

Classical Chinese Verse Grammar
Coexisting sub-grammars and formal grounding

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Preface

This study develops a formal grammar that captures the modern speaker's scansion of classical Chinese verse and accounts for his intuitive judgment of the metrical harmony. The central proposal is that the grammar is represented by the coexistence of the five minimally different sub-grammars in which the cognitively oriented reading experience can be grounded. The grammar is couched in the Optimality Theory framework and the empirical basis is constituted by a corpus of 3933 lines randomly selected from five major genres of classical Chinese verse spanning more than 2000 years. The corpus obviously offers a fertile ground for exploration from various angles, and the present study focuses on only one aspect, namely, the development of the above-stated grammar. Other related topics such as the historical dimension of the verse grammar are also briefly addressed.

As such, the study might hold appeal to a wide range of audience, including phonologists, metricists and sinologists. Specifically, phonologists may concentrate on the development of the individual sub-grammars and the representation of their coexistence via the floating constraints model. Metricists may wish to focus on the discussion of the formal grounding of the metrical harmony, find metrical issues of interest briefly dealt with in Sections 5.3 and 7.3, and hopefully gain insights into further issues from the present study. Sinologists might want to quickly go over Section 1.2 (and probably the references cited therein) to get familiarized with the theoretical frameworks before discovering how the present study bears directly on some intriguing questions in classical Chinese poetry, such as the position of a verb in a verse line, the best word order and the frequency pattern, which have been long discussed by literary commentators.

I wish to thank NWO, LOT and Tilburg University for funding my research and the following people for their generous help in various ways: Clemens Bennink, Anne Breitbarth, Hans Broekhuis, Sabine Buchholz, Matthew Chen, Lisa Cheng, Norbert Corver, Rein Cozijn, San Duanmu, Nicole van Eindhoven, Christine Erb, Lloyd Haft, Bruce Hayes, Ben Hermans, Roeland van Hout, Riny Huybregts, Scott Meyers, Krzysztof Migdalski, Marc van Oostendorp, Michael Redford, Henk van Riemsdijk, Wayne Schlepp, Donca Steriade, Rint Sybesma, Craig Thiersch, Riet Vos, Moira Yip, Conchita Zerrouk-Barbé, and Danny Zhao.

Special gratitude to my parents, Zuo Yuren and Chen Ruihua, to my sister, Wei, and to Zhen for always being there.