ZHANG, GRACE QIAO. Using Chinese Synonyms. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. (ix, 435)

This text, part of a series that focuses on usage and synonyms in an assortment or world languages, is a remarkable achievement in compiling and organizing terms according to lexical fields. The lists of grouped data that constitutes the body of the text, with example sentences written in the Chinese simplified script, occupy 369 pages. These are followed by an index arranged alphabetically according to lexical field in the English gloss (e.g., 'ability' for 能力 [*nengli*]). The book also contains an index of compounds according to their first element arranged alphabetically according to their rendering in Mainland Pinyin, and an index of lexical elements that constitute the synonym group heads arranged according to Pinyin, under which words in its synonym group are listed in simplified characters, which section is rather clumsily translated "*Pinyin* Grouped List." Once one figures out the indexes, using them makes reference within the volume convenient and easy.

The page numbering system includes the conventional roman numeral system for forward matter but rather awkwardly (for reference, at least) starts the forward indexes and introductory material at Page 1 (of which the portion of text labeled "Introduction" occupies pages 37 – 42) and starts over again at Page 1 to paginate the material that is the body of the text. Herein number references will refer to the pagination of the main body unless 'Int.' is noted in the citation.

Of course, in producing and in digesting such a work, one must temporarily forget that true synonyms seldom occur in language; what are presented here are terms related in a lexical field, albeit varying in significant ways in usage and style. Thus with 成 *cheng* 'one

tenth', which is noted as intermediate in formality and three on a scale of four in least used/most difficult, we find … 分之 … *x fen zhi y*, used to make expressions of fractions (2 分之 1 = 1/2); 分 *fen* 'one tenth', which is noted as most used and 'N/A' in usage (in fact this term is ubiquitous); and 折 *zhe*, used to mark the percent of original price to which an item is discounted (55). These four terms are not interchangeable. Tokens of the group head term, 成 *cheng*, are found in business and manufacturing situations, while tokens of 分 *fen* occur widely in familiar and colloquial expressions, 十分满意 *shi fen manyi* 'entirely [100%] satisfied'. The last term, 折 *zhe* is used specifically in point of sale promotions and in advertising fliers. These are related expressions that involved traditional ways of expressing an aspect of 1/10 or a fraction of a quantity or amount, albeit in different ways in different situations.

The category of the negative in Chinese is extensive. With 不 *bu* 'negative' for general use appear 未 *wei* and 未曾 *weiceng* (40) which are applied in the perfective aspect with different foci in more formal situations, and 没有 *meiyou* with its abbreviation 没 *mei* , which negativizes verbal elements with a past focus. Omitted from the group are 无 *wu* and 非 *fei*. 无 can be glossed as 'without' or 'absence of', occurring as a term and as a member of many compounds in which it contributes as glossed e.g., 无业 *wuye* 'jobless' and 无限 *wuxian* 'limitless' and in phrases, 无一定计划 *wu yi ding jihua* 'with no definite plan', while 非 serves as a general negativizer, 非法 *feifa* 'illegal' and 非党员 *fei dangyuan* 'non (not a) party member', and in complex expressions as a primary means of embedding a negative subordinate clause in a negative matrix clause, 他非去不可 *ta fei qu bu ke* 'Him not going is not all right'. Both enjoy common use both in speech and in signage. Yet I could not find 无 in

the text except as part of two compounds presented in other lexical groups, and I could find 非 only in its (re)grammaticalized form compounded as 非常 *feichang*, an intensifier ubiquitous in casual and colloquial speech, e.g., 我非常非常非常喜欢这首歌 *wo feichang feichang feichang xihuan zhe shou ge* 'I really really really liked that song'. The absence of these two terms from the negative group and from the text is remarkable.

