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 summer

熱 (re (Putonghua, 4th tone), yit (Cantonese 6th tone))
Basic meaning: hot, heat

炎熱 (yan re = fiery-hot) describes climate/weather. 熱帶 (re dai = hot-belt) means equator, 亞熱帶 (ya re dai = sub-hot-belt) means the sub-tropics.

熱鬧 (re nao = hot-noisy) means full of people/noise/fun. 熱愛 (re ai = hot-like/love) means loving something dearly. 熱戀 (re lian = hot-love) means madly loving someone. 狂熱 (kuang re = mad-hot) means craze/fanaticism.

熱門 (re men = hot-door) means a horse/competitor sure to win therefore carrying heavy stakes. 冷門 (leng men = cold-door) means the opposite. 熱辣辣 (re la la = hot-spicy-hot-spicy-hot) describes temperature-hot or spicy-hot food, sexy girls, hot topics, scorching criticism. 打得火熱 (da de huo re = hit/clash-so-fiery-hot) describes a man and a woman in a hot relationship.

by Diana Yue