

The Origin of the Anti-ergative [xa] in Huangshui Chinese^{*}

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This study describes the full range of meanings associated with the morpheme [xa] 哈 as it is used in the Huangshui 湟水 dialect of Qinghai province. Identifying its key feature as marking something like the “anti-ergative” in Tibeto-Burman languages, the paper argues that the morpheme entered the dialect as a result of contact with Amdo Tibetan. Further, it is argued that the mechanism by which it entered the dialect involved a complex accommodation negotiated among several features in those languages, including verb-final word order, the *pǎ* 把 pre-transitive structure, and intonation unit (IU) marking. These findings suggest the possibility of reconstructing a detailed history of an individual language in a complex ecology, an ecology that is often referred to as a *Sprachbund* or “linguistic area.” Finally, the use of a topic-marker of similar phonetic form in the dialect, and variations of that form within the dialect, suggest further work is needed on the historical development of this feature.

Key words: dialect syntax, language contact, historical linguistics, Qinghai Chinese

1. Introduction

Since Cheng (1980) first described peculiar morpho-syntactic phenomena among the Chinese dialects of Qinghai province, the morpheme [xa] 哈 has attracted the attention of researchers trying to describe the region’s dialect. However, like Cheng (1980), many of the earlier descriptions were insufficiently precise in specifying the source of their data from among the sub-dialects in the province. This imprecision led to disputes about the exact role the morpheme plays in the dialect’s grammatical system. Later descriptions, particularly Zhang & Zhu (1987), Zhang (1994), Zhu & Ding (2003)

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and Ren (2004), remedied this problem by focusing on the dialect of the province's capital, Xining. However, their descriptions do not account for all of the roles [xa] plays in the grammars of closely related dialects in the city's hinterland. Further, both earlier and later descriptions make no attempt to identify the origins of the morpheme or explain how this feature developed in the dialect.

In this paper I shall provide a more complete description of the role [xa] plays in the Qinghai Chinese sub-dialect of Huangshui 湟水, encompassing urban Xining and the counties of Huangyuan, Huangzhong, Datong, Ping'an, and Guide.¹ This description will reveal that there are differences within this dialect with regards [xa], necessitating a further subdivision. Within one subdivision (urban Xining, Guide, Ping'an, Datong, and parts of Huangzhong), [xa] is a postposition that marks the "anti-ergative" for preverbal noun phrases. In the other subdivision (Huangyuan and parts of Huangzhong), it marks the "anti-ergative" and also serves as a general topic marker. In the Xining sub-dialect, the topic marker function is performed by a separate morpheme, [xɔ] 呵.

With the identification of [xa] as an "anti-ergative marker" we can begin to inquire into the origins of the feature in the dialect. Postpositional anti-ergative marking is not found in other Chinese dialects. Therefore, like other postpositional markers in the dialect, I argue that this feature has entered the dialect's grammar through language contact. However, unlike other markers, the "anti-ergative" in Huangshui Chinese will be shown to have entered the dialect as a result of contact with a Tibeto-Burman language, most likely Amdo Tibetan.

These findings are significant for at least two reasons. First, while it has long been known that the Chinese dialects of the region have had a peculiar post-nominal marker, its origin has been unexplained until now. Second, though the Qinghai area and its neighboring region in Gansu province has been known as a *Sprachbund* or "linguistic area" (Dwyer, Slater, et al.), this designation does little to explain the evolution of cultural and linguistic features in the region. In effect, naming it a "linguistic area" defines away the problem. As Cambell (2006) argues, as historical linguists our task is to explain "what happened". This paper will explain what happened to create this unique feature among Chinese dialects.

