CANTONESE PHONEMIC INVENTORY

Please remember that dialectal differences exist for each language and should be considered when using the phonemic charts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bilabial</th>
<th>Labiodental</th>
<th>Dental</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Velar</th>
<th>Labial-Velar</th>
<th>Glottal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plosive</strong></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>pʰ</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>tʰ</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>kʰ</td>
<td>kw</td>
<td>kʰw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nasal</strong></td>
<td>m</td>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>η</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trill</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tap or Flap</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fricative</strong></td>
<td>f</td>
<td></td>
<td>s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affricate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ts</td>
<td>tsʰ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Glides</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>j</td>
<td></td>
<td>w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liquid</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>l</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reference:
Facts on Cantonese Phonology

- Cantonese is a tonal language. Each syllable has a tone and each tone will change the semantics of a word. The number of tones in Cantonese is widely debated (between 6 and 9); however, much of the literature reports six tones:1
  - high falling,
  - middle rising,
  - middle level,
  - low falling,
  - low rising, and
  - low level.
- Words are monosyllabic.2
- There are no consonant clusters.3
- There are six consonants used in final position:4 /t/, /k/, /p/, /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/.
- Dialectal variations:5
  - Initial /n/ and /l/ are often interchangeable.
  - Initial /ŋ/ is often deleted.
- Developmental phonological processes in Cantonese include the following:6
  - affrication,
  - assimilation,
  - cluster reduction,
  - deaspiration,
  - final glide deletion,
  - fronting,
  - initial /h/ deletion, and
  - stopping.

---

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
Facts on Cantonese Phonology

- Phonemes in English that are not found in Cantonese include the following:
  - /b/, /d/, /g/, /v/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /ɹ/, /ʧ/, /ʤ/, /ð/, and /θ/.
- In addition to final consonant deletion, common substitution errors for Cantonese speakers learning English are as follows:7
  - /s/ for /θ/ in initial position;
  - /ʃ/ for /θ/ in final position;
  - /d/ for /ð/ in initial or medial position;
  - /s/ for /z/ in initial, medial, or final position;
  - /f/ for /v/ in initial or medial position;
  - /w/ for /v/ in initial or medial position;
  - /l/ for /r/ in initial, medial, or final position; and
  - /s/ for /ʃ/ in initial, medial, or final position.
- Some of the Cantonese sounds, which are not found in English, have similar correlates in English:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cantonese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/pʰ/</td>
<td>/b/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/tʰ/</td>
<td>/d/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kʰ/</td>
<td>/g/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/tsʰ/</td>
<td>/ʃ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ts/</td>
<td>/dʒ/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---