BASIC CANTONESE
A GRAMMAR AND WORKBOOK

Virginia Yip
and Stephen Matthews

Also available as a printed book see title verso for ISBN details
Basic Cantonese introduces the essentials of Cantonese grammar in a straightforward and systematic way. Each of the 28 units deals with a grammatical topic and provides associated exercises, designed to put grammar into a communicative context. Special attention is paid to topics which differ from English and European language structures.

Features include:

- clear, accessible format
- lively examples to illustrate each grammar point
- informative keys to all exercises
- glossary of grammatical terms

Basic Cantonese is ideal for students new to the language. Together with its sister volume, Intermediate Cantonese, it forms a structured course of the essentials of Cantonese grammar.

Virginia Yip is Associate Professor at the Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong. Stephen Matthews lectures in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Hong Kong. They are the authors of Cantonese: A Comprehensive Grammar (1994).
Titles of related interest published by Routledge:

*Basic Chinese: A Grammar and Workbook*
By Yip Po-Ching and Don Rimmington

*Intermediate Chinese: A Grammar and Workbook*
By Yip Po-Ching and Don Rimmington

*Chinese: An Essential Grammar*
By Yip Po-Ching and Don Rimmington

*Colloquial Chinese*
By Qian Kan

*Colloquial Chinese (Reprint of the first edition)*
By Ping-Cheng T’ung and David E.Pollard

*Colloquial Chinese CD Rom*
By Qian Kan

*Colloquial Cantonese*
By Gregory James and Keith S.T.Tong

*Cantonese: A Comprehensive Grammar*
By Stephen Matthews and Virginia Yip
BASIC CANTONESE: A GRAMMAR AND WORKBOOK

Virginia Yip and Stephen Matthews
For Timothy and Sophie,

to fountains of creativity and inspiration
CONTENTS

Introduction ix

1 Consonants 1

2 Vowels and diphthongs 7

3 Tone 11

4 Pronouns 17

5 Possession: ge 23

6 Possession and existence: yáuh 27

7 Being: haih 32

8 Noun classifiers 36

9 Adjectives 42

10 Adverbs of manner 47

11 Adverbs of time, frequency and duration 52

12 Comparison: gwo and dī 58

13 Prepositions: space and time 65

14 Negation 72

15 Verbs of motion: heui and làih 78
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Verbs of giving: běi</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Verbs and particles</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Actions and events: jó and gwo</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Activities: gán and jyuh</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Auxiliary verbs</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Passives</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Word order and topicalization</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Yes/no questions</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Wh-questions</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Sentence particles</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Imperatives</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Requests and thanks</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Numbers, dates and times</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Key to exercises</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glossary of grammatical terms</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

This book is for learners of Cantonese who aim to take their knowledge of the language beyond the phrase-book level. While our Cantonese: A Comprehensive Grammar was designed as a reference book, Basic Cantonese is more pedagogical in orientation. It highlights the key building blocks of sentence structure, leaving details of grammar and usage for the more advanced learner. It also provides practice for the grammar points of each unit in the form of communicatively oriented exercises. The book is self-contained in the sense that it can be used on its own for self-paced learning. With the grammar points presented in approximate order of difficulty, it should also be useful for practice, revision and reference. It can be used in conjunction with a language course or lessons from a tutor. Either way, it should be understood that to learn a tone language such as Cantonese effectively requires some aural support—ideally from native speakers, or as a second best option from audiovisual materials such as tapes or CD-ROMs.

The Cantonese language

Cantonese is named after the city of Canton (known as Guangzhou in Mandarin), the capital of Guangdong province in southern China. Apart from the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, it is spoken in neighbouring Hong Kong and Macau, and also in Chinese communities overseas where it is often the predominant form of Chinese. Both in southern China and in Singapore and Malaysia, where it is widely spoken, it enjoys considerable prestige due to its association with the prosperous southern provinces as well as with the Cantonese culture of films and popular music (‘Canto-pop’). It is also widely heard in cities such as Toronto and Vancouver in Canada, Sydney in Australia, New York and San Francisco in the USA. Cantonese will continue to be spoken widely around the Pacific Rim in the twenty-first century.

Cantonese is generally regarded, even by its own speakers, as a dialect of Chinese. This tends to imply, misleadingly, that it differs from standard Chinese (Mandarin or Putonghua ‘common speech’) largely in pronunciation, with some differences in vocabulary and relatively few in grammar. The grammatical differences are often underestimated, and it is dangerous to assume that the same Chinese grammar (essentially that of Mandarin) can be applied straightforwardly to Cantonese. In fact Cantonese has its own fully-fledged grammatical system, largely independent of Mandarin grammar. Indeed the Chinese ‘dialects’ vary in
grammar, as they do in other respects, as much as the various Romance languages such as French, Spanish and Italian. Moreover, the dialects of southern China, which include Cantonese and Taiwanese, are especially distinctive and diverse. Naturally, some knowledge of Mandarin can be helpful in learning Cantonese, but one cannot assume that it is simply a matter of learning a new pronunciation for the same language, or a new set of vocabulary to go with the same grammar. Hence to learn Cantonese effectively one needs to pay attention to its grammar.

Cantonese grammar

Readers should be aware that the concept of ‘grammar’ used here is essentially that of contemporary linguistics, which is descriptive in approach, rather than that of traditional school grammar with its prescriptive concern for what is ‘good’ or ‘correct’. The descriptive approach aims to capture the patterns of language as they are actually used by native speakers, without imposing value judgements on particular grammatical forms. Speakers of Cantonese are often puzzled by the idea of Cantonese, as a ‘dialect’, having its own grammar. Perhaps the simplest way to demonstrate that it does is to consider examples of ‘Cantonese’ as spoken by foreign learners, such as the following:

*I Ngóh fāan ûkkéi chìh dl  I’ll go home later
*Kéuih móuh heui-jó  He didn’t go

These two sentences are unacceptable to a native speaker (the asterisk * marks them as ungrammatical), the first because in Cantonese adverbs of time such as chìh dl meaning ‘later’ come before the verb, not after as in English, and the second because the suffix -jó indicating completion is incompatible with most types of negative sentence. These explanations, simply put, are rules of grammar (the precise details are, of course, more complicated). By grammar, then, we mean the rules or principles governing the structure of sentences.

The kind of grammar to be learnt in mastering Cantonese, however, is not like that of Latin or Spanish where the forms of words—noun declensions, verb conjugations and the like—call for study. Instead, the more important questions are those of syntax: the order and patterns in which words are put together to form sentences. Sometimes Cantonese syntax resembles English:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>leng sāam</th>
<th>pretty clothes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>taai loih</td>
<td>too long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gwa héi</td>
<td>hang up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngóh sīk kéuih</td>
<td>I know him</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In other cases, the order of words is markedly different. In some of these features, Cantonese differs from English as well as from Mandarin—the construction with beɪ ‘to give’ being a well-known example:

*Ngóh béi chín léih*  
(*lit.* I give money you)  
I give you money

Where the syntax is likely to cause difficulty in following the examples, as in this case, we give a literal word-by-word gloss reflecting the Cantonese word order as well as the natural, idiomatic English translation. As a general principle we have aimed to do this where the English translation diverges substantially from the Cantonese original, as in the case of questions and ‘topicalized’ sentences:

*Léih sihk mātyéh a?*  
(*lit.* you eat what)  
What are you eating?

*Tìhmbán ngóh nh sihk la*  
(*lit.* dessert I not eat)  
I don’t eat dessert

The glosses, within parentheses preceded by *lit.*, are generally omitted once a pattern has been established.

**Chinese writing and romanization**

The relationship of spoken Cantonese to Chinese writing is complicated. The Chinese writing system is based on Mandarin, the spoken language of Beijing and northern China. Although Cantonese can be written as it is spoken—with some difficulty, since many Cantonese words lack established characters—written Cantonese of this kind is hardly used for serious purposes, being largely confined to popular magazines and newspaper columns. For serious writing, standard Chinese is used instead. This standard written Chinese can then be read aloud with Cantonese ‘readings’ (pronunciations) for each character, which are taught in schools in Hong Kong and Macau, enabling educated Cantonese speakers to be literate in standard Chinese while speaking only Cantonese.

For most western learners wishing to learn to read or write Chinese, however, it will be useful to do so in conjunction with spoken Mandarin, rather than Cantonese alone. For these reasons, we have not included characters, but use the Yale romanization system (with the minor
modifications introduced in our *Cantonese: A Comprehensive Grammar*). This system has proved effective for learners and is used in most language courses, textbooks, dictionaries and glossaries. The main disadvantage of the Yale system is that most native speakers are unfamiliar with it, and therefore find it quite difficult to read: it should be considered merely as an aid to learning the spoken language.

**Pronunciation**

Beyond grammar, one of the main difficulties of Cantonese is posed by its pronunciation, and tones in particular. For this reason, the first three chapters are devoted to establishing and reinforcing the main features of Cantonese pronunciation. Learners who do not have access to native speakers or Cantonese media should be sure to acquire some tapes or other audiovisual materials in order to practise recognition and production of tones.

**Exercises**

The exercises in this book are intended to be communicatively useful tasks, rather than the mechanical rote practice of some past grammars. The emphasis is placed on expressing ideas and, to give them a more authentic feel, some are situated in a real-life context: ordering dishes in a restaurant, asking for directions, and the like. Because many of the exercises are open-ended, they naturally allow more than one answer: the suggested answers given in the key by no means represent the only options. Learners with access to native speakers may benefit from reading out their own answers to them and eliciting alternatives. More demanding exercises, which may require additional knowledge or reference to other units, are marked with a dagger (†).

**Further practice**

Few learners will be satisfied with armchair knowledge of the language: to put grammatical knowledge to practical use, exposure to Cantonese media and practice with native speakers will be needed. This book aims to provide a firm foundation on which to build proficiency. Using the minimum of terminology, it should provide just enough grammatical apparatus for the teacher and learner to devise further practice activities of their own. Readers graduating from this book will also be able to progress to *Intermediate Cantonese* which takes them into new and more challenging territory.
In Cantonese it is useful to distinguish initial consonants, that is those which occur at the beginning of a syllable, from those found at the end of a syllable.

**Initial consonants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unaspirated</th>
<th>Aspirated</th>
<th>Fricative</th>
<th>Nasal/liquid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilabial</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental/alveolar</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>n/l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Velar/glottal</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>ng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labio-velar</td>
<td>gw</td>
<td></td>
<td>kw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alveolar affricates</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The consonant sounds in the third and fourth columns—the fricatives f, s, h and the nasals m, n, ng—are pronounced much as in English, while the first two columns pose greater difficulty. Whereas English stops such as p and b are distinguished by the fact that p is voiceless and b voiced, no Cantonese stops are distinctively voiced; instead they are distinguished by aspiration—a burst of air emitted in the process of articulation. In English, this feature is also present in that initial p is normally aspirated and b not; however, this contrast is not a distinctive one. To an English speaker, Cantonese b as in bèi ‘give’ may sound either like p (because of the lack of voicing) or like b (because of the lack of aspiration). This combination of features—voiceless and unaspirated—is not found in English, making the Cantonese consonants b/d/g difficult to recognize and produce at first. Remember that b- as in bāt ‘pen’, d- as in deui ‘pair’ and g- as in gwai
‘expensive’ are not voiced. The problem also arises in romanized place names: *Kowloon*, for example, is generally pronounced by English speakers with an aspirated [k], but in the Cantonese form *Gáulùhng* the initial consonant is not aspirated.

In the labio-velar consonants *gw* and *kw*, the initial velar consonant is articulated more or less simultaneously with the bilabial [w] as in *gwa* ‘hang’ and *kwàhn* ‘skirt’. There is a tendency to simplify *gw* and *kw* to [g] and [k] respectively before o or u, e.g. *gwok* ‘country’ sounds identical to *gok* ‘feel’. Similarly:

| Gwóngjâu | → | Góngjâu Canton (Guangzhou) |
| gwú | → | gú guess |
| gwun | → | gun can (of beer, Coke, etc.) |
| kwòhng | → | kòhng crazy |

The affricates *j* and *ch* are probably the most difficult of the initial consonants. They are distinguished by aspiration: *ch* is accompanied by a breath of air while *j* is not. There are two rather different pronunciations for each consonant, depending on the following vowel:

(i) Before the front vowels *i*, *yu* and *eu* or *eui* they are alveo-palatal, [tʃ] and [tʃ’] respectively, formed with the tongue touching both the alveolar ridge and the palate:

| ji | know | chl | to stick |
| jyú | Pig | chýun | village |
| jéui | chase | chéui | to blow |

In these cases the sounds are fairly close to their English counterparts as in ‘June’ and ‘choose’.

(ii) In all other cases they are alveolar, [ts] and [ts’] respectively, formed at the front of the mouth (like *d* and *t*) at the alveolar ridge just behind the teeth:

| jä | to drive | cháh | tea |
| johng | crash | cho | wrong |

These sounds are different from any in English: *cháh* should not be pronounced like ‘char’. In all cases remember that the Cantonese *j* is not voiced, just as *d* is not, while *ch* as in *chín* is aspirated, like *t*.
Consonants and names

The romanized forms of names used in Hong Kong and south China follow various older transcription systems which can be confusing for the learner. To pronounce them correctly, bear in mind the following correspondences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place name</th>
<th>Yale romanization</th>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Yale romanization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kowloon</td>
<td>Gáulùhng</td>
<td>Kong</td>
<td>Gong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwun Tong</td>
<td>Gwun Tòhng</td>
<td>Kwok</td>
<td>Gwok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai Po</td>
<td>Daaih Bou</td>
<td>Tang</td>
<td>Dahng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsimtsatsui</td>
<td>Jimsajéui</td>
<td>Tse</td>
<td>Jeh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shatin</td>
<td>Satìhn</td>
<td>Shek</td>
<td>Sehk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Semivowels

The semivowels w- and y- also occur at the beginning of a syllable. They can be pronounced much as in English:

- w- wah say wúih will
- y- yiu want yuhng use

In the case of initial y- followed by the vowel yu, technically we would have yyu, but this is conventionally written more simply as yu, as in yuht ‘month’.

Nasals

The velar nasal written as ng- is a single consonant which presents two problems:

- It is basically the same sound that we find in ‘sing’ and ‘singer’, but in Cantonese it can begin a syllable, as in ngóh ‘I’. It can be produced by pronouncing ‘singer’ as ‘si-nger’.
- Cantonese speakers frequently do not pronounce it where expected. Thus the pronoun ‘I’ is often heard as óh, ‘duck’ is either ngaap or aap, while ngh ‘five’ may be pronounced as m´h instead.

A similar problem arises with the distinction between n and l which is made in dictionaries and some textbooks. Although certain words
nominally begin with n, notably the pronoun néih ‘you’, most speakers pronounce these with l instead:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>néuih-yán</td>
<td>or léuih-yán woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nám</td>
<td>or lám think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nídouh</td>
<td>or lídouh here</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Syllabic nasals**

The nasal consonants m and ng occur as syllables in their own right, albeit only in a few words. The most frequently encountered examples are:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>níh</td>
<td>not (the main negative word: see Unit 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngíh</td>
<td>five (also pronounced níh: see above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngíh</td>
<td>Ng (a common surname)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that these words each carry a tone of their own.

**Final consonants**

Only two kinds of consonants occur at the end of a syllable:

- the stops -p, -t, -k: these stops are unreleased, i.e. the airstream is closed to make them, but not reopened again, so that no air is released. Such consonants occur in casual pronunciation in English (e.g. ‘yep!’) as well as in German and many other languages, and are not difficult to produce. What is more difficult is to hear the difference between them, as they tend to sound alike:

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>baat (eight) vs. (yät) baak ((one) hundred)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sāp chē (wet car) vs. sāt chē (missing car) vs. sāk chē (traffic jam)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- the nasals -m, -n, -ng: these are easily pronounced, although Mandarin speakers may have difficulty with -m.

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sāam (three) vs. sāan (to close) vs. sāang (alive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>làahm (south) vs. làahn (difficult) vs. làahng (cold)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One complication here is that many speakers pronounce the -ng words with -n in certain syllables, so that hohksāang ‘student’, for example, is pronounced hohksāan.
Exercise 1.1

Pronounce the following words paying special attention to the consonants. You may need to look at Unit 2 (vowels) and Unit 3 (tone) in order to pronounce the words correctly. If possible check your pronunciation with a native speaker.

1 baat eight
2 taap tower
3 je lend/borrow
4 ngoh hungry
5 ngaam exactly
6 luhk six
7 seun letter
8 cheung sing
9 ngh five
10 yaht day

Exercise 1.2

The following words are ‘minimal pairs’ differing in only one feature. Identify this difference and make sure that your pronunciation distinguishes the two words.

1 bin change pin a slice
2 baai worship paai distribute
3 daai bring taai too (excessively)
4 dfn mad tfn sky
5 jéui chase chëui blow
6 jéun bottle chëun spring
7 gok feel kok accurate
8 gau enough kau deduct
9 gwan stick kwan difficult
10 jéung sheet (of paper) chëung window

† Exercise 1.3

The following surnames (1–6) and place names (7–12) are written in obsolete romanization systems. Pronounce them and write them in Yale romanization.
<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cheung</td>
<td>7 Tai O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chiu</td>
<td>8 Lai Chi Kok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kwan</td>
<td>9 Tseung Kwan O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ting</td>
<td>10 Shaukeiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Shum</td>
<td>11 Tai Kok Tsui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chung</td>
<td>12 Sham Shui Po</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The vowels written a, aa, e, i, o, u, eu and yu are all single vowels which should be pronounced with consistent quality throughout: for example, Cantonese so should not sound like ‘so’ in English, but more like ‘saw’. The first six are comparable to English vowels, while the last two are not, being closer to French:

- a  bāt pen  similar to the vowel in ‘but’
- aa sāam three  similar to the vowel in ‘father’
- i  sī silk  similar to the vowel in ‘see’
- e  leng pretty  similar to the vowel in ‘pet’
- o  dō many  similar to the vowel in ‘paw’
- u  fu trousers  similar to the vowel in ‘fool’
- yu syū book  similar to the vowel in French ‘tu’
- eu seun letter  similar to the first vowel in French ‘Peugeot’

### Long and short a

A peculiarity of Cantonese not shared with most other varieties of Chinese is the distinction between short a and long aa. The following minimal pairs differ in the length of the vowel:

- sām heart  sāam three
- mahn ask  maahn slow
- hàhng permanent  hàahng walk
- kāt cough  kāat card

These vowels differ in sound quality as well as length: sām sounds much like English ‘sum’, while sāam has an open vowel more like that of ‘sample’ in (southern British) English. When a comes at the end of a syllable as in fa ‘flower’ it is written with a single a but pronounced as in ‘fa-ther’.
Front rounded vowels

The digraphs **yu** and **eu** represent single vowels produced at the front of the mouth with rounded lips; counterparts to these are not generally used in English, but exist in several European languages:

- **yu** is similar to French ‘u’ and German ‘ü’. In English something like it appears in the second syllable of ‘issue’.
- **eu** is similar to French ‘eu’ as in the second syllable in ‘hors d’oeuvre’. English speakers may try pronouncing ‘her’ with rounded lips (as if pouting).

Variable vowels

The sound of a vowel can be affected by a following consonant. In particular, high vowels become more open before the velar consonants -k and -ng:

1. The vowel in **sihk** ‘eat’ lies between **i** and **e**, but is still distinct from **sehk** ‘stone’. Similarly, **ging** ‘pass by’ can be difficult to distinguish from **gêng** ‘be afraid’. In a few words usage varies between **i** and **e**, for example, **sihng** or **sêhng** ‘whole’.
2. The vowel in **luhk** ‘green’ lies between **u** and **o**, but is still distinct from **lohk** ‘go down’. Similarly, **tûhng** ‘with’ can be difficult to distinguish from **tôhng** ‘sugar’.
3. The rounded vowel **eu** before the velar consonants **k** and **ng** as in **jeuk** ‘wear’ and **cheung** ‘sing’ is more open than that in **chêut** ‘go out’, **jêun** ‘bottle’, **seun** ‘letter’, and so on.

Diphthongs

These combinations of two vowel sounds are produced by shifting from one vowel to another over the course of one syllable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>digraph</th>
<th>meaning</th>
<th>pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iu giu</td>
<td>call(ed)</td>
<td>as in English ‘few’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oi choi</td>
<td>vegetable</td>
<td>as in English ‘boy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ou dou</td>
<td>arrive</td>
<td>as in English ‘hold’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ei sei</td>
<td>four</td>
<td>as in English ‘say’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ui guih</td>
<td>tired</td>
<td>as in English ‘goo-ey ‘(but pronounced as only one syllable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eui seu</td>
<td>tax</td>
<td>(the front rounded vowel <strong>eu</strong> followed by the glide <strong>i</strong>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note that there are diphthongs corresponding to both short \( a \) and long \( aa \):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ai</th>
<th>sāi</th>
<th>west</th>
<th>aai</th>
<th>sāai</th>
<th>to waste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>máih</td>
<td>rice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au</td>
<td>gau</td>
<td>enough</td>
<td>aau</td>
<td>gaau</td>
<td>to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lauh</td>
<td>leak</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to scold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The long diphthongs are close to those in English: \textit{aai} is similar to that in ‘sky’, \textit{aau} to that in ‘how’.

**Exercise 2.1**

Pronounce the following minimal pairs (refer to Unit 3 for the tones, which are the same for each pair):

1. gān follow  
2. fān separate  
3. sān new  
4. gām gold  
5. lām think  
6. gām dare  
7. lāhm to water  
8. gāi chicken  
9. láih polite  
10. chāu autumn  
11. ling shiny  
12. pīhng flat  
13. līk take, pick  
14. sihk eat  
15. gīng pass  
16. mohk curtain, screen  
17. song lose, die  
18. lohk happy  
19. dohk measure  
20. mohng to stare

**(classifer for house)**  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gāan</th>
<th>back, return</th>
<th>sāan</th>
<th>mountain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gām</td>
<td>prison</td>
<td>lāam</td>
<td>hug, embrace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gām</td>
<td>deduct, reduce (prices)</td>
<td>lāahm</td>
<td>blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gāi</td>
<td>street</td>
<td>láaih</td>
<td>milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chāu</td>
<td>copy</td>
<td>leng</td>
<td>pretty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pīhng</td>
<td>cheap</td>
<td>lek</td>
<td>clever, smart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sihk</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>sehk</td>
<td>wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gīng</td>
<td>fear</td>
<td>sung</td>
<td>send</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mohk</td>
<td>wood</td>
<td>lohk</td>
<td>green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>song</td>
<td>read</td>
<td>duhk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| mohng | dream |}

**Exercise 2.2**

Pronounce the following words, paying special attention to the rounded vowels \textit{yu} and \textit{eu} (if possible check your pronunciation with a native speaker or against a recording):

1. gōng pass  
2. fōng pass  
3. chōng to stare  
4. lohn happy  
5. dohn measure  
6. mohn to stare  
7. chōng to stare  
8. fōng pass  
9. chōng to stare  
10. lohn happy  
11. dohn measure  
12. mohn to stare  

**(classifer for house)**  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>fōng</th>
<th>pass</th>
<th>chōng</th>
<th>to stare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gōng</td>
<td>fear</td>
<td>sung</td>
<td>send</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pēng</td>
<td>cheap</td>
<td>lēk</td>
<td>clever, smart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>līk</td>
<td>take, pick</td>
<td>sihk</td>
<td>stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gīng</td>
<td>fear</td>
<td>sung</td>
<td>send</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mohk</td>
<td>wood</td>
<td>lohk</td>
<td>green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>song</td>
<td>read</td>
<td>duhk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| mohng | dream |}

**(classifer for house)**
Exercise 2.3

Pronounce the following pairs of words paying special attention to the diphthongs:

A monosyllabic                      B disyllabic
1 meih  not yet                11 meihdouh  taste
2 gei  mail                    12 jihgei  oneself
3 yiu  want                    13 jiugu  take care
4 siu  smile                   14 diu-yu  fishing
5 tiu  jump                    15 tiu-mou  to dance
6 mujh  every, each            16 muihmui  sister
7 mikh  seconds                17 keihmuh  wonderful
8 guih  tired                   18 hauhfui  regret
9 giu  call                     19 gui-ngou  proud
10 wuigh  will                 20 hoi-wui  have a meeting
11 doi  bag                     21 joigin  see you (lit. see again)
12 goi  change                  22 yinggoi  should
13 goo  tall                    23 gwonggou  advertisement
14 loiuh  old                  24 dihnlouh  computer
15 teui  push                   25 teui-yau  retire
Like other varieties of Chinese and many south-east Asian languages, Cantonese is a tonal language: the relative pitch at which a syllable is pronounced plays a role in distinguishing one word from another. While tone presents one of the biggest obstacles, both real and psychological, to a working command of Cantonese, it also gives a musical quality to the language, and some learners find musical analogies helpful.

The importance of tones

Whereas in other languages deviation in pitch might merely result in a foreign accent, in Cantonese it changes the identity of a word:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High level</th>
<th>Low level</th>
<th>Mid level</th>
<th>Low level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sān   new</td>
<td>sahn  kidney</td>
<td>gau  enough</td>
<td>gauh  old, dated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syu   book</td>
<td>syuh  tree</td>
<td>dim  to touch</td>
<td>dihm  OK, done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High level</th>
<th>High rising</th>
<th>High rising</th>
<th>Low rising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lāu  jacket</td>
<td>lāu  apartment</td>
<td>ngó  goose</td>
<td>ngóh  I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yāt  bun  one half</td>
<td>yāt  bún  one (book)</td>
<td>chí  teeth</td>
<td>chíh  resemble</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fortunately a word pronounced with an inaccurate tone can often be recognized from the context, although the errors are sometimes amusing.

How many tones?

To begin with a perennial question: how many tones are there? Linguists of different persuasions debate the issue, and different dialects of Cantonese vary in this respect. Although some reference books distinguish seven, nine or even ten tones, most current analyses assume six in Hong Kong.
Cantonese—and for the beginner six tones are plenty. These are shown, with the vowel a as an example, in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rising</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Falling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>á</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>(à)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>áh</td>
<td>ah</td>
<td>àh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ‘high level’ tone is sometimes pronounced with a noticeable fall (à) as in sin ‘first’. Some books and dictionaries attempt to distinguish high level as in sāan ‘hill’ from high falling as in sàan ‘to close’, but most speakers make no such systematic distinction and these two words sound identical. Some other textbooks show this tone as ‘falling’ (à) for typographical convenience; we write them with the ‘high level’ diacritic (á) throughout as this pronunciation seems to be dominant among younger speakers in Hong Kong.

For many beginners, two strategies may be useful in tackling the six tones:

- The three level tones (high, mid and low) are relatively easy to recognize and produce, providing three anchor points. In musical terms, the difference between the high and mid-level tones is about one and a half tones (a minor third), while that between the mid-level and low-level tones is one whole tone.
- It is relatively easy to recognize a tone as being one of the higher or one of the lower three. The ‘h’ marking the three low tones in the Yale romanization system comes in useful here, effectively marking the lower register. To distinguish between the various lower tones, especially between the low level and low falling, is more demanding. The low falling tone as in làih ‘come’ can often be recognized by a ‘creaky’ voice quality as the pitch reaches the bottom of the speaker’s voice range.

The pronunciations are best learnt from native speakers or recordings, but English intonation patterns approximate some of the tones:

- The high rising tone as in dim ‘how?’ resembles a question showing surprise (‘who? really??’);
- The low rising tone as in ngóh ‘I’ begins with a slight dip and can be compared to a hesitant ‘well,…’;
- The low falling tone as in yàhn ‘person’ resembles a dismissive intonation, as in a calm but definitive ‘no’.
It may be some consolation to note that speakers of other Chinese dialects, and even some native speakers, have difficulty distinguishing the two rising tones, sometimes confusing phrases such as:

- sung séung heui: send some pictures (séung)
- sung séuhng heui: send something up (séuhng)
- Méihgwok sí: American history
- Méihgwok síh: the American market

**Tone versus stress and intonation**

In English a word such as ‘yes’ can be pronounced with a variety of intonation patterns:

- falling: yes! (We’ve done it!)
- dipping: yes, (but…)
- low level: yes…(What is it this time?)

In Cantonese the word haih ‘yes’ must be pronounced with a low-level tone regardless of the context, otherwise it will sound like another word. Word stress and intonation patterns as used in English and other European languages often interfere with production of tones. When we stress a word, we automatically give it a high pitch; if this is superimposed on a Cantonese tone, it may turn a low tone into a high level or high falling one, for example:

    haih (yes)+emphatic stress → hái or hài (this is a common error, often committed by the second author, and comes dangerously close to obscenity)

Similarly, questions in English and many other languages end with a rising intonation. If this is added to a Cantonese question it may change the identity of the last word or two. Consequently, the scope for stress and intonation is limited (largely to sentence particles).

**Tone change**

A ‘changed tone’ occurs in colloquial speech in certain combinations. The affected syllable is pronounced with a high rising tone instead of the usual low (level or falling) tone. There are several categories including the following:
(i) Nouns at the end of a compound or phrase:

- **yàhn** person  but **léuih-yán** woman
- **yuht** month  but **chóh-yút** spend a month recovering after giving birth
- **màhn-hohk** literature  but **Yíng-mán** English (language)
- **yùh-dáan** fish-cake  but **tiuh yú** a/the fish
- **làuh-táï** staircase  but **déng-láu** top floor, penthouse
- **yät hahp syú** a box of books  but **yät go háp** a box
- **yät diĥp choi** a dish of vegetables but **yät jek díp** a dish

(ii) Names with the prefix **a-** or **lóuh-**:

- **Chàhn Sāang** Mr. Chan  but **A-Chán** Chan (colloquial)
- **Làih Sāang** Mr Lai  **Lóuh-Lái** old (Mr) Lai

(iii) Reduplicated adjectives, in which the second syllable changes to a high rising tone (see also Unit 9):

- **sòh** foolish  but **sòh-só-déi** silly
- **fèih** fat  but **fèih-féi-déi** chubby

The rules underlying this alternation are rather too complex to spell out here. Learners will develop a feel for this phenomenon on exposure to colloquial Cantonese.

**Exercise 3.1**

Practise distinguishing the six tones on the following syllables (meanings given in parentheses indicate that the syllable forms part of a word with that meaning):

1. **sí** poem  **sì** history  **síh** try  **síh** time  **síh** market  **síh** matter
2. **fán** split  **fán** powder  **fàhn** lie  **fáhn** grave  **fáhn** (excited) portion
3. **sèui** need  **sèui** water  **seuih** tax  **sèuih** suspend  **séuih** (clue) (tunnel)
4. **yáu** rest  **yáu** petrol  **yau** slender  **yàuh** swim  **yáuh** have again
5. **fú** (husband)  **fú** bitter  **fu** trousers  **fúh** support  **fúh** woman  **fuh** father
Exercise 3.2

Read out the following sentences which illustrate the same sequence of six tones as in exercise 3.1:

1. **Dt gú-piu kòhng séuhng lohk** (The shares are going up and down (in value) like crazy)
2. **Ükkéi gam kòhng móuh yuhung** (The household is so poor, it’s no use)
3. **Gám lín gwai ñh máaih jyuh** (This year it’s expensive, (we) won’t buy it yet)
4. **Sán láu taaì làahn máaih maaìh** (New flats are too difficult to buy and sell)
5. **Bìn gwái go tùhng kéuih jyuh?** (Who on earth is living with him?)
6. **Jíng hóu saai sèhng máahn sihk** (After steaming everything, spend the whole evening eating it)

Exercise 3.3

Pronounce the following pairs differing in tone (and occasionally other features such as vowel length):

1. **fóchë** train **fochë** lorry
2. **chísìn** crazy **chihsihn** charity
3. **láuh yàhn** old person **louh yàhn** pedestrian
4. **gáaisih** market **gai sìh** count the time
5. **sái sah** to wash one’s body **sái sahn** clean the kidney (dialysis)
6. **láangsáam** sweater **laahn sāam** worn-out clothes
7. **gúsìh** stock market **gusih** story
8. **maaih lǽu** sell a flat **máaih lǽu** buy a jacket
9. **gáu díhm** 9 o’clock **gáau dihm** manage to do something

10. **séung mòhng** casualty **séuhng móhng** get on the Internet

† Exercise 3.4

Change the tone of the italicized syllable or word to the high-rising changed tone as used in colloquial speech, for example, **sán** new+**màhn** information → **sänmán** news:

1. **hauh** behind+**mùhn** door → ____ back door
2. **yàuh** oil+**tiuh** strip → ____ Chinese fried doughnut
3. **bun** half+**yeh** late → ____ midnight
<p>| | | | | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>sīu burn+yeh late→_____</td>
<td>late-night meal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dāk German+māhn language→____</td>
<td>German</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>tin sky+pàahng scaffolding→____</td>
<td>roof top</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>sāam jek three-classifier+dihp dish→____</td>
<td>three dishes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ou bay+mùhn door→____</td>
<td>Macau (place name)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>yahp put in+yàuh oil→____</td>
<td>fill up with petrol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>fā flower+yùhn garden→____</td>
<td>garden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The personal pronouns make a good place to begin an initiation into Cantonese grammar, since they are rather straightforward: they do not vary according to gender, case or social status. Nor are there any possessive forms as such, since the pronouns combine with the possessive ge to indicate possession (see Unit 5). The plural forms are produced in regular fashion by adding the suffix -deih to the corresponding singular forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>first:</td>
<td>ngóh (óh)</td>
<td>ngóhdeih (óhdeih)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second:</td>
<td>néih (léih)</td>
<td>néihdeih (léihdeih)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third:</td>
<td>kéuih (héuih)</td>
<td>kéuihdeih (héuihdeih)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that each of the pronoun forms has alternative pronunciations. The forms in brackets are the result of sound changes, and are the object of a certain amount of controversy: courses rarely teach them; teachers may treat them as incorrect, and television advertising campaigns have even sought to outlaw them. Nevertheless in the case of ‘you’ léih has become by far the most common form, with initial l- replacing n-, while óh and héuih are also commonly heard.

