

Professor William Wang's Interview (26 April 2010)

Yip:

We are very happy to have Professor Bill Wang here with us today. First let me give an introduction. Professor William Wang, Wang Shi Yuan is Wei Lun Research Professor at the Department of Electronic Engineering, and is affiliated with the Centre for East Asian Studies, Department of Translation; and Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages at The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Before joining CUHK, he was Professor of Linguistics at the University of California in Berkeley from 1966-1994, and Chair Professor of Language Engineering at the City University of Hong Kong from 1995-2004. Professor Wang is a distinguished scholar whose influence and contributions are well recognized in the international and regional communities. A trailblazer, he founded the Department of Linguistics and Department of East Asian languages at Ohio State University, serving as the first chairman of both departments. He is the founder of the Journal of Chinese Linguistics, and a central figure in the development of Chinese linguistics. He was elected President of the International Association of Chinese Linguistics when it was first founded in 1992, and is an Academician of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan. At Berkeley, he served as Director of the Chao Yuen Ren Center for Chinese Linguistics and Professor of Graduate School till 2000.

He's the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship; two fellowships from the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford; a National Professorship from Sweden; a resident fellowship from the Center for Advanced Studies at Bellagio, Italy; and a fellowship from the International Institute of Advanced Studies in Kyoto. He is an Honorary Professor of Peking University.

His publications include numerous articles in technical journals, and several entries in different encyclopedias, as well as in general science magazines, including American Scientist, Nature, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Scientific American and 科學人 in Taiwan. His writings have appeared in Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, and Japanese.

His recent honors include an honorary degree from Beijing University, and Golden Language Award from Taiwan. In recent years, Professor Wang has collaborated with biologists and computer scientists in a common search for the origin of language and patterns in language differentiation. At The Chinese University of Hong Kong, he continues his research on language from an interdisciplinary perspective, involving engineering, linguistics, and

biological sciences.

Hi Bill. Congratulations on your recent awards. We're so happy for you. Would you like to talk about them?

Wang:

Well, this month, I was very lucky. On April 9th, just a couple of weeks ago, I was in Beijing, and was given the title of Honorary Professor of Peking University. I think I have many friends there and I was happy to see them. Just last week, I was in Taiwan. There was an International Conference on Applied Linguistics and the Taiwan University of Science and Technology, which hosted this conference, gave me a Golden Language Award.

Yip:

What an honor!

Wang:

It was quite a pleasure to be appreciated.

Yip:

Yes. We'd like to know about the stories of the Journal of Chinese Linguistics. You are the founder of this prestigious international journal. What was it like in the beginning? What inspired you to give birth to this journal?

Wang:

It was in the 1970s, and in 1973 I had my first opportunity to return to China at the invitation of Peking University and the Academy of Social Science. And when I returned to Berkeley, I recognized that there is a very impressive body of scholarship on the nature of language then in China, with a tradition that stretches back 2000 years. Somehow this tradition of scholarship never merged with international scholarship on language. So I went to the Dean at Berkeley, and he was very enthusiastic about the idea. With a grant from the Dean's office, we started the journal. It was a really rubber band, paper clip type of operation at the beginning. We wrote in a lot of the Chinese characters by hand because there was no Chinese word processing, and it was very much like a garage job but gradually with support from all quarters, it became stabilized and I was very happy. Two years ago when the Chinese University expressed an interest in this journal, and we moved the journal to this campus. So now essentially, it has two headquarters: one at Berkeley, and one here.

Yip:

Could you tell us about the early days? Like what problems did you encounter and what's been done to overcome all these obstacles?

Wang:

The early days it was difficult to come to a uniform decision on political alignment. One wouldn't think for a scholarly journal this should be a problem, but since I felt that the bulk of the scholarship, and most of the scholars in this area were on the mainland, we decided to publish in simplified characters as well as pinyin. This somehow irritated the people in Taiwan, and so the journal was put on the black list in Taiwan. Many of my good friends in Taiwan had no access to the journal, and I myself was put on the black list. For a long time, I was a persona non grata there. But all of this gets washed away by time, and I think right now it enjoys popular support from both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Yip:

So you were a unifying force behind this. You just got this award from Taiwan. I think both Beijing and Taiwan recognize your contributions.

