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 heat waves

浪
Putonghua pronunciation: lang4
Cantonese pronunciation: long6
Meanings: wave, unrestrained


Poet 蘇東坡 (Su1 Dong1-po1) sighs: “大江東去 (da4 jiang1 dong1 qu4 = big-river-eastward-flows), 浪淘盡 (lang4 tao2 jin4 = waves-wash-away-completely) 千古風流人物 (qian1 gu3 feng1 liu2 ren2 wu4 = thousand-ancient-wind-flow-person-things = history’s distinguished characters).” = “The mighty river eastward flowing ushers into oblivion history’s most gifted heroes.”

by Diana Yue