

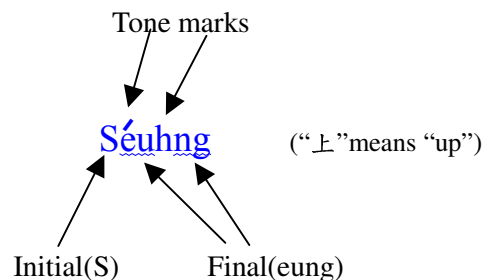
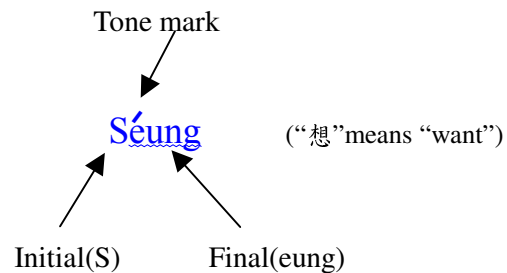
# Unit 1 Basic Cantonese Sound System

## 1.1 A syllable

Initial + Final + Tone = Syllable

Each syllable of Cantonese is composed of three elements:

- Initial : the beginning sound element of a syllable
- Final : the ending sound element of a syllable
- Tone : the relative pitch, or variation of pitch, of a syllable.



## 1.2 Tones

### 1.2.1 Tone marks

The six tones in Cantonese are grouped into one of three main contours: **falling**, **rising** and **level**, which are distinguished by using **tone marks on top of the first vowel in the final**.

The low level tone mark “**h**” is put after the vowel or the diphthong but before the ending consonant (if there is any). i.e. LR, LL and LF tones.

### 1.2.2 The Cantonese tones with mnemonic words

Cantonese has 6 distinctive tones:

Tone 1	HL	sī	~ pitch level of “he”
Tone 2	HR	sí	~ pitch level of “then”
Tone 3	ML	si	~ pitch level of “you” in “see you”
Tone 4	LF	sìh	~ pitch level of “cy” in “Tracy”
Tone 5	LR	síh	~ pitch level of “see” in “I see” *
Tone 6	LL	sih	~ pitch level of “in”

\* Some Hong Kong people pronounce “I see” in this way”.

The respective 6 tones with the English examples:

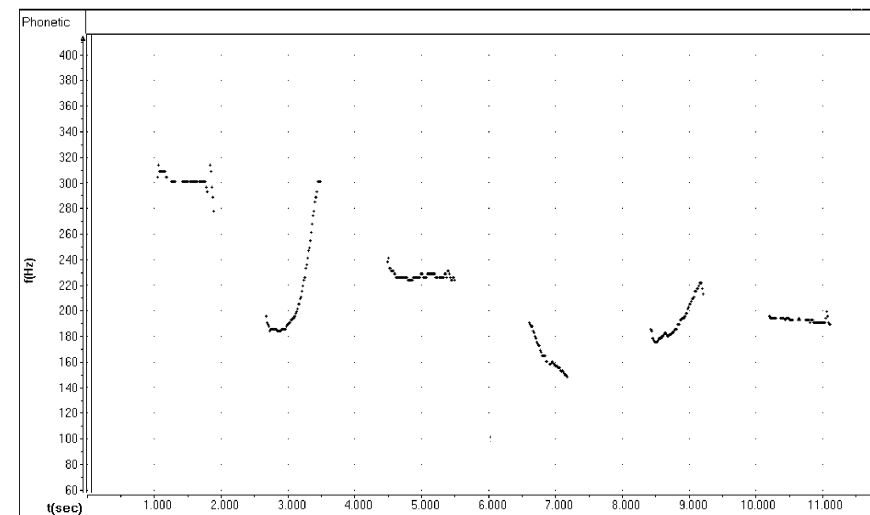
he	then	you	“cy”	see	in
sī	sí	si	sìh	síh	sih

### 1.2.3 The tones table

Tone No.	Tone Name	Mnemonic words	Tone mark	E.g.	Meanings
1 HL	High Level	he	—	sī	poem 詩
2 HR	High Rising	then	/	sí	history 史
3 ML	Middle Level	you		si	to try 試
4 LF	Low Falling	Tracy	\h	sìh	time 時
5 LR	Low Rising	see	/h	síh	market 市
6 LL	Low Level	in	h	sih	matter 事

