Degrammaticalization in Northern Mao's pronominal innovations: from subject prefix to full pronoun

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1. The Mystery of the Mao Pronouns: A Challenge for Reconstruction

Bender (2000:199) notes that pronouns in the Mao languages (Afroasiatic/Omotic/Mao) are highly innovative and problematic for reconstruction. At times, innovations in the Mao pronominal systems and wider lexicon have prompted some to suggest the group might be related to Nilo-Saharan (Grottanelli 1940; Greenberg 1963:130) or perhaps of mixed Omotic-Koman (Nilo-Saharan) lineage (Bender 1996:158; 2000:184).

Within the innovative Mao branch, Northern Mao's pronouns are the most divergent; only two of nine pronouns are transparently cognate with corresponding forms in sister languages (Table 1). Of particular interest is the [ha] sequence on 1st and 2nd person non-singular pronouns, the /-el/ plural suffix on the 1st and 2nd plural pronouns (where either /-kol/ or the related /-(w)ol/ serve as plural suffixes on all other nominals in the language) and the dual series, which has not been reported for any other Mao language.

Table 1. Free Pronouns and Verbal Subject Markers in the Mao Languages*

	Singular			Plural			Dual		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Northern Mao	tíjé	hìjè	íʃè	hambèlè	hàwèlè	íʃkolè	hané	háwé	íʃkuwe
/ha-/ + subject prefixes	(ha-)tí-	hì-	(ha-)Ø-	ham̀-	hàw-	(ha-)Ø-	hań-	háw-	(ha-)Ø-
Ganza	ti	je	kjenä (M) ki (F)	mu	näm	ku			
/ha-/ + subject prefixes	(ha-)di-	(ha-)nä-	(ha-)gä- (M) (ha-)gi- (F)	(ha-)mu-	(ha-)näm-	(ha-)gu-			
Sezo	haːʃe	hɪnʃe	ha(a)nʃe	daːʃe	namʃe	hɛlʃe			
subject prefixes	ha(a)-	hin-	han-	dol-	nam-	hɛl-			
Hozo	nəŋga	hiːŋga	za-aŋga	nuŋga	dɔŋga	(i)nɛŋga			
subject prefixes	na-	hi-	aː-	nu-	do-	ɛnɛ-			

* The data in Table 1 are from various sources: Northern Mao (Ahland 2012:377); Ganza pronouns and subject prefixes (Reidhead 1947:21-2; Bender 2000:183-5); Ganza's /ha/ form (Hofmeister 2010); Sezo and Hozo (Bender 2000:183-5).

Innovations in the Northern Mao pronominal paradigm include: 1) the fusion of a /ha-/ affirmative verb prefix with subject prefixes (see the row under the free pronouns, Table 1); 2) the development of new free pronouns, degrammaticalized from the bound subject prefixes (i.e. from bound to free); 3) the development of a new dual opposition (found today across all persons); and 4) a new 3rd person series from a demonstrative. Thus, despite the divergence represented in Table 1, these innovations are internal developments in Northern Mao. Each is discussed below.

2. The /ha-/ Affirmative Prefix

The [ha] sequence on the 1DU/PL and 2DU/PL pronouns has its origins in the verbal system: the /ha-/ affirmative (AFF) verbal prefix (Ahland 2012:243ff). The /ha-/ AFF prefix is distributed relative to speech acts of different mood/modality (here called utterance types). The /ha-/ prefix is optional in declarative utterances; it is required in polar interrogatives (where the answer is expected to be affirmative); and it is prohibited in all content interrogatives, imperatives, jussives and negatives (Ahland 2012:394).

2.1. Distribution of /ha-/ AFF on the Irrealis Future Verb

The /ha-/ prefix is optional on final irrealis future declarative verbs (across all person subjects); in the irrealis future declarative verb, subject marking is suffixal, following the /-gà/ FUT marker and preceding the auxiliary /-biʃ/ and the declarative marker /-á/. Table 2 illustrates the verb 'slap' /pèːʃ/ conjugated across all persons in the irrealis future.

