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 babies

Putonghua pronunciation: hu4
Cantonese pronunciation: woo6
Meanings: protect, defend, guard, shield, safeguard, patronize

護 (radical 言 yan2, words) = 保護 (bao3 hu4 = preserve/guarantee-protect = protect/protection): 護衛 (hu4 wei4 = protect-defend = guard), 護林 (hu4 lin2 = protect-forests), 救護車 (jiu4 hu4 che1 = rescue-protect-car = ambulance), 保護國 (bao3 hu4 guo2 = preserve-protect-country = protectorate).
Traveler needs 護照 (hu4 zhao4 = protect-picture = passport).
Socialite needs 護花使者 (hu4 hua1 shi4 zhe1 = protect-flower-messenger = lady’s escort). Demon-possessed person needs 護身符 (hu4 shen1 fu2 = protect-body-charm/amulet).
護士 (hu4 shi4 = protect-person = nurses) administer 護理 (hu4 li3 = protect-treat = medical care/treatment). Parents 愛護 (ai4 hu4 = love-protect), 呵護 (he1 hu4 = blow-air/coax-protect = coax), sometimes 被護 (tan3 hu4 = bare/naked-protect = unfairly defend) their kids.

by Diana Yue