Yvonne Li Walls & Walls, Jan W. *Using Chinese: A guide to contemporary usage*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. (viii, 290)

As the authors point out, Chinese is increasingly studied as a foreign language, both in North America and in Asia. At the same time, major universities on the Asian continent increasingly accept international students in adjutant academies which teach Chinese language, history, and culture. This text provides a great deal of information about contemporary Chinese. Many pages are dedicated to catalogues of putative neologisms, set phrases of four syllables, proverbial sayings, riddles, quotable selections from the classics, and what are called here "idioms," all of which occupy a prominent position in discourse in Chinese. Interested readers will find much to occupy them as they scan the entries. On the other hand, the text offers much information that seems to serve no useful end, while omitting important principles to explicate what is included.

The four character "idioms" (成語 *chengyu*, often translated 'proverbs') (52 - 55), a fascinating element of the Chinese oral and written tradition, invite more explication. The timeless influence of the Classical tradition is felt in these items, each of which crystallizes a moral or practical lesson in a brief anecdote. When the four syllables are repeated in a given context, hearers cognize the story and its lesson *en toto*. Some of these, like "*Ba miao zhu zhang*," the story of a young rice farmer who, anxious for his seedlings to grow faster, pulled on them to make them taller but thus wound up killing them all, appear in collections of bedtime stories for toddlers. These items number in the thousands, and popular literature available to readers of all ages is infused with them. These terse formulations carry a heavy semantic load in the oral and written traditions.

Shuffled in with many lists in Chapter 2 is a page of items formed from compounding words of opposite meaning, like 長短 *changduan* (long short) 'length', 粗細 *cuxi* (coarse fine)

'thickness', and 大小 *daxiao* (big small) 'size'. The text reductively remarks that "[s]ome opposites can be combined to become nouns" (149). But the importance of such items, which form abstract nouns for the lexical field named in the opposites, to lexical semantics in Chinese cannot be overstated. This has been a primary element of the Classical tradition at least since the time of Sunzi, *The Art of War*, where formulations such as 天地 *tian di* (heaven earth), which signifies 'all things in creation', are found in every chapter. A book of this type would be expected to at least take a stab at such an important element in the oral and written tradition.

As is typical in books that introduce Chinese, a brief discussion of the so-called major dialects, the Northern (or 'Mandarin'), Wu, Min (Hokkian [Fukian is a typographical error (3) – Fujian speech does not produce [fu], but [$h^{w}ɔ$]), Xiang, Hakka (*Kejia* in Northern Chinese), Yue (Cantonese), and Gan and their "subdialects" is offered (3, f). These merit comment. It is a socio-cultural practice, in effect probably since the Qin dynasty first unified the several states under one empire, that these are regarded as *dialects*; it is the weight of this tradition that dominates folk conceptions in classification, as represented by the speaker quoted, "I speak Chinese, but not Mandarin" (3). Consider the situation in Guangdong Province, where the dominant language is Cantonese. In the Chaoshan (*Teochew* or *Chiuchow*) region in the eastern part of the province several largely mutually unintelligible varieties related to Min are spoken, which are also mutually unintelligible with Cantonese. By any set of scientific criteria, these varieties constitute languages in their own right. Natives of the region are in essence trilingual — their Chaoshan variety, Cantonese, and *guoyu* 'national language', i.e., the national variety, influenced locally by the regional variety, acquired from schooling. A similar situation obtains for Hakka speakers and in the Wu area.

To the extent that the aforementioned traditional classification is justified by the use of a common writing system and script, though, the text represents a fundamental error. Are we to forget that Japanese uses the Chinese character system for writing content words, as did Korean until the fourteenth century, when Han'gul was established? It is language, not orthography, that is primary.

The very large group of mostly mutually intelligible varieties that are popularly called 'Mandarin' by foreigners are spoken by a large majority of speakers in the land, but it is to be noted this is far from a unified variety — every region, city, and berg has its *tuhua* 'local speech' — which differ significantly in pronunciation including tone realizations, lexical selection, and grammar. Furthermore, the 'Mandarin' forms in regions where other varieties are native show significant substrate influence. This conglomeration is not to be confused with *putonghua*, the putative standard that is used in broadcasting and government speech, taught in schools, and represented in grammars and lesson books. While popular conceptions place the model for the *putonghua* in Beijing, the capital city, this, on investigation, proves to result from a romanticized impulse that seeks to imbue the modern capital with too much influence. The *putonghua* derives from the speech of the educated elite of the last dynasty, which was called at the end of the *Qing Chao* 'Qing Dynasty', *guanhua* (manage talk) 'the speech of the administrators'. This speech is closest historically to the language of the Harbin area in Heilongjiang Province in the Northeast, where the Qing, of the Man nationality, learned Chinese. Today, properly speaking, *putonghua* is no one's native language, but the variety taught prescriptively in the schools. Many linguists and language teachers like to wrap a language up in neat little packages, but these Chineses have been spoken far too long by far too many people in an area far too large to lend itself to a tidy accounting.

