



Cantonese II

Week 12



UNIT 21

Passives

Cantonese passives are signalled by **bei2** 畀 phrase similar to the English *by* phrase. The **béi** 畀 phrase (**béi** 畀 + a noun phrase indicating the agent of the action) occurs before the verb:

di1 syut3 gou1 bei2 di1 sai3 lou6 zai2 sik6 zo2 啲雪糕畀啲細路仔食咗

(lit. the ice cream by the children eaten)
The ice cream was eaten by the children.

bun2 syu1 bei2 go3 hok6 saang1 ze3 zo2 本書畀個學生借咗

The book was borrowed by a student.

ngo5 go3 zai2 bei2 sin1 saang1 fat6 gwo3 我個仔畀先生罰過

My son has been punished by the teacher.

The noun phrase denoting the agent of the action is obligatory in spoken Cantonese, in contrast to English and Mandarin which allow agentless passives. When the identity of the agent is unknown or left unspecified, the word 人 'person' or 嘢 'thing' is used generically:

ngo5 go3 ngan4 baau1 bei2 jan4 tau1 zo2 我個銀包畀人偷咗

My wallet was stolen.

Kei5 keoi5 sing4 jat6 bei2 jan4 aak1 佢成日畀人呃

He often gets cheated.

N ngo5 jau6 bei2 je5 ngaau5 can1 我又畀嘢咬親

I've been bitten again.

Note the contrast with the English translations in which the agent is not mentioned at all.

A peculiarity of Cantonese passives is that a passive verb can still take a direct object. This applies especially to those verbs introduced in Unit 16 which take two objects, such as 偷 'steal', 罰 'fine' and 問 'ask':

keoi5 bei2 jan4 tau1 zo2 go3 ngan4 baau1 佢畀人偷咗個銀包

She had her purse stolen.

ngo5 bei2 jan4 fat6 zo2 hou2 do1 cin2 我畀人罰咗好多錢

I was fined a lot of money.

ngo5 m4 soeng2 bei2 jan4 man6 gam3 do1 je5 我唔想畀人問咁多嘢

I don't want to be asked so much.

This possibility gives rise to alternative passive forms for the same idea:

a ngo5 go3 ce1 paai4 bei2 jan4 lo2 zo2

我個車牌畀人擺咗

My licence has been taken away.

b ngo5 bei2 jan4 lo2 zo2 go3 ce1 paai4

我畀人擺咗個車牌

I've had my licence taken away.

a keoi5 gaa3 ce1 bei2 jan4 zong6 gwo3

佢架車畀人撞過

Her car has been dented.

b keoi5 bei2 jan4 zong6 gwo3 gaa3 ce1

佢畀人撞過架車

She's had her car dented.

The first version provides an objective statement of events, while the second focuses on the effect on the person suffering the misfortune.

Exercise 21.1

Turn the following active sentences into their passive counterparts using **béi** 畀:

Example ging2 caat3 zuk1 zo2 keoi5 dei6 警察捉咗佢哋 The police have caught them. → keoi5 dei6 bei2 ging2 caat3 zuk1 zo2 佢哋畀警察捉咗

1 gaa3 ce1 zo2 zyu6 ngo5 dei6
架車阻住我哋

The car is blocking us.

2 ngo5 jung6 zo2 di1 cin2 ín
我用咗啲錢

I have used the money.

3 di1 sai3 lou6 zai2 gaau2 lyun6 zo2 gaan1 fong2
啲細路仔搞亂咗間房

The children have made a mess of the room.

4 keoi5 ze3 zo2 ngo5 go3 sau2 doi2
佢借咗我個手袋

She has borrowed my handbag.

5 di1 ce1 seng1 cou4 seng2 zo2 ngo5 hóh
啲車聲嘈醒咗我

The noise of the cars has
awakened me.

6 ngo5 tai2 gwo3 fung1 seon3 í
我睇過封信

I have read the letter.

7 keoi5 dei6 zing2 wai6 zo2 go3 din6 nou5 úh
佢哋整壞咗個電腦

They have broken the
computer.

8 keoi5 hoi1 gwo3 go3 seon3 soeng1 í
佢開過個信箱

He has opened the mailbox.

9 keoi5 dei6 sik6 zo2 di1 zyu1 gu1 lik1 ík
佢哋食咗啲朱古力

They have eaten the chocolate.

10 keoi5 daa2 laan6 zo2 zek3 bui1 í
佢打爛咗隻杯

He has broken the glass.

