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 horses


馳名 (chi2 ming2 = gallop-name) = famous. Knight 駍騁沙場 (chi2 cheng3 ha1 chang3 = gallop-roam-sandy-field = charges/fights on battlefields). Businessman 駆騁商場 (chi2 cheng3 shang1 chang3 = gallop-roam-business-field = makes conquests in business circles).

Salary-man 為口奔馳 (wei4 kou3 ben1 chi2 = for-mouth/eat-run-gallop = rushes around earning livelihood), feels dreams and reality 背道而馳 (bei4 dao4 er2 chi2 = back/opposite-road-and-gallop = go opposite ways).

by Diana Yue