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Top 5 Phrases in Cantonese

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Traditional Chinese

唔该
你好
聽唔明
唔知
對唔住
我愛你

Jyutping

m4 goi1
nei3 hou2
teng1 m4 ming4
m4 zil
deoi3 m4 zyu6
ngo5 oi3 nei5

English

Thank you.
Hello.
to not understand
don't know
Sorry.
I love you.

Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is Five Must-Know Cantonese Phrases

Following are five essential phrases (and one bonus phrase) guaranteed to be

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absolutely must-know phrases you'll use in Cantonese.

#1 Must-Know Phrase: 唔该, m4 goi1 ("Thanks")

The Cantonese aren't big on "please," but they love "thank you" so much that they'll often hit you with a barrage of thanks all at once: m4goi1 m4goi1 m4goi1 m4goi1... True, sometimes they will say this as a way to get rid of you, sometimes it's genuine thanks, and sometimes you'll hear this because they don't know what exactly you're talking about. But nonetheless, this is the universal word that means gratitude. We'll leave interpreting its exact meaning to you to interpret.

#2 Must-Know Phrase: 聽唔明, teng1 m4 ming4 ("I don't understand what you are saying.")

This phrase is going to be your best friend, go-to, and solace. When your conversation partner follows you perfectly accented neihou with a barrage of Cantonese at lightning speed, this phrase will instantly replace any looks of irritation or impatience with something else: ill-concealed laughter, bewilderment, compassion and perhaps an immediate switch to the language that transcends all national, political, and cultural boundaries: charades.

#3 Must-Know Phrase: 你好 nei5 hou2 ("Hello")

If you don't know it yet, we don't know where you've been. But we would be remiss if we didn't teach you "hello." Neihou literally means "you good." Not a bad way to greet someone.

#4 Must-Know Phrase: 唔知, m4 zil ("I don't know.")

You may hear this phrase more than use it, however, learn from the Cantonese how to m4zil every situation you wish to evade, play dumb about, or avoid.

#5 Must-Know Phrase: 對唔住, deoi3 m4 zyu6 ("Sorry.")

You're likely going to need to apologize a lot. In fact, you can just throw this word out at random, just to be on the safe side of etiquette. You can use deoi3 m4 zyu6 to apologize to anyone you step on in the Hong Kong subway, to apologize for



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any cultural faux pas you've likely committed, or to just curry favor in general.

Bonus Must-Know Phrase: 我愛你, ngo5 oi3 nei5 ("I love you.")

You're going to love this phrase. But use it with caution.