### 1.2.4 Actual recorded tone patterns

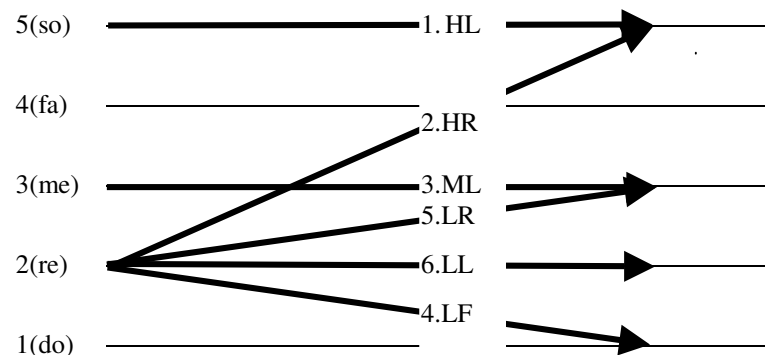
The following diagram shows the actual recorded pitch pattern of the six tones.



Tone No.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tone names	HL	HR	ML	LF	LR	LL
Tones marks	—	/	no tone mark	\h	/h	h
Cantonese e.g.	sī	sí	si	sìh	síh	sih
English words with the same tones	he	then	see "you"	tra"cy"	I "see"	in
Character:	詩	史	試	時	市	事
Meaning:	poem	history	try	time	market	matter

### 1.2.5 Schematic tones diagram

The following is a tones diagram illustrating the co-relation of the six tones in Cantonese: (it's schematic only, not in scale)



In this diagram, “5” stands for the highest pitch level while “1” stands for the lowest pitch level.

The arrows show the pitch level or the variation of the pitch of the tones.

Tone No.	Tone Name	From Pitch	To Pitch
Tone 1	High level	5	5
Tone 2	High rising	2	5
Tone 3	Middle level	3	3
Tone 4	Low falling	2	1
Tone 5	Low rising	2	3
Tone 6	Low level	2	1

### 1.2.6 Comparing the tones

1) As you can see, the order of these 6 tones – tone 1 to tone 6 are not in the order from the highest pitch to the lowest pitch. And therefore it is quite difficult for learners to compare the relative pitch levels of these 6 tones.

2) Here is just a comparison which rearranges the tones order to make it easier for learners to compare the differences between the tones.

Group	Tone No.	Tone name	Mnemonic words	Tone marks	E.g.
Level	1	HL	he	—	sī
	3	ML	you		si
	6	LL	in	h	sih
	4	LF	“cy”	h	sih
Rising	2	HR	then	/	sí
	5	LR	see	h	síh

3) This is a reference only for comparing the pitch values. Ordinarily learners should follow the sequence of previous tones table (tone 1-6), because it is the sequence adopted by traditional Cantonese and most systems.

### 1.2.7 Examples of the 6 tones ◀

1. <b>SĪ</b>	2. <b>SÍ</b>	3. <b>Sì</b>
<b>Tone 1 (HL)</b> <b>High Level</b>	<b>Tone 2 (HR)</b> <b>High Rising</b>	<b>Tone 3 (ML)</b> <b>Middle Level</b>
Tone mark: a line on top —	Tone mark: a line going up /	Tone mark: Nothing
Example: 一 <b>yāt</b> one 筆 <b>bāt</b> pen 蚊 <b>mān</b> dollar 三 <b>sāam</b> three 車 <b>chē</b> car 多 <b>dō</b> many	Example: 手 <b>sáu</b> hand 等 <b>dāng</b> wait 死 <b>séi</b> die 紙 <b>jí</b> paper 錢 <b>chín</b> money 好 <b>hóu</b> good	Example: 細 <b>sai</b> small 貴 <b>gwai</b> expensive 瘦 <b>sau</b> thin 四 <b>sei</b> four 褲 <b>fu</b> trousers 去 <b>heu</b> go

