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 thunderstorms**

泥

Pronunciation: *ni* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *nai* (Cantonese 4th tone)  
Basic meaning: mud, clay


棗泥 (*zu ni* = date-mud) = date paste for dessert. 拘泥 (*qu ni* = bound-mud) means inhibited by formalities, rules, biases. 和稀泥 (*he xi ni* = mix/blend-thin-mud) means trying to compromise incompatible elements.

泥足深陷 (*ni zu shen xian* = mud-foot/feet-deep-sunk) means locked in trouble/debts. 露泥之別 (*yun ni zhi bie* = cloud-mud-’s'-difference) means huge difference. 出污泥而不染 (*chu wu ni er bu ran* = emerge-dirty-mud-yet-not-stained) describes the lotus flower or someone morally pure/clean despite his/her sinful origin.

*by Diana Yue*