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

(радикал 力 li = strength)  晃 (Putonghua, 4th tone),  佪 (Cantonese, 6th tone)  
Basic meaning: strength, energy, tenacity, drive, zeal, fervor

勁 li (jing li = energy~strength) = muscle strength: 手勁 (shou jing = hand/arm-strength), 腰勁 (yao jing = waist-strength), 腿勁 (tui jing = leg-strength). Pop-stars perform 勁歌熱舞 (jing ge re wu = energetic-singing~hot~dancing). 勁敵 (jing di = strong~enemy) means formidable opponent.

勁 also means earnestly/zeal/tenacity. Teachers like 起勁 (qi jing = lift~strength = keen) students. Bosses like employees’ 衝勁 (chong jing = push-ahead~strength = drive). Lazy people 沒勁 (mei jing = have-no~strength = lack~zeal/drive). Late-bloomers 後勁 凌厲 (hou jing ling li = later~strength/tenacity~soar~terrible = do magnificently well later).

Recessions make investors 勁蝕 (jing shi = great~lose = lose heavily). Football-fans watching 勁射 (jing she = powerful~shot) yell “勁!” (jing = “Awesome!”/“Swell!”)

by Diana Yue