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 attires

褲 (ku4)
Cantonese pronunciation: foo3
Meanings: trousers, pants, slacks

褲子 (ku4 zi0 = trousers-diminutive) include 長褲 (chang2 ku4 = long-pants), 短褲 (duan3 ku4 = short-pants), 三角褲 (san1 jiao3 ku4 = three-corner-pants = briefs), 泳褲 (yong3 ku4 = swimming-pants/trunks), Charles Chaplin’s 燈籠褲 (deng1 long2 ku4 = lamp-cage-pants = baggy pants), cowboy’s 青仔褲 (niu2 zai3 ku4 = cow-boy-denim-trousers).

Girls wear 褲裙 (ku4 qun2 = pant-skirts), 熱褲 (re4 ku4 = hot-pants), 襪褲 (wa4 ku4 = stockings-pants = panty-hoses).

Toddlers wear 開裆褲 (kai1 dang4 ku4 = open-crotch-trousers with hole for peeing).

Whores 解褲頭 (jie3 ku4 tou2 = untie-pants-waist = let men fuck them). Coward takes 胯下之辱 (kua4 xia4 zhi1 ru3 = stride-below-’s’-humiliation = crawling under challenger’s stride/ trousers = outrageous open insult) submissively.

by Diana Yue