

## Modal Auxiliaries in Qīnghǎi Chinese

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### Abstract

The Chinese dialects of northeastern Qīnghǎi and southwestern Gānsù provinces have long been recognized for how they reflect their multilingual environment and their typological difference from other Mandarin dialects. To date, most evidence for structural interference from non-Chinese languages that cause this typological difference has centered on noun phrases and their grammatical relationships. There has been little description of the internal composition of complex verb structures. This paper will present new data on the syntax of modal auxiliary verbs in one sub-dialect of Qīnghǎi Chinese that shows these structures also exhibit evidence of interference through contact with non-Chinese languages. Further, I will argue this form is under increased pressure to conform with Modern Standard Mandarin (MSM) and will likely disappear in the near future.

### Keywords

Qīnghǎi dialect, language contact, language change, modal auxiliary, dialect syntax

## 1.

The Chinese dialects of northeastern Qīnghǎi and southwestern Gānsù provinces have long been recognized for how they reflect their multilingual environment and their typological difference from other Mandarin dialects (Cheng 1980, Zhang and Zhu 1987, Wang 2012, etc.). To date, most evidence for structural interference from non-Chinese languages that cause this typological difference has centered on noun phrases and their grammatical relationships. For example, the postposition *lja* 倆<sup>1</sup> attaches to nouns, indicating the equivalent of instrumental case, as in (1) below (Dede 2009):<sup>2</sup>

- (1) 我            鋼筆倆    寫慣                    了    毛筆倆    寫    不來  
 no<sup>3</sup>      kō<sup>1</sup>pj<sup>3</sup> lja    ɕj<sup>3</sup>kwā                    ljo    mo<sup>2</sup>pj<sup>3</sup> lja    ɕj<sup>3</sup>    pw le<sup>2</sup>  
 1stSing pen-INT write-accustomed PRT brush-INT write cannot  
 ‘I’m used to writing with a pen; I can’t write with a brush.’

Similar evidence shows a range of other grammatical relationships including commitative, ablative and accusative, which are expressed in a similar syntactic pattern (Dede 1999, 2007, 2009). However, with a few notable exceptions (Zhang 2007 and Wang 2012), there has been little description of the internal composition of complex verb structures. This paper will present new data on the syntax of modal auxiliary verbs in one sub-dialect of Qīnghǎi Chinese that shows these structures also exhibit evidence of interference through contact with non-Chinese languages. Further, I will argue this form is under increased pressure to conform with Modern Standard Mandarin (MSM) and will likely disappear in the near future.

<sup>1</sup> The character 倆 is not meant to represent the *běnzì* 本字 or ‘etymological root’ of the word it transcribes. It is simply a conventionally used graph representing an etymologically obscure morpheme in the dialect. Note also that 倆 is homophonous with the sentence final mood particle *lja*, as in (2). The same graph is used to transcribe both morphemes, though the morphemes themselves are unrelated.

<sup>2</sup> The transliteration used in this paper is based on Kawasumi’s (2006, 2009) description of the urban Xīning dialect. There is some variation in the pronunciation across the sub-dialect, but this system is generally applicable. Abbreviations used in the glosses are as follows: 1stSing=first person singular pronoun, 2ndSing=second person singular pronoun, 2ndPl=second person plural pronoun, 3rdSing=third person singular pronoun, ACC=accusative, COMP=verbal complement, COND=conditional marker, EMP=emphatic marker, ERG=ergative marker, INT=instrumental, Fut.Prt=future particle, MW=measure word, NOM=nominalizer, NonPst=non-past particle, Prep=preposition, Pres=present tense, PRT=mood particle, Qprt=question particle, QUOT=quotative marker, TOP=topic marker.

## 2.

Qīnghǎi Chinese refers to the Chinese language spoken by the people of metropolitan Xīníng (which includes the counties of Huángzhōng, Huángyuán, and Dàtōng Huí and Tǔ Autonomous County), Hǎidōng Prefecture (which includes the counties of Píng'ān, Hùzhǔ Tǔ Autonomous County, Lèdū, Mínhé Huí and Tǔ Autonomous County, Huàlóng Huí Autonomous County and Xúnhuà Salar Autonomous County), Tónggrén Tibetan Autonomous County in Hénán Prefecture, and Guǐdé County in Hǎinán Prefecture. There are Chinese dialects in other prefectures and counties throughout the province, but they are relatively newly formed, unstable, and under-investigated. Within Qīnghǎi Chinese, there are three subdialects: 1) Hézhōu, encompassing the counties of Tónggrén, Xúnhuà, and Huàlóng, which are aligned along the Yellow River and share lexical and phonological features with the Línxià dialect across the border in Gānsù, 2) Lèdū-Mínhé, which shares features with the Lánzhōu dialect across the border in Gānsù, and 3) Xīníng, encompassing the remaining counties, and which I have elsewhere termed Huángshuǐ Chinese after the major waterway connecting the region (with the notable exception of Guǐdé, which lies on Yellow River) (Dede 2003).

