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 reunion gatherings

Putonghua pronunciation: qin1
Cantonese pronunciation: chan1
Meanings: dear, family, parent, blood relation, marriage, close, in person, kiss

親 = 親人 (qin1 ren2 = blood-relation-persons = family/kinsmen): 父親 (fu4 qin1 = father-parent), 母親 (mu3 qin1 = mother-parent), 兒子 (er2 zio  = child-son = son), 女兒 (nũ3 er0 = daughter-child = daughter), 親戚 (qin1 qi1= close-relatives).

Couple 成親 (cheng2 qin1 = fulfil-marriage = marry), 親嘴 (qin1 zui3 = kiss-mouth = kiss each other on the lips). Parents meet 親家 (qin4 jia1 = close-family = son's/daughter's in-laws).

至親好友 (zhi4 qin1 hao3 you3 = closest-blood-relations-good-friends = family and friends) 親臨 (qin1 lin2 = personally-arrive/attend) couple’s 30th wedding anniversary, meet their 親生子女 (qin1 sheng1 zi3 nũ3 = blood-born-son-daughter = biological offspring), congratulate family for 相親相愛 (xiang1 qin1 xiang1 ai4 = mutual-endearment-mutual-love).

by Diana Yue