Introduction

Sinitic Grammar is published in two forms (or volumes). Despite their confusingly different titles, the two volumes are actually virtually identical editions of the same book. Sinitic Grammar is a hardcover edition and Chinese Grammar (issued three years later) is softcover. There are only a couple of significant differences between the two editions (both of which are unfortunate): one is the change in title between the two editions, and the other is that a Chinese dialect map is included in the hardcover edition but omitted from the softcover edition.

This book includes an editor’s introduction, which is quite helpful in unifying the papers and which in particular explains the formatting and some notational choices which are used within the volume. Following that, the book consists of 13 papers/chapters by individual scholars, divided into five parts. Part I consists of a single paper by the editor, Hilary Chappell, giving an overview of Chinese dialects. Part II contains three papers that focus on “Typological and Comparative Grammar.” Part III groups three papers under the heading “Historical and Diachronic Grammar.” Parts IV and V focus, respectively, on Yue Grammar and Southern Min Grammar, and each include three papers. There is a single, unified bibliography for the whole book at the end; individual chapters do not include their own bibliographies.

I will first summarize and comment on each chapter and then give some general comments of the entire book at the end of this review.

At various points in this review, I will comment on issues that have special relevance to linguistic fieldworkers. Some of these issues are related to research methodology, while others are related to linguistic phenomena that have particular importance for those of us who do fieldwork in China. The studies presented here offer quite a lot for fieldworkers to think about, whether they are investigating Chinese dialects or other languages which have contact with forms of Chinese.
Individual Chapters

Chapter 1 (pages 3–28), “Synchrony and Diachrony of Sinitic Languages: A Brief History of Chinese Dialects,” by Hilary Chappell, provides a brief and excellent introduction to the various dialect families within Sinitic. In addition to mentioning some of the structural characteristics of each family, Chappell outlines the historical development of Sinitic dialects and mentions some theories of the historical relationships among the various dialect families.

Chappell lists (p. 6) ten major dialect families, including seven (北方話 Mandarin, 贛 Gàn, 湘 Xiāng, 闽 Mǐn, 粤 Yuè, 宋 Wú, 客家 Kèjiā) which have long-standing recognition in Chinese dialect studies and also three which have been recognized “since the 1930s” as deserving separate treatment (晋 Jìn, 平話 Pínghuà, 徽 Huī).

As is widely known, there is quite a low degree of mutual intelligibility across the various dialect families, and Chappell reminds us that there is quite a bit of variation within most of the families as well, such that most of these dialect families probably consist of multiple languages, from an intelligibility point of view.

The chapter also gives summaries of all the remaining articles included in the book.

On page 10, the reader is referred to the map of Chinese dialect areas, included in the endpapers of the volume. Unfortunately for those readers who did not buy the hardback edition, this map has been omitted from the paperback edition. This will be somewhat of a handicap for nonspecialist readers; I recommend that readers of chapter 1 plan to keep a good linguistic map of China nearby.

Chapter 1 closes by pointing out two areas for further research which this volume highlights: in-depth study of ancient written texts and their relationship to modern Sinitic languages other than Mandarin and comprehensive synchronic descriptions of the many un- or under-described modern Sinitic varieties. This latter need is an urgent one, since, as Chappell points out, increasing contact with Mandarin is already leading to significant changes in many such varieties, and many may be expected to disappear completely within a relatively short time.

In chapter 2 (pages 31–55), “The Development of Locative Markers in the Changsha Xiang Dialect,” Yunji Wu 伍雲姬 discusses a family of forms used as locative prepositions in the Xiang Dialect of Changsha. Wu draws on an extensive oral history interview to provide naturally occurring examples which illustrate the use of these various forms.

Wu’s article is quite a wide-ranging one, dealing with the historical development (in semantics, syntax, and phonology) of the various locative markers, as well as giving illustrations of their synchronic syntactic behaviors and semantic functions. She shows similarities and differences among the various forms, discusses how the forms might have come to have the distributions they do, and focuses in some detail on proving that one of the forms is a recent borrowing from Standard Mandarin.
The use of data from natural text material is laudable, as it demonstrates convincingly that many of these forms appear in nearly identical contexts. However, some puzzlement may be introduced when (on p. 35), Wu begins to discuss interchangeability within specific sentences, and then goes on to provide contrastive ungrammatical examples. Where do these examples, which amount to grammaticality judgments, come from? Undoubtedly, they are useful for the discussion, but what is their source, and how sure is Wu of their status? Not until p. 45 do we learn, in an aside comment, that Wu is “a Changsha Xiang speaker myself.” We are left to infer that the paper’s grammaticality judgments are Wu’s own, but this is never explicitly stated. Since Wu discusses some forms which, she suggests, seem to be undergoing processes of replacement, we might expect to find variation across different sociolinguistic groups; which subset(s) of the speaker population do these judgments represent?

