Language, Symbols, and Society  
ANTH 5631  Spring 2014

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<th>Lecture:</th>
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**Course Description**

This course examines the nature of language and symbolic structures 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. After taking this course, you will appreciate much more the extraordinary nature of language, and you also will have a better understanding of how arbitrary language and symbols are in their hold over us—you will have learned to “see through symbols.”

**Course Objectives**

After taking this course, you will be able to
1) Understand the extraordinary nature of language, as well as the arbitrary hold that languages and symbols have over human beings
2) Describe the structure of language
3) Analyze language in its complex sociocultural and political contexts
4) Analyze symbols and their use and manipulation in daily life

**Course Requirements**

Requirements for this class are:
1) Take-home mid-term examination (40% of your grade). The mid-term exam will be available on Blackboard on 13th March and is due on 20th March.
2) Take-home final exam OR final paper of 20 pages, on any topic relating to language or symbols that interests you (50% of grade). The final paper is due on 2nd May.
3) Class participation: 10% of grade

The final paper is to be double-spaced and in 12-point font. Please follow the Anthropology Department citation style at http://arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~ant/en/dept_thesis_style.php. Late assignments will be penalized. If for valid reasons you need to have your assignment rescheduled, please be sure to make a timely request.

The university adopts a policy of zero tolerance on plagiarism. Any use of another person’s words or ideas, taken directly or paraphrased, without citing the source is plagiarism. This includes taking material from the Internet without citing the website. Please consult the university’s policy on academic honesty at
Students are required by university policy to submit soft copies of all papers to VeriGuide. Please check the website www.cuhk.edu.hk/veriguide for information on how to submit papers through VeriGuide. Please be sure to submit your final paper together with the signed VeriGuide receipt.

Readings for the course are available in University Library, as well as on Blackboard.

**Topics**

**Jan 9: Introduction: The Nature of Language**
--“An Ape Types in Iowa” (*International Herald Tribune*, Aug. 11-12, 2007)

**Jan 16: Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics**
--“Tongue Twisters: In Search of the World’s Hardest Languages” (*The Economist*, Dec. 19, 2009)


**Jan 30: Chinese New Year**

**Feb 6: Non-Verbal Communication**
Guest Lecture by Professor Gordon Mathews

Feb 13: Sociolinguistics: Language and Social Class, Language and Gender

Feb 20: Formal Language, Foul Language, Slang, and Their Social Meanings

Feb 27: Language and Culture
--George LAKOFF and Mark JOHNSON, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 3-24
March 6: Language, Politics and Ideology
   -- “Different Texts Sow Seeds of Opinion in Young Minds” (South China Morning Post, Aug. 4, 2005)

March 13: Postgraduate take-home midterm exam will be uploaded on Blackboard
   The midterm exam is due on March 20, to be submitted to Blackboard

March 20: Language in Hong Kong and Asia
   -- Mingyue Michelle GU and Ho King TONG. 2012. “Space, Scale and Languages: Identity Construction of Cross-Boundary Students in a Multilingual University in Hong Kong.” Language and Education iFirst Article: 1-15
   -- “Hong Kong English,” “Hong Kong Cantonese,” Wikipedia.
   -- “In Search of an Asian Lingua Franca” (International Herald Tribune, May 28-29, 2005); “Across Cultures, English Says It All” (International Herald Tribune, April 10, 2007)

March 27: Symbols and Their Meanings in Daily Life
   -- “Invented Symbols” (International Herald Tribune, Jan. 6, 2006)

April 3: Symbols and Meanings in Anthropological Thinking

April 10: Language and Symbols in Mass Media

April 17: Language, Symbols, Technology, and the Future

Optional Readings


de Saussure, Ferdinand. Introduction, II-V (pp. 6-23); Part One, I-II (pp. 65-78), Part Two (pp. 101-139). *Course in General Linguistics*.


