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 \(\backslash\) 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 the *nouveau-riche***

**發**

Putonghua pronunciation: **fa1**

Cantonese pronunciation: **faat3**

Meanings: start, dispatch, develop, express, bloom

發 = start/send/develop. Events 發生 (**fa1 sheng1** = start-born = happen). Traveler 出發 (**chu1 fa1** = out-start = starts journey). Illness 發作 (**fa1 zuo2** = start-act = surfaces). 發現 (**fa1 xian4** = start-show) = discover/discovery. 發明 (**fa1 ming2** = tapt-understanding) = invent/invention.

Secretary 發信 (**fa1 xin4** = sends-letters). Central bank 發表 (**fa1 biao3** = pronounces/publishes/issues) declaration, 發行 (**fa1 xing2** = dispatch-distribute = issues) bonds. Glamor girl 容光煥發 (**rong2 guang1 huan4 fa1** = visage-light-radiant-bloom = looks radiant).

Colloquial expression 發達 (**fa1 da2** = start/develop-arrive) means get rich. Businessman 發揮 (**fa1 hui1** = develop-wave = uses/manifests) business skills, 發展 (**fa1 zhan3** = starts-develops) career, 發大達 (**fa1 da4 da2** = start/develop-big-arrive = acquires huge fortune).

*by Diana Yue*