Languages in Hong Kong, Cantonese and its status

BBL

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Outline

1 Clear the path
2 The Cantonese language
- Phonology
- Lexicon
- Morphology
- Syntax
- The two writing systems
- The historical path

3 Why?
4 Future
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Languages in HK

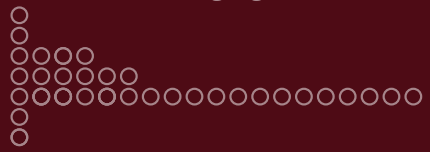
Two official languages: English (since 1842) and “Chinese” (since 1974)





- Under British rule for more than 150 years (1842–1997)
- The regional lingua franca: Cantonese
- English
  - dominates the economic, educational, and legal sectors
  - prevails in official documents, including law and contracts
  - shows regional characteristics (“Konglish”)
- The term “Chinese” refers to a written language
- Since 1997, Mandarin has gained importance in HK


Gough Street
2-34 歌賦街 40-44
蘭桂坊
Seymour Road
2-34 西摩道 40-44
Stanley Market Street
1-25 赤柱市場道
Lan Kwai Fong
蘭桂坊
Hip Wo
197-93 協
Gough Street
2-34 歌賦街 40-44
Hip Wo Street
197-93 協和街 92-55
Kennedy Road
1-6 堅尼地道 7-48
Pate
1-25
reet
街 92-55
Bonham Strand West
2-10 文咸西街 66-120
Princess Margaret Road
12-33 公主道 40-106
Lan Kwai Fong
蘭桂坊
Gough Street
2-34 歌賦街
Chun Yeung Street
197-93 春秧街 92-55
Ngan Mok Street
銀幕街
Magazine Gap Road
1-25 馬己仙峽道
Stanley Market Street
Lan Kwai Fong
蘭桂坊



Cantonese 101

How much do you know about Cantonese?

Cantonese 101

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- Heard of it, but don't know what it is?

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Cantonese 101

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- Heard of it, but don't know what it is?
- A dialect?
- spoken somewhere in Asia?

Cantonese 101

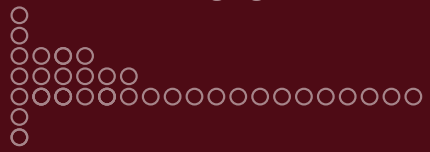
How much do you know about Cantonese?

- Heard of it, but don't know what it is?
- A dialect?
- spoken somewhere in Asia?
- Another minor language?

Cantonese 101

How much do you know about Cantonese?

- Heard of it, but don't know what it is?
- A dialect?
- spoken somewhere in Asia?
- Another minor language?
- Somewhat related to Chinese?



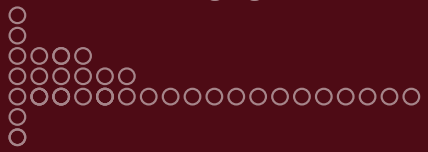
Chinese 101

What about Chinese?
a complicated term with many meanings

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- a race: biological, genetic (Han)



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  - a language family (similar to the Romance language family with multiple **languages**)

Chinese 101

What about Chinese?
a complicated term with many meanings

- a race: biological, genetic (Han)
- a nationality: related to a country or geography
- a language?
  - a language family (similar to the Romance language family with multiple **languages**)
  - a **written language** (no spoken equivalent, unlike many European languages, the closest probably Mandarin)

Weinreich witticism

"A language is a dialect with an army and navy"

Cantonese

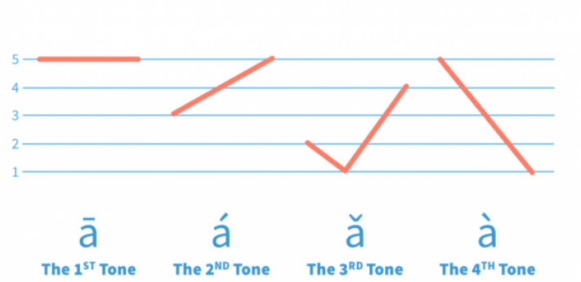
- It is **not a dialect**, it is not a **variety**
  - Linguistic distance: Spanish French
  - → not mutually intelligible
  - → differences in phonology, morphology and syntax

