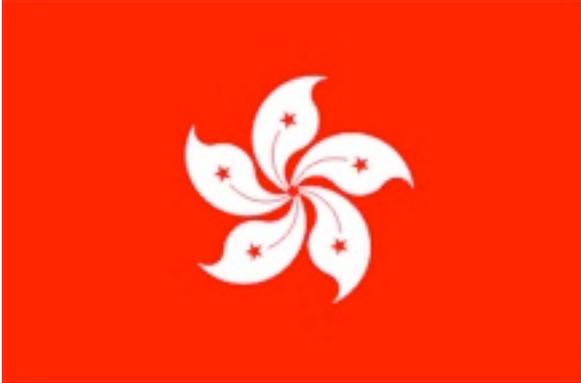# Hong Kong Cantonese Accent
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A Voice For Good

Speaker interviewed by Lucinda Worlock
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Cantonese Accent Overview

About the Language

Cantonese is one of the five major Chinese languages, spoken by around 100 million people in the southern provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, Hong Kong and Macao, as well as as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam.

The name Cantonese comes from Canton, the former English name of Guangzhou, Guangdong, once regarded as the home of the purest form of Cantonese. In recent decades, Hong Kong has become the cultural centre of Cantonese.

General Notes

• Cantonese is syllable-timed, so English weak and strong forms may lose contrast.
  I went to the corner store to buy a piece of cheese and some bread, but I could not find them and went home.

• Loudness and pitch are preferred over length as a means to signal tonicity.

• Speaker tends to favour strong stress at the end of a phrase *'take some force to trap HER'*, '*vocal folds closed to stop IT*'

• Final consonants in Cantonese are nasals, voiceless plosives [ptk], or close vowels

• A tendency to devoice final consonants means that vowel length contrast in *bat* and *bad*, *mate* and *made*, *loose* and *lose,* may also become weakened or reversed.

• Glottal onset is prevalent on vowel-initial words, even across word boundaries. This tends to chop up tone groups quite sharply into smaller portions.
  I always ask Anna if she ever invites Oscar to art openings.

• Linking [w], [j] and [ɹ] are absent.
  See Eleanor under that tree over there, she wants to mellow out on the lawn.

Oral Posture

• Jaw slightly advanced
• Slight buccinator tensing behind lips corners (into incisors and bicuspids)
• Inner lip pursing seems more a muscular driving force than protrusion
• Front tongue arching and bunching
• Central tongue cupping
• A degree of tongue root retraction
• Velum is slightly lowered

Consonants			
English Consonant	**Cantonese Neighbour**	**What's the pattern?**	**Practice Phrase**
post-vocalic *r*		Speaker is non-rhotic. This is common, due to influence of British English, but not the only variant.	*It's hard to be heard above the hordes near Times Square near New York.*
pre-vocalic and intervocalic *r*	→ [ɹʷ]	Speaker uses advanced - sometimes labialised - [post-]alveolar approximant	*It's really rather risky to reach the ring road via this route.* *Erik had to hurry to get his aromatic coffee, or he'd be very sorry.*
[ɫ]	[u]	[ɯ] favoured by this speaker, [ʊʷ] or [w] in stronger accents. More weakly articulated post-vocalically.	*I chilled out all by myself, gulping almond milk with Malcolm.*
[z]	[s] → [z̥]	[s] [z̥] Likely to be devoiced word-finally. Occasionally [z] appears as a strongly-articulated hypercorrection when [s] is in fact the target.	*My dad loves dogs, lizards, horses and frogs.*
Word-initial [t]	[t̪] laminal-dental	Strongly articulated, but slightly laminal and dentalised.	*At twenty past two I take my tiny terrier to town.*
Word-initial [p t k]	[ptk] and [pʰtʰkʰ]	Reduced aspiration may occur, as both the sets found left appear in Cantonese.	*Carl temps part time as a care worker for extra cash.*
Word-final [p t k]	[ʔp ʔt ʔk] or [ʔ ʔ ʔ]	Likely to be glottally reinforced or replaced.	*It's up to you what part of that cake you cut, and how fat a whack of it you want me to get.*
'Emphatic' [t]	[t͡s] → [tˢ] [tʃ] [tʲ]	Speaker may add a secondary articulation word-finally, phrase-finally, or more generally to signal emphasis.	*I got quite a lot wrong* [likely glottalised], *but in fact, I did get that one right* [possibly with secondary articulation].

