

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 new-born babies

Putonghua pronunciation: *yīng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yīng1*

Meaning: baby, infant

嬰 (two 貝 *bei4*, seashe/treasure + 女 *nǚ3*, female) means 嬰兒 (*yīng1 er2* = baby-child): 男嬰 (*nán2 yīng1* = male-baby = baby boy), 女嬰 (*nǚ3 yīng1* = female-baby = baby girl).

Orphanage adopts 棄嬰 (*qì4 yīng1* = abandoned-babies), 聖嬰 (*shèng4 yīng1* = holy-infant) means baby Jesus. 聖嬰效應 (*shèng4 yīng1 xiào4 yīng4* = holy-baby-result-effect) is Chinese term for El Niño effect.

Parents-to-be purchase 嬰兒床 (*yīng1 er2 chuāng2* = baby-bed/cot), 嬰兒車 (*yīng1 er2 chē1* = baby-pram), study 育嬰常識 (*yù4 yīng1 cháng2 shí1* = breed-baby-common-knowledge = baby-care know-how). 換尿片 (*huàn4 niào4 piàn4* = change-urine-piece = changing diapers), 嬰兒夜啼 (*yīng1 er2 yè4 tí2* = baby-child-night-cry = baby crying at night) test parents' skills/patience.

by Diana Yue