

From ‘two’ to a comitative-instrumental case marker

A regional innovation in the Gansu-Qinghai linguistic area

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This paper examines the comitative and instrumental case markers in the Chinese dialects and Altaic languages spoken in the Gansu-Qinghai Linguistic Area (GQLA) and finds a noteworthy phenomenon: one of the frequently used comitative-instrumental markers originated from the numeral ‘two’, a rare source for comitatives. The numeral ‘two’ is grammaticalized under the process of {‘two’ (appositive) > coordinator > comitative > instrumental}. This paper argues that the marker ‘two’ in Chinese dialects did not have an Altaic origin and was then borrowed for Chinese, as Dwyer (1992) suggested. The fact that the comitative-instrumental markers in both Altaic (especially Mongolic) languages and Chinese dialects come from the numeral ‘two’ with comitative-instrumental syncretism reflects a regional innovation in GQLA.

Keywords: comitative-instrumental case marker, grammaticalization, origin, regional innovation

1. Introduction

In Northwest China, especially in the west of Gansu and the east of Qinghai, three major types of languages, Tibetan (Amdo), Altaic (Mongolic and Turkic), and Chinese, coexist. These languages have experienced long-term and intense contact with each other, forming a linguistic area, the Gansu-Qinghai Linguistic Area (henceforth GQLA; see e.g. Slater 2003; Xu 2014; Sandman 2016; Zhou 2019a).¹

1. Researchers use different terms to name this linguistic area: “Qinghai-Gansu Sprachbund” (e.g. Slater 2003), “Amdo Sprachbund” (e.g. Sandman 2016), and “Gansu-Qinghai linguistic area” (e.g. Zhou 2019a, and the convention followed in this paper).

Languages and dialects in this area share some features, one of which is discussed in this paper: they all have a case marking system (even the Chinese dialects, which are normally considered case absent). In general, the case marking system of the Chinese dialects in GQLA originated from contact with the Tibetan and Altaic languages in the same area. However, the form of every specific case marker in Chinese dialects can either directly copy its counterpart in Tibetan or Altaic languages or use Chinese elements that serve the function of case markers. Many studies have – albeit briefly – referred to the subject of case markers in Chinese dialects in GQLA, with but a few studies having examined them in depth. Xu (2015) concentrated on the origin of the case markers in Gansu-Qinghai Chinese dialects, and Dede (2007) and Zhou (2019b) focused on the dative-accusative case marker *xa*. In this article, we turn to the comitative-instrumental case marker, which is examined first in §2. We find that in most Chinese dialects and some Altaic languages spoken in GQLA, the comitative-instrumental marker originated from the numeral ‘two’.

Typological studies do not see ‘two’ as a common starting point for the grammaticalization of a comitative case marker. For example, in the collection of grammaticalization processes worldwide, Heine & Kuteva (2002) mentioned three sources of comitatives, including ‘comrade’, ‘follow’, and ‘take’. Stolz et al. (2006) found other concepts that can form comitatives, such as ‘one’, ‘union’, and ‘company’. They did not mention ‘two’. Thus, a question arises: how does ‘two’ become a comitative marker and then an instrumental marker? We focus on this question in §3. Interestingly, Stolz et al. (2006) claimed that “the numeral ONE recurs all over the place [in Europe] as a source concept of Comitatives.” The phenomenon discussed in this article would add ‘two’ to this “numeral group”.

The next issue that this paper addresses is the origin of ‘two’ as a comitative-instrumental marker. Dwyer (1992) argued that the marker ‘two’ came from Altaic languages and was borrowed by Chinese dialects, an idea conforming to the mainstream view that Altaic/Tibetan affected Chinese in terms of the case marking system. However, this argument presents problems (see §4.1). Instead, we tentatively propose that the marker ‘two’ might have spread in the opposite direction, from Chinese dialects to Altaic languages; and another possibility that ‘two’ developed independently in both Chinese dialects and Altaic languages cannot be absolutely excluded (see §4.2 and §4.3).

Regardless of the source language of the marker ‘two’, the fact that the comitative-instrumental markers in both Altaic languages and Chinese dialects come from the numeral ‘two’ reflects a regional innovation in GQLA. First, as mentioned above, the ‘two’ is scarcely if ever found elsewhere as a source concept of the comitative-instrumental marker. Second, the comitative-instrumental syncretism seen in GQLA is also quite specific in Altaic (Mongolic and Turkic) languages spoken outside this region (see §5).

2. The comitative-instrumental case markers in the Chinese dialects and Altaic languages in GQLA

In this section, we shall thoroughly examine the comitative and instrumental case markers in the Chinese dialects and Altaic (especially Mongolic) languages in GQLA.²

2.1 Chinese dialects

In GQLA, Chinese dialects are influenced so deeply by the nearby Tibetan (Amdo) and Altaic languages that they have transformed the basic word order from SVO to SOV, though they can be further divided into the preferred SOV and solid SOV (Zhou 2017). It is therefore not surprising that the Chinese dialects with SOV word order formed case marking systems since an OV language “almost always has a case system” (Greenberg 1963: 96). The comitative and instrumental case marking among the Chinese dialects in GQLA have two things in common. First, the comitative and instrumental are syncretic; second, they are both from the meaning of ‘two’. We consider the Zhoutun dialect as a representative and others as supplements.

