



香港中文大學
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Language and Aging: Memory and Attention

Linguistics Seminars

Prof. James H.-Y. Tai

Graduate Institute of Linguistics and Advanced Gerontological Expertise Institute
National Chung Cheng University

Date: November 15, 2016 (Tuesday)

Time: 16:30 – 18:15

Venue: Lecture Theatre 2, Lee Shau Kee Building,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

For the first time in history, the human race faces a grave threat in the global aging of populations. Although the proportion of the elderly population in Taiwan is not as large as in Japan, Europe, or America, its rate of aging is the fastest in the whole world, partly due to its very low birthrate. In 2025, Taiwan will be a “super-aged society” with 20% of the population over 65. In many rural areas in Southern Taiwan, the 65+ elderly people will range between 25% and 30%.

Yet, the crisis of global aging also creates new opportunities for science and technology. In this talk, I will begin with a brief introduction to neurolinguistics, focusing on the changes of different subsystems of memory and attention with their corresponding development in cognitive neurological underpinnings. Some key areas of the age-related language performances in both comprehension and production will be identified for the normal elderly. Cognitive-linguistic deficits in MCI (Mild Cognitive Impairment) will also be discussed with the aim for cognitive-linguistic therapy to prevent or delay the development of dementia. Two assessment tools of dementia commonly adopted by clinical psychologists and psychiatrists, namely MMSE (Mini-Mental State Examination) and CAIS (cognitive ability screening instrument, CASI), will be discussed with regard to their validity.

Finally, I will identify some of the areas where linguists can conduct cutting-edge research on language and aging with non-trivial theoretical implications and practical applications. This talk will end with an urge to rethink what has been privileged as “theoretical linguistics” since the establishment of Chomskyan paradigm in early 1960s. I will make an important conceptual distinction between “solving puzzles” in theoretical inquiries and “solving problems” for the well-being of a society. Focus on “solving problems” requires trans-disciplinary research efforts and can lead to new frontiers of scientific inquiries.

Speaker

Professor James H.-Y. Tai is Distinguished Chair Professor and Director of the Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences of National Chung Cheng University. He received his doctoral degree in Linguistics from Indiana University, and taught at Southern Illinois University and Ohio State University (1970-1995) before joining National Chung Cheng University to serve as the founding chair of the Graduate Institute of Linguistics and later as Dean of College of Humanities. He was Director-General of the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Taiwan National Science Council during 2002-2005, President of the International Association of Chinese Linguistics (2004) and recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Taiwan Linguistic Society (2010). His research focuses on syntagmatic relations on the syntax-semantics interface and the modality of communication in spoken language and sign language, with reference to the universals and particulars of human language. Since 2010, he has been working with psychologists and neuro-scientists on the relationship between language and aging, with the aim of identifying linguistic markers of dementia in Chinese.

ALL ARE WELCOME

Enquiries

Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, CUHK.

Tel: (852)3943 7911/7025 Fax: (852)2603 7755 E-mail: lin@cuhk.edu.hk

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