Altaic Elements in the Línxià dialect: 
Contact-Induced Change on the Yellow River Plateau

Arienne M. Dwyer
University of Washington

Abstract

Language contact between the Hán and non-Hán languages of China has often been assumed to be unidirectional (i.e., Hán > non-Hán) and limited generally to lexical items, while morpho-syntactic interference is believed to be moderate and comparatively recent. However, in the northwestern Chinese dialect of Línxià, it will be shown below that in fact the opposite is true: the Línxià dialect consistently retains certain native phonological and lexical features, while undergoing heavy interference in syntax.

In this paper three examples illustrating the nature and extent of contact-induced change in the Línxià dialect are examined. In Section 1 the morphemes for ‘small, little’ of the region’s languages are compared as an illustration of extensive lexicosemantic diffusion resulting in areal convergence. In Section 2 it is concluded that the co-existing markers of the comitative/instrumental in Línxià represent two different types of borrowing: one, a calque on a compound numeral of the Mongolic languages of the region, and the other an outright loan from Mongolic of the Proto-Altaic comitative suffix *-lū. Finally, as an example of significant syntactic and phonological reanalysis, in Section 3 the Línxià postpositional conditional marker -šlū is examined.

We conclude that this is the result of the combination of certain social and linguistic factors, and that social factors, such as political dominance, may well be the primary determinants of change. These data provide evidence to support a reanalysis of certain universals of language contact.

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Seventh Annual Meeting of Central Asia at Berkeley, May 19-20, 1989.
2 For case studies and further discussion on the social determinants of linguistic change, see Thomason and Kaufman.
臨夏”方言”中的阿爾泰語成份：
黄河高原的語言交叉及其變化

杜安霓
華盛頓大學西雅圖

漢語與非漢語接觸常被推認為是單方向的（漢語 → 非漢語）接觸，並且侷限於詞匯，而不太影響到語法。然而筆者發現在中國西北部的臨夏方言中，一直保持着一種帶有本地特點的語音與詞匯。但同時在語法方面，該方言又受到很強的阿爾泰語言的影響。

本文采用了三個例子來闡明語言交叉及其變化的性質與範圍。文章的第一部分要考證臨夏地區諸語言中表示”小”這個詞意的詞素。第二部分重點論證臨夏方言中存在着共－具格的兩種不同的借用法。第一種借用法是從蒙古語言系中借用並譯成的複合數字。第二種借用法是將原始阿爾泰語的共格後綴 *-tə 從蒙古語系中直接用過去。第三部分側重論述臨夏方言中的後置條件符號。

全文述了語言與社會因素交叉與變化的結果。社會因素中的政治統治通常是語言變化的主要根源。這一研究資料為世界範圍內語言交往規律的再分析提供一些依據。
0. Introduction

The Yellow River plateau, which includes modern-day western Qǐnghǎi and southern Gǎnsū provinces and the Nǐnxīà Hūi Autonomous Region, has long been a hotbed of cultural and linguistic contact. Represented in this area are not only the Chinese dialects loosely grouped under ‘northwestern Mandarin’, but also the Turkic languages of Salar and Western Yugur, the Mongolic languages of Monguor, Eastern Yugur, Bāōnǎn and Santa, and Amdo Tibetan. In politics, language, and geography, this region represents a transition zone between Hàn-controlled and historically non-Hàn areas, between majority Hàn Chinese-speaking and majority Altaic-speaking peoples, and between the valleys and fertile loess plains of northern China and the arid, high steppe country of the Northwest.

With the innumerable political campaigns waged through this region by Hàn and non-Hàn alike, extensive cultural and linguistic contact was inevitable. Given, for example, the frequent intermarriage of Hàn and Altaic peoples during the partitioning of northern China in the fourth century, it is likely that linguistic interference could have occurred at an early date.

Línxìà (formerly Hézhōu 河州) is located south of the Yellow River at the confluence of the Dàxià River 大夏河 in Gǎnsū province. It has long been an economic center for the Mongolic, Turkic, and Tibetan peoples residing in or on the perimeters of the Línxìà Hūi Autonomous district. Within Línxìà city itself, significant linguistic differences between Hàn and Hūi Chinese reflect the cultural differences of these two groups.

The Chinese spoken by the Hàn of Línxìà is representative of the widespread and profound syntactic interference that has occurred in Chinese dialects in northwestern China. With head-final constructions and postpositions, the Línxìà dialect, unlike Standard Chinese, is an SOV language.

