

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 marine life

殼

Putonghua pronunciation: *ke2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hok3*

Meanings: shell

Animals' bodies are protected by 皮 (*pi2*, skin), 毛 (*mao2*, hair/fur), 甲 (*jia3*, carapace/armor), 殼 (*ke2*, shell), 鱗 (*lin2*, scales). Fish have 魚鱗 (*yu2 lin2* = fish-scales). Nuts have 硬殼 (*ying4 ke2* = hard-shells).

Shellfish are 海產 (*hai3 chan3* = sea-products). 甲殼類 (*jia3 ke2 lei4* = armor~shell-species = crustaceans) include 蟹 (*xie4*, crabs), 蝦 (*xia1*, shrimps/prawns), 龍蝦 (*long2 xia1* = dragon~shrimp = lobsters). 貝類 (*bei4 lei4* = seashell-species) include 蚌 (*bang4*, clams), 蜆 (*xian4*, basket clams), 鮑魚 (*bao4 yu2* = abalone), 牡蠣 (*mu3 li4* = oysters), 扇貝 (*shan4 bei4* = fan~seashell = scallops).

金蟬脫殼 (*jin1 chan2 tuo1 ke2* = gold~cicada~disconnect~shell) means cicada molting or strategy of slipping away cleverly from eyes/control of opponent.

by Diana Yue