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 feeling miserable

怒 (nu4)
Cantonese pronunciation: no6
Meanings: anger, fury, rage, profuse, energetic

怒 (radical 心 xin1, heart) = bursting with fury/energy: 怒氣 (nu4 qi4 = angry-air = fury), 怒火 (nu4 huo3 = angry-fire = fiery rage), 怒海 (nu4 hai3 = angry/tempestuous-sea), 怒放 (nu4 fang4 = profusely-blooming) flowers. 憤怒青年 (fen4 nu4 qing1 nian2 = bursting-anger-green-years) = angry young man.

Looters 犯眾怒 (fan4 zhong4 nu4 = offend-majotity-anger = arouse everyone’s anger), 激怒 (ji1 nu4 = stimulate-angry = enranges) bystanders. Demonstrators 怒吼 (nu4 hou3 = angrily-roar/shout), 遷怒 (qian1 nu4 = move-anger = shifts anger/blame on) police.

Buddhist deities 金剛怒目 (Jin1 Gang1 nu4 mu4 = Vajra/Diamond-angrily-stares = fierce-looking warrior) and 菩薩低眉 (Pu2 Sa3 di1 mei2 = Bodhisattva/Pusa-lowers-eyebrows = gently-looking goddess) symbolize Buddhism’s bi-focal teaching: punishment and mercy.

by Diana Yue