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 the digestive system

排 (pai2)
Cantonese pronunciation: paa2
Meanings: dispel, expel, excrete

排 (radical 手 = hand shou3, hand) means sweep-out/expel. 排斥 (pai2 chi4 = expel-rebuke) = discriminate-against/reject/oust. 出恭 (chu1 gong1 = out-respectful) means 排便 (pai2 bian4 = excrete-faeces i.e. stooling). 結恭 (jie2 gong1 = solidify/knot-respectful) = constipation.

Politely, 如廁 (ru2 ce4 = go-lavatory) means going to 廁所 (ce4 suo3 = latrine-premises = lavatory): 男廁 (nan2 ce4 = men’s-lavatory), 女廁 (nu3 ce4 = women’s-lavatory), 坐廁 (zuo4 ce4 = sitting/seat-lavatory), 躺廁 (zun1 ce4 = squatting-lavatory), 旱廁 (han4 ce4 = dry-lavatory = pit toilet).

排污 (pai2 wu1 = dispel-filth/sewage) system supports 水廁 (shui3 ce4 = water/flushed-toilet/W.C.). Be 衛生 (wei4 sheng1 = protect-life = hygienic)! 便後沖廁 (bian4 hou4 chong1 ce4 = convenience-after-flush-lavatory = Flush toilet after use!)

by Diana Yue