ANTH 3630 (Spring 2018): Language, Symbols, and Society
(Version 2.0, Subject to Change)

Professor: Prof. Matthew WEST
Lecture: Tuesdays, 11:30 am – 1:15 pm
Lecture Location: NAH 115
Office and Office Hours: NAH 302
Mondays, 1:00 - 3:00 pm
Please email me at mwest@cuhk.edu.hk if you have any
questions, want to discuss course concepts with me, or
need to find a time outside of office hours to talk with me!

Tutorials:
T01: T 2:30 - 3:15 pm in UCC 103
T02: T 5:30 - 6:15 pm in MMW 704
T03: W 12:30 – 1:15 pm in MMW 705

Tutors:
MK Tam: __________________

Course Description
This course examines the nature of language and symbolic systems within human social worlds. It explores the
nature and structure of language, the underlying meanings and rules of conversation, the shaping of language by gender
and social class, formal language and foul language and what they mean, and language and culture: how the structure of
enculturated consciousness is shaped by language. It also examines a range of symbols in society, the language not just
of words but of everyday goods and everyday life, popular culture and mass media, political discourse and propaganda,
and computers and cyberspace, to understand how cultural symbols are socially constructed, performed, and contested.
Language and symbols and their cultural construction and social usage form a central topic of anthropological inquiry;
this course will explore and explicate this topic.

Expected Learning Outcomes
By the end of this course, students will be able to:
• recognize the extraordinary nature of language, as well as to explain the arbitrary hold that languages and symbols
  have over human beings
• describe the structure of language
• analyze language in its complex sociocultural and political contexts
• analyze symbols and their use and manipulation in daily life
• describe and deploy a wide range of the tools anthropologists use to understand language

Assessment Criteria
• Active Class Participation: 10%
• In-class mid-term exam: 40%
• Take-home final exam (12 pages in length): 50%

General Notes on the Course
This course is an English language course. Lectures, Tutorials, and Readings will be in English. That said, it is
also a course about language, so you are welcome to find novel ways of communicating, work through translation, and
to use your colleagues to help you get your points across linguistically. I do not expect you to understand everything
right away. I do expect that if you do not understand something, at any time, you will ask! This year's tutors also speak
Cantonese, Mandarin, and Japanese and your classmates can help you further as needed (But, really, seriously, it's ok,
please ask me or your tutors first! Other classmates most likely have the same questions!).

Required Readings are listed below the date we will discuss them. As this is a 3000 level class, I expect you to
know how to manage your schedule so that you keep up with the readings and so that you come to class/tutorials
prepared to discuss them! Assignments are listed below the date they are due. Late work will be marked down one third
of a letter grade per day late (an A- paper will get an A- if turned in up to 24 hours late or a B+ if turned in within 48
hours of the deadline). No assignments will be accepted more than 3 days late except under emergency circumstances.
You MUST speak with the professor as soon as possible if you think this applies to you.

If you find yourself particularly intrigued by a topic, please ask me about other directions you might take your
readings in. You should also feel free to consult some of the anthropology books on language and culture (for instance,
Paul Kockelman, and Jack Sidnell eds. 2014. The Cambridge handbook of linguistic anthropology. Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press) and other online resources when you find terms or groups of people/places that you do not

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recognize. This is not cheating, it is smart University-level reading! Coming to class prepared will enable you to get more out of the lecture, ask me (or your tutor) questions when you do not understand something, answer questions when I ask them of you, and, overall, more fully participate in the discussions. I want to hear each of your voices to get to know what you think!

**Feedback for Course Evaluation and Improvement**

The University’s course and teaching evaluation survey will be conducted in the second last week of the course. Students are reminded of their responsibility and right to give feedback to facilitate enhancement of the course. Students are (of course!) welcome to give feedback to the course teacher at any time in person or through emails. This way, together, we can make this course a success.

