

## ECLL Chinese Linguistics Day

7 April, 2017

Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies  
Zürichbergstr. 4 (ZUB-4), 8044 Zürich (Tram stop: “Kantonsschule”)



To celebrate the publication of the *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics* by E.J. Brill (Leiden) in December last year, the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies at the University of Zurich is organizing an “ECLL Chinese Linguistics Day”. Five of the six ECLL editors will present on their current research on Chinese linguistics and the Chinese writing system and share a few memorable moments from what turned out to be almost a decade of compiling and editing the five volumes of the encyclopedia. All interested students and colleagues with a background in sinology and/or linguistics are cordially invited to attend.

## Programme

ZUB-4, Room 416

9.00-9.15 *Welcome*

9.15-10.00 ZEV HANDEL (University of Washington, Seattle)  
“Sino-Japanese and Sumero-Akkadian: Towards a theory of how linguistic typology and cognitive universals shape script borrowing”

10.00-10.45 GU YUEGUO (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing)  
“The Construction of the Written Word Empire: From Oracle Bones to Digital Web-Pages”

10.45-11.15 *Coffee*

11.15-12.00 Wolfgang Behr (University of Zurich)  
“Radical misconceptions: On the background and consequences of European ideas about *bushou* 部首”

12.00-13.30 *Lunch*

ZUB 4, Room 314

13.30-14.15 RINT SYBESMA (Leiden University)  
“Classifiers and countability”

14.15-15.00 C.-T. JAMES HUANG (Harvard)  
“On ‘gapless relatives’ in Mandarin and types of clausal complementation”

15.00-16.00 Some memorable ECLL moments & *Drinks*



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## Abstracts

### Sino-Japanese and Sumero-Akkadian: Towards a theory of how linguistic typology and cognitive universals shape script borrowing

Zev HANDEL (University of Washington, Seattle)

Chinese characters (attested from the 13th century BCE) and Sumerian cuneiform (attested from the 32nd century BCE) are two of the handful of known *ex nihilo* inventions of writing. Both of these logosyllabic scripts were widely adapted to write other languages and underwent significant transformation in the process. Cuneiform fell out of use about 2,000 years ago, while Chinese characters remain an integral part of modern-day Chinese and Japanese orthography.

In the adaptation of Chinese characters to write the Old Japanese language and the adaptation of Sumerian cuneiform to write the Akkadian language we have two examples of script borrowing bridging a typological divide: analytic to agglutinating in the first case, agglutinating to inflecting in the second case. While the two borrowing events took place greatly separated in time and historical circumstance, there are nevertheless remarkable parallels which shed light on two factors that, I will argue, highly constrain and motivate the pathways and mechanisms of script adaptation.

The first factor is related to human cognition. What we know about internal development and external adaptation suggests that two fundamental processes of graphic manipulation are latent in logographic scripts: phonetic adaptation of graphs and semantic adaptation of graphs. As a written representation of a morpheme, a logogram has both semantic and phonetic components. Script users readily dissociate the two, allowing a logogram to be repurposed as a phonogram (representing sound alone) or to be repurposed synonymically (representing a second morpheme with similar meaning). These two basic processes drive logographic script adaptation.

The second factor is linguistic typological incompatibility. When script borrowing crosses a typological divide, a means must be devised for the graphic representation of morphological elements or processes in the target language that have no analog in the source language, such as affixation and inflection.

Through a comparison of Sino-Japanese writing and Sumero-Akkadian writing, the operation of these two factors can be examined comparatively, with implications for the development of a unified linguistic theory of script adaptation independent of specific historical and social circumstances.



## The Construction of the Written Word Empire: From Oracle Bones to Digital Web-Pages

GU YUEGUO (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing)

No invention can be greater than that of writing in the history of human civilization. Writing enables a literate culture to construct what this paper proposes to call “Written Word Empire”. Like any political-social empires, a Written Word empire is also subject to rises and falls. The empire constructed through the Chinese Written Word is adopted as a case study.

