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An ablative postposition in the Xining dialect

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a morphosyntactic feature of the Xining dialect that is unique among all Chinese dialects: that is, the use of a postposition to express ablative nominal relationships. The postposition [tɕia] is invariably pronounced in the neutral tone and has no cognates in either earlier varieties of Chinese or among present Chinese dialects. The morpheme's origin is shown to have come from a neighboring non-Sinitic language. Moreover, the variations within the syntactic expression of the ablative are correlated with various sociolinguistic groups. These correlations suggest an ongoing change in the dialect's morphosyntactic system of a kind rarely observed among Chinese dialects. Finally, the process of linguistic change is correlated with demographic changes within the Xining region that show Xining is a place where language contact and rapid linguistic change are likely to be found.

Xining 西宁, Qinghai 青海, is a special region within the whole of China, lying at the crossroads of Tibetan, Mongolian, and Chinese cultural spheres of influence and populated at times in its history by people of these different ethnolinguistic groups. Prior to 1949, it was a rather small, provincial town, largely isolated from the currents of change in other parts of the country. In the 1950s, the central government began moving large numbers of people into the region as part of its plan to industrialize and centralize the nation, and consequently highways and railroads were opened that connected Xining with the rest of the country. At present, while these connections are still in place, the policy of forcing people to migrate into the region has stopped. Thus, the city now consists of a large proportion of nonnative people, in addition to a substantial number of native people, who are both Han and non-Han.

As one might expect, the city's dialect demonstrates the city's special sociogeographic situation. While investigating the dialect's existential locative, I came across a peculiar method of expressing the ablative. Unlike all other Sinitic languages that I am aware of, the Xining dialect uses the postposition [tɕia] after a nominal time or place word to express the idea of "source," as in (1), (2), and (3).[1]

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(1) 他昨天北京 tɕia 来了
t'aɪ tsuʌ t'iãʏ pɪɪ tɕiãʏ tɕia leɪ liɔ
he-yesterday-Beijing-Po-come-asp.
He came back from Beijing yesterday.

(2) 他夜来个儿从内地里 tɕia 来了
t'aɪ iʌ leʏ kɔ ɛʏ ts'uãɪ nuiʌ tsɪ l tɕia leɪ liɔ
he- yesterday- Pr.- interior- Po-come-asp.
He came back from the interior yesterday.

(3) 我上个星期 tɕia 就没吃烟者
nɔʏ ʂãʌ kɔ ɕiãɪ tɕ'jʏ tɕia tɕiɯʌ mɔʌ tʂ'ɻɪ iãɪ tʂɔ
I- last week- Po- then-didn't-smoke-asp.
I haven't smoked since last week.

The pattern in these examples is summarized in (4).[2]

(4) NP_1-(Pr)-NP_2-Po-VP

This postposition naturally intrigued me, and I began asking as many people as I could to produce sentences with an ablative. The answers I collected constitute the data for this article, which shows how the ablative came into the dialect, how the variation in its forms coincides with different sociolinguistic groups, and how that variation may have come into being. I also argue that variations within the dialect's syntactic expression of the ablative can be correlated with various sociolinguistic groups, suggesting an ongoing change in the dialect's syntactic pattern in the direction of the pattern used in Standard Chinese (Pǔtōnghuà普通话). The data suggest a change in progress within the dialect's morphosyntactic system of a kind rarely observed in Sinitic languages.

Perhaps the presence of an ablative postposition should not come as a surprise. The dialect also uses the postposition [lia] to express the comitative/instrumental case: that is, to express with whom or with what object a verb is carried out. As this feature has been described in detail elsewhere,[3] I simply provide two examples from among the data I collected in 1996. Example (5) demonstrates the comitative function of the postposition, and example (6) demonstrates the instrumental function.

(5) 你的袜子 teʌ 鞋子 lia jʏ kuaʌ 在盒盒里 lia
niʏ tsɪ uaɪ tsɪ teʌ xeɪ tsɪ lia jʏ kuaʌ tseʌ xuɪ xuʏ l lia
your- sock- Pr-shoe- Po-all- at-box- in-prt.
Both your socks and shoes are in the box.

(6) 你把它 teʌ 报报 lia 包下
niʏ paʏ t'aɪ teʌ pɔʌ pɔʏ lia pɔɪ xa
you-Disp.-it-Pr-newspaper-Po-wrap-down
Use a piece of newspaper to wrap it up.

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Clearly, the syntax of the postposition [lia] is similar to the syntax described for the ablative postposition. Since this postposition has been described elsewhere, the remainder of this article focuses on the heretofore unstudied ablative postposition.

THE DATABASE AND THE INTERVIEW

The database, or sample population, consisted of 71 informants whose parents were also born and raised in Xining. The informants' ages ranged from 16 to 73, with the mean age of 37. There were 42 females in the group and 29 males. Educational levels ranged from the illiterate (given a rank of 1) to college professors (given a rank of 10), with the mean educational rank of 5 (the rank given to graduates of junior middle school). The informants came from all sections of the city, including villages in outlying sectors of the metropolitan area. Their occupations included everything from peasant to teacher, truck driver to office worker.

