

HUMA5280 Cantonese Grammar in Contemporary Linguistic Theories [C] Spring 2025

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Time & venue: Wednesday 9:00–11:50 5566

Course description

This course explores the intricacies of Cantonese grammar through the lens of contemporary linguistic theories. Students will gain a comprehensive understanding of Cantonese grammar, including its word formation (morphology), sentence structure (syntax), aspectual system and sentence-final particles. This course will situate Cantonese within the broader context of linguistic typology, examining how its grammatical structures relate to and diverge from those of other languages in the region and globally. By the end of the course, students will have developed a solid theoretical foundation in Cantonese grammar, enabling them to analyse its complexities within modern linguistic frameworks and appreciate its place in the landscape of the world's languages.

Intended learning outcomes

- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Cantonese grammar
- Analyse Cantonese grammar within a typological framework, comparing and contrasting it with other languages in the region and globally
- Appreciate the unique position of Cantonese within the broader context of the world's languages

Assessment

Attendance & participation	15%
Reading presentation	15%
Term paper presentation	20%
Term paper (due 23 May)	50%

Course schedule (tentative)

Week	Date	Topic	Reading presentations
1	5 Feb	Introduction	
2	12 Feb	The typological approach	
3	19 Feb	Morphology	
4	26 Feb	Syntactic categories	Francis & Matthews (2005), Law (2014)
5	5 Mar	Syntactic structure Part 1	Simpson et al. (2011), Arcodia (2017)
6	12 Mar	Syntactic structure Part 2	Ansaldo (2010), Matthews (2006)
7	19 Mar	Aspect and verbal particles	Chor (2013), Fan & Chan (2022)
8	26 Mar	Sentence-final particles	Sybesma (2013), Yiu (2021)
			Mid-term break

9	9 Apr	Grammaticalization	Ansaldo et al. (2017), Chin (2011)
10	16 Apr	Areal typology	Chappell (2015), Szeto & Yurayong (2021)
11	23 Apr	Theoretical frameworks	Dixon (2010), Haspelmath (2015)
12	30 Apr	Term paper presentations	
13	7 May	Term paper presentations	

Main references

- Arcodia, Giorgio Francesco & Bianca Basciano. 2021. *Chinese linguistics: An introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cheung, Samuel Hung-nin 張洪年. 2007. *香港粵語語法的研究* [A grammar of Cantonese as spoken in Hong Kong], revised edn. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
- Cheung, Samuel Hung-nin 張洪年. 2021. *香港粵語：二百年滄桑探索* [Cantonese in Hong Kong: An exploration of the past 200 years]. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
- *Matthews, Stephen & Virginia Yip. 2011. *Cantonese: A comprehensive grammar*, 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Peng, Xiaochuan 彭小川. 2010. *廣州話助詞研究* [Research on particles in Cantonese]. Guangzhou: Jinan University Press.
- Tang, Sze-Wing 鄧思穎. 2015. *粵語語法講義* [Lecture notes on Cantonese grammar]. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press.
- Zhan, Bohui 詹伯慧. 2002. *廣東粵方言概要* [An outline of Yue dialects in Guangdong]. Guangzhou: Jinan University Press.
- *Zhan, Bohui & Yu'en Gan 詹伯慧、甘于恩. 2012. *廣府方言* [The Cantonese dialect]. Guangzhou: Jinan University Press.

Suggested readings

- Ansaldo, Umberto. 2010. Surpass comparatives in Sinitic and beyond. *Linguistics* 48(4). 919–950.
- Ansaldo, Umberto, Walter Bisang & Pui Yiu Szeto. 2018. Grammaticalization in isolating languages and the notion of complexity. In Heiko Narrog & Bernd Heine (eds.), *Grammaticalization from a typological perspective*, 219–234. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Arcodia, Giorgio Francesco. 2017. Towards a typology of relative clauses in Sinitic: Headedness and relativization strategies. *Cahiers de Linguistique Asie Orientale* 46. 32–72.
- Chappell, Hilary M. 2015. Linguistic areas in China for differential object marking, passive, and comparative constructions. In Hilary M. Chappell (ed.), *Diversity in Sinitic languages*, 13–52. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chin, Andy C. 2011. Grammaticalization of the Cantonese double object verb [pei35] 畀 in typological and areal perspectives. *Language and Linguistics* 12(3). 529–563.
- Chor, Winnie. 2013. From ‘Direction’ to ‘Positive evaluation’: On the grammaticalization, subjectification and intersubjectification of *faan1* ‘return’ in Cantonese. *Language and Linguistics* 14(1). 91–134.
- Dixon, R. M. W. 2010. *Basic Linguistic Theory*, Volume 1: Chapter 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- de Sousa, Hilário. 2024. Some observations on the Cantonese lexical suprafixes. *Languages* 9(10). 311.
- Fan, Xiaolei & Kin Wing Kevin Chan 范曉蕾、陳健榮. 2022. 香港粵語「咗」的語法特點：與北京話「了₁」的比較 [Grammatical properties of *zo* 咗 in Hong Kong Cantonese: A comparative study with *le*₁ 了₁ in Beijing Mandarin]. *Language and Linguistics* 23(3). 371–410.
- Francis, Elaine J. & Stephen Matthews. 2005. A multi-dimensional approach to the category ‘verb’ in Cantonese. *Journal of Linguistics* 41(2). 269–305.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2015. Framework-free grammatical theory. In Bernd Heine & Heiko Narrog (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of linguistic analysis*, 2nd edn, 287–310. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Law, Paul. 2014. The negation *mou5* in Guangdong Yue. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 23. 267–305.
- Matthews, Stephen. 2006. On serial verb constructions in Cantonese. In Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald & R. M. W. Dixon (eds.), *Serial verb constructions: A cross-linguistic typology*, 69–87. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Matthews, Stephen. 2007. Cantonese grammar in areal perspective. In Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald & R. M. W. Dixon (eds.), *Grammars in contact: A cross-linguistic typology*, 220–236. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Simpson, Andrew, Hooi Ling Soh & Hiroki Nomoto. 2011. Bare classifiers and definiteness: A cross-linguistic investigation. *Studies in Language* 35(1). 168–193.
- Sybesma, Rint. 2013. Cantonese *sin* 先 and the question of microvariation and macrovariation. In Guangshun Cao, Hilary Chappell, Redouane Djamouri & Thekla Wiebusch (eds.), *Breaking down the barriers: Interdisciplinary studies in Chinese linguistics and beyond*, 971–994. Taipei: Academia Sinica Institute of Linguistics.
- Szeto, Pui Yiu & Chingduang Yurayong. 2021. Sinitic as a typological sandwich: Revisiting the notions of Altaicization and Taicization. *Linguistic Typology* 25(3). 551–599.
- Szeto, Pui Yiu & Chingduang Yurayong. 2022. Establishing a Sprachbund in the Western Lingnan region: Conceptual and methodological issues. *Folia Linguistica* 56(1). 25–55.
- Yiu, Carine Yuk-man. 2021. The origin and development of the question particle *mei* in Cantonese. *Lingua* 254. 103049.

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