

*Word-class Flexibility in Classical Chinese: Verbal and Adverbial Uses of Nouns.* By Lukáš Zádřapa. *Conceptual History and Chinese Linguistics*, no. 2. Leiden: Brill, 2011. xii + 256 pp.

One of the fine aesthetic pleasures of Chinese is the indeterminacy of parts of speech. We meet with words that appear intrinsically to be nouns but are being used as verbs, or words that are intrinsically verbs but are being used as nouns. Both kinds may also behave as adverbs. One of the central skills we cultivate when we learn Chinese, and especially Classical Chinese, is how to hold basic meanings tentatively in mind while we manipulate their possible parts of speech until they all fit together as a plausible string of meaning.

Lukáš Zádřapa, in a book derived from his 2009 dissertation (Charles University, Prague), explores a theory of word classes and word formation to categorize the patterns of part-of-speech flexibility in received Warring States texts. Now, the general subject of his book is philological but the treatment is not; this is a work of cognitive linguistic philosophy. Cognitive linguistics—associated with Ronald Langacker—views linguistic organization as a set of interconnected symbols representing conventions governing the use and understanding of language. It may be thought of as a branch of semiotic philosophy and is not, despite its name, related to the branch of experimental neurolinguistics known as cognitive psychology. Cognitive linguistics has far less of the emphasis on either rigid rules or rigid categories than do the more mainstream schools of linguistics, and that is an advantage when, as in the case of Classical Chinese, parts of speech, rules, and categories are difficult to pin down. I found much of the discussion in this book technical beyond my expertise, but it appears to me that Zádřapa has not yet reached a decisive and resounding conclusion to the problems he has posed for himself. In his conclusion he says he sees this research as laying the groundwork for more general study.

After initial chapters introducing the native historical background and modern approaches to the issue of part-of-speech flexibility, and a brief explanation of his omission of phonological evidence, Zádřapa launches into the core of his presentation, in three substantial chapters. Chapter five deals with the general philosophical problem of what the Chinese word classes are and how one assigns a word to one of them, particularly the identity of the noun category. To make linguistic relationships easier to grasp, Zádřapa constructs a “semantic map”—a schematic diagram—to show the relationships between the three main types of word in his chosen theory: object words, property words, and action words (loosely, nouns, adjectives, and verbs), and the three types of function: reference, modification, and predication. In cognitive linguistics, nouns are static and characteristically express meaning more or less without reference to other entities, unlike the more dynamic property and action words. But some of the categories in Zádřapa’s map have fuzzy boundaries. He considers many issues in the declaration of word classes but in the end he concurs with most other scholars who have wrestled with this

problem, concluding that expert intuition must play a role in deciding whether a word is fundamentally a noun in Classical Chinese. Of course, this is a hardship not unique to Chinese but endemic across all etymology: establishing the actual order in which original and derived meanings stand to one another.

Chapters six and seven deal with object words denoting processes and words modifying action words (i.e., those functioning adverbially, in traditional grammar terminology). These hundred and thirty pages of dour technical argument are eased by eighteen lists of concrete examples, some of which are full quotations from Classical texts, followed by encouragingly discursive commentary. There are those cases where verbal usage involves applying the noun as a limit or restriction, for instance *guī* 規 ‘compass, rule’ → ‘to correct’. There are those where verbal usage involves “basing oneself on, drawing on, following a course,” for instance *zōng* 宗 ‘ancestor’ → ‘to follow the tradition of’. There are those nouns naming roles in society that are freely used for processes, for instance *shī* 師 ‘teacher’ → ‘to have as teacher’. There are nouns functioning adverbially as instruments of action, for instance *jǐgōu* 戟鉤 ‘halberd’ + ‘to hook’ → ‘to hook with a halberd’. Many of these usages are still found standardly as bound forms in contemporary Mandarin vocabulary. The most interesting list of all is that of the dozen or so nouns that have more than one verbal derivation, such as *shī* 尸 ‘corpse’ → ‘to look for and collect corpses after a battle’, ‘to expose a corpse after execution’, and ‘to throw a corpse away’. These examples show that derived meanings do not necessarily follow in a single, simple way from the primary meanings, and one sees then just why Zádrapa has turned to something like cognitive linguistics for his theoretical framework. The curious thing is that cognitive linguistics does not fully resolve our difficulties in identifying word classes. It is not clear to me whether Zádrapa considers this a problem or not.

I gained knowledge and insight from this book, but on balance found it rough going. The path the reader must take through the text is rocky and overgrown not only because of the recondite linguistic-philosophical content, but also because of heavy use of abbreviations, both for concepts and for the names of classical texts. There is a single-page table of abbreviations tucked between the Preface and the Introduction, but it would have added very little length to the book to write the names of all concepts and texts out in full; the result would have been much more readable. As an example, what I have called the “flexibility of Chinese parts of speech” in this review is called HY by Zádrapa, short for *huóyòng* 活用, “active, in living use,” which is to say “flexibility, productivity (of derivational processes).” It would have been easier on the reader’s eye to have used a normal English expression—or several of them—for this concept, rather than creating an abbreviation from a foreign word and making it a technical term. Heavy use of abbreviations is part of the non-negotiable culture of modern linguistics, but it does not aid fluent reading. Also, an index of the Chinese words discussed in the text would have been an immense blessing to the reader, since they are the evidence on which, regardless what linguistic philosophy one subscribes to, all conclusions must depend. Given the density of the argument and the countless facts raised in pass-

ing, the index should have been many times longer than the five pages Zádrapa has given us.