There are undoubtedly some biases in my sample population. First, the ratio of males to females in Xining is closer to 48:52,[4] unlike my sample of 40:60. Second, the mean educational level is probably lower than my sample's. However, it is now the state policy that all urban residents must complete junior middle school, so if my sample's educational rank is high for now, it will probably soon be the city's average. Third, while I interviewed people from all sections of the city, the majority of my informants came from the eastern sector of the city because that is where I was living. Finally, although I interviewed all types of people, there is a preponderance of students and teachers in my sample because I was living at an educational institution and naturally came into more contact with them than with other sorts of people. While I recognize these biases in my sample, I still feel that the database accurately reflects the population of Xining.

The interview consisted of my asking the informants to say the following sentences in their native dialect after I had said them in Standard Chinese or English, depending on the informant.[5]

(7) a. 我昨天从窗户里看见她。
I saw her through the window yesterday.
b. 他从飞机上看见大海。
He saw the ocean from the airplane.
c. 我爸爸从上星期就开始不抽烟。
My father hasn't smoked since last week.
d. 他昨天从北京回来了。
He came back from Beijing yesterday.

I frequently varied the noun phrases in the elicited sentences for a number of reasons. For example, when interviewing a Muslim informant, I could not imply that their father was a smoker, and some village residents would have thought it too strange to say that someone had "seen the ocean from an airplane" or "just

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came back from Beijing." Therefore, many of the examples in the database are not identical with (7a–d), but they do represent the same syntactic pattern.

I made no effort to control for register differences within the interview. Because all the sentences were elicited in a formal interview, they may be understood to represent a relatively formal style.

I rarely asked an informant to produce all four sentences. This interview was carried out at the end of a lengthier one, and the number of questions I asked an informant was based on how much time I had available, how good the interview situation was, and how willing the informant was to continue working.[6] On average, I asked a little more than two sentences per informant, so my database consists of a total of 176 utterances. I recorded all the responses in notebooks and on audiotape.

Certainly, even if I had asked all the informants all four sentences, I would not have collected enough data for a thorough study of the Xining dialect's ablative pattern. More properly, each informant should have been asked several dozen sentences with numerous syntactic and lexical parameters to explore the topic in depth. Nonetheless, taken as a whole the database is large enough to draw some preliminary conclusions about the ablative pattern in the Xining dialect.

VARIATION IN POSTPOSITION

I characterize the Xining dialect's ablative postposition as taking the phonetic form [tɕia]. However, this is not the only phonetic form it takes. The other variants, in order of frequency, are [sa], [ɕiã], [ɕia], and [ta]. There is no phonological explanation for the variations: that is, in identical phonological environments, some informants used one variant and some used another. Interestingly, if an informant used one variant, with the exception of [tɕia], they rarely used another. For example, of the twelve people who used the variant [sa], none used any of the other variants.

The breakdown of the occurrences of the postposition in the database is summarized in Table 1. Clearly, the most frequently occurring variants are [tɕia], [∅], and [sa]. Other than the Standard Chinese pattern without a postposition, all the postpositions share a common main vowel and similar points of articulation in the initial consonant. They are likely to be related variants.

VARIATION IN SYNTACTIC PATTERN

The ablative's syntactic patterns can be organized into four variations: (1) Pr-NP-VP, (2) Pr-NP-Po-VP, (3) NP-Po-VP, and (4) NP-VP. This last pattern is somewhat ambiguous, as it may be an ablative construction or a simple time/locative construction; so for the time being it will be put aside. This pattern accounted for only 5 utterances of the 176 in the database, or about 3%. One such example is given in (8).

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TABLE 1. *Frequency and percentage of various ablative postpositions*

Postposition	Frequency	Percentage
tɕia	71	40
sa	26	15
ɕiã	12	7
ɕia	4	2
ta	5	3
No postposition	58	33
Total	176	100

(8) 我上个星期就戒烟了
nɔ˩ ʂɔ̃˥ kɔ ɕiə̃˧ tɕʼj˩ tɕiɯ˥ tɕi˥ iã˧ liɔ
I-last week-then-quit-tobacco-prt
I quit smoking last week.

Thus, even though I asked the informant to produce an ablative construction, the informant preferred to express a simple "time when" pattern.

Examples with pattern 1 (Pr-NP-VP)

Examples of pattern 1, exactly the same as the pattern in Standard Chinese, have two variations of the preposition. The first has the preposition [tsʻuə̃˧] 从, as in (9).[7]

(9) a. 我夜来从窗户里把他见了呗
nɔ˩ i˥ le˩ tsʻuə̃˧ tʂʻuɔ̃˧ xv˩ l pa˩ tʻa˧ tɕiã˥ liɔ pɛ
I-yesterday-Pr-window-inside-Disp.-him-see-prt.-prt.
I saw him in the window yesterday.
b. 我 ta˧ ta 从上个星期就开始不抽烟了
nɔ˩ ta˧ ta tsʻuə̃˧ ʂɔ̃˥ kɔ ɕiə̃˧ tɕʼj˩ tɕiɯ k'ɛ˧ sɪ˩ pv˥ tʂʻɯ˧ iã˧ liɔ
I-father-Pr.-last week-adv.-start-not-smoke-prt.
My father hasn't smoked since last week.
c. 他昨天从北京回来了
tʻa˧ tsu˧ tʻiã˧ tsʻuə̃˧ pɪ˧ tɕiə̃˩ xui˧ lɛ liɔ
he-yesterday-Pr.-Beijing-return-come-prt.
He returned from Beijing yesterday.

