

LESSON NOTES

All About #4 Cantonese Pronunciation

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is on Cantonese Pronunciation

Each Cantonese character can be said to be a syllable. These syllables can be standalone words, or they can be grouped together to make compound words. Each syllable, or character, in Cantonese is made up of an initial and final sound. These initials and finals can be combined to make over six hundred unique sounds. Since there are only six hundred or so individual possible words in Cantonese, there are a lot of homophones, so it is the context or written characters which tell us which word is intended in any given context.

Cantonese uses a "phonetic system" called *jyutping* to aid learners of Cantonese in pronunciation. This *jyutping* uses roman letters to represent Cantonese sounds.

The Tones

1. The first tone is high and flat: [si1].
2. The second tone is a rising tone: [si2], and has intonation similar to that used in English to indicate a question (e.g., "Huh?").
3. The third tone starts in the middle and is flat: [si3].
4. The fourth tone is a flat tone at the bottom of our range: [si4]. You will feel a slight vibration at the base of your throat when doing it correctly.
5. The fifth tone is a rising tone: [si5], which starts from the lowest point in your range and rises to the middle.
6. The sixth tone is a flat tone: [si6], which starts from near the base and stays there.

The Entering Tones

The seventh, eighth, and ninth tones are called entering tones. These are not unique tones in the phonetic sense, but are rather syllables that end in a stop consonant, such as [p], [t], [k], or a glottal stop.

1. The seventh tone is a syllable that ends in a glottal stop but shares the same pitch as the first tone: [sik1]. It is high and flat.
2. The eighth tone is a syllable that ends in a glottal stop and shares the same pitch with the third tone: [sek3]. It is mid-pitch and flat.
3. The ninth tone is a syllable that ends in a glottal stop and shares the same pitch with the sixth tone: [sik6]. It is a low-flat pitch.

Hearing the Chinese, Not for the First Time

As a worldwide language, Cantonese is of course a language with a few different accents. The main difference in pronunciations is that certain words are pronounced using different tones. Due to the influence of local dialects, there is also some variation in the pronunciation of the initial and final sounds of Chinese; however, your ear will quickly become accustomed to these variations with exposure to them.