Wang:

Yes. I feel that the political divide of the Taiwan Strait is a very artificial one, and a product of the politics of the time has no scholarly validity. So at the very first chance I got, I met the leading scholars from both sides together in Berkeley. At first they were nervous, coming into contact with people from the other side, but gradually everybody realized that scholarship is scholarship.

Yip:

Could you comment on the major milestones in the evolution of the journal, maybe within the larger field of Chinese linguistics?

Wang:

I felt that Professor Chao Yuen Ren was a very strong formative influence on Chinese linguistics, and so when we published the very first issue, I was very proud of it, and took a copy of the first issue in person to his residence up the hill and presented it to him, and right on the first page, it says: "Dedicated to him (Professor Chao)" He was very happy about that.

Yip:

Could you tell us what was it like when you were both colleagues at Berkeley?

Wang:

I have just an infinite amount of admiration for him. He's a very inward person, never says very much, but whenever he opens his mouth, it's usually something very worthwhile. Mrs. Chao on the other hand was a very colorful lady who had quite a history of her own. I remember that she would point her finger at her husband and say, "Look, you have written so many papers, so many books, and yet you don't have half the readership that I have with one cookbook." Which is "How to Cook and Eat in Chinese." They live up the hill, in the Berkeley hills, and once I was at their house, when I first got to know them, and I went upstairs, up their three storey house to go to the washroom and I didn't know where the lights were, so I went in to wash my hands in the dark washroom, and then I heard somebody splashing in the bathtub, and I got really worried. I looked for the lights, found the lights, turned on the lights, and in the bathtub there were three or four big fish, swimming, splashing in there. So Mrs. Chao was fond of cooking, and whenever she had some unexpected guests, she would go up to the bathtub and pull out a fish and have a fresh fish. Mr. Chao of course spent a lot of time playing the piano, so it's a musical household, and clear evidence of this influence is their daughter Iris, Pian Chao Ru Lan, who is one of the leading experts on merging Western music with Chinese music. And I just understand from what you just told me, Iris has donated a lot of her musical facilities to Chinese University.

Yip:

In fact she just donated her entire collection of books on music and musical instruments, notes, materials, we're very grateful to her. I mean the entire Chinese University community is very grateful.

Wang:

Must be an amazing donation.

V. Yip:

Part of her heritage, because her father, Professor Chao Yuen Ren, was known as a musician, as well as many other things like mathematician, linguist, and you share this broad range of interests too.

Wang:

I think I was influenced by his approach to scholarship. He got his degree in mathematical physics from Harvard, and went on to do lots of things in language and music. One of the songs that I think, most beloved songs in the middle twentieth century in China is *Jiao Wo Ru He Bu Xiang Ta* (叫我如何不想他), and when *Language* asked me to write a eulogy of

Professor Chao, I could think of no better way of ending the eulogy than to put in the song with his music, as the end of the eulogy in *Language*. *Language* told me they don't publish music, but the editor was a good friend of mine, Bill Bright, and I said for Professor Chao, make an exception. And he did. They published the line of music in full musical staff at the end of the eulogy.

I think that language is really interdisciplinary par excellence. Professor Chao is a very good example. But ultimately, I think the whole goal of scholarship is to find out who we are. What is a human being. And the most distinguishing feature of a human being is human language. And if you look at it from one window, you see some of it; and if you look at it from another window, you see some other parts. It's like the *Blind Man and the Elephant*. So only if we look through it through many, many different windows, can we have a better idea, a deeper idea of what language is, and through that understand human nature more deeply.

Yip:

So this is one of the motivating forces that drives your work. What are the major discoveries and achievements as far as the origin of language is concerned? What is the relationship between Chinese linguistics, and the more general quest for the origin of language?

Wang:

Well the early training that I had in linguistics, especially when I was a graduate student at the University of Michigan, it was an offshoot of European neogrammarian view of what languages are, and also very much influenced by Saussure about linguistic systems. At around that time, I was also quite impressed by Darwin's achievements and evolution theory, and as I look at language through an evolutionary perspective, I see that there is so much variation, so much flux, and so I experimented with the idea that whereas the neogrammarians told us that sounds change, there's no exception; whereas the great Leonard Bloomfield said phonemes change. I experimented with the idea that maybe it's words which change. And once words which share a phoneme regroup, then it will look like the phoneme changed. And this idea that I worked up, many colleagues call it lexical diffusion, and since then I think I broadened my perspective on that to think that it's not just sound change, but morphological change, syntactic change, any change in language is actually by changes in words. I think this is probably still a minority view, but nonetheless, it's worth looking at from that perspective.