4. <b>sìh</b>	5. <b>síh</b>	6. <b>sih</b>
<b>Tone 4 (LF)</b> <b>Low Falling</b>	<b>Tone 5 (LR)</b> <b>Low Rising</b>	<b>Tone 6 (LL)</b> <b>Low Level</b>
Tone mark: a line going down with "h" \ h	Tone mark: a line going up with "h" / h	Tone mark: Nothing but "h" only h
Example: 人 <b>yàhn</b> people 裙 <b>kwàhn</b> dress 肥 <b>fèih</b> fat 平 <b>pèhng</b> cheap 年 <b>nìhn</b> year 停 <b>tìhng</b> stop	Example: 我 <b>ngóh</b> I 你 <b>néih</b> you 佢 <b>kéuih</b> he 有 <b>yáuh</b> have 冇 <b>móuh</b> don't have 買 <b>máaih</b> buy	Example: 飯 <b>faahn</b> rice 慢 <b>maahn</b> slow 食 <b>sihk</b> eat 麵 <b>mihn</b> noodles 六 <b>luhk</b> six 月 <b>yuht</b> month

### 1.2.8 Mnemonic words for the 6 tones

In the following sentences, the 1<sup>st</sup> syllable is tone 1 high level, the 2<sup>nd</sup> syllable is tone 2 high rising and so on.

- ◀
- 394052  
**sāam gáu sei lǐhng ñgh yih**  
3 9 4 0 5 2
  - boss went to, friend's place  
**bō-sí heui, pàhng-yáuh douh**  
boss go to, friend's place
  - 1:30, come to my place  
**yāt díng bun, làih ngóh douh**  
1:30, come to my place
  - taxi is fast, won't be slow  
**dīk-sí faai, m̀h wúih maahn**  
taxi fast, not will slow

### 1.2.9 General problems with the tones

Many learners don't follow what the tone that a syllable should be. It's because in English, speakers change the pitch levels according to the rhythm of the sentence.

- eg. I am happy. → The pitch of "py" is low  
Happy Birthday → The pitch of "py" is high

However in Cantonese, the tone, means the pitch level is a decisive element of a syllable. So try the best to stick with the tones. Same sounds with different tones may mean something very different.

- eg. buy: **máaih**, sell: **maaih**

## 1.3 Initials

### 1.3.1 The initials table

1) Cantonese has 19 initials as follows: ◀

Manner of Articulation Place of Articulation	Plosives/ Affricates		Fricatives	Nasals / Lateral	Semi- Vowels
	Unaspirated Stops	Aspirated Stops			
Bilabial (two lips)	<b>b</b>	<b>p</b>		<b>m</b>	<b>w</b>
Alveolar (Tip of tongue and the alveolar ridge)	<b>d</b>	<b>t</b>		<b>n, l</b>	
Palatal-Alveolar (blade of tongue articulates with hard palate).	<b>j</b>	<b>ch</b>	<b>s</b>		
Velar (back of tongue and soft palate)	<b>g</b>	<b>k</b>		<b>ng</b>	
Labial-velar (adding the sound of “g” or “k” with “w”)	<b>gw</b>	<b>kw</b>			
Glottal (narrowing vocal cords)			<b>h</b>		
Labiodental (lower lip and the upper teeth)			<b>f</b>		
Palatal					<b>y</b>

◀ The sequence of the initials said in the sound files is:

b, p, d, t, j, ch, g, k, gw, kw,  
s, h, f, m, n, l, ng, w, y

### 1.3.2 The examples

As the initial can not be pronounced by itself, in the tape, the vocal element “a” is added to the initial to form a complete syllable.

For easy comparison, all the following syllables are pronounced at high level.

Articulation	symbol	English eg.	example	meaning
Non-aspirated stops	<b>b</b>	<b>ba</b>	boy	巴(士) bus
	<b>d</b>	<b>da</b>	dark	打 a dozen
	<b>g</b>	<b>ga</b>	guard	家 family
	<b>gw</b>	<b>gwa</b>	guava	瓜 melon
Aspirated stops	<b>j</b>	<b>ja</b>	jar	渣 residue
	<b>p</b>	<b>pa</b>	park	趴 lie on one’s stomach
	<b>t</b>	<b>ta</b>	tart	他 he
	<b>k</b>	<b>ka</b>	car	卡 card
Fricatives	<b>kw</b>	<b>kwa</b>	quick	誇 boast
	<b>ch</b>	<b>cha</b>	charge	差 inferior
	<b>f</b>	<b>fa</b>	fast	花 flower
Nasals / liquids	<b>h</b>	<b>ha</b>	ha(interj.)	蝦 prawn
	<b>s</b>	<b>sa</b>	sand	沙 sand
	<b>m</b>	<b>ma</b>	mummy	媽 mummy
Semi-vowels	<b>n</b>	<b>na</b>	name	拿 LF pick
	<b>l</b>	<b>la</b>	leg	啦 PM
	<b>ng</b>	<b>nga</b>	sing	牙 LF tooth
Semi-vowels	<b>w</b>	<b>wa</b>	went	蛙 frog
	<b>y</b>	<b>ya</b>	yes	也 LR also

