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 royal weddings

嫁
Putonghua pronunciation: jia4
Cantonese pronunciation: ga3
Meanings: marry husband, transfer

Many Chinese marriage terms have radical 女 (nu3, woman). 嫁 (女 + 家 jia3, home) means woman marries man. 婚姻 (hun1 yin1 = marry-relation) = marriage. 結婚 (jie2 hun1 = tie-marriage) = tie the knot. 嫁娶 (jia4 qu3 = marry-man-marry-woman) = marriage/wedding event/activities.

Lovers 談婚論嫁 (tan2 hun1 lun4 jia4 = talk-marriage-discuss-marry-man = consider/plan marriage). Kate 嫁人 (jia4 ren2 = marry-person = gets married), prepares 嫁妝 (jia4 zhuang1 = marriage-adornments/dowry). William 娶妻 (qu3 qi1 = marries/takes-wife). Spinster 嫁不出 (jia4 bu4 chu1 = marry-no-away = can’t find husband).

嫁 also means relay/transfer. Criminal 嫁禍 (jia4 huo4 = marry-man-disaster = passes on guilt) to scapegoat. Investment bank 轉嫁 (zhuan3 jia4 = turn/relay-marry-man = dumps) losses on customers.

by Diana Yue