1 jau5 jan4 lo2 zo2 ngo5 go3 sau2 biu1

有人攞咗我個手錶

2 jau5 jan4 hoi1 zo2 dou6 mun4 n

有人開咗度門

3 jau5 jan4 sik1 zo2 laang5 hei3 gei1

有人熄咗冷氣機

4 jau5 jan4 aak1 zo2 keoi5 di1 cin2 hín

有人呃咗佢啲錢

5 jau5 jan4 maai5 zo2 di1 syu1

有人買咗啲書

6 jau5 je5 ngaau5 dou2 ngo5 zek3 sau2

有嘢咬到我隻手

7 jau5 di1 je5 faan4 dou2 keoi5 h

有啲嘢煩到佢

8 jau5 di1 je5 jing2 hoeng2 dou2 keoi5
ge3 sam1 cing4

有啲嘢影響到佢嘅心情

Someone took my watch.

Someone opened the door.

Someone turned off the air conditioning.

Someone cheated him out of his money.

Someone bought the books.

Something has bitten my hand.

Something has troubled him.

Something has affected her mood.

Translate the following into Cantonese and also in passive voice.

1. Someone ate my bread (min6 baau1 麵包)
2. Someone borrowed my money (ze3 cin2 借錢)
3. My father broke (zing2 waai6 整壞) the computer (bou6 din6 nou5 部電腦)
4. I washed (sai2 洗) the clothes (saam1 衫)
5. He has broken (daa2 laan6 打爛) the glass (zek6 隻 bui1 杯)
6. Someone open the box (soeng1 箱)
7. Someone stole (tau1 偷) her wallet (ngan4 baau1 銀包)
8. Someone scammed (aak1 呃) his money

UNIT 25

Sentence particles

Sentence particles are one of the most challenging features of Cantonese for learners of the language. Without them, many Cantonese sentences sound incomplete, abrupt or even impolite. Cantonese has a rich repertoire of particles which serve a variety of communicative functions in different speech contexts and are probably best learnt from direct experience. Below we introduce some of the most basic and frequently used particles, bearing in mind that there are altogether some thirty particles in use.

Perhaps the most basic particle is **aa3** 呀, because of its importance for politeness and in asking questions. It is the most common, and most neutral, of the sentence particles, serving to soften the force of a statement or question.

aa3 呀 is regularly used in questions, as we have seen in Units 23–24:

nei5 heoi3 m4 heoi3 keoi5 uk1 kei2 aa3 ? Are you going to his house?

你去唔去佢屋企呀?

keoi5 hai6 m4 hai6 zyu6 hai2 saa1 tin4 aa3 ? Does she live in Shatin?

佢係唔係住嚟沙田呀?

ngo5 dei6 heoi3 bin1 dou6 sik6 faan6 aa3 ? Where shall we go to eat?

我哋去邊度食飯呀?

aa3 呀 can also be used in affirmative sentences, for example, to soften the force of a negative response (see Unit 24):

A: nei5 hai6 m4 hai6 m4 syu1 fuk6 aa3 ? Are you sick?

你係唔係唔舒服呀?

m4 hai6 aa3 唔係呀

No.

me1 咩 is used in a particular kind of question, expressing surprise or the unexpected:

nei5 m4 zi1 me1 ? 你唔知咩?

Don't you know?

ngo5 dei6 m4 gau3 me1? 我哋唔夠咩?

Don't we have enough?

講笑啫

Gong2 siu3 ze1

ze1 啫 serves to play down the extent or significance of something:

gei2 baak3 man1 ze1 幾百蚊啫 It's just a few hundred dollars.

hou2 jung4 ji6 ze1 好容易啫 It's really pretty easy.

ngo5 dei6 heoi3 waan2 haa5 ze1 We're just going to have some fun.

我哋去玩吓啫

laa3 喇 adds a sense of current relevance to the statement. It is comparable to Mandarin 了, although rather less widely used. It occurs especially with the perfective aspect 咗 and other particles expressing completion such as 好 and 完.

keoi5 dei6 lei4 zo2 fan1 hou2 noi6 laa3 They have been divorced for some time.

佢哋離咗婚好耐喇

keoi5 bun2 zi6 cyun4 se2 hou2 laa3 Her autobiography is written up.

佢本自傳寫好喇

ngo5 tai2 jyun4 go3 bou3 gou3 laa3 I've finished (reading) the report.

我睇完個報告喇

laa1 啦; aa1 吖 are used primarily in imperatives and requests (see Units 26–27):

nei5 siu2 sam1 di1 laa1 你小心啲啦 Do be careful.

m4 goi1 bei2 bui1 seoi2 ngo5 aa1 (Give me) a glass of water, please.

唔該畀杯水我吖

Of the two, 㗎 is rather more insistent.