**The suffix -deih**

One of the few grammatical suffixes in the language, the suffix -deih cannot be used to form plural forms of nouns (e.g. we cannot use *sǐnsāang-deih to mean ‘teachers’). Apart from the personal pronouns as shown above, its only uses are:
(i) In the form *yàhn-deih* which serves as a kind of indefinite pronoun (people, one, etc.):

- Yàhndeih tái-juh léih  
  People are watching you
- Mhóu chou yàhndeih  
  Don’t disturb (other) people

This form can also be used to refer indirectly to oneself:

A: Léih dímgáai ihh chεut sëng ga?  
   Why don’t you say anything?
B: Yàhndeih mhóuyisi a  
   Maybe I’m embarrassed

(ii) In contracted forms with names, as in:

- Paul kéuihdeih → Paul-deih  
  Paul and his family/friends
- A-Chán kéuihdeih → A-Chán-deih  
  Chan and his family/company, etc.

**Using pronouns**

Pronouns are used to refer to individuals, as in introductions:

- Ngóh giu Stephen  
  My name is Stephen
- Ngóh haih go hohksaang  
  I’m a student
- Kéuih haih Méihgwokyàhn  
  He’s American
- Ngóhdeih haih yàuhhaak  
  We’re tourists

As in many languages (such as Italian, Spanish and Japanese) pronouns can be omitted when they are understood from the context. Some typical examples of such contexts follow:

A: Heui bǐndouh a?
   *(lit. go where?)*
   Where are you going?

B: Fāan ükkéi
   *(lit. return home)*
   I’m going home

A: A-Yīng jouh mātyéh gūng ga?
   *(lit. Ying does what job?)*
   What does Ying do for a living?
B: Jouh wuhsih ge
(lit. does nurse)
She’s a nurse

Note that this also applies to objects, as in the following cases:

A: Yám-ǹh-yám jāu a?
(lit. drink wine or not?)
Would you like some wine?

B: ¢H yám la, mōi saai
(lit. not drink, thanks a lot)
I won’t, thanks

A: Ni go sung béi léih ge
(lit. this give to you)
This is for you

B: Dōjeh! Ngóh hóu jùngyi a!
(lit. thank you! I very much like!)
Thank you! I like it!

Again, when several statements are made about the same subject, it is usually understood after its first mention. If you are introducing yourself, for example, it is sufficient to use ngóh once:

Ngóh giu Mary, gām lín sahp-baat seui, làih Hēunggóng jouh gāauwuhn hohksāang
(lit. I called Mary, this year eighteen years old, come Hong Kong as exchange student)
My name is Mary, [I’m] eighteen this year, [I] came to Hong Kong as an exchange student

The third person: he, she and it

The third-person pronoun kéuih means ‘he’ or ‘she’, without distinction of gender. It is not normally used to refer to inanimate things, and hence there is typically nothing corresponding to the English pronoun it, whether as subject or object of the verb. For example, referring to a picture or piece of clothing:

Hóu leng a! Ngóh yiu a!
(lit. very nice! I want)
It’s beautiful! I want it!
Again, a sequence of statements can be made about the same topic:

Kéuih máaih-jó ga sän chē hou gwai ge, hōu chíi kéuih taaitáai dōu jūngyi jēk
(lit. he bought a new car, very expensive, fortunately his wife also likes)
He’s bought a new car, [it was] very expensive, fortunately his wife likes [it] too

Similarly, there is no counterpart to ‘it’ referring to the weather, or to nothing in particular:

Gāmyaht hōu yiht a
(lit. today very hot)
It’s hot today

Lohk yūh la!
(lit. falls rain)
It’s raining!

Hōu làahn góng
(lit. very hard to say)
It’s hard to say

**Reflexive jihgéi**

The reflexive form jihgéi is used for all persons: myself, yourself, herself, ourselves, etc. It is used:

(i) Alone, referring back to the subject of the sentence:

Léih yiu síusām jiugu jihgéi
(lit. you should carefully look after yourself)
You should look after yourself carefully

Mhóu sēhngyaht gwaaí jihgéi
(lit. don’t always blame yourself)
Don’t blame yourself all the time

Kéuih deui jihgéi hōu yáuh-seunsām
(lit. he towards himself very confident)
He has confidence in himself

(ii) Reinforcing a pronoun:
Ngóh jihgéi inputEmail wúih gám jouh
(lit. I myself not would so behave)
I myself would not behave like that

Léih jihgéi sín jī daap-on
(lit. you self only know answer)
Only you yourself know the answer

A-Yân sèhngyaht jaan kéuih jihgéi
(lit. Yan always praise her self)
Yan is always praising herself

(iii) As an adverb meaning ‘by oneself’:

Ngóh jihgéi máaih sung jyú faahn
(lit. I myself buy groceries cook rice)
I’ll buy the groceries and cook by myself

Léih yînggōi jihgéi lâm chîngchó
(lit. you should yourself think clearly)
You should think things over by yourself

Kéuih séung jihgéi jouh haih-jyúyahm
(lit. he want self do department chairperson)
He wants to be the department chairperson himself

Exercise 4.1

Supply the missing pronouns:

1. ____ jyuh hái Gáulùhng  
   I live in Kowloon
2. Hóu hōisām gin dōu ____  
   Glad to see you
3. ____ sîk ____  
   We know them
4. ____ haih go hóu yīsāng  
   You are a nice doctor
5. ____ haih hohksâang  
   You are students
6. ____ hóu jûngyi yāmngohk  
   He likes music
7. ____ dá-jó-dîhnwâ bēi lóuhbâan  
   I phoned the boss
8. ____ heui-gwo Oumún  
   They’ve been to Macau
9. ____ geidâk ____  
   She remembered me
10. ____ hóu gwa-jyuh ____  
    They missed us very much
Exercise 4.2

Replace the italicized phrases with pronouns in the following sentences:

1. **Síu Mìhng hóu lengjái**  
   Ming is very handsome
2. **Ngóh heui taam ngóh a-màh**  
   I’m going to visit my grandmother
3. **Máh yíssäng yí-hói-jó gēi go behngyāhn**  
   Dr Ma has cured several patients
4. **Susan ga-jó John go sailóu**  
   Susan has married John’s brother
5. **Dīhokhsāang ge gūngfò taai dō la**  
   The students’ homework is too much
6. **Lōuhbāan tùhng go beisyū git-jó-fān**  
   The boss and the secretary got married
7. **Ngóh hóu gwa-jyuh go léui**  
   I’m missing my daughter very much
8. **Kéuih tái-jó dītúhngsih ge seun**  
   She read her colleagues’ letter(s)
9. **Ngóh tùhng ngóh sailóu yātchāih hahpjok**  
   My brother and I collaborate together
10. **Léih tùhng go jái hóu chíhyéung**  
    You and your son look like each other

† Exercise 4.3

Answer the following questions, considering whether a pronoun is needed or not:

1. **Léih jűng-ḿh-jyngyi Hēunggóng a?**  
   Do you like Hong Kong?
2. **Kàhmyaht tinhéi dím a?**  
   How was the weather yesterday?
3. **Bīngó hóyíh bōng ngóh a?**  
   Who can help me?
4. **Léih tóuh-ḿh-tóuh-ngóh a?**  
   Are you hungry?
5. **Kéuihdeih jáu-jó meih a?**  
   Have they left?
6. **Kéuih je-jó chín bēi bīngó a?**  
   Who did he lend money to?
7. **Léih maaih-jó ga chē meih a?**  
   Have you sold the car?
8. **Fūk wà leng-ḿh-leng a?**  
   Is the picture beautiful?
9. **Ga chē jíng hóu meih a?**  
   Is the car mended?
10. **Dī gūpiú yáuh-móuh sīng a?**  
    Have the shares gone up?
ge is one of the most frequent words in Cantonese, used in several important grammatical patterns. One of its main uses is to indicate possession, as we can illustrate with the pronouns introduced in Unit 4:

- **ngóh ge**  
  my, mine  
- **léih ge**  
  your, yours  
- **kéuih ge**  
  his/her, hers  
- **jihgéi ge**  
  one’s own  
- **ngóhdeih ge**  
  our, ours  
- **iéihdeih ge**  
  your, yours  
- **kéuihdeih ge**  
  their, theirs  
- **bńgo ge**  
  whose

As the two translations suggest, these are used in two ways:

1. Before a possessed noun:

   - **Ngóh ge deihjí hái nǐdouh**  
   My address is here  
   - **Léih ge Gwôngdǔng-wá m̀h cho**  
   Your Cantonese is not bad  
   - **Kéuih ge gihnǹg mhaih géi hóu**  
   Her health is not too good  
   - **Jihgéi ge gáuíng jeui gányiu**  
   One’s own family is most important

2. As predicates, usually following the verb **haih** ‘be’ (see Unit 7):

   - **Nǐ go haih léih ge**  
   This is yours  
   - **Dī chín haih kéuih ge**  
   The money is his  
   - **Haih-mhaih ngóh ge?**  
   Is it mine?

The verb **haih** ‘be’ can also be understood, so that the resulting sentence lacks a verb:

   - **Bá jë kéuih ge**  
   This umbrella is hers  
   - **Jek m̀au kéuihdeih ge**  
   The cat is theirs  
   - **Nǐ tìuh sósih bńgo ge?**  
   Whose key is this?
Some points to notice:

- The **ge** indicating possession is sometimes omitted, especially where there is a close intrinsic relationship between the possessor and possessed, as in the case of relatives and family members:

  
  - **kéuih sailóu** her younger brother
  - **ngóh lóuhgûng** my husband (colloquial)
  - **léih gûje** your aunt (father’s younger sister)

These phrases can themselves serve as the possessor of another noun:

- **Kéuih sailóu ge mahntàih hóu dô**
  Her (younger) brother’s problems are many

- **Ngóh lóuhgûng ge ūkkéi-yàhn làih saai**
  My husband’s family have all come

- **Léih gûje gê mahtyihp hóu jihk-chín**
  Your aunt’s property is worth a lot money

- Before nouns, the appropriate classifier (see Unit 8) is often used in place of **ge**, especially in colloquial language:

  
  - **ngóh go léui** my daughter
  - **kéuih ga chê** his car
  - **léih gihn sâm** your shirt

This has a similar meaning to the corresponding phrase with **ge**, but denotes a particular individual or object. To specify more than one, the plural classifier **di** is used:

  
  - **ngóh di jáiléui** my children
  - **kéuih di sâm** her clothes
  - **Peter di höhksâang** Peter’s students

See Unit 8 for more on classifiers.

**Exercise 5.1**

Express the following by using the possessive marker provided (i.e. classifier, **ge** or **di**):

- Example: my book (syû: bûn) → **ngóh bûn syû**
1 your nose (beih: go)
2 her friends (pàhngyáuh: ge/dī)
3 her eyes (ngáahn: deui)
4 his desk (tói: jēung)
5 my letters (seun: ge/dī)
6 her handbag (sáudóí: go)
7 my foot (geuk: jek)
8 Hong Kong’s weather (tfnhei: ge)
9 today’s news (sānmán: ge/dī)
10 tomorrow’s temperature (heiwān: ge)

Exercise 5.2

Express the following by using the appropriate possessive marker:

Example: Your computer is too slow → Ngóh go dihnlouh taai maahn

1 Compliment someone on their shoes (deui hàaih)
   _____ _____ hàaih hóu leng wo
2 Ask for the price of your friend’s coat (gihn lau)
   _____ _____ lau géi dō chín a?
3 Describe Hong Kong’s airport (go gēichèuhng) to a friend
   _____ _____ gēichèuhng hóu daaih ga
4 Your sports car (ga páauchē) has broken down
   _____ _____ páauchē waaih-jó
5 More than one of your relatives (chánchīk) is coming to see you
   _____ _____ chánchīk làih taam ngóh
6 Your wife (taaitáai) is waiting for you
   _____ _____ taaitáai dāng-gán ngóh
7 Your son (jái) likes to sing
   _____ _____ jái jūngyi cheung-gō
8 Your children (jāiléui) are in secondary school
   _____ _____ jāiléui duhk-gán jūnghohk

Exercise 5.3

Translate into Cantonese:

1 This watch (jek sáubīu) is mine
2 The piano (go gongkàhm) is hers
3 That house (gāan ūk) is theirs
4 These books (di syū) are yours
5 Those pictures (dī wá) are Miss Chan’s
6 This place (go wái) is ours
7 This office (go baahn-gung-sat) is Mr Lam’s
8 The money (di chín) is my wife’s
UNIT SIX
Possession and existence: yáuh

The verb yáuh, like ‘have’ in English, serves both as a main verb (‘I have a question’) and as an auxiliary (‘Have you sent the letter?’). Like all verbs in Cantonese, it keeps the same form for different persons:

- Ngóh yáuh yat go jái yáuh go léui
  I have a son and a daughter
- Léih juhng yáuh gēiwuïh
  You still have a chance
- Kéuih yáuh gēi gāan ūk
  She has several houses

Unusually, however, it has one irregular form: móuh is the negative form of yáuh. So, ‘I don’t have’ is ngóh móuh (not *ngóh mh yáuh):

- Léih móuh gīngyihm
  You don’t have experience
- Ngóhdeih móuh sailouhjái
  We don’t have any children
- Kéuihdeih móuh ūkkèi
  They don’t have a home

The question form is composed by putting yáuh ‘have’ and móuh ‘not have’ together as yáuh-móuh (not *yáuh- mh-yáuh):

- Léih yáuh-móuh mahntāih a?
  Do you have any questions?
- Ngóhdeih yáuh-móuh sīhgaan a?
  Do we have time?
- Kéuihdeih yáuh-móuh chīn a?
  Do they have money?

See Unit 23 for more on questions of this kind.

Existential yáuh

yáuh can also mean ‘there is’ (like Spanish ‘hay’, French ‘il y a’, etc.). Similarly, móuh can mean ‘There is not’ and yáuh-móuh ‘Is there…?’:
Heunggóng yáuh hóu dō dīksí  
(lit. Hong Kong have very many taxis)  
There are lots of taxis in Hong Kong

Nídouh móuh hūhngmāau  
(lit. here not-have pandas)  
There are no pandas here

Tói seuhngmihn yáuh gēi jek dīp  
(lit. table on-top have a few plates)  
There are a few plates on the table

Notice that no preposition is needed: the sentence simply begins with the place expression (see Unit 13).  
yáuh in this sense also serves to introduce an indefinite noun phrase:

Yáuh (yāt) go yàhn wán léih  
(not *Yāt go yàhn wán léih)  
(lit. have a person seeking you)  
A man is looking for you

Yáuh gēi go hohksgiving hóu lāu  
(lit. have several students very angry)  
Several students are angry

Yáuh hóu dō haakyàhn làih-jó  
(lit. have many guests came)  
Many guests came

A verb can be added to show what is to be done with the item introduced by yáuh/móuh:

Ngóh gāmyaht yáuh gūngfo jouh  
(lit. I today have homework to do)  
I have homework to do today

Nídouh móuh sāam máaih  
(lit. here have no clothes to buy)  
There are no clothes to buy here

Yahpbihn yáuh-móuh yēh sihk a?  
(lit. inside have or have not anything to eat)  
Is there anything to eat inside?
Note that there is no need to distinguish infinitives from the regular form of the verb.

yáuh **as auxiliary**

yáuh also serves as an auxiliary verb, rather like ‘have’ in English ‘They have left’, but normally only in the negative form móuh and in questions as yáuh-móuh:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kéuih gāmyaht móuh fān-gūng</th>
<th>He hasn’t been to work today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh móuh jouh-gwo sǐnsānɡ</td>
<td>I’ve never been a teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A: Kéuihdeih yáuh-móuh būn òk a? Have they moved house?
B: Yáuh a (būn-jó la) Yes (they have)

A: Léih yáuh-móuh hohk-gwo Have you learnt Putonghua?
Póutūng-wá a?
B: Móuh a (móuh hohk-gwo a) No (I haven’t)

Note the close relationship here between yáuh/móuh and the aspect markers jó and gwo (gwo can appear in sentences with móuh or yáuh-móuh but jó cannot: see Unit 18). The use of yáuh alone as an auxiliary is rare, but a useful idiom is yáuh lohk ‘Someone’s getting off’ (used on minibuses, and so on to express the wish to get off):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yáuh lohk, mgōi</th>
<th>(Someone’s) getting off, please</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chìnmihn yáuh lohk</td>
<td>(Someone’s) getting off just ahead</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Adjectives formed with yáuh**

yáuh and móuh can also be added to nouns to form adjectives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>yáuh + chín money</th>
<th>→ yáuh-chín rich</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yáuh + sām heart</td>
<td>→ yáuh-sām thoughtful, kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yáuh + yuhng use</td>
<td>→ yáuh-yuhng useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>móuh + yuhng use</td>
<td>→ móuh-yuhng useless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yáuh + líu substance</td>
<td>→ yáuh-lixu substantial, learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>móuh + líu substance</td>
<td>→ móuh-lixu vacuous, ignorant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The adjectives thus formed can then be modified in the usual way (see Unit 9):
**Exercise 6.1**

Turn the following statements into questions, positive or negative statements as specified:

Example: Ngóh yáuh mahntài I have a problem → negative: Ngóh móuh mahntài

1. Ngóh yáuh yigin (I have an opinion) → negative
2. Léih yáuh beimaht (You have a secret) → question
3. Gamyaht yáuh sűisík (Today we have the latest information) → negative
4. Faatgwok yáuh Júnggwokyàhn (There are Chinese people in France) → question
5. Chëutbihn móuh yàhn (There’s nobody outside) → positive
6. Kéuih yáuh behng (She has a disease) → negative
7. Léih yáuh láihmaht (You have a gift) → question
8. Bún syú yáuh Júngmnàhnjíh (There are Chinese characters in the book) → negative
9. Sáitihn yáuh fóché-jaahm (There’s a railway station at Shatin) → question
10. Kàhmyaht móuh taaiyèuhng (There was no sunshine yesterday) → positive

**Exercise 6.2**

Answer the following questions about yourself using yáuh or móuh as appropriate:

1. Léih yáuh-móuh yāt baak mān a ($100)?
2. Léih hái Héunggóng yáuh-móuh pàngyáuh a (friends)?
3. Léihdeih yáuh-móuh dihnlóuh a (computer)?
4. Léih gāan fóng yáuh-móuh hūngwái a (space in your room)?
5. Léih yáuh-móuh sīhgaan hohk Gwóngdūng-wá a (time to study Cantonese)?
6. Léihdeih yáuh-móuh heui-gwo Gwóngjāu a (been to Guangzhou)?
7. Léih gāmyaht yáuh-móuh táí sānmān a (watch the news today)?
8 Léih yáuh-móuh hingcheui jyun gung a (interested in changing your job)?

**Exercise 6.3**

Translate these questions into Cantonese:

1. Do you have a car (chē)?
2. Do you have brothers or sisters (hīngdaih jímuih)?
3. Do you have a mobile phone (sáutaih dihnwá)?
4. Have you been to Beijing (Bākīng)?
5. Has she visited (taam-gwo) you?
6. There are no birds (jeukjái) here.
7. There are many minibuses (síubā) in Hong Kong.
8. Is there anybody inside (yahpbihn)?
9. Are there students in the classroom (fosāt)?
10. Is there any good news (hōu sfusīk) today?
The verb haih ‘to be’ is straightforward in form, but used in ways which do not always match those of English and other European languages. It is used to introduce noun phrases, as in making introductions and identifying people:

Ngóh haih Chàhn Síu Mìhng I’m Chan Siu Ming
Léih haih bǐngo a? Who are you?
Kéuih haih yìsāng She’s a doctor

As we saw in Unit 5, many such statements can also be made without haih, especially when a sentence particle such as the explanatory lèihga is added (see Unit 25):

Nh go haih ngóh làahm-pàhngyáuh This is my boyfriend
or Nh go ngóh làahm-pàhngyáuh (lèihga)
Ngóhdeih haih Chìuhjáuyàhn We are Chiu Chow (people)
or Ngóhdeih Chìuhjáuyàhn (lèihga)

Note in particular that haih is not used with predicative adjectives, which are typically introduced by hóu (lit. ‘very’: see Unit 9):

Ngóh yihgá hóu mòhng I’m busy now
(not *Ngóh yihgá haih hóu mòhng)
Léih gājé hóu leng Your (elder) sister is beautiful
(not *Léih gājé haih hóu leng)
Ngóh tūhng kêuìh hóu suhk I know him well (lit. I with him familiar)
(not *Ngóh tūhng kêuìh haih hóu suhk)
haih **showing agreement**

haih also serves to indicate agreement and as an answer to certain types of question, haih meaning ‘yes’ and its negative form mhaih ‘no’:

A: **Hóu gwai wo** It’s very expensive
B: **Haih a** Yes, it is

A: **Léih jänhaih seun mè?** Do you really believe it?
B: **Mhaih a** No, I don’t

haih should not be taken simply as a counterpart to ‘yes’, however, since:

(i) haih can indicate agreement with a negative sentence:

A: **Léih mh seun àh?** Don’t you believe it?
B: **Haih a** No (I don’t)

A: **Kéuihdeih meih dou mè?** Haven’t they arrived yet?
B: **Haih a** No (they haven’t)

(ii) The most common types of question do not take haih for an answer. Instead, the verb of the original question is repeated (see Unit 23):

A: **Ngóhdeih heui-`mh-heui máaih yéh a?** Are we going shopping?
B: **Heui a** Yes (not *haih)

A: **Léih jüng-`mh-jüngyi a?** Do you like it?
B: **Jüngyi a** Yes (not *haih)

haih **versus** hái

Notice the difference in tone between haih and hái, which can also be translated as ‘be’ but in the sense of being located:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>haih be</th>
<th>e.g.</th>
<th>Kéuih haih Yahtbúnyàhn</th>
<th>She’s Japanese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kéuih haih haauhjéung</td>
<td>He’s the principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hái be at/in</td>
<td>e.g.</td>
<td>Kéuih hái Seuhnghói</td>
<td>She’s in Shanghai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ngóh hái syufóng</td>
<td>I’m in the study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emphatic haih and ge

haih can serve to emphasize the following word(s), especially in concert with the particle ge at the end of the sentence:

Haih léih bông ngóh ge  (emphasizing the subject léih)
It was you who helped me

Nǐ bún syū haih bǐngo sung ga?  (emphasizing the subject bǐngo)
(lit. this book is who gave)
Who was it that gave (us) this book?

Fūng seun haih gāmyaht gei dou ge  (emphasizing the adverb gāmyaht)
(lit. the letter is today arrived)
It was today the letter arrived

This formula is especially useful because, Cantonese being a tone language, there is limited scope for emphasizing a word through stress as is commonly done in English as in ‘The letter arrived today’. The particle ge is characteristic of assertions (see Unit 25).

Exercise 7.1

Answer the questions affirmatively or negatively as indicated. Add the particle a for politeness.

1  Léih chìh dou àh?  Are you late? (answer: no)
2  Léih héi-jó-sān làh?  Have you woken up? (yes)
3  Léih behng-jó àh?  Are you sick? (no)
4  Kéuih jáu-jó mē?  Has he left? (yes)
5  Léih gin-gwo ngóh mē?  Have you seen me before? (no)
6  Kéuih sāk léih ge mē?  Does she know you? (no)
7  Kéuih fan-jó làh?  Has she fallen asleep? (yes)
8  Kéuih yǎnsīk-gán àh?  Is he resting? (yes)
9  Kéuih hóu guih àh?  Is he tired? (yes)
10  Máh gaausauh hōi-gán wúi àh?  Is Professor Ma having a meeting? (no)
11  Léih mh sāk kéuih mē?  Don’t you know him? (no)
12  Léih msái fāan gūng àh?  Don’t you need to go to work? (no)
Exercise 7.2

Choose haih or hái as required:

1. Kéuihdeih ____ Méihgwokyàhn  They are American
2. Kéuih ____ ngóh sailóu   He’s my brother
3. Kéuih ____ hohkhaauh   She’s at school
4. Kéuihdeih ̀mh _____ Héunggóong  They are not in Hong Kong.
5. Ngóh ____ Seuhnghóiyàhn  I’m Shanghainese
6. Go dòi ____ kéuih ge  The bag is his
7. Léih Sàang ____ gungsì   Mr Lee is at the office
8. Ngóhdeih ____ pàhngyáuh  We’re friends
9. Ngóh go jái ____ ðkkêí   My son is home
10. Kéuih ____ ngóh tûnhghokk  He’s my classmate

† Exercise 7.3

Use haih and ge to emphasize the italicized word(s):

Example: Ngóh gaau Yingmán I teach English → Ngóh haih gaau Yingmán ge

1. Lóuhbáan góng bêí ngóh têng  The boss told me
2. Ngóh bêí bûn syû léih  I gave you the book
3. Kéuih gãm ñhu jàú  He left this morning
4. Gihn sàam géisih máaih  When was this shirt bought?
5. Go chêung bîngó hî?  Who opened the window?
6. Ngóh hái nldouh dâng léih  I’ll wait for you here
7. Kéuih taaitáai wán dóu  His wife found it
8. Kéuih hái Taigwok johng chê  He had a car crash in Thailand
UNIT EIGHT
Noun classifiers

To refer to a certain number of items, Cantonese (like other varieties of Chinese and many Asian languages) calls for a classifier (or measure) after the number. While in English relatively few nouns have such words associated with them, (for example ‘a brace of pheasants’, ‘twenty head of cattle’), in Cantonese all nouns have such words and they must be used, for example:

\[
\begin{align*}
yàt \text{ } go \text{ } yàhn & \quad \text{one person} \\
léuhng \text{ } tiuh \text{ } yú & \quad \text{two fish} \\
sei \text{ } jek \text{ } gáu & \quad \text{four dogs} \\
sahp \text{ } tou \text{ } hei & \quad \text{ten films}
\end{align*}
\]

Classifiers pose two different problems:

(i) which one to use with which noun;
(ii) when and where to use them.

First, however, it is useful to distinguish some sub-types of classifier.

**Measures**

These are in the narrow sense words used in counting quantities as in ‘two dozen eggs’:

\[
\begin{align*}
léuhng \text{ } bohng \text{ } ngàuhyuhk & \quad \text{two pounds of beef} \\
yàt \text{ } gáñ \text{ } choi & \quad \text{a catty of vegetables (1 catty=22 ounces)} \\
bun \text{ } dāgāidáan & \quad \text{half a dozen eggs}
\end{align*}
\]
Containers

These form an open-ended category since any container can serve as a measure:

- sāam būi chàh: three cups of tea
- léuhng hahp tóng: two boxes of sweets
- yāt bāau máih: a bag of (uncooked) rice
- yāt dihp choi: a dish of vegetables

These container words can also be used as nouns in their own right, in which case they generally take the classifier go:

- yāt go wūn: a bowl
- dō yāt go būi: another glass/cup
- léuhng go hāp: two boxes
- géi jek dīp: several plates

Collective classifiers

These refer to a grouping of items:

- nī bāan hohksāang: this class of students
- gó deui laahpsaap: that pile of rubbish
- yāt daahp syū: a pile of books
- yāt tou sān sām: a set of new clothes
- gó deui hàaih: that pair of shoes

Unfortunately, not all things that are treated as pairs in English take deui: ‘a pair of trousers’ is yāt tīuh fu, ‘a pair of scissors’ yāt bā gaauijīn. On the other hand, there are other uses of deui which are understandable:

- ngōh deui sāu
  (lit. my pair (of) hands)
  my (two) hands

- yāt deui fūfūh
  (lit. one pair couple)
  a (married) couple

- nī deui māléui
  (lit. this pair twin girls)
  these twin girls
Plurals and quantities with dì

The word dì can be seen as a special kind of measure, or more precisely as a collective classifier. It is used for both countable and uncountable nouns:

(a) referring to an unspecified number of countable items:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifier</th>
<th>Semantic class</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dì cháang hóu tìhm</td>
<td>The oranges are nice and sweet</td>
<td>Ngóh heui taam dl pàhngyáuhs</td>
<td>I’m going to visit some friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kéuih dl tùhngsih taaí mòhng</td>
<td>Her colleagues are too busy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) referring to quantities of uncountable substances:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifier</th>
<th>Semantic class</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dì séui mh gau yiht</td>
<td>The water is not hot enough</td>
<td>Ngóh yiu máaih dl sìnnáaih</td>
<td>I need to buy some fresh milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Léih dl chàh hóu hëung</td>
<td>Your tea smells good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which classifier?

There are dozens of different classifiers, from the ubiquitous go to very specific items like bùn in bùn syú ‘the book’. As the term suggests, classifiers generally serve to sort nouns into semantic classes of objects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifier</th>
<th>Semantic class</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bá</td>
<td>tools, instruments</td>
<td>bá dòu</td>
<td>knife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ga</td>
<td>machines, vehicles</td>
<td>ga chê</td>
<td>the car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gáan</td>
<td>buildings</td>
<td>gáan ük</td>
<td>the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gihn</td>
<td>most clothes</td>
<td>gihn sáam</td>
<td>shirt, dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go</td>
<td>people</td>
<td>yāt go yìfsìng</td>
<td>a doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>abstract things</td>
<td>nī go kyutdhìng</td>
<td>this decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jek</td>
<td>most animals</td>
<td>jek gáu</td>
<td>a dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>one of a pair</td>
<td>yāt jek sáu</td>
<td>one hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A further important criterion is that many common classifiers categorize objects by their shape:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifier</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>faai</td>
<td>vertical surface</td>
<td>yāt faai geng</td>
<td>a mirror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fük</td>
<td>square/rectangular</td>
<td>yāt fük wá</td>
<td>a picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jëung</td>
<td>flat surface</td>
<td>yāt jëung tòi</td>
<td>a table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jì</td>
<td>cylindrical</td>
<td>jì bät</td>
<td>a pen/pencil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The shape criterion can override the semantic class criterion, so that animals and items of clothing distinguished by their elongated shape take tiuh, rather than jek or gihn:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>tiuh yü</th>
<th>fish</th>
<th>tiuh kwàhn</th>
<th>skirt/dress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tiuh sèh</td>
<td>snake</td>
<td>tiuh fu</td>
<td>trousers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The appropriate classifier (or measure) can usually be checked in a dictionary, although it should be borne in mind that alternative classifiers may exist for the same noun. A computer, for example, is classified variously as a machine (yat bouh dihnlóuh), or as a mere object (yat go dihnlóuh).

### Using classifiers

The main cases in which a classifier must be used are (illustrated with the commonest classifiers, such as go):

(i) Following a number:

- yát go yísäng one doctor
- léuhng go dihnlóuh two computers
- saam go yàhn three people
- sahp go háp ten boxes

(ii) With the demonstratives ni or li ‘this’ and gó ‘that’:

- ní go sailouh this child
- ní go yínyùhn this actor
- gó go behngyàhn that patient
- gó go chêung that window

While these usages may be familiar to readers who know Mandarin, two other important uses are more characteristically Cantonese:

(iii) In a possessive construction:

- ngóh go jái my son
- léih gihn sàam your dress
- kéuih gàan fóng her room
- léihdeih chàhng láu your flat

This is a colloquial alternative to the possessive construction with ge (see Unit 5).

(iv) With a noun alone:
This usage typically refers to a particular item. When the noun it goes with comes before the verb it is definite (generally corresponding to ‘the’):

Gihn sāam hóu gwai
Ga chĕ jáu-jó
Go waih hóu tung
The dress is expensive
The car has gone
The stomach hurts

When the classifier and noun come after the verb it can be definite, but can also refer to an indefinite, but specific item (‘a certain…’):

Kéuih máaih-jó gihn sāam
Ngóh gamyah tái-jó bún syū
Kéuihdeih hōi-jó go wuhháu
She’s bought a/the dress
I read a/the book today
They opened an/the account

Exercise 8.1

Fill the gap with a suitable measure:

1 yăt ____ baahkchoi (Chinese cabbage)
2 bun ____ müihgwaiñ (roses)
3 yăt ____ seun (letter)
4 yăt ____ jyūyuhk (pork)
5 yăt ____ sihgaan (time)
6 léuhng ____ bejáu (beer)
7 yăt ____ tō-háai (slippers)
8 géi ____ sāijōng (suit)

Exercise 8.2

Order the following items at a restaurant, adding mgōi for politeness at the beginning or end of the sentence (see Unit 27):

1 two glasses (būi) of red wine (hūhng jáu)
2 a dish (dihp) of fried noodles (cháau mihn)
3 three bowls (wún) of rice (faahn)
4 another pair (deui) of chopsticks (faaïjí)
5 a bottle (jēun) of water (sēui)
6 a menu (chāan-pái)
7 two wine glasses (jáu-būi)
8 a pot (wùh) of hot water (yiht séui)
9 a piece (gihn) of cake (daahn-gōu)
10 a cup (būi) of coffee (gafe)

Exercise 8.3

Match the following items with the appropriate classifier or measure:

A clothing
1 tāai tie a gihn
2 hàaih (one) shoe b tiuh
3 sāijōng suit c dēng
4 móu hat d jek
5 láu coat e tou

B stationery
1 gaaujín scissors a fūk
2 bāt pen b bá
3 báan board c jêung
4 yàuh-wá oil painting d jī
5 kāatpín business card e faai

Exercise 8.4

Choose the appropriate classifier to replace ge in the following possessive expressions:

1 kěuih ge sáubū her watch a jēung
2 lóuhbáan ge tói the boss’s desk b tiuh
3 gó chàhng láu ge mùhn the door of that flat c jek
4 ngóh ge sósīh my key d ga
5 léih ge séunggēi your camera e douh
Adjectives are words which denote properties or qualities. Typically they serve to modify or describe nouns, and can also appear in comparative forms (see Unit 12). Since the dividing line between adjectives and verbs is not always clear, the Chinese equivalents of adjectives are often termed stative verbs. While learners need not worry about whether there ‘are’ adjectives in Cantonese, it is useful to remember that the words in question generally behave like verbs: that is, what applies to verbs generally applies to adjectives too.