Phonology

- Cantonese has 6 tones with 3 checked variations

絲	si˥	‘silk’	色	sɪk˥	‘colour’	high level
試	si˧	‘try’	泄	sit˧	‘reveal’	mid level
事	si˨	‘matter’	食	sɪk˨	‘eat’	low-mid level
時	si˩	‘time’				low falling (mid-to-low)
史	si˧˥	‘history’				high rising (mid-to-high)
市	si˨˩	‘city’				low rising (low-to-mid)

  - Most of the Cantonese studies are working on phonology: it used to be only a spoken language
  - My Cantonese name in IPA [p^hu:i^{21}] [ji:^{33}] [jy:n^{21}]
- Mandarin has 4 tones



Lexicon

- Cantonese prefers monosyllabic words:
  - 櫈 *dang*^{33} ‘chair’ (vs. 椅子)
  - 枱 *toi*^{35} ‘table’ (vs. 桌子)
- Words of choice:
  - 食 *sik*^{22} ‘to eat’ (vs. 吃)
  - 飲 *jam*^{35} ‘to drink’ (vs. 喝)
  - 嘴 *zeoi*^{35} ‘mouth’ (vs. 口)

Leixcal item

(1) a. 細 路 / 細 蚊 仔
sai^{33} *lou*^{22} / *sai*^{33} *man*^{55} *zai*^{35}
little road / little mosquito son
'child/ children' (vs. 孩子)

b. 差 人
caa^{55} *jan*^{21}
bad person
'police' (vs. 警察)

c. 朱古力
zyu^{55}*gu*^{55}*lik*^{55}
chocolate (Homophonic translation)
'chocolate' (vs. 巧克力)

d. 士多啤梨
si^{22}*do*^{55}*be*^{55}*lei*^{35}
strawberry (Homophonic translation)
'strawberry' (vs. 草莓)

Functional items I

(2) a. 我-哋 去 買 書
ngo^{35}-*dei*^{35} *heoi*^{33} *maai*^{23} *syu*^{55}
1.-PL go buy book

‘We go to buy books’ (vs. 們)

b. 一 啲 書
jat^{55} *di*^{55} *syu*^{55}
one CL.PL book

‘some books’ (vs. 些)

c. 睇 咗 書
tai^{35} *zo*^{35} *syu*^{55}
read PFV book

‘have read some books’ (vs. 了)

Functional items II

d. Mary 嘅 書
Mary *ge*^{35} *syu*^{55}
Mary LE book

‘Mary’s books’ (vs. 的)

e. 唔 睇 書
m^{21} *tai*^{35} *syu*^{55}
NEG read books

‘(I) don’t read books’ (vs. 不)

f. 冇 書
mou^{23} *syu*^{55}
NEG.EXIST books

‘No books’ (vs. 沒有)

Ideophones

in ABB structure, with A part normally being a noun, and BB some meaningless ideophones or adjectives

(3) a. 頭 耷-耷
tau^{21} *dap*^{55}-*dap*^{55}
head down-down
'disappointed'

b. 密 質-質
mat^{22} *zat*^{55}-*zat*^{55}
dense quality-quality
'dense'

c. 黑 扐-扐
hak^{55} *mang*^{55}-*mang*^{55}
black IDEO-IDEO
'black'

Headedness

Cantonese can be both left-headed or right-headed: (Mandarin is right-headed)

- Left-headed:

(4) a. 雞 公
gai^{55} *gung*^{55}
chicken male
'rooster'

b. 雞 嫲
gai^{55} *naa*^{35}
chicken female
'hen'

- Right-headed:

(5) a. 科學 家
fo^{55}*hok*^{22} *ga*^{55}
science -er
'scientist'

b. 豬 肉 佬
zyu^{55} *juk*^{22} *lou*^{35}
pig meat man(vulgar)
'butcher'

Question words

A different set of interrogative markers:

- 咩事 Q-incident ‘what’ (vs. 怎麼了)
- 咩嘢 Q-stuff ‘what’ (vs. 什麼)
- 邊個 Q-CL$_{[+human]}$ ‘who’ (vs. 誰)
- 邊度 Q-CL$_{[+place]}$ ‘where’ (vs. 哪裡)
- 點解 Q-explain ‘why’ (vs. 為什麼)
- 點樣 Q-matter ‘how’ (vs. 怎樣)
- 幾時 Q-time ‘when’ (vs. 什麼時候)

