

REVIEW

*WUTUN*. Janhunen J, M Peltomaa, E Sandman, and Xiawudongzhuo. 2008. München: Lincom Europa.

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I once heard a presentation in which the speaker gave a typology of 'mixed languages', the final type of which was 'languages that should not be', and the only example of this type given was Wutun. This evaluation was based on confusing details about Wutun that had, to that time, appeared in scholarly publications. Based on the descriptions found in such publications as Chen (1982, 1988, 1989), Li (1984, 1986), Wurm (1995), and especially the analysis presented by Lee-Smith and Wurm (1996), Wutun appeared to be a fairly random mixture of Tibetan, Chinese, and Mongolian elements. Randomness in linguistic structure, of course, *should not be*, and a random mixture of elements from three source languages would be unusual indeed.

With this background, the linguist with an interest in the outcomes of language contact will be delighted with *Wutun*. Janhunen et al. have done a great service to the field by giving us both a reliable outline of the structures of Wutun, and (more importantly from a contact perspective) by identifying historical sources of the various Wutun lexemes and structures that they describe. Under this well-informed treatment, Wutun no longer appears to be a random mixture, nor even a particularly odd language. Wutun is, the authors clearly show, a language of Sinitic extraction, which has undergone significant restructuring as a result of intensive contact with Tibetan; there is also

limited borrowing from Mongolic, but this influence is very small.

The introductory sections (11-25) give an overview of the history and cultural context of Wutun. This discussion is critical to understanding the historical factors that played into the current status of the language, as well as to understanding why Wutun, though it has only about 4,000 speakers, is currently strongly maintained. The authors also discuss previous scholarly work on Wutun, and give an overview of the linguistic area to which the language belongs, which they refer to as the 'Amdo Sprachbund'.

Phonologically, the authors tell us on page twenty-five, the fundamental question for Wutun is "how Sinitic Wutun phonology remains, and how Bodic it has become." The answer is not a simple one, and alongside their synchronic phonological analysis, the authors devote much space to discussion of historical concerns, showing which elements of the system can be traced back to Sinitic roots, and which have been innovated based on Tibetan patterns. The phonology discussion (25-52) includes consonants, vowels, syllable structure, suprasegmentals (Wutun has no tone system), and comments on segmental sandhi occurring at syllable boundaries.

Morphologically, Wutun is odd for a Sinitic language, because it has adapted itself to the agglutinative pattern of Amdo Tibetan (mostly by creating suffixes or enclitics from reanalyzed Sinitic morphemes). This means that there is much morphology to discuss, and the authors devote most of their book to this topic (52-101). This discussion includes such nominal morphological phenomena as case and number marking, pronoun forms, and such verbal morphological categories as tense, aspect, voice, perspective, modality, interrogation, and negation.

Wutun has a Sinitic-style nominative-accusative case system, and its case markers are primarily Sinitic in origin,

though in a couple of the oblique cases (distributive and comparative) there is the possibility of Tibetan influence. The numerals one through ten are Sinitic, but there are some Tibetan borrowings among larger numbers; the language has only one classifier *ge* (which also functions as a singular marker).

The verbal system is described as one involving serialization, plus auxiliaries. There is a series of verbal suffixes, referred to by the authors as 'complements', that indicate aspect, voice, or modal meanings. In certain instances these suffixes create nonfinite verbs in a complex construction, and in other instances they appear on finite main verbs. Most verbal inflectional and derivational markers are clearly Sinitic in origin, but (as with the case system) a few forms may be of Tibetan provenance. There is also a set of three 'serial markers' that appear on nonfinite verbs within a complex construction, and "are functionally equivalent to what are also termed verbal adverbs (converbs or gerunds)" (89), especially in the Altaic descriptive tradition.

The authors list eleven auxiliary verbs (93), of which ten are identified as Sinitic in origin and one (the factual *re*, which indicates certainty) is borrowed from Tibetan.

Like other languages of this Sprachbund, Wutun marks its finite verbs for perspective (see also Slater 2003). The authors note (97) that this binary distinction basically "divides statements into two contrasting types: those belonging, and those not belonging, to the personal (egophoric) sphere of the speaker."

A nice feature of the morphology sections is that nearly all of the discussed morphological features are illustrated with sentence-length examples; thus, the reader can see not only the morphological forms, but their syntactic functions as well.

As one whose primary interest is in syntax, I was disappointed when I first picked up this book and

discovered that the section devoted to 'syntax' comprises only six pages (101-106); however, as we have seen, a significant amount of syntactic analysis is actually contained in the sections devoted to morphology. In the additional three syntax sections, we learn that Wutun may be characterized as a 'topic-prominent' language (101-103). Nonetheless, there is a basic SOV word order, though some variation is permitted, especially in the ordering of adjectives with respect to the head noun. The authors also illustrate certain of the morphosyntactic behaviors of 'invariable' word classes (i.e., words that are neither nouns nor verbs).

The book ends with a bibliography and three examples of supplemental information: an invaluable sample text, glossed and provided with free translations; a basic wordlist (the introduction to which tells us that hardly any Mongolic words are to be found in Wutun basic vocabulary); and a brief index of grammatical forms discussed in the work.

Again, *Wutun* is a welcome contribution. The team who produced it is highly qualified to settle the historic confusion regarding the origins of Wutun structures, and in this book they have provided ample discussion to do just that. No longer will Wutun be cited as an implausibly bizarre mixture. This is a laudable contribution to the field of language contact studies.

More generally, the book will be extremely helpful to those engaged in descriptions of languages and language contact processes in Qinghai. Finally, the book will be of great value to Sinitic studies in general, as we continue to develop an understanding of the ways in which Chinese languages can change under the influence of various neighboring languages.

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