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 borrowing arrows

謀
Putonghua pronunciation: mou2
Cantonese pronunciation: mau4
Meanings: seek, plot, strategize

謀 means make plans/efforts with aim/purpose: 謀生 (mou2 sheng1 = seek/make-a-living), 謀反 (mou2 fan3 = plot-rebellion), 謀殺 (mou2 sha1 = plot-kill = murder). 不謀而合 (bu4 mou2 er2 he2 = un-planned-and/yet-agree) = separately arrive at similar views/plans.

Schemers plan 隱謀 (yin1 mou2 = dark-plot = conspiracy). Corrupt officials 以權謀私 (yi3 quan2 mou2 si1 = with-power-seek-private/self = use their power for selfish purposes). Rash people are 有勇無謀 (you3 yong3 wu2 mou2 = has-bravery-lack-strategy = daring but brainless).

諸葛亮 (Zhu1 Ge2 Liang4) was also called 孔明 (Kong3 Ming2). His 計謀 (ji4 mou2 = scheme-plot) which made the enemy send him arrows is called 孔明借箭 (Kong3 Ming2 jie4 jian4 = Kong-ming borrowed arrows).

by Diana Yue