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:

1\textsuperscript{st} tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2\textsuperscript{nd} tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3\textsuperscript{rd} tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4\textsuperscript{th} 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 Chinese sun god

射
Putonghua pronunciation: she1
Cantonese pronunciation: se6
Meanings: shoot

射 = shoot/release arrow/bullet/missile. Hunter 射箭 (she4 jian4 = shoots-arrow), 射殺 (she4 sha1 = shoots-kills) deer. Gunman 射擊 (she4 ji1 = shoot-hit = fires shots), 射中 (she4 zhong4 = shoots-hits) target. Strategy 射人先射馬 (she4 ren2 xian1 she4 ma3 = shoot-person-first-shoot-horse) is effective — hit horse, rider will fall.

射精 (she4 jing1 = shoots-sperms) = copulating male’s ejaculation.

噴射機 (pen1 she4 ji1 = jet-shoot-machine/airplane) = jet aircraft. Missile’s 射程 (she4 cheng2 = shoot-path) = shooting range. 核輻射 (he2 fu1 she4 = nuclear-wheel-spoke/converge-shoot) = nuclear radiation.

In myth 翟射九日 (Yi4 she4 jiu3 ri4 = Yi-shot-down-nine-suns), 神射手 (shen2 she4 shou3 = god-shoot-hand = mighty/miraculous archer) Hou Yi shot down nine suns, saving the world.

by Diana Yue