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 fatty foods

**濃**

Putonghua pronunciation: **nong2**
Cantonese pronunciation: **nung4**
Meanings: rich, thick, dense, strong, great, concentrated

濃 (radical 氵= water shui3, water) = 濃濃的 (nong2 nong2 de0 = dense/rich/concentrated); 濃煙 (nong2 yan1 = dense/thick-smoke), 濃眉 (nong2 mei2 = dense/bushy-eyebrows), 濃密 (nong2 mi4 = thick-dense) hair, 濃重 (nong2 zhong4 = dense-heavy) smell/accent. 濃縮液 (nong2 suo1 yi4 = dense-contract-liquid) = concentrated solution.

不濃不淡 (bu4 nong2 bu4 dan4 = not-dense-not-light) = tastes just right, neither bland nor heavy. 香濃 (nong2 hou4 xiang1 nong2 = fragrant/rich) coffee/cream. 濃情厚意 (nong2 qing2 hou4 yi4 = deep-affection-thick-sentiment) = deep affection/friendship.

濃味 (nong2 wei4 = heavy-taste) = heavily marinated/spiced. 濃油赤醬 (nong2 you2 chi4 jiang4 = thick-oil-red-paste) describes oily dishes/stews in dark/thick/rich sauce. 濃茶 (nong2 cha2 = concentrated/strong-tea) cleans the palate.

by Diana Yue