From my own vantage point as a philologist of Chinese I find three curious omissions in Zádrapa's book. One is that he is using only received texts, leaving out our growing corpus of excavated materials. That confers on him the advantage of superior exegesis along with the risk of overly polished (normalized) content. Surely it is possible that the unkempt excavated materials would shed light on some of the problems that the normalized texts do not? Another omission is the whole tradition of the "word family" (the flocculations of presumed cognates or comparanda). The word family confers documentary breadth on each morpheme while often adding to our confusion as to dating and the historical sequence of derivational processes. The whole issue of what came from what becomes recast when individual words are replaced with clusters of words in families. And the most curious omission—which Zádrapa excuses in a six-page chapter, though without winning me over—is that there is no discussion of phonological evidence.

It is curious because phonology and morphology might help him assert meaningful word classes. One of the major traditions in the modern study of early Chinese phonology models the seeming flexibility of Chinese parts of speech in terms of actual segmental morphology, and the key evidence for this interpretation is phonological. Now, as Zádrapa notes, the evidence is not uncontroversial, and opinions about it still vary, more than a century and a half after it was first proposed in the West. Premodern China's two most eloquent thinkers on philological matters, Yán Zhītuī 顏之推 and Gù Yánwǔ 顧炎武, disavowed the whole tradition of varying readings for varying parts of speech, which they claimed had been dreamt up by pedantic teachers, with no basis in the language of antiquity. Many insightful and well-read East Asian and Western sinologists remain sympathetic to that position; most college teachers of Chinese historical phonology in the Chinese-speaking world seem to support it energetically, as did the late Jerry Norman. But whatever one thinks about reconstructed morphology, the evidence for it raises two questions that all of us who consider the matter must answer and that also have substantial meaning for Zádrapa's research.

First: why do some cases of part-of-speech flexibility *not* have special readings associated with them? If those readings were solely the product of a pedantic tradition in the long post-Warring States era of exegetic and graphic normalization, we then would expect our pedants to have supplied them for every single case. But they did not, and far from it. So it seems that when special readings do not exist for part-of-speech alternations, that negative fact may (when taken in aggregate) be considered a piece of positive evidence for morphology. The limited incidence of variant readings for derived parts of speech should be accepted as part of the inventory of detail that we can bring to the whole question of word classes and derivation, in research such as Zádrapa's.

Second: the most soundly attested examples of reconstructed early morphology are affixes to monosyllabic nouns and verbs. But the nominalization of whole verb phrases and the verbalization of noun phrases are also common in our texts, and

there is little if any evidence for segmental morphology in connection with either of them. Do affixes simply not affect polysyllabic phrases for some reason? Or was evidence for them lost earlier in the oral pre-history of written Chinese? The instrumental and other modifying use of even monosyllabic nouns, to which Zádrapa devotes a whole chapter, is enormously common yet similarly scant of plausible morphological variants. In fact, those three tendencies—verb phrase to noun, noun phrase to verb, and noun to adverb, are why Classical Chinese appears to display not only flexibility but also indeterminacy as to part of speech, and why today the fuzzy “topic-comment” word order seems the analytic tool ideally suited to this language. But is the lack of evidence for morphology in these syntactic patterns a consequence of the monosyllabic, isolating tendencies of the exegetic tradition? And if so, can clues about morphology be teased out of what we can choose to view as elliptical constructions—among others, instrumental with *yǐ* 以 and *yòng* 用 ellipticized, post-verbal locative with *yú* 於 ellipticized, and transitivizing with the abstract object *zhī* 之 ellipticized? Even without a clear phonological visualization, this larger elliptical context would be interesting to see examined in connection with nouns-become-modifiers—again, in research exactly of the sort for which Zádrapa is laying groundwork. Not through “theory” alone are linguistic problems solved; perhaps the next instantiation of Zádrapa’s research will involve collaboration with specialists in other branches of Chinese philology, including a representative of the morphological hypothesis.

Zádrapa has read widely and carefully for this research. (I do spot one factual error: it is the preface to the *Qièyùn* 切韻 rather than the *Jīngdiǎn shìwén* 經典釋文 that identifies the role of Yán Zhītuī on p. 75. The over-wide derivational diagrams of *cháng* and *zhǎng* 長 on pp. 184-85 also omit a third historical reading, *\*zhàng*, *Guāngyùn* {drangH-3 宕開三去漾澄} ‘to have left over, extra’, attested in the *Lǚ shì chūnqiū* 呂氏春秋 and some modern southern dialects.) I hope he will reconsider the three omissions I have named, especially phonology, as part of the gestalt of his problem in future. Cognitive linguistics, after all, emphasizes precisely this comprehensive approach to understanding the practices of language.

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