

**GE2124**

# **The World through Languages**

**Sem. B 2023/2024**  
**Dr. LI Bin**



# Lecture 1

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- Course preliminaries
- Introduction



# Instructors

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# Intended learning outcomes

- ❑ To Describe key concepts and terminologies in studies on language, and related interdisciplinary fields.
- ❑ To Compare critically within and between linguistic communities and cultures for patterns in language use.
- ❑ To Critically discuss major issues concerning the interrelationship between language, cognition, and society.
- ❑ To Discover and explain language-related phenomena in daily life.
- ❑ To Design one's own methodology to study individual/community's perception of the world through languages.

# Suggested readings and useful references

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- ❑ Yule, George. *The Study of Language*. Cambridge University Press. (E-book available via CityU library).
- ❑ Holmes, J. 2008. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Pearson Education Limited. (E-book available via CityU library)
- ❑ Carroll, W. David. 2008. *Psychology of Language*. Thomas Higher Education.
- ❑ Deutscher, Guy. 2010. *Through the Language Glass*. Arrow Books.
- ❑ 羅常培, 1989, 《語言與文化》。北京：語文出版社。
- ❑ Journal articles and book chapters on relevant topics to be given later



# Assessment tasks

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Quizzes	Two quizzes, closed-book, 2 hours each, at mid and end of semester	70%
Assignments	Discovering language/linguistic phenomena 1) Linguistic landscape of Hong Kong/other place of your choice 2) Soundscape: production/perception of speech sounds	30%



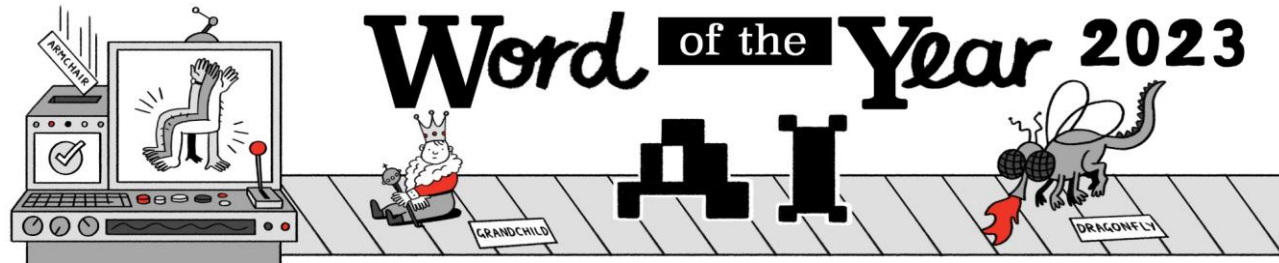
# Language

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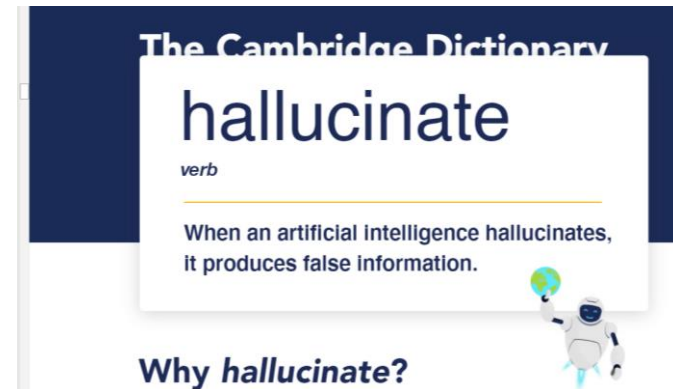
- Why studying language?
- What is language?
  - A system
  - Creativity
  - Language diversity
  - Social functions



