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

鮮 = not stale. Supermarkets sell 鮮魚 (xian yu = fresh-fish), 鮮肉 (xian rou = fresh-meats), 鮮果 (xian guo = fresh-fruits), 鮮奶 (xian nai = fresh-milk). 鮮花 (xian hua = fresh-flowers) look 鮮豔 (xian yan = fresh-gorgeous = bright/colorful). Poinsettias are 鮮紅 (xian hong = fresh/bright-red). 鮮血 (xian xue = fresh-blood) = red blood.

鮮 = 魚 (yu = fish) + 羊 (yang = lamb/mutton), flavorful meats. Bouillabaisse tastes 鮮美 (xian mei = flavorful-beautiful/good). Salt/MSG added to food can 提鮮 (ti xian = raise/bring-out-flavor).

鮮明 (xian ming = fresh-bright/clear) describes impressions. 新鮮人 (xin xian ren = new-fresh-person) = college freshmen. 新鮮出爐 (xin xian chu lu = new-fresh-from-oven) describes freshly-baked cakes or last-minute news.

by Diana Yue