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 jewelry

Jewelers buy/sell 寶石 (bao shi = precious-stones): 鑽石 (zuan shi = drill-stone = diamonds), 紅寶石 (hong bao shi = red-precious-stone = rubies), 藍寶石 (lan bao shi = blue-precious-stone = sapphires), 綠寶石 (lu bao shi = green-precious-stone = emeralds), 紫晶 (zi jing = purple-crystal = amethysts), 閃山雲 (shan shan yun = glitter-mountain-cloud = opals).

Precious/semi-precious stones, weighed in 卡 (ka = short for 卡拉 ka la = “carat”-transliterated), are 鑲嵌 (xiang kan = set-inlaid = cast) in gold/silver/platinum. Right 切工 (qie gong = cut-workmanship = cutting) brings out 火 (huo = fire/flash) in 鑽戒 (zuan jie = diamond-rings).

珠寶玉石 (zhu bao yu shi = pearl-precious-items-jade-stone) = collective term for jewels.

by Diana Yue