



# The History of Chinese Grammars in Chinese and Western Scholarly Traditions

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CHINESE AND WESTERN SCHOLARLY TRADITIONS<sup>1</sup>:  
THE HISTORY OF CHINESE GRAMMARS

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The history of Chinese grammars in Chinese and Western scholarly traditions)

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1. *Introduction*

While China has a long tradition in the compilation of rhyme dictionaries, philology and the study of rhetoric, a native tradition of grammar writing only began to develop at a relatively late period of its modern history. Several of the earliest extant grammars of Chinese to appear in the 17th century were, in fact, written by Spanish missionaries in collaboration with native speakers.

The first grammar of any Chinese dialect is in fact the *Arte de la lengua Chiō Chiu* (Grammar of the Chiō Chiu language), dated 1620-1621 and handwritten by Melchior de Mançano.<sup>2</sup> In 1653, a second, very brief description of Mandarin grammar by Martino Martini was brought back to Europe by its author, followed by the *Arte de le lengua mandarina* (Grammar of the Mandarin language), completed in 1682 by Francisco Varo. This third description reflects the prestige southern style of Mandarin in currency at the time.

The Greco–Latin model apparent in these and other later works was originally inspired by the grammar of Elio Antonio de Nebrija (1444–1522), *Introductiones Latinae* (1481), and was one evidently designed for highly inflectional languages. Hence, it is not surprising to find that chapters in these early western grammars of Chinese include sections on verb conjugations and tenses, and the declension of nouns, despite the fact that Sinitic languages are celebrated for the absence of such morphology.

In contrast to this, Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat's grammar of (1822), *Éléments de la grammaire chinoise ou principes généraux de Kou-wen ou style antique et du Kouan-hoa, c'est-à-dire de la langue commune généralement usitée dans l'empire chinois*, treats vernacular Chinese and stands out as an early exception to this 'rule', setting out to explain Chinese grammar on its own terms.

It was only in 1898 that the first indigenous Chinese grammar, written by Ma Jianzhong, appeared. This is the *Mǎ shì wén tōng* 馬氏文通 (*Basic principles for writing clearly and coherently by Mister Ma*). After a brief outline of the Chinese linguistic tradition in section 2, the following two main issues will be addressed:

- (i) The scientific contribution of missionaries and other western scholars to the study of Chinese languages in the writing of descriptive grammars.

- (ii) The aptness of the Greco–Latin and other models of grammar in its application to Chinese languages, in particular, with respect to the approaches used by western scholars to analyse the numeral classifier, a grammatical category not found in European languages.

Finally, in an epilogue, we consider the reasons for a lack of theoretical interest in the structural aspects of language in the native Chinese tradition.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. *Literati in China and the Chinese linguistic tradition*

The first native Chinese grammar, written by Ma Jianzhong 馬建忠 (1845-1900) was published in 1898, and was possibly co-written with his brother, Ma Xiangbo 馬相伯 (1840-1939). The *Mǎ shì wén tōng* 馬氏文通 describes Classical Chinese, rather than any vernacular form of Chinese. Unlike the western works to be discussed in §3 and §4, it is not inspired by the grammars of Nebrija, nor consequently based directly on any Greco-Latin model, although it was influenced by other western models, amalgamating features from these with certain of those taken from the Chinese linguistic tradition.

According to Peyraube (1999, 2001), Ma Jianzhong, who was educated in a Shanghai Jesuit school, St-Ignace, later obtaining his law degree in Paris, was inspired by both Prémare's *Notitiae Linguae Sinicae* (composed in 1728 but only published in 1831) and by the *Grammaire générale et raisonnée contenant les fondements de l'art de parler, expliqués d'une manière claire et naturelle, les raisons de ce qui est commun à toutes les langues, et des principales différences qui s'y rencontrent* (known as the *Grammaire de Port-Royal*) of Arnauld et Lancelot (1660). The evidence comes in the form of his method of analysis and the comparison of the parts of speech described therein.

*Mǎ shì wén tōng* also draws upon Chinese philological traditions which have a history spanning two millennia. Specifically, his grammar was inspired by several philological treatises, if not stylistic ones, from the time of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) onwards, which described and classified various kinds of rhetorical particles. There are scattered references to grammar in these works, but they are entirely non-systematic in nature. The major works are presented in Table 1 below and then briefly commented upon in the context of China's own native linguistic tradition:

Table 1: Synopsis of Chinese sources on style and rhetoric

Author	Title	English translation of title	Year
Chen Kui 陈骙	<i>Wén zé</i> 文则	<i>Rules for literary composition</i>	1170
Lu Yiwei 卢以纬	<i>Yǔ zhù</i> 语助	<i>Grammatical particles</i>	1311
Yuan Renlin 袁仁林	<i>Xū zì shuō</i> 虚字说	<i>Treatise on empty words</i>	1710
Liu Qi 劉淇	<i>Zhù zì biàn lüè</i> 助字辨略	<i>Compendium of grammatical particles</i>	1711
Wang Yin zhi 王引之	<i>Jīng zhuàn shì cí</i> 經傳釋詞	<i>Explanation of particles in the Classics and the Commentaries</i>	1798
Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1907)	<i>Gǔ shū yí yì jǔ lì</i> 古書疑義舉例	<i>Examples of disputable problems from the classics</i>	n.d.

The *Wén Zé* (1170) and the *Yǔ Zhù* (1311) represent some reflections on grammar that can be characterized as works concerning rhetoric or stylistics. Their main aim was to achieve a mastery of use for these grammatical particles in order to assist in the task of literary composition. Both are, effectively, compilations of grammatical particles or ‘empty words’ used in Classical Chinese: in the first one, 45 particles called *zhùcí* 助词 are analysed and in the second one, 135 particles, in this case called *yǔzhù* 语助, come under discussion.

The *Yǔ Zhù*, more elaborate in its descriptions than the *Wén Zé*, defines these particles as not having any ‘precise, concrete meaning’. Selected from the classical texts of the Archaic period (11<sup>th</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC), but also, in the case of the *Yǔ Zhù*, from those of the Medieval period (2<sup>nd</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries), they include a dozen disyllabic ones. Interestingly, the author of the *Yǔ Zhù* does not hesitate to include the grammatical particles of the vernacular language of his period, even including those of the Wu dialect, which he frequently cites as equivalents to the Classical language. Preceding the main analysis, the particles are categorized into several classes, and for the first time in China’s linguistic history, a distinction is made between assertive particles, interrogatives and exclamatives. These two treatises were certainly known to Ma Jianzhong, who was in fact inspired by the second one, in particular, in his explanation of certain examples and terms which he adopted.

The *Xū Zì Shuō* (1710) by Yuan Renlin constitutes another of the major sources of inspiration for Ma Jianzhong, similarly quite clearly belonging to this stylistic and rhetorical tradition. It describes in detail the use of 141 ‘empty words’ and is far more important than the two former works in the sense that it groups together particles which have an identical or similar meaning. Five categories of ‘empty words’ are distinguished: ‘initial particles’, ‘adversative particles’, ‘auxiliary particles’, ‘interrogative particles’, and ‘exclamative particles’, while the division into ‘inactive words’ (*sǐ zì* 死字) including nouns and adjectives, and ‘dynamic words’ (*huó zì* 活字) corresponding to verbs is adopted – a division that is found as early as in the rhetorical works of the Song dynasty (960-1279).

Furthermore, the author often makes use of the vernacular language of his period in order to more insightfully explain the meaning of these particles in the Classical language. For example, in the case of *zé* 则 or *jí* 即, which are explained as expressing the consequence or the result of what has preceded, Yuan Renlin adds: ‘we would use *jiù* 就 ‘thus’ in the colloquial language of today.

If any proof were necessary to show that Ma Jianzhong profited from the work of Yuan Renlin, it is sufficient to compare the following few passages, extracts from *Xū zì shuō* (XZS) and recopied almost *ad verbatim* from the *Mǎ shì wén tōng* (MSWT):

1. XZS, p. 117: ‘(则) 字 (即) 字, 乃直承顺接之辭, 猶俗云 (就)也, 與上影响相随, 口吻甚緊 « *zé* » *zì* « *jí* » *zì*, *nǎi zhíchéng shùnjiē zhī cí, yóu sù yún «jiù» yě, yǔ shàng yǐngxiǎng xiāngsuí, kǒuwěn shèn jīn.*  
(The characters *zé* and *jí* are words with the function of smooth coordination, and are similar to the vernacular *jiù*, in following the preceding context; the tone resembles it very closely).’

MSWT, p. 495: (则) 字乃直承顺接之辭，與上文影响相随，口吻甚緊 « zé » zì nǎi zhíchéng shùnjiē zhī cí, yǔ shàngwén yǐngxiǎng xiāngsuí, kǒuwěn shèn jǐn.  
(The character zé is a word with the function of smooth coordination, in following the preceding context; the tone resembles it very closely).’

