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

Putonghua pronunciation: ying2
Cantonese pronunciation: ying4
Meaning: facing, welcome, receive

迎 (radical chuo4, walk) means 迎接 (ying2 jie2 = welcome-receive). Scenic 黃山 (Huang2 Shan1 = Yellow-Mountain)’s 迎客松 (ying2 ke4 song1 = beckoning-to-guests-pine-trees) 迎風而立 (ying2 feng1 er2 li4 = facing-wind-and-stand = stand braving the wind).

Freshmen attend 迎新派對 (ying2 xin1 pai4 dui4 = welcome-newcomers-“party”-transliterated). Prostitutes lead 迎送生涯 (ying2 song4 sheng1 ya2 = welcome-see-off-life-limit = life with men/customers coming and going). Seeing tanks 迎面 (ying2 mian4 = head-on) coming, soldiers 迎敵 (ying2 di2 = face/flight- the-enemy).

Groom 迎娶 (ying2 que3 = welcome-wed) bride, throws banquet to 迎合 (ying2 he2 = welcome-match = please) in-laws. 迎賓 (ying2 bin1 = welcome-guest = receptionists) chime: “歡迎您!” (huan1 ying2 nin2 = cheerfully-welcome-you = “Welcome!”)

by Diana Yue