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 kitchens

Putonghua pronunciation: lu2
Cantonese pronunciation: lo4
Meanings: stove, furnace, fireplace, hearth, oven

爐 (radical 火 huo3, fire) covers kitchen's 火爐 (huo3 lu2 = fire-stove), factory's 鍋爐 (guo1 lu2 = pot-oven = boiler), temple’s 香爐 (xiang1 lu2 = incense-burner). Rubbish is burned in 焚化爐 (fen2 hua4 lu2 = burn-transform-oven = incinerators).

爐灶 (lu2 zao4 = stove-fire-hole = kitchen range/counter) uses 燃料 (ran2 liao4 = burning-material = fuel): 柴 (chai2, firewood), 電 (dian4, electricity), 瓦斯 (wa3 si1 = “gas”-transliterated = 煤氣 mei2 qi4 = coal-gas). 灶君 (zao4 jun1 = kitchen-counter-king) = Kitchen God in Chinese mythology.

In Hongkong, 吃火鍋 (chi1 huo3 guo1 = eat-hot-pot) is called 打邊爐 (da3 bian1 lu2 = hit-side-stove). 新鮮出爐 (xin1 xian1 chu1 lu2 = new-fresh-exit-oven) describes freshly-baked buns or latest news.

by Diana Yue