

Cantonese is the standard representative of the Yuè dialects of Chinese, specifically referring to the variety of Yuè spoken in the city of Guǎngzhōu (Norman 1988). The variety of Yuè spoken in Hong Kong, however, is so near to that of Guǎngzhōu that it is also called Cantonese.

The Consonants of Guǎngzhōu:

Lenis:	b	d	dz	g	gw	(ʔ)
Aspirated:	p ^h	t ^h	ts ^h	k ^h	kʷ	
Fricatives:	f	s				h
Nasals:	m	n		ŋ	(ŋw)	
Sonorants:		l		j	w	

The above chart is largely accurate for Hong Kong Cantonese, with the exception that no distinction is typically made between /n/ and /ŋ/. Note that the use of [ʔ] is non-distinctive.

Tones and Vowels:

Cantonese has essentially eight full vowels:

i	y	u
ɛ	œ	ɔ
	ɐ	
	a:	

The vowel [ɐ] is a conditioned variant of [a:] which occurs in closed syllables.

Cantonese is most successfully treated as having nine distinctive tones, six full and three checked:

53, 21, 35, 24, 44, 33 are the full tone melodies.
 5̣, 4̣, 3̣ are the checked tone levels.

The full tones occur on syllables ending in sonorants; checked tones occur on syllables ending in stops. The speaker recorded here seems to neutralize the checked tones 4̣ and 3̣ to a single mid-low checked tone.

I. Word ListsInitials:

1	[b]	[ba: ⁵³]	"trumpet"
2		[bei ³⁵]	"to give"
3	[d]	[da: ⁵³]	"dozen"
4		[dɔu ⁵³]	"knife"
5	[dz]	[dza: ⁵³]	"residue"
6		[dze ⁴⁴]	"borrow"
7	[g]	[ga: ⁵³]	"family"
8		[gip ³]	"to crowd, pinch"
9	[p ^h]	[p ^h a: ⁴⁴]	"to frighten"
10		[p ^h ɔu ²⁴]	"a bubble"
11	[t ^h]	[t ^h a: ⁵³]	"he"
12		[t ^h ɔ ⁵³]	"to pull, tow, drag"
13	[ts ^h]	[ts ^h a: ⁵³]	"fork"
14		[ts ^h ɛ ⁵³]	"car"
15	[k ^h]	[k ^h a: ⁵³]	"a carriage"
16		[k ^h im ³⁵]	"to thumb through (a book)"
17	[gw]	[gwa: ⁵³]	"pumpkin"
18		[gwɔ ⁴⁴]	"to go to"
19	[kɰ]	[kɰa: ⁵³]	"to compliment"
20		[kɰɛn ³⁵]	classifier "ream"
21	[f]	[fa: ⁵³]	"flower"
22		[fei ²¹]	"fat"
23	[s]	[sa: ⁵³]	"sand"
24		[se ³⁵]	"to write"
25	[h]	[ha: ⁵³]	"shrimp"
26		[hin ⁵³]	"to lead (with one's hand)"
27	[m]	[ma: ⁵³]	"mother"
28		[me ⁵³]	"to carry on the back"
29	[ŋ]	[ŋa: ⁵³]	"blackbird"
30		[ŋɔi ⁵³]	"to love"
31	[l]	[la: ⁵³]	an end particle
32		[lik ³]	"strength, energy"
33	[j]	[ja: ²⁴]	"also"
34		[jɔt ³]	"month"
35	[w]	[wa: ⁵³]	"frog"
36		[wu ³⁵]	"cooking pot"

Finals:

1	[p]	[dzɛp ⁵]	"juice"
2	[t]	[dzɛt ⁵]	"quality"
3	[k]	[dzɛk ⁵]	"side"
4	[m]	[dzɛm ⁵³]	"needle"
5	[n]	[dzɛn ⁵³]	"true"

Tones and Vowels:

1	[i]	[dzi ⁵³]	"expenditure"
2		[lin ²¹]	"even"
3	[y]	[dzy ⁵³]	"pig"
4		[lyn ³³]	"to be confused"
5	[ɛ]	[dzɛ ⁵³]	"to cover"
6		[gɛŋ ⁵³]	"to be afraid"
7	[œ]	[hœ ⁵³]	"boot"
8		[gœŋ ⁵³]	"ginger"
9	[ɐ]	[dzɛm ⁵³]	"needle"
10		[dɛk ⁵]	"to get, receive, gain"
11	[a:]	[dza: ⁵³]	"residue"
12		[da: ³⁵]	"hit"
13	[ɔ]	[dzɔ ³⁵]	"left"
14		[ts ^h ɔŋ ²¹]	"bed"
15	[u]	[fu ⁵³]	"man"
16		[bun ⁴⁴]	"half"

Tone contrasts:

1	[fɛn ⁵³]	"to divide"
2	[fɛn ³⁵]	"powder"
3	[fɛn ⁴⁴]	"to advise"
4	[fɛn ²¹]	"grave"
5	[fɛn ²⁴]	"excited"
6	[fɛn ³³]	"to share"
7	[bit ⁵]	"must"
8	[bit ⁴]	"marine turtle"
9	[bit ³]	"departure"
10	[jɛn ⁵³]	"reason"
11	[jɛn ³⁵]	"to hide"
12	[jɛn ⁴⁴]	"to stamp"
13	[jɛn ²¹]	"man"
14	[jɛn ²⁴]	"to tempt"
15	[jɛn ³³]	"knife"

16	[sik ⁵]	"colour"
17	[sik ⁴]	a kind of metal
18	[sik ³]	"to eat"
19	[fu ⁵³]	"husband"
20	[fu ³⁵]	"office"
21	[fu ⁴⁴]	"rich"
22	[fu ²¹]	"support"
23	[fu ²⁴]	"wife"
24	[fu ³³]	"father"
25	[t ^h ɔŋ ³³]	"sugar"
26	[t ^h ɔŋ ³⁵]	"candy"
27	[mui ³⁵]	"younger sister"
28	[mui ²¹]	"coal"
29	[mui ²⁴]	"each, every"
30	[gɛŋ ³⁵]	"neck"
31	[gɛŋ ⁵³]	"afraid"
32	[gɛŋ ⁴⁴]	"mirror"
33	[dzɛk ³]	"straw mat"
34	[dzɛk ⁴]	general classifier
35	[dɛk ³]	"flute"
36	[dɛk ⁵]	"to banish" (slang)
37	[sɛŋ ⁵³]	"voice"
38	[sɛŋ ²¹]	"city, town"
39	[sɛŋ ³⁵]	"to be awake"
40	[bɛŋ ³⁵]	"cake"
41	[bɛŋ ⁴⁴]	"handle"
42	[bɛŋ ³³]	"ill"
43	[dɛŋ ⁵³]	"nail"
44	[dɛŋ ³⁵]	"top"
45	[dɛŋ ³³]	"to reserve"
46	[dzɛŋ ³⁵]	"well"
47	[dzɛŋ ³³]	"clean" (adj.)
48	[dzɛŋ ⁵³]	"to be clever"
49	[dzɛŋ ⁴⁴]	"accurate, correct"

50	[ts ^b ɛŋ ⁴⁴]	“blue”
51	[ts ^b ɛŋ ²¹]	“the sky cleared up”
52	[ts ^b ɛŋ ³⁵]	“to invite”

II. Reading Sample

References:

Huang, Parker Po-fei (1970) *Cantonese Dictionary*, New Haven: Yale U. Press.

Li, Charles N. (1992) “Chinese,” in *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, Oxford: Oxford U. Press.

Norman, Jerry (1988) *Chinese*, Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press.