

Lesson 1: Introductions I

Dialogue 1

Yale Romanization

A: nei⁵ hou²!

B: nei⁵ hou²!

A: nei⁵ giu³ mat¹ye⁵ meng² a³?

B: ngo⁵ giu³ John. nei⁵ ne¹?

A: ngo⁵ giu³ Mary.

English Translation

A: Hello!

B: Hello!

A: What is your name?

B: My name is John. How about you?

A: My name is Mary.

Vocabulary

Yale Romanization

nei⁵

hou²

giu³

mat¹ye⁵

meng²

a³

ngo⁵

ne¹

Part of Speech

PN

Adj

V

QW

N

Part.

PN

Part.

English Meaning

You

good, fine

to call

what?

name

[question particle]

I, me

[question: what about?]

Dialogue 2

Yale Romanization

Mark: ching²man⁶, nei⁵ gwai³sing³ a³?

Jenny: ngo⁵ sing³ Chan⁴. nei⁵ ne¹?

Mark: ngo⁵ sing³ Wong⁴. ngo⁵ giu³ Mark. nei⁵ giu³ mat¹ye⁵ meng² a³?

Jenny: ngo⁵ giu³ Jenny.

English Translation

Mark: May I ask, what's your surname?

Jenny: My surname is Chan. And you?

Mark: My surname is Wong. My name is Mark. What is your name?

Jenny: My name is Jenny.

Vocabulary

Yale Romanization

ching²man⁶

gwai³sing³

sing³

Chan⁴, Wong⁴

Part of Speech

Expression

Expression

V

English Meaning

May I ask, Excuse me...?

honorable surname

to have the surname...

Chan, Wong (common surnames)

Dialogue 3

Yale Romanization

John: wai⁶ David!

David: wai⁶ John! ni¹paai⁴ dim² a³?

John: gei² hou² a³, nei⁵ ne¹?

David: m⁴ cho³ a¹.

John: dang² ngo⁵ gaai³siu⁶-ha⁵, ni¹ go³ hai⁵ ngo⁵ go³ pang⁴yau⁵, Mary.

Mary: nei⁵ hou²!

David: nei⁵ hou²! ngo⁵ hai⁶ a³ David!

English Translation

John: Hey David!

David: Hey John! How have things been going?

John: Pretty good, how about you?

David: Not bad.

John: Allow me to introduce. This is my friend Mary.

Mary: Hi!

David: Hi! I'm David.

Vocabulary

Yale Romanization

wai⁶/wei⁶

ni¹paai⁴

dim²

Part of Speech

Expression

Time Word

QW

English Meaning

Hey!

recently; lately

how?

gei ² (+adj.)	Adv.	quite
m ⁴	Neg.	not; do not
m ⁴ cho ³	Expression (adj.)	not bad
a ⁶ /a ¹	Part.	[statement particle]
dang ²	V (imperative)	Let/Allow...
gaai ³ siu ⁶	V	to introduce
ni ¹	Particle	this
go ³	Dem.	measure for person or thing
hai ⁶	MW	to be
pang ⁴ yau ⁵	V	friend
a ³	N	prefix added to names

Supplementary Vocabulary

Yale Romanization

Part of Speech

English Meaning

keui ⁵	Pronoun	he/she
-dei ⁶	suffix	plural for pronouns
jeui ³ gan ⁶	Time Word/Adv	recently; lately
gan ⁶ paai ²	Time Word	recently; lately
fei ¹ seung ⁴ (ji ¹)	Adv	extremely
hou ² (+adj.)	Adv	very
tung ⁴ hok ⁶	N	classmate

Grammar

1) Cantonese Word Order

The general word order of Cantonese is Subject-Verb-Object.

ngo ⁵	giu ³	John	keui ⁵	jung ¹ yi ³	ping ⁴ gwo ²
<i>I am</i>	<i>called</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>he/she</i>	<i>likes</i>	<i>apples</i>
S	V	O	S	V	O

2) Pronouns

	Singular		Plural	
1st	ngo ⁵	I, me	ngo ⁵ dei ⁶	We, us
2nd	nei ⁵	You	nei ⁵ dei ⁶	You
3rd	keui ⁵	He/she/him/her	keui ⁵ dei ⁶	They, them

Pronouns in Cantonese do not distinguish masculine and feminine, so gender is determined from context. The plural marker only applies to pronouns and fixed expressions, i.e. yan⁴dei⁶ 'others'.

3) Question Particles a³ and ne¹

The question particle a³ is used for neutral questions, generally to soften the tone.

nei⁵ go³ pang⁴yau⁵ giu³ mat¹ye⁵ meng² a³? What is your friend's name?

The question particle ne¹ is used in follow questions based on previous context (what about.../how about...?), or to indicate a sense of wonder, like when one thinks to oneself.

keui⁵ ne¹? What about him?

gam¹yat¹ (today) tin¹hei³ (weather) dim² ne¹?
 (I wonder) how's the weather today?

4) Verb *hai6*

The verb *hai6* connects nouns and noun phrases, but unlike English, it cannot be used to link a noun and an adjective in a general statement.

ngo⁵ hai⁶ hok⁶saang¹. I am a student.

*ngo⁵ hai⁶ hou² lek¹(smart) a³. I (really) am very smart.
 (As a general statement, this is ungrammatical. Cases in which this is grammatical will be introduced later)

5) Adjectives in general

In Cantonese, there are cases in which the adjectives may function as a verb. As such, they do not use the verb *to be* in forming sentences as English does. However, if they are used in the predicate (the portion of the sentence that contains the verb), then they usually must be preceded by some sort of modifier.

ni¹ go³ hou² gwai³ a³! This one is (very) expensive.

ngo⁵ ni¹paai⁴ gei² hou²! I'm doing quite well lately.

6) Asking how one is doing

The use of *nei⁵ hou²* 'Hello!' and *nei⁵ hou² ma³?* 'How are you doing?' is typically used between strangers or in a formal polite setting. Between friends and close acquaintances, a speaker will use *wai6* followed by the person's name to greet the listener and *dim² a³?* 'How are you doing?'

Example:

wai⁶ a³ John! jeui³gan⁶ dim² a³?

Hey John! How have you been doing (recently)?