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 Chinese cuisine

炒 (radical 火 huo = fire) means using spatula to stir/turn meat/vegetables in 鍋 (guo = pan = 鍋 huo, Cantonese wok = wok) over 武火 (wu huo = martial-fire = strong flames), sometimes adding 芡 (qian = thickened sauce). Freshly done dishes have 鍋氣 (huo qi = wok-air = hot frying smell).


炒魷魚 (chao you yu = stir-fry-squid-fish) = 炒人 (chao ren = stir-fry people) = sack employees: stir-fried squid curls up; sacked employees leave with their rolled-up bedding.

by Diana Yue