There are problems with section numbering in chapter 2 which obscure the logical structure of the paper: section 2.4, which discusses the historical development of two locative forms, should be numbered 2.3.2, in order to show its relationship to section 2.3.1, which discusses the historical development of two other forms. As it stands, there is a section 2.3.1 but no 2.3.2, making it appear that no subdivision was appropriate. Similarly, section 2.2.4 is confusingly subdivided into a general introductory discussion and a single subsection 2.2.4.1—again, one wonders why a break was made at all. Furthermore, the final paragraph of this subsection is actually a summary of the entire section 2.4, and it should accordingly have been set off with a separate number and heading to make clear its place in the larger text.

Chapter 3 (pages 56–84), is by Hilary Chappell and is titled “A Typology of Evidential Markers in Sinitic Languages.” The main point of the chapter is the claim that some forms which have previously been described as aspect markers are in fact primarily indicators of evidentiality.

Traditionally, Mandarin postverbal 过 guò and its cognates in several other Sinitic varieties have been identified as markers of a cross-linguistically rare “Experiential Aspect.” Chappell argues that this aspeclual function, although it is certainly present, is not the most central meaning of this form. Rather, Chappell says, this marker is “in essence, an evidential marker” (p. 56). Specifically (pp. 65–68), it signifies both direct experience (in association with first person subjects) and inference (in association with second and third person subjects).

Chappell applies this same analysis to Taiwanese Southern Min 別 bat, which appears preverbally and which is cognate to a verb meaning “know.”

The analysis turns on examples which demonstrate personal knowledge on the part of the speaker. In Mandarin, for example, (1) would be appropriate only if the speaker had actually seen the arrival (and departure) of the person being discussed (p. 64):

(1) 她 來過 (又 走 了)

\[tā lāi-guo yòu zǒu le\]

she come-EVIDENTIAL again leave CURRENTLY RELEVANT STATE

‘She’s been (and gone again).’
Chappell tells us (p. 65) that a speaker who had not seen this event, but had been told about it, could not use (1) alone, but would have to preface it with something like *mì shū shuō* “the secretary says,” indicating that this information was obtained secondhand.

An example of an inferential use of Mandarin *guò* is provided in (2) (p. 68):

(2) 誰 開 過 窗戶?
*shéi kāi guò chuánghu*

who open EVIDENTIAL window

‘Who opened the window?’

This would be appropriate if the window is currently closed and the speaker infers that it was previously opened (for example because the windowsill is wet from rain or because papers have blown about the room).

These examples are quite convincing in showing that Mandarin *guò* can have evidential force.

However, Chappell also illustrates a number of the well-known features of all of these forms which are clearly not evidential in character. For example, (2) can only be uttered when the window is no longer open; the event marked with *guò* must be one which was completed at some time in the past, and which remains relevant but is no longer actually taking place. Chappell refers to this as “discontinuity” from the present time (pp. 68–71), and it is a typical characteristic of these forms in the Sinitic varieties that Chappell discusses.

Another semantic feature of these forms is repeatability (p. 70)—the event must be one that can be repeated, which disallows these markers with verbs for events like “die” in normal circumstances.

Some Chinese dialects allow the forms which Chappell discusses to mark imperatives or future events (pp. 76–79), and some permit *guò* to mark irrealis and conditional events (79–80).

Another relevant use is in examples such as (3), from Changsha (New Xiang) Chinese, where *guò* (pronounced [ko\(^{55}\)] in this dialect) appears in a relative clause and the event is presupposed, rather than asserted (p. 61):

(3) 到 過 長沙 的 人
*tau\(^{55}\) ko\(^{55}\) tsan\(^{24}\) sa\(^{33}\) ti zen\(^{24}\)*
go EVIDENTIAL Changsha LIGATURE people

‘People who have been to Changsha will certainly know...’

This example shows a use of *guò* for which there is no discernable evidential connotation. Here, *guò* indicates something very close to the experiential aspect category to which it has traditionally been assigned. It simply indicates that the event of ‘going’ has occurred at least once in the past. (This example would work identically for Mandarin, as well.)
The claim that Chappell makes here is a fascinating one, and this chapter convincingly demonstrates that guò and its cognates can have evidential functions, in some circumstances. However, the conclusion that guò is therefore in essence an evidential marker seems to me to overstate the pervasiveness of these functions. It is in fact the temporal/aspectual functions such as discontinuity and repeatability which are found most consistently when guò is used. The evidential functions, then, seem most reasonably understood to be pragmatic inferences which are naturally drawn when the essentially aspectual guò appears in appropriate contexts.

Thus, though Chappell has shown that some of the usages of guò qualify as “evidential strategies” (as Aikhenvald 2004 would put it), it seems that these functions are not definitional for this form, but rather should be counted as pragmatic uses to which it is frequently put.

