

Character Builder

您好學？

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 hungry stomach

搶

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiang3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *cheung2*

Meaning: snatch, seize, grab, rob, rush, forestall

搶 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand + 倉 *cang1*, barn, i.e. robbing grains) means 搶奪 (*qiang3 duo2* = snatch-seize), 搶先 (*qiang3 xian1* = rush-forward-to-seize/handle): 搶購 (*qiang3 gou4* = rush-to-buy) discount items, 搶救 (*qiang3 jiu4* = rush-to-rescue) accident victim.

Workers 搶修 (*qiang3 xiu1* = rush-to-repair) collapsed bridge. Marines 搶灘 (*qiang3 tan1* = rush-onto-to-occupy-beach). 搶手袋 (*qiang3 shou3 dai4* = snatching-hand-bag) is 搶劫 (*qiang3 jie2* = snatch-rob = open robbery).

Beggar's bread got 搶走 (*qiang3 zou3* = snatched-away), 呼天搶地 (*hu1 tian1 qiang3 di4* = call-heaven-snatch-earth = wails loudly). Aggressive guys win in 搶食世界 (*qiang3 shi2 shi4 jie4* = Cantonese *cheung2 sik6 sai3 gaai3* = snatch-eat-world-territory = Cantonese expression meaning "competitive world ruled by jungle law").

by Diana Yue