**Attributive adjectives**

These modify the noun. All such adjectives come before the noun they modify:

- pèhng ge sāam  cheap clothes
- gwāai ge sailouhjái  good, obedient children
- cho ge kyutdihng  a wrong decision

The particle ge, which we have already seen in possessive constructions (Unit 5), serves here to link the adjective and noun. The adjective can be modified by hóu ‘very’, jeui ‘most’, etc.:

- hóu kàhnlihk ge hohksāang  hard-working students
- jeui línhēng ge boksih  the youngest PhD
- gam daaih ge yínghéung  such a big influence
Predicative adjectives

These are used to state that something has a certain property. The verb haih ‘to be’ is not used (see Unit 7), but instead the adverb hóu is usually included:

- Ngóh hóu hōisām I’m happy
- Dī tōng hóu hàahm The soup is salty
- Kéuih gihn sāam hóu leng Her dress is beautiful
- Gamyaht hóu sāp It’s humid today

hóu by itself can mean ‘good’ or ‘very’, but when used in this way it does not really mean ‘very’ but is merely part of the syntax of predicative adjectives.

Modifying adjectives

Other modifiers such as géi ‘quite’ and gam ‘so’ can appear in place of hóu, for example:

- Dī géipiù géi pèhng The air tickets are quite cheap
- Léih go sāutāih dihnłóuh gam gwai Your laptop computer is so expensive
- Go daahn-gōu taai tīhm The cake is too sweet
- Önchyūhn jeui gānyiu Safety is most important
- Tīuh sīng gau (saai) chèuhng The string is (more than) long enough

Reduplicated adjectives

Another strategy to modify the meaning of an adjective is reduplication together with the suffix -déi:

- dīn crazy → dīn-dīn-déi rather crazy
- fū bitter → fū-fū-déi rather bitter
- sau thin → sau-sāu-déi rather thin
- tīhm sweet → tīhm-tīm-déi rather sweet
- lyūhn warm → lyūhn-lyūn-déi rather warm
- muhn bored/boring → muhn-mūn-déi rather bored (or boring)

Note the change to a high rising tone on the repeated syllable (see Unit 3): this happens in all cases except where the original tone is high level (as in
din-din-déi ‘rather crazy’) or already high rising (as in fú-fú-déi ‘rather bitter’). These forms are used to qualify the force of an adjective:

-  "Dī Júng-yeuhk fú-fú-déi" Chinese medicine is rather bitter
-  "Tīuh gāai sāp-sāp-déi" The street is a bit wet
-  "Tou hei muhn-mún-déi" The film was fairly boring
-  "Ngóh gokdāk muhn-mún-déi" I feel rather bored

Note that these forms are not used together with hóu or other modifiers such as géi ‘quite’:

-  "Nǐ go gaau sauh dīn-dīn-déi ge" This professor is pretty crazy ([not * Nǐ go gaau sauh hóu dīn-dīn-déi ge])
-  "Go wuhsīh fēih-fēih-déi" The nurse is rather chubby ([not * Go wuhsīh géi fēih-fēih-déi])

Such reduplicated forms are also used as adverbs (Unit 10).

**Exercise 9.1**

Use appropriate predicative adjectives to describe the following:

Example: the film on an aeroplane: "Tou hei hóu chèuhng" The film was long

1. your girlfriend
2. your children or your friend’s children
3. a teacher you like
4. a colleague at work
5. your good points (to your boss)
6. your favourite film star
7. a car you would like to own
8. the food at school or university
9. the weather in Hong Kong
10. a novel you have been reading

**Exercise 9.2**

Add an appropriate attributive adjective to modify the following:

Example: "Ngóh gölhō hái yāt gāan hóu yáuh-méng ge gùngsī jouh-yēh" My (elder) brother works for a famous company
1. Kéuih ūkkéi yáuh go ____
   At home there is a...living room haak-tëng

2. Deuimihn yáuh gāan ____
   Across the street there is chāantëng

3. Ngóh jeui gahn táí-gwo bún ____
   I have recently read a...book syù

4. Ngóh séung yiu jek ____ gáu-jái
   I would like a...puppy

5. Ngóh táí-gwo yāt tou ____ hei
   I have seen a...film

6. Ngóhdeih yáuh dī ____ gūngfo
   We have some...homework mahntài

7. Kéuih ūkkéi yáuh go ____
   There is a...problem at his home lóuhsí

8. Ngóh yīnhchìhn yáuh go ____
   I used to have a...teacher

**Exercise 9.3**

Substitute a modifier (e.g. géi, gam, taai, gau saai) for hóu:

1. Ngóhdeih hóu múhnyi
   We are satisfied

2. Kéuih hóu lèk
   She’s smart (capable)

3. Kéuihdeih hóu guih
   They’re tired

4. Dī sailoujhái hóu dăkyi
   The children are cute

5. Tou heí hóu lohngmaahn
   The film is romantic

6. Kéuih dī tàuhfaat hóu dyún
   Her hair is very short

7. Dī găsi hóu pēhng
   The furniture is cheap

8. Go gaausauh hóu yáuh-méng
   The professor is famous

9. Go hohksăang hóu láahn
   The student is lazy

10. Dī séung hóu leng
    The photos are pretty

**Exercise 9.4**

Form reduplicated adjectives to express the meaning based on the adjective provided, remembering the change of tone:

Example: The baby is chubby (fēih) Go bihhī fēih-fēi-dēi

1. This dish (diḥp sung) is a bit hot (laaht)
2. The soup (dĭ tōng) is rather sour (syŭn)
3. Your clothes (dī săam) are a bit wet (săp)
4. The weather (fīnhei) is rather cold (dung)
5. Her face (faai mihn) is rather round (yùhn)
6. Her eyes (deui ngáahn) are a little red (hūhng)
7 His office (go baahn-gűng-sā́t) is rather messy (lyuhń)
8 The button (lāp láu) is rather loose (sűng)
9 Your glasses (fu ngáahn-gě́ng) are rather fuzzy (mùhng)
10 Your husband (lóuhgű́ng) is a bit drunk (jeui)
Several types of adverb phrase can be used to modify a verb or verb phrase:

- with dãk
- with gám
- with reduplication.

These types of adverb phrase are generally based on adjectives (see Unit 9).

1 Adverb phrases with dãk

The most general form of adverbial phrase is formed with dãk and an adjective after the verb. The order is thus: verb—dãk—adjective. As usual the adjective is normally preceded by a modifier such as hóu or gěi, and so on (see Unit 9):

**Ga chë hàahng dãk hóu maahn**  
(lit. the car travel manner very slow)  
The car moves very slowly

**Dt haakyàhn sihk dãk gěi hōisām**  
(lit. the guests eat manner quite happy)  
The guests are eating quite happily

**Go góngst góng dãk tæai faai**  
(lit. the lecturer speak manner too fast)  
The lecturer talks too fast

When the verb is followed by an object, the verb is repeated so that dãk immediately follows the verb:
Ngóh cheung-gō cheung dāk hóu chà
(lит. I sing songs sing manner very bad)
I sing very badly

Kéuih waahk-wá waahk dāk géi leng
(lит. she paints pictures paints manner quite nice)
She draws quite nicely

Léih góng-yéh góng dāk taai daaih-sēng
(lит. you speak things speak manner too big voice)
You speak too loud

2 Adverb phrases with gām

An adjective together with gām ‘thus’ forms an adverbial phrase which comes before the verb:

Dī gwûnjung hóu daaih-sēng gām paak-sáu
(lит. the audience very big voice thus clap hands)
The audience applauded loudly

Go yàuh-haak hóu yáuh-láihmaauh gām mah̄ ngóh
(lит. the tourist very politely thus asked me)
The tourist asked me very politely

Go sīgēi hóu daaih-lihk gām sān mùhn
(lит. the driver very big-force thus closed door)
The driver closed the door hard

Note here also the use of gām by itself or gām yéuhng to mean ‘in this way’:

Ngóh `mh wúih gām góng
I wouldn’t put it like that
Kéuih `mh yǐnggōi gām yéung sāi chín
He shouldn’t waste money in this way

3 Reduplicated adverbs

A limited number of adverbs of manner are formed by repeating an adjective and adding the suffix -dēi:
gwāai  obedient → gwāai-gwāai-déi  obediently
hēng  light → hēng-hēng-déi  lightly

These are placed before the verb they modify:

Léih yiu gwāai-gwāai-déi jouh gūngfo
(lit. you need obediently do homework)
You have to obediently do your homework

Yáuh yàhn hēng-hēng-déi paak mūhn
(lit. have person lightly knock door)
Someone knocked lightly on the door

A few such forms are also used without -déi:

maahn  slow → maahn-máan hàahng  to walk slowly
hōi-sām  happy → hōi-hōi-sām-sām jouh yēh  to work happily

Note that:

(i) The repeated adverb may take on a changed tone (with a low tone becoming a high rising one: see Units 3 and 9):

jihng  quiet → jihng-jíng-déi  quietly

(ii) In adjectives with two syllables, each syllable is repeated separately:

gāan-dāan  simple → gāan-gāan-dāan-dāan  simply
hīng-sūng  relaxed → hīng-hīng-sūng-sūng  in a relaxed manner

All these forms of adverb come before the verb they modify:

Léih jihng-jíng-déi yahp heui lā
Go in quietly

Kéuih tāu-tāu-déi jáu-jó
He left secretly

Kéuih gāan-gāan-dāan-dāan gām hīngjūk sāangyaht
She celebrated her birthday in a simple way

Ngōhdeih hīng-hīng-sūng-sūng, gāan-gāan-dāan-dāan gām douh-ga
We spend our holiday in a laid-back, simple style
Reduplicated adverbs, especially those of more than one syllable, can combine with gám as described in (ii) above:

Kéuih sòh-só-déi gám siu
He smiles in a foolish way

Léih syū-syū-fuhk-fuhk gám fan háidouh là
Lie down here comfortably

Kéuihdeih háidouh hîng-hîng-sûng-sûng gám têng gô
They’re relaxing listening to songs

Exercise 10.1

Add the adverbial phrase provided to the following sentences:

1 Kéuihdeih hàahng fâan ûkkéi
   They walk home slowly (màahn-máan)
2 Kéuih gaa sisih jihgéi
   He introduces himself excitedly (hóu hîngfâhn gám)
3 Kéuih mahn-jó yât go mahntàih
   He asked a question boldly (hóu daaih-dáam gám)
4 Kéuih só-jó douh mûhn
   She locked the door carefully (hóu síusám gám)
5 Nógh go jái waak-jó géi fûk wá
   My son drew several pictures quickly (hóu faai gám)
6 Kéuih hohk-gán Gwóngdûng-wá
   He is studying Cantonese diligently (hóu lóuhlihk gám)
7 Dî hohksûång têng-gán yín-gông
   The students are listening to the lecture attentively (hóu làuhsâm gám)
8 Dî Heunggông hohksûång yêhng-jó bêichoi
   The Hong Kong students won the competition comfortably (hóu hîngsûng gám)
9 Yi-ngoih faatsûång-jó
   The accident happened suddenly (hóu dahtyîhn gám)
10 Nógh jüngyi hîngjûk sângyaht
    I like to celebrate birthdays happily (hôi-hôi-sâm-sâm gám)

Exercise 10.2

Use dák to create adverbial phrases using the adjectives provided, repeating the verb where necessary (as in numbers 6–10):
Example:  Kéuih jáu dāk hóu faai  
Kéuih já-chē já dāk hóu msíusām  
He runs quickly  
He drives carelessly

1 Léih sé ____ hóu hóu  You write well
2 Ga feīgēi fei ____ hóu dāi  The plane flies low
3 Ngóhdeih fan ____ hóu syūfuhk  We sleep comfortably
4 Kéuihdeih wáan ____ hóu hōisām  They play happily
5 Kéuih tiu ____ hóu yūhn  She jumps a long way
6 Kéuih yíng-séung ____ ____ hóu leng  She takes pictures well
7 Ngóh yàuh-séui ____ ____ hóu maahn  I swim slowly
8 Kéuih cheung-gō ____ ____ hóu sai-sēng  She sings softly
9 Ngóh jyú-faahn ____ ____ hóu faai  I cook quickly
10 Ngóh tiu-móuh ____ ____ hóu chā  I dance badly

Exercise 10.3

Fill in the gaps with a suitable manner adverbial with -gám:

1  Ngóh (I) ____ sé nī fung seun (write this letter)
2  Ngóhdeih (We) ____ tāí boujī (read the newspaper)
3  Kéuih (He) ____ fan hái chōng seuhmihn (sleep on the bed)
4  Kéuihdeih (They) ____ jáu-jó (have left)
5  Léih Súujé (Miss Lee) ____ daap ngóh go mahntāih (answer my question)
6  Lóuhbāan (The boss) ____ sāan-jó douh mùhn (closed the door)
7  Yihp gaausauh (Professor Yip) ____ góng syū (give a lecture)
8  Dī hohksāang (The students) ____ tēng syū (listen to the lecture)
9  Go bihbī (The baby) ____ wáan-gán (playing)
10  Kéuih (She) ____ haam-gán (crying)
UNIT ELEVEN
Adverbs of time, frequency and duration

While the adverbs introduced in the previous unit describe the manner of action, those included in this unit are concerned with the way events take place in time.

1 Adverbs of time

Given that verbs do not indicate tense in Cantonese, adverbs are especially important in specifying when events take place:

Kéuih yihgā juhngh hái yīyún
She’s still in hospital (now)

Kéuih gójahnsih juhngh hái yīsyún
She was still in hospital (then)

Ngóh jikhāak heui Yīnggwok taam léih
I’m going to visit you in England (right away)

Ngóh daih-yih-sih heui Yīnggwok taam léih
I’ll visit you in England (in the future)

In English the tense of the verb indicates when things take place, and the adverb can easily be omitted, while in Cantonese only the adverb indicates the time. Common adverbs include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present:</th>
<th>Recent past:</th>
<th>Past:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yīhgā</td>
<td>tāuhsīn</td>
<td>yīhchihm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>now</td>
<td>just now</td>
<td>before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gāmyaht</td>
<td>ngāam-ngāam</td>
<td>būnlōih</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>today</td>
<td>just</td>
<td>originally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the day before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yesterday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yīyhmaht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>chīhnyahnt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the day before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yesterday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future:</td>
<td>jikhāak</td>
<td>right away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hah chi</td>
<td>next time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tīngyəht</td>
<td>tomorrow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These adverbs may come:

(a) Before the verb:

Ngóhdeih yìhg chëut heui  We’re going out now
Këuih ngām-ngām jáu-jó  He just left

(b) Before the subject:

Búnloih ngóh sêung duhk yīfo  Originally I wanted to study medicine
Tàuhsin këuih mgeidak daai sòsih  Just now he forgot his keys

2 Adverbs of frequency and duration

Useful adverbs to describe the frequency of an action include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sèhngyəht</td>
<td>always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dōsou</td>
<td>mostly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yāuh(-jahn)-sìh</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yāt sìh-sìh/yāt sì-sìh</td>
<td>occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pihngsìh</td>
<td>normally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yāt chi</td>
<td>once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>léuñg chi</td>
<td>twice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sāam chi</td>
<td>three times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gēi chi</td>
<td>several times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tūngsèuñg</td>
<td>usually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

mūih ‘each’ can be used to form adverbial phrases:

mūih go yuht  every month  mūih go sìngkëih  every week

Note that several common time expressions of one syllable do not take a classifier, and can form reduplicated adverbs:

mūih chi or chi-chi  every time  (not *mūih go chi)
mūih yaht or yaht-yaht  every day  (not *mūih go yaht)
mūih lihn or lihn-lihn  every year  (not *mūih go lihn)
mūih jìu or jìu-jìu  every morning  (not *mūih go jìu)
mūih máahn or máahn-máahn  every evening  (not *mūih go máahn)
All these adverbs generally come before the verb:

Kéuih múih jǐu luhk dím héi sān ge
(lit. he each morning six o’clock gets up)
He gets up at six every morning

Kéuih yaht-yaht sái-tàuh
(lit. she daily washes hair)
She washes her hair every day

Note the order in phrases such as the following describing the frequency of actions:

yāt līhn yāt chi once a year (lit. one year one time)
múih go yuht yāt chi once a month (lit. each month one time)

Such phrases are often split up with the more general term coming before the verb and the more specific frequency expression after:

Ngóhdeih yāt līhn heui yāt chi douh-ga
(lit. we one year go one time spend holiday)
We go on holiday once a year

Ngóhdeih līhn-līhn fāan heui yāst chi
(lit. we each year return go one time)
We go back once a year

Adverbs of frequency may come after the verb and object:

Ngóh heui-gwo Daaihluhk yāt chi I’ve been to mainland China once
Ngóh gin-gwo yīsāng sāam chi I’ve seen the doctor three times

Adverbs of both frequency and duration can be used in the following ways:

(i) Between the verb and the object:

Ngóh heui-gwo yāt chi Daaihluhk I’ve been to the mainland once
Kéuih jyú-gwo géi chi faahn He’s cooked dinner a few times
Ngóh gāmyaht sái-gwo lēuhng I’ve washed my hair twice today
chi tāuh
Ngóh gin-gwo sāam chi yīsāng I’ve seen the doctor three times
Kéuih duhk-jó sāam līhn Jōngmán He has studied Chinese for three years
Ngóh diu-jó sèhng yaht yú I’ve been fishing for a whole day
Ngóh tái-jó yât go jüssngtàuh syū I’ve read for an hour
Kéuih sihk-jó yât go yuht yeuk She has been on medication for a month

(ii) After the verb and object, with repetition of the transitive verb as seen in Unit 10:

Kéuih háau-síh háau-gwo gēi chi She’s taken the exam several times
Kéuih jyú-faahn jyú-gwo gēi chi He’s cooked dinner a few times
Ngóh duhk Jüngmán duhk-jó sām lihn I’ve been studying Chinese for three years
(or: I studied Chinese for three years)

Kéuih jyuh yīyuⁿ jyuḥ-jó yāt go yuht She’s been in hospital for a month
(or: She stayed in hospital for a month)

As the translations suggest, this construction can refer either to a period of time leading up to the present, or to a completed period in the past (see Unit 18 on the aspect marker -jó).

Exercise 11.1

Add a suitable adverb to the following, paying attention to the position of the adverb:

1. Ngóh hái Jīmsājéui
   I was in Tsimshatsui (yesterday)
2. Kéuih dou-jó gēichèuhng
   She arrived at the airport (just now)
3. Ngóh gin-gwo kéuih
   I’ve met him (before)
4. Kéuihdeih jung-jó tàuh-jéung
   They won the first prize (last time)
5. Ngóhdeih juhng sai
   We were still small (then)
6. Ngóh jouh wuhsih ge
   I used to be a nurse (originally)
7. Ngóhdeih wán léih
   We’ll contact you (next time)
8 **Kéui hóu lāu**
He got angry (immediately)

9 **Ngóh chéng léih sihk-faahn**
I’ll treat you to a meal (in future)

10 **Ngóhdeih hái Méi hwok jyu gwo**
We used to live in America (before)

**Exercise 11.2**

Say how often you engage in the following activities (fictitiously where necessary):

1. play tennis (*dá móhngkàuh*)
2. go swimming (*heui yàuh-séui*)
3. watch television (*táih díhnshih*)
4. read the newspaper (*táih boují*)
5. wash your hair (*sái tāuh*)
6. have a haircut (*jín tāuhfaat*)
7. buy groceries (*máaih sung*)
8. go to a concert (*heui yám-ngohk-wúi*)
9. eat ice cream (*sihk syutgōu*)
10. visit relatives (*taam chānchík*)

**Exercise 11.3**

State how long you do the following every day:

1. play video games (*dá gēi*)
2. practise Cantonese (*lihn Gwóngdūngwá*)
3. talk on the phone (*góng dīhnwá*)
4. cooking (*jyū-faahn*)
5. listen to music (*tēng yām-ngohk*)
6. reading (*táí-syū*)
7. chat with friends (*kīng-gái*)
8. stay on the Internet (*sēuhng móhng*)
9. take a shower (*chūng lēuhng*)
10. write in a diary (*sē yahtgei*)

**Exercise 11.4**

Add an adverb of duration in the space provided. Note that the following sentences involve reduplication of the verb.
1. Kéuih hōi wúi hōi-jó ____
   She has been in a meeting

2. Ngóhdeih sīhk-faan sīhk-jó ____
   We have been having a meal

3. Kéuihdeih dá bōdá-jó ____
   They have been playing a ball game

4. Ngóh sé seun sē-jó ____
   I have been writing letters

5. Kéuih gōi gyūn gōi-jó ____
   She has been marking papers

6. Lohk yū lohk-jó ____
   It’s been raining

7. Kéuih cheung-gō cheung-jó ____
   He’s been singing

8. Di hohk săang jouh gūngfo jouh-jó ____
   The students have been doing homework

9. Kéuihdeih aai-gāau aai-jó ____
   They’ve been arguing

10. Kéuih jā-chē jā-jó ____
    He’s been driving
In this unit we look at ways of making simple comparisons. In colloquial Cantonese there are two basic kinds of comparison:

(i) Where two things are explicitly being compared, *gwo* is used to mean ‘more (adjective) than (noun)’. The word order is similar to the English (and quite unlike that in Mandarin):

- Jenny sai gwo ngóh  
  Jenny is younger than me
- Baat láu hóu gwo yih láu  
  The eighth floor is better than the second floor
- Ni deui gwai gwo gó deui  
  This pair is more expensive than that one

Note that *gwo* is also a verb meaning ‘cross’ or ‘pass’, so it is natural that it comes to mean ‘surpass’ in comparisons.

(ii) If the object of comparison is not expressed (i.e. there is no ‘than…’), *dī* is used instead:

- Jenny sai dī  
  Jenny is younger
- Baat láu hóu dī  
  The eighth floor is better
- Gó deui gwai dī  
  That pair is more expensive

*dī* literally means ‘a little’ but here serves largely to indicate a difference between the two items with respect to some property.

**Modifying comparisons**

Both kinds of comparison can be modified by adverbs of degree such as *hóu dō* ‘much’ and *síu-síu* ‘a little’. as follows:
(i) In comparisons with gwo, the adverb of degree is simply added at the end of the construction:

```
Léih lèk gwo kéuih hòu dò  You’re much smarter than him
Kéuih gōu gwo léih sīu-sīu  She’s a little taller than you
Ngóh daaih gwo kéuih yat lihn I’m a year older than her
```

(ii) In comparisons where dì would normally be used, a degree word such as hòu dò ‘a lot’ replaces dì:

```
Nī go leng dì       →  Nī go leng hòu dò  This one is much nicer
Nī go gwai dì       →  Nī go gwai sīu-sīu This one is a little more expensive
Nī go chúhng dì     →  Nī go chúhng géi púih This one is several times heavier
```

The reason for this is that dì literally means ‘a bit’, so that to combine it with an adverb like hòu dò ‘a lot’ would be a contradiction in terms. This shows that dì as in leng dì is not really equivalent to the suffix -er in English ‘prettier’, tempting though the equivalence may be.

juhung ‘even’ can be applied to both the gwo and dì constructions, but comes before the adjective:

```
Gām chi juhung hòu gwo seuhng chi  This time is even better than last time
Gām yéung juhung hòu (dì)         This way is even better
```

(dì can be omitted here since the presence of juhung implies that a comparison is being made.)

**Alternative forms of comparison**

An alternative to the gwo form of comparison uses bēi ‘compare’. The word order is quite different since bēi and the object of comparison come before the adjective:

```
Hahtīn bēi dūngtin chèuhng
(lit. summer compare winter long)  Summer is longer than winter
Heunggóng ge jáudim bēi Bākgīng dō
(lit. Hong Kong’s hotels compare Beijing more)  There are more hotels in Hong Kong than Beijing
```
A modifying phrase comes after the adjective, as with gwo:

**Kéuih béi ngóh sāi yat līhn**
(lit. she compare me young(er) one year)
She’s a year younger than me

**Ngóh béi ngóh lóuhpòh dāaih saam seui**
(lit. I compare my wife big three years)
I’m three years older than my wife

Being basically a feature of Mandarin and written Chinese, the comparison with béi is more formal than the gwo construction. Learners who know some Mandarin will be able to use the béi construction readily in Cantonese, while other beginners would do best to stick with the colloquial gwo. The béi form does allow some comparisons which would not be possible with gwo, such as those expressing a change of state:

**Kéuih béi gauh-lín sau-jó**
(lit. she compare last year got thinner)
She’s got thinner since last year

**Léih béi seuhng chi jeunbouh-jó**
(lit. you compared last time improved)
You’ve improved since last time

Yet another alternative is to omit gwo but add a phrase showing the degree of difference:

**Kéuih gǒu yàhndeih yāt go tàuh**
(lit. he tall people one head)
He’s a head taller than everyone else

**Ngóhdeih faai kéuih yāt bouh**
(lit. we fast him one step)
We’re a step ahead of him

This construction is commonly found with dimensional adjectives such as dāaih and sai, which are often used in this way to mean ‘older’ and ‘younger’ respectively:

**Léih gǒhgǒ dāaih léih géi dō a?**
(lit. your brother big you how much?)
How much older is your brother than you?
Kéuih sai ngóh yāt líhn
(lit. she small me one year)
She’s a year younger than me

Comparison of adverbs

This involves combining the syntax of adverbs (Unit 10) with that of comparison; it thus comes for free in the sense that nothing new has to be learnt. Comparisons using gwo, dī or béi are added to adverbial constructions with dāk:

Kéuih tái dāk faai gwo ngóh
(lit. he read manner quick than me)
He reads faster than I do

Léih sé dāk leng dī
(lit. you write manner nicer)
You write better

Kéuihdeih béi ngóhdeih jouh dāk hóu
(lit. they compare us do manner well)
They do it better then we do

The main difficulty arises where the verb has an object and both are repeated (Unit 10):

Kéuih tái Jüngmán tái dāk faai gwo ngóh
(lit. he reads Chinese reads manner quick than me)
He reads Chinese more quickly than I do

Léih sé jih sé dāk leng dī
(lit. you write characters write manner nicer)
You write characters better

Kéuihdeih jouh sāangi béi ngóhdeih jouh dāk hóu
(lit. they do business compare us do manner well)
They do business better then we do

Superlatives

Superlatives are expressed straightforwardly by jeui, or as a colloquial alternative by ji:
These forms are typically used as follows:

(i) Attributively, with ge:

jeui fôngbihn ge jouhfaat the most convenient method
jeui gányiu ge sīsīk the most important news
ji pèhng ge gēpiu the cheapest air tickets

(ii) Predicatively, with haih:

Gám yéuhng jeui fôngbihn This way is the most convenient
Nǐ júng ji dái máaih This kind is the best value

The order is often reversed beginning with the superlative expression as the subject:

Jeui fôngbihn haih nǐ go deihdím (lit. most convenient is this location)
This location is most convenient

Ji pèhng haih nǐ jek pàaihjí (lit. most cheap is this brand)
This brand is the cheapest

A point to note here is that the range in which the comparison is to be made is specified before the superlative form:

Hēunngòng jeui chēutméng ge gōáu (lit. Hong Kong most famous singer)
The most famous singer in Hong Kong

Chỳun gwok jeui daaih ge ngànhnhòhng (lit. whole country most big bank)
The biggest bank in the whole country

Gam dō jāulàuh jeui hòu-sihk haih nǐ gāan (lit. so many restaurants most good-to-eat is this one)
This is the best of all the restaurants to eat at
This ordering illustrates a general tendency in Cantonese to put the more general, inclusive term before the more specific one.

**Exercise 12.1**

Decide whether the following comparisons would use *gwo* or *dī*, and translate as much of the sentence as you can into Cantonese:

1. It’s warmer today
2. She’s happier now
3. My friend is older than me
4. She’s much taller than before
5. It’s slower this time
6. This restaurant is cheaper than that one
7. I like dancing more than singing
8. Your idea is better

**Exercise 12.2**

Make any meaningful comparison between the following:

1. Today (*gāmyaht*) and yesterday (*kàhmyaht*)
2. Girls (*léuihjái*) and boys (*làahmjái*)
3. Shirts (*sêutsāam*) and ties (*léngtāai*)
4. Toronto (*Dôlèuhndō*) and London (*Lèuhndēun*)
5. Chinese (*Jūngmán*) and English (*Yīngmán*)
6. Swimming (*yàuh-séui*) and jogging (*páau-bouh*)
7. Cantonese food (*GWONGdūNG choi*) and Chiu Chow food (*CHIUHJAU choi*)
8. Doing business (*jouh sāangyi*) and teaching (*gaau-syū*)

**Exercise 12.3**

Make the following comparisons more explicit using the adverb given in brackets:

1. *Gām-lín dung gwo gauh-lín*
   This year is (much) colder than last year
2. *Gāmyaht lyúhn dī*
   It’s (much) warmer today
3 Léih dī tàuhfaat yihgā dyún dī
   Your hair is (a little) shorter now

4 Hēunggóng gwai gwo nìdouh
   Hong Kong is (several times) more expensive than here

5 Ngóh guih gwo kéuih
   I’m (even) more tired than she is

6 Sihk faahn pèhng gwo sihk mihn
   Eating rice is (even) cheaper than eating noodles

7 Gām chi hohkfai bèi seuhung chi gwai
   This time the tuition is (a hundred dollars) more expensive than last time

8 Kéuih gōu gwo ngóh
   She is (three inches) taller than me

† Exercise 12.4

A Express the following comparisons colloquially with gwo:

Example: Fóchē bèi bāsī faai → Fóchē faai gwo bāsī
   The train is faster than the bus

1 Hói-yú bèi yéuhng-yú gwai
   Wild fish are more expensive than farmed fish

2 Hēungpín bèi hühng chàh hēung
   Jasmine tea is more fragrant than black tea

3 Làahnfā bèi gūkfā leng
   Orchids are prettier than chrysanthemums

4 Go léui bèi go jái daaih léuhng seuī
   The daughter is two years older than the son

5 Nī bāan hohksāang bèi gō bāan kàhnlihk
   This class is more hard-working than that one

B Express the following comparisons with bèi:

1 Gauh hàaih syūfuhk gwo sān hàaih
   Old shoes are more comfortable than new ones

2 Yihgā heui Oujāu yùhngyih gwo yīhchīhn
   Going to Australia now is easier than before

3 Gūngsī gām-Iīn jaahn dāk dō gwo gauh-līn
   The company has earned more this year than last year

4 Nī būn síusyut hōu-tái gwo daaih yāt būn
   This novel is better than the first one

5 Léih gām chi jouh dāk hōu gwo seuhung chi
   This time you’re doing better than last time
Three important classes of words are involved in the expression of location. We shall introduce these before showing how they are used in combination.

1 Prepositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hái</td>
<td>at/in/on (also héung)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heung</td>
<td>towards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tühng</td>
<td>with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of these items are also known as coverbs, since they have certain characteristics of verbs (see *Intermediate Cantonese*).

2 Demonstrative terms, based on nī ‘this’ and gó ‘that’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nīdouh</td>
<td>here (also nīsyu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nībihn</td>
<td>over here, this way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nītāuh</td>
<td>around here (in this area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gódouh</td>
<td>there (also gósyu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>góbihn</td>
<td>over there, that way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gótāuh</td>
<td>around there (in that area)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Localizers or postpositions indicating spatial relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>seuhngbihn</td>
<td>on top of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chiinhbihn</td>
<td>in front of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yahpbihn</td>
<td>inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>léuihmihn</td>
<td>inside, within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deuimihn</td>
<td>opposite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jünggāan</td>
<td>in the middle of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hahbihn</td>
<td>below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hauhbihn</td>
<td>behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chēutbihn</td>
<td>outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngoihbihn</td>
<td>outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jākbin</td>
<td>beside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jīgāan</td>
<td>between</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note how these characteristically end in **bihn** or **mihn** meaning ‘side’ (the two forms being interchangeable in most cases).

**Location**

Using the words introduced above, several characteristic patterns are used to indicate location in space:

(i) **hái** followed by names of places:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dī sailouhjái hái gódouh</th>
<th>The children are over there</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kéuihdeih léi màaih hái nǐsyu</td>
<td>They are hiding here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh gámyaht sèhng yaht hái ükkéi</td>
<td>I was at home all day today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kéuih hái Méihgwok duhk-syū</td>
<td>She studies in America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngóhdeih hái hohkhaauh höi-wúi</td>
<td>We’re having a meeting at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kéuih yihgā mǐh hái gūngsǐ</td>
<td>She is not at the office at the moment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that the word **háidouh** ‘to be here’ is generally used instead of **hái nǐdouh** when presence or absence is at issue. For example, on the telephone:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Léih sāang mǐh háidouh</th>
<th>Mr Lee is not here</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(not * Léih sāang mǐh hái nǐdouh)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**háidouh** is also used to express action in progress (progressive aspect: Unit 19).

