

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
1st Term of 2025-2026

Course code: LING2301/UGEC2925

Course title: Language and Society 語言與社會

Note: Students who took UGEC1925 Language and Society 語言與社會 before are not allowed to take this course.

Course description:

This course explores human language in the broader context of culture and society. How, for example, does one language community interact with another language community in the multilingual world? Does language change and what are the processes involved? To what extent does the same language vary due to gender, power, status, and identity? How do men and women, people with higher and lower social status talk differently? How are these relationships reflected in the use of politeness markers and other linguistic devices? What are the implications of sociolinguistics on education and language planning?

Through introducing students to major issues in sociolinguistic studies, students will be able to develop a better understanding of how language functions in societal contexts from a linguistic perspective. Discussions will also focus on common sociolinguistic phenomena in daily communication, with a specific emphasis on the use of various languages and dialects spoken in Hong Kong. Exploring these topics will enhance students' awareness of language as a cultural phenomenon and sharpen their sensitivity to the nuances of language use in the context of a multilingual world, with special reference to the sociolinguistic context of the Greater China area.

本科目旨在探究語言和社會文化的關係。本科會談論不同的語言族群會怎樣互相影響，語言會怎樣隨時間而轉變。另外，我們也會分析不同性別、社會地位和角色會怎樣影響一個人在社會環境下應用他們的語言。例如，男和女、有權勢者和社會的草根階層的用語會有甚麼分別？人與人之間的關係可以怎樣透過禮貌用語和其他語言手段反映出來？本科亦會討論社會語言學怎樣幫助我們更深入地了解教育和語文規劃這些課題。

通過向學生介紹社會語言學研究的主要課題，學生將能夠從語言學的角度更好地理解語言在社會環境中的功能。本課程也會重點討論日常交流中常見的社會語言現象，尤其是香港各種語言和方言的使用。探討這些課題可加強學生對語言作為一種文化現象的認識，並提高他們在多語言世界中對語言運用細微差異的敏感度，特別是對大中華地區社會語言環境的認識。

Learning outcomes:

Students are expected to achieve the following learning outcomes:

- Discuss the social factors that influence language use.
- Identify the key issues in sociolinguistics and discuss these issues using the appropriate terminology.
- Identify common sociolinguistic phenomena in daily communication settings.
- Conduct basic analysis of sociolinguistic phenomena using the concepts learned in the course.

Course syllabus:

Topics	Concepts
Language, dialects and varieties	Language vs. dialect, language standardization, regional dialects, social dialects, styles, registers and genres
Multilingual societies and discourse	Multilingualism, diglossia, code-switching, language shift, maintenance, and revitalization
Contact languages	Lingua francas, pidgin and creole formation, linguistic characteristics of pidgins and creoles
Language variation and change	Regional variation, linguistic variables, social variation, gender variation, language change
Language, gender and sexuality	Sexist language, gender and sexuality identities
Sociolinguistics and education	Social dialects and education, multilingual education, English as a global language
Language attitudes and identity	Language attitudes and effects on identity; how identities are expressed through variations of language
Language policy and planning	The goals of language policies, the role of government and language users, the roles of ethnic and national identities

Course components: Teaching modes and Learning activities

Lecture: 2 hrs 09:30 – 11:15 am (Lecture will be offered face-to-face, with no hybrid mode of teaching and learning.)

Interactive Tutorial: 1 hr 11:30 am – 12:15 pm

Lecture (hrs) In class	Interactive tutorial (hr) In class
2	1
M	M

M: Mandatory activity in the course

Assessment Scheme

Task nature	Description	Weight
Individual written assignment	Compare two multilingual societies in terms of their respective 'sociolinguistic landscapes'. (between 1200-1500 words, normal margin, Times New Roman, font 12, double spacing)	40%

Group project: group oral presentation + project paper	Choose a sociolinguistic topic related to daily life in the speech community with which you are most familiar. In addition to a literature review related to the selected topic, the group's oral presentation should include explanation of the project's aim and approach. (The 'exercises' in Wardhaugh & Fuller (2015) suggest possible topics.) A mini-research paper on the chosen topic (1500-1800 words, Roman font 12, single space).	30% (10% presentation + 20% project paper)
Midterm test	Questions are based on reading materials and concepts covered in class (MC, T/F, short questions)	30%

Late submission policy:

(Please specify the late submission policy of each of the course assessments. The policy should detail the penalties for late submission of the assessment, circumstances under which extensions may be granted, and if applicable, the process for requesting extensions. For details, please refer to Clause 9 of the [supplementary assessment guidelines for University GE courses](#).)

The requirement to include a late submission policy in the course outline for each of the assessments in the University GE courses was introduced by SCGE in May 2024. A clear submission policy provides a structured framework for teachers to deal with late submissions of assignments, and for students to understand the submission requirements. This helps minimize disputes between teachers and students arising from the lack of a clear policy and avoid delays in the grading process and/or providing feedback to students. This practice also aligns with the GE standards at other institutions, creating a structured and fair learning environment for all students. The examples below provide guidance for course teachers in designing a late submission policy. For more details, please refer to "A Guide for Teachers of University GE courses".

