

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 wedding day

偶

Putonghua pronunciation: *ou3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngau5*

Meaning: doll, pair, companion, mate, partner, random

偶 (radical 亻 = 人 *ren2*, human/person) means lifeless figure: 人偶 (*ren2 ou3* = human-doll/figurine/mannequin), 木偶 (*mu4 ou3* = wooden-doll/puppet), 偶像 (*ou3 xiang4* = doll-image = idol: deity's man-made image or fans' beloved darling).

偶然 (*ou3 ran2* = coincidental-ly) describes chance/rare occurrences, but 偶 actually means two/pair: 偶數 (*ou3 shu4* = even-number), 配偶 (*pei4 ou3* = matching-companion = spouse/partner). Incompatible couple becomes 怨偶 (*yuan4 ou3* = mutually-blaming/unhappy-pair). Wife's death gives husband 喪偶之痛 (*sang4 ou3 zhi1 tong4* = die/lose-spouse-'s -pain = grief of losing spouse).

Bachelor 求偶 (*qiu2 ou3* = beg/seek-mate = wants a wife). Guests praise bride-and-groom: “佳偶天成!” (*jia1 ou3 tian1 cheng2* = good-mates-heaven-made = “Perfect match! You two are born for each other!”)

by Diana Yue