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 feeling good

歡 喜

Putonghua pronunciation: huan1
Cantonese pronunciation: foon1
Meanings: joy, fondness

歡 = 歡樂 (huan1 le4 = joy-happiness). Friends 歡聚 (huan1 jü4 = happy-gather = get together), 歡迎 (huan1 ying2 = joyfully-welcome) newcomers, 歡呼 (huan1 hu1 = joyfully-shout/cheer), 歡笑 (huan1 xiao4 = joyfully-laugh). Next table’s loner 歡不歡 (yü4 yü4 bu4 huan1 = melancholy-melancholy-no-cheer = feels cheerless/low).

Employers 喜歡 (xi3 huan1 = pleasure-joy = like/favor/prefer) hardworking employees. Lazybone who 失歡於 (shi1 huan1 yü1 = loses-fondness/favor-with) boss gets sacked.

歡喜 (huan1 xi3 = joy-mirth) = pleasure/joy. 歡好 (huan1 hao3 = joy-good/union) = sexual intercourse. 一夕歡愉 (yi1 xi2 huan1 yü2 = one-evening-joy-pleasure) = one night of pleasurable sex.

歡喜佛 (huan1 xi3 fo2 = joy-pleasure-buddha) is Buddhist icon showing male and female figures copulating.

by Diana Yue