

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 marriage

緣

Putonghua pronunciation: *yuan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yuen4*

Meanings: derivation, cause, link, chance, because

緣 = 緣故 (*yuan2 gu4* = derive/link-reason = cause). Buddhism explains all phenomena as 緣: 因緣 (*yin1 yuan2* = reason-derivation/link = causal relationships). If people 有緣 (*you3 yuan2* = have-link = 有緣分 = *you3 yuan2 fen4* = have-destined-share = are destined to be linked), they meet, become friends/lovers. 姻緣 (*yin1 yuan2* = marriage-derivation-link) means man links with, marries woman.

天賜良緣 (*tian1 chi4 liang2 yuan2* = heaven-bestow-good-link) = heaven-sent match. 緣盡 (*yuan2 jin4* = link-exhaust) = end/severing of emotional relationship. 無緣 (*wu2 yuan2* = has-no-derivation = not fated to) describes people who just don't happen to meet/develop further.

Success requires 機緣 (*ji1 yuan2* = chance-fated-link = opportunities). 絕緣體 (*jue2 yuan2 ti3* = end-link-body) = insulator.

by Diana Yue