## 1.4 Finals

### 1.4.1 The finals table

Cantonese has 51 finals as follows: ◀

	aa	a ✕	e	i	o	u	eu	yu
i	aai	ai	ei		oi	ui	eui	
u	aa <u>u</u>	au		iu	ou			
m	aam	am		im				
n	aan	an		in	on	un	eun	yun
ng	aang	ang	eng	ing	ong	ung	eung	
p	aap	ap		ip				
t	aat	at		it	ot	ut	eut	yut
k	aak	ak	ek	ik	ok	uk	euk	

◀ The sequence of the finals said in the sound files is:

aa, aai, aau, aam, aan, aang, aap, aat, aak,

ai, au, am, an, ang, ang, ap, at, ak

e, ei, eng ... and so on

There is no single “a” sound, which is with “✕” besides it, in Cantonese. Therefore it is not pronounced. Actually in Yale, the symbol of “a” stands for the sound “aa”.

### 1.4.2 Examples for some syllables ▶

	aa	a	e	i	o	u	eu	yu
	a <b>fā</b> flower 花	X	e <b>chē</b> car 車	i <b>jī</b> know 知	o <b>gō</b> song 歌	u <b>kū</b> hoop 箍	eu <b>hēu</b> boot 靴	yu <b>syū</b> book 書
i	aai <b>tāai</b> tie 呔	ai <b>gāi</b> chicken 雞	ei <b>fēi</b> fly 飛		oi <b>tōi</b> embryo 胎	ui <b>fūi</b> grey 灰	eui <b>sēui</b> bad 衰	
u	aa <u>u</u> <b>bāu</b> bun 包	au <b>nāu</b> angry 鬍		iu <b>bīu</b> a watch 錶	ou <b>gōu</b> tall 高			
m	aam <b>sāam</b> three 三	am <b>sām</b> heart 心		im <b>jīm</b> sharp 尖				
n	aan <b>fāan</b> back 返	an <b>mān</b> dollar 蚊		in <b>chīn</b> thousand 千	on <b>gōn</b> dry 乾	un <b>būn</b> move 搬	eun <b>jēun</b> bottle 樽	yun <b>syūn</b> sour 酸
ng	aang <b>jāang</b> owe 掙	ang <b>jāng</b> hate 憎	eng <b>tēng</b> listen 聽	ing <b>bīng</b> ice 冰	ong <b>bōng</b> help 幫	ung <b>fūng</b> wind 風	eung <b>chēung</b> window 窗	
p	aap <b>taap ML</b> tower 塔	ap <b>jāp</b> juice 汁		ip <b>līp</b> lift 輦				
t	aat <b>saat ML</b> kill 殺	at <b>chāt</b> seven 七		it <b>mīt</b> pinch 搵	ot <b>got ML</b> cut 割	ut <b>wuht LL</b> [alive]活	eut <b>chēut</b> out 出	
k	aak <b>jaak ML</b> narrow 窄	ak <b>dāk</b> okay 得	ek <b>lēk</b> smart 叻	ik <b>sīk</b> color 色	ok <b>gok ML</b> corner 角	uk <b>luhk LL</b> six	euk <b>dēuk</b> [chop]啄	yut <b>syut ML</b> snow 雪

