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 romantic love

情 (radical 心 = heart) denotes emotion/love/kindness:

心情 (xin1 qing2 = heart's-feelings/moods), 感情 (gan3 qing2 = sense-feeling = attachment to person/pet/place), 情慾 (qing2 yu4 = emotion-lust).

愛情 (ai4 qing2 = love-feeling) = romantic love. Romeo is 多情 (duo1 qing2 = much-love = amorous/romantic). 元宵 (yu2n xiao1 = first-eve, i.e. 15th day of first lunar month) is Chinese 情人節 (qing2 ren2 jie2 = lovers-festival), celebrated with 花燈會 (hua1 dieng1 hui4 = flower/colorful-lanterns-parade).

Pessimists think fate is 無情 (wu2q ing2 = no-love = heartless/harsh/cruel). But good people have 人情味 (ren2q ing2 wai4 = human-feeling-taste = consideration/kindness), show us that 人間有情 (ren2 jian1 you3 qing2 = human-territory-has-love = there is love in the world).

Putonghua pronunciation: qing2
Cantonese pronunciation: ching4
Meanings: emotion, love, amour, sympathy, empathy, kindness

by Diana Yue