

# John Benjamins Publishing Company



This is a contribution from *Studies in Language* 41:4  
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## REVIEW

William S. -Y. Wang and Chaofen Sun, eds. 2015. *The Oxford handbook of Chinese linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Oxford Handbook Series] xx+765 pp. ISBN 978-0199856336.

Reviewed by Danjie Su (University of Arkansas)

### 1. Introduction

As a thriving field, Chinese linguistics, with its rich data and considerable scope, is attracting ever-wider audiences to its scholarly literature. The advent of *The Oxford handbook of Chinese linguistics*, in the *Oxford Handbook Series*, marks an important step in bringing together many recent, empirically-grounded advances in a wide range of subdisciplines within Chinese linguistics. It is the first handbook written in English to offer comprehensive coverage of the field from a multi-disciplinary perspective. It will serve as a guide for the novice and a reference work for the established scholar.

As accomplished scholars of the field, William S-Y. Wang and Chaofen Sun are ideal candidates to edit such a handbook. The editors have commissioned contributions from an impressive number of the world's leading experts in their respective areas, as well as a few new scholars. This cohort of sixty-six specialists has furnished an encyclopedic effort that advances the literature in Chinese linguistics.

The Handbook is organized into eight sections: history, languages and dialects, language contact, morphology, syntax, phonetics and phonology, sociocultural aspects, and neuropsychological aspects. It provides both a diachronic view of how languages evolve and a synchronic view of how languages in contact enrich each other. It offers in-depth discussions on the historical, structural, sociocultural, and neuropsychological aspects of Chinese, carrying implications for various domains of linguistics, especially crosslinguistic typology.

The first three sections portray historical features of Chinese and languages in contact with Chinese, their genetic relationships, and the outcome of their contact. Section 1, *History*, provides an overview of the historical background of Chinese. This section starts with a concise account of the evolutionary background of the diverse peoples and languages of China. It proceeds to explain how Chinese is classified among the language families of East and Southeast Asia. After discussing Proto-Sino-Tibetan morphology and Sino-Tibetan syntax, the section ends with

three chapters on Chinese phonology during various historical periods. Section 2, *Languages and Dialects*, explains the diversity of languages and dialects of China. It discusses Austric languages, Austronesian languages of Taiwan, the relation between Chinese and Tibeto-Burman languages, and Chinese dialects (Min, Yu, and Wu). Section 3, *Language Contact*, covers thousands of years of language contact. It discusses the influence language contact had on Chinese syntax, the influence of Chinese on Korean, Japanese, and Tibeto-Burman languages, and the influence of Buddhist Sanskrit on Chinese.

The next three sections discuss structural aspects of Modern Chinese. Section 4 and 5 (reviewed in detail later) are on morphology and syntax respectively. Section 6, *Phonetics and Phonology*, discusses phonation types in languages of China, tone and tone perception, phonology and intonation of Modern Chinese, and vowel distribution in Mandarin and Cantonese.

In addition to the astonishing breadth of topics and the depth of treatment in conventional aspects, among the Handbook's welcome innovations are discussions of socio-cultural aspects (Section 7, detailed review later) and empirical findings from a psychological and neurocognitive perspective (Section 8). Section 8 presents neuro-psychological findings in child language acquisition, semantic processing, language disorder, and sign language in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

It would take up too much space to discuss all of the fifty-five individual chapters, so I concentrate on three sections. Readers interested in an all-chapter overview may refer to the Introduction for an excellent summary by the editors.

## 2. Chapter-by-chapter review for Section 4 Morphology

Readers can learn the simple and unique morphological structure of Chinese, compared to common European languages. The distinctive morphosyntactic devices Chinese uses to express conventional grammatical concepts are valuable for typological and general linguistic research.

Packard's chapter, *Morphology: Morphemes in Chinese*, provides an introduction to basic structural aspects of Chinese morphemes. Interested readers may turn to a monograph (Packard 2000) for further information. Packard's discussion on four types of complex words (compounds, bound root words, derived words, and inflected words) is very interesting. However, I still agree with Li and Thompson (1981: 45) that there is no clear demarcation between compounds and noncompounds, especially considering that "bound roots do not have any special, distinctive properties [other than having a bound root]" and that "anything compound words can do, bound root words can do as well" (p. 269, the Handbook).

