

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Habilitation thesis

Reviewer

**Reviewer's home unit,
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Wei-lun LU

Comparing construals across languages and genres: A perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

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This thesis results from the combination of 9 research papers published by the candidate, either by himself or in co-authorship, in highly prestigious outlets. Since these papers have already been the object of strict peer-review work, their quality has already been determined by experts. I concur with these anonymous experts on the quality of the candidate's research. For this reason, my comments are mostly made in the spirit of personal reflection to assist the candidate in his future developments of the previous work.

The papers have been structured by the candidate as follows:

Publications 1-4: These publications provide a cross-linguistic approach to viewpoint in narratives. The languages in contrast are English and Chinese. The candidate points out that narrative viewpoint can be studied from a general textual perspective whose study belongs to (cognitive) poetics and stylistics. But he also argues that narrative viewpoint can be studied at a lower sentential level, which brings in the constructional perspective. The candidate cites relevant work carried out from both perspectives within Cognitive Linguistics and embeds his research within the latter perspective on viewpoint. This perspective involves a consideration of constructions based on personal pronouns, deixis, tense marking, discourse particles, negation, and inverted word order. The candidate here mentions the importance of non-verbal cues (gaze, facial expression, etc.), although his work is exclusively based on texts, and cross-linguistic analyses, which are within his scope of interest because of the smaller amount of previous research in this area. From a methodological perspective, the candidate has chosen to work with multiple parallel texts (translations) where a masterpiece written in English is studied in contrast to several translations into Chinese. This approach is seen as capable of providing more reliable insights into contrasting viewpoint constructions than a study of parallel annotated (but unrelated) corpora because the former strategy, but not the latter, allows the analyst to compare different perspectives for the same content.

Publications 5-9: This group of publications is focused on cultural variation in Chinese. The data for analysis has been obtained from eulogistic idioms chosen by mourners according to their belief and professional backgrounds. The study of cultural conceptualization is focused on metaphorical and metonymic construal and the pragmeme of offering solace. The papers in this group address such issues as the extralinguistic factors that impinge on how people communicate death in a cultural setting, how death is construed (metaphorically) within the

same culture in connection to religious (Buddhist and Christian) or political background, and also in relation to the speaker's profession. The constructionist perspective is added in terms of lexical instantiation. While there may be a high degree of coincidence in metaphorical conceptualization across religious communities, lexical realization provides nuances of meaning that reveal important aspects of the underlying worldview.

There follows a brief general assessment of the relevance of these topics, the clarity in their formulation, the contributions to the field, the adequacy of the research methodology, the depth of the analyses, and formal standards. Then, I will make some critical but constructive observations that the candidate is welcome to reflect on and address in future work.

1. Relevance of topics. The thesis is very well constructed with two broad areas of focus: viewpoint and conceptualization. Both areas are immense and there is much previous work by other scholars on some of the specific topics chosen by the candidate (viewpoint shifts, deixis, demonstratives, tense shifting, etc.). However, the candidate has endowed his research with a pervasive contrastive perspective that stands out as a differentiating factor. This perspective takes the form of cross-linguistic analysis in the first group of publications and of intra-cultural sub-genre contrasts in the second group of publications. The research carried out by the candidate is also relevant from the point of view of what it adds to monolingual analysis. The publications in the first group are a good example of what cross-linguistic concerns cast light on aspects of individual systems that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. A case in point is the nuanced analysis provided by the candidate of potential viewpoint strategies in Chinese, when looked at through the lens of the grammatically more complex English system. Then, the publications in the second group add to the growing body of cognitive-linguistic studies in culture in an original way by conceptualization, cultural constraints, and (contextualized) communicative impact in the same light. This alignment between pragmatics and cognition is welcome.

2. Clarity in the formulation. The publications in the two groups have clearly contextualized statements of goals. The preliminary "commentary" provides readers with an equally clear overview of the explorations provided by each publication and how they link together. The result is a coherent set of publications that guide readers through two major concerns of Cognitive Linguistics, i.e., perspective and conceptualization, in a methodologically solid way.

