

ERC ADVANCED GRANT
THE HYBRID SYNTACTIC TYPOLOGY OF SINITIC LANGUAGES

SINOTYPE
(2009 – 2013)

RESUME OF RESEARCH OUTCOMES

This project carried out the first large scale investigation into the linguistic typology of Sinitic or Chinese languages. In its conception, the horizons were broadened beyond Standard Mandarin to consider major typological parameters in the grammatical profile of this language taxon with respect to the East and Southeast Asian linguistic area. The principal objective throughout all four and half years of the project was to undertake extensive fieldwork of the little-studied Sinitic languages in order to provide a more fine-grained characterization of this taxon in a typological perspective, and, notably, to gauge the extent of their diversity in a rigorous manner, considering areal patterns.

Consequently, the project set out to refine the hypothesis of a North-South dichotomy for characterizing Sinitic languages, advocated by Mantaro Hashimoto from the 1970s onwards in his pioneering research on Sinitic typology, work which was later further advanced by Jerry Norman. However, such a division was shown to be insufficient to account for the enormous diversity found in this language taxon.

The SINOTYPE project was conducted by an international team of seven researchers, based in France for the 4 ½ years of the grant. Each team member was responsible for the description of the grammar of one Sinitic language, based on extensive fieldwork in China. The scope of the project thus involved pan-Sinitic research not previously carried out in any depth in either China or the West. The team members and the languages they chose to investigate are listed below:

THE HYBRID SYNTACTIC TYPOLOGY OF SINITIC LANGUAGES: TEAM MEMBERS

Principal Investigator (PI):

1. Hilary CHAPPELL 曹茜蕾 (PhD, Australian National University, Chair Professor at the EHESS, Paris);
Xianghua, an unclassified Sinitic language of Hunan province

Postdoctoral Fellows:

2. Weirong CHEN 陈伟蓉 (PhD, University of Hong Kong)
Hui'an language of Southern Min, Fujian
3. Yujie CHEN 陈玉洁 (PhD, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing)
Shangshui language of Central Plains Mandarin, Henan
4. Hilario DE SOUSA 苏沙 (PhD, University of Sydney)
Nanning Southern Pinghua, Guangxi
5. XuPing LI 李旭平 (PhD, Bar Ilan University, Tel Aviv)
Yichun language of Gan, Jiangxi
6. WANG Jian 王健 (PhD, Peking University)

Shangzhuang language of Jixi Hui, Anhui

Doctoral student

7. Sing Sing NGAI 倪星星 (MPhil, Cambridge University)

Shaowu language of Northwestern Min, Fujian

Outcomes

Over 50 publications have so far resulted from this research project, including four books, 24 book chapters, 20 articles, and also 80 conference papers and 30 field trips to China. The edited volume, *Diversity in Sinitic languages* (2015, OUP) is first definitive outcome with contributions from all the team members.

A new series on Sinitic grammars with De Gruyter Mouton is currently being edited by the former P.I., Hilary Chappell, entitled *Sinitic languages of China: typological descriptions*, with the first two grammars to appear in early 2018: *A grammar of Gan Chinese: the Yichun language* by XuPing LI and *A grammar of Hui'an Southern Min* by Weirong CHEN.

Some of the findings are described below in more detail:

A major outcome of this ERC Advanced Grant project is the identification of a much higher degree of variation amongst Sinitic languages than even initially hypothesized. On the basis of our empirical research, we proposed that there are at least five micro-areas within China for the Sinitic languages that are determined by syntactic and morphological patterning and include important grammaticalization zones (H. CHAPPELL):

1. Northern
2. Central
3. Southeastern
4. Southwestern
5. Far Southern

Hence, the generally-accepted view that was challenged by the SINOTYPE project – concerning a strong typological distinction between Northern and Southern Sinitic languages – proved to be somewhat oversimplified.

