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 new-born babies

Putonghua pronunciation: teng2
Cantonese pronunciation: tang4

Meaning: sore, ache, pain, love dearly, be fond of, dote on, endear, cherish

疼 (radical 广 chuang2, illness + 冬 dong1, winter/year-end) = ache/pain: 疼痛 (teng2 tong4 = aching-pain), 頭疼 (tou2 teng2 = head-ache), 骨疼 (gu3 teng3 = bones-ache), 肌肉疼痛 (jii1 rou4 teng2 tong4 = muscle-flesh-sore-pain = muscle pain).

心疼 (xin1 teng2 = heart-ache/pain) means 心痛 (xin1 zang4 teng2 tong4 = heart-organ-sore-pain = heart/cardiac pains, cardiologist’s concern) or 疼愛 (teng2 ai4 = ache-love = dearly love). Mom 疼子心切 (teng2 zi3 xin1 qie4 = love-son-heart-eager = loves son dearly/keenly), nurses sick baby, drops 無關疼癢 (wu2 guan1 teng2 yang3 = not-related-to-pain-itch = unimportant) engagements.

Maestro 疼惜 (teng2 xi3 = loves-and-treasures) musical talent. Husband gives wife goodbye hug: “疼你!” (teng2 ni3 = “Love-you!”

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