Review

Chinese discourse and interaction: *Theory and practice*
Yuling Pan and Dániel Z. Kádár (eds) (2013)

Reviewed by Mireia Vargas-Urpi[1]

Chinese discourse and interaction, edited by Yuling Pan and Dániel Z. Kádar, brings together research from many different perspectives on a wide range of topics related to Chinese discourse. As China opens up to the world, the topic of Chinese discourse is attracting the interest of scholars from many different disciplines: linguistics, communication, sociology, translation and interpreting, Chinese as a second language, and anyone eager to know more about how the Chinese communicate and interact.

As the editors point out, research to date has been largely based on abstract theories and personal intuition. Empirical research to confirm, qualify or refute these theories or hypotheses is therefore necessary for the field of Chinese discourse to mature and form a sound basis for further research. *Chinese discourse and interaction* seeks to address this need and move from theoretical approaches to a more practical view of the field. It emphasises naturally occurring data that are common to all the studies included in the book, thus yielding interesting and insightful results. Most of the data were gathered from corpora, and although some of those corpora were relatively small, meaning they do not provide statistically significant results, they are still valuable for the ideas they provide.

Affiliation

University Pompeu Fabra, Spain
email: mireia.vargas@upf.edu

equinoxonline

The book is divided into two main parts. The first deals with the subject from the perspective of conversation analysis and linguistics, while the second deals with discourse analysis and sociological issues. In addition to these two main sections, there is an introduction at the start and an epilogue, an index of authors and an index of topics at the end.

The thirteen chapters cover a broad scope, making the book an excellent resource for readers looking for an overview of topics currently being studied in the field of Chinese discourse. This scope, however, is also a drawback for any readers looking for more in-depth insight into a specific topic. Nevertheless, the editors deserve due credit for ordering the chapters in such a way that there is a logical progression and dividing them into two parts. The epilogue also contributes to the book's cohesion, critically reviewing all the contributions and establishing connections among them.

In the introduction, the editors explain why they decided to publish the book, what their aims were and how they decided which articles to include. They also describe the special characteristics of the data and some of the features that make the content unique, e.g. the emphasis on naturally occurring data and the inclusion of studies conducted in several major Chinese-speaking regions: mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and the Chinese community in the United States. According to the editors, the volume also includes 'major dialects in the Chinese language', which was necessary to produce realistic data on naturally occurring spoken Chinese.

The first part (conversation and linguistic analysis) starts with Tomoko Endo's description and classification of the uses of the expression *wo juede* (我觉得) to denote epistemic stance in conversational Mandarin (chapter 2). Though the analysis is interesting, the conclusions are rather obvious and somewhat detached from the actual analysis.

In chapter 3, Wei Zhang and Angela Chan compare self-repair phenomena in Mandarin and Cantonese using two corpora: one containing casual conversations and one with news interviews. This comparison recognises and reflects the major differences between these so-called Chinese 'dialects', and those differences are made evident by the self-repair strategies used.

In chapter 4, Agnes Weiyun He studies deontic meaning in Chinese based on the analysis of conversations among Chinese-speaking students in the United States. Interesting as it may be, the chapter is a little confusing, because it has no introduction and it lacks continuity. The conclusions, drawn from only two examples, state that the deontic modality is related to Chinese cultural values, but one must ask whether the deontic modality is unique to Chinese or whether it exists in all languages.

In chapter 5, which concludes the first part, Cher Leng Lee analyses the usage of the English word 'then' as a connector in colloquial Singaporean Mandarin. She uses a classical structure for the different sections, using sound reasoning to present her research. The conclusions are well-grounded and suggest important implications for bilingual studies.

The second part of the volume is devoted to discourse analysis and sociological issues. In chapter 6, Yueguo Gu analyses power in situated discourse. After an extensive literature review concerning the concept of 'power', the author applies the modelling method to analyse power in a case study. It is certainly an original approach that Gu describes thoroughly, but the title is somewhat misleading, because the article does not focus so much on 'Chinese power' as on power in a more general sense.

In chapter 7, Wei-Lin Melody Chang and Michael Haugh explore the concept of 'face' in Taiwanese business interactions. The authors analyse the opinions of a sample of respondents concerning the notion of 'face' (the etic perspective) and how that notion applies in a real interaction (the emic perspective). The chapter provides a fresh approach within the growing literature concerning the role of *mianzi* (面子) in Chinese discourse.