This study focuses exclusively on the Xīníng sub-dialect. There are over two million residents in the region where this sub-dialect is spoken, spread across rural and heavily urban environments. A large percentage of the residents are relatively recent immigrants, having moved to the city from other dialect areas in China after 1949 (Dede 2006). Consequently, the actual number of speakers of the dialect is considerably smaller than two million, perhaps fewer than one million. Given the large number of non-native inhabitants, there is considerable pressure from Modern Standard Mandarin (MSM) on the dialect, which reflects this pressure through a great amount of variation in its phonology, lexicon, and syntax (Dede 2006).

## 3.

Wáng (2012) briefly mentions a modal auxiliary for expressing conjectures, roughly the equivalent of the MSM modal kěnéng 可能, as in the following (Wang 2012: 476):

- (2) 我      後日                      家裏      去      呵<sup>3</sup>      也      闖<sup>4</sup>      倆<sup>5</sup>  
 no<sup>3</sup>      xu<sup>4</sup>zj<sup>2</sup>                      tɛja<sup>1</sup>l      tɛ<sup>h</sup>j<sup>4</sup>      xo      je<sup>3</sup>      tɕ<sup>h</sup>wǒ<sup>3</sup>      lja  
 1stSing day-after-tomorrow home-in go COND also probably PRT  
 ‘I’ll probably go home the day after tomorrow.’ ( “我後天有可能回家” )

As Wáng notes, examples such as this share a striking similarity to Amdo Tibetan (example gathered from native Amdo speaker, July 2013):

- (3) *kho-yis*              *nganglag*              *sa-na-thang*  
 3rdSing-ERG      banana              eatPres-COND-probably  
 ‘He will probably eat a banana.’

and Mongghul, a Mongolic language spoken in Qīnghǎi and parts of Gānsù, sometimes referred to as Monguor, and also known as Tūyǔ 土語 (example gathered from native Mongghul speaker, July 2013):

- (4) *gan*              *xangjoggi*              *rde-sa*              *chuang*  
 3rdSing              banana-ACC              eat-COND              probably  
 ‘He will probably eat a banana.’

In all three of these examples, the key elements may be generalized as follows:

Pattern #1: MainVerb(MV)-ConditionalMarker(CM)-ModalAuxiliary(MA)

The salient difference with MSM is that in the three languages spoken in Qīnghǎi the MA follows the MV, while in MSM the MA precedes the MV. Having observed these phenomena in earlier fieldwork on the Xīníng dialect, in 2009 I endeavored to gather data to find out whether this pattern occurred with other modal auxiliaries.

<sup>3</sup> Though glossed as a conditional marker, the morpheme also serves to mark sentential topics.

<sup>4</sup> The character 闖 in (2) does not represent the etymological root, or *běnzì*, as in the previous note.

<sup>5</sup> The exact meaning of the sentence final mood particle *lja* 倆 is not entirely clear, but it seems to represent a kind of *realis* mood. Further, it is probably a fusion of the particle / 哩 and *ja* 呀.

## 4.

In autumn 2009 and winter 2010, I gathered conversational data from native speakers of the Xīníng sub-dialect. The data were gathered through free-flowing conversations among two, three or four native speakers. In some cases a native-speaker assistant was part of the conversation, in others the participants conversed among themselves. The participants represent a broad geographic (both urban and rural speakers) and socio-economic range (students, workers, doctors, etc.), yet half of the thirty-two speakers were students at Qīnghǎi Normal University. In total, the dataset consists of nearly forty hours of recorded conversations. Assistants and I transcribed the recordings in Chinese characters, and that dataset is the source for the following analysis.

## 5.

The necessitative modal auxiliary *jo*<sup>4</sup> 要 ‘must’ occurs in two patterns, most commonly in the MSM pattern before the main verb, as in the following:

- (5) …大下            呵            要            學習  
       ta<sup>4</sup> xa            xo            jo<sup>4</sup>        ɕyo<sup>2</sup>ɕj<sup>2</sup>  
       …big-COMP    COND    must    study  
       ‘…once [they’ve] grown up, they have to study.’

