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: bao4
Cantonese pronunciation: po5
Meaning: hold in both arms, arm's embrace, carry, encircle, hug, cherish, give birth to, adopt

抱 (radical \| = hand/arm) means hold/encircle/encircle. Lovers 擁抱 (yong1 bo4 = hold/hug-each-other-in-embrace), Nurse 抱起 (bao4 qi3 = holds-up) baby, puts it in mom's 怱抱 (huai2 bao4 = arm's-embrace). Orphanage encourages 抱養 (bao4 yang3 = carry-breed/raise = child adoption).

Sea 環抱 (huan2 bao4 = circle-embrace = encircles) island.

Hero has 抱負 (bao4 fu4 = cherished-aims/ambitions). Weak team 抱蛋 (bao4 dan4 = carry-egg = scores zero/nil). Boss 抱怨 (bao4 yu4an = carries/expresses-grudge).

Grandparents 抱病 (bao4 bing4 = have-illness), desire 抱孫 (bao4 sun1 = holding-grandchild = grandchild's arrival), wish 新 抱 (xin1 bao4 = Cantonese term san1 po5 = newly-embraced = daughter-in-law) can 三年兩抱 (san1 lian2 liang3 bao4 = three-years-two-carry = have two babies in three years).

by Diana Yue