

Review of *A Synchronic and Diachronic Study of the Grammar of the Chinese Xiang Dialects*

By Yunji Wu. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2005.

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Among numerous fieldwork reports on the grammar of Chinese dialects in recent years, few of them combine a description of contemporary grammar with analysis of diachronic development. A recent achievement in this field is *A Synchronic and Diachronic Study of the Grammar of the Chinese Xiang Dialects*, written by Yunji Wu. This book under review here represents a major contribution to the synchronic grammar of Xiang dialects, and provides a good example of the study of Chinese dialectal grammar based on both modern oral data and historical records.

Key words: Xiang dialects, diachronic grammar, dialectal grammar, grammaticalization

For some decades, Sinitic linguists have had the hazy impression that the diversity of Chinese dialects lay mainly in the phonetic and phonological systems rather than in the grammar of the dialects. Consequently, scholars who work on Chinese dialectology have devoted themselves to describing and comparing the phonetics and phonology of different Chinese dialects, with relatively little research on dialectal grammar being undertaken. Although fieldwork reports on the grammar of Chinese dialects have been increasing in recent years, few of them combine a description of contemporary grammar with analysis of diachronic development. A recent achievement in this field is a book entitled *A Synchronic and Diachronic Study of the Grammar of the Chinese Xiang Dialects* (by Yunji Wu, Mouton de Gruyter 2005, pp. xxii, 438, ISBN: 3-11-018366-8). Wu's book aims to provide both synchronic and diachronic analyses of the Xiang dialect group, a Chinese dialect group which is mainly spoken in the center of Hunan. The synchronic analysis covers contemporary grammar across localities within the Xiang-speaking area from comparative and typological perspectives, while the diachronic analysis embraces reconstructions of earlier grammatical systems and the evolution of the syntactical systems of the Xiang dialects from the perspectives of historical linguistics and grammaticalization. Wu's work represents a major contribution to the grammar of

Xiang dialects that has not attracted the attention it deserves, and provides a good example of the study of Chinese grammar based on both modern oral data and historical records.

This book under review begins with an introduction and two chapters which provide the skeleton of the book, and some linguistic background to the spoken and written language of the Xiang dialects. The introduction gives a broad outline including the purpose, linguistic approach, framework, and data of this book, as well as an overview of Xiang grammar, which embraces word structure, syntactic categories and word order. The first chapter describes the main phonological features of the Xiang dialects and takes Changsha as a case study of the phonological development over fifty years. The second chapter introduces three types of written materials employed in this book, and discusses the characters utilized in these written materials. One small objection that might be raised is that it seems contradictory to describe a ‘corresponding’ character as ‘borrowed from Mandarin,’ as stated in §1.1 in Chapter 2 since corresponding forms usually have an opposing definition with borrowed forms in historical linguistics.

The introductory chapters are followed by seven chapters, each of which contains one topic of the grammar in the Xiang dialects. Chapter 3 deals with the lexical systems which are viewed via building blocks (morphemes) and word formation rules. The author examines the lexicon in two dictionaries of the Xiang dialects, and, after making a comparison with that of the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (MCD), classifies all local words into four types. Among the four types, type four (i.e. all constituents of compounds having correspondences in the MCD) makes up over 75% of the total number of local words. Words classified as type one are monosyllabic words which are absent from Mandarin. Although this type constitutes a small proportion of the lexicon, it characterizes the Xiang dialects. An interesting observation obtained here is that many words of this type regard bodily movements. The second part of the chapter discusses the development of three types of affixation, which are prefixes used to indicate intensification of adjectives, diminutive suffixes, and gender markers for animal terms. Comparing similar adjective patterns across different localities in the Xiang dialects, a reasonable path of grammaticalization is traced to account for the development through the four groups of the [Very X] adjectives. As for diminutive suffixes, three forms and their functions across sixteen localities are introduced, and the relationship between [tʂa] and [tʂi]/[tʂɿ] are adequately discussed. Wu argues that [tʂi] and [tʂɿ] are not borrowed forms from northern Chinese, but that [tʂɿ] is a literary pronunciation of [tʂa] and has co-existed with [tʂa] since the Han dynasty. While the word for ‘son’ was indeed recorded as different characters in the north and in the south early in the Han dynasty, her argument faces problems, the most crucial one being that the so-called literary pronunciation is intrinsically a borrowed form from outside, where the culture and education are highly developed. Thus most questions the author addressed to disprove the ‘borrowed form hypothesis’ are still left

