

Poly-functionality of the preverbal “acquire” in the Nanning Yue dialect of Chinese: an areal perspective

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the origin and to reconstruct the path of the development of a preverbal element, glossed as ACQ here, in the Nanning Yue dialect (NY) spoken in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in southwestern China. Apart from being a full verb meaning “acquire”, this morpheme can also appear in preverbal and post-verbal positions, expressing different modalities. It is argued that the preverbal ACQ in Early Cantonese (i.e. the ancestral language of modern Cantonese spoken in the Pearl River Delta as well as NY) is relatively non-productive, and this leads us to consider that the emergence of this peculiar grammatical element in modern NY might involve external factors. One of such possible factors is language contact. Specifically, we argue that the new readings derived from the preverbal ACQ in NY were transferred from Zhuang, the most common non-Sinitic language of the Tai-Kadai family in Guangxi, by contact-induced interference.

1. Introduction

The Yue 粵 dialect of Chinese spoken in the urban areas of Nanning 南寧, the capital city of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region 廣西壯族自治區, is known to be closely related to Standard Cantonese spoken in Guangzhou and Hong Kong (Yue-Hashimoto 1988).¹ This consequently suggests that Nanning Yue (henceforth,

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Abbreviations: 1 sg. – first person singular, 2 sg. – second person singular, 3 sg. – third person singular, asp. – aspect marker, cl. – classifier, det. – determiner, foc. – focus, neg. – negation, part. – particle, prep. – preposition.

¹ Yue-Hashimoto (1988:29) carefully examines the phonological behaviours of 47 Yue dialects and comes to the conclusion that Nanning Yue and Guangzhou Yue (=SC) should be placed within the same subgroup, which she calls the “Guangfu subgroup” 廣府片.

“NY”) and Standard Cantonese (henceforth, “SC”) share considerable amount of common words, though NY also has more words with non-Sinitic origins. Historically speaking, NY was not formed until the late-Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), when surges of Cantonese speakers from the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong 廣東 migrated to the central part of Guangxi due to socio-economical reasons (Li J. 2000:67; Hong 2004:110; Lin and Qin 2008:6-7). The phonological systems of both dialects also show great resemblance.² With these conditions, the mutual intelligibility between NY and SC is quite high. It is thus proper to conclude that Early SC is directly ancestral to Modern NY. By now, speakers of NY mainly come from two ethnic groups: the descendants of the Guangdong immigrants, and the native Zhuang people 壯人, who have been living in Guangxi for thousands of years. The contributions of the latter in the development of NY will be discussed in section 4.

On the basis of our fieldwork on NY, we found that the greatest divergence between NY and SC lies in the grammatical structure – an aspect which was scarcely explored in the past. NY displays a rich arrays of grammatical peculiarities which are rarely attested in any Chinese dialects outside Guangxi: the resultative complement follows the object in the verb-complement structure (Kwok 2008); the words for “more” (NY [多⁵⁵] 多) and for “take” (NY [攞³⁵] 攞) are attached to verb phrases to indicate the intensification of degree and the manner of the actions respectively (Ouyang 1995:50-51; Deng 2008:213). But what raised our greatest interest is the poly-functionality of NY [得⁵⁵] 得 (an element glossed and referred here as ACQ (= DE)).³ Apart from being a full verb meaning “acquire”, this morpheme can also appear in preverbal and post-verbal positions, performing a number of functions related to modality. These usages are apparently less restricted than those in SC in which DE mainly appears in a post-verbal position.⁴

By focusing on the preverbal ACQ in NY, this paper has several aims: (a) to describe the functions of this element in light of our first-hand fieldwork data;⁵ (b) to explore its origin and to reconstruct its path of development based on historical documents on Classical Chinese and Early Cantonese; (c) to demonstrate the role of language contact, especially with the Zhuang language, in the formation of this preverbal ACQ usage in NY; and, last but not least, (d) to incorporate the present case into the theoretical framework centring on the poly-functionality of ACQ in the

² For general descriptions of the phonological system of NY, see Tsuji (1980), Xie (2007) and Lin and Qin (2008).

³ DE is the romanization of Modern Standard Chinese word 得 (lexical meaning: “to acquire”). When referring to the Chinese language in general (including Classical Chinese and Modern Chinese dialects), the terms DE and ACQ are used interchangeably; when doing cross-linguistic comparison we solely use the term ACQ.

⁴ For the usages of ACQ in SC, see Matthews and Yip (1994), Luke (1999) and Sybesma (2008).

⁵ All NY and SC data in this paper are taken from our own field notes unless otherwise stated.

Southeast Asian languages established by Enfield (2001, 2003), and to testify whether his model can fully account for the preverbal usage in NY. We hope our findings would shed new light not only on the grammar of NY but also on the mechanism of language contact.

2. Preverbal ACQ in Modern Nanning Yue and in its ancestral languages

This section aims to describe the major functions of the preverbal ACQ in Modern NY, Classical Chinese and Early Cantonese. There has been a general assumption that the Yue dialects underwent a linear development from Classical Chinese > Early Cantonese > Modern SC and Modern NY. One might expect most functions of the preverbal ACQ in NY, if not all, can be traced back to Early Cantonese or even Classical Chinese, with the assumption that both of them are ancestral to NY. The results we obtain, however, seem to contradict this assumption.

