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 surgical operations

Putonghua pronunciation: chu2
Cantonese pronunciation: chue4
Meaning: divide, remove, eliminate, except, divide

除 (radical  fu4, left-ear radical) = 清除 (qing1 chu2 = clean-up-remove). Gardener 除蟲 (chu2 chong2 = removes/ extinguishes-bugs), 剷除 (chan3 chu2 = hoes-removes) weeds. 除非 (chu2 fei1 = remove-not) means unless. Arithmetics has 加減乘除 (jia1 jian3 cheng2 chu2 = addition-subtraction- multiplication-division).

King 免除 (mian3 chu2 = dismisses-removes) opponents' titles/powers, 排除 (pai2 chu2 = dismisses-eliminates) usurper's comeback. School/boss 開除 (kai1 chu2 = open/off-remove = sacks/discontinues) truants. Dragon-slayer 為民除害 (wei4 min2 chu2 hai4 = for-people-remove-pest = eliminates common threat/harm).


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