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 corruption

貪 (radical 貝 bei4 = sea-shell/money)
Putonghua pronunciation: hui4
Cantonese pronunciation: fooi2
Meanings: money (old meaning), bribe, bribery

貪 = 貪賄 (hui4 lu4 = money-bribe) = bribing/bribery. 行賄 (xing2 hui4 = walk/act-bribe = giving bribes) = 輸送利益 (shu1 song4 li4 yi1 = transport-send-advantage-benefit = giving advantages). 受賄 (shou4 hui4 = accepting-bribes) = 收受利益 (shou1 shou4 li4 yi1 = receive-accept-advantage-benefit = accepting advantages).

Mafia operatives 賄選 (hui4 xuan3 = bribe-elect = buy votes). Electors/voters 收黑錢 (shou1 hei1 qin3 = accept-black-money = accept graft money).

Police launches 反貪污 (fan3 tan1 wu1 = reverse-greed-dirty = anti-corruption) actions, applies 防止貪賄條例 (fang2 zhi3 hui4 lu4 tiao2 li4 = prevent-stop-bribe-bribe-item-rule = Prevention of Bribery Ordinance) to charge 疑犯 (yi2 fan4 = doubt-commit = suspects) for 貪污 (tan1 wu1 = greed-dirty = corruption).

by Diana Yue