Consonants			
English Consonant	**Cantonese Neighbour**	**What's the pattern?**	**Practice Phrase**
medial and final [θ] [ð]	→ [f][v]	Speaker may *th*-front word medially or word-finally towards [f] and devoiced [v]	*Arthur likes soothing music in the bath to gather himself together before doing maths.*
word-initial [ð]	[d̪]	Slightly laminal and dentalised.	*I want this one, that one, and the other one over there.*
[m n ŋ]	[ŋm ŋn ŋ]	These sounds may be slightly extended, interchanged, or a combination of one or more of them articulated in sequence.	*My name is Wayne. I must begin to explain.*

Consonant Clusters
Cantonese has not consonant clusters so various strategies may be used to reproduce those in English

English Consonant	**What's the pattern?**		**Practice Phrase**
[kw]	[kʷ] [kʷʰ]	Speaker reduces [w] so it plays a secondary role to [k].	*The Queen quit cigarettes quite quickly, but was quite querulous as a result.*
[st]	[s] or [sʔ]	[t] is elided or glottally replaced	*The First Lady asked him if the last one had left already.*
[tˡl]	[təl]	[t] is likely to be fully released here and may be preceded by glottal reinforcement.	*The skittles were gently rattling.*
[kɹ] [pɹ] [tɹ]	[kʷ] [pʷ] [tʃʷ]	[ɹ] may be reduced to a weakly-articulated labialised offglide.	*You're crying like crazy about these problems and I'm trying to help you.*
[kt]	[k] [t]	Often simplified to single [k] or [t]	*You backed the president elect? Is that a fact?*

Front Vowels		
Lexical Set	**What's the pattern?**	**Practice Phrase**
KIT-KIN	[ɪ], [i̞] — The 'CHICKEN-WINGS' split. KIT may undergo pre-nasal tensing, with the latter realised as lowered CV1.	*I wish for a single little thing, and that little thing is chicken wings.*
FLEECE	[i] [iʲ] — Speaker mentions [y] on Cantonese Stereotypes passage, but does not noticeably exhibit this feature. His own close front vowel sometimes progresses towards a slight palatalised offglide.	*Steve needs to retrieve the keys to the canteen.*
HAPPY	[i] — HAPPY may be extended in length, or otherwise given extra prominence so that it is more *secondarily* stressed than *un*stressed.	*I'm really very happy that Freddie's coming to my party.*
DRESS	[ɛ̈] → [ɛ̞̈] — DRESS is consistently lowered and centralised.	*Deborah says that a regular breakfast helps stress levels.*
TRAP	[ɛ̞] [æ̞] — TRAP is often raised but when lowered, hovers in the zone commonly associated with Contemporary RP.	*You have a drastic lack of anger management and really ought to backtrack.*

Central Vowels			
Lexical Set	**What's the pattern?**		**Practice Phrase**
NURSE	[œ̆] → [ɜ̞]	Typical landing point is somewhat advanced and may be slightly rounded.	*Ernest the German surgeon turned up early to work to flirt with Shirley.*
COMMA LETTER	[ə] or [ɜ]	Merged due to non-rhoticity. Speaker may use either a close-mid or open-mid phoneme but as with HAPPY, there may an increase in relative prominence.	*Joanna Foster was a better stage actor but neither Eva nor Sarah Connor had any idea how to master serious drama.*
STRUT	[ɐ̞]	Centralised and sometimes raised.	*My buddy Justin's brother has had enough rough luck this month.*

			Back Vowels
Lexical Set	**What's the pattern?**		**Practice Phrase**
GOOSE	[ɯ] or [ʉ]	Usually somewhat centralised and less rounded.	*Keeping a list of who's who in this room is usually a useful thing to do.*
LOT	[ɒ̝]	Rounded and often tongue root retracted.	*The posh oncology doctor rocked up in dodgy socks.*
THOUGHT NORTH FORCE	[ɔ̝]	THOUGHT NORTH FORCE tend to be merged as in RP, though some spellings may produce ad hoc irregularities, eg *poor* Rounded and often tongue root retracted. Length may be clipped when word is not 'phrase-focal'.	*You have four more important chores. That's for being so awkward and naughty.*
FOOT	[ʊ] or [ʊ̈]	May be unrounded or occasionally contrast weakened with GOOSE	*I would if I could, but I don't think I should.*
START BATH PALM*	[ɑ]	These tend to be merged as in RP, although certain words from the PALM set may take a more centralised realisation.	*The harsh master of the large castle demanded that the staff varnished the marble and brass.*

Diphthongs			
Lexical Set	**What's the pattern?**		**Practice Phrase**
FACE	[ei]	Cantonese front-closing diphthongs terminate in [i] or [y]. This speaker's English front-closing diphthongs are correspondingly close in coda, with a faster glide and a sense of more even onset-coda 'weighting'.	*On the eighteenth of May we bake cakes and play crazy games all day.*
PRICE	[ʌi]		*It's not quite the right time of night to go for a bike ride.*
CHOICE	[ɔi]		*Lloyd was annoyed and destroyed his toys, but Roy was overjoyed.*
GOAT	[ɘʊ], [ɞö]	A wayward GOAT, as is common in L2. The individual phonemes might not pose much problem, as Cantonese has equivalents or near-equivalents. The glide *between* them seems to be more challenging and perhaps exerts a mutational pull on the onset and/or the coda.	*I don't want a hangover so I'm staying sober and drinking only Coca Cola.*
MOUTH	[æö�]	Defined mainly by fast glide, and may have a less rounded, centralised coda.	*Wow! Brown trousers are now down to a round pound.*
SQUARE	[ɛ̈ː]	Lowered and centralised, like DRESS	*Claire likes doing dangerous dares, but I'm too scared.*
NEAR	[ɪ] [iə]	Usually monophthongal as in Contemporary RP	*To cheer you up, I'll take you to the pier near here.*