

*A PROVISIONAL SYSTEM OF GRAMMAR FOR TEACHING CHINESE (WITH INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY).* Li Chi. University of California (Berkeley) Center for Chinese Studies, Studies in Chinese Communist Terminology No. 6, June 1960, i-vi, 1-204.

PROFESSOR LI CHI has placed us all in her debt in an important volume which is so far too little known. She has translated the official Communist "A Provisional System of Grammar for Teaching Chinese" into English and in a traditional Chinese form which deserves more widespread emulation in English, and has interspersed it with a learned and judicious commentary. The center for Chinese Studies at Berkeley has earned the respect of many of us for this volume and for Paul L. M. Serruy's outstanding "Survey of the Chinese Language Reform and the Anti-Illiteracy Movement in Communist China." My only criticism is that these volumes were printed in too small an edition, and are consequently unfortunately difficult to obtain.

The Chinese Communists, at least in part because of their avowed interest in the replacement of Chinese characters with an alphabetic script, are faced with much more serious problems of language standardization than the Nationalists have yet had to face. Language standardization involves three distinct problems which the Communists have carefully considered: phonology, grammar or syntax, and vocabulary.

Both Communists and Nationalists faced the problem of Phonology first: Just what is "standard pronunciation"? The Nationalists moved from an artificial Nanking dialect (Nanking minus the ju-sheng) to an unashamed adoption of spoken Pekinese. *Which level* of Pekinese proved to be a question. Most Chinese tended to prefer that of an educated native of Peking with its more limited distribution of the characteristic final -r. Rigorous linguists preferred the speech of the uneducated native of Peking since it was undeniably "purer" or less influenced by literary forms than that of his more cosmopolitan neighbor. Nationalist standard pronunciations on Taiwan as on the mainland are often based on the spoken forms of an older male Manchu native of Peking (Ch'í jen).

In the early days of the Communist victory the Communists showed an equal adherence to spoken Pekinese. In the part of central China where I was living many cadres affected Pekinese forms by adding -r's even to places that were never so modified in native Pekinese. But gradually the Communists came to feel that Peking pronunciations were too provincial to serve the needs of the whole country. They reflected this uneasiness by speaking

less of Pekinese and more and more of "widespread" Chinese (p'u-t'ung hua). This was further modified to "Chinese speech" (Hán yǔ) in a movement another of Li Chi's studies has carefully documented.

We thus have a strange reversal in terms of standard pronunciation: the Communists are considerably less revolutionary than the Nationalists. The Communists have tempered their revolutionary zeal by the need to have forms more suitable to the rest of the country and more clearly related to China's cultural past. Communist willingness to be ruthless in terms of written characters limits their freedom of action in terms of the spoken language: such are the responsibilities of power.

The situation in terms of grammar has been similar. At first both parties seemed to assume that the grammar of Spoken Pekinese (still very inadequately studied) would serve the needs of the rest of the country. But since acoustic grammars are rare, sophisticated, and difficult, they wanted a written corpus on which grammatical analysis could be based. Both sides hoped that the vernacular novel, especially "The Dream of the Red Chamber" would be just this. But when it was studied carefully, even without the poetic interludes, it was found that the novel contained a great deal more of the literary language than people had hoped and assumed.

In general, the Nationalists have been content to let this problem sleep, but the Communists have been goaded into action. The class revolution which the Communist victory entailed meant that many proletarians wrote a Chinese which was so confused grammatically that it was sometimes unintelligible. The forced labor which is now such an important part of student education has reduced the time for study and the ability of the student to write clear and attractive Chinese. Communist teachers demand some relief from this almost chaotic disorder by a clear statement of the grammatical principles inherent in Chinese, on the basis of which they can correct student composition exercises.

The Communists tried to introduce order into this chaos by drawing up an official grammar, which Miss Li has translated and annotated for us. They had several accomplished linguists, many with considerable understanding of Western linguistic studies, available for consultation. Lo Ch'ang-p'ei, Wang Li, Yang Shu-ta were internationally known linguists. Li Jung demonstrated his familiarity with Western linguistic studies by translating the preface to Y. R. Chao's Mandarin Primer (which still remains one of our most important grammatical statements) from English into Chinese in Peking in 1952.

In many ways the Communist product is disappointing. The

first disappointment stems from the nature of the directive. The Communist government specified that the grammar should stay close enough to traditional Chinese grammars to be useful to high school teachers of the Chinese language. This precluded the work from being cast in the most modern linguistic form of which China's scholars were capable.

In the second place, since it was a co-operative effort it inevitably loses the ability to innovate. Individuals can invent, discover, open up lines of approach that might be wrong, but might also prove to be excitingly right. Co-operative scholarship cannot rise higher than the common denominator, which unfortunately by nature, cannot be very revolutionary. The individual studies of any of these scholars are more advanced than their common effort, but the approach Y. R. Chao took in his *Mandarin Primer* is still in advance of these.

The third difficulty comes from international factors. Many of us hoped that the reaction against "Western imperialism" and its grammatical concomitant—grammatical categories derived from Latin—would free Chinese scholars for a grammar fashioned to the unique needs of the Chinese language. But Chinese scholars with considerable alacrity traded one bondsman for another. Rather than developing a new grammar from a fresh point of view they turned to Russian linguists and smugly quoted them as unimpeachable authorities.

In some important areas Russian linguists seem to be considerably behind Western linguistic developments; at any rate, those the Chinese linguists enshrined as authorities are undoubtedly behind. This is strikingly apparent in the definition of word-classes. Wang Li quotes a Russian grammar compiled under Serba, "the word class which represents things is called nouns." He concludes that if a language as complex in morphology as Russian bases its definitions for word classes only on meaning, there is even more reason for Chinese to do the same. Our grammar accordingly defines the Chinese noun: "Nouns represent names of men, events, or things." This is a disappointing bondage to "meaning"; Russian linguistic theory is a new fetter rather than a promising liberation.

The last important deficiency stems directly from Chinese Communist political control. As long as any grammatical problem has no political overtones and thus remains genuinely neutral it can be debated in linguistic terms. But it is the responsibility of communist linguists to relate linguistics to politics in as many ways as possible. That is, it is their responsibility to use linguistics as an ideological vehicle.

The question whether Chinese is "monosyllabic" and whether

it has morphology became an ideological one in 1952. The Soviet linguist Konrad argued that the idea that Chinese is monosyllabic and has no morphology is an instance of Western disdain of Chinese. This pre-empts it as a linguistic problem. Now if anyone disagreed with Konrad, he would not be discussing a linguistic problem but using linguistic terms for an ideological or political attack on Konrad, and thus would be open to severe political repression. Once political considerations pre-empt a linguistic question, argument is treason. Linguistics stops where politics begins.

In spite of these considerable difficulties, the work remains an important one. No Chinese specialist can afford to ignore it, especially if he is interested in a modern treatment of Chinese grammar.

Miss Li's comments are judicious and illuminating. If one first reads the Appendix (Historical Sketch of Modern Grammatical Studies) one gets a very clear picture of the development of Chinese grammar from the beginning of the twentieth century. She displays an easy familiarity with the men who played important roles, and a complete understanding of their work. The most sophisticated linguistic terms in English or Chinese present no difficulties in her able hands, although such equivalents are not available even in the latest dictionaries. Y. R. Chao, while he was on the Berkeley campus, followed her work with interest and sympathy; she could hardly have found a more competent mentor. Her English style is smooth and pleasant; it is indeed an exemplary study. Both she and the University of California can be justly proud of the standards set by this work.

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