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 celebrations

欣
Putonghua pronunciation: xin1
Cantonese pronunciation: yan1
Meaning: cheer, glad, joyous, happy

欣 (radical 欠 qian4, strain upper-body) means cheerful/glad. Girl wooed by boy feels 欣悦 (xin1 yue4 = glad-happy). Scholar wins top honor, 欣喜若狂 (xin1 xi3 ruo4 kuang2 = glad-happy-resemble-mad = is mad with joy), friends feel 欣佩 (xin1 pei4 = gladness-and-respect), mentor expresses 欣慰之情 (xin1 wei4 zhi1 qin2 = glad-comforted-‘s feeling = joyous consolation).

Violinist wins audience’s 欣賞 (xing1 shang3 = glad-appreciate = admiration), 欣然接受 (xin1 ran2 jie2 shou4 = glad-ly-takes-accepts) standing ovation.

Invader is defeated, nation 欣欢 (hua1 xin1 = joy-glad = rejoices), 欣欢 (xin1 qing4 = gladly-celebrate = feels fortunate) peace is restored. In economic up-swing, industries 欣欣向榮 (xin1 xin1 xiang4 rong2 = cheerfully-cheerfully-towards-prosperity = pick up growth, prosper).

by Diana Yue