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 fever

**燒**
Putonghua pronunciation: *shao1*
Cantonese pronunciation: *siu1*
Meaning: burn, heat, boil, cook, roast, fever


Fire-victim 燒傷 (*shao1 shang1* = is burnt-wounded), 發高燒 (*fa1 gao1 shao1* = develops-high-fever/temperature), finally 退燒 (*tui1 shao1* = retreat-fever = fever/temperature goes away), but 燒焦 (*shao1 jiao1* = burnt-and-seared/charred) skin leaves scars.

by Diana Yue