

Book Review

Li Wang. 2023a. *Modern Chinese grammar I: Syntax*. Bo Wang & Yuanyi Ma (trans.).

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Li Wang. 2023b. *Modern Chinese grammar II: Grammatical constituents*. Bo Wang & Yuanyi Ma (trans.). Abingdon & New York: Routledge, xiii+191 pp. ISBN: 978-1-032-31958-2 (hbk);

Li Wang. 2023c. *Modern Chinese grammar III: Substitution and numeration*. Bo Wang & Yuanyi Ma (trans.). Abingdon & New York: Routledge, xiv+193 pp. ISBN: 978-1-032-31969-8 (hbk);

Li Wang. 2023d. *Modern Chinese grammar IV: Special forms and europeanized grammar*. Bo Wang & Yuanyi Ma (trans.). Abingdon & New York: Routledge, xi+220 pp. ISBN: 978-1-032-31970-4 (hbk).

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Modern Chinese grammar, written by Li Wang and translated by Bo Wang and Yuanyi Ma, is a four-volume set that provides a description of the various grammatical patterns of modern Chinese. The original book (Wang 1943), upon its publication, is different from the existing books that center on ancient Chinese (e.g. Ma 1898; Yang 1930) in its pioneering attempt of exploring modern Chinese grammar. Further, Wang (1943) is regarded as a monumental work in presenting a revealing account of modern Chinese grammar, encompassing lexis, syntax, special forms, and the Western influence on modern Chinese.

The author of the book, Li Wang, was one of the most important Chinese linguists in history, who not only specialized in phonetics and phonology, but was also an expert in grammar, lexicography, historical linguistics, and dialectal studies. He had a profound influence on linguistics in general and on Systemic Functional Linguistics in particular. M. A. K. Halliday, the founder of Systemic Functional Linguistics, had openly acknowledged Wang's influence on him (e.g. Halliday 1985, 2017).

This four-volume set covers multiple topics in modern Chinese grammar, ranging from word classes to sentence structures. It makes an in-depth exploration of modern Chinese grammar through careful examination of authentic data and discusses, in a critical way, the influence of Western languages on Mandarin Chinese. The whole translated set comprises four volumes. Volume I deals with the syntax of modern Chinese, corresponding to Chapters 1 and 2 of the original book. Volume II examines grammatical constituents of Chinese grammar, matching Chapter 3 of the original book. Volume III discusses substitution and numeration, and is translated from Chapter 4 of the original book. The last volume, Volume IV, investigates special

forms and europeanized grammar, and is translated from Chapters 5 and 6 of the original book.

Volume I introduces the basic concepts in Chinese syntax, involving those of characters, words, word classes, phrases, and sentences. The different forms of phrases and sentences are discussed and the various grammatical constructions in modern Chinese are presented. Specifically, this volume first distinguishes Chinese characters from words, and then introduces the classifications of word classes, namely monosyllabic words and disyllabic words, based on the number of syllables. Various examples are also provided to illustrate the different kinds of disyllabic words. Words are further categorized into different word classes such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and pronouns. Influenced by Otto Jespersen, Li Wang applies the notion of rank to construct a new framework for Chinese grammar, focusing on three ranks of words, namely primary, secondary, and tertiary. Moreover, Wang introduces the different forms of phrases and sentences. In terms of the structure, a sentence is divided into two parts: subject and predicate. Then according to differences in predicate words, sentences are classified into three kinds, i.e. narrative sentences, descriptive sentences, and determinative sentences. After that, different types of composite sentences are introduced. Having introduced the fundamental grammatical units, this volume further elaborates on the various grammatical constructions in modern Chinese, including those of optative, causative, dispositive, passive, annexed, and contracted. For instance, optative forms, which are used in sentences that focus on stating opinions or volitions, are divided into two types, i.e. potential and volitive, with the lexical choices that express such meanings being summarized. Further, Wang discusses the position of complements based on the notion of rank discussed previously, and provides his description of secondary complements and tertiary complements.

After introducing the basic units and concepts of syntax in modern Chinese grammar, Volume II inquires into the specific grammatical constituents of modern Chinese. Nine grammatical components are discussed, namely (i) copula, (ii) negation, (iii) adverb, (iv) marker, (v) aspect, (vi) mood, (vii) modal tertiary, (viii) connective, and (ix) relative tertiary. For instance, in the chapter on copulas, determinative sentences, a type of sentences characterized by the use of copulas, are first presented. Determinative sentences are further discussed according to the different use of subjects and copulas. Some typical copulas, like “是” (*shì*; ‘be’) and “非” (*fēi*; ‘be not’), and quasi-copulas, like “像” (*xiàng*; ‘be like’) and “似” (*sì*; ‘be like’), are deeply explored. In terms of negation, the most commonly-used negative words in modern Chinese are canvassed, including “无” (*wú*; ‘not have’), “不” (*bù*; ‘not’), “未” (*wèi*; ‘not’), and “别” (*bié*; ‘not do’). These negative words belong to different word classes and perform different functions. Four classifications of negative words are then explained, followed by meanings of negation and special forms of negation.

