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 accidents

責
Putonghua pronunciation: ze2
Cantonese pronunciation: jaak3
Meaning: responsibility, duty, burden, onus, require, reproach, reprimand, punish

責 (￥ feng1 = growing + 貝 bei4, seashell/money, i.e. dividend/loans/requirements) means 責責 (zhi2 ze2 = post/work-duties), 責 (fu4 ze2 = bearing/fulfilling-duties), 責 (ze2 bei4 = demand-perfect = scold). Slave-owner 責罵 (ze2 ma4 = scolds-rebukes), 責（ze2 fa2 = scolds-punishes）slave.


In traffic accident trial, prosecutor has 舉證責任 (jü3 zheng4 ze2 ren4 = offer-proof-responsibility = onus of proof), appoints 專責 (zhuan1 ze2 = special-duty = specially-designated) investigators. Verdict: Drunken/speeding driver 應負全責 (ying1 fu4 quan2 ze2 = should-bear-full-responsibility).

by Diana Yue