Morphosyntactic markers and certain lexemes often bear a striking phonological resemblance to those of neighboring languages, while the lexicon and aspect markers of the Línxìà dialect are clearly Chinese.

The convergence features exhibited by these languages can be isolated by comparing local varieties with related languages and with their historical counterparts. Past work on the Línxìà dialect is lacking, with the notable exception of recent works on Línxìà morphology by Mā Shujun.

1. ‘Small, Little’

In the Línxìà dialect there are two expressions for ‘small’: ka₄₄ and ɕio₄₄; the latter closely resembles Standard Chinese xiǎo 小. ka is perceived by Línxìà speakers to be a more native word; only speakers from outside the region use ka₄₄. ka₄₄ also bears emotional overtones of affection, while ɕio is neutral. For example, ka₄₄ foŋ₁₃ ɕǫ₃ expresses the speaker’s subjective fondness of the house, i.e. ‘a small (cute) house’, whereas a ɕio foŋ₁₃ ɕέ₃ expresses objectively ‘a small house’. ka₄₄ is also used predicatively, e.g.:

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³ The Yellow River plateau covers an area approximately 35-38 degrees latitude and 101-105 degrees longitude.
Still, as an attribute, the Standard Chinese ɕio is used instead of ka, as in ɕiokoŋ 小工 ‘unskilled laborer’, ɕiomí 小米 ‘millet’, and ɕioyó 小月 ‘lunar month’. Looking at the distribution of ɕio in both Linxià and Xīnínɡ, we notice that ɕio generally occurs in compounds which also occur in Standard Chinese. Attributive ka, on the other hand, only occurs in free lexemes, and is obligatory with kinship terms of the nuclear family (ka wawa ‘small child’ or even Xīnínɡ wo te ta ka wawa ‘my eldest child’). With many other kinship terms, however, ka and ɕio alternate. ka also expresses the emphatic superlative ‘youngest’: ka erts ȶȹ ‘my youngest son’; and Xīnínɡ ka pa ‘youngest of father’s younger brothers; uncle’.

Thus, in the Chinese dialects of the Yellow river plateau, ɕio occurs in bound lexemes as an attribute; some of these lexemes may have been borrowed from Standard Chinese. ka is colloquial, subjective and occurs in free lexemes attributively, and can express an emphatic superlative.

In addition to Línxià and Xīnínɡ, this distribution of features is partially reflected in the neighboring languages. The morpheme ka appears in Santa (in the attributive only), and in the Tángwàng 唐汪 and Wūtún 五屯 creoles⁴ (in both the attributive and the predicative). In Santa, the attribute ka can be used subjectively (as in Línxià ka), or it can be used in bound forms borrowed from Standard Chinese (as in Línxià ɕio):

(2) ka ots ¥n ‘little girl’ (affectionate)
(3) ka ɕum ‘litre’ (<Std. Chinese sheng 升)

Santa has another morpheme, moila, for the predicative:
(4) moila oliə ‘half as small/half as young’
(5) moila səila ‘the large and the small’

The source language for ka is uncertain; clearly it is not of Chinese origin: ka is a rare syllable in Chinese, appearing generally in loans or onomatopoeic syllables. It is striking that in at least four of the languages of the region, speakers distinguish between ka and one other morpheme for ‘small, little’ on the basis of both subjective and objective linguistic criteria.

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⁴ The Tángwàng creole represents the spoken language of two villages in the northeast of the Dōnghsi Autonomous County in Gānsù. Numbering approximately 20,000, its speakers are Muslims and call themselves Santa (Dōnghsi zú 東鄉族) although they do not speak the Santa language. While the lexis is almost exclusively Chinese, the morphosyntactic features of Tángwàng are largely Santa. Speakers of the Wūtún creole number about 2000 and reside in the Huángnán 黃南 Tibetan Autonomous State in eastern Qīnhǎi province. While Tibetan is the lingua franca for the area, most speakers are bilingual in Tibetan and Chinese, which is reflected in lexical and morphological features of their language.
Two other neighboring languages have a similar syntactic and/or semantic split. Amdo Tibetan has:

(6) (wo) ‘little, small’ (affectionate), as in wo-mo ‘girl’

(7) ts’un ts’un ‘little, small’ (neutral)

Both originate in literary Tibetan.5

The Bāonán dialects have dīgan6 and bādi7; it appears that the former is bound while the latter is a free morpheme:

(8) fgo-dīgan ‘the large and the small’

(9) dīgan yan ge dī ‘a little less, a little smaller’

(10) bādi tsina qala ‘two small wolves (together)’8

From the above, it is clear that the languages of this region possess two distinct lexical items partitioning the functional load of ‘small, little’. Although the specific morphemes may differ between languages, the semantic and syntactic features of these two morphemes is remarkably similar. This linguistic convergence illustrates the extent of lexicosemantic diffusion in this region.