We may generalize this as follows:

Pattern #2: MA-MV

However, there is also a pattern in which the modal occurs after the main verb, as in the following examples:

- (6) 你            再            好好地        學            的            要            倆  
       ni<sup>3</sup>            tse<sup>4</sup>        xo<sup>3</sup>xo<sup>3</sup>tsj    ɕyo<sup>2</sup>        tsj        jo<sup>4</sup>        lja  
       2ndSing    then    properly    study    NOM    must    PRT  
       ‘You, then, have to study well.’

- (7) 考上            說   呵            趕緊   準備   的   要   倆  
 k<sup>h</sup>o<sup>3</sup>ʃõ        fo   xo        kã<sup>3</sup>tɕjã   tɕwã<sup>3</sup>pe<sup>4</sup>   tsj   jo<sup>4</sup>   lja  
 test-COMP   say   COND   hurry   prepare   NOM   must   PRT  
 ‘In regards taking the test, you have to hurry up and prepare.’
- (8) 排隊            的   要            哩            嗎            說  
 p<sup>h</sup>e<sup>2</sup>twi<sup>4</sup>        tsj        jo<sup>4</sup>        l            ma        fo  
 line up        NOM   must   PRT        Qprt     QUOT  
 ‘[I] said, “Do you have to line up?”’

In each of the examples, the MV is nominalized with *tsj* 的 before the MA is attached. We may generalize this as follows:

Pattern #3: MV-NOM-MA

Pattern 3 also occurs with more complicated MVs, such as verb-complement compounds, as in the following examples:

- (9) …學        去        的        要        哩        哦  
 …ɕjo<sup>4</sup>        tɕ<sup>h</sup>j        tsj        jo<sup>4</sup>        l        o  
 …study    go        NOM    must    PRT    Qprt  
 ‘…doesn’t [he] need to go study?’
- (10) …計劃生育部                    裏   簽   去   的   要   哩   撒  
 …tɕj<sup>4</sup> xwa<sup>4</sup> ʃã<sup>1</sup> y<sup>4</sup> pw<sup>4</sup>        l        tɕ<sup>h</sup>jã<sup>1</sup>   tɕ<sup>h</sup>j   tsj   jo<sup>4</sup>   l        sa  
 …family planning bureau   in   sign-in   go   NOM   must   PRT   PRT  
 ‘…[you] have to go sign-in at the family planning bureau.’

In (9) and (10), the verb is followed by the directional complement *tɕ<sup>h</sup>j* 去 before the morphologically complex verb is nominalized with *tsj* 的 and attached to the MA.

Pattern 3 also occurs with Verb-Object verb compounds:

- (11) 信息中心                    去   呵            你們   還是   辦證            的  
 ɕjã<sup>1</sup>ɕj<sup>1</sup> tɕwã<sup>1</sup>ɕjã<sup>1</sup>        tɕ<sup>h</sup>j        xo        ni<sup>3</sup>mã    xe<sup>2</sup>sj    pã<sup>4</sup>tɕã<sup>4</sup>        tsj  
 information center   go   TOP   2ndPI   still   get accredited   NOM

要 哩 唄  
 jo<sup>4</sup> l pe  
 must PRT PRT

‘After going to the information center, you still have to get accreditations.’

In one example, the pattern occurs with a post-verbal generic measure word indicating quantity:

(12) 多 學上 點 的 要 倆  
 tu<sup>1</sup> ɕjo<sup>2</sup> ʂɔ̃ tʃã<sup>3</sup> tsj jo<sup>4</sup> lja  
 more study-COMP a little NOM must prt  
 ‘[You] have to study a little more.’

It is important to point out that this is a pattern in the dialect, not the result of an afterthought or disjointed expression. The dataset included one example of the necessitative modal occurring at the end of the sentence as a kind of resumptive, as in the following:

(13) 提前 傢<sup>6</sup> 找 工作 倆 要  
 ts<sup>h</sup>j<sup>2</sup> tɕ<sup>h</sup>jã<sup>2</sup> tɕja<sup>2</sup> tʂo<sup>3</sup> kwɔ̃<sup>1</sup> tswo<sup>1</sup> lja jo<sup>4</sup>  
 beforehand 3rdSing search work PRT must  
 ‘He must look for work beforehand.’

