

**CANTONESE MADE EASY: A BOOK OF
SIMPLE SENTENCES IN THE CANTONESE
DIALECT, WITH FREE AND LITERAL
TRANSLATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR
THE RENDERING OF ENGLISH
GRAMMATICAL FORMS IN CHINESE**

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Cantonese Made Easy: A Book of Simple Sentences in the Cantonese Dialect, with Free and Literal Translations, and Directions for the Rendering of English Grammatical Forms in Chinese by J. Dyer Ball

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FREE AND LITERAL TRANSLATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS
FOR THE RENDERING OF ENGLISH GRAM-
MATICAL FORMS IN CHINESE.

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PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

THIS little book is meant to supply a want. The Author has heard a beginner in Chinese sadly lamenting the difficulty he had in the use of his phrase-book to know what the Chinese words really meant. Before him and before many a learner, there appear on the opened pages of his book sentences in English and sentences in Chinese. He reads the English and his Chinese teacher reads the Chinese over to him until he learns the sounds. By dint of memory he learns that a certain English sentence is expressed in Chinese by certain Chinese words, which he supposes are the equivalents of the English words; but as soon as he commences to analyse the two sentences—to place them side by side, he finds that there seems to be very little similarity between the two. The one often has more words by far than the other; there are no numbers, no moods, no tenses, or but halting expedients to represent them, which are well nigh unintelligible to him; and the use of his dictionary, at first, affords him but little assistance in his attempts to pick asunder the component parts of a Chinese sentence, for either he does not find the word that is given in his phrase-book, or he is embarrassed by the multiplicity of renderings for one word.

Arrangement of this Book.

In some of the first books in Cantonese and English by the veteran sinologists, this difficulty was in a great measure met by a literal as well as a free translation being given of the Chinese. The Author has resuscitated this old plan and trusts it will be found of service. In some cases it will be found, however, that it has been well nigh impossible, on account of the idiomatic differences of the two languages, to give a perfectly intelligible and literal rendering of the Chinese; for it sometimes happens, as GEORGE MACDONALD well remarks, that:—'It is often curious how a literal rendering, even when it gives quite the meaning, will not do, because of the different

'ranks of the two words in their respective languages.' (*Adela Cathcart*, p. 34.) Yet, with the object of pointing out the connection of the different words and their respective places in the sentence, even a poor literal translation will assist the learner far better to grasp the construction of the sentence and the real meaning of the words than a free translation, which must necessarily often be but a paraphrase of the Chinese.

When two or more English words represent one Chinese word, the Author has, in the literal translation, connected them by a hyphen, and the same holds good of the Chinese and English. Any exceptions to this are so plain that there is no necessity to make any note of them.

The fault of most phrase-books in Chinese is the multiplying Chinese words in a sentence; especially do such books delight in a redundancy of particles; one is almost sickened by a glance through some of the phrase-books in use where 'ko ko', 'ni ko', 'ke', and many other particles are brought in at any time and every time to the detriment of the learner's fluency in speaking. The consequence of this fault is that learners pile up the component parts of a sentence until the outcome is something wonderful to hearken to, and more like a foreign language than good Chinese. The Chinese are fonder of expressing themselves in a terse and concise manner than most book-makers represent them as doing. Redundant words are cut out of good Chinese colloquial with an unsparing hand: and it would be a good thing for a learner to lay it down as a general rule that if it is possible to express his meaning with few words, he should do so; for though to his own ear the addition of words may make the meaning plainer, it has probably a directly contrary effect on a Chinese ear.

Compare:—

ⁿNéi ǰlaf tò² ǰni shū² k'ap₂ 'péi 'ko ko' ǰshū kwo² ǰngo 't'af kín' ǰlá.
and

ǰLaf ǰni shū² 'péi 'ko pò² ǰshū ǰngo 't'af.

There is often also no distinction made in phrase books between the colloquial and book language: immediately after a sentence which would be understood by any woman or child comes one so bookish that if the learner were to attempt to air his newly-acquired knowledge, thus obtained, out of the range of his study or of the ears of his erudite teacher, he would find his talk utterly unintelligible to the mass of his hearers. In short, a hotchpotch of anything and everything is thrown together, mixed and pure, Cantonese and provincialisms, and the result is a phrase-book.

Many of the simplest and commonest forms of expression are entirely omitted even in books of considerable size where want of space could be no excuse.