The Zhoutun dialect, which was the research subject of four months of field-work conducted by the author, is spoken in Zhoutun Village, Guide County, Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province. The comitative and instrumental case markers in the Zhoutun dialect are both *lā*. See (1) and (2) for these two usages, respectively.

- (1) 我阿奶 兩 街 上 去 了 。
- ŋɿ anɛ lā kɛ xǎ tɕhi lɔ.*

1 grandmother COM street POST go PFV
‘I went to the street with grandmother.’

- (2) a. 你說，嘴 兩 說 唄 。
- ni ɕur, tsui lā ɕur pi.*

2 speak mouth INS speak PART
‘You speak, speak with your mouth.’

2. Amdo Tibetan in GQLA does not have ‘two’ as a comitative-instrumental marker: in Amdo the comitative marker is *la/-ra*, while the instrumental marker is identical to the ergative marker (see Wang 1995; Zhou 2003; Vollmann 2008). Thus, despite its profound influence on the Chinese dialects in GQLA (see Sandman 2016; Sandman & Simon 2016; Zhou 2019b, 2020a, b), it has nothing to do with the ‘two’ comitative-instrumental marker.

- b. 你 筷子 兩 飯 哈 吃。
ni khuetsi lā fā xa t̚ʃhi.
 2 chopsticks INS rice ACC eat
 ‘You eat the rice with chopsticks.’
- c. 西紅柿 糧食 兩 換 著 個。
ɛixūsi liāʃi lā xuā t̚ʃx kx.
 tomato foodstuff INS exchange PROG PART
 ‘Using tomatoes to exchange foodstuff.’
- d. 周屯話 兩 比林 說 著 個。
T̚ʃuuthūxua lā pili ʃux t̚ʃx kx.
 Zhoutun dialect INS story say PROG PART
 ‘Saying a story with Zhoutun dialect.’
- e. 腳 踮踮 兩 走 著。
t̚ɛyʃ tiātiā lā tsu t̚ʃx.
 foot tiptoe INS walk PROG
 ‘Walking tiptoe.’

In (1), *lā*, as a comitative marker, adheres to *anɛ* ‘grandmother’, the accompanier, and *ŋx* ‘I’ is the accompanee. In (2), *lā* encodes various kinds of “instruments” that include body part (*tsui* ‘mouth’), artifact (*khuetsi* ‘chopsticks’), concrete material (*ɛixūsi* ‘tomato’), abstract material (*T̚ʃuuthūxua* ‘Zhoutun dialect’) and manner (*tiātiā* ‘tiptoe’) in (2a)–(2e), respectively, demonstrating its identity as an instrumental marker.

The comitative-instrumental marker *lā* does not develop spontaneously. Its original meaning is ‘two’, manifested through the replacement by *liā kx* ‘two’+CL when *lā* is not used as a comitative-instrumental marker. Examples are as follows:

- (3) 我 兩 / 兩 個 街 上 走。
ŋx lā / liā kx ke xā tsu.
 1 two two CL street POST go
 ‘We two go to the street.’
- (4) 你 天天 酒 喝 時， 我 兩 / 兩 個 婚 離。
ni thiāthiā t̚ɛiu xux ʃi, ŋx lā / liā kx xū li.
 2 every day wine drink COND 1 two two CL marriage divorce
 ‘If you drink every day, we will divorce each other.’

Now we turn to other Chinese dialects in GQLA, all of which share the syncretism of comitative and instrumental. Most of these dialects have the marker meaning ‘two’:

(5) Wutun dialect

- a. *ngu ngu-de tixang-liangge qhi-zhe.*
 1 1-ATTR younger brother-COM go-PROG
 'I will go together with my younger brother.'
- b. *gu agu shetek-liangge zhaze da-pe-lio ze-li.*
 that girl rock-INS window hit-get broken-PFV EXEC-SEN-INF
 'That girl broke the window with a rock.' (Sandman 2016: 57–58)

(6) Linxia dialect

- a. *no tɕia lianʃkə (~-la) pʃu tsɿ.*
 1 3 COM (COM) NEG go
 'I won't go with him/ her.'
- b. *no pʃi lianʃkə (~-la) ɕi tsɿ.*
 1 pen INS (INS) write words
 'I write with a pen.' (Dwyer 1992: 5)

As shown in (5), the comitative-instrumental marker *-liangge* in the Wutun dialect has a transparent composition of the numeral *liang* 'two' and the classifier *ge*. The same marker can be found in the Linxia dialect; see (6). Other dialects, such as Xunhua (Dwyer 1995), Xi'ning (Wang 2012) and Gan'gou (Yang & Zhang 2016), have the marker *lia*, which also means 'two', in which the classifier is incorporated. The Linxia dialect, however, represents another type in which there are two comitative-instrumental markers synchronically. One means 'two', and the other is *-la*. With regard to the origin of *-la*, it might be borrowed from Altaic languages or a reduced variant of *liangge* (see §4). There is only one dialect, Bonan Han (Zhang 2013), according to our collected data, that merely has *-la* as the comitative-instrumental marker.