3. Contributions to the field. The publications in the first group provide relevant insights into quite a few topics: the methodology of cross-linguistic analysis, the understanding of narrative viewpoint, the role of lexical and grammatical constructions in signaling viewpoint shifts, the role (and frequency) of proximal/distal demonstratives in building English and Chinese narratives, and the stylistic effects of tense shifting (English) versus other devices like reduplication (Chinese) to determine the dominance of character versus narrator construal. The results include an exploration of cross-linguistic construal mismatches, such as the lack of zoom-in effects in some Chinese renditions of English texts, and the greater length of the iconic parts of the Chinese versions. The publications of the second group contribute not only to the general understanding of the conceptualization of death in Chinese, but more specifically to the study of eulogistic idioms. They deal with different subgenres and specific communicative needs as constraints on the metaphorical design of these idioms. The discussion of results is significant from both the cultural and pragmatic perspectives and it contributes to the field of cultural linguistics and to the development of our understanding of the role of conceptual metaphor in communication. It is also of interest because it addresses other aspects of worldview that were not focused on in the first group of publications.

4. Adequacy of the research methodology. The candidate is well aware of the different methodologies that could have been used in the context of his research goals. He refers to both of them in the publications and in the introductory comments. I have already commented on the methodology based on multiple parallel texts and its advantages over other methodologies if the focus of attention is placed on comparing viewpoint strategies when the content is virtually the same. It would have been interesting to contrast a selection of the results obtained through this methodology with results arising from other methodologies (e.g., a quantitative and/or monolingual corpus study that correlates realization strategies with specific textual features). The methodology for the second group of papers is equally adequate to the study of death metaphors from different culture-internal perspectives: the qualitative analysis of cultural allusions on the basis of a collection of eulogistic idioms in terms of their underlying cognitive models. There is also contrast with eulogies from Western cultures (e.g., American and Italian eulogies). This is where the candidate may have missed the opportunity to make his contrasts more meaningful by adding some other (sub-)cultures (Eastern, African, Native American, etc.) and to make such contrasts systematic rather than occasional. However, I am aware of the difficulty involved in compiling typological data and the exploration offered by the candidate is valuable as is.

5. Depth of the analysis. The overview of results provided above suggests in-depth discussion of the topics under scrutiny. The candidate is particularly brilliant and clear when it comes to examining cross-linguistic contrasts. The phenomena identified are not easy to analyze, much less while making contrasts between two languages that make use of widely different constructional choices. An example of one such complex area is the discussion of the Chinese proximal demonstratives as alleged rough equivalents of English definite articles, where the candidate provides evidence that definiteness is systematically expressed in Chinese either through proximal and distal demonstratives, which points to a different management of viewpoint in both languages.

However, the culture-oriented publications are not any less lucid. For example, the discussion of metaphors in the studies on the conceptualization of death is fine-grained, very well contextualized, and written in a reader-friendly way. The candidate has provided a fully explicit account of the cultural connections revealed by different but related metaphors (e.g., the discussion of DEATH IS A JOURNEY TOWARDS LIFE, which relates to LIFE IS A JOURNEY and LIFE IS A CIRCLE in different ways).

6. Formal standards. Since the publications follow the style guidelines of the editorial houses, which is a process whose standards are taken care of by the editors, I have no special comments in this respect. The expository and argumentative style of the candidate is clear and persuasive. The introductory comments provide a well-organized rationale of the contents of the publications and how they relate to one another.

1. The thesis mentions the notion of embodiment but, perhaps because of its strong emphasis on cross-linguistic analysis, it fails to address its real importance. Viewpoint is embodied, so maybe some of the Chinese data, where viewpoint is not clearly marked grammatically, could be accounted for in terms of embodied discourse viewpoint. Reconsidering the candidate's findings from the complementary multimodal discourse perspective could also be useful (of course, this would require working with other empirical methodologies). Perhaps some of the work carried out by Mittelberg could serve as a source of inspiration for this sort of development; e.g.:

Mittelberg, I. (2017). Experiencing and construing spatial artifacts from within: simulated artifact immersion as a multimodal viewpoint strategy. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 28, 381–415. doi: 10.1515/cog-2016-0124

2. The discussion of the differences between the coding of TIME in English and Chinese could benefit from multiple studies on time from embodied, cultural, and typological perspectives that have been carried out over the years within Cognitive Linguistics or compatible approaches. Moore (2014), for example, discusses perspective-neutral and perspective-specific frames in time metaphors across languages.

Moore, K. E. (2014). *The Spatial Language of Time. Metaphor, metonymy, and frames of reference*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

The embodied perspective on the study of time across cultures has been taken by Lera Boroditsky, who the candidate only cites once. Boroditsky has shown, on experimental grounds, that linguistic differences in the treatment of time lead to different ways of thinking about it (Boroditsky, 1999, 2000). The experiments contrast English and Chinese. Since the candidate mentions linguistic relativity several times (although only in an incidental way), this kind of work could be useful for further contextualization of his work and the formulation of more powerful generalizations.