There are a total of 48 sentences using pattern 1 with the preposition [tsʻuə̃˧], constituting 27% of the database.

The second variant of pattern 1 uses the preposition [tɛ˥], as in (10).

(10) a. 他夜来个 tɛ˥ 兰州来了
tʻa˧ i˥ le˩ kɔ tɛ˥ lã˧ tʂɯ˧ le˧ liɔ
he-yesterday-Pr-Lanzhou-come-prt.
He came from Lanzhou yesterday.

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TABLE 2. *Frequency and percentage of Pr and Po combinations in pattern 2*

Preposition	Postposition	Frequency	Percentage of Pattern 2	Percentage of Total ($N = 176$)
[tsuɜ˥]	[tɕia]	23	37	13
	[sa]	6	10	3
	[ɕiã]	1	1	1
[tɛ˩]	[tɕia]	13	21	8
	[sa]	9	15	5
	[ɕiã]	1	1	1
	[ta]	3	5	2
	[ɕia]	2	3	1
[tɕiɔ˩]	[tɕia]	2	3	1
[kɪ˧]	[ɕiã]	2	3	1
Total		62	99	36

b. 他夜来个儿 tɛ˩ 兰州上来了
t'a˥ i˩ le˧ kɔ ɛ tɛ˩ lã˥ tʂɯ˥ ʂɔ̃˩ le˧ liɔ a
he-yesterday-Pr-Lanzhou-up-come-prt.-prt.
He came up from Lanzhou yesterday.

There are a total of 5 sentences in the database using pattern 1 with the preposition [tɛ˩], constituting 3% of the total. All together, there are 53 sentences using pattern 1, constituting about 30% of the total utterances.

Examples with pattern 2 (Pr-NP-Po-VP)

Examples using pattern 2 total 62 sentences, constituting about 36% of the database. Within this group, there is variation in both the preposition and postposition. All the postposition variants mentioned in Table 1 are used. In addition to the prepositions just mentioned, there are also [tɕiɔ˩] 叫 and [kɪ˧] 给.[8] Table 2 summarizes the frequency of all the combinations of preposition and postposition in pattern 2 in the database.

I limit myself to present examples of the most commonly occurring variants, the first of which is [tɛ˩] + NP + [sa].

(11) a. 我夜来个 tɛ˩ 窗户里 sa 把他看见了
nɔ˧ i˩ le˧ kɔ tɛ˩ tʂ'uɔ̃˥ xv˧ l sa pa˧ t'a˥ k'ɑ̃˩ tɕiɑ̃˧ liɔ
I-yesterday-Pr-window-Po-Disp.-him-saw-prt.
I saw him in the window yesterday.
b. 他 tɛ˩ 飞机上 sa看见了大海
t'a˥ tɛ˩ fɪ˥ tɕj˧ ʂɔ̃ sa k'ɑ̃˩ tɕiɑ̃˧ liɔ ta˩ xɛ˧
he-Pr.-airplane-Po-saw-prt.-sea
He saw the sea from the airplane.

There are 9 such sentences in the database, constituting 5% of the total.

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The next variant of pattern 2 is [tɛ˧] + NP + [tɕia], as in (12).

(12) a. 我夜来 tɛ˧ 窗窗里 tɕia 见了呗
nɔ˩ i˧ le˩ tɛ˧ tʂ'uɔ̃˥ tʂ'uɔ̃˩ l tɕia tɕiã˧ liɔ pɛ
I-yesterday-Pr-window-Po-saw-prt.prt.
I saw (her) in the window yesterday.

b. 我哥哥 tɛ˧ 上个星期 tɕia 就不吃烟了
nɔ˩ kɔ˧ kɔ˩ tɛ˧ ʂɔ̃˧ kɔ ɕiə̃˥ tɕ'j˩ tɕia tɕiɯ˧ pv˧ tʂ'ɻ˥ iã˥ liɔ
I-brother-Pr-last-week-Po-adv.-not-smoke-prt
My brother hasn't smoked since last week.

c. 他夜来 tɛ˧ 北京 tɕia 来了呗
t'a˥ i˧ le˩ tɛ˧ pɾ˥ tɕiə̃˩ tɕia lɛ˥ liɔ pɛ
he-yesterday-Pr-Beijing-Po-come-prt.-prt.
He came from Beijing yesterday.

There are 13 sentences of this type in the database, constituting 8% of the total.

The most common variation of pattern 2 is [ts'uɔ̃˥] + NP + [tɕia], as in (13).

