

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 World War II

分

Putonghua pronunciation: *fen1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fan1*

Meaning: split, divide, separate, partition

分 (radical 刀 *dao1*, knife) means cut/divide/separate: 分別 (*fen1 bie2* = distinction-difference), 分離 (*fen1 li2* = separation-departure), 分店 (*fen1 dian4* = branch-shop). Friends 分享 (*fen1 xiang3* = divide-enjoy = share) gain/happiness. Clan 分家 (*fen1 jia1* = split/redistribute-family- assets).

After WWI the Ottoman Empire was 瓜分 (*gua1 fen1* = melon-split/cut = carved up). After WWII Germany 分裂 (*fen4 lie4* = divide-crack = was divided).

分析 (*fen1 xi1* = separate-dissect = analyses) predict: 分久必合 (*fen1 jiu3 bi4 he2* = split-up-long-time-will-definitely-combine = enemies will unite), 合久必分 (*he2 jiu3 bi4 fen1* = combined-long-time-will-definitely-split-up = allies will part ways); US, EU, China will 三分天下 (*san1 fen1 tian1 xia4* = three-divide-heaven-below = control world as three major powers).

by Diana Yue