Our investigation shows that [ɿ] 得 is one of the most common modal auxiliaries in NY, where it can freely appear in both affirmative and negation sentences. Moreover, it is a poly-functional element and expresses at least four seemingly unrelated meanings: (a) a “result of prior event”-reading (an aspect-like modal meaning); (b) deontic modality (permission); (c) a loose “past tense” reading; and (d) a passive reading.⁶

“Result of prior event” is a term used by Enfield (2003) to denote a special function of the preverbal ACQ in various Southeast Asian languages such as Thai, Lao, etc. This term was consequently adopted by Bisang (2004) and Sybesma (2008), with further elaboration. Sybesma (2008:231), for example, argues that this marker is used to describe events that “can only have come about due to prior other event.” It is also noted that the same sentence can also have the deontic modality which, according to Palmer (2001:9-10), is associated with obligation or permission in regard of external factors such as rules or the law.⁷ Thus, in most cases, the readings of “result of prior event” and “deontic modality” obtained in the preverbal ACQ in NY cannot be easily distinguished, especially when the context is not clear.⁸ The following examples from modern NY thus allow both readings.

- (1) 阿 座 山 冇 得 爬 上 去 。
- ɿ→³³ ...²² ɿ→⁵⁵ ɿ₋²⁴ ...⁵⁵ <ɿ→²¹ ɿ₋·²⁴ ɦ³³

⁶ The preverbal usage of ACQ in NY is briefly described in Lin and Qin (2008:284), where they only identify the “result of prior event”-reading.

⁷ For further discussion on different kinds of modalities, see Palmer (2001).

⁸ Similar multi-interpretations arising from the preverbal ACQ are repeatedly attested in the Tai languages. When dealing with the semantics of the preverbal ACQ in Lao, Enfield (2003:158) notes that “the most noteworthy features of this item [=preverbal ACQ] are associated with its high context-dependence for interpretation, and the range of pragmatic interpretations which can emerge.”

this cl. mountain neg. ACQ climb up

Prior-event reading: ‘(We) do not have the chance to climb that mountain.’

Deontic reading: ‘This mountain is not allowed to climb.’

(2) 佢 又 得 去 香 港， 又 得 去 歐 洲。
 □□₂₄ □□₂₂ □□₅₅ 佢₃₃ 佢₃₃.₅₅ □□₃₅, □□₂₂ □□₅₅ 佢₃₃
 □₅₅ □□₅₅

3sg. also ACQ go Hong Kong also ACQ go Europe

Prior-event reading: ‘S/He gets to go to Hong Kong as well as Europe.’

Deontic reading: ‘S/He is allowed to go to Hong Kong as well as Europe.’

(3) 做 工 陣 時 冇 得 傾 偈。
 □□₃₃ □□₅₅ □□□₂₂ □□₂₁ 冇₂₄ □□₅₅ □□□₅₅ □□□₃₅

working cl. time neg. ACQ chat

Prior-event reading: ‘(You) would not get the chance to chat when you are working.’

Deontic reading: ‘(You) are not allowed to chat when you are working.’

(4) 得 睡 多 十 分 鐘。
 □□₅₅ □□₂₂ □□₅₅ □□₂₂ >□□₅₅ □□□₅₅

ACQ sleep more 10 minutes

Prior-event reading: ‘(You) get to sleep for 10 more minutes.’

Deontic reading: ‘(You) are allowed to sleep for 10 more minutes.’

(5) 教室 裡 底 得 食 嗎？
 □□₃₃ □□₅₅ 佢₂₄ □□₃₅ □□₅₅ □□₂₂ 冇₂₄

classroom inside ACQ eat part.

Prior-event reading: ‘(Do we) get to eat inside the classroom?’

Deontic reading: ‘Is it allowed to eat inside the classroom?’

In (1), if the context is that the mountain is in a private place and is not open to the public, the deontic reading of the preverbal ACQ seems to be the most plausible interpretation. For the “prior-event” reading, imagine there was a landslide which blocked the roads and climbing the mountain became impossible. Here, “landslide” is the “prior event” which consequently leads to “the loss of a chance to climb the mountain”. This also implies that the mountain is climbable when there is no landslide. (5) favours the deontic reading, since it is known that eating is normally not permitted in classrooms. The “result of prior event”-reading, however, is not impossible at all.

For example, on the last day of the school term, on which farewell parties are held inside the classroom. In such cases the reading of “result of prior event” can be obtained. The other three examples also allow two possible interpretations, depending on the contexts.

Unlike the preverbal ACQ, the post-verbal ACQ in NY is often associated with the ability of the agent. Palmer (2001:10) considers “ability” one of the categories of dynamic modality, mainly expressing “subjects’ physical and mental power”. In order to capture the contrast between the preverbal ACQ and the post-verbal ACQ in NY, we compare (6) and (7) with (1) and (2). These two pairs of sentences differ only in terms of the position of ACQ. In (6) and (7), ACQ occurs *after* the verbs.

(6) 阿 座 山 冇 爬 得 上 去。
 ɿ→³³ ɿ_22 ɿ→⁵⁵ ɿ_24 ɿ_21 ɿ_55 ɿ_24 ɦ³³
 this cl. mountain neg. climb ACQ up
 ‘(I am) unable to climb that mountain.’

(7) 佢 又 去 得 香港， 又 去 得 歐洲。
 ɦ³³ ɦ_22 ɦ³³ ɦ_55 ɦ_55 ɦ_35, ɦ_22 ɦ³³ ɦ_55
 ɦ_55 ɦ_55
 3sg. also go ACQ Hong Kong also go ACQ Europe
 ‘S/he is able to go to Hong Kong as well as Europe.’

(6) only denotes the agent’s inability of climbing the mountain, probably due to his/her health problems. The interpretations of “permission” or “result of prior event”, which (1) expresses, however, are not obtained here. The same contrast is also obtained for (2) and (7). In sum, the usages of the preverbal ACQ and the post-verbal ACQ in NY form a full-fledged division of labour.