As a fieldworker in China, I regularly run across forms in minority languages which are glossed guò in their Chinese translations. The evidential functions demonstrated in this chapter suggest that fieldworkers would do well to be on the lookout for similar functions in other languages, particularly in view of the twin facts that evidentiality and other epistemological categories are very common in some of China’s non-Sinitic language families and that many minority languages have been heavily influenced by Chinese in both structure and semantic/pragmatic functions.

Chapter 4 (pages 83–120), by Christine Lamarre, is entitled “Verb Complement Constructions in Chinese Dialects: Types and Markers.” This chapter presents a tentative typology of Chinese dialects, based the complementizers used in forming three semantically different complement clause types.

Lamarre considers complements that indicate extent (as in (4)), manner, and potential (as in (5)). Both of these examples (from p. 86) illustrate the Mandarin complementizer 得 de.

(4) 吵 得 人家 睡 不 著

chǎo de rénjia shuì bú zháo
make:noise DE other:people sleep NEGATION achieve
‘make so much noise that others cannot sleep’

(5) 看 得 完

kàn de wán
read DE finish
‘can finish reading’

Lamarre finds four basic patterns among Chinese dialects. For some dialects, represented by Standard Mandarin, all three types of complement clause are constructed with the same complementizer. A second group of dialects (including some northern and some southern dialects) uses one complementizer for potential complements and a different complementizer to construct both manner and extent complements. A third group (including many, but not all, southern dialect families) has a unique complementizer for extent complements, in contrast to a complementizer which can mark both manner and potential complements. Finally, a fourth group
(some Southern Min dialects) does not conflate any of the complement types, but uses a different complementizer for each of the three semantic functions.

In the course of her presentation, Lamarre illustrates a number of complementizers aside from cognates of Standard Mandarin 得 de. The article includes extensive historical discussion of each of these forms and offers a brief overview (pp. 107–114) of the grammaticalization processes which each individual form seems to illustrate.

Readers who are interested in this chapter should also read chapter 9, which delves into textual evidence for the historical emergence of some complement constructions, and which includes discussion of recent historical changes that can be observed in Cantonese texts since the 1800s.

Chapter 5 (pages 123–142), “Vestiges of Archaic Chinese Derivational Affixes in Modern Chinese Dialects,” by Laurent Sagart, applies the comparative method to widely dispersed modern Sinitic varieties to reconstruct two derivational affixes for Archaic Chinese. This reconstruction supports the existence of morphological forms which have previously been posited for independent reasons, and thus demonstrates compatibility of internal reconstruction and the application of the comparative method—a compatibility that has not been assumed for Chinese, which lacks “a well-agreed-upon subgrouping” (p. 142). The identification of features relevant for comparison in such a family, Sagart tells us, can rely on “linguistic geography,” which searches for features whose wide dispersal cannot reasonably be attributed to parallel innovations.

The first of these two affixes is a derivational prefix *k-, which is shown to have appeared in several contexts: on verbs, probably indicating some sort of imperfective aspect for dynamic actions, possibly momentary or progressive; on adjectives, most of which seem to be semantically stative; and on nouns, notably on concrete count nouns.

Sagart notes (p. 132) that the adjectival uses with stative meanings seem at odds with the progressive, dynamic meanings which seem to be associated with the use of *k- with verbs. We might also wonder if a verbal derivational prefix with aspeccual meaning ought to be identified with a prefix that occurs with concrete count nouns. To me, it appears that we may well be dealing here with multiple morphemes which happen to have had similar phonetic shapes, and in fact Sagart may be suggesting this same conclusion in commenting that “little can be said of the meaning” of pre-nominal k- (p. 134).

The second affix is an infix *-r-, which, as Sagart has shown elsewhere, “derives nouns for plural objects and verbs of distributed actions” (p. 134)—these functions are easier to see as possibly belonging to a single morpheme, even across the noun/verb word class distinction. This form has reflexes ranging from infixes in Jin, Min, and Hakka, to a suffix -la in Shandong, and Sagart says that “a process of -l- infixation can be reconstructed for the common ancestor of Jin, Shandong Mandarin, Min, Hakka, and Yue dialects” (p. 139) though the phonological processes are somewhat different across these dialects.

This paper provides a particularly good example of the need for additional detailed studies of the morphosyntax of modern Chinese varieties, which Chappell called for in chapter 1. Comparative
reconstructions of this type crucially depend on having abundant and adequate synchronic descriptions, and as the pressure from Standard Mandarin increases, evidence for ancient morphological processes like these is undoubtedly being lost in local varieties all across China.

Chapter 6 (pages 143–171), entitled “Markers of Predication in Shang Bone Inscriptions,” is a description by Redouane Djamouri of the syntax and semantics of five predication markers in Shang bone inscriptions. I admit to having approached this chapter with some trepidation, having never read anything at all about these famous “oracle bone” inscriptions, but I found Djamouri’s presentation to be both accessible and convincing. The five predication markers (or “verbs”) are WEI 唯, HUI 惠, QI 其, WU 勿, and BU 不.