2. XZS, p. 19: (第) 字(但) 字(獨)字(特)字之聲，皆屬輕轉，不甚與前文批駁，只從言下單抽一處，輕輕那轉，猶言別無可說，但只有一件如此也 « dì » zì « dàn » zì « dú » zì « tè » zì zhī shēng, jiē shǔ qīngzhuǎn, búshèn yǔ qiánwén pībó, zhǐ cóng yánxià dān chōu yíchù, qīngqīng nà zhuǎn, yóu yán bié wú kě shuō, dàn zhǐ yǒu yíjiàn rúcǐ yě.  
(The tone of the words, dì, dàn, dú, and tè are all slightly adversative but do not contradict the preceding text to any great extent. They only focus on one feature in the actual text, making a slight shift, but just one of this sort, since there is no disagreement with the other points)

MSWT, pp. 523-524: ‘(第) (但) (獨)(特) (惟) 五字，皆轉語辭 ... 皆承上文，不相批駁，只從言下單抽一端輕輕掉轉。猶云則別無可說，只有一件如此云云 « dì » « dàn » « dú » « tè » « wéi » wǔ zì, jiē zhuǎnyǔ cí ... jiē chéng shàngwén, bù xiāng pībó, zhǐ cóng yánxià dān chōu yí duān qīngqīng diào zhuǎn, yóu yún zé bié wú kě shuō, zhǐ yǒu yíjiàn rúcǐ yún yún.  
(These five words dì, dàn, dú, tè, and wéi are all conjunctions and continue the preceding text without any disagreement. They only focus on one feature in the actual text, making a slight shift, and just one of this sort, since there is no disagreement with the other points).

Among the works which belong more to the philological tradition than to the rhetorical and stylistic tradition is the *Zhùzì Biànlüè* (1711) by Liu Qi which discusses and explains 476 grammatical particles, called *zhùzì* 助字 ‘grammatical particles’ by the author. These ‘empty words’ are collected from a large corpus of philosophical, historical and literary works, predating the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368). One of the fundamental contributions of this work is the presentation of words for each period belonging to the ancient vernacular register. It is thus worth mentioning the very interesting gloss for the aspect marker *le* 了, which he considers to be a dialectal word for *què* 却. In addition, Liu Qi often uses the colloquial language of his period to explain the particles of the Classical language. The work also contains some novel remarks of a grammatical nature, such as the interpretation of *jiàn* 见 as a marker of the passive construction without an agent noun. This is the type of observation which Ma Jianzhong preferred to draw on most of all, as the valuable information it contained on the ancient vernacular language (*gǔdài báihuà* 古代白话) appears not to have interested him greatly.

Nonetheless, it is above all the *Jīng zhuàn shì cí* (1798) by Wang Yinzhi which can be regarded as the main traditional Chinese source for the *Mǎ shì wén tong*. It is unquestionably the prototypical treatise on classical philology, whose publication culminated in a far-reaching influence on the literati of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It also happens to contain a lexicon of grammatical particles: 160 of them are analyzed in their context and provided with examples chosen in the main from the classics prior to the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). The author calls these particles *yǔzhù* 语助 (the common term mainly in use before the Tang, 618-907) rather than *zhùyǔ* 助语 (the later term), undoubtedly through respect for the more ancient tradition. The objective of the author is to explain the classics and their related commentaries.

The work of Wang Yinzhi is by far superior to any of his predecessors. He corrects their many errors of interpretation and his analyses testify to an exemplary rigour, rarely to be faulted in following eras. He distinguishes, among other things, initial particles, conjunctions, affixes, negatives, exclamatives, and modals. The grammatical notions are certainly more precise than those which are found in preceding works of the same type. The conjunctions, for example, are analysed in their turn as adversatives, interrogatives and concessives. In fact, several modern grammarians of the Classical language, notably Yang Shuda (1928), Lü Shuxiang (1944) and Yang Bojun (1981) have also used Wang Yinzhi's work as a model.

Finally, the *Gǔ shū yíyì jǔlì* by Yu Yue, a contemporary of Ma Jianzhong, also exercised a certain degree of influence on the *Mǎ shì wén tōng*. Organised into 7 *juàn* or volumes, this scholarly work deals with 88 systematic errors, commonly found in the interpretation of classical texts as a consequence of a different understanding of its grammar or words. Yu Yue argues on the basis of sentence form, and from a comparative point of view in comparing sentences with one another. He also pays attention to inversion of word order (*dào wén* 倒文) and to ellipsis (*shenglüe* 省略) (see Ma Songting 1986: 18-19). These works and their uses are described in more detail in Beiluobei (1998, 2001), Peyraube (2000, 2001), He (1985) and in Peyraube & Chappell (2011).

Ma Jianzhong, a genius of a synthesizer, had only to draw upon this fund of traditional grammatical knowledge, explore it in more detail and re-arrange it, using the framework of western grammar.

### 3. *Western traditions in the description of Chinese grammar*

Many of the first works on the grammar and lexicon of Chinese languages were composed in the Philippines and in the Spanish language by missionaries sent first of all to Manila and Cebu during the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and then later to southern China, when it became once more possible for foreigners to live in China, as was the case for Francisco Varo. The principal works in this category of both historical and linguistic importance are listed in the following table, and will be briefly discussed in turn below.<sup>4</sup>

Table 2: Synopsis of the major extant Chinese grammars from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

AUTHOR	TITLE	DATE OF COMPOSITION	DATE & PLACE OF PUBLICATION
Melchior de Mançano	<i>Arte de la lengua Chiõ Chiu</i>	1620/1621	
Francisco Varo	<i>Arte de la lengua mandarina</i>	1682	1703, Canton
Martino Martini	<i>Grammatica Sinica</i>	1653	
Joseph Prémare	<i>Notitiae Linguae Sinicae</i>	1728	1831, Malacca
Thomas (Theophilus) Bayer	<i>Museum sinicum</i>		1730, St Petersburg
Etienne Fourmont	<i>Grammatica sinica (Linguae Sinarum Mandarinicae hieroglyphicae grammatica duplex, Latine, &amp; cum characteribus Sinensium)</i>		1742, Paris
Joshua Marshman	<i>Clavis Sinica, or Elements of Chinese Grammar, with an Appendix containing the Ta-Hyoh of Confucius, with a Translation</i>		1814, Serampore
Robert Morrison	<i>A grammar of the Chinese language</i>		1815, Serampore
Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat	<i>Elémens de la grammaire chinoise ou principes généraux de Kou-wen ou style antique et du Kouan-hoa</i>		1822, Paris
Antoine Bazin	<i>Grammaire mandarine, ou principes généraux de la langue Chinoise parlée</i>		1856, Paris
Joseph Edkins	<i>A grammar of the Chinese colloquial language commonly called the Mandarin dialect</i>		1864, Shanghai
Stanislas Julien	<i>Syntaxe nouvelle de la langue chinoise fondée sur la position des mots, suivie de deux traités sur les particules et les principaux termes de grammaire, d'une table des idiotismes, de fables, de légendes et d'apologues, traduits mot à mot par Stanislas Julien</i>		1869-1870, Paris
Georg von der Gabelentz	<i>Chinesische Grammatik mit Ausschluß des niederen Stiles und der heutigen Umgangssprache</i>		1881, Leipzig

### 3.1 17<sup>th</sup> century grammars of Chinese languages by Spanish missionaries

Spanish missionaries, particularly the Dominicans and Franciscans, played a significant role in the Chinese linguistic history of the late Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties (1644-1911) in being the first to record the grammar and lexicon of vernacular forms of Sinitic languages and dialects. The Dominican missionaries did not begin their linguistic work in China however, but rather in the Philippines, setting up first with a Chinese Sangle community in Manila, from where their priests later sailed to China in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century to establish new missions in Fujian province and in Canton. They were also the first to create romanization systems and to promote the use of the demotic or specially created dialect characters (see van der Loon 1966, 1967). Two important surviving works in this category are the *Arte de la lengua Chiõ Chiu* (Grammar of the Chiõ Chiu language) from 1620/1621, and the *Arte de la lengua mandarina* (Grammar of the Mandarin language) from 1682. The term ‘arte’ refers of course to the grammatical arts, as distinct from the sciences (*scientia*) (Breitenbach 2000: xxiv).

Surprisingly, the first *Arte* from 1620-1621 is not a grammar of the imperial language of the court, that is, it does not represent any kind of Early Modern Mandarin, but is rather a

grammar describing a variety of Southern Min or Hokkien. We next discuss each work in chronological order, after a brief digression on even earlier but as yet unsighted grammars of Chinese languages, all written in Spanish.

### 3.2. *Lost grammars of Chinese languages*

There are reputedly even earlier grammars than both the 1620/1621 grammar of *Chiō Chiu* Southern Min and Varo's 1682 Mandarin grammar, but for which, unfortunately, the manuscripts and their copies have disappeared from circulation, if have not been entirely lost. We know of these only through serendipitous mentions in works on the history of the Spanish missions in the Philippines such as Gonzales (1962) or van der Loon (1966, 1967) and also in Abel-Rémusat (1826).

