LESSON NOTES

Learn Cantonese in Three Minutes #23
Asking "When" in Cantonese

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GRAMMAR

The focus of this lesson is asking "When" in Cantonese

Topic 1: How to use "when"

Sentence from the lesson:
'你幾時返呀？'
 nei5 gei2 si4 fan1 aa6?
"When will you come back home?"

1. Imagine you want to ask when your roommate is coming back home. You will ask him *nei5 gei2 si4 fan1 aa6?* "When will you come back?"

2. So let's break down this question:
    nei5 → "you"
    gei2 si4 → "what time;" "when"
    fan1 → "to return"
    aa6 → question particle

3. So in Cantonese, "When" is generally translated as *gei2 si4*.
    For example:
    nei5 gei2 si4 saang1 jat6?
     "When is your birthday?"
    nei5 gei2 si4 dou3 gaa3?
     "When did you arrive?"
     It is really simple since it is exactly the same pattern: First we have *nei5*, which is "you." Then the second word, *gei2 si4*, which is this lesson's focus "When" then followed by the verb "to arrive," *dou3*. And finally *gaa3* which is the final particle for making an assertion.

4. Did you notice how both sentences, *nei5 gei2 si4 fan1?* and *nei5 gei2 si4 dou3 gaa3?* use the same words for "When" even though the first sentence is referring to a future action—"When are you coming back home?" and the second one is referring to the past "When did you arrive?" So you can use *gei2 si4* to talk about any moment, whether past or present.

Topic 2: How to ask "since when" and "until when"

Sentence from the lesson:

nei5 gei2 si4 hoi1 ci2 zou6 lou5 si1 gaa3?

"Since when have you been a teacher?"

1. If you want to ask a question about duration as in "Since when have you been a teacher?" then you will have to say *nei5 gei2 si4 hoi1 ci2 zou6 lou5 si1 gaa3?* Here we add *hoi1 ci2*, the verb "to start," after *gei2 si4*, so literally it is "You when start being teacher?"

2. Here is how to ask "Until when?" in Cantonese. It is very easy because you can translate it directly. It becomes: *dou3 gei2 si4?*
For example:
nei5 hai2 dou6 lau4 dou3 gei2 si4?
"Until when are you going to stay here?"

Language Tip

To ask how long an action has been taking place in Cantonese, we could say *gei2 noi6*, for example: *nei5 dang2 zo2 gei2 noi6?* That is "How long have you been waiting?"