Members of another subcategory of the negative, prohibition (or terms of negative imperative), are curiously distributed in three sections, under 不许 *buxu* 'to disallow', 不要 *buyao* 'don't …; no!' (45 - 47), and 禁止 *jinzhi* 'do not / it is forbidden to' (233-4), where they are camouflaged with other types of verbal items, e.g., 禁止 *jinzhi*, as in 禁止吸烟 *jinzhi xi yan* 'absolutely no smoking', appears with 防止 *fangzhi*, as in 防止感冒 *fangzhi ganmao* 'prevent catching cold' (233; translations mine). Since life anywhere Chinese is spoken is rife with prohibitions, usually expressed using these prohibitions, they constitute a very useful category to include.

With every term in the text is offered a notation as to frequency of use and "Register level" (glossed at 39 of Int.). But this latter category is ambiguously arranged. The middle range (assigned a value of 2) is labeled "neutral," in opposition to "formal / written" (at 3), "informal and colloquial" (at 1), and "vulgar" (at 1*). It is hard to understand, for example, how 不 *bu*, ubiquitous in speech and writing in every level of formality, is placed at Register 2. Does Register 2 ("neutral")subsume all other levels then? Is this true of other terms, like 公 *gong* 'public' (155) and 告别 *gaobie* 'to say goodby, to part' (145) which are also assigned to Register 2?.

This difficulty is reinforced by the nature of the example sentences offered for terms and

expressions in the book. Consider sentences, chosen here pretty much at random, offered for 而且 *erqie* 'conj.' and the restricted 况且 *kuangqie*, assigned 2A (Neutral, highly frequent) and 3C (formal/written, not often used) respectively (both on 106):

> 而且 – 他的女儿年轻而且漂亮，谁都喜欢她 *ta de nu'er nianqing erqie piaoliang, shui dou xihuan ta* 'His daughter is young and pretty, everyone likes her'
> 况且 – 今天天气不好，况且你还有病，别出去了 *jintian tianqi bu hao, kuangqie ni hai you bing, bie chu qu le* 'today the weather is bad, moreover you are still sick, [so] don't go out' (translations mine)

Other than the question terms and my choice of English objects (*and* and *moreover*) for the translation which reflect the 'register' of the Chinese, nothing in these sentences exemplifies any difference in register or usage for this reader. Learners acquire usage and register elements of meaning and grammar through exposure to communication in the language, precisely through hearing and reading authentic usage.

And that is a problem for the design of this text. The book is self-consciously focused on an audience of Chinese learners, as numerous remarks in the opening paragraphs of the Introduction (37 – 42 of Int.) make explicitly clear. Furthermore, we are informed that the terms selected for this text come "primarily from the pool of … words listed in the guideline of proficiency grades" for the 1992 HSK Chinese proficiency exam (37 of Int.). (This text, in this respect, reflects the reality that education activities in China focus exclusively on preparing for examinations.)

Accordingly, since example sentences containing authentic language are acknowledged as likely to present learners with difficulties in reading the vocabulary (37 of Int.), the example sentences are designed at a language level deemed suitable for non-native speakers (38 of Int). These example sentences thus have the ring of those made up for use in teaching grammars, i.e., often vacant of content but somehow showing the function of the term. That is to say that

the examples demonstrate the gloss of the word, which evidently is adequate to answer questions on the test, but they offer very little to demonstrate the level of usage and register assigned, which users of the language must acquire to communicate competently.

In this respect I am reminded of a student at a leading national university in Shanghai some years ago who wrote with great feeling that her household was saddened by her grandfather recently *kicking the bucket* (the gloss offered in her reading text indicated the idiom means ‘to die’). Decontextualized glosses and nonauthentic language samples pose a problem for learners.

These difficulties notwithstanding, this text offers students and teachers resources like those found in a thesaurus, which, when used in conjunction with a good enough dictionary to provide authentic example sentences which suit the terms concerned, constitute a very use handy book. The convenient indexes make reference quick and easy, and in the presentation of items in simplified characters and their *Hanyu Pinyin* rendering, one has all one needs to get started.

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