# (English) Word of the Year



<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/woty>



<https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/>

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/word-of-the-year>





# Chinese character of the Year

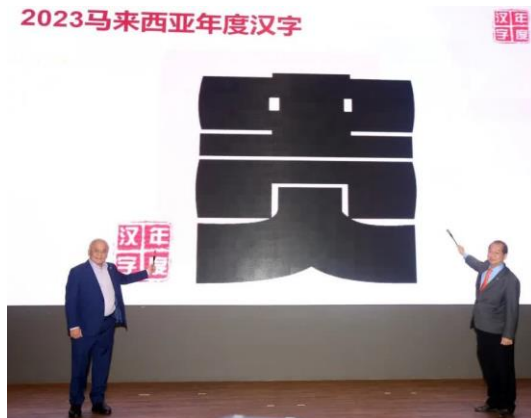
汉语盘点，國家語言資源監測  
與研究中心、商務印書館



國內

國際

2023马来西亚年度汉字

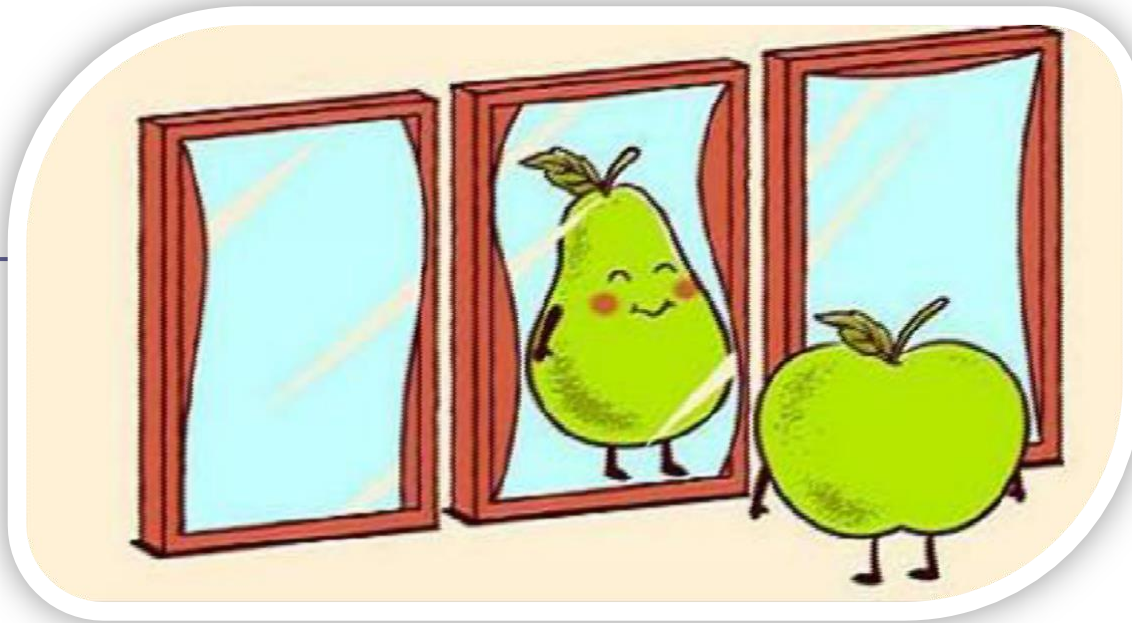


Malaysia Annual Selection of  
Chinese Characters

Japan: Annual polls run by the Japan  
Kanji Aptitude Testing Foundation  
based on votes cast by the general  
public



Kanji character written by the chief  
Buddhist priest, Seihan Mori, of  
Kiyomizu temple, Kyoto, Japan.



## □ Topics

- The relation between world views and our language
- The influence of speech on socialization and personal relationships
- The interaction of linguistic and social communities
- The development of the linguistic abilities



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# Language

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Nature, Structure, Function



# What is language?

- "...[A] vehicle of thought, a system of expression that mediates the transfer of thought from one person to another."

Finegan & Besnier, *Language: Its Structure and Use*, 1989:2)

- [A] system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates.

Bloch & Trager. *Outline of linguistic analysis*. Baltimore: Linguistic Society of America, 1942.

- "... [W]hat some might call the "human essence," the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to man."

Chomsky, *Language and Mind*, 2006:88



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- A command of the language is an indispensable means of obtaining accurate and thorough knowledge [of the culture that is being studied], because much information can be gained by listening to conversations of the natives and by taking part in their daily life, which to the observer who has no command of the language, will remain entirely inaccessible.
  - Boas, F., *Handbook of American Indian Languages*, 1911:60



# Language, Culture, Human

- In the course of their cultural evolution during the past million years, humans were immeasurably aided by their developing of an effective means of communication, the most remarkable and crucial component of which is human language.
  - Salzman, Z., *Language, Culture, and Society: an Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology*, 2004:3
- 心生而言立，言立而文明，自然之道也。
  - 刘勰，文心雕龙，around AD500.

