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 Chinese New Year lucky money

紅
Putonghua pronunciation: hong2
Cantonese pronunciation: hung4
Meanings: red, sanguine, prosperous

紅, vibrant//fiery//feverish color, symbolizes happiness/luck/prosperity. 紅色 (hong2 ri4 = red-sun), 赤紅 (xue3 hong2 = blood-red), 紅腫 (hong2 zhong3 = red-swollen) wound, 紅紅 (huo3 hong2 = fire-red = raging) trend. 紅光滿面 (hong2 guang1 man3 mian4 = red-light-full-face) = reddish/robust countenance.

紅軍 (hong2 jun1 = Red-Army) guards 紅色政權 (hong2 se1 zheng4 qian2 = red-colour-political-power = Communist regime). Pop-group走紅 (zou3 hong2 = run-red = shoots into stardom), premiere gets 滿堂紅 (man3 tang2 hong2 = full-hall-red = full-house and cheers).


by Diana Yue