



## Music in Our Speech

Music is magic. It gives expression to inarticulate thoughts and feelings. It can lift a dark mood or give rest to an anxious mind. Music has long been an integral part of people's lives. It is only natural that music-related terms keep popping up in our daily language. The following are but a few examples:

Andy broke his neighbour's window with his football. Now he has got to *face the music*.

They pulled out all the stops to make sure their daughter had a wonderful wedding.

The government is *soft-peddalling* on the toll increase issue until after the pass of the proposed bill.

Something that is *music to one's ears* is something always welcome. It refers to good news or a piece of information that makes someone happy. When it comes to *facing the music*, it is undoubtedly undesirable. To *face the music* is to answer to the consequences of one's actions, especially punishment. Its origin is military, from forcing a cavalry horse to face the regimental band to accustom it to the blare.

To *pull out all the stops* means to make a tremendous effort. The *stops* refer to organ stops — the knobs at the side of an organ, which are used to control the sound. When all the stops are pulled out, the organ makes its loudest sound. To *soft-pedal* is to treat something more gently or to make something seem less important, urgent or bad than

it really is. The soft pedal on a piano is used to mute the tone. With the soft pedal down, the piano plays more quietly.

A tune is no stranger to musicians. If someone *changes his tune* after something has happened, he starts expressing a different attitude and reacting in a different way. A musician normally has the full control over the tune he is to play. In an office or other settings, however, it is always the person in charge who *calls the tune*. To *call the tune* means to make decisions. This expression derives from the practice of paying itinerant pipe musicians for a song, as in the proverb "He who pays the piper calls the tune". If you are *out of tune* with somebody, you have nothing in common with him, and you are unable to understand or agree with what he thinks and wants.

Music-related expressions add a vivid touch to our day-to-day communication. For example, *harping on the same string* sounds more dramatic and powerful than *talking about something over and over again*. The origin of this idiom goes back to the 16th century when harpists loved to fully show their remarkable skills by plucking on the same string. To *harp on the same string* is to make the same point continuously, especially in a way that is annoying or boring.

There is indeed music in our speech. Incorrect usage of music-related idioms, however, may lead to misunderstanding or embarrassment. It is always better to *strike the right note* than to hit the wrong one.

*Music washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.*

Berthold Auerbach

## 粵語懶音舉隅



有語言學家把語言喻作人的衣冠，發音不正等同衣履不整。日常碰到粵語發音不正的例子不少，而懶音更屢為語言學家詬病。

常見的粵語懶音包括聲母“n”（鼻音）、“l”不分。或許因為聲母“n”、“l”的發音差異不大，而“n”的發音須利用鼻音，人們往往捨難取易，把男(nam<sup>4</sup>)<sup>1</sup>人讀成藍(lam<sup>4</sup>)人，女(nœy<sup>5</sup>)伴讀成旅(lœy<sup>5</sup>)伴，鼻音消失殆盡。

其他常見的粵語懶音例子還有：

一. 聲母“gw”（圓唇）讀成“g”。例如：電視台介紹北國(gwɔk<sup>8</sup>)風情的旅遊節目，主持人說成北角(gɔk<sup>8</sup>)風情。乘客購買京廣(gwɔŋ<sup>2</sup>)鐵路的車票，如說成京港(gɔŋ<sup>2</sup>)鐵路，目的地便會由廣州變成香港。

二. 韻尾“ŋ”（橙tsan<sup>2</sup>）讀成“n”（鏗tsan<sup>2</sup>）。韻尾又叫收音，是韻母最後的部分。“ŋ”、“n”混淆，是常見的毛病。例如：恒生銀行說成痕身銀寒；朋友滿天下說成貧友滿天下。

三. 韻尾“k”、“t”混淆。由於以“p”、“t”、“k”收音的字讀起來較短促，如說話急促，很容易把韻尾混淆。例如：墨(mek<sup>9</sup>)汁魷魚跟蜜(mt<sup>9</sup>)汁魷魚的風味截然不同；公司今年純利八百(bat<sup>8</sup> bak<sup>8</sup>)萬美元與百八萬(一百八十萬)美元，相差甚遠。

香港人平常說話夾雜懶音，可能已見怪不怪。懶音有時無傷大雅，但有時可能會引起誤會，有礙溝通。只要平時多點查找粵語字音，並針對較難發音的字，勤加練習，日子有功，要做一個衣履整齊的人，絕非難事。

<sup>1</sup> 本文採用《中華新字典》粵語注音符號。