

**The Chinese University of Hong Kong**  
**Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Term of 2025-2026**

**1. Course code: LING5503**

**2. Title in English: Topics in Chinese Language Acquisition**

**3. Title in Chinese: 漢語語言獲得**

**4. Course description:**

This course introduces postgraduate students to major empirical findings and theoretical issues in first, second and heritage language acquisition of Chinese across monolingual, bilingual and multilingual contexts. It examines in depth the development in key linguistic areas including phonology, lexicon and grammar as well as literacy of Chinese, focusing on a number of prominent linguistic structures and features of Chinese such as lexical tone, flexible word order and aspect marking. Methodology of acquisition research is an integral part of the course and will be demonstrated through representative studies and hands-on tutorials. Basic knowledge of Chinese linguistics is a prerequisite. The main medium of instruction is English, supplemented by Chinese (Putonghua).

**5. Learning outcomes:**

Students will develop a good understanding of the acquisition tasks facing child, adolescent and adult learners of Chinese, and the factors affecting the path and outcomes of the acquisition. They will be familiar with the common methods used in empirical research on language development, and be able to elicit and analyze acquisition data for research or teaching purposes.

**6. Course syllabus**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Contents/fundamental concepts</b>
General linguistics	Lexical tone, pitch, functional category, Aspect Phrase (AspP), Complementiser Phrase (CP), head-direction, little <i>v</i> , split intransitivity (unaccusative, unergative), argument structure, thematic roles, event structure, telicity, agentivity, information structure, focus, presupposition, features
Chinese linguistics	Tone, null subject, null object, pro-drop, long-distance binding, <i>wh</i> -in-situ, existential polarity words, topic structures, Resultative Verb Compounds (RVC), pretransitive ( <i>ba</i> ), passive ( <i>bei</i> ), aspect markers, sentence-final particles
Language Acquisition	Language input, positive evidence, learner variability, representational deficit, linguistic interfaces and features, cross-linguistic influence, ultimate attainment, statistical learning, processing difficulty, morphological and phonological awareness, working memory, executive function
Research methods	Spoken language corpora, transcription and analysis of speech samples, elicited production and narrative, acceptability and truth-value judgment, standardized assessment, self-paced reading, priming, eye-tracking, tables, figures, descriptive and inferential statistics

**7. Course components:**

<b>Teaching Modes and Learning Activities</b>	
<b>On-site face-to-face</b>	<b>Percentage of time</b>
<i>Lectures (hybrid no)</i>	26 hours
<i>Interactive tutorial (hybrid no)</i>	13 hours
<b>Out-of-classroom self-study</b>	
<i>Reading, assignment, group work</i>	39 hours

## 8. Assessment type, percentage and rubrics

Task nature	Description	Weight
1. Class participation	Answer multiple-choice questions on content taught in class via Blackboard; late submissions will not be graded - <i>graded automatically by Blackboard</i>	10%
2. Quiz	Two in-class quizzes testing understanding of key concepts and theories, and their applications to new data and real-world problems - <i>graded by TA on rubrics provided by teacher; reviewed by teacher</i>	60%
3. Term paper	An oral presentation (15%, 5 minutes) and a paper (15%, 2,000-2,500 English words or 4,000-5,000 Chinese characters) reporting a replication study on L1 or L2 Chinese; students can work individually or form groups (max. 3 students per group) - <i>managed by TA, graded by teacher</i>	30%

N.B. Attendance at lectures and tutorials is required; All questions and instructions in the quizzes and the term paper will be presented in English to the students. No translation or explanation of English terms will be provided during the quizzes. MACLA students can answer the quiz questions, present and write up term papers in **either Chinese or English**; MALIN students should complete all assessment tasks **in English**.

## 9. Required and recommended readings:

*This course does not have a textbook. Students should read the following book chapters and journal articles (all downloadable through CUHK library):*

- 1) Hua, Z., & Dodd, B. (2000). The phonological acquisition of Putonghua (modern standard Chinese). *Journal of Child Language*, 27(1), 3-42.
- 2) Lee, T. H.-T. (1996). Theoretical issues in language development and Chinese child language, In J. C.-T. Huang and A. Li (eds.) *New Horizons in Chinese Linguistics*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, pp. 293-356.
- 3) Lu, Y. & Ke, C (2018). L2 Chinese Grammar Development. in *The Routledge Handbook of Chinese Second Language Acquisition*. 1st ed., Routledge, 151–216.
- 4) Mai, Z. (2016). L2 Chinese: Grammatical development and processing. *Second Language Research*, 32(1), 123-141.
- 5) McBride, C. A. (2016). Is Chinese special? Four aspects of Chinese literacy acquisition that might distinguish learning Chinese from learning alphabetic orthographies. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28, 523-549.
- 6) Shi, R. (2006) Basic Syntactic Categories in Early Language Development. In Li, P., Tan, L. H., Bates, E. and Tzeng, O. J. L. (eds.) *The Handbook of East Asian Psycholinguistics*. Cambridge University Press, 90–102.
- 7) Tardif, T. (2006). “The Importance of Verbs in Chinese.” In Li, P., Tan, L. H., Bates, E. and Tzeng, O. J. L. (eds.) *The Handbook of East Asian Psycholinguistics*. Cambridge University Press, 124–135.
- 8) Wang, Y., Sereno, J. and Jongman, A. (2006) L2 acquisition and processing of Mandarin tones. In Li, P., Tan, L. H., Bates, E. and Tzeng, O. J. L. (eds.) *The Handbook of East Asian Psycholinguistics*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 250-256.
- 9) Yip, V., & Matthews, S. (2010). The acquisition of Chinese in bilingual and multilingual contexts. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 14(1), 127-146.

