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 dancing

伴 (radical 亻 = 人 ren = person)
Pronunciation: ban (Putonghua, 4th tone), boon (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: accompany, partner

伴 = 同伴 (tong ban = same/together-accompany) = accompanying person. Party-goers need 男伴 (nan ban = male-escort), 女伴 (nu ban = girl/lady-partner) to be 舞伴 (wu ban = dancing-partner). 舞廳 (wu ting = dancing-parlours) hire 舞女 (wu nu = dancing-girl/woman-partners) to 伴舞 (ban wu = accompany-dance = dance with men customers).

Vocalists need 伴奏 (ban zou = accompany-perform-instrument = accompanists). Tourists hire 伴遊 (ban you = accompany-roam/tour = tour escorts/guides) or 結伴同遊 (jie ban tong you = knot/form-accompany-together-travel = travel together).

情侶 (qing lu = love-partners = lovers) may become 終生伴侶 (zhong sheng ban lu = lasting-life-accompany-partner = life-long partner/spouse, affectionately called “老伴” lao ban = old-partner).

by Diana Yue