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 mass shootings

槍
Putonghua pronunciation: qiang1
Cantonese pronunciation: cheung1
Meanings: gun, (spear, lance)

槍 (radical 木 mu4, wood) may mean wooden lance/spear, but槍聲 (qiang1 sheng1 = gun-sound) means sound of gunshot. 手槍 (shou3 qiang1 = hand-gun) = pistol. 長槍 (chang2 qiang1 = long-gun) = rifle. 機關槍 (ji1 guan1 qiang1 = hinge-valve-gun) = machine-gun.

Executioner 槍斃 (qiang1 bi4 = gun-die = shot dead) criminal.
Lone Ranger 單槍匹馬 (dan1 qiang1 pi1 ma3 = single-gun-one-horse = roams alone). 槍林彈雨 (qiang1 lin2 dan4 yu3 = guns-forest-bullets-rain) = thick/heavy gun-fire.

Gunner 持槍 (chi2 qiang1 = holds/wields-gun/rifle), 開槍 (kai1 qiang1 = open-gun = opens fire), 槍殺 (qiang1 sha1 = gun-kill = shoots down) victims. Many victims 身中多槍 (shen1 zhong4 duo1 qiang1 = body-gets-hit-many-gun = got hit by many shots).

by Diana Yue