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:

1. **1st tone**: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
2. **2nd tone**: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
3. **3rd tone**: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
4. **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 relatives

- **Putonghua pronunciation**: qin1
- **Cantonese pronunciation**: chan1

Meaning: parent, family, marriage, close, kin, blood-related, dear, in person, kiss

親 (radical 見 jian2, see/utmost) means close-related/dear. 雙親 (shuang1 qin1 = pair-close/dear) = parents. 父親 (fu4 qin1 = father-close/dear) = 親爹 (qin1 die1 = blood-related/real-father = 爸爸 ba4 ba0), 母親 (mu3 qin1 = mother-close/dear) = 親娘 (qin1 niang2 = blood-related/real-mother = 媽媽 ma1 ma0). 親人 (qin1 ren2 = close/dear-people/ones) = family member(s).

Bachelor and spinster 相親 (xiang4 qin1 = view-close/dear = meet, view/assess each other as marriage-candidate, 成親 (cheng2 qin1 = succeed/close-dear = marry), enlarge 親戚 (qin1 qi1 = close/dear-relative = cousins/relatives) circle through marriage.

可親 (ke3 qin1 = can-close/dear) describes amiable person. Lovers 親嘴 (qin1 zui3 = close/dear-mouth = kiss), call each other 親愛的 (qin1 ai4 de0 = close/dear-love-adjectival = dear/darling).

by Diana Yue