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 partying

Putonghua pronunciation: huan1
Cantonese pronunciation: fo0n1
Meanings: joy, cheer, sexual intercourse

Verb 喜歡 (xi3 huan1 = like-joy) = like/love someone/something. 歡樂 (huan1 le4 = joy-cheer/happiness) makes people 歡笑 (huan1 xiao4 = happily-laugh). Crowds 歡呼 (huan1 hu1 = joyously-shout/cheer) to 歡迎 (huan1 ying2 = cheer-welcome) homecoming troops. 交歡 (jiao1 huan1 = cross-joy) means sexual intercourse, 求歡 (qiu2 huan1 = beg-fun/sex) means ask for sex. Tibetan Buddhism icon 歡喜佛 (huan1 xi3 fo2 = joy-cheer-Buddha) shows male and female mating. Men frequent 歡場 (huan1 chang3 = fun/entertainment-places) to 尋歡 (xun2 huan1 = find/buy-fun/sex).

Solo diner/drinker 獨酌無歡 (du2 zhuo2 wu2 huan1 = lonely-drinking-lacking-fun/joy),鬱鬱寡歡 (yu4 yu4 gua3 huan1 = dense-dense-few/lacking-joy = looks/feels sad/cheerless/out-of-place). 不歡而散 (bu4 huan1 er2 san4 = dis-pleased-so-disperse) describes quarreled partners’ party’s breaking-up.

by Diana Yue