(13) a. 我哥哥从上个星期 tɕia 开始没吸烟者
nɔ˩ kɔ˧ kɔ˩ ts'uɔ̃˥ ʂɔ̃˧ kɔ ɕiə̃˥ tɕ'j˩ tɕia k'ɛ˥ sɪ˩ mɔ˥ ɕj˥ iã˥ tʂɔ
I-brother-Pr-last week-Po-start-didn't-smoke-prt.
My brother hasn't smoked since last week.

b. 他昨天从北京 tɕia 来了
t'a˥ tsu˥ t'iã˥ ts'uɔ̃˥ pɾ˥ tɕiə̃˩ tɕia le˥ liɔ
he-yesterday-Pr-Beijing-Po-come-prt.
He came from Beijing yesterday.

c. 我从星期一 tɕia 就不抽烟了啊
nɔ˩ ts'uɔ̃˥ ɕiə̃˥ tɕ'j˩ j˥ tɕia tɕiɯ˧ pv˧ tʂ'ɯ˥ iã˥ liɔ a
I-Pr-last Monday-Po-adv.-not.-smoke-prt.-prt.
I haven't smoked since Monday.

d. 他夜来个从内地里 tɕia 来了
t'a˥ i˧ le˩ kɔ ts'uɔ̃˥ nui˧ tsɪ˩ l tɕia le˥ liɔ
he-yesterday-Pr-interior-Po-come-prt.
He came up from the interior yesterday.

There are 23 sentences with this pattern in the database, constituting 13% of the total number of utterances.

Examples of pattern 3 (NP-Po-VP)

Examples using pattern 3 total 56 sentences, constituting 31% of the database. All of the postposition variants mentioned in Table 1 occur in this pattern, but the two most common are [sa] and [tɕia]. Examples with [sa] are given in (14).

(14) a. 我夜来窗窗里 sa 把他见了
nɔ˩ i˧ le˩ tʂ'uɔ̃˥ tʂ'uɔ̃˩ l sa pa˩ t'a˥ tɕiã˧ liɔ
I-yesterday-window-Po-Disp.-him-see-prt.
I saw him in the window yesterday.

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b. 我上个礼拜 sa 就不抽烟了
nɔɤ ʂɔɻ kɔ lɤ pɛɻ sa tɕiɯɻ pvɤ tʂʻɯɤ iãɪ liɔ
I-last week-Po-adv.-not-smoke-prt.
I haven't smoked since last week.

c. 他夜来北京 sa 将回来
tʻaɪ iɻ lɛɤ pɪɪ tɕiəɤ sa tɕiɔɤ xuiɤ lɛ
he-yesterday-Beijing-Po-adv.-return
He just came back from Beijing yesterday.

There are a total of 11 sentences with this pattern in the database, constituting 6% of the total.

Much more frequent are examples with the postposition [tɕia].

(15) a. 我夜来个儿窗窗里 tɕia 把他见了
nɔɤ iɻ lɛɤ kɔ ɛ tʂʻuɔɪ tʂʻuɔɤ l tɕia paɤ tʻaɪ tɕiãɻ liɔ
I-yesterday-window-Po-Disp-her-see-prt.
I saw her in the window yesterday.

b. 我阿哥上个星期 tɕia 再不抽烟了
nɔɤ aɪ kɔɪ ʂɔɻ kɔ ɕiəɪ tɕʻjɤ tɕia tsɛɻ pvɤ tʂʻɯɪ iãɪ liɔ
I-brother-last week-Po-adv-not-smoke-prt
My older brother hasn't smoked since last week.

c. tɕiaɪ 夜来个儿兰州 tɕia 来 lia
tɕiaɪ iɻ lɛɤ kɔ ɛ lãɪ tʂɯɪ tɕia lɛɪ lia
he-yesterday-Lanzhou-Po-come-prt.
He came up from the interior yesterday.

There are 33 examples in the database with this pattern, constituting 17% of the total.

In sum, pattern 1, Pr-NP-VP, occurred 53 times (30%) out of a total of 176 sentences. Pattern 2, Pr-NP-Po-VP, occurred 62 times (36%), and pattern 3, NP-Po-VP, occurred 56 times (31%).

ORIGINS IN MONGUOR[9]

Clearly this postposition is unique among Sinitic languages. Many dialects use morphemes other than the Standard Chinese cóng 从 to express ablative constructions, but in all cases the ablative morpheme is a preposition. However, the non-Sinitic languages spoken in Qinghai are virtually all suffixing languages that express the ablative with some kind of postposition. Comparison with these non-Sinitic languages suggests that the Xining dialect's postposition almost certainly originates from Monguor, a Mongolic language that probably has been used in the area since the 13th century.

Monguor, like all Mongolic languages, suffixes case endings to nouns to express the usual relationships of nominative, accusative, dative, ablative, and so on. The Monguor ablative postposition is pronounced [sa] (cf. written Mongolian

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-aca/-ece and modern Chahar *-aas/-ees)*, exactly the same as one of the variants observed in the Xining dialect. Compare the examples in (16) with the Xining dialect examples in (14).[10]

(16) a. vaŋʤa aade badzar-**sa** reʤ a
PN-grandfather-town-Po-come-to be
Grandpa Wang came from town.

b. xamdʐɔ-**sa**-nə varə
sleeve-Po-on grab
Grab (it) from the sleeve!

c. dərɛ:**sa** jausa badzar kurə ʂdana
here-Po-leave- town- come- may
Setting out from here, you can get to town.

d. ndərɛ:**sa** ɢara: ɕdʐa
here-Po-out-went
(He) went out from here.

