

The Historical-Morphosyntactic Development of the Omotic-Mao Verb

The verbal systems of Omotic languages are complex, varied, and problematic for reconstruction, posing problems for subgrouping (Bender 2000:215). The Mao subgroup (Seezo, Hozo, Ganza, and Mawes Aas'e (MA)), an early split from Proto-Omotic (Bender 2003), shows significant divergence from the wider family. This paper explores developments in the verbal systems of the Mao languages from their common Omotic base, tracing major innovations in the grammaticalization of subject marking, aspectual morphology, and the development of disparate item-arrangements in verbal words.

In many Omotic languages, reduced pronominals move throughout the clause, cliticizing to topical elements, e.g. co-referential pronouns, initial constituents, and the verb (Hellenthal 2010:429). The Mao languages show a range of phenomena related to these reduced pronominals. In Seezo and MA, reduced pronominals have prefixed to the verb, becoming subject-marking inflections. This move from clitic > prefix has impacted both the verbal systems and the free pronominal systems of these languages (e.g. verbal subject-markers triggered the development of new pronominal forms with relic verbal morphology still visible: /hà-w-/ AFF-2PL prefix > /hàwèl/ 2PL pronoun with fused AFF, cf. Ahland 2014 for MA). Ganza also shows evidence of its reduced pronominal clitics moving toward verbal prefixation in some constructions.

Most Omotic languages exhibit a verbal base with the order: root-derivation-aspect-modality (cf. Amha 2001; Rapold 2006; Ahland 2012). The Mao languages show augmentation of this verbal base through the collapse of both verb serialization constructions and clause chains. First, the Mao languages developed aspectual forms through serialization (e.g. 'have' > Perfect, 'finish' > completive/perfective; and 'disappear' > Perfect) where grammaticalized forms suffix to the lexical root--typologically common in OV systems. Interestingly, these languages also developed aspectual prefixes through the collapse of clause chains. For instance, the reconstructed lexical verb *kòb- 'sit' (> durative and progressive) developed along this chaining route and has resulted in unexpected pre-root positions for aspectual markers across all the Mao languages: durative in MA (1) and progressive in the others (2-4). In Seezo, a relic of the clause chain marker (/n/) remains on the new verbal prefixes (2).

Mawes Aas'e

(1) ha-tí-kò-jé:ts' -l'á
AFF-1SG-DUR-run-DECL
'I ran for a while.'

Seezo

(2) jé-kés kón-hel-hùzz-á
DEF-land PROG-3-farm-DECL
'They are farming the land.' (from Mengistu 2015:209)

Hozo

(3) ná kó-má-tí-ì
1SG PROG-eat-PST-REAL
'I was eating.' (Getachew 2015:229)

Ganza

(4) suk-sa=di gára-háv-bò
store-LOC =1SG PROG-go-DECL
'I am going to the store.'

Finally, nominalization/subordination played a role in the development of Mao verbal forms: periphrastic (subordinate + main clause constructions) collapsed into single verbal words. Across the Mao subgroup, erstwhile nominalizers/subordinators and auxiliaries can be found as relics inside resulting verb-forms. This collapse has resulted in new subject suffixes for future/irrealis forms in MA, Seezo, and Ganza.

The significance of this paper is that it attempts a historical account of how the Mao verbal systems developed and diverged from the larger Omotic family and from one another. The study underscores the possibility of reconstructing these systems to further clarify linguistic relatedness.

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