

Fang Mei [方梅]. (2018). 浮现语法: 基于汉语口语和书面语的研究 [Emergent grammar: Studies based on spoken and written Chinese]. 北京: 商务印书馆. Beijing: The Commercial Press. 429 pp. ISBN 978-7-100-16170-1

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Emergent Grammar, proposed by Paul Hopper in 1987, represents a functional approach to the study of syntax, which postulates that the rules of grammar emerge from language use. This is contrary to the *A Priori* Grammar Postulate as called by Hopper (1988), which posits that grammar is a set of rules existing in the mind before the production of utterances. Distinguishing from other functionalist frameworks, Emergent Grammar pays more attention to synchronic variations in language instead of diachronic change, and attempts to synthesize principles of language change over time from these synchronic variations. For this reason, Emergent Grammar gives special weight to naturally occurring data, such as spontaneous conversations. Principal concerns of Emergent Grammar include grammaticalization, the process by which communicative practices become syntactic properties, and pragmaticalization, the process whereby syntactic items develop pragmatic functions.

Since 1987, Emergent Grammar has further developed and widely applied to the studies of various languages, with a significant number of publications. However, its applications to the Chinese language are lesser known and monographs based on these are limited. Fang's book is thus significant in that it offers a systematic and thorough investigation on a wide variety of emerging phenomena in Chinese, from the perspective of Emergent Grammar.

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, the main body of this book is organized into six parts, with each part consisting of 3–4 chapters on a shared theme. The first part is composed of the first three chapters, focusing on the syntactic representations of background information. Backgrounding refers to parts of narrative which provide supportive materials that does not itself narrate the main events (Hopper 1979). Generally speaking, background information and foreground information in narrative discourses are presented through different grammatical devices. Due to the lack of grammatical inflections, Chinese has distinctive ways of encoding background information. Chapters 1 and 2 aim at revealing these features by exploring three emergent syntactic structures designated for background information packaging. It is found that both cataphoric

zero subject clauses and descriptive relative clauses are means of backgrounding in Chinese narratives. They are said to be downgraded to non-embedded dependent clauses and embedded subordinate clauses respectively. Additionally, clauses containing “V *zhe* (a progressive aspect marker)” are also said to provide background information, as they are adverbial clauses and also syntactically dependent. Chapter 3 discusses the phenomenon of post-nominal relative clauses, whose order is said to be motivated by a pragmatic principle known as “postpositional tendency of heavy components”. Fang argues that the post-positioned relative clauses are being conventionalized as an emerging syntactic expression.

In the second part, the author illustrates the decategorization of verbs in spoken Beijing, with epistemic and evidential verbs, locutionary verb, and modal verbs as examples. Decategorization refers to the process whereby a member of major grammatical categories such as nouns and verbs begin to lose the morphological and syntactic properties that mark their membership in their respective categories (Hopper and Traugott 1993:103–113). In Chapter 4, the author demonstrates that a range of epistemic and evidential verbs are in the process of shifting from lexical items to pragmatic markers, indicating the speaker’s viewpoint on the assertion conveyed by the grammatical complement. Whether an epistemic or evidential verb becomes bleached and loses its semantic content, as well as its lexical category, depends crucially on its degree of control (cf. Givón 1980). Those with less control are said to more likely be decategorized. In Chapter 5, the author thoroughly investigates the synchronic variation of the high-frequency speech act verb *shuo* ‘say’ and points out that it has reached the status of a complementizer. This new grammatical function is driven by its use as a quotative marker in discourse. Chapter 6 examines another type of decategorization, namely from modal verbs to sentential adverbs. The author attributes this development to the fact that modal verbs often occur at the beginning or end of a sentence.

The third part of the monography comprises three chapters devoted to the extension of referential functions and loss of referentiality. Chapter 7 shows that a definite article is derived from the proximal demonstrative *zhe* ‘this’. It is noted that rather than the distal demonstrative *na* ‘that’, it is the proximal demonstrative *zhe* ‘this’ that has developed this new function, because the proximal “*zhe* + NP” expression tends to carry a higher degree of topicality. Chapter 8 explores the functions of *zhe* in two types of verb-related reference structures, namely “*zhe* (S) VP” and “S *zhe* VP”. It is noted that the pre-positioned *zhe* structure is used to establish topics, while the medial positioned one functions as an anaphoric device. In the author’s point of view, the emergence of these two structures are motivated by the requirements of topic establishment and topic continuity. Chapter 9 gives a detailed discussion of the non-deictic usages of second-person and

third-person pronouns in spoken Beijing. In addition to designating dummy objects and impersonal use, they are shown to also serve as means of expressing subjectivity to reflect the attitude of the speaker and index some psychological distance. In Chapter 10, the author argues that the postpositioned *li* 'inside', originally being attached to nouns, can now be used on verbs and functions as a clitic indicating the completion of an action.

