

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 bio-chemical weapons

化

Putonghua pronunciation: *hua4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fa3*

Meanings: transform, disintegrate, convert, suffixes “-ize”, “-fy”, chemistry, chemical

化 (showing 亻 and 匕, two persons, back-to-back) = 變化 (*bian4 hua4* = change-transform = transformation). 造化 (*zao4 hua4* = create-transform) means Nature's creation or person's blessing/fortune. 教化 (*jiao4 hua4* = teach-transform) means educate/civilize. 分化 (*fen1 hua4* = split-transform) means split/divide.

化學 (*hua4 xue2* = transformation-study/science = chemistry) studies changes/multiple natures of physical matter. Ice 溶化 (*rong2 hua4* = melts-disintegrates). Rocks 風化 (*feng1 hua4* = are wind-disintegrated/eroded). 火化 (*huo3 hua4* = fire-disintegrate) = burn/cremate. 魚化石 (*yu2 hua4 shi2* = fish-transform-rock) = fish fossil. 綠化 (*lü4 hua4* = green-ize = greening) improves environment's ecology.

化學武器 (*hua4 xue2 wu3 qi4* = chemical-military-tools/instruments = chemical weapons) include 沙林毒氣 (*sha1 lin2 du2 qi4* = “Sarin”-transliterated-poisonous-gas).

by Diana Yue