I have divided this chapter into two basic sections, the first dedicated to the approaches to the HY one can generally encounter in mainstream Chinese literature and the second dealing with the views of particular Western scholars. This is a matter not only of convenience, the organization is also justified by the fact that the two traditions of CC description have not interacted very intensively, and to a certain extent they form scientific worlds of their own. This is especially true for Chinese scholars, whose papers have until recently strikingly lacked almost any reference to any kind of Western scholarship and more importantly, to general linguistic works. But neither have Western researchers drawn very eagerly on Chinese secondary sources, and it is actually not to their merit that the mainstream theories of language have been elaborated in Europe and the USA under the hegemony of English, so that they have been easily accessible to them and naturally formed their linguistic education. On the other hand, this is not an excuse for Chinese linguists ignoring the global linguistic developments, however critical a stance to it they might occupy. Fortunately, it seems that the two branches have been coming progressively closer in the last few years, though this naturally depends on the author and other circumstances.

III.1 China

In this section, I aim to summarize the typical conceptions of the HY as presented on the topic in Chinese literature. I do not intend to trace them chronologically and/or systematically. One of the reasons for this strategy is the fact that they are usually in the form of rather brief and not infrequently simplistic excursions, sometimes merely notes, in comprehensive grammars of CC, or exceptionally in books on CC lexicology. The rest is found in the form of separate articles that, I dare to say, very frequently lack a deeper and better theoretically grounded investigation (cf. also Miáo Yǒngchuān 1997: 71 for the unsatisfactory state of the HY research). There is only one monograph deserving of the name as far as I know, Zhāng Wénguó 2005, which I constantly refer to and a special dictionary, Yáng Zhāowèi 1991 et al. Besides this, many of the basic observations tend to have been repeated since at least 1922 up to the present day. That is also why I do not consider it to be meaningful to pile up quotations from the many grammars of CC that
have been published in the last hundred years, and unlike in the case of
the Western sources I introduce below, I do not proceed author by author
but prefer a mostly anonymous epitome, which will be supplemented by
a detailed description of Zhāng Wénguó’s framework (partially based on a
synthesis of the mainstream tradition and partially extending beyond it). In
the end, the task of introducing the previous research in modern times and
the current theory of HY was carried out by him and it would be superfluous
to repeat it in here. This naturally does not mean that there are otherwise
no valuable contributions to the discussion in Chinese. It is only that on the
grounds of the literature available to me I was not able to constitute a mean-
ingful succession, or at least a structured set, of single conspicuous authors
as in the case of Western research.

As a matter of fact, the extent of the literature measured by number of
articles is considerable, which also makes the method applied in the next
section impossible. Moreover, as Zhāng Liánróng, an eminent Chinese lexi-
cologist, repeatedly stresses (2000: 150, 1996: 359–360), the situation both
in conception and in terminology is one of true chaos and too many trea-
tises give the impression of a theoretical nebula. I tried to extract a relatively
coherent conceptual core that is seldom called into doubt, or more precisely
that is treated as unproblematic or simply taken for granted, so that there
seems to be general agreement on the appropriateness of the particular con-
cept comprised in it, however inappropriate it may to turn out to be in my
framework. These, of course, tend to be repeated in most of the articles. In
no case should the picture I present here be taken as an exhaustive summary
on Chinese literature on the topic, and it is needless to say that the concrete
views that were either more specific or did not fit in this gross overview for
any reason are referred to or quoted at relevant points in my own exposition
of the issues.

III.1.1 Chinese mainstream

First, the HY is typically characterized as a temporary process. It is presented
simply as an unusual way of using a word, identifiable on the grounds of the
context, which is described mostly in syntactic terms. It is often defined as a
purely grammatical phenomenon: the word stands in a slot reserved normally
for words of other categories, assuming for a while their “grammatical func-
tions” (yǔfǎ gōngnéng 語法功能). In such cases, there is usually no mention
of a word-class transition from the semantic point of view, as if word classes
were not for a large part related to categories of meaning and as if the verbal
use of nouns, for instance, did not involve any substantial shift in the seman-
tic interpretation of the expression. My experience is that although the HY
is unconventional by definition, there is little discussion about the pragmatic