In some cases, the preverbal ACQ in NY is compatible with a seemingly “past-tense” context. This is evident from the fact that this kind of preverbal ACQ is always accompanied by the verbal suffix [ɦ³³] 過 (the experiential aspectual marker with the lexical meaning “to pass”).

(8) 得 聽 見 佢 講 過 阿 件 事。
 ɦ_55 ɦ_55 ɦ³³ ɦ_24 ɦ_35 ɦ³³ ɿ→³³ ɦ_22 ɦ_22
 ACQ hear see 3sg. talk asp. this cl. matter
 ‘(I) really heard him / her mention this.’

(9) 我 得 見 過 佢 啼 哭。

.ˊ□²⁴ ㄟ□⁵⁵ □□□³³ □□³³ □□□²⁴ ㄟ□□□²¹ h□⁵⁵
 1sg. ACQ see asp. 3sg. cry
 ‘I really saw him / her cry.’

However, since there is “no past in the strict sense of the word in mainland Southeast Asian languages” (Bisang 2004:119), this preverbal marker is not obligatory, i.e. it can be omitted with the sentence remaining grammatical, but the meaning would be slightly different from the original. For example, our NY informants noted that the use of the preverbal ACQ has the function of stressing the factuality of the events denoted by the verb immediately following ACQ.

Finally, the preverbal ACQ in NY can function as a passive marker. This marker is followed immediately by a subject-predicate construction: NP₁ ACQ [NP₂ VP], which has the meaning that the agent has been affected by an action, which is usually desirable, as shown by (10) and (11).

(10) 佢 得 北 大 取 錄 晒。
 □□□²⁴ ㄟ□□⁵⁵ ㄟ□□⁵⁵ ㄟ→□²² ㄟ□□³⁵ lo□²² □→□³³
 3sg. ACQ Peking U. get admitted part.
 ‘S/He got admitted by the Peking University.’

(11) 佢 得 領導 點 名 表 揚。
 □□□²⁴ ㄟ□□⁵⁵ lo.ˊ□²⁴ ㄟ²² ㄟ□³⁵ ㄟ□.ˊ□²¹ ㄟ□³⁵ □□.ˊ□²¹
 3sg. ACQ leader call off name praise
 ‘S/He was praised by the leader by calling off her/his name.’

If the agent is subjected to an undesirable action, NY speakers tend to use [.ˊㄟ→□²¹] 捱 (lexical meaning: “to suffer”) as the passive marker (Lin and Qin 2008:349-351). For example,

(12) 佢 捱 人 打 晒 一 餐。
 □□□²⁴ .ˊㄟ→□²¹ □□□²¹ ㄟ→□³⁵ □→□³³ □□⁵⁵
 ㄟ□→□⁵⁵
 3sg. suffer someone beat asp. 1 cl.
 ‘S/He was suffered from beating by someone.’

It is noted that in SC, [.ˊㄟ→□²¹] mainly serves as a verb and unlike NY, cannot take any subject-predicate construction. The passive marker in SC is [pei³⁵] 俾 (lexical meaning “to give”).

The preverbal usage of ACQ was also found in Classical Chinese including Old Chinese 上古漢語, Middle Chinese 中古漢語 and Early Modern Chinese 近代漢語⁹ (see, for example, Pulleyblank 1995:122; Sun 1996:§5; Peyraube 1999:35-36; Liu 2000:155-178; Yang P. 2001; Du 2007, among others). These studies however only provide a synchronic description of the usage and do not link up the relationship between the usage in Classical Chinese and that in modern dialects.¹⁰ The historical development of the preverbal DE in the Chinese language is yet to be explored.

Peyraube (1999:35-36) claims that DE (=ACQ) is one of the modal auxiliaries in Old Chinese spoken in the 4th to the 3rd century BCE. This auxiliary verb is believed to have been grammaticalized from a full verb meaning “to obtain”. Examples can be widely found in written documents such as *Analects* 論語, *Mencius* 孟子, *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 and *Zhan’guo Ce* 戰國策 (cf. Du 2007:2-10). The following examples together with their interpretations are adopted from Peyraube (1999:36):

(13) *Mencius* (Gongsun Chou I 公孫丑上)

夫子 加 齊 之 卿相 得 行 道 焉。
*fuzi jia qi zhi qingxiang de xing dao yan*¹¹
 Master occupy Qi det.-part. minister ACQ practice principle to+it
 ‘Master, (if you) occupy the position of the Minister of Qi, (you) can [be allowed to] practice your principle there.’

(14) *Analects* (Shuer 述而)

得 見 君子 者 斯 可 矣。
de jian junzi zhe si ke yi
 ACQ meet gentleman the-one-who this satisfy part.
 ‘(If it were still) possible to meet a gentleman, that would satisfy (me).’

Two types of modal meanings, deontic and epistemic, are found in the above two sentences respectively. Different from deontic modality which refers to events that are not actualized, epistemic modality expresses the speaker’s judgment about the factual status of the proposition (Palmer 2001:8). Peyraube (1999:36) argues that in Old Chinese, the preverbal ACQ was used more for expressing the deontic meaning than the epistemic meaning. It is generally believed that the non-epistemic system is more basic than the epistemic one and that the latter usually is derived from the former,

⁹ Old Chinese, Middle Chinese and Early Modern Chinese refer to the Chinese languages spoken roughly in 771 BCE to 220 CE, 220 CE to 960, and 960 to 1900 respectively. See Sun (2006: 15-19).