Djamouri gives a very convincing presentation of the syntactic predicative functions of all of these forms. WEI, HUI, and QI can each be either modal auxiliaries, verbal copulas, or focus markers. With only printed texts to go by, it is quite hard to identify the actual meanings of these three forms—an author mentioned in footnote 14 (p. 148) posits 23 separate meanings for WEI, for example—but nonetheless their structural identification seems quite clear. Thus, although we cannot be certain that 唯降 wei jiàng ‘WEI send down’ means “does send down” (p. 149), we can be quite sure that WEI is structurally a modifier of a main verb jiàng.

WU and BU, like their Modern Chinese descendants, are both negative markers. Again, Djamouri shows convincingly, largely on the basis of nice pairs of contrastive examples from the corpus, that each of these forms can be either an auxiliary verb or a focalization marker (WU can focalize NPs with many more semantic roles than can BU). BU can also stand alone as a negative copula, but there is no example of WU standing alone in this way, and apparently it cannot. WU means “must not” (p. 160), while BU is a negative auxiliary for intransitive verbs, in which role it contrasts with another negative marker FU, used as a negative auxiliary only with “highly transitive verbal predicates” (p. 163). BU can also negate inherently transitive verbs, such as “harm,” but in such cases Djamouri notes that a meaning shift has occurred and the predicates function intransitively; thus, 不害 BU hài ‘not harm’ means ‘not harmful,’ rather than ‘does not harm (X).’

Alain Peyraube’s paper (chapter 7, pages 172–187) outlines the semantics of four Classical Chinese modal auxiliaries which express volition. It is entitled “On the Modal Auxiliaries of Volition in Classical Chinese.”

Peyraube’s analysis of the semantics of these four volitional auxiliaries is bound up with a discussion of the syntactic behavior of the forms, and this is the major contribution which the paper makes. Important facts about the syntactic distribution of the forms are convincingly shown to follow naturally from their semantic properties; some forms are in virtual complementary distribution, syntactically, and this is shown to be a natural consequence of their meanings. This is an excellent practice for grammatical description, particularly if one purpose of a description is to help people understand why the grammar functions the way it does.

In this paper, the author does a nice job of reconciling grammatical analysis in the Chinese tradition with analysis in contemporary Western tradition—a challenge faced by nearly anyone who works with both Chinese and Western linguistic writings. In Peyraube’s analysis, for
example, the Chinese traditional class of modal auxiliaries (能动词 néngyúán dòngcì) seems to be a defensible one from a Western linguistic point of view (pp. 172–175), but the Chinese traditional distinction between “subjective” and “objective” modality (p. 174) is “difficult to apply” in a Western linguistic framework.

Having said this, I would like to point out that Peyraube’s acceptance of the traditional class of “auxiliary verbs” crucially depends on a syntactic test (p. 173–174); but this test in turn depends on the analysis that these verbs take a following VP as an object, and the author does not spell out precisely what this means in structural terms. Sinitic languages have a variety of clause-combining structures, including complementation and serialization, and if one wishes to posit a V + O construction, in which the O consists of a VP, it would be desirable to give an explicit definition of this construction, so as to clearly distinguish it from other construction types. The discussion may be intended to imply that such a definition is given in a 1998 paper by Peyraube, but if so this should be stated clearly.

In chapter 8 (pages 191–231), “The Interrogative Construction: (Re)constructing Early Cantonese Grammar,” Hung-Ning Samuel Cheung 張洪年 examines syntactic changes in Cantonese interrogative constructions, based on a corpus of 12 pedagogical grammars and dictionaries published from 1828 to 1963. These interesting materials yield a picture of some remarkably rapid structural changes.

Cheung takes the structure VP neg VP as the underlying structure for all yes/no questions in Cantonese and argues that all past and present yes/no question constructions can be analyzed as derived from this basic pattern, via deletion of various repeated elements. In “forward deletion,” repeated elements after the negative are deleted, yielding patterns like VP neg V or simply VP neg; in “backward deletion,” on the other hand, it is elements before the negative which are deleted, yielding patterns like V neg VP.

The major assertion of the paper is that Cantonese utilized exclusively forward deletion in the early 1800s, but that during the 1930s to 1950s there was a rapid and nearly complete shift to backward deletion, which brought Cantonese into conformity with the rest of the Sinitic languages. This assertion is nicely borne out by the data which Cheung examines; he is also able to show that the change progressed differently for different verbs and construction types, which is consistent with what we might expect for a grammatical change, even one as rapid as this appears to have been.