2. Huangshui Chinese

Using a combination of lexical and phonological evidence, Zhang (1984) argues that there are at least three sub-dialects of Chinese spoken within the borders of Qinghai

¹ The Huangshui dialect includes the county Huzhu also. Having never been to Huzhu nor ever interviewed speakers from Huzhu, I shall omit it from this description.

province. First, there is the “Xunhua group”, including the counties of Xunhua, Tongren and some parts of Guide County. This variety is locally known as “Hezhouhua” 河州話; Hezhou being the former name of Linxia 臨夏, the county directly across the border in Gansu province that was the administrative center of this area for at least 400 years prior to the establishment of Qinghai province in 1929. The second sub-dialect is called the “Ledu group”, consisting of Ledu and Minhe counties. This variety consists of Chinese-speaking communities along the lower reaches of the Huangshui River 湟水河.

The third sub-dialect Zhang refers to as the “Xining group”, but which I have renamed Huangshui Chinese. It consists of urban Xining and the counties of Huangyuan, Huangzhong, Datong, Ping’an, Huzhu and parts of Guide. With the exception of Guide, these communities are along the river drainage system that constitutes the upper Huangshui River. The dialect boundary that separates the Ledu group from Huangshui Chinese coincides with a major geographic feature along the Huangshui River, a cataract in the river known as Daxia 大峽.

This paper will describe [xa] as it is used in Huangshui Chinese. While the Ledu group and Hezhouhua have a similar feature, perhaps an identical feature, I have not sufficiently investigated [xa] in those regions, so I shall not make claims about them. However, I strongly suspect that what I have found to be true of Huangshui Chinese is also true for the other sub-dialects.

3. [xa] — description

This description of [xa] in Huangshui Chinese is complicated by an immense amount of variation in the data. There are at least two reasons for this variation. First, the system is not necessarily syntactically determined, but dependent on semantic/pragmatic considerations. That is, the use of [xa] as a postnominal marker is concerned with differentiating semantic roles in utterances where there is the possibility of confusion of such roles. When those semantic roles are clear from context, then there is no need for the marker to occur. Second, the entire dialect is in the process of undergoing rapid change under the influence of Standard Chinese (Dede 2006). There is strong selection pressure for speakers to use variants that more closely resemble common Chinese structure. Consequently, for every pattern in which [xa] marking occurs, there is a variant without [xa]-marking that is more similar to Standard Chinese and capable of carrying roughly the same semantic content. Because of these difficulties, the following description must be somewhat selective, attempting to uncover the dialect stratum that reveals the semantic role [xa] fulfills, while weeding out the overlay of Standard Chinese.

3.1 The anti-ergative marker

LaPolla (2004) defines anti-ergative marking as follows:

... the patient in monotransitive clauses is often or always marked with the same adposition as the goal, beneficiary, genitive or other non-actor argument in ditransitive clauses (LaPolla 2004:51).

LaPolla uses the term “non-actor” in this definition because these marking systems are not so much syntactically systemic as based on semantic/pragmatic considerations. That is, the markers generally only appear when they are needed to disambiguate which noun phrase is performing which semantic role. By way of example, LaPolla cites Matisoff’s (1973:156-157) Lahu example:

- (1) a. *ɲà thàʔ tã dôʔ*
 1sg OBJ neg.imp hit
 ‘Don’t hit me.’
 b. *liʔ chi ɲà thàʔ piʔ*
 book that 1sg OBJ give
 ‘Give me that book.’

In 1a the postposition [thàʔ] follows the noun with the semantic role of patient. In 1b the same morpheme marks the receiver, while the patient is unmarked. The postposition [thàʔ] is the anti-ergative marker. LaPolla (2004:54) also points out that anti-ergative marking is related to the “animacy or overall saliency of the argument”, not necessarily the precise grammatical relationship or semantic role. In a survey of Tibeto-Burman nominal relational morphology, LaPolla (1992, 2004) describes this phenomenon occurring widely across the language family (found in 92 languages, of 170 surveyed).

3.2 [xa] in Huangshui

It has long been recognized that [xa] can mark patients in monotransitive clauses in Huangshui Chinese. Cheng (1980), the first published description of Qinghai Chinese, includes examples such as (2) below, in which [xa] occurs after the patient:

- (2) 我 開水 哈 喝 了
 1st boiled-water [xa] drink prt
 ‘I drank the boiled water.’

