

Reference Grammar of Chinese (2016) by Shi Ding-Xu and Huang Chu-Ren (eds),
Cambridge University Press:

Chinese linguistics is in a very healthy state at the moment, since in recent years there has been a remarkable surge of new and innovative scholarship that is slowly yet profoundly transforming our field. One such work is Huang Chu-Ren and Shi Ding-Xu's (2016) *A Reference Grammar of Chinese*, Cambridge University Press (henceforth *Cambridge Grammar of the Chinese Language* (CGCL)), which, as its title indicates, is a new and authoritative reference grammar of Chinese. With the current boom of research in Chinese linguistics, there is danger of overlap in material, and the editors of this volume clarify (p. 1-2) that the primary objective of CGCL is to provide a full and detailed empirical coverage of Chinese grammar, which differs ontologically from the formal accounts of Chinese syntax (Huang, Li, Li (2009), Paul (2015), Xu (2017)) or the recent handbooks containing state-of-the-art analyses in Chinese linguistics (Chan (2016), Huang, Li, Simpson (2014), Wang and Sun (2015)). Furthermore, CGCL is much more detailed in its coverage than the exhaustive yet brief encyclopedic entries in Sybesma (2017) and far more sophisticated and up-to-date than traditional classic grammars written in English like Chao (1968) and Li and Thompson (1981). All in all, CRCL is a welcome addition to the growing and fast-developing field of Chinese linguistics and a must-read for all students, teachers and researchers of Chinese language and linguistics.

As stated in the preface (xvi-xxvii), CGCL is designed to be a full descriptive account of standard Mandarin Chinese and is modelled on Huddleston and Pullum's seminal *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (CGEL) (2002) in its structure and organization of , namely preliminaries (chapter 1) and syntactic overview (chapter 2) followed by chapters on lexical word formation (chapter 3), verbs and verb phrases (chapter 4), aspectual system (chapter 5), negation (chapter 5), classifiers (chapter 7), nouns and nominal phrases (chapter 8), relative constructions (chapter 9), adjectives and adjective phrases (chapter 10), comparison (chapter 11), adverbs (chapter 12), prepositions and preposition phrases (chapter 13), sentence types (chapter 14), major non-canonical clause types: *ba* and *bei* (chapter 15), deixis and anaphora (chapter 16), information structure (chapter 17) and punctuation (appendix). Furthermore, CGCL provides descriptive generalisations based on native intuitions, as most of the contributors are native speakers of Chinese, and all of its empirical claims are based on corpus analysis as it is accompanied with a corpus of modern Chinese supplied by the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong (<http://crg.cbs.polyu.edu.hk>) (p. 5-7). Such a full and detailed empirical account of Chinese makes CGCL indispensable for anyone working or interested in Chinese both from a pedagogical perspective and for academic research.

However, there are certain things about the content and structure of CGCL that need to be clarified and, if possible, scrutinized so as to maximise its utility for the academic and educational communities. While CGCL covers all major aspects of Chinese grammar, it notably does not contain any discussion of Chinese phonology (in contrast to Li and Thompson (1981:chapters 1-2)) since it is exclusively focused on the morphosyntax of Chinese and only contains brief and superficial accounts of Chinese history, sociolinguistics and orthography (p. 2-13). CGCL, therefore, cannot be used as a sole textbook for studying/teaching Chinese as a second/foreign language and must be used in conjunction with a similar volume on Chinese phonology/phonetics and character-writing, and for researchers of Chinese phonology/phonetics, CGCL may be neglected altogether unless one is interested in prosody for which there are some subsections in the latter half of the volume. Secondly, although the editors (p. 2-4) make it explicitly clear that CGCL is a synchronic description of standard Mandarin Chinese as the *lingua franca* in the Sinosphere (mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and numerous diaspora), they seem to give the impression that standard Mandarin Chinese is a monolithic entity with no linguistic variation, and the chapters hardly discuss morphosyntactic variation at all apart from some brief comments on different types of negators (p. 52-53), stylistic variation in morphology (p. 75), negative questions (p. 155), dialectal equivalents of Mandarin *ba* and *bei* (p. 466-467, 478-482), sociolinguistic terms of address (p. 494-495). This is a gross simplification of Mandarin Chinese, since it only presents some of the widely accepted core aspects with little regard to its global and regional variation, which brings us to Chinese dialects. As is well known, Chinese dialects are plentiful and are briefly acknowledged in the introduction (p. 4). The present reviewer appreciates the editors' concern in describing standard Mandarin Chinese as the main object of study (p. 3-4), though I also believe that this volume could have provided a more 'lateral' coverage of Chinese dialects from a comparative-historical perspective, which would have been hugely beneficial both for Chinese pedagogy and linguistic research. In my experience of teaching Chinese in the West, westerners are by no means only interested in learning standard Mandarin which is indisputably the most useful in terms of numbers and range but also in dialectal vernaculars like Cantonese (in fact, I have, surprisingly, taught more Cantonese pupils than Mandarin!). Empirical coverage of other Chinese dialects is hence not just a good supplement but an important part of any description of Chinese, and incorporating Chinese dialects here may attract a wider readership. One may object that mentioning all the dialects in addition to Mandarin would impractically expand the empirical scope, but this need not be the case given how well CGCL is organized according to grammatical domains (outlined above), since,