Liu's chapter, *Tense and Aspect in Mandarin Chinese*, does an excellent job clarifying some challenging concepts regarding tense and aspect in Mandarin. It concludes that, although Chinese lacks grammaticalized marking of tense and does not distinguish the verb form for the differences of event time, there are distinct aspectual markers to express perfective versus imperfective. The chapter illustrates how events are conceived and reported in Chinese through perfective, progressive, durative, and other aspect markers. The chapter also explains the fine distinctions between perplexing markers such as *le* and *guo*, *zai* and *zhe*. An insightful note regarding the notoriously elusive perfective marker *le* is the notion of "actualization" – "the action has been done and realized in real time" (p. 277).

Huang and Hsieh's chapter, *Chinese Lexical Semantics: From Radicals to Event Structure*, argues convincingly that there is a consistent and coherent semantic system corresponding to the radical-based writing system, and that lexical eventive information is hypothesized to be linked to the Module-Attribute Representation of Verbal Semantics. This chapter's discussion on lexical semantics free from context may account for the choice between "grammatical" and "ungrammatical." For future studies, I would also like to see more research on how speakers make the choice among all grammatical options. Studies in lexical semantics in real discourse can address this question (for a recent discussion on Mandarin lexical semantics in discourse, see, e.g., Su 2017a).

Tham's chapter, *Resultative Verb Compounds in Mandarin*, discusses various semantic interpretations of resultative verb compounds (RVC) related to causative event structure. A highlight is the conclusion that the syntactic and interpretational properties of a causative RVC are best understood as resulting from the causative situation and not as tied to particular syntactic patterns or roles with particular interpretations. The analysis in this chapter focuses on hypothetical interpretations of forms free from context. While discussions of this kind are undoubtedly useful, for future research, I would hope to see more studies that examine what is "real" for speakers when they use these linguistic forms in discourse. Readers interested in Mandarin RVC may turn to J. Chen (2007) for a cognitive analysis with experimental data, Hong & Huang (2015) for a computational analysis with corpus data, or Su (2017b) for a discourse analysis with naturally-occurring conversational data.

Lin's chapter, *the Encoding of Motion Events in Mandarin Chinese*, uses the scale structure approach to account for the relative order of motion morphemes in Chinese directed motion constructions. Lin argues that Chinese motion morphemes can be classified into four scalar types, which follow this order when forming a directed motion construction: nonscalar change (*piao* 'drift') > open scale (*luo* 'fall') > close scale (*lai* 'come') > special (*dao* 'arrive'). This hierarchy is well-organized, and the author anticipates it to be applicable to other languages (Lin & Peck 2011). I would suggest considering situations where verbs are used in real context. One such case is

when a verb can have multiple interpretations that belong to different scalar types.<sup>1</sup> I disagree with the argument that Tai's (1985) Principle of Temporal Sequence (PTS)<sup>2</sup> cannot explain those motion morphemes that “denote simultaneous subevents. For instance, a person can run and ascend stairs at the same time” yet ‘run’ still proceeds ‘ascend’ as in *pao-shang* run-ascend ‘went up the stairs running’ (p. 323). This case does not challenge PTS: *Shang* here actually means ‘to arrive at a higher location.’<sup>3</sup>

Tao's chapter, *Profiling the Mandarin Spoken Vocabulary Based on Corpora*, provides new insight into spoken lexicon. It analyzes prominent features of the spoken vocabulary with compelling empirical evidence from spontaneous conversational data. A finding contrary to the common belief is that monosyllabic words constitute much of the active lexicon (72.2% among the top 1,000 most frequently used words and 82.3% among the top 100). To answer the question of why a small number of active words (20%) can make up a large portion (80%) of the core lexicon, Tao convincingly proposes *the mechanism of collocation and colligation*, namely, high-frequency words combine with one another into high-frequency lexical chunks, forming the foundation of basic spoken vocabulary. This study carries implications for cross-linguistic studies, especially regarding basic spoken vocabulary and formulaicity. It also has direct implications in various areas of applied linguistics, especially second language pedagogy.