Virtually every publication afterward lists similar examples. As Ren (2004) points out, there is a tendency for patient NPs to occur before verbs in Xining, but in the imperative mood, it is obligatory. Data I collected in 2004 include numerous examples of [xa] marking the patient in the above manner. Interestingly, my data also include the patient doubly marked: [xa] after the patient and [pa] 把 before the patient, as in the examples below:²

- (3) 把 書 哈 放 著 桌 上
 [pa] book [xa] place COMP table on
 ‘Put the book on the table!’
- (4) 家 把 門 哈 關 上 了
 3rd [pa] door [xa] close up *pft*
 ‘He closed the door.’³

The double-marking of nominal arguments is a common feature in Qinghai Chinese, occurring with the ablative, comparative and comitative/instrumental markers (Dwyer 1992, Dede 1999b & 2007). Therefore, it should not be surprising to find examples in which patient NPs are also doubly marked.

The topicality of the NP marked with [xa] changes with word order, so that a sentence-initial NP+[xa] will have more focus than an NP+[xa] that occurs sentence medially. This contrast is clear in the following examples:

- (5) a. 肉 哈 狗 娃 吃 上 了
 meat [xa] dog eat *pft*
 ‘The meat was eaten by the dog.’⁴
- b. 狗 肉 哈 吃 了
 dog meat [xa] eat *pft*
 ‘The dog ate the meat.’
- c. 狗 把 肉 哈 吃 了
 dog [pa] meat [xa] eat *pft*
 ‘The dog ate the meat.’

² Examples (4)-(5) were gathered from college age students in Xining in 2004. Example (4) is from a woman and Example (5) is from a man.

³ Qinghai Chinese has two 3rd person singular pronouns; [tɕiaɿ] which I transcribe as 家, and [tʰaɿ] 他. These two forms are in free variation. Interestingly, Amdo Tibetan also has two 3rd person singular pronouns, *kho* and *khur ge* (Norbu et al. 2000).

⁴ The passive translation is an attempt to capture the difference in focus on the noun phrases. It is not meant to imply that this is a “passive construction”.

These three sentences “mean” the same thing, but there is a difference in emphasis or focus. In (5a), the focus is on the meat, while in (5b) and (5c) it is on the dog. My informant considered (5b) and (5c) to be identical.

Examples (2)-(5) demonstrate [xa] marks preverbal patient NPs. However, there are numerous examples of [xa] marking preverbal NPs that are not, strictly speaking, patients. Zhang (1994:51) includes the following comparison with Beijing dialect’s use of *ba* 把: “Together with a noun and verb [it; i.e. [xa]] forms a “NP+[xa]+VP” structure, similar to the “[pa]+NP+VP” structure of the Beijing dialect.” After which, Zhang (1994) includes the following examples and equivalents in the Beijing dialect:

- | | Xining example | Beijing equivalent |
|-----|--|--|
| (6) | a. 他 哈 叫 著 來
3 rd [xa] call COMP come
‘Call him here.’ | b. 把 他 叫 來
[pa] 3 rd call come
‘Call him here.’ |
| (7) | a. 我 你 哈 想 了 十 八 年
1 st you [xa] think <i>prf</i> 18 year
‘I’ve thought of you for 18 years.’ | b. 我 把 你 想 了 十 八 年
1 st [pa] you think <i>prf</i> 18 year
‘I’ve thought of you for eighteen years.’ |

While the 3rd person pronoun in (6) may be construed as a patient, the 2nd person pronoun in (7) is not being acted upon by the verb, and so is not a patient. Similarly, Zhu & Ding (2003:252) provide the following example, in which the single noun argument of the verb is not a patient, but it is marked with [xa]:

- (8) 我 你 哈 等 一 掛
1st 2nd [xa] wait a bit
‘I’ll wait for you for a bit.’

