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 cold snacks

汽 also means水蒸氣 (shui3 zheng1 qi4 = water-steam-gas = steam/water vapor): 蒸汽機 (zheng1 qi4 ji1 = steam engine), 蒸汽浴 (zheng1 qi4 yu4 = steam-vapor-bath = steam bath).
可口可樂 (ke3 kou3 ke3 le4 = “Coca Cola”-transliterated) is 汽水 (qi4 shui3 = aerated/carbonated-water). 香檳 (xiang1 bin1 = “Champagne”-transliterated) is 葡萄汽酒 (pu2 tao2 qi4 jiu3 = grape-gas/vapor-wine = sparkling wine) oozing 汽泡 (qi4 pao1 = gas/vapor-bubble = bubbles). Perrier is natural 有氣礦泉水 (you3 qi4 kuang4 qian2 shui3 = has-gas-mine-spring-water = mineral water with gas).

Putonghua pronunciation: qi4
Cantonese pronunciation: hei3
Meanings: steam, water vapor, gas, gaseous

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