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 abusive language

Putonghua pronunciation: xie2
Cantonese pronunciation: che4
Meaning: unorthodox, heretical, perverted, devilish, sinister, indecent, erotic


Monk 目 不邪視 (mu4 bu4 xie2 shi4 = eyes-won't-sideways-look = keeps straight gaze), blocks 邪念 (xie2 nian4 = sinister/erotic-thoughts), 肆邪物 (pi4 xie2 wu4 = banish-evil-objects = talismans) dispel 邪氣 (xie2 qi4 = evil-atmosphere/mystic-force), defeat 邪魔外道 (xie2 mo2 wai4 dao4 = evil-demons-unorthodox-powers).

邪不能勝正 (xie2 bu4 neng2 sheng4 zheng4 = evil-can't-conquer-righteousness). Criminals must 改邪歸正 (gai3 xie2 gui1 zheng4 = change-evil-return-to-correct-path = reform themselves).

by Diana Yue