

THE IDEA OF AN INDIGENOUS CHINESE GRAMMAR

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ABSTRACT

As Chinese linguistics encounters a more developed general linguistics, two opposite reactions emerged. One is to learn and imitate, while the other is to learn and innovate. As a visionary, William S-Y. Wang (1999) innovates. He rejected purely formal theories such as the Generative Grammar and envisioned an Indigenous Chinese Grammar (ICG) that takes culture into consideration. Echoing Wang's seminal vision, we offer a possible ICG. We focus on the perplexing pair of *cai2* 才 ('necessary') and *jiu4* 就 ('sufficient'). Both *cai2* and *jiu4* have divergent meanings that may be closely related, well related, remotely related, or even dubiously related. (See for example, *you3qian2 cai2 jia4 tai* 'Marry him *only if* he is rich', *tal cai2 lai2* 'He has *just* come', *wo3 cai2 you3qian2* 'I am *the one* that has money', *wo3 cai2 bu2 pao4 ne0* 'I *contrary to anybody's expectation* am not afraid'.) Traditional formal theories seem unable to explain this wide range of divergence. But an Emergent Grammar (EG) can. Given a composition, EG enables its two elements to 'interact' into a largely unpredictable result. Free interactions in a specific context produce flexible results, making the derived meanings often unpredictable, as one would expect from a Complex system as opposed to a Complicated system. Realized as a complex-systematic approach to Chinese grammar, Wang's brilliant insight of ICG could well inspire and help launch a fresh advancement path in Chinese linguistics.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous Chinese grammar Emergent Grammar Complex system *Cai2* vs *Jiu4*

1. CULTURE AS A PART OF LANGUAGE

The theory of Generative Grammar (Berwick and Chomsky 2016), in its Principles and Parameters (P&P) version (Chomsky and Lasnik 1993) assumes that an innate Universal Grammar (UG) is a set of principles deployed as rules on a set of parameter values in particular grammars. By implication, since grammar is innate, whereas culture is acquired, culture should not be able to affect or motivate a particular grammar. The P&P can easily explain the head-final and head-initial distinction between Japanese (SOV) and English (SVO). But by disregarding culture, UG tends to leave some culture-motivated syntactic patterns unexplained. For example, Japanese has a well-known two-layer sentence pattern, in which a subject-predicate layer is embedded in a topic-comment layer, as seen in ex. (1):

- (1) *Bara wa ī kaori ga suru.*
 Rose topic good smell subject do
 ‘Roses have good smell.’

However, no principle can directly, without an arbitrary twist, deploy this two-layer pattern on a parameter value. An English subject (*roses*) anticipating its object (*smell*) is alternatively shaped in Japanese as a combination of a topic and a subject (*bara wa ī kaori ga suru*). The English and Japanese sentences are two dissimilar expressions in two different cultures. Contradicting P&P, culture is not remotely separated from but is intimately connected to UG. And this connection produces regional patterns with their informing cultural traits. Tai (1985) has observed that in Chinese the phrase order extensively reflects event sequence. For example (see [2]):

- (2) a. *Zhang1san1 na2 shu1 qu4 tu2shu1guan3.*
 Zhang1san1 take books go library
 ‘Zhang1san1 took books to the library’