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 senile dementia

忘 (radical 心 xin1, heart) means 忘記 (wang4 ji4 = forget-to-remember = forget), 忘卻 (wang4 qie4 = forget-decline = deliberately forget). Genius 過目不忘 (guo4 mu4 bu4 wang4 = pass-eyes-no-forget = remembers everything read/seen). Dementia patient 善忘 (shan4 wang4 = good-at-forgetting = is forgetful).

Ungrateful person 忘本 (wang4 ben3 = forget-origin = disowns roots/benefactors). Artist/rescuer enjoys 忘我 (wang4 wo3 = forget-me/ego = selfless) work/mission. 毋忘我 (wu4 wang4 wo3 = don’t-forget-me) is forget-me-not, a flower.

Old love 難以忘懷 (nan2 yi3 wang4 huai2 = is-difficult-to-forget-from-bosom/heart). But sage says: 太上忘情 (Tai4 Shang4 wang4 qing2 = Ultimate-Supreme-forget-feelings = enlightened people put away feelings). 忘掉他/她! (wang4 diao4 tal = forget-drop-him/her = Forget him/her!)

Putonghua pronunciation: wang4
Cantonese pronunciation: mong4
Meaning: forget, oblivious

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