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 quantitative easing

印

Putonghua pronunciation: yin4
Cantonese pronunciation: yan3
Meanings: print, stamp, brand


Hong Kong property buyers pay 印花費 (yin4 hua1 fei4 = print-flower/mark-fee = stamp duties). Printing house 印刷 (yin4 shua1 = print-scrape = prints) books. Classics/bestsellers get 重印 (chong2 yin4 = re-prints).

Central bank 印發 (yin4 fa1 = print-issue) 銭票 (chao1 piao4 = money-tickets = banknotes). 大量印鈔 (da4 liang4 yin4 choa1 = big-amount-print-banknotes = massive issuing of banknotes) 印 證 (yin4 zheng4 = mark-evidence = bears witness to) QE3.

by Diana Yue