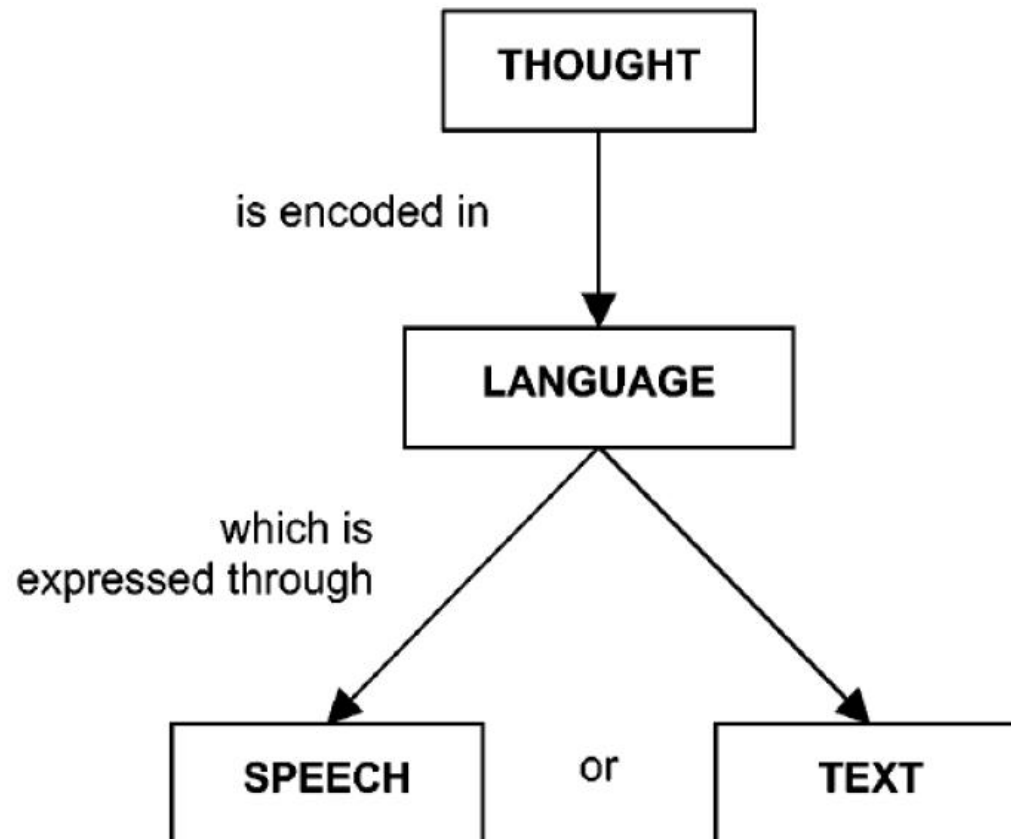


# Language-R-Us

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*“In many ways the study of language is like the study of life itself.”*

Bolton, W.F., “Language: An Introduction” *Language: Readings in Language and Culture*. Eds. Clark, et. al. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1998. 61-72



Christopher, J. Hall. (2005). *"An Introduction to Language and Linguistics: Breaking the Language Spell"*. London: Continuum. p5.





# So, we study...

- Language and linguistics (science of human language; scientific study of human language)
- Language and cognition, culture, society, psychology, anthropology
- *First of all, some linguistic facts of life.*



# The many faces of language

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- Twin aspects/dualities of language (Saussure 1916; Sharpe 2009)
  - the sounds of speech are not just sounds, they create acoustic impressions that need to be interpreted by listeners;
  - sound is also the instrument of thought, it combines with an idea to form a complex psychological unit;
  - speech has both an individual and a social aspect and neither can exist without the other; and
  - speech always implies both an established system and an evolution – ‘at every moment it is an existing institution and a product of the past’.



# Languages Change

- Old English

Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre,  
minre sylfre sið. Ic þæt secgan mæg,  
hwæt ic yrmþa gebad, siþþan ic up weox,  
niwes oppe ealdes, no ma þonne nu.

- From “*The Wife’s Lament*” (before 1072)



# In contemporary English

Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre,  
I tell this poem about myself, full of sorrow

minre sylfre sið. Ic þæt secgan mæg,  
in my own journey. I can say this,

hwæt ic yrmpa gebad, sippan ic up weox,  
for I miserably endured after I grew up,

niwes oppe ealdes, no ma þonne nu.  
new or old, never more than now.



# Ancient Chinese

- 禮之用，和為貴；先王之道，斯為美，小大由之。有所不行，知和而和，不以禮節之，亦不可行也。《論語-學而第一》
- 禮的運用，貴在能和。先王傳下來的道，以禮為最美好，不論小事大事都是由此而行。但也有行不通之處，這個時候如果只知道要『和』，一意孤行地用『和』，不用『禮』來節制，也是不行的。

The Analects by Confucius, *Translated by James Legge.*

The philosopher You said, "In practicing the rules of propriety, a natural ease is to be prized. In the ways prescribed by the ancient kings, this is the excellent quality, and in things small and great we follow them. Yet it is not to be observed in all cases. If one, knowing how such ease should be prized, manifests it, without regulating it by the rules of propriety, this likewise is not to be done."



