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L1 – Pinyin Introduction

Yale Romanization:

There are several Romanization systems used in teaching Cantonese to non-Chinese speakers. The system used in this book is the Yale Romanization. A syllable in Cantonese is made up of three elements: Initial, Final, and Tone.

- 1) An **initial** is the beginning consonant(s) of the syllable. There are 19 initials in all.
 - Cantonese uses “**ng**” as a syllabic-initial consonant, such as “**ngo**” (first person pronoun).
- 2) A **final** is the vowel(s) and consonant(s) that follow the initial in the syllable. There are 51 finals in all.
 - Cantonese differentiates long and short vowels, such as “**a**”, and “**aa**”.
 - Cantonese has three nasal endings “**-m/-n/-ng**”, and three plosive endings “**-p/-t/-k**”.
- 3) A **tone** is the pitch contour of the syllable. There are seven tones in all. (The traditional classification divides the Cantonese tones into **9** kinds, but there are only **6** pitch patterns.)
 - There are two set tones in Cantonese: **high** and **low**.
 - There is no neutral tone in Cantonese.

An example of a syllable: **low register**

	龍 (dragon)
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An example of a syllable: **high register**

	寵 (a hole)
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Discussion of Tones:

- You have probably heard that Chinese languages are tone languages, and know this means that sounds, which are the same except for rise and fall of the voice, mean different things. This sometimes leads to confusion and/or merriment when a foreigner gets a tone wrong in a phrase. In Cantonese, there are seven tones, which is seven variations in voice pitch having the power to combine with an otherwise identical syllable to make seven different meanings.

Tones	H.L.	H.F.	H.R.	M.L.	L.F.	L.R.	L.L.
🔊	sī	sì	sí	si	sìh	síh	sih
	詩	思	史	試	時	市	事

➤ The following is a sketch illustrating the co-relation of the seven tones in Cantonese.

High level	:55	sī	詩		Pitch	HL	HF	HR	ML	LF	LR	LL
High falling	:53	sì	思			sī	sì	sí	si	sìh	síh	sih
High rising	:35	sí	史		5	→	↘	↗				
Mid level	:33	si	試		4							
Low falling	:21	sìh	時		3				→			
Low rising	:23	síh	市		2					↘	↗	
Low level	:22	sih	事		1							→
					scale	5-5	5-3	3-5	3-3	2-1	2-3	2-2

- In present day, Hong Kong Cantonese dialect most of the **high falling** tones seems to be dying out. Many people rarely speak at a high falling tone in their speech, and use **high-level** tone in place of high falling.

Tones	H.L.	H.F.	H.R.	M.L.	L.F.	L.R.	L.L.
7 tones	sī	sì	sí	si	sìh	síh	sih
🎧	詩	思	史	試	時	市	事
6 tones	sī		sí	si	sìh	síh	sih
🎧	詩/思		史	試	時	市	事

- Below is a practice exercise on the seven tones. Concentrate on listening to the teacher or audio. Repeat loud and clear during the pause after each syllable or group of syllables.

🎧 sì sì __; sí sí __; si si __; sī sī __; sìh sìh __; síh síh __; sih sih __.
 思思__; 史史__; 試試__; 詩詩__; 時時__; 市市__; 事事__.

🎧 sì sí si __; sì sí si __; sì sí si sī __; sì sí si sī __; sìh síh sih __; sìh síh sih __.
 思史試__; 思史試__; 思史試詩__; 思史試詩__; 時市事__; 時市事__.

🎧 sì sí __; sì sí __; sìh síh __; sìh síh __; si sih __; si sih __.
 思史__; 思史__; 時市__; 時市__; 試事__; 試事__.

🎧 sì sìh __; sì sìh __; sí síh __; sí síh __; sī si sih __; sī si sih __.
 思時__; 思時__; 史市__; 史市__; 詩試事__; 詩試事__.

🎧 fàn fán fan __; fàn fán fan __; fàn fán fan fān __;
 fāhn fāhn fahn __; fāhn fāhn fahn __.
 分粉訓__; 分粉訓__; 分粉訓分__;
 墳奮份__; 墳奮份__.

🎧 fàn fán __; fahn fáhn __; fan fān fahn __; fān fan fahn __; fàn fahn __;
fán fáhn __; fàn fán fan fān __; fahn fáhn fahn __.

分粉____; 墳奮____; 訓分份____; 分訓份____; 分墳____;
粉奮____; 分粉訓分____; 墳奮份____.

🎧 bà bá ba __; bà bá ba __; màh máh mah __; màh máh mah __;
bà bá ba__ : màh máh mah __.