Huang and Xue's chapter, *Modeling Word Concepts without Convention: Linguistic and Computational Issues in Chinese Word Identification*, presents the challenges of Chinese word segmentation and provides a solution using an automated word-segmentation model to parse Chinese texts without a word list. Unlike most European languages, Chinese orthography does not conventionalize word boundaries. This results in enormous difficulty for the computer to identify words. The key to word segmentation lies in the successful resolution of ambiguities and an effective method of handling new words.

1. For example, *ti* ‘kick’ can be of “nonscalar change” as in *ti jiao* ‘leg kicking,’ or “closed scale” as in *ti men* ‘kick the door.’ In *ti-fei-le* kick-fly ‘kick...and cause ... to fly away,’ *ti* is of “closed scale,” and *fei* is “nonscalar change.” This example contradicts the hierarchy.

2. The order between two syntactic units is determined by the temporal order of the states which they represent in the conceptual world (Tai 1985).

3. It would be odd to change this sentence into a progressive sentence which indicates two simultaneous subevents – running and ascending: \*他正在跑上楼梯。\* *Ta zhengzai pao shang louti*. ‘\* He is running while ascending the stairs.’ An example of *shang* meaning ‘to arrive at a higher location’ is *Yi shang lou jiu kan dao, zoulang li zhan le jin 30 ge min'gong* 一上楼就看到，走廊里站了近30个民工。‘As soon as (the reporter) went upstairs, he saw nearly 30 migrant workers.’ From a news report by 央视国际 2003年12月19日 <http://www.cntv.cn/program/jjbx/20031221/100342.shtml>. Accessed on 22 October 2015.

Sun's chapter, *The Uses of de as a Noun Phrase Marker*, hypothesizes a continuum from lexical nouns (proper nouns > common nouns > word-like nouns > phrase-like nouns > modifying clauses > nominalizations) to grammatical phrases. This raises interesting questions as to whether this continuum can be typologically proven and whether traditional linguistic categories are clear-cut for speakers in interaction (for recent findings on the latter with Mandarin data, see, e.g., Tao 2015). Sun's chapter also addresses a challenging issue in Mandarin grammar: the use or non-use of a noun phrase marker *de* (similar meaning as the English *of*'s). Sun's account offers a powerful explanation. Namely, the use of *de* signals modification of an individual entity, whereas the non-use of *de* is associated with uniqueness of a nominal reference. Whereas fully lexicalized nouns reject the use of *de*, the less lexicalized nouns may allow the use of *de* depending on degrees of lexicalization.

### 3. Chapter-by-chapter review for Section 5 Syntax

This section provides a classic analysis on major distinctive features of Mandarin syntax, including word order, topic-prominent feature, discourse referentiality, function words, and special syntactic construction. While some analysis focusing on forms isolated from context is rather intuition-based, other analysis (especially on referentiality, adverbs, and grammaticalization) is more grounded on discourse data.

Wu and Y. He's chapter, *Some Typological Characteristics of Mandarin Chinese Syntax*, introduces five distinctive Chinese syntactic word order patterns compared to many other languages in the world, including relative clause-noun pattern, prepositional phrase-verb pattern, standard-adjective pattern in comparatives, polar question pattern A-not-A, and potential complement construction V-*de*-C/V-*bu*-C. From a general linguistic perspective, these special constructions provide a valuable resource for research on the interface and integration of syntax and pragmatics.

Xu's chapter, *Topic Prominence*, discusses several special properties of Chinese topic structures in comparison to English topic structures. In addition to the introduction of the topic licensing condition account, the chapter also presents several conflicting generative proposals to Chinese-style topic structures.

Chen's chapter, *Referentiality and Definiteness in Chinese*, discusses the subject matter within a discourse context. It concludes that there is no specific linguistic device in Chinese to mark pragmatic referentiality, nor does Chinese have a simple and fully grammaticalized marker of definiteness like the definite article *the* in English. Chinese is sensitive to distinction in discourse thematic referentiality. The pragmatic distinction between identifiability and nonidentifiability is expressed in terms of distinctive lexical and morphological encodings and the positioning of nominal expressions in sentences. The chapter is well-illustrated. For future studies,

I would hope to see more research on this topic using interactive data, as illustrated in a collection by Enfield & Stivers (2007).

