

LESSON NOTES

Pronunciation #2

The Cantonese Tones

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GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is the Pronunciation of Cantonese Tones

The Tones

The first tone is high and steady: [si1].

The second tone is a rising tone and has intonation similar to that used in English to indicate a question (i.e., "huh?"): [si2].

The third tone starts from the middle and is steady: [si3].

The fourth tone is the lowest flat tone: [si4]. You can feel a slight vibration at the base of your throat when you are doing it correctly.

The fifth tone is a rising tone and starts from the lowest of your range and rises to the middle: [si5].

The sixth tone is a flat tone that starts from somewhere between the base and the middle: [si6].

The Entering Tones

The seventh, eighth, and ninth tones are called entering tones. However, they are not real tones in the phonetic sense but rather syllables that end in a stop consonant such as -p, -t, -k, or glottal stop.

The seventh tone is a syllable that ends in a glottal stop but shares the same pitch with the first tone: [sik1].

The eighth tone is a syllable that ends in a glottal stop and shares the same pitch with the third tone: [sek3].

The ninth tone is a syllable that ends in a glottal stop and shares the same pitch with the sixth tone: [sik6].

Pronunciation Tip

There is no better way to get the hang of the tones in Cantonese than by listening and practicing them yourself. If you have access to a native speaker of Cantonese, it is great practice to have them say words and have you repeat after them with the native speaker correcting you where necessary. Gradually, the tune of the tones will stick in your head.

You can also use the materials at CantoneseClass101.com to listen to native speakers' pronunciation in the MP3 recordings of the vocabulary, and repeat, repeat, repeat. Also, the voice recorder on the website allows you to hear and compare your pronunciation with the native speakers.

CULTURAL INSIGHT

Are Your Cantonese Tones a Bit Off?

Don't worry if you are having trouble with the tones at first. There are a lot of tone variations even amongst different regions in China, and most often if you have some context (even if your tones are not perfect), you can be understood. Just keep speaking, and they will improve naturally over time.