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 hospitalization

Putonghua pronunciation: yang3
Cantonese pronunciation: yeung5
Meaning: give birth to, breed, raise, rear, foster, nurture, support, conserve

養 (yang2, sheep/goat + 食 shi2, eat/ feed) = sire/raise/support. Couple 養孩子 (yang3 hai2 zi0 = breed-child-diminutive = have/raise children), 養家 (yang3 jia1 = raise/support-family). Children/donors 供養 (gong1 yang3 = pay/donate-to-support) parents/deity. 領養 (ling3 yang3 = lead-rear) means adopt foster son/daughter.

Teachers 培養 (pei2 yang3 = develop-nurture) new talents. Farmers 飼養 (si4 yang3 = feed-breed) livestock, 養殖 (yang3 zhi2 = raise-breed) oysters for 養珠 (yang3 zhu1 = cultured-pearls). Countries 養兵 (yang3 bing1 = keep/train-soldiers/army).

Patients 養傷 (yang3 shang1 = rest-to-nurse-wounds), 養病 (yang3 bing4 = rest-to-cure-illness). 養老金 (yang3 lao3 jin1 = support-old-gold = old-age pension) 養活 (yang3 huo2 = sustain livelihood of) seniors in 療養院 (liao2 yang3 yuan4 = heal-feed/sustain-institution = sanitorium).

by Diana Yue