

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

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

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

4<sup>th</sup> 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 babies

Putonghua pronunciation: *ying1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ying1*

Meanings: baby, infant

Ideogram 嬰 (two 貝 *bei4*, seashell/treasure + 女 *nü3*, female/daughter) suggests darling 嬰兒 (*ying1 er2* = baby~child), not necessarily girl. 男嬰 (*nan2 ying1* = male~baby = baby boys), 女嬰 (*nü3 ying1* = female~baby = baby girls) in 嬰兒床 (*ying1 er2 chuang2* = baby~child~bed = baby-beds) fill maternity ward.

育嬰常識 (*yü4 ying1 chang2 shi1* = breed~baby~common~knowledge) = baby-care know-how. 換尿片 (*huan4 niao4 pian4* = change~urine~piece = changing diapers), 嬰兒夜啼 (*ying4 er2 ye4 ti2* = baby~child~night~cry = baby crying at night) drain parents' energy.

Orphanage adopts 棄嬰 (*qi4 ying1* = abandoned-babies). 聖嬰 (*sheng4 ying1* = holy~baby) = baby Jesus. 聖嬰效應 (*sheng4 ying1 xiao4 ying4* = holy~baby~effect) is Chinese term for El Nino effect.

by Diana Yue