

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Wei-lun LU

Habilitation thesis

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

Reviewer

Prof. Dr. Hans-Georg Wolf

**Reviewer's home unit,
institution**

Department of English and American Studies
University of Potsdam

The habilitation thesis submitted by Dr. Wei-lun LU is cumulative, i.e., it consists of nine previously published articles and book chapters and one general commentary that, as the candidate writes "comprises a characterization of the investigated matter (Section 1), objectives of the work (Section 2), research questions and employed methodology (Section 3), obtained results (Section 4), a self-assessment of the work reported in this thesis (Section 5), works cited in the commentary and the applicant's share of contribution in each of the publications included in the habilitation thesis." The total number of pages is 210. A cumulative habilitation thesis has become an acceptable standard in countries where a habilitation is the traditional norm for becoming a full professor; the downside of such a thesis, though, is a certain redundancy. Thematically related articles and book chapters that are included in it naturally repeat the theoretical background, the literature review, and the methodology. This is also the case for the present thesis, but pointing this out should not be understood as a criticism of Dr. Lu's submission in particular.

Be it as it may, in my review, I will follow the guidelines given to me, i.e., I will not provide a summary of the individual published works the thesis consists of, but will loosely orient myself along the lines of the following questions, as suggested and slightly adjusted:

- How relevant are the topics within the given academic field?
- What contributions does the thesis make to the field(s) and how does it compare to other works, both foreign and domestic?
- How precisely, clearly and understandably are the topics formulated?
- How appropriate and relevant are the chosen methodological approaches to the topics?
- What is the level of the analysis?
- Are formal criteria (language, citations, etc.) of sufficiently high standard?

The thesis is divided into two topical parts; the first one deals with the construal of narrative viewpoint across languages, the second with the construal of an institutionalized event of death in the genre of eulogy. Beyond 'construal' as notion that unites the two parts, 'viewpoint,' in a wider theoretical sense, can also be considered a common thread. Methodologically, the 'usage-based commitment' of Cognitive Linguistics underlies both parts of the thesis. For the thesis, this commitment translates into the use of parallel text corpora (English and Mandarin Chinese) of well-known literary works for the first topic, and an online data base of pre-defined death eulogies, realized as four-character idioms in Taiwanese Mandarin.

The publications assembled in the habilitation thesis make important and manifold contributions to the wider field of Cognitive Linguistics, respectively Cultural Linguistics, and beyond, as outlined in the following.

The publications in part one break new ground in the realm of Cognitive Stylistics and gain their relevance from the fact that light is shed on a hitherto underresearched topic by means of a well-established research method. The use of parallel text corpora for the study of "viewpoint management" (p. ix) has been quite limited, and the comparison of English and Mandarin Chinese with that scope and method is original and unique. Each of the four publications under part one investigates different grammatical constructions or tools that play a role in the construal of viewpoint (e.g., punctuation, connectives, deictic verbs, demonstratives, tense shifting). The findings convincingly show that there are irreducible differences (see p. ix) between English and Mandarin in the construal of viewpoint and that, moreover, given the different linguistic tools available in these two languages, the strategies of the translators are not uniform within one language. Thus, the works by the candidate (and his co-authors) are of immediate relevance to Translation Studies and provide an argument in favor of the linguistic relativity principle (though the implication of the findings for the relation between the two languages and the respective worldviews affected by them is not made explicit). Furthermore, the candidate's research opens new vistas for the field of World Englishes: While there are no inter-varietal translations of literary works across the different varieties of English (leaving aside translations into creoles and pidgin Englishes) and hence no such parallel text corpora, the candidate's works provoke the question of how viewpoint is realized in these varieties, especially in second language varieties (or, in Kachru's terms, the Outer Circle) that emerged in different cultural and semiotic contexts and were shaped by different linguistic inputs.

