

Laudation for the inaugural talk of Alain Peyraube

Hungarian Academy of Sciences, November 21st, 2023

Alain Peyraube, born in Bordeaux in 1944, is a French linguist extending the cognitive and functionalist visions of language to the study of contemporary Chinese language and its history. He is a central international figure in the crosslinguistic analysis of recent varieties of Chinese and the factors of syntactic change.

During his career, he has pursued investigations into various areas of Chinese linguistics, including the history of the Chinese language, its typological properties, processes of grammaticalization, the diachronic change in its syntactic structures, as well as the history of Western studies of the languages of China. His classical studies on the wide scope historical changes in dative constructions (*Syntaxe diachronique du chinois: Évolution des constructions datives du XIVe siècle av. J.-C. au XVIIIe siècle*, 1988) brought him international fame. He has explored and mapped out the development and history of the double-object construction, the serial verb constructions, the passive constructions, coordinative structures, various locative constructions, and the localizers and prepositions involved in them. In these works, he systematically traced down and analyzed examples of these structures occurring in texts from the Archaic Chinese period through medieval texts. Relying on these analyses, as well as related work by others, he set up a model of diachronic changes and structural innovation for the history of the Chinese language that is in accordance of what we know about language change in general, and with some specific properties of diachronic changes uncovered by his previous studies.

His overview of the ‘state of the art’ of Chinese diachronic syntax in the survey volume *New Horizons in Chinese Linguistics* (1996, ed. by C.-T.J. Huang and Y.A. Li) where he summarized the major results in this field in the preceding two decades, including his own work. This study is one of his most cited papers even today. His new synthesis (with T. Wiebusch as coauthor: *Grammaticalization and Lexicalization in Chinese*, De Gruyter, 2021) positions Chinese grammatical changes into the general theoretical framework of grammaticalization at large.

Apart from his scholarship, he has made great organizational contributions to international sinology as well. Serving as President of the International Association of Chinese Linguistics (1998–1999), and President of the European Association of Chinese Studies (2002–2004), his role was instrumental in establishing close ties between China scholars in the West and the East, and in helping European scholars to join the mainstream of sinological research.

Professor Peyraube has filled leading positions in the humanities branches of CNRS and *École Pratique*, and between 2010 and 2016 he was the founding director of *Collegium de Lyon* Institute for Advanced Studies. In this later position he facilitated the organization of conferences inspired by Hungarian fellows, for example, on network theory, and information theory in morphology. Recently he has been appointed the founding director of the Paris based EURICS (*European Institute for Chinese Studies*).

Alain Peyraube has established close ties with Hungarian linguists and cognitive researchers in the process of his integrative crossdisciplinary and cross-national organizational work of humanities disciplines. As section leader of ESF, ERC and Academia Europaea collaborating with Ferenc Kiefer, István Kenesei, Ilona Kovács and Csaba Pléh he has supported the integration of Hungarian researchers into the European community in publication recording, organizing conferences in Hungary (ESF, *Naturalistic Approaches to Culture*, 2011), as well as in the evaluation boards of ERC, and in membership drives of *Academia Europaea*. A decade ago he mobilized his contacts to further on the initiative of the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, to establish the still flourishing cooperation with the Linguistic Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Several distinctions indicate the excellence of Alain Peyraube. Since 2008 he has been a chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur, and from 2019 its officer. He is honorary member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and of *Academia Sinica* of Taiwan. On the basis of his scientific merits and his intense collaboration with Hungarian colleagues, the 195th Assembly of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2022 elected Professor Peyraube to become an honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, on the initiative of Katalin É. Kiss, István Kenesei, and Csaba Pléh.