¹⁰ Wu Y. (2005:343-363) is one of the very few exceptions. Mainly dealing with the synchronic status of the ACQ-V and V-ACQ constructions in the Modern Xiang dialect 湘語 spoken in Hunan 湖南, she also discusses the possible origins and historical development of ACQ from Classical Chinese.

¹¹ For easy reference, Classical Chinese examples are romanized with Modern *Hanyu Pinyin*.

which is attested cross-linguistically (cf. Traugott 1989:36-37; Bybee et al. 1994: §6; Auwera and Plungian 1998:111, figure 14).

Probably due to the rise of the V-ACQ construction (post-verbal ACQ),¹² the usages of the preverbal ACQ seemed to become more restricted in Middle Chinese and Early Modern Chinese than Old Chinese. For example, it mostly appeared in the negation form to express the deontic modality. Consider the following two examples taken from the colloquial texts *Zutangji* 祖堂集 and *Zhuzi Yulei* 朱子語類 compiled in the 10th and the 13th century respectively:

(15) Middle Chinese / Early Modern Chinese: *Zutangji* (see Sun 1996:148)

王不得變悔。

wang bu de bian hui
lord neg. ACQ change regret

‘Your lordship is not allowed to change your mind.’

(16) Middle Chinese / Early Modern Chinese: *Zhuzi Yulei* (see Sun 1996:148)

既曰：「不得無語。」又曰：「不得有語。」

ji yue bu de wu yu you yue bu de you yu
then say neg. ACQ haven’t words also say neg. ACQ have words
‘then says that it is not all right not to say anything, but also says that it is not all right to say something.’

Sun (1996:148) observes that the NEG-ACQ-V (不-得-V) pattern had been the dominating form for deontic negation until the 15th century. The division of labour between the preverbal ACQ and the post-verbal ACQ in Middle Chinese and Early Modern Chinese is quite clear: the former is generally associated with the deontic meaning and the latter the meaning of possibility (either epistemic or non-epistemic) (Sun 1996:150).¹³

In this paper, Early Cantonese refers to a representative Yue dialect widely spoken in Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macau in the 19th century and the early 20th century. It can roughly be considered the direct genetic ancestor of NY since, as discussed in section 1, early NY speakers came from the Pearl River Delta in the mid-19th century. Thanks to the textbooks and dictionaries compiled by Western

¹² The dramatic increase of the V-ACQ construction in Middle Chinese and Early Modern Chinese is reflected in the following figure: in the 10th century, only 12% of the DEs occur post-verbally. The ratio rose significantly to 47% in the 13th century, then 63% in the 15th century (cf. Sun 1996:143).

¹³ It is interesting to note that in Modern Chinese (1900 to present) only the ACQ-V form, not the *bu*-ACQ-V, can express the deontic meaning. The preverbal ACQ is pronounced as *dei*, which differs from the post-verbal ACQ *de*. Sun (1996:150-152) argues that the former is less grammaticalized than the latter, thus preserving a “larger diphthong”. For further analyses of Modern Mandarin preverbal *dei*, see also Chao (1968:742-743).

missionaries such as Robert Morrison (1782-1834) and Elijah Bridgman (1801- 1862), we are left with a rough sketch of the colloquial dialect spoken in more than 100 years ago.¹⁴ In the early texts available to us,¹⁵ ACQ appeared to be an active morpheme, but it usually functioned as a main verb or appeared in a post-verbal position. We can only find a few examples of the preverbal ACQ:¹⁶

(17) Early Cantonese (Morrison 1828 III / I)

人 生 得 過， 隨 時 過。
yun shang tāk kwo, tsuy she kwo
 man living ACQ pass according to time pass
 ‘Man living can pass, according to the time pass.’¹⁷

(18) Early Cantonese (Bridgman 1841:194)

毋 得 將 租 扣 除。
mò tak tséung tsò k'au ch'ü
 neg. ACQ prep. rent deduce
 ‘...shall not be allowed to make any deduction (of the rent).’

(19) Early Cantonese (Bonney 1854:32)

落 神 字 唔 得 圓 句 說話。
lawk shun tsz 'm tuk ün kü shiit wa
 put down shun character neg. ARQ complete cl. speech
 ‘If *shun* is written, the language will not be complete.’

Morrison simply translated ACQ in his example as “can”. The ACQ-V construction in this example expresses what Palmer (2001:8) calls “speakers’ attitude to the truth-value or factual status of the proposition”, and has nothing to do with the ability of the agent, implying an epistemic modality. (18), on the other hand, expresses a deontic reading since it is associated with the sense of permission. The ACQ in (19) can be treated as a marker of “result of prior event”. As mentioned in the earlier part of this section, the reading of “result of prior event” is the most common function for the preverbal ACQ in NY.

The usage of the preverbal ACQ in Early Cantonese has largely been replaced by *ho2 ji5* 可以¹⁸ in Modern SC, especially in the affirmative form. For example,

¹⁴ For the contribution of the Western missionaries on Cantonese linguistics, see Yue (2004).

¹⁵ The data on Early Cantonese materials was drawn from a corpus built by Professor Samuel H.-N. Cheung of The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

¹⁶ A few more examples of Early Cantonese preverbal ACQ are cited in Yue (2001:250-251) and Yang J. (2006: 56-57).

¹⁷ Both transcriptions and English translations are taken from the original texts.

(20a) 你 可以 返 屋 企 喇。
nei5 ho2 ji5 faan1 uk1 kei5 laa3
 2sg. allow get back home part.
 ‘You are allowed to get back home.’

(20b)*你 得 返 屋 企 喇。
nei5 dak1 faan1 uk1 kei5 laa3
 2sg. ACQ get back home part.
 Intended meaning: ‘You are allowed to get back home.’