despite the wealth of scholarship in Chinese dialectology (though most of it written in Chinese and inaccessible to the western general public), there remains lacking a detailed grammatical comparison which could be extremely illuminating (see Thurgood and LaRolla (2003) which contains grammatical surveys of major dialect groups as well as of Classical Chinese and proto-Chinese but not comparative analyses of individual grammatical phenomena). Moreover, the historical perspective of Chinese is totally lacking, apart from some brief remarks in the preliminaries (p. 3), since CGCL is written as a synchronic description of modern standard Mandarin, though some diachronic perspective would also have been desirable, since although there have been some excellent surveys of Chinese diachronic syntax in recent years (Aldridge (2013a, b), Feng (2014), not to mention the classic Peyraube (1996)), an account of the evolution of different Chinese grammatical phenomena would be a huge desideratum. As it stands, CGCL is a detailed grammatical description of standard Mandarin Chinese loosely defined as the shared core of all varieties of Chinese (p. 4), which is not to say that it has a limited scope but it may be fair to say that it does not contain everything about Chinese grammar with some glaring omissions which make it unsuitable for certain academic/pedagogical purposes.

The organization and presentation of material can also be improved in certain places, since despite its admirable attention to empirical detail and its stance on theory-neutrality and minimal use of theoretical expressions (p. 2), there are certain sections where some formal representations would have improved the clarity of the empirical presentation. Indeed, the danger of applying Western grammatical labels to a typologically exotic language like Chinese is, although it is the standard academic practice for performing grammatical analyses (p. 5), it also has the inherent danger of anglocentricism which may cause confusion and misunderstanding for inexperienced western learners. There are a few chapters which handle the typological uniqueness of Chinese very well, namely Shi and Chuang's syntactic overview (chapter 2), Packard's chapter on morphology (p. 67-68), Li's chapter on verb phrases and argument structure (p. 81-82), the chapters on the Chinese nominal constructions (Ahrens and Huang on classifiers (p. 169), Shi on noun phrases (p. 199-200), Matthews and Yip on relative clauses (p. 256-257)), all of which clearly define their respective Chinese linguistic phenomena on the outset and present working definitions for the technical aspects, which greatly reduces the possibility of learner errors. Others, on the other hand, use western-derived grammatical labels in ways that could be confusing, especially when describing syntactic phenomena which are unique or idiosyncratic in Chinese e.g. Chappell and Shi's chapter on Chinese *ba* and *bei* (chapter 15) and Shyu's on Chinese information structure (chapter 18), which cover the basic properties of these constructions but are far too superficial to do full

justice to the many subtleties of these constructions (see e.g. Li (2006) on *ba*, Huang (1999) on *bei*, and Hole (2004) on Chinese focus constructions *lian/dou/ye*). For these analysis, some formal representations would certainly have improved the presentation of the Chinese data since it is impossible to rephrase them straightforwardly in western-derived terms and it may be necessary to explain them in terms of syntactic trees and linguistic analysis. After all, CGCL is based on CGEL which, despite its emphasis on full and accurate empirical coverage, is not averse to the use of formal representations when necessary (Huddleston and Pullum (2002:18-20)), and it is one of the main proponents of 'what you see is what you get' (WYSIWYG) approach, which could be applied to Chinese and may yield very interesting results.

Nonetheless, it is clear that CGCL is a monumental piece of seminal scholarship which is a must-read for anyone interested in the grammar of Chinese, since it is to-date by far the most detailed, extensive and accurate grammatical description of standard Mandarin Chinese. In this review, I have mentioned some caveats which should be borne in mind when using this volume, namely the idealized and simplified version of standard Mandarin Chinese with little to no mention of Chinese dialects, the total absence of Chinese phonology/phonetics, and some potentially confusing sections on some complex Chinese constructions. Otherwise, CGCL is an excellent addition to the field of Chinese linguistics and is highly recommended to all.

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