New Perspectives on Chinese Syntax by Waltraud Paul (review)

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REVIEW

New Perspectives on Chinese Syntax (Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs 271). By Waltraud Paul. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015. Pp. xvi, 357. ISBN 978-3-11-033877-3. $154 (hardcover).

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New Perspectives on Chinese Syntax by Waltraud Paul (2015) is a theory-oriented discussion of Chinese syntax after Huang, Li, and Li (2009). Even though the book does not provide a full coverage of Chinese syntax as expected of descriptive or reference grammars, it explores in depth the most controversial issues with a new analysis in the generative approach. While each chapter tackles different topics in Chinese syntax, the chapters form a coherent whole to accomplish the major goal of the book, which is to deconstruct typological generalizations, particularly the concept "cross-categorial harmony", as part of grammar. Cross-categorial harmony in this book refers to "the observation that in many languages the order between a head and its complement is the same across different categories." (p.2)

The book is organized into eight chapters. I will review each chapter and then comment on the book as a whole.

Chapter 1 is a preface-like short introduction to the book. It sets out with a list of questions in Chinese syntax that will be addressed in the book, and then states the position of the whole book: while the concept of cross-categorial harmony has become important since Greenberg (1963), it is based on a statistical observation and thus cannot be a principle of grammar.

Chapters 2 – 7 dwell on one topic of Chinese syntax in each chapter. Among them, Chapters 2-4 involve joint work and discussion with two other linguists, Redouane Djamouri and John Whitman. These chapters are very readable thanks in part to two helpful features: each chapter is skillfully balanced at 40-50 pages, and the key ideas of each

chapter and most of the sections are easily accessible to readers via the summaries and interim summaries thoughtfully provided by the author.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the debate of VO vs. OV word order in Chinese, with the aim of invalidating Li and Thompson' (1974) claim that Chinese has undergone major word order change in its history. This chapter argues that VO has been the main order from the earliest attested history of Chinese (oracle bone inscriptions) to Modern Mandarin. Section 2.1 demonstrates that in oracle bone inscriptions, there are only two cases of OV order: focalization of the object and object pronouns in negated sentences, but even for these two cases, the underlying head-complement configurations are consistent with the VO order. Section 2.2 centers on Modern Mandarin. It firstly shows that the extended verbal projection (e.g., AuxP and AspP) displays head-complement order in accordance with VO, and then provides an extensive discussion of the *bǎ* construction. It argues that *bǎ* is not a preposition, but rather a higher head that takes as complement the verbal projection on the right side. In other words, the *bǎ* construction is also in a head-complement order.

Chapters 3 - 5 discuss three lexical categories that have triggered heated debates in the literature: prepositions, postpositions, and adjectives. In these chapters, the author points out that the three categories all exist in Chinese, and thus challenges the typological generalization that isolating languages have less lexical categories than inflected languages.

Chapter 3 argues for prepositions as a distinct category. After providing a list of words that are exclusively prepositions and a list of prepositions that have a homophonous verbal counterpart in Section 3.1, the chapter presents further evidence in the next three sections to show that prepositions form a distinct lexical category: prepositions are incompatible with adverbs or negation, and they cannot function as predicates or occur without their objects (i.e. they disallow preposition stranding). The chapter then turns to a diachronic study regarding verb-to-preposition reanalysis. It finds that *zì* 'from' and *yú* 'at, to' have been prepositions since the very first attested material (oracle bone inscriptions), i.e. not all prepositions were reanalyzed from verbs. The chapter thus states that the category preposition must exist beforehand because "reanalysis cannot create new grammatical categories that did not exist before" (p.92). The statement serves to show that Chinese as an isolating language has the category preposition just as inflected languages

do. Meanwhile, the statement may lead to more debates among historical linguists who speculate whether a verb-to-preposition reanalysis has occurred to *zì* 'from' and *yú* 'at, to' before written texts (given that all other prepositions in Chinese have verbal origins), as well as among those who propose that new categories can be created.

