

Undergraduate Course offered by Centre of Buddhist Studies in 2026–27

ELECTIVE COURSE
(OPEN TO ALL FACULTIES)

BSTC2016 Pāli language I

Lecturer	Dr. Dipen Barua
Office	Rm 4.12, 4/F, Centre of Buddhist Studies, Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus
Mob/ Office Tel	
Email address	dipen@hku.hk
Offering Semester	Semester I
Schedule	To be confirmed
Class Venue	To be confirmed

Course Description

Pāli is the language of Theravāda Buddhist canon used by the Theravāda Buddhist tradition commonly practiced in South and Southeast Asia. This canon is the only complete Buddhist canon dating back to the 3rd century B.C. This course is meant for those students who have no prior knowledge of Pāli and who wish to become familiar with Pāli expressions and idioms so as to understand simple passages of Pāli Buddhist texts. The main focus of the course is to introduce the basics of the Pāli language including its grammar phonetics, parts of speech, nouns of different genders and their declensions, verbs and their conjugations, participles and their functions, syntax and classification of sentences. By the end of the course the students are expected to be able to read simple Pāli sentences and understand their religious and philosophical significance.

Course Content

This course is for the absolute beginners. The content of this course deals with an introduction to Pāli and Pāli grammar that includes Pāli alphabet and sound system, nouns and their declensions, verbs and their conjugations, participles and their functions, secondary and primary derivatives, particles, join and disjoin Pāli words. Examples and exercises will be done from the Pāli *sutta*-s which will help students understand basic Buddhist teachings.

Learning Outcome

By the end of this course, students are expected to be able to understand basic Pāli grammar. Grammatical studies include nouns, verbs, declensions with different vowel and consonant endings, conjugations of the verb classes, tenses, and other grammatical forms. Students are also expected to read, write and understand Pāli sentences and explain the content of the Pāli discourses with the help of glossaries and dictionaries.

Teaching and Learning Method

Lectures, class discussions and tutorials

Assessment

50% coursework and 50% examination

Assessment Method

- Coursework (50%):
 - Class participation (15%)
 - Homework (15%)
 - Mid-term Test (20%)
- The final examination (50%) will be held at the end of the semester. It is an open-textbook exam.

Lecture Schedule

Lesson	Contents
Lesson 1	(a) Introduction to the Pāli language and its alphabet • Phonological remarks • Vowels short and long (b) Nouns: masculine (m), neuter (n) and feminine (f) (c) Example of Pāli sentences
Lesson 2	(a) Cases: (i) nominative, (ii) accusative, (iii) instrumental, (iv) dative, (v) ablative, (vi) genitive, (vii) locative, and (viii) vocative. (b) Exercises
Lesson 3	(a) Adjectives (b) Indeclinable (c) Verbs (d) Examples of Pāli sentences containing verbs
Lesson 4	(a) Gen used for expressing “to have” (b) Three grades of root strength (c) Conjugational classes of verbs (d) Classes of verbs: I and X verbs (e) Exercises
Lesson 5	(a) Declension of <i>ā</i> ending (f) (b) Declension of <i>-i</i> ending (m) (c) More on adverbial usages (d) Exercises

Lesson 6	(a) Prefixes (b) Class VI verbs (c) Class IV verbs (d) Declension of <i>-u</i> ending (m) (e) Exercises
Reading Week	No Class
Lesson 7	(a) Declension of <i>-ī</i> ending (f) (b) Causative verbs (c) Denominatives (d) Class II verbs (e) Exercises
Lesson 8	(a) Declension of consonant-ending nouns (b) Possessive suffixes <i>-vant</i> and <i>-mant</i> (c) Gerund (d) Possessive suffixes <i>-in</i> and <i>-vin</i> (e) Exercises Mid-term Test
Lesson 9	(a) Past Participle Passive (b) Declension of <i>-an</i> ending (m) (c) Declension of <i>-an</i> ending (n) (d) Exercises
Lesson 10	(a) Declension of demonstrative pronouns (b) Declension of personal pronouns (c) Strong and weak stems (d) Exercises
Lesson 11	(a) Pronouns as substantives and as adjectives (b) Class V and VIII verbs (c) Exercises
Lesson 12	(a) Future tense (b) Revision and discussion for the final exam

Note: The content may be modified based on students' feedback during class. Although the textbook is prescribed, the materials covered may not strictly follow it. Class notes and supplementary materials will be provided throughout the semester.

Textbook

Dhammajoti, KL. *Reading Buddhist Pāli Texts: An Elementary Grammatical Guide*. Hong Kong: The Buddha–Dharma Centre of Hong Kong, 2025 (3rd edition).

Recommended Readings

Anuruddha, Kakkapalliye. *A Guide to the Study of Pali: The Language of Theravada Buddhism*.

Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhism Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2010.

Buddhadatta, A.P. *The New Pali Course* (Parts I & II). Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 1997.

Gair, James W. and W.S. Karunatilake. *A New Course in Reading Pāli: Entering the Word of the Buddha*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1998.

Geiger, Wilhelm. *A Pāli Grammar*. Translated by Batakrishna Ghosh. Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1994.

Nyanatiloka. *Buddhist Dictionary, Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1988.

Rhys Davids, T.W. and W. Stede (eds). *Pali-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1993.

Warder, A.K. *Introduction to Pali*. Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2001.

Pāli Dictionaries (online)

Rhys Davids, T.W. and W. Stede (eds). *Pali-English Dictionary*. Available on Digital Dictionaries of South Asia. Updated in Mar 2021.

<https://dsalrv04.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/pali/>

Rhys Davids, T.W. and W. Stede (eds). *Pali-English Dictionary*. London: The Pali Text Society: <https://ancient-buddhist-texts.net/Reference/PTS/Pali-English-Dictionary.pdf>
