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

Putonghua pronunciation: Shuang1
Cantonese pronunciation: seung1
Meanings: two, pair, twin, dual, both, double

雙 (radical 雛 chou2, two birds) means pair: 雙數 (shuang1 shu4 = pairs/even-number), 雙親 (shuang1 qin1 = pair-dear = parents), 雙手 (shuang1 shou3 = two hands), 雙邊 (shuang1 bian1 = two-sides = bilateral). 天下無雙 (tian1 xia4 wu2 shuang1 = heaven-below-no-pair) = unequalled/unequalled.

雙線行車 (shuang1 xian4 xing2 che1 = two-lines-move-car) = two-lane traffic. 雙子星座 (shuang1 zi3 xing1 zuo4 = twin-sons-stars-seat) = Gemini. Athletes play雙槓 (shuang1 gang4 = parallel-bars), 雙打 (shuang1 da3 = pair-hit = doubles). Some people have 雙重 (shuang1 chong2 = two-double = dual) nationality/personality.

Lovers 出雙入對 (chu1 shuang1 ru4 dui4 = out-pair-enter-pair = go everywhere together), share 雙人床 (shuang1 ren2 chuang2 = two-people-bed = double-bed).

by Diana Yue