(20a) becomes ungrammatical if one substitutes the modal auxiliary *ho2 ji5* by *dak1*, as shown in (20b). Under this situation, some scholars claim that “Cantonese *dāk* ACQUIRE... does not have any such preverbal usage.” (Enfield 2003:307)¹⁹ While it is true that the preverbal ACQ is no longer active and productive in SC, some fossilized expressions still prevail:

(21) 喺 圖書館 唔 得 咁 大 聲 講 嘢 㗎。
haai2 tou4 syu1 gun2 m4 dak1 gam3 daai6 seng1 gong2 je5 gaa3
 in library neg. ACQ so big voice talking part.
 ‘It is not allowed to talk so loudly inside the library.’

(22) 我 有 得 去 倫 敦。
ngo5 jau5 dak1 heoi3 leon4 deon1.
 1sg. have ACQ go London
 ‘I get to go to London.’

(23) 個 個 學 生 都 想 得 老 師 讚。
go3 go3 hok6 saang1 dou1 soeng2 dak1 lou5 si1 zaan3
 cl. cl. student all want ACQ teacher praise
 ‘Every student wants to be praised by the teacher.’

Deontic negation is expressed by NEG-ACQ-VP (*m4-dak1*-VP, 唔-得-VP) in (21). It is noteworthy that this kind of construction only accepts a complex VP but not a bare

¹⁸ In this paper, romanization of SC follows the *Jyutping* system developed by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong.

¹⁹ Note that Sybesma (2008:234) also has a similar statement but he adds that “(w)hen we look below the surface, however, we see that Cantonese has the two pre-verbal elements that Lao and Zhuang have, the modal and the ‘result of prior event’-marker.”

verb. The construction *jau5-dak1*-VP (有-得-VP), as illustrated in (22), is acknowledged by Matthews and Yip (1994:245-246), Luke (1999:219) and Sybesma (2008:235). Sybesma describes it as “more literally pre-verbal in the sense that it precedes the main verb; it is post-verbal because it is preceded by *jau5* ‘have’ or *mou5* ‘have not’.” He also considers this preverbal ACQ a marker of “result of prior event”. (23) denotes a passive reading, which has not been discussed much. This kind of expression is no longer active and only appears in some idiomatic expressions, suggesting its archaisms. It is not impossible to postulate that such a usage could also be found in Early SC, despite the fact that no textual record has been found in our pre-modern Cantonese corpus. Modern SC speakers mostly use *bei2* 俾, instead of the preverbal ACQ, as the passive marker (Matthews and Yip 1994: 149-151).

The above discussion shows that the poly-functionality of the preverbal ACQ represents one of the most striking grammatical features of NY. Given the fact that the preverbal ACQ in Early Cantonese and Modern SC is relatively non-productive, this brings in the question on the origin of the poly-functional preverbal ACQ in NY. It seems that the usage is not directly inherited from Early Cantonese. Therefore, internal factors may not be sufficient to account for the various peculiar syntactic functions of ACQ in NY, and external factors such as language contact might be possible solutions. A number of critical questions can be raised here: (a) where did the poly-functions of NY’s preverbal ACQ come from? (b) How did the “new” functions of the preverbal ACQ emerge in NY? (c) What is the correlation between Middle Chinese preverbal ACQ and Early Cantonese preverbal ACQ? We attempt to answer these questions in the next section.

3. The Zhuang origin of the poly-functional ACQ in Nanning Yue

One of the most widespread non-Sinitic languages spoken in Guangxi is Zhuang, a member of the Northern Branch of the Tai language (Strecker 1990:21), which has now approximately 14 million speakers. It is noted that a relatively high ratio of Zhuang speakers also master one or two Chinese dialects. Some of them, especially those living in the urban areas such as Nanning, have even given up their mother tongues and shifted to use the Chinese dialects (mostly Yue, Mandarin or Pinghua 平話) as the first language or home language (Tsou et al. 2009). This phenomenon is faithfully reflected in the following figure: in 2001, around 35% of the total population of Nanning were Zhuang. Over two third of these Zhuang people were either multi-lingual or even had shifted to NY or Mandarin Chinese (cf. Chen and Li eds. 2005:191-193). Our NY informant, whose age is near 60, comes from the Zhuang ethnic group but her first language is NY. She can hardly use the Zhuang language for daily communication.

The Zhuang language has a poly-functional element which seems to be syntactically and semantically equivalent to Chinese DE 得. The phonetic shapes of this element in different Zhuang dialects are shown as follows (cf. Zhang J. et al. 1999):²⁰

| | | | |
|-----------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Laibin 來賓 | □→□ ³ | Southern Yongning 邕寧南 | □→□ ⁵ |
| Yishan 宜山 | □→□ ³ | Longzhou 龍州 | □→□ ³ |
| Wuming 武鳴 | □→□ ³ | Jingxi 靖西 | □→□ ³ |

The proto-form of this word can be reconstructed as *□□→□. From the historical point of view, there is no clear connection between this form and Chinese DE (Enfield 2001: 279-280). Besides performing as a main verb meaning “acquire”, *□□→□ can appear pre-verbally and post-verbally to denote various modalities. Again, we gloss this element as ACQ.²¹ These usages of Zhuang preverbal ACQ has been documented and described in Sybesma (2008),²² which is based on the Hechi 河池 dialect of Zhuang.²³ Sybesma categorizes two basic interpretations for the preverbal ACQ in Zhuang: (a) deontic modality; and (b) the “result of prior event”-reading, and points out that (a) cannot be used in the affirmative form (Sybesma 2008:233). Our study, which is based on a comprehensive monograph on the Zhuang language (Zhang J. et al. 1999), reveals that Sybesma’s (2008) categorization does not completely correspond to the Zhuang examples. Moreover, the deontic meaning can be expressed by the preverbal ACQ in the affirmative form in various Zhuang dialects, such as Wuming and Longzhou. Sybesma’s model thereby calls for modification.

