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\(^{st}\) tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
2\(^{nd}\) tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
3\(^{rd}\) tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
4\(^{th}\) 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 more the sky

**藍**

Putonghua pronunciation: lan2
Cantonese pronunciation: laam4
Meanings: blue

藍 = 藍色 (lan2 se1 = blue~color): 淺藍 (qian3 lan2 = light-blue),粉藍 (fen3 lan2 = powder-blue = pastel/baby blue), 深藍 (shen1 lan2 = deep/dark-blue), 藍鯨 (lan2 jing1 = blue~whale), 藍牙 (lan2 ya2 = blue-tooth). Barbie 金髮藍眼 (jin1 fa3 lan2 yan3 = gold/blonde~hair~blue~eyes).

Writer uses real event as 藍本 (lan2 ben3 = blue~version = original version/model) for novel/movie. Conservative investor keeps 藍籌股 (lan2 chou2 gu3 = blue~chip~stocks). Factory workers are 藍領階級 (lan2 ling3 jie1 ji2 = blue-collar~step~class = blue-collar class).

青 (qing1) means green or 藍: 青山 (qing1 shan1 = green~hills), 青天 (qing1 tian1 = blue~sky). 碧海藍天 (bi4 hai3 lan2 tian1 = turquoise/emerald~sea~blue~sky) describes sunny seascape.

by Diana Yue