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.

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This week: Words about pearls

澤

Putonghua pronunciation: ze2
Cantonese pronunciation: jaak6
Meanings: pond, marsh, luster, gloss, moisten, nurture, kindness, benefaction

澤 (radical氵 = water shui3, water) = enclosed water-body: 潤澤 (hu2 ze2 = lakes-ponds),沼澤 (zhao3 ze2 = marsh-pool = marsh/wetland/mire), 深山大澤 (shen1 shan1 da4 ze2 = deep/steep-mountains-big-lakes). Praya become澤國 (ze2 guo2 = marsh-country = flooded/inundated area) after heavy rain.

Rain 潤澤万物 (run4 ze2 wan4 wu4 = moisten-nurture-ten-thousand-things = nourishes all things). People appreciate benevolent ruler's 恩澤 (en1 ze2 = kindness-generosity). Lady's admirer seeks to 一親芳澤 (yi1 qin1 fang1 ze2 = one-close/kiss-fragrant-body-perfume/lotion = have an intimate rendezvous with her).

Good silk/hair has 光澤 (guang1 ze2 = light-gloss = shine/sheen). Beautiful pearls have 色澤 (se1 ze2 = color-shine = luster): 晶瑩 (jing1 ying2 = crystalline-translucent), 光潔 (guagn1 jie2 = bright-clean/pure).

by Diana Yue