The works dealing with eulogies in the Taiwanese Chinese context are likewise novel and unique; this topic has not been investigated before, at least not from a cultural-linguistic perspective. The way the publications interweave the sociocultural dimension of Taiwanese society with a linguistic analysis is Cultural Linguistics at its best. In turn, the candidate's respective publications demonstrate the universal relevance and applicability of the Cultural Linguistics framework. Notably, the introduction of the subjectivity/objectivity distinction, as developed in Cognitive Grammar (see especially publication 8), adds to the methodological toolbox of Cultural Linguistics. Besides, he also explicitly reinforces the links between Cultural Linguistics and Pragmatics by highlighting and elaborating on the pragmatic functions of the eulogies. That is to say, Dr. Lu's approach is truly interdisciplinary. On a somewhat negative note, the claims stressing the role of Cognitive Linguistics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory in studying culture (alongside the relation between language and thought, see p. 162) brush over longstanding debates about the grounding of cognition and the neglect of culture by many researchers in Cognitive Linguistics.

The fact that the works submitted for the habilitation thesis are published in top-notch international journals and leading publishing houses speaks for their quality. In the field the candidate works in, the distinction between foreign and domestic works does not hold. He publishes at international level and his articles and book chapters mark him out as a scholar of international repute.

The candidate's style of writing is lucid and straightforward; he presents his research in a clear and understandable manner, without losing depth of argument. The candidate's English is in tune with the highest academic standards.

As indicated above, the methodologies he uses are innovative and appropriate for the topics at hand. It is remarkable how creatively Dr. Lu applies methods and theoretical concepts developed in related areas to his own research. At some points of the thesis, one would have wished for more numerical information (for example on p. 167, how many idioms representing the individual metaphors are found in the database).

Regarding the level of his analysis in the various studies that make up the habilitation thesis, there is no disagreement or criticism with reference to the first part of the thesis. The analyses are fine-grained and meticulous, and the interpretation of the data is nuanced and informed by

extensive theoretical knowledge of the field. I do have certain misgivings, however, of his analyses in the second part of the thesis. First of all, one would have wished for a more reflective assessment of the conceptualization DEATH IS REST (passim), interpreted by the candidate for the Christian context as a conceptual metaphor (with DEATH as target REST as source domain, passim). If the notion of 'viewpoint' is taken seriously, the decision whether this conceptualization constitutes a metaphor or metonymy (with DEATH and REST as contiguous concepts for Christians) should not be pre-empted. To my mind, the last publication (9) is the weakest part of the thesis. The line of argument does not always flow coherently and deductively. It oscillates between general explications of death rituals and more specific ones of death eulogies. Moreover, there is textual repetition (see p. 194 and 195, the elaboration of LIFE CYCLE IS REPETITIVE JOURNEYS frame). Leaving these minor flaws aside, the conceptualization DEATH IS A RETURN JOURNEY (see p. 196, p. 200) is debatable; is death really a journey or is it not rather the case that dying is returning? As the candidate and his co-author write themselves, the journey *terminates* in heaven (p. 198). Besides, can it be said that two out of eight idioms containing *guī* 'return' constitute "high type frequency"? To my mind, the conceptualization NEXT LIFE IS A RETURN JOURNEY TO THIS WORLD (p. 201) is similarly inaccurate; the next life already *is* another journey in this world. That said, these critical observations do not take very much away from the overall highly positive opinion I gained from Dr. Lu's habilitation thesis.

The formal standard of the habilitation thesis is excellent (apart from a few sporadic typos), assured by high quality editing of the publication outlets.

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

- Could you suggest a methodology that allows us to investigate viewpoint across different varieties of English?
- How could the notion of 'viewpoint' be applied to determining whether a construal is metaphoric and metonymic?
- On what grounds do you claim that DEATH IS REST is a metaphor for Christians?
- Is it not the case that DEATH IS THE ENDPPOINT OF A JOURNEY rather than a JOURNEY itself?
- When did the Mandarin eulogies become conventionalized and canonized; is there room for creativity, i.e., the creation of new ones?
- On what basis was the electronic database (mortuary service) provided by the Taiwanese government compiled?

Conclusion

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

Date:

January 4, 2023

Signature

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