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 cooking shows

Putonghua pronunciation: peng1
Cantonese pronunciation: paang1
Meanings: boil, cook meat or vegetables, cooking, cuisine

烹 (radical 灬, i.e. 水 sui3, water or 火 huo3, fire) = 烹飪 (peng1 ren3 = cook-well-cooked = cooking). 烹調 (peng1 tiao2 = cook-adjust) = cook skillfully. 烹茶 (peng1 cha2 = cook-tea) = boil water, brew tea. 烹藥 (peng1 yao4 = boil-medicine) = concoct Chinese herbal medicine.

Family watches 烹飪節目 (peng1 ren4 jie2 mu4 = cook-well-section-item = cooking show) on 電視 (dian4 shi4 = electric-sight = television). Chef talks about 烹飪心得 (peng1 ren4 xin1 de2 = cook-done-heart-achieve = cooking tips), tours 街市 (jie1 shi4 = street-market = wet market), picks 作料 (zuo2 liao4 = make-material = cooking ingredients).

Mom boasts: “I am also 烹飪高手 (peng1 ren4 gao1 shou3 = cook-well-high-hand = master-cook)!”

by Diana Yue