Taking another example, in respect of mood, Li Wang provides a detailed description of twelve mood types, such as determinative mood, explanative mood, and exaggerative mood, and specifies the modal particles that help realize these mood types. The differences and relationships between different mood types are examined, such as those between determinative mood and exclamative mood. Moreover, Jespersen's notion of rank has been further applied to the description of mood and relative, with the modal tertiary and relative tertiary being discussed in detail. Thorough information on other parts will not be unfolded further. Briefly, this volume exhibits nine grammatical components which give a truly distinctive flavor to modern Chinese, making it differentiated from other languages.

Volume III provides an introduction to different kinds of substitution and methods of numeration in modern Chinese. This volume begins with different types of pronouns, including personal pronouns, indefinite pronouns, reflexive pronouns, reciprocal pronouns, modified pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and interrogative pronouns. They are used to substitute for subjects or entities mentioned before or already known. For example, with regard to personal pronouns, their singular and plural forms are compared. Also, Li Wang mentions the polite forms for second person singular, “您” (*nín*; ‘you’) and “他” (*tān*; ‘he’). It is pointed out that non-use of personal pronouns in conversations could show great respect. Having finished the discussion of substitution system, this volume draws our attention to the system of numeration of modern Chinese. To start with, cardinal numbers, ordinal numbers, and ways of inquiring about an amount are presented. The differences in numeration between modern Chinese and other languages are important characteristics of modern Chinese. The usages of certain words, such as “零” (*líng*; ‘zero’), “二” (*èr*; ‘two’) and “两” (*liǎng*; ‘two’), are illustrated. Flexible usages of “一” (*yī*; ‘one’) and the differences between “一” (*yī*; ‘one’) and “一个” (*yí gè*; ‘one’) are listed. At last, numeration methods for persons, things, and behaviors in modern Chinese are discussed. Differences between modern Chinese and ancient Chinese in those numeration methods are highlighted.

The final volume, Volume IV, elaborates on special forms and europeanized grammar of modern Chinese. It consists of two parts. Part I deals with special forms in modern Chinese grammar, including the following topics, (i) reduplicated syllables, reduplicated words, and opposite terms, (ii) incorporation, agglutination, and idioms, (iii) onomatopoeia and scene-painting, (iv) repetition, (v) continuation and omission, (vi) inversion and parenthesis, and (vii) interjection of emotion and interjection of meaning. Part II highlights the changes in modern Chinese grammar resulting from the influence of Western culture. Li Wang first reports on the coinage of disyllabic words, which involves methods such as forming synonymous disyllabic words and compounding. Moreover, Wang comments on the increase of subjects and copulas, the extension of sentence length, the Europeanization of potential

forms, passive forms, and markers. In addition, the new methods of substitution and numeration are explored.

Overall, this four-volume set constructs an influential and unique framework for investigating lexis and syntax in modern Chinese. Meanwhile, discussions on the differences between modern and ancient Chinese pervade the whole book, thus showing the diachronic change of Chinese language. The following merits should not be ignored and deserve special attention. First and foremost, Li Wang gives a new insight into Chinese grammar, different from previous scholars who have imposed grammar of Western languages on that of Chinese, such as Ma's (1898) pioneering book on Chinese grammar published in the late Qing Dynasty. In Ma's book, Chinese grammar was constructed on the basis of Latin grammar. However, with different cultural backgrounds and language structures, some straight references are slightly maladapted. Being aware of the urgency of building a new approach to studying Chinese grammar, Wang provides a unique way of describing lexis and syntax of modern Chinese. Many discussions, like those on reduplicated syllables and words, are characterized with Chinese features, showing particular qualities of Chinese grammar. Wang believes that it is unnatural and inappropriate to foist grammar of Western languages on the study of Chinese. He declares that, for the study of Chinese grammar, some discussions of Western grammar are redundant while others are deficient. But it should be noted that it does not mean Western grammar is wrong. It is not the issue of right and wrong, but the issue of appropriateness. To justify his points of view, Wang frequently reminds us of specific issues for studying modern Chinese grammar. For example, he emphasizes the study of tertiary predicate forms, regarding it as an important topic of Chinese grammar.