(ii) **hái** together with a localizer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yīsāng hái seuhngbihn</th>
<th>The doctor is upstairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heiyún hái deuimihn</td>
<td>The cinema is just opposite (across the street)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gíngchaat hái yahpbihn</td>
<td>The police are inside</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A noun phrase can come between **hái** and the localizer, in the pattern **hái (…) X-mihn/bihn:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bún syū hái jēung tóí seuhngbihn</th>
<th>(lit. the book on the table top)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The book is on the table</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kéuih kéih hái pō syuh hauhmihn  
(lit. she stood at the tree behind)  
She stood behind the tree

Ngóh jyuh hái kéuih õkkéi deuimihn  
(lit. I live at her home opposite)  
I live opposite her (home)

douh ‘there’ serves colloquially as a localizer in this pattern:

A-Mā hái tēng douh Mum’s in the living room  
Di séung hái ngóh douh The pictures are with me/at my place

While this pattern with two separate expressions of location may appear redundant, note that douh (or another localizer in its place) is required here:

Kéuihdeih hái ga chē douh They’re in the car  
(not * Kéuihdeih hái ga che)  
Dī jīliú hái dihnloüh douh The data are in the computer  
(not * Dī jīliú hái dihnloüh)

With jīgāan ‘between’, tūhng is used to join the two noun phrases concerned, in the pattern X tūhng Y jīgāan:

Ngóh tūhng kéuih jīgāan móuh saai gāmchīhng  
(lit. I and him between haven’t all feeling)  
There’s no feeling left between us

Chihnggām tūhng léihji jīgāan hōu lāahn syūnjaahk  
(lit. emotion and rationality between very hard to choose)  
It’s difficult to choose between emotion and rationality

(iii) A demonstrative form or localizer followed by the existential yáuh (or its negative counterpart móuh: Unit 6) or another verb:

Nīdouh yáuh hōu dō sailouhjái There’re many children here  
Gōdouh móuh yáuh-wīhng-chīh There’s no swimming pool there  
Yahpbihn yáuh hōu dō yēh There are lots of things inside  
Hahbhīhn móuh chāantēng downstairs there’s no restaurant  
Chēutbihn lohk-gán yūh It’s raining outside

Again a noun phrase can be added before the localizer:
Daaihohk léuihmihn yáuh sāam go tòuh-syū-gwún
There are three libraries in the university

Gāan fóng jūnggāan yáuh go gongkàhm
There’s a piano in the middle of the room

**Movement and direction**

Movement towards a point in space may be expressed by **heung**:  

Léih yīnggōi heung nībihn hàahng  You should walk this way  
(or Léih yīnggōi hàahng nībihn)

Mhóu heung gòbihn mohng  Don’t look in that direction  
(or Mhóu mohng gòbihn)

To express a starting point in time or space, **yàuh** is used as follows:

Ngóh gāmyah tòuh baat dīm hōichí sēuhng-tôhng  
(lit. I today from eight o’clock beginning attended lessons)  
Today I had classes from eight o’clock onwards

Yàuh Toihwāan làih Hēunggōng yīuh yāt go jūngtàuh fēīgēi  
(lit. from Taiwan coming to Hong Kong needs one hour’s plane)  
It’s an hour’s flight from Taiwan to Hong Kong

Yàuh nīdōu heui Syutlēih géi yūhn a?  
(lit. from here go to Sydney how far)  
How far is it from here to Sydney?

Note that the prepositional phrase comes before the verb.

yàuh is also used together with **dou** indicating the end point of a journey in time or space:

Ngóhdeih yàuh gām jīu dàng dou yīhgā  
We’ve been waiting from this morning till now

Yàuh daaihohk dou ūkkēi yīuh bun go jūng  
It takes half an hour to get from the university to home

Kéuih yàuh sai dou daaih dōu haih gām ge  
He’s always been like this (lit. from small to big)
‘via’ introduces an intermediate step between the starting point and end point:

Ngóhdeih ging Dúnggíng heui Sāam Fàahn Síh
(lit. we pass Tokyo go to San Francisco)
We’re going to San Francisco via Tokyo

Léih hóyíh yàuh Hēunggóng dóu ging seuihdouh dou ükkéi
(lit. you can from Hong Kong island pass the tunnel arrive home)
You can go home from Hong Kong island via the tunnel

Reflecting the intermediate step in a journey, the phrase with ging ‘via’ typically comes in the middle of the sentence, before the destination.

léih is used to indicate distance from a location:

Yìyún léih ndouh géi yúhn a?
(lit. hospital from here how far)
How far is the hospital from here?

Ngóh ükkéi léih gēichèuhng yihsahp fānjūng
(lit. my home from the airport twenty minutes)
My home is twenty minutes from the airport

Note that a verb is not needed here.

**Exercise 13.1**

Express the location for each of the following using hái and a localizer in the spaces:

Example: Dí fā hái fājěun yahpbihn The flowers are inside the vase

1 Hohksāng ____ fónɡ ____ The students are inside the room
2 Jek māau ____ tóí ____ The cat is on the table
3 Go jāmtāuh ____ chòhng ____ The pillow is on the bed
4 Jí bāt ____ háp ____ The pen is inside the box
5 Bún syú ____ dāng ____ The book is under the chair
6 Go jūng ____ chèuhng ____ The clock is on the wall
7 Bá jé ____ mùhn ____ The umbrella is behind the door
8 Dī séung ____ sèungbóu ____ The photos are inside the photo album
9 Pō syuh ____ gāan ŭk ____ The tree is in front of the house
10 Dihnsihgèi ____ syūgwaih ____ The television is beside the book-case
Exercise 13.2

Express the following in Cantonese:

1 behind the wall (chèuhng)
2 on top of the bookcase (syûgwaih)
3 opposite the bank (ngàhnñhòhng)
4 in the middle of the road (máhlouh)
5 between the park (gûngyûn) and the petrol station (yàuh jaahm)
6 sitting (chôh) beside you
7 inside the box (háp)
8 outside the classroom (baafön göng)
9 in front of the mirror (geng)
10 below the table (tóii)
11 towards this direction (fóngheung)
12 from morning (jù) to evening (máahn)

Exercise 13.3

Say what there is at the following locations in your home:

1 On the table: töii sweuhngmihn ____
2 On the wall: chèuhng sweuhngmihn ____
3 In the kitchen: chyùhfön gölpbihn ____
4 Inside the living room: haak-têng léuihmihn ____
5 In the closet: yûgwaih yahpbihn ____
6 Under the bed: chòngh hahmihn ____
7 Under the chair: dang hahbihn ____
8 On the bookcase: syûgwaih sweuhngmihn ____
9 In the bathroom: sáisûu-gàan yahpbihn ____
10 In the study: syûfön yahpbihn ____

Exercise 13.4

Describe the following journeys:

Example: from home to school: yàuh úkkéi heui hohkhaauh

1 from here to the hospital (yûyûn)
2 from the library (tóoh-syu-gwûn) to the canteen (faahnh-tôhng)
3 from the ground floor (deih-há) to the eighth floor (baat láu)
4 towards Kowloon (Gáulûhng)
5 to Tokyo (Dünggīng) via Taipei (Tōihbāk)
6 from Hong Kong to London (Lēuhndēun) via Bangkok (Maahn-gūk)
7 from the study (syūfōng) to the kitchen (chyùhfōng)
8 from the first time (daih yāt chi) until now (yīhgā)
9 from the airport (gēichèuhng) to home (ūkkēī)
10 from the beginning (tàuh) to the end (méih)
UNIT FOURTEEN

Negation

To express negation, Cantonese uses negative words that all begin with the nasal consonant "m" and have low-register tones:

- Negative word: m\-  
  - Used with:
    - môuh: not  
      - Adjectives, verbs referring to the present
    - móuh: have not  
      - Nouns, verbs referring to the past
    - meih: not yet  
      - Verbs
    - mhaih: is not  
      - Sentences
    - m-: un-  
      - Antonyms of adjectives and verbs

môuh is used to negate:

(i) Most adjectives:

- **Ngôh gihn sāam môuh pèhng ga**  
  - This shirt is not cheap
- **Dī jih môuh chīngchó**  
  - The writing is not clear
- **Ngôh gīngyihm môuh gau**  
  - My experience is not sufficient
    (lit. enough)

(ii) Verbs referring to the present:

- **Ngôh gamyaht môuh fāan-hohk**  
  - I’m not going to school today
- **Kēuihdeih môuh său yihn-gām**  
  - They do not accept cash
- **Gūngst jahmsih môuh chēng yāhn**  
  - The company is not hiring anyone right now

móuh is the negative form of yáuh (Unit 6), used in two main ways:

(i) As a main verb:

- **Kēuih móuh lāahm-pāhngyáuh ge**  
  - She doesn’t have a boyfriend
Ngóhdeih yihgá móuh gungyàhn  We don’t have a (domestic) helper now
Ngóh móuh leng sàam jeuk  I have no nice clothes to wear

(ii) As an auxiliary verb:

Ngóh gâmyaht móuh gin dòu  I haven’t seen her today
kéuih a
Kéuih móuh làih hòi-wú  He didn’t come to the meeting
Kéuihdeih móuh túngjì ngóhdeih  They didn’t inform us

móuh used in this way serves as the negative counterpart to jó (Unit 18), as can be seen in pairs like the following:

a) Ngóh kàhmyaht máaih-jó choi  I bought vegetables yesterday
b) Ngóh kàhmyaht móuh máaih choi  I didn’t buy (any) vegetables yesterday
a) Gûngsì chéng-jó kéuih  The company has hired him
b) Gûngsì móuh chéng kéuih  The company has not hired him

meih as an auxiliary has the specific meaning ‘not yet’:

Ngóhdeih juhng meih bûn òk  We haven’t moved house yet
Lóuhbáan meih fàan làih  The boss hasn’t come in yet
Jaahmsìh meih yáuh sàusîk  So far there hasn’t been any news

Attached to the end of a statement, meih makes a special form of question, typically with jó or gwo (see Unit 18):

Léih jouh-jó gûngfo meih a?  Have you done your homework (yet)?
Léih heui-gwo Hóiyèuhng Gûngyún meih a?  Have you ever been to Ocean Park?

mhaih ‘it’s not’ is the negative form of the verb haih ‘to be’. It is used in negating adjectives modified by an adverb (see Unit 9):

mhaih hóu leng  not very pretty
mhaih géi gûngpìhng  not quite fair
Ngóhdeih mhaih gam suhk  We’re not that familiar (with each other)
Antonyms formed with negation

Antonyms of many adjectives (and some verbs) can be formed by adding a prefix **m-**:

- **hōisām** (happy) → **mhōisām** (unhappy)
- **chīngchō** (clear) → **mchīngchō** (unclear)
- **güngpīhng** (fair) → **mgüngpīhng** (unfair)
- **tūhngyi** (agree) → **mtūhngyi** (disagree)

Some of these negative forms carry a meaning related to that of the underlying verb or adjective, but not simply its opposite:

- **gin** (see) → **mgin** (lose)
- **geidāk** (remember) → **mgeidāk** (forget)
- **tūhng** (same) → **mtūhng** (different)
- **dākhāahn** (at leisure) → **mdākhāahn** (busy)
- **syūfuhk** (comfortable) → **msyūfuhk** (unwell, sick)

All such antonyms can be modified by **hōu** or other adverbs:

- **Kéuih hōu mjūngyi léih ge tāihyīh**
  She really dislikes your proposal

- **Gám yéung deui ngóh taaī mgüngpīhng**
  *(lit. this way towards me too unfair)*
  This is too unfair to me

A few such words exist in the negative form, i.e. they are inherently negative; without the prefix **m-**, they do not occur in an affirmative statement:

- **mhōuyisi** (embarrassed)
- **mfahnhei** (discontented)

- **Kéuih gokdāk hōu mhōuyisi**
  *(but not *Kéuih gokdāk hōu hōuyisi)*
  She feels very embarrassed

- **Ngóh gokdāk hōu mfahnhei**
  *(but not *Ngóh gokdāk hōu fahnhei)*
  I feel very discontented
Double negatives

Combinations of two negative forms are widely used to give a qualified or indirect positive meaning. A typical case is to use \textit{mhaih} to deny a negative statement:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Ngóh mhaih m̂h seun léih} \quad \text{It’s not that I don’t believe you}
  \item \textit{Mhaih mhólàhng ge} \quad \text{It’s not impossible}
  \item \textit{Ngóhdéih mhaih móuh hēimohng} \quad \text{We’re not without hope (i.e. we still have a chance)}
\end{itemize}

Another case involves negating both the main verb and an auxiliary (see Unit 20):

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Kéuih m̂h wúih m̂h fāan lāih} \quad \text{He won’t fail to come back}
  \item \textit{Gám yéung m̂h wúih mgūngpihng} \quad \text{That would not be unfair}
  \item \textit{Léih m̂h hóyíh m̂h bēi chín} \quad \text{You cannot choose not to pay (i.e. you have to pay)}
\end{itemize}

Exercise 14.1

Put these statements in the negative by using \textit{móuh} or \textit{mhaih}:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item \textit{Kéuih ukkan yáuh mahntāih} \quad \text{His family has problems}
  \item \textit{Ngóhdéih hóu guih} \quad \text{We’re very tired}
  \item \textit{Ngóh sīŋ-jó-jīk} \quad \text{I got promoted}
  \item \textit{Kéuih gihn sāam hóu gwai} \quad \text{Her dress is very expensive}
  \item \textit{Ngóh tāuhsīn sīhk-jó yeuhk} \quad \text{I have taken the medicine just now}
  \item \textit{Yīsāng heui-jó douh-ga} \quad \text{The doctor has gone on holiday}
  \item \textit{Lōuhbāan hóu lāu} \quad \text{The boss is very angry}
  \item \textit{Dī hoksaang yáuh séuṅng-mōhng} \quad \text{The students have got on the Internet}
  \item \textit{Dī hoksaang hóu kāhnlihk} \quad \text{The students are very diligent}
  \item \textit{Gó tou hei taai chēuṅng} \quad \text{That film is too long}
\end{enumerate}
Exercise 14.2

Show your disagreement with the following negative statements by providing the affirmative counterparts:

Example: Léih móuh sihgaan You have no time → Ngóh yáuh sihgaan (a) I do have time (the particle a serves to soften the force of the disagreement, see Unit 25)

1 Sihk hóisìn mhung gwai
   Eating seafood is not expensive
2 Wòhng Sáang mhung chéng kéuih
   Mr Wong is not hiring her
3 Léih móuh duhk-gwo Faatmán
   You haven’t studied French
4 Kéuihdeih meih git-fán
   They’re not married
5 Léih móuh bou-méng
   You haven’t applied
6 Dí háausíh tăihmuhk mhaih hóu làahn
   The exam questions are not very hard
7 Gāan fóng mhung gönjeihn
   The room is not tidy
8 Kéuih yihgā mđākhàahn
   He’s busy now
9 Gāmyaht móuh tóhng
   There are no lessons today
10 Ngóhdeih meih sihk-gwo sèh-gâng
    We’ve never eaten snake soup

Exercise 14.3

Create antonyms based on the following adjectives and verbs, translate and pronounce them:

1 sànsfn fresh 6 jūngyi like
2 sìusām careful 7 mìhngbaahk understand
3 hóuchói lucky 8 tūhngyi agree
4 gōuhi ng glad 9 yānséung appreciate
5 gînhńg healthy 10 làuhsām attentive
Exercise 14.4

A Create a double negative based on the sentence provided:

Example: Ñógh nh séung heui I don’t want to go → Ñógh nh séung heui

1. Kéuih móuh seunsám
   She lacks confidence
2. Kéuih góng ge yéh móuh douhléih
   What he says is unreasonable
3. Léih gājé nh wúih bōng léih
   Your sister won’t help you
4. Ñóghdeih nh gau chín
   We don’t have enough money
5. Léih gāmyaht mdākhàahn
   You’re busy today

B Use a double negative to express the following indirectly:

Example: Léih yâtdihng yiu seun kéuih You must believe him →
Léih nh hóyíh nh seun kéuih

1. Ñóghdeih tūhngyi
   We agree
2. Ñóghdeih yiu jáu
   We must leave
3. Gângsí hâng gā yàhn-gūng
   The company is willing to raise salaries
4. Ñógh wúih geidāk
   I’ll remember
5. Léih máaih dāk héi
   You can afford it
UNIT FIFTEEN
Verbs of motion: heui and làih

The verbs heui ‘go’ and làih (or lèih) ‘come’ are used as follows:

(i) By themselves as main verbs:

Ngóhdeih yáatchài heui là  Let’s go together
Kéuih tìngyaht mìh làih la  She’s not coming tomorrow

Both can be followed directly by a place name or other expression of the destination, without a preposition as in English:

Ngóh yät-yuht heui Méihgwok  I’m going to America in January
Ngóhdeih yìhgá heui fóchějaahm  We’re going to the railway station now
Kéuihdeih mìh làih Yìnggwok  They’re not coming to England
Léih gósìh làih ngóh ükkéi a?  When are you coming to my place?

They can also take a verb phrase to show the purpose of the journey:

heui (gwóng-chèuhng) yám-chàh  Go (to the shopping centre) for dim sum (lit. to drink tea)
làih (nìdouh) tái hei  Come (here) to see a film

(ii) Together with directional verbs:

yahp heui  go in  yahp làih  come in
chêut heui  go out  chêut làih  come out
séuhng heui  go up  séuhng làih  come up
lohk heui  go down  lohk làih  come down
gwo heui  go over  gwo làih  come over
fāan heui  go back  fāan làih  come back
These combinations are used in the same way as the simple verbs, for example:

**Ngóh séuhng heui Bākìng hōi-wúi**  
(lit. I ascend go Beijing hold meeting)  
I’m going up to Beijing for a meeting

**Ngóhdeih lohk heui sihk-faahn là**  
(lit. we descend go eat rice)  
Let’s go down and eat

**Léih géisìh gwo làih taam ngóh a?**  
(lit. you when over come visit me)  
When are you coming over to visit me?

A third verb may be added before the directional verb to express the manner of movement, resulting in a sequence of three verbs: (manner—direction—come/go):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Combination</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fēi yahp làih</td>
<td>fly in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dit lohk làih</td>
<td>come falling down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiu séuhng làih</td>
<td>jump up (here)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hàahng fāan làih</td>
<td>walk back (here)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When used with a transitive verb, the directional verb and heui/làih follow the object:

**Ngóhdeih séung daai dī san tūhngsih yahp làih**  
(lit. we wish to bring some new colleagues in come)  
We’d like to bring in some new colleagues

**Ngóh līng dī hàhngléih séuhng làih sīn**  
(lit. I carry the luggage up come first)  
I’ll bring the luggage up first

**Mgōi léih daih dī sung gwo làih**  
(lit. please you pass the food over come)  
Could you pass the dishes over, please

Aspect markers like jō and gān (Units 18–19) appear after the first verb of the sequence:
These sequences of verbs are known as serial verb constructions. One such pattern, using both làih and heui, uses four verbs in a row:

- hàahng làih hàahng heui (walk to and fro)
- fēi làih fēi heui (fly back and forth)
- lám làih lám heui (think it over and over)
- si làih si heui (try and try again)

Directional verbs are also used as verbs in their own right, with a place expression as their object. This pattern includes a number of useful set phrases:

- séuhng/lohk chē (get on/off a car, bus, etc.)
- séuhng/lohk sāan (go up/down a hill)
- yahp/chēut gíng (enter/leave a country (at the border))
- yahp/chēut yún (enter/leave hospital)
- gwo máhlouh (cross the road)
- gwo hói (cross the sea, harbour, etc.)
- fāan ūkkéi (return home)
- fāan gūng (go (lit. return) to work)

**Exercise 15.1**

Expand the sentence given by adding a directional verb:

Example: heui Hêunggóng go to Hong Kong → gwo heui Hêunggóng go over to Hong Kong/fāan heui Hêunggóng go back to Hong Kong

1. Làih ngóh ūkkéi (come to my place)
2. Heui hohkhaauh (go to school)
3. Heui làuhseuhng (go upstairs)
4. Làih Yīnggwok (come to England)
5. Heui séjihlàuh (go to the office)
6. Làih tái-háh (come and take a look)
7. Làih taam ngóhdeih (come to visit us)
8. Heui hōi-wūi (go to a meeting)
9 Làih sihk-faahn  come and eat
10 Heui jouh-yéh  go to work

Exercise 15.2

Add a suitable object to the verb sequences given to show the destination:

1 Ngóh tìngyaht heui ____  I’m going tomorrow
2 Léih làih ____ sihk-faahn  Come to eat
3 Ngóh gwo heui ____ wán yàhn  I’m going over to look for someone
4 Léih dák hàahn séuhng làih ____ chóh when you’re free
5 Ngóhdeih yiu fèi fāan heui ____ We have to fly back
6 Go léuijái jáu chèut heui ____ The girl ran out
7 Ngóh dì chàńchìk fàan làih ____ douh-ga My relatives are coming back for a holiday
8 Léih hóyih lohk heui ____ máaih yéh You can go down to do some shopping
9 Ngóh jík hāak yahp heui ____ wuhn sāam I’m going in to change right away
10 Ngóh tùhngsih gwo làih ____ kíng-gái My colleague is coming over to chat

Exercise 15.3

Fill in the blanks according to the translation:

1 ____ ____ Gáulùhng  Go over to Kowloon
2 ____ ____ ngóh gāan fǒng  Come into my room
3 ____ ____ Hĕunggóng  Come down to Hong Kong (e.g from mainland China)
4 ____ ____ Bākging  Go up to Beijing
5 ____ ____ haak-tēng  Go out to the living room
6 ____ ____ ìkkéí  Come back home
7 Yàuh sahp láu dit ____ ____ Fall down from the tenth floor
8 Tiu ____ ____ ga fōchē  Jump onto the train
9 Hàahng ____ ____ syūfóng  Walk into the study
10 Fèi ____ ____ Oujāu  Fly back to Australia
† Exercise 15.4

Add an aspect marker (jó or gán: see Units 18–19) in the appropriate place according to the English translation:

1. Ga fochē fāan làih
2. Dī seun gei heui Méihgwok
3. Dī gúpiu sīng séuhng heui gōu wāi
4. Kéuih hái fōng hāahng chēut làih
5. Kéuihdeih pāh séuhng làih sāandéng
6. Bún syū dit lohk heui deihhá
7. Go kàhm būn gwo heui deuimihn
8. Ga chē hōi yahp làih tīhng-chē-chèuhng
9. Kéuih hāahng chēut heui gāi douh
10. Kéuihdeih būn lohk heui yīh láu
UNIT SIXTEEN

Verbs of giving: béi

béi is an important verb used both on its own as a verb meaning ‘give’ and together with other verbs of giving. The verb béi takes two objects, the direct object (representing what is given) followed by the indirect object (representing the person to whom something is given):

Kéuih béi-jó yāt baak mān ngóh
(lit. she gave one hundred dollars me)
She gave me a hundred dollars

Ngóh béi-jó tíuh sósih ngóh taitäai
(lit. I gave the key my wife)
I gave my wife the key

Béi gān choi ngóh ā
(lit. give catty vegetables me)
Give me a catty of vegetables, please

Léih béi dī mín kéuih lā!
(lit. you give some face (to) her)
Show her some respect!

Note that the order of the two objects here is the reverse of that in English as well as that in Mandarin.

With other verbs of giving such as gei ‘send’ and wàahn ‘return’, béi ‘to’ is used to introduce the indirect object:

Ngóh páhngyáuh gei-jó jèung kāat béi ngóh
My friend sent me a card

Ngóh yīhīng wàahn-jó chín béi léih
I’ve already returned the money to you
Kéuih lóuhgung làuh-jó gāan ük béi kéuih
Her husband left her the house

Yáuh go yáuh-chín-lóu gyûn-jó hóu dō chín béi daaih-hohk
A rich man donated a lot of money to the university

Note here the verb sung which is used in this pattern to mean ‘give’ in the sense of giving presents:

Dī tùhngsih sung-jó dī fā béi kéuih
Her colleagues sent her some flowers

Kéuih lihn-lihn sung sāangyaht láihmaht béi ngóh go jái
She gives my son a birthday present every year

Nǐ jek gaaijí sung béi léih ge!
This ring is (a present) for you

A third verb may be added to the construction to indicate the purpose for which the object will be used:

Kéuih wúih gei dī màhn-gín béi léih chīm-méng
She will send the documents for you to sign

Go hohksāang chyùhnjān-jó pīn màhnjēung béi ngóh táí
The student faxed an article for me to read

Kéuih yiu jyú-faahn béi ükkéi-yàhn sihk
She has to cook for her family (to eat)

béi and permission

béi can also indicate permission (allowing, letting someone do something):

Lóuhsī béi ngóhdeih jóu dī jáu
The teacher let us leave early
Ngóh béi léih yuhng ngóh go dihnlóuh
I’ll let you use my computer
Mhóu béi yàhn jī a
Don’t let anyone know

Other verbs with two objects

A number of other verbs can take two objects, such as gaau (teach), mahnh (ask). Here the word order is different, with the indirect object coming first:
Kéuih gaau-gwo hóu dō yàhn gongkàhm
She has taught a lot of people the piano

Ngóh jùngyi mahn hohksēang mahntàih
I like to ask students questions

A similar pattern appears with verbs of deprivation such as faht (fine) and tāu (steal) or chéung (rob):

Gūngsī faht ngóhdeih gēi baak mān
The company fined us a few hundred dollars

Ngóh yèhng-jó kéuih hóu dō chín
I won a lot of money from him

Yáuh go cháak tāu-jó ngóh sāam bún syū
A thief has stolen three books from me

Kàhm máahn yáuh yàhn chéung kéuih yéh
Last night someone robbed things from him

The verb je when used in this pattern can be ambiguous, meaning either ‘lend’ or ‘borrow’ according to the context:

Ngóh je-jó kéuih yāt baak mān
I borrowed $100 from him
or I lent him $100

Ngóh gājē je-jó ngóh gēi tiuh kwàhn
My sister has borrowed a few dresses from me
or My sister has lent me a few dresses

To make the meaning clear, the preposition tūhng or heung can be used to mean ‘borrow from’:

Ngóh tūhng kéuih je-jó yāt baak mān I borrowed $100 from him
or Ngóh heung kéuih je-jó yāt baak mān

By contrast, using bēi to introduce the indirect object gives the meaning ‘lend’:

Ngóh je-jó yāt baak mān bēi kéuih I lent him $100
Ngóh gājē je-jó gēi tiuh kwàhn bēi ngóh
My sister has lent me a few dresses
Exercise 16.1

Add an indirect object to show who the object is given to:

1. I have to pay (money)
2. You need to return some books
3. I want to give a present
4. I’m going to send a letter
5. Hurry up and call (telephone)
6. Hand in your homework tomorrow
7. Please leave some food (for someone to eat)
8. I’m always buying clothes (for someone to wear)
9. I can pick a film (for someone to watch)
10. I’d like to request a song (for someone to listen to)

Exercise 16.2

Translate the following sentences using appropriate verbs of giving:

1. He gave me some perfume (di heunssui)
2. The doctor (yiisang) gave me some medicine (di youhk)
3. I’m going to return the documents (di mahn-gin) to you
4. The boss (iuhbaan) donated a lot of money to the church (gaauwui)
5. He sent his family (ukkei-yaan) a letter (fung seun)
6. I lent him a pencil (ji yunbbat)
7. Please give him face (respect: min)
8. You must give me back the key (tiuh sosih)
9. He wants to borrow two books (lewng bunn syu) from me
10. The lecturer (go gongsii) gave us some homework (fungfo) to do

Exercise 16.3

Add an indirect object to show the recipient of the action:

Example: Ngoh sif gaau gongkathm I know how to teach the piano?
→Ngoh sif gaau daaih-yaan gongkathm I know how to teach adults the piano
1. We still have to pay (money)
2. My sister lent a lot of clothes
3. That person is always stealing things
4. Somebody has stolen a lot of money
5. I’m going to borrow a few books
6. She wants to ask a few things
7. My friend teaches English
8. The government will impose a fine
UNIT SEVENTEEN
Verbs and particles

The Cantonese verb combines with a rich, versatile set of particles (also known as verbal complements). The resulting combinations often resemble those known as verb-particle constructions (or phrasal verbs) in English, as in the following cases:

- **tiu héi**  
  jump up
- **tiu gwo**  
  jump over
- **báai dāi**  
  put down
- **báai fāan**  
  put back

The particles may indicate the state of an object as the result of an action, or different phases of an action (beginning, continuing or ending). According to the functions they serve, they can be divided into the following categories:

1 Directional particles, indicating the direction of movement or action:

- **yahp**  
  in
- **máaih**  
  buy + yahp → máaih yahp  
  buy in, acquire
- **chēut**  
  out
- **gei**  
  send + chēut → gei chēut  
  send out
- **héi**  
  up
- **gwa**  
  hang + héi → gwa héi  
  hang up (clothes, etc.)
- **dāi**  
  down
- **fong**  
  put + dāi → fong dāi  
  put down
- **fāan**  
  back
- **ló**  
  bring + fāan → ló fāan  
  bring back
- **gwo**  
  over, past
- **ging**  
  pass + gwo → ging gwo  
  pass by
- **hōi**  
  away
- **hāahng**  
  walk + hōi → hāahng hōi  
  walk away, step out
- **màaih**  
  closer
- **hāahng**  
  walk + màaih → hāahng màaih  
  come closer

Note that some of these items (yahp, chēut, fāan and gwo) are the same as the directional verbs introduced in Unit 15. The meaning of the combinations is often predictable, as in the above examples, but it can also be figurative or quite idiomatic as in the following cases:
# 2 Resultative particles, describing the extent or consequences of an action:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particle</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>báau</td>
<td>full up</td>
<td>eat+báau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cho</td>
<td>wrongly</td>
<td>choose+cho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dihm</td>
<td>conclusively</td>
<td>manage+dihm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dihng</td>
<td>ready</td>
<td>deal with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dóu</td>
<td>accomplish</td>
<td>receive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heui</td>
<td>arrive</td>
<td>go+dou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jihng</td>
<td>remain</td>
<td>eat+jihng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>míhng</td>
<td>clear</td>
<td>leave behind (after eating)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>séi</td>
<td>to death</td>
<td>write+míhng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sèhng</td>
<td>succeed</td>
<td>bored+séhng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waaïh</td>
<td>bad, broken</td>
<td>teach+waaïh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yùhn</td>
<td>to the end</td>
<td>read+yùhn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Léih jeui hóu sé gwo pín mán
  You’d better rewrite (write over) the essay
  Ngóh hah chi sín tühng léih wáan gwo
  I’ll play with you again next time
Verbs of perception

An important sub-type of verb+particle construction involves verbs of perception. In these combinations, a verb denoting some mode of perception combines with the particle **dóu** to indicate successful perception of an object:

- **təng** listen $\rightarrow$ **təng dóu** hear
- **táí** look, watch, read $\rightarrow$ **táí dóu** see
- **gin** see, meet $\rightarrow$ **gin dóu** see, notice
- **wán** seek, look for $\rightarrow$ **wán dóu** find
- **màhn** smell $\rightarrow$ **màhn dóu** smell (something)
- **lám** think (about) $\rightarrow$ **lám dóu** think of (a problem, solution, etc.)
- **gám gok** feeling $\rightarrow$ **gok dóu, gám gok dóu** feel (something)

The simple verbs on the left describe activities, the combinations with **dóu** successful perception:

- **təng go** listen to songs $\rightarrow$ **təng dóu səng** hear a noise
- **táí sānmán** watch the news $\rightarrow$ **táí dóu bougou** see a report
- **lám baahnfaat** (try to) think of a way $\rightarrow$ **lám dóu go baahnfaat** think of a way

Potential constructions

Verb-particle combinations can be separated by **m’h** and **dāk** in constructions which express inability and potential respectively:

- **heui m’h dóu** cannot get there
- **heui dāk dóu** can get there
- **táí m’h dóu** cannot see
- **táí (dāk) dóu** can see
- **təng m’h chēut** cannot tell
- **təng dāk chēut** can tell (by listening)
- **təng m’h mihng** cannot understand
- **təng dāk mihng** can understand (what one hears)

Some examples:

Ngōhdeih táí m’h dóu go dihnyíng mihngsīng
We could not see the film star
I can understand your Cantonese

I can tell (by listening) that you’re American

I cannot think of his English name

Such combinations often have idiomatic meanings:

- `seun m̀h gwo` can trust
- `máaih m̀h héi` can afford
- `díng m̀h seuhn` can stand
- `gón m̀h chit` can make it

Exercise 17.1

Add a particle after the verb from the list provided:

(cho, dāi, dou, dóu, fāan, gwo, hōi, yūhn)

1. tái ____ ga chē see the car
2. báai ____ gihn sāam put the dress down
3. ló ____ dì seun bring back the mail (letters)
4. gīng ____ yīyún pass by the hospital
5. lám ____ baahnfaat think of a solution
6. tái ____ boují finish reading the newspaper
7. yihng ____ yàhn misrecognize someone
8. jáu ____ go away
9. sāu ____ chín receive money
10. heui ____ gūngsī arrive at the office

Exercise 17.2

Translate the following using verbs of perception:

1. He often listens to stories (gújái)
2. I hear rumours (yiuhyihn)
3. He’s already thought of the answer (go daahp-on)
4. I saw an advertisement (go gwónggou)
5. You can feel the pressure (ngaatihk)
6. I smell smoke (yinmeih)
7. She likes to read novels (siusyut)
8. She doesn’t like watching films (hei)

**Exercise 17.3**

Express the following situations using m̀h and the particle dóu:

Example: You cannot see (your name) → Ngóh tái m̀h dóu (ngóh go méng)

1. You did not receive her letter (kéuih fúng seun)
2. You cannot buy the cinema ticket (hei fei)
3. You could not see the sign (go páai)
4. You cannot smell the food (dí sung)
5. You cannot hear the aeroplanes (fèigêi sêng)
6. You cannot think of how to answer (dím daap)
7. You cannot remember (gei) so many names (gam dô méng)
8. You cannot eat so much ice cream (gam dô syutgōu)
9. You cannot think of how to answer (dím daap)
10. Your friend cannot get (heui) to Shatin

**Exercise 17.4**

Use the potential dák to contradict the following statements:

Example: Ngóhdeih heui m̀h dóu Bålài We cannot get to Paris → heui dák dóu Yes we can (Note that this response is sufficient: there is no need to repeat the subject or object.)