The situations of the dialects mentioned above can be summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The comitative and instrumental case markers in the Chinese dialects in GQLA

Dialects	COM	INS	Sources
Wutun	<i>-liangge</i>	<i>-liangge</i>	Janhunen et al. (2008); Sandman (2016)
Xunhua	<i>-lia</i>	<i>-lia</i>	Dwyer (1995)
Xi'ning	<i>-lia</i>	<i>-lia</i>	Wang (2012)
Gan'gou	<i>-lia</i>	<i>-lia</i>	Yang & Zhang (2016)
Zhoutun	<i>-lā</i>	<i>-lā</i>	fieldwork
Linxia	<i>-la/-lianʃkə</i>	<i>-la/-lianʃkə</i>	Dwyer (1992)
Tangwang	<i>-la/-lia</i>	<i>-la/-lia</i>	Xu (2014)
Bonan Han	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	Zhang (2013)

2.2 Altaic languages³

The comitative-instrumental markers in some Altaic languages are ‘two’, and another frequently used marker is *-la*. See the following examples:

(7) Bonan

- a. *tɛi mənə dəu-galə damələ.*
 2 1:ATTR younger brother-COM raise
 ‘You raise (it) with my younger brother.’

- b. *nogsun-galə tχum ti.*
 wool-INS felt roll
 ‘Roll the felt with wool.’

(Buhe & Liu 2008: 345)

(8) Mangghuer

- a. *Madage chu-saihang nige=la ger pudu-jiang.*
 Madage most-beautiful one=COM house change-OBJ:PFV
 ‘Madage set up house with the most beautiful one (and had a happy family all his life).’

- b. *gan-si ni tuosi=la dimei china-jiang bai.*
 3:SG-PL this oil=INS bread cook-OBJ:PFV EMPH
 ‘They cooked bread with this oil.’

(Slater 2003: 170)

In Bonan, as reported by Buhe & Liu (2008), there is only one form of comitative-instrumental marker *-galə*, which is composed of the numeral root *guar* ‘two’ and *-lə*. The same marker is recorded as *-gh(w)la* in Wu (2003). In Mangghuer, the comitative-instrumental marker is *-la*. According to Slater (2003), Mangghuer has another comitative marker *-tai*, which is unproductive and “appearing only in a few lexicalized contexts.” Moreover, *-ghula*, like the counterpart in Bonan, can be used as an instrumental marker (see (9) below) but is not reported to mark the comitative.

(9) [*shuguo tashi ghula*] yanke.

- big stone INS grind
 ‘(and then) grind (it) with a big stone.’

(Slater 2003: 109)

The Kangjia language has both *-gala* and *-la* as its comitative-instrumental marker, whereas *-la* is used less frequently (Siqinchaoketu 1999). In Santa (Kim 2003), the marker ‘two’ *-gh(u)ala* marks both the comitative and instrumental

3. The Altaic languages spoken in GQLA are mainly Mongolic with a few Turkic languages such as Salar and Western Yugur. Since Western Yugur is spoken in the margin of GQLA and it has little influence on Chinese dialects and its comitative and instrumental marker neither means ‘two’ nor are syncretic (Zhou 2020b), this paper does not deal with it.

cases, and *-le/-re* only serves as a comitative marker. Mongghul (Georg 2003), together with Salar (Ma 2013), has one comitative-instrumental marker *-la* or *-la(ni)*. See Table 2 below.

Table 2. The comitative and instrumental case markers in the Altaic languages in GQLA

Languages	COM	INS	Sources
Bonan	<i>-gh(w)la/-galə</i>	<i>-gh(w)la/-galə</i>	Wu (2003); Buhe & Liu (2008)
Kangjia	<i>-la; -gala</i>	<i>-la; -gala</i>	Siqinchaoketu (1999)
Mangghuer	<i>-la; -tai</i>	<i>-la; -ghula</i>	Slater (2003)
Santa	<i>-le/-re; -gh(u)ala</i>	<i>-gh(u)ala</i>	Kim (2003)
Mongghul	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	Georg (2003)
Salar	<i>-la(ni)</i>	<i>-la(ni)</i>	Ma (2013)

3. From 'two' to a comitative-instrumental marker

As mentioned in the introduction, 'two' rarely if ever acts as a source concept of comitatives and instrumentals. How does this happen in GQLA? This issue will be addressed in this section. Since the chain {comitative > instrumental} recurs in many languages (see Narrog 2008; Stolz et al. 2008 etc.), the key point is the process of {'two' > comitative}, which is discussed below.

First, the numeral construction {'two'+X} (X=CL or *-la* in Chinese and Altaic languages respectively) can function as an appositive, identifying the two NPs in a coordinate construction. See examples from the Zhoutun dialect and Mangghuer (Slater 2003: 107) in (10) and (11).

(10) 扎西 帶 小宋 兩個婚 結 上 了 。

Tʂaci te ɕiɕsũ liã kx xũ tɕie xã l.

Zhaxi and Little Song two CL marriage marry PFV PFV

'Zhaxi and Little Song got married.'