unanswered even if the ‘literary pronunciation hypothesis’ is proposed. The key point here, in my opinion, might not be whether [tsɿ] is a borrowed form or not, but when it was introduced into the Xiang dialects. The analysis would seem more convincing if the author focused on the difference of the time that [tɕi]/[tsɿ] and [tsa] co-existed between the two hypotheses.

Chapter 4 deals with pronouns in the Xiang dialects, especially the evolution of personal and demonstrative pronouns. Two particular observations are made in this chapter. One is that the distinction between singular and plural forms for personal pronouns may have shifted from tonal variation to suffixation. The other is that there is a very close relationship between personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and personal and demonstrative pronouns since the older layer of these pronouns all possess a form or forms with velar initial(s). Besides, it is hypothesized that the two demonstrative pronouns ‘this’ and ‘that’ both share the same source as the 1st person pronoun in the older layer of the Hunan dialects. This hypothesis, though ingenious and observant enough, sounds less convincing in that the phenomenon whereby the initials of two pronouns share the same place of articulation could be superficial, and it seems too rash to infer from such a superficial phenomenon that the two pronouns have the same source. The distinction between the 1st person pronoun and the two demonstrative pronouns for their methods of articulation should be better explained since the alternation of nasals and stops is not quite common in Chinese.

Chapter 5 sheds light on the adverbs and their evolution in the Xiang dialects. A detailed description of adverbs in the Changsha dialect, which includes adverbs of time, manner, negation, comparison, degree, and mood, is provided in this chapter. In addition, the author focuses her typological and diachronic discussion on the evolution of negative adverbs. The typology of negative verb and negative adverb as well as the typology of subjective negation and objective negation in the Xiang dialects are examined and compared with Mandarin Chinese. It is argued that there were no distinctions between negative verb and negative adverb, or between subjective negation and objective negation, and that these distinctions in most of the Xiang-speaking area occurred due to the influence of northern Chinese. Although how the distinctions and typological differences developed needs further research, the examination in this chapter indeed presents quite a clear picture of negative adverbs in the Hunan dialects.

Chapter 6 focuses on the typology of disposal and passive constructions, which have attracted a lot of attention from Chinese linguists and raised much discussion in the field of Chinese dialectal grammar and diachronic grammar. The disposal and passive markers are subject to a wide variation in their lexical sources. The author looks into the meanings from which the disposal and passive markers are derived. It is pointed out that the disposal markers in Hunan dialects derived from the meaning ‘to hold, to give’, ‘to

take', 'to help', or other unknown meanings, while the passive markers derived from the meaning 'to suffer', 'to let, to request', 'to give', or 'to take'. One valuable observation made here is that 把 *bǎ* is the most common disposal marker which derives from the verb meaning 'to give' in the Hunan dialects. The author thus raises a penetrating question, which is: why can 把 *bǎ* bearing the meaning 'to give' be used as a disposal marker only, but cannot be used as both disposal and passive markers like other verbs with the meaning 'to give'? In attempting to find a reasonable answer to this question, he therefore provides evidence to suggest that 把 *bǎ* is borrowed from Mandarin and has a different path of evolution from that of the local forms. Though the abundant evidence introduced by the author goes to show that 把 *bǎ* as a disposal marker is owing to the influence of Mandarin, another interesting question which arouses my curiosity is that, if 把 *bǎ* is a borrowed form from Mandarin, why does it in Hunan dialects have the meaning 'to give' which does not exist in Mandarin 把 *bǎ*? 把 *bǎ* seems to have experienced its local development in Hunan after it was borrowed from northern Chinese, but the path of evolution of how 把 *bǎ* got the meaning 'to give' is not presented in this research.

