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 assassins**

Putonghua pronunciation: jü3
Cantonese pronunciation: Igui2
Meanings: raise, lift, erect, act, choose, deed, action, elect, enumerate, whole

舉 shows arms raising load: 舉動 (jü3 dong4 = lifting/gestures-movements), 舉手 (jü3 shou3 = raise-hands, show of hands), 舉例 (jü3 li4 = name/give-example). Drinkers 舉杯 (jü3 bei1 = raise-cups/glasses). Impotent guy 不舉 (bu4 jü3 = won’t-erect).

舉重 (jü3 zhong4 = lift-heavy) means weight-lifting, but 舉重若輕 (jü3 zhong4 ruo4 qing1 = lift-heavy-resemble-light) describes competent person performing difficult task with ease. 舉棋不定 (jü3 qi2 bu4 ding4 = hold-high-chess-piece-can’t-decide) describes person hesitating over next move.

Assassin 舉鎗 (jü3 qiang1 = raises-gun), aims. Revolutionaries 舉事 (jü3 shi4 = launch-endeavor/attack), 一舉成功 (yi1 jü3 cheng2 gong1 = one-action-complete-achievement = succeed after single action), 舉世震驚 (jü3 shi4 zhen4 jing1 = whole-world-shocked-terrified = stun the world).

by Diana Yue