爸把霸____; 爸把霸____; 嫲馬罵____; 嫲馬罵____;
爸把霸____; 嫲馬罵____.

🎧 bìn bín bin __; bìn bín bin __; bìn bín bin bīn __;
mìhn míhn mihn __; mìhn míhn mihn __.

邊扁變____; 邊扁變____; 邊扁變辯____;
綿免麪____; 綿免麪____.



- Tone sandhi is a phonological change occurring in tonal languages, in which the tones assigned to individual words or morphemes change based on the pronunciation of adjacent words or morphemes. The following are some examples of Hong Kong People common saying, if you have any questions, ask your native teacher and copy what you hear.

🎧	bà-bà	father	➔	bàh-bā
🎧	mà-mà	mother	➔	màh-mā
🎧	Tùhng-Lòh-Wàan	Causeway Bay	➔	Tùhng-Lòh-Wàahn
🎧	daahn-ngàuh-mihn	noodle with egg and beef	➔	daahn-ngáuh-mihn

- You may find that sounds you hear in native Cantonese speakers' speech are often different from what you find in textbook. This may be caused by the following factors:
 - Sound change is in progress Cantonese,
 - Same words have alternative pronunciations.

- Learners can improve their listening skills with the following guideline.
 - **Initial “n-” is widely pronounced as “l-”**
 - e.g. néih (you) => léih, 🎧 naahm (south) => laahm. 🎧

 - **Initial “ng-” and zero initial are interchangeable:**
 - e.g. ngóh (I) => óh, 🎧 oi (love) => ngoi. 🎧

 - **Initial “gw-” and “kw-” before “o” are often pronounced as “g-” and “k-”:**
 - e.g. gwóng (wide) => gong, 🎧 kwok (broad) => kok. 🎧

 - **alternative finals are used:**
 - e.g. nī (this) => nēi/lēi, 🎧 làih (come) => lèih. 🎧

Jyutping and Yale system

As mentioned in **Preface** – “Simplify the history of Cantonese to reduce the confusion of tone “high level” and “high falling.” Adopt the “Jyutping system 粵拼” to combine the two confusing tones of the “Yale system” into one.”

The difference between Jyutping and Yale system

- Initials: only 3 out of 19 initials are differently spelt.
- Finals: only 6 of 53 finals are differently spelt.
- Tones: numbers are used instead of diacritics.

The differences in Initials:

Yale	Jyutping
j	z
ch	c
y	j

The differences in Finals:

Yale	Jyutping
eu	oe
eung	oeng
euk	oek
eui	eo
eun	eon
eut	eot

The differences in Tones:

Yale	Jyutping
à/ā	a1
á	a2
a	a3
àh	a4
áh	a5
ah	a6

The pronunciation of each character is based on the standard pronunciation of Hong Kong Cantonese, which may be found in the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong (LSHK) at: <http://www.lshk.org>

Traditional Cantonese tones 粵語九聲

傳統上中國粵語 - 粵音將四聲細分為九聲，分別是：陰平、陽平、陰上、陽上、陰去、陽去、陰入、中入、陽入。一個字的讀音，一般由聲母、韻母、聲調所組成。廣東話有九個聲調，分別是陰平陰上陰去、陽平陽上陽去；再加上陰入、中入、陽入。換言之，各分陰陽，再加上中入，就是九聲。

	平	上	去	入
陰	sāam 3	gáu 9	sei 4	chāt 7
陽	lihng 0	ńgh 5	yih 2	baat 8
中	-	-	-	luhk 6

[陰入、中入、陽入三聲] 一般而言，只有以 -p、-t、-k 收音的字才是這三個聲調的。所以如果我們遇到收 -p、-t、-k 的字，只須判斷它是陰入，中入還是陽入，因為它一定不會是陰平上去，和陽平上去的字。而以 (gap) 為例，可以調出「gāp 急、gap 鴿、gahp 及」三聲。

九聲	陰平	陰上	陰去	陽平	陽上	陽去	陰入	中入	陽入
Yale	HL	HR	ML	LF	LR	LL	HL	ML	LL
🔊	sāam	gáu	sei	lihng	ńgh	yih	chāt	baat	Luhk
	3	9	4	0	5	2	7	8	6






Daily Expressions:

The following are some of the essential expressions you come across when meeting Hong Kong people. They are short and easy to say. Let us practice and you will soon be getting by in Cantonese.




Remark: in this textbook, when you see ‘m4’, that is low falling tone of ‘m’.

