

Character Builder 您好學？

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 climate change

Putonghua pronunciation: *nuan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *nuen5*

Meaning: warm, warm up

暖 (radical 日 *ri4*, sun) describes 暖和 (*nuan3 he2* = warm-mild) temperature/tone: 暖風 (*nuan3 feng1* = warm-breezes), 暖色 (*nuan3 se1* = warm-color). 暖壺 (*nuan3 hu2* = warm-bottle) = thermos flask.

Friends enjoy 暖烘烘 (*nuan3 hong1 hong1* = warm-bake-bake = nice warm) fire, 暖手 (*nuan3 shou3* = warm-hands), 暖酒 (*nuan3 jiu3* = warm/heat-up-wine). 溫暖如春 (*wen1 nuan3 ru2 chun1* = temperate-warm-resemble-spring) describes temperature or congenial personality.

Depletion of 臭氧層 (*chou4 yang3 ceng2* = stinking-oxygen-layer = ozone-layer) makes 氣候變暖 (*qi4 hou4 bian4 nuan3* = air/weather-season-change-warm = climate turn warmer). Whales follow ocean's 暖流 (*nuan3 liu2* = warm-current). However, 冷暖人間 (*jeng3 nuan3 ren2 jian1* = cold-warm-human-area) means life/world is sometimes kind, sometimes unkind.

by Diana Yue