(11) *chuna dai yehu ghu=la xi danang dimei a bo a luoti a*

wolf and fox two=COLL go after bread also drum also boot also

ni-si=ni yigua bari ri-jiang bai.

this-PL=ACC totally take come-OBJ:PFV EMPH

'Wolf and fox went and took away all these things: the bread and the drum and the boots.'

In the environment shown in (10)–(11), i.e. the coordinate construction plus an appositive 'two' {NP1 'and' NP2 'two'}, the numeral 'two' is prepared for the grammaticalization in semantics and partly in syntax. Semantically, NP1

and NP2 are two participants in an event, paralleling the pair of accompanion-accompanee. Although an accompanion and an accompanee are syntactically asymmetrical whereas NP1 and NP2 in a coordinate construction are equal, in semantics, they are similar to each other. For example, in English, the *Harry* in *John and Harry* and in *John with Harry* differs in syntax, yet it is a participant semantically in these two constructions without a major difference. Syntactically, ‘two’ falls behind NP2, a proper position for becoming a postpositional marker and for becoming a case marker attached to NP2 but not to the whole {NP1 and NP2} construction.

Since both the coordinator ‘and’ and the appositive ‘two’ have the function of involving two participants, they overlap each other semantically. Therefore, for the sake of brevity, the language may only use one in a sentence, forming {NP1 ‘and’ NP2} and {NP1 NP2 ‘two’}, respectively, of which the former is the common coordinate construction, whereas the latter provides an environment for the further development of ‘two’ to a comitative maker. Initially, the ‘two’ in {NP1 NP2 ‘two’} ought to have the same function as ‘and’ in that it marks the coordinate relationship between NP1 and NP2. Take (12) from the Zhoutun dialect and (13) from Bonan (Fried 2010: 69) as examples:

- (12) 茶 藥 兩 一 個 話 。
- tʂha yɿ lā i kɿ hua.*
- tea herbal medicine two one CL word
- “Tea” and “herbal medicine” are the same word.

- (13) *jaŋ papa ana=ɓala guda khəl-saŋ sanə.*
- again father mother=two before speak-PFV.NMLZ besides
- ‘Again, (my) father and mother, in addition to what (they) said before ...’

In (12), the *tʂha* ‘tea’ and *yɿ* ‘herbal medicine’ are coordinands, whereas the *lā* ‘two’ can either be an appositive or reanalyzed as a postpositional coordinator. The latter is preferable since *lā*, the reduction from *liā kɿ* “two’ CL”, loses its independence as an appositive (if it is an appositive, it would likely be *liā kɿ* instead). In (13), the two NPs *papa* ‘father’ and *ana* ‘mother’ are coordinands, and the *ɓala* ‘two’ can be reanalyzed as a coordinator.⁴ The ‘two’ in these examples can hardly be a comitative marker since the two NPs in each sentence are symmetrical. However, the syntactic possibility does exist for the further development of {coordinator > comitative}.

4. Fried (2010) treats this *-ɓala* as a dual marker, which in our opinion is not appropriate here because *-ɓala* refers to ‘father and mother’ rather than ‘two mothers’.

The boundary between a coordinator and a comitative is not always clear. Therefore, we can naturally find some situations in which 'two' has an ambiguous interpretation. For example, in addition to labeling the *lā* in (1) as a comitative marker, it is not impossible to interpret it as a coordinator. Especially considering the lack of verb agreement in the Zhoutun dialect (and in other Chinese dialects and Altaic languages), it is difficult to tell the identity of the 'two' syntactically. The example is repeated here for convenience:

- (1) 我阿奶 兩 街 上 去 了 。
- ŋɿ anɛ lā kɛ xǎ tɕhi l.*
- 1 grandmother COM street POST go PFV
- 'I went to the street with grandmother.'

We use COM to mark this *lā* because according to the native speakers' intuition, the *ŋɿ* 'I' in the sentence is prominent, whereas the *anɛ* 'grandmother' is marginalized. The sentence is preferred as the answer to a question such as, "What did you do yesterday?" If, however, the question is, "What did you and grandmother do yesterday?", sentence (1') is no longer the most appropriate one; instead, people would use *tɛ* 'and' to manifest the coordinate relationship between *ŋɿ* 'I' and *anɛ* 'grandmother', constructing an answer such as *ŋɿ tɛ anɛ ...* 'I and grandmother'.

Having undergone the ambiguous phase, the 'two' continues its way toward being a comitative marker. In some situations, it is no longer suitable to be analyzed as a coordinator. See the examples below.

