

# John Benjamins Publishing Company



This is a contribution from CSL 58:1  
© 2023. John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. The author(s) of this material is/are permitted to use this PDF file to generate printed copies to be used by way of offprints for their personal use only.

Permission is granted by the publishers to post this file on a closed server which is accessible only to members (students and faculty) of the author's institute. It is not permitted to post this PDF on the internet, or to share it on sites such as Mendeley, ResearchGate, Academia.edu.

Please see our rights policy at <https://benjamins.com/content/customers/rights>  
For any other use of this material prior written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com)).

For further information, please contact [rights@benjamins.nl](mailto:rights@benjamins.nl) or consult our website:  
[www.benjamins.com](http://www.benjamins.com)

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Introducing Chinese Linguistics: A handbook for Chinese language teachers and learners*, by Hang Zhang & Lan Zhang. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2022. 283 pp. ISBN: 978 90 272 1279 5 (Hardcover); also available in paperback and e-book [doi](#)

Reviewed by **Han Luo** (Lafayette College)

*Introducing Chinese Linguistics: A Handbook for Chinese Language Teachers and Learners* (henceforth ICL) provides a comprehensive, accessible and innovative introduction to Chinese linguistics, covering key topics such as Chinese phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, the writing system and the role of social and cultural factors in Chinese language use. Although a number of introductory textbooks on Chinese linguistics are available on the market (e.g., Norman, 1988; Sun, 2006; Shei, 2014), ICL is distinctive in that it is tailored to the needs of L2 Chinese language educators and learners. It highlights common challenges encountered by adult L2 learners of Mandarin Chinese and offers pedagogical suggestions based on research findings in Chinese second language acquisition.

ICL consists of eight chapters. The first chapter starts with basic concepts in general linguistics and second language acquisition and then moves to a survey of language varieties under the umbrella term of “Chinese language” and a brief history of Mandarin Chinese with emphasis given to dispelling common misconceptions about linguistics and the Chinese language. The following two chapters focus on Chinese phonetics and phonology: Chapter 2 is dedicated to consonants, vowels, syllable structures, and Chinese annotation systems, whereas Chapter 3 discusses tones, intonation, and stress. Chapter 4 examines Chinese morphology and decodes how words are structured in Mandarin Chinese with insightful examples and explanations. The next two chapters attend to important issues in Chinese syntax, with Chapter 5 addressing basic syntactic structures, such as lexical categories, noun and verb phrases and Chapter 6 explaining non-canonical Chinese sentence structures, such as the *ba* and *bei* constructions. Chapter 7 is devoted to demystifying the Chinese writing system, a very challenging aspect for L2 learners to acquire. This chapter covers a variety of topics crucial to the Chinese writing system, including an overview of Chinese script evolution, formation of Chinese characters, the basic strokes, components and radicals of Chinese characters as well as Chinese script reforms. The last chapter investigates how social and cultural factors shape Chinese language use. This chapter introduces important concepts in Chinese pragmatics and Chinese language variation

and employs authentic linguistic examples to demonstrate the influence of gender, language contact and the Internet on Chinese language use.

