

REVIEWS

Figures of General Linguistics

Qixiang Cen

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This handsome collection (Chinese title being *pu tong yu yan xue ren wu zhi*) consists of eighteen articles devoted to eighteen linguists. It can be roughly divided into four sections, i.e. (1) Western European linguists (1-90), (2) American linguists (91-112), (3) Slavic linguists (113-172), and (4) Chinese linguists (173-213).

The section on Western European linguists introduces Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), Antoine Meillet (1866–1936), Vilhem Thomsen (1842–1927), Karl Verner (1846–1896), Otto Jespersen (1860–1943), Joseph Vendryès (1875–1960), Marcel Cohen (1884–1974), and André Martinet (1908–1999). As can be seen, these eight linguists are not exactly chronologically presented, since the three Danish linguists were all born earlier than Meillet. This presentation arrangement implies Cen's view of the position that Saussure and Meillet take in the history of linguistics. The article on Saussure focuses on his *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916) and Cen concludes with the statement that since its publication the revision and development of linguistic theories by all linguists have to be based on the relevant concepts in this book (16). The article on Meillet talks about his achievements in historical-comparative linguistics, historical linguistics, and general linguistics. The three articles on Thomsen, Verner, and Jespersen introduce their respective contribution, i.e. Thomsen's deciphering of the Turkic Orkhon inscriptions, Verner's Law, and Jespersen's study of English and other subjects. The article on Vendryès focuses on his *Le Langage* (1921), which Cen believes has deeply influenced linguistics in China (58). In fact, Cen and his student (the late Professor Ye Feisheng) co-translated *Le Langage* into Chinese (published in 1992). The article on Cohen is comprehensive with some account of their interpersonal relation-

ship while the article on Martinet concentrates on his book *Éléments de linguistique générale* (1960).

The section on Slavic linguists introduces Baudouin de Courtenay (1845–1929), Lev Vladimirovich Scherba (1880–1944) Nikolai Sergeyevevich Trubetzkoy (1845–1929), and Roman Jakobson (1896–1982). The article on Baudouin focuses on his contribution to phonology. The discussion is based on the Russian edition of Baudouin's writings on general linguistics (1963, 1964), although probably for most of the present-day readers Edward Stankiewicz's all-English Baudouin anthology (1972; cf. Stankiewicz 1987; Birnbaum 1998) is more accessible and helpful, which Cen does not refer to. The article on Scherba makes a fairly comprehensive presentation of his contribution to phonology, grammar, lexicography, and other fields. The article on Trubetzkoy concentrates on his contribution to phonology. In Cen's view, Trubetzkoy's contribution lies not only in his coinage of certain terms, but also in his definition and illumination of their content (146). The presentation is based on Trubetzkoy's *Grundzüge der Phonologie* (1939). At the end of this article, after a brief mention of Roman Jakobson and André Martinet's further development of Trubetzkoy, Cen writes that "structural linguistics is characterized by a conspicuous feature, i.e. over-attention to the interrelationship among linguistic elements. Some even think that the sole goal of linguistics is to study these relationships, as if all the rest are irrelevant to them. And that is a big weak point of structural linguistics." (155-156) The article on Roman Jakobson summarizes his contribution to linguistics as the theory of phonemic distinctive features, clarification of the relationship between synchronic linguistics and diachronic linguistics, the study of child language and aphasia, and the theory of language functions.

The section on American linguists introduces Zellig Harris (1909–1992) and Noam Chomsky (b. 1928). The article on Harris discusses his work, the first phase of which (pre-1951) is characterized by his structural analysis of morphology and phonology whereas the second phase of which (post-1951) is characterized by his analysis of sentences, and in between is his representative book *Methods in Structural Linguistics* (1951). Cen believes that there are many self-contradictions in Harris's approach and "it is not strange that he is scoffed at as of 'hocus-pocus group'." (98) The article on Chomsky focuses on pre-1970 Chomsky. Cen tries to explain Chomsky's phrase structure grammar, transformational grammar, and generative grammar. His illustration is mainly based on Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957). Cen believes that Chomsky's transformational generative grammar is in essence based on Descartes's rationalism, intermingled with many mathematical-logical elements, and "no matter how skillfully he applies it, it is methodologically inadvisable." (112)

