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 golden week

假 (jia4)
Cantonese pronunciation: ga3
Meanings: leave, holiday, vacation

假 (jia4) means leave/vacation: 假日 (jia4 ri4 = vacation-day = holiday), 有薪假期 (you3 xin1 jia4 qi1 = have-firewood/wage-holiday-period) = paid leave. 放假 (fang4 jia4 = release-vacation) = take leave. 告假 (gao4 jia4 = inform/appeal-vacation) = apply for leave. 銷假上班 (xiao1 jia4 shang4 ban1 = annul-leave-go-on-shift) = end leave, resume work.

病假 (bing4 jia4 = ill-vacation = sick leave) is 凜涼 (qi1 liang2 = pitiful-cool = sad). 蜜月假期 (mi4 yue4 jia4 qi1 = honey-moon-vacation-period = honeymoon vacation) is 浪漫 (lang4 man4 = wave-ooze = “roman” tic-transliterated = romantic).

巴黎 (ba1 li2 = “Paris”-transliterated), 杭州 (hang2 zhou1 = Hangzhou) are 度假勝地 (du4 jia4 sheng4 di4 = pass-vacation-win-land/spot = nice places for holidaying).

by Diana Yue