Plural marker

哋 can be used only with pronouns, but not with other common nouns

(6) a. 我-哋
ngo^{35}-*dei*^{35}
1.-PL
'we/us' (vs. 我們)

b. * 學生-哋
hok^{22}*saang*^{55}-*dei*^{35}
student-PL
'students' (vs. 學生們)

Adverb formation

Cantonese uses a different suffix *gaam* to form adverb

(7) a. 好 快 咁 行 去
hou^{35} *faai*^{33} *gam*^{35} *haang*^{21} *heoi*^{33}
very fast ADV walk go
'walk quickly' [Cantonese]

b. 很 快 地 走 過 去
very fast ADV walk COVERB go
'walk quickly' [Mandarin]

Diminutive

Cantonese forms diminutive with the suffix *zai*

(8) a. 熊 仔
hung^{21} *zai*^{35}
bear DIM
'a cub' [Cantonese]

b. 小 熊
DIM bear
'a cub' [Mandarin]

Infixes

Cantonese has some infixes

(9) a. 晨 咁 早
san^{21} *gam*^{33} *zou*^{35}
morning GAM early
'that early' [Cantonese]

b. 那麼 早
that early
'that early' [Mandarin]

c. 是 鬼 但
si^{22} *gwai*^{35} *daan*^{22}
yes GWAI yet
'whatever' [Cantonese]

Definiteness

Cantonese allows the bare classifier structure for definite reading (L. L.-S. Cheng & Sybesma, 1999; Jenks, 2018; Hall, 2019) (vs. in Mandarin using bare noun and demonstratives (Jenks, 2018)):

(10) a. 本 書 好 睇
bun^{35} *syu*^{55} *hou*^{35} *tai*^{35}
CL book good see
'The book is good' [Cantonese]

b. 那 本 書 好 看
DEM.THAT CL book good see
'The book is good' [Mandarin]

Usage of classifiers I

Different classifier choices

(11) a. 一 隻 牛
jat^{55} *zek*^{33} *ngau*^{21}
one CL cow
'a cow' (vs. 一頭牛)

b. 一 個 橙
jat^{55} *go*^{33} *caang*^{35}
one CL orange
'an orange' (vs. 一顆橘子)

Usage of classifiers II

Creative usage of classifiers

(12) a. 一 條 友 / 一 支 公
jat^{55} *tiu*^{21} *jau*^{35} / *jat*^{55} *zi*^{55} *gung*^{55}
one $\text{CL}_{[+prolonged]}$ friend / one $\text{CL}_{[+prolonged+solid]}$ male
'alone'

b. 我 條 女
ngo^{23} *tiu*^{21} *neoi*^{35}
1. $\text{CL}_{[+prolonged]}$ girl
'my girlfriend (vulgar)'

Usage of classifiers III

Classifiers reduplication for the meaning of ‘each of’

(13)

個-個	學生	都	咁	聰明
go^{33}-*go*^{33}	*hok*^{22}*saang*^{55}	*dou*^{55}	*gam*^{33}	*cung*^{55}*ming*^{21}
CL-CL	student	too	that	smart

‘Each of the students is also that smart.’

Aspect marker I

Solely suffixal aspectual markers, and no one-to-one mapping with the Mandarin counterparts

- 咗 perfective marker

(14)

我	睇	咗	本	書
ngo^{23}	*tai*^{35}	*zo*^{35}	*bun*^{35}	*syu*^{55}
1.	see	PFV	CL	book

'I have read the book' (vs. -了)

- 緊 progressive marker

(15)

我	食	緊	飯
ngo^{23}	*sik*^{22}	*gaan*^{35}	*faan*^{22}
1.	eat	PROG	rice

'I am eating' (vs. 在-)

Aspect marker II

- 吓 delimitative marker

(16) 你 睇 吓
nai^{23} *tai*^{35} *haa*^{23}
2. see DEL
'Look!' (vs. V-一-V)

- 開 habitual marker

(17) 我 練 開 柔道
ngo^{23} *lin*^{22} *hoi*^{55} *jau*^{21} *dou*^{22}
1. train HAB judo
'I (habitually) practice Judo.'
(vs. ∅)

