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 raising families

Putonghua pronunciation: yang3
Cantonese pronunciation: yeung5
Meanings: give birth to, raise, foster, nurture, bring up, support

養 = 羊 (yang2, sheep/goat) + 食 (shi2, eat/feed). 養孩子 (yang3 hai2 zi0 = breed-child-diminutive) = give birth to, raise children. 養家 (yang3 jia1 = raise-family) means 養活 (yang3 huo2 = support/rear-alive = sustain livelihood of) wife/kids. Farmers 飼養 (si4 yang3 = feed-raise) livestock. Countries 養兵 (yang3 bing1 = keep/train-soldiers/army).

Responsible adults 供養父母 (gong1 yang3 fu4 mu3 = provide-for-support-father-mother), give kids 好敎養 (hao3 jiao4 yang3 = good-teach-raise = good breeding). 養父養母 (yang3 fu4 yang3 mu3) means foster parents.

Oldsters need 養老金 (yang3 lao3 jin1 = support-old~gold = old-age pension). Divorcee pays 賠養費 (shan4 yang3 fei4 = support-support-fee = alimony). Tired person 閉目養神 (bi4 mu4 yang3 shen2 = closes-eyes-preserves-spirit/energy).

by Diana Yue