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 burning the linked ships**

**連**

Putonghua pronunciation: lian2
Cantonese pronunciation: lin4
Meanings: link, join

連 describes joined things or consecutive events. 連續 (lian2 xū2 = link~continue) = continuous. 接二連三 (jie2 er4 lian2 san1 = receive~two~link~three) describes events occurring in a row.
心連心 (xin1 lian2 xin1 = heart~link~heart) describes firm-hearted comrades/lovers.

連體嬰 (lian2 ti3 ying1 = link~body~baby) = con-joined/Siamese twins. 連鎖店 (lian2 xuo3 dian4 = link~lock~shop) = chain-stores. 網上連結 (wang3 shang4 lian2 jie2 = net~on~link~knot) = links on the Internet.

魏國 (Wei4 guo2 = Wei-Kingdom) used 連環船 (lian2 huan2 chuan2 = link~ring~ships = ships chained together) to fight naval battle on 長江 (Chang2 Jiang1 = Long-River = the Yangtze River). 戰火連天 (zhan4 huo3 lian2 tian1 = battle~fire~link/meet~sky) describes battle scene with soaring flames.

by Diana Yue