ICL is highly accessible and user friendly. The whole book is written in easy-to-understand language with an effort to avoid unnecessary linguistic jargon. When the use of linguistic jargon is inevitable, brief yet precise explanations are provided, accompanied with a variety of authentic and insightful linguistic examples. The way in which each chapter is structured also contributes to its accessibility and digestibility. All the chapters are organized in a consistent and predictable manner, which allows readers to locate information easily and focus on the parts that interest them most. At the beginning of each chapter is a brief summary of the key points (e.g., main knowledge points, common misconceptions, major pedagogical challenges) covered in the chapter. The main text starts with some basic linguistic concepts in general linguistics explained in simple language. What comes next is the bulk of the chapter, which consists of a comprehensive introduction of a fundamental area in Chinese linguistics. In this bulk of text, the authors not only strive to provide an accurate description of the linguistic phenomenon under discussion through carefully chosen examples, but also attempt to speculate the possible underlying rules to explain why it is the case. For example, in Chapter 4 when discussing reduplication of Chinese adjectives, the authors point out that not all adjectives can undergo reduplication. For example, 简单 *jiǎndān* and 老实 *lǎoshí* can be reduplicated into 简简单单 *jiǎnjiǎndāndān* and 老老实实 *lǎolǎoshíshí*; however, 复杂 *fùzá* and 恶毒 *èdú* cannot be duplicated in a similar way. The authors further explain that formal and non-colloquial adjectives typically cannot undergo reduplication. Such explanations are invaluable for L2 Mandarin Chinese teachers and learners. The section following the main text is a summary of major research findings in Chinese second language acquisition, which leads to pedagogical implications for L2 Chinese language teachers and learning strategies for L2 Chinese learners. It is also worth mentioning that each section of a chapter concludes with a box summarizing key points and concepts. Furthermore, at the end of each chapter is a list of recommended readings, followed by ample exercise questions, allowing interested readers to pursue a given topic further or to reinforce the learned material.

ICL is innovative in the sense that it is the first text of its kind to integrate general linguistics, Chinese linguistics, second language acquisition and Chinese language pedagogy into a coherent and comprehensive volume on introductory Chinese linguistics. Considering the fact that students who may take a course in Chinese linguistics are likely to come from various backgrounds, such integration is not only effective, but also much needed. The clear pathway from general linguistics to Chinese linguistics and pedagogical implications uniquely offered by

ICL allows readers of various backgrounds to explore how the Chinese language works with a high level of accessibility.

Most importantly, ICL is a customized introduction of Chinese linguistics tailored to the needs of L2 Chinese teachers and learners. The authors not only demonstrate tremendous knowledge of the Chinese language, but also extraordinary familiarity with L2 Mandarin Chinese learners' challenges and difficulties. ICL gives impressive emphasis to linguistic features that L2 learners of Chinese find challenging to learn and offers abundant and a wide variety of exercises to reinforce the learning of such linguistic features. For example, as the Chinese tonal system and writing system pose many challenges for L2 adult learners of Chinese, ICL dedicates a whole chapter (i.e., Chapter 7) to the Chinese writing system and a significant portion of Chapter 3 to Chinese tones, unlike other textbooks on Chinese linguistics available on the market. In Chapter 4, a separate subsection is reserved for "difficulties in learning Verb-Object compounds," highlighting the common errors made by L2 Mandarin Chinese learners and explaining why Verb-Object compounds are difficult for them to learn. Moreover, authentic errors from L2 learners are cited extensively throughout the book to advance clear descriptions of given linguistic features and enhance learners' linguistic awareness. L2 learners' common errors are also designed into various types of exercises, serving as a pedagogical tool to facilitate learners' noticing and explicit learning of given linguistic forms.

The authors have done an amazing job in providing a comprehensive and digestible presentation of basic linguistic concepts and Chinese linguistic features, largely in a traditional paradigm. For example, in Chapter 1 when introducing basic distinctions in linguistics, the authors list competence and performance to distinguish between "knowledge of the rules of the language" and "the realization of this knowledge in utterances." With continuing development of the usage-based theory of language in the past two decades (e.g., Langacker, 2000; Tomasello, 2003; Bybee, 2010), increasing empirical evidence suggests that knowledge of language emerges from language usage events. In other words, our knowledge of the rules of a language is built up from our experience of specific occasions of use in a bottom-up fashion. Therefore, in the usage-based view of language, the distinction between competence and performance no longer exists. In Chapter 5 when introducing Chinese lexical categories, the authors adopt the traditional noun-verb classification relationship to describe Chinese. However, with recent developments in Chinese Cognitive Linguistics (Shen, 2016; Shu, Zhang, & Zhang, 2019), Shen (2019) hypothesizes that verbs constitute a sub-category of nouns in Chinese. In other words, nouns and verbs form two separate grammatical categories in English, whereas in Chinese, nouns constitute a super-noun category that includes verbs. Shen further warns that the verb-noun division has been






overstated in Chinese due to the influence of grammatical distinctions based on European languages like English, which has caused many problems for Chinese grammarians.