The fourth part centers on the fluid phenomena of various word class categories, aiming to reveal the rules and means of lexical category changes in a language without grammatical inflections. It is pointed out that frequent changes in lexical category arise from innovative syntactic combinations. Some conversions only appear in a rhetorical context, whereas others have been conventionalized due to grammatical context. These contrastive types of category shift are called rhetorically induced and grammatically induced respectively. In Chapter 11, the author takes the shift in nouns as an example to illustrate the development caused by rhetorical and grammatical effect. This study exemplifies one of the assumptions of usage-based model, that syntactic patterns evolve from pragmatic patterns. In Chapter 12, the author differentiates two functions of diminutive suffix *-er* in Beijing. On the one hand, it can serve as a derivational suffix converting a verb to a noun, referring to an object as related to the action denoted by the verb. On the other hand, it functions as an inflectional affix and only changes the parts of speech category of the verb without changing its meaning. In other words, the verb with *-er* is a self-designation form, i.e. referring to the action itself. Chapter 13 accounts for the morpho-syntactic significance of tone sandhi in words with the diminutive suffix in Beijing. As observed by the author, the "AA-*er*" formation, a monosyllabic adjective duplication with the diminutive suffix *-er*, can be an adverb when the duplication is pronounced in the first tone, which is a high-pitched tone. Moreover, it also works on words other than adjective duplications. In these cases, the tone sandhi is a double marking operation coming with the suffix *-er* to convey diminutive meaning and act as an adverb marker.

Three chapters in the fifth part are concerned with the pragmaticalization of syntactic items. Pragmaticalization refers to a process by which certain syntactic items develop new pragmatic functions, such as linking parts of a discourse, expressing the attitude of speakers, and so forth. In Chapter 14, drawing on data from spontaneous conversation, the author concludes that some of the Chinese conjunctions have gone through semantic reduction and assumed discourse markers functions, including discourse organizing and speech act functions. In Chapter 15, the author further points out that these newly developed functions are mainly motivated by the pragmatic cooperation principle. Under the effect of this principle, forward-linking conjunctions, rather than backward-linking conjunctions, are preferred in the turn-initial positions. Many conjunctions are shown

to have acquired various emergent meanings and function as discourse markers. As suggested by the author, the interpretation and the function of a certain conjunction are susceptible not only to its position in a conversational turn but also to the topic continuity between turns. Chapter 16 looks into the development of interrogative marker *sh bu shi* into a discourse marker, which the author argues exhibits functions such as seeking unknown information, confirming information, and establishing interlocutor interaction, and so forth.

The sixth part is centered around the relationship between register features and grammatical features. All three chapters in this part attempt to answer two questions, (1) What is the relationship between various registers, and the structures of sentences and discourses? And (2) How do the requirements of communicative functions of different discourse genres affect grammatical expressions? In Chapter 17, the author reviews the distribution of *ya*, *na*, and *la* in dialogues taken from fictions and play scripts and finds that these particles can turn a constative utterance into a performative utterance, thus conveying illocutionary meaning. This usage is not accounted for by previous phonetics-based explanations. Chapter 18 illustrates how syntax is shaped by register features with a variety of detailed examples. It is noted that different registers vary in terms of immediacy and interaction, thus requiring different syntactic forms, and this plays an important role in the development of emerging syntactic forms. For example, agentive object sentences are used only in conversations but not in narrative discourses. Tense and aspect markers are often omitted in the titles of news reports. Typically, a new grammatical form comes into being in a specific register. Chapter 19 concerns mainly with the second questions – that of impact of register on grammar. With a further comparison of data from different registers, the author draws the following conclusions:

1. Syntactic features may exhibit distributional preferences in different registers (e.g., adverbs with subjective views are not preferred in expository text).
2. Syntactic behaviors are subject to the constraints of discourse registers (e.g., although Chinese adverbs cannot be used on its own by definitions, this can take place in conversation.)
3. The semantic interpretation of syntactic forms depends on specific registers (e.g., in the case of conjunctions, many of their newly developed meanings and functions are obtained from conversation rather than other registers.)

All of the examples described here aim to prove that grammar develops gradually from use and is always in a state of flux. In short, grammar is shaped by communicative functions.

Since this book touches on so many important topics and complex phenomena, it is unsurprising that there is room for further improvement. For example,

although the title mentions both spoken and written Chinese, there are no systematic comparisons of the two registers. Additionally, more evidence is needed to prove that “S *zhe* VP” construction in Beijing has the same function as the “subject-*zhi*-predicate” construction in Classic Chinese.

On the whole, this book is an important contribution not only to Chinese research from the perspective of Emergent Grammar, but to the theory itself. The combination of detailed descriptions of Chinese usage and theoretical discussion in this book will certainly help us gain deeper insights into both the nature of grammar and the characteristics of Chinese. Furthermore, this book covers many important topics in Emergent Grammar and provides a clear picture of this theory, which will help readers better understand the view that grammar arises out of language use, and is always changing. Undoubtedly, this book will inspire further researches in the future.

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