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 foreign currencies

值

Putonghua pronunciation: zhi2
Cantonese pronunciation: jik6
Meanings: worth, value

值 = 價值 (jia4 zhi2 = price-worth = value). Antiques are 值錢 (zhi2 qian2 = worth-money). Rare gem 價值連城 (jia4 zhi2 lian2 cheng2 = price-worth-row-of-cities = is worth trillions). Romeo thinks dying for love is 值得 (zhi2 de2 = worth-gain = worth it).

Investors watch 币值 (bi4 zhi2 = currencies' value). Economists predict RMB’s 升值 (sheng1 zhi2 = increase-value = appreciation), US dollar’s 貶值 (bian3 zhi2 = lower-value = depreciation). Accountants calculate company’s assets’ 總值 (zhong3 zhi2 = total-value). Market slump hurts stocks’ 市值 (shi4 zhi2 = market-value).

增值税 (zeng1 zhi2 shui4 = add-value-tax) = value-added tax (VAT). We work/study hard to 自我增值 (zi4 wo3 zeng1 zhi2 = self-l-increase-value = enhance our own value/competitiveness).

by Diana Yue