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 translation

Putonghua pronunciation: e2
Cantonese pronunciation: nghoh 4
Meanings: distorted, false, falsify, misrepresentation, rumour

訛 (radical言 yan2, word/speech) means incorrect/false words.訛音 (e2 yin1 = incorrect-sound) = wrong/distorted pronunciation.訛字 (e2 zi4 = incorrect-written-character) = wrongly-written or mis-typed/mis-printed word.訛誤 (e2 wu4 = incorrect-mistake) = inaccurate writing/record.

Crooks 綁架 (bang3 jia4 = bind-carry = kidnap) victim,訛詐 (e2 zha4 = false-deceive = blackmail) victim’s family for贖金 (shu2 jin1 = redemption-gold/money = ransom).核訛詐 (he2 e2 zha4 = nuclear-false-deceive) means blackmailing other countries by threatening to use nuclear force.

訛傳 (e2 chuan = incorrect-communicate) means spreading incorrect/false information.訛譯 (e2 yi4 = incorrect-translation) may result in以訛傳訛 (yi3 e2 chuan2 e2 = with~ false-communicate-false = incorrectly spreading an incorrect message), i.e. departing further and further from the original story/message.

by Diana Yue