- (14) Gan'gou dialect
- 噯傢我倆 吵 著 哩 啊，我 噯傢倆 沒 吵 著。
- aijia wo lia chao zhe li a, wo aijia lia mei chao zhe.*
- 3 1 COM quarrel PROG PART PART 1 3 COM NEG quarrel PROG
- 'He/she is quarreling with me, but I am not quarreling with him/her.'
- (Yang & Zhang 2016: 33)⁵

- (15) Kangjia language
- [*ɛnə dɔndɔvɯ-gala guanʃi isɯn*] kɯn.
- this thing-COM relation have person
- 'The person who has relations with this thing.' (Sinqinchaoketu 1999: 101)

The verb 'quarrel' usually represents a mutual act involving more than one participant, all of whom have equal status in the action. In (14), however, the participant marked by *lia* is passive and the other active, showing their asymmetrical

5. Examples of the Gan'gou dialect in (14) and (16a) and the example of the Xiantao dialect in (18) are transcribed in pinyin in this paper since the authors present them only in Chinese characters.

status. Thus, the *lia* is construed as a comitative marker rather than a coordinator. In (15), there is only one constituent (*dɔnduku* ‘thing’) in the clause, whereas the other (*kun* ‘person’) is relativized. If the two elements are coordinands, it is impossible for only one of them to be extracted. These two examples, among others, manifest the usage of ‘two’ as a comitative marker.

Once the process of {coordinator > comitative} is accomplished, the next step from ‘comitative’ toward ‘instrumental’ begins. Since {comitative > instrumental} recurs frequently in many languages and scholars have conducted thorough research on this topic (see e.g. Stolz et al. 2006), we do not provide a detailed discussion. We only need to determine the common point in the clause with a comitative marker and the one with an instrumental marker. That is, there are two participants involved: in the former, there are an accompaniment and an accompanee, whereas in the latter, there are typically a person and a tool. This similarity is a bridge linking the two domains.

So far, we have established the entire grammaticalization chain from the numeral ‘two’ to the instrumental marker, i.e. {‘two’ (appositive) > coordinator > comitative > instrumental}. Initially, ‘two’ appears in the construction {NP1 ‘and’ NP2 ‘two’} as an appositive. When ‘and’ is omitted, the ‘two’ has an ambiguous function of either being an appositive or a postpositional coordinator. In the construction {NP1 NP2 ‘two’}, the ‘two’ may further be interpreted as a comitative marker. The last step sees the development from a comitative marker to an instrumental marker.

4. Where did the comitative-instrumental markers come from?

This section mainly addresses the origin of the comitative-instrumental marker ‘two’ in GQLA. At first glance, it is attractive to think that the markers in Chinese dialects are borrowed from Altaic languages since Altaic languages had a case marking system while Chinese dialects, before contact, did not. Is this the true story? Dwyer (1992) is a representative of the Altaic-affects-Chinese point of view, which we examine first.

4.1 Dwyer (1992)

Dwyer (1992) maintains that the comitative-instrumental marker *-la* in Altaic languages comes from the Proto-Altaic **-lū*. In addition, the Chinese dialects borrow the *-la* “probably from Bonan or Santa, while the compound numeral postposition [such as *-qala*, which is composed of ‘two’+*la*] has been nativized to *liɤŋkəʔ*.” Her viewpoints are enlightening, leading us to focus on the contact between Chi-

nese dialects and Altaic languages in the study of comitative-instrumental markers. However, an important question has not been answered satisfactorily: the origin of the marker 'two' (such as *-ghula*, *-gala* in Altaic languages and *-liangge*, *-lia* in Chinese dialects). Dwyer (1992) placed considerable focus on the source of *-la*, whereas the origin of the marker 'two' is mentioned briefly: "in Bonan and Santa there is the suffixed numeral *-qala*, such a numeral is not attested in Middle Mongolic. Thus *-qala* could well be a calque from Salar *-bilə*." There are at least two problems with this assumption.

First, how could $\{-bilə>-qala\}$ happen? Phonetically, it is unlikely to occur. Semantically, it is more doubtful: the numeral root is 'one' in the former but 'two' in the latter. Moreover, why is a marker of Salar borrowed into Bonan and Santa, whereas Salar itself does not keep it?

Second, even if we accept the $\{-bilə>-qala\}$, there is still a critical question that needs to be answered: can this marker be borrowed effectively enough into all the Chinese dialects that have 'two' as their comitative-instrumental marker? Let us first consider the performances of the ablative markers in different Chinese dialects as a reference. In the Gan'gou dialect, which is influenced by Mangghuer spoken in the same area (Yang & Zhang 2016), the ablative marker can label the standard in comparative constructions; as a contrast, the Zhoutun dialect, spoken in Zhoutun village, which is surrounded by Tibetan villages, never uses the ablative marker in the same situation. See (16).

(16) a. Gan'gou dialect

兄弟	阿姐	吵大。
<i>xiogndi</i>	<i>ajie</i>	<i>sha da.</i>
younger brother	elder sister	ABL tall

'The younger brother is taller than the elder sister.'

b. Zhoutun dialect

*我你嗒大。

**ŋx ni tha da.*

1 2 ABL tall

'I am taller than you.'

(Yang & Zhang 2016: 31)

The ablative marker *-sha* and its usage in comparative constructions in the Gan'gou dialect directly originate from Mangghuer, in which the ablative *-sa* has a parallel function. See (17).

(17) Mangghuer

qi nige dasi nige=sa han qiang bang bai.

2:SG one 1:PL one=ABL still better OBJ:COP EMPH

'Your (secret) is even better than ours.'

(Slater 2003: 169)

In fact, using the ablative marker to label the comparative standard is very common in Altaic languages. However, this usage is not seen in Zhoutun and some other dialects,⁶ which illustrates that the case markers in Altaic languages are not loaned to Chinese dialects spoken in relatively remote areas as easily as one might have thought.

