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 Jonah and the whale

抗
Putonghua pronunciation: kang4
Cantonese pronunciation: kong3
Meanings: resist, object, oppose

抗 (radical 手 = hand/arm + 六 kang4, high/excited) means 抵抗 (di3 kang4 = ward-off-resist), 反抗 (fan3 kang4 = rebel-resist-against). Dissidents 抗議 (kang4 yi4 = resist-discuss = raise protests), 違抗 (wei2 kang4 = disobey-resist = disobey) orders, launch 抗爭 (kang4 zheng1 = resist-querrel = fights/opposition).


Hebrew Bible told how 先知約拿 (xian1 zhi1 yue4 na2 = early-know-“Jonah”-transliterated = the prophet Jonah) 抗拒 (kang4 jü4 = resisted-refused = rejected) God’s command to preach to the citizens of 尼尼微城 (ni2 ni2 weil cheng2 = “Niniveh”-transliterated-city = Nineveh).

by Diana Yue