

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 heat waves



Putonghua pronunciation: *jiao1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jiu1*

Meanings: scorched, charred, anxious, nervous, irritated

焦 describes 燒焦 (*shao1 jiao1* = burnt~charred), 曬焦 (*shai4 jiao1* = sun-burnt~charred = scorched) objects: 焦炭 (*jiao1 tan4* = burnt~charcoal), 焦糖 (*jiao1 tang2* = burnt~sugar = caramel). When market crashes, speculators 焦頭爛額 (*jiao1 tou2 lan4 er4* = burnt~head~broken~forehead = suffer heavy blows).

心焦 (*xin1 jiao1* = heart~scorched) = 焦急 (*jiao1 ji2* = scorched~urgent) = feel impatient. Caged animals get 焦躁 (*jiao1 zao4* = impatient~restless). Workers pressed by deadline feel 焦灼 (*jiao1 zhuo2* = impatient~boiled = anxious/pressed). Missing child's parents feel 焦慮 (*jiao1 lu4* = impatient~worry = terribly worried).

In war of resistance, using 焦土政策 (*jiao1 tu3 zheng4 ce4* = scorched-land~policy~strategy) means burning/destroying everything before retreating so that no resources fall into the invaders' hands.

by Diana Yue