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 feeding of the five thousand

奇
tone 2 = qi2

Putonghua pronunciation: qi2
Cantonese pronunciation: kei3
Meanings: odd, strange, rare, exotic, marvel at

奇 = 奇怪 (qi2 guai4 = odd-strange): 奇才 (qi2 cai2 = rare/marvelous-talent/genius), 奇妙 (qi2 miao4 = strange-wonderful/marvelous). 猎奇 (lie4 qi2 = hunt-for-strange) means adventure-seeking or sensationalized reportage.

奇花異草 (qi2 hua1 yi4 cao3 = strange-flowers-foreign-grasses) = exotic plants and blooms. 奇異果 (qi2 yi4 guo3 = strange-foreign-fruit) is Chinese name for kiwi fruit.

耶稣表演了 奇蹟 (qi2 zhi1 = strange-feats = miracles). 他只有 五餅二魚 (wu3 bing3 er2 yu2 = two-cakes-five-fish = two loaves and five fish) 但 餵飽五千人 (wei4 bao3 wu3 qian1 ren2 = fed-full-five-thousand-people = fed them to five thousand people and made them full). 每个人 嘔噥稱奇 (ze2 ze2 cheng1 qi2 = “tut”-“tut”-exclaim-strange = marveled profusely).

by Diana Yue