In other cases, [xa] marks preverbal NPs that mean something like “source”.⁵

- (9) 我 家 哈 借 了 幾 本 兒 書
1st 3rd [xa] borrow *pft* several MW book
‘I borrowed several books from him.’
- (10) 東 西 家 拿 走 了; 你 他 哈 要 去
thing 3rd take go *pft*; 2nd 3rd [xa] want go
‘He took the things; go get them from him.’

⁵ Examples (9)-(15), (25) and (26) are from my fieldwork in 2004. The informants are all college-aged men and women from the Huangshui region.

In yet other cases, [xa] marks preverbal NPs that mean something like “goal”:

- (11) 你 他 哈 說給, 我 就 去
 2nd 3rd [xa] tell 1st then go
 ‘Tell him, then I’ll go.’
- (12) 你 家 哈 打聽 一掛
 2nd 3rd [xa] inquire a bit
 ‘Ask him.’

That [xa] does not simply mark patient NPs is further confirmed when we consider how it functions in sentences containing a di-transitive verb. In the examples below the verb phrase contains two nominal arguments. In these sentences, [xa] marks the argument that is *not* the patient:

- (13) 家 大家 哈 辦 事兒 著 了
 3rd everybody [xa] do business *pft pft*
 ‘He takes care of things for everybody.’
- (14) 我 你 哈 給 一 雙 筷子
 1st 2nd [xa] give one MW chopstick
 ‘I’ll give you a pair of chopsticks.’
- (15) 你 家 哈 甬 問 家 的 媳婦兒
 2nd 3rd [xa] don’t ask 3rd *pft* wife
 ‘Don’t ask him about his wife.’

Ren (2004:341) notes that with di-transitive verbs, the following four possibilities exist, all of which mean “Little Wang returned the book to me”:⁶

- (16) a. S + IO + DO + V: 小王 我 啊 書 還 了
 PN 1st [xa] book return *pft*
- b. IO + S + DO + V: 我 啊 小王 書 還 了
 1st [xa] PN book return *pft*
- c. DO + S + IO + V: 書 小王 我 啊 還 了
 book PN 1st [xa] return *pft*

⁶ S=subject, IO=indirect object, DO=direct object, V=verb. This transcription differs from Ren’s (2004:341) original in two ways. First, I transcribe Ren’s “O₁” as IO; Ren’s “O₂” as DO; and Ren’s “VP” as V. Second, Ren transcribes the morpheme with the Chinese character 啊 and claims that within Xining it is pronounced [.a], while outside of Xining it is pronounced [xa]. I have not confirmed this observation in my own field work or in other publications.

- d. S + DO + IO + V: 小王 書 我 啊 還 了
 PN book 1st [xa] return *pft*

In all cases, [xa] marks the NP that is the recipient, not the patient. As Ren (2004: 351) notes, the morpheme in these examples “emphasizes the recipient” 強調與事.

This description makes it clear that [xa] marks a wide range of grammatical relationships. If this is accurate, an explanation of its function based solely on analyzing grammatical relationships may be problematic. Turning again to LaPolla’s notion of the “anti-ergative”, we see that [xa] can mark the single noun argument of a mono-transitive verb, and the non-patient argument of a di-transitive verb. With the exception of (2)-(5) above, the nouns marked with [xa] are animate. The marker, then, may be understood to identify the animate NP that is not the agent of the verb. I shall argue in §6 below that the exceptions to this animate marking are due to the peculiar manner in which this feature became incorporated into the dialect.

4. Language contact origins of [xa]

Postpositional anti-ergative marking in the manner that Huangshui Chinese uses [xa] is anomalous in comparison with other varieties of Chinese, past and present, which suggests it arose in the dialect through language contact. This is to be expected given that many other features of the dialect arose through language contact. The problem, then, is determining with which language it was in contact and what the nature of that contact situation was.

