

UOW College Hong Kong / Community College of City University
Student English Enhancement Unit (SEE U)
Daily English Practice

Week 10

#148 Cantonese Sound System

Skills/ Objectives: Reading, Listening and Writing Skills

PART 1: Before you read...

Preparatory questions

- Are you aware Cantonese is a tonal language? What is a tonal language?
- Do you know how many tones there are in Cantonese?
- How many tones do you use in speaking Cantonese?

Vocabulary

- accent (n): The special way in which people of an area pronounce words in a language.
- dialect (n): A form of a language that people in one part of the country speak. It may contain variations in word use and grammar.
- romanization (n): Representation of the writing of a language in Roman alphabet.
- monosyllabic (adj): Containing only one syllable.
- tone (n): The pitch of speaking.
- pitch (n): The highness or lowness of a sound.
- distinctive (adj): Very different from others and easily recognizable.

PART 2: Article for Reading

Let us read the article posted by the Cantonese Learning Centre at the following website and learn more about the Cantonese tone system:

<http://www.clc.com.hk/material/sound.html>

To help you better understand what the article says, it would be useful for you to start thinking about the following questions. Actually, you can find the answers in the article:

Qt1: How many tones are in common use in modern Cantonese?

Qt2: How does a tonal language like Cantonese work?

The answers to Qt1 & 2 will be provided in the next set of exercises.

The answers to relevant question in the preceding set PART 2 of exercises (How to speak with the right intonation in English) are as follows:

Qt1: What did the article writer Fazle Muniem compare intonation to?

Ans: Fazle Muniem said intonation of a language could be comparable to 'the music of speech'.

Qt2: What other features of pronunciation can be found in a language other than intonation?

Ans: Besides intonation, other features of pronunciation in a language include stress, rhythm, connected speech and accent.

Qt3: What are two major functions of intonation in English?

Ans: The two major functions of intonation in English are attitudinal and grammatical. Intonation tells the speaker's attitude, e.g., boredom, interest, surprise, anger, appreciation, happiness, etc. It also matches particular grammatical structures. "Wh-questions" usually carry a falling intonation while "Yes/No questions" carries an upward intonation.

PART 3: Listening Comprehension

Watch the following video to learn more about Cantonese tones and practise your listening skills:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ3q0rEvSNc>

PART 4: Writing Practice

You must have realized the following sentence at the beginning of the article: Each syllable of Cantonese is composed of three elements – the initial, the final and the tone.

The phrasal verb "composed of" means "made up of". To make this meaning, the preposition "of" is necessary and the verb is used in the passive voice. When you use the verb without the preposition, it means "making up a portion of a larger entity" and the verb is used in the active voice. The meanings of the two uses are different. Take a look at the following examples:

e.g.1: The air is composed of different gases, including oxygen and nitrogen.

e.g.2: Oxygen only composes part of the air on earth. There are other gases, e.g., nitrogen.

Now try to make a sentence of them each and book an appointment to discuss your work with a SEE U teacher:

composed of

Compose