The first lost manuscripts are reputedly the *Arte y vocabulario de la lengua China* by the Augustinian Martín de Rada (1533-1578) and a grammar of Mandarin, entitled *Arte de la lengua China* by Juan Cobo (ca. 1546-1592~1593), a Spanish missionary who arrived in the Philippines in 1588 (van der Loon, 1966:2). Hence, these grammars would necessarily have been written prior to, if not well before 1592, predating by 40 years the 1620-1621 *Arte*. Nonetheless, none have, so far, been recovered, presuming copies still exist. A similar situation applies to still another grammar of Mandarin which is attributed to Francisco Díaz (1606-1646), written during the years 1640-1641 in Bataán (the Philippines), with the title *Gramática española-china* (Gonzales 1962: 639), while a third lost manuscript is the *Arte de la lengua mandarina*, purportedly composed in the year 1641 by Juan Bautista de Morales (1597-1664) (Gonzales 1962: 634; see also Coblin & Levi (2000: ix), Breitenbach (2004: 39), Casacchia & Gianninoto (2012: 294-309).<sup>5</sup>

### 3.3. *Arte de la lengua Chiō Chiu* (1620).

The *Arte* is composed of 33 folios (or 66 pages) and presents a sketch grammar of a Southern Min or Hokkien dialect. The handwritten title is *Gramática China* (Chinese Grammar) and on the last page we find the signature 'Fr. Melchior de Mançano' which is suggestive of the *Arte* having been composed by one and the same de Mançano (1580-?1630), a Dominican priest in Manila, to assist in the work of proselytizing to the Chinese community who had settled there. It is well-known that Chinese traders regularly visited Manila from southern Fujian province beginning in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, where they eventually set up a small community in the Parián, outside the city walls of Manila (van der Loon 1967).<sup>6</sup>

The homeland of the Min dialects is the southeastern province of Fujian in China, from where migrations down the coast to Guangdong province and across the straits to Taiwan, as well as to many areas of Southeast Asia, spread varieties of Min further afield from the time of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, that is, from 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The language of the *Arte* most likely represents a koine of Southern Min dialects spoken in the south of Fujian during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17th centuries (Yue-Hashimoto 1998, Chappell 2000, Chappell & Peyraube 2006, Klöter 2011)<sup>7</sup>. The place name, Chiō Chiu, reflects the Hokkien pronunciation for the city of Zhangzhou (or Changchow) 漳州, according to historical sources such as Klaproth & Clerc de Landresse (1839), Phillips (1892), but also van der Loon (1967: 97) and Klöter (2011: 3, 159-162). Close by Zhangzhou was the port of Haicheng 海澄 where departures for Southeast Asia set out during this period. Today, there are an estimated 45 million speakers of the different varieties of Southern Min (Hokkien) in both China and Southeast Asia (Chappell 2009, Chappell & Lien 2011).<sup>8</sup>



The *Arte* begins by stating some rules for the pronunciation, as the author admits that ‘La mayor dificultad que tiene la lengua china es saver la pronunçiar’.<sup>9</sup> Details are given for the five tones: / ˊ ˊˊ ˋ ˋˋ ˋˋˋ in Chapter 1. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted respectively to declensions in order to distinguish different cases: nominative, dative, accusative, ablative, and then to the conjugation of verbs. Evidently, neither is linguistically well-adapted, since the Southern Min dialects do not have inflectional cases, nor do they conjugate verbs.

The following chapters (4, 5, 6) describe the use of adverbs (especially five temporal adverbs), as well as several particles and conjunctions. Chapters 7 and 8 are concerned with negatives and interrogatives. Finally, the syntax of Southern Min is treated in just a few pages in Chapter 10, entitled ‘Del modo de componer’ (‘The method of composition’).

At the end of the description, the numeral system, from one to 10,000, including all kinds of variants, is given in detail, as well as the classifiers called ‘otros numerales propios para contar cosas particulares’ (other specific numerals for counting particular items’). Following these appendices, we also find many details about how the days of the week, the months and the currencies (coins and their values) are counted. Importantly, on folio 31 of the manuscript, the following sentence is written, testifying to the date of the composition of the book: *bǎng lěng sǐ ch’ap pě nī* 萬曆四十八年 ‘forty-eighth year of the Wan Li era’ (that is, 1620 or 1621).<sup>10</sup>

### 3.3. *Arte de la lengua mandarina* (1682/1703)

The *Arte de la lengua mandarina compuesto per el M.R.P. Francisco Varo* (Grammar of the Mandarin language written by M.R.P. Francisco Varo) was completed in 1682 by the Dominican scholar, Francisco Varo (1627-1687), either while he was living in Fu’an 福安 or in Fuzhou 福州, both towns being located in the northeast of Fujian province, China (Breitenbach 2004:53). It was, however, only in 1703 that the grammar was posthumously printed using the woodblock (or xylographic) method in Canton. Varo’s *Arte* was thus composed some 60 years after Southern Min or *Chiō Chiu* grammar of Mançano.

The grammar is written in Spanish, with the examples in romanization and not accompanied by any Chinese characters. The author, a Dominican missionary, devoted this work exclusively to the description of the rules for the vernacular language of officialdom in his time, which was based on the Nanjing or southern variety of Mandarin (Breitenbach 2000: xxiii, Coblin 2007). Thus, like the 1620-1621 *Arte*, it is clearly not a grammar of Classical Chinese. Ignoring the remarks on pronunciation, as well as descriptions of Chinese habits and customs, which are explained in detail, some 30 pages are devoted to grammar in the narrow sense of the word.

After discussing Chinese pronunciation, and especially the tones (Chapter 2), the author treats the declension of nouns and pronouns, in addition to case and the plural in Chapter 3, and nouns and adjectives in Chapter 4, where the comparative and superlative constructions are also to be found. Chapter 5 contains verbs, the diminutives, the frequentatives, the names of professions and gender. Chapter 6 is again devoted to pronouns, but this time to the demonstrative, the relative and the reciprocal ones. In Chapter 7, the following topics are considered: interjections, conjunctions, negations, interrogatives, conditionals; in Chapter 8, the verb and its conjugations. Chapter 9 is devoted to the passive construction, and Chapter 10 to prepositions and adverbs, this being the most elaborate one. It contains an important list of adverbs with translations and examples in alphabetic order (according to the Spanish language). Chapter 11, consisting of only a few pages, treats the formation of sentences, and Chapter 12 the numbers. Finally, Chapter 13 is entitled ‘Various particles’.<sup>11</sup>

The models for these two Spanish grammars of Chinese languages are, first and foremost, the famous Latin grammar of Elio Antonio de Nebrija (1444–1522), *Introductiones Latinae* (1481) and secondly what is possibly the earliest grammar of an existing Romance language, the *Grammatica de la Lengua Castellana* (1492), composed by the same scholar. In fact, Varo explicitly acknowledges Nebrija’s grammatical framework in his prologue (page 1a, Coblin & Levi 2000: 5).

The Latin grammar by Nebrija is considered by some historians of linguistics as the first real grammar we have. From a purely terminological point of view, most of the linguistic terms can be found in this treatise that were later adopted by the different Latin *Artes* and which are still in use today.<sup>12</sup> Note, however, that his second grammar on Castilian was not widely available, before its re-edition in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Given this adoption of a Greco–Latin model, it is not surprising to find these missionary grammars include chapters on verb conjugations and tenses, such as the use of the infinitive and the subjunctive, the pluperfect preterite, and the future forms, not to mention discussions on the declension of nouns and pronouns, including features such as case, gender and number. Consequently, the resulting description is not always concise. For example, in the *Arte de la lengua Chiō Chiu*, a complete verb conjugation is given for the verb *lāy* 來 ‘to come’ in Southern Min for both the present and the perfect tenses. Nonetheless, these forms remain invariable in Southern Min Chinese, just as they do in Mandarin.<sup>13</sup>

Table 3: Southern Min verb paradigm for ‘come’, *Arte de la lengua Chiō Chiu* (1620/1621: 11)

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
1	<i>gua lay</i> 我 來	<i>yo vengo</i> ‘I come’	<i>guan lay</i> 阮 來	<i>nosotros benemos</i> ‘we come’
2	<i>lu lay</i> 汝 來	<i>tu bienes</i> ‘you (SG) come’	<i>lun lay</i> 恁 來	<i>vosotro benis</i> ‘you (PL) come’
3	<i>y lay</i> 伊 來	<i>aquel biene</i> ‘that one comes’	<i>yn lay</i> 因 來	<i>aquellos bienen</i> ‘those ones come’

The same situation obtains in Varo’s grammar for conjugating the verb *gái* 愛 ‘to love’ in the Nanjing-based Mandarin koine of the late 17th century (a pronunciation which corresponds to contemporary standard Mandarin *ài*):

- (1) 我愛 *gò hái* ‘I love’, 你愛 *nì hái* ‘you love’, 他愛 *t’ā hái* ‘that one loves’,  
我們愛 *gò mèn hái* ‘we love’, 你們愛 *nì mèn hái* ‘ye love’, 他們愛 *t’ā mèn hái*  
‘those ones love’ (Coblin & Levi 2000: 117).

Despite such an apparent lack of descriptive economy, Varo proceeds with a detailed and didactically useful seven-page account of how to render the different Spanish tenses, moods and voices into Mandarin (Coblin & Levi 2000: 51–58). For example, with regard to the tenses, he remarks upon the use of time adverbs to confine the verb to a particular time and the use of particles with tenses other than the present, of the type generally known as aspect markers, if not modal verbs today (Chappell 2006).

