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:

1\textsuperscript{st} tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2\textsuperscript{nd} tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3\textsuperscript{rd} tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4\textsuperscript{th} 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 Halloween

Putonghua pronunciation: wan4
Cantonese pronunciation: maan6
Meanings: ten thousand, many, innumerable

萬 = 10,000. 百萬富翁 (bai2 wan4 fu4 weng1 = hundred-10,000-rich-old-man) = millionaire. 億 (yi4) = 一萬 (yi1 wan4 wan4 = one-10,000~10,000 = 0.1 billion).

萬 also means all/innumerable: 萬物 (wan4 wu4 = 10,000-things = all creation), 萬能 (wan4 neng2 = 10,000-able = omnipotent), 萬里長征 (wan4 li3 chang2 zheng1 = 10,000-miles-long-march). We wish friend 萬事如意 (wan4 shi4 ru2 yi4 = 10,000-things/events-resemble-wish = success/joy in everything). Emperor's title 萬歲 (wan4 sui4 = 10,000-years/age) also means “Hurrah!” War kills 千萬生靈 (qian wan4 sheng1 ling2 = thousand-10,000-living-souls = countless lives).

Christians observe 萬聖節 (wan4 sheng4 jie2 = 10,000-holy/saint-festival = All Saints Day), 萬靈節 (wan4 ling2 jie2 = 10,000-spirit/soul-festival = All Souls Day).

by Diana Yue