Course Code: HUMA 5230

Course Title: Languages of China: Anthropological and Cognitive Dimensions [C] [Pu]

Course Offered in: Spring 2026

Course Instructor: Professor Zhang Min

Office Hours: To be announced at class; and by appointments

Course Description: A cross-disciplinary discussion of issues pertaining to social, historical, cultural, and cognitive aspects of languages and dialects of China, approached from perspectives of areal linguistics, linguistic anthropology, and cognitive linguistics.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Strengthen awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity in China.
2. Understand how language as a complex adaptive system is shaped by sociohistorical, cultural, and cognitive processes.
3. Analyze structuring principles of Chinese and non-Han minority languages of China with core concepts and methods employed by cognitive-functional linguists and linguistic anthropologists.

Course Objectives

This course is designed around three primary, interrelated objectives:

*   Foundational Methodology: To familiarize students with the core concepts and methodologies employed by functional linguists and linguistic anthropologists in the analysis of human language as a complex individual and social communicative behavior.
*   Diversity and Contextualization: To sensitize students to the nature, origins, and consequences of linguistic and cultural diversity—with a particular focus on China and its periphery. Students will recognize that language is not a fixed or self-contained system, but is intimately linked to culture, social relations, biological makeup, and lived experience.
*   Interdisciplinary Discourse: To foster academic dialogue among students from diverse disciplines within the Humanities and stimulate critical thinking through cross-disciplinary interaction.

Course Structure and Scope

The curriculum is organized into four thematic areas:

1. Part A: Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology
2. Part B: Historical Dimensions of Chinese Languages
3. Part C: Cognitive-Cultural Dimensions of Chinese Languages
4. Part D: Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Chinese Languages

In this context, "Chinese languages" encompasses not only Han Sinitic varieties (dialects), but also the non-Han minority languages spoken within China and its neighboring regions.

Academic Background and Rationale

- Language is the most fundamental form of human behavior. Consequently, the study of how language and culture interact remains one of the most compelling avenues for understanding the human condition. As a core component of human culture, language is best understood through the prism of society; conversely, the study of linguistic structures offers profound insights into the nature of humanity.

- Historically, particularly within the North American tradition, linguistics has been established as one of the four pillars of anthropology, alongside cultural, physical, and archaeological subfields. Linguistic anthropology (or anthropological linguistics) encompasses both sociolinguistics (the study of language as a social marker) and historical linguistics (the study of linguistic evolution). A more recent evolution in this field is cognitive anthropology, which integrates structural linguistics with the emerging insights of cognitive linguistics.

- While linguistics and anthropology have diverged over the last few decades – the former often adopting a positivistic, structuralist orientation and the latter an interpretivist, discursive approach – this course seeks to bridge that gap. Despite this disciplinary distance, fields such as areal linguistics, historical linguistics, and cognitive-functional linguistics remain deeply rooted in anthropological inquiry due to their shared tenets and methodologies.

- To achieve a holistic understanding of human culture, we must synthesize contributions from both disciplines. This course provides students – both linguistics majors and those from other Humanities backgrounds – with a rigorous, overarching perspective to explore the complex intersections of language, mind, and society.

Assessment and Grading

Your work will be evaluated against absolute academic standards (criterion-referencing) rather than relative peer performance (no curving). To assist with your preparation, detailed rubrics for each task will be available on Canvas, providing a clear roadmap of the criteria used for assessment.

- Attendance (starting from Week 3): 10%
- Class participation and homework assignments: 40%
- Term paper: 50%

Course AI Policy

- Students may use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools as supportive learning aids during the learning process for the following limited purposes: (a) brainstorming and refining research questions, (b) exploring and comparing alternative explanations or formulations, (c) generating illustrative examples, and (d) proofreading for grammar, style, and clarity. Such use is intended to facilitate learning and intellectual exploration rather than to replace students' own analytical work.
- All use of AI tools must be approached critically and transparently. Students are required to evaluate AI-generated outputs with caution, to verify their accuracy and appropriateness, and to document how the tools were used. Where applicable, students should include a brief reflection on the limitations, potential biases, and errors of the AI system in relation to the task at hand.
- The use of generative AI tools to produce, substantially draft, or revise any content for essay-based assessments or other graded written work is strictly prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to, the generation of arguments, analyses, interpretations, or complete written passages intended for submission. Students remain fully responsible for the originality, accuracy, and academic integrity of all submitted work.