Matthews:

Professor Wang I understand that you also learned from the late Joseph Greenberg. As he's no longer with us, perhaps you could share some memories of learning from him. Maybe how he influenced your work.

Wang:

Greenberg was another major influence on my thinking. It was quite amusing how I first met him. I was a freshman at Columbia College, and Greenberg was a young lecturer who just returned recently from Africa. And you know in Ivy League universities, typically things are a little bit more formal, and instructors come typically with a tie, and much more structured than I later found out Berkeley to be. But once I took a course from Greenberg, and first class instead of regular class of 23...30 students, there were maybe five or six of us, and we waited there, we waited there, and 20 minutes past the hour, there's a young man with a very disheveled look came in with a huge batch of handouts, kind of rushed into the room, and that was Greenberg. He had completely overestimated the class, both in size and ability because the handout was a problem for reconstruction of some African languages, languages that we've never heard of, but it shows how completely absorbed he was in his work, and I enjoyed that class even though I found it very hard because he would wander off into the depth of his own thinking, and lose his students periodically.

Later on, I had the good fortune of being close to him because when I moved to Berkeley, he had already moved to Stanford, and we were only an hour away. I would drive down to visit him. Did you know that Greenberg was a concert quality pianist? And sometimes after dinner, he would sit at the piano and entertain us with some beautiful sonatas, and quite often we would go to the Stanford faculty club, and I think that I really wanted to have his approval of my work. I remember once, I published something in *IJAL*, *International Journal of American Linguistics*, about tones, and the last part of the paper dealt with a tone sandhi phenomenon in Chaozhou, which I understand is Virginia's early language. It was a very interesting phonological phenomenon because there are five long tones, two short tones we put aside. The five long tones in the sandhi position chase each other around like in a circle, so this was sometimes called the Min tone circle. And I was very proud in coming up with an elegant, simple rule to describe this tone circle. Bursting with pride, I showed this to Greenberg. I scratched on the napkins at the faculty club at Stanford, and Greenberg listened very patiently, and he said "and then?", and so, I was flabbergasted because it seemed the achievement was right there in front of him. But Greenberg was asking a deeper question. He says "you've shown me a clever trick with a formalism, what do I learn about the nature of language, what do I learn about the nature of Min with this clever trick?" and I went home frustrated, and thought and thought and thought, and I realized how extremely right he was. How excessive abstraction, excessive formalism, removing us from the empirical foundations of language is leading linguistics down the wrong track. On my next trip, I told Greenberg that I understood his question, and he was glad.

Yip:

Both Chao Yuen Ren and Joseph Greenberg were two towering figures in linguistics, and I'm interested to hear your view on their lasting legacies. What do you think of their perspectives on language? What have we learned from them?

Wang:

I think from both of them, there is a very clear message, that language is not just an autonomous system but it's embedded in culture, it's embedded in human civilization, human cognition. Chao got his degree in mathematical physics. Greenberg got his degree from Northwestern University in anthropology. They both brought to the study of language a very interesting and very useful perspective.

Another giant figure that I have the good fortune of being close to is a population geneticist. His name is Luca Luigi Cavalli-Sforza. Took me a long time just to remember that name.

Yip:

You said it beautifully.

Wang:

Once somebody called a meeting at Berkeley. Somebody who wanted to put together a book and Cavalli was invited up there to write a chapter on human genetics, and my assignment was to write about language. That book never came to fruition but Luca and I became very good friends. We would visit each other, I would drive down, he would drive up, and he made me realize that understanding human prehistory can be very important toward understanding language prehistory. The origin of human behaviors can shed a lot of light on the origin of language and conversely.

All these three giants in my life, Luca is still alive and well, and some of us put together a package applying for a honorary academicianship, if there's such a word, and the Academia Sinica, *Zhong Yang Yan Jiu Yuan* (中央研究院), approved our application, and Luca will probably come to Taiwan this summer to be among the very first batch of honorary academicians of *Zhong Yang Yan Jiu Yuan* (中央研究院). We're very happy about that.

