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 cold snacks

涼 Putonghua pronunciation: liang2
Cantonese pronunciation: leung4
Meanings: cool, chilly, chilled, disappointed, thin, unkinkd

涼 (radical 氵 = water shui3, water) means 清涼 (qing1 liang2 = pure/clear-cool). 乘涼 (cheng2 liang2 = ride-cool) means enjoying leisure, shade and 涼風 (liang2 feng1 = cool-wind/breeze). Fan/air-conditioner sends off 涼飔 (liang2 sou1 sou1 = cool-swish- swish = cool/chilly) air-current.

Bad news makes you 涼了半截 (liang2 le0 ban4 jie2 = cool-ed-half-section = suddenly shocked/disappointed), 心涼 (xin1 liang2 = heart-cool = excitement/enthusiasm deflated/spent). 涼薄 (liang2 bo2 = cool-thin) describes unkinkd/un grateful person.

Cold-dish 涼拌 (liang2 ban4 = cool-mix of shredded meat and vegetables) goes with vinegar. 涼粉 (liang2 fen3 = cool-powder/rice-noodle = chilled black grass-jelly) goes with honey/syrup. Cantonese people 啞涼茶 (yin3 liang2 cha2 = drink-cool-tea = drink specially-concocted darkish herbal/medicinal tea) to reduce body-heat.

by Diana Yue