Contrary to many previous opinions that localizers in Chinese are nominal (e.g., Huang, Li, and Li 2009), Chapter 4 takes the position that localizers are better analyzed as postpositions, an adpositional category along with prepositions in Chinese. Unlike most previous studies that are limited to spatial postpositions (e.g., *shàng* 'above' in *zhuōzi shàng* 'on the table'), this chapter extends the discussion to the temporal and abstract domains (e.g., *shàng* in *huìyì shàng* 'during the conference' and *lǐlùn shàng* 'in theory'). The evidence against the conflation of postpositions with nouns lies in three aspects: (a) adposition standing is not allowed with postpositions; (b) nothing (particularly *de*) can intervene between postpositions and its complement; (c) while some postpositions have nominal origins, some (e.g., *lái* 'for, during, over' and *qǐ* 'starting from, on') and all postpositions prefixed by *yǐ* (e.g., *yǐhòu* 'later, after', *yǐlái* 'since', and *yǐqián* 'ago, before') were reanalyzed from verbs. Furthermore, this chapter compares the distribution of PostPs, PrePs, and NPs. It suggests that the distributional parallel between PostPs and NPs (e.g., when they are embedded as modifiers in a DP) may have caused the nominal analysis of postpositions in previous literature. The chapter then discusses in detail the internal structure of circumpositional phrases, i.e. discontinuous constituent that consists of a preposition and a postposition (e.g., *zài…xià* 'at…below'). Again, unlike previous studies that mainly focus on spatial location, the chapter covers temporal location and finds that the circumpositional phrases for spatial location are [$_{PreP}$ prep [$_{PostP}$ XP postp]], those for temporal location are [$_{PostP}$ [$_{PreP}$ prep XP] postp], whereas *zài* 'at' is a special preposition and always heads the circumpositional phrases it occurs in. This finer-grained analysis thus further challenges the nominal analysis of postpositions. In all, the chapter again calls cross-categorial harmony into question: if the harmony is true, postpositions would not be expected as Chinese is mainly a VO language.

Chapter 5 treats adjectives as a lexical category in Chinese. The chapter has three major sections. Section 5.1 presents four pieces of evidence that distinguish adjectives from stative verbs: (a) the existence of

non-predicative adjectives (e.g., *gòngtóng* 'common' and *yuánlái* 'original'), (b) the different patterns of reduplication between adjectives and verbs, (c) the fact that some adjectives can modify nouns without the presence of *de*, and (d) *hĕn* 'very' being a bleached adverb for adjectives but a real degree adverb for verbs. Among them, (b) may not be the best diagnostic test because as shown later in Section 5.3, the modifier-head derived adjectives (e.g., *xuĕbái* 'as white as snow') shares the same reduplication pattern with verbs. Section 5.2 elaborates on *de*-less structure "Adj N" and aims to demonstrate that the structure is phrasal and adjectival modification as is "Adj *de* N", in contrast to the earlier analysis that treats the *de*-less structure as adnominal modification (Sproat and Shih 1988, 1991). Section 5.3 focuses on the derived adjectives. It argues that Chinese not only has adjectives as a distinct lexical category, but has two morphologically different classes of adjectives (simple adjectives and derived adjectives), a phenomenon unexpected by the traditional assumption of isolating languages. The argument is valid even though the section can be more specific regarding the structure of derived adjectives, especially reduplicated adjectives. For instance, not all AABB adjectives are generated from simple adjectives (e.g., *xūxūshíshí* 'be real and sham' and *fēngfēnghuŏhuŏ* 'energetic') and it is still a question whether ABB adjectives (e.g., *báihuāhuā* 'shining white') are products of reduplication or affixation (cf. Huang and Shi 2016).

The next two chapters of the book focus on topics and sentence final particles, the left and right peripheries of the sentence proper. In Chapter 6, the author firstly presents that topic in Chinese has two functions, aboutness (what the sentence is about) and frame-setting (where a sentence holds), and for both functions, a topic does not always carry given information. The chapter then argues that topics can be syntactically derived in two ways: (a) movement from a position within the sentence; (b) base-generation in the topic position. It also points out that the latter is the only derivational path for non-referential topics (e.g., topics that are conditional clauses or adjunct XPs). This chapter also argues for a sentence-internal topic which is to the right of the subject and has often been analyzed as the focus in previous literature.

Chapter 7 concerns sentence final particles (SFPs). The chapter argues that SFPs are best analyzed as complementisers that select sentential complements. Parallel to Zhu's (1982) analysis of the distribution of SFPs,

the chapter proposes a three-layered hierarchical split CP for hosting SFPs: ClowP < ForceP < AttitudeP. The three are neatly instantiated by ne_1 (continuing situation), ne_2 (follow-up question), and ne_3 (exaggeration) respectively. The complementiser analysis of SFPs thus serves as another challenge to the hypothesis born out of the cross-categorial harmony: Chinese as a VO language is not expected to have head-final CPs.

