



# Cantonese II

## Week 10



# 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?

ngo5 dei6 m4 gau3 me1? 我哋唔夠咩?

Don't you know?

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 le 了, although rather less widely used. It occurs especially with the perfective aspect zo2 咗 and other particles expressing completion such as hou2 好 and Jyun4 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, **lā** 啦 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 becomes **leihga**

Translate into Cantonese with the appropriate final particles

1. Don't you know there will be exam (haau2 si3) ?
2. Whose book is this?
3. This book is mine.
4. How to go to the park?
5. He/She studies Chinese Studies.
6. Does he/she study Chinese studies?

## UNIT 26

### Imperatives

Imperatives are a type of sentence telling someone to act, as in commands and requests. While English drops the subject pronoun in imperatives, Cantonese typically retains it:

nei5 bong1 sau2 laa1 你幫手啦  
(lit. you help hand)  
Help me.

nei5 zoi3 gong2 jat1 ci3 aa1 你再講一次呀  
Repeat (that) once more.

nei5 dei6 gan1 ngo5 lai4 laa1 你哋跟我嚟啦  
Come with me.

Note that a particle such as **la** 啦 or **a** 呀 is needed to distinguish an imperative from a statement; of the two, **la** 啦 is more insistent and **a** 呀 more neutral. The pronoun **lei** 你 can be dropped, especially in emergencies, but this is less usual than in English and tends to be less polite:

daa2 din6 waa2 bou3 ging2 laa1 打電話報警啦!  
Call the police!

faai3 di1 hoi1 mun4 laa1 快啲開門啦!  
Hurry up and open the door!

gau3 ming6 aa3 救命呀!  
Help!

To make a request more polite, **ngoi** 唔該 'please' can be added at the beginning or end of the sentence (see Unit 27):

m4 goi1 nei5 gong2 daai6 seng1 di1 aa1 唔該你講大聲啲  
Could you speak louder?

nei5 lai4 zip3 ngo5 aa1, m4 goi1 你嚟接我呀, 唔該  
Could you come and pick me up, please?



nei5 bong1 ngo5 se2 laa1 你幫我寫啦

(lit. you help me write)

write it for me, will you? (not: \*Help me write it)

m4 goi1 nei5 bong1 ngo5 hoi1 dang1 aa1 唔該你幫我開燈呀

(lit. please you help me open light)

Would you turn on the light for me?

Although **bōng** 幫 on its own can mean 'help', in this construction, it means that the addressee is expected to perform the action himself/herself.

Adjectives too can be used in imperatives but call for the use of **dī** 啲 (lit. 'a little'):

nei5 siu2 sam1 di1 laa1 你小心啲啦!

Be careful!

m4 goi1 nei5 sing2 muk6 di1 laa1 唔該你醒目啲呀!

Please try to be smart!

nei5 dei6 laang5 zing6 di1 laa1 你哋冷靜啲呀!

Calm down a bit!

Compare the use of **dī** 啲 in comparatives (see Unit 12) and similarly with adverbial constructions (see Unit 10):

nei5 zap1 dak1 zeng3 di1 laa1 你執得

Try to dress better! (colloquial)

正啲啦!

m4 goi1 nei5 gong2 dak1 maan6 di1 laa1 唔該你講得慢啲呀!

Please speak a bit more slowly!

nei5 faai3 di1 zap1 je5 zau2 你快啲執嘢走!

Hurry up and pack to leave!

### Prohibitions m4 hou2 唔好

Negative imperatives are marked by **mhóu** 唔好 'don't' (lit. 'no good') between the subject and the verb. Here the pronoun can be freely omitted:

m4 hou2 heoi3 laa1 唔好去啦

Don't go.

(Léih) m4 hou2 zau2 zyu6 唔好走住

Don't leave yet.

(Léih) m4 hou2 aai3 gaau1 laa1 (你哋)唔好噏交啦

Don't argue.

Again the pattern is applicable to adjectives too, often with **gam** 咁 'so':

m4 hou2 gam2 bei1 gun1 laa1 唔好咁悲觀啦!

Don't be so pessimistic!

(U) m4 hou2 gam2 soeng1 sam1 laa1

Don't be so sad!

(你)唔好咁傷心啦!

Don't be (so) noisy!

(Léihdeih) m4 hou2 cou4 laa1 (你哋)唔好嘈啦!

An alternative marker for negative imperatives is **máih** 咪, usually used without the pronoun:

mai5 cou4 laa1 咪嘈啦!

(你) 咪走住!

mai5 ceot1 seng1 laa1 咪出聲啦!

Don't be (so) noisy!

Don't go yet!

(lit. don't produce (a) sound) Shut up!

