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 reporters

偽
Putonghua pronunciation: wei3
Cantonese pronunciation: ngai6
Meanings: false, fake, untrue, pretended, forged, illegitimate


Spy uses 偽造護照 (wei4 zao4 hu4 zho4 = false-make-protect-photo = faked passport) for 偽裝 (wei4 zhuang1 = false-wear = disguise/camouflage). In WWII China, 偽政府 (wei4 zheng4 fu3 = false-administrative-building = illegitimate/unrecognized collaborative government) worked for 敵偽 (di2 wei4 = enemy-illegitimate = Japanese enemy).

偽善 (wei4 shan4 = false/pretend-kind = hypocrisy) is repelling. Rather than 偽君子 (wei4 jün1 zio0 = false-honorable-man = hypocrites), I prefer 真小人 (zhen1 xiao3 ren2 = true-small-person = frankly/openly bad guys).

by Diana Yue