4.1 Monguor

The non-Sinitic languages in Qinghai are from two linguistic families, Altaic and Tibeto-Burman. In Dede (1999b), I show that the Xining dialect’s ablative postposition arose due to contact with Monguor (Ch: *Tǔzúyǔ* 土族語), an Altaic language spoken in northeastern Qinghai, primarily in Huzhu, Ledu, and Minhe counties. The varieties of Monguor spoken in the first two counties are not mutually-intelligible with the Minhe variety. So, scholars now refer to the Huzhu variety as Mongghul and the Minhe variety as Mangghuer. Mongghul is also spoken in Tianzhu county in Gansu province. With regard to the morpho-syntactic phenomena under discussion in this paper, these two varieties pattern similarly, so I shall use the traditional name, Monguor, in referencing them.

Like its Mongolic relatives, and like other Altaic languages, Monguor is strictly verb-final and indicates grammatical relationships with postpositions. This typological

similarity with Huangshui Chinese suggests it is a possible source for the [xa] marking system. However, the most significant aspect of Huangshui's system, that [xa] marks "anti-ergative", is not found in Monguor. Rather, Monguor regularly distinguishes accusative/patient marking from dative/recipient marking.

Slater (2003:164-165), in the most complete description of a Monguor language to date, identifies the postposition *ni* as the marker of the accusative (and also the genitive), but notes that it only marks accusatives in "highly transitive clauses", as in example (17):

- (17) Ni muni aguer=*ni* ala ge-jiang
 this 1:SG:GEN daughter=ACC kill do-OBJ:PERF
 'It killed my daughter.'

If the "identity of the particular entity affected by an action is not important," or if it is generic or indefinite, it is usually unmarked, as in example (18):

- (18) Bi mamei di-*ni*
 1:SG wheat eat-SUBJ:FUT
 'I will/want to eat wheat.'

However, with highly transitive verbs, even indefinite or non-individuated NPs can take the accusative marker, as in example (19):

- (19) Bi tuerghang kong ge=*ni* ala ge-ba
 1:SG fat person SG:INDEF=ACC kill do-SUBJ:PERF
 'I have killed a fat person.'

Slater (2003:165) suggests that this "seems to emphasize the affectedness of the patient."

In contrast to accusative marking, the dative/locative marker, *du*, marks a wide range of semantic roles, including "benefactive or malefactive; recipient; location in space, in time, or in the course of an event; goal of movement or speaking; and impersonal agency" (Slater 2003:166). In di-transitive clauses, the accusative *ni* and dative/locative *du* are kept separate, as in (20) (Slater 2003:124):

- (20) Kebeghe=*nang* bi mori=*du*=*nang* tiejie-*ni*
 wheat:bran=REFLPOSS 1:SG horse=DAT=REFLPOSS feed-SUBJ:FUT
 'I will feed my wheat bran to my horses.'

Monguor's argument marking system differs from the Huangshui "anti-ergative", so it is not likely the Huangshui "anti-ergative" arose due to contact with a Monguor source.

4.2 Tibetan

As LaPolla (2004) notes, anti-ergative marking is found in a wide range of Tibeto-Burman languages, including Qiangic, which was spoken in Qinghai probably through the 9th Century CE, and Tibetan, the Amdo dialect of which is still spoken there today. For historical reasons, it is unlikely that Qiangic directly influenced the Chinese spoken in Qinghai today, so we turn to Amdo Tibetan as our likely source of "anti-ergative" marking in Huangshui Chinese.

Amdo is a typical ergative language: both the agent/subject of an intransitive verb and the patient/object of a transitive verb have the same zero marking. However, for some verbs, the patient/object is marked with the so-called "dative" marker. The "dative" in Amdo is marked with *la* or a suffix to a noun that takes the form [Ca], where "C"=consonants: *g, ŋ, n, b, m, r* or *ʔ* (Wang 1995:15). Following the terminology of my sources, this marker is labeled "dative" (DAT), but as will be shown below, it marks more than recipient and location. Consider the examples below (Wang 1995:16-17):

- (21) *nor ra rtsva byin*
 cow DAT grass give
 'Give the grass to the cattle.'
- (22) *nor ra rdo gis ma rgyag*
 cow DAT stone INST NEG hit
 'Don't hit the cattle with a stone.'