The interpretation of the preverbal ACQ in Zhuang can be generalized into three categories, where the first two have already been identified by Sybesma (2008): (a) the deontic reading; (b) the “result of prior event”-reading; (c) the loose “past tense” reading.²⁴ Five examples from different Zhuang dialects are listed below to illustrate these three functions.

²⁰ For the Zhuang examples, the numerals indicate the tonal categories of the words instead of the tonal values.

²¹ We have to stress that although the ACQs in both NY and Zhuang share very similar patterns of poly-functionality, they are neither cognate words nor loanwords. Enfield (2003:320-321) argues that “the ACQUIRE pattern ... is signified across mainland Southeast Asia by some ten different etymons... Complex signified patterns can be shared across languages, without corresponding signifiers also being shared.”

²² Enfield (2003:327-328) provides a few more relevant examples in Zhuang and Dong 侗語, which he believes to be comparable with the Lao examples. His arguments on the preverbal ACQ in Lao will be discussed in the later part of this section.

²³ Sybesma (2008) mainly focuses on the functions of the post-verbal ACQ in Zhuang and SC, but he also discusses the properties of the preverbal usage of ACQ.

²⁴ The “past tense” reading of the preverbal ACQ in Zhuang was identified as early as in Li F. (1956 / 2005:223).

(24) Wuming Zhuang (Zhang J. et al 1999:865)

□□³ □□→□⁴ □□→□.·¹ □□¹ □□³ □□→□³ □□□⁷ □□□⁹ □□□⁸
 □□→□¹
 cl. water soup that neg. ACQ pour outside go
 ‘The hot water is not allowed to pour outside.’

(25) Longzhou Zhuang (Zhang J. et al 1999:901)

.·□□→□⁵ □□→□³ □□⁷ □□→□⁷ □□→□² □□→□⁵ □□→□⁷
 □□⁶
 just ACQ do cook tea and sweep floor
 ‘(The Master) just allowed (him) to cook the tea and to sweep the floor.’

(26) Laibin Zhuang (Zhang J. et al. 1999:843)

□□→□³ □□→□³ □□¹ □□→□⁴ □□³, □□² kuk⁷ □□□⁴ □□□⁶ □□→□³
 cut branch cl. tree 1 cl. tiger this then ACQ
 □□□² □□→□³ □□□³
 come down asp.
 ‘(He) cut the branches of the tree off, and this tiger got the chance to come down.’

(27) Wuming Zhuang (Zhang J. et al 1999:878)

□□→□¹ □□→□.·¹ □□¹ □□³ □□→□⁷ □□→□⁶, □□→□□¹ □□→□²
 □□→□⁶ □□→□³
 cl. lamp that neg. extinguish part. the couple then ACQ
 □□□¹ □□□□²
 pair safe
 ‘If the lamp does not extinguish, the couple can live safely.’

(28) Laibin Zhuang (Zhang J. et al. 1999:844)

□□□¹ □□□⁶ □□□¹ □□□→□⁸ □□□⁶ □□□², □□□→□¹ □□□² □□□¹ □□□→□³
 1sg. also neg. steal part. man friend 1sg. ACQ
 □□□→□¹ □□□→□.·³ □□□¹
 come give 1sg.
 ‘I didn’t steal (it) from other people. It was my friend who came and gave this to me.’

These examples are all extracted from folk stories. With clear contexts provided, category (a) and category (b) can be distinguished easily. (24) and (25) involve the sense of permission and belong to category (a); (26) and (27) are associated with prior events and should be included in category (b); the last example, which expresses a “past tense” reading, comes under category (c). Interestingly enough, cognate words for this element display strikingly parallel poly-functional patterns in other members of the Tai family. The following three examples of Lao, a member of the Southwestern Branch (Strecker 1990:21), convey the deontic reading, the “result of prior event” reading and the “loose past tense” reading respectively:

(29) Lao (Enfield 2003:142)²⁵

kuu³ daj⁰ n¹aa⁴ hùan²
 1sg. ACQ move house
 ‘I got / get to move house.’ /
 ‘I had / have to move house.’

(30) Lao (Enfield 2003:145)

caw⁴ bò⁰ puuk⁵ phak² caw⁴ka⁰ bò⁰ daj⁰ kin³ phak²
 2sg. neg. plant vegetables 2sg. foc.part. neg. ACQ eat vegetables
 ‘(If) you didn’t plant vegetables, you wouldn’t get to eat vegetables.’

(31) Lao (Enfield 2003:150)²⁶

n¹ang² bò⁰ daj⁰ kap²
 still neg. ACQ return
 ‘I still haven’t been back (there).’

It should be stressed that the preverbal ACQ in Lao has a few more functions mentioned in Enfield (2003), such as the “politeness” and the “formality” effects. They are, however, beyond the scope of the present study and thus will not be discussed.

The high degree of parallelism between the poly-functional pattern of the preverbal ACQ in Zhuang and that in NY cannot be regarded as a mere coincidence. Three possible causes have been proposed to account for the similarities among languages: (a) Genetic similarities – the languages in question share inheritances from

²⁵ Enfield (2003) seldom uses the traditional terms on modalities such as “deontic” and “epistemic”. But according to his description given on p.143, (29) can still express a strong sense of permission. Thus, we can still consider this example having a deontic reading.