Boroditsky, L. (1999). First-language thinking for second-language understanding: Mandarin and English speakers' conceptions of time. Proceeding of the Twenty-First Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, Vancouver, BC.

Boroditsky, L. (2000). Metaphoric structuring: understanding time through spatial metaphors. *Cognition*, 75, 1–28.

In this regard, note that English grammar uses past tense to signal tentativeness in directive speech acts. The metaphor PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE IS PHYSICAL DISTANCE (Kövecses 1995: 321), which is grounded in the more general metaphor TIME IS SPACE, acts as a licensing factor for this aspect of English grammar. This is an embodied metaphor; however, it does not seem to be operational in all languages, which further shows that embodiment does not necessarily entail universality. There are typological and cultural co-factors.

Kövecses, Z. (1995). American friendship and the scope of metaphor. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 6-4: 315-346.

3. The linguistic relativity controversy has not been given much attention either in the comments or in the publications. Authors like Slobin and Boroditsky could have been cited on this topic. Slobin is mentioned twice but on methodological issues only. One of the two papers that the candidate cites could be a good starting point:

Slobin, D. I. (2003). Language and thought online: Cognitive consequences of linguistic relativity. In D. Gentner & S. Goldin-Meadow (Eds.), *Language in mind: Advances in the study of language and thought* (pp. 157–191). MIT Press.

4. On the topic of mixing viewpoints through deixis my advice is to make connections with previous work on *come/go* in English; e.g.:

Radden, G. (1996). Motion metaphorized: The case of coming and going. In E. H. Casad (Ed.), *Cognitive Linguistics in the Redwoods: The Expansion of a New Paradigm in Linguistics* (pp. 423–458). Berlin & New York: De Gruyter Mouton.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110811421.423>

In addition, it may be a good idea to explore how *lai/qu* work in other languages and take into account cross-linguistic analyses like Oshima (2006), which, by the way, devotes a section to the contrast between the English and Chinese uses of *come/go*:

Oshima, D. Y. (2006). GO and COME revisited: What serves as a reference point?. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 32(1). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3765/bls.v32i1.3466>

Oshima (2006) provides a well-motivated fine-grained account of the contrasts.

5. The methodology is good enough for the candidate's analytical goals, but I wonder if it could be further improved in either of two ways: by contrasting findings with monolingual corpora studies for the same range of topics; and by further strengthening them through inter-rater reliability protocols to ensure that data collected are correct representations of the variables measured. The first method would be especially useful to determine the relationship between the English definite article and the Chinese proximal and distal demonstratives. It is necessary to further validate (or falsify) the claim that both demonstratives can be used to render the definite article and to find the motivation behind the use of one or the other. The best complementary methodology would be one that samples non-parallel corpora and examines (manually) usage contexts to determine usage principles for the two languages. Then, the intra-linguistic results can be contrasted in terms of general patterns and possible principles that account for (and predict the likelihood of) form-function correlations.

Motivation is also needed to account for the use of reduplication to express viewpoint in Chinese. One wonders about the connection between intensity or immediacy, vividness, liveliness (as functional extensions of intensity) and viewpoint.

6. In the section on the use of inversion, vantage point and subjective construal, the paper claims that in English (as a rigid word order language), the sentential subject position tends to be occupied by elements of higher cognitive salience. I find this claim to be at odds with the fact that dummy "it" subjects are not salient and that heavy constituents, which are prominent because of their greater informational load, take the rightmost clausal position. By default, the leftmost position is thematic (given). In this sense, it is not salient, since its informational value has been set up in previous discourse. Later on, in example (2a), for the sentence "In comes a raving maniac, Jerry West", we find the claim that "the primary entity in the motion event, Jerry West, is linguistically encoded as the subject of the sentence and receives unambiguously maximal attention from the reader". But maximal attention arises from its dislocated position, not because of its status as subject.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

1. What is the candidate's stance on linguistic relativity? Would the data that he has handled call for a deterministic position or for a weak version of the hypothesis? If closer to the weak view, would it be possible for the candidate to identify some phenomenon in which relativity is clearly not at work?
2. Besides the English and Chinese phenomena discussed in his thesis, which other phenomena does the candidate think would benefit from his Multiple-Parallel-Text approach?
3. Is the study of metaphor and metonymy completely unrelated to sentential viewpoint analysis or can there be some degree of interaction?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled *Comparing construals across languages and genres: A perspective of Cognitive Linguistics* by Wei-lun Lu **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of General and diachronic linguistics.

Date: December 13, 2022

Signature:

A red stamp with the word "UNIVERSIDAD" is visible in the background. Below it, there is a blue ink signature.