

## ON THE HIERARCHY OF STRUCTURAL CONVERGENCE IN THE AMDO SPRACHBUND

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The *Amdo Sprachbund*, also known as the Qinghai-Gansu Sprachbund (Slater 2003), comprises ca. 15 languages and/or principal dialects spoken in the Sino-Tibetan borderland historically known as the Amdo Province of Ethnic Tibet, and today divided between the Gansu and Qinghai Provinces of China. The languages of the Sprachbund belong to four linguistic stocks: Turkic (Sarygh Yughur, Salar), Mongolic (Shira Yughur, Huzhu Mongghul, Minhe Mangghuer, Qinghai Bonan, Gansu Bonan, Kangjia, Santa), Sinitic (Northwest Mandarin, Hezhou, Tangwang, Gangou, Wutun), and Bodic (Amdo Tibetan, with variants). All of the idioms concerned have undergone interactive adaptations, which may be seen as manifestations of mutual “creolization”. Speaking of “creoles” in the proper sense of the term is nevertheless unjustified, since the distinction between the four genetic lineages remains synchronically unambiguous, as is evident from the genetically diagnostic sections of linguistic substance (basic vocabulary, morphological elements). Outside of the Amdo Sprachbund, but partly within the same physical region, other languages are spoken which also represent the same four linguistic stocks: Turkic (Kazakh), Mongolic (Qinghai Oirat), Sinitic (Standard Mandarin), and Bodic (Khams Tibetan, marginally also variants of Central Tibetan).

The mutually conditioned structural developments observed in the languages of the Amdo Sprachbund may be divided into four categories: *active positive* (adoption of a new feature), *active negative* (loss of an original feature), *passive positive* (retention of an original feature), and *passive negative* (non-adoption of a new feature) (Janhunen 2001). As a result, the participants of the Sprachbund share a significant number of properties at all levels of linguistic structure (phonology, morphology, morphosyntax, syntax, discourse). Not all properties are shared by all the participants, however. Diachronically, it is possible to operate with three typological spheres, which variously cover the languages of the Sprachbund: the Altaic sphere, the Sinitic sphere, and the Bodic sphere. Features representing the Altaic sphere (as understood in the typological sense only) are mainly manifested as a general substratum, uniformly present in all the languages of the Sprachbund, while features representing the Sinitic and Bodic spheres are often, though not necessarily, mutually exclusive. Thus, the Sinitic and Bodic languages of the Sprachbund may be said to share a basic Altaic typological orientation with their Turkic and Mongolic partners. The contrast between the Sinitic and Bodic spheres is most clearly observed in the Mongolic languages of the Sprachbund, which can have an exclusively Sinitic orientation (Santa), an exclusively Bodic orientation (Shira Yughur, Huzhu Mongghul, Qinghai Bonan), or a primary Bodic orientation upon which secondary Sinitic features have been added (Minhe Mangghuer, Kangjia, Gansu Bonan).

Apart from the overall Altaic orientation of all the languages of the Amdo Sprachbund (the highest level of interaction), and the cumulative impact of the contrasting Sinitic and Bodic typological spheres (the medium level of interaction), there are also more localized relationships of structural adaptation (the lowest level of interaction). These are manifested as an even closer convergence especially at the morphosyntactic and phonotactic levels, making the participating idioms mutually fully convertible both morphologically (*isomorphy*) and phonologically (*isophony*). Even in such cases, at least synchronically, one of the languages seems to be the dominant partner, while the other(s) take(s) a recessive position, as can be deduced from the generally unilateral forms of bilingualism. The most obvious such case is formed by Minhe Mangghuer (dominant) and Gangou (recessive) (Zhu & al. 1997), but the areal union between Santa (dominant) and Tangwang (recessive) may also turn out to be a relevant example. Another pair of convergent languages is formed by Qinghai Bonan and Wutun, though it is difficult to establish for the time being to what extent their parallelism is due to their immediate mutual interaction, and to what extent it is conditioned by their independent convergence under the impact of the local form (the Rebgong dialect) of Amdo Tibetan (the dominant form of speech and *lingua franca* in the area).

Although the structural properties characteristic of the Amdo Sprachbund are present in several languages in parallel, it is generally possible to single out for each property the specific linguistic stock, or stocks, from which the property ultimately derives. At the syntactic level, for instance, the basic word order in the Sprachbund is SVO, which is typically an Altaic (as well as, possibly, Bodic) feature secondarily in-