One case in point is the commonly-accepted view that the **classifier inventory** increases dramatically as one moves from North to South that cannot be fully upheld on the basis of our analyses of nominal structure in many Sinitic languages. Yichun Gan, a central Sinitic language spoken in the southern province of Jiangxi, and even certain non-standard Mandarin dialects such as Shangshui Central Plains Mandarin (located in Henan province and hence also quite far the south of Beijing) turn out to have smaller inventories of classifiers than standard Northern Mandarin (XuPing LI; Yujie CHEN). Hence, there are other factors at play here than mere geography.¹

Other findings are:

- The default or general classifiers vary quite widely from language to language.
- The semantic extension that occurs with the use of **bare classifier phrases**, that is, *CL + Noun*, to indefinite or definite markers is uneven across Sinitic and is conditioned by preverbal or postverbal position of the CL-NOUN constituent, among other factors (Yichun, Hui, Nanning Pinghua). Some dialects only use the

¹ *Note:* Classifiers are words that must be used when counting a noun, similar to English ‘a swarm of bees’ or ‘a handful of nuts’ but having the structure *Numeral-Classifier-Noun*.

postverbal position such as Pinghua, Xianghua and standard Mandarin. However, in Pinghua, CL+N can code either definiteness or indefiniteness (H. DE SOUSA) while in Mandarin and Xianghua it codes indefiniteness. Other dialects are able to use both positions such as Hui and Yue dialects, while yet others, such as the Min group cannot use this structure at all. WANG Jian has set up a typology of seven types for this structure in Sinitic languages which lead to three implicational universals regarding pre- and postverbal position and [+/-] definiteness.

In certain Jixi dialects, the definite use has clearly arisen from omission of a demonstrative, which can be detected by the tone sandhi patterning (WANG Jian). This may also prove to be the case for other Sinitic languages using the CL+N pattern in subject position, without any numeral or demonstrative.

- Lexical sources for singular **pronouns** and their plural suffixes vary more widely than previously believed: Typically, first and second person pronouns are cognate across Sinitic and it is rather 3rd person pronouns which show more diversity in their sources. In Shaowu, a quite aberrant western Min dialect, the singular forms remain temporarily a mystery, as far as their provenance is concerned: xaj³⁵ ‘1SG’, xien³⁵ ‘2SG’, xu³⁵ ‘3SG’ (S. NGAI) and so too for certain pronouns in Xianghua which uses zε³³ ‘3SG’ and zaŋ⁴¹xaj ‘3PL’ (H. CHAPPELL). A restricted group of dialects also has emphatic forms including Hui (J. WANG) and Yichun Gan (X.P. LI), while Nanning Pinghua unexpectedly turns up an inclusive 1PL form, uncommon in Southern Sinitic (H. DE SOUSA).
- A typological study of Sinitic languages by Yujie CHEN shows that while **two-way systems for demonstratives** are very common in Sinitic languages, there are also **one-way, three-way, four-way, even five-way systems**, based on the scale of distance and visibility. For example, Nanning Pinghua has a basic two-term system with the use of /kə⁵⁵/ ‘this’ and ‘that’ /ŋi²²/. However, the distal demonstrative is rare in use, showing a tendency towards conflation into a one-term system. Yichun Gan has a three-term system in which one is distal, /len⁴⁴/, one is proximal, /li⁴²/, and the other is distance-neutral, /ko³⁴/ (X.P. LI). Xianghua has a three-term system based on a proximal and distal contrast, but making a finer division for the distal demonstrative – ‘that over there’ versus ‘that far away’ for objects at quite some distance from the speaker.
- Both classifiers and demonstratives may double up as **relative clause markers**, similar to the use of ‘that’ in English ‘the diplomatic gaffe **that** brought down the government’. One of our interesting findings is the widespread use of postposed relative clauses, for example, in Shangshui Mandarin (Y. CHEN) and in Hui’an Southern Min (W. CHEN), whereas in standard Mandarin relative clauses are preposed to the head noun. This non-standard Mandarin dialect (as well as other languages being analysed as part of our project) thus shows a word order alignment that is head-initial and in harmony with SVO order, thereby resolving at this level one of the conundrums of the hybrid syntactic typology of Sinitic languages.
- **Diminutives** are typically coded by suffixes. Furthermore, in both Yichun Gan and Shangshui Mandarin, not only do nouns undergo diminutive derivation but also, quite unusually, classifiers. This produces the meaning of approximation in Gan (X.P. LI). Tone sandhi may also signify the diminutive meaning as, for example, in Jixi Hui (WANG Jian).
- **Gender affixes** for animal terms reputedly show a North-South division for Sinitic languages: prefixes in the North and suffixes in the South. Once again, the SINOTYPE team found that the situation is more complicated. For example, Pinghua has gender prefixes yet is a Far Southern Sinitic language (H. DE SOUSA). Xianghua, located in central China has both prefixes and suffixes (H. CHAPPELL).
- Counterexamples exist where the claimed Northern feature is possessed by a purportedly Southern Chinese language. A case in point is the **basic ditransitive order** in Southern Min which is IO-DO and not DO-IO as might be supposed (CHAPPELL & PEYRAUBE 2007, W. CHEN). The same ordering is found even further south in Nanning Pinghua of the Guangxi Autonomous Region (see DE SOUSA). The SINOTYPE team also identified a large number of languages spoken in the central and southeastern areas of China that do not possess a verb of giving, as predicted by ZHANG Min (2011). Instead, they coerce TAKE verbs into this function in conjunction with a third recipient argument NP and, in some cases, with a locative or benefactive prepositional phrase as well, as in Yichun Gan, Shangshui Mandarin, Xianghua, Caijia and Shaowu Min (X.P. LI, H. CHAPPELL, S. NGAI).
- **Comparative constructions of inequality** in Sinitic languages fall into seven main structural types. Unlike the object-marking or disposal construction, most dialects will have at least two colloquial strategies for coding the comparative meaning. In the Northern area which is largely Mandarin territory, we find Type I, the prepositional Compare comparative, *She compared to me is tall*, co-existing with Type IV, the zero-marked comparative *She tells me*. Type II, the transitive Surpass comparative, *I tall surpass you*, is widely used across the Far Southern area and the Southwest where Yue, Hakka, Pinghua and Southwestern Mandarin are spoken. It is used alongside the Type IV zero-marked comparative.