Matthews:

I remember when you came to Hong Kong at a time in your career when many academics would be thinking of retiring, you went off into South China to do field work on minority languages of South China. Could you tell us something about what was motivating that work,

and something about what you found?

Wang:

Sure. I can't imagine retiring because this work that we do is so interesting. Actually when I was at Berkeley, quite early on, I read about a Chinese anthropologist by the name of Fei Xiao Tong. Fei Xiao Tong, I think in the 1930s or 40s, went to a place in Guangxi called Da Yao Shan to study the Yao people there. And there's a very touching history of him and his young wife going up to Da Yao Shan, finally tracking down these people, and through a series of tragic accidents, he lost his wife on that field trip, so that made a deep impression on me. Later on when I got to know Professor Lee Fang Kui. Lee Fang Kui of course had this master plan of how the languages of China fit together and the Miao-Yao branch was always very controversial. Is it Sinitic? Is it Austro-Asiatic? Is it Austronesian, or is it something of its own?

So Fei Xiao Tong's story, this linguistic controversy, kind of stuck in my mind and I tried to make some trips when I was at Berkeley, but it was just too inconvenient. So when I finally decided to retire from teaching at Berkeley, I thought this would be a much better way of doing it. Just to relocate to Hong Kong and be a lot closer to these endangered languages. One of the first things I did of course was to go to Dao Yao Shan with a bunch of my students and recorded some of the Yao materials. Since that time, we've also extended our interest to many of the languages in Yunnan and one of my students at the City University now is a professor at Peking University, by the name of Wang Feng, has studied another such enigma – the Bai language of Yunnan. How is that affiliated?

So I think such languages are of interest in two dimensions. On the one side, we need to solve the scientific problems about language evolution and what is vertical transmission, what is horizontal transmission. On the other hand, I think we ought to call attention to these languages which are disappearing fast. As people tell me there, you pave another road and you lose another language. Because once these villagers smell the success of outside, there's a genuine reluctance to pass on their own heritage. To pass on their own language. And once you lose a language, you lose a culture. So this was one of the reasons that motivated my going to these villages as well as moving across the Pacific in the first place.

Yip:

Well, as you know, our department, the Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages is still very young and we'd like to train the next generation of linguistics students. Could you give us some advice, some words of wisdom? How could we train them to be aware of the

theoretical interest as well as the applications of Linguistics?

Wang:

Well. I think if a person is intellectually alive, they should need not much motivation for him to study language because I think that's the most interesting, the most challenging intellectual area towards understanding who human beings are. But I think it is unfortunate that many departments of Linguistics, especially in the United States, has been too much swept over by a conception of Linguistics where there is all too much eagerness to follow the latest fashion. And in expending too much energy, excessive amount of attention, on what is the latest fashionable theory to follow, what is the latest formula to write. The cleverness that I was talking about earlier, the energy is aside from the way from getting to the real stuff of language.

I was browsing through the wonderful book that you and Steve put out on the bilingual child, I think that's really a beautiful contribution because it's both empirical and theoretical. Two should not be separated. They're two sides of the same coin. And as both MacWhinney and O'Grady said in the back cover, this is ground-breaking because people talk about bilingualism from very different perspectives. As I thumbed through your various chapters, every time Sophie makes a comment about Alicia, it's a very insightful and very fresh perspective on how to look at language. So, I think, you know, language acquisition is a fundamental topic towards understanding what language is and the Chinese context is fertile, as a laboratory for such studies.

And Steve's interested in typology and what we said about endangered languages. That's another very timely and very important topic that we must not neglect. And my own curiosity has been led further and further down into the questions about the biological foundations. The child follows ... a somewhat uniform time schedule. When does it become more entrenched in its native language, and less able to hear the contrasts in other languages? When do the first words come? When do the first constructions come? And of course this is not accidental. It has to do with the maturation of the brain. So, the more we understand about how the brain actually processes something as complex and intricate as language, the more we'll understand about language. I think all these empirical approaches to language dovetail together very well.

Yip:

Yes. This is a very important point, especially when we, say, give promotion talks, orientation talks about linguistics; we want the public and our students to appreciate how interdisciplinary linguistics is. In a way, linguistics is really unique in terms of the humanities,

and also sciences, we're known as the most scientific of the humanities.