Particle combinations

The expressive range of particles is greatly increased by combinations; **ge** 嘅, for example, can be followed by almost any particle:

go2 tou3 din6 si6 kek6 zou6 jyun4 **ge3 laa3**

嗰套電視劇做完嘅喇

That soap opera has finished now.

keoi5 gong2 siu3 **ge3 ze1** 佢講笑嘅啫

He's only joking.

nei5 ji5 wai6 ngo5 so4 **ge3 me1 ?**

你以為我傻嘅咩?

Do you think I'm stupid?

In this way, three or more particles can readily occur together:

nei5 sik1 lou6 **ge3 laa3 me1 ?** 你識路嘅喇咩?

Do you (really) know the way?

keoi5 hai6 siu2 hok6 saang1 lai4 **ge3 zaa3 wo3 !**

佢係小學生嚟嘅咋喎!

She's only a primary school student, you know!

Normally, the particles have their usual contributions, so that rather than learning how to use, say, the combination **ge la** 嘅喇, the learner should concentrate on individual particles and the combinations will tend to look after themselves.

Contractions: ge 嘅 + **a** 呀 = **ga** 㗎

This contraction of two particles already introduced illustrates another way in which particles combine. Take a typical statement ending with **ge** 嘅:

ni1 go3 bou3 gou3 hai6 keoi5 se2 ge3 呢個報告係佢寫嘅

(lit. this report is he wrote)

It was him who wrote this report.

keoi5 hai6 sing3 lam4 ge3 佢係姓林嘅

(lit. he is surnamed Lam)

His surname is Lam.

Putting these sentences into question form, which requires the particle **a** 呀, we end up with **ga** 㗎:

ni1 go3 bou3 gou3 hai6 m4 hai6 keoi5 se2 gaa3 ?

呢個報告係唔係佢寫㗎?

keoi5 hai6 m4 hai6 sing3 lam4 gaa3 ?

佢係唔係姓林㗎?

Was it him who wrote this report?

Is his surname Lam?

嘅 + 㗎 becomes **leihga**

Particle	Jyutping	Usage	Example
呀	aa3	Used in neutral questions . Also used to soften the tone of affirmative statements so they don't sound as abrupt .	Nei5 heoi3 bin1aa3? 你去邊呀? Where are you going? Ngo5 faan1 uk1 kei2 aa3. 我返屋企呀 I'm going home.
嘅	ge3	Used in assertions where something is emphasized (usually 係 hai6 is in front of what is being emphasized). Pronouncing it as ge2 adds a sense of puzzlement about the situation. This is equivalent to the Mandarin/written Chinese 的 dik1.	Ngo5 hai6 gam1 jat6 faan1 uk1 kei2 ge3. 我係今日返屋企嘅 I'm going home today. (the "today" is emphasized)
㗎	gaa3	Contraction of the combination 嘅呀 ge3 aa3. Can be used in question and answer.	你係幾時返來㗎? When are you coming back? (the "when" is emphasized) Use for defending your argument or emphasis. Stronger than嘅ge3. Hai6 ngo5 gaa3! 係我架! It's mine!
啦	laa1	Used in requests and imperatives. This is one particle where leaving it out could make the sentence sound rude. This is equivalent to the Mandarin/written Chinese sentence final 吧 baa6.	Bei2 ngo5 laa1 畀我啦 Give it to me [please].
啫	ze1	Can be used to mean "only" or "that's all," or used to play down the significance of the situation.	Keoi5 faan1 yat1 yat6 ze1 佢返一日啫 He's only coming back for one day.

keoi5 faan1 zo2 uk1 kei2 佢返咗屋企 ("He went home")

佢返咗屋企 aa3 呀 – (informing the listener) "He went home!"

佢返咗屋企 laa3 喇 – (informing the listener) "He already went home!"

佢返咗屋企 wo3 喎 – "Oh... He already went home though."

佢返咗屋企 gwaa3 啫 – (with uncertainty) "He went home, I guess"

佢返咗屋企 me1 咩? – "Oh, he went home?"

佢返咗屋企 lo1 囉 – (with emphasis) "He went home already."

