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 fox borrowing tiger's majesty

**Putonghua pronunciation:** mao4
**Cantonese pronunciation:** mo6
**Meanings:** emit, rise, defiant, risking, pretend, disguise, assume


冒著 (mao4 zhe0 = wear-hat--ing) means acting against pressure. 冒雨前進 (mao4 yu3 qian2 jin4 = against-rain-forward-advance) = pressing ahead despite/in the rain. Daring people 冒險 (mao4 xian3 = despite-danger = take risks), 冒犯權威 (mao4 fan4 qian2 wei1 = go-against-defy-power-authority = defy/offend authority).

Lackey 冒充 (mao4 chong1 = pretends-fill = assumes title of) boss, but is 冒牌貨 (mao4 pai2 huo4 = pretend-brand-goods = a fake).

by Diana Yue