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 auto-racing

速 (su) Pronunciation: su (Putonghua, 4th tone), chuk (Cantonese, 1st tone) Basic meaning: speed, fast, quick

快速 (kuai su = fast-speed) = fast. 光速 (guang su = light-speed) means 速度 (su du = fast-degree = speed) of light. DHL/FedEx do 速递 (su di = fast-pass-on = express delivery).

時速 (shi su = hour-speed) = speed k/mph On highways, cars enter 快線 (kuai xian = fast-line = fast lane) to 超車 (chao che = exceed-car = overtake other cars), cops watch out for 超速 (chao su = exceed speed = speeding).

Smart generals 速戰速決 (su zhan su jue = quick-battle-quick-settle/done = quickly defeat enemy). Students of 速成班 (su cheng ban = fast-complete/succeed-class = crash courses) often 欲速不達 (yu su bu da = want-quick-no-arrive = no patience, no gain).

by Diana Yue