In (21) the "dative", unsurprisingly, marks the recipient. However, in (22) it marks the patient. Similarly, in the following examples, the "dative" marks an oblique NP (Ebihara 2005:9):

- (23) *ŋa haba la fiŋcek taŋ zək*
 1SG:ABS dog DAT be scared:Vp DIR/INT AUX
 'I was scared of the dog.'
- (24) *ŋa tɕʰo la ga taŋ zək*
 1SG:ABS 2SG DAT love:Vp DIR/INT AUX
 'I fell in love with you.'

The “dative” marked NPs in examples (21)-(24) are all animate. Similar to anti-ergative marking in other Tibeto-Burman languages, the Amdo dative marks the animate NP that is *not* the actor.

5. Language contact scenario

In Dede (1999a), I argue that the present language contact phenomena in Qinghai Chinese dialects most likely occurred in the late 14th century and early 15th century when the Ming dynasty incorporated the region into the empire. Certainly, Han Chinese have lived for long periods of time in the region at times prior to the Ming era. However, except for about 100 years during the 11th century, during the six centuries prior to the arrival of Ming armies, the region was politically administered by non-Han peoples, including Mongolians and Tibetans. If there had been language contact among Sinitic and non-Sinitic speakers during the last period the region was under Han control, i.e., in the mid-Tang period, then the descendants of those speakers would have likely emigrated to other parts of China or assimilated to the ruling non-Sinitic speaking peoples.

In contrast, from the Ming period to the present, there has been consistent political control of the region by Sinitic speakers, suggesting continuity in the political structure. Furthermore, except in the 20th century, there has not been large-scale immigration of any other ethno-linguistic group to the region since the arrival of the Ming. This suggests the ethno-linguistic situation has been more or less stable since that period. Finally, there are folk histories among Qinghai Han people that point to the early Ming as the period of their emigration to the region. All of these lines of evidence suggest that the earliest period in which Sinitic and non-Sinitic speakers could have created the kinds of language interference now witnessed in Huangshui Chinese was the early Ming period.

While available historical documents are not sufficient for a precise description of the cultural context of that early period, there is enough information to allow for some speculation on the social situation. The Ming established military and agricultural colonies in the area, including commandaries in the Huangshui region. The military colonies were certainly predominantly male communities, so colonists may have looked for wives from among the non-Sinitic communities already there, including Tibetan-speaking and Monguor-speaking communities. The linguistic context would have been extremely fluid, including people speaking all three of these languages. Under these conditions, multilingualism and linguistic interference would have been wide-spread.

6. The linguistic mechanism

Sinitic speakers communicating with Tibetan and Monguor speakers would have had to accommodate to the pattern in both of those languages of uttering verbal arguments before the verb and suffixing some kind of marker to those arguments. Simultaneously, Tibetan and Monguor speakers, shifting to speaking Chinese for socio-political reasons, searched for ways in which their first language structure could be accommodated within a Sinitic structure. I would suggest there are two ways in which mutual accommodations led to the incorporation of the anti-ergative marker [xa] in the newly created Qinghai Chinese.

First, in Chao's (1968:67) influential study of Standard Chinese, he identifies a pause particle that functionally separates subject/topic from predicate/comment. In fact, the use of such particles strongly correlates (232 out of 233 particles in three conversations (Tao 1996:52)) with the end of intonation units (IU) (Ibid.). IUs in Mandarin are frequently "sub-clausal" and frequently occur as single noun phrases (Iwasaki & Tao 1993). In the standard language, this IU boundary marker often takes the phonetic form of a zero- or glide-initial followed by a low central vowel, e.g. [a] or [ia].

