BÁIMĂ NOMINAL POSTPOSITIONS AND THEIR ETYMOLOGY[1]

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This article focuses on the nominal postpositions used for marking the agent, the instrument, the genitive, the definite, the locative, the ablative, the dative and the comitative in Báimă, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the south-west of the People's Republic of China.

Taking previous classifications of Báimă nominal postpositions (Nishida and Sūn 1990; Sūn 2003; Huáng and Zhāng 1995) as the starting point, I comment on the disputed issues in these analyses, propose a new summary of nominal postpositions in my data, argue for isomorphism of some postpositions and discuss their etymology. I demonstrate that Báimă nominal postpositions are etymologically heterogeneous, some being cognate to their Classical Tibetan counterparts, some being of possibly Qiangic provenance, while others being of yet unclear origin. The discussion is based on a corpus of Báimă stories collected in 2003-2004, of which one is appended to the article.

Keywords: Tibeto-Burman, Baima, postpositions, Sino-Tibetan, Qiangic, Tibetan

1. BÁIMĂ

Báimă is a non-literary Tibeto-Burman language, spoken by approximately 10.000 people in three counties (Jiǔzhàigōu, Sōngpān, Píngwǔ) in the north of Sìchuān Province and one neighboring county (Wénxiàn) in the south of Gānsù Province in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Báimă people reside in the

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immediate proximity of the Qiāng (to their south-west), the Chinese (east and south) and the Tibetans (west and north).

The Báimǎ language is currently regarded as unclassified, with a tentative affiliation to the Himalayish branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family (*Ethnologue*). Sūn Hóngkāi, who pioneered Báimǎ research in the late 1970s, classifies Báimǎ as an independent language in the Tibetan branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family (1983: 100). Other Báimǎ specialists consider it a dialect of Tibetan, probably of the Khams group.

The problematic affiliation of the Báimǎ language (separate language or Tibetan dialect) is partly due to the controversy surrounding the ethnic classification of the Báimǎ people. In 1951, the Báimǎ were classified as Tibetans. In the 1970s, they were argued to be descendents of the Dī people, who set up influential kingdoms in the third through the sixth centuries CE in the areas currently inhabited by the Báimǎ (Sìchuān Shěng Mínzú Yánjiūsuǒ 1980, Zēng et al. 1987). The Dī, whose name frequently appears together with that of the Qiāng in Chinese historical sources, are currently considered to be related to the Qiāng (cf. Lǐ 1987: 46, Mǎ 1984). Huáng & Zhāng (1995: 116-117) even argue for a Dī substratum in Báimǎ to account for a number of distinct non-Tibetan features in its lexicon, morphology and syntax. Almost nothing is however known about the linguistic affiliation or about the language of the Dī. Furthermore, the very designation "Dī" is probably a general label for a range of people in the west of ancient China, as is also the case with the name "Qiāng" (Wang 1992, 2005). For these reasons, to state that Báimǎ has a Dī substratum is equivalent to saying that Báimǎ has some kind of substratum which is not yet identified.

2. NOMINAL POSTPOSITIONS

This article focuses on nominal postpositions in Báimǎ. Such postpositions are formal reflections of the roles played by noun

phrases in relation to the verb or between noun phrases themselves. Nominal postpositions in Báimǎ are used for marking the topic, the agent, the instrument, the genitive, the locative, the ablative, the comitative, and the comparative, among other functions.

Scholars who previously worked on Báimǎ, Sūn Hóngkāi (Nishida and Sūn 1990; further developed in Sūn 2003a and 2003b) and Huáng Bùfán and Zhāng Mínghuì (Huáng & Zhāng 1995) describe nominal postpositions as case particles, in comparison to Tibetan data, thereby somewhat expanding the notion of case particles according to the traditional Tibetan model of analysis and including such markers as 'comparative', 'definite' and 'marker of disposal'. Table 1, based on Sūn's tabulation, lists the analyses of Sūn (2003a: 71; Báimǎ 1) and of Huáng & Zhāng (Báimǎ 2), both in original transcriptions. Sūn compares his own data with that of Huáng & Zhāng as well as with that of Classical Tibetan, as reflected in standard Written Tibetan orthography (hereafter WT) and the three groups of Modern Tibetan dialects spoken in the PRC (dBus-gTsang, Khams and Amdo). As noted by all authors, case particles in Báimǎ are significantly dissimilar to those in Tibetan dialects.

Case	Báimǎ 1	Báimǎ 2	WT	dBus-gTsang	Khams	Amdo
Ergative	i^{53}	$kæ^{53}$	gis	$kɛ$	ki	$kə$
Genitive	$tɛ^{5}$[sic.]/ ti^{53}	$tæ^{53}$	gi	ki	ki	$kə$
Allative	$tsɑ^{53}/iɛ^{53}$	$kæ^{53}$	la	la	le	la
Locative	$nɔ^{53}/kɛ^{53}$	$kæ^{53}$	na	la	le	na
Ablative	$iɔ^{53}$	$jɔ^{53}$	nas	$nɛ$	$nɛ$	$kə$
Comparative	$ɕyɛ^{53}$	$ɕyæ^{53}$	las/bas	$lɛ$	ji	$kə$
Comitative	re^{13}	$ʑæ^{53}$	da|	ta	do	ra
Disposal	i^{53}	$tæ^{53}$				
Definite	$lɛ^{53}/nɛ^{53}$					
Instrumental	$rɛ^{53}/nɔ^{53}$					

Table 1: Báimǎ and Tibetan case particles (Sūn 2003a: 71)

Though Huáng & Zhāng and Sūn all analyze the variety of Báimǎ spoken in the neighboring villages of Báimǎ Tibetan Township (Píngwǔ County, Sìchuān province), their classifications differ in a number of respects. The authors agree only in their marking of the ablative and comparative and partially also of the genitive and locative. The comitative marker, despite different transcriptions, also appears to be the same in both analyses. For the remaining particles they present dissimilar forms.

In Huáng & Zhāng's tabulation, the postposition [kæ^{53}] marks several distinct semantic roles: ergative, allative and locative. Huáng & Zhāng do not list instrumental and dative markers separately, because they deem the former identical with ergative and the latter with locative, as is the case in Tibetan. In contrast, Sūn distinguishes between ergative, denoted by [i^{53}], the same particle as the marker of disposal, and instrumental, viz. [rɛ^{53}]/[nɔ^{53}]. Similarly, Huáng & Zhāng analyze the form [tæ^{53}] as combining the functions of the genitive marker and the marker of disposal. In Sūn's classification, on the other hand, these are represented by distinct forms, [tɛ^{53}~ti^{53}] and [i^{53}], respectively. Sūn only sees the markers [i^{53}] (ergative and disposal) and [nɔ^{53}] (locative and instrumental) as multi-functional.

Given the discrepancy between Huáng & Zhāng's and Sūn's classifications, I propose a new summary of nominal postpositions in my data, also collected in Báimǎ Township. Furthermore, within the proposed range of postpositions, I (a) comment on the disputed points in the previous analyses (viz. markers of ergative, genitive, instrumental, definite and disposal), while arguing for isomorphism of some postpositions (genitive and agentive, definite and genitive, comitative and instrumental, locative and dative) and (b) discuss their etymology. Given that the etymology of many postpositions is yet unclear, I hope to initiate a discussion on their possible origins.