Aspect marker III

Aspect markers	States	Activities	Accomplishments	Achievements	Semelfactive
緊 progressive	✗	✓	✓	✓ (trending reading)	✓
住 progressive	✗ (except emphasise)	✓ (durative reading)	✗	✗	✓ (repetitive reading)
咗 perfective	✗ (except endpoint)	✗ (except endpoint)	✓	✓	✗ (except endpoint)
完 perfective	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
過 experiential	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
開 habitual	✗	✓	✓ (routine reading)	✓ (routine reading)	✗
吓 delimitative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
晒 exhaustive	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
落 achievement w/ extension	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
定 preparation	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗

Resultatives

Cantonese resultatives can only build from a strong action-result relationship (i.e. the action will inevitably lead to the result), but Mandarin also allows the weak relationship (Lau & Lee, 2015)

- sleep → wake

(18)

瞓	醒
fan^{33}	*seng*^{35}
sleep	wake

'I wake after sleeping'

- run → win

(19)

跑	贏	比賽
paau^{35}	*jeng*^{21}	*bei*^{35}*coi*^{33}
run	win	competition

'win the running competition'

- run ?→ drop

(20)

# 跑	跌	車	飛
paau^{35}	*dit*^{33}	*ce*^{55}	*fei*^{55}
run	drop	car	ticket

'(I) drop the train ticket while running'

Sentence Final Particle I

Cantonese has a larger sentence final particle inventory (Matthews & Yip, 2011; Wakefield et al., 2011)

- 啵, 吓, 咩, 喎, 啫, 囉 (and some studies suggest there can be up to 200 SFP in Cantonese)
- Sentence final particle can be used doubly or even triply

(21)

我	講	吓	咋	喎
ngo^{23}	*gong*^{35}	*haa*^{23}	*zaa*^{21}	*wo*^{33}
1.	say	DEL	SFP	SFP

'I only briefly said it.'

Sentence Final Particle II

- Different SFPs can lead to completely different meanings or attitudes

(22) a. 你 講 咋
nei^{23} *gong*^{35} *zaa*^{21}
2. say SFP
'Only you say so!'

b. 你 講 咩
nei^{23} *gong*^{35} *me*^{55}
2. say SFP
'What did you say?/ What do you mean?'

c. 你 講 啦
nei^{23} *gong*^{35} *laa*^{55}
2. say SFP
'You can say'

d. 你 講 囉
nei^{23} *gong*^{35} *lo*^{55}
2. say SFP
'You can say as you wish'

Sentence Final Particle III

- Replacing or doubling with syntactic constructions

(23) a. (又) 食 錯 嘢 啫
(*jau*^{22}) *sik*^{22} *co*^{33} *je*^{23} *tim*^{55}
(again) eat wrong stuff SFP
'I ate something wrong again' [Cantonese]

b. 又 食 錯 東西
again eat wrong thing
'I ate something wrong again' [Mandarin]

Hyperraising

Cantonese can raise the subject of the subordinate clause to the subject of the main clause (T. T.-M. Lee & Yip, 2020)

(24)

場	雨	感覺	/	聽聞	話	唔	會	完
coeng^{21}	*jyu*^{23}	*gam*^{35}*gok*^{33}	/	*teng*^{55}*man*^{21}	*waa*^{22}	*m*^{21}	*wui*^{23}	*jyun*^{21}
CL	rain	feel like	/	hearsay	COMP	NEG	will	stop

‘(I) feel/hear that the rain will not stop’

Imperative structure

Cantonese imperative of ditransitive verbs is in the structure of [verb-direct object-indirect object] (Griffiths, 2021)

(25) a. 俾 水 我
bei^{35} *seoi*^{35} *ngo*^{23}
give water 1.
'Give me water!' [Cantonese]

b. 給 我 水
give 1. water
'Give me water!' [Mandarin]

Expressing experience

Existential verb for expressing experience

(26) a. 我 有 食 晚 飯
ngo^{23} *jau*^{23} *sik*^{22} *maan*^{23} *faan*^{22}
1. EXIST eat evening rice
'I have had dinner.' [Cantonese]

b. 我 吃 了 / 過 晚 飯
1. eat PFV / EXP evening rice
'I have had dinner.' [Mandarin]

