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.

This week: Words about weddings

The radical 女 (nu = woman) in 婚 (hun = marriage), 嫁 (jia = marry husband), 娶 (qu = take wife) reflects male dominance in Chinese culture.

婚約 (hun yue = marriage-agreement) means marriage promise, 訂婚 (ding hun = book-marriage) means engagement. 婚禮 (hun li = marriage-ceremony) = wedding. The bride (新娘 xin niang = new~woman) and groom (新郞 xin lang = new young-man) 結婚 (jie hun = tie-knot~marriage = get married), 度蜜月 (du mi yue = pass~honey-moon = go on honeymoon), then begin their 婚姻生活 (hun yin sheng huo = marriage-life).

Arranged marriages are 盲婚啞嫁 (mang hun ya jia = blind-wed~mute~marry-husband). 婚外情 (hun wai qing = marriage~outside~love/emotion) means extra-marital affair.

by Diana Yue