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 England

Putonghua pronunciation: ying1
Cantonese pronunciation: ying1

Meanings: First word in England’s Chinese name

England’s Chinese name is 英格蘭 (ying1 ge2 lan2). These three zi are chosen for their sounds, not their literal meaning “hero~square~orchid”. 英語 (ying1 yu3 = English~language), 英里 (ying1 li3 = English~mile) are used worldwide.

On island of 大不列顛 (da4 bu4 lie4 dian1 = Great~“Britain”-transliterated) are England, 苏格蘭 (su1 ge2 lan2 = “Scotland”-transliterated), 威爾士 (wei1 er3 shi4 = “Wales”-transliterated). These with 北愛爾蘭 (bei3 ai4 er3 lan2 = Northern Ireland) form联合王國 (lian2 h2 wang2 guo2 = join~combine~king~state = United Kingdom/UK), conventionally called 英國 (ying1 guo2 = “Eng”-state).

UK is member of 歐盟 (ou1 meng2 = “Eu”-transliterated-alliance = European Union) but not 歐羅區 (ou1 luo2 qu1 = “Euro”-transliterated-region = Eurozone).

by Diana Yue