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, 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 heroes

Putonghua pronunciation: jiang1, jiang4
Cantonese pronunciation: jeung3
Meaning: general, chief, leader, lead, chess-piece

將 (radical 丄 pan2, territory/border) means 將軍 (jiang1 jün1 = leader-of~army = general), 將領 (jiang4 ling3 = general~leader = various ranks of army-chiefs). 五星上將 (wu3 xing1 shang4 jiang4 = five~stars~top~general) = five-star general.

將帥之才 (jiang4 shuai4 zhi1 cai2 = general~admiral~’s~talent) means person/hero with leadership talents. In Chinese chess, 將 (jiang4, general) 帥 (shuai4, admiral) each heads one side. The Chinese say “將軍!” (jiang1 jün1 = charge~army) for “Chess!” Beware of opponent 將你一軍 (jiang1 ni3 yi1 jün1 = chess~you~once = challenge/crush you with hostile move/question/demand).

Boss sighs: 千金易得, 一將難求 (qian1 jin1 yi4 de2, yi1 jiang4 nan2 qiu2 = thousand~gold~easy~obtain, one~general~difficult~seek = Even millions can’t buy me a good CEO!)

by Diana Yue