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 more animal stories

狼
Putonghua pronunciation: lang2
Cantonese pronunciation: long4
Meanings: wolf

狼群 (lang2 qun1 = wolf-crowd = pack of wolves) is savage/fierce. On night of full moon 狼嗥 (lang2 hao2 = wolf’s-howling) suggests 狼入 (lang2 ren2 = wolf-human = werewolf) is around. 狼圖騰 (lang2 tu2 teng2 = wolf-totem) is worshipped in Mongolia.

色狼 (se1 lang2 = color/-wolf) = men who harass/molest women. 狼吞虎咽 (lang2 tun1 hu3 yan4 = wolf-swallow-tiger-swallow) describes people eating hungrily/greedily. 豺狼當道 (cai2 lang2 dang1 dao4 = small-wolf-wolf-astride-road) = bad/cruel people are in power.

披著羊皮的狼 (pi1 zhao2 yang2 pi2 de0 lang2 = covered-with-sheep-skin-~'s-wolf = wolf in sheep’s clothing) is dangerous. Shepherd boy who calls “狼來了!” (lang2 lai2 le0 = wolf-come-ed = “Wolf!”) too many times loses credibility.

by Diana Yue