



Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*The Covid-19 Outbreak and
its Impact on Chinese
Language: A Study of the
New Morphological
Construction*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker :

Somya Nayak

11 September 2024

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Speaker: Dr. Somya Nayak, Assistant Professor, Department of Asian Languages, English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad

Chair: Prof. Sabaree Mitra, Chairperson and Professor, Centre for Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi

Date: 11 September 2024

Venue: Zoom

- The seminar explored how the Chinese language evolved in response to societal transformations brought about by the pandemic. Chaired by Prof. Sabaree Mitra, the session examined the dynamic nature of language systems and the influence of social, economic, and political shifts on linguistic development.
- Dr. Nayak emphasised that language is constantly evolving, with new vocabulary emerging as a reflection of human experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this linguistic evolution, as individuals sought to articulate new challenges and emotions, leading to the creation of novel expressions. Literature, in particular, serves as a mirror to these linguistic changes, capturing the emotional and social landscapes shaped by the pandemic.
- The speaker highlighted key linguistic mechanisms that drive the evolution of language. Referring to cognitive responses to new experiences, Dr. Nayak stated that the human

mind generates new vocabulary spontaneously in response to survival-related challenges, facilitating the articulation of novel situations. Furthermore, new words arise from collective societal needs, through socially driven linguistic adaptation, and become embedded in language through literature, media, and everyday communication.

- The speaker also differentiated sociolinguistics from the sociology of language. Whereas the former examines how social factors influence language development, including how events like the pandemic drive linguistic shifts, the latter focuses on how language policies impact society, shaping communication norms and language usage
- Dr. Nayak stressed that while the pandemic's impact on health and human relations has been widely studied, its specific effects on language systems — particularly in Chinese — remain underexplored. Her research aims to bridge this gap by analysing the pandemic's role as a catalyst for linguistic transformation.
- In conclusion, the speaker noted that language evolution is a continuous and dynamic process, with new vocabulary emerging in response to changing societal needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated linguistic shifts, reflecting broader social transformations. Furthermore, it is essential to comprehend language evolution in the context of global health crises in order to understand how societies adapt to unprecedented challenges.

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