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 Moses crossing the Red Sea

Noun 領 means 衣領 (yi1 ling3 = clothes’ collar). Verb 領 means 帶領 (dai4 ling3 = bring~lead = lead). Fast runner 領先 (ling3 xian1 = lead~ahead = takes the lead). 領航 (ling3 hang2 = lead~voyage) = navigate. 領袖 (ling3 xiu4 = collar~sleeve) means leader.

領 also means receive/rule. Winner 領獎 (ling3 jiang3 = receives~prize). Scholar explores 領域 (ling3 yu4 = given~area = areas) of knowledge, 領悟 (ling3 wu4 = receive~epiphany = understands) truths. 領土 (ling3 tu3 = received/ruled-land) = country’s territory. 領事 (ling3 shi4 = govern~affairs) = consul.

Moses 領導 (ling3 dao3 = led~guided) Israelites against Egypt’s 法老 (fa3 lao3 = “Pharoah”-transliterated). 領軍人才 (ling3 jün1 ren2 cai2 = lead~army~person~talent) = person talented/skilled/qualified to head army/work-team.