

Wu, Yi'an. 2004. *Spatial Demonstratives in English and Chinese: Text and Cognition*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. (xviii + 236pp.)

Reviewed by Jiajin Xu (National Research Centre for Foreign Language Education, China)

Wu's *Spatial Demonstratives in English and Chinese* is one of the few book-length studies on the topic and a particularly careful one which is empirically rich and theoretically innovative. Spatial demonstratives are a topic of philosophical relevance, as space is conceived as "a necessary *a priori* representation, ... and spatial organisation is of central importance in human cognition" (p. 40). Spatial demonstratives do not draw the same type of attention from Chinese linguists as many other topics such as zero anaphora, apparently because of their consistent formal features and transparent semantics. However, as a discourse analyst, Wu holds the view that common forms such as *this/zhe* and *that/na* in English and Mandarin Chinese are of great interest because their use intimately links the speaker to the physical, textual or cognitive worlds, and demonstratives can be seen as spatially, temporally, and mentally charted.

Wu, a bilingual in Chinese and English, has in mind how the two languages share and differ in terms of discourse use and cognitive representation of such demonstratives as *this(here)/zhe(li)* and *that(there)/na(li)* and their variant forms. The primary motivation of the book is to analyse these demonstratives contrastively.

In the first two chapters, Wu reviews the existing literature and summarises the canonical understanding of spatial demonstratives at the interfaces of semantics, pragmatics, discourse, philosophy of language, cognitive science and so forth. Linguistic categories such as zero anaphora, reference tracking systems, parataxis in clause linkage, devices of indexicality, and expression of temporality as they are related to Chinese are given special treatment. After an overview of the central topics, semantic categorisation of spatial demonstratives in both English and Chinese is presented.

After the discussion of the Chinese demonstrative system, with a focus on *zhe* 'this', *na* 'that', and their compound forms, Wu observes that *zhe* and *na* are the prototype members of the Chinese demonstrative system, and that *zhe/zhexie*, *na/naxie*, *zheli/zher*, and *nali/nar* are semantically comparable to their English counterparts. One seemingly trivial yet important point about the demonstrative distinction in Wu's book is the use of the less contentious terms of 'non-proximal/non-proximity' instead of the usual term 'distal' in describing the use of spatial

demonstratives, which avoids the difficulties to gauge the linguistic and/or cognitive distance of the referent from the deictic centre.

In the rest of the book, three methodological and theoretical highlights merit special mention. The first highlight is its data collection procedure and research design. As Wu's study is of a contrastive nature, she carefully chooses some demonstrative-rich data sources from both English and Chinese. The well-planned jigsaw task (pp. 59–63) helped elicit the basic deictic usages of English and Chinese spatial demonstratives in immediate situational contexts, in which one child (A) did the pointing and naming, and the other child (B) moved the jigsaw pieces following the instructions given by A. This task simulates the naturally occurring verbal interaction in actual physical contexts, which is important for a study of spatial demonstratives. In addition, a set of English-Chinese parallel texts are used to serve as data for the comparison and contrast of extended, displaced spatial demonstrative usages. Texts of this kind facilitate the pairing of data from multiple languages, which maximises comparability and thus increases the likelihood of reaching balanced and comparable conclusions.

The second highlight is the cognitive-linguistic approach taken by the author of the study. Central to this approach is the notion of *deictic force* (synonymous terms used elsewhere in the book include deicticity and deictic-ness, pp. 53–55). This major theoretical innovation accounts well for the asymmetry in the “semantics of the proximal and non-proximal demonstratives” (p. 53) in discourse. Wu concludes that linguistic and cognitive approaches to spatial demonstratives are “complementary” in the first place. While a discourse-based study can identify the basic semantic components of the demonstratives and distinguish “deictic words” from “description words”, a cognitive approach helps account for the semantics of demonstratives and their motivations. The notion of deictic force (pp. 54–55) is suggested to be the governing mechanism for the use of either proximal or non-proximal spatial demonstratives, in which ego is viewed from the point of view of the figure-ground distinction. The interplay of two major components, the deictic parameter and the distance parameter, is regarded as producing the force which conditions the asymmetry between the deictic centre and the referent, which explains their usage patterns in discourse.

The relativity of the deictic force points to another highlight of the book, namely, empathy or subjectivity of demonstratives in discourse. The importance of empathy and subjectivity is illustrated by the space jigsaw task, in which spatial demonstrative usage is seen as closely related to the speaker's intentionality. There is a similarity between English and Chinese spatial demonstratives in that the perceived distance in the situational use of demonstratives is actually defined and represented by the speaker's intentionality (p. 74). The non-proximal demonstratives are shown to have relatively weaker deictic forces in comparison with the proximal

demonstratives, resulting in more non-deictic and extended usages. Thus, in Chinese, *zhe* is found to assume the role of a grammatical pronoun, whereas *na* has developed its conjunctive usage in conditionals and euphemisms. Thus the third highlight of the book is in the extended usages of spatial demonstratives, with subjectivity at its core. The notion of subjectivity ultimately bridges the connection between text and cognition, and the ego and the referent. The extended usages involve a projection of a deictic centre. The realignment of the deictic centre and character in stories, naturally, creates subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

As significant as the book is, it has a number of weaknesses and inconsistencies. For example, the author claims earlier in the book that non-deictic use is not within the focus of the study (p. 45). Yet in Chapters 4 and 5, quite a few non-deictic usages, such as expression of modality, pragmatic marker, and interjective uses of spatial demonstratives, are discussed. Wu, at different places (p. 109, p. 113, p. 127, p. 128, p. 138), reiterates that the extended usages can be traced to their basic semantic properties in a situational context. In many cases, it does not seem so easy to leave out the non-deictic uses, or to tease apart the deictic usages from pragmatically loaded usages.

From an expository point of view, the concept of deictic force seems to get lost in the detailed analysis of the texts. It would be useful to introduce the cognitively oriented notion of deictic force with carefully chosen concrete examples.

Another issue in this book concerns the generalisability of the findings given the data used. Wu comes to a conclusion that proximal demonstratives *this* and *zhe* tend to co-occur with temporal expressions of past-time events (p. 172) and, more often than not, they are used to qualify "here-and-now scene(s)" (p. 178). This is not surprising in that temporality is a key feature of narrative discourse (Biber 1988: 19), and past events are characteristic of the narrative genre. In other words, the frequent reference to past-time events is characteristic of fictional narrativity, which may not necessarily be due to some gravity of *this* and *zhe* to past temporal expressions, as the author claims.

In addition to micro level discussions of empirical language use, this book also touches upon the larger issue of the nature of language. The book makes both theoretical and methodological contributions to our understanding of spatial demonstratives and will have its due impact on similar contrastive studies of linguistic issues.

Reference

Biber, D. 1988. *Variation across Speech and Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.