

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 the prodigal son

離

Putonghua pronunciation: *li2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lei4*

Meanings: depart, leave, separate, desert, abandon

離 = 離去 (*li2 qu4* = depart-go-away): 離校 (*li2 xiao4* = leave-school), 離職 (*li2 zhi2* = leave/quit~post/job). Disappointed party-member 離心 (*li2 xin1* = depart~heart = no longer feels loyalty).

Prodigal son 離家出走 (*li2 jia1 chu1 zou3* = leave-home~out~ run = runs away from home/family). Migrants 離鄉別井 (*li2 xiang1 bie2 jing3* = leave-home-village~separate-from~well = leave hometown), feel 離愁 (*li2 chou2* = depart~sadness = nostalgia of separation).

Iago 離間 (*li2 jian4* = separate~block = creates misunderstanding/ mistrust between) Othello and wife. Incompatible couples 離婚 (*li2 hun1* = separate~marriage = divorce), 離異 (*li2 yi4* = separate~alienate = are estranged). Novels describe 悲歡離合 (*bei1 huan1 li2 he2* = grief-joy~separation~union = all kinds of sad and happy events).

by Diana Yue