Table 2. Option /ha-/ AFF on Irrealis Future Verbs

	AFF-slap-FUT-SUBJ-AUX-DECL	Gloss
1SG	(ha-)pèːʃ-gà-t-bíʃ-á	'I will slap (it)'
1DU	(ha-)pèːʃ-gà-n-bíʃ-á	'We (DU) will slap (it).'
1PL	(ha-)pèːʃ-gà-m-bìʃ-á	'We (PL) will slap (it)'
2SG	(ha-)pèːʃ-gè-m-bìʃ-á	'You (SG) will slap (it)'
2DU	(ha-)pèːʃ-gǎː-bíʃ-á	'You (DU) will slap (it)'
2PL	(ha-)pèːʃ-gàː-bìʃ-á	'You (PL) will slap (it)'
3SG	(ha-)pèːʃ-gà-m-bìʃ-á	'S/he will slap (it)'
3NSG (DU/PL)	(ha-)pèːʃ-and-gà-m-bìʃ-á	'They (DU/PL) will slap (it)'

2.2. The Distribution of /ha-/ AFF on the Realis Non-Future Verb

On the realis non-future declarative verb, however, the subject is marked by prefixes, not suffixes, and the distribution of the /ha-/ prefix is inconsistent relative to various person markers (Table 3). These may be divided into those with an optional /ha-/ AFF prefix (1SG and 3rd person), those with a [ha] sequence fused to the subject prefixes (1DU/PL and 2DU/PL), and one where no hint of /ha-/ is present at all (2SG).

Table 3. Distribution of /ha-/ and [ha] on Realis Non-Future Verbs

optional /ha-/	1SG	(ha-)tí-pèːʃ-á	'I slapped (it).'
	3SG	(ha-)pèːʃ-á	'S/he slapped (it).'
	3NSG (DU/PL)	(ha-)pèːʃ-and-á	'They (DU/PL) sl.apped (it).'
fused [ha]	1DU	han-pèːʃ-á	'We (DU) slapped (it).'
(no /ha-/ AFF prefix)	1PL	ham-pèːʃ-á	'We (PL) slapped (it).'
	2DU	háw-pèːʃ-á	'You (DU) slapped (it).'
	2PL	hàw-pèːʃ-á	'You (PL) slapped (it).'
no /ha-/	2SG	(*ha-) hì-pèːʃ-á	'You (SG) slapped (it).'

The /ha-/ prefix optionally precedes the /tí-/ 1SG marker and also occurs optionally on all realis verbs with 3rd person (singular, dual or plural) subjects (i.e. where the subject marker is zero). On realis verbs where the subject is 1DU, 1PL, 2DU or 2PL, the subject marker includes the sequence [ha] and does not carry an additional /ha-/ prefix to the left of this subject marker. This [ha] sequence is always present on these subject prefixes and is also found on the corresponding free pronouns (cf. Table 1, rows 1 and 2). The 2SG subject marker on realis verbs is /hì-/, corresponding to the pronoun /hìj-è/. No hint of the /ha-/ prefix can be found co-occurring with the /hì-/ subject marker.

3. The Fusion of /ha-/ AFF with Subject Prefixes, the Development of New Free Pronouns and a New Dual Opposition

The only way that the [ha] sequence could have entered the pronominal inventory on the 1st and 2nd person non-singular forms was via prior fusion of the /ha-/ affirmative prefix with corresponding verbal subject prefixes. And the phonological facts suggest that this occurred before the development of dual.

The /ha-/ AFF prefix fused with the older 1PL /*nù-/ and 2PL /ẁ-/ subject prefixes on realis verbs (1). While Bender reconstructs /*n/ or other alveolar consonants for the 1PL in all non-Mao Omotic subgroups (2000:202), the Northern Mao /ẁ-/ for 2PL appears to be innovative and is not found in the other Mao languages (Ahland 2012:249).

	sequence of verbal prefixes		fused prefixes
(1)	ha- + nù-	>	hanù-
	AFF 1PL		new 1PL (reconstructed)
	ha- + ẁ-	>	hàw-
	AFF 2PL		new 2PL

This fusion was perhaps motivated by phonotactic necessity as the subject markers reduced phonologically. Certainly beginning all Northern Mao verbs with the /ẁ-/ 2PL prefix would have been difficult since the vast majority of verbs exhibit consonant-initial stems.

Once the 1PL and 2PL subject prefixes were fused with the erstwhile /ha-/ AFF prefix, their frequent use (as required subject marking on verbs) motivated the development of new pronouns. This process of pronoun development also included the development of new dual forms for 1st and 2nd person through predictable tone changes and morphological augmentation to match full nominal word patterns: the L tone on plurals became H tone on the new dual forms, an older nominal plural suffix /-el/ was added to plurals, and the nominal final vowel /-e/ was added to each pronoun (2).

