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 furniture

床
Putonghua pronunciation: chuang2
Cantonese pronunciation: chong4
Meaning: bed

床 (radical 木 mu4, wood) = bed: 床架 (chuang2 jia4 = bed-frame), 木床 (mu4 chuang2 = wooden-bed), 鐵床 (tie3 chuang2 = iron/metal-bed), 床褥 (chuang2 ru4 = bed-mattress/futon), 床鋪 (chuang2 pu1 = bed-bedding), 起床 (qi3 chuang2 = rise-bed) = get up. 上床 (shang4 chuang2 = mount-bed) = get into bed.

Hotels offer 雙人床 (shuang1 ren2 chuang2 = pair/double-beds), 單人床 (dan1 ren2 chuang2 = single-beds), 嬰兒床 (ying1 er2 chuang2 = baby-beds/cots), 榻榻米 (ta4 ta4 mi3 = Japanese “tatami”-transliterated = futon).

床頭人 (chuang2 tou2 ren2 = bed’s-head-board-person) = spouse/partner. 床上戲 (chuang2 shang4 xi4 = bed-on-drama) = sex/porn scenes. 床頭金盡 (chuang2 tou2 jin1 jin 4 = bed’s-head-board-gold-exhausted) describes person completely broke.

by Diana Yue