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 ECFA (Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement)

陸
Putonghua pronunciation: lu4
Cantonese pronunciation: luk6
Meanings: land, short for Mainland China

陸 = 陸地 (lu4 di4 = continents-land). 陸上 (lu4 shang4 = land-above) = on land. 中國大陸 (zhong1 guo2 da4 lu4 = middle-kingdom/state-big-land) = Mainland China. 登陸 (deng1 lu4 = mount-land) describes marines’ military action and businessmen going to China.

北京 (bei3 jing1 = Beijing), 台北 (tai2 bei3 = Taipei) signed 兩岸經濟協議 (liang3 an4 jing1 ji4 xie2 yi4 = two-coasts-manage-irrigate-together-discuss = Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement = ECFA, 2010). “Two coasts” = two sides of 台灣海峽 (tai2 wan1 hai3 xia2 = Tai-wan-sea-strait = Taiwan Strait).

ECFA will boost 雙邊貿易 (shuang1 bian1 mao4 yi4 = pair-sides-trade-exchange = bilateral trade), improve 陸海關係 (lu4 tai2 guan1 xia4 = Mainland-Taiwan-concern-link = Mainland-Taiwan relations).