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 territorial disputes

Putonghua pronunciation: zhan4
Cantonese pronunciation: jim3
Meanings: take by force, capture, seize, occupy, possess, constitute, amount to

佔 = 佔據 (zhan4 jü4 = take-over-occupy = take overpoweringly/unjustifiably). Bully 佔便宜 (zhan4 pian2 yi2 = occupy-convenient-cheap = take advantage) of weakling. In soccer Brazilians 佔上風 (zhan4 shang4 feng1 = occupy-upper-wind = have the upper hand).

Invaders 侵佔 (qin1 zhan4 = invade-occupy), 霸佔 (ba4 zhan4 = bully-occupy = appropriate/occupy) others’ territories. Gibraltar, Malvinas/Falklands are 英佔 (Ying1 zhan4 = “Eng” land-transliterated-occupied = occupied by Britain). In the East China Sea, 釣魚島 (Diao4 Yu2 Dao3 = angle-fish-island = Diaooyudao), which Japan calls 尖閣島 (Jian1 Ge2 Dao3 = Senkaku-Island), is 日佔 (Ri4 zhan4 = “Japan”-transliterated-occupied = occupied by Japan).

Depression-hit masses cry: “佔據華爾街!” (zhan4 jü4 Hua2 Er3 Jie1 = occupy-“Wall”-transliterated-Street) = “Occupy Wall Street!”

by Diana Yue