The study to which Wu has dedicated most of her energy is probably shown in Chapter 7. This meaty chapter sheds light on aspectual markers and their evolution in the Xiang dialects. A detailed comparison of perfective, anterior, and continuative aspectual markers between Changsha and Xiangxiang dialects constitutes the first part of this chapter, which is followed by a discussion of the relationships between aspectual markers and locative markers as well as that of grammaticalization path of aspectual markers. It is argued that in the Changsha dialect, four forms, [tʰɿ24], [ta21], [tsai21] and [tau45] can co-occur in the same locative construction, [V + Loc M + Loc P + (V2)], and function as locative markers. These four forms can be sub-grouped into two categories. [tsai21] and [tau45], being grouped as one category, have a direct relationship with location and can be used as main verbs; while [tʰɿ24] and [ta21], as another group, have no direct relationship with location and cannot be used as main verbs with locative phrases as their object. Wu maintains that both [ta21] and [tʰɿ24] are derived from the same lexical source 得 *dé* 'to obtain; to gain', with [ta21] going further along the path of grammaticalization. This study, giving evidence from the Xiang dialects, supports the claim made by scholars of Sinitic diachronic grammar that many aspectual markers in Sinitic languages evolve from locative markers into aspectual markers. Thus Wu turns out to agree with Mei Tsu-Lin (1988) that [ta21] had experienced a stage of being a locative marker, although Wu has advanced an alternative opinion as to the lexical sources of [ta21]. One argument I think might seem a little weak is the process whereby 得 *dé* has evolved from a verb meaning 'to obtain, gain' into a locative marker.

The valuable observations and fruitful discussions on aspectual systems in the Xiang dialects have made a profound impression on me; however, the terminology used

in this study is sometimes confusing. This can be seen from the following three aspects. First of all, Wu citing Bybee et al. (1994:127) defines the continuative aspect as ‘to view a situation, be it dynamic or stative, as ongoing at a reference time’. Nevertheless, Bybee et al. attribute this definition to ‘continuous’ rather than ‘continuative’. The definition Bybee gives for ‘continuative’ is ‘to include progressive meaning—that a dynamic situation is ongoing—and additionally to specify that the agent of the action is deliberately keeping the action going’. The sentences Wu offers for the examples of ‘continuative’ seem to fit the more general meaning, i.e. the meaning that embraces both dynamic and stative situation, though inchoative meaning also seems to be involved. Second, since ‘continuative’ is not precisely defined, another term, namely ‘durative’, introduces more confusion into the terminology of aspect. The term ‘durative’ doesn’t occur at all in §1, whereas it appears suddenly in the discussion of the evolution of aspectual markers in §2. Example (90) on page 246, which is an example of [tau41] being used as a durative marker, would probably be regarded as a sentence with a continuative marker. Finally, Wu points out on page 250 that [ti] in WX-Guzhang and GH-Zixing can be used both as a ‘perfective marker’ and an ‘aspectual marker’. Since the perfective marker is referred to as one of the aspectual markers throughout the chapter, it would be a puzzle to readers how a grammatical element could be used as both a perfective marker and an aspectual marker.

Chapter 8 looks into the evolution of structural particles in the Xiang dialects. Structural particles are forms connecting modifiers and their heads, such as attributive particles, adverbial particles and complement particles, which correspond to 的 *de*, 地 *de*, 得 *de* in Mandarin respectively. The author throws the main emphasis upon the attributive particles in the Xiang dialects since they represent the greatest difference with those in Mandarin. The attributive particles in the Xiang dialects differ from those in Mandarin in that they have different lexical sources which bear [k-] initials, and in that, in some Xiang dialects, the distinction between attributive and nominalized particles parallel to the distinction between 之 *shī* and 者 *zhě* in Archaic Chinese has remained. The [k-] initial attributive particles found in the Xiang dialects are widely attested in southern Chinese dialects; however, agreement has not yet been reached among scholars on the etymology of the [ko]-like sound particle, which is usually written as 個 *gè*. For this issue, according to her research in the Xiang dialects, Wu suggests a new hypothesis that the [k-] initial particles might have derived from three different sources with a similar sound: a classifier, a demonstrative pronoun, and a suffix of an adjective. This hypothesis, though as yet unverified and requiring further investigation, is extremely inspiring and indicates that the research of the Xiang dialects can add an appreciable contribution to the evolution of the grammar of other Chinese dialects.

