

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 king planning revenge

Putonghua pronunciation: *chang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *seung4*

Meanings: taste, try

嘗 = taste food. Gourmets 嘗新 (*chang2 xin1* = taste~new = try new dishes). Chinese myth says 神農嘗百草 (*Shen2 Nong2 chang2 bai2 cao3* = Divine~Farmer~tasted~hundred~grasses = God of Agriculture/Medicine tasted many herbs to test/ascertain their nutritious/healing effects).

嘗試 (*chang2 shi4* = taste~try) = attempt. 嘗過甜酸苦辣 (*chang2 guo4 tian2 suan1 ku3 la4* = tast~ed~sweet~sour~bitter~hot) = has gone through failures/successes/everything. 嘗 also means “has”. Double-negative 未嘗不可 (*wei4 chang2 bu4 ke3* = not~yet~has~no~can) describes “not entirely negative/dismissable” evaluations/plans.

Wu invaded Yüe. Yüe Kingdom’s ruler 屢嘗敗績 (*lü3 chang2 bai4 ji1* = repeatedly~tasted~defeat~record = suffered series of defeats), was taken hostage, 嘗盡苦頭 (*chang2 jin4 ku3 tou2* = tasted~exhausted~bitter~head = went through countless hardships/humiliations).

by Diana Yue