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 scandals

羞 P utonghua pronunciation: xiū1
Cantonese pronunciation: sau1
Meaning: shy, embarrassed, shame, insult, humiliation

羞 (radical 丑 chou3, ugly/embarrassing/embarrassed) = shy/shameful feeling. Children are 羞涩 (xiū1 se4 = shy-immature/awkward = shy), 羞怯 (xiū1 qie4 = shyly-timidly) before strangers. 羞愧 (hai4 xiu1 = ill/contract-shyness) = Cantonese 恐懼 (pa4 chou3 = Cantonese pa3 chau2 = fear-ugly/embarrassed) = feel shy.

Prodigal son 羞愧 (xi1 chan2 = abashed-ashamed = feels shameful). Pharisees 羞辱 (xi1 ru3 = shame-insult) sinner, 羞與為伍 (xi1 yu3 wei3 wu3 = embarrassed-with-be-company = are ashamed of his company).

Tabloid says VIP involved in 醜聞 (chou3 wen2 = ugly-news = dirty scandal) 不知羞恥 (bu1 zhi1 xiu1 chi3 = not-know/understand-embarrassment-shame = has no sense of shame).
VIP 老羞成怒 (lao3 xiu1 cheng2 nu4 = old/extreme-shame-become-anger = badly shamed/offended, gets angry).

by Diana Yue