There is often also apparent in these books an evident attempt to *put* the English sentence, which the compiler chooses, into Chinese, ignoring often to a great extent the simple fact that the idiom is essentially English; and the result is a sentence composed of Chinese words, which is either constructed on an English idiom wholly foreign to the genius of the language, or stilted in order to convey the whole meaning of the English sentence into Chinese; or else the two sentences are not the counterparts of each other, and the learner is misled.

Knowing these defects, the Author has endeavoured to avoid them.

It appeared to him that a compiler should endeavour above everything else to have his Chinese perfect and readable, or *shun*, as a Chinese would term it, and then try his best to render the Chinese into English. Under such conditions there is more likelihood of getting good Chinese into our phrase-books than when the opposite plan is tried.

Daily intercourse for nearly a quarter of a century with all classes of Chinese in their daily life, and years of daily contact with all grades of Chinese in the course of his official duties, where no attempts, or but few, are made to adapt themselves to the foreign ear, have placed him, he believes, in an exceptionally favourable position to hear and note the different idioms of good Cantonese. He has endeavoured to embody a number of them in this book, which, if it meets with a favourable reception, might induce him to attempt something more pretentious on a future occasion.

Nothing, he hopes, will be found amongst the fifteen Lessons but pure good colloquial; and from the examples given in that part of the book, as well as in the part which follows, the learner will be able to frame other sentences.

In learning Cantonese the learner should aim first at acquiring such common idioms and such words as to make himself understood by even the illiterate class, for then all classes will understand him. Starting in this manner he will lay a good solid foundation for his colloquial, which will stand him in good stead all through his stay in China. After this foundation is laid he can easily acquire the mixed colloquial, composed principally of what he has already learned, and partly of book terms; and if he has previously pleased the illiterate ear, qualify himself to please the fastidious taste of the scholar. Though there is no hard and fast line between these two forms of colloquial, as they merge more or less into each other, there is still a distinction. And the learner should keep this distinction in his mind and ask his teacher whether any new phrase he comes across is colloquial or not. Without this precaution he will find himself talking in a most ridiculous style, at one breath, as it were, using Johnsonian words and pure English.

In most, if not all, phrase-books the tones seem to be a thing of secondary importance. If the compiler carefully gives the tones, as he finds them in his dictionary, he congratulates himself on at least stretching a point. As a general rule, no attempt is ever made to give the tones as they are spoken, or, when the attempt has been made, the compiler has had so little idea of the frequency of difference between colloquial and book tones that his attempts to point one or two out have not been of the practical use they might have been. It is one thing to read a book and utter all the tones correctly, but quite another thing to explain to a Chinese the contents of a few pages thereof, and if the speaker sticks to the same tones in speaking as in reading he will not find all he says is understood. It is, the Author believes, an ignoring of this fact that often spoils foreigners' Chinese. The awkward thing about ignoring these tones in books, for the use of those who wish to learn to speak Chinese, is that the learner attempts to say the word in the tone that he sees it marked in his book or dictionary, the consequence being that he systematically mispronounces it, while if the tone were marked properly, he would at least attempt to pronounce it properly.

The colloquial tones in this book are given instead of those used in the book language. *

It will be noticed that occasionally the tones of one word are different in different connections.

Learners may at once make up their minds to the belief that there are more tones in the Chinese than many of the old scholars will give credit for. The *chung yap* is introduced in this phrase book. The man who pretends to doubt its existence may as well confess at once that he knows nothing about differences in tones; it was well known by one or two of the older sinologists in olden times, but was well-nigh forgotten until unearthed recently. There, perhaps, is more excuse for the scepticism that exists about some of the other tones, though there can be no doubt as to their existence. * * *

Instead, then, of only eight tones in Cantonese, it is the fact that there are sixteen well-defined tones at least, and possibly one or two others as well, affecting only a very few words. This last need not, however, trouble the learner at first. It is well that he should know at the same time that he must not attempt to fit every Chinese word into the only tone, perchance, assigned to it by the dictionaries. Cantonese will not be confined in that way, and much of the poor pronunciation of Chinese in the past by Europeans is on account of their persistent attempts to pronounce all Chinese words as if they must belong to one or other of the eight or nine tones their dictionaries told them about. Get a good teacher, then copy him exactly, no matter what your dictionary may say about the tone of the word; for it is