

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 cycling

飄

Putonghua pronunciation: *piao1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *piu1*

Meanings: wind blowing, float in air, fly in air

飄 has radical 風 (*feng1*, wind). Kite 飄上 (*piao1 shang4* = floats/flies~up), 飄下 (*piao1 xia4* = floats/flies~down). Fragrance 飄來 (*piao1 lai2* = float-come = whiffs by), 飄過 (*piao1 guo4* = floats/whiffs~past). Autumn leaves 飄落 (*piao1 luo4* = float~descend). 飄 (*piao1* = blown by wind) is Chinese title of novel *Gone With The Wind*.

Secret agent 行蹤飄忽 (*xing2 zong1 piao1 hu1* = walk-track~float~sudden/dim/remote = moves unnoticeably/unpredictably). 花果飄零 (*hua1 guo3 piao1 ling2* = flower~fruit~float~reduced) laments uprooted cultural heritage disintegrating/vanishing.

Cyclist 騎車 (*qi2 che1* = ride~cart/car = rides bicycle), 飄然而去 (*piao1 ran2 er2 qu4* = float~adjectival~and~away = goes away like a whiff of gentle wind), enjoys 飄逸 (*piao1 yi4* = float~detached = detached/carefree) feeling.

by Diana Yue