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 moving

運 (radical 足 = 走 zou3 = walk)
Putonghua pronunciation: yun4
Cantonese pronunciation: wan6
Meanings: move, function, convey, transport, fortune

運 means move/function. Planets 運行 (yun4 xing2 = move~walk = move) in outer-space. Investors 運用 (yun4 yong4 = move~use = utilize) capital. 運動會 (yun4 dong4 hui4 = move~motion~meet) = athletics meet. 運輸 (yun4 shu1 = move~convey = transportation) involves 海運 (hai3 yun4 = sea~transport), 陸運 (lu4 yun4 = land~transport), 空運 (kong1 yun4 = empty/air/sky~transportation = air transport).

搬 (ban1) = move/remove site. 搬運公司 (ban1 yun4 gong1 si1 = move~transport~public~bureau = movers/moving companies) send 貨車 (huo4 che1 = goods~car = trucks) to help clients 搬家 (ban1 jia1 = move~home/residence = move house), 運貨 (yun4 huo4 = transport/deliver~goods).

走私者 (zou3 si1 zhe3 = run~private~person = smugglers) defy 禁運 (jin4 yun4 = prohibit~transport = embargo).

by Diana Yue