Wang:

Right.

Yip:

We have the potential to bridge science and humanities. And we can't think of a better person to embody this interdisciplinarity. You are the quintessential interdisciplinarian because you've done so much work collaborating with engineers, biologists and geneticists, not to mention linguists in different fields. I think this is really the future of linguistics in order for linguistics to grow and flourish, we have to actively engage in interdisciplinary pursuits.

Wang:

I thoroughly agree with that. I think knowledge only progresses when we see new connections. Once we see a new connection and integrate two earlier discipline bodies of knowledge, then we've really made an intellectual revolution. I mean the history of science has followed such examples. When we realized that the movement of the celestial bodies, and the falling of the apple are driven by the same force, that was a major breakthrough. When we realized that electricity and magnetism are essentially the same phenomenon working at different frequencies, that's a major breakthrough. When people realized we can study the radioactive decay of isotopes, and apply that to trees and skulls to study human prehistory, that's a major breakthrough. And when Swadesh said, "Oh, maybe we can try something like that with language, and use basic vocabulary to date language", that's a breakthrough, too. But language is much harder than trees and skulls, because it's human behavior and human behavior's always much more variable than the physical phenomenon. Nonetheless, I think it's these interdisciplinary perspectives that connect hitherto unconnected things, that gives us the best chance of advancing knowledge. And I think language is right at the hub of this. I don't believe in the departmentalization. This is archeology, this is linguistics, that's psychology. I think knowledge is unity. It's just that we haven't connected certain pieces together yet.

Yip:

We know that you're very much interested in language and the brain, and the biological basis of language. So maybe you could comment on that too.

Wang:

Well. When somebody goes to the gym, works out, he gets big biceps. Environment or experience is shaping the body. When a pianist plays a lot on the keyboard, now we can

image his brain, and we can see that that portion of his motor cortex which controls finger movement is larger in the pianist. Now a child is born speaking a language, that language has its sound, has its words, has its constructions, that's a lot of experience, and lots of practice, much more than the pianist of the keyboard. How does this shape his brain? So this is kind of the big question I am struggling with because... How does a language shape the brain that services that language? Chinese is distinctive in many ways, very obviously is distinctive in having tones, is distinctive in having a different writing system than the alphabet. So right now we are looking with primarily EEG techniques, to see how having tones affects one's perception of sounds, such as music. Writing in characters, how does that influence one's perception of graphic patterns? In fact, one of my colleagues just came back from Guangzhou this last weekend. He's been collecting data in the music conservatories in Guangzhou to see whether people who are speakers of tone languages have a better chance of recognizing absolute pitch. This is a question raised by a psychologist at UC San Diego, by the name of Diana Deutsch. She's found this to be true with limited sampling. We want to see whether this is really true and we do it on a much larger scale. So if we can somehow come to some kind of an understanding of how the language we speak shapes our brain, and how in turn our brain shapes our behavior. I think that would be a significant contribution linguistics can make towards understanding humanity.

Yip:

It's very exciting. In the next decade or two... we can anticipate a lot of important results coming from research in this direction.

Wang:

Keeping my fingers crossed. I hope so.

Matthews:

You're also following in the footsteps of and Chao Yuen Ren and Joseph Greenberg, combining language research and what we can learn from being a musician.

Wang:

Yes, I think we are in a much better position than they were. We have the tools now. Imagine Galileo without a telescope. How can you study the brain without brain imaging? And our telescope into the brain came into being only twenty, thirty years ago? So I think it makes a big difference.

Yip:

You have brought us a book. This is a very important book. “永遠的 POLA”.

Wang:

Yes.

Yip:

Can you introduce it a little bit?

Wang:

POLA is a ragged old house. So... Yes, it is. POLA stands for Project On Linguistic Analysis. When we did research in Berkeley, we didn't have a decent place, since the building for the Linguistics Department was all taken up. So they gave us a run-down house called Project On Linguistic Analysis. That's where *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* was started. After we acquired that place, many friends interested in Chinese linguistics would come visit us there. So every half a year or so, we would have a meeting. It was a very relaxing and easygoing meeting. Dr. Ovid J.L. Tzeng was a frequent guest right from the beginning. There were also Zhu De Xi and Ma Xue Liang from Beijing, Mei Tsu Lin from Cornell and Ting Pang Hsin from Taiwan. So the title "POLA forever" was probably suggested by Ovid Tzeng, who felt that that type of...that spirit of informal, in-depth kind of exchange was very much.

