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 lovers

情 (radical ↑ = 心 xin1 = heart)
Putonghua pronunciation: qing2
Cantonese pronunciation: ching4
Meanings: feeling, emotion, attachment, love

Humans have 心情 (xin1 qing2 = heart’s-feelings/moods), 感情 (gan3 qing2 = sense-feeling = attachment to person/pet/place), 親情 (qin1 qing2 = blood-relationship-feeling = parent-child emotional bond), 友情 (you3 qing2 = friend-feeling = friendship), 愛情 (ai4 qing2 = love-feeling) = romantic love, 情人節 (qing2 ren2 jie2 = lov-ers’-festival) = Valentine’s Day.

Romeo and Juliet 談情說愛 (tan2 qing2 shuo1 ai4 = talk-feeling~say-love = talk amorous talk, do what lovers do), 雙雙殉情 (shuang1 shuang1 xun4 qing2 = pair-pair-die-for-love = die together as suicide lovers).

無情 (wu2 qing2 = have-not-love = heartless) lover 移情別戀 (yi2 qing2 bie2 lian3 = move-love~other-love = dumps one for another). 一夜情 (yi1 ye4 qing2 = one~night-love) = one night stand.

by Diana Yue