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 disabled people

### 足

Putonghua pronunciation: bo3
Cantonese pronunciation: boh2
Meanings: crippled

Man has 四肢 (si4 zhi1 = four-limbs). 足 (radical足 zhu2 = foot) describes crippled person/limb. 殘廢 (can2 fei4 = mangled/maimed-invalidated = disabled) describes 殘 (tan1 zi0 = paralyzed-son = paralytic), 足 (bo3 zi0 =瘸子 que2 qi0 = cripple), person lacking 臂 (bi4, arm), 腿 (tui3, leg), 手 (shou3, hand), 掌 (zhang3, palm), 足 (zhu2 =腳 jiao3 = foot).

Accident victim undergoes 麻醉 (ma2 zui4 = numb-drunken = anesthesia), 斷肢再植 (duan4 zhi1 zai4 zhi2 = broken-limb-again-plant = limb re-attachment/re-plant). After 截肢 (jie2 zhi1 = sever-limb = limb amputation), patient gets 義肢 (yi4 zhi1 = adopted-limb = artificial limb).

Powerful opposition batters 足踏鴨 (bo3 jiao3 ya1 = lame-leg-duck = lame duck) government.

by Diana Yue