Biq's chapter, *Adverbs*, provides a comprehensive introduction to Chinese adverbs, including degree, negation, scope, affective, epistemic, and special adverbs. Fine nuances of many adverbs are captured. A highlight is the interpretation of stance in adverbs. For instance, *cai* and *jiu* can also express stance. *Cai* suggests a refutation of the hearer's assumption. *Jiu* suggests an insistence on the speaker's intention. *Ye* can also be a stance adverb suggesting that the speaker takes what he or she is saying as an extreme case. Stance in Asian languages is an emerging hot topic (see e.g., R. Wu 2004; for a recent collection, see Iwasaki & Yap 2015). I appreciate the reflection on such cutting-edge findings in the Handbook.

Sun's chapter, *The Grammaticalization of the BA Construction: Cause and Effect in a Case of Specialization*, details the grammaticalization of the famous BA construction over two millennia – a case of specialization. It concludes that the biclausal YI construction from Old Chinese and the serial verb construction in Middle Chinese combined to form a monocause and then interacted with another serial-verb construction marked by *lai/qu* 'come/go' signaling a cause-and-effect relationship. In Early Modern Chinese *ba* 'to take' lost its verbal status and the ability to occur with *lai/qu*, while the cause-and-effect relationship is kept in the form of a resultative verb complement. In Modern Chinese, BA construction has further specialized to require a change-of-state predicate. From a cross-linguistic perspective, this study contributes to the understandings of word order change, specialization, and grammaticalization.

#### 4. Chapter-by-chapter review for Section 7 Sociocultural Aspects

The first three chapters discuss Chinese within a historical and political context. F. Wang and Tsai's chapter, *Chinese Writing and Literacy*, traces the development of the Chinese characters over 3,000 years. The authors stress that the basis for Chinese literacy lies in Chinese characters and that Chinese characters, as a nonalphabetic orthographic system, have considerable historical value and linguistic research value. Chen's chapter, *Language Reform in Modern China*, reviews "the most ambitious program of language planning the world has ever seen" (Crystal 1987), which has successfully reduced the illiteracy rate as much as 80% or more. The reform consists of a written standard based on contemporary Northern Mandarin, a spoken standard, and a simplified writing system. H. Sun's chapter, *Language Policy of China's Minority Languages*, introduces the language policies for ethnic minorities in China and discusses the achievements and challenges. It concludes

that bilingual education is the suitable approach and a harmonious multilingual society should be the goal.

The next two chapters bear on issues in applied linguistics, both focusing on teaching Chinese as a foreign / heritage language in the American context. Chi's chapter, *Design and Deliver: Teaching Students to Communicate*, discusses curriculum design and teaching methodology. It offers six suggestions: alignment with the national standards, backward design for vertical articulation of learning goals, a thematic approach, performance-based instruction, evidence-based assessment, contextualized instruction of grammar, and differentiated instruction. A. He's chapter, *Chinese as a Heritage Language*, summarizes the linguistic characteristics of Chinese heritage language speakers: (1) difficulties with recognition and retention of characters; (2) simple and sometimes aberrant syntax; (3) a great strength in phonology, but may be with a heavy heritage accent due to interference from English and Chinese dialects; (4) frequent code-switching between Chinese and English. A. He insightfully illustrates how sociocultural factors play an important part in shaping heritage language competence.

