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 manipulating stockmarkets

Putonghua pronunciation: gong1
Cantonese pronunciation: gung1
Meanings: attack, offensive

攻 = 進攻 (jin4 gong1 = advance/forward-attack) = attack. 军攻擊 (gong1 ji1 = attacks-hits/storms) enemy, 攻佔 (gong1 zhan4 = attacks-occupies) territories/cities.

投資者 (tou2 zhi4 zhe3 = throw-in-capital-person = investors) watch金融市場 (jin1 rong2 shi4 chang3 = gold-merge-market-place = financial market). Commentators advise 攻守策略 (gong1 shou3 ce4 liue4 = attack-defend-strategy-plan = how/when to buy/sell/act/wait).

投機者 (tou2 ji1 zhe3 = throw/head-for-chance-person = speculators) launch 攻勢 (gong1 shi4 = attack-force = offensive), 廃空 (mai3 kong1 = buy-empty = long futures), 賣空 (mai4 kong1 = sell-empty = short futures). 恒生指數 (Heng2 Sheng1 zhi3 shu4 = Hang-Seng-finger-number = Hang Seng Index) rises and falls, 失守 (shi1 shou3 = lose-defense = drops below) 15,000.

by Diana Yue