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Annex No. 10 to the MU Directive on Habilitation Procedures and Professor Appointment Procedures

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	Giorgio Francesco Arcodia
Reviewer's home unit, institution	Department of Asian and North African Studies, Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Italy)

The habilitation thesis presented by Wei-lun Lu, "Comparing construals across languages and genres: A perspective of Cognitive Linguistics", is composed of nine papers published in high-prestige venues, including e.g. the journal "Cognitive Linguistics" and edited volumes from Oxford University Press, John Benjamins, De Gruyter, and Springer. This reviewer assumes that each of the articles included in this thesis has already undergone strict peer review, as is customary for this type of publications: my personal assessment is that the research contained in them is indeed of high quality, originality and relevance in the field. Generally speaking, in all of the papers presented by Wei-lun Lu the methodology and theoretical relevance is clearly stated, the results are significant and the presentation (language, style, etc.) is almost flawless. The research contained in Mr Lu's thesis focusses on two main topics:

1. The construal of narrative viewpoints in English and Chinese (publications 1 to 4)
2. The construal of events of death in (Taiwanese) Chinese (publications 5 to 9)

A very positive aspect of Wei-lun Lu's approach is the methodology used for data collection. In the papers on narrative viewpoints, Mr Lu (and collaborators) analysed a sample of parallel texts which, crucially, comprise several Chinese translations for the same English source text (the so-called "MultiParT" approach). This is, indeed, a very fortunate methodological choice, as it enables him to establish a solid foundation for the analysis of target language strategies for rendering/adapting a source text (instead of relying on a single translation, which may not be representative of general language pattern). While it is true that translated texts have their own genre- and medium-specific conventions which are not necessarily found e.g. in the colloquial spoken language, there are at present not many practical alternatives to conduct this type of analysis (as Mr Lu himself points out, there are no 'parallel corpora' of spontaneous conversation). I may suggest that a possible source of data for this type of research could be corpora as the 'Chinese Pear Stories' database, in which the same simple story is told by different speakers in different languages.
In the papers on the construal of events of death, Wei-lun Lu also makes a wise methodological choice, namely collecting data on fixed formulas for funeral eulogies in a highly specific cultural context. This is indeed valuable data, as it represents a complete set of possible formulas which may be used at public funerals in Taiwan (Taipei only? I didn't get this from the articles), which are further classified into subtypes depending on the attributes of the deceased. Here, a welcome development for Mr Lu's research would be to analyse a sample of *oral* texts in the same context, to compare e.g. the degree of subjectification/objectification of the mourners, of the deceased, etc.

The conclusions reached by Wei-lun Lu in his work are, in my view, very significant for the advancement of our knowledge on the syntax and pragmatics of Chinese. In papers 1-4, he gives abundant and convincing examples of the different constructions and techniques employed in (written) Chinese to encode viewpointing, highlighting the many differences with English. I really appreciated the distinction he makes (and, I believe, is not made often enough in the literature) between grammatical rules *stricto sensu* and conventional ways of 'saying things': this is one of the major issues in much formalist work, in which 'acceptable' (but highly unusual) sentences are sometimes used as evidence to prove an argument (often, some deep principle constraining language). The fact that something is (marginally?) acceptable does not entail that this is what speakers actually *do* when they use language.
In papers 5-9, he offers interesting analyses of the metaphors and schemas involved in the conceptualisation of death (and life) in (Taiwanese) Chinese culture, in a specific ritual context, showing how certain (well-established) general metaphorical schemas in fact vary considerably in different cultures (and, crucially, also *within* the same culture, depending on the subgroup/subculture considered). This type of research, I believe, is not relevant only for cognitive and cultural linguistics, but also for cultural and linguistic anthropology, and even for translation studies.
Lastly, the individual contribution of Mr Lu to each paper is clearly stated: he is the only author in 6 out of 9 of them, and did anyway most of the work also in the remaining three.

While, as pointed out above, my general assessment of the candidate's work is very positive, there are however a few remarks and suggestions which, I hope, might be useful for Mr Lu in the his future research on these topics. For the sake of clarity, my comments are presented separately for each paper (numbered 1-9).

[Article 1] After reading the conclusions of this paper, I wonder whether here the Haspelmathian notion of 'comparative concept(s)' may apply here (see e,g, Haspelmath 2010). The candidate wrote: "Thus, although the necessary cognitive infrastructure is presumably universal, there will not be universal linguistic patterns of viewpoint management. […] That is, we can establish a conclusion about categories of viewpoint organization in discourse that parallels Croft's (2001) conclusion about syntactic categories: As such categories can only be defined in terms of properties of constructions, and the latter are necessarily language specific, the categories are of necessity also language specific. Similarly, as linguistic patterns of viewpoint mixing can only be defined (in a way that allows instances of them to be identified in texts) by reference to conventional linguistic items, with all their language specific properties, they are also of necessity language specific". As is known, Haspelmath's comparative concepts do **not** correspond to universal categories: they are convenience tools for cross-linguistic comparison, based on 'hybrid' criteria: functional, semantic, formal. I guess it might be possible to obtain a working definition of devices for viewpoint management, as e.g. 'shift to mainly-narrator-viewpoint' etc., and then compare the actual constructions used in individual languages.

