
Proposal

Most discussion about 'words' are centred on some European languages, which are mostly synthetic languages. But do all the other languages follow this pattern as well? In the search for a universal definition of 'words', we find an awkward but essentially important fact that some languages do not have 'words' at all, at least they do not fit the specific definition of words in English. Take Chinese in East Asia as an example, Linguist C. F. Hockett comments that 'there are no words in Chinese. The whole tradition of "words" as worked out with western languages is useless in Chinese'. However, Y. R. Chao has an opposing conclusion that, although lacks of a conventional 'word' structure in Chinese, it still contains another form of structure that meets the criteria for grammatical word. In this mini research, I will try my own approaches to find out whether Chinese does have 'words' or not, and whether this ever-growing language has generated any new patterns in past few decades since Chao's theory.

Outline

- Brief introduction to the lexical-item-centred definition of word in European languages.
 - what is it? etc.
- Counterexample of the previous definition of word
 - polysynthetic languages
 - what are they?
 - why do they fail the previous definition?
 - others like Chinese -C.F. Hockett's view
- Objections to Hockett
 - Chao's view
 - different structure
 - what
 - how
 - why
 - examples
 - verification of Chao's view
 - do they make sense?
 - do they still make sense NOW?
 - any further predictions towards Chinese words
- Conclusion
 - about lexical-item-centred definition
 - is it universal?
 - No
 - why
 - about Chinese 'words'
 - is it universal (among all languages)?
 - No
 - Why

- But in the end, Chinese should have its own definition of word
- do we have a universal definition?
 - No
 - prediction: other languages don't fit previous definition of word should also have their own 'word' structure.
- others

Annotated bibliography

CHAO, YUEN REN. 1945. The logical structure of Chinese words. *Language* 22.4-13. The author argues that it is neither necessary nor possible to set up the idea of general word, but it is rather possible to set up a new special form of structure in Chinese. This is where the core question of this research is located.

DIXON, R. M. W; and AIKHENVALD, ALEXANDRA Y. (eds.) 2002. *Word: a cross-linguistic typology*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press. The whole book discusses the concept of 'word' and its applications in a range of typologically diverse languages. Especially the first chapter is a great introduction to some basic ideas of general word definition.

HOCKETT, C. F. 1944. Review of linguistic interludes and morphology: the descriptive analysis of words (1944 edition) both by E. A. Nida, in *Language* 20.252-5. The article demonstrates an argument that Chinese does not have words, which originates Chao's view. And, at the same time, saying some languages have no words strengthens the idea that 'general word' does not fit in every other language from another angle.