Clearly, the two sets of data are comparable and likely related.

The other non-Sinitic languages in Qinghai are less likely to be the source of the Xining dialect's postposition. Amdo Tibetan, the most widely used non-Sinitic languge in Qinghai, also suffixes a postposition to nouns in order to express the ablative, but its phonetic value—either [ne] or [ge]—is rather different than that of the Xining dialect. Other less likely candidates (Salar, Mongolian, etc.) likewise lack phonetic similarity.

In support of the proposal that the origin of the Xining dialect's ablative postposition in the Monguor ablative suffix, there is historical evidence that Monguor people were the primary inhabitants of the valleys in which Xining now lies at the time of the early Ming Dynasty (1368–1644).[11] The evidence is circumstantial, but it seems that the first "local headmen" (tǔsī 土司) established in the Xining region in the early Ming Dynasty were ancestors of the present Monguor.[12] At the same time, large numbers of Han immigrants also moved into the region, creating a language contact situation.

The manner in which the postposition came into the dialect is likely to have been through substratum interference. The Monguor inhabitants of the region, under pressure to assimilate to the dominant Han culture, probably began switching to Chinese as the numbers of Han immigrants increased in the 14th and 15th century. As speakers of Monguor shifted to Chinese, they probably did not have access to proper instruction in the target language. Therefore, when expressing the notion of source in the Chinese language, they probably inserted their native postposition [sa] into sentences, creating a hybrid dialect. There must have been sufficiently large numbers of speakers switching to Chinese so that the postposition became widely used throughout the dialect, even by those who were not originally shifting their language from Monguor to Chinese. In this way, the postposition became used throughout the dialect.

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TABLE 3. *Gender distribution of [sa] group and [tɕia] group*

	Male	Female
[sa] group	7	5
[tɕia] group	10	25

POSTPOSITIONS [tɕia] AND [sa]

In comparing the most common variants, [tɕia] and [sa], I noted earlier that they occur in identical phonological situations and express the same meaning. The only difference between the two seems to be the sociolinguistic background of the people who use them. A total of 12 people used the variant [sa]. This [sa] group had a mean age of 49.8 and a mean educational rank of 4.8, and the speakers were predominantly from rural areas (75%). The 35 people who used the variant [tɕia] had a mean age of 33.6 and a mean educational rank of 5.8, and they were split nearly evenly between rural and urban areas (17 urban, 18 rural). Thus, it seems the [sa] group is on average older, less educated, and more rural than the [tɕia] group. Of these criteria, age seems to be the most significant, suggesting that [sa] is the older form of the postposition.[13]

The other sociolinguistic variable considered in this study is sex, which does not seem to have a significant effect in the sample population. Table 3 provides the data on the sex of the [sa] and [tɕia] groups. While there is a preponderance of females in the [tɕia] group, a chi-square test results in $p > .10$, suggesting that sex is not a statistically significant factor in distinguishing the two groups.

If the ablative postposition [sa] is the oldest of the forms observable, as the Monguor and social data suggest, then there is an ongoing change in the postposition's phonetic form from the initial fricative in [sa] to the initial affricate of [tɕia], which is now the most common of the variants in my database. This is a case of phonological drift that I cannot completely explain. However, there is observable today an intermediate stage between [sa] and [tɕia]: the variant [ɕia]. Although my database includes few examples of its use, [ɕia] seems to be the obvious intermediate between the other two variants. Moreover, the two informants I recorded that use [ɕia] belonged to the same family and were one generation younger than two of the informants who used [sa].[14] In this one family, then, the change from [sa] to [ɕia] seems to be complete in one generation.[15]

A HISTORY OF THE XINING DIALECT'S ABLATIVE PATTERN

If we assume that the Chinese-speaking immigrants to Qinghai in the late 14th and early 15th century had the same ablative pattern as all other Sinitic language

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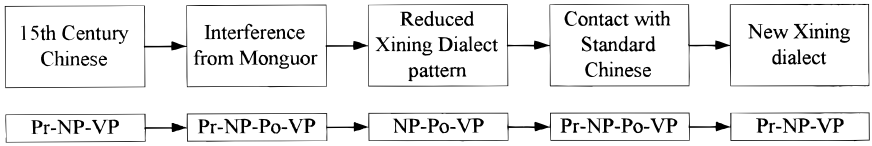


FIGURE 1. Historical development of the ablative pattern.

speakers, we can assume that they brought the ablative pattern Pr-NP-VP. When these immigrants arrived in Qinghai and began living in close proximity with speakers of Monguor, they came into contact with the NP-Po-VP pattern used in Monguor. It stands to reason that, as the languages started to mix, there was an intermediate stage in which the ablative pattern was Pr-NP-Po-VP. This pattern is redundant, with both the preposition and the postposition expressing the same "source" meaning. Therefore, in some cases speakers probably found it simpler to express source as NP-Po-VP.

