

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 weddings

誓

Pronunciation: *shi* (Putonghua, 4th tone), *sai* (Cantonese 6th tone)
Basic meaning: swear, vow, oath

誓 (radical 言 *yan* = words) = spoken vow. The wedding couple proclaim their 結婚誓詞 (*jie hun shi ci* = tie-knot~marriage~oath~words = wedding vow) in front of 証婚人 (*zheng hun ren* = witness~wedding~persons).

People 發誓 (*fa shi* = raise~oath) = 宣誓 (*xuan shi* = declare~oath) asking Heaven/God to be their witness. 誓要 (*shi yao* = vow~want = vow to do something), 誓死 (*shi si* = vow~death/to die) and 發毒誓 (*fa du shi* = make~poisonous~vow) show determination. 誓死不從 (*shi si bu cong* = vow~death~not~obey) means would rather die than obey the oppressor.

A love pledge is 山盟海誓 (*shan meng hai shi* = mountain~pledge/alliance~sea~vow): “As the hills and the sea are our witness ...”

by Diana Yue