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 accidents

傷
Putonghua pronunciation: shang 1
Cantonese pronunciation: seung 1
Meanings: injury

Construction workers may have 工傷意外 (gong1 shang1 yi4 wai4 = work-injury-idea/intention-beyond = injured in accident on work site): 輕傷 (qing1 shang1 = light/slight-injury), 重傷 (zhong4 shang1 = heavy/serious-injury), 內傷 (nei4 shang1 = internal-injury = internal organs injured), 外傷 (wai4 shang1 = external-injury = skin/flesh/bones injured).

受傷 (shou4 shang1 = receive-injury) means get injured: 打傷 (da3 shang1 = beaten-injured), 扭傷 (niu3 shang1 = twisted-injured), 撞傷 (zhuang4 shang1 = collided-injured), 刺傷 (ci4 shang1 = pricked-injured), 燒傷 (shao1 shang1 = burned-injured).

After 傷癒 (shang1 yu4 = injury-healed), 傷口 (shang1 kou3 = injury-mouth = wound) leaves 傷疤 (shang1 ba1 = injury-scar).

“大家小心!” (da4 jia1 xiao3 xin1 = big-family-little-heart) means “Everyone be careful!”

by Diana Yue