1. Kéuih béi m̀h dóu öncyûhn-gám ngóh
   He can’t give me a sense of security
2. Ngóh gáau m̀h dihm léuhng go sailouh
   I can’t deal with two kids
3. Gâm máahn tái m̀h dóu sêng-sêng
   We can’t see the stars tonight
4. Ní dāan sângyi jouh m̀h sêhng
   We cannot complete the deal
5. Kéuihdeih seun m̀h gwo ga
   They can’t be trusted
6. Léih saht máaih m̀h héi
   I bet you can’t afford it
7. Gâm chi ngóhdeih jouh m̀h chit
   This time we won’t manage it in time
8. Léih têng m̀h mìhg ngóh ge Júngmán àh?
   Can’t you understand my Chinese?
Cantonese is said to lack tense, in the sense that the form taken by the verb does not consistently indicate the location of events in time. We have already seen how adverbs can serve to indicate when events take place (Unit 11); in this unit we introduce the aspect markers jó and gwo which also play an important role here. Although it may be tempting to equate jó and/or gwo with past tense, the fact of referring to the past is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for their use. They are termed aspect markers because they are concerned with the way an action is viewed—as complete, or as ongoing as discussed in Unit 19—rather than directly with time.

**Perfective jó**

A sentence can refer to the past merely by including an adverb such as yíhchihnh ‘before’ (Unit 11):

\[ \text{Ngóhdeih yíhchihnh háí Ganàhdaaih jyuh ge} \]

We lived in Canada before

By adding the perfective suffix jó to the verb it is possible to refer to the same situation as a complete whole:

\[ \text{Ngóhdeih háí Gânàhdaaih jyuuh-jó sāam lihn} \]

We lived in Canada for three years

In this case specifying the period of three years, now completed, calls for the suffix jó. Adverbs such as yíhgíng ‘already’, ngām-ngām ‘just’ and tāuhsīn ‘just now’ also favour jó:
Kéuih yíhg kyutdihng-jó chihjík  
He has already decided to resign

Kéuihdeih ngääm-ngääm lèih-jó-fān  
They’ve just had a divorce

Ngóh tāuhsîn daap-jó lèih ge mahntàih  
I answered your question just now

Naturally this tends to place the action in the past. It also extends to a period of time up to and including the present:

Ngóh taaitáai gaau-jó sääm lihn Yîngmān  
My wife has taught/has been teaching English for three years

Ngóh tái-jó bun yaht syū  
I have been reading for half a day

Ngóh sailóu jouh-jó gíngchaat hóu loih  
My brother has been a policeman for a long time

**Experiential gwo**

The ‘experiential’ meaning of gwo corresponds to one of the meanings of the present perfect in English—that something has happened at least once. Given a human subject, this is essentially the concept of experience, hence the grammatical term ‘experiential’ to describe this function. Typical cases are:

Léih yáuh-móuh sihk-gwo Góngsîk sāi chāan a?  
Have you eaten Hong Kong-style western food?

Léih heui-gwo Taai-hûng Gwún meih a?  
Have you been to the Space Museum?

Adverbs which call for gwo include châhnggâng ‘once’ and meih ‘not yet’:

Kéuih châhnggâng oi-gwo ngóh  
She once loved me

Ngóh meih yám-gwo nǐ jek jáu  
I’ve not drunk this wine before

(not * Ngóh meih yám-jó nǐ jek jáu)
jó versus gwo

jó and gwo may appear similar in meaning, both corresponding to the present perfect forms of the verb in English. Indeed there will be cases when either makes sense:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>jó Version</th>
<th>gwo Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh táí-jó sãam go yīsāng</td>
<td>I’ve (just) seen three doctors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh táí-gwo sãam go yīsāng</td>
<td>I’ve seen three doctors (before)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kéuih sé-jó yāt pīn ān</td>
<td>He’s (just) written an article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kéuih sé-gwo yāt pīn ān</td>
<td>He’s written an article (before)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kéuih jyu-h-jó sãam go yuht yīyūn</td>
<td>He’s been in hospital for three months (recently)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kéuih jyu-h-gwo sãam go yuht yīyūn</td>
<td>He’s been in hospital for three months (once before)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh wán-jó léih géi chi</td>
<td>I’ve looked for you several times (recently)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh wán-gwo léih géi chi</td>
<td>I’ve looked for you several times (before)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In such cases, jó puts a focus on the result or current relevance of the action, while gwo makes it of less immediate relevance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>jó Version</th>
<th>gwo Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh máaih-jó nǐ jek pāaihjí</td>
<td>I’ve bought this brand (and still have it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh máaih-gwo nǐ jek pāaihjí</td>
<td>I’ve bought this brand (before, in the past)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kéuih heui-jó gëichëuhng</td>
<td>He’s gone to the airport (and is still there or on his way)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kéuih heui-gwo gëichëuhng</td>
<td>He’s been to the airport (but is no longer there)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions with meih

Statements with either jó or gwo can be turned into yes/no questions by adding meih (see also Unit 23).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Léih sîk-jó dâng meih a?</td>
<td>Have you turned the light(s) off?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Léih si-gwo nǐ jùng hëungsëui meih a?</td>
<td>Have you tried this perfume before?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Such questions are answered by the verb+ jó or gwo:

A: Léih chüng-jó-lèuhng meih a?  Have you taken a bath yet?
B: Chüng-jó la/meih a  Yes/no
A: Léih sî-gwo nî dî meih a?  Have you ever tried these?
B: Sî-gwo la/meih (sî-gwo) a  Yes/no

**Negating jó and gwo**

Because it suggests completion of an action, jó is not compatible with negation. The negative counterpart of jó is móuh (have not) or meih (not yet):

Kéuih yîngsihng-jó ngóh  He (has) promised me
Kéuih móuh yîngsihng ngóh  He didn’t promise me

(Not * Kéuih móuh yîngsihng-jó ngóh)  He hasn’t promised me yet
Kéuih meih yîngsihng ngóh

(Not * Kéuih meih yîngsihng-jó ngóh)
Ngóhdeih sihk-jó-faahn  We’ve had our dinner
Ngóhdeih meih sihk-faahn  We haven’t had dinner yet

(Not * Ngóhdeih meih sihk-jó-faahn)

Unlike jó, gwo can be negated either with móuh or meih:

Ngóh móuh sâu-gwo léih ge chín  I have not received your money
Kéuih meih jouh-gwo sâuseuht  She has not yet had an operation

**Exercise 18.1**

Choose jó or gwo to fill in the gaps:

1. Ngóh gin ____ kéuih ükkéi yâhn  I’ve met his family before
2. Ngóh tâuhsîn sáî ____ tâu  I’ve just washed my hair
3. Kéuih gâmju sihk ____ jóuchâan la  He had breakfast this morning
4. Ngóh têng ____ nî sáu gô  I’ve heard this song before
5. Ngóh heui ____ yât chi Bâkîng  I’ve been to Beijing once
6. Ngóh bou ____ méng hohk yàuhséui  I’ve applied for swimming lessons
7. Kéuih yèhng ____ tâu jéung  She’s won the first prize!
8. Kéuih meih háau ____ daih yât mîhng  She hasn’t got first place in an exam before
9. Kéuih meih máaih ____ sän chê  He hasn’t bought a new car before
10 Ngóh ngåam-ngåam maaih ___ ga chê  
I just sold the car

Exercise 18.2

Add jô or gwo to the following questions in accordance with the translation:

1 Léih lám ____ yîhmàhn meih a?  
Have you ever considered emigrating?

2 Go biibi fan ____ meih a?  
Has the baby gone to sleep yet?

3 Léih si ____ nî jek yeuhk meih a?  
Have you tried this medicine before?

4 Léih yeuk ____ kéuih meih a?  
Have you made an appointment with him yet?

5 Léih sâńchéng ____ gó fahn gûng meih a?  
Have you applied for that job yet?

6 Ga chê johng ____ meih a?  
Has the car ever had an accident?

7 Bûn syû chêutbâan ____ meih a?  
Has the book been published yet?

8 Léih cheung ____ nî sàu gô meih a?  
Have you sung this song before?

9 Léih gâmjîu táî ____ boujî meih a?  
Have you read the newspaper this morning?

10 Lóuhbáan fân ____ ūkkéi meih a?  
Has the boss gone home yet?

Exercise 18.3

Negate the following sentences (refer to Unit 14 if necessary):

Example: Kéuihdeih git-jô-fân They’ve got married: Kéuihdeih móûh git-fân (They have not got married) or Kéuihdeih meih git fân (They’re not married yet)

1 Dî hohksaang jàu-jô  
The students have gone

2 Ngóh go jài heui-gwo Yînggwok  
My son has been to England

3 Kéuih lô-jô chêpàaîh  
She’s got her driving licence

4 Ngóhdeih johug-gwo jingfû gûng  
We’ve worked for the government before

5 Ngóh dehng-jô fông  
I’ve reserved a room

6 Go beisyû fong-jô ga  
The secretary has taken a day off

7 Ngóh yàm-gwo Chîngdou bêjâu  
I’ve drunk Tsingtao beer before

8 Ngóh tûhng kéuih paak-gwo-tô  
I’ve been on a date with him
9 Dihnfai gā-jó ga  
10 Lóuhbáan lauh-gwo kéuih  

Electricity costs have gone up  
The boss has scolded him before

**Exercise 18.4**

Choose an appropriate adverb to add to each sentence from the list (a-f):

1 Kéuih meih si-gwo chìh dou  
   She’s never been late  
   a yíhging already

2 Ngóhdeih heui-gwo léih ükkéi  
   We’ve been to your house  
   b ngāam-ngāam just

3 Ngóh sīnsāang fāan-jó séjihlàuh  
   My husband has gone to the office  
   c chàhngging once

4 Kéuih sāang-jó go jái  
   She’s had a child  
   d yíhchihn before

5 Ngóh háaulëuih-gwo chihihjík  
   I’ve considered resigning  
   e jeuigahnh recently

6 Gāan jáulàuh sāan-jó mùhn  
   The restaurant has closed  
   f chùhnglòih never
UNIT NINETEEN
Activities: gán and jyuh

The aspect markers gán and jyuh attached to verbs express ongoing actions.

1 Progressive gán and háidouh

The progressive suffix -gán, like the English progressive ‘-ing’, is used for ongoing activities:

Kéuih yìhg hōi-gán-wúi  She’s having a meeting
Kéuihdeih léuhng go kīng-gán-gái  The two of them are chatting

Unlike the English ‘-ing’ in such cases, gán does not have to be present. Thus the same sentences shown above are also possible without gán (although a sentence particle may be needed in its place: see Unit 25):

Kéuih yìhg hōi-wúi wo  She’s having a meeting
Kéuihdeih léuhng go kīng-gái la  The two of them are chatting

Although referring most often to the present, verbs with gán may apply to an activity in the past. In such cases there is typically a past time adverb present to make this clear (see Unit 11; note also the adverb jhung ‘still’):

Gauh lín kéuih juhng duhk-gán jūnghohk  Last year she was still studying in secondary school

Kéuihdeih seuhung go yuht juhng paak-gán-tō, yìhgā yìhgīng fān-jō-sáu la  Last month they were still dating, now they’re already separated

Similarly, gán may be used in subordinate clauses referring to the past:
Ngóh duhk-gán síuhok gójahnsìh, kéuih yíhgìng sìk ngóh
(lit. I studying primary school that time, he already knew me)
When I was in primary school, she already knew me

Léih fan-gán-gaaú gójahnsìh, yáuh yàhn dá-dihnwá làih
(lit. you sleeping that time, somebody telephoned come)
Somebody called while you were sleeping

An alternative means of describing an ongoing action is by using háidouh,
which literally means ‘to be here/there’:

Ngóh háidouh jouh güngfo I’m (here) doing homework
Léih háidouh dăng bìngo a? Who are you waiting for?
Kéuihdeih háidouh aai-gaau They’re having an argument

Because of the literal meaning ‘here’, it is suitable where the activity is
going on in a location close to the speaker. háidouh and gán can also be
used together in expressing progressive meaning:

Kéuih háidouh jyú-gán-faahn She’s cooking
Lóuhbáan háidouh sê-gán-seun The boss is writing letters

2 Continuous jyuh

jyuh added to a verb describes a continuous activity or state without
change. It is associated with particular verbs, such as those denoting
stationary situations:

Ga dihndāanchè jó-jyuh go chēutháu
The motorbike is blocking the exit

Kéuih sèhngyaht jâ-jyuh fahn boují
She’s always holding a newspaper

Ngóh yaht-yaht deui-jyuh tûhung-yéung yât baan yâhn
I face the same bunch of people every day

Certain transitive verbs with jyuh indicate putting something in a state, as
with kám-jyuh ‘cover’ and bón-g-jyuh ‘tie up’:

Léih yiu yuhng go goi kám-jyuh go wok
You need to use the top to cover the wok
Kéuih yuhng dī hóu leng ge jī bāau-jyuh fahn láihmaht
She used some nice paper to wrap up the gift

Kéuih móuh baahnfaat bǒng-jyuh kéuih lóuhgúng
There’s no way she can tie up her husband (physically or metaphorically)

Note that verb + jyh can mean something different from the simple verb by itself, such as lám-jyuh ‘intend’ vs. lám ‘think’, tái-jyuh ‘watch over’ vs. tái ‘look, see’:

Ngóh lám-jyuh chéng kéuihdeih sihk-faahn
I intend to invite them to dinner

Léih tái-jyuh nī léuhng go sailouhjái, mhóu běi kéuihdeih dá-gāau
Keep an eye on these two kids, (and) don’t let them fight

A verb with jyh can also be used to describe an action carried out simultaneously with another:

Kéuih mohng-jyuh ngóh siu
(lit. he watching me smiled)
He smiled (while looking) at me

Kéuih deui-jyuh ngóh haam
(lit. she facing me cried)
She cried at (while facing) me

Léih gān-jyuh ngóh hàahng
(lit. you following me walk)
Walk after (following) me

Note that there is no conjunction linking the two verbs (this is a characteristic of the sequences of verb phrases known as serial verb constructions).

gán versus jyh

Since both may be translated with progressive ‘-ing’ forms in English, it can be difficult to choose between gán and jyh. As a general rule, gán is appropriate for activities involving change or movement and jyh for static ones. In some cases either is possible, sometimes with a marked difference of meaning:
In each case gán indicates a dynamic, changing situation and jyuh a static one.

Exercise 19.1

Add gán and/or háidouh to express progressive aspect in the following sentences:

Example: Kéuih tái syu She’s reading (a book) → Kéuih tái-gán syu

1 Ngóh yīhg wuhn sāam I’m changing (my clothes) now
2 Kéuihdeih kàhm-máahn dá māhjéuk They were playing mahjong last night
3 Kéuih góng dihnwá She’s (talking) on the phone
4 Yīhgā lōhk yūh It’s raining now
5 Dī sailouhjái wáan séui The children are playing water games
6 Ngóhdeih hāahng láih We’re coming (walking) over
7 Kéuih yīhg chūng-lēuhng She’s taking a shower
8 Ngóh go jāi waahk-wá My son is drawing
9 Lóuhbáan hōi-wūi The boss is having a meeting
10 Kéuih juhng lāu ngóhdeih She’s still angry with us

Exercise 19.2

Add gán or jyuh as appropriate to complete the following sentences:

Example: Ngóh sái sāam I’m washing clothes → Ngóh sái-gán sāam

1 Ngóh jā tiuh sósih I’m holding a key
2 Kéuih máaih sung She is buying groceries
3 Ngóhdeih hōu gwa léih We miss you very much
4 Léih jyú mātyēh a? What are you cooking?
5 Kéuih yām gafe He’s drinking coffee
Unit 19 103

6 Dímgáai léih mohng ngóh a?  Why are you staring at me?
7 Dī sailouhjái chéng-lèuhng  The children are taking a bath
8 Hóu dō yāhn wán gūng  Many people are looking for a job
9 Ngóh yihgā daap mahntāih  I’m answering questions right now
10 Kéuih sēhngyaht jeuk dī gauh sāam  He’s always wearing old clothes

Exercise 19.3

Add jyuh and the verb provided to expand the following sentences:

Example: Léih gān ngóh Follow me,
(cheung ‘sing’) → Léih gān-jyuh ngóh cheung Sing along with me

1 Kéuih jeuk sāam  He wears clothes (yàuh-séui ‘swim’)
2 Kéuih líng dī hānnglēih  He carried the baggage (jáu ‘leave’)
3 Kéuih tái dīhnsih  She’s watching television (jouh gūngfo ‘do homework’)
4 Dímgáai léih mī h mohng ngóh?  Why aren’t you looking at me (góng ‘speak’)?
5 Ngóh jünghyí tēng yâmngohk  I like to listen to music (yāusīk ‘relax’)
6 Kéuih sēhngyaht chī léih go léui  He’s always hanging around your daughter (heui gāai ‘go out’)
7 Go má̄nirh póuh go jái  The mother is carrying her son (chēut gāai ‘go out’)
8 Dímgáai léih daai ngáahn-gēng?  Why do you wear your glasses? (fan-gaau ‘sleep’)
9 Ngóh lōuhgūng jā ga sān chē  My husband is driving his new car (làih jip ngóh ‘to meet me’)
10 Ngóh nh wúih jós léih  I won’t get in your way (faat daaht ‘make money’)
UNIT TWENTY

Auxiliary verbs

Auxiliary verbs are used together with a main verb. The most important auxiliary verbs are:

- **wúih** will, would
- **hóyíh** can, may
- **sík** know (how to)
- **yînggôi** should, ought to
- **yiu, sëuiyiu** want, need
- **sëung** want to

They express mainly ‘modal’ meanings having to do with possibility and necessity. The auxiliary verbs come before the main verb:

- **Ngôh wúih sé seun bêi léih** I’ll write to you
- **Léih yînggôi douh-hip** You should apologise
- **Kéuih sìk góng Faatmán** He can speak French

An adverb may intervene between auxiliary and verb, as in the following examples:

- **Léih hóyíh sîn heui Jüngwàahn** You can go to Central *first*
- **Ngôh yînggôi dô dî wanduhng** I should exercise *more*
- **Ngôhdeih sëung faai dî bâtyihp** We want to graduate *quickly*

Note that some of the auxiliary verbs double as main verbs:

- **sík** to know (someone)
- **sík** to know (how to do something)
- **yiu** to want (something, someone)
- **yiu** to need (to do)

Compare the meanings in the following:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I know her</th>
<th>Ngóh s̀k kéuih</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know how to swim</td>
<td>Ngóh s̀k yàuh-s̀uéi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She wants coffee</td>
<td>Kéuih yiu gafè</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She wants/needs to eat</td>
<td>Kéuih yiu sihk-yéh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A rare irregularity should be noted here. The form **m̀h yiu** means ‘don’t want’, usually as a main verb:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I don’t want any dessert, thanks</th>
<th>Ngóh m̀h yiu tìhm bàn, m̀g̀i</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He doesn’t want to take the plane</td>
<td>Kéuih m̀h yiu daap f̀g̀ìg̀i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the negative form of **yiu** used as an auxiliary meaning ‘need’ is not **m̀h yiu** but **ms̀i:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I need to go to work today</th>
<th>Ngóh gamyah t yiu fàan gung</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t need to go to work today</td>
<td>Ngóh gamyah ms̀i fàan gung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He needs to see the doctor</td>
<td>Kéuih yiu tái ỳs̀àng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He doesn’t need to see the doctor</td>
<td>Kéuih ms̀i tái ỳs̀àng</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**s̀eu i yiu** is a more explicit form of **yiu**:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We need to rest more</th>
<th>Ngóhdeih s̀eu i yiu dó d̀i yàus̀ik</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You needn’t be so impatient</td>
<td>Léih m̀h s̀eu i yiu gam sàm-gàp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**hàng** ‘to be willing’ is used mainly (though not exclusively) in the negative form **m̀h háng:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My son won’t go to school</th>
<th>Ngóh gómaj m̀h hàng fàan hohk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She won’t answer my calls</td>
<td>Kéuih m̀h hàng tènng ngòh dìhnwá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My (elder) sister is willing to help</td>
<td>Ngóh gàjè hàng bòng sàu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Modal meanings**

Since Cantonese does not have a grammatical category of tense, **wúih** should not be thought of simply as a future tense. Rather, **wúih** has a range of meanings including future (‘will’) and conditional (‘would’):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I’ll come tomorrow</th>
<th>Ngóh tìngyaht wúih láih</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I wouldn’t help him</td>
<td>Ngóh m̀h wúih bòng kéuih</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The basic modal meanings can be modified by modal adverbs such as **waahkjà** and **hólàhng** ‘perhaps’, **hángdihng** and **yàtdihng** ‘certainly’:
Kéuihdeih waahkjé wúih yìhmàhn  They may (perhaps) emigrate
Kéuihdeih hángdihng wúih yìhmàhn  They will definitely emigrate
Ngóh hólàhng wúih jouh  I may do it
Ngóh yåtdihng wúih jouh  I will certainly do it

Note here the distinction between yåtdihng yiu meaning ‘must’ in the sense of obligation and yåtdihng haih in the sense of logical necessity or inference:

Léih yåtdihng yiu làih  You really must come
Léih yåtdihng haih jyün-gà  You must be an expert
Kéuih yåtdihng yiu jouh ge  He must (has to) do it
Yåtdihng haih kéuih jouh ge  It must have been him (who did it)

Since haih is not used with adjectives (Unit 9), yåtdihng alone indicates inference with an adjective:

Léih yåtdihng hóu guih  You must be tired
Léih go léui yåtdihng hóu lèk ge  Your daughter must be pretty smart

yìnggói can mean ‘should’ in the sense of either obligation or probability:

Léih yìnggói jéunsìh fàan gúng  You should get to work on time

Léih fahn láihmaht yìnggói jéunsìh dou  Your present should arrive on time (I expect)

Kéuih gàmyaht yìnggoi fàan làih ge  He should be back today (I predict, and/or he is obliged to do so)

Finally, note that the meanings of possibility and ability are often more naturally expressed by dák following the verb, rather than by hóyíh ‘can’:

Léihdeih jáu dák la  (or Léihdeih hóyíh jáu la)  (lit. you leave can already)
You can leave now

Tìuh yú sihk dák la  (or Tìuh yú hóyíh sihk la)  (lit. the fish eat can already)
The fish can be eaten

Similarly, verb+particle combinations with mìh (see Unit 17) are often used to express the negative counterparts meaning ‘cannot’ in preference to mìh hóyíh:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chín bồng mh dóu léih (lit. money help not succeed you)</th>
<th>or</th>
<th>Chín mh hóyih bồng léih (lit. money not can help you)</th>
<th>Money can’t help you</th>
<th>Money can’t help you</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh wán mh dóu kéuih (lit. I find not succeed her)</td>
<td>(not *Ngóh mh hóyih wán dóu kéuih)</td>
<td>I can’t find her</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a subtle difference between…mh dóu, meaning inability to do something, and mh…dák, meaning that something is not allowed or not possible due to external circumstances:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ngóh bông mh dóu léih</th>
<th>I can’t help you (because I lack the ability)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh mh bông dák léih</td>
<td>I can’t help you (because I’m not allowed to, I have no time, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consequently, inability to perceive something is expressed with…mh dóu:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ngóh gám+yàht séung-fung, màhn mh dóu yéh</th>
<th>I have a cold today, (so I) can’t smell anything</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh lám mh dóu baahnfaat</td>
<td>I can’t think of a solution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See also Unit 17 on verbs of perception.

**Exercise 20.1**

Translate the following using a modal auxiliary:

1. I need to go home (faan ukkéi)
2. She knows how to drive (ja che)
3. I’m going to apologize (douh-hip)
4. My friend will take you there (daai léih heui)
5. You can take the train (daap fóche heui)
6. We should arrive on time (jéunsìh dou)
7. You may leave early (jóu jáu)
8. I will return the books (wàahn syu)
9. He knows how to answer the question (daap mahntàiḥ)
10. She should get married (git-fan)
11. She’s willing to reduce the price (gáam ga)
12. We’re willing to compromise (tóhhip)
108 Unit 20

13 They’re not willing to wait any longer (dáng loih dî)
14 My wife doesn’t need to attend the meeting (họi-wúi)
15 We don’t need to worry (dåamsâm)

Exercise 20.2

Make the following statements negative:

1. Ngóh slik kéuih
   I know him

2. Ngóh slik heui gódouh
   I know how to go there

3. Ngóh yiu fan-gaau
   I need to sleep

4. Kéuih yiu faahn
   She wants rice

5. Kéuih wúih fãan ûkkéi
   She will go home

6. Léih háyíh làuh dâi
   You can stay behind

7. Léih háyíh wuhn sâam
   You may change your clothes

8. Ngóhdeih yínggōi yâusîk
   We should rest

9. Kéuih yínggōi máaih láu
   She should buy a flat

10. Kéuih slik tàahn kàhm
    He knows how to play the piano

Exercise 20.3

Express the following situations using a modal verb:

1. You want to date (yeuk) someone

2. Undertake to inform (túngjí) someone on a future occasion

3. Regret that you cannot help (bóng) someone this time

4. You don’t need anything to eat (sihk)

5. Someone should drive more carefully (síusâm dî)

6. Give someone permission to give in their homework late (chîh dî gâau gûngfo)

7. Tell your students they should not be so rude (gam chǒulóuh)

8. You are not willing to pay so much (béi gam dô chîn)

9. You do not know how to get to the post office (heui yâuh-gûk)

10. Your friend would not agree (tûhngyi)

Exercise 20.4

Add a modal adverb to the sentences provided to give the meaning indicated:

Example: Léih yiu jór dî sâńchéng → Léih yâtdihng yiu jór dî sâńchéng You must apply early
1. Ngóh gǎm-lín wúih git-fān I may get married this year
2. Ngóh gǎm-lín wúih git-fān I will definitely get married this year
3. Kéuihdeih hái ükkéi They must be at home
4. Kéuihdeih hái ükkéi They may be at home
5. Ngóh wúih sahpyih dím jǐchīhn faan dou ükkéi I will definitely be home before twelve
6. Ngóh yiu sahpyih dím jǐchīhn faan dou ükkéi I must be home before twelve
7. Fūng seun yiu tǐngyāhgt dou ge The letter must arrive tomorrow
8. Fūng seun haih kǎhmyāhgt dou ge It must have arrived yesterday
9. Go leuhtsī yiu hóu lēk The lawyer must be (needs to be) good
10. Go leuhtsī hóu lēk The lawyer must be good (it seems)

**Exercise 20.5**

Give alternatives to the following sentences using dāk (see Unit 17) or māh dóu:

Example: Léih hóyíh tái You can take a look → Léih tái dāk

1. Ngóh gǎm-máahn hóyíh pǔih léih I can keep you company tonight
2. Ngóhdeih mā hóyíh yahp heui We can’t go in
3. Léih yīhgā hóyíh jáu You can leave now
4. Hōhksāang mā hóyíh gòng daaih wah Students may not tell lies
5. Hóyíh sīhk la We can eat (now)
6. Ngóh gāmyaht mā hóyíh heui I can’t go today
7. Ngóh mā hóyíh sīhk tǐhm'bān I can’t eat dessert
8. Ngóh mā hóyíh daap léih I can’t answer you
9. Jēung gěipū mā hóyíh gōi The air ticket cannot be changed
10. Nǐdouh mā hóyíh těng Daaihluhk dîhntōih Here we cannot hear mainland radio programmes
UNIT TWENTY-ONE
Passives

Cantonese passives are signalled by a béi phrase similar to the English by phrase. The béi phrase (béi+a noun phrase indicating the agent of the action) occurs before the verb:

Di syutgōu béi dī sailouhjái sihk-jó  
(lit. the ice cream by the children eaten)  
The ice cream was eaten by the children

Bún syū béi go hohksāang je-jó  
(lit. the book by a student borrowed)  
The book was borrowed by a student

Ngóh go jái béi sīnsāang faht-gwo  
(lit my son by teacher punished)  
My son has been punished by the teacher

The noun phrase denoting the agent of the action is obligatory in spoken Cantonese, in contrast to English and Mandarin which allow agentless passives. When the identity of the agent is unknown or left unspecified, the word yàhn ‘person’ or yéh ‘thing’ is used generically:

Ngóh go ngànhbāu béi yàhn tāu-jó  
(lit. my wallet by person stolen)  
My wallet was stolen

Kéuih sèhngyaht béi yàhn ngāak  
(lit. he often by person cheated)  
He often gets cheated

Ngóh yauh béi yéh ngáauh chān  
(lit. I again by something bitten)  
I’ve been bitten again
Note the contrast with the English translations in which the agent is not mentioned at all.

A peculiarity of Cantonese passives is that a passive verb can still take a direct object. This applies especially to those verbs introduced in Unit 16 which take two objects, such as tau ‘steal’, faht ‘fine’ and mahn ‘ask’:

Kéuih béi yàhn tāu-jó go ngāhnbāau  
She had her purse stolen

Ngóh béi yàhn faht-jó hóu dō chín  
I was fined a lot of money

Ngóh m̄h séung béi yàhn mahn gain dō yéh  
I don’t want to be asked so much

This possibility gives rise to alternative passive forms for the same idea:

a Ngóh go chēpàaih béi yàhn lō-jó  
My licence has been taken away
b Ngóh béi yàhn lō-jó go chēpàaih  
I’ve had my licence taken away
a Kéuih ga chē béi yàhn johng-gwo  
Her car has been dented
b Kéuih béi yàhn johng-gwo ga chē  
She’s had her car dented

The first version provides an objective statement of events, while the second focuses on the effect on the person suffering the misfortune.

**Passive meaning without béi**

There are a number of ways in which Cantonese effectively avoids passives, involving constructions which appear to be passive in meaning but lack the béi phrase:

Gāan fóng yàuh-jó la  
(lit. the room painted)  
The room has been painted

Ni gihn sāam jeuk-gwo yāt chi  
(lit. this blouse worn once)  
This blouse has been worn once

Ga gēi juhng jíng-gán  
(lit. the machine still mending)  
The machine is still being mended
These cases may be seen as instances of topicalization—making the object the topic of the sentence by placing it first, as described in the next unit. Typically the verb has an aspect marker as in the above examples, or a verbal particle indicating the result of the action (see Unit 17):

**Jek gáu wán fāan la**
*(lit. the dog found back)*
The dog has been found again

**Yàuhhei wáan yùhn la**
*(lit. game played finish)*
The game is finished

**Tìuh yú jìng hóu la**
*(lit. the fish steamed complete)*
The fish is done (having been steamed)

This pattern also commonly occurs with an auxiliary (see Unit 20):

**Di cháaugā yìnggōi faht ge**
*(lit. those speculators should punish)*
Those speculators should be punished

**Ngóh go léui sèhngyaht yiu póuh**
*(lit. my daughter always wants carrying)*
My daughter always wants to be carried

**Tìuh fu sái-msái góí a?**
*(lit. the trousers need to alter or not)*
Do the trousers need to be altered?

In such sentences a subject could be inserted:

**Tìuh fu (ngóh) sái-msái góí a?**
*(lit. the trousers (I) need to alter or not)*
Do (I) need to alter the trousers?

**Ní gāan ük (ngóhdeih) yìnggōi jōngsāu**
*(lit. this house (we) should redecorate)*
(We) should redecorate this house

**Ní dī yùhnjāk (yàhn-yàhn) yiu gei-jyuh**
*(lit. these principles (everyone) need remember)*
(Everyone) needs to remember these principles
For the most part, however, the subject remains implicit and is understood as ‘one’ or ‘people’ in general.