For the two questions mentioned above, we cannot immediately conclude that the comitative-instrumental marker ‘two’ in Chinese dialects is borrowed from Altaic languages. In contrast, it is more reasonable to deduce that the marker ‘two’ came from Chinese and was borrowed into Altaic languages; and another possibility that ‘two’ developed independently in both Chinese dialects and Altaic languages cannot be absolutely excluded. See §4.2 below for further discussion.

4.2 From Chinese to Altaic

Although it is true that the case marking system in Chinese dialects is formed under the influence of Tibetan and/or Altaic languages, the very specific comitative-instrumental marker ‘two’ is more likely to have spread in the opposite direction from Chinese to Altaic.

First, comparing the marker ‘two’ and *-la* in Chinese dialects and Altaic languages, one finds that ‘two’ is more fundamental in Chinese dialects, whereas *-la* is more fundamental in Altaic languages. In the Chinese dialects mentioned in §2 (see Table 1), five out of eight have only ‘two’ as their comitative-instrumental marker, and two dialects have both ‘two’ and *-la*. The only exception is Bonan Han, in which ‘two’ is absent. In Altaic languages (see Table 2), however, *-la* is dominant. In the six languages mentioned above, five have *-la*, and in Mongghul and Salar, *-la* is the only form.

The fact that the marker ‘two’ is distributed so widely in Chinese dialects⁷ illustrates that this marker was formed in Chinese dialects in an early period, whereas *-la* in some Chinese dialects is borrowed from Altaic languages in the later period of contact. On the one hand, the distribution of ‘two’ and *-la* in Chinese dialects is analogous to that between the dative-accusative marker *-xa* and

6. For instance, the comparative construction in the Wutun dialect “has an exact parallel in Amdo Tibetan construction” (Sandman 2016: 146), whereas the ablative marker is not used.

7. Zhou (2020b) term this kind of case marker as “widely distributed”, in comparison with the “narrowly distributed” one. He argues that the widely distributed markers are mainly formed during the first stratum of contact with Amdo Tibetan (which does not mean that these markers are necessarily copied directly from Amdo) while the narrowly distributed markers (such as the ablative *-sa*, the reflexive possessive *-nang* etc.) are borrowed in the second stratum of contact with Altaic languages.

the ablative *-sa*. Zhou (2020b) noted that the dative-accusative marker *-xa* is distributed in all Chinese dialects, whereas the ablative *-sa* only exists in some that are spoken in the same area with Altaic languages. Moreover, *-xa* in most, if not all, Chinese dialects can mark a comparative standard, whereas in those that have *-sa*, the ablative marker can be used in comparative constructions as well (as discussed above).

A novel usage is the combination of *-xa-sa*, such as:

兄弟	阿姐	哈哧 大。
<i>xiongdi</i>	<i>ajie</i>	<i>hasha da.</i>
younger-brother	elder-sister	<i>xa-sa</i> tall

‘The younger brother is taller than the elder sister.’ (Yang & Zhang 2016)

Such a usage is not attested in Altaic but is an innovation in particular Chinese dialects. Both the facts that *-xa* is distributed much more widely than *-sa* and that the combination of the two can be used in comparative constructions indicate that *-xa* and *-sa* come from different strata: *-xa* is formed in the earlier period and shared by all Chinese dialects in GQLA, whereas *-sa* comes from later contact of some Chinese dialects with Altaic languages. For ‘two’, a reasonable deduction is that it is – like *-xa* – formed earlier in Chinese dialects. However, the marker *-la* can also be found in other Altaic languages spoken outside GQLA (see § 5), indicating its possible Altaic origin.⁸

If one insists that both ‘two’ and *-la* are from Altaic languages, questions would arise. “Why would a large majority of Chinese dialects coincidentally only borrow ‘two’, whereas *-la* – which seems more easily borrowable due to its simplicity – has not been borrowed?” And “Why would those Chinese dialects, influenced much more deeply by Tibetan (such as the Zhoutun and Wutun dialects), borrow an Altaic marker, especially given the context wherein the Altaic ablative marker failed to spread into these dialects?” On the other hand, if ‘two’ had come from Chinese dialects, these questions are no longer an issue.

Second, in Altaic languages spoken elsewhere, we can hardly find a comitative-instrumental marker meaning ‘two’, whereas in some Chinese dialects, we do see the grammaticalization chain {‘two’ > coordinator > comitative}. Dwyer (1992) mentioned a postpositional numeral to mark the comitative in Orxon Tur-

8. There is another possible way in which *-la* formed. According to a reviewer’s comment, all the forms attested in Sinitic might reflect successively reduced variants of *liangge*, that is: *-liangge* > *-liang* > *-liā* > *-lia*, *-lang* > *-lā* > *-la*. The fact that the variant *-la* coincides with the Mongolic comitative marker *-la* < *-IAA < *-luA < *luxA may be viewed as an example of “shared drift” (Janhunen 2012b), that is, the gradual development of similar forms in adjacent languages without actual borrowing being involved. Thanks to the reviewer.