佢返咗屋企 laa3 maa3 啦嘛 – "He went home already! (so he can't be here right now)"

Exercise 25.3

Match the sentence with the translation based on the particle:

- | | | |
|---|--|------------------------------------|
| 1 | keoi5 soeng2 bong1 nei5 ge3 佢想幫你嘅 | a He only wants to help you. |
| 2 | keoi5 soeng2 bong1 nei5 me1? 佢想幫你咩? | b He wants to help you. |
| 3 | keoi5 soeng2 bong1 nei5 ze1 佢想幫你啫 | c Does he really want to help you? |
| 4 | nei5 gong2 bei2 keoi5 teng1 laa1? 你講畀佢聽啦? | d Are you going to tell her? |
| 5 | nei5 wui5 gong2 bei2 keoi5 teng1 me1? 你會講畀佢聽咩? | e Would you really tell her? |
| 6 | nei5 wui5 m4 wui5 gong2 bei2 keoi5 teng1 aa3? tēng a 你會唔會講畀佢聽呀? | f Why don't you tell her? |
| 7 | keoi5 dei6 git3 zo2 fan1 laa3 me1? 佢哋結咗婚嘅喇咩? | g Are they married? |
| 8 | keoi5 dei6 git3 zo2 fan1 ge3 laa3 佢哋結咗婚嘅喇 | h What, they're married? |
| 9 | keoi5 dei6 git3 zo2 fan1 mei6 aa3? 佢哋結咗婚未呀? | i They're already married. |

Exercise 25.1

Add an appropriate particle at the end of each sentence (choose from 嘍, **la** 喇, **ge3** 嘅, **gaa3** 架 or **lai4 gaa3** 㗎):

1 **I** **di1 min6 sik6 dak1** **k** 啲麵食得 ____

The noodles are ready to eat.

2 **D** **di1 min6 m4 sik6 dak1** **k** 啲麵唔食得 ____

The noodles cannot be eaten (are inedible).

3 **N** **ngo5 zing6 hai6 tai2 haa5** **h** 我淨係睇下 ____

I'm just looking.

4 **I** **ngo5 sai3 lou2 zou6 wui6 gai3 si1** **i** 我細佬做會計師 ____

My younger brother is an accountant.

- 5 naam4 jan2 hai6 gam2 ge3 男人係咁嘅 ____ Men are like that.
- m4 goi1 nei5 bong1 ngo5 se2 唔該你幫我寫 ____ Please write it for me.
- 7 ngo5 dei6 ji5 ging1 fan1 zo2 sau2 我哋已經分咗手 ____ We've already split up.
- 8 Li ni1 go3 hai6 tin1 coi4 ji4 tung4 呢個係天才兒童 ____ This is a child prodigy, you see.
- 9 nei5 hoi1 sam1 di1 你開心啲 ____! (Try to) be happier!
- 10 K nei5 zaang1 ngo5 hou2 siu2 cin2 n 佢爭我好少錢 ____ He owes me very little money.

Exercise 25.2

Add an appropriate particle to complete the following questions (choose from

aa3 呀 me1 咩 ga 㗎 lai4 gaa3 㗎㗎):

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | nei5 giu3 mat1 je5 meng2 _____? | What is your name? |
| | 你叫乜嘢名 _____? | |
| 2 | ni1 go3 mat1 je5 _____? | What is this? |
| | 呢個乜嘢 _____? | |
| 3 | dim2 wui5 gam3 gwai3 _____? | How come it's so expensive? |
| | 點會咁貴 _____? | |
| 4 | gam1 jat6 hai6 sing1 kei4 jat6 _____? | Is it really Sunday today? |
| | 今日係星期日 _____? | |
| 5 | nei5 jam2 m4 jam2 je5 _____? | Will you have a drink? |
| | 你飲唔飲嘢 _____? | |
| 6 | gei2 dim2 gin3 gaau3 sau6 _____? | What time do we see the professor? |
| | 幾點見教授 _____? | |
| 7 | nei5 m4 sik1 zaa1 ce1 ge3 _____? | Don't you know how to drive? |
| | 你唔識揸車嘅 _____? | |
| 8 | hai6 m4 hai6 nei5 se2 _____? | Was it you who wrote it? |
| | 係唔係你寫 _____? | |

The magic of gwai2 鬼

One of the most versatile elements in colloquial spoken Cantonese, **gwái** 鬼, gives a native flavour and colour to ordinary daily expressions in the language. From the Cantonese learner's point of view, to master the different properties of **gwái** 鬼 may be difficult without sufficient exposure to authentic input as spoken by ordinary people on the street. Examples are typically absent from textbooks, which follow the prescriptive tradition in providing formal, prestigious examples for learners. The literal meaning of **gwái** 鬼 is 'ghost', 'devil', but it has taken on other meanings which are extensions of the original ones, such as mischievousness, frivolousness, strangeness etc. Chinese people generally have a rich **gwái** 鬼 culture, and Cantonese is no exception: the ghost festival (**gwái-jit** 鬼節) falls on the fourteenth day of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar, which is the Chinese equivalent of Halloween in the West. **Gwái** 鬼 commonly appears:

