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 fishing

漁 (radical 氵 = water shui3, water)
Putonghua pronunciation: yu 2
Cantonese pronunciation: yue 4
Meanings: water

魚 Verb 漁 = 氵 (water-drops) + noun 魚 (yu2, fish) which floats on (water-drops): 漁民 (yu2 min2 = fishing-people = fishermen), 漁船 (yu2 chuan2 = fishing-boats/vessels).

捕魚業 (bu4 yu2 ye4 = hunt/catch-fish-industry = fishing industry) targets 鰭 (qing1, mackerels), 藍鰭鰈 (lan2 qi2 wei3 = blue-finned-tunas), 石斑 (shi2 ban3 = rock-stripes = groupers), 海鱸 (hai3 lu2 = sea-basses), 蝦 (xia1, shrimps/prawns), 蟹 (xie4, crabs), 龍蝦 (long2 xia1 = dragon-prawn = lobsters).

Chinese fable “鹬蚌相爭” (yu4 bang4 xiang1 zheng1 = sandpiper-clam-mutual-fight), “漁人得利” (yu2 ren2 de2 li4 = fisher-man-gets-advantage) describes “Sandpiper and Clam in deadlocked fight; Fisherman comes along, grabs both”. Lesson: “If A & B quarrel/fight, C gets the advantage”.

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