**Exercise 21.1**

Turn the following active sentences into their passive counterparts using béi:

1. Ga chē jō-jyuh ngōhdeih (The car is blocking us)
2. Gíngchaat jūk-jō kéuihdeih (The police have caught them)
3. Dī sailouhjái gāau lyuhn-jō gāan fōng (The children have made a mess of the room)
4. Nī go hohksäang yēhng-jō gó go daaih jēung (The student has won that grand prize)
5. Kēuih je-jō ngōh go sáudóí (She has borrowed my handbag)
6. Dī chē sēng chōuh séng-jō ngōh (The noise of the cars has awakened me)
7. Kēuih go làahm-pāhngyáuh máaih-jō gāan ūk (Her boyfriend has bought the house)
8. Kēuihdeih jíng waaih-jō go dīhnlóuh (They have broken the computer)
9. Ngōh yuhng-jō dī chīn (I have used the money)
10. Kēuihdeih sīhk-jō dī jyūgwūlk (They have eaten the chocolate)
11. Kēuih dá làahm-jō jek būi (He has broken the glass)
12. Ngōh tái-gwo fūng seun (I have read the letter)
13. Kēuih hōi-gwo go seunsēung (He has opened the mailbox)
14. Kēuih jíng-gān ga chē (He is mending the car)
15. Kēuihdeih māaih-jō fūk wā (They have sold the picture)

**Exercise 21.2**

Turn the following sentences into passive ones by either a béi+yāhn phrase or a béi+yēh phrase (note yāuh yāhn meaning ‘somebody’: see Unit 6). In some cases there may be two alternative versions:

Example: Yáuh yāhn chéung-jō ngōh go léuih-pāhngyáuh Someone stole my girlfriend from me → Ngōh go léuih-pāhngyáuh béi yāhn chéung-jō or Ngōh béi yāhn chéung-jō go léuih-pāhngyáuh

1. Yáuh yāhn lō-jō ngōh go sāubfu (Someone took my watch)
2. Yáuh yāhn hōi-jō douh mūhn (Someone opened the door)
3 Yáuh yáhn sīk-jó láahngheigei Someone turned off the air conditioning
4 Yáuh yáhn ngāak-jó kéuih dī chín Someone cheated him out of his money
5 Yáuh yáhn máaih-jó dī syū Someone bought the books
6 Yáuh yéh ngáauh dóu ngóh jek sáu Something has bitten my hand
7 Yáuh dī yéh fāahn dóu kéuih Something has troubled him
8 Yáuh dī yéh yínghéung dóu kéuih ge sāmchihng Something has affected her mood

† Exercise 21.3

Render the passive sentences below with non-passive (topicalized) alternatives, adding an aspect marker or auxiliary where appropriate:

Example: The tuition has been paid (béi) → Hohkfai béi-jó la

1 This room (gāan fóng) has been booked (dehng)
2 The house (gāan ūk) is being built (héi)
3 The film (tou hei) should be seen (táí)
4 The book (bún syu) has been published (chēutbáan)
5 The shirt (gihn sāam) doesn’t need to be ironed (tong)
6 Your plan (go gaiwaahk) is being considered (háauleuih)
7 The car (ga chē) has been checked (yihm) before
8 The picture (fūk séung) has been taken (yíng) already
9 The light (jáan dāng) has been turned off (sīk)
10 The child (go sailouhjái) always wants to be carried (póuh)
UNIT TWENTY-TWO

Word order and topicalization

For the most part, word order in Cantonese may be said to follow the pattern subject—verb—object, much as in English:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh</td>
<td>júngyi</td>
<td>kéuih</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngóh sailóu</td>
<td>máaih-jó</td>
<td>gāan ūk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I like him/her
My brother has bought a house

It would be more accurate, however, to say that while Cantonese can be treated in this way—this order normally works—departures from it play an important role in the language. In particular, the sentence need not begin with the subject. Indeed, the object of the verb often comes first if it represents what the sentence is felt to be about:

Nī go yàhn ngóh gin-gwo
(lit. this person I have seen)
I’ve seen this person before

Póutūng-wá ngóh sik sú-sú
(lit. Putonghua I know a little)
I know a little Putonghua

Fahn boujį léih báai hái b índouh a?
(lit. the newspaper you put where)
Where did you put the newspaper?

This pattern is known as topicalization—making something other than the subject the ‘topic’ of the sentence—and while also possible in English, its use is much more widespread in Cantonese. In English it is used mostly for contrasting two things, explicitly or implicitly, and this also occurs in Cantonese:
Pìhnggwó ngóh jüngyi sihk
Apples I like to eat (but not bananas)

Chín ngóh hóyǐh běi léih, sìhgaan jauh m̀h hóyǐh laak
Money I can give you, but not time

Deihtit ngóh chóh-gwo, dihnch̄ īh meih (chóh-gwo)
(lit. underground I’ve taken, tram then not yet)
I’ve been on the underground, but not the tram

Bākging choi ngóhdeih sihk-gwo, Chíuhjāu choi jauh meih (sihk-gwo)
(lit. Beijing food we have eaten before, Chiu Chow food then not yet)
We’ve eaten Peking food but not Chiu Chow

Note some characteristic features of sentences of this kind:
(i) the adverb jauh is often added after the second topic to make the contrast more explicit;
(ii) the predicate can be omitted in the second clause;
(iii) in many cases the most natural English translation does not put the object first; this illustrates how the Cantonese syntax ‘prefers’ the topicalized version.

**Topic without subject**

Making the object the topic usually results in the word order: object—subject—verb, as in the above examples. Remembering that the subject can be omitted, however (see Unit 4), we are often left with merely object—verb:

Sāangyaht daahn-gǒu sihk-jó la
(lit. birthday cake eaten already)
We’ve eaten the birthday cake

Dī hēungbān yām saai la
(lit. the champagne drunk all)
The champagne is all gone

Gihn sāam tong-jó meih a?
(lit. the shirt ironed or not yet)
Has the shirt been ironed?

Such a pattern often appears like a passive sentence, and may be so translated (see Unit 21):
Sān gēichèuhng juhng héi-gán
(lit. new airport still building)
They’re still building the new airport
(or: The new airport is still being built)

Ga chē hái chóng douh jíng-gán
(lit. the car at the garage there repairing)
They’re repairing the car at the garage
(or: The car is being repaired at the garage)

Hanging topics

A less familiar, but characteristically Chinese form of topicalization occurs when the topic is neither the subject nor the object of the verb, but something more loosely related to the content of the sentence. We may distinguish several types of ‘hanging topics’ of this kind:

(i) The topic sets a location in time or space:

Hēunggóng jeui gwai haih jōu uk
(lit. Hong Kong most expensive is rent house)
In Hong Kong the biggest expense is rent

Hahtīn ngóh jünɡyi yàuh-séui
(In) summer, I like swimming

Seuhnghói ngóh yáuh pâhngyáuh, Bākgīng jauh móuh
I have some friends in Shanghai, but not in Beijing

(ii) The topic sets up a whole, of which an element later in the sentence represents a part:

Gam dō geijé jeui lēk haih kéuih
(lit. so many reporters most smart is him)
Of all the reporters he’s the brightest

NĪ go daahn-gōu kéuih sihk-jó yāt bun
(lit. this cake he’s eaten one half)
He's eaten half of this cake

Sahp go hohksāang yáuh gáu go hōyīh yahp daaihhohk
(lit. ten students have nine can enter university)
Nine out of ten students can enter university
(iii) The topic states a general category of which the subject or object represents a particular type:

Síusyut ngóh tái Júngmán faai dī
(As for) novels, I read Chinese ones faster

Bējáu léih hóyīh yám Chīngdōu
(For) beer, you can drink Tsingtao

Gwóngdūng gō, ngóh jùngyi těng Wòhng Fēi
As far as Cantonese songs are concerned, I like to listen to Faye Wong

Exercise 22.1

Change the word order to make the object the topic of the sentence:

Example: Ngóh meih sihk-gwo yùh-chi I’ve never eaten shark’s fin
→ Yùh-chi ngóh meih sihk-gwo

1 Ngóh máaih-jó gó bún syū I bought that book
2 Kéuih hóu júngyi sihk syutgōu She likes to eat ice cream
3 Ngóh nǐh sīk heui Wohnggok I don’t know the way to Mongkok
4 Ngóhdeih táí-gwo nǐ tou hei We’ve seen this film
5 Kéuih sīk góng Chiuhjāuwá She knows how to speak Chiuchow dialect
6 Léih těng-gwo nǐ sáu gō meih a? Have you heard this song before?
7 Léih yáuh-móuh sāam baak mān a? Have you got 300 dollars?
8 Kéuih heui-gwo Hóiyèuhng Gūngyún She has been to the Ocean Park
9 Ngóh jeui júngyi Sīubōng ge yāmngōhk I like Chopin’s music best
10 Ngóh hóu tūngyì léih ge táifaat I quite agree with your view

Exercise 22.2

Add a clause using jauh to contrast with the first (for negation in the second clause, see Unit 14):

Example: Fūng seun sé yùhn la, bún syū jauh meih The letter’s finished, the book is not
1. A-Ann ngóh gin-gwo, A-May ____
   Ann I’ve met, May I haven’t

2. Nǐ gihn sääm sái-jó, gó gihn ____
   This dress has been washed, that one…

3. Wóonggok hóu fōngbihn, Sāigung ____
   Mongkok is convenient, Sai Kung…

4. Nǐ tou hei hóu chèuhng, gó tou ____
   This film is pretty long, that one…

5. Dihnsih ngóh yahtyaht dòu táí, dihnyíng ____
   Television I watch every day, films…

6. Kéuih mùihmúi ngóh sīk, kéuih sailóu ____
   Her sister I know, her brother…

7. Oujàu ngóh heui-gwo, Méihgwok ____
   Australia I’ve been to, America…

8. Léih ge táihyíh ngóh jipsauh, kéuih ge ____
   Your suggestion I accept, his…

9. Yàuh-séui ngóh hohk-gwo, móhngkàuh ____
   Swimming I’ve learnt, tennis…

10. Láuhhâhng yâmngohk ngóh jûngyi, gûdín yâmngohk ____
    Pop music I like, classical music…

**Exercise 22.3**

Express your opinion or experience of the following topics, beginning the sentence with the phrase provided:

Example: Hêunggóng Dóu…(Hong Kong Island): Hêunggóng Dóu ngóh m’h sîk louh I don’t know my way around Hong Kong Island

1. Faai chāan (fast food)…
2. Syúga (in the summer holidays)…
3. Sailouhjái (children)…
4. Gam dò yeuhsng dîmsâm (of all the kinds of dim sum)…
5. Sâutâih dihnwá (mobile phones)…
6. Sääm tîuh tâai (of the three ties)…
7. Yahtmán (Japanese)…
8. Páaucho (sports cars)…
9. Jêunggwok yâmngohk (Chinese music)…
10. Git-fân (marriage, getting married)…
UNIT TWENTY-THREE

Yes/no questions

To ask a question to which the answer is ‘yes’ or ‘no’, Cantonese in effect asks ‘verb-not-verb?’ This is rather like asking ‘Is X the case or not?’ without the ‘or’ being expressed:

Kéuihdeih làih-mh-lài a?
(lit. they coming (or) not coming)
Are they coming?

Léih seun-mh-seun a?
Do you believe it?

Léih dàng-mh-dàng kéuih a?
Will you wait for her?

The same pattern applies to adjectives:

Ga chê gwai-mh-gwai a?  Is the car expensive?
Dî hàhngléi chúhng-mh-chúng a?  Is the luggage heavy?
Léih gâan fóng daaih-mh-daaih a?  Is your room big?

With auxiliaries (see Unit 20), the auxiliary is repeated before the verb:

Gâmyaht wúih-mh-wúih lohk yúh a?
(lit. today will (or) will not fall rain)
Will it rain today?

Léih sfk-mh-sfk góng Yahtmán a?
Can you speak Japanese?

Léih yiu-mh-yiu heui sái-sáu-gâan a?
Do you want to go the bathroom?
Applying this pattern to the verb haih ‘to be’ we have haih-mhaih ‘is it the case’, a form which is especially useful in checking information:

Léih haih-mhaih sing Tàahm ga?   Is your surname Tam?
Ngóhdeih haih-mhaih gāmyaht heui a? Is it today we are going?

Some points to notice:

(i) The particle a is usually added: this is felt to make the question more polite, less of an imposition on the listener (see Unit 25).

(ii) If the verb, adjective or auxiliary being questioned has more than one syllable, only the first syllable is repeated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>jünstyi</th>
<th>like</th>
<th>Léihdeih jünst-mh-jünstyi Hëunggóng a?</th>
<th>Do you like Hong Kong?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sâncëng</td>
<td>apply</td>
<td>Léih sànn-mh-sâncëng ni fahn gëng a?</td>
<td>Will you apply for this job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hëisäm</td>
<td>happy</td>
<td>Léih gëmyaht höi-mh-hëisäm a?</td>
<td>Are you happy today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chëungmihng</td>
<td>smart</td>
<td>Këuih chëung-mh-chëungmihng a?</td>
<td>Is he smart?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>höyïh</td>
<td>can</td>
<td>Ngóh hö-mh-höyïh chóh a?</td>
<td>Can I sit down?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yënggöi</td>
<td>should</td>
<td>Ngóh yëng-mh-yënggöi douhip a?</td>
<td>Should I apologize?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exceptional verbs**

Two common verbs have special negative forms, which also need to be used in questions. Since the negative form of yáuh is móuh (Unit 6) the question form is not *yáuh-mh-yáuh* but yáuh-móuh:

Léih yáuh-móuh sailouhjái a?   Do you have children?
Ngóhdeih yáuh-móuh sìhgäan a? Do we have time?

We also use yáuh-móuh to ask a question about a past event:

Léih yáuh-móuh heui máiäh yëh a? Did you go shopping?
Kàhmyaht yáuh-móuh lohk yúh a? Did it rain yesterday?

Similarly, given that the negative counterpart of yiîu meaning ‘need’ is msái (Unit 20), the corresponding question form is sái-msái:
A: **Léih sái-msái tái yīsāng a?**
B: **Yiu a** (not *sái a)*

A: **Ngóh sái-msái bŏng-sāu a?**
B: **Msái la, Ṡgōi**

**Do you need to see a doctor?**

**Yes**

**Do I need to help?**

**No, thank you**

---

**Rephrasing questions**

The standard reply to questions of this kind is to repeat the whole verb or adjective used in the question, adding the negative word **mīh** for a negative answer:

A: **Léih jūng-mīh-jungyi ndōuh a?**

B: **Jūngyi a**

A: **Léih heui-mīh-heui Lēuhndēun a?**

B: **Mēh heui la**

---

**Questions with mēih**

Another important question form uses **mēih** ‘not yet’ which when added to a statement makes a question:

- **Léih sīhk bāau mēih a?** Have you eaten enough?
- **Ngóhdeih wāan yūhn mēih a?** Have we finished playing yet?

This form is used to ask whether an action has taken place or not, with completion signalled by verbal particles like **bāau** and **yūhn** above (see Unit 17) or by the aspect markers **jó** and **gwo** (Unit 18):

- **Kēuih git-jó-fān mēih a?** Is he married?
- **Kēuih git-gwo-fān mēih a?** Has he ever been married?
- **Léih gāau-jó séui mēih a?** Have you paid your taxes yet?
- **Léih gāau-gwo séui mēih a?** Have you ever paid taxes?

The standard responses pick up the relevant part of the question as follows: Yes—repeat the verb and aspect marker, often adding the particle **la**:

A: **Léih sīk-jó dāng mēih a?** Have you turned off the lights?
B: **Sīk-jó la**

**Yes**
A: Léih heui-gwo Maahn-gûk meih a? Have you ever been to Bangkok?
B: Heui-gwo la Yes, I have

No—repeat meih, typically adding the particle a to make the negative response less abrupt:

A: Kéuih sîng-jó-jîk meih a? Has she got promoted?
B: Meih a No, not yet
A: Léih si-gwo waaht-syut meih a? Have you ever tried skiing?
B: Meih a No, I haven’t

Exercise 23.1

Form yes/no questions based on the following statements:

1 Ngóhdeih tîngyaht heui hâahng-sâan We’re going hiking tomorrow
2 Héunnggông yîhgâ hóu yiht It’s hot in Hong Kong now
3 Kéuih gûngsî yáuh mahntâih His company has problems
4 A-John yîhgîng fâan-jó làih John is back (has returned) already
5 Léih yiu làuh häidouh a You need to stay here
6 Kéuihdeih bûn-jó ūk They’ve moved house
7 Taaigwok léihdeih heui-gwo You’ve been to Thailand before
8 Gâmyaht haih gakèih lèihge Today is a holiday
9 Kéuih haih gáu yuht chêutsai ge She was born in September
10 Léih ūkkéi hóu yûhn ge Your home is a long way away

Exercise 23.2

Add an auxiliary to form a question using wúih, yînggôi, hóyîh, yiu/msái, sı̀k:

1 Léihdeih _____ yîhmàhn a? Are you going to emigrate?
2 Tîngyaht _____ fâan-gûng a? Do we need to go to work tomorrow?
3 Léih _____ jà-chê a? Do you know how to drive?
4 Ngóhdeih _____ chîh dî jáu a? Could we leave a bit later?
5 Léih _____ bông ngóhdeih a? Would you help us?
6 Léih _____ pûih léih ūkkéi-yàhn a? Will you stay with your family?
7 Kéuih ____ je chín gāau jōu a?  Does she need to borrow money to pay her rent?

8 Kéuihdeih ____ jóu dī git-fān le?  Maybe they should get married sooner?

9 Léih ____ hingjūk sāangyaht a?  Will you have a birthday celebration?

10 Ngóh ____ gām yéung jouh a?  Should I act this way?

**Exercise 23.3**

Answer the following questions, alternating positive and negative answers:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Léih ūkkéi yáuh-móuh dihnlóuh a?  Do you have a computer at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kéuih yáuh-móuh bóuhím a?  Does he have insurance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nī go haih-mhaih lóubáan a?  Is this the boss?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Haih-mhaih léih sé ge?  Did you write this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Léihdeih wúih-mīh-wūih git-fān a?  Will you get married?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Léih háau-jó sīh meih a?  Have you had your exams yet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Léih heui-gwo Seuhnghói meih a?  Have you been to Shanghai?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kéuih fan-jó meih a?  Has she gone to sleep yet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Léih gaau yūhn syū meih a?  Have you finished teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ga chē johng-gwo meih a?  Has the car been in an accident?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wh-questions involve the ‘wh-words’ *who, what, where,* and so on. Their Cantonese equivalents are mostly based on the interrogative forms *бин, géi* and *dím:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cantonese</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>бин…</td>
<td>which?</td>
<td>how…?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>дим (yéung)</td>
<td>how?</td>
<td>mátyéh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bīngo</td>
<td>who?</td>
<td>géisih</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dímgaai</td>
<td>why?</td>
<td>jouh mátyéh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bǐndouh</td>
<td>where?</td>
<td>géi dō</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Syntax of questions**

Instead of coming at the beginning of the question as in English, the Cantonese question words come wherever the corresponding word or phrase would come in a plain statement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ngóh tàahn kàhm</em></td>
<td>* ingin dóu a?* (lit. I play the piano)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play the piano</td>
<td>Who plays the piano?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ngóh gin dóu Peter</em></td>
<td><em>Léih gin dóu ingin a?</em> (lit. I see Peter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(lit. I see Peter)</td>
<td>(lit. you see who) Who did you see?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I saw Peter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ngóh sihk mihn</em></td>
<td><em>Léih sihk mátyéh a?</em> (lit. I eat noodles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(lit. I eat noodles)</td>
<td>(lit. you eat what) What are you eating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m eating noodles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ngóh heui Yīnggwok</em></td>
<td><em>Léih heui bǐndouh a?</em> (lit. I go England)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(lit. I go England)</td>
<td>(lit. you go where) Where are you going?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m going to England</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similarly, ‘how’ and ‘why’ usually come between the subject of the sentence and the verb, like the corresponding phrase in a statement:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ngóhdeih daap bäsí heui gēichèuhng} & \quad \text{Ngóhdeih dím yéung heui gēichèuhng a?} \\
\text{(lit. we take bus go airport)} & \quad \text{(lit. we how go airport)} \\
\text{We go to the airport by bus} & \quad \text{How do we get to the airport?}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ngóh yänwái héui gam sëungsäm} & \quad \text{Léih dímáai gam sëungsäm a?} \\
\text{(lit. I because (of) him so sad)} & \quad \text{(lit. you how come so sad)} \\
\text{I’m so sad because of him} & \quad \text{Why are you so sad?}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Kéuih wái-jó ngóh’híng yíu fahn günst} & \quad \text{Kéuih dímáai’mh yíu fahn günst a?} \\
\text{(lit. he on account of me not take the job)} & \quad \text{(lit. he how come not take the job)} \\
\text{He turned down the job for my sake} & \quad \text{Why did he turn down the job?}
\end{align*}
\]

Alternatively, dímgáai ‘why’ can also begin the question:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Dímgáai léih gam sëungsäm a?} & \quad \text{Why are you so sad?} \\
\text{Dímgáai kéuih’híng láih hói múhn gé?} & \quad \text{Why doesn’t he open the door?}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jouh mátyéh (lit. ‘do what?’) is an alternative expression for ‘why’ questions:} \\
\text{Kéuih jouh mátyéh gam lâu a?} & \quad \text{Why is she so angry?} \\
\text{(lit. she do what so angry)} & \\
\text{Léih jouh mátyéh kéih háidouh a?} & \quad \text{What are you standing there for?} \\
\text{(lit. you do what stand here)} & \\
\text{Jouh mátyéh usually asks the purpose behind someone’s doing something, while dímgáai (lit. ‘how to explain?’) asks the reason for it.}
\end{align*}
\]
Questions and politeness

Note that the sentence particle a is usually added at the end, as in other types of question (Unit 23). Without it, the question would sound abrupt and even impolite: for example, if you are asking why someone is doing something, which already represents something of an intrusion. A way to make such a question more polite is to add Chéng mahn ‘May I ask’ as well as a:

Chéng mahn yìhgá géi dúm a?  May I ask what time it is?
Chéng mahn léih gwai sing a?  May I ask what your surname is?

This formula is especially appropriate for asking questions of strangers.

Interrogative phrases

bǐn ‘which’ combines with the classifier appropriate to the noun concerned (see Unit 8); the noun itself can either be included or be understood:

Léih jūngyi bǐn fūk (wá) a?  Which (picture) do you like?
Ngóhdeih máaih bǐn tiuh (yú) a?  Which (fish) shall we buy?
Léih go léui duhk bǐn gāan  Which (school) does your daughter go to?
(hohkhaauh) a?

géi ‘how (many)’ combines with adverbs and adjectives to form question phrases such as géi loih ‘how long’ and géi dō ‘how many/how much’:

Léih làih-jó Hēunggóng géi loih a?  How long have you been in Hong Kong?
Léih tiuh fu géi chèuhng a?  How long are your trousers?
Ngóh túhng léih góng-gwo géi dō chi a?  How many times have I told you?
Daap bāsí yiu géi dō chí a?  How much does it cost to take the bus?

Note also the phrases géi dō seui to ask a person’s age and géi dúm (jūng) to ask the time:

Léih go jái géi dō seui a?  (lit. your son how many years)
How old is your son?
Ngóhdeih géi dím chëut mìnhnáu a?
(lit. we what time go out door)
What time do we leave?

Exercise 24.1

Form questions by substituting a question word for the phrase in bold italic type:

Example: Peter dá dihnwá làih → Bìngó dá dihnwá làih a?

1a Ngóh pàhngyáuh hái heiyún dáng ngóhdeih
My friend is waiting for us at the cinema
b Ngóh pàhngyáuh hái heiyún dáng ngóhdeih
My friend is waiting for us at the cinema
2a Kéuihdeih tíngyáht heui Dòlhéuhndó
They are going to Toronto tomorrow
b Kéuihdeih tíngyáht heui Dòlhéuhndó
They are going to Toronto tomorrow
3a Gàm máahn yáuh yú sihk
There’s fish for dinner tonight
b Gàm máahn yáuh yú sihk
There’s fish for dinner tonight
4a Ngóh daap bāsí heui hohkhaauh
I go to school by bus
b Ngóh daap bāsí heui hohkhaauh
I go to school by bus
5a Kéuih waih-jó dījáiléui yìhmàhn
She emigrated for the children’s sake
b Kéuih waih-jó dījáiléui yìhmàhn
She emigrated for the children’s sake
6a Léih jyuh-jó (hái) Méihgwok sahp lìhn la
You have been living in America for ten years
b Léih jyuh-jó (hái) Méihgwok sahp lìhn la
You have been living in America for ten years

Exercise 24.2

Form questions to elicit information as follows:

1 Ask what your friend is eating (sihk)
2 Ask a friend when he will come back (fāan làih)
3 Ask what time the plane (fēigēi) departs (héifei)
4 Ask where someone lives (jyuh)
5 Ask why there is nobody here (móuh yàhn)
6 Ask a child her age (seui)
7 Ask why your friend is late (chǹh-dou)
8 Ask what time the library (tòhuṣyū-gwún) closes (sāan mùhn)
9 Ask where you can buy a train ticket (fóchē fēi)
10 Ask why the door is closed (sāan-jó)

**Exercise 24.3**

Ask for directions in a polite way by starting with Chéng mahn ‘May I ask’:

1 How to get to Kowloon Tong MTR station (Gáulùhnɡtòhng deihtit jaahm)
2 How to get to the Chek Lap Kok Airport (Chek Lahp Gok Ĝēichèuhng)
3 Where is the restroom (sáisáugān)/toilet (chisó)?
4 How to get to the top floor (déng láu)?
5 How to get to the post office (yàuh-gúk)?
6 Where are the restaurants (châantēng) in this hotel (jáudim)?
7 Which bus goes to the Star Ferry (Tinsīng Máhtàuh)?
8 Which ferry (syūhn) goes to the Discovery Bay (Yūhɡīnɡ-wāan)?
9 Where is the nearest supermarket? (jeui káhn ge chīukāp-sīhchèuhng)?
10 Where is the minibus station (síubā jaahm)?
Sentence particles are one of the most challenging features of Cantonese for learners of the language. Without them, many Cantonese sentences sound incomplete, abrupt, or even impolite. Cantonese has a rich repertoire of particles which serve a variety of communicative functions in different speech contexts, and are probably best learnt from direct experience. Below we introduce some of the most basic and frequently used particles, bearing in mind that there are altogether some thirty particles in use.

Perhaps the most basic particle is a, because of its importance for politeness and in asking questions. It is the most common, and most neutral, of the sentence particles, serving to soften the force of a statement or question.

a is regularly used in questions, as we have seen in Units 23–24:

Léih heui- mh- heui kéuih úkkéi a? Are you going to his house?
Kéuih haih- mhaih jyuh hái Sāthn a? Does she live in Shatin?
Ngóhdeih heui bindouh sihk- faahn a? Where shall we go to eat?

a can also be used in affirmative sentences, for example, to soften the force of a negative response (see Unit 24):

A: Léih haih- mhaih msyūfuhk a? Are you sick?
B: Mhaih a No

mē is used in a particular kind of question, expressing surprise or the unexpected:

Léih mh jī mē? Don’t you know?
Ngóhdeih mh gau mē? Don’t we have enough?

(mē should not be confused with the Mandarin question particle ma, which has no real counterpart in Cantonese.)
Another important particle is ge, which appears in assertions, especially together with haih (see Unit 7):

Kéuih jouh wuhsih ge  She’s a nurse
or:  Kéuih haih jouh wuhsih ge
Ngóh séung bōng kéuih ge  I want to help her
or:  Ngóh haih séung bōng kéuih ge

jé serves to play down the extent or significance of something:

Géi baak mǎn jé  It’s just a few hundred dollars
Hóu yùhnjyih jé  It’s really pretty easy
Ngóhdeih heui wáan háh jé  We’re just going to have some fun

la adds a sense of current relevance to the statement. It is comparable to Mandarin le, although rather less widely used. It occurs especially with the perfective aspect -jó and other particles expressing completion such as hóu and yùhn:

Kéuihdeih lèih-jó-fān hóu loih la  They have been divorced for some time
Kéuih bún jihjyún sé hóu la  Her autobiography is written up
Ngóh táí yùhn go bougou la  I’ve finished (reading) the report

lā and ā are used primarily in imperatives and requests (see Units 26–27):

Léih sìusām dī lā  Do be careful
Mgōi béi būi séui ngóh ā  (Give me) a glass of water, please

Of the two, lā is rather more insistent while ā is more neutral.

Particle combinations

The expressive range of particles is greatly increased by combinations. ge, for example, can be followed by almost any particle:

Gó tou dihnsih-kehk jouh yùhn  ge la  That soap opera has finished now
Kéuih góng-siu ge jé  He’s only joking
Léih yīhwāih ngóh sōh ge mē?  Do you think I’m stupid?

In this way three or more particles can readily occur together:
Léih sìk louh ge la mē?
Do you (really) know the way?

Kéuih haih síuhohk-sāang lèihge je wo!
She’s only a primary school student, you know!

Normally the particles have their usual contributions, so that rather than learning how to use, say, the combination ge la, the learner should concentrate on individual particles and the combinations will tend to look after themselves.

**Contractions:** ge+a=ga

This contraction of two particles already introduced illustrates another way in which particles combine. Take a typical statement ending with ge:

Nî go bougou haih kéuih sé ge
(lit. this report is he wrote)
It was him who wrote this report

Kéuih haih sing Làhm ge
(lit. he is surnamed Lam)
His surname is Lam

Putting these sentences into question form, which requires the particle a, we end up with ga:

Nî go bougou haih-mhaih kéuih sé ga? Was it him who wrote this report?

(Not * Nî go bougou haih-mhaih kéuih sé ge a?)
Kéuih haih-mhaih sing Làhm ga? Is his surname Lam?
(Not * Kéuih haih-mhaih sing Làhm ge a?)

Similarly lèihge, itself a combination of lèih and ge, becomes lèihga in questions through fusion with a:

Nî go ngóh pàhngyáuh lèihge This is my friend
Haih-mhaih léih pàhngyáuh lèihga? Is he your friend?
Exercise 25.1

Add an appropriate particle at the end of each sentence (choose from je, la, la, ge, ga, léihga):

1. Dī mihn síhk dāk ____ The noodles are ready to eat
2. Dī mihnhõesíhk dāk ____ The noodles cannot be eaten (are inedible)
3. Ngóh jihnghaih táī-háh ____ I’m just looking
4. Ngóh sailóu jouh wuihgaísí ____ My younger brother is an accountant
5. Làahmyán haih gám ge ____ Men are like that
6. Ngói léih bông ngóh sé ____ Please write it for me
7. Ngóhdeih yîhging fân-jo-sáu ____ We’ve already split up
8. Ngóh jihnghaih táih-yáhng ____ This is a child prodigy, you see
9. Léih hóisám dī ____ (Try to) be happier!
10. Ngóhdeih yíhg fàih jíó-sáu ____ We’ve already split up

Exercise 25.2

Add an appropriate particle to complete the following questions (choose from a, më, ga, léihga):

1. Léih giu mâyéh méng ____? What is your name?
2. Nî go mâyéh ____? What is this?
3. Dîm wûih gam gwai ____? How come it’s so expensive?
4. Gàmmyaht haih Sîngkèih Yaht ____? Is it really Sunday today?
5. Léih yám-nàh-yâm yéh ____? Will you have a drink?
6. Géidîm gin gaausauh ____? What time do we see the professor?
7. Léihmèsík jà-chê ge ____ ? Don’t you know how to drive?
8. Haih-mhaih léih sé ____? Was it you who wrote it?

Exercise 25.3

Match the sentence with the translation based on the particle:

1. Kéuih séung bông léih ge a He only wants to help you
2. Kéuih séung bông léih më b He wants to help you
3. Kéuih séung bông léih jë c Does he really want to help you?
4. Léih góng bêí kêuíh têng lâ d Are you going to tell her?
5. Léih wûih góng bêí kêuíh têng më e Would you really tell her?
6  Léih wúih-ûnh-wúih góng bèi kéuih tēng a  f  Why don’t you tell her?
7  Kéuihdeih git-jó-fān ge la mē  g  Are they married?
8  Kéuihdeih git-jó-fān ge la  h  What, they’re married?
9  Kéuihdeih git-jó-fān meih a  i  They’re already married
Imperatives are a type of sentence telling someone to act, as in commands and requests. While English drops the subject pronoun in imperatives, Cantonese typically retains it:

**Léih bông-sâu lá**  
(*lit. you help hand*)  
Help me

**Léih joi góng yät chi ä**  
(*lit. you again say chi a*)  
Repeat (that) once more

**Léihdeih gân ngóh làih lá**  
(*lit. you follow me come*)  
Come with me

Note that a particle such as lá or ä is needed to distinguish an imperative from a statement; of the two, lá is more insistent and ä more neutral. The pronoun léih can be dropped, especially in emergencies, but this is less usual than in English and tends to be less polite:

**Dá dihnwá bougíng lá!**  
Call the police!
**Faai dí höi mühn lá!**  
Hurry up and open the door!
**Gau mehng a!**  
Help!

To make a request more polite, mgōi ‘please’ can be added at the beginning or end of the sentence (see Unit 27):

**Mgōi léih góng daaih sēng dī ä?**  
Could you speak louder?
**Léih làih jip ngóh ā, mgōi?**  
Could you come and pick me up, please?
Note the use of **bōng** (**lit.** ‘help’) meaning to do something for another’s benefit, which is often used in imperatives:

**Léih bōng ngóh sé là**  
(*lit.* you help me write)  
Write it for me, will you? (not: *Help me write it*)

**Mgōi léih bōng ngóh hōi dāng ā?**  
(*lit.* please you help me open light)  
Would you turn on the light for me?

Although **bōng** on its own can mean ‘help’, in this construction it means that the addressee is expected to perform the action himself/herself. Adjectives too can be used in imperatives, but call for the use of **dí** (**lit.* ‘a little’):

**Léih síusām dī là!**  
Be careful!

**Mgoi léih síngmuhk dī là!**  
Please try to be smart!

**Léihdeih láahngjihng dī là!**  
Calm down a bit!

Compare the use of **dí** in comparatives (see Unit 12) and similarly with adverbial constructions (see Unit 10):

**Léih hah chi jyú dāk hōu-sihk dī là!**  
(*lit.* you next time cook good-to-eat more)  
Can you cook a bit better next time?

**Léih jāp dāk jeng dī là!**  
(colloquial)  
Try to dress better!

**Mgōi léih gōng dāk maahn dī là!**  
Please speak a bit more slowly!

**Léih faai dī jāp yēh jáu!**  
Hurry up and pack to leave!

**Prohibitions:** **mhōu**

Negative imperatives are marked by **mhōu** ‘don’t’ (**lit.* ‘no good’) between the subject and the verb. Here the pronoun can be freely omitted:

**Mhōu heui là**  
Don’t go

**Léih) mhōu jáu jyu**  
Don’t leave yet

**Léihdeih) mhōu aai-gāau là**  
Don’t argue

Again the pattern is applicable to adjectives too, often with **gam** ‘so’:

**Mhōu gam bēigwān là!**  
Don’t be so pessimistic!
(Léih) mhóu gam sèungsâm lá! Don’t be so sad!
(Léihdeih) mhóu chòuh lá! Don’t be (so) noisy!

Similarly with adverbial constructions:

(Léih) mhóu já dâk gam faai lá! Don’t drive so fast
(Léih) mhóu tō gam loih lá! Don’t delay too long

An alternative marker for negative imperatives is máih, usually used without the pronoun:

Máih chòuh lá! Don’t be (so) noisy!
(Léih) máih jáu jyuh! Don’t go yet!
Máih chèut sèng lá! *(lit. don’t produce (a) sound)*
   Shut up!