As the Xining dialect comes into increasing contact with Standard Chinese, there is pressure on its native ablative pattern to change towards the Standard Chinese pattern, which is Pr-NP-VP. When that pattern mixes with the Xining dialect's native pattern, the pattern Pr-NP-Po-VP is a likely result. Note that this is the same pattern just proposed for the time of the first mixing of Monguor and Chinese. However, their developmental contexts are somewhat different. The latter pattern arises out of influence from Standard Chinese, while the former arose out of interference from Monguor.

At present, as the pressure from Standard Chinese on the Xining dialect increases, Xining is losing both its native pattern and the redundant, mixed pattern and is in the process of adopting the Standard Chinese pattern, Pr-NP-VP. The flowchart in Figure 1 summarizes the historical process described here.

The complicating factor in this historical scenario is that Standard Chinese, in one guise or another, has pressured the dialect and influenced its development throughout its history. Before the 20th century and the advent of the modern Chinese state, there was a precursor to Standard Chinese, a vernacular known as guān nhuà官话. Guān nhuà was the language common to the elite, educated class of officials of imperial China. As the language of the elite, it certainly held a prestigious position among the vernaculars of its time. Through the prestige of the speakers of guān nhuà, this vernacular was in a position to influence the speakers of the Xining dialect and to change the direction of the dialect's development from its inception up to the present. For this reason the flowchart in Figure 1 is an idealized depiction of the mainstream of syntactic change in the ablative pattern, because at times in the past, as is evident today, all three of the syntactic patterns probably co-existed. However, because of the popularization of education, the state's promotion of Standard Chinese, and a large proportion of nonnative people residing in Xining, the pressure to change toward Standard Chinese is greater now than it ever was in the past.

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TABLE 4. *Rural–urban distribution of use and non-use of Standard Chinese pattern*

	Rural	Urban	Total
Use	8	19	27
Non-use	32	12	44
Total	40	31	71

TABLE 5. *Age data for use and non-use of Standard Chinese pattern*

	Number of Informants	Mean Age	Standard Deviations
Use	27	29.9	12.5
Non-use	44	40.8	15.5

THE INFLUENCE OF STANDARD CHINESE

The process of change toward the Standard Chinese pattern is identifiable within the database collected in Xining in 1996. The sociolinguistic factors associated with the use and non-use of the Standard Chinese pattern suggests an ongoing change toward the Standard Chinese pattern that will likely be complete in the near future.

One would expect that the urban center of the metropolitan area would be at the forefront of the change toward Standard Chinese. This assumption is based on the fact that the majority of non-Qinghai natives live in the city center, levels of education are generally higher than in the countryside, and the media through which Standard Chinese is accessible (i.e., radios, televisions, etc.) have been available for a longer period of time. Indeed, the data in Table 4 suggest that the Standard Chinese pattern is more prevalent among informants from the city center. Clearly, there is a preponderance of urban informants producing the Standard Chinese pattern and relatively few rural informants producing such sentences. A 2×2 chi-square test with Yate's correction was performed on this data resulting in $p < .01$, suggesting that the difference between the urban and rural informants' use of the Standard Chinese pattern is significant.

Moreover, one would expect younger people to be at the forefront of the change toward the Standard Chinese pattern because of their generally higher levels of education and their growing up with non-Qinghai natives as playmates. Indeed, the difference between the age of those who used the Standard Chinese pattern and those who did not is also significant. The relevant data regarding the age of the two groups is presented in Table 5. A *t* test was performed on this data resulting in $p < .01$, suggesting that age is a significant difference between the group that used the Standard Chinese pattern and the one that did not.

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TABLE 6. *Educational rank of use and non-use of Standard Chinese pattern*

	Number of Informants	Mean Educational Rank	Standard Deviations
Use	27	6.4	2.1
Non-use	44	4.9	2.5

TABLE 7. *Sex distribution of use and non-use of Standard Chinese pattern*

	Males	Females	Total
Use	8	19	27
Non-use	21	23	44
Total	29	42	71

Also, one would expect more highly educated speakers to be at the forefront of the change toward the Standard Chinese pattern because Standard Chinese is the language used in schools. Table 6 provides the relevant data concerning the distribution of educational levels among those who used the Standard Chinese pattern and those who did not.

Again, it seems the group that used the Standard Chinese pattern has a higher educational rank than those that did not. A Mann-Whitney test was performed on the two groups resulting in $p < .05$, indicating that educational rank is a significant difference between the two groups.

If women, especially younger women, tend to be at the forefront of a shift toward a prestige variety, as research in other areas has suggested,[16] one would suspect that there would be a higher preponderance of women using the Standard Chinese pattern. Table 7 provides the relevant data. Clearly, there is a preponderance of females in the group that uses the Standard Chinese pattern. However, when a 2×2 chi-square test with Yate's correction on this data was performed, the result was $p > .05$, suggesting that sex is not a statistically significant factor in the use or non-use of the Standard Chinese pattern.

