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 contracts

違
Putonghua pronunciation: wei2
Cantonese pronunciation: wai4
Meaning: disobey, revert, violate, offend, oppose, opposite, depart from

違 (radical \_ chuo4, walk) means violate: 違反 (wei2 fan3 = violate-oppose) regulations, 違抗 (wei2 kang4 = oppose-resist) orders, 違背 (wei2 bei4 = oppose-revert = go against) one's own conscience. Speaker making 違心之論 (wei2 xin1 zhi1 lun4 = against-heart-'s argument = insincere remarks) doesn't believe himself.

違約 (wei2 yue1 = violate-contract) = default. Selling 違禁品 (wei2 jin4 pin3 = violate-ban-objects = illegal goods) is 違法 (wei2 fa3 = against-the-law). 違紀 (wei2 ji3 = breach-of-discipline). 違憲 (wei2 xian4 = violate-the-constitution) = unconstitutional.

Police dismantle 違章建築 (wei2 zhang1 jian4 zu2 = violate-rules-build-construct = illegal structures). Sheriff imposes curfew: "違者斬!" (wei2 zhe3 zhan3 = oppose-person-chop = "Whoever ignores/violates it will be beheaded!")