Potential form

Cantonese expresses potential/ ability to take the action by the suffix *dak* behind the verb

(27) a. 行 得 㗎 啦
haang^{21} *dak*^{55} *gaa*^{33} *laa*^{55}
walk can SFP SFP
‘(We) can go.’ [Cantonese]

b. 可以 走 了
can go SFP
‘(We) can go’ [Mandarin]

Passive

Cantonese passive must be formed with an explicit agent, even if it is just ‘a person’

(28) a. 你 俾 *(人) 呃 咗
nei^{23} *bei*^{35} *jan*^{21} *aak*^{55} *zo*^{35}
2. PASS person deceive PFV
‘You were being deceived’ [Cantonese]

b. 你 被 騙 了
2. PASS deceive PFV
‘You were being deceived’ [Mandarin]

Demonstratives

Cantonese demonstratives cannot be used singly

(29) a. 呢 *(個) 太 怪 啦
ni^{55} *go*^{33} *taai*^{33} *gwaai*^{33} *laa*^{55}
DEM.THIS CL too odd SFP
'This is strange' [Cantonese]

b. 這 太 奇怪 了
DEM.THIS too odd SFP
'This is strange' [Mandarin]

Comparatives

Cantonese forms comparison: *than* following the adjective, with an optional element equivalent with *more* preceding the noun

(30) a. (仲) 高 過 佢
zung^{22} *gou*^{55} *gwo*^{33} *keoi*^{23}
(more) tall than 3.
'(one is) taller than him/ her' [Cantonese]

b. 比 他 高
than 3. tall
'(one is) taller than him/ her' [Mandarin]

Although/ compromise

Cantonese uses another sentential structure for making a compromise, apart from the conjunction

(31) a.

叻	還	叻	,	都	唔	可以	咁	冇	禮貌
lek^{55}	*waan*^{21}	*lek*^{55}	,	*dou*^{55}	*m*^{21}	*ho*^{35}*ji*^{23}	*gam*^{33}	*mou*^{23}	*lai*^{23}*maau*^{22}
smart	WAAN	smart	,	also	NEG	can	GAM	NEG.EXIST	politeness

‘Although you are smart, you still cannot be that impolite’ [Cantonese]

b.

雖然	你	很	聰明	,	但	也	不	可以	沒	禮貌
although	2.	very	smart	,	but	also	NEG	can	NEG.EXIST	pilotness

‘Although you are smart, you still cannot be that impolite’ [Mandarin]

Post-nominal copula verb

Cantonese can form the indefinite copula “be” sentence with a post-nominal marker

(32) a. 佢 學生 嚟
keoi^{23} *hok*^{22}*saang*^{55} *lei*^{21}
3. student PRT
‘(S)he is a student’ [Cantonese]

b. 他 是 學生
3. COP student
‘He is a student’ [Mandarin]

Motion/ direction

Cantonese serial verb construction: the V1 involving motion (go/ come) and the V2 cannot be separated by object

(33) a. 我 去 咗 買 嘢
ngo^{23} *heoi*^{33} *zo*^{35} *maai*^{23} *je*^{23}
1. go PFV buy stuff
'I have gone to buy something' [Cantonese]

b. 我 買 東西 去 了
1. buy stuff go PFV
'I have gone to buy something' [Mandarin]

The “handling” light verb

Cantonese has limited use of the causative light verb; the main verb cannot follow the object, but precede it

(34) a. *將 封 信 交
zoeng^{11} *fung*^{55} *seon*^{33} *gaau*^{55}
LV CL letter submit
咗
zo^{35}
PFV
‘Intended: (I) submitted the letter’ [Cantonese]

b. 把 信 交 了
LV letter submit PFV
‘(I) submitted the letter’ [Mandarin]

c. 交 咗 封 信
gaau^{55} *zo*^{35} *fung*^{55} *seon*^{33}
submit PFV CL letter
‘(I) submitted the letter’ [Cantonese]

Ditransitive construction

Cantonese must form the indirect object with the light verb ‘give’ and cannot precede the direct object, unless with resultative compound (with indefinite DO)

(35) a.

我	送	一	本	書	畀	佢
ngo^{23}	*sung*^{33}	*jat*^{55}	*bun*^{35}	*syu*^{55}	*bei*^{35}	*keoi*^{23}
1.	gift	one	CL	book	LV.GIVE	3.