Chapters 8 and 9 are based on the same research: a study on the responses of Chinese people in survey interviews. In a globalised world where the Chinese diaspora is spread across so many different countries, survey interviews aimed at the general population may well need to include Chinese views. However, how can we know whether Chinese informants are responding to what they have been asked? Are their answers sincere, or have they been influenced by cultural values such as face? Yuling Pan (chapter 8) and Anna Yukyee Chan (chapter 9) address these two questions in their respective chapters. They both use a sound methodology, which is clearly explained, allowing replicability and reinforcing the validity of their approach. The interesting results could have direct applications in terms of using surveys targeted at Chinese respondents.

In chapter 10, Hao Sun presents a diachronic analysis of customer–employee telephone interactions. Diachronic studies are scarce and are sometimes difficult to conduct. Indeed, the two datasets in Sun's study used almost the same participants, even though one set was collected a decade after the other. The study detected certain shifts that reflect how discourse practices change over time.

Chapter 11 is devoted to 'prenatal genetic counselling discourse in Hong Kong'. More specifically, authors Olga Zayts, Virginia Wake Yelei and Stephanie Schnurr use a multi-method approach with complementary datasets (recordings of real interactions, interviews, written guidelines) to ascertain to what extent the discourse practices of healthcare providers influence the decisions made by

patients. The results illustrate issues of power and influence in these kind of exchanges, and could be applied to other fields of research, such as healthcare interpreting and transcultural healthcare.

In chapter 12, Winnie Cheng analyses the pragmatics of question–answer interactions, focusing on public discourses in Hong Kong. The author presents the study in a clear way, and the summary of her findings is especially welcome. The conclusions focus mainly on new directions that could be taken in future studies based on this contribution.

Chapters 13 and 14 analyse Chinese discourse and interaction in historical contexts. In chapter 13, Dániel Z. Kádár applies the notion of *communities of practice* to the study of Chinese group identity formation among a group of people living in the Shaoxing area in northern China's Zhejiang province during the 18th century. Kádár analyses a corpus of 60 letters and focuses on 'positive' identity formation. One of the positive features of Kádár's approach and the way he presents his results is his deliberate effort to avoid stereotyping and generalisations about East Asia.

In chapter 14, Xinren Chen analyses the way of referring to oneself in *Hong Lou Meng* (Cao Xueqin, ca. 1749). This study is framed around the discussion of Gu's (1990) maxims, one of which is self-denigration to show politeness in interactions. Gu's theory has been criticised by other authors (e.g. Kádár 2007), who say that it is an over-generalisation. Chen's results reflect some examples of forms of self-denigration and self-reference that feature modesty, but the use of first-person pronouns is still prevalent. Gu's theories are therefore partly confirmed, as Chen explains in her conclusions.

In the epilogue, Kenneth Kong reviews the studies presented in the volume and highlights how they are mutually complementary in describing Chinese discourse and interaction. He also looks at them within the overall context of literature on Chinese discourse and discusses the concept of 'Chinese-ness' in discourse: Is the way the Chinese communicate really so unique? What about geographical differences within China? Finally, Kong points out some of the book's limitations and considers future directions of enquiry.

The book shows that Chinese discourse studies is a dynamic field, especially in terms of methodological approaches. At the same time, though, it also shows that certain topics remain core to the discipline, such as the study of politeness, face, (in)directness and power. It is very clear that the studies presented in the book could be applied to other disciplines.

Some minor improvements could have been made to the presentation. For instance, in some chapters, the transcriptions of Chinese examples do not follow the rules of pinyin, and there are inconsistencies between different chapters in terms of the layout used for presenting the various datasets.

Overall, however, the clear, reader-friendly book is highly recommendable for anyone interested in Chinese discourse practices, especially interaction.

Notes

1.   This review is part of the project 'Translation and Interpreting in Criminal Proceedings' (FFI2014-55029-R) of the MIRAS research group, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness.

References

Gu, Y. (1990) Politeness phenomena in modern Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 14: 237–257.

Kádár, D. (2007) 考察近代汉语有礼和无礼称谓用语的对话解释 (On the interactional interpretation of deferential and rude vocatives in vernacular Chinese texts). *Asian and African Studies* 11(3): 1–20.

(Received 21st December 2016; accepted 16th January 2017)