Yip:

That's fascinating.

Wang:

Indeed it was..

Wang:

Ovid said that he would like to cultivate a place like POLA after he returned to Taiwan, to rekindle that spirit. But he didn't carry it on. He later served as Minister of Education in Taiwan. So he didn't have time.

Yip:

There's a music score inside the book. Could you tell us about it?

Wang:

Oh yes? Where?

Yip:

It's a song called "Autumn Song."

Wang:

Yes.

Yip:

“Music and lyrics by Prof. William S-Y. Wang.” I bet not many people knew you are a composer.

Wang:

I don't know much about this stuff actually, but I do like to hum some songs once in a while. When I hummed some music, I thought it might be better to add some words. So I wrote some lyrics in English first. Then Ovid Tzeng said, let me translate them into Chinese. I think he did a better job in the Chinese translation than I did with the English lyrics. So they included this song in the book and some photos as well.

Yip:

You have trained many generations of students in Chinese linguistics, many of whom have become influential scholars scattered in different institutions. Maybe you could also say something about this.

Wang:

I think what pleases me most is that in the beginning, they were students and I the teacher. But one year or two later, we became good friends. These friends have all been friends for decades, not just when they were studying. There were some distinguished talents amongst them. When I was at Ohio State, my first PhD student was a Japanese. His name was Mantaro Hashimoto. I was still very young then, so he was two or three years older than me. Although I was his supervisor, I had the impression that he was more knowledgeable than me in many aspects. He studied sinology in Japan, so he learned a lot about the Chinese tradition.

Yip:

Thank you, Prof. Wang, for giving us this book. The title of this book is very significant: *POLA Forever: Festschrift in Honor of Professor William S-Y. Wang on His 70th Birthday*. Inside is a collection of articles written by those distinguished and influential scholars who used to study under Prof. Wang. This is their tribute to Prof. Wang. Let's have Prof. Wang say something about these papers. There are also many nice photos inside.

Wang:

This book was edited by two good friends of mine. Ho Dah An was the director of Institute of Linguistics at Academia Sinica. Ovid Tzeng may have been Taiwan's Minister of Education then. They are both outstanding scholars. Ho Dah An is an authority on the history of Chinese. He has a good knowledge about the dialects, refined discourse etc, all the essentials of traditional Chinese linguistics. Ovid Tzeng is a psychologist. I think he came to see me at Berkeley in the 1970s. That was the first time I met him. He asked me: why do you linguists study only the spoken language? Why don't you pay the slightest attention to written language? I said: you are a psychologist. So you pay attention to written language. I'll see what I can do. I will give you whatever help I can. At that time, people thought that since Chinese characters are not alphabetical, you can retrieve the semantics directly by looking at the characters, without phonological access. Ovid said: this seems to be a misconception. So he did some very interesting experiments with me. He's an expert at conducting experiments. And I was beside him to give some assistance. Then we wrote a paper together entitled "[Speech](#) Recoding in Reading Chinese Characters", published in 1977. That was the first scientific paper about Chinese reading. From then on, many papers have studied this same question: When we look at a character, is phonology involved? Many of the authors here are my good friends, but I can't name them all one by one. For example, Hung Lan is Ovid's wife. She's also an eminent psychologist. Hsieh Hsin-I is a very good friend of mine. He is both a linguist and a poet. He has published many beautiful anthologies of poems at the University of Hawaii. Ting Pang Hsin and I used to have very different views at the beginning. But after much discussion, I found that we shared a lot in common. There are quite a few papers here, so I don't mean to talk about them all. I just mentioned Ting Pang Hsin. I wrote an article with Cheng Chin Chuan at that time on a Min dialect. That Min dialect is Chaozhou. Many tones in Chaozhou were undergoing change then. We thought that change was a kind of lexical diffusion. But P.H. Ting said we haven't considered influence from other dialects. I think what he said made sense. Later on we collected some other data, so we kept on investigating the question. We found that Ting is right in some ways, but we are also right in the paper. Now we have a better understanding of this change in Chaozhou. As for Lien Chin Fa, he is at Tsinghua University in Taiwan. His paper also resulted from my discussion with Ting. Many languages have different strata. Southern Min is such an example. The stratum can be found in each individual syllable. For instance, a dialect may have a literary and a colloquial stratum. In each syllable we can identify three components: tone, initial and final. Some syllables have literary tone but colloquial initial and final. Others have a literary initial but colloquial tone and final. With the binary value of three components, that is, two to the power of three, you get eight. So there are altogether eight possibilities. Lien talked about this in his paper, which I found quite interesting. Matthew Chen is, I think, an authority on tone sandhi. He has studied the phenomenon of sandhi in many dialects. Weera Ostapirat is a Thai name. He's an overseas Chinese from Thailand. I don't know how to

