

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 scandals

Putonghua pronunciation: *gai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *goi3*

Meaning: hide, lid, cover, build, surpass, stamp, press, build

蓋 (radical 盍 *he2*, empty container) means lid/cover/build: jar's 蓋子 (*gai4 zi0* = lid-diminutive = lid/cover), shed's 上蓋 (*shang4 gai4* = top-cover/roof), 蓋房 (*gai4 fang2* = erect house/building), 蓋章 (*gai4 zhang1* = stamp-seal). Noises 蓋過 (*gai4 guo4* = cover-over) conversation. 蓋頭 (*gai4 tou2* = cover-head) = Mongolian girl/bride's red veil.

蓋棺論定 (*gai4 guan1 lun4 ding4* = cover-coffin-comment-settle = posthumous assessment of person's life/opus): Napoleon 武功蓋世 (*wu3 gong1 gai4 shi4* = military-achievements-cover-world = made unparalleled military conquests). However, 蓋世太保 (*gai4 shi4 tai4 bao3* = cover-world-ancient-Chinese-official-title) is "Gestapo" transliterated.

VIP tries 掩蓋 (*yan3 gai4* = concealing-covering-up) misconduct, but 欲蓋彌彰 (*yü4 gai4 mi2 zhang1* = desire-cover-up-more-manifest = hiding it only magnifies it).

by Diana Yue