

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 change of weather

Putonghua pronunciation: *bian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bin3*

Meaning: change, transform, alter, become, rebel

變 (radical 又 *you4*, again) means 改變 (*gai3 bian4* = alter-change), 變化 (*bian4 hua4* = change-transformation). Pupa 蛻變 (*tui4 bian4* = changes/metamorphosizes-into-becomes) butterfly. Husband 變心 (*bian4 xin1* = changes-heart, loves another). Magician/illusionist 變走 (*bian4 zou3* = change-run/gone = vanishes) tiger.

變天 (*bian4 tian1* = change-sky) means weather/regime change. Weather 變暖 (*bian4 nuan3* = becomes-warm = warms up), 變涼 (*bian4 liang2* = becomes-cool = cools down), 變好 (*bian4 hao3* = becomes-good = improves), 變壞 (*bian4 huai4* = becomes-bad = worsens). Army initiates 政變 (*zheng4 bian4* = political-change/rebellion/coup).

Sage advises: 窮則變, 變則通 (*qiong2 ze2 bian4, bian4 ze2 tong1* = end/exhaust-then-change, change-then-through = When road ahead is blocked, change strategy, and you will find way out).

by Diana Yue