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 celebrations

Putonghua pronunciation: qing4
Cantonese pronunciation: hing3
Meaning: rejoice, celebrate, congratulate, joyous occasion, festivity, blessing

慶 (radical 广 an1, house) means 喜慶 (qing4 zhu4 = rejoice-celebrate), 喜慶 (xí qìng4 = happy-joyful occasions), 慶賀 (qing4 hé4 = praise-congratulate), 慶典 (qing4 diǎn3 = celebration-ceremonies). Peasants 喜慶 (qìng4 fēng1 shòu1 = celebrate-abundant-harvest). Graduates attend 校慶 (xiào qìng4 = school’s-anniversary-celebrations).

Winners 慶捷 (qing4 jié2 = celebrate-victory), 慶功 (qìng4 gōng1 = celebrate-conquest/success). 國慶節 (guó qìng4 jié2 = nation’s-celebrations-festival = National Day) 普天同慶 (pǔ tiān tóng qìng4 = all-heavens-together-rejoice = is celebrated by all). Patient 慶幸 (qing4 xìng4 = rejoice-fortunate = feel fortunate/relieved) cancer vanished.

積善之家, 必有餘慶 (jí shàn4 zhī jiā, bì yóu3 yú qìng4 = accumulate-goodness-'s-family, definitely-has-remnant-blessings) means philanthropic family will inherit forefathers’ blessings.

by Diana Yue