

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 wedding day

媒

Putonghua pronunciation: *mei2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mooi4*

Meaning: go-between, matchmaker, medium

媒 (女 *nū3*, female/woman + 某 = 謀 *mou2*, plan) = 媒介 (*mei2 jie4* = medium-link): 神媒 (*shen2 mei2* = gods' medium = medium communicating between gods/ghosts and humans), 媒人 (*mei2 ren2* = matchmake-er), 病媒 (*bing4 mei2* = disease-medium/carrier), 傳媒 (*chuan2 mei2* = communications-media). Television is 冷媒體 (*leng3 mei2 ti3* = cold-medium-body = medium cool).

In traditional arranged marriages, 媒婆 (*mei2 po2* = matchmaker-grandma = professional woman matchmaker) served families looking for eligible brides/grooms for their sons/ daughters. 明媒正娶 (*ming2 mei2 zheng4 qū3* = clear/sure-matchmaker-proper-take-wife) describes openly/lawfully married couple. Popular Chinese TV dating and matchmaking program 非誠勿擾 (*fei1 cheng2 wu4 rao3* = unless-sincere-don't-disturb) packages 做媒 (*zuo4 mei2* = make-match = matchmaking) for trendy singletons.

by Diana Yue