The age, educational rank, and urban versus rural data all suggest that there is an ongoing change toward the Standard Chinese pattern. Indeed, the confluence of so many sociolinguistic factors leading the change suggests that neither the native pattern nor the mixed patterns will survive much longer in the dialect.

THE MECHANISM OF CHANGE

From the social point of view, it is clear that the change toward Standard Chinese in the ablative pattern is working its way through the population gradually. The

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TABLE 8. *Distribution of variation among group 1*

Example	Total Number of Tokens	Pattern 1 (Pr-NP-VP) Tokens (%)	Pattern 2 (Pr-NP-Po-VP) Tokens (%)
(7a)	9	4 (44.4%)	5 (55.5)
(7b)	2	1 (50%)	1 (50)
(7c)	14	5 (35.7%)	9 (64.3)
(7d)	15	9 (60%)	6 (40)

TABLE 9. *Distribution of variation among group 2*

Example	Total Number of Tokens	Pattern 2 (Pr-NP-Po-VP) Tokens (%)	Pattern 3 (NP-Po-VP) Tokens (%)
(7a)	7	3 (42.9%)	4 (57.1%)
(7b)	3	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)
(7c)	12	2 (16.6%)	10 (83.3%)
(7d)	14	11 (78.5%)	3 (21.4%)

social group leading the change is more highly educated, young, and urban. These social attributes are generally highly regarded in Xining, and for this reason I suspect the shift toward Standard Chinese will rapidly move through the entire population.

Similarly, from a linguistic point of view, it seems the change toward Standard Chinese is working its way through the syntax gradually. As I stated earlier, the data I collected are insufficient for a complete study. In order to answer questions of what manner or mechanism is facilitating the syntactic change, one would require a questionnaire containing several dozen sentences, testing various lexical and syntactic parameters such as verb type, presence or absence of adverbs, various types of noun phrases, embedding of the ablative phrase in a dependent clause, and so on.

Nonetheless, the data collected may suggest how the change is working within the ablative pattern. That the change is gradual is fairly clear; 45% of the informants (32 of 71) used more than one ablative pattern. If the distribution of the three possible patterns is tallied for the four sentences in the questionnaire (see (7)), we may get an indication of how the change is moving through the syntax of the dialect.

The 32 informants that used multiple patterns may be divided into three groups. The first group varied between pattern 1 and pattern 2, as shown in Table 8. The second group varied between pattern 2 and pattern 3, as shown in Table 9, and the third group varied between pattern 1 and pattern 3, as shown in Table 10. None of the informants used all three patterns.

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TABLE 10. *Distribution of variation among group 3*

Example	Total Number of Tokens	Pattern 1 (Pr-NP-VP) Tokens (%)	Pattern 3 (NP-Po-VP) Tokens (%)
(7a)	2	1(50%)	1(50%)
(7b)	0	0	0
(7c)	4	1(25%)	3(75%)
(7d)	5	3(60%)	2(40%)

Certainly, with such a limited amount of data there can be no firm conclusions. However, it is clear from the distribution in the tables that (7d) is further advanced toward the Standard Chinese pattern. In Table 8 (7d) occurs more often in pattern 1 than in pattern 2, in Table 9 it occurs more often in pattern 2 than in pattern 3, and in Table 10 it occurs more often in pattern 1 than in pattern 3. The distribution of (7c) is opposite that of (7d), and (7a) and (7b) seem fairly evenly split.

This evidence suggests that verb type is a significant indicator of how the change is moving through the pattern. Sentences (7a) and (7b) both contain the verb 'to see' and have similar distributions. Sentence (7d) has the intransitive motion verb 'to return' or 'to come'. Sentence (7c) has the transitive verb 'to smoke'. Perhaps, starting with intransitive verbs ('to return', 'to come'), the change then moves to transitive verbs ('to smoke'). However, with the limited data available, this must remain but one possibility that a more thorough investigation would confirm or deny.

It should also be noted that there is a great deal of variation in (9)–(15) among words for 'window' ([tʂʻuɔ̃˧ hv˩] vs. [tʂʻuɔ̃˧ tʂʻuɔ̃˩]), 'yesterday' ([tsu˧ tʻiã˧] vs. [iɻ˨ lɛ˩ kɔ ɛ]), and other noun phrases. These variations may correspond to variations in ablative pattern used: that is, the more "native" lexical item probably corresponds with the more "native" syntactic pattern. However, it is clear that the lexical variation is present in all syntactic patterns, and so the correspondence cannot be characterized as absolute.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We should not be surprised by the change in the ablative's syntax, because change in a language is a direct reflection of change in the society that uses it, and Xining's social situation has radically changed in the past 40 years. The most significant change is the immigration of non-native Han Chinese people from other parts of the country. In the 1950s and 1960s the central government in Beijing pursued a policy of reinforcing the Han Chinese presence in the region by inducing, coercing, and forcing people from all parts of the country to take up residence at various work units in Xining.[17] This population influx raised the city's

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population from under 50,000 in 1949 to around 250,000 in 1965 and then to around 600,000 in 1985.[18]

While the new immigrants to Xining were coming from all parts of the country the central government was strongly promoting the use of Standard Chinese.[19] These new immigrants lacked a single, common vernacular and regarded the local Xining dialect with a good deal of disdain. Therefore, they readily endorsed the adoption of Standard Chinese. Over the past four decades, this endorsement of Standard Chinese has largely been accepted by native Xining people. The change in the expression of the ablative in the Xining dialect is a direct reflection of the changes in the population of the city, their willingness to accept Standard Chinese, and their increased access to it.

