

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 Chinese New Year lucky money



Putonghua pronunciation: *bao1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *baau1*

Meanings: wrap, packet, package, contain, bun

包 = 包圍 (*bao1 wei2* = wrap/contain~surround), 包括 (*bao1 kuo4* = contain~include/comprise). 包容 (*bao1 rong2* = wrap~contain) = tolerate/tolerant. 包袱 (*bao1 fu2* = wrap~cloth/bundle) also means burden. 叉燒包 (*cha1 shao1 bao1* = fork-burn/roast-bun) is steamed bun with barbecued pork filling. 打包 (*da3 bao1* = form~package) means pack leftovers/takeaways.

包辦 (*bao1 ban4* = wrap~handle) = provide complete service. 包機 (*bao1 ji1* = exclusive-book~airplane) = chartered flight. “包在我身上!” (*bao1 zai4 wo3 shen1 shang4* = exclusive~on~my~body~over) = “I take care of everything!”

紅包 (*hong2 bao1* = red~packet) = Cantonese 利是 (*lei6 si6* = profit~yes) is “lucky money” in red envelop given as blessing. 收紅包 (*shou1 hong2 bao1* = receive~red~packet) = taking graft/bribes.

by Diana Yue