Character Builder

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 anesthesia

昏 (日 ri4, sun/day under 太 yi4, horizon) describes 昏暗 (hun1 an4 = dim-dark) room, 昏黃 (hun1 huang2 = dimmed-yellowed) pages, 昏亂 (hun1 luan4 = confused-disorderly) scene/situation. 黃昏 (huang2 hun1 = yellow-dim) = evening/dusk. Night-shift workers 晨昏顛倒 (shen2 hun1 dian1 dao3 = morning-evening-turn-upsidedown = reverse night/day).

天昏地暗 (tian1 hun1 di4 an4 = heaven-darkey-earth-dim) describes sunless/stormy landscape. 老眼昏花 (lao3 yan3 hun1 hua1 = old-eyes-dim-blurred) describes dim-sighted oldies. 昏君 (hun1 jun1 = brainless/ immoral-monarch) trusts 昏庸 (hun1 yong1 = brainless- mediocre/stupid) ministers.

Anesthesia causes 昏睡 (hun1 shui4 = stupor/coma-sleep). Pot-smoker 頭昏腦脹 (tou2 hun1 nao3 zhang4 = head-murky-brain-swell = feels head bursting), 昏倒 (hun1 dao3 = faints/swoons-collapses), 昏迷 (hun1 mi2 = faints-mesmerized).

by Diana Yue