troduced into the Sinitic (as well as, possibly, Bodic) languages of the Sprachbund. At the morphosyntactic level, Altaic (as well as, partly, Bodic) features include the systems of suffixally (or postclitically) marked nominal cases and verbal tense-aspect categories. The use of postpositions (often with genitive rection) seems also to be a feature deriving mainly from the Altaic sphere of the Sprachbund. On the other hand, the loss of the category of suffixally marked personal conjugation in the Turkic languages of the Sprachbund (Sarygh Yughur, Salar), as well as the non-introduction of personal conjugation in the Mongolic languages of the Sprachbund (in deviation from several other branches of Mongolic), clearly represent the impact of the Sinitic and Bodic typological spheres. An important feature of the discourse level contributed to the Amdo Sprachbund by Bodic (Amdo Tibetan) is the category of perspective, documented to a varying degree from several Turkic (Sarygh Yughur, Salar?), Mongolic (Shira Yughur, Huzhu Mongghul, Minhe Mangghuer, Qinghai Bonan, Gansu Bonan, Kangjia?), and Sinitic (Gangou? Wutun?) languages of the region. Another Bodic (supported by Sinitic) feature is the presence of a final indefinite article (from the numeral ‘one’) in some of the Mongolic languages of the Sprachbund (Huzhu Mongghul, Minhe Mangghuer, Qinghai Bonan, Gansu Bonan).

From the analysis of the structural features shared by the languages of the Amdo Sprachbund it is obvious that certain structural properties were liable to be transmitted by areal contact, while others were not. In contrast to the conventional understanding of “creolization”, it would be wrong to view the diachronic developments that have taken place in the participating languages as manifestations of a tendency towards overall grammatical simplification, in which the Sprachbund would end up exhibiting the smallest common denominator for each given feature. For instance, the loss (or non-development) of personal conjugation in some languages of the Sprachbund may be seen as a simplification, but the effect of this simplification is counteracted by the parallel adoption of the new category of perspective, which in some respects overlaps functionally with the category of person. It is simply not possible to determine which feature is universally less complex, personal conjugation or a grammaticalized system of perspective (though the latter is certainly less frequent among the languages of the world). The real issue is, however, *why* it was the category of person that receded in the Amdo Sprachbund, while the category of perspective expanded into new languages. This may have been connected with the demographic and cultural power relations of the languages concerned, but it is also possible that there is an inherent, though not necessarily universal, hierarchy of structural convergence, rendering some features more liable to be borrowed than others.

If the assumption of a hierarchy of structural convergence is correct, it is interesting to have a look at such features in the languages of the Amdo Sprachbund that have generally *not* been transmitted across language boundaries. It is not impossible that such features represent exceptionally persistent and, consequently, conservative properties of language, on a par with the contrast between head-marking and dependent-marking grammars (Nichols 1986). Not surprisingly, among such features we find the basic difference between accusative and ergative strategies of sentence structure. In the Amdo Sprachbund, Amdo Tibetan (like other forms of Tibetan) is consistently an ergative language, and in spite of its otherwise Altaic sentence structure it has not adopted the accusative strategy of Altaic typology. On the other hand, the Turkic and Mongolic languages of the Amdo Sprachbund keep their original accusative strategy with the only complication that the Mongolic (but not the Turkic) languages of the region have replaced the actual accusative by a syncretic connective case which also functions as a genitive (Janhunen 2002). Interestingly, the Sinitic languages of the region have generally adopted the accusative model (with no syncretism between accusative and genitive), while the ergative strategy seems to have remained alien to them. This may be connected with the fact that the direct impact of Bodic on Sinitic in the Amdo Sprachbund is rare (the only exception being Wutun). A secondary ergative is, however, reported from a “creolized” variety of Chinese (Daohua) spoken in Northern Sichuan (Ye.shes.vod.gsal xA.tshogs 2003).

Another apparently conservative feature for which the languages of the Amdo Sprachbund retain their original structural diversity is the word order of the nominal phrase. The languages belonging to the Altaic and Sinitic typological spheres exhibit the widespread Altaic (and Sinitic) word order GAN, in which both the genitival (G) and the adjectival (A) attribute precede the head noun. Amdo Tibetan (like other forms of Tibetan), by contrast, belongs to the Southeast Asian area of languages in which the adjectival attribute (including adjectivally used numerals and pronouns) follows the head noun, while only the genitival attribute precedes the head noun, yielding the order GNA (Dryer 2003). With the exception of the final indefinite article (based on the numeral ‘one’), as well as the occasional use of borrowed Tibetan numerals in a Mongolic context (Qinghai Bonan), this feature seems not to have crossed language boundaries within the Amdo

Sprachbund, leaving a fundamental structural difference between the Bodic and non-Bodic languages of the region.

It has to be noted that almost all the languages and dialects of the Amdo Sprachbund, including even those for which relatively large systematic grammars and/or dictionaries are available (Sarygh Yughur, Salar, Huzhu Mongghul, Minhe Mangghuer, Amdo Tibetan), are still insufficiently documented, especially as far as their syntactic and discourse properties are concerned. It will take a lot of more effort to map their individual grammatical systems in detail, so that a more comprehensive understanding of their shared properties and areal relationships can arise. A fortunate circumstance in this context is that almost all of the languages (and even dialects) concerned are still alive, being transmitted to the next generation. Therefore, the Amdo Sprachbund remains a promising laboratory for future fieldwork on contact linguistics.

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