2. Comitative/Instrumental ‘Together with N’

 Whereas in Standard Chinese prepositions (yòng and gēn) are used to express the instrumental and the comitative, in Línxià the postpositional elements -la and lianjie are used.

(11) p044 pfi13 lianjie44.13 (~ -la.3) g44 ts753
      I pen INST (INST) write
     ‘I write with a pen’.

(12) p044 tsi13 lianjie44.13 (~ -la.3) pfu24 ts753  
      I he COM NEG go
     ‘I won’t go with him’

5 Although the same graph 尕 appears in certain Tibetan place names of the region, it is a different morpheme altogether. 尕 is used to transliterate the Amdo Tibetan k’a ‘mouth’ (and by extension, ‘opening; col’). For example, Kasar尕撤爾 (a village on the west bank of the Lóngwù river in Qīnghāi), and Wānkàn尒尕灘 (village, located south of Línxià).

6 In Gānsù Bāonán (Jīshíshān搁石山 county, Dàtún大屯 village); based on data in Bu He, Chén Naixiong 1982.

7 In Qīnghāi Bāonán (Tóngrén同仁 county); based on data in Bu He, Chén Naixiong 1981.

8 bedi may be cognate with Inner Mongolic bagii and also possibly Monguor mula(a) ‘small’ and W. Yugur mula ‘child’. The origin of dīgan is unclear.
liaŋkə is obviously derived from the Standard Chinese quantity numeral 两 ‘two’, and the general measure ge 個. But in the Línxià language, unlike in Standard Chinese, liaŋkə functions both as the simple numeral 两 ‘two’ and the compound numeral 個 ‘two together.’ (Standard Chinese lia 個 ‘two together’ does not occur in the Línxià dialect.) Thus Línxià liaŋkə has three functions: as a simple quantity numeral, as a compound numeral, and when used postpositionally, as an instrumental/comitative marker.

The latter case marker appears to be an semantic extension and abstraction of the compound numeral ‘two together’; however there is no precedent for the abstraction of a numeral to a case marker in Standard Chinese; moreover, its use as a postposition suggests more than mere drift is involved here. I would like to propose that Línxià liaŋkə is a calque on the compound numeral ‘two together’ in Yellow River plateau Mongolic. In Bāonán and Santa the compound numeral qua-la has been reanalyzed as a postpositional instrumental/comitative suffix -qala (~ -qal).

Looking at Bāonán, we find:

(13) gete-qala dalga node ‘use a mallet to pound earth clods’

(14) bɔdi tsina-qala ‘two small wolves (together)’

This use of the compound numeral precisely parallels that of Línxià:

Bonan, Santa:
-qala < quar ‘two’ + le (plural suffix) ‘two together’

Línxià:
liaŋkə < lian ‘two (qty)’ + ke (measure) ‘two together’

The numeral has thus been reanalyzed first as a postposition, and then as an enclitic. What, then, is the origin of the Línxià alternate suffix -la? -la has a broad distribution in the languages of the region; it functions as an instrumental and/or comitative postposition.

For example, compare data from Tángwàng and Santa:

Tángwàng:

(15) vas3vəs3 -m ʃu3ʃu3 -la ʦɬ child -PL. spoon -INST eat

‘Children eat with a spoon.’

(16) fɨ23 a21 ka [-la] ʃi2tə tə ɬy you elder bro. COM together go

‘You go together with elder brother.’

Conversely, in Xīnǐng, the compound numeral lian has become generalized to these three functions to the exclusion of liaŋkə.

9 Bu He, Chén Naixiong p. 67; Liu Zhaoxiong 1981.
Santa:

(17) $k^h\lambda wos \text{-la } \theta\theta-o-qala \text{i}$

‘Children eat with a spoon’

(18) $t\mathbf{\&}u \text{aka} \text{-le hantu } \text{et}$

‘You go together with elder brother.’

