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 sheep and goats

Putonghua pronunciation: qan3
Cantonese pronunciation: gon2
Meaning: chase, pursue, hurry, rush, drive away, catch up, speed up

趕 (radical 走 zou3, walk/run) means hurry/drive/chase. Busy person 趕時間 (gan3 shi2 jian1 = races-against-time). Car 趕上 (gan3 shang4 = rush-on = catches up with) and 趕過 (gan3 guo4 = rush-pass = overtakes) bicycle.

Cowboy 趕羊 (qü1 gan3 = drive-chase/hurry = drives) cattle. Shepherd 趕羊 (gan3 yang2 = drives/herds-sheep), 趕走 (gan3 zou3 = chases-away) wolf. Farmer 超集 (gan3 ji2 = hurries-to-market/fair).

Factory 超工 (gan3 gong1 = speeds-up-work), 超起 (gan3 qi3 = rushes-out-completes) quota. Migrants 超回家 (gan3 hui2 jia1 = hurry-return-home = hurry home) for holidays. Enterprises 你追我趕 (ni3 zui1 wo3 gan3 = you-chase-I-rush = compete fiercely).

Monopolies 超盡殺絕 (gan3 jin4 sha1 jüe2 = chase-exhaust-kill-extinct = squeeze out, kill off) small businesses.

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