This study raises a number of interesting questions. For example: to what degree do the pedagogical materials (notably those published under names such as “Ball” and “Wisner”) represent truly natural Cantonese? Further, we may wonder what register(s) or sociolect(s) each grammar captures, as well as how frequent a construction must be before it appears in a book like these. If a published grammar uses 25% construction A and 75% construction B, what does that tell us about the actual practices of the speech community, or for that matter, about the grammar writer’s interaction with that community? Finally, and perhaps most obviously, what would cause such a drastic change and cause it to occur so quickly? Cheung addresses most of these questions in one way or another, but wisely advises us that more data, of different types, is needed before firm conclusions can be reached.
Chapter 9 (pages 232–265) is by Anne O. Yue 余靄芹 and is titled “The Verb Complement Construction in Historical Perspective with Special Reference to Cantonese.” This chapter forms a nice pair with chapter 4, delving in greater detail into the historical development of some complement types.

Whereas Lamarre, in chapter 4, examined three types of complement clauses, Yue here treats only the “causative/resultative” complement type, of the sort illustrated in the Cantonese example (6) with the dak, which is cognate to Mandarin 得 de (p. 234):

(6) 洗唔洗得乾淨
\[ \text{saɪ m⁴ saɪ dak¹ gon⁶ jeng⁶} \]
\[ \text{wash-NEGATION-wash-DAK-clean} \]
\[ \text{‘Can it be washed clean?’} \]

Many such resultatives are formed with 得 de and its cognates, and thus this material overlaps with Lamarre’s topic, where we saw 得 de as a marker of multiple semantic complement types.

Yue devotes most of this chapter to tracing, in careful detail, the historical emergence of causative complements as a distinct syntactic pattern in Written Chinese (pp. 235–250). Although there are many constructions in early periods which might be interpreted as V + C constructions of this type, Yue shows that in many cases these constructions may just as well be understood to be biclausal. A simple test for this is whether it is permissible to insert 而 ér between the verbs to make an unambiguous biclausal construction. Thus, when we find in the 尚書 Shàng Shū a sequence like 撲滅 pū miè ‘beat extinguish,’ meaning ‘beat and put out (a fire),’ we cannot be entirely sure that this is a single predication, rather than a biclausal construction which could be paraphrased 撲而滅 pū ér miè ‘beat and extinguish’ (pp. 235–236).

An important historical stage in the grammaticalization of V + C constructions, Yue tells us, is the “pivotal construction,” in which we have \( V_1 + O + V_2 \), with the medial nominal serving as object of \( V_1 \) and as subject of \( V_2 \). Again, unambiguous examples of this construction are difficult to find, but Yue shows that it had clearly begun to emerge by the time of the 史記 Shǐ Jì, written in the Han period.

In the end, Yue concludes (p. 243) that the earliest clear evidence for V + C constructions also comes from the 史記 Shǐ Jì of the Han period. Yue notes, though, that this construction “may have come into use in the colloquial language even earlier” than its appearance in literary texts like this one.

The chapter concludes with a discussion (pp. 250–260) of V + C constructions in Cantonese, relying on a series of historical documents (from 1841 until the present) that include some of the same ones which Cheung cited in chapter 8. In brief, this section shows that into the 19th and even the early 20th centuries, spoken Cantonese preserved some constructions which were of considerable antiquity; but some such constructions have faded away almost completely in contemporary written texts.
This study is admirable for its careful use of historical sources and its recommendation that we not make claims without strong morphosyntactic evidence. As with chapter 8, I do wonder about the degree to which the modern Cantonese sources represent the colloquial language, but Yue has presented compelling evidence that the patterns she finds in these texts do represent constructions which emerged a very long time ago in Chinese. Although we can never access the details of oral frequency for languages of the past, it would be nice to see this chapter followed up with a study of contemporary oral Cantonese, to see if the patterns suggested by the written texts are also found in the spoken language.

In chapter 10 (pages 266–281), Stephen Matthews and Virginia Yip discuss the structure of relative clauses in Cantonese, with special attention to the importance of recognizing different registers in the language in order to explain the distribution of two relative clause types. This chapter is entitled “Aspects of Contemporary Cantonese Grammar: The Structure and Stratification of Relative Clauses.”

The authors show that Cantonese has one type of relative clause construction which closely resembles Mandarin relatives and a different construction which uses a classifier phrase to create a relative clause. The two types have an important functional difference: the Mandarin-like construction is found in High register discourse contexts (e.g. on page 276 in collocation with literary particles); while the classifier construction, which has no Mandarin counterpart, is used in Low register contexts. A hybridized construction, using both patterns, is also produced in some H register contexts: the authors cite (p. 281) a set of scholarship interviews in which all 10 student interviewees produced this hybrid construction.

Now that there is near-universal access to Standard Mandarin media, we might expect that the recognition of register differences would yield similarly useful results in characterizing the distribution of alternate grammatical constructions in nearly all Chinese dialects. And in a similar way, many non-Chinese languages have calqued extensively from Chinese (typically from local dialects), and we might also expect to find similar register differences in these situations. It is to be recommended that any fieldworker in China, regardless of language or dialect, pay close attention to discourse context as it relates to the distribution of grammatical forms, especially those which appear to be similar to Standard Mandarin constructions.