As these examples suggest, commands with **máih** 咪 tend to be more abrupt or impatient than those with **mhóu** 唔好, and used when there is a close relationship between the speaker and addressee.

4 S  
5 Jik  
6 Yá  
7 Jáu  
8 Tà  
9 Dá  
10 Lá

Exer



## Exercise 26.3

Use **bong1** 幫 'help' to make requests using the following phrases:

Example: **só mùhn** 鎖門 Lock the door (for me). →

**le** nei5 bong1 ngo5 so2 mun4 aa1 你幫我鎖門吖

- |    |                            |                             |
|----|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1  | <b>maai5 sung3</b> 買餸      | buy groceries (for me)      |
| 2  | <b>gei3 seon3</b> 寄信       | send the mail (for me)      |
| 3  | <b>jing2 soeng2</b> 影相     | take a picture (for us)     |
| 4  | <b>gam6 zung1</b> 揷鐘       | ring the bell (for him)     |
| 5  | <b>gaau1 hok6 fai3</b> 交學費 | pay tuition (for them)      |
| 6  | <b>zing2 ce1</b> 整車        | fix the car (for us)        |
| 7  | <b>jiu2 daan6 gou1</b> 做蛋糕 | make a cake (for her)       |
| 8  | <b>zyu2 faan6</b> 煮飯       | cook a meal (for us)        |
| 9  | <b>deng6 gei1 piu3</b> 訂機票 | book an air ticket (for me) |
| 10 | <b>wan2 gung1</b> 搵工       | find a job (for him)        |

唔好意思，我唔得閒，我要。。。。

m4 hou2 ji3 si3, ngo5 m4 dak1 haan4, ngo5 jiu3...



## Exercise 26.4

Form imperatives with the adjectives provided:

Example: tell someone to be happy (**hōisām** 開心) →  
**Léih hōisām dī lā!** 你開心啲啦!

- 1 Ask a friend to be more optimistic (**lo** lok6 gun1 樂觀).
- 2 Tell a guest not to be so polite (**haak3** hei3 客氣).
- 3 Encourage a student to be diligent (**kan4** lik6 勤力).
- 4 Tell a child not to be so greedy (**taam1** sam1 貪心).
- 5 Ask someone to be more civilized (**si1** man4 斯文).
- 6 Tell someone not to be so proud (**giu1** ngou6 驕傲).
- 7 Ask someone to speak louder (**daai6** seng1 大聲).
- 8 Ask your friend not to walk (**haang4** 行) so fast (**faai3** 快).
- 9 Tell a friend not to dress (**zoek3** 著) so casually (**ceoi4** bin2 隨便).
- 10 Ask your spouse not to be so stubborn (**ngaang6** geng2 硬頸).

| 頭髮 | Hair        | tau4 faat3  |
|----|-------------|-------------|
| 面  | Face        | min6        |
| 眼  | Eye         | ngaan5      |
| 耳  | Ear         | ji5         |
| 口  | Mouth       | hau2        |
| 鼻  | Nose        | bei6        |
| 顏色 | Colour      | ngaan4 sik1 |
| 黑色 | Black       | hak1 sik1   |
| 金色 | Gold/Blonde | gam1 sik1   |
| 啡色 | Brown       | fe1 sik1    |
| 藍色 | Blue        | laam4 sik1  |
| 綠色 | Green       | luk6 sik1   |

| 高  | Tall     | gou1       |
|----|----------|------------|
| 矮  | Short    | ai2        |
| 肥  | Fat      | fei4       |
| 瘦  | Thin     | sau3       |
| 大  | Big      | daai6      |
| 細  | Small    | sai3       |
| 大隻 | Muscular | daai6 zek3 |
|    |          |            |
|    |          |            |
|    |          |            |
|    |          |            |

| 職業              |                             | zik1 jip6                                    |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 職業係乜嘢？<br>做乜職業？ | What is his/her occupation? | zik1 jip6 hai6 mat1 je5? zou6 me1 zik1 jip6? |
| 學生              | Student                     | hok6 saang1                                  |
| 醫生              | Doctor                      | ji1 sang1                                    |
| 海盜              | Pirate                      | hoi2 dou6                                    |
| 特務              | Spy                         | dak6 mou6                                    |
| 佢識啲乜嘢呀？         | What does he/she know?      | keoi5 sik1 di1 mat1 je5 aa3?                 |
| 魔法              | Magic                       | mo1 faat3                                    |
| 揸船              | Driving a boat              | zaa1 syun4                                   |
| 穿梭時間            | Time travel                 | cyun1 so1 si4 gaan3                          |



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=191jEmyM81w>

12:30