English	Pinyin	Text	Audio
➤ Thanks for someone’s help or service:			
<i>Thank you.</i>	M4-gōi.	唔該.	
<i>Thank you very much.</i>	M4-gōi saai.	唔該晒.	
<i>You are welcome.</i>	M4-sái m4-gōi.	唔駛唔該.	
➤ Thanks for someone’s gifts, invitations or expressions of appreciation:			
<i>Thank you.</i>	Dō-jeh.	多謝.	
<i>Thank you very much.</i>	Dō-jeh saai.	多謝晒.	
<i>No need to say thank you.</i>	M4-sái dō-jeh.	唔駛多謝.	
➤ Hello:			
<i>Good day!</i>	Néih-hóu!	你好!	
<i>Long time no see.</i>	Hóu-noih-móuh-gin.	好耐冇見.	
<i>How is everything?</i>	Dím-a?	點呀?	
<i>I am fine.</i>	Ōu-kēi lā.	O K 啦.	
<i>Are you busy?</i>	Mòhng-m4-mòhng a?	忙唔忙呀?	
<i>Very busy.</i>	hóu-mòhng a.	好忙呀.	




➤ Good morning:

<i>Good morning.</i>	Jóu-sàhn.	早晨.	
<i>Where are you going?</i>	Heui bīn-douh a?	去邊度呀?	
<i>Going to class.</i>	Séuhng-tòhng.	上堂.	
<i>Going to class.</i>	Fāan-hohk.	返學.	
<i>Going to work.</i>	Fāan-gūng.	返工.	





➤ Good afternoon – have you eaten? (used as a greeting):

<i>Have you eaten yet?</i>	Sihk-jó-faahn meih-a?	食咗飯未呀?	
<i>Yes, I have eaten.</i>	Sihk-jó-la.	食咗喇.	
<i>Not yet.</i>	Meih-sihk-a.	未食呀.	




➤ Going home:

<i>Going home?</i>	Fāan-ūk-kéi?	返屋企?	
<i>Yes.</i>	Haih-a.	係呀.	
<i>No.</i>	M4-haih-a.	唔係呀.	








➤ Good-bye:

<i>I am off now.</i>	Jáu-sīn-la.	走先啦.	
<i>Good-bye.</i>	Bāai-baai.	拜拜.	
<i>See you.</i>	Joi-gin.	再見.	
<i>Good night!</i>	Jóu-táu!	早啲!	






➤ Apologize:

<i>Excuse me; I'm sorry</i>	deui-m4-jyuh	對唔住.	
<i>I'm sorry; it's embarrassing</i>	m4-hóu-yi-si	唔好意思.	
<i>That is all right; never mind.</i>	m4-gán-yiu	唔緊要.	

➤ Shopping, money and number:

<i>This one, please!</i>	Nī-go, m4-gōi.	呢個, 唔該!	
<i>How much?</i>	Géi-dō-chín?	幾多錢?	
<i>Hong Kong dollar</i>	mān	蚊/文	
<i>Number - 1,2,3,4,5</i>	yāt, yih, sāam, sei, ngh	一, 二, 三, 四, 五	
<i>Number - 6,7,8,9,10</i>	luhk, chāat, baat, gáu, sahp	六, 七, 八, 九, 十	
<i>\$10</i>	sahp-mān	十蚊	
<i>\$100</i>	yāt-baak-mān	一百蚊	

➤ Others:

<i>I cannot speak Cantonese.</i>	ngóh m4-sīk-góng Gwóng-Dūng-wá	我唔識講廣東話.	
<i>Do you speak English?</i>	Néih sīk-m4-sīk góng Ying-Mahn a?	你識唔識講英文呀?	
<i>Please translate for me.</i>	M4-gōi bòng-ngóh fāan-yihk.	唔該幫我翻譯.	
<i>Excuse me, may I ask...</i>	Chíng-mahn...	請問...	
<i>Where is the toilet?</i>	Chi-só hái bīn-douh-a?	廁所喺邊度呀?	

Excuse me, where is the MTR station?












Chíng-mahn deih-tit-
jaahm hái bīn-douh-a?

請問地鐵站喺邊度呀?



Say it in Cantonese:

What do you say when.....

1.  Someone opens the door for you.
2.  Someone thanks you for your help.
3.  You greet someone at 10:00 am.
4.  You greet someone at lunchtime or dinnertime.
5.  Someone presses the button for you in an elevator.
6.  You bump into somebody.
7.  Someone buys a coffee for you.
8.  You drop your keys and someone picks them up for you.
9.  Someone congratulates you on your promotion.
10.  You leave the office.
11.  Excuse me, where is the MTR station?

<< End of Lesson 1 >>