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 hunting

獵 (radical 犭 = 狗 gou3, dog/hound) = hunt. 獵人 (lie4 ren2 = hunt-er) takes 獵槍 (lie4 qiang1 = hunting-gun), 獵犬 (lie4 quan3 = hunting-dog/hound), 獵鷹 (lie4 ying1 = hunting-eagle/hawk/falcon) to 獵獵 (lie4 shou4 = hunt-animals). 盜獵 (dao4 lie4 = steal-hung = poaching) is illegal.

狩獵 (shou4 lie4 = winter-hunt-hunt = hunting) was royal sport: Englishmen 獵狐 (lie4 hu2 = hunted-foxes), Manchurians 獵虎 (lie4 hu3 = hunted-tigers), 獵鹿 (lie4 lu4 = hunted-deer) in 獵場 (lie4 chang2 = hunting-fields = hunting grounds).


by Diana Yue