The last four chapters report sociolinguistic findings, especially within a global context. D. Li's chapter, *Lingua Francas in Greater China*, presents an overview of Han Chinese lingua francas in Greater China. Mandarin in mainland China and Taiwan are both competing with regional dialects. Mandarin may be developing into an international lingua franca. Tsou and Kwong's chapter, *Some Basic and Salient Linguistic Features Across Chinese Speech Communities from a Corpus Linguistics Perspective*, reveals common features and considerable regional variations of Pan-Chinese, using a corpus of 450 million characters of newspaper texts from several representative speech communities. The common belief of needing 3,000 characters to read a Chinese newspaper is found to be incorrect. The most frequent 450 to 550 characters cover 80% of all characters found in newspaper. W. Li's chapter, *Codeswitching*, takes codeswitching as an expressive act and examines its structural, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions. The study demonstrates that a Conversation Analysis approach to codeswitching can be fruitful. Xu's chapter, *Gender Differences in Chinese Speech Communities*, argues that the projection of gender identity is directly governed by sociolinguistic conventions of a speech community. The Kundulun case illustrates a speech community evolving from gender-absent to gender-constrained. The Nvnguoyin in Beijing illustrates the projection of a gender identity (femininity). This fronted pronunciation is also a southern dialectal accent. When southern men come to Beijing, their fronted pronunciations may be interpreted as "womanish speech" (Chan 1998). Xu's argument provides insight into an influential theory on gender and language – Ochs's (1992) model of indexicality – by demonstrating the decisive effect of sociolinguistic conventions of a speech community over gender variation.



## 5. Overall evaluation

This Handbook is exceptionally useful because of its empirical orientation, wide coverage, and authoritative status. The breadth of topics, and the depth of their treatment, is nothing short of staggering. The Handbook has many strengths, including but not limited to:

1. Empirical orientation. The editors insightfully decide the analysis to be “concerned with the facts of the language rather than using these facts to argue for one formal theory or another” and consider such an orientation to be “by far the most appropriate for the nature of the present Handbook, which is aimed at a broad audience of readers from a wide variety of backgrounds” (p. 12). I fully agree that this cannot be stressed enough. The Handbook reveals thought-provoking findings that either correct commonly accepted norms (e.g., the chapters by Tao on monosyllabic words constituting active spoken lexicon and Tsou & Kwong on approximately 500 – not 3,000 – Chinese characters for literacy), or bring a long line of research to a new level (e.g., Sun’s chapter on the famous *de*), or synthesize cutting-edge perspectives (e.g., stance) with classic categories (e.g., Biq’s chapter on adverbs). The result is a valuable volume not only for linguists working on Chinese but also for any scholar who wants to expand their typological data pool, conduct comparative analysis, and/or test models primarily built on other languages.
2. Comprehensive coverage of distinctive features of Chinese. The focus of the Handbook on major distinctive characteristics of Chinese, together with its ambitious scope, again makes it a particularly valuable reference not only for Chinese linguists and language teachers, but also for non-Chinese linguists. The study of the particular phenomena in Chinese contributes to our knowledge of general linguistic theory in many areas, such as grammaticalization, language evolution, language contact, tense and aspect, function words, construction grammar, cognitive science, natural language processing, codeswitching, gender and language, applied linguistics, language acquisition, brain and language, language disorder, and sign language, etc.
3. Authority. The majority of the contributors are recognized experts in their particular areas, although some other experts and some prominent Chinese linguists who publish merely in Chinese are not included, a limitation that is understandable given that the book has already gone over 700 pages.

The Handbook maintains a relatively neutral position with regard to two major linguistic schools – formal and functional. Occasional mentioning of generative approaches is spotted in very few chapters. Function-oriented studies presented are primarily concerned with language facts.

If I needed to point out ways to make this admirable collection even better, I would suggest including another recent trend (if the space allows): conversation and discourse analysis, especially work in interactional linguistics done by Chinese linguists. A few popular topics are touched upon (such as stance in Biq's chapter and conversation analysis in W. Li's chapter) but more attention needs to be paid to this important field, for the reason that being the largest unit of language, discourse is certainly a major aspect of language.

The Handbook is well-organized, well-edited, and the helpful indexes of the topics and contributors are appreciated. A few chapters provide a Chinese character version for example sentences, but the majorities do not. Considering that Chinese has many homophones, it would be helpful to provide a character version for the examples.

## 6. Conclusion

This comprehensive, highly-informative, and thought-provoking handbook is an extraordinary treasure trove of information about Chinese linguistics that are of wider theoretical significance. The Handbook should be required reading for any graduate students in Chinese linguistics. It will undoubtedly serve as an indispensable reference for any scholar working on issues in / related to Chinese linguistics. Indeed, anyone with interests in general linguistics will find this Handbook constructive.

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