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 removing obstacles

Putonghua pronunciation: gan3
Cantonese pronunciation: gon2
Meaning: drive, rush, hurry, chase, drive away, catch up, speed up

趕 (radical 走 zou3, walk/run) means hurry/drive/chase: 赶緊 (gan3 jin3 = hurry-urgent = hastily), 赶快 (gan3 kuai4 = "Hurry-up-quick!"), 不趕 (bu4 gan3 = “No-hurry!”) Farmers 赶集 (gan3 ji2 = hurry-to-market/fair). Shepherd 赶羊 (gan3 yang2 = drives-sheep), 赶走 (gan3 zou3 = chases-away) wolf.

Busybody 赶來趕去 (gan3 lai2 gan3 qü4 = hurry-come-hurry-go = rushes around). Police 赶到 (gan3 dao4 = speedily-arrives) scene of rioting, 驅趕 (qū1 gan3 = drive-chase/hurry = drives off) mobsters.

Team 赶工 (gan3 gong1 = speeds-up-work), 赶上 (gan3 shang4 = meets/catches-up with) deadline. Enterprises 你追我趕 (ni3 zu1 wo3 gan3 = you-chase-I-rush = compete fiercely). Monopolies 赶盡殺絕 (gan3 jin4 sha1 jüe2 = chase-exhaust-kill-extinct = chase/kill off) small businesses.