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 national anthem

吼 hou2
Cantonese pronunciation: hau3
Meanings: roar, howl, thunder, bellow, yell

Sharing radical 口 (kou3, mouth), 吼 (hou3, roar), 嚎 (hao2, howl) have similar meaning: 獅吼 (shi1 hou3 = lion-roars), 虎吼 (hu3 hou3 = tiger-roars), 狼嚎 (lang2 hao2 = wolf-howls).

狂風怒吼 (kuang2 feng1 nu4 hou3 = mad-wind-angry-roar) = gale bellows furiously. In flood, 黃河怒吼 (Huang2 He2 nu4 hou3 = The Yellow River thunders/roars).

Army trumpet 吼響 (hou3 xiang3 = blares-aloud). Angered people 吼叫 (hou3 jiao4 = roar-yell). National anthem calls: China is endangered! 每個人被迫發出最後的吼聲! (mei3 ge4 ren2 bei4 po4 zhe0 fa1 chu1 zui4 hou4 de0 hou3 sheng1 = each-every-person-is-forced-to-issue-out-most-last-’s-roar-sound = We must shout unanimously, for the last time!) 起來 (qi3 lai2 = rise-come = Arise!)

by Diana Yue