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 dress codes

服
Putonghua pronunciation: fu2
Cantonese pronunciation: fuk3
Meaning: dress, clothes, attire, ingest, respect, obey

服 (radical 月 yue4, moon) means 服用 (fu2 yong4 = ingest-use = ingest/eat), 服從 (fu2 cong2 = respect-obey), 衣服 (yi1 fu2 = upper-garment-attire) = 服裝 (fu2 zhuang1 = clothes-furnish/ decorate) = dress/clothes/attire.

裁縫 (cai2 feng2 = cut-fabric-sew = tailor) makes 外套 (wai4 tao4 = outer-put-on = coat/jacket), 襯衣 (qin4 yi1 = match-coat = shirt/blouse), 裙子 (qun2 zhi1 = skirt-diminutive = skirt), 褲子 (ku4 zhi1 = trousers/slacks-diminutive = trousers/slacks), 禮服 (li3 fu2 = ceremonial/formal-dress), 制服 (zhi4 fu2 = establishment-dress = uniform), 軍服 (jun1 fu2 = military-attire).

洋服 (yang2 fu2 = ocean/foreign-clothes) means western-style clothes/dresses/suits. Mourners wear 喪服 (sang1 fu2 = funeral-attire). Models sport 華衣美服 (hua2 yi1 mei3 fu2 = glamorous-upper-garment-beautiful-clothes) = glamorous/expensive clothes.

by Diana Yue