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 rainstorms

豪
Putonghua pronunciation: hao2
Cantonese pronunciation: ho4
Meaning: extraordinary, grand, rich, luxurious, lavish, bold, unrestrained, heroic
豪 (radical 矢 shi3, pig) = enormous/extravagant/bold: 豪爽 (hao2 shuang3 = generous-straightforward), 豪华 (hao2 hua2 = grand-extravagant), 豪杰 (hao2 jie2 = outstanding-heroes/winners), 豪门 (hao2 men2 = rich-household/family), 豪雨 (hao2 yu3 = big/heavy-rainfall). 文豪 (wen2 hao2 = writing-great) = great/prolific writer/novelist.
豪客 (hao2 ke4 = generous-guest) = big spenders. 豪赌 (hao2 du3 = bold/extravagant-gamble) means play/gamble with big stakes, or take big risk. Slangily, 豪乳 (hao2 ru3 = big-milk/female-breast) means sex-bomb’s big boobs.
土豪恶霸 (tu3 hao2 e4 ba4 = local-tyrant-fierce-bully = village/neighborhood’s bad/powerful guys) 巧取豪夺 (qiao3 qu3 hao2 duo2 = cleverly-take-powerfully-snatch = rob others unscrupulously). PRC’s 土豪 (uneducated/vulgar nouveau-riche) typically like 豪宅 (hao2 zhai2 = grand-houses/homes), 豪车 (hao2 che1 = expensive-cars).

by Diana Yue