Matthews and Yip note (p. 276) that their claims about distribution across H and L registers ought to be backed up by study of corpora. This is, in fact, the main weakness of their paper—although the evidence they give does seem convincing, one nonetheless wishes to see some corpus-based support for their analysis. The authors themselves note (p. 273) that their subject is a difficult one to study, because of the difficulty of finding monolingual speakers of Cantonese. They suggest that grammaticality judgments are not entirely trustworthy on these points, but in fact they seem to have to rely significantly on grammaticality judgments for their analysis. It remains to be seen how consistently their predictions will account for the patterns of usage in natural texts.

Chapter 11 (pages 285–308), “Semantics and Syntax of Verbal and Adjectival Reduplication in Mandarin and Taiwanese Southern Min,” by Feng-Fu Tsao 曹逢甫, gives a very detailed outline and comparison of reduplication in these two varieties.
Verbal reduplication occurs in both Mandarin and TSM. In both languages, Tsao concludes that it can be considered to indicate a type of perfective aspect (pp. 288, 293); in Mandarin, verbal reduplication typically expresses “tentativeness” (p. 288), while in TSM it can express “delimitative aspect or rapid completion, depending on whether there is a following complement” (p. 292). Furthermore, verbal reduplication can be used in TSM to indicate uncertainty, so that 笑 chiò ‘smile’ can become 笑笑 chiòchiò ‘kind of smile’ or ‘seem to smile’ (pp. 294–295).

Adjectival reduplication also exhibits some differences between the two languages. In Mandarin, reduplication is used to intensify or make an adjective more vivid; thus 红 hóng ‘red,’ 红红 hónghóng ‘very red.’ In TSM, however, reduplication of adjectives indicates tentativeness, and intensification can be performed only by triplication. Thus, 红红 âng-âng ‘red-red’ means ‘reddish,’ and 红红红 âng-âng-âng ‘red-red-red’ means ‘very red’ (p. 287).

These synchronic descriptions are the strength of this chapter. Tsao further discusses, in introductory and concluding remarks, some historical considerations, but I found this analysis less convincing. Tsao takes the “tentativeness” meaning as basic to the various constructions discussed here and discusses how more specific meanings such as “delimitative aspect,” “brief duration,” and “uncertainty” may all be derived from this core meaning. He presents schematic diagrams which show “tentativeness” as the central concept, with other meanings extending out from it and from each other in the manner of the “radial categories” discussed by Lakoff (1987).

This application of the concept of radial categories leaves me rather unsatisfied. When discussing the semantic history of these constructions, it seems incongruous to me to put the most abstract category meaning in the middle. The question raised is: what historical status is posited for this abstract meaning? Tentativeness may well be in some way common to these various constructions, but it is an abstraction, not an actual meaning that they all instantiate. What, then, is its historical status? If the diagram is intended to illustrate the historical development of the semantics of these constructions, then the abstract category does not belong inside the diagram; rather, it ought to contain all the other categories, and the diagram should clarify the historical order of their emergence. If, on the other hand, this diagram only schematizes a set of abstract semantic categories in the synchronic language, why is it introduced as a historical illustration? It seems to me that this diagram attempts to combine synchrony and diachrony in a confusing way.

In chapter 12 (pages 309–339), “Competing Morphological Changes in Taiwanese Southern Min,” Chienfa Lien 連金發 discusses competition and complementarity between affixes that belong to literary and colloquial strata of Taiwanese Southern Min (TSM). The author aims to show that there is a competition between morphemes belonging to different registers (or strata) which is analogous to the patterns of competition observable between phonological rules; furthermore, Lien argues that such competitive relationships may emerge “not only between etymologically related words” belonging to different strata, “but also between words with no etymological link but which are locked into a semantic paradigm” (p. 309).

To oversimplify somewhat, the colloquial stratum includes forms passed down by direct inheritance from the ancestors of TSM, while the literary stratum includes forms introduced by
more recent waves of migration. In many cases, the actual forms are cognate, but there are many phonological differences between the strata.

Let me illustrate the data and argumentation of this paper by summarizing a couple of typical examples of the types of competing forms which are described.

Among etymologically related forms, for example, we find (p. 314–16) three reflexes of 老 ‘old:’ colloquial lau⁷; semi-literary lau²; and literary lo². The literary form lo² does not conform to the Modern TSM phonological system, while the colloquial form lau⁷ does; the two differences are in the tone category and in the form of the syllable final.² The semi-literary form lau² conforms in one respect (the final) but does not conform in another (the tone category). The literary form is bound, in the sense that it appears only in fixed expressions. The semi-literary form is free (like the colloquial form), but has undergone some semantic shift, losing its original meaning and developing two metaphorical senses, ‘be good at’ and ‘spoiled’.