NOTES

1. Each example consists of four lines: the first line is in Hànzì, the second line is a phonetic transcription, the third line is an English gloss, and the fourth line is the English translation. The transcription system is a broad phonetic system, not a phonemic one. The tones indicated are those actually produced and include certain changed tones. No attempt is made here to reproduce both the base tone of the morpheme and the sandhi form. For a discussion of tone sandhi in the dialect, see Dede and Du (1997).

2. Here and throughout, NP refers to noun phrase, Pr to preposition, Po to postposition, and VP to verb phrase. Parentheses indicate that an element is optional.

3. Dwyer (1992) and Du (1995) are the most thorough descriptions of the comitative/instrumental postposition. Note that the postposition [lia] differs from the sentence-final particle of the same phonetic form.

4. Estimates are based on 1985 data found in Zhai Songtian (1989:245).

5. Some of the students I interviewed had fairly good English and welcomed the opportunity to use it. I did not notice any difference in responses collected during English interviews and those collected in Standard Chinese interviews.

6. Foreigners are often regarded with a bit of fear and suspicion in Xining, and consequently many of my informants were reluctant to work with me or only worked with me as a favor to a friend. Also, many of the interviews were carried out in homes in villages. My presence in the village naturally aroused some excitement, and relatives and neighbors would often come by to have a look, thereby disrupting the interview.

7. While the postposition is regularly pronounced in the neutral tone, the prepositions are sometimes given full tonal value and sometimes not. For consistency, the prepositions in the examples are given full tonal value.

8. I am not entirely sure what to make of the variation in the prepositions. However, those informants that used these other variants as the ablative preposition also used them for other prepositions, including locative and instrumental/comitative. Perhaps in the early history of the dialect all prepositions were replaced by postpositions, and then after more contact with other Chinese dialects the need for prepositions was re-introduced, at which time some speakers favored one and others favored another. This appears to be the situation as it stands now, but the entire question of prepositions in the dialect requires further research.

9. The Monguor are officially referred to as Tǔzú 土族, but many in the group regard this name as a bit demeaning and prefer the name Monguor, which more closely reflects the word they use to designate themselves.

10. Monguor has two major dialectal distinctions. The first, upon which most of the published descriptions of Monguor are based, is Huzhu 互助 Monguor, spoken primarily in Huzhu Monguor Autonomous County, northeast of Xining. The second is Minhe 民和 Monguor, spoken primarily in Minhe Hui and Monguor Autonomous County east of Xining. The latter variety of Monguor is poorly described. What little I can find out about it is gleaned from Qingge'ertai (1991). Huzhu Monguor is geographically closer to the city of Xining and probably the more likely candidate as the source of the Xining dialect's interference. The Monguor examples in (16) are from two sources. Examples (16a,b) are from Zhaonasitu (1981:20), and (16c,d) are from Qingge'ertai (1991:162–163). Both sources

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state the "ablative/comparative case" (cóng-bǐ gé 从比格) marker is [sa]. The emphasis in the examples is mine.

11. For information on the history of Han Chinese immigration to the Xining region, see Dede (1993:26–48).

12. These headmen were to act as administrators of their communities on behalf of the Ming bureaucracy.

13. A *t* test on the difference between the mean ages of the two groups resulted in $t = 5.15$ and $p < .05$, suggesting that age is a significant difference between the two populations.

14. This family resided in Cao Jiazhai 曹家寨, a village east of the center of town. The two older informants are brothers, and both used [sa]. The generation younger than the two brothers, consisting of the eldest brother's son and nephew, used [ɕia]. Another of the eldest brother's nephews also used [ɕia]. However, because I determined that this nephew used [ɕia] in a conversation rather than a formal interview, I did not include it in the database.

15. Other people from the same village most commonly use [tɕia], suggesting that this one family is a bit conservative.

16. See Chambers' (1995:163–165) summary of Susan Gal's work, the source of this observation.

17. Immigrants came from all parts of the country, but there seems to be a preponderance of northern Chinese people. Based on unscientific observations, it seems that Shaanxi 陕西 is the source of many, if not the majority, of the immigrants.

18. Figures from Zhai Songtian (1989:226). In fact, the population grew from under 50,000 in 1949 to around 700,000 in the late 1950s, before the famines of 1961–1962 caused a rapid decrease in population and put a temporary stop to the policy of forced immigration. Exact population figures for the present are sketchy, but I have heard that the city's population is now approaching 1,000,000.

19. All major schools in Xining have banners urging students and teachers to "Speak Standard Chinese, and Write Standard Chinese Characters" (Shuō Pǔtōnghuà, xiě guīfàn zì 说普通话，写规范字). I have never seen such banners in any other part of China.

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