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 BRIC

俄

Putonghua pronunciation: e 2
Cantonese pronunciation: ngoh 4
Meanings: first character of “Russia”-transliterated

俄羅斯 (E Luo Si 221) is “Russia” transliterated. Russians speak 俄語 (E yu 23 = Russian-language), read 普希金 (Pu Xi Jin 311 = “Pushkin”-transliterated), are 東正教 (Dong Zheng Jiao 144 = Eastern-Orthodox-Church/religion) Christians, 沙皇 (Sha huang 12 = “Czar”-transliterated-emperor) ruled Russia until 十月革命 (shi yue ge ming 2424 = ten/tenth-moon/month-change-fate = October Revolution, 1917) led by 列寧 (Lie Ning 42 = “Lenin”-transliterated). In 1991 USSR 解體 (jie ti 23 = loosen/free-body = disintegrated).

Russia sells 油 (you 2 = oil/petroleum), 氣 (qi 4 = natural-gas), 太空科技 (tai kong ke ji 4114 = ether-sky/space-science-technolgy = space technology), keeps big 國防預算 (guo fang yu suan 2244 = state-defense-prepare/projected-calculation = defense budget).

by Diana Yue