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 papacy and clergy

領 (radical 令 ling4, order) means lead/receive. Champion 領先 (ling3 xian1 = lead-before = is ahead of) other racers. Country’s 領袖 (ling3 xiu4 = collar-sleeve = leader) governs 領土 (ling3 tu3 = received/acquired/ruled-land = territory).

Mao領導 (ling3 dao3 = led-directed) Communist Revolution. 紅領巾 (hong2 ling3 jin1 = red-collar-scarves, revolutionary emblem) helps PRC children 領悟 (ling3 wu4 = given- understand = understand) Revolution’s significance.

梵蒂岡 (fan2 di4 gang1 = “Vatican”-transliterated) is 領地 (ling3 di4 = given/ruled-land = territory/seat) of 教宗 (jiao4 zong1 = religion’s-head = the Pope) and 天主教廷 (tian1 zhu3 jiao4 ting2 = heaven’s-lord-religion-court = Catholic/papal court). Priests 帶領 (dai4 ling3 = lead-guide) converts to 領洗 (ling3 xi3 = receive-wash/bath = baptism).

by Diana Yue