



## Absolute Beginner S1 The Cantonese Identity Mix-Up

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## Traditional Chinese

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唔該，你係唔係偉仔？  
唔係。  
唔好意思。  
唔緊要。

## Jyutping

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m4 goi1 , nei5 hai6 m4 hai6 wai5 zai2 ?  
m4 hai6。  
m4 hou2 ji3 si1。  
m4 gan2 jiu3。

## English

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Excuse me, are you Tony Leung?  
No.  
Sorry.  
Never mind.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
唔好意思	m4 hou2 ji3 si1	excuse me, sorry
係	hai6	to be
唔係	m4 hai6	no
唔緊要	m4 gan2 jiu3	it doesn't matter
廣東話	gwong2 dung1 waa2	Cantonese language
學	hok6	to learn
食	sik6	to eat
做	zou6	to do; to work

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

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唔好意思，洗手間喺邊？	m4 hou2 ji3 si1 , sai2 sau2 gaan1 hai2 bin1 ?	Excuse me, where is the washroom?
佢係女仔。	keoi5 hai6 nei5 zai2。	She is a girl.
佢最近唔係幾好。	keoi5 zeoi3 gan6 m4 hai6 gei2 hou2。	He hasn't been doing too well lately.
唔緊要。	m4 gan2 jiu3。	Doesn't matter.
我識講廣東話。	ngo5 sik1 gong2 gwong2 dung1 waa2。	I (know how to) speak Cantonese.
你識唔識講廣東話？	nei5 sik1 m4 sik1 gong2 gwong2 dung1 waa2 ?	Do you (know how to) speak Cantonese?
我學過跳舞。	ngo5 hok6 gwo3 tiu3 mou5。	I've learned dancing.
一齊食嘢。	jat1 cai4 sik6 je5。	Eat together.
最近好多嘢做。	zeoi3 gan6 hou2 do1 je5 zou6。	(There's) a lot of stuff to do lately.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is 係, hai6 ("to be")

唔該，你係唔係偉仔？

m4 goi1 , nei5 hai6 m4 hai6 wai5 zai2?

"Excuse me, are you Tony Leung?"

In Cantonese, the verb 係 (hai6) - "to be" links the subject of the sentence with the object. For example, take 我係佢嘅朋友。(ngo5 hai6 keoi5 ge3 pang4 jau5) - "I'm his/her friend." Here, 係 links the subject 我 with the object 嘅朋友。

Another feature of this verb and many other verbs in Cantonese is how we use them when asking a question. Cantonese uses an V-唔-V approach to asking a question. We duplicate the verb with the negation 唔 placed in the middle.

Some simple verbs that you can use in this format include:

1. 做唔做  
zou6 m4 zou6  
"to do or not to do"
2. 食唔食  
sik6 m4 sik6  
"to eat or not to eat"
3. 學唔學  
hok6 m4 hok6  
"to learn or not to learn"

## Cultural Insight

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### Mistakes in Cantonese

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Mistakes and misunderstandings are bound to happen when learning a language. Luckily, most Cantonese people are very forgiving about innocent mistakes and are quite amused at any non-native speaker speaking the language. With that said, here are two phrases that you can use when cultural misstep takes place:

1. 唔好意思。

m4 hou2 ji3 si1

"Excuse me."

You can use this very casual and versatile phrase in a lot of different situations.

2. 唔該。

m4 goi1

"Excuse me." or "Thank you."

You can use this phrase just to bring attention to a certain situation. If you need to pass someone on the street, you can say 唔該.

Many loan words have been adopted in Hong Kong and thus, have been disseminated through the Cantonese-speaking lexicon. "Hello" in Cantonese is 哈囉 (haa1 lo2). Whereas, "Bye" is 拜拜 (baai1 baai3). Both words have been adapted to the Cantonese pronunciation.