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 disabled people**

**呆**

Putonghua pronunciation: **dai1**

Cantonese pronunciation: **daai1, ngoi4**

Meanings: dumb, stuck, slow-wittee, idiotic, mentally retarded

呆 describes 呆笨 (**dai1 ben4** = slow-witted-stupid) people, 呆板 (**dai1 ban3** = slow/dumb-board = stiff) behavior, 呆滞 (**dai1 zhi4** = stuck-sluggish = slow) progress.

Shocked person 呆住 (**dai1 zhu4** = stuck-still = is stunned stiff).

Daydreamer 發呆 (**fa1 dai1** = develop-dumb = stays dumb).

呆若木雞 (**dai1 ruo4 mu4 ji1** = dumb-like-wooden-cock) describes expressionless/dumbfounded person. 呆帳 (**dai1 zhang4** = dumb-debt) = bad debts.

呆子 (**dai1 zi0** = dumb-witted-son/person) is 智障 (**zhi4 zhang4** = intelligence-blocked = cognitively impaired).

老年痴呆症 (**lao3 nian2 chi1 dai1 zheng4** = old-year/age-fixated-dumb-illness) = senile dementia (Alzheimer’s disease).

針灸 (**zhen1 jiu3** = needle-mugwort-burn = acupuncture and moxibustion) can stimulate disabled people's 血氣運行 (**xue3 qi4 yun4 xing2** = blood-breath/energy-move-circulation).

by Diana Yue