pronounce his name in Thai, so I call him by his Chinese name Xu Jia Ping. He studies Kra-Dai, an Austro-Asiatic language. Shen Zhong Wei studies Menggu Ziyun (Mongolian Letters arranged by Rhymes). I saw that there are many pictures here in the book. Two were taken at Tsinghua University, Beijing, which I visited to give a speech in 2004. I learned some good news just a few days ago. After that speech in Beijing, many people felt enthusiastic and inspired. So they will publish a big volume on language evolution and the brain soon, probably toward the end of this year. They compiled forty or fifty-odd papers translated from English into Chinese. I'm helping them take a final look at the book to see if any revision needs to be made. So wherever I go, people tend to say: Here comes Prof. Wang again to sow seeds for us. Indeed it is like sowing seeds. When people reach a certain age, they might not be open-minded enough to accept new ideas. But those young people at twenty or thirty always feel excited when they hear something new. They might say to themselves: it's time for me to work harder. This is one thing that pleases me a lot.

Yip:

This is also making us very excited, to hear about your work, and to know that your speech has produced a great impact in such a short time. We hope Prof. Wang will also say something to encourage this young department of ours, the Dept. of Linguistics and Modern Languages, to inspire our young students. If they set their mind on entering this department, how can they prepare themselves to confront different kinds of challenge?

Wang:

Well, this is an extremely important question. I'm glad that Prof. Yip cares about this issue. People generally just mind their own business, but I think we have the responsibility to look further. When we look further, Hong Kong is an ideal place. First of all, it carries on the tradition of two thousand years of Chinese linguistics. Secondly, it has easy and full access to various achievements and theories of Western linguistics. Integrating the two approaches of research will be a promising solution. I already talked about this when I launched *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*. Western Linguistics, Chinese Linguistics, let them flow together. I think Hong Kong is a perfect place for the two streams of thought to flow together. It is well known that linguistics can be said to initiate from William Jones' speech in 1786. From then on, most of those brilliant developments in linguistics were found in Europe. Schleicher, Brugmann, Verner, all these prominent linguists worked in Europe. We can thus say that linguistics of the 19th century was essentially in Europe. Europe had the leading role then. The situation was a bit different in the 20th century. For example, there were Leonard Bloomfield and Edward Sapir. And then there was Roman Jakobson from Russia. In Europe there was Hjelmslev from Copenhagen, and J.R. Firth from London. So England and the US led the way in the 20th century. Since Europe led in the 19th century, then Europe and the US

in the 20th century, so it is my great hope that the 21st century might be ours to take the lead. My advice to these young people is thus, firstly, they need to work with a direction. They need to have both a historical perspective and a sense of mission. Secondly, when we work together, we should set a common goal. We should let East Asia, China, and Hong Kong become the center of linguistics in the 21st century. This is the greatest dream I wish to fulfill.

Yip:

Wow, this is an awe-inspiring vision. I never thought about this before: Prof. Wang's vision. He has such a noble wish in his vision. I do see that now in many fields, whether in economy or elsewhere, China is playing a decisive role. Many world powers and leading countries have turned their eyes on Mainland China now. So our work in linguistics can also play such a role.

Wang:

Yes, while working toward that goal, the Childhood Bilingualism Research Centre shoulders a great responsibility.

Yip:

Indeed, we have an important mission and a long way to go. Thank you very much. Thank you Prof. Wang.