An example of etymologically unrelated forms in competition is colloquial lang⁵ 儂 and literary jin⁵ 人, both meaning ‘person’ (pp. 324–328). When used as derivational suffixes, they show distributional differences: lang⁵ is productive, can appear with literary or colloquial stems, and is transparent in meaning (e.g. 大儂 toa⁷-lang⁵ ‘big-person’ = ‘adult’); in contrast, jin⁵ appears only with literary stems, is non-productive, and in many expressions has undergone semantic shift (e.g. 大人 tai⁷-jin⁵ ‘big-person’ = ‘police officer’). In fact, Lien says that jin⁵ behaves more like an element in a compound than a full-fledged affix, but that lang⁵ is clearly an affix.

The criteria for identifying “literary,” “colloquial,” and various intermediate strata (e.g. “semi-literary” on p. 317 or “colloquial-1” vs. colloquial-2,” on the same page) are quite puzzling, based on this presentation. Lien cites a number of studies related to this distinction in TSM (see p. 310), but seems here to justify the assignment of specific morphemes to one category or another primarily on the basis of phonology. It is not clear from this description how phonology can be predictively related to “literary” status. Perhaps this problem is merely terminological; if the author had stuck with the opposition “alien” vs. “native,” (introduced on p. 309), rather than “literary” vs. “colloquial,” it would have been easy to see that the “alien” forms simply represent relatively late borrowings from dialectal norms outside of the TSM area. Nonetheless, the apparent indeterminacy of the number of categories employed, and their various labels, makes me wonder if it would be possible to standardize them on the basis of non-phonological evidence.

The book’s final chapter (chapter 13, pages 340–368), by Ying-Che Li 李英哲, is “Aspects of Historical-Comparative Syntax: Functions of Prepositions in Taiwanese and Mandarin.” This chapter compares the synchronic inventories of Taiwanese and Mandarin prepositions, classifying their functions by semantic roles (agent, benefactive, location, time, etc.) and discusses the historical relationships of the individual forms and the two overall inventories to the inventory of archaic Chinese.

The major thrust of this paper is to show that the genetically inherited sets of prepositions in Taiwanese and Mandarin are essentially non-overlapping and that later additions to these inventories have been through differing mechanisms. Taiwanese has added prepositions
primarily through borrowing from Written Chinese, while Mandarin has added through other
means, prominently including compounding and the addition of a progressive aspect marker -zhe 著, both of which have yielded bisyllabic prepositions. Li suggests that this evidence supports a relatively early differentiation of the ancestors of Taiwanese and Mandarin, with extensive later contact via the written language.

By Li’s count, Mandarin has 93 prepositions, of which 58 are not shared by Taiwanese and 35 are shared (via borrowing from Written Chinese into Taiwanese). By contrast, Taiwanese has only 49 prepositions, among which there are 14 which have no Mandarin cognates; three of these are inherited from Ancient Chinese.

The major points made in Li’s paper are quite reasonable, but there is a methodological issue that I feel needs some discussion. Li classifies prepositions (pp. 345–346) according to the semantic roles which they indicate, and this means that many prepositions appear more than once in his list. Thus, the Mandarin preposition gěi 給 ‘give’ appears three times in the list (p. 345), under the categories “agent (passive),” “benefactive,” and “recipient.” In the case of the prepositions that indicate “time” (p. 346), the entire inventories of both Taiwanese (8 forms) and Mandarin (16 forms) are forms which have already been listed under the “location” category (p. 345). No doubt time and location are different semantic roles, just as agent, benefactive, and recipient are, but this paper primarily discusses which forms are shared. This discussion seems to me to be obscured by counting the same forms multiple times. Removing from Li’s table all of the repetitions, we find similar trends, but significantly different actual numbers. Rather than Li’s 93 Mandarin prepositions, I find 68 total forms, of which 31 (4 less than Li’s 35) are shared with Taiwanese. Similarly, I count only 37 Taiwanese prepositions (less than Li’s 49), of which 6 are not shared with Mandarin (compared with Li’s count of 14).

Furthermore, a couple of apparent errors make me wonder if this inventory of prepositions is complete. On page 357, for example, Li lists both sì 似 and rú 如 as comparative prepositions in “Modern Mandarin,” but neither is included in the chart on which the counts and comparisons are based. Furthermore, if counting is to be based on semantic functions, rather than on morphological forms, one may wonder why duì 對 is listed under location but is not also counted again as a recipient or goal marker, as in 對人说 duì rén shuō ‘say to someone.’

Categorizing by semantic function also means that, for example, kap 及 (Mandarin pronunciation: jú) is listed both as a shared form (with ‘comitative’ function) and also as a form found in Taiwanese but not Mandarin (as a comparative marker).

Overall, Li’s approach seems to me to be an interesting way to compare semantic functions, but quite an odd way to count “prepositions.” I am not sure what to make of the author’s claims, when the numbers seem to have been arrived at through such an odd methodology.

On a different subject, regarding the functional uses of one Mandarin preposition, it is often claimed that the Mandarin passive construction with the preposition bèi 被 has been influenced by translation from Western languages. Li reminds us here (p. 351) that bèi actually has a “long historical agentless use,” so that although contact may well have helped to increase its frequency, this function is by no means primarily attributable to contact with Western languages.
General Comments

First, some comments must be made about the two editions of this book.

