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 nuclear leakage

爆
Putonghua pronunciation: bao4
Cantonese pronunciation: baau3
Meanings: crack, explode, blast, hot oil quick fry


When earthquake/tsunami crisis 爆發 (bao4 fa1 = explode-emit = erupts), media 爆出 (bao4 chu1 = explode-out = blasts out) stunning news: Nuclear plants may 爆炸 (bao4 zha4 = explode-fry = explode)!

by Diana Yue