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

進
Putonghua pronunciation: jin4
Cantonese pronunciation: jun3
Meanings: roar, howl, thunder, bellow, yell

進 (radical 亻 = 人, chuo4, run) = advance/progress. 進來 (jin4 lai2 = advance-come) = Come in! 進行 (jin4 xing2 = proceed-walk) = proceed. 進退兩難 (jin4 tui4 liang3 nan2 = advance-retreat-both-difficult) = trapped in awkward situation.

進口 (jin4 kou3 = enter-mouth/port) = import. 進步 (jin4 bu4 = advance-step) means progress/improve or ideologically progressive. French national anthem 馬賽曲 (Ma3 Sai4 Qü3 = “Marseille”-transliterated-song = La Marseillaise) is 進行曲 (jin4 xing2 qü3 = advance-walk-tune/song = march) accompanying revolutionaries’ 進攻 (jin4 gong1 = forward-offensive = attack).

Chinese national anthem 義勇軍進行曲 (yi4 yong3 jün1 jin4 xing2 qü3 = righteous-brave-army-advance-walk-tune = March of the Volunteer Troops) rallies revolutionaries: 前進 (qian2 jin4 = forward-advance = proceed/march)!

by Diana Yue