Charater Builder

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 hams

豬
Cantonese pronunciation: jue1
Meanings: pig, hog

豬 lives in 豬圈 (zhu1 qüan1 = pig-ring/sty): 公豬 (gong1 zhu1 = grandpa/male-pig = boar), 母豬 (mu3 zhu1 = mother/female-pig = sow), 小豬 (xiao3 zhu1 = little-pig/piglet).

Chinese eat 豬肉 (zhu1 rou4 = pig-meat = pork), 豬肚 (zhu1 du4 = pig’s-stomach), 豬蹄 (zhu1 ti2 = pig’s-trotters). 豬油 (zhu1 you2 = pig-oil) = lard. In Chinese New Year Hongkong people eat 豬舌 (zhu1 she2 = Cantonese 豬脷 zhu1 li4 = pig’s tongue) for good luck because 脷 is synonymous with 利 (li4, profit/benefit). Wedding banquet features 燒豬 (shao1 zhu1 = burn/roast-pig = whole roasted pig/piglet).

Cantonese 咪 (gam2) means “like this”. 殺豬啲叫 (Cantonese saat3 jue1 gam2 giu3 = kill-pig-like-this-call/yell/scream) = screeching like a pig being slaughtered.

by Diana Yue