

Nouns and verbs in Chinese:

In cognitive, philosophical, and typological perspectives

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There exists a *realizational* vs. *constitutive* distinction among metaphors. While realizational metaphors are used to help us explain or realize abstract concepts, in constitutive metaphors a concrete concept itself constitutes the abstract one which cannot be expressed or understood without the former. Just like the metaphor of *virus* in computer science, the abstract concepts *noun* and *verb* are realized with the help of the pragmatic concepts *reference* and *predication* in the grammar of Western languages, but in Chinese these two concrete concepts themselves constitute the syntactic categories *noun* and *verb*. In addition, the ontological metaphor deeming activities and events as things is also constitutive in Chinese.

The conclusion is that while *noun* and *verb* are two separate syntactic categories in Western languages, in Chinese *noun* and *verb* are pragmatic categories and not separated from each other. In other words, Chinese nouns constitute a super-noun category with verb as a sub-category.

In addition, in Chinese the pragmatic categories *utterance* and *topic* by themselves constitute the syntactic categories *sentence* and *subject* respectively. Therefore, metaphors in the form of “A is B” are all not only realizational but also constitutive to the Chinese people. The philosophical background is that in Chinese “is” and “there is” are two separate concepts, the latter and the concept of “has” being covered by the same word *yeou* which has nothing to do with the word *shi*, in the sense of “is a”. In Chinese philosophy, *to yeou* or *not to yeou*, that is the question. The consequence is that “the problem of being” does not even exist in Chinese philosophy and Chinese nouns are not to be negated in grammar.

From the perspective of word class typology, Latin is a highly grammaticalized system with “verb separated from noun” and Chinese a non-grammaticalized system with “verb included in noun”. And Tongan, often defined as a “type-token” language, represents a transitional state between Chinese and Latin in the process of grammaticalization. If English in comparison with Latin is a de-grammaticalized language, then the change of word class system types of world languages can be considered as cyclic.