

TGIF

THE NTU LINGUIST CHATROOM

CONDUCTED OVER ZOOM

- **Articulatory characterisation of Singapore Mandarin Tones using Laryngeal Ultrasound**

Dawn Poh Zhi Yun (LMS, NTU) | 2 Oct | 1.30 - 2.30pm

Previous acoustic studies on Mandarin tones have traditionally focused on standard varieties of Mandarin spoken in Beijing or Taiwan. While studies on Singaporean Mandarin tones remain relatively scant, existing research has indicated that tones in this variety of Mandarin differ from the other variants in terms of syllable duration and f0 contour. Tone production is a complex process linked quantitatively with various physiological correlates—one such mechanism is the vertical movement of the larynx, which is a critical component of f0 control. The physiology of pitch control has, to date, remained unexamined in relation to Singapore Mandarin tones.

In light of the differences between Singapore Mandarin and other variants of Mandarin, the present study will examine the production of four lexical tones in 11 native speakers of Singapore Mandarin using Laryngeal Ultrasound, so as to provide an acoustic and articulatory account of Singapore Mandarin. Findings revealed an inverse relationship between larynx height and f0 for the production for some tones, which could plausibly be attributed to laryngeal medialisation, a novel phenomenon discovered in this study.



- **A rose is not a rose: A Digital Synonymy for Historical and Ethnopharmaceutical Research**

Michael Stanley-Baker (History, NTU) | 23 Oct | 1.30 - 2.30pm

Whether plant, animal or mineral, simple or compound, drugs constitute an important part of cultural exchange, and have done for thousands of years. The exchange of potent substances is a powerful lens for studying the meeting (and divergence) of cultural horizons. A multi-lingual database of drug terminology would be a very useful tool to support scholars to study the histories and forms of translation, transmission, adaptation and assimilation of medical, material and intellectual culture over time. But the historical, philological, ethnographic and botanical vicissitudes of such research requires multi-disciplinary expertise. The Polyglot Medicine project approaches this large goal with simple beginnings by bringing together Drs. Stanley-Baker, Zakariah and Perono Cacciafoco with the Medicinal Plant Name Service at the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, to link medicinal nomenclature in Chinese, Malay and Abui with botanical identities. The aim to develop an online digital infrastructure that will house drug texts (whether manuals, tracts or “stories”), as well as a digital synonymy database to tag the texts and link them across languages. We intend the database as a publication outlet, to support future scholars to publish drug terms in further languages, and expand the work. Thus we hope to produce a new online publishing format for ethnographic and philological drug terms. As we are in the design phase, we will present the problems and tentative solutions, and welcome your input in a digital workshop format.



- **The linguistic (pre-)history of South Asia and Southeast Asia: Drivers of dispersion and contact prior to the European colonial expansion**

Alexander R. Coupe (LMS, NTU) | 30 Oct | 1.30 - 2.30pm

In this talk I will reconstruct a linguistic (pre-)history of South Asia and Southeast Asia in the context of the agricultural revolution, environmental influences on the dispersal of early farmers, the consequences of technological innovations, and historical and cultural developments that shaped the languages of the region prior to the coming of the Europeans. Drawing on geographical, archaeological, historical and linguistic evidence, the paper will consider how South Asia and Southeast Asia first became populated, and by whom. Special consideration will be given to the impact of the Neolithic transition, when peripatetic hunter-gatherers shifted to sedentary cultivation, resulting in food surpluses and subsequent population explosions that drove migration in a search for new lands. It will be shown that this has important consequences for understanding how languages and their speakers dispersed throughout Asia, profoundly reshaping the linguistic composition of the region. The paper will identify what languages were used by various ethnic groups inhabiting South and Southeast Asia prior to the arrival of European traders and then missionaries in the 16th century, it will present historical evidence of language contact in the modern-day languages spoken in the region, and in conclusion it will summarize explanations for the types of borrowing and convergence that emerged in that contact.



- **“Do you smoke?”: On patients’ ‘less-than-direct’ responses and doctors’ countermeasures**

Lim Ni Eng (LMS, NTU) | 13 Nov | 1.30 - 2.30pm

The correlation between smoking and various sorts of life-threatening conditions is medically well-established and widely accepted, even amongst chronic smokers. In Singapore, smoking prohibition began in 1970 and has progressively extended its reach to ban smoking in almost all public places, ostensibly to achieve the aims of a smoke-free nation. Hence, there is a palpable sense of censure, both sociologically and medically, for being a smoker in Singapore. During a medical consultation, asking if the patient smokes, or if s/he is a smoker, is highly commonplace, as such information is critical for the doctor to effectively do diagnosis and assess medical risk. Yet, patients who do smoke often orient to such a question as doing more than simply history-taking, and can work to resist the perceived upcoming censure of this line of questioning.

Using conversation analytic methods, we examine the various interactional practices that patients employ to either resist the implicature of the “smoking question”, or to obfuscate the degree of how much one is smoking. Correspondingly, doctors have to also counter such responses with appropriate interactional strategies to make an adequate medical diagnosis. Such findings alerts us to how simple medical history-taking also have to be sensitive to the societal/ sociological context within which such consultations are taking place.

