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 love

恨
Putonghua pronunciation: hen4
Cantonese pronunciation: han6
Meaning: hate, resent, detest, rue, regret, yearn, distress, sadness, remorse

恨 (radical 心 xin1, heart) covers 憎恨 (fen4 hen4 = anger-hate = hate/hatred), 悔恨 (hui4 hen4 = regret-hate = regret/rue), 怨恨 (yuan4 hen4 = blame-resent), 仇恨 (chou2 hen4 = offence-hate = deep offence and consequent hate/anger).

Unforgiving person 记恨 (ji4 hen4 = remembers-offence), 報仇雪恨 (bao4 chou2 xue3 hen4 = repay-offence-snow/wash-hate = takes revenge). 亡國恨 (wang2 guo2 hen4 = die-country/state-hatred) = anger/distress felt by loyal subject of destroyed annexed country.

Compatible singles 相見恨晚 (xiang1 jian4 hen4 wan3 = each-other-see-regret-late = wish they had met earlier), 恨不得 (hen4 bu4 de2 = hate/yearn-not-get = wish/yearn to) get married immediately. 愛恨交織 (ai4 hen4 jiao1 zhi4 = love-hate-cross-knitted) is how person in love-hate relationship feels.

by Diana Yue