Note the difference between the syntax of (13) and (6)-(12). In (13), the verb phrase (VP) 找工作 ‘search for work’ is followed by the particle *lja* 倆, a sentence final particle that seems to indicate a kind of *realis* mood (see note 4 above). This particle generally is sentence final, or at least post-VP. In examples (6)-(12) the main verb is never followed by *lja* 倆, but the MA is followed by ! 哩 or *lja* 倆. The particle indicates the end of the clause, so the MA in (13) is clearly a kind of resumptive, or afterthought, not a regular syntactic phenomenon.

<sup>6</sup> The third person singular pronoun occurs in two forms, tɕja<sup>2</sup> 傢 and t<sup>h</sup>a<sup>1</sup> 他. They seem to be in free variation, though it is interesting to note that Amdo Tibetan also generally employs two different forms for this pronoun.

Perhaps the most intriguing examples in the database are those in which Patterns 2 and 3 are merged into a doubly-marked, hybrid pattern, which we generalize as follows:

Pattern #4: MA-MV-NOM-MA

This pattern is rare, only occurring in the following three examples:

- (14) 可 要 重讀 一遍 的 要 倆  
 k<sup>h</sup>o<sup>3</sup> jo<sup>4</sup> tɕ<sup>h</sup>wǎ<sup>2</sup> tw<sup>2</sup> j<sup>1</sup> pjǎ<sup>4</sup> tsj jo<sup>4</sup> lja  
 EMP must re-study one-MW NOM must PRT  
 ‘[You] will have to study again one more time.’
- (15) 你 還 得 學 點 別的 知識 的 要 倆  
 ni<sup>3</sup> xe<sup>2</sup> ti<sup>1</sup> ɕjo<sup>2</sup> tjǎ<sup>3</sup> pi<sup>1</sup>tsj tsj<sup>1</sup>sj<sup>1</sup> tsj jo<sup>4</sup> lja  
 2ndSing still must study a bit other knowledge NOM must PRT  
 ‘You still have to study some other areas of knowledge.’
- (16) 我 得 加上 的 要 倆 我 得 把  
 no<sup>3</sup> ti<sup>1</sup> tɕja<sup>1</sup>ɕǔ<sup>3</sup> tsj jo<sup>4</sup> lja no<sup>3</sup> ti<sup>1</sup> pa<sup>3</sup>  
 1stSing must add NOM must PRT 1stSing must Prep  
 傢 加上  
 tɕja<sup>2</sup> tɕja<sup>1</sup> ɕǔ<sup>3</sup>  
 3rdSing add  
 ‘I had to add [him]; I had to add him.’

In (14) the speaker uses the necessative modal 要 before the main verb as in MSM Pattern 2, and the nominalization and modal after the main verb as in the dialect’s Pattern 3. In (15) and (16) the speakers used an alternate form of the necessative modal 得 before the main verb and the nominalization and modal after the verb. Note, also, that in (16), the speaker restates the sentence without the double-marking modal, switching to the more common MSM Pattern 2. Though rare, this hybrid Pattern 4 attests to an ongoing change in the dialect, one where the growing influence of MSM is blending Pattern 3 with Pattern 2.

There are three further pieces of evidence that support the contention that Pattern 3 is an older pattern in the process of being replaced by MSM’s Pattern 2. First, Pattern 3 is similar to the patterns for necessitative modals in the non-Sinitic languages in the

region. Consider the following examples from Amdo Tibetan (gathered July 2013 from a native speaker):

- (17) *kho-yis*      *sman*      *'thung*      *dgos*  
 3rdSing      medicine      drink-Pres.      must  
 'He needs to take medicine.'
- (18) *kho*      *'gro*      *dgos*  
 3rdSing      go-Pres.      must  
 'He must go.'

The Amdo Tibetan word-order is similar to Pattern 3, the main verb in its present tense form is followed by the auxiliary. Similarly, consider the following Mongghul examples:

- (19) *gan*      *luanhan*      *rde-gu*      *gulagu-na*  
 3rdSing      a lot      eat-FutPrt      need-NonPst  
 'He needs to eat more.'
- (20) *gan*      *qidarini*      *luanhan*      *suri-gu*      *gulagu-na*  
 3rdSing      Chinese      a lot      study-FutPrt      need-NonPst  
 'He needs to study more Chinese.'

