

**Word-order change and grammaticalization in the history of Chinese.** By Chaofen Sun. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. Pp. xiii, 207. \$39.95.

Studying Chinese grammar is difficult – the average Chinese may try to tell you ‘Chinese has no grammar’ – because of its very spare morphology. One of the first things one can grasp at is *structure particles*. This revised-for-publication PhD dissertation is an attempt to study how some of the major structural particles in Chinese, especially *ba3*, *bei4* (the darlings of Chinese syntax studies), *le*, and *de* became grammaticalized from various full verb forms. Sun’s examples are taken mainly from texts determined by the author to be vernacular rather than representative of the frozen written style of various historical periods, but he also gives made-up sentences from modern Mandarin.

S’s discovery of different historical origins for the ‘suffixal *le*’ (from the verb *lai* ‘to come’) and ‘perfect *le*’ (from *liao* ‘to complete’), in particular, is interesting and noteworthy. Although *ba3* and *bei4* seem to have been dissected and expounded on ad infinitum by linguists, S presents a reasonably full historical picture of their evolution and expansion.

I was a little disappointed to find no discussion of how the written forms of *de* often merge in modern Chinese. And S does not address the issue of the nominalizing *de* at all, which admittedly would have greatly lengthened and complicated his work.

S’s writing is concentrated and demanding for the reader. I found myself taking time out after practically each sentence in places to either guess the characters suggested by the romanization or to figure out how the examples fit in with the theoretical descriptions. This took a great deal of effort; any reader not prepared to invest this kind of energy will probably not get very much from this book and will find it tedious in the extreme. (S really should be taken to task for omitting tone marks in the Pinyin romanization and for often not providing Chinese characters. These would be an enormous convenience to readers, and they are not at all technically difficult with current Chinese input systems. And there are a few typos.) But once I was able to fit everything together in my head, I was generally impressed with S’s presentation.

S offers a solid, useful study as far as he goes. The nagging feeling one gets when reading works like this is that there is much more going on in Chinese syntax than meets the eye; Chinese grammatical processes are highly word order and context dependent, and just dealing with the grammatical trappings you can easily see, such as particles, isn’t going to give you the whole picture. Nevertheless, S makes a worthy contribution toward increasing our understanding of some of those more easily seen things which is an undeniably important, though not the only, part of the foundation of Chinese syntax. [Karen Steffen Chung, *National Taiwan University*.]