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

撞 (radical 手, hand/arm) is intended/unintended body collision: 撞見 (zhuang jian = bump-into-see = come across) someone, 撞上 (zhuang shang = bump-on = happen on to) chance, 撞破 (zhuang po = bump-into-break = catch red-handed) conspiracy. Footballers/boxers 碰撞 (peng zhuang = hit/collide-bump). Police 撞門 (zhuang men = crash/break-door) to enter crime scene.

意外 (yi wai = intention-beyond = surprise = accidents) occur when 天雨路滑 (tian yu lu hua = sky-rains-roads-slippery): 撞車 (zhuang che = collide-car = car crash), 翻車 (fan che = flip/turn-over-car = car overturned), 撞倒逃去 (zhuang dao tao qu = bump/hit-topple-down-someone/something-escape-away = hit-and-run).

Cantonese expression “撞鬼!” (zhuang gui = “bump-into-ghost!” = “Dammit!”) expresses dismay/anger (forgot wallet/appointment, got cheated etc.)

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