   Instead of a simple summary of the previous chapters, Chapter 8 extends the discussion of Chinese syntax to the role of cross-categorial harmony in grammar. Specifically, the chapter shows that Chinese has both harmonic and disharmonic features and raises doubts about the usefulness of typological databases (e.g., WALS, Dryer and Haspelmath 2013). The author then concludes with the "radical position" (in the author's words, p.333) that cross-categorial harmony cannot be a principle of universal grammar.

   The book has several merits. The first lies in its clear structure. Each chapter in the book deals with individual topics in Chinese syntax and thus makes it convenient for readers who are interested in a particular topic. Meanwhile, the chapters taken together constitute a coherent argument against cross-categorial harmony. Furthermore, the book frequently offers interim summaries and summaries as signposts so that readers can easily follow the major ideas of a section or a chapter.

   Despite being a generative discussion of the major controversial issues in Chinese syntax following Huang, Li, and Li (2009), the book provides insights that differ from those in Huang, Li, and Li (2009) and other previous literature, e.g., the postpositional analysis of localizers and the complementiser treatment of SFPs. The author has usefully expanded the scope of the debate about issues in Chinese syntax, e.g., by considering postpositions for temporal and abstract locations, and including non-referential elements (e.g., conditional clauses or adjunct XPs) as topics. The book also reinterprets existing accounts in different ways, e.g., a generative understanding of Zhu's (1982) descriptive analysis of SFPs. Many accounts proposed in the book may seem very different from previous studies, but are thought-provoking and very likely to lead to more extensive discussion.

   In spite of its merits, there are some areas that the book could be improved. For instance, the author sometimes drifts away from central argumentation. One such example can be found in Section 5.1.4. The section aims to show that simple adjectives differ from stative verbs with

respect to the interpretation of their modifier *hěn* 'very'. However, after reaching the goal, the section proceeds to introduce previous generative analyses on the function of *hěn*, and declares in advance that these studies cannot account for derived adjectives that will be introduced later in Section 5.3. This way of proceeding is likely to distract readers.

Another issue to concern is that some examples given in the book may not sound very natural to native speakers. Take Chapter 5 again for example. The chapter lists *mǎlǐmǎhǔ* 'careless, sloppy' and *húhútútú* 'muddle-headed' as reduplicated adjectives (p.178), but these two forms are marginal in natural Chinese data. For instance, a search in the assorted subcorpus of the BLCU corpus (about one billion words, Xun et al. 2016) only retrieved two instances of *mǎlǐmǎhǔ* (cf. about 1,500 instances of *mǎmǎhūhū* 'careless, sloppy; not bad') and 205 instances of *húhútútú* (cf. about 2,200 instances of *húlihútú* 'muddle-headed')[1]. Also, some sentences, examples (3)-(6) in Chapter 6 to name a few, would not be readily acceptable without much richer contexts. Therefore, a more empirical-data-based approach may be considered to decide on the acceptability of the data used in the book.

While the book is firmly grounded in a generative framework, it may also be rewarding to explore further than that. For instance, the book correctly points out in Chapter 5 that it is due to semantic constraints that derived adjectives behave differently from simple adjectives in the incompatibility with negation and degree adverbs, but the discussion would be more fruitful if more recent studies on concepts such as "degree", "scale" and "standard of comparison" are considered (cf. Huang and Shi 2016, Kennedy 2007). Also the book states in Chapter 8 that the correlation "V(S)O-prepositions" and "OV-postpositions" is a basically statistical observation, because out of 1,519 languages, there are about 200 that do not conform to the correlation. Nonetheless, from the perspective of statistics, the numbers suggest a significantly high correlation, so it would be worthwhile to probe into the basis for that correlation.

Unquestionably, this book makes a valuable contribution to the generative literature on Chinese syntax. At the same time, given the high complexity of Chinese syntax, it may not be surprising that the perspective and position taken by this book would trigger more discussion of the issues, and it would be also interesting if the discussion engages non-generative linguists such as functionalists, typologists, cognitive theoreticians, and construction grammarians.

NOTE

1.   BLCU corpus (Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus), http://bcc.blcu.edu.cn/, accessed May 2, 2016.

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CORRIGENDA

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PAGE   FOR

453, line 8   "appositional" should be corrected to "adpositional"

453, line 14   "apposition" should be corrected to "adposition"