- As the final element of a compound:

laan5 gwai2 懶鬼

a lazy person

mou5 daam2 gwai2 冇膽鬼

a coward

seoi1 gwai2 衰鬼

rascal (may be affectionate, referring to

zau2 gwai2 酒鬼

someone intimate)

- As the initial element of a nominal compound:

gwai2 lou2	鬼佬	adult male foreigner	gwai2 po4	鬼婆	adult female foreigner
gwai2 zai2	鬼仔	child or young male foreigner	gwai2 mui1	鬼妹	child or young female foreigner

In these expressions, **gwái** 鬼 refers to foreigners who have Western features. A common practice is to refer to Westerners as **gwái** 鬼 as opposed to **yàhn** 人 ‘humans’:

keoi5 hai6 jan4 ding6 hai6 gwai2 aa3 ?

佢係人定係鬼呀?

Is he Chinese or Western?

ngo5 di1 zai2 neoi2 go3 joeng2 bun3 jan4 bun3 gwai2

我啲子女個樣半人半鬼

My children look half Chinese and half Western.

hou2 coi2 ngo5 lou5 baan2 gwai2 gwai2 dei2 ge3

好彩我老闆鬼鬼嘅嘅 (from an audio recording)

Fortunately, my boss is pretty Westernized.

These terms have lost the ‘devilish’ connotations and are hardly insulting, though in polite company including foreigners they are avoided, **sai1 jan4** 西人 (Westerner) and **ngo6 gwok3 jan4** 外國人 (foreigner) being used instead.

Intensification **gwái** 鬼 can occur

- With adjective phrases: for emphasis and intensification, **gwái** 鬼 can occur after degree modifiers such as **hou2** 好 'very' **gam3** 咁 'so' as an intensifier to modify an adjective:

gam1 ziu1 gam3 gwai2 dung3 ge3 ! 今朝咁鬼凍嘅!

It's so cold this morning!

dim2 gaai2 nei5 gam3 gwai2 yim1 zim1 gaa3?

Why are you so choosy?

點解你咁鬼奄尖㗎?

gwái 鬼 can be inserted in the middle of a bisyllabic adjective:

maa4 faan4 麻煩

troublesome

→

màh-gwái-fàahn

really

麻鬼煩

troublesome

si6 daan6 是但

indifferent

→

sih-gwái-daahn

It doesn't

是鬼但

matter a bit

do1 jyu4 多餘

superfluous

→

dō-gwái-yùh

totally

多鬼餘

unnecessary

- **gwái** 鬼 may come between the verb and aspect marker:

gaa3 gei1 wai6 gwai2 zo2 架機壞鬼咗

The machine has gone and broken down.

These usages express frustration or annoyance. Although mildly expletive, **gwái** 鬼 is not particularly offensive to native speakers.

- In questions, where **gwái** 鬼 can also occur between **bin1** 邊 and **go3** 個 as in **bin1 gwai2 go3** 邊鬼個 ‘who on earth’ or between **bīn** 邊 and classifier:

bin1 gwai2 gaa3 ce1 zong6 faa1 ngo5 gaa3 ce1 aa3?

Which damned car scratched mine?

ga a?

邊鬼架車撞花我嗰架呀?

- In rhetorical questions (see Unit 17):

gwai2 zi1 me1? 鬼知咩?

How on earth should I know?

gwai2 bong1 keoi5 aa3 鬼幫佢呀

Only the devil will help him.
(i.e. nobody will)

Exercise 24.3

Add **gwái** 鬼 to indicate frustration in the following statements and questions.

Example: ngo5 gwai2 zi1 me1 ? 我(鬼)知咩? How (on earth) should I know?

1 tou3 hei3 hou2 mun6 套戲好悶

The film was pretty (damn) boring.

2 bin1 go3 hai2 dou6 cou4 aa3?

Who (on earth) is making such a racket?

邊個喺度嘈呀?

fai3 si6 heoi3 laa3 費事去喇

There's no (earthly) point in going.

gaa3 ce1 maai6 zo2 laa3 架車賣咗喇

The car's (damn well) been sold.

5 nei5 heoi3 zo2 bin1 dou6 aa3?

Where (the hell) have you been?

你去咗邊度呀?

6 gam3 coeng4 hei3 gaa3! 咁長氣㗎!

He's so long-winded!

邊個	Who	Bin1 go6
咩 / 乜嘢	what	Me1 / Mat1 je5
邊度	Where	Bin1 dou6
點解	Why	Dim2 gai2
幾時	When	Gei2 si4
點 (樣)	How	Dim2 (yoeng2)
幾多	How many/ much	Gei2 do1