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 residency

留 (radical 田 tian2, field) means 留下 (liu2 xia4 = stay/reserve/retain-behind). 留心 (liu2 xin1 = keep-heart/mind) = 留神 (liu2 shen2 = keep-spirit) = “Be careful!” Tourist takes photo 留念 (liu2 nian4 = keep-memory). Hero 留芳百世 (liu2 fang1 bai2 shi4 = leave-fragrance-hundred-generations = enjoys lasting fame).

留學 (liu2 xue2 = stay-study) = go study abroad, e.g. 留法(liu2 Fa3 = stay-“Fra”nce-transliterated = go study in France).

Gauguin 留戀 (liu2 lian3 = lingers-in-loves) Tahiti, 停留 (ting2 liu2 = stopped-remained), finally 居留 (jü1 liu2 = lived-stayed).

Sympathetic country 收留 (shou4 liu2 = accept-invite-to-stay = accepts, takes in) asylum-seeker. Tackling opponent, kind person 留有餘地 (liu2 you3 yü2 di4 = leave-have-surplus-ground = gives him some room to maneuver).

by Diana Yue