

**The physical foundation of the patterning of physical action verbs:** A study of Chinese verbs. By Hong Gao. (Travaux de l'institut de linguistique de Lund XLI.) Lund: Lund University. 2001. Pp. 265, xiv. ISBN 91-974116-3-9

*Action verbs* is author Hong Gao's Ph. D. dissertation revised for publication as a book. Ch. 1 offers an 'overview of physical action verbs' and introduces such concepts as 'natural agreement between semantics and syntax' (16), and energy source, flow, overflow, transfer, and sink (28). Ch. 2 summarizes previous studies of motion verbs and presents the author's basic thesis that physical action verbs mirror the particular characteristics of the body parts involved in their execution. In Ch. 3, Gao applies the MARVS (module-attribute representation of verbal semantics) model to show how directional satellites will mirror the physical limitations of the body part used to perform a given action; for example, *gui4* 'to kneel', usually combines with *xia4* 'down'.

In Ch. 4, Gao compares the 'distributional differences in the syntactic patterns of near-synonyms to determine the relevant components of verb meaning' (89). She draws up semantic hierarchies, in which specific actions are subsumed under more general verbs; she also looks at such features as intentionality, and instantaneous vs. gradual action. This is interesting in that it makes explicit many of the subconscious judgments a speaker makes when choosing one verb over another.

Ch. 5 examines the combinability of physical action verbs into VV resultative, directional, and phase resultative constructions. Concrete examples are given of how 'the more possible acts that a physical body part can perform, the more components of meaning such a verb may carry and the more dimensions its syntactic structure extends to' (126). Ch. 6 examines 'verbs of intentional physical contact for love and friendliness' and 'for punishment and revenge' (127). These verbs are often found to include 'information about the agent and patient' or even 'the body part and the instrument' (156).

Gao notes in Ch. 7 that the polysemous verb *da3* 'to strike' can be used literally, metaphorically, and as a light verb, and that it occurs more often and with more extended metaphorical use in mainland than in Taiwan usage. Moreover, Chinese *da3* extends 'into many more semantic fields' than the Swedish *slå* 'to hit, strike' (202). The author seems to have failed, however, to note the inchoative use of *da3* when used as a light verb in VV compounds, e.g. *da3 suan4*, 'to plan'.

In Ch. 8, "Children's production of physical action verbs", Gao investigates child use of the verbs *da3*, *slå*, and *hit/beat* in the three target languages: Chinese, Swedish, and English, respectively. The conclusion, Ch. 9, is a brief recap of the main points of the work, along with a short list of issues for future study.

This is a carefully executed work. There are various minor typographical, Romanization and English usage errors, but overall the English is clear, to-the-point, and correct.

*Action verbs* is a descriptive rather than theoretical work in which the author presents a rich array of diverse data in interesting formats. Yet what does it all mean and where can one go with it? These questions must perhaps be left to a follow-up study on this intriguing but as yet inconclusive area of investigation. [Karen Steffen Chung, *National Taiwan University*.]