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 wound treatment

救
Putonghua pronunciation: jiu4
Cantonese pronunciation: gau3
Meanings: rescue, save, redeem


Surgeon performs 急救 (ji2 jiu4 = hurry/impatient=save = first-aid/quick rescue) on accident victim: 切開傷處 (qie1 kai1 shang1 chu4 = cuts-open-injured-area), 取出碎骨 (qü3 chu4 sui4 gu3 = takes-out-broken-bones), 輸血 (shu1 xue3 = supply-blood = gives blood transfusion), 縫合傷口 (feng2 he2 shang1 kou3 = sew-together-wound-mouth = sews up cut).

Hard-hearted person 見死不救 (jian4 si3 bu4 jiu4 = see-die-won 抜-save = won掐 give help where it is desperately needed).

by Diana Yue