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 wedding day

媒
Putonghua pronunciation: mei2
Cantonese pronunciation: mooi4
Meaning: go-between, matchmaker, medium

媒 (女 nü3, female/woman + 某 = 警 mou2, plan) = 媒介 (mei2 jie4 = medium-link): 神媒 (shen2 mei2 = gods' medium = medium communicating between gods/ghosts and humans), 媒人 (mei2 ren2 = matchmake-er), 病媒 (bing4 mei2 = disease-medium/carrier), 傳媒 (chuan2 mei2 = communications-media). Television is 冷媒體 (leng3 mei2 ti3 = cold-medium-body = medium cool).

In traditional arranged marriages, 媒婆 (mei2 po2 = matchmaker-grandma = professional woman matchmaker) served families looking for eligible brides/grooms for their sons/daughters. 明媒正娶 (ming2 mei2 zheng4 qü3 = clear/sure-matchmaker-proper-take-wife) describes openly/lawfully married couple.

Popular Chinese TV dating and matchmaking program 非誠勿擾 (fei1 zcheng2 wu4 rao3 = unless-sincere-don't-disturb) packages 做媒 (zuo4 mei2 = make-match = matchmaking) for trendy singletons.