The section on Chinese linguists introduces four eminent linguists, Zhao Yuan Ren (= Yuen Ren Chao, 1892–1982), Luo Chang Pei (=Lo Ch'ang-p'ei, 1899–1958), Li Fang Gui (=Fang-Kuei Li, 1902–1987), and Wang Li (1900–1986). The first three are generally regarded as pioneers and great contributors in the course of modernization of Chinese linguistics (205). The article on Zhao refers to his achievements in establishing a set of Roman letters to spell Chinese characters, his field study of Chinese

dialects, and his co-translation (with Luo Chang Pei and Li Fang Gui) of the Swedish sinologist Bernhard Karlgren's (1889–1978) *Études sur la phonologie chinoise* (1915-1926; Chinese translation *zhong guo yin yun xue yan jiu* published in 1940, 781 pages). The project was far more than merely translating, as it involved addition, deletion, and rewriting, all with Karlgren's permission. The articles on Luo and Li focus on their phonological studies and historical-comparative studies respectively. Zhao and Li lived and died in the USA, and Luo died in 1958 in mainland China. The only one of them who experienced the so-called Great Cultural Revolution that swept the mainland China from 1966 to 1976 was Wang Li, a distinguished linguist, phonologist, and grammarian. The article on Wang Li gives a general description of his research and teaching. In spite of their varied experiences these Chinese linguists are characterized by two shared features. One is their international educational experience in their formative years. Zhao (Ph.D., Harvard, 1918; cf. Zhao & Huang 1998:89) and Li (Ph.D., Chicago, 1928) studied in the USA, Wang studied in France (Ph.D., 1932), and Luo taught from 1944 to 1948 in the USA (I found out that among Leonard Bloomfield Papers at Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library is one letter by Luo to Bloomfield, written on June 8, 1946.)¹. Another is their profound knowledge of their native culture (philology, literature, history, philosophy, etc.). These two features may explain why they became distinguished linguists.

Qixiang Cen (1903–1989), author of this collection, was a professor of Chinese at Peking University in mainland China. The collection was somehow intended as a supplement to his monograph *yu yan xue shi gai yao* (*History of Linguistics*, 1958, revised ed. 1988). Being a France-trained linguist (1928–1933), Cen understandably includes articles on Meillet Vendryès, and Cohen, from whom he took linguistic classes. Being a Chinese linguist whose research areas included Chinese dialects and languages of other ethnic groups in China, he naturally includes articles on four important Chinese linguists. Taken as a whole, the collection makes an informative and introductory reading. One distinctive flavor of the book is Cen's accounts of his interpersonal relationships with some of the linguists in question (71–72, 189–192, 198, 206, 208), which are fairly interesting.

References

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¹<http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0635>

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Note from the Editors

The Editors of PBML have been pleased very much to learn that Professor Jun Qian (English Department, Peking University), who is a frequent contributor to our Bulletin, has been awarded by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs the *Jan Masaryk Bronze Medal* for promoting Czech culture in China.

Qian's introduction of the Czech culture to the Chinese people began in 1990. He has published three books and many papers closely related with the Prague School or Czech scholars, the most important one of which is *Structural-Functional Linguistics: The Prague School* (1998). This book is the first one on the Prague School in Chinese and it won a book prize and a research prize awarded by China's Ministry of Education.

To help Chinese have access to Czech scholars' writings, Qian made strenuous efforts to urge Chinese publishers to reprint these writings. At present three books by Czech scholars have been reprinted in China, with Qian's detailed introduction for each of them. The three books by Czech scholars are as follows:

- Mathesius, Vilém. 2008. *A Functional Analysis of Present Day English on a General Linguistic Basis*. [Qian's introduction, 13-63] Beijing: World Publishing Corporation.
- Firbas, Jan. 2007. *Functional Sentence Perspective in Written and Spoken Communication*. [Qian's introduction, 13-31] Beijing: World Publishing Corporation.
- Luelsdorff, Philip A., Jarmila Panevová, and Petr Sgall (eds.). 2004. *Praguiana 1945-1990*. [Qian's introduction, 1-42] Beijing: Peking University Press.

Qian's two courses *The Prague School* and *Functional Linguistics* are devoted to the understanding of Czech scholars and he has advised many theses and dissertations on their ideas. In addition, Qian has also taken an active part in translating Czech scholars' writings into Chinese and has given talks on Czech scholars.

Qian's twenty-year effort has contributed remarkably to Chinese people's better understanding of the Czech culture and to the cultivation of the younger generation's interest in this domain.

Our most sincere congratulations!