Before considering some of the later grammars of Chinese, let us briefly mention a work known as *Grammatica Sinica* by Martino Martini (1614–1661) which first appeared in Europe in

1653 on his return from China, though undoubtedly composed at an earlier date. Thus, it would be situated chronologically between the two *Artes*. In Bertuccioli's view (2003), the grammar was never published, while the manuscript was successively copied, recopied and modified. The original has since been lost.<sup>14</sup> What remains are five copies, the most complete of these being one of the three versions which belong to Glasgow University Library, once again, according to Bertuccioli, who examined and compared all of the manuscripts.<sup>15</sup> Written in Latin, the description of grammar is very brief, being found in chapters 2 and 3, between pages 9 to 26 with examples taken from the standard language of that time, and a few others from southern dialects. He divides the grammar into seven of the traditional eight chapters: nouns, pronouns, prepositions, verbs, adverbs, interjections and conjunctions: only participles are missing (see also Gianninoto, this issue, on parts of speech).

#### 4. Major 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century grammars of Chinese by Western scholars

4.1. The *Notitiae linguae sinicae* (1728/1831) by Father Joseph Henri de Prémare (1666-1735) is written in Latin. It covers both Classical Chinese and the vernacular. Different rules are given for each language style. In addition, many hundreds of examples are provided. The rhetorical nature of this grammar is important to note, as the author concentrates on matters of style and figures of composition. This notwithstanding, the grammatical remarks *strictu sensu* and explanations of sentences remain legion. What is missing in this vast compilation of specific observations is a level of generalization. The author uses the same terminology for the first part concerning the vernacular language, as for the second part on Classical Chinese. Moreover, in the examples he cites, the distinction between the two registers is not always clear.

Prémare takes the *littera* (Chinese *zì* 字) as the basic grammatical units. He counts 487 sounds (*soni*) and four tones (*accenti*), forming 1445 syllables (*voces*). In the following parts he adopts the traditional Chinese division into 'full words' and 'empty words' only to then divide them into the Western parts of speech: nominals (nouns and adjectives), for which he distinguishes different cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, vocative, ablative), pronouns, verbs (copula, auxiliaries, active/passive, etc.), adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, particles. Tense and mood are treated in the chapter on verbs. Syntax is quite neglected in this work, as it is hardly touched upon.

The content of this volume makes it clear that Prémare, like Varo before him, took the Latin model and applied it to the Chinese language. Thus, also in his case, linguistic facts often have to be distorted in order to fit into his model. Prémare did not try to create a new terminology to account for specific features of the Chinese language, but was satisfied to use the terms he was familiar with from grammars of Latin. Despite this general trend, he did make reference to the Chinese classification of the lexicon and included two glossaries of particles, thus effectively adopting several categories from the Chinese linguistic tradition (see Gianninoto, this issue). The *Notitiae* – already completed in 1728, but only published in 1831 in Malacca on the initiative of Protestant missionaries – was going to have a considerable impact on later grammars.

4.2 Other less important works from the 18<sup>th</sup> century are those by Bayer and Fourmont: Thomas (Theophilus) Siegfried Bayer (1694-1738) translated a revised, shorter version of the 1620 Southern Min *Arte de la lengua Chiō Chiu* into Latin, adding sections from the Southern Min *Doctrina Christiana*, as well as a grammar of literary Chinese to this work, entitled *Museum Sinicum* (1730).<sup>16</sup> In a famous case of plagiarism for its time, Etienne Fourmont's (1683-1745)

*Grammatica sinica* (1742) turned out to be a translation of Varo (1703) from Spanish into Latin.<sup>17</sup>

4.3 The 19<sup>th</sup> century works of the *Clavis Sinica, or Elements of Chinese Grammar, with an Appendix containing the Ta-Hyoh of Confucius, with a Translation* by Joshua Marshman (1768-1837) and *A grammar of the Chinese language* by Dr Robert Morrison (1782-1834), were published nearly simultaneously (in 1814 and 1815 respectively) in Serampore. They represent less important works. In fact, they could be better described as kinds of textbooks or manuals, introducing the learner to the language by translated examples, rather than being real grammars.

The *Clavis Sinica* is an expanded version of a predecessor from 1809 focusing on a translation of the *Lún Yǔ* 論語 or the *Analects of Confucius* (5<sup>th</sup> c. BC). As a consequence, it is actually an analysis of Classical Chinese based on a single text, albeit one of the most prestigious. The author is also very eloquent when it comes to explanations of a more general nature on social and anthropological phenomena in China, not concerned with the language itself.

*A Grammar of the Chinese language* is even more of a didactic manual. In fact, from the time of the author's arrival in Canton in 1807, Morrison was eager to collect the Chinese equivalents of common English phrases for the purposes of conversation. The book may have been useful for translating English into Chinese, but it cannot be considered to be an authentic grammar in the sense of giving any detailed rules for syntax and word formation.

4.4 The *Elémens de la grammaire chinoise* by Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788-1832), was published for the first time in 1822 and a second time in 1857. Abel-Rémusat occupied the first *chaire de langues et littératures chinoises et tartares-mandchoues* devoted to sinology in Europe at the Collège Royal from 1814 to 1815 which later became the Collège de France. His grammar is the first attempt at a logical synthesis of the Chinese language. For a long period, it served as the main reference work on Chinese, at least until the appearance of *Grammaire mandarine ou principes généraux de la langue Chinoise parlée* (1856) by Antoine Bazin (1799-1863) and *A grammar of the Chinese colloquial language commonly called the Mandarin dialect* (1864) by Joseph Edkins (1823-1905).

Following the example of the grammar by Father Prémare, which served as a model for the *Elémens*, Abel-Rémusat distinguishes carefully between Classical or literary Chinese and the vernacular (*guānhuà* 官话). The two languages are treated in two different parts, entitled respectively 'Style antique' and 'Style moderne'. They are both arranged according to parts of speech in the following order: nouns, adjectives, names (this section is missing, however, from the 'style moderne'), numbers, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions, interjections, particles and idioms.

Unlike the previous grammars, Abel-Rémusat did not try to impose any of the common categories of European languages on the two forms of Chinese he described. He takes fully into account the characteristics of the Chinese language and has no hesitation in stating that Chinese nouns are not marked for gender or case, nor are there any verb conjugations. It remains to be observed that the sections on Classical Chinese are rather slim (there are only a few lines on prepositions and conjunctions, hardly more on adverbs) and that the book is valuable mainly due to its analyses of the vernacular, which is much better represented. This is so, despite the fact that the examples chosen to illustrate the rules often come from earlier literature such as the novel *Jīn Píng Méi* 金瓶梅 (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*) (early 17th century) and the fact that

Abel-Rémusat clearly only had a very bookish knowledge of the contemporary Chinese language of his times.

4.5 Stanislas Julien (1797-1873) was unquestionably the most brilliant student of Abel-Rémusat, if not the unchallenged master of European sinology in the second half of the 19th century, his research covering a wide range of disciplines in this domain. His *Syntaxe nouvelle de la langue chinoise* (1869-1870) contains in fact only a very short description of 72 pages in length for the ‘style antique’ or *gǔwén* 古文, as part of an erudite volume of 412 pages with a short descriptions on how to use important function words in Classical Chinese such as *suǒ* 所, *yǐ* 以 and *zhě* 者 (*Monographies*, pp. 73-147) ; a lexicon on Classical Chinese (*Supplément aux Monographies*, pp.153-231) and a treatment of the same type of words in terms of the phrases and expressions they form (*Table des Idiotismes*, pp. 235-293). All these preceding sections have the purpose of aiding the reader to interpret a series of legends and parables translated from Sanskrit into Classical Chinese (*Fables, Légendes et Apologues*, pp. 295-412). Gianninoto & Casacchia (forthcoming) observe that Julien incorporated translations of some of Wang Yinzhì’s discussions of particles from the *Jīng zhuàn shì cí* that he believed would cause difficulties for occidental scholars (see §2 above).

4.6 Antoine Bazin’s *Grammaire mandarine ou principes généraux de la langue chinoise parlée* (1856) and Joseph Edkin’s *A grammar of the Chinese colloquial language commonly called the Mandarin dialect* (1864) both represent solid grammars on the vernacular style of Mandarin, as their titles reveal. While Bazin’s grammar does not forgo analysis of the eight traditional categories, it is noteworthy that he includes a long section describing the syntax of all these parts of speech, in addition to a chapter on polite language – *Du langage de la civilité* – and a comparison of the literary style with the vernacular.

This grammar by Bazin (1799-1862) was known to Joseph Edkins (1823-1905) in the form of an earlier, circulated version. His opus is, in fact, even more comprehensive than that of Bazin. The grammar is divided into three parts: Part I: *On Sound* (pp. 1-96); Part II: *The Parts of Speech* (pp. 96-218) and Part III *Syntax* (pp. 218-266) and uses data from native speakers of both the northern and southern varieties of Mandarin as well as examples from the 18<sup>th</sup> century vernacular novel, *Hóng Lóu Mèng* 紅樓夢 (*Dream of the Red Chamber*). His grammar, too, has chapters on all the main parts of speech and significantly dedicates one of these to the numeral classifiers (see §5 below) and another to particles. The third part on syntax includes complex sentences with both coordination and subordination.