### 1.4.3 The finals table with mnemonic words

	<b>aa</b> rather	<b>a</b> cut	<b>e</b> ten	<b>i</b> see	<b>o</b> or	<b>u</b> too	<b>eu</b> fur	<b>yu*</b> tu
<b>i</b> see	<b>aai</b> five	<b>ai</b> ice	<b>ei</b> page		<b>oi</b> toy	<b>ui*</b> oo+ee	<b>eui*</b> oy+ee	
<b>u</b> too	<b>aa<u>u</u></b> loud	<b>au</b> out		<b>iu*</b> ee+oo	<b>ou</b> go			
<b>m</b>	<b>aam</b> farm	<b>am</b> come		<b>im</b> him				
<b>n</b>	<b>aan</b> aunt	<b>an</b> fun		<b>in</b> in	<b>on</b> on	<b>un</b> moon	<b>eun</b> nation	<b>yun*</b> une
<b>ng</b>	<b>aang*</b> am+ng	<b>ang</b> sung	<b>eng</b> sang	<b>ing</b> king	<b>ong</b> long	<b>ung*</b> tone+ng	<b>eung*</b> earn	
<b>p</b>	<b>aap</b> carp	<b>ap</b> cup		<b>ip</b> sip				
<b>t</b>	<b>aat</b> art	<b>at</b> cut		<b>it</b> sit	<b>ot</b> lot	<b>ut</b> boot	<b>eut*</b> short put	
<b>k</b>	<b>aak</b> ark	<b>ak</b> luck	<b>ek</b> echo	<b>ik</b> sick	<b>ok</b> lock	<b>uk</b> book	<b>euk</b> jerk	<b>yut*</b> chute

Where there is an asterisk “\*”, it means there is no English equivalent.

For the column of “yu”, the examples are French words.

### 1.4.4 Notes

- 1) “a” in the Yale system

Cantonese has the final “aa” but doesn’t have the final “a”. In the Yale system, final “aa” will be written as “a”. But the sound is still “aa”.

◀ eg. flower : fā (the sound is actually fāa)

- 2) The unreleased consonants

Finals ending with “p, t, and k” are not aspirated, which means don’t blow out air at the end of the final. People call these “p, t and k” the “unreleased consonants”



1:	<b>yāt</b>	but not	<b>yāt~</b>
6:	<b>luhk</b>	but not	<b>luhk~</b>
10:	<b>sahp</b>	but not	<b>sahp~</b>

## Unit 2 Tone Drills

### 2.1 Table 1 - From HL to other tones ◀

HL→HL	HL→HR	HL→ML	HL→LF	HL→LR	HL→LL
<b>yāt-mān</b> one dollar 一蚊	<b>fāan-ké</b> tomato 蕃茄	<b>sāam-seui</b> 3 years old 三歲	<b>gā-yàhn</b> family member 家人	<b>gām-máahn</b> tonight 今晚	<b>sāu-yahp</b> income 收入
<b>fēi-gēi</b> aeroplane 飛機	<b>fā-yún</b> garden 花園	<b>Dāk-Gwok</b> Germany 德國	<b>mā-mìh</b> mum 媽咪	<b>tīng-máahn</b> tomorrow night 聽晚	<b>gām-yaht</b> today 今日
<b>sīn-sāang</b> Mr. 先生	<b>bē-jáu</b> beer 啤酒	<b>sīu-aap</b> roast duck 燒鴨	<b>dē-dìh</b> daddy 爹哋	<b>yāt-míuh</b> one second 一秒	<b>sāng-wuht</b> live 生活
<b>hōi-sām</b> happy 開心	<b>fēi-lám</b> film 菲林	<b>tīn-hei</b> weather 天氣	<b>chūng-mìhng</b> clever 聰明	<b>wān-nyún</b> warm 溫暖	<b>chūk-daih</b> courier 速遞
<b>dūng-tīn</b> winter 冬天	<b>fūng-gíng</b> scenery 風景	<b>jūng-yi</b> like/love 鍾意	<b>chīu-yàhn</b> superman 超人	<b>sāu-léih</b> repair 修理	<b>fūk-jaahp</b> complicated 複雜

### 2.2 Table 2 - From HR to other tones ◀

HR→HL	HR→HR	HR→ML	HR→LF	HR→LR	HR→LL
<b>géi-dō</b> how many 幾多	<b>géi-chín</b> how much 幾錢	<b>dím-heui</b> how to get to 點去	<b>séui-chíh</b> pool 水池	<b>chéng-chóh</b> please sit down 請坐	<b>cháau-faahn</b> fried rice 炒飯
<b>jí-gān</b> tissue 紙巾	<b>jí-yúu</b> kite 紙鳶	<b>gíng-chaat</b> policeman 警察	<b>gíng-yìhn</b> unbelievably 竟然	<b>hó-yíh</b> can 可以	<b>cháau-mihn</b> fried noodles 炒麵
<b>sáu-bīu</b> wrist watch 手錶	<b>síu-síu</b> a little bit 少少	<b>gó-go</b> that one 嗰個	<b>hóu-fèih</b> very fat 好肥	<b>hóu-káhn</b> very near 好近	<b>hó-lohk</b> coke 可樂
<b>dím-sām</b> dim sum 點心	<b>fó-téui</b> ham 火腿	<b>hó-kaau</b> reliable 可靠	<b>hóu-yàhn</b> nice person 好人	<b>hóu-yúhn</b> very far 好遠	<b>hóu-sihk</b> tasty 好食
<b>hóu-lēk</b> very smart 好叻	<b>hóu-séui</b> sea water 海水	<b>hóu-gwai</b> very expensive 好貴	<b>gwóng-chèuhng</b> plaza 廣場	<b>séung-máaih</b> want to buy 想買	<b>hóu-meih</b> delicious 好味