In Santa, -qala marks the instrumental, while -le (~ -la) marks the comitative. In Tángwàng, -la marks both the instrumental and the comitative. This is true of many of the region’s languages, including for example Salar:

(19) $\text{men } \text{sen-la va(r)-ur}$

‘I’ll go with you’

Let us compare the distribution of these markers in all the major languages of the region:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comitative</th>
<th>Instrumental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Línxià</td>
<td>-la44 liąŋkɔ44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xīning</td>
<td>-lia.3 ~te324 N lia.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wutun</td>
<td>liąŋkɔ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tángwàng</td>
<td>-la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa</td>
<td>-qal/a/-qal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bāonān</td>
<td>-qal/a/-qal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monguor</td>
<td>-la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Yugur</td>
<td>-aor/-eer/-oor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salar</td>
<td>-la, -la bilɔ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Yugur</td>
<td>budzin ~vudzin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amdo Tibetan</td>
<td>-ki/-gi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The source of -la, found in all four major language families above, is complex. Professor Poppe has identified the Proto-Altaic Comitative suffix *-lū; the modern Turkic languages have the reflex -li/-lig (< *lū + gal (adjectival)) except for Yakut and Salar, which have -lin/-lun and -la ne, respectively (< *lū + -n, an ancient instrumental).12 The modern Tungusic languages have only the latter compound type comitative -nuń (< *lū + -n, again, an ancient instrumental). Only the most conservative of Mongolic languages preserve Proto-Altaic *-lū: Monguor, Santa, and

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11 In Amdo Tibetan the comitative -la xəmdo occurs only rarely with certain verbs (e.g., ‘to have’) in the literary language. It is unlikely that -la is native to Amdo Tibetan since it is not present in the basic stratum; furthermore, xǝmtu appears in The Secret History of the Mongols as ‘together’, suggesting that -la xǝmdo was borrowed into Amdo Tibetan from the neighboring Mongolic languages, perhaps during the medieval period.

12 Poppe 1977, p. 72.
Eastern Yugur. Most other modern Mongolian language instead have *-tai/-tei as the comitative.13

Thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>Modern Language</th>
<th>Turkic Equivalent</th>
<th>Tungusic Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Com. Turkic</td>
<td>*(l)ī, liɣu</td>
<td>-li, liɣu</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*(l)ī-n</td>
<td>Yak. -lin/lun</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Altaic</td>
<td>*(l)ū</td>
<td>Sal. - la na14</td>
<td>Com. Tungusic (3)</td>
<td>*(l)ū-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Evenki, Lamut -nun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. Mongolic</td>
<td>*(l)ū-gāi &gt; *lūɣa &gt; -lu’a &gt; E. Yug. -lə/-le/-lo</td>
<td>Mod. Mongolic *(tai/-te)i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*(tai/-tei)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above data indicates an Altaic origin for the comitative suffix -la; in particular, the following evidence suggests that Mongolic languages are the source for this suffix: Common Mongolic, unlike Common Turkic, preserved the feature [+BACK] of Proto-Altaic *(l)ū. The vowel in *(l)ū became lowered through regressive assimilation and coalescence with the suffix -gai. As Professor Poppe explains, “*(l)ū a should have resulted in -lo in Modern Mongolian, but when becoming part of the declension system, the comitative form appeared, analogically to all the other case forms, with the suffix -lā/-lē and, in some languages having the labial attraction, also with -lō/-lō.”15

Furthermore, given the harmonic rules of Salar vowels, we would expect the suffix -li(na). The presence of a low back vowel in the modern comitative suffix -la suggests that it is also a loan from Mongolic.

Why do the case suffix -la and the former compound numeral (-qala, liŋkə) co-occur as the instrumental/comitative markers in the languages of this region? Both markers appear in early Altaic sources; however, it is likely that Proto-Altaic *(l)ū originally had a function other than to indicate the instrumental or comitative,16 and that only after its affixation to certain ancient particles (-gai in Mongolic, -gu/-u in Turkic, and -n in Turkic and Tungusic) did the compound suffix assume the function of instrumental/comitative marker.