Assessment task	Extension allowed (Y/N)	Late submission policy
1. Individual written assignment	Y	<i>Unless an extension is granted, late submissions will result in a deduction of 5% of the marks awarded per day, with no marks to be given for a delay beyond 5 calendar days. Extension requests, supported by appropriate documentation, should be submitted to the course teacher for approval at least one week before the deadline in writing. Only unforeseen or exceptional circumstances beyond a student's control will be considered.</i>
2. Group project: group oral presentation + project paper		

Required reading:

Wardhaugh, Ronald & Janet Fuller. 2015. *An introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Wiley Blackwell. (CUHK Library online access available)

Feedback for evaluation

Students are encouraged to give their feedback via email, Blackboard, and through use of the Early Feedback Collection System in the middle of the semester.

Grade descriptors

LING2301	Sociolinguistics
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize almost all the basic concepts about language and society covered in the course ▪ Describe with great depth a wide range of factors influencing language use in the society ▪ Excellent in analyzing and evaluating linguistic phenomena in real-life situations with a lot of critical insights
A-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize most basic concepts about language and society covered in the course ▪ Describe with great depth a wide range of factors influencing language use in the society ▪ Good in analyzing and evaluating linguistic phenomena in real-life situations with some critical insights
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize some basic concepts about language and society covered in the course ▪ Describe with some depth some factors influencing language use in the society ▪ Satisfactory in analyzing and evaluating linguistic phenomena in real-life situations
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize relatively few basic concepts about language and society covered in the course ▪ Describe rather superficially some factors influencing language use in the society ▪ Weak in analyzing and evaluating linguistic phenomena in real-life situations
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize very few basic concepts about language and society covered in the course ▪ Describe superficially a very limited number of factors influencing language use in the society ▪ Very weak in analyzing and evaluating linguistic phenomena in real-life situations
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize almost no basic concepts about language and society covered in the course ▪ Describe almost no factors influencing language use in the society ▪ Extremely weak in analyzing and evaluating linguistic phenomena in real-life situations

Course schedule:**Contact details of the instructor**

Week	Date	Topic	Required reading
Week 1	3 Sept	Languages, dialects and varieties	W & F Chapters 1-2
Week 2	10 Sept	Language Attitudes and Identity	W & F Chapter 3
Week 3	17 Sept	Multilingual societies and language contact	W & F Chapter 4
Week 4	24 Sept	Contact languages: pidgins and creoles	W & F Chapter 5
Week 5	1 Oct	<i>Public Holiday</i>	
Week 6	8 Oct	Language Variation	W & F Chapters 6-7
Week 7	15 Oct	Language Change	W & F Chapter 8
	20 Oct	<i>Individual essay due</i>	
Week 8	22 Oct	Discourse Analysis	W & F Chapter 11
Week 9	29 Oct	<i>Public Holiday</i>	
Week 10	5 Nov	<i>Midterm Quiz</i>	
Week 11	12 Nov	Language, Gender and Sexuality	W & F Chapter 12
Week 12	19 Nov	Sociolinguistics and Education	W & F Chapter 13
Week 13	26 Nov	Language Policy and Planning	W & F Chapter 14
	1,2 Dec	<i>Make-up classes: student presentations</i>	
	5 Dec	<i>Project paper due</i>	

Instructor:	
Name:	Prof Jonathan J Webster
Email:	jonathanjameswebster@cuhk.edu.hk
Teaching Venue:	LSB-LT4
Lecture/Tutorial Time:	Wednesday, 9:30-12:15

Teaching Assistant/Tutor:	
Name:	DONG, Qiren
Email:	1155208916@link.cuhk.edu.hk
Name:	YU, Yan
Email:	1155249179@link.cuhk.edu.hk

A facility for posting course announcements

A Blackboard account has been set up for students to access information of the course.

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed **declaration** that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

- In the case of group projects, all members of the group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible and liable to disciplinary actions, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the problematic contents.
- For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment.
- Students' work will be investigated by AI content detection software to determine originality.
- Students are fully aware of the AI approach(es) adopted in the course. In the case where some AI tools are allowed, students have made proper acknowledgment and citations as suggested by the course teacher.

Assignments without a properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers.

Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submissions. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

The copyright of the teaching materials, including lecture notes, assignments and examination questions, etc., produced by staff members/ teachers of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) belongs to CUHK. Students may download the teaching materials produced by the staff members/ teachers from the Learning Management Systems, e.g. Blackboard, adopted by CUHK for their own educational use, but shall not distribute/ share/ copy the materials to a third-party without seeking prior permission from the staff members/ teachers concerned.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Approach 1 - All use of AI tools is prohibited in assignments and assessment tasks

Use of AI tools for grading and provision of feedback on student work (include this Section where applicable)

Approach 1 - All use of AI tools is prohibited for grading and provision of feedback on student work

Guidelines on sharing lecture recordings

1. The copyright of any lecture recordings shared in the course, whether they are produced by teachers, students, or peer note-takers, belongs to the University.
2. Students should not share these recordings with others without obtaining prior written consent from the teacher.

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