It is my contention that this IU marker became grammaticalized as Sinitic and Amdo Tibetan speakers accommodated each others' speech during the initial contact period in the late 14th and early 15th century. In negotiating nominal morphology in this complex linguistic environment, particularly in accommodating the Amdo Tibetan anti-ergative marker (i.e., the "dative"), speakers drew focus on relevant, animate noun phrases by placing them before the verb and bounding them with an IU marker. This accommodation was facilitated by the phonetic similarity between the Amdo Tibetan "dative" and the Sinitic IU marker. Over time, or perhaps within a single generation, this marker became grammaticalized to mark the anti-ergative in the newly formed Huangshui Chinese.

However, contemporary Huangshui Chinese use of [xa] does not correlate exactly with the Amdo Tibetan anti-ergative or "dative" marking. [xa] marks simple patient objects much more readily than the Amdo Tibetan "dative", which means there was not a simple one-to-one mapping of Amdo "dative" onto the new Huangshui Chinese [xa]. Rather, in the process of grammaticalization in Huangshui Chinese, the system was influenced by the second strategy available to speakers as they accommodated each others' speech.

The second strategy was to make use of the *bǎ* 把 structure, which Chao (1968: 346) describes as a pre-transitive verb that, among other things, "serves to advance the position of the object". In effect, the *bǎ* structure creates an NP₁-NP₂-VP pattern, where NP₂ is frequently, though not exclusively, the patient of the main verb. As LaPolla &

Poa (forthcoming, footnote 17) more precisely describe it, the particle marks the major topic-comment division in the sentences where it is used, having evolved “to disambiguate non-agentive non-focal elements appearing in preverbal position”.

As the early Chinese colonists and Amdo Tibetan speakers mutually accommodated their speech in the upper Huangshui region, they must have taken advantage of the fortuitous overlap this verb-final pattern creates. Indeed, in modern Huangshui, the [pa] structure occurs a bit more freely than in Standard Chinese, allowing such utterances as (Wang & Wu 1981:17):

- (25) 你 把 你 吃, 你 我 哈 報 管
 2nd [pa] 2nd eat 2nd 1st [xa] don't consider
 ‘You eat yours, don’t bother with me.’ (你吃你的, 不用管我)

This suggests that [pa] was re-analyzed in the contact situation that created Huangshui Chinese. While [pa] retained its common Chinese function of marking non-agentive, non-focal elements in the preverbal position, it also evolved into a more general preverbal NP marker. In this way, [pa]’s function overlapped with the grammaticalized [xa] marker, creating a situation in which doubly-marked preverbal patients occur, as evidenced by examples (3) and (4) above. As one might expect, once a double-marking pattern was established, one or the other of the markers could drop off and the utterance could carry the same semantic content.

In sum, then, the contact situation between Sinitic speakers and Amdo Tibetan speakers created a hybridized anti-ergative marker in Huangshui Chinese. This was done through the processes of accommodation and grammaticalization. Making use of the animacy marking in the Amdo anti-ergative, the phonetic and structural similarity of the IU boundary marker in Chinese, and the generalized patient fronting of the [pa] construction, the newly created marking system is both similar to its progenitors and unique to Huangshui Chinese.

7. Topic marking in Huangshui Chinese

At least since Zhang & Zhu (1987) it has been recognized that there is a “conditional” or “topic” marker in the Xining dialect pronounced [xɔ]. Haiman (1978) argues that topic and conditional markers are identical, so I shall simply refer to this morpheme as a topic marker. Zhang & Zhu transcribe this topic marker as 荷, but Liu (1998), based on phonological analysis and the use of the graph in Yuan era texts, argues it is more properly transcribed as 呵.

In 2004, while working with a speaker from Chengguan zhen 城關鎮, in Huangyuan County, in the western part of the Huangshui Chinese dialect region, I discovered that this topic marker is pronounced [xa] there. Example (26) below, from a female, college-aged Xining speaker, is in direct contrast with example (27) from a female, college-aged Chengguan zhen speaker:

- (26) 我 去 呵 比 你 去 的 方 便
 1st go [xɔ] comp 2nd go prt convenient
 ‘It’s more convenient for me to go than you.’
- (27) 我 去 哈 比 你 去 的 方 便
 1st go [xa] comp 2nd go prt convenient
 ‘It’s more convenient for me to go than you.’

