



Cyclical Change (Linguistik Aktuell/Linguistics Today 146)

To cite this article: (2012) Cyclical Change (Linguistik Aktuell/Linguistics Today 146), Australian Journal of Linguistics, 32:2, 291-292, DOI: [10.1080/07268602.2012.669101](https://doi.org/10.1080/07268602.2012.669101)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07268602.2012.669101>



Published online: 19 Apr 2012.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 47



View related articles [↗](#)

Book Reviews

Cyclical Change (*Linguistik Aktuell/Linguistics Today* 146)

ELLY VAN GELDEREN (ed.)

Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009, viii + 329 pp.

Reviewed by FEDERICO GOBBO, *University of Insubria/University of Torino*

Unlike some edited books, the volume under review is well-focused, as the main expert in the field of linguistic cycles is the editor herself, who opens it with a theoretically-minded contribution, in which the key concept of the book is explained and discussed. In fact, this book can be seen as the proceedings of the Workshop on the Linguistic Cycle organized by van Gelderen in 2008. Much of van Gelderen's research is about economy relating to grammaticalization within the Minimalist Program. In particular, she proposes two principles, the Head Preference Principle and the Late Merge Principle, that arguably explain the patterns which language data present in diachronic change.

Historically, the notion of cycles in linguistics is connected to the name of Otto Jespersen, and to his work on the grammaticalization of negation in English. This heritage is still evident in present-day research, as three chapters of this book (out of 13 in total) are explicitly devoted to discussing the work on negation by the Danish linguist, which was neglected for decades until recent times. Moreover, negation is still a central topic of research. Roughly, Jespersen's cycle aims to explain the presence of one or two morphological markers of negation, sometimes obligatory, sometimes optional—one may think of the French *ne ... pas* case. However, while for Jespersen the cycle of negation was very clear, the more robust linguistic data provided by the contributions on it in this book, often based on corpus analysis, show more irregular or even 'broken' cycles than regular ones. For instance, Hoeksema (Chapter 2) suggests that 'the change from nominal quantifier to adverbial negation [...] takes place in many (though certainly not all) languages as part of the Jespersen cycle' (p. 32). Van der Auwera (Chapter 3) solves the problem in pluralizing the notion—the Jespersen cycles—but the picture becomes so complex that the reader can rightly ask if the notion is still useful.

However, the negation cycle is only one of the linguistic cycles analysed in this book, the others being the subject cycle (applied to Italian and Russian), the modal cycle (applied to English *rather*), the aspectual cycle (Mayan languages), the copula cycle (various languages) and the preposition cycle (English). This generalization

permits us to cast new light on old problems in grammaticalization, and this is the main virtue of the volume itself and of contemporary research in linguistic cycles in general. However, most of the cycles mentioned are so irregular that one may ask if the right form is a cycle or a line. This seems to be linked to the particular languages under analysis, and the language policy and planning involved with them. For instance, two contributions on Modern and Old Italian, by Vedovato and Poletto respectively, show highly irregular subject cycles in the case of pronouns, essentially because of the strong pressure of prescriptive grammars that shaped the language at least from the Renaissance. However, we cannot have any evidence of what would have happened if the cycles had been unbroken in case of less directive language policy and planning. This is not a problem of a single study, but a question for the whole direction of research, which in this reviewer's opinion is still open.

Another limitation of this book is that many papers take a single language as the main focus—Lohndal's contribution on copulas (Chapter 9) being a notable exception. Moreover, outside of Pye's paper on Mayan (Chapter 11), most linguistic examples are from languages belonging to the Standard Average European sprachbund. All that said, the book is still very interesting, because its approach freely mixes synchronic and diachronic data from linguistic phenomena that are often problematic if not really puzzling. The only superficial observation I found is by Hoeksema, who argues that 'artificial languages, such as Esperanto or predicate logic, and impoverished languages such as pidgins or early stages of child language [...] have only one marker for negation' (p. 18). Child language registers are not 'impoverished' while Esperanto is a mature planned language (not artificial like predicate logic!), which in fact shows many forms of negation; it is sufficient to look at the correlative series *neni-*. But this is only a minor failing; in general all contributions are of a high level. Finally, the fact that the underlying theoretical framework is Minimalist does not affect the interest of the many observations present in the book, so it can also be of interest to linguists not adhering to Chomsky's ways.

Oxford FLTRP English–Chinese Chinese–English Dictionary

JULIE KLEEMAN AND HARRY YU (eds)

Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching & Research Press, 2010

Reviewed by KAIHUAI DU, *Xiamen (Amoy) University*

The *Oxford FLTRP English–Chinese Chinese–English Dictionary* (henceforth *Oxford FLTRP*) is by far the largest bidirectional learners' dictionary co-compiled by international scholars, and co-published by publishing houses in Britain and China—the prestigious Oxford University Press and the Beijing-based Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. The *Oxford FLTRP* appears in twin formats, one with normal-size print and a reduced reprint (in a more portable size and with a more affordable price). The present review is based on the latter.