

HUMA1030 Structure of the Chinese Language [C] Spring 2025

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Time & venue: Wednesday 15:00–16:20 2502
Friday 15:00–16:20 2502

Course description

This course offers an introduction to the Chinese language, suitable for students with no prior knowledge of linguistics. We will discuss the key aspects of the Chinese language, including its history, its sound structure, its lexicon and morphology, and its syntax. Throughout the course, we will pay special attention to the internal diversity of Chinese, such as the differences between Cantonese and Mandarin. Additionally, we will compare the characteristics of non-Sinitic languages spoken in neighbouring regions to those of Chinese varieties, highlighting the bidirectional influences between these language groups.

Intended learning outcomes

- Gain an understanding of the history of the Chinese language
- Examine the typology of the Chinese language, including its phonology, morphology, and syntax
- Identify the similarities and differences between major varieties of Chinese, especially Cantonese and Mandarin
- Appreciate the linguistic diversity of China

Assessment

Quiz 1 (26 Feb)	20%
Quiz 2 (26 Mar)	20%
Quiz 3 (23 Apr)	20%
Term paper (due 23 May)	40%

Term paper guidelines

Students are encouraged to explore any topic in Chinese linguistics that interests them. This could include the historical development of the Chinese language, its unique structural characteristics compared to other world languages, the similarities and differences among major Chinese varieties, the rich linguistic diversity within China, or the dynamic interactions between Chinese and its neighbouring languages.

Term paper length: 1,200–1,800 words (including references)

Course schedule (tentative)

- Part 1: Introduction: History and diversity of languages in China
- Part 2: Chinese phonology
- Part 3: Chinese morphology and lexicon
- Part 4: Chinese syntax
- Part 5: Interactions between Chinese and its neighbouring languages

Grading rubrics

Grade	Short description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent performance	Demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of subject matter, expertise in problem-solving, and significant creativity in thinking. Exhibits a high capacity for scholarship and collaboration, going beyond core requirements to achieve learning goals.
B	Good performance	Shows good knowledge and understanding of the main subject matter, competence in problem-solving, and the ability to analyse and evaluate issues. Displays high motivation to learn and the ability to work effectively with others.
C	Satisfactory performance	Possesses adequate knowledge of core subject matter, competence in dealing with familiar problems, and some capacity for analysis and critical thinking. Shows persistence and effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals.
D	Marginal pass	Has threshold knowledge of core subject matter, potential to achieve key professional skills, and the ability to make basic judgments. Benefits from the course and has the potential to develop in the discipline.
F	Fail	Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the subject matter and lacks the necessary problem-solving skills. Shows limited ability to think critically or analytically and exhibits minimal effort towards achieving learning goals. Does not meet the threshold requirements for professional practice or development in the discipline.

Main references

- *Arcodia, Giorgio Francesco & Bianca Basciano. 2021. *Chinese linguistics: An introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cao, Zhiyun 曹志耘(ed.). 2008. *汉语方言地图集* [Linguistic atlas of Chinese dialects]. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Chappell, Hilary M. (ed.). 2015. *Diversity in Sinitic languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chen, Ping. 1999. *Modern Chinese: History and sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Norman, Jerry. 1988. *Chinese*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Shen, Zhongwei. 2020. *A phonological history of Chinese*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- *Sun, Chaofen. 2006. *Chinese: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sun, Hongkai, Zengyi Hu & Hang Huang 孙宏开、胡增益、黄行 (eds.). 2007. *中国的语言* [The languages of China]. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Szeto, Pui Yiu & Chingduang Yurayong. 2021. Sinitic as a typological sandwich: Revisiting the notions of Altaicization and Taicization. *Linguistic Typology* 25(3). 551–599.
- You, Rujie 游汝杰. 2016. *汉语方言学教程* [A course in Chinese dialectology], 2nd edn. Shanghai: Shanghai Educational Publishing House.
- Zhang, Zhenxing 张振兴 (ed.). 2012. *中国语言地图集* [Language atlas of China], 2nd edn. Beijing: The Commercial Press.

Academic integrity

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