# Variations: sounds

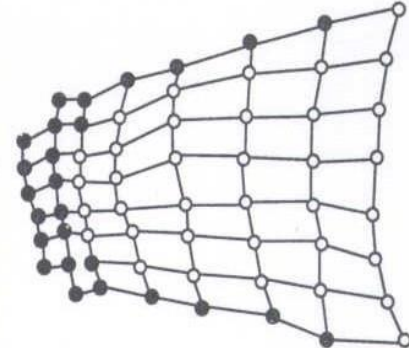
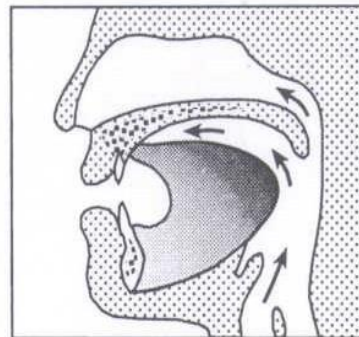
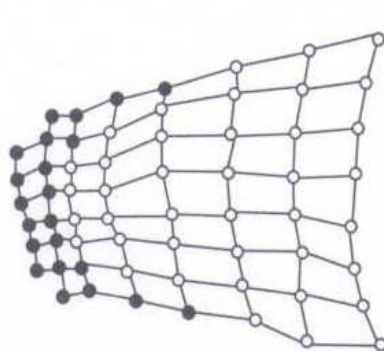
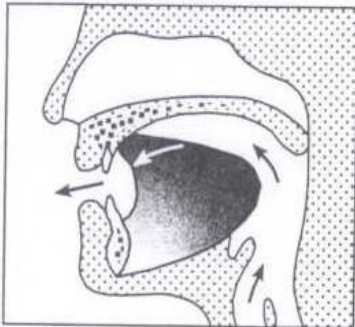
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- Regional variations
- English
  - coupon, due, news, duke
  - pass, four
- Contextual variations (language intrinsic)
- Chinese: tones
  - Mandarin: 老蒋好久没买酒
  - Cantonese: 姨丈, 阿姨; 師奶, 牛奶



# night or light ?

- /l/ : alveolar lateral, side branches
- /n/ : alveolar nasal, nasal cavity



Pictures retrieved from <http://www.ling.northwestern.edu/~abradlow/Ling250-07.ppt>



# Variations: word meaning

## □ Over time

- hot, nice
- 逗比, 喪

## □ Across space

- soft drinks: a map of soda, coke, pop
- 菠蘿、鳳梨
- 窩心





# Variations: sentences

## □ English

- We ain't never had no trouble about none of us pullin' out no knife.

## □ Cantonese

- 金都茶餐廳，英文叫CAN DO.....老板阿杜過幾年大可以返東莞鄉下買幢西班牙式洋樓，養只番狗.....行行 企企嘆世界聽譚詠麟李克勤鋤大弟食野味睇無線拍蚊 過世。

(香港三部曲之金都茶餐廳, 陳冠中)



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# The linguistics system

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# The Linguistic System

- Sounds: Phonetics and Phonology
- Structures and meanings: Morphology, Semantics, Syntax,
- Functions and uses: Pragmatics



# Phonetics and Phonology

- Speech sounds and sound systems
  - How are speech sounds produced and perceived
  - What are the physical properties of speech sounds
  - How are sounds organized in languages



# Morphology

- Word: structure and meaning
  - What components encode meaning
  - How are words formed...



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□ scvrnkls

□ Antidiseestablishmentarianism



# Homework

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- Decipher this word

Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis

## *The word in the news*

“Boy, 16, uses ‘longest word’ in Parliament”, 31 July 2017,

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-dorset-40775470>

- the longest word in English?



# Syntax

## Phrases, sentences

How are phrases formed

What are the orders of words

How do we judge on grammaticality...





## Extended reading

1. George Pullum:

<http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/lan guagelog/archives/002173.html>

2. Murray Gell-Mann and Merritt Ruhlen (2011).

The origin and evolution of word order. *PNAS* October 18, 2011 108 (42) 17290-17295; <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1113716108>



# Languages: Same or Different

## □ Universals

A rose by any other name  
would smell as sweet.



## □ Variations:



<https://www.soundimals.com/home#/sounds-all-around/>

# More linguistic facts of life



Language is not everywhere equivalent in communicative role and social values...[and] no normal person, and no normal community is limited in repertoire to a single variety of [style], to an unchanging monotony which would preclude the possibility of indicating respect, insolence, mock-seriousness, humor, role-distance, etc., by switching from one code variety to another.

Hymes, D., 1967, Models of language and social settings, *Journal of Social issues*, 23(2):9.



# Why do we say the same thing in different ways?

- ❑ Language enables alternative ways
- ❑ Different choices entail useful non-linguistic information of the speaker and/or the listener
- ❑ Linguistic variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level