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 cancers

擴
Putonghua pronunciation: kuo4
Cantonese pronunciation: kwok3
Meanings: spread, enlarge, extend

擴 (j = hand shou3, hand = 廣 guang3, broad/expansive) means spread/expand. 擴音器 (kuo4 yin1 qi4 = spread-sound- machine) = audio-amplifier. Business擴建 (kuo4 jian4 = expand-build = expands) complex, 擴展 (kuo4 zhan3 = expands-develops) operations. Travelling擴闊視野 (kuo4 kuo4 shi4 ye3 = expand-broad-sight-field = broadens one’s view/experiential knowledge of things).

Hegemonic power 擴軍 (kuo4 jün1 = expands-military), violating 核不擴散條約 (he2 bu4 kuo4 san4 tiao2 yüe4 = nuclear-no-spread-disperse-item-covenant = 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons).

血管擴張藥 (xüe3 guan3 kuo4 zhang4 yao4 = blood-vessels-enlarge-expand-medicine = vasodilators) widen blood-vessels.

癌擴散 (ai2 kuo4 san4 = cancer-expand-disperse = cancer spreading) means affected area 擴大 (kuo4 da4 = expand-big = is enlarged/enlarging).

by Diana Yue