The basic unit of the Chinese language is the ζì (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each ζì 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 ζì together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each ζì 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 ζì 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 wound treatment

Putonghua pronunciation: zhen1
Cantonese pronunciation: jam1
Meanings: needle

針 (radical 金 jin1, gold/metal) = needle: 針線 (zhen1 xian4 = needle-thread), 針眼 (zhen1 yan3 = needle’s-eye), 松針 (song1 zhen1 = pine-needles). 針刺麻酢 (zhen1 ci4 ma2 zui4 = needle-prick-numb-intoxication) = Chinese traditional acupuncture anesthesia.

Hospitals in China practice 中西醫結合 (zhong1 xi1 yi1 jie2 he2 = China-West-medicine-tie-combine = Chinese integrative medicine). 針炙 (zhen1 jiu4 = needle-burn = acupuncture and moxibustion) combines 針刺 (zhen1 ci4 = needle-prick = insertion of needle into energy-spots under skin = acupuncture) and 艾灸 (ai4 jiu4 = mugwort-burn = heating energy-spots with mugwort bars).

Acupuncture helps rehabilitation: 凍痛 (jian3 tong4 = reduce/ lessen-pain), 加強氣血 (jia1 qiang2 qi4 xue3 = add-strong- air/gas-blood = improve flow of energy/qi and blood inside body).

by Diana Yue