If there is any room for improvement for this already marvelous project, the authors might consider the following areas for the second edition of the volume. First, instead of a long list of references provided at the end of the book, it might be more convenient for readers to have access to a short list of references right at the end of each chapter. Second, for the key concepts introduced in the text, it might be worthwhile to format them in bold in an attention-grabbing color and define them in brief and precise language in the margins next to the text in which they occur (see Hummel, 2014 for examples). The key points box towards the end of each section within each chapter might also adopt a consistent color other than black and gray throughout the book. Third, the exercise questions in the current edition are largely designed to reinforce the learning of explained material. More discussion topics and research project ideas may be added to the exercise section to stimulate critical thinking and encourage students to bring in their own perspectives and life experience into the discussion of a certain topic. Fourth, relevant video links (e.g., Ted Talks, lectures by leading scholars, teaching demos) on given topics may be suggested as resources for self-study at the end of each chapter. Finally, the pedagogical implications provided in the current volume are research-based, which presents a strength, but also has potential limitations. For example, pedagogy-oriented discussions tend to be sporadic rather than systematic. Also, practical suggestions for teaching and learning are often rather thin for topics that have received less scholarly attention. A more systematic discussion of pedagogical implications accompanied with targeted exercises for readers to apply these practical suggestions to real-life scenarios may be able to benefit L2 Mandarin Chinese teachers and learners to a greater extent.

In conclusion, ICL is an exciting addition to the field of Chinese linguistics and the field of teaching Chinese as a second language. The authors demonstrate tremendous knowledge of the Chinese language and L2 Mandarin Chinese learners' common challenges. The clear and unique pathway from general linguistics to Chinese linguistics and then to Chinese second language acquisition and Chinese language pedagogy make this volume an excellent textbook for Chinese language teacher training programs. I also highly recommend this book to all serious learners of Chinese as a second language and readers who are interested in Chinese linguistics. Moreover, this volume also serves well as a resource book for current and prospective Chinese language teachers and researchers in Chinese grammar, linguistics and language pedagogy. Looking forward, the authors may consider developing a companion website demonstrating how this volume can be used as textbooks for Chinese linguistic courses designed for students of various back-

grounds through shared syllabi, lesson plans, classroom activities and research project ideas.

## References

-  Bybee, J. L. (2010). *Language, usage and cognition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hummel, K. M. (2014). *Introducing second language acquisition: Perspectives and practices*. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.
- Langacker, R. (2000). A dynamic usage-based model. In M. Barlow & S. Kemmer (Eds.), *Usage-based model of language* (pp. 1–37). CSLI publications.
- Norman, J. (1988). *Chinese*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
-  Shei, C. (2014). *Understanding the Chinese language: A comprehensive linguistic introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Shen, J. (2006). Renzhi yu Hanyu yufa yanjiu 认知与汉语语法研究 [Cognitive linguistics and Chinese grammar research]. Beijing: Commercial Press 商务印书馆
-  Shen, J. (2019). Types of negatives and the noun-verb distinction in English and Chinese. In D. Shu, H. Zhang, & L. Zhang (Eds.), *Cognitive linguistics and the study of Chinese* (pp. 121–155). Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
-  Shu, D., Zhang, H., & Zhang, L. (2019). (Eds.). *Cognitive linguistics and the study of Chinese*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
-  Sun, C. (2006). *Chinese: A linguistic introduction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tomasello, M. (2003). *Constructing a language: A usage-based theory of language acquisition*. Harvard University Press.

## Address for correspondence

Han Luo  
Lafayette College  
730 High St.  
Pardee Hall 410  
Easton, PA 18042  
USA  
luoh@lafayette.edu

## Publication history

Date received: 16 March 2023  
Date accepted: 31 March 2023  
Published online: 22 August 2023