Chapter 9 presents a general survey of the usages of modal particles, which are comparatively less discussed in the study of the grammar of Chinese dialects. Although the usage of modal particles is difficult to describe because personal preferences are usually involved, Wu dedicates her best efforts to give a detailed description of the modal particles in the Changsha dialect. Furthermore, he focuses on the evolution of modal particles in interrogative sentences in the Xiang dialects. It is concluded that the native sentence structure of Yes/No questions in the Xiang dialects is [V + Neg + (MOD)], which is the construction that appeared in Archaic Chinese. In some sentences of some localities, the [V + Neg + (MOD)] construction can be shifted to [V + fusion word] and becomes the most common construction. At the same time, the Mandarin construction [V + Neg + V] has started to influence the Xiang dialects. The chief contribution made in this survey is the comprehensive description of modal particles in the Xiang dialects and the perfect demonstration of using the transcription of local operas to conduct the survey.

The evolution of two constructions, which are double-object and 得 *de* constructions, is discussed in Chapter 10. There seems to be no common properties between these two constructions at first sight; however, Wu connects them by focusing attention on their differences in word order between the Xiang dialects and Mandarin. Thus the subject of this chapter would have been more explicit if its title had mentioned anything about ‘word order’. In the discussion of the former construction, Wu assumes that the difference in word order comes from the omission of dative markers in different positions. The Mandarin [V + IO + DO] evolved from the construction [V + Dative M + IO + DO], while the Xiang dialects [V + DO + IO] evolve from the construction [V + DO + Dative M + IO] or [V¹ + DO + V¹ + IO]. On the other hand, by representing the contrasts between [得 *de* + V] and [V + 得 *de*], Wu suggests that the [V + *de*] construction has a different evolutionary path from [*de* + V] rather than derives from a word order shift. Leaving this tentative conclusion aside, the main contribution of this study, in my opinion, falls on the elaborate description of the usages of 得 *de* constructions that are not found in Mandarin, thus deepening our understanding of the varieties of Chinese grammar.

On the whole, this book represents a pleasant combination of diachronic and dialectal perspectives of Chinese grammar, with most chapters basing their discussion on materials from both sides. Moreover, it also demonstrates a good example of integrating data gathered through fieldwork with data collected from written materials. One can well imagine how much time and energy the author had spent in giving such wide coverage of the Xiang dialects. With regard to the linguistic approach of this book, it suffers simply from its limitations on the application of grammaticalization. Despite Wu’s taking grammaticalization as a major approach in the discussion of grammatical evolution,

he lays emphasis no more than upon searching for the ‘missing links’ of the path(s) of development or upon identifying the timing in the chain of grammaticalization. As a result, the study would have been more valuable if some central concerns in the discussion of grammaticalization, such as the motivated mechanisms by which grammaticalization takes place, are much more expressed in this study. Except for this minor weakness, this book makes a significant contribution to the grammar of the Xiang dialects and to Sinitic dialectology; readers will benefit greatly from its abundant content.

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書評

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近年來出版的眾多漢語方言語法的調查報告中，少有能夠結合共時語法描述與歷時發展分析的作品。由伍雲姬所撰寫的《漢語湘方言語法的共時與歷時研究》一書，正是在這方面有所成就的作品。本文旨在評論這本學術論著。該書對湘方言的共時語法作出重大貢獻，並且根據現代口語資料與歷史紀錄立論，為漢語方言語法的研究提供一個良好的示範。

關鍵詞：湘方言，歷時語法，方言語法，語法化