tic, but the numeral is ‘one’ rather than ‘two’: *birla* ‘with’ < *bir* ‘one’ + *la* (emphatic particle). By contrast, Jiang (2012) reported some Chinese dialects spoken in Hu’nan and Hubei Provinces using the numeral ‘two’ to link the coordinands and label the accompanee. However, the marker ‘two’ in these dialects is prepositional and not further developed into an instrumental marker, both of which are unlike the one used in the Chinese dialects in GQLA.⁹ See examples from the Xiantao dialect (Jiang 2012: 301–302):

- (18) a. 我 兩 (個) 大姐 一路 去的。
wo liang (ge) dajie yilu qu de.
 I two (CL)/and elder sister together go PART
 ‘My elder sister and I went (somewhere) together.’
- b. 這 件 事 要 兩 兒子 商量 下。
zhe jian shi yao liang erzi shangliang xia.
 this CL matter should two/COM son discuss CL
 ‘As for this matter, (I) should have a discussion with (my) son.’

Third, during the contact between the Altaic languages and Chinese dialects in GQLA, it is not always the case that the former affected the latter; the Chinese influence on Altaic languages is also enormous. Many Altaic languages borrow words from Chinese, and in some of them, even the core numerals are loaned from Chinese. In Mangghuer, as reported by Slater (2003), for example, “the only two numeric forms which retain Mongolic roots” are *nige* ‘one’ and *ghu* ‘two’, whereas “the rest of the numerals in the language are Chinese borrowings.” In addition to *ghu* ‘two’, the Chinese borrowing *liang-ge* ‘two-CL’ is also used, for example, *liang-ge aguer* ‘two-CL tiger’. The comitative-instrumental usage of *liangge* could be borrowed into Mangghuer from Chinese simultaneously, unless it is nativized to *ghula*. Interestingly, according to Slater (2003), *-ghula* is only used as an instrumental, but not a comitative marker. If the description is credible, then a question arises: why can it not mark comitatives, since the concept ‘two’, as discussed in §3, should first become a comitative marker before it further develops to an instrumental marker? Two possibilities exist. One is that the ability of marking comitatives has been lost, and only the usage as an instrumental marker remains. The other is that marking an instrumental is the only function borrowed from Chinese, whereas the other function of ‘two’ in Chinese (i.e. marking comitatives) is not borrowed (possibly because in Mangghuer, there are already two comitative markers (*-la* and *-tai*)). Of the two possible explanations, we believe the latter is

9. These dialects are SVO, so a preposition is preferred over a postposition. They already have instrumental prepositions, such as 用 *yong* ‘use’, so the comitative ‘two’ has no further development.

more acceptable. The same comitative-vanishing phenomenon does not occur in other Altaic languages in GQLA.

The above analysis shows that it is more likely that the marker 'two' originates from Chinese and is borrowed into Altaic, rather than the reverse.

4.3 Another possibility

However, based on current materials, we cannot absolutely exclude another possibility that 'two' developed independently in both Chinese dialects and Altaic languages. After all, Altaic languages do have the constructions in which 'two' undergoes the entire process of {'two' > coordinator > comitative > instrumental}. In fact, as a reviewer mentioned, in Mongolic languages (already in Middle Mongol), numerals, including 'two' are used as copulative elements: A B 2 = A and B, A B C 3 = A and B and C etc. The use of **ghwa-la* in the Mongolic languages of the GQLA could have arisen from this native background. Furthermore, the reviewer insightfully points out that the comitative-instrumental marker in the local Mongolic languages is not 'two' but is based on the complex word form **ghwa-la* (from which > *ghala* > *ghalə* etc.). This is a collective numeral, ultimately from **koa-la* < **koxa-xula* 'two together'. If the Mongolic suffix were a simple translation of Chinese *liangge* 兩個, we would expect to have something like **ghwar* 'two' as the form of the Mongolic marker, rather than **ghwa-la*.

We totally agree with the reviewer's comment that the question as to whether the comitative-instrumental marker connected with 'two' arose first in Sinitic or in Mongolic is not very relevant. It is more important to stress the regional character of the innovation.

Regardless of which possibility mentioned above is closer to the truth, the idea that 'two' first came from local Mongolic languages and spread into Chinese dialects is the most unlikely one.

5. Regional innovation

The fact that the comitative-instrumental markers in both Altaic languages and Chinese dialects come from the numeral 'two' reflects a regional innovation in GQLA, which can be viewed in two aspects.

On the one hand, as mentioned in the introduction, the numeral 'two' is not found in typological studies as the source concept of the comitative (-instrumental) marker. Sandmann (2016), when describing the Wutun dialect, also noticed this marker that was "unusual from a cross-linguistic perspective";

this “seems to be one of the most prominent areal features of this particular linguistic area.”

On the other hand, the comitative and instrumental markers are formally identical. Even if we count the other frequently used marker *-la* in Altaic languages and one Chinese dialect, this syncretism still exists. However, if the Altaic languages outside this area are examined, one finds that the comitative-instrumental syncretism in GQLA is special. For instance, in many Mongolic languages other than Santa, Mangghuer etc., spoken in GQLA, the comitatives have a closer relation with possessive markers than instrumentals. See Table 3 below.

