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 ceramics


Potters mould 素胎 (su tai = plain/uncolored-womb = clay bodies), 上釉 (shang you = on-glaze = cover/paint with glaze), fire them in窯 (yao = cave/oven = kilns). 低溫燒 (di wen shao = low-temperature-firing) produces potteryware, 高溫燒 (gao wen shao = high-temperature-firing) produces porcelainware.

紅燒 (hong shao = red-cook) means cooking in thick dark sauce. 燒鴨 (shao ya = roast-duck), 叉燒 (cha shao = fork-roast = barbecued pork), 燒肉 (shao rou = roast-pork) are Cantonese 燒味 (shao wei = roast-taste = roasted meats).

Pronunciation: shao (Putonghua, 1st tone), siu (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: burn, cook, roast, fire

by Diana Yue