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 practice

意 (radical 心 xin1, heart) means 意識 (yi4 shi1 = notion~ consciousness), 意思 (yi4 si1 = notion~think = meaning/significance), 意念 (yi4 nian4 = notion~idea/remembrance).

Gifts reflect senders’ 心意 (xin1 yi4 = heart’s-intent/fondness), 好意 (hao3 yi4 = good/kind-intent).

Girl with 情意結 (qing2 yi1 jie2 = emotion-intent-knot = emotional complex or crush) on man 一心一意 (yi1 xin1 yi1 yi4 = one-heart-one-intent = wholeheartedly) loves him. Partners sign 誠意 (cheng2 yi4 = honest-intention = bona fide) agreement. Polls collect 意見 (yi4 jian4 = idea-see/view = opinions).


by Diana Yue