²⁶ This “loose past tense” reading often exists in the negation form. The reason remains to be a question (Enfield 2003:150).

a common ancestor; (b) Areal similarities – the features shared by the languages are due to borrowing or shift-induced interference from geographical neighbours; and (c) Parallel similarities – the similarities stem from sharing of some common inner dynamic (cf. Dixon 1997:14-15; Aikhenvald 2006:1-4).²⁷ The similarities between Zhuang and NY are definitely an areal one. Firstly, Tai (to which Zhuang belongs) and Sinitic (to which NY belongs) are now believed to be entirely unrelated (see, for example, Benedict 1972, 1975, Mei and Gong 1992). Both genetic similarities and parallel similarities, however, require the languages involved to be derived from a single parent. They are thus not directly relevant to our current study. More importantly, the present case fits perfectly with the criterion for which contact-induced linguistic transfer is identified:

If there is a linguistic property x shared by two languages M and R, and these languages are immediate neighbours and / or are known to have been in contact with each other for an extended period of time, and x is also found in languages genetically related to M but not in languages genetically related to R, then we hypothesize that this is an instance of contact-induced transfer, more specifically, that x has been transferred from M to R. (Heine and Kuteva 2005:33)

In the present study, “property x ” is the “preverbal ACQ”, while “language M” and “language R” are Zhuang and NY respectively. Zhuang and NY are neighbouring languages which have been in extensive contact since NY was formed. The poly-functionality of the preverbal ACQ has been widely attested in Tai, as discussed above, but not in Sinitic (not even in SC, for example). One possible explanation for the poly-functionality of the preverbal ACQ is that it was transferred from Zhuang to NY. Section 4 reconstructs the path of the diachronic development of this usage from Early Cantonese to Modern NY under the notion of language contact.

4. Reconstructing the development of the preverbal ACQ in Nanning Yue

As mentioned in the previous section, considerable numbers of Zhuang people have shifted their first language to NY, whose speakers often have higher socio-economic status. However, it is not surprising to note that some Zhuang shifters acquired the target language (i.e. NY) imperfectly. In such a scenario, “imperfect learning”, as thoroughly discussed in Thomason (2001), would become a crucial factor in making a language diverge into two distinct dialects – one dialect with the original system and

²⁷ Dixon (1997:15) only speaks of “genetic similarities” and “areal similarities”, but he provides various examples of “parallel similarities”. In addition, Dixon considers borrowing the only element contributing to areal similarities. Here we add “shift-induced interference” in accordance with Thomason’s (2001) ideas.

the other with an “imperfect” system biased to the language formerly used by the shifters.²⁸ “Imperfect learning” does not imply that the learners are unable to learn, or lack sufficient access to the target language. In fact, it refers to the situation that the shifters choose to retain some features from their first language, which are not available in the target language (Thomason 2001:74). Heine and Kuteva (2005:37) even view the shifters as “creators” because they use the linguistic materials of one language to shape another language in novel ways.²⁹

Zhuang and NY resemble in terms of phonology and syntax. They also share lexicon but the number is not significant. This situation basically corresponds to the prediction made by Thomason (2001:75) on contact-induced interference, which starts with phonology and syntax. The development of the preverbal ACQ in NY can be considered an illustration of contact-induced interference.

NY descends from Early SC, where the preverbal ACQ was still in use but not active. How could this element revive in NY after it came into contact with Zhuang? The “revival” mechanism has been proposed with different emphases: “category extension” (Heine and Kuteva 2005:138-141), “enhancement of an already existing feature” (Aikhenvald 2006:22), “contact-induced retention” (Wu F. 2007:5). “Category extension” outlined by Heine and Kuteva (2005) is the most relevant to the current situation. Following their ideas, the development of the preverbal ACQ in NY can be reconstructed as follows:

When Early NY came into contact with Zhuang, the Zhuang shifters found that NY had a preverbal element, [_{NP}55], roughly equivalent to their preverbal [_{NP}→_{NP}3], and they naturally equated the former with the latter. Due to the growing number of Zhuang shifters to NY, the frequency of using the preverbal [_{NP}55] in NY by Zhuang shifters increased and this element could appear in the same syntactic slots where Zhuang [_{NP}→_{NP}3] occurred. As a result, [_{NP}55] adopted all the functions (“result of prior event”-reading, deontic reading and “loose past tense” reading) of the preverbal [_{NP}→_{NP}3] from Zhuang. The preverbal [_{NP}55] further consolidated its poly-functionality when the new dialect – NY – gradually gained its status in Nanning. This new dialect made great impact to the original Yue speakers, whose population was much lower than that of the Zhuang shifters. These NY speakers thus followed the Zhuang shifters and began to use the preverbal [_{NP}55].³⁰

²⁸ Chen (2005) also considers “contact-induced interference” (he calls it “mother tongue interference”) one of the major factors of dialect formation. He illustrates this by drawing examples from the Dai-Chinese 傣族漢語 spoken in Yunnan 雲南.

²⁹ Note that many other scholars such as Hagege (1993) and Ansaldo (2004:490) also have the same idea that language transmission always involves creation.

³⁰ A well-known parallel example can be found in modern-day Taiwan. The majority of the native Taiwanese speakers have incorporated certain Southern Min features into Mandarin Chinese, their target language. The descendants of the “Mainlanders”, who arrived Taiwan shortly before 1949 with the population outnumbered the natives, have adopted this kind of “imperfect” Mandarin Chinese.

