

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 willow trees



Putonghua pronunciation: *xü4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sui6*

Meanings: flake, tuft, flocculent, filament, flaky, bit, trivial

絮 (如 *ru2*, resemble + 系 = 絲 *si1*, thread/silk) means bits/filaments of cotton/silk fibres: 棉絮 (*mian2 xü4* = cotton~tufts/flakes), 布絮 (*bu4 xü4* = cloth~shreds). Hence 思絮 (*si1 xü4* = idea~filaments = disconnected/drifted thoughts), 絮語 (*xü4 yü3* = small~talk), 絮煩 (*xü4 fan2* = trivial~and~irritating), 絮叨 (*xü4 dao1* = trivial~chatter/nagging).

Society-page carries event's 花絮 (*hua1 xü4* = flowery~bits = amusing anecdotes). 絮絮不休 (*xü4 xü4 bu4 xiu1* = chatter~chatter~no~rest) describes nagging wife gossiping away.

柳樹 (*liu3 shu4* = willow~trees) bear 柳絮 (*liu3 xü4* = willow~flakes = willow~catkins) coated with 白絨毛 (*bai2 yong3 mao2* = white~fluffy~hair). Resembling 飄雪 (*piao1 xüe3* = blown~about~snow~flakes), 飛絮 (*fei1 xü4* = flying/drifted~catkins) invading air in springtime is popular poetic theme.

by Diana Yue