

Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about Chinese sun god

Putonghua pronunciation: *yan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yim4*

Meanings: hot, fever, inflammation

Character 炎 (radical 火 *huo3*, fire) shows two 火, means heat/hot/fever. 炎熱 (*yan2 re4* = feverishly-hot). In 炎夏 (*yan2 xia4* = hot~ summer) people easily contract 炎症 (*yan2 zheng4* = hot-illness = fevers).

Untreated wounds may 發炎 (*fa1 yan2* = develop~heat = become inflamed). 腸胃炎 (*chang2 wei4 yan2* = intestines~stomach~fever) = stomach fever. Aspirin is a 消炎藥 (*xiao1 yan2 yao4* = allay/ reduce~inflammation~drug = drug for fever/pain relief). 肝炎 (*gan1 yan2* = liver~fever) = hepatitis. 腦膜炎 (*nao3 mo2 yan2* = brain~membrane~fever) = meningitis.

炎涼 (*yan2 liang2* = hot-cool) are opposites. Bankrupt person experiences 世態炎涼 (*shi4 tai4 yan2 liang2* = world~attitude~hot-cool = first gets treated warmly, then gets the cold shoulder — it's an unkind, snobbish world!)

by Diana Yue