I am grateful to the publisher for the existence of a paperback edition, which puts the book within reach of more personal budgets. However, as I have already mentioned, there are a couple of unfortunate differences between the two editions. The most important of these is the change in title, which to me is really quite inexplicable and has in fact caused some confusion as to whether these two titles are really the same book; one reviewer (Chen 2004) mistakenly says of the paperback version that “additional papers have been included in the present volume.” Publishers ought not to reissue books with confusingly different titles.

The second notable difference between the two editions concerns a distributional map of Chinese dialects (based on traditional Chinese analysis). The map is included only in the hardback edition, though even the paperback edition includes a reference to the endpaper map (page ix) and also acknowledgement for its source (p. xxv). And as I mentioned earlier, the reader of chapter 1 is also referred to this map (p. 10), as though the map were included in all editions of the book. For readers of the paperback edition, particularly the dialect overview of chapter 1, I suggest referring to one of the many similar maps which can easily be found on the internet.

The general editing of the book is excellent. Clearly, a lot of forethought and planning went into the layout, presentation, and so on. The editor’s introduction is a critical and helpful tool for unifying the various papers. In fact, scholars who copy individual chapters (under fair use terms, of course) may find themselves wishing for access to the introduction. For example, the asterisk symbol (*) is used for three different purposes throughout the book, and these uses are outlined only in the introduction. Similarly, having a single unified bibliography for the entire book could be a disadvantage for anyone who photocopies only a single chapter.

Excellent choices have been made for data presentation throughout the work, including the use of characters alongside romanization with tone marks. This makes the book really useful for specialists and for general linguists alike.

There are also some odd font behaviors, such as the fact that the letter a appears to change size in example 18 (p. 152); in fact the font size changes more than once in example 10 on page 350, and font sizes change in quite a number of other places as well. These size changes do not much affect readability, but I found them distracting in an otherwise well-produced book.

There is one apparent translation error, on page 167, where 不禍 is translated ‘is unfortunate’ in example 76, but is translated ‘is not unfortunate’ in the next example.

In chapter 4 there are several examples in which, in a line of Chinese characters, the symbol “□” appears (pages 98 and 102). I presume that these are cases where no character has been identified to represent the phonetic syllable being transcribed (these appear in non-Mandarin dialects), but I could find no explanation of this symbol anywhere in the book. Since this box symbol is distressingly familiar to many of us as the result when our operating system cannot
find a character that is encoded in a text, I was left wondering if these boxes are intentional or if they were unintended outputs of the publisher’s typesetting system.

Traditional (rather than simplified) forms of Chinese characters are used throughout, which is reasonable since the book is aimed at an international audience. Since this is an electronic review, though, I might point out that an electronic edition could easily enable readers to display the character set they prefer. But at this writing (2011), the publisher’s website does not list an electronic version for purchase.

From a fieldworker’s point of view, perhaps the greatest overall contribution of the book is implied by its subtitle: it presents a healthy integration of synchronic and diachronic approaches to language description. This integration is evident not only in the individual chapters (as I have noted at points above), but also in the selection of papers for inclusion. Grammar is certainly a here-and-now phenomenon, but it has also come from somewhere, and this volume does an admirable job of tying those two facts together to help us see not only how various aspects of Chinese grammar work, but also how they came to work that way over time. Field work and synchronic description is much the richer when it is informed by comparative and historical study.

As I have also noted in summarizing individual chapters, at many points social factors in language use are critical to arguments made by the various authors. Sociolinguistic analysis is essential when synchronic and diachronic approaches meet. Fieldworkers need to be alert to the facts of how various forms are used within the speaking community, particularly if they plan to discuss diachrony in their linguistic descriptions.

And finally, as Chappell notes in chapter 1, this volume may also serve to illustrate the pressing need for careful synchronic studies of additional local Chinese dialects. Several of these studies show that much progress can still be made in, for example, comparative Chinese linguistics, but the pressure of standardization towards Standard Mandarin today is quite intense and growing, and the longer we wait for local dialect descriptions, the less we will probably learn from them when they do appear.

Notes

1 There is, however, no universal acceptance of any list of Sinitic dialect families. For example, Sagart, in this same volume (p. 124), refers to eleven “commonly-recognized Chinese dialect groups,” adding “the so-called Shaozhou patois” to the list given by Chappell.

2 The term final is used in Chinese linguistics to indicate, approximately, the combined nucleus and coda of a syllable. Any syllable thus consists of an initial (the onset) and a final (the rest of the segmental units). In distinction from Western phonological theory, however, a pre-vocalic glide appearing as the second segment in a syllable belongs to the nucleus, rather than to the onset. Thus, for example, a syllable like duan [twan] is analyzed as /d + wan/. 
References

