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 moving

移 (yi4)

Putonghua pronunciation: yi2
Cantonese pronunciation: yi2
Meanings: move, change position


After Hong Kong’s 主權移交 (zhu3 quan2 yi2 jiao1 = master-right-move-deliver = sovereignty handover), some people 移民 (yi2 min2 = move-people = emigrate/immigrate/leave), 轉移 (zhuan3 yi2 = turn-move = relocate) assets.

Pastor 堅定不移 (jian1 ding4 bu4 yi2 = hard-steady-no-shift = remains dedicated and firm), strengthens parishioners’ faith through 潛移默化 (qian2 yi2 mo4 hua4 = dive-move-silent-transform = subtle and steady influence).

by Diana Yue