**Note on Electronic Devices**

I encourage you to take notes on the lectures as well as the readings. The mere act of selecting what is important in a lecture and writing it down (physically) on paper has been shown to increase learning significantly. In order to encourage you to take notes, I am open to whatever note taking style you believe is best for your own learning. That said, the use of an electronic device in this class is a privilege, not a right. Generally, I have found that computers and mobile devices tend to be much more of a distraction then a help while in class. Remember that these are not only a distraction for your own learning, but also for your classmates. Be certain to **turn off or turn to silent mode all of your devices** so as not to disturb the class. Do not check email, chat on/message with your phone, browse social networks or the web, play games, or do anything on your devices that is not related to this class. If you do not understand something in class, raise your hand and ask me! **If you do not have the discipline to focus on class, you will be asked to switch off your device and take notes with paper and pen instead.**

**Note on Academic Honesty**

Students are required by university policy to **submit all papers to VeriGuide** (the Chinese University Plagiarism Identification Engine System) before turning them in. Be sure that you leave enough time to submit the paper to VeriGuide, print out the receipt, and sign it. Do not forget to sign the receipt! **There is no excuse for plagiarism.** It is your responsibility as University students to understand what counts as plagiarism and what does not. If you are ever in doubt, cite your sources. If you borrow someone else's specific words, then put them in quotation marks (“ ”) and cite it. To learn more on citation and plagiarism, see http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ant/ststyle.doc and http://www.ile.cuhk.edu.hk/english/resource/referencing_avoidingplagiarism1.pdf. For information on how to submit papers through VeriGuide, please point your browser to http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academic honesty/.

1. **January 9: Introduction: The Nature of Language**
   - Video: “Do Animals Have Language?” (2015, 4:54)

2. **January 16: Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics I**
   - Tongue Twisters: In Search of the World’s Hardest Languages” (The Economist, Dec. 9, 2009)

3. **January 23: Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, and Semantics II**
   - Review the Salzman chapters.

   - Review the Derber and Jankowiak Articles.


5. February 6: Non-Verbal Communication and Sign Language
- This article about Nicaraguan Sign Language from an Undergraduate Senior Thesis Writer's perspective: http://www.reed.edu/reed_magazine/june2013/articles/features/signlanguage/signlanguage1.html
- Nicaraguan Sign Language from PBS: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjBpWQ4tzso and one from CBS’s 60 Minutes show: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTb9uVVx20Y

Optional
- Video: “Ten Surprising Ways to Offend People in Other Countries” (2012, 2:35) (Read Comments, too)

5. February 13: Sociolinguistics: Language and Social Class, Language and Gender
- Video: Natalia KHOSLA, “Body Language and Gender From a Dancer’s Perspective” (2015, 13:05)

February 20: Chinese New Year Holiday

7. February 27: Language and Culture
- “Biological Dig for the Roots of Language” (International Herald Tribune, March 18, 2004),
- “Losing the Gift of Tongues” (International Herald Tribune, Oct. 19, 2005)

8. March 6: Language, Politics and Ideology

- “How Dare You Say That! The Evolution of Profanity” (Wall Street Journal, July 17, 2015)
- optional
- Video: George CARLIN, “Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television” (2011 [1972], 7:04)

10. March 20: Midterm exam

11. March 27: Language in Hong Kong
• “Are English Standards Really Falling in Hong Kong? Don’t Believe All You Read” (South China Morning Post, Oct. 9, 2015)
• “Majority of Hong Kong’s Post-secondary Education Programmes Unsuitable for Non-Chinese Speakers, Study Finds” (South China Morning Post, Aug. 11, 2015)
• Video: “Defending Cantonese Dialect and Identity in Hong Kong” (2010, 2:17)

April 3: Reading Week

11. April 10: Symbols and Meanings in Anthropological Thinking
• Arthur Asa BERGER, Signs in Contemporary Culture, (Salem, WI: Sheffield, 1984), Selections.

Optional
• Roland BARTHES, Mythologies (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), Selections.
• Video: “What Do The Symbols On A Dollar Bill Mean?” (2015, 1:14)

13. April 17: Language and Symbols in Mass Media
• Video: “Top 10 Super Bowl Commercials 2015” (9:54)

• Newspaper Articles
• “Why Machines Alone Cannot Solve the World’s Translation Problems” (Huff Post, Tech, Sept. 1, 2014)
• “Global Web-Site Design: It’s All in the Translation” (The New York Times, March 22, 2001)
• “A nation’s interests? Google tells all” (The New York Times, May 12, 2006)

Take-Home Final Exam Due May 8

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