- 10) Yuan, B. (2010) Domain-wide or variable-dependent vulnerability of the semantics-syntax interface in L2 acquisition? Evidence from wh-words used as existential polarity words in L2 Chinese grammars. *Second Language Research*, 26, 219-260.
- 11) Zhao, Y. (2011). A tree in the wood: a review of research on L2 Chinese acquisition. *Second Language Research*, 27:4, pp. 559-572.
- 12) Zhou, P., & Crain, S. (2010). Focus identification in child Mandarin. *Journal of Child Language*, 37(5), 965-1005.

## 10. Feedback for evaluation

Apart from the end-of-term course evaluation, the teacher and the teaching assistant welcome students' timely comments and suggestions on any aspect of the course. Email communication and in-class discussions are preferred. Appointment meetings can also be arranged.

## 11. Course schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Readings	Question
1.	Jan 9	Lecture: Introduction - Tutorial: Naturalistic data	Lee (1996)	
<b>Part I: Child L1 Chinese</b>				
2.	Jan 16	Lecture: Phonological and lexical development - Tutorial: Infant studies	Hua & Dodd (2000) Tardif et al. (2006)	Q1
3.	Jan 23	Lecture: Early grammatical forms - Tutorial: CDI	Shi (2006)	Q2
4.	Jan 30	Lecture: Semantics in child Chinese - Tutorial: Experimentation with children	Zhou & Crain (2010)	Q3
5.	Feb 6	Lecture: Developing literacy skills - Tutorial: Standardized assessment	McBride (2016)	Q4
6.	Feb 13	Lecture: Acquiring Chinese in multilingual contexts - Tutorial: Elicited narration	Yip & Matthews (2010)	Q5, Q6
7.	Feb 20	No class – Happy Chinese New Year!		
<b>Part II: Adult L2 Chinese</b>				
8.	Feb 27	<b>Quiz I (covering 6 lectures in Weeks 1-6, 40%, 80min)</b> - Term project workshop		
9.	Mar 6	Lecture: Lexical tone in L2 Mandarin - Tutorial: Sound discrimination	Wang et al. (2006)	Q7
10.	Mar 13	Lecture: L2 Chinese syntax - Tutorial: Judgment tasks	Lu & Ke (2018)	Q8
11.	Mar 20	Lecture: Semantics in L2 Chinese - Tutorial: Elicited production	Yuan (2010)	Q9
12.	Mar 27	Lecture: Processing L2 Mandarin - Tutorial: Online experiments	Zhao (2010), Mai (2016)	Q10
13.	Apr 3	No class – Good Friday		
14.	Apr 10	<b>Quiz II (covering 4 lectures in Weeks 9-12, 20%, 40min)</b> Student presentation (1st batch, bonus points for audience)		

15.	Apr 17	Student presentation (2nd batch, bonus points for audience)		
	Apr 24	<b>Term project paper due</b>		

## 12. Contact details:

Teacher: Prof. MAI Ziyin (Maggie) 麥子茵

Email: [maggiezymai@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:maggiezymai@cuhk.edu.hk)

Teacher assistants:

FENG Xilai (Celia), [celia.feng@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:celia.feng@cuhk.edu.hk)

LIU Zhan (James), [jamesliu@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:jamesliu@cuhk.edu.hk)

## 13. Details of course website

Course website in Blackboard.

## 14. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in teaching, learning and assessments

This course adopts the following approach in the major assessment components (i.e., items that count towards 30% or above of the final grade):

Use of AI tools

Approach 1 - Prohibit all use of AI tools in the major assessment components (quizzes)

- For general information about use of AI tools in learning:

[AI Hub@CUHK](https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ai-hub/) <https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ai-hub/>

- CUHK Library website on AI in Education:

<https://libguides.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/c.php?g=917899&p=6975970>

## 15. Use of AI tools for grading and provision of feedback on student work

The teacher and the teaching assistant(s) will NOT use AI tools for grading and providing feedback on student work in the major assessment components.

## 16. 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/>.

- 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 may be investigated by AI content detection software to determine originality.

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.