‘I gifted him a book’ [Cantonese]

b.

我	講	畀	佢	聽	*(一)	件	事
ngo^{23}	*gong*^{35}	*bei*^{35}	*keoi*^{23}	*teng*^{55}	*jat*^{55}	*gin*^{22}	*si*^{22}
1.	say	LV.GIVE	3.	hear	one	CL	thing

‘I told him one thing’ [Cantonese]

c. 我 送 他 一 本 書
1. gift 3. one CL book

‘I gifted him a book’ [Mandarin]

Coverbs

Coverbs are verbal elements adding extra meaning to the main verb: Cantonese coverbs exist postverbally, in contrast to Mandarin

(36) a. 佢 行 先
keoi^{23} *haang*^{21} *sin*^{55}
3. walk first
'(S)he goes first' [Cantonese]

b. 佢 冇 去 乜滯
keoi^{23} *mou*^{23} *heoi*^{33} *mat*^{55}*zai*^{22}
3. NEG.EXIST go not much
'(S)he hasn't gone much' [Cantonese]

c. 他 先 走
3. first leave
'He leaves first'

d. 他 不 怎麼 去
3. NEG how go
'(S)he hasn't gone much' [Mandarin]

“Only”

Cantonese also expresses “only” for action with a particle at the post-VO position

(37) a. 佢 睇 書 咋嘛
keoi^{23} *tai*^{35} *syu*^{55} *zaa*^{33}*maa*^{21}
3. see book only
‘(S)he is reading only’ [Cantonese]

b. 他 只是 看 書
3. only see book
‘He is reading only’ [Mandarin]

Even the writing systems are not the same: Hong Kong uses Traditional Chinese characters for formal writing, and creates Written Cantonese (Bauer, 1988, 2018) for daily usage, which now extends to cultural (literature, music, etc.) (vs. Simplified Chinese in China)

(38) a. 佢 哋 係
keoi^{23} *dei*^{22} *hai*^{22}
3. PL COP
差-人
caai^{55}-*jan*^{21}
bad-person
'They are police' [Cantonese]

b. 他 們 是 警察
3. PL COP police
'They are police' [Mandarin]



