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 maps

位
Pronunciation: wei (Putonghua, 4th tone), wai (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: seat, position

位子 (wei zi = seat-diminutive) = 座位 (zuo wei = chair-seat) = seat. 訂位 (ding wei = book-seat) = advance seat-booking. 地位 (di wei = ground-seat) = status. 王位 (wang wei = king-seat) = throne.

Maps use 經緯 (jing wei = warp-weft = longitudes and latitudes) to indicate 東 (dong, east), 西 (xi, west), 南 (nan, south), 北 (bei, north). 方位 is 方向 (fang xiang = direction-facing) + 位置 (wei zhi = seat-place). Strasbourg 位于 (wei yu = is-positioned/situated-at) the center of Europe. Glaciers, sand dunes, estuaries are found to 移位 (yi wei = move/change-course/position).

Air-plane/car navigation uses 全球定位系统 (quan qiu ding wei xi tong = all-ball/globe-determine-position-link-system = Global Positioning System = GPS).

by Diana Yue