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 cosmetic surgery

隆
Putonghua pronunciation: long2
Cantonese pronunciation: lung4
Meaning: grand, intense, thriving, tall, rise, bulge, swell, protrude, honour

Adjective 隆 (radical 堆 bu4, hill/lump) means thriving/intense: 隆冬 (long2 dong1 = deep-winter), 隆隆 (qing1 long2 = prosperous-thriving). Giving 隆重 (long2 zhong4 = grand-serious = grand) party shows host's 隆情厚意 (long2 qing2 hou4 yi4 = intense-feeling-dense-intent = sincere goodwill).


整容手術 (zheng3 rong2 shou3 shu4 = reconstruct/reform-face/appearance-hand-method) = cosmetic surgery: 隆鼻 (long2 bi2 = raise-nose-bridge = augmentation rhinoplasty), 隆胸 (long2 xiong1 = enlarge-breast = breast implant, mammoplasty enlargement).

by Diana Yue