4.7 In contrast to these colloquial grammars, *Chinesische Grammatik* (1881), by Georg von der Gabelentz, presents a much more complete grammar of Classical Chinese than does Abel-Rémusat. It is undoubtedly the best from the end of the 19th century to deal with this style of written language and is still in use today by specialists in the domain, in contrast to the other early grammars of Classical Chinese. It contains all the parts of speech listed for the grammars discussed above, but also gives detailed explanations on their syntactic function (subject, predicate object, etc.) and on the structural principles of the language, for example, inversion of word order, the expression of modality, concessive and conditional sentences. Divided into three parts, the first covers general and introductory topics such as the sound and intonation system, and the method of writing characters, while the second and the third parts constitute the core of

this grammar of 549 pages in their treatment of the Classical language from the complementary viewpoints of an analytic system and a synthetic system.

In conclusion to this section, it has been observed that the early European grammars of Chinese languages typically included most of the eight classical parts of speech of the Latin *ars grammatica* of Dionysius Thrax (see Breitenbach 2000: xxxii), often adding further chapters on interjections, numbers and postpositions. This is evident in the similar chapter layouts found in the grammars of de Mançano, Varo, Martino Martini and Abel-Rémusat *inter alia*. To different degrees, Prémare and Abel-Rémusat described both genres of the literary language – Classical Chinese – and the vernacular or spoken Mandarin, whereas von der Gabelentz describes mainly Classical Chinese, as too does Stanislas Julien. In contrast to these grammars, Marshman, on Classical Chinese, and Morrison, on the vernacular form, mainly discuss questions of style in Chinese, rather than systematically analysing the grammar. Finally, the grammars of Bazin and Edkins resemble more closely those of contemporary linguistics in their focus on explaining, in as comprehensive a manner as possible, the spoken form of Mandarin. For a comprehensive discussion of parts of speech in western grammars and manuals of Chinese, see Casacchia & Gianninoto (2012: 541-598).

In the following section, we discuss the approaches taken by several of these Western scholars to the grammatical category of the classifier for those grammars which treat vernacular varieties of Chinese languages.

#### 5. *The treatment of a previously unknown grammatical category by European scholars: the classifier*

In this section, we consider a grammatical category which is not to be found in any Greco-Latin grammatical model, and certainly not in any grammatical descriptions written prior to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. This is the numeral classifier, whose treatment in several grammars of different Chinese languages is discussed after first defining this part of speech, widespread in the languages of East and Southeast Asia.

##### 5.1. Definition of a classifier

A classifier (CL) is a word which is syntactically required by certain languages in the operation of quantifying a noun, whether this be by a numeral or by a quantifier. In Chinese languages, classifiers principally occur in a prenominal position between the numeral (NUM) or quantifier and the head noun: DEM/NUM – CL – NOUN. They are obligatory with numerals and with some, though not all, of the quantifiers. Depending on the Sinitic language or dialect in question, classifiers may, however, be omitted with demonstratives under certain conditions.

- |     |           |             |             |           |     |               |            |
|-----|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----|---------------|------------|
| (2) | Mandarin: | <i>wǔ</i>   | <i>tiáo</i> | <i>yú</i> | 五條魚 | <i>*wǔ yú</i> | <i>*五魚</i> |
|     |           | five        | CL          | fish      |     | five fish     |            |
|     |           | 'five fish' |             |           |     |               |            |

In this respect, it is essential to distinguish measure words (MWs) from classifiers. Measure words, on the other hand, are likely to be found in all languages of the world, as exemplified for English and French:

- |     |                           |   |                                   |
|-----|---------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| (3) | <i>a jug of cider</i>     | – | <i>un pichet de cidre</i>         |
|     | <i>a kilo of potatoes</i> | – | <i>un kilo de pommes de terre</i> |

Measure words do not typically distinguish any characteristic of the head noun that they modify. Examples such as *kilo* or *pound* may be used for any object that can be measured by its weight, or in the case of containers, by volume, such as a *cup* or a *jar*. Nor are they obligatory in counting, shown in the fact that they can be applied to mass nouns as well as to count nouns: *a pound of flour<sub>mass</sub>* or *a pound of apples<sub>count</sub>*.

A second important feature of classifiers is that they generally single out some salient semantic feature of the set of nouns they classify with respect to shape and dimensions or a functional part of the whole. For example, the core use of the classifier *tiáo* 條 in standard Mandarin pertains to objects that are long, thin and can have a curved section, or, if not, are flexible in nature. Some of the nouns that are classified by *tiáo*, with the purpose of being able to count them, are the following:

- (4) *hé* 河 ‘river’, *shé* 蛇 ‘snake’, *lǐngdài* 領帶 ‘tie’, *shéngzi* 繩子 ‘rope’, *dàizi* 帶子 ‘belt’, *wěiba* 尾巴 ‘tail’, *lù* 路 ‘road’, *jiē* 街 ‘street’, *huángguā* 黃瓜 ‘cucumber’, 褲子 *kùzi* ‘trousers’, *tuǐ* 腿 ‘leg’...

Historically viewed, classifiers in Chinese started to emerge during the Han dynasty from the 2nd century BC onwards, increasing in frequency of use with count nouns by the time of Early Medieval Chinese (3rd-7th centuries). In this initial stage, their quantifying function was foremost. From Late Medieval Chinese (7th century) to the end of the period of Modern Chinese (19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries), classifiers in Chinese became highly diversified and assumed the important role of semantic categorization, in addition to their quantifying role (for details, see Peyraube 1998, Chappell & Peyraube 2011, and in particular, Zhang Cheng 2012).

How did missionaries and other European scholars treat such a novel grammatical category? In order to answer this question, we briefly consider the approaches taken in several of the vernacular grammars of Mandarin that have just been presented above.

## 5.2. Classifiers in the *Arte de la lengua chiō-chiu* (1620)

Although de Mançano relegates discussion of the category of the classifier to an appendix at the end of his short grammar of Southern Min, it nonetheless provides a very detailed account and an important source for the use of classifiers in Southern Min of this early period. The appendix in question lists 80 classifiers, called *numerales propios* ‘specific numerals’.<sup>18</sup> Most of the examples use the format, as follows:

- (5) sì 四 ‘four’ – CLF – NOUN  
       sì     buè     chui bè     四尾水馬  
       four   CLF     seahorse  
       ‘four seahorses’           (*Arte* 1620 : 23b)

A selection of nouns is provided for each classifier with a short explanation of its use. The syntax combining the classifier with its head noun is given in the following description at the beginning of the appendix:

‘In this language, apart from the common numerals, there are also other specific numerals for counting particular items. These are placed between the common numeral and the noun; for example: “one snake” is called *cheg bue choa*.’ (一尾蛇 one – CLF – snake (1620: 23b))<sup>19</sup>

After this example, the list of 80 ‘special numerals’ follows (*Note*: the example number N° 73 is repeated). Using our definitions given above, about half are true classifiers (39) while the other half are actually measure words (41), including three collective terms (Chappell & Peyraube 2010). Some examples from the appendix for each category are given below:

- (6) Southern Min measure words in the 1620-1621 *Arte*:  
 載 chài ‘for loads ...’, 尺 chió<sup>c</sup> ‘foot’
- (7) collectives:  
 群 cūn ‘group for herds, troops...’, 莖 kéng ‘for bunches of fruit’
- (8) classifiers:  
 櫟 chāng ‘for trees, vegetables...’, 幅 pág ‘for pictures...’  
 條 tiāu ‘for sins, roots, springs...’, 隻 chiá ‘for ships and large animals’

It is interesting, in itself, that the classifier *bue*<sup>2</sup> 尾 (or *wěi* in Mandarin) is chosen as the very first classifier to be listed in the appendix. It is used to classify creatures possessing a tail, including most fish and reptiles such as crocodiles. It is not found in contemporary Mandarin, nor in most other Sinitic languages (see Tai 1994) and can thus be seen as emblematic of the Min dialects.

### 5.3. *Grammatica Sinica* (1653)

Martino Martini similarly provides an extensive list of 38 Mandarin classifiers with examples in his Chapter 7 on numbers, using the appellation of *particulae numericae* ‘numerical particles’. Notably, he does not include any measure words in this list. He states (in a one-sentence description) that ‘the numerical particles are different, depending upon the things to which they are applied’ (*Particulae autem numericae sunt diversae prout res quibus applicantur*, q.v. Bertociulli 1998: 440). For example, *lim* is used for clothing, and *tiāo* for ‘things that are long and pendant’:

- (9) 一領道袍 jě lim tào pào TOGA ‘a robe’  
 一條蛇 jě tiāo xé UNUS SERPENS ‘a snake’

His grammar was much prized in Northern Europe, to where he first returned from China in 1653 with the consequence of greatly stimulating the pursuit of sinology, especially among scholars in Germany and Holland (see Bertociulli 1998, 2003).