The widespread use of a suffixed numeral postpositionally to mark the comitative is attested in Orxon Turkic: birla ‘with’ < bir ‘one’ + la (emphatic particle):

(20) toquz tatar birla  ‘together with the Tokuz Tatar’17

However, while in Bāonán and Santa there is the suffixed numeral -qala, such a numeral is not

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13 Poppe 1955, p.204.
14 The Salar instrumental suffix -la, unlike the comitative suffix, alternates with -la na, which I believe is the last trace of the Common Turkic (and Common Tungusic) ancient instrumental suffix -n.
15 Poppe 1955 p. 203.
16 Proto-Altaic *(l)ū occurred without other suffixes only in pre-thirteenth century Turkic, where it functioned to create derived nouns or as a nominalizer: tengrili yerliça ‘in Heaven and on earth’; edguli ayiɣu ‘the good as well as the evil one’. (examples from Poppe 1977, p. 204.)
17 Tekin, p. 277.
attested in Middle Mongolic. Thus -qala could well be a calque from Salar bilə. The instrumen-
tal/comitative markers liaŋkə and lia in the Chinese dialects of the Yellow river plateau are the
most recent examples of this regional loan translation. The Línxià postposition, unlike
Xīnìng -lia, still retains its full tonal features.

The two instrumental/comitative markers of the Línxià dialect reflect different degrees of
interference: the suffix -la has been borrowed outright probably from Bāonán or Santa, while the
compound numeral postposition has been nativized to liaŋkə.

Interestingly, the Hán Chinese of Línxià prefer to use -la, while the Huí tend to use liaŋkə.18
This may well reflect a stronger cultural identity on the part of the Huí Chinese, who are thus
more likely to blend foreign and native features rather than borrowing outright.

3. Conditional -šl

In the Línxià dialect, there is a clause-final suffix -šl that is phonologically equivalent to the
Standard Chinese copula shì 是 but functions instead as a marker of the conditional:

(21) koŋ13fu44 pfu34 xa53 ʂ1 ʂ1 ʂ1 ts35 (xa3) tɕiu53ɕi44 pfu32 xo44
time NEG spend PROG COND, kanji (ACC) then write NEG well
‘If you don’t take the time, you won’t write well’.

(22) tɕia13 me44ku013 tɕi ʂ1 ʂ1 hŋ044 tɕia13 xu013 pfu32 ʨie44
he America go COND I he [won’t marry]
‘If he goes to America, I won’t marry him’.

Compare the usage of the Salar conditional marker -se:

(23) at al-yu keli-se da eŋər al-yu keli
horse buy need-COND also saddle buy need
‘If you want to buy a horse, you also need to buy a saddle.’

If we compare the conditional markers of the other languages of the region, we find that they are
all clause-final suffixes which fall into two major groups: those virtually identical with the Salar
form (the Turkic and Mongolic languages), and those with a different suffix (the languages of
Tibetan origin).

Salar -sa/-se
W.Yugur -sa/-se
Bāonán -sə
Santa -sə
Monguor -sa
E. Yugur -sa /-se /-so
Amdo Tibetan -na
Wütün -ra

18 Personal communication from my language informant, Mr. Xiāolí Zhū, to whom I extend my thanks for his
patience and good humor.
The conditional forms above have no cognates in the historical or modern Mongolic languages outside of this region (compare, for example, Khalkha -bal). However, conditional -sa/-se is a regular feature common to all Turkic languages. This suggests that the Yellow river plateau Mongolic conditional suffixes are loans from Salar or West Yugur.

Given the phonological and morphosyntactic similarities between Línxià -śl and Salar -sa, it is conceivable that the Turkic conditional was loaned into Línxià and then underwent certain nativizing phonological changes. However, the syllable sa exists in Línxià Chinese; therefore there is no reason for it to have become retroflexed if Salar -sa was borrowed directly into the Línxià dialect. It is thus more plausible that Línxià -śl is a contraction of the Standard Chinese conditional marker yàoshi 要是, which has been reanalyzed as a verbal suffix. Thus, only the morphosyntactic features of the Salar conditional marker were shifted into Línxià.

4. Implications for Language Contact Theory

The maintenance of native structural features (including segmentals and tone) in the Línxià conditional marker -śl, coupled with the wholesale adoption of foreign morphosyntactic features, parallels the case of the instrumental/comitative marker liayka. These two examples of the use of functionally equivalent structures in Línxià to nativize such adstratum features testifies to the resiliency of certain levels of the language, namely lexicon and, to a lesser degree, phonology. Even within the context of such heavy borrowing, “interference features are still scattered among the various grammatical subsystems, so that typological disruption in any one subsystem is limited: the inherited structures, including the morphemes that express them, are still largely intact.”

