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 Jonah and the whale

腹

Putonghua pronunciation: fu4
Cantonese pronunciation: fuk1
Meanings: abdomen, stomach

腹 (radical 月 = 肉 rou4, flesh/meat) = 腹部 (fu4 bu4 = abdomen-part) or 胃 (wei4, stomach). When 空腹 (kong1 fu4 = empty-stomached), we eat to 肚腹 (guo3 fu4 = stuff/fill-stomach). 腹瀉 (fu4 xie4 = stomach-flush) = diarrhoea. 腹話 (fu4 yu3 = stomach-talk) = ventriloquism.

剖腹 (poul1 fu4 = cut-open-stomach) = caesareian operation. 切腹 (qie4 fu4 = cut-stomach) = seppuku/hara-kiri, Japanese suicide by disembowelment with sword. 葬身魚腹 (zang4 shen1 yu2 fu4 = buried-body-in-fish’s-stomach) = disappeared/died in sea/river.


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