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Sommario/riassunto

Language is a symbolic system of meanings evoked by linguistic forms. The choice of forms in communication is non-arbitrary. Rather, speakers pick those forms whose meanings best convey their discourse intention. The meaning of the Mandarin *ba*-construction, argues Jing-Schmidt, is discourse dramaticity, a concept that includes high conceptual salience and subjectivity. The *ba*-construction and its "syntactic variations" are never interchangeable because contrast in their meanings determines difference in their functions. Quantitative analyses based on authentic data validate the postulation of discourse dramaticity. By taking discourse pragmatics seriously, the dramaticity hypothesis enables a unitary explanation that transcends sentence grammar. The diachronic treatment reveals the syntactic change of the *ba*-construction as an adaptive process of pragmatization, which raises the issue of linguistic evolution as a result of socio-cultural development. This book will be of particular value to readers interested in the interaction between grammar and pragmatics and to teachers confronting the controversy of the *ba*-construction in foreign language pedagogy.
