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 new People's Congress

接 (radical 手 = hand) = 連接 (lian2 jie1 = linked-touching), 接受 (jie1 shou4 = accept-tolerate). Neighboring countries 接壤 (jie1 rang4 = touch-territories, share borders). Lovers 接吻 (jie1 wen3 = touch-mouth = kiss). 接近 (jie1 jin4 = close-near) means approach (verb), nearby/close (adjective).

Basketballer 接球 (jie1 qiu2 = takes/catches-ball). Buses 接送 (jie1 song4 = take-send = transport) commuters. Host 迎接 (ying2 jie1 = faces-welcomes/receives) guest. 接機 (jie1 ji1 = receive-air-plane) = see/welcome someone landing at airport.

At 交接 (jiao1 jie1 = pass-on-accept = handover) ceremony, newcomers 接替 (jie1 ti4 = takeover-from-replaces) outgoing team. 青黄不接 (qing1 huang2 bu4 jie1 = green-yellow-no-link = between green/new and yellow/old crops) describes gap/discontinuity between old and new talents/generations.

by Diana Yue