The brief listing of compounds (4, 5) does offer the promised taste of how monosyllabic morphemes are combined to form new lexemes. Of course, book length treatments are required to describe the several processes through which these formations occur, for example *shouyinji* (receive sound machine) 'radio' is built on a VO-N headword process, while *guoqingjie* (state celebrat[ion] festival) 'national day' involves nominalization of *qing*, with *guoqing* in attributive relation to *jie*. The prescriptive list of formations (11, 12), however, provides insights into none of the pertinent processes. Also useful — but too short — is the list of digital and computer terms, most of which are too new to appear in standard dictionaries. These, perhaps because they are of recent coinage, witness some variation. For 'internet', 互聯網 *hulianwang* (45) is the formal name on the mainland, but in Taiwan, one hears 網路 *wanglu* 'net(work)', and in most regions and most circumstances, one hears 上网 *shang wang* (up net) 'go on line' or 网上 *wang shang* (net on) '[be] online. Likewise, on the mainland 又盘 *youpan* (U[SB] drive) 'flash drive' is used for the small portable flash memory unit, while Taiwan uses 隨身碟 *suishendie* (follow body dish [= drive]). The more than six pages that provide many examples of homonyms, homophones, and homographs reveal the challenges that face a student determined to achieve fluency and adult levels of literacy in the language.

Among the neologisms, the item 買單 *maidan*, glossed erroneously as 'pay the bill' (36), is an example of a folk etymology resulting from opaque borrowing between the varieties. The word is from Shanghainese, pronounced something like *madè* (reflecting the 'leaving tone' of the older tonal system), 'check please', used by restaurant patrons to request the check, in which sense it is used in other varieties as well. Borrowing among the dialects is also evident in the ubiquitous 拜拜 *baibai* 'goodbye' which has currency across China and East Asia, where it has radiated from Hong Kong. The word is erroneously attributed to English influence by some in

another folk etymology, but speakers of Cantonese recognize it as the traditional honorific salutation.

Like most languages with a literary tradition, Chinese is and has long been diglossic. The authors ascribe vocabulary to stylistic registers, identified as "formal," "a bit formal," "familiar," and "normal" (8, 9). Sometimes it is hard to see the difference intended by these distinctions, especially as many of the examples offered seem to fit in multiple slots. Included for either 'husband' or 'wife' is the somewhat dated and primarily Northern 老伴兒 *lao* banr, while one item prominently absent in the casual and familiar register is 老公 *lao gong* 'husband', ubiquitous in the South and recognized everywhere. Probably the more relevant distinction, particularly to learners who wish to use the language for general communication purposes, is that between the written and colloquial spoken norms. Since learners study through the use of books, they are exposed to mostly written vocabulary and grammatical choices, in comparison to which the colloquial speech of any region seems quite foreign.

Chapter 3, with its hardly informative title "Functional Language," is filled with information that is not easy to come across — the names of prominent geographical entities in the world, holidays and festivals in China, standard measures, time, kinship terms, at least those common in Northern varieties, and the very rarely catalogued Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches which form the basis of the mystical, pre-Confucian mystical system. Compiling this material in one location itself constitutes a contribution to those who enjoy reading and using Chinese and wish to better understand its literary sources.

Omitted from the chapter, though, are some necessary details, such as a description of the morphology of years: 1996 is *yi jiu jiu liu nian* 'one nine nine six year'. Questions are also raised as to the audience of the book in such places as the section on the names of oceans, which opens

with these remarks: “There are five oceans on earth. They cover about 70% of the earth’s surface” (165). Unfortunately, remarks of this nature occur too frequently. Instead of this formulaic recitation of trivial facts known to any seventh grade pupil, something of the etymology of the names would be interesting, along with the distribution of the three names give for the Southern Ocean. For example, 洋 *yang* ‘ocean’ (as in 太平洋 *taipingyang* ‘Pacific Ocean’ yields the old derogatory term 洋鬼子 *yangguizi* (ocean devil) ‘foreigner’. In contemporary Chinese, a toddler born in the West may be referred to by a local mother as 洋妹 *yangmei* (ocean sister) ‘little foreign girl’, a term from neutral to admiring socially. Certainly information of this character would be more interesting and useful.

One wonders at the point of providing a list of terms that contrast English and Chinese, especially in the use of color names, “Phrases with color in English, but equivalent phrases in Chinese have no color” and “Phrases with no color in English, but with color in Chinese” (146, 147), as no connection appears to exist between the items compared. In any case it is a poor practice to ground descriptions of elements of one language in those of another. This prominent comparative theme in the organization of the book seems to reflect the generation of the authors’ training and their experience teaching basic Chinese to English speakers in North America, where such lessons, while useless in acquiring competence in Chinese, perhaps provide something novel to talk about in class.