Table 3. The comitative, instrumental and possessive markers in Mongolic languages

Languages	COM	INS	POSS	Sources
Mongolian	POSS	-AAr	-tai	Janhunen (2012a)
Khamnigan Mongol	POSS	-Ar	-tie	Janhunen (2003)
Buryat	POSS	-AAr	-tAi	Skribnik (2003)
Dagur	POSS	-AAr	-tii	Tsumagari (2003)
Khalkha	POSS	-Ar	-tAi	Svantesson (2003)
Ordos	-IAA	-AAr	-tAi	Georg (2003)
Oirat	-IUGAA>-IA	-yeer>-Ar	-tAi>-tA	Birtalan (2003)
Kalmuck	-IA	-Ar	-tA	Bläsing (2003)
Shira Yughur	-IA	(/GA)-Ar	- -	Nugteren (2003)
Moghol	-la, -lah	-ar	- -	Weiers (2003)

Some Mongolic languages have no comitatives in their nominal paradigms. The comitative meaning is expressed by a possessive marker; for example, Buryat *bagsha-tai* ‘together with a teacher, accompanied by a teacher’ (Skribnik 2003: 109). These types of languages include Mongolian,¹⁰ Khamnigan Mongol, Buryat, Dagur, and Khalkha.

Ordos, Oirat, and Kalmuck have a trisection of instrumental, comitative, and possessive, and the comitative in Ordos and Oirat often functions as instrumental. Notice that the form of comitative is *-IA*, from which we can deduce that the comitative marker *-la* used in GQLA has an Altaic origin and is extended to be an instrumental marker (but also see Footnote 8).

Shira Yughur has comitative and instrumental markers, but whether the comitative can function as instrumental is not mentioned. Moghol is another language that has comitative and instrumental markers, and its “comitative func-

10. Janhunen mentions there is a “literary comitative” (in *-IAA* < **-IUXA*) in Mongolian but that it “has been lost in spoken language.”

tions mainly as an instrumental, while the instrumental functions as a comitative" (Weiers 2003: 254).

According to Table 3 and the analysis above, we can see that in Mongolic languages, possessive-comitative syncretism is more common than comitative-instrumental syncretism.

As for Turkic languages, based on the available materials, we do not see comitative-instrumental syncretism except the languages spoken in GQLA. In fact, in the description edited by Johanson & Csató (1998), the most frequently mentioned case markers in a Turkic language are genitive, accusative, dative, locative, and ablative. The comitative and instrumental markers are not even mentioned.

6. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the comitative and instrumental case markers in the Chinese dialects and Altaic languages spoken in GQLA. In Chinese dialects, the comitative-instrumental marker 'two' predominates, whereas in some Altaic languages, this marker is also used along with another common marker *-la*. Since the numeral 'two' is rarely recognized as a source concept of comitatives, this paper discusses its grammaticalization process as {'two' > coordinator > comitative > instrumental}. In contrast to mainstream viewpoints that Altaic affected Chinese in terms of case markers, this paper proposes that the marker 'two' might have originated from Chinese dialects and was borrowed by Altaic languages, or developed independently on either side; whereas the marker *-la* might come from Altaic languages and was loaned to some Chinese dialects spoken in the same area or, it is simply a reduced form of *-liangge* in Chinese dialects. The fact that the comitative-instrumental markers in both Altaic languages and Chinese dialects come from the numeral 'two', with the comitative-instrumental syncretism, reflects a regional innovation in GQLA.

It is well accepted that the case marking system in Chinese dialects in GQLA comes from contact with Tibetan and Altaic languages in the same area. However, each and every specific case marker in Chinese dialects is not always copied from Tibetan or Altaic languages, but has some features formed in Chinese. For instance, as discussed in Zhou (2020b), the dative-accusative syncretism is seen neither in Altaic nor in Tibetan but exists in Chinese dialects, which use *-xa* as the dative-accusative marker. The dative-ablative combination (*-xa-ša*) as a standard marker in some Chinese dialects is also an innovation in Chinese, as mentioned in §4.2. These phenomena require further in-depth studies.

Acknowledgements

This research is supported by the key project of National Social Science Fund (19AYY004) and European Research Council (ERC)-funded research project, “Tracing language and population mixing in the Gansu-Qinghai area”, ERC-2019-AdG, 883700-TRAM. The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, who made valuable comments. Any remaining errors are the author’s.

Abbreviations

1	first person pronoun	GQLA	Gansu-Qinghai Linguistic Area
2	second person pronoun	INF	inferential
3	third person pronoun	INS	instrumental
ABL	ablative	NEG	negative
ACC	accusative	NMLZ	nominalizer
ATTR	attributive	OBJ	objective
CL	classifier	PART	particle
COLL	collective	PFV	perfective
COM	comitative	PL	plural
COND	conditional	POST	postposition
COP	copula	PROG	progressive
EMPH	emphatic	SEN	sensory
EXEC	executive auxiliary	SG	singular

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Publication history

Date received: 15 March 2018
Date accepted: 14 August 2019
Published online: 29 March 2022