

## Cantonese Particles - Part II

Contributed by Taospark  
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 ADVANCED PARTICLES

Can you see these Chinese characters? (~ /) If not, [click here](#) for directions on how to view them with no downloads or cost.

The following is a list of other particles that may be encountered. Usage of these particles is not completely required, but they may help to clarify the meaning of a statement or question.

Pronunciation

Character

Explanation

Example

aa1

or

Can indicate enthusiastic consent or a sarcastic retort. Can also be used like ‡ laa1.

}! B`ÔK!

Okay! I'll follow you home!

B`ÔK ?

How am I supposed to be able to go home?  
 (sarcastically)

Ô‡

Come back [please].

aa4

or @

Used in questions expecting agreement, sometimes with a sense of disapproval.

ˋÔK ?

You're going home? [But really I don't want you to.]

gaa4

î

Contraction of the combination  
ge3 aa4.

ˋÂÊâÔK î?

You're going home today? [But really I don't want you to.  
Can't you wait until tomorrow?] (the "today"  
is emphasized)

me1

©

Used in questions expressing surprise or disbelief.  
bÊâÔ†©?

He's coming back today? [Really? I wasn't aware of  
this.]

ne1

b

Used in follow up questions or when a question is  
repeated but for a different subject. Also used for  
rhetorical questions where an answer is not expected (especially

when the speaker is wondering to himself/herself).

bô—t, `ô ôtb?

He came back, are you coming back?

bPãÔK b?

I wonder why he's going home.

maa3

î

Used to change a statement into a neutral question.

This is used more often in Mandarin/written Chinese, but can still be heard in Cantonese.

`ÔK î?

Are you coming home?

zek1

k

Can be used to mean "only" or "that's all," or used to play down the significance of the situation.

bô åk

He's only coming back for one day.

ze1

û

(same as k zek1)

zaa3

◁  
 Contraction of the combination k@/û@  
 ze1 aa3.  
 bÔ â◁

He's only coming back for one day. (slightly less abrupt  
 than bÔ âk)

zaa4

◁  
 Contraction of the combination k /û  
 ze1 aa4.  
 bÔ â◁?

He's only coming back for one day? [Only one day?  
 I  
 wish it was more.]

gwaa3

i  
 Indicates uncertainty in a statement.

bÔ—K i

He went home [but I'm not completely sure of this].

wo3

ž  
 Indicates information is being reported. Pronouncing it as wo5 adds the indication that the  
 information is second-hand and the speaker may not agree with it.

88ë`ÔK Ž

Father is telling you to come home.

bo3

C  
Indicates that the sentence is a reminder.

øÊÔK }ëC

It is quick to go home by car. (used in the context where the person being addressed may not have thought about driving home)

lo1

É  
Indicates a suggestion or conclusion that should be obvious (usually occurs with <sup>a</sup> mai6).

‡Ê<sup>a</sup>Ô OK É

Without a car, [then of course] I am unable to go home.

lo3

É or <sup>-</sup>  
Indicates an agreement with the previous speaker.

}, ß`ÔK É

Okay, I will follow you home.

haa2

Used to soften an instruction, similar to adding "okay?" in English.

—v

Remember to buy milk, okay?

ho2

u  
Used to check whether a statement is correct, similar to adding "right?" in English.

`—vu?

You bought the milk, right?

aa1 maa3

@  
Used in response to a question where the answer is obvious.

bÔK @ !

He's going home! [So of course he can't go to the movies with us.]

laa1 maa3

f  
Contraction of the combination @ /' @  
laa3 aa1 maa3.

bÔ—K f !

He went home! [So of course he can't be here right now.]

gaa1 maa3

–

Contraction of the combination @  
ge3 aa1 maa3.

À}âÔK – !

I'm coming home tomorrow! [So of course I won't be able to see you today.] (the "tomorrow" is emphasized)

zaa1 maa3

◁

Contraction of the combination k@ /û@  
ze1 aa1 maa3.

bÔ â◁ !

He's only coming back for a day! [So of course he won't have time to visit all of us.]

zi1 maa3

K

Can be used to mean "only".

ÔK K

I'm only going home. [...and nothing else.  
What else  
are you expecting from me?]

## COMBINING PARTICLES

Particles may also be chained together to convey more than one mood. The contractions exhibited in the above lists are already the result of the chaining of two particles together. There are unwritten rules about which particles can be combined and in what order they occur which are probably too complicated to explain here. However, one good rule of thumb is that ge3 always comes before the other particles. In addition, the particles used in questions (@ aa3, © me1, b ne1, Î maa3, etc.) always come last.

The best bet for students of Cantonese is to first master the single particles before moving onto combining more than one together. Even then, there are very few cases where you would need to combine more than two. Again, check with

a native Cantonese speaker before you start using such combinations. In addition to the contractions above, the most common are /<sup>1</sup> ge3 laak3/ge3 laa3 (assertion + relevance), © ge3 me1 (assertion + surprise), and <sup>1</sup>© laa3 me1 (relevance + surprise; sometimes ends up being pronounced le3 me1). For example:

- \* b4â“Ô—K <sup>1</sup> = He already went home yesterday.
- \* Ô—K ©? = I'm unable to go home? [Really? Why not?]
- \* bò“Ô—†<sup>1</sup>©? = He already came back? [Really? I wasn't aware of this.]

Here's one case where three particles are chained together:

- \* Â f ! = [Of course] it's been this way! ( + <sup>1</sup> + @ = f )

#### WRITTEN CHARACTERS FOR PARTICLES

It should be noted that there has not been any standardization for writing these particles (standard written Chinese is based on the Mandarin dialect, which has its own set of particles, and most of the time the particles aren't even indicated in writing). Therefore they may be written differently depending on who is doing the writing.

So don't be surprised if you see a different character written for a particular particle. You may see different sources write the aa particles using either @, , or sometimes even J. The laa particles may sometimes be interchangeably written as <sup>1</sup>, f, or ‡. The same may be true for the other particles. This article has tried to list the characters that seemed most consistent among different sources and to list more than one if alternatives are common. Particles are mostly used for speech so learners should try to focus on the verbal usage and not the written characters anyway.

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