[Article 2] Firstly, the author here seems to imply that there are proximal and distal demonstratives *only*, while there are also more fine-grained distinctions. Secondly, Chinese *zhè* and *nà* are not always only the expression of the proximal *vs.* distal distinction: they have a richer array of meanings. Lastly, in the example on P. 43, there is an error in the glosses: in 發生得太突然了, the 得 is not a perfective marker: it is a particle introducing the manner complement.

[Article 3] On page 73, the author makes reference to the so-called theory of 'Linguistic Relativity'; indeed, there are other references to Linguistic Relativity in other papers. I see two problems with this. Firstly, Linguistic Relativity in the Whorfian version has been discredited and is not seriously considered by the vast majority of contemporary scholars. Secondly, the fact that viewpoint markers are not obligatory in Chinese, in my view, is totally unrelated to

Linguistic Relativity (not even in the 'contemporary' sense, see e.g. the work by Caleb Everett). The point here is that English is a tensed language, and tense may be used productively for viewpointing; Chinese being (generally regarded as) a tenseless language, grammatical tense marking is virtually non-existent. This apply to a broad range of grammatical categories, as e.g. number or gender; even aspect is rarely *obligatorily* marked in Chinese. Does this entail that speakers of Chinese 'see the world' differently? I don't think so, and to suggest anything remotely close to that we would need psycholinguistic evidence to support such a claim.
Also, the author here mentions Mandarin aspect markers as elements guiding the temporal interpretation of utterances. This is obviously true, but it is just part of the picture. If we want to compare the ways in which TIME (not 'tense') is encoded in Chinese, we should adopt a more 'holistic' approach and take into consideration lexical aspect (/*Aktionsart*) etc. (see Lin 2006, 2010, 2012).

[Article 4] I think that the discussion of Chinese word order here is problematic. For a language like Mandarin, the use of labels as SVO and SOV makes sense only for the purposes of typological comparison (e.g. correlates of different basic word orders). But the whole discussion, I feel, is based on the flawed assumption that Chinese does have a viable notion of 'subject', and that the notions of 'subjecthood' and 'objecthood' are the primary determinants of word order in Chinese. Much ink has been spilled on this topic: some references that come to mind are LaPolla (2009), Paul (2015, on word order correlations), and Morbiato (2018a-b).

[Article 5] The standard variety of Mandarin of the Mainland (*Putonghua*) and that of Taiwan (*Guoyu*) differ not only in their phonology and lexicon, but also in their grammar. Moreover, it might be worth pointing out, in the context of this type of research, that the *written* standards differ even more (Taiwanese Written Chinese being generally more 'conservative' and more distant from the spoken language). Also, I was puzzled by the fact that the author mentions Standard Mandarin and Aboriginal languages, but he fails to mention major dialects of Taiwan, as Taiwanese (Taiwan Southern Min / Taiwanese Hokkien) and Hakka. These are not only officialy recognised national languages in Taiwan, but they are also languages of habitual use for a nontrivial share of the population. Even highly conventionalised formulas as four-character idioms may be read following Taiwanese or Hakka (etc.) pronunciation, possibly with different suggestions deriving from different patterns of (near-)homophony / similarity.
I noticed that several common occupations seem to be missing from the possible choices offered by the online eulogy system: is this because those listed are the only professions/sectors which are considered 'respectable' in Taiwan?

[Article 6] Having grown up in a (relatively conservative) Catholic country, I can confirm that the SLEEP metaphor is extremely common and entrenched in religious discourse about the dead. For instance, a very common set formula used at every mass is 'let us pray for our brothers and sisters who fell asleep hoping for resurrection'. So, here there is some (limited) degree of overlap with the Buddhist conception that death is a temporary state: however, in this case 'resurrection' is not being again alive in *this* world, but rather in heaven (hence, it's still a one-way journey – there's no coming back!!).

[Article 7] On page 147, the author writes that 化干戈為玉帛 and the like are "archaic, but they keep the etymology from ancient Chinese, which is important in understanding the use of eulogistic expressions as a sub-type of political communication". I think that the point here is the distinction between spoken *vs.* written Chinese; all of those expressions and more are commonly used in the written language, and they are all well known to educated speakers.
Also, on p. 148 the author proposes a connection between GOOD IS UP and HEAVEN IS FULL OF LOTUSES; however, the connection between these two metaphorical domains is not entirely clear to me.
Lastly, on p. 155 there is a mistake in the translation from Italian: "che si è sempre spesa per

gli altri" > "that she has always devoted herself **to her families**"; "gli altri" actually means "the others" (not restricted to one's family).

[Article 8] On page 168, I think that the use of smallcaps to refer to concepts is a bit excessive: to me, 'peach and plum' sounds more like a metaphorical vehicle for the concept STUDENTS**,** rather than a concept in itself.

Cited works

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Morbiato, Anna (2018b). Word Order and Sentence Structure in Mandarin Chinese: New Perspectives. PhD Dissertation, Ca' Foscari University of Venice and The University of Sydney.
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Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

Q1: Why do you think that Cognitive Linguistics is the **ideal** framework for the comparison of viewpointing devices?

Q2: What is the average (educated?) Taiwanese competence of eulogies (輓語)? How are they related to 'ordinary' four-character idioms (成語)?

Q3: The candidate's paper mentions both the framework of Cognitive Linguistics and that of *Cultural* Linguistics. However, the type of analysis seems quite similar to me. Could you please elaborate on the differences between the two approaches?

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: Signature:

30 December 2022