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 confections and sweets

糖
Pronunciation: tan (Putonghua, 2nd tone), tong (Cantonese, 4th tone)  
Basic meaning: sugar, candy

甘蔗 (gan zhe = sweet/sugar-cane), 甜菜 (tian cai = sweet-vegetable = sugar beet) produce sugars, e.g. 葡萄糖 (pu tao tang = grape-sugar = glucose). Dessert-chefs use 蜜糖 (mi tang = honey-sugar = honey), 冰糖 (bing tang = ice-sugar = rock sugar), 糖霜 (tang shuang = sugar-frost = sugar icing).

We put 砂糖 (sha tang = grain-sugar), 方糖 (fang tang = square-sugar = sugar cubes) in tea/coffee. 糖尿病 (tang niao bing = sugar-urine-illness = diabetes) patients check their 血糖 (xue tang = blood-glucose-sugar) level, avoid 糖果 (tang guo = sugar-fruit/candy = candy), 巧克力 (qiao ke li = chocolate-transliterated).

糖衣毒藥 (tang yi du yao = sugar-coat-poisonous-drug) means harmful ideas disguised in pleasant/high-sounding words.

by Diana Yue