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

急
Putonghua pronunciation: ji 2
Cantonese pronunciation: gap 1
Meanings: urgent, emergency

傷者 (shang1 zhe3 = injured-person) 暈倒 (yun1 dao3 = faint-fall = faints), 休克 (xiu1 ke1 = “shock”-transliterated = falls into a coma), 需要 急救 (ji2 jiu4 = urgent-rescue = first-aid): 人工呼吸 (ren2 gong1 hu1 xil = man-work-exhale-inhale = artificial respiration), 心肺復甦 (xin1 fei4 fu2 su1 = heart-lungs-re-wake = cardiopulmonary resuscitation), 輸血 (shu1 xue4 = transport-blood = blood transfusion).

急救車 (jiu4 shang1 che1 = rescue-wounded-vehicle = ambulance) rushes 急病 (ji2 bing4 = urgent-illness = acute illness) patients to 急症室 (ji2 zheng4 shi1 = urgent-illness/ case-room = emergency ward) for 搶救 (qiang3 jiu4 = snatch/ quick-rescue = emergency treatment).

人急智生 (ren2 ji2 zhi4 sheng1 = person-urgent/Pressed-clever-grows/comes): In emergency situations we instinctively become/act smart.

by Diana Yue