As these examples suggest, commands with máih tend to be more abrupt or impatient than those with mhóu, and used when there is a close relationship between the speaker and addressee.

**First person imperatives: let’s…**

A different kind of imperative is the first person plural (‘let’s…’). Here the pronoun ngóhdeih (‘we’) may be retained or dropped:

Ngóhdeih faan heui sîn Let’s go back
Jáu lá! Let’s go!
Yâtchàih sihk lá Let’s eat together

The adverb bâtyûh ‘rather’ is often added here, before or after ngóhdeih:

Bâtyûh ngóhdeih heui wáan lá! Why don’t we go and have some fun!
Ngóhdeih bâtyûh jóu dî jáu à Let’s leave early

Negative counterparts can be formed by adding mhóu before the verb, just as for second-person imperatives:

Ngóhdeih mhóu gam sâm-gâp lá Let’s not be so impatient
Ngóhdeih bâtyûh mhóu góng kéuih lá Let’s not talk about him
Exercise 26.1

Add a particle to the following statements to form imperatives:

1. **Léih sê-seun béi ngóh**  Write to me
2. **Léih faai dî fāan ükkiéi**  Come home quickly
3. **Maaahn-máan hàahng**  Walk slowly
4. **Sîusâm gwo máhlouh**  Cross the street carefully
5. **Jîkhâak bêi chîn**  Pay immediately
6. **Yám dô dî séui**  Drink more water
7. **Jóu dî fong gúng**  Get off work as early as you can
8. **Tâuh ngóh yât piu**  Vote for me
9. **Dâng ngóh yât jahn**  Wait for me a while
10. **Lám chîngchó dî**  Think more clearly

Exercise 26.2

Make negative counterparts of the imperatives given:

Example: **Léih sâan mûhn lâ**  Close the door, will you?  →  **Léih mhóu sâan mûhn lâ**

1. **Léih hîi chûng lâ**  Open the window, will you?
2. **Léih góng lohk heui lâ**  Carry on speaking, will you?
3. **Léih maaith-jó gâan ük lâ**  Sell the house, will you?
4. **Léih sihk yeuh kâ**  Take the medicine, will you?
5. **Léih gôi tâihmuhk lâ**  Change the topic, will you?
6. **Léihdeih gaijuhk góng lâ**  Do carry on talking
7. **Ngôdhêih heui lâ**  Let’s go
8. **Léihdeih faai dî kyutdihng lâ**  Hurry up and decide
9. **Léih bâtyûh jyun gúng lâ**  Why don’t you change your job?
10. **Ngôdhêih bâtyûh bûn uk lâ**  Let’s move house

Exercise 26.3

Use **bông** to make requests out of the following statements:

Example: **só mûhn** lock the door (for me)  →  **léih bông ngóh só mûhn â**

1. **mâaih sung**  buy groceries (for me)
2. **gei seun**  send the mail (for me)
3 yíng séung take a picture (for us)
4 gahm jüng ring the bell (for him)
5 gāau hohkfai pay tuition (for them)
6 jíng čhē fix the car (for us)
7 jouh daahn-gōu make a cake (for her)
8 jyú-faahn cook a meal (for us)
9 dehng gēipiu book an air ticket (for me)
10 wán gūng find a job (for him)

Exercise 26.4

Form imperatives with the adjectives provided:

Example: tell someone to be happy (hōisam): Léih hōisām dī là!

1 ask a friend to be more optimistic (lohk-gwūn)
2 tell a guest not to be so polite (haakhei)
3 encourage a student to be diligent (kāhnlihk)
4 tell a child not to be so greedy (tāam-sām)
5 ask someone to be more civilized (sīmāhn)
6 tell someone not to be so proud (gīu-ngouh)
7 ask someone to speak louder (daaih sēng)
8 ask your friend not to walk (hāahng) so fast (faai)
9 tell a friend not to dress (jeuk) so casually (chèuihbín)
10 ask your spouse not to be so stubborn (ngaahng-géng)
UNIT TWENTY-SEVEN
Requests and thanks

Polite requests

Requests typically use imperative sentences as introduced in Unit 26. To make a request in a polite way, mgōi ‘please’ is used either at the beginning or at the end of the utterance. Note that the particle ǎ or lá is necessary so that the request does not sound abrupt (see Units 25–26):

Mgōi bēi búi yīht chāh ngōh ǎ?  May I have a cup of hot tea, please?
Bēi yāt go sēunfūng ngōh ā, mgōi?  May I have an envelope, please?

Alternatively, mgōi léih is used with the pronoun léih present:

Mgōi léih bēi fahn boujī ngōh ǎ?  May I have a newspaper, please?
Hāahng faai dī lá, mgōi léih  Walk faster, will you

Invitations which are a form of request are initiated by chéng which means ‘invite’:

Chéng yahp làih chōh ā  Come in and have a seat, please
Chéng chōh dāi maahn-māan gōng ā  Sit down and talk slowly, please

Compare also the polite formulation Chéng mahn ‘May I ask’ (Unit 24).

Thanks

Two different expressions mean ‘thank you’: mgōi and dōjeh. These cause some difficulty for the English speaker since the precise distinction between the two is not easily drawn, while mgōi also means ‘please’. mgōi is used as a response to small favours such as opening the window, picking up a book from the floor, serving drinks or food:
A: Ngóh bōng léih ló là Let me carry it for you (*lit.* help you to carry it)

B: Mgŏi Thanks

Note here a common source of misunderstanding: while bōng literally means ‘help’, in a sequence of verbs like the above it generally means to do something *for* someone.

mgŏi saai ‘thank you very much’ is stronger, with the particle saai ‘all’ added for emphatic effect:

A: Yám dō dī tōng ā? Have more soup, please?

B: Hóu ā, mgŏi saai Sure, thanks very much

A: Ngóh bōng léih hōi mūhn lā Let me open the door for you

B: Léih léih dāk hōu haahp sīh, mgŏi saai You came at the right time. Thanks very much

dōjeh is used to thank people for gifts and unexpected favours. Examples include presents and invitations:

A: Sung bēi léih ge This is for you (giving someone a present)

B: Dōjeh Thank you

A: Gāmyaht ngóh chéng sīh-faahng Lunch is on me today

B: Dōjeh saai! Thanks very much!

(Alternatively B can insist on paying: Ngóh chéng lā! Let me pay!)

It also includes what might be considered metaphorical gifts, such as compliments and congratulations:

A: Gūnghēi léih wo! Congratulations!

B: Dōjeh! Oh, thank you

Alternatively, the compliment can be played down in accordance with traditional Chinese modesty:

A: Léih gāmyaht jeuk dāk gam leng gé! *(lit.* you today dress manner so beautiful)

You’re looking great today!

B: Mhaih aak Not really

Thanks of any kind can be replied to with msái (mgŏi/dōjeh) or msái haakhei all of which mean ‘no need’ (see Unit 20):
A: Dŏjeh léih bêí ngóh ge jîchîh  Thank you for your support
B: Msái haakhei  Not at all

Apologies

deui-mjyuh ‘sorry’ is a general apology, appropriate for minor inconveniences such as accidentally running into somebody, but also for major offences.

Deui-mjyuh, ngóh tàuhsín ìmh yînggōi faat pèihhei ge  Sorry, I shouldn’t have got angry just now

deui-mjyuh literally means ‘cannot face’ and can take an object representing the person wronged, which may come after deui-mjyuh or between deui ‘face’ and mjyuh:

Ngóh gokdāk hóu deui-mjyuh ûkkéi-yàhn  I feel I cannot face my family (after what I’ve done)
Ngóh jānhaih deui-mjyuh kéuih  I really feel bad about what I’ve done to him
(or Ngóh jānhaih deui kéuih mjyuh)

mhóuyisi (lit. ‘[I’m] embarrassed’) is appropriate for matters such as misun-derstandings and minor failures to meet expectations:

Mhóuyisi, seuihdouh sâk-chê, sóyîh ngóh chîh dou  I’m sorry, the tunnel was jammed, that’s why I’m late

Mhóuyisi, ngóh làuh-jó fûng seun hái ûkkéi  Sorry, I left the letter at home

mgŏi je-gwo is used to apologize for pushing through a crowd.

Exercise 27.1

Formulate the following requests using mgŏi:

1 Give me a menu (jêung chāanpáai)
2 Speak slower (maahn dî)
3 Say it again (joi…yât chí)
4 Write faster (faai dî)
5 Don’t turn on (hôi) the air conditioning (láahnghei)
6 Close (sāan màaih) the door (douh mùhn)
7 Ask the students to come
8 Call the police (gíngchaat)
9 Don’t waste money (sāai chín)
10 Give me the bill (dāan)

Exercise 27.2

Make the following requests more polite by inserting chéng ‘invite’ at the beginning of the sentence and adding an appropriate particle:

1 Chéng Làuh dāi háu seun Leave a message (as on an answering machine or voicemail)
2 Chéng Gaijuhk góng lohk heui Continue talking again
3 Chéng Dáng ngóh yāt jahn Wait for me a little while
4 Chéng Tungjí ngóhdeih jeui săn sfusìk Inform us of the latest news
5 Chéng Séuńg töih lǐhng jéung Go on the stage to get the award
6 Chéng Lāuhsām tēng syū Listen to the lecture attentively
7 Chéng Gān-jyuh ngóh hàahng Follow me
8 Chéng Gwo làih nǐbihn chóh Come and have a seat over here
9 Chéng Béi jéung géipiū ngóh tái Show me your (air) ticket
10 Chéng Sé dāi léih ge deihjí tūhng dihnwá houhmáh Write down your address and telephone number

Exercise 27.3

Choose mgōi or dōjeh to thank someone for the following:

1 A friend opens the door for you
2 An acquaintance has treated you to dinner at a restaurant
3 A group of colleagues present you with a leaving present
4 A waiter hands you the menu
5 A colleague compliments you on your dress/suit
6 Someone calls you to the phone
7 Someone offers to give you a ride
8 When you’re the seller having sold something to a client, customer
9 Someone you don’t know has helped you with directions to your destination
10 Your boss congratulates you on your performance
Exercise 27.4

Express apologies as appropriate for the following situations:

1. You arrive very late for a formal business meeting
2. You inadvertently step on someone’s toes
3. You forgot to return someone’s call
4. You failed to do something very important as promised
5. You are pushing your way into the lift
6. You sincerely regret what you have done to someone
7. You’re only a few minutes late. Your friends are waiting for you
8. You made a terrible mistake, causing your company to suffer a loss of profit
9. You have missed a deadline, causing some inconvenience
10. You have missed an important appointment
UNIT TWENTY-EIGHT

Numbers, dates and times

Lucky numbers

Our last unit, twenty-eight, falls appropriately enough on a lucky number: two (yih) sounds like ‘easy’ and eight (baat) rhymes with faat meaning ‘make money, prosper’ as in the Chinese New Year greeting Gungheī faat chòih, literally ‘congratulations (and may you) prosper’. By contrast, four (sei) is an unlucky number as it rhymes with séi ‘die’ and is consequently subject to taboo: the Alfa Romeo 164 (yät luhk sei) was perceived to be uncomfortably close to yät louh séi (‘one—road—die’) so that it was renumbered for the Hong Kong market as the 168 (yät luhk baat/yät louh faat ‘one—road—prosper’).

Cardinal numbers

The number system is decimal and highly regular—so much so that it has been claimed to give the Chinese an advantage in mathematical tasks.

| 1 yät | 11 sahp-yät | 21 yih-sahp-yät (yah/yeh-yät) |
| 2 yih | 12 sahp-yih | 22 yih-sahp-yih (yah/yeh-yih, etc.) |
| 3 sāam | 13 sahp-sāam | 23 yih-sahp-sāam |
| 4 sei | 14 sahp-sei | 24 yih-sahp-sei |
| 5 ngh | 15 sahp-ng’h | 25 yih-sahp-ng’h |
| 6 luhk | 16 sahp-luhk | 26 yih-sahp-luhk |
| 7 chāt | 17 sahp-chāt | 27 yih-sahp-chāt |
| 8 baat | 18 sahp-baat | 28 yih-sahp-bāat |
| 9 gáu | 19 sahp-gáu | 29 yih-sahp-gáu |
| 10 sahp | 20 yih-sahp | 30 sāam-sahp |
| 100 yät baak | 1,000,000 yät baak maahn |
| 1,000 yät chīn | 10,000,000 yät chīn maahn |
| 10,000 yät maahn | 100,000,000 yät yīk (as used in the Hong Kong Stock Exchange) |
Note some abbreviations:

- In combinations, **yih-sahp** (20) may become **yah-** or **yeh-**:
  
  - Kéuih jauhlèih yah seui ge la  She’s almost twenty (years old)
  - Yah-sei síusih yihtsin  Twenty-four hour hotline
  - Yeh-ngh män, mgöi  Twenty-five dollars, please

- In numbers from thirty onwards, the word **sahp** ‘ten’ is often reduced to **ah** as in **sà’ah-yât** ‘thirty-one’, and so on.
  
  - Ngóh yáuh gáu’ah-baat go hohksång  I have ninety-eight students
  - Kéuih sèhng sei’ah seui dòu mei git-fân  He’s already forty but still not married

Numbers over a hundred precede the lower numbers as follows:

- 120  yätı baak yih-sahp (or simply: **baak yih**)
- 1,400  yätı chîn sei baahk (chîn sei)
- 15,000  yätı maahn ngh chîn (maahn ngh)

The difficulty comes above 10,000, **yätı maahn**. Above this figure Cantonese speakers count in terms of **maahn**, not **chîn** (1,000):

- 42,000  sei maahn yih chîn
- 360,000  sâamsahp-luhk maahn

Zero is **lihng**. It is used in numbers with zero at the beginning or between digits:

- 0.8  **lihng dîm baat** (lit. nought point eight)
- 306  **sâam baak lihng luhk** (lit. three hundred zero six)

Two: **yih** or **léuhng**?
There are two words meaning ‘two’:

- **yih** is used in counting and quoting numbers, days, etc.:
  
  - yih yuht yih houh  the second of February
  - daih yih chi  the second time (lit. number two time)
  - daih yih doih  the second generation
• léuhng is used, together with the classifier, in referring to a number of items:

| léuhng go yàhn   | two people          |
| léuhng gihn sàam | two shirts          |

In a few instances either yih or léuhng can be used, for example, when the numbers 200, 2,000 and 20,000 are used before a noun:

| yih/léuhng baak mán | two hundred dollars |
| yih/léuhng chën bohng | two thousand pounds |
| yih/léuhng maahn yàhn | twenty thousand people |

**Ordinal Numbers**

Ordinal numbers are formed, also in a highly regular way, by putting daih before the number:

| daih yät          | first             |
| daih yih          | second (idiomatically also means ‘another’) |
| daih sàam saigaai | the third world   |
| daih luhk lìhnghgám | the sixth sense |

**Dates**

Dates are also based on a highly regular system:

• days of the week are numbered one to six from sîngkèih yät (Monday) to sîngkèih luhk (Saturday) with the exception of sîngkèih yaht (Sunday);
• the months are numbered from yät yuht (January) through to sahpyih yuht (December). Note the following pairs which are similar in form but very different in meaning:

| sîngkèih yät | Monday vs. | sîngkèih yaht | Sunday |
| sàam yuht    | March vs.  | sàam go yuht  | three months |
| sahpyät yuht | November vs.| sahpyät go yuht| eleven months |

The order in dates is the reverse of the English, going from the general to the specific, beginning with the year and ending with the day, expressed by the number followed by houh. The formula is thus: X lìhn Y yuht Z houh:
The hours of day are expressed by **dím jūng** ‘o’clock’ or **dím** alone as follows:

**X dím (jung)** e.g. **baat dím (jūng)**
- eight o’clock
- twelve o’clock

**X dím bun** e.g. **léuhng dím bun**
- half past two, 2.30
- half past twelve, 12.30

**X dím Y fān** e.g. **yāt dím sahp fān**
- 1.10
- half past 1.10

To indicate points between the hours, Cantonese speakers colloquially use **jih** (5-minute intervals, or divisions of the clock face):

- 3.05 **sāam dím yāt go jih** (or simply: **sāam dím yāt**)
- 3.10 **sāam dím léuhng go jih** (or: **sāam dím yih**)
- 3.15 **saam dím sāam go jih** (or: **sāam dím sāam**)

For units less than ten minutes, **lihung** ‘zero’ is usually inserted between **dím** and **fān** in the formula **X dím lihung Y fān**:

- 7.04 **chāt dím lihung sei fān**
- 9.08 **gāu dím lihung baat fān**

Seconds are expressed by **míuh** in the form **dím Y fān Z míuh**:

- 1.03.09 **yāt dím sāam fān gāu míuh**
- 8.12.16 **baat dím sahp-yih fān sahp-luhk míuh**

To specify a.m. or p.m., the word for morning, and so on, precedes the time:

- **seuhngjau** morning
- **hahjau** afternoon
- **yehmáahn** evening

- **seuhngjau sahp dím bun** 10.30 a.m.
- **hahjau sei dím jūng** 4.00 p.m.
- **yehmáahn gāu dím** 9.00 p.m.
Notice how the general term precedes the particular, as we saw in the case of dates above. This also applies to addresses, which thus follow the opposite order to English:

**Hĕunggóng Mōsīngléhng Douh ng̓̂hsahp-luhk houh sāam láu B joh**
Flat B, Third floor, 56 Mt Davis Road, Hong Kong

**Gáulùhng Jīmsājéui Gānàhfān Douh sahpbaat houh deihhá**
Ground floor, 18 Carnarvon Road, Tsimshatsui, Kowloon

### Exercise 28.1

Read the following numbers in Cantonese:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>34</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>1,200</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24,302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>818</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>315,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Exercise 28.2

Read the following dates in Cantonese:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>January 1</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>July 4, 1963</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>December 12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>June 30, 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>May 21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>December 31, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>August 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>February 29, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Friday 13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>September 15, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Exercise 28.3

Match the following times:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2.25</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>saphyāt dím sahp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>sāam dím sāam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>gáu dím bun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>chāt dím yihsahp-luhk fān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.45</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>baat dím yāt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>yāt dím yīh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>ng̓̂ h dím baat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exercise 28.4

Practise giving the following information:

1. today’s date (gāmyaht ge yahtkèih)
2. your birthday (sāangyaht)
3. your date of birth (chēut sāng yahtkèih)
4. your telephone number at home (ūkkēi dihnwá) and at work (gūngsī dihnwá)
5. your address (deihjí)

Exercise 28.5

Choose an auspicious registration number for your car and explain why it is a good choice for you.
KEY TO EXERCISES

Unit 1 Consonants

Exercise 1.2 Aspiration: the second of each pair begins with an aspirated consonant.

Exercise 1.3 1 Ñëung 2 Jiuh 3 Gwëan 4 Òìng 5 Sám 6 Jëung 7 Daaih Où 8 Laih Ji Gok 9 Ñëung Gwëan Où 10 Sâaugëiwëan 11 Daaih Gok Jëui 12 Sâm Séui Bóu

Unit 2 Vowels and diphthongs

Exercise 2.1 gân should sound like English ‘gun’, fän like ‘fun’, etc., while gâan, fâan, etc., should rhyme with ‘barn’ without the ‘r’ being sounded.

Unit 3 Tone

Exercise 3.4 1 hauhmûn 2 yàuhtûu 3 bunyê 4 sîuyê 5 Dâkmûn 6 tînpâang 7 sâm jek dip 8 Oumûn 9 yahp-yáu 10 fâyûn

Unit 4 Pronouns

Exercise 4.1 1 Ngóh jyuh hái Gâulûhng 2 Hóu hóisâm gin dòu léih 3 Ngóhdeih sik këuihdeih 4 Lëih haih go hóu yisëng 5 Lëihdeih haih hohksâang 6 Këuih hóu jëungyî yâm-ngohk 7 Ngóh dá-jó-dihnwá bëi lóuhbáan 8 Këuihdeih heuí-gwo Oumûn 9 Këuih geidâk ngóh 10 Këuihdeih hóu gwa-jyuh ngóhdeih
**Exercise 4.2**


**Exercise 4.3**


**Unit 5 Possession: ge**

**Exercise 5.1**


**Exercise 5.2**


**Exercise 5.3**


**Unit 6 Possession and existence: yáuh**

**Exercise 6.1**


**Exercise 6.2**

1. Yáuh a/Móuh a 2. Yáuh a (ngóh yáuh géi go)/Móuh a (yàt go dòu móuh) 3. Yáuh a/Móuh a 4. Yáuh a/Móuh a/Juhng meih yáuh a 5. Yáuh gé, daahnhaïhmh gau/Móuh mât a 6. Yáuh a (heui-gwo)/Móuh a (meih heui-gwo) 7. Yáuh a/móuh a 8. Yáuh a (hóu yáuh hëngcheui)/Móuh a (móuh mât hëngcheui)

Unit 7 Being: haih

Exercise 7.1 1 mhaih a 2 haih a 3 mhaih a 4 haih a 5 mhaih a 6 mhaih a 7 haih a 8 haih a 9 haih a 10 mhaih a 11 haih a 12 haih a

Exercise 7.2 1 haih 2 haih 3 hái 4 hái 5 haih 6 haih 7 hái 8 haih 9 hái 10 haih

Exercise 7.3 1 Haih lóuhbáan góng bói ngóh têng ge 2 Haih ngóh bói bún syü léih ge 3 Kéuih haih gâm jiu jau ge 4 Gihn sàam haih géisih máaih ge 5 Go chëung haih bîngo hói ge? 6 Ngóh haih hái nídouh dâng léih ge 7 Haih këuih taaitái wân dòu ge 8 Kéuih haih hái Taaigwok johng chè ge

Unit 8 Noun Classifiers

Exercise 8.1 1 gân (catty) 2 dâ (dozen) 3 fûng (pound) 5 dyuhn (portion, segment) 6 bûi (glass)/ji (bottle) 7 deui (pair) 8 tou (set)

Exercise 8.2 1 Mgôi léuhng bûi hùhng jâu 2 Mgôi yât dihp cháau mihn 3 Mgôi sàam wûn faahn 4 Mgôi (bêî) dô deui faaijî 5 Mgôi bêî jëun sëui 6 Mgôi bêî yât jëung/go châanpáai ngóh 7 Mgôi léuhng go jâu-bûi 8 Mgôi yât wûh yiht sëui 9 Mgôi yât gihn daahn-gû 10 Mgôi yât bûi gafë

Exercise 8.3 (A) 1b 2d 3e 4c 5a (B) 1b 2d 3e 4a 5c

Exercise 8.4 1c 2a 3e 4b 5d
Unit 9 Adjectives

Exercise 9.1 1 Kéuih hóu leng pretty/hó-oi lovely/lek smart 2 Kéuihdeih hóu yáih naughty/gwáai nice, obedient/chúngmíhng clever 3 Kéuih hóu lég smart/yáuh hohkmahn learned/yáuh-méng famous 4 Kéuih hóu làhnggon capable/káhnlihk diligent/yáuh láihmauh polite 5 Ngóh hóu káhnlihk diligent/yáuh seunsám confident 6 Kéuih hóu lengjái handsome/lengléui pretty/ut tall 7 Ga chóu yáuh-yìhng stylish/taai gwai too expensive 8 hóu làahn-sihk pretty bad/ge hóu-sihk quite good 9 Tínhèi hóu sāp humid/taai yiht too hot 10 Bún sìusyut hóu chèuhng long/ge hóu-tái quite good (to read)

Exercise 9.2 1 hóu sai small/daai big/syūfuhk comfortable ge haakténg 2 hóu pèhng cheap/gwai expensive/dái-sihk good value/ge fuhk comfortahle 3 hóu yúhmjuhng serious/ge mahntàih 4 hóu dàm cute/hó-oi lovely ge gáujái/mà jái/mà sài/mà bù hai/hóu-oi lovely 5 hóu màahn-máan háahng fāan úkkéi 6 hóu dàm taai/gam, gau saai) difficoltà/ge haakténg 7 hóu yáuh-yìhng stylish/taai gwai too expensive 8 hóu làahn-sihk pretty bad/ge hóu-sihk quite good 9 Tínhèi hóu sāp humid/taai yiht too hot 10 Bún sìusyut hóu chèuhng long/ge hóu-tái quite good (to read)

Exercise 9.3 1 Ngóhdeih géi (gau saai) mühnyi 2 Kéuih gam (taai, gau saai) lég 3 Kéuihdeih taai (gam, gau saai) guih 4 Dī sailouhjái gam (géi, gau saai) dàkyi 5 Tou hei gam (taai, gau saai) lohngmaahn 6 Dī tâuhaftai taai (gam, gau saai) dyún 7 Dī gāsi gam (géi, gau saai) pèhng 8 Go gaausauh gam (gau saai) yáuh-méng 9 Go hohksāang taai (gam, gau saai) láahn 10 Dī séung gam (géi, gau saai) leng


Unit 10 Adverbs of manner

Exercise 10.1 1 Kéuihdeih màahn-máan háahng fāan úkkéi 2 Kéuih hóu hngfāhn gām gaaisiuh jihgéi 3 Kéuih hóu daaih-dáam gām mahnh-jó yāt go mahntài 4 Kéuih hóu sūsám gām só-jó douh múhn 5 Ngóh go jái hóu faai gām waak-jó géi fūk wā 6 Kéuih hóu lühlīk gām hohkgan Gwóngdung-wā 7 Dī hohksāang hóu làuhsám gām tēng-gām yín-gōng 8 Dī Héunggōng hohksāang hóu hūngsūng gām yēng-jó bēichoi 9 Yi-ngoih hóu dahtyihn gām faatsāng-jó 10 Ngóh jùngyi hōi-hōi-sāmsām gām hingjuk sāangyaht
Exercise 10.2 1 Léih sé dák hóu hóu 2 Ga feǐgēi fèi dák hóu dái 3 Ngôhdéih fan dák hóu suǐfuhk 4 Kéuihdeih wáan dák hóu hôisâm 5 Kéuih tiu dák hóu yúnh 6 Kéuih yìng-séung yìng dák hóu leng 7 Ngôh yàuh-séui yàuh dák hóu maahn 8 Kéuih cheung-gó cheung dák hóu sai-séng 9 Ngôh jyú-faahn jyú dák hóu faai 10 Ngôh tiu-móuh tiu dák hóu chá

Exercise 10.3 1 hóu síusám gám (carefully) 2 hóu yáuh-loihsing gám (patiently) 3 hóu syùfúk gám (comfortably) 4 jìng-jìng gám (quickly) 5 hóu lào gám (angrily) 6 hóu chéuhng-chéuhng (clearly) 7 hóu daaih sèng gám (loudly) 8 hóu làuhsám gám (happily) 9 hóu hóisâm gám (happily) 10 hóu sèungsám gám (sadly)

Unit 11 Adverbs of time

Exercise 11.1 (Note that the adverb can appear in more than one position.) 1 (Kàhmyaht) ngóh (kàhmyaht) hái Jmsájéui 2 Kéuih ngàam-ngàam dou-jó gèichèuhng/(TàuhsIn) kéuih (tàuhsIn) dou-jó gèichèuhng 3 (Yíhchihnh) Ngôh (yíhchihnh) gin-gwo kéuih 4 (Seuhngchi) kéuihdeih (seuhngchi) jung-jó tâu-jéung 5 (Gójahnshih) ngóhdeih (gójahnshih) juhng sai 6 (Búnlòih) ngóh (búnlòih) jouh wuhsih ge 7 (Hah chi) ngóhdeih (hah chi) wán leíh 8 Kéuih jìkháa hóu lâu 9 (Daih yih sìh/daih sìh) ngóh (daih yih sìh/daih sìh) chéng léih sìhk-faahn 10 (Yíhchihnh) ngóhdeih (yíhchihnh) hái Méihgwok jyuh-gwo

Exercise 11.2 1 Ngôh yàuh go láihbaai dá yàt chi móhngkàu (once a week) 2 Ngôh yaht-yaht heui yáuh-séui (every day) 3 Ngôh máahn-màahn tái dihnsih (every night) 4 Ngôh jìu-jì biojú (every morning) 5 Ngôh yàt go láihbaai sài sàam chi tâuh (three times a week) 6 Ngôh yàt go yuht jìn yàt chi tâuhsaafat (once a month) 7 Ngôh yàt go láihbaai màaih yàt chi sung (once a month) 8 Ngôh yàt linh heui géi chi yìmngohk-wúi (a few times a year) 9 Ngôh yàt go yuht sìhk yàt chi sìytgòu (once a month) 10 Ngôh yàt go láihbaai taam yàt chi chanchikh (once a week)

Exercise 11.3 1 (Ngôh yaht-yaht) dá bun go jìngtâuh géi 2 linh yàt go jìngtâuh Gwóngdung-wá 3 gong sàamsahp fânjung dìhnwà 4 jìu go bun jìngtâuh faahn 5 têng sèhng màahn yâm-ngoìk 6 tâi sèhng yàh syû 7 kíng yàt jahn gài 8 sèhng géi go jìngtâuh móhng 9 chüng sahp fânjung léuhng 10 sê yàt go jìngtâuh yahtgei

Exercise 11.4 1 géi go jìngtâuh (a few hours) 2 sèhng màahn (a whole
evening) 3 yăt go hah-jau (one afternoon) 4 sèhng yaht (a whole day) 5 yăt go láihbaai (one week) 6 gēi yaht (a few days) 7 sèhng jiu (a whole morning) 8 gēi máahn (a few evenings) 9 sèhng go yuht (a whole month) 10 gēi lihn (a few years)

Unit 12 Comparison

Exercise 12.1 1 Dī: Gāmyaht lyúhn dī 2 Dī: Kēuih yihgā hōisām dī 3 Gwo: Ngōh go páhngyāuh daaih gwo ngōh 4 Gwo: Kēuih gōu gwo yīhchiihn hòu dō 5 Dī: Gām chi maahn dī 6 Gwo: Nī gāan chāantēng/jáulàuh pèhng gwo gō gāan 7 Gwo: Ngōh jūngyi tiu-móuh dō gwo cheung-gō 8 Dī: Lēih ge lámfat hòu dī

Exercise 12.2 1 Gāmyaht dung (cold) gwo kāhmyaht (well-behaved) gwo làahmjái 3 Sèutsāam gwai (expensive) gwo lēhngtāai 4 Dōlēuhndō (juhng) dung (cold) gwo Lēuhndēun 5 Jūngmán làahn (difficult) gwo Yīngmán 6 Yāuh-sēui syūfuhk (comfortable) gwo pāauh-bouh 7 Gwōngdūng choi chēutmēng (famous) gwo Chīuhjāu choi 8 Jouh sāangyi sānfū (hard) gwo gaau-suū

Exercise 12.3 1 Gām-lín dung gwo gauh-lín hòu dō 2 Gāmyaht lyúhn hòu dō 3 Lēih dī tāuhfaat yihgā dyún siū-siu 4 Hōunggōng gwai gwo nǐdouh gēi pūih 5 Ngōh jūng guih gwo kēuih 6 Sīhk faahn juhng pèhng gwo sīhk mīhn 7 Gām chi hokhfai bèi seuhung chi gwai yāt baak man 8 Kēuih gōu (gwo) ngōh sāam chyun

Exercise 12.4 A 1 Hōi-yú gwai gwo yēuhng-yú 2 Hōungpín hōung gwo hūhng chāh 3 Lāahnfā leng gwo gūkū 4 Go léui daaih (gwo) go jái lēuhng seu 5 Nī bāan hōhsāang kāhnlihk gwo gō bāan B 1 Gauh hāaih bèi sān hāaih syūfuhk 2 Yihgā heui Oujāu bèi yīhchiihn yīhungyīh(-jó) 3 Gūngsī gām-lín bèi gauh-lín jaahn dāk dō(-jó) 4 Nī būn siusyut bèi daih yāt būn hōu-tái 5 Lēih gām chi bèi seuhung chi jouh dāk hōu(-jó)

Unit 13 Prepositions

Exercise 13.1 1 Hōhksāang hái fōng yahpbihn/douh 2 Jek māau hái tōi seuhungbihn 3 Go jāmtàuh hái chōhng seuhungbihn/douh 4 Jī bāt hái hāp yahpbihn 5 Būn syū hái dang hahbihn 6 Gō jūng hái chēhung seuhungbihn 7 Bá jē hái mūhn hauhbihn 8 Dī séung hái sēungbōu yahp-
Global Translation

bihn/douh  9  Pō syuh hái gān úk chihnbihn  10  Dihnsihgēi hái syūgwaih jākbǐn

Exercise 13.2  1  chêung hauhbihn  2  syūgwaih seuhngbihn  3  ngānhnhòng deuimihn  4  máhlouh jùnggāan  5  gungyùn tūhng yàuh jaalm jīgāan  6  (chóh) hái lēih jākbǐn  7  háp yahpbihn/léuïhmihn  8  bàanfòng chēutbihn  9  geng chihnhmihn  10  tôi hahmihn  11  heung nǐ go fōngheung/ heung nǐbihn  12  yàuh jū dou máāhn

Exercise 13.3  1  Tôi seuhngmihn yàuh yât daahp syū (a pile of books)  2  Chēuung seuhngmihn yàuh fūk wá (a picture)  3  Chyùhfóng yahpbihn móuh yàhn (nobody)  4  Haak-tēng léuïhmihn yàuh gěi go haakyàhn (several guests)  5  Syūgwaih seuhngmihn yàuh go gungjái (a doll)  6  Sāisāu-gāan yahpbihn yàuh tiuh mōuhgān (a towel)  7  Syūfóng yahpbihn yàuh bouh dihnlōuh (a computer)