Course Outline:

(Approximately 12-13 weekly topics will be selected from the list below.)

- Topic 0: Overview: Language as a complex adaptive system (總論 – 語言作為複雜的適應性系統)
- Topic 1: Introduction: linguistics as a branch of anthropology and cognitive psychology (導論 - 作為人類學和認知心理學分支的語言學)
- Topic 2: Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and subjunctives in Chinese and English (語言相對論及漢語、英語裡的虛擬語氣)

- Topic 3: Structural properties of Chinese in comparative perspective, and the 'Thinking for Speaking' hypothesis (世界語言視野中的漢語結構特徵，以及「思由言限」假設)
- Topic 4: Sound symbolism in Chinese and other languages (語音象徵性)
- Topic 5: Iconicity in Syntax (句法像似性)
- Topic 6: Categorization: How Human Beings Categorize the World with Language (範疇化：人類如何用語言給世界分類)
- Topic 7: Historical, Geographical, and Ethnic Factors in the History of Chinese (漢語結構格局及結構變遷中的歷史、地理、民族融合因素)
- Topic 8: Linguistic Epidemiology: The Grammaticalization Sprachbund of Mainland Southeast Asian Languages (語言流行病學：東南亞大陸語言的語法化區域)
- Topic 9: Cultural Complexity and Structural Complexity of Language (文化的複雜性和句法操作的複雜性)
- Topic 10: Deixis in Chinese and Other Languages (漢語及其他語言裡的直示現象)
- Topic 11: How Space is Structured by Chinese and Other Languages (漢語及其他語言是如何構造空間的)
- Topic 12: Spatial-Temporal Expressions in Different Languages and Their Relationship with Spatial-Temporal Cognition (不同語言的空間-時間表達方式及其與時空認知的關係)
- Topic 13: Crosslinguistic Variation in the Perspectives of Ethnography of Speaking and Discourse Analysis (從言語交際民族志和會話分析的角度看跨語言差異)
- Topic 14: Reduplication and Coordinate Compounding in Chinese and World Languaegs: Semantic Patterns and Areal Features (中國及世界語言裡的重疊及並列複合形式：語義模式和區域特徵)

Selected Readings:

[Specific required and optional readings for each topic will be announced on the weekly pages.]

(1) 陳保亞 1993.《語言文化論》(中國西南邊疆民族經濟文化研究叢書)，昆明：雲南大學出版社。
(2) 鄧曉華 1993.《人類文化語言學》，廈門：廈門大學出版社。
(3) 李如龍 1998.《漢語地名學論稿》，上海：上海教育出版社。
(4) 羅常培 1950. 《語言與文化》，北京：北京大學出版社。
(5) 王士元 2002.《王士元語言學論文集》，北京：商務印書館。

(6) 鄒嘉彥、游汝傑 2001.《漢語與華人社會》，上海、香港：復旦大學出版社、香港城市大學出版社。

(7) 橋本萬太郎. 1978.《言語地理類型論》. 東京：宏文堂。余志鴻譯《語言地理類型學》，北京：北京大學出版社，1985。

(8) 朱文俊 2000.《人類語言學論題研究》，北京：北京語言文化大學出版社。

(9) Blount, Ben, ed. 1995. Language, Culture and Society: A Book of Readings. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.

(10) Casson, R. W., Ed. 1981. Language, Culture, and Cognition: Anthropological Perspectives. New York: Macmillan.

(11) Cheung, H-N. Samuel 1989. "Terms of address in Cantonese." Journal of Chinese Linguistics, Volume 18, Number 1.

(12) D'Andrade, R. G. 1995. The Development of Cognitive Anthropology. New York: Cambridge University Press.

(13) Dougherty, J. W. D., Ed. 1985. Directions in Cognitive Anthropology. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

(14) Duranti, A. Ed. 2001. Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

(15) Duranti, A. 1997. Linguistic Anthropology. Cambridge University Press. (A reprint edition was jointly published by Cambridge University Press and Peking University Press in 2001.)

(16) Foley, W. A. 1997. Anthropological Linguistics: An Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell.

(17) Frake, C. O. 1980. Language and Cultural Description. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

(18) Gumperz, John J. and Stephen C. Levinson, eds. 1996. Rethinking Linguistic Relativity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.