In other areas in the section, as in social interactions and the use of ‘thanks’, some explication of the pragmatics involved would be useful. Literal expressions of ‘thank you’ are most appropriate in public places with strangers (but certainly not with servants and clerks, unless they act outside their general duties), but among friends, family, and intimates of one’s connections, expressions of ‘thank you’ run the risk of 見外 *jian wai* (look outside) ‘regarding

one as an outsider', i.e., they can be perceived as so formal as to be rude. A host wants his guest to be pleased; an astute conversationalist can convey their pleasure by complimenting the food, complaining about how full one is, or noticing the trouble another went to in making preparations on one's behalf. A book that purports to teach such vocabulary alongside idioms and classical literary quotations should explicate its application.

A curiosity in the arrangement of this text arises in the fact that the attempt to describe the language grammatically is divided between Chapters 1 and 5. Much in the larger Chapter 5 follows virtually point for point the presentation in *Shiyong Hanyu Keben* 'A Practical Chinese Reader,' Books 1, 2, and 3 (Beijing Language Institute), which are very popular in college Chinese courses outside China, and which in turn follows (without attribution) the treatment of the topics in Chao (Zhao), Y.R., 1968, *A Grammar of Spoken Chinese*. The material here reflects the structural, item by item orientation of that highly influential grammar.

The material in Chapter 1 follows a source from 1898, in the prescriptive tradition of the late eighteenth century, where not being satisfied with following Bishop Lowth and his colleagues in applying the syntax of Latin to English, Chinese is also bludgeoned into the Latin system. We are offered a list of "parts of speech" (10), which faithfully finds all eight Latin categories (!), along with some terms from traditional Chinese grammar, and which ignores mountains of scholarship over the last thirty or forty years. In the same section the very complex system of compounding with particles and the fusion of morphemes in nominal production is summed up under a list of "suffixes" (12). This is wholly unsatisfactory as an accounting of the processes involved. Therein the authors faithfully find "prepositions," without noticing that locational and directional phrases in Chinese are chiefly postpositional, consistent with the properties of OV type languages, many of which Chinese unequivocally shares (See Joseph

Greenberg, 1974, *Language Typology*). This treatment of the grammar reflects the prescriptive grammar lessons given to school age boys and girls; one marvels at how, in the 21st century, such an archaic analysis can appear, especially from a major academic house.

It is the case that words identified by traditional grammarians as prepositions in Chinese derive from verbs of location and direction, all of which still function as main verbs. But required for grammaticality are postpositional elements, as in the following example, 放在桌子上 *fang zai zhuozi shang* (release be-LOC table on) 'put it on the table'. The (main) action verb *fang* is followed by *zai*, a locational verb, and the noun *zhuozi* is followed by the postpositional *shang*. Furthermore, *zai* can be elided, but not *shang*. Compare with the sentence pattern 他在家 *ta zai jia* (he/she be-LOC home) 'he/she is at home', where *zai* is the (main) only verb in the utterance. OV typology (Greenberg, *ibid*.) also accounts for the manner in which envelopes are addressed in Chinese, i.e., country first, followed by province, city, and finally street or neighborhood and number, certainly far more satisfactorily than the condescending assertion that this word order is "logically written" (209).

The above notwithstanding, we are informed that Chinese is an SVO language (219), which may reflect some, but far from all, of literary sources (especially given the extensive Western literary influence over the last two centuries), but which only poorly describes vernacular speech. And since this is followed by the information that Chinese follows topic – comment discourse organization (221), the notion SVO is quite out the window. Furthermore, many *topics* occupy the patient roles of the verbal elements in *comments* (i.e., are OV, in typology terms), e.g., 聯吃飯的時間也沒有 *lian chifan de shijian ye meiyou* (even eat Attr. time Int Neg have) 'do not even have time to eat', while the ubiquitous *ba* construction results in OV organization as well, e.g, 把門打開 *ba men da kai* (grasp door strike open) 'open the door'.

Furthermore, in many sentence patterns in colloquial speech the notional subject follows the verb, e.g., 能得很你的女兒 *neng de hen ni de nüer* (able Comp. very you Attr. daughter) 'your daughter is very bright!' A brief handful of examples are given which demonstrate what is called in this text the "reversed order" (220), but this vastly understates the reality of VS forms that are very frequently encountered in the colloquial language.

This text includes much that is of interest to one with a strong background in the language and interest in its sources, although, as noted, it lacks much that would be useful and includes much that must be overlooked. The compilations of special resources that are provided in themselves make the book valuable, despite its manifold shortcomings in describing the language.

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