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

唾
Putonghua pronunciation: tuo4
Cantonese pronunciation: teuh3, to3, toh3
Meaning: spit, saliva, spurn

唾 (radical 口 kou3, mouth) means noun 唾液 (tuo4 ye = spit-liquid = spit/saliva), verb 唾啐 (tuo4 cui4 = spit-spit-out). 唾盂 (tuo4 yu2 = spit-bowl = spitoons) are for 吐痰 (tu4 tan2 = spitting-phlegm). Untalented writer 拾人餘唾 (shi2 ren2 yu2 tuo4 = picks-up-other-people’s-leftover-saliva = says what others have already said).

唾手可得 (tuo4 shou3 ke3 de2 = spit-on-hands-can-obtain) means spitting 唾沫 (tuo4 mo4 = saliva-drops) on one’s own hands, describes something very easy to obtain/accomplish.

Fans 唾罵 (tuo4 ma4 = spit-on/spurn-rebuke/revile), 唾棄 (tuo4 qi4 = spit-on/spurn-desert/abandon) singer involved in 醜聞 (chou3 wen2 = ugly-news = dirty scandal), but he 唾面自乾 (tuo4 mian4 zi44 gan1 = spitted-on-face-self-dry = swallows rebuke/insult shamelessly without responding/reacting).

by Diana Yue