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 love

容
Putonghua pronunciation: rong2
Cantonese pronunciation: yung4
Meaning: hold, contain, tolerate

容 (必, house + 谷 gu3, valley) means 容納 (rong2 na4 = hold-accept = accommodate/contain). 容器 (rong2 qi4 = contain-er) has 容量 (rong2 liang4 = contents/load's-volume). Cowboy state 容許 (rong2 xü3 = allows-permits) gun-purchase, 容忍 (rong2 ren3 = accepts-tolerates) shooting crimes.

Monastery 收容 (shou1 rong2 = accepts-accommodates) escapee seeking 容身之處 (rong2 shen1 zhi1 chu4 = contain-body's-place = shelter). 間不容髮 (jian4 bu4 rong2 fa3 = space/crack-no-accommodate-hair-on-head) describes extremely short/narrow time/space available for escape.

寬容大量 (kuan1 rong2 da4 liang4 = broad-volume-big-quantity = generous/forgiving) people say: 愛是包容 (ai4 shi4 bao1 rong2 = love-is-wrap-contain = Love is tolerant). But drug-trafficking is 天理不容 (tian1 li3 bu4 rong2 = divine-reason-no-tolerate = wrong/intolerable).

by Diana Yue