

A Cantonese Transliteration System for English Speakers

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Back in the 1980's when I first started to teach my kids Di Zi Gui I did it in Cantonese, since that was my native Chinese tongue, they had a real hard time with both the Cantonese transliteration system in my Cantonese-to-English dictionary and the International Phonetic Symbols, so I came up with this system. It's designed to be intuitive for the English speaker and can be readily input on any ordinary keyboard.

Three areas need special explanation, especially for non-Cantonese speakers:

1. THE SIX TONES:

Cantonese has six tones. While traditionally the stops (see below) are considered tones 7, 8, and 9, here I just consider them tones 1, 3, and 6.

	分	粉	訓	焚	奮	份
Tone:	fun-1	fun-2	fun-3	fun-4	fun-5	fun-6

2. THE STOPS K, P, AND T:

Some Cantonese words have terminal stops, represented here as **K**, **P**, and **T**. While in English such terminal letters are sounded, in Cantonese they have no sound but only represent stops. Cantonese words with terminal stops are found only in tones 1, 3, and 6 (traditionally called "tones 7, 8, 9").

德	惡	力	急	輒	業	不	洁	勿
K: duk-1	ohk-3	lik-6	P: gup-1	jeep-3	yeep-6	T: but-1	geet-3	mut-6

3. SPECIAL CANTONESE VOWEL SOUNDS: the English transliterations below are approximations only and the reader is advised to hear the correct sound pronounced by a Cantonese speaker. The terminal "h" here has no sound and doesn't shorten the syllable's sound, and "r's" here don't produce a curling of the tongue.

aeuh: 弟、規	oke: 睦、服	ueut: 出、律
eu: 譽、書	one: 容、用	ui: 回、味
eurh: 鋸、靴	uein: 怨、選	uaey: 須、居
eurng: 常、傷	ueet: 悅、說	
eurk: 藥、若	ueun: 進、循	