



CANTONESE PHONEMIC INVENTORY

Please remember that dialectal differences exist for each language and should be considered when using the phonemic charts.

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labial-Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p p ^h			t t ^h			k k ^h	kw k ^h w	
Nasal	m			n			ŋ		
Trill									
Tap or Flap									
Fricative		f		s					h
Affricate				ts ts ^h					
Glides (Approximant)						j		w	
Liquid (Lateral Approximant)				l					

Reference:

- Cheng, L. (1991). *Assessing Asian language performance: Guidelines for evaluating limited-English proficient students* (2nd ed.). Oceanside, CA: Academic Communication Associates.
- Fung, F., & Roseberry-McKibbin, C. (1999). Service delivery considerations in working with clients from Cantonese-speaking backgrounds. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 8, 309–318.
- International Phonetic Association. (1999). *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association: A guide to the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Facts on Cantonese Phonology

- Cantonese is a tonal language. Each syllable has a tone and each tone will change the semantics of a word. The number of tones in Cantonese is widely debated (between 6 and 9); however, much of the literature reports six tones:¹
 - high falling,
 - middle rising,
 - middle level,
 - low falling,
 - low rising, and
 - low level.
- Words are monosyllabic.²
- There are no consonant clusters.³
- There are six consonants used in final position:⁴ /t/, /k/, /p/, /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/.
- Dialectal variations:⁵
 - Initial /n/ and /l/ are often interchangeable.
 - Initial /ŋ/ is often deleted.
- Developmental phonological processes in Cantonese include the following:⁶
 - affrication,
 - assimilation,
 - cluster reduction,
 - deaspiration,
 - final glide deletion,
 - fronting,
 - initial /h/ deletion, and
 - stopping.

¹ Fung, F., & Roseberry-McKibbin, C. (1999). Service delivery considerations in working with clients from Cantonese-speaking backgrounds. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 8, 309–318.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ So, L. (1996, July). Cantonese phonology and its influence on intervention. *ASHA Division 14 Newsletter*.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ So, L., & Dodd, B. (1995). The acquisition of phonology by Cantonese-speaking children. *Journal of Child Language*, 22, 473–495.

Facts on Cantonese Phonology

- Phonemes in English that are not found in Cantonese include the following:
 - /b/, /d/, /g/, /v/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /ɹ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /ð/, and /θ/.
- In addition to final consonant deletion, common substitution errors for Cantonese speakers learning English are as follows:⁷
 - /s/ for /θ/ in initial position;
 - /f/ for /θ/ in final position;
 - /d/ for /ð/ in initial or medial position;
 - /s/ for /z/ in initial, medial, or final position;
 - /f/ for /v/ in initial or medial position;
 - /w/ for /v/ in initial or medial position;
 - /l/ for /r/ in initial, medial, or final position; and
 - /s/ for /ʃ/ in initial, medial, or final position.
- Some of the Cantonese sounds, which are not found in English, have similar correlates in English:

Cantones e	English
/p ^h /	/b/
/t ^h /	/d/
/k ^h /	/g/
/ts ^h /	/tʃ/
/ts/	/dʒ/

⁷ Cheng, L. (1991). *Assessing Asian language performance: Guidelines for evaluating limited-English proficient students* (2nd ed.). Oceanside, CA: Academic Communication Associates.