### 2.3 Table 3 - From ML to other tones ◀

ML→HL	ML→HR	ML→ML	ML→LF	ML→LR	ML→LL
<b>ga-lēi</b> curry 咖喱	<b>daai-jí</b> scallop 帶子	<b>Taai-Gwok</b> Thailand 泰國	<b>taai-nàahn</b> too difficult 太難	<b>pa-néih</b> afraid you 怕你	<b>sau-yuhk</b> lean pork 瘦肉
<b>la-bā</b> loudspeaker 喇叭	<b>taai-táai</b> wife 太太	<b>Faat-Gwok</b> France 法國	<b>jeui-fèih</b> fattest 最肥	<b>taai-háuh</b> too thick 太厚	<b>jeui-hauh</b> last 最後
<b>daai-syū</b> bring books 帶書	<b>gaan-chék</b> ruler 間呎	<b>sai-gaai</b> world 世界	<b>jeuk-hàaih</b> wear shoes 着鞋	<b>baak-móuh</b> friend's mum 伯母	<b>jeuk-maht</b> wear socks 着襪
<b>heui-gāai</b> go out 去街	<b>dang-jái</b> stool 櫈仔	<b>gam-gwai</b> so expensive 咁貴	<b>syun-tàuh</b> garlic 蒜頭	<b>tiu-móuh</b> to dance 跳舞	<b>gyun-sehk</b> diamond 鑽石
<b>Syut-bīk</b> Sprite 雪碧	<b>cheung-pín</b> music records 唱片	<b>sung-fo</b> deliver goods 送貨	<b>syut-yàhn</b> snow man 雪人	<b>seun-kéuih</b> believe him 信佢	<b>syut-gwaih</b> refrigerator 雪櫃

### 2.4 Table 4 - From LF to other tones ◀

LF→HL	LF→HR	LF→ML	LF→LF	LF→LR	LF→LL
<b>yàuh-chāai</b> postman 郵差	<b>yèh-jí</b> coconut 椰子	<b>yàuh-haak</b> tourist 遊客	<b>yàhn-yàhn</b> everyone 人人	<b>ngàuh-méih</b> ox tail 牛尾	<b>nàahn-sihk</b> terrible taste 難食
<b>kèih-tā</b> other 其他	<b>yìh-ché</b> moreover 而且	<b>kèih-gwaai</b> strange 奇怪	<b>ngàuh-yàuh</b> butter 牛油	<b>kàhm-máahn</b> last night 嚟晚	<b>ngàuh-yuhk</b> beef 牛肉
<b>yìh-gā</b> now 而家	<b>pìhng-gwó</b> apple 蘋果	<b>pèih-hei</b> temper 脾氣	<b>pìhng-sìh</b> ordinarily 平時	<b>yàhn-nóuh</b> human brain 人腦	<b>kàhm-yaht</b> yesterday 嚟日
<b>lìhng-mūng</b> lemon 檸檬	<b>yùh-gwó</b> if 如果	<b>sìh-gaan</b> time 時間	<b>yìhng-yìhn</b> still 仍然	<b>pàhng-yáuh</b> friend 朋友	<b>lòh-baahk</b> Chinese radish 蘿蔔
<b>yùhn-bāt</b> pencil 鉛筆	<b>syùh-jái</b> potato 薯仔	<b>chìhng-fong</b> situation 情況	<b>yùh-syùhn</b> fish boat 魚船	<b>yùh-láuh</b> fish fillet 魚柳	<b>yèuhng-yuhk</b> lamb 羊肉



