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 books

編 (radical 纜 = 絲 si = thread/silk) = arranging/grouping. Housewives 編織 (bian zhi = weave-knit = knit). Tickets/products have 編號 (bian hao = assigned-numbers), 編碼 (bian ma = assigned-code). Libraries have 編目 (bian mu = arranged-items = catalogues).

Publishers’ 編輯 (bian ji = collate-edit = editors) 編書 (bian shu = edit/produce-books). Newspaper’s 總編輯 (zong bian ji = chief-editor) writes 社論 (she lun = society-discussion/criticism = editorials). 編劇 (bian ju = make-drama = scriptwriters) sometimes 改編 (gai bian = change-make = adapt) novels for filmmaking. Liars 編故事 (bian gu shi = weave-past-happenings = invent stories).

Choreographers 編舞 (bian wu = design-dancing-steps). The ancient Chinese played music on suspended bronze 編鐘 (bian zhong = set-of-chimes).

by Diana Yue