Here, too, the modal auxiliary follows the main verb. The difference between Mongghul and Amdo Tibetan with regards necessitative modals is that the Amdo modal directly follows the verb. In Mongghul, on the other hand, the verb is modified by the suffix *-gu* which Faehndrich (2007: 167) has called a future participle, but which is certainly derived from what Poppe (1991: 94) called the *nomen futuri* in Written Mongolian. In effect, the Mongghul main verb becomes nominalized before the modal is added after it. The Mongghul pattern, derived from Classical Mongolian, is an exact replica of the Qīnghǎi Dialect Pattern 3.

There are, to the best of my knowledge, no other varieties of Chinese, past or present, in which necessitative modals follow a nominalized main verb, as in Pattern 3 (see Norman 1988: 100-101, 124-125). We must conclude that the Qīnghǎi Chinese Pattern 3 developed under the influence of non-Sinitic languages in the area, and most likely under the influence of Mongghul. The contact that led to this development began

around five hundred years ago (Dede 2003). Therefore, Pattern 3 represents a relatively old stratum. Pattern 2 represents both an archaic, pre-contact stratum and a modern stratum developing under contact with MSM.

The second piece of evidence suggesting Pattern 3 is being replaced by Pattern 2 is geographic variation in the two patterns. Pattern 3 only occurs among speakers from rural backgrounds in our dataset. One recorded conversation in the dataset was among four residents of urban Xīníng, whose families had lived in the city for generations. All four speakers were over sixty years old. In the two hour conversation, there was not a single occurrence of Pattern 3. While this small sample size does not constitute conclusive proof, it suggests that Pattern 3 is indicative of rural speech, somewhat distinct from urban Xīníng speech. There are a number of possibilities why urban and rural varieties differ. First, the original settlers in the city were likely less influenced by non-Sinitic languages when the language community was first formed. Second, the urban environment has been more heavily influenced by MSM, and its predecessor *guānhuà* 官話, through mass media and the educational system. In either case, it suggests Pattern 3 is an old pattern under pressure to change to Pattern 2.

The third piece of evidence, which is the relative rarity of Pattern 3, suggests that it will not likely survive much longer. The dataset includes roughly 40 hours of conversation, of which there were around 114 examples of necessitative modal usage, of which 89 (78%) were in the MSM Pattern 2 (including instances of 一定要 and 需要), while there were only 25 (22%) in Pattern 3. The sample size of consultants was too limited to allow an analysis of demographic variation among users of different patterns, except for the association of Pattern 3 with rural speakers. Nonetheless, given Pattern 3's relative rarity in this dataset, we suspect it will likely give way to the MSM Pattern 2 in a generation or two.

## 6.

The data presented here further supports the argument that the Chinese dialects of Qīnghǎi have been syntactically restructured under the influence of non-Sinitic languages. The modal auxiliaries expressing conjecture and necessity occur in patterns that are identical in structure to the neighboring Mongghul language. The patterns are typologically distinct from other varieties of Chinese, suggesting that they arose under influence from Mongghul.

Second, the data suggest the variation in the expression of modality is an indication that this distinctive feature of the dialect will succumb to pressure to conform to MSM, thereby reducing the range of variation found among Chinese languages.

### Acknowledgements

It is my honor to present this research as a token of my appreciation for Professor Anne Yue, my teacher and mentor, whose tireless work to describe the fullness of Chinese dialect grammar inspired its conception and execution. The research was also made possible with a generous grant from Fulbright-Hayes. I also would like to thank Qinghai Normal University for their support during 2009-2010 when the data were gathered, and the numerous assistants and language consultants who devoted their time to gathering data and transcribing recordings. Without their help, this project would not have been possible. Any shortcomings in the work, of course, are the responsibility of the author.

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# 青海漢語方言的語氣助動詞

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## 提要

青海省東北農業區和甘肅省甘南地區的漢語方言早就被認定為多語環境的產物，其類型與其它官話方言有明顯的區別。到目前為止，多數研究只是表明這種區別表現在名詞短語內在結構上，而並未就複雜的動詞短語進行充分的闡述說明。這份報告會介紹青海漢語方言的語氣助動詞語法，表明這些結構同樣具有接觸非漢語的語言而表現出干擾的證據。此外，我們還會證明在普通話逐漸影響甚至同化這種語言表現形式的情況下，它極有可能在不久的將來消失殆盡。

## 關鍵詞

青海漢語方言，語言接觸，語言演變，語氣助動詞，方言語法