Secondly, in addition to pursuing a local way of studying Chinese, Li Wang did not limit himself to domestic Chinese linguistics, but instead made one of the first attempts to employ the thoughts of Jespersen and Bloomfield to descriptions of modern Chinese grammar. For instance, "pin" (i.e. rank), one of the most important concepts throughout the book, has been adapted from Jespersen's work. He also investigates the influence of Western languages on modern Chinese, showing his open view of describing a language. Also, this kind of differentiation makes it easier to discriminate original Chinese and those influenced by Western languages.

Thirdly, the organization of the whole set is well-thought and clear. The discussions are comprehensive, ranging from the scale of lexis to the scale of discourse. Initially, the whole picture of modern Chinese syntax is drawn, in which the basic concepts and definitions are given. Thereafter, grammatical constituents full of modern Chinese features are analyzed. Furthermore, detailed discussions on specific topics, like numeration and substitution, have followed. Starting with the general descriptions, the whole set gradually zooms in on the actual use of modern Chinese. Numerous authentic examples are given to make explanations

more concrete and more powerful. Some important concepts are explained from different respects. Taking the concept of rank as an example, it is applied in different rank scales, from words to sentences. This kind of consistency avoids the superfluity of complicated theories so that readers could easily grasp the essential features of modern Chinese grammar.

Fourthly, at the end of some chapters, there includes a section titled “Contrastive Grammar”, in which Mandarin Chinese is contrasted with English and other Chinese dialects, such as Cantonese, Min dialect, and Hakka. For example, when it comes to the indicating function of objective positions, the close objective position is used to indicate the thing and the distant objective position is to indicate the person in the Min dialect, Cantonese, and Hakka; while, in Mandarin Chinese, the close objective position is used to indicate the person and the distant objective position is used to indicate the thing.

Finally, yet importantly, the whole study is corpus-based. Most examples were selected from two classic Chinese novels, namely *A dream in red mansions* and *The biographies of the heroic youths*. Those authentic materials have ensured that the analyses are descriptive rather than prescriptive. The use of authentic data makes it distinctive from, for example, Chao's (1968) *A grammar of spoken Chinese*, which uses examples made up by the author that may not sound natural to native Chinese speakers. The grammar generated from authentic data in this set concerns its interaction with semantics, which was emphasized further by Halliday (1994) in his discussion of “natural” grammar. Additionally, based on the corpus, Wang regards discourse as the unit of analysis, which is echoed by Systemic Functional linguists (see Hu 1991).

This set could also be praised for its style of translation. It accurately conveys the content and intent of the original book, also taking into account the differences between the traditions of Chinese and Western linguistics. The way it presents the Chinese examples is thorough and clear. Pinyin, interlinear glossing, and literal translation into English are presented for every example. This style helps readers perceive not only the phonetic information, but also the semantic meaning of the original sentence. The interlinear glossing provides word-for-word translations of the source text, acting as the bridge between the source text and its translation. Based on that, readers could easily notice the differences in word orders and sentence structures between Chinese and English. Also, to draw readers' attention to the understanding of Chinese grammar rather than to the appreciation of Chinese novels, the translations are given in a literal way, such as “Cuiyan Bridge” rather than “Green Smoke Bridge” for “翠烟桥” (*cui yān qiáo*; ‘green-smoke-bridge’).

To sum up, this four-volume set is a breakthrough in the exploration of Chinese grammar, which concentrates on modern Chinese grammar by examining authentic data selected from great works of literature. The research rooted in Chinese

generates appropriate explanations for it, which is better than applying improper rules of Western languages mechanically to the study of Chinese. Certainly, this set is not flawless. It may not satisfy readers who are seeking general linguistic theories because this set focuses only on the Chinese linguistic patterns discovered from authentic materials. It is recommended that those researchers consult Wang (1945), as a supplement to this set, which enlarges on the theoretical issues of Chinese grammar. However, this set of four volumes is capable of serving as a good reference for teachers and students to learn the details of Chinese grammar. Also, in every part, concise definitions and exercises related to the very topic are provided. Thus, teachers of the following courses should be encouraged to recommend this book to their students, including (i) Chinese linguistics, (ii) Chinese grammar, (iii) linguistic theories, (iv) trends in applied language sciences, (v) Systemic Functional Linguistics, (vi) language description, and (vii) language typology. In all, the book is a must-read for researchers and academics that work on linguistics, Chinese grammar, or related areas as well as MA or Ph.D. students who have some basic knowledge of Chinese grammar. It is also hoped that more works by Li Wang can be translated into English and introduced globally.

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