The difference between the two sentences in rapid speech is almost imperceptible, but in slow, deliberate speech, it is readily apparent. Further, I have found this difference repeated among a dozen informants. The isogloss separating [xa] topic marking areas and [xɔ] topic marking areas runs in the western part of Huangzhong county. The [xa] areas are Huangyuan and the western portion of Huangzhong county, while the [xɔ] areas are southern Huangzhong county, Datong, Ping’an, and Guide counties and urban Xining.

This observation raises questions about the origin of the difference and whether the [xa] topic marker is related to the anti-ergative topic marker found throughout Huangshui Chinese. A number of possibilities exist. First there is the possibility that [xɔ] topic marking is the older topic marker that later blended with the [xa] anti-ergative marker because of phonetic similarity.

A second possibility is that [xa] marking is the older pattern. This suggests that [xa] began as a topic marker, setting off either verb phrases or noun phrases at the beginning of an utterance as topics. Again, this was likely a matter of grammaticalizing the IU boundary marker inherited from Chinese. Later, it was co-opted and restricted to marking the anti-ergative as described above. Having taken on this new role, however, it did not completely give up its role of marking topics, so that [xa] came to mark topics and the anti-ergative. Later Chinese immigration, particularly to the urban setting of Xining, brought the more recognizably Sinitic [xɔ] topic marker to the region. The Xining dialect being the urban, high prestige variety in the area influenced the speech in the surrounding counties, so that now most areas use [xɔ] for topic marking and [xa] for the anti-ergative.

At present there is insufficient evidence internally for deciding which of these possibilities is more likely. The shift from general topic marker to more specific nominal marking is cross-linguistically plausible, but it requires an additional layer of immigration

and linguistic diffusion to account for the present distribution of [xa] and [xɔ]. A more detailed investigation of the record of Chinese immigration to the region in conjunction with a more careful mapping of the isogloss between [xa] and [xɔ] areas may provide the evidence needed to support this theory.

8. Conclusions

While the exact relationship between anti-ergative and topic marking in Huangshui Chinese needs further investigation, it is clear that [xa], when simply marking noun phrases, functions similarly to the Amdo Tibetan “dative”. This similarity in form and function strongly suggest the origin of [xa] is due to contact with Amdo Tibetan. The mechanism by which [xa] was created was mutual accommodation in a complex linguistic environment. That environment included a Sinitic IU boundary marker of a similar phonetic form to the Amdo “dative”. This boundary marker was adapted to marking the anti-ergative. At the same time, structural similarity between the order of major constituents in Amdo Tibetan and the Sinitic *bǎ* pre-transitive construction was also exploited. The result of these two strategies created a nominal marker that is similar to both progenitors, but unique in its combination.

This analysis suggests that features of the so-called “Qinghai-Gansu *Sprachbund*”, through careful investigation, can yield an explanation of the source and direction of their spread. Like Cambell (2006), it calls into question the utility of the designation “Sprachbund” or “linguistic area”, and argues that a fuller picture of the historical possibilities of language evolution is possible to achieve.

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青海湟水方言中反作格語素“哈”的來源

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本文描述了青海湟水方言中語素“哈”的意義與來源。“哈”的關鍵特點是標識如同藏緬語族中的反作格 (anti-ergative) 的語法範疇。本文論述了由於安多藏區文化的影響，該語素進入了湟水方言。此外，“哈”進入湟水方言的機制是一種語言特色所交涉的複雜調節；如句末動詞語序，‘把’字句與語調單位標識的語言特色。這些研究發現表明我們可以用生態學的觀點來重新構築詳盡的語言歷史。最後本文指出方言中使用相近語素作為話題標識，同時這種形式呈現不同的形態，關於這一特點的研究還有待挖掘。

關鍵詞：方言句法，語言接觸，歷史語言學，青海方言