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 counting your blessings

Putonghua pronunciation: xie4
Cantonese pronunciation: je6
Meaning: thank, grateful, decline, refuse, resign, take leave, wither

謝 (radical 言, word/speech) means 感謝 (gan3 xie4 = feel-thankful/grateful), 道謝 (dao4 xie4 = say-thankyou). Graduates throw 謝師宴 (xie4 shi1 yan4 = thank-teacher-banquet = thankyou party for teachers). Christians 謝飯 (xie4 fan4 = thank-cooked-rice = say grace before meals), 謝恩 (xie4 en1 = thank-blessing = give thanks to God’s blessings).

Saying “謝謝!” (xie4 xie0 = thanks-thnx, thankyou) is common courtesy. 謝天謝地 (xie4 tian1 xie4 di4 = thank-heaven-thank-earth = Thank God!) is expression of relief.

致謝 (zhi4 xie4 = convey-thanks) means expressing 謝意 (xie4 yi4 = thankful/grateful-feeling) with words/gift. But 大恩不言 謝 (da4 en1 bu4 yan2 xie4 = big-favor/blessing-no-say-thank = To someone who has generously helped you, saying thanks is too superficial).

by Diana Yue