		Development of Dual Marked by Tone		Augmented with PL Suffix and Final Vowel	New Pronoun
(2)	hanù-	1DU	hanú	+ -e	hané
	1PL	1PL	hanù	+ -el-e	hambèlè
	hàw-	2DU	háw	+ -e	háwé
	2PL	2PL	hàw	+ -el-e	hàwèlè

While Northern Mao's productive nominal plural suffix is /-(w)ol/ today (Ahland 2012:195), the /-el/ plural suffix has been reported for Dizoid Omotic languages as well (Bender 2000:213).

After the addition of the /-el/ PL suffix and the final vowel, the 1PL pronoun underwent three additional changes: the nasal [n] became [m], a [b] was introduced, and the [u] vowel was lost. Two scenarios could account for these changes: 1) [hanuele] > [hanbele] > [hambele]--phonological strengthening (akin to [u] > [b]) is attested in other degrammaticalizations (Norde 2009:228ff) or 2) [hanuele] >[hamuele] > [hambele]. There is support for an [m] > [mb] development in other Northern Mao words as well as across the western Ethiopian area: 'camel' /gɨmɛl/ in Amharic; /dʒəmel/ in Arabic; /kambəla/ in Gumuz (Colleen Ahland, personal communication); /hambel/ in Bertha (BGLDP 2007:112); and /hàmbèlè/ in Northern Mao (Ahland 2012:252).

Regardless of the exact historical steps which shaped the [mb] of the 1PL pronoun, it is clear that verbal subject prefixes were later updated to match the new pronoun forms: /hané/ > /hań-/ 1DU, /hambèlè/ > /ham̀-/ 1PL, /háwé/ > /háw-/ 2DU, and /hàwèlè/ > /hàw-/ 2PL.

4. The Development of a New 3rd Person Series

The Northern Mao 3rd person series developed from a demonstrative /íʃé/ with the addition of new nominal dual /-kuw/ and plural /-kol/ (today: /-(w)ol/) suffixes as well as the final vowel /-e/ (Ahland 2012:239-40): /íʃ-è/ 3SG, /íʃ-kuw-e/ 3DU, and /íʃ-kol-è/ 3PL. The use of the same dual and plural suffixes found on other nominals in Northern Mao today suggests that the 3rd person series developed more recently than the 1st and 2nd non-singular pronouns.

5. Conclusions

In Northern Mao, the [ha] sequence found on the 1DU/PL and 2DU/PL pronouns is clearly not reconstructable as part of the pronominal inventory. It must be related to the /ha-/ affirmative verbal prefix. Hofmeister's 2010 work on Ganza (an Omotic-Mao sister to Northern Mao) offers a likely cognate for Northern Mao's /ha-/ prefix. Ganza exhibits a /ha/ form immediately preceding subject markers (cf. Table 1). This /ha/ shows a similar distribution (relative to utterance type) to Northern Mao's /ha-/: Ganza's /ha/ is attested in declarative past/present and polar interrogatives, but not in content interrogatives, imperatives, negatives and declarative future (based on this author's analysis of data found throughout Hofmeister's manuscript). In Ganza, however, the /ha/ form has not been found to be part of any of the pronouns or permanently fused with any subject markers (Hofmeister 2010 and Reidhead 1947); Reidhead's data, in fact, do not show the /ha/ form at all (1947).

In conclusion, apart from the uncertain reconstruction of 2PL /ẁ/ in Northern Mao, which, given the Ganza and Sezo data, may have at one time derived from /*m/, it is clear that the other innovations in the Northern Mao pronouns can be fully attributed to internal development. First, the [ha] sequence on the 1DU/PL and 2DU/PL pronouns is due to the /ha-/ AFF prefix fusing to certain subject prefixes. These subject prefixes then sparked the formation of new pronouns through their higher frequency of use over the free pronominals. These facts support a degrammaticalization analysis and the growing challenge against unidirectionality (i.e. free > bound) in pronoun development (cf. Harvey 2003, Mushin and Simpson 2008). Additionally, the development of dual number involves clear splits from the 1PL and 2PL formatives with predictable tone changes and augmenting morphology. Thus, Northern Mao pronouns do not appear to be the result of substrata interference or borrowing (contra some of Bender's ruminations 1994:158; 2000:184,199).

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