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 staple foods


麪粉 (mian fen = noodles-powder = wheat-flour) is made into 麵條 (mian tiao = noodle-strings), 饢頭 (man tou = bun-head = buns), 糕點 (gao dian = cakes-dumplings). 麥片 (mai pian = wheat-piece = oatmeal) and 麥草 (mai cao = wheat-grass) are health foods.

麥當奴 (mai dang lao = “McDonald’s”-transliterated = wheat-should-labour) is the Chinese name of Big Mac.

by Diana Yue