### 5.4 *Arte de la lengua mandarina* (1682/1703)

In his grammar of Mandarin, Varo discusses the classifier in the second paragraph of Chapter XII, ‘On the numbers and numerals’. Distinct from the Southern Min *Arte* of 1620, Varo calls this



grammatical category, *numerales* ‘numerals’ or ‘enumerator’, and refers to the particular instances as either a *propia particula* or a *particula propria*, that is, a ‘specific particle’ or also ‘a particular particle’ and states that:

‘The **numerals** are mainly rendered by the particle *kó* 個 postposed immediately to the number, unless that which is being counted has its own **particular particle**, in which case we do not use *kó* 個 but rather the appropriate particle, e.g., “four men” *çú kó jîn* 四個人, “six books” *lǒ puèn xū* 六本書. In the first (example) we have used *kó* 個 because there is no specific particle which enumerates men, and in the second we have not used it because books have their own particle, which is *puèn* 本. In the absence of a **specific particle**, *kó* 個 is absolutely necessary, because without it the meaning would change, e.g., “four coins” *çú kó çh’iên* 四個錢. If we don’t use *kó* 個 and we say *çú çh’iên* 四錢, then it means “four silver *reales*”.’ (Coblin & Levi 2000: 159, our emphasis).

Varo next lists 52 of the more common of these specific particles, each in combination with a preceding numeral. However, not all examples have a head noun and the lexical field needs to be deduced from the Spanish translation in many cases:

Here are some examples with the classifiers highlighted in bold style:

(10)	pǎ <b>chě</b> ch’uên	八隻船	‘eight boats’
	iě <b>tìng</b> máo	一頂帽	‘one cap’
	leàng <b>chī</b> chǒ	兩枝燭	‘two candles’
	iě <b>k’ò</b> mì	一顆米	‘one grain of rice’

Varo’s description of classifiers is an accurate description of the category and of the syntactic construction it forms in terms of constituency and word order. It holds true today, even though, once again, some examples Varo gives are of measure words and collective nouns, such as ‘two bales or bundles’ *úl k’uèn* 二捆 and ‘eight flocks, as of sheep’ *pǎ k’iún* 八群.

### 5.5 *A grammar of the Chinese language* (1815)

Robert Morrison continues the Spanish missionary linguistic tradition in using the name of ‘numerals’ for classifiers, as part of an extensive discussion on the properties of nouns, stating that:

‘From their name, it is apparent, that they are used in numbering. But they occur not only when reckoning, but also when mentioning one of a thing: as, “a ship”, is expressed by, *yǎ chē chuēn* 一隻船 One single ship.<sup>20</sup> As if they would say, “One sail ship.” (1815: 37).

In the next 22 pages, a fulsome list of 81 classifiers is presented accompanied by an indication of the semantic categories to which they are applied as well as appropriate language examples, including sometimes full sentences. Abel-Rémusat states in fact that this list is taken from the dictionary of Father Basile (Gemoni) (1987 edition:50, footnote 1).<sup>21</sup>

Apart from the insightful remark on the semantic function of classifiers – ‘The numeral has an allusion to some quality or circumstance of the Noun (1815: 37).’ – there is otherwise little further description of the category.

#### 5.6. *Elémens de la grammaire chinoise* (1822/1857)

In his *Elémens de la grammaire chinoise*, Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1822/1857) very briefly discusses the main syntactic characteristics of the classifier under the name of *numérale* (page 1987: 50-51), *particule* or *numérale spéciale* (1987 : 116). It is possible that Morrison and Abel-Rémusat may have both borrowed the term from the Spanish grammars, discussed above. In contrast to Morrison, Abel-Rémusat clearly does not see any importance in the semantic relationship between a classifier and the noun it modifies, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

‘Presque toujours on ajoute aux noms des nombres une particule qui ne change rien au sens, quoiqu’elle varie suivant la nature des objets nombrés. On nomme ces sortes de particules, *numérales*. Les mots employés en ce sens perdent tout-à-fait la signification qu’ils auraient isolément, et l’on en est averti par la présence du nom de nombre.’  
(1857/1987:50)

(Translation : Nearly always a particle is added to the nouns for numerals that makes no change to the meaning, although it varies according to the nature of the enumerated objects. We call this sort of particle, an enumerator (*numérales*). The words used in this way lose their meaning altogether that they had in isolation, and we are alerted to this fact by the presence of a numeral.)

Here is one of his examples of the common classifier *kó* which he too notes has a wide usage, as did Varo before him:

‘309. Outre les *numérales spéciales* (113), il y en a une commune qui sert également pour les personnes et pour les choses: c’est la particule *kó*, (...). Il faut remarquer qu’en *kouan-hoa* les *numérales* ne se joignent pas seulement aux noms de nombre, mais qu’on les place aussi après les mots qui marquent la pluralité ou un nombre indéfini, et après les adjectifs démonstratifs (310, 337).’ (Abel-Rémusat 1857/1987 : 116)

310. — *ĩ* ‘un’, suivi de la *numérale kó*, forme l’article indéfini *quidam*, un certain :

人 <i>jîn</i>	個 <i>kó</i>	一 <i>ĩ</i>
homo.	(p.n.)	unus
« Un homme »’		

Translation: ‘Apart from the specific enumerators (113), there is a common one which can be used both for persons and for things: this is the particle *kó* (...). It should be noted that, in the language of the officials (Mandarin), not only can the enumerators be combined with the nouns for numerals, but they can also be placed after the words which mark the plural or indefinite number, and after demonstrative determiners (310, 337).

310. — *ĩ* ‘one’, followed by the enumerator *kó*, forms the indefinite article *quidam*, for someone unknown:

人 <i>jîn</i>	個 <i>kó</i>	一 <i>ĩ</i>
homo.	(p.n.)	unus
« A person » <sup>22</sup>		

Abel-Rémusat completes this discussion by pointing out that the numeral ‘one’ may be omitted, which also expresses the equivalent of the indefinite article in French: *kó jîn* ‘a person, someone’.

From the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we find a change in terminology from ‘specific numerals’ (or ‘enumerators’) and ‘numerical particles’ to ‘auxiliary nouns’ in the work of Bazin (1856) and Edkins (1864), who were familiar with each other’s work. This is accompanied by an increasing sophistication in the descriptive approach used.

### 5.7 *Grammaire mandarine* (1856)

While noting that the missionaries used the term ‘particule numérale’ and that the English prefer the term ‘classifier’, Antoine Bazin followed Joseph Edkins, to whom he refers, in employing the term *substantif auxiliaire* or ‘auxiliary noun’ for this category. With examples of classifiers restricted to a list of just 14, he provides *en revanche* a three-page discussion of the *raison d’être* of the classifier, longer than any found in the preceding grammars (1856: 20-23), explaining, for example, the determinative function of these *auxiliaires substantifs*, such as 一本書 *ĩ-‘pen-chou*, (one-classifier-book) ‘a book’

“... servent, comme auxiliaires, à fixer le sens des substantifs (...) à restreindre l’idée d’une plus grande quantité à une plus petite. (...serve as auxiliaries, to determine the sense of the nouns (...) in restricting the idea of a larger quantity to a smaller one.)”

Bazin also proceeds to enunciate a second explanation for the origin of this auxiliary use, namely, to come to the rescue of head nouns in disambiguating the many homophonous monosyllabic words to be found in Chinese (page 21), thereby adopting Abel-Rémusat’s viewpoint on the development and usefulness of compound words. This appears, however, somewhat less astute than his first observation on their function, given above, since as he remarks, himself, these classifiers also occur with di- and trisyllabic nouns.

While explicitly including measure words and collectives in his definition of auxiliaries (§32, p.23), he too, as did Abel-Rémusat before him (1987: 51, footnote1), refers the reader to the ‘incomplete’ list of classifiers given at the end of Père Basile’s dictionary (1856: 22).

### 5.8 *A grammar of the Chinese colloquial language* (1864)

Edkins dedicates an entire chapter to the subject of the ‘auxiliary substantives or numeral particles’ (1864: 127-143), noting that they have been named variously by other writers as ‘numeral particles’, ‘classifiers’, ‘numerals’ or ‘numeratives’ (p.127). His definition is very instructive, particularly with respect to ‘appellative’ or common nouns, which we reproduce below:

Words such as *pair* (...) in *a pair of shoes* (...) are substantives descriptive of the number and quantity of other substantives. They constitute a secondary class of nouns, and are concerned with the quantity of things somewhat as adjectives are with their qualities. This class of nouns is very much extended in the Chinese colloquial language, where not only collectives with weights and measures exist, but also certain words appropriated to appellative nouns; e.g. 一張桌子 *yih ,chang choh ‘tsi*, a table;

He describes the syntax and also notes the use of ko‘個 as a substitute for any of the common nouns in Northern Mandarin and, like Abel-Rémusat, claims that they have no meaning of their

own (p. 128). His major contribution to the understanding of this category is his illuminating classification of auxiliary nouns into five main types: (1) the ‘distinctive numeral particles’ (or true individuating classifiers) that are used with common nouns; (2) ‘significant numerals’, that is, words for measures and weights used for material nouns (mass nouns); (3) collectives; (4) ‘modal nouns’ for kind or manner and (5) numeral particles applied to verbs, or verbal classifiers.

Finally, to complete this brief study on the treatment of classifiers in western grammars of Chinese languages, we examine the analysis of classifiers in a German grammar of Hakka.

### 5.9 *Kleine Hakka Grammatik* (1909)

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Basel Evangelische Gesellschaft began to send missionaries to Guangdong province in southern China, where they carried out linguistic studies on a variety of Huizhou Hakka. The resulting works, *Kleine Hakka Grammatik* and the *Kleines Deutsch-Hakka Wörterbuch für Anfänger*, were both published in 1909.<sup>23</sup>

In section 2.1.2., the description of classifiers is to be found, using a different, descriptive term, *sinngemäße Bestimmungswörter*, ‘semantic determiners’ or more literally ‘determiners according to their general sense’ by the missionaries. The relevant passage is reproduced below (translation by Chappell & Lamarre 2005: 48; original page 9):

‘When numerals are used, the colloquial language requires a more detailed specification by means of semantically based determiners (called ‘classifiers’ in English) whose use is important and necessary, but also somewhat unfamiliar and difficult for us.’

