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 supermarkets

人類 (ren lei = person/man-kind = mankind), 種類 (zhong lei = seed-type = species), 鳥類 (niao lei = bird-species = birds), 同類 (tong lei = same-kind/species = similar/same type).

Foods in supermarkets 分門別類 (fen men bie lei = divide-doors-distinguish-kinds = are categorized): 蔬菜 (shu cai = vegetables), 肉類 (rou lei = meat-kinds = meat), 奶類食品 (nai lei shi pin = milk-kind-eat-things = dairy foods), 罐頭 (guan tou = can-head = canned foods), 糕餅 (gao bing = pudding-cake = bakery).

Librarians use 分類法 (fen lei fa = divide-kind-method = classification systems). Intelligent learners can 觸類旁通 (chu lei pang tong = touch/feel-kind-sideways-through = know something and deduce related things).

by Diana Yue