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.

This week: Words about MTR

卡 (ka = “cart”-transliterated) in 卡車 (ka che = car/vehicle) means truck.

卡 (ka) is also transliteration of first syllable of “carriage”: 車卡 (che ka = car/vehicle~carriage = train’s compartment), 頭等卡 (tou deng ka = head-class-compartment = first-class compartment), 普通卡 (pu tong ka = all-common-compartment = ordinary-class compartment).

卡 (ka) is also transliteration of “card”. Smart cards are 智能卡 (zhi neng ka = wisdom~ability~cards). 刷卡 (shua ka = brush~card) = swipe electronic card. 八達通 (ba da tong = eight-reach-through = Octopus Card) is a 儲值卡 (chu zhi ka = stored-value~card). 信用卡 (xin yong ka = trust~use~cards) = credit cards. 欠卡數 (qian ka shu = owe~card~amount) means unable to pay credit card charges.

by Diana Yue