The most common determiner is *tšak*<sup>6</sup> 隻.

*tšak*<sup>6</sup> 隻 ‘piece’:

It can often be replaced by the more indefinite and general *kai*<sup>4</sup> 个, as in the following:

<i>si</i> <sup>4</sup> <i>tšak</i> <sup>6</sup> <i>nyin</i> <sup>2</sup>	四隻人	‘four people’
<i>si</i> <sup>4</sup> <i>kai</i> <sup>4</sup> <i>nyin</i> <sup>2</sup>	四个人	<i>Ibid.</i>

More than 45 separate classifiers described and provided with examples (q.v. 2005: 48-58 or pp.9-15 in the 1909 original). The authors do not generally fuse the category with measure words and overall their description proves to be both accurate and linguistically appropriate. For the purposes of a useful comparison with the cognate classifier to Mandarin, exemplified in (4) above, the list for the Hakka classifier *thiau*<sup>2</sup> 條 is given below:

- (11) Hakka classifier *thiau*<sup>2</sup> 條
- |  |      |                |
|--|------|----------------|
| <i>yit</i> <sup>6</sup> <i>thiau</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ša</i> <sup>2</sup>                             | 一條蛇  | ‘a snake’      |
| <i>yit</i> <sup>6</sup> <i>thiau</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ho</i> <sup>2</sup>                             | 一條河  | ‘a river’      |
| <i>kai</i> <sup>4</sup> <i>thiau</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>lu</i> <sup>4</sup>                             | 个條路  | ‘that road’    |
| <i>sam</i> <sup>1</sup> <i>thiau</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>ma</i> <sup>1</sup>                             | 三條馬  | ‘three horses’ |
| <i>yit</i> <sup>6</sup> <i>thiau</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>on</i> <sup>4</sup>                             | 一條案  | ‘a trial’      |
| <i>yit</i> <sup>6</sup> <i>thiau</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>nyin</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>myang</i> <sup>4</sup> | 一條人命 | ‘a human life’ |
| <i>yit</i> <sup>6</sup> <i>thiau</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>lun</i> <sup>4</sup>                            | 一條論  | ‘a treatise’   |

The last three examples need to be seen as semantic extensions by the mechanism of metaphor from the core usage, for example, ‘life’ and ‘trial’ being viewed as a trajectory (or a line)

whereby space is mapped onto time. Similarly in Mandarin, *xinwén* 新聞 ‘news’, *mìng* 命 ‘life’ and *àn* 案 ‘trial’ may also take the cognate classifier.

## 6. Conclusion

In the early phase of grammar writing by western scholars, there appears to be little influence of language type on the design of grammars for Chinese languages. This is evident in the somewhat redundant application of European inflectional categories to predominantly analytic Chinese languages with some minor adjustments made for categories not to be found in the major European languages, such as particles and classifiers.<sup>24</sup>

Although scholars and missionaries trained in a western Greco-Latin framework worked on the description of different Sinitic languages, including Southern Min, Mandarin and Hakka, they did not, however, necessarily ‘force’ European language categories onto the target language. They described the facts albeit using traditional terminology, often in terms of translation equivalents, but they also invented terms for new categories, as has been shown in our brief overview of these early grammars.

Thus, classifiers are described under a specially created term which in several grammars is indeed appropriately linked with the notion of counting. De Mançano (1620) and Varo (1682) both used the term *numerales* for the unknown category of the classifier, each providing a plenitude of examples, while Martini (1653) called them *particulae numericae*. Much later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Abel-Rémusat (1822/1857) continued this same tradition, using the terms *numérale*, *numérale spéciale* and *particule*, while Bazin and Edkins elected to use the term of *substantif auxiliaire* or ‘auxiliary noun’. Bazin adroitly explained the classification process as a semantic operation of determination, involving the restriction of the objects associated with a concept to a certain number or quantity. Edkins further advanced the study of the classifier with his subcategorization into five main types, clearly distinguishing the true individuating classifiers from measure words, collectives and kinds. In a separate linguistic tradition, the Basel linguists used a quite different but descriptively revealing term, that of ‘semantic determiners’ – *sinngemässe Bestimmungswörter* – while also judiciously keeping measure words apart from the true classifiers, as did Edkins.

Describing the previously undescribed – in this case, the exotic, oriental languages of this epoch, inevitably leads to the discovery of new grammatical categories and constructions, not to mention the enrichment of our linguistic knowledge and consideration of the cognitive processes that these categories might reflect. The early missionaries and scholars faced this kind of challenge in the Philippines and China, with increasing degrees of sophistication in their resulting analyses, building upon a scientific foundation, that was gradually expanding, being reinforced by the addition of each new refinement in grammatical description.

## Epilogue

Returning to the enigma of the Chinese linguistic tradition with its lack of interest in the analysis of grammar, including the vernacular forms of language, we would like to end our brief study of the history of Chinese grammars with this epilogue.

As raised in the introductory sections of this article, early treatises on the Chinese language that made some passing reference to grammar mainly concerned style, rhetoric and thus, by default, the use of grammatical particles. This had the didactic goal of learning how to write elegant poetry and essays for the imperial exams, and this most clearly had to be in a Classical or literary style. The genre dates back to the Song dynasty (960-1279), while the imperial exams

were first instituted under the Sui dynasty (581-618), continuing until 1905 when they were abolished definitively.

As has been argued, the first grammar of Chinese to be written by a Chinese scholar was that by Ma Jianzhong, first published in 1898. It was similarly written with the purpose of aiding the user in the composition of literary essays in the style of Classical Chinese. The part on syntax is one of the shortest in the grammar (see Beiluobei 1998, Peyraube 1999). The exams on literature and philology required an in-depth knowledge of the classic texts from the period of Late Archaic Chinese (5th -3rd BC), not to mention the ability to compose poems and essays in the classical style. This may help to explain the *raison d'être* for a linguistic tradition which took prosody, rhymes, textual interpretation and philology as its core. Nor should the social context be forgotten, namely, that the literacy rate in China had always been very low, never having surpassed approximately 10% up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education being undoubtedly the privilege of an elite minority and, unsurprisingly, one that was largely male (see also Peyraube 2000). Thus, grammars of the vernacular languages and dialects of China did not have a place, nor any relevance, in the educational requirements of such a cultivated milieu.

This notwithstanding, in the early 20th century, a movement arose to use the vernacular language in writing and education instead of the Classical language, with many intellectuals involved in campaigning for such a language reform and other modernizations. It came to a head with the May 4th Movement, which refers to the demonstrations that began in Peking on this day in 1919 over the unjust outcome of the Treaty of Versailles for China, and spread to many other cities in China. These events became a turning point in China's modern history with respect to a large number of issues. Writers who supported the movement, such as Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936) and Bing Xin 冰心 (1900-1999), began to compose their novels in a form closer to the spoken language which became known as *báihuà* 白話 'plain language'.

In a nutshell, the need for grammars describing the vernacular form of Chinese, specifically, the official language, Mandarin, was stimulated by the massive change in both the political and educative system – which saw the fall of the last Qing dynasty, a Manchu dynasty, in 1911 and the change from empire to republic, accompanied by a general demand for a modern, more accessible education system that would teach and use a written language based more decidedly on the vernacular form of Mandarin. Due to the ensuing political and social upheaval which continued until well after the end of World War II, it is only from the mid-20th century that the first grammars of spoken standard Chinese (Mandarin) begin to appear, written by native-speaker linguists in China, roughly coinciding with the implementation of new language reform policies of the People's Republic of China. The language reforms concerned two main axes: (i) promotion of the widespread use of the 'common language', *pǔtōnghuà* 普通話, or what is known better as 'standard Mandarin' in the west and (ii) simplification of the writing system for some of the more complicated Chinese characters (Chappell 1980, Chen Ping 1999).

Consequently, to meet the first need in particular, the post-war period has witnessed an exponential increase in the publication of grammars of spoken Mandarin Chinese, written in mainly structuralist and functionalist frameworks. Amongst these, the most celebrated work written in English is undoubtedly Yuen-Ren Chao's *A grammar of spoken Chinese* (1968), while for those composed in Chinese, some of the first modern grammars have been pioneered by Lü Shuxiang 呂叔湘 (1942), Wang Li 王力 (1943, 1944), Gao Mingkai 高明凱 (1957), Li Jinxi 黎錦熙 (1957), Ding Shengshu 丁聲樹 (1961) and Zhu Dexi 朱德熙 (1982), among many others.

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### *Historiography*

A list of works by missionaries in the production of grammars and descriptions of Chinese languages and dialects can be found in Gonzales (1967) and Masini (2000). Van der Loon (1966, 1967) also provides a brief historiography of the study of Chinese languages by western scholars, discussing major works from 16th century onwards. A detailed history of Chinese linguistics and written works on the Chinese language, both western and Chinese, is to be found in Casacchia & Gianninoto (2012), while a bibliography is given in Breitenbach (2004: 204-212).