This contradicts the hallowed implicational universal that phonological and lexical change must precede any transfer of syntactic features. Moreover, constraints on naturalness and markedness would lead us to believe that in such a complex multicultural environment (where the need for intergroup communication at least in commerce is fairly high), that these would display trends towards simplification and less markedness, and, thus, convergence of certain features. In the Línxià dialect, the adoption of an SOV word order and its accompanying postpositions (such as liayka) and suffixes (such as -śl) to parallel the other languages of the region has resulted in decrease in its areal markedness; yet by retaining certain features of an SVO order, the incorporation of external features has resulted in the complication of its structure.

This simultaneous co-existence of genetic (i.e. Chinese) features with borrowed features at all levels of language, while more complicated, serves two important functions for the

19 For example, sa₅₃ ‘what?’
20 This reanalyzed form of the Standard Chinese conditional yàoshi 要是 also appears in the Línxià clause-final counterfactual enclitic zhèhuàśl 這話是 (<zhèsshuas₃ 這話 ‘actually, really’ + śl [conditional marker]). Although the counterfactual, like conditional śl, maintains the segmental features of the original morphemes, tonal features are not maintained except in emphatic speech. -śl only occurs as a bound morpheme in Línxià. The verb śl 是 is ungrammatical in copular sentences unless it co-occurs with the negative particle bù 不. Thus at the levels of both phonology and syntax, what was in origin a copula and a preverbal conditional marker has been abstracted to a suffix in the Línxià dialect.
21 Thomason and Kaufman, p.76.
speakers of the Línxià dialect: by increasing the number of structures for any given function, Línxià speakers are increasing the likelihood of intergroup communicative success, while at the same time maintaining their own linguistic identity. It is likely that this is a factor in maintaining both Altaic instrumental/comitative -Ja and also the nativized -lianjia.

In addition, the expressive possibilities within a given level of the Línxià dialect also increase. Take, for example, the ka~gio alternation discussed above. In Standard Chinese, subjective affection is expressed through reduplication or vocal inflection of the morpheme xiǎo 小. While these morphosyntactic or suprasegmental processes also occur in Línxià, its speakers have a lexical alternative as well.

Although the Línxià dialect has been drastically changed through incorporated Altaic features, it still maintains a basic stratum of Chinese lexicon and phonology. Social and historical factors, such as the political and economic dominance of the Hàn Chinese (even in a region where the Hàn are culturally a minority), have contributed to the genetic continuity of the Chinese stratum of the Línxià dialect. As we have seen, the stronger group identity of the Huí Chinese has resulted in significant structural isoglosses within Línxià city itself: Hàn Chinese is more vulnerable to substratum interference.

Through at least several hundred years of contact, the Línxià dialect has had pervasive substratum interference, particularly in syntax and morphology. Yet the surrounding languages have likewise undergone contact-induced changes. In these languages, it appears that those changes that were the result of Altaic or Tibetan interference are generally phonological and lexical and are temporally remote. This is due to their genetic relationship and typological similarity. Those changes that have been induced through contact with Chinese, however, are of two types. The older Chinese loans into these languages were also lexical and, to a lesser extent, phonological in nature. The more recent interference features, however, occur at all levels of language, and have in many cases been rapidly assimilated into the Altaic and Tibetan languages.

The difference in the nature of contact-induced changes between Hàn and non-Hàn can perhaps be explained in the following way. For the last several centuries, the non-Hàn have been economically and politically subordinate. They have thus been more motivated to become bilingual in the dominant language, Chinese. In learning the language, speakers of Altaic and Tibetan languages assimilate whatever vocabulary and pronunciation (morphophonemic rules) they need to function in Hàn society. Some speakers abruptly abandoned the vocabulary of their native language, while retaining its syntax, resulting in, for example, the Tángwàng and Wùtún creoles. Others who remained bilingual, like the Salar, Santa, and Bāonán, were exerting pressure on Chinese syntax at the same time that Chinese features were being shifted to these languages. One can only speculate that this syntactic pressure resulted from either imperfect learning of Chinese on the part of the non-native speakers, thus introducing SOV syntax into intergroup communication; or that the Hàn Chinese began to produce a mixed SVO/SOV word order in their efforts at commercial or political communication.

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22 Particularly after 1949 we see the rapid assimilation of Standard Chinese political and economic vocabulary and the adaptation or assimilation of certain Standard Chinese phonemes. For example, as much as 51% of Gānsù Bāonán vocabulary is Chinese in origin (Li, 1989).
References