It should be highlighted that this “category extension” has only affected the internal structure of a category (modal auxiliaries) but posed no effect on the grammatical categories. It also did not involve any grammaticalization process, since [ㄟㄟ⁵⁵] had already become a mature modal auxiliary before the contact took place between Early NY and Zhuang. There is still one more question: how did the passive reading of the preverbal ACQ in NY emerge, given that Zhuang does not have such a reading?³¹ This reading is claimed to have been directly inherited from Early SC. Its survival largely benefits from the high popularity of the already-established preverbal [ㄟㄟ⁵⁵] in NY, due to the fact that the passive reading also uses the same marker.

The linkage between Middle Chinese / Early Modern Chinese and Early SC in this issue is not explicit. While the usage of the preverbal ACQ had declined significantly and had become more restricted in Middle Chinese / Early Modern Chinese, the element was still in use in Early SC and did not vanish completely. Moreover, the functions of the preverbal ACQ in Early SC are quite different from that in Middle Chinese / Early Modern Chinese. It should be reminded that the contact between the Tai language and the Yue dialect of Chinese has a rather long history. A thick and well-defined Tai substratum in the Yue dialect suggests that a great number of Tai speakers shifted to Early Yue when the newcomers from northern China populated the south (Yue-Hashimoto 1991:296; Bauer 1996; LaPolla 2001:232-233; among others), probably during the late-Tang (618-907) or the early-Song Dynasties (960-1279). It is possible that this interference (we may call it “the first interference”) partly contributes to the reinforcement of the usages of ACQ in Early Yue. The first interference also made Early Yue acquire various new functions of ACQ from Tai. The two languages might have shared the same (or very similar) patterns of poly-functionality of ACQ in the ancient time. On the other hand, as a Chinese dialect, Yue had been receiving paramount influence of the prestige Chinese since its formation. The replacement of the modal auxiliary of *dak1* by the Standard Chinese word *ho2 ji5* in SC is one of the examples.³² Matthews’ (2006:226) observation is somehow compatible with our argument, but he puts more weight on the geographical distribution of the ACQ: “In the case of grammaticalization of ‘acquire’, Lao and Zhuang are at the centre of the ‘epidemic’, and Mandarin at the periphery.” The position of SC, as described by him, is “somewhere in-between”. His statement can be further strengthened if he also considers the manifestation of NY, which experienced the second interference from the Zhuang language around 100 years ago.

³¹ Vietnamese *duoc* (=ACQ) in the preverbal position can have the passive reading. For the description and examples, see Sybesma (2008:232). In spite of the geographical proximity, the contact between NY and Vietnamese is not remarkable and has received not much attention. The passive readings of the preverbal ACQs in both NY and Vietnamese seem to have different origins.

³² For the history of *ho2 ji5* (= *keyi*) in Standard Chinese, see Ōta (1958, Chinese edition 2003: 185-186).

The reason why the ACQ in NY has more functions than that in other Yue dialects is that the formation of NY comprises at least two interferences from Zhuang (“epidemic”) in different times, while the formation of other Yue dialects comprises only the first interference, which probably occurred more than 1,000 years ago.

In the conclusion of his monograph Enfield (2003:367-368) outlines five possibilities on “how a complex pattern of poly-functionality such as the ACQUIRE pattern... may have come to exist in neighbouring languages”. Among the various possibilities, the “pattern copying” seems to be the most possible and suitable description for our case since it apparently involves areal diffusion. But how “copying” operates? The present study reminds us that besides the well-known borrowing, contact-induced interference can be a very important means for transferring complex patterns of poly-functionality from one language to another. We have illustrated that shifters can transfer the poly-functional pattern of a given element in the language they originally spoke to a corresponding element (usually these two elements share the basic meaning) in the target language by interference easily. We argue that contact-induced interference is a fairly common feature in Southeast Asia where language shifts occur frequently.³³ It may enhance our understanding on how such “copying” functions if contact-induced interference is to be considered a main factor of dialect / language formation.

Enfield (2003) incorporates data from various Chinese dialects such as Standard Mandarin, Southwestern Mandarin 西南官話, SC, Xinyi 信宜 Yue and Taiwanese Southern Min into his study on “linguistic epidemiology”. While the morpheme ACQ (mainly represented by DE or occasionally by other morphemes) displays a wide range of functions in these dialects, its preverbal usage is rather limited and cannot be compared with the vitality of the preverbal ACQ in the Tai languages. We have shown that the poly-functionality of the preverbal ACQ in NY is proven to be comparable to that of Zhuang as well as other Southeast Asian languages. In a larger context, NY not only provides a unique example on the preverbal usage of ACQ among the Chinese dialects, but also illustrates the mechanism of transferring a complex pattern from one language to another.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we discuss the usages of ACQ in NY with our first-hand fieldwork data. It has been documented that NY has been in close and extensive contact with the neighbouring Zhuang language for more than a century. NY has thus developed some

³³ A famous example is that the Tai language spoken in Thailand (=Thai) has a Mon-Khmer substratum, suggesting a great number of Mon-Khmer speakers shifted to Thai in the ancient time (cf. Enfield 2003:365-366). It is thus tempting to incorporate the notion of contact-induced interference into the formation theory of Thai.

of the ACQ usages which are not commonly found in SC. We have explained how these new readings derived from the preverbal ACQ in NY were transferred from Zhuang as a result of contact-induced interference. In other words, the shifters from Zhuang to Yue have played a key role in shaping Modern NY.

It should be stressed that NY has been assimilated greatly by SC in the last two decades (cf. Lin and Qin 2008:6), and might fall out of use gradually in the next few generations. It is thus of paramount importance to carry out in-depth investigations and to document and archive this dialect and its associated varieties before they extinct.

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