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this article were presented first as the Lesley Seiffert Plenary Lecture by the first author under the title of ‘Grammar writing in China: the missionary and gentleman scholar tradition’ during the *Annual Colloquium of the Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas*, held at Aarhus University, 30 August – 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012; and, second, under the title of ‘Écrire la grammaire en Chine : les traditions missionnaire et académique’, as an invited research lecture for the Séminaire DéLiCorTal at Université Stendhal, Grenoble 3, on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2013. We thank both audiences for many insightful comments on our work, and in particular, Mariarosaria Gianninoto, Kenichi Kadooka, Henning Klöter, Nicola McClelland, Bill McGregor, Iva Novakova and Jean-Christophe Verstraete. **We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewer for insightful comments and suggestions on another important aspect of this topic: the history of ideas surrounding the Chinese language in Europe pertaining to the more general domains of sinology and philosophy.**

<sup>2</sup> The date is given as: 萬曆四十八年 *Wàn Lì sìshíbā nián* ‘the forty-eighth year of the reign of the Emperor Wan Li’ which is 1620 or 1621 when converted to the Gregorian calendar. We thank Professor Mei Tsu-Lin of Cornell University for bringing this to our attention. There are at least two versions of the *Arte* in existence. Only the University of Barcelona version includes this page and not the British Library copy.

<sup>3</sup> **Our analysis and description will not take into account, however, the very interesting questions concerning the impact on European intellectual life, particularly from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, of the new and growing knowledge about the Chinese language, and by means of translations, its cultural and philosophical traditions, the latter including the rites controversy within the Catholic church, sparked off by the Jesuits (see Mungello 1989). Not only were books, atlases and other documents brought back in a constant stream from China by merchants and missionaries, but also direct contact with a small number of educated Chinese visiting Europe, increased the information and interest about many aspects of China. Such was the case of Shen Fuzong 沈福宗 (1657-1691) (Michael Alphonsius or Michel Sin) who in the 1680s worked with Thomas Hyde (1636-1703) at the Bodleian library in Oxford, after a year spent in the Bibliothèque du roi in France (see Poole 2010, Batchelor ODNB), or Arcade Hoang (Huang Jialüe 黄嘉略, born in 1679 in Putian, Fujian, died in Paris in 1716), who worked with Nicolas Fréret (1688-1749) and was the interpreter of Louis XIV (see Elisseeff, 1985). As the anonymous reviewer pointed out, all these sources helped to inspire the debate during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century on the origin and nature of language, including speculations that Chinese could represent the primitive, if not some kind of universal language (see, for example, Webb 1669).**

<sup>4</sup> This table does not purport to be exhaustive in any way, as a large number of other western grammars could also have been cited, in particular, those dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which describe different Chinese dialects, discussion of which would be outside the scope of the present article. Production of this large corpus of grammars, dictionaries and manuals can be directly linked to the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 which opened up southern China to foreign missionaries and entrepreneurs.

<sup>5</sup> Although our discussion is restricted to grammars, it should be pointed out that the compilation of dictionaries of Chinese languages was also an important task, and in many cases preceded the writing of grammars, including: (i) the famous dictionary *Diccionario português-chinês* by the Jesuits Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607), compiled between 1583 and 1588 (and re-edited by Witek, 2001); (ii) *Vocabulario Sinico* and *Diccionario español – chino vulgar* by the Dominican Miguel de Benavides (1550-1605); (iii) *Dictionarium Sino-Hispanicum* by the Jesuit Pedro Chirino (1557-1635) whose preface is dated 1604 (see Masini 2000); (iv) *Diccionario chino* attributed to Domingo de Nieva (1563-1606), who also worked at the Manila Dominican Mission; (v) *Vocabulario Chino*, attributed to Juan Cobo; (vi) *Diccionario de la lengua Chin-cheo*, dated 1609. Many of these works have similarly been lost (which explains why they are not given in the reference list to the present article). We have also overlooked discussion of grammars and dictionaries written by Portuguese missionaries (see Gianninoto & Casacchia forthcoming).

Given that these *Artes* were often a collaborative effort by several of the missionaries in Manila and the similarity of the titles, the possibility also exists that the same *Arte* may have been attributed multiply to different authors. See also Table 1 on missionary sources given in Klöter (2011: 53-56).

<sup>6</sup> The manuscript of this *Arte* was serendipitously rediscovered by one of the co-authors of the present paper, Alain Peyraube, during a visit to the University of Barcelona Library in the early 1990s, having been brought to his attention by the Catalan sinologist Dolors Folch (see also Folch 1995). Prior to this, the *Arte* had been located at the convent of Santa Caterina, whence it was transferred as part of a book collection to the university library.

<sup>7</sup> See also Klöter (2011) for a complete translation of the *Arte*. He names this variety of Southern Min ‘Early Manila Hokkien’.

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<sup>8</sup> Note that, technically speaking, the Min dialects should be considered as a separate group of Chinese languages since they are not mutually intelligible with Mandarin in their spoken form.

<sup>9</sup> Translation: ‘The main difficulty of the Chinese language is to know the pronunciation.’

<sup>10</sup> This information and analysis was first presented by the two authors as Chappell & Peyraube (1999).

<sup>11</sup> See Coblin & Levi (2000) for an annotated translation of Varo’s grammar into English.

<sup>12</sup> Some linguists consider *Tékhne grammatiké* by *Dionysios Thrax* (2nd century BC) to be the first systematic grammar in the Western tradition, but this book only deals with word morphology. It is remarkable that not until the time of Apollonius Dyscolus (2nd century AD) was the study of syntax added to grammar (*Grammatici Graeci*), later developed by a Latin grammarian from Constantinople, Priscian, in his book *Institutiones grammaticae* (early 6th century).

<sup>13</sup> Note that the 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish orthography used by the missionary author has been reproduced faithfully in this table. The examples are found on folios 6b and 7a of the 1620/21 *Arte* which we have re-arranged as Table 3 for presentation purposes, adding in the English translations.

<sup>14</sup> However, see the remarks in Gianninoto, this issue, who observes that a revised version of the grammar was indeed published in an appendix to M. Thévenot’s *Relations des diverses voyages curieux* in 1696. The present authors have not yet sighted this work.

<sup>15</sup> A fourth copy is found in the Jagiellonska Library in Krakow, while the fifth is in the Staatsbibliothek (or former Royal Prussian Library) in Berlin.

<sup>16</sup> For example, the verb conjugation given in Table 3 above can be found on page 149 in Bayer’s work.

<sup>17</sup> As Abel-Rémusat 1822/1987: xiv correctly observed: ‘(la grammaire de) Fourmont n’est, à proprement parler, qu’une traduction latine de celle du P. Varo.’

<sup>18</sup> Note, however, that this appendix is only found in the Barcelona manuscript, and is missing in the less complete version held by the British Library.

<sup>19</sup> Original Spanish: *En esta lengua fuera de los nume-rales communes ayotros numera-les propios para contar coasas par-ticulares estos se ponen entre el numeral comun Y el nombre ut. Una culebra se diçe cheg bue choa.*

<sup>20</sup> We have changed the order of elements in the example for ease of reading.

<sup>21</sup> Not having had access to the original manuscript of Père Basile de G(l)emona (Basilus a Glemona, Basilio Brollo) (1648-1704) which was a Chinese-Latin dictionary composed between 1696 and 1699 (see Bertuccioli 2003: 629), we consulted the *Dictionnaire chinois français latin* compiled by Chrétien Louis Joseph de Guignes (1813) that used Père Basile’s as its basis. There are two lists of 92 classifiers in this dictionary of over 1000 pages. The first is found on pages 933-938 and is entitled ‘Caractères numériques’. Each classifier is presented in the form of its Chinese character and French romanization with a brief explanation for the semantic domain of application, also in French, followed by its Latin definition of use and sometimes examples. The second list, entitled ‘Table tonique des particules numériques’ is presented on pages 1107-1108 in alphabetic order, according to the French romanization, without Chinese characters or examples but with the same explanation in French, except that ‘particule numérique’ substitutes for ‘caractère numérique’. Neither appears to be entirely identical to the list given in Morrison’s grammar, although by virtue of describing the same phenomenon, the content necessarily overlaps. We checked a few random classifiers in both Morrison and the De Guignes dictionary and did not find the entries to be the same. More research is needed to verify Abel-Rémusat’s remark.

<sup>22</sup> Note that the order of the words is to be read from right to left in this example.

<sup>23</sup> There is no attribution of authorship for either of these works on the Sin-on variety of Hakka 新安客家話. On the basis of available historical documents, Chappell & Lamarre (2005) have concluded that the Hakka grammar is probably the result of a team effort with the native speaker collaborators, Kong Ayun 江雲章 and Li Shin-en 李承恩, who worked with the Basel missionaries, while Tai Wunkong 戴文光 assisted the missionaries, Theodor Hamberg and Rudolf Lechler in the compilation of the dictionary, later revised by Charles Piton. For an annotated translation into English, see Chappell and Lamarre (2005).

<sup>24</sup> For a similar study, see Chappell (2006) on the object marking or ‘disposal’ construction in Sinitic languages and its treatment in early grammars.