The Written Word is defined as a visual representation of the Spoken Word. The Chinese Spoken Word arguably emerged with the Peking Man — hunter-fisher-gatherers (about 400,000 to 200,000 BP). Early pottery signs by definition are not regarded as the Written Word representations. Oracle bone scripts, and bronze scripts are mature representations of the Written Word. In other words, the Chinese Written Word Empire began with oracle bone scripts in Shang dynasty and has continually grown until today.

The Chinese Written Word Empire (CWWE) for short) can be expounded in multiple perspectives. Given the space permitted, the paper will examine the empire in terms of (1) multimodal experience, i.e., total saturated experience (TSE) with total saturated signification (TSS); (2) the evolutionary history of the book. The Spoken Word is embedded in the multimodal experience of living and becoming. The Written Word, one of the essential building blocks of the CWWE, due to its materialization and objectification, fossilizes the living Spoken Word in linearized endurable chunks. This metamorphosis made loss of the properties intrinsic to the Spoken Word, and at the same time gained a life of existence unique to the Written Word itself.

The book, another essential component of the CWWE, arguably began, properly so to speak, with bamboo strips (简册). (Some scholars hold that oracle bone inscriptions should be regarded as books too, but we have reservations for this view.) The Chinese book is traditionally classified, in view of cultural history, in terms of writing media, e.g., 帛书, 金文, 碑文 and many others. Digital technology is the latest medium used to represent the Written Word. This talk will review the evolutionary history of the book media in terms of multimodal experience, i.e., TSE with TSS.



## Ineradicable misconceptions: On the background and consequences of the European construal of *bushou* 部首 as ‘radicals’

WOLFGANG BEHR (University of Zurich)

The idea that the part of a Chinese compound character commonly called *bushou* 部首 in Chinese and translated by ‘radical’ in English (or cognate expressions in other European languages) contains the semantic root of that character or the lexical root it represents has a long European prehistory, which reaches back to the first accounts of the Chinese writing system in missionary sources of the 17th century. In my talk I will trace the early history of both the Chinese and the European terms (as well as some competing designations). It will be shown that the term ‘radical’ arose out of a peculiar constellation of a community of scholarly missionaries working in East and Southeast Asia as well as South-America under various presuppositions of ‘alterity’. Arguably, it inhibited the recognition of *bushou* as semantic determinatives or classifiers for a long time – despite the emergence of the latter concept in the same intellectual environment.

Building upon the discussion of a few selected examples, I will show how this perception led to some seemingly ineradicable misconceptions about the role of semantic and phonological elements in compound characters, as well as the nature of word-families and etymologies built upon them, which are still noticeable today in various domains of sinology and even Chinese linguistics.



### Classifiers and countability

RINT P.E. SYBESMA (Leiden University)

There are many languages we call “classifier languages”. The classifier in these languages, however, performs different functions in different languages. Even closely related languages like Cantonese and Mandarin differ with respect to the use of the classifier. The difference comes down to the following: while in Cantonese the classifier is required by the noun, in Mandarin it is required by the numeral.

In this paper, the differences between Mandarin and Cantonese will be discussed against the background of the debate on differences and similarities between classifiers (in languages such as Chinese) and number/plural morphology in languages such as English as well as the debate on properties of count nouns and mass nouns.



## On “gapless relatives” in Mandarin and types of clausal complementation

C.-T. JAMES HUANG (Harvard)

I will discuss the syntactic and semantic analysis of pre-nominal modifying clauses in NP, illustrated by *ta tan gangqin de shengyin* (the sound of him playing the piano) in Mandarin (with similar examples in other East Asian languages), commonly referred to as “gapless relative clauses”. I shall gather arguments that strengthen the view that such are not relative clauses but complement clauses selected by their transitive head nouns. I also discuss the types of clausal complements a noun may select, drawing a parallel to the syntactic categories and semantic types of verbal complementation.