Although it has been generally held that there are two main types of comparative which divide China into the North versus the Centre and the South (Type I and Type II), notwithstanding this, an area of high variation has been identified by the SINOTYPE project which spreads from the Central-eastern to the

Southeastern area where the Topic comparative (Type VI) is found in certain Wu dialects of Zhejiang province; the Adverbial Comparative (Type III) proves to be an identifying feature of Min dialects and the Hybrid Comparative (Type V) is widespread in the Min and Hakka dialects. Type VII, a polarity comparative, has been newly identified in Xianghua (H. CHAPPELL). Certain Southern Min dialects, such as Hui'an, may possess up to six different types of comparative construction (W. CHEN).

Type II is harmonic with SVO word order while Type I is not. Diachronically viewed, the Compare comparative (Type I) is a late development which has diffused rapidly throughout Sinitic languages as a borrowed form. It has developed from a serial verb construction, a common grammatical pattern in Sinitic and other Asian languages. An historical explanation may therefore help to explain this word order disharmony.

- According to M. HASHIMOTO (1976, 1986), the North-South linguistic division for China is apparent in the use of a verb of giving as the *source* for a **marker of the agent NP in the passive construction** in the South, versus a causative verb in the North. In contrast to this, the SINOTYPE team distinguished five micro-areas, classified according to the source of the marker: a clear Northern area which mainly uses causative verbs, and the SUFFER verb, BEI, as in the standard language; the two micro-areas of Southwestern SUFFER/CONTACT verbs and Southeastern GIVE verbs, in addition to a further two central areas that are quite mixed in their use of agent markers.

The Southeastern area for GIVE verbs is in fact adjacent to these two mixed areas in central China, for example, eastern Hunan and Jiangxi provinces where ambiguous GIVE and TAKE verbs act as the source for agent markers and object (or disposal) markers simultaneously, as well as causative verbs derived from WAIT, found principally in the Gan dialects of northern Jiangxi and also in Xianghua (H. CHAPPELL, X.P. LI). The source of an agent marker in GIVE verbs is highly unusual typologically (H. CHAPPELL).

- The SINOTYPE team examined and described the crosslinguistic variation found in **object-marking (or 'disposal') constructions** in Sinitic languages for the sources of prepositional markers that introduce a direct object noun in preverbal position. In terms of grammaticalization pathways, verbs of holding and taking such as *bǎ* 把 and *ná* 拿, which are well-described for Mandarin, do not, however, turn out to be the sole source of object markers in Chinese languages (H. CHAPPELL). A second important source is found in comitative prepositions in Min, Wu and some Jianghuai Mandarin dialects and also in Xianghua (H. CHAPPELL), while another new lexical source is found in a third type based on verbs of giving and helping in central China (S. NGAI, X.P. LI, WANG Jian). In the very far Southern region of China, this type of construction is dispreferred and serial verb constructions with TAKE verbs are used in its stead (H. DE SOUSA). Many languages make use of several markers for this construction type.

Since, as already observed, most of the linguistic literature on Chinese concerns the standard language, Mandarin, the knowledge that is steadily being made available on Sinitic languages by the SINOTYPE team to the wider linguistics community, we hope, will change immeasurably, if not irrevocably, the profile of what is known about this vast language group in the years to come.

H.M. Chappell

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