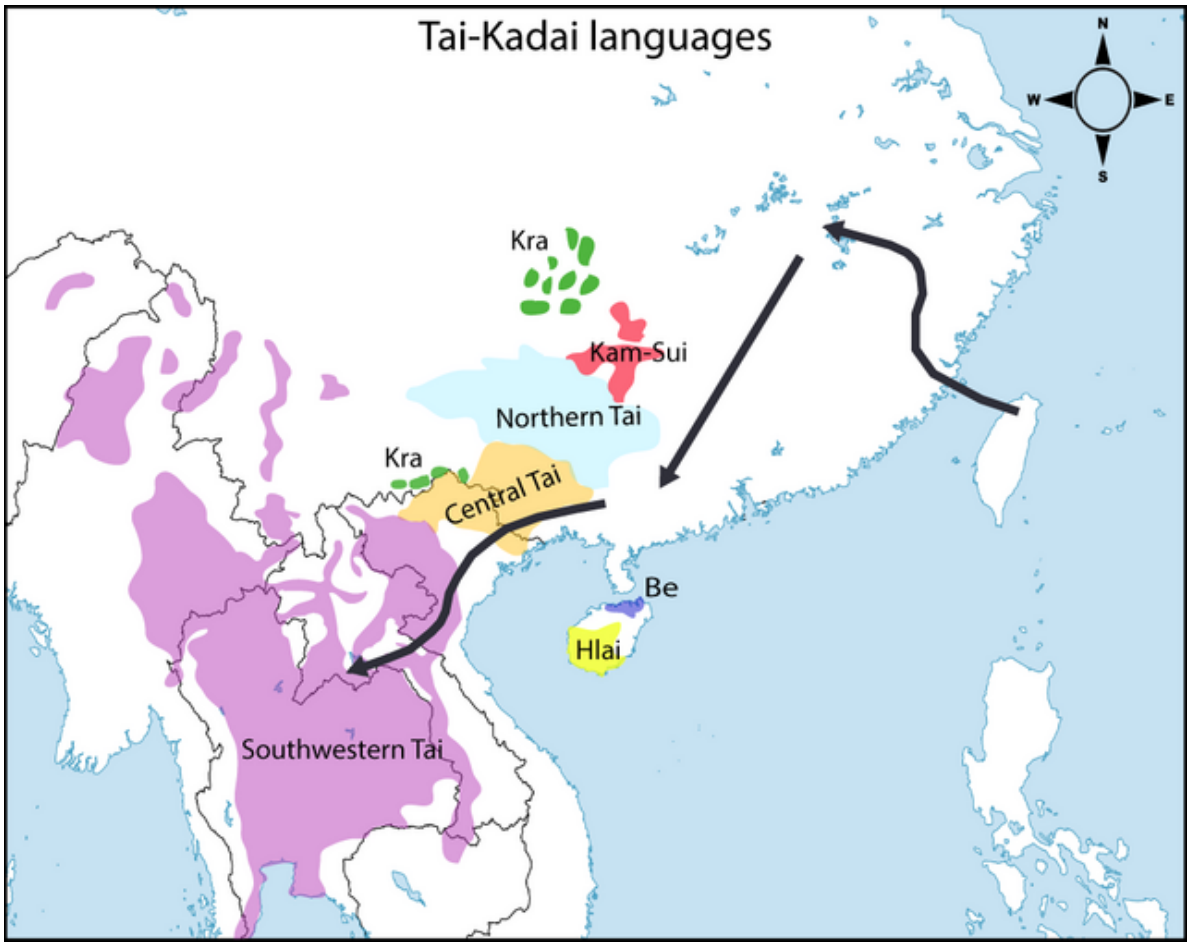


Language contact I

Cantonese is a language developed separately from Mandarin, originating from Southern China

- Non-Han languages (Tai-Kadai languages), e.g. Zhuang, Thai, Kam, Lao, are the basis of Cantonese
- Other Sino-Tibetan later contacted with Cantonese, and the mixture became a pidgin language
- And the pidgin further developed into the Cantonese language (similar to a creole)
- Cantonese nowadays still shows a lot of (phonological, morphosyntactic) features of Tai-Kadai languages

Language contact II



Why the misunderstanding?

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6. The lack of standardised grammar

The goal

- Research on Cantonese is not systematic & lack a standardised grammar:
  - Research focuses on only one topic and moves on without studying the whole picture of Cantonese in a theoretical way
  - Many grammars are written in Cantonese only and mainly for teaching purposes (Tang, 2015; Cheung, 2007)

  $\rightarrow$ That's what I/we are working on :D
- Make Cantonese more visible

What next?

The government is trying to “cancel out” Cantonese in Hong Kong, due to the national language policy

Policy	Content
Prestige Planning of Mandarin	Emphasis on the usefulness and the critical value of Mandarin (Marten, 2016; Clark, 2018) The Education Bureau’s statement: “Cantonese is a Chinese dialect not considered an official language.” (K. Cheng, n.d.)
“Biliteracy and Trilingualism” policy (2000)	Students should learn three spoken languages and two written languages
Mandarin as the Medium of Instruction	Started considering (Poon, 2013) Optional but highly recommended (2003): despite students’ inability to comprehend (K. S. Lee & Leung, 2012; Tam, 2011)
Language Funding	Budget only promoting Mandarin & English + Ignoration of Cantonese
Recent intention of further development	Should clarify the official status of simplified Chinese and Mandarin in the Basic Law ((RTHK), n.d.) Fear of the sole and obligatory MOI in schools

The fear of today’s Guangzhou will be tomorrow’s Hong Kong

Why this topic?

“Where speakers value their native language highly, the language will thrive.” (Sautman & Xie, 2020)

What can we do?

- Preservation from bottom-up:
  - Local: Cherishing language and culture (music, literature), written Cantonese
  - Global: Promoting Cantonese and Cantonese classes for foreign learners and heritage speakers, making Cantonese more visible, accessible and interesting
  - **Academia**: Put Cantonese as one of the languages in the cross-linguistic research! Linguists are putting the bits and pieces together, analysing it in a theoretical way and formulating Cantonese grammar

Thank you!

Enjoy the Wall of Fame and the Party!

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