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 faith

疑
Putonghua pronunciation: yi2
Cantonese pronunciation: yi4
Meaning: suspect, suspicious, uncertain, guess, doubt, suspicion, unsolvable

疑 means uncertainty/doubt: 可疑 (ke3 yi2 = can-suspect = suspicious/questionable/fishy), 懊疑 (huai2 yi2 = bosom/embrace-suspicion = harbor suspicion/skepticism), 疑霧 (yi2 yün2 = doubt-cloud = cloud of suspicion), 半信半疑 (ban4 xin4 ban4 yi2 = half-believing-half-doubting), 無疑 (wu2 yi2 = no-doubt, certainly).

Employees have 疑問 (yi2 wen4 = suspecting-questions = queries). Employer dispells their 疑惑 (yi2 hua4 = doubts-misunderstandings). Detective sees 疑點 (yi2 dian3 = questionable-point/issue), 起疑 (qi3 yi2 = begins-develops-suspicion). Person who 疑神疑鬼 (yi2 shen2 yi2 gui3 = suspect-gods-suspect-ghosts = suspects anything/everything) often 猜疑 (cai1 yi2 = doubts-distrusts) others.

多疑的多馬 (duo1 yi2 de0 Duo1 Ma3 = many/much-doubt-‘s-“Thom-mas”-transliterated) is doubting Thomas, Jesus' disciple who wouldn’t believe Jesus had risen from the dead.

by Diana Yue