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

送 (radical 亾 = 船 ting = small boat) involves polite/well-meant movement. 送别 (song bie = see-out/off-depart) means seeing/accompanying someone/friend leave. 送出 (song chu = give-out/away) means giving away things/money.

送 = 贈 (zeng, radical 貝 bei = seashells/money). Shoppers get coupons/gifts at 大贈送 (da zeng song = big-give-give = big sales). 送錢 (song qian = give-money). 送禮 (song li = give-polite-things) = give presents/bribes. 買一送一 (mai yi song yi = buy-one-give-one) = “Buy one get one free!”

送 + radical 食 (shi = eat) = 餐 (song = Cantonese sung) = food/dishes accompanying cooked rice. Housewives 買餐 (mai song = buy vegi/meat for home-cooking). “好餐!” (hao song = good-dishes) describes meals with sumptuous dishes.

by Diana Yue