Exercise 13.4  1  yàuh nǐdouh heui yīyūn  2  yàuh tōuh-syū-gwún heui faahn-tōhng  3  yàuh deih-há heui baat lāu  4  heung Gāulūhng  5  gīng Tōihbāk heui Dūnggīng  6  yàuh Heunggōng gīng Maahn-gūk heui Lēuńdēn  7  yàuh syūfòng heui chyùhfóng  8  yàuh dāih yât chi dou yihgā  9  yàuh geichèuung heui ūkkēi  10  yàuh tāuh dou méih

Unit 14 Negation

Exercise 14.1  1  Kēuih ūkkēi móuh mahntāih  2  Ngōhdeih mhaih hōu guih  3  Ngōh móuh sing-jīk  4  Kēuih gihn sāam mhaih hōu gwai  5  Ngōh tāuhšǐn móuh sǐk yeuḥk  6  Yīsāng móuḥ heui douh-ga  7  Lóuḥbāán mhaih hōu lāu  8  Đī hohksāang móuḥ sēuhng-mōhng  9  Đī hohksāang mhaih hōu kānhlíhk  10  Gō tou hei mhaih taai chēuung

Exercise 14.2  1  Sihk hōisīn hōu gwai (ga)  2  Wōhng Sāang chéng kēuih (a)  3  Ngōh (yáuh) duhk-gwo Faatmān (a)  4  Kēuihdeih git-jō-fān (la)  5  Ngōh bou-jō-méng (la) or Ngōh yáuh bou-méng (a)  6  Đī háausīh tāihmuhk hōu láahn (a)  7  Gāan fōng gěi/hōu gōnjehng (a)  8  Kēuih yihgādākhāahn(a)  9  Gāmyaht yáuh tōhng  10  Ngōhdeih sihk-gwo sēh-gān (a)

Exercise 14.3  1  msānsīn not fresh, stale  2  msíusām careless  3  móuchōi unfortunate  4  mgōuhing discontented  5  mgihnhōng unhealthy  6  mjūngyi
dislike 7 m-mihngbaahk fail to understand 8 mtùhngyi disagree 9 m-yänséung not appreciate 10 mlàuhsäm inattentive

Exercise 14.4 A 1 Kéuih mhaih móuh seunsâm 2 Kéuih góng ge yéh mhaih móuh douhléih 3 Léih gajë mhaih m’h wúih bông léih 4 Ngóhdeih mhaih m’h gau chín 5 Léih gámyaht mhaih mdákhàahn B 1 Ngóhdeih mhaih mtùhngyi 2 Ngóhdeih m’h hóyíh m’h jáu 3 Günsí mhaih m’h häng g’àhn-gúng 4 Ngóh m’h wúih mgeidák 5 Léih mhaih máaih m’h hét

Unit 15 Verbs of motion

Exercise 15.1 1 sëuhng làih ngóh 2 fàan heui hohkhaauh 3 sëuhng heui làuhseuhng 4 gwo làih Yínggwok 5 lohk heui séjíhláuh 6 gwo làih táí-háh 7 fàan làih taam ngóhdeih 8 yahp heui hóí-wúí 9 lohk làih sìhk-faahn 10 chëut heui jouh-yéh

Exercise 15.2 1 Ngóh tingyaht heui hohkhaauh (to school) 2 Léih làih m’dóu (here) sìhk-faahn 3 Ngóh gwo heui göbihn (there) wán yàhn 4 Léih làih sëuhng làih ngóh ükkéi (my place) chóh 5 Ngóhdeih yíu fèi fàan heui Oujáu (to Australia) 6 Go léuihjái jáu chëut heui chëutbíhn (outside) 7 Ngóh dí chànhfk fàan làih Hêunggóng (to Hongkong) douh-ga 8 Léih hóyíh lohk heui gwóng-chëuhng (to the shopping centre) màaih yéh 9 Ngóh jíkhâak yahp heui sái-sáu-gàan (bathroom) wuhn sàam 10 Ngóh tùhngsih gwo làih ngóh gàan fóng (to my room) kíng-gái

Exercise 15.3 1 gwo heui 2 yahp làih 3 lohk làih 4 sëuhng heui 5 chëut heui 6 fàan làih 7 lohk làih/heui 8 sëuhng heui 9 yahp heui/làih 10 fàan heui/làih

Exercise 15.4 1 Ga foché fàan-jó làih 2 Dí seun gei-jó heui Móihgwok 3 Dí gúpiu sëuhng heui gòu wái 4 Kéuih hái fóng hàahng-gán chëut làih 5 Kéuihdeih pàh-gán sëuhng làih sàändéng 6 Bún syú dit-jó lohk (heui) deihhá 7 Go kàhm bün-jó gwo heui deuimihn 8 Ga chë hôi-gán yahp làih tíhng-chë-chëuhng 9 Kéuih hàahng-gán chëut heui gáai douh 10 Kéuihdeih bün-gán lohk heui yih láú

Unit 16 Verbs of giving

Exercise 16.1 1 Béi chín ngóh taaitáai (my wife) 2 Wàahn syú bèi tùhnghohk (a classmate) 3 Sung lâilhmaht bèi léuih-pàhngyáuh (one’s
girlfriend) 4 Gei seun běi Léih haauhjéung (Principal Li) 5 Dá-díhnwá běi gíngchaat (the police) 6 Gáau gungfo běi sinsaang (teacher) 7 Làuh sung běi nógh (me) sikh 8 Máaih sàam běi go léui (daughter) jeuk 9 Gáan tou hei běi léih (you) tái 10 Dím gō běi nógh pàhngyáuh (my friend) téng

Exercise 16.2 1 Kéuih sung-jó dí hëungséuí běi nógh 2 Yísang běi-jó dí yeuhk nógh (sikhk) 3 Nógh wúih wàahn (faan) dī mành-gín běi léih/ Nógh wúih běi faan dī mành-gín léih 4 Lóuhbáan gyun-jó hòu dō chín běi gaauwuí 5 Kéuih gei-jó fūng seun běi kêuí-ıyìn 6 Nógh je-jó jī yuhnbát běi kéuih 7 Mói běi-mín kéuih 8 Léih yiu wàahn (faan) tiuh sóiíh běi nógh/Léih yiu běi faan tiuh sóiíh nógh 9 Kéuih séung je nógh lëuhng bún sy/Kéuih séung tūhng nógh je lëuhng bún sy 10 Go gōngsi běi-jó dí gungfo nóghdeih jouh

Exercise 16.3 1 Nóghdeih juhung yiu běi chín kéuih (to him) 2 Nógh gājé je-jó nógh hòu dō sàam/jé-jó hòu dō sàam běi nógh (to me) 3 Gō go yāhn shëngyaht tàu günsi (the company) yēh 4 Yāuh yāhn chëung-jó kéuih lóuhbáan (his boss) hòu dō chín 5 Nógh heui je go tūnhghok (a classmate) gēi būn syù 6 Kéuih séung mahn sinsaang (the teacher) gēi yēuhng yēh 7 Nógh go pàhngyáuh gaau sailouhjái (children) Yingmán ge 8 Jingfú wúih faht günsi (the company) chín ge

Unit 17 Verbs and Particles

Exercise 17.1 1 dóu 2 dāi 3 faan 4 gwo 5 dóu 6 yùhn 7 cho 8 hōi 9 dóu 10 dōu

Exercise 17.2 1 Kéuih shëngyaht téng gûjái 2 Nógh téng dóu yiuhyihn 3 Kéuih yīhging lám dóu go daahp-on 4 Nógh gin dóu go gwónggou 5 Léih gāmgok dōu ngaatlihk 6 Nógh māhn dóu yínmeih 7 Kéuih jänger tái sūsyt 8 Kéuih mh jänger tái hei

Exercise 17.3 1 Nógh sū mh dóu kêuíh fûng seun 2 Nógh màaih mh dóu heí fēi 3 Nógh táí mh dóu/gin mh dóu go páai 4 Nógh màhn mh dóu dī sung 5 Nógh téng mh dóu fēigéi sêng 6 Nógh lâm mh dóu dim daap 7 Nógh géi mh dóu gam dō méng 8 Nógh sikh mh dóu gam dō syutgōu 9 Nógh wán mh dóu fung seun 10 Nógh pàhngyáuh heui mh dóu Satihn

Exercise 17.4 1 běi dāk dóu 2 gāau dāk dihm 3 táí dāk dóu 4 jouh
dak sèhng 5 seun dák gwo 6 máaih dák hēi 7 jouh dák chit 8 tēng dák mìhng

Unit 18 Actions and events

Exercise 18.1 1 gin-gwo 2 sái-jó 3 sihk-jó 4 tēng-gwo 5 heui-gwo 6 bou-jó-méng 7 yèhng-jó 8 háau-gwo 9 máaih-gwo 10 maaih-jó

Exercise 18.2 1 lám-gwo 2 fan-jó 3 sih-gwo 4 yèhng-jó 5 chung-gwo 6 bou-jó-méng 7 yèhng-jó 8 cheung-gwo 9 tāi-jó 10 fāan-jó

Exercise 18.3 1 Dí hohksāang meih jáu 2 Ngóh go jái meih heui-gwo Yīnggwok 3 Kēuih meih ló chēpāaih 4 Ngóhdeih meih jouh-gwo jīngfū gūng 5 Ngóh móuh dehng fōng 6 Go beisyū móuh fōng ga 7 Ngóh meih yām-gwo Chēngdōu bējáu 8 Ngóh móuh tūhng kēuih paak-gwo-tō 9 Dihnfaí móuh gā ga 10 Lōuhbāan móuh laauh-gwo kēuih

Exercise 18.4 1f Kēuih chūngnlōih meih si-gwo chīh dou 2d Ngóhdeih yīchhihn heui-gwo yīhgīng/ngāam-ngaam fāan-jó sējīhlāuh 3a/b Ngóh sīnsāang yīhgīng/ngāam-ngaam séjīhlāuh 4b/e Kēuih ngāam-ngāam/jeuigahn sāang-jó go jái 5c/d/e Ngóh chāhnggīng/yīchhihn/jeuigahn hāalueuih-gwo chīhjīk 6a/b Gāan jāulāuh yīhgīng/ngāam-ngāam sāan-jó mùhn

Unit 19 Activities: gān and jyuḥ

Exercise 19.1 1 Ngóh yihgā wuhn-gān sāam 2 Kēuihdeih kāhm-māahn hāidouh dá māhjēuk 3 Kēuih gōng-gān dīhnwā 4 Yīhgā lohk-gān yūh 5 Dī sailouhjái hāidouh wāan sēui 6 Ngóhdeih hāahng-gān làih 7 Kēuih yihgā chūng-gān-lēuhng 8 Ngóh go jái hāidouh wāahk-wā 9 Lōuhbāan hōi-gān-wū fā 10 Kēuih juhng lāu-gān ngóhdeih


Exercise 19.3 1 Kēuih jēuk-jyuḥ sāam yāuh-sēui He swims with his clothes on 2 Kēuih līng-jyuḥ dī hāahnglēih jāu He left carrying the baggage 3 Kēuih tāi-jyuḥ dīhnsīh jouh gūngfō She does her homework while watching television 4 Dīmgāai léih mīh mohng-jyuḥ ngōh gōng? Why don’t you look at me while talking? 5 Ngóh jūngyī tēng-jyuḥ yāmngōhk yāusīk l
like to relax while listening to music 6 Kéuih sèhnyaht chëh-jyu pe léuih heui gáai He always goes around with your daughter 7 Go mähny pöuh-jyu pe jài chëut gáai The mother goes out carrying her son 8 Dímgáai léih daai-jyu pe ngáahn-gëng fan-gaau a? Why do you sleep with your glasses on? 9 Ngóh lóuhgung jàh-jyu pe sán chëlàih jip ngóh My husband is driving his new car to meet me 10 Ngóh mëh wúih jòh-jyu léih faat dääh I won’t get in the way of your making money

Unit 20 Auxiliary verbs

Exercise 20.1 1 Ngóh yiu fàan ükkéi 2 Kéuih sìk jà-chë 3 Ngóh wúih douh-hip 4 Ngóh pàhngyáuh wúih daai léih heui 5 Léih hòyíh daap fòchë heui 6 Ngóhdeih yìnggöi jëunsih dòu 7 Léih hòyíh jòu jáu 8 Ngóh wúih wàahn syù 9 Kéuih sìk daap mahntài 10 Kéuih yìnggöi git-fàn 11 Kéuih häng gáam ga 12 Ngóhdeih häng tôhhip 13 Kéuihdeih mëh häng dëng loih dì 14 Ngóh taaitáai msái hòi-wúi 15 Ngóhdeih msái dàamsám

Exercise 20.2 1 Ngóh mëh sìk këuih 2 Ngóh mëh sìk heui gòdouh 3 Ngóh msái fan-gaau 4 Kéuih mëh yiu faahn 5 Kéuih mëh wúih fàan ükkéi 6 Léih mëh hòyíh làuh dài 7 Léih mëh hòyíh wùhn săam 8 Ngóhdeih mëh yìnggöi yàusìk 9 Kéuih mëh yìnggöi màaih láu 10 Kéuih mëh sìk tàahn kähm

Exercise 20.3 1 Ngóh sëung yeuk këuih (chëut gáai) 2 Ngóh wúih tungi léih (ge la) 3 Deuimjyu pe, gäm chi ngóh mëh hòyíh böng léih/ngóh bòng mëh dòu léih 4 Ngóh msái sihk yéh 5 Léih yìnggöi sùsùm dì jàchë 6 Léih hòyíh chìh dì gáau gùngfo 7 Lëideih mëh yìnggöi gam chòulóuh 8 Ngóh mëh häng bëi gam dò chënh 9 Ngóh mëh sìk heui yàuh-gúk 10 Ngóh pàhngyáuh mëh wúih tùhngyi

Exercise 20.4 1 Ngóh gám-lín waahkjë wúih git-fàn 2 Ngóh gám-lín hângdihng wúih git-fàn 3 Kéuihdeih yâtdihng hái ükkéi 4 Kéuihdeih hólàhng hái ükkéi 5 Ngóh yâtdihng wúih sahpyih dìm jìchënh fàan dòu ükkéi 6 Ngóh yâtdihng yiu sahpyih dìm jìchënh fàan dòu ükkéi 7 Fûng seun yâtdihng yiu tôngyaht dòu ge 8 Fûng seun yâtdihng hâih kähmvaht dòu ge 9 Go leuhftslëytâdihng yiu hòu lëk 10 Go leuhftsl yâtdihng hòu lëk

Exercise 20.5 1 Ngóh gám-màahn pùih dàk léih 2 Ngóhdeih mëh yahp dàk heui/Ngóhdeih yahp mëh dòu heui 3 Léih yîhgá jàu dàk 4 Hôhksàang mëh gòng dàk daaih wah 5 Sihk dàk la 6 Ngóh gàmvaht heui mëh dòu/Ngóh gàmvaht mëh heui dàk 7 Ngóh mëh sihk dàk
Exercise 21.1 1 Ngóhdeih bëi ga chë jë-yuh 2 Këuihdeih bëi gingchaat jük-jëo 3 Gään fông bëi dë sailouhjái gáau lyuhn-jëo 4 Gó go daaihl jëung bëi nì go hohksaang yëhng-jëo 5 Ngóh go saudóí bëi këuih je-jëo 6 Ngóh bëi dë chë sëng chòuh sëng-jëo 7 Gään òk bëi këuih go làahmpaangyáuh máaih-jëo 8 Go dihnlóuh bëi këuihdeih jëng wàaih-jëo 9 Dë chë bëi ngóh yuhng-jëo 10 Dë jëungwëlk bëi këuihdeih sëhk-jëo 11 Jëk bëi bëi këuih dë naahnh-jëo 12 Fëng seun bëi ngóh táí-gwo 13 Go seunsëung bëi këuih hói-gwo 14 Ga chë bëi këuih jëng-gân 15 Fëk wë bëi këuihdeih maaïh-jëo

Exercise 21.2 1 Ngóh go saubëu bëi yành ló-jëo/ Ngóh bëi yành ló-jëo go saubëu 2 Douh múhn bëi yành hoi-jëo 3 Láahngheigëi bëi yàhn sëhk-jëo 4 Këuih dë chë bëi yàhn ngäak-jëo/Këuih bëi yàhn ngäak-jëo dë chë 5 Dë syë bëi yàhn máaih-jëo 6 Ngóh jek sëu bëi yëh ngàauh dëu/ Ngóh bëi yëh ngàauh dëu jek sëu 7 Këuih bëi dë yëh fàahn dëu 8 Këuih ge sëmchëihng bëi dë yëh yinghëung dëu/Këuih bëi dë yëh yinghëung dëu sëmchëihng

Exercise 21.3 1 Ní gään fông dehng-jëo (la) 2 Gään òk (juhng) hëi-gân 3 Tou hei yënggëi táí 4 Bëu syë chëuthbëan-jëo (la) 5 Gihn sëam msái tong (la) 6 Lëih go gaiwaák (juhng) hàauleuih-gân 7 Ga chë yëhm-gwo (la) 8 Fëk sëung yëng-jëo (la) 9 Jáan dëng sëk-jëo (la) 10 Go sailouhjái sëhngyaht yiu póuh

Exercise 22.1 1 Gó bën syë ngóh máaih-jëo 2 Syutgòu këuih hóu jëngyí sihk 3 Wohnggok ngóh më sëk heui 4 Ní tou hei ngóhdeih táí-gwo 5 Chiuhjëuwá këuih sëk gëng 6 Ní sëu láj yëhng-gwo meih a? 7 Sëam baak man lëih yàuh-mëuh a? 8 Höiyëuhng Güngyún këuih heui-gwo 9 Siubong ge yám-ngohk ngóh jei jëngyi 10 Lëih ge táifat ngóh hóu tûhngyí

Exercise 22.2 1 A-May jauh meih 2 gö gihn jauh meih 3 Sëigung jauh mëuh gam fëngbëhn 4 gö tou hóu dyün 5 dëhnyíng jauh hóu sëu táí 6
kéuih sailóu ngóh jauh Ṣhík 7 Méihgwok jauh jughn meih 8 kéuih ge ngóh jauh Ṣhík jipsauh 9 móhngkàuh ngóh jauh meih höhk-gwo 10 gúdín ñamngohk ngóh jauh móuh gam jùungyi

Exercise 22.3 1 Faai chàan ngóh Ṣhík séung sèhungyaht sihk (I don’t want to eat it that often) 2 Syúga ngóhdeih heui-jó léuihhàhng (We went on holiday) 3 Sailouhjái sàang lëuhng go jauh gau la (To have two is enough) 4 Gam dò youhng dímsám móuh yát youhng hòu-sihk (Not one dish was good) 5 Sàutàih dìhnva gachìhn yuht láih yuht pëhng (The prices get cheaper and cheaper) 6 Sàam tiuh tài jeui leng mì tiuh (This one looks best) 7 Yahtmán ngóh gëi séung hohk (I’d quite like to learn it) 8 Páauch ngóh máaih mì (I can’t afford one) 9 Jënggwok yámngohk ngóh mì suhk (I’m not familiar with it) 10 Git-fàn jeui gányiu mìou gam jóu (The most important thing is not to do it too soon)

Unit 23 Yes/no questions


Exercise 23.3 1 yáuh a/móuh a 2 yáuh a/móuh a 3 haih a/mhaih a 4 Haih a/mhaih a 5 wúih a/mì wúih a 6 háau-jó la/meih a 7 heui-gwo la/meih a 8 fan-jó la/meih a 9 gaau yùhn la/meih a 10 johng-gwo la/meih a

Unit 24 Wh-questions

Exercise 24.1 1a Bìngo hái heiyûn dáng ngóhdeih a? 1b Ngóh

Exercise 24.2 1 Léih sihk-gán m hái b? 2a Kéuihdeih t gēisih heui bǐndouh a? 2b Ngóh daap bāsí heui bǐndouh a? 3a Gām máahn yáuh mātyéh sihk a? 3b Léih síin hái b? 4a Léih jyuž-jó (hái) bǐndouh sahp lihn a? 4b Léih jyuž-jó (hái) Méihgwok gēi lioh a?

Exercise 24.3 1 Chéng mahn dím heui Gáulùhngtòhng deihtit jaahm a? 2 Chéng mahn dím heui Chek Lahp Gok Gēischèuhng a? 3 Chéng mahn sàisáug an/chisó hái bǐndouh a? 4 Chéng mahn dím heui děng láu a? 5 Chéng mahn dím heui yàuhjìnggúk a? 6 Chéng mahn nl gāan jáudim gi chāantëng hái bǐndouh a? 7 Chéng mahn bǐn ga bāsí heui Tinsìng Máhtàuh a? 8 Chéng mahn bǐn ga syùhn heui Yùhgíng-wāan a? 9 Chéng mahn jìeu káhn ge chūtkàp-sîfchèuhng hái bǐndouh a? 10 Chéng mahn siub jàahm hái bǐndouh a?

Unit 25 Sentence Particles

Exercise 25.1 1 la (ge la) 2 ga (ge) 3 jè 4 ge 5 la 6 lá 7 la (ge la) 8 lèihga 9 la 10 jè

Exercise 25.2 1 a 2 lèihga 3 ga 4 mè 5 a 6 a 7 mè 8 ga (ge)

Exercise 25.3 1b 2c 3a 4f 5e 6d 7h 8i 9g

Unit 26 Imperatives

Exercise 26.1 1 Léih sé-seun bèi ngóh lá (á) 2 Léih faai dī fāan ükkéi lá (á) 3 Maahn-máan hāahng (lá) 4 Sīusām gwo máhlouh lá 5 Jīkhāak bèi chíin la 6 Yám dō dī sèuí lá 7 Jòu dī fong gūng lá (á) 8 Tàuh ngóh yàt piu lá (á) 9 Dáng ngóh yàt jahn á (lá) 10 Lám chīngchó dī lá (á)

Exercise 26.2 1 (Léih) mhóu hói chèung lá or Máih hói chèung lá 2 Léih mhóu gōng lōhk heui lá 3 (Léih) mhóu maaïh (-jó) gàan ūk lá 4 (Léih)
mhóu sikh yeuhk là 5 (Léih) mhóu gòi tài-hmuhk là 6 Léihdeih mhóu gaijuhk góng là 7 Ngóhdeih mhóu heui là 8 Léihdeih mhóu gam faai kyutdihng là 9 Léih bâyúh mhóu jyun gung là 10 Ngóhdeih bâyúh mhóu bun ùk là

Exercise 26.3 1 Léih bong ngóh màaih sung à (là) 2 Léih bong ngóh gei seun à (là) 3 Mgóoi léih bong ngóhdeih yìng séung a 4 Léih bong këuih gahm júng là (à) 5 Léih bong këuihdeih gáau hohkfai là (à) 6 Léih bong ngóhdeih jìng chë à 7 Léih bong këuih jouh daahn-gòu à (là) 8 Léih bong ngóhdeih jyú-faahn là (à) 9 Léih bong ngóh dehng geipiu à (là) 10 Léih bong këuih wàn gung là (à)

Exercise 26.4 1 Léih lohk-gwùn dì là 2 Mhóu gam haakhei là! 3 Léih kâhnlik dì là! 4 Léih máhu gam täam-sâm là 5 Mgó léih simàhn dì là! 6 Léih máhu gam gùu-ngouh 7 Mgó léih góng (dák) daaïh sëng dì là 8 Mhóu hàahng (dák) gam faai là! 9 Mhóu jejuk dák gam chëuihbin là 10 Léih máhu gam ngaahng-géng là!

Unit 27 Requests and thanks

Exercise 27.1 1 Mgó bêí jëung cháanpáai ngóh à/Béi jëung cháanpáai ngóh à, mgó 2 Mgó góng maahn dì à 3 Mgó joi góng yêt chi à 4 Mgó sé faai dì à 5 Mgó léih máhu hoi làahnghei à 6 Sàan màaih douh muhn à, mgó 7 Giu dì hohksaang léih à, mgó 8 Giu gíngchaat à, mgó 9 Mgó léih máhu sâai chín là 10 Mgó bêí jëung dàan ngóh à/Màaih dàan à, mgó

Exercise 27.2 1 Chéng (léih) làuh dài háu seun à/là 2 Chéng (léih) gaijuhk góng lohk heui à/là 3 Chéng (léih) dáng ngóh yêt jah à/là à 4 Chéng (léih) túngji ngóhdeih jewi sàn sìúsík à/là 5 Chéng (léih) sëuxng tôih líhng jëung à/là 6 Chéng (léih) làuhsâm têng suy là 7 Chéng (léih) gàn-jyuh ngóh hâahng à/là 8 Chéng (léihdeih) gwo làih níbïhn chòh à/là 9 Chéng (léih) bêí jëung gëipiú ngóh tâi à 10 Chéng (léih) sé dâi léih ge deijjì túhxng dihnwà houhmáh à/là

Exercise 27.3 1 mgó 2 dòjeh 3 dòjeh 4 mgó 5 dòjeh 6 mgó 7 mgó 8 dòjeh 9 mgó 10 dòjeh

Exercise 27.4 (deui-mjyuh is always acceptable) 1 deui-mjyuh 2 mhóuyisi 3 mhóuyisi 4 deui-mjyuh 5 mhóuyisi/mgó je-gwo 6 deui-mjyuh 7 mhóuyisi 8 deui-mjyuh 9 mhóuyisi 10 deui-mjyuh
Unit 28 Numbers, dates and times

Exercise 28.1 1 säämsahp-sei 2 chätsahp-gáu 3 yätbaak-lihng-luhk 4 yihbaak-säämsahp-sei 5 baat baak yätsaahp-baat 6 yätchën yihbaak (chën-yih) 7 yät maahn-yihchën (maahn-yih) 8 yih maahn sei chën säm baak lihng-yih 9 sei maahn sääm chën ng’h baak seisahp-ng’h 10 säämsahp-yät maahn ng’h chën

Exercise 28.2 1 yät yuht yät houh 2 sahpyih yuht sahpyih houh 3 ng’h yuht yihsahp-yät houh 4 baat yuht gáu houh 5 sahpsääm houh sängkëih ng’h 6 yät gáu luhk sääm lihn chät yuht sei houh 7 yät gáu gáu chät lihn luhk yuht säämsahp houh 8 yät gáu gáu lihn sahpyih yuht säämsahp-yät houh 9 yihlihnglihnglihng lihn yih yuht yihsahp-gáu houh 10 yih lihng lihng baat lihn gáu yuht sahpng’h houh

Exercise 28.3 1h 2f 3i 4g 5j 6e 7b 8a 9d 10c

Exercise 28.4 1 Gämyaht haih yätgáugáugagáu lihn sahp yuht sahp houh 2 Ngóh ge säängyaht haih sahp yuht säämsahp-yät houh 3 Ngóh ge chëutsäng yahtkëih haih yät gáu luhk yih lihn gáu yuht sääm houh 4 Ngóh ükkëi dihnwá haih yih luhk lihng gáu chät lihng yät gáu/ Ngóh güngsí dihnwá haih yih haih yuht ng’h gáu yih chät yih yih 5 Ngóh ge deihjí haih Gáulùhng Sihng Lyùnhhahp Douh yät baak houh sääm láu C joh
adjective a class of words used to describe nouns.
adverb a class of words used to describe verbs or to modify sentences.
antonym a word having the opposite meaning to another, e.g. unclear as opposed to clear.
aspect a grammatical distinction involving whether an event is seen as complete (as in the Cantonese perfective form -jó) or ongoing, as in the English progressive form -ing and Cantonese -gán.
auxiliary a class of words used together with a verb and carrying a grammatical function, e.g. wúih (will).
classifier a class of words used to ‘classify’ nouns by shared features such as shape or function, e.g. tiuh for elongated objects as in tiuh yú (fish).
demonstrative words indicating proximity (this) or distance (that).
digraph a combination of letters representing a single sound, e.g. ng, eu.
diphthong a combination of two vowel sounds, e.g. au as in sau (thin).
experiential a form of the verb denoting experience, or something which has happened at least once (expressed by gwo in Cantonese).
hanging topic an instance of topicalization in which the topic is not subject or object of the verb, but bears a loose relation to the subject or object.
localizer a class of words used after a noun to specify location, e.g. yahpbihn (inside).
measure similar to classifier; more precisely, those classifiers which denote a measured quantity, e.g. yāt dā gāidáan ‘a dozen eggs’.
minimal pair a pair of words or sentences differing in only one feature.
modal having to do with possibility and necessity, as opposed to fact.
modality the field of meaning involving possibility and necessity.
negation forms used to deny the truth of a statement.
particle a word which does not belong to any of the major word classes but plays a grammatical or communicative role. Verb particles, such as dóu indicating completion of an action, appear after the verb, while
sentence particles, like a added to questions for politeness, come at the end of the sentence.

passive a type of sentence which shows action being done to the subject.

perfective a form of the verb denoting an event viewed as complete (expressed by the suffix -jó in Cantonese).

predicate the part of the sentence which says something about the subject, typically a verb or adjective.

preposition a word which precedes a noun (more precisely a noun phrase), indicating a spatial or other relationship to it.

pronoun a word which substitutes for a noun (more precisely a noun phrase, i.e. the noun and any modifiers which go with it).

topicalization the process by which some constituent is placed first in the sentence, so that the sentence appears to be ‘about’ that constituent, e.g.  

*ga chē ngóh juhng meih maaih* (The car I haven’t sold yet).

transitive verb a verb that can or must take a noun as its object, e.g. *hit.*
INDEX

ā particle 131, 135
a particle 121, 123, 127, 130, 132
a- prefix 14
addresses 149
adjectives 32, 42–44
    attributive 42–43
    comparison of 58–61
    modification of 43
    negative 74
    predicative 43
    reduplicated 14, 43–44
    with yáuh/móuh 29–30
adverbs
    comparison of 61
    of frequency/duration 53–55
    of manner 47–49
    of time 52–53
    reduplicated 48–50
affricates 2
antonyms 74
apologies 142
aspect markers 55, 79–80
    progressive, continuous 99–102
    perfective, experiential 93–96
aspiration 1
auxiliary verbs 104–107, 112
    yáuh 29
bátyūh rather 137
béi give, let 83–85
béi comparative 59–61
béi passive 110–112
bln which 127
bông help 136, 141
chéng please 140
chéut (go out) 78–80, 88
classifiers 36–40
    in possessive construction 24, 39
    collectives 37
    comparison 58–61
    of adverbs 61
    completion 96, 122
    consonants 1–4
    containers 37
dái down 88
dák manner 47–48, 61
dâk potential 90–91
dates 147–148
definiteness 40
déi suffix 14, 43–44, 48–49
deh suffix 17–18
demonstratives 39, 65
deuimjyuh sorry 142
dí comparative 58–59, 61, 136
    plural 24, 38
diphthongs 8–9
direction 68, 78–80
dôjeh thank you 140–141
dóu 89–90
dou to, arrive 68, 89
emphasis 33–34
existence 27–28
fân (go) back 78–80, 88–89
future 105
gaau teach 84–85
gám thus 48
gam so 43
gán progressive 99–102
ge attributive 62
  particle 33–34, 131–132
  possessive 23–24, 39
géi quite 43, 44, 47
géi how (many) 127
gin see 90
ging via 65, 69
gwo comparative 58–61
gwo (go) over 78–80, 88
gwo experiential 94–95, 122

hái at 33, 65–67
haih be 23, 32–34, 43, 62, 106
háidouh progressive 99–100
héi up 88–89
heui go 78–80
heung towards 65, 68
hői away 88
hóu very 43, 44, 47, 74
hóyíh can 104, 106–107

imperatives 131, 135–137
inference 106
interrogatives 120–128
intonation 13

jauh then 116
jé particle 131
je lend/borrow 85
jeui, ji most 61–62
jihgéi oneself 20–21
jó perfective 93–95, 122
jüng even 59
jyuh continuous 100–102

kéuih he/she 17–21
la particle 131, 135
la particle 122, 131
lái come 78–80
léih from 65, 69
léihga 32
léih you 17–21, 135
localizers, location 65–68
lohk go down 78–80

m- negative prefix 72, 74
máaih closer 88
mähn smell 90
mahn ask 84–85
máih don’t 137
Mandarin x-xii, 60
mê particle 130

meih not yet 72–73, 96
  in questions 95–96, 122–123
mgói please/thank you 135,
  140–141
míh not 72, 122
  potential 90–91
mhaíh not be 71–73, 75
mhou don’t 136–137
mhóyisi sorry 142
modality, modals 104–107
móuh 27–29, 96
motion, movement 68, 78–80
msái 105

nasals 3–4
necessity 104–106
negation 72–75
  with jó and gwo 96
negatives, double 75
ngóh I 17–21
numbers 145–147

obligation 106

permission 84
particles
  directional 88–89
  resultative 89
  sentence 130–132
  passive 110–112, 116–117
  perfective 93–95
  plural 24
  politeness 121, 127, 140–142
  possession 23–24, 27–28, 39
  possibility 104–107
  potential 90
  prefixes 14, 72, 74
  prepositions 65–69
  progressive 99–102
  prohibitions 136–137
  pronouns 17–20
  pronunciation xii

questions
  yes/no 120–123
  wh-questions 125–128

reduplication 13, 43–44, 48–49
reflexives 20–21
repetition
  of transitive verb 47–48, 55
requests 131
romanization xi
   in place names, surnames 3

semivowels 3
séung want 104
séuhng go up 78–80
sik know 104
stress 13
suffixes 17–18
superlatives 61–62

taaí too 43, 74
téng listen/hear 90–91
time 52–55
   of day 148
tones 11–14
   changed 13–14, 43, 49

topic, topicalization 111–112,
   115–118

verbs
   directional 78–80
   of giving 83–85
   of perception 90

vowels 7–9

wán seek/find 90
wúih will/would 104–106

Yale system xii

yaõp (go) in 78–80, 88
yáuh have, there is 27–29
yàuh from 65, 58
yiu want/need 104–105