



香港中文大學
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Predicting language change

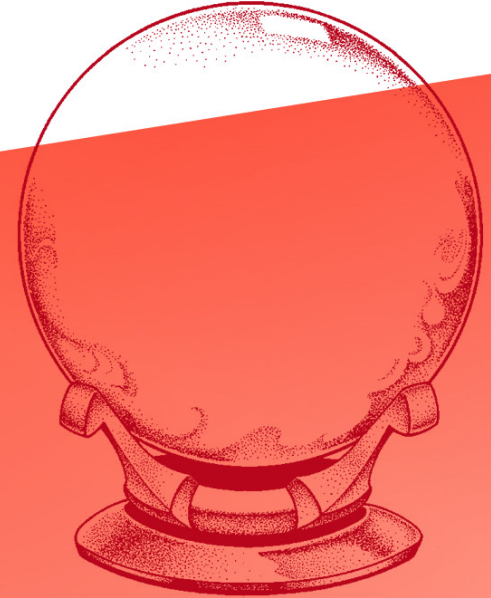
Date: October 17, 2013 (Thursday)

Time: 11:00 – 13:00

Venue: FKH 220 (Fung King Hey Building), The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Professor Charles Yang

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Abstract

From the comparative method to modern quantitative research on language variation, the study of language change has largely been inferential in nature. The outcome of language change is subjected to structural and/or statistical analysis to identify general principles of change as well as the course of change for specific languages.

We develop a new approach that complements these inferential methods. It projects well motivated mechanisms of language transmission over multiple generations to derive the expected dynamics of language change. This approach allows one to identify conditions in the linguistic environment--from historical corpora, dialectal surveys, etc.--under which certain linguistic changes would necessarily take place. We illustrate the utility of this predictive approach with a few empirical case studies, including the condition of dialect mixture that facilitated the *l-n* merger in Hong Kong Cantonese.

Speaker

Professor Charles Yang is currently Associate Professor of Linguistics and Computer Science at the University of Pennsylvania. He has researched extensively on domain-general and domain-specific mechanisms in language acquisition using computational modeling, and on mathematical models of language variation and change. Professor Yang is the author of *Knowledge and learning in natural language* (2002), *The Infinite gift: How children learn and unlearn languages* (2006) and editor of *Language acquisition: Critical concepts in linguistics* (2010).

ALL ARE WELCOME

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