HUMA2031 The Cantonese Language [C] [CA]
Spring 2025

Instructor: Dr. SZETO Pui Yiu (hmpyszeto@ust.hk)
Tutor: TBA
Time & venue:

L1 Fri	10:30–12:20	2465	
T1 Wed	17:00–17:50	2306	
T2 Wed	17:00–17:50	4504	

Course description

This course explores the Cantonese language, emphasizing its role as a vital lingua franca in Hong Kong. Students will gain a comprehensive understanding of Cantonese grammar, including its sound system, word formation, and sentence structure. The course also examines the challenges posed by Cantonese's unique features, such as its tones, sentence structures, and the frequent lack of direct English and even Mandarin counterparts for many grammatical categories. Additionally, this course offers an introduction to the historical background and sociolinguistic context of Cantonese. By the end of the course, students will have developed a solid foundation in Cantonese grammar, enabling them to better appreciate its intricacies and to further their understanding of the multifaceted aspects of this important language.

N.B. This is not a language enhancement course. Students are expected to have native (or near-native) proficiency in Cantonese.

Intended learning outcomes

- Identify and analyse the unique features of the Cantonese sound system, including its tones, consonants, and vowels
- Demonstrate an understanding of the core components of Cantonese grammar, such as word formation, sentence structure, and the use of classifiers
- Develop an understanding of the sociohistorical context of Cantonese, including its historical background, social status, and the ongoing processes of language variation and change

Assessment

Attendance & participation	10%
Group project (3–5 students per group)	30%
Final exam	60%

Further details about the group project will be announced after the add/drop period

Course schedule (tentative)

Week	Date	Topic	Notes
1	5 Feb, 7 Feb	Introduction	

2	12 Feb, 14 Feb	Historical background of Cantonese	
3	19 Feb, 21 Feb	Topics in sociolinguistics	Tutorial 1
4	26 Feb, 28 Feb	Sound system and Jyutping Part 1	
5	5 Mar, 7 Mar	Sound system and Jyutping Part 2	
6	12 Mar, 14 Mar	Word structure	Tutorial 2
7	19 Mar, 21 Mar	Syntactic categories	
8	26 Mar, 28 Mar	Syntactic structure Part 1	Tutorial 3
			Mid-term break
9	9 Apr, 11 Apr	Syntactic structure Part 2	Tutorial 4
10	16 Apr	Aspect and verbal particles	Good Friday
11	23 Apr, 25 Apr	Sentence-final particles	Tutorial 5
12	30 Apr, 2 May	Group project presentations	
13	7 May, 9 May	Group project presentations	

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

Chappell, Hilary M. (ed.). 2015. *Diversity in Sinitic languages*. 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. *广州话助词研究* [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. *广东粤方言概要* [An outline of Yue dialects in Guangdong]. Guangzhou: Jinan University Press.

*Zhan, Bohui & Yu'en Gan 詹伯慧、甘于恩. 2012. *广府方言* [The Cantonese dialect]. Guangzhou: Jinan University Press.

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