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# SAY-COMPLEMENTIZERS IN SINITIC LANGUAGES

HILARY M. CHAPPELL

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SUMMARY: I treat the pathway of grammaticalization which leads to reanalysis of SAY verbs as the category of the complementizer in the case of Sinitic languages, casting an eye over the wider areal and crosslinguistic perspective. Each stage in this grammaticalization process is established in turn and a comparison made between Chinese dialects in terms of their variation in this respect.

## 1. DEFINITION OF A COMPLEMENTIZER

A complementizer, 從句標記 *cóngjù biāoji* in Chinese, is a grammatical morpheme introducing a dependent clause that can fill either, if not both, the positions of subject or object argument of the matrix verb, that is, the main clause verb. Complementizers are also known under the names of ‘subordinating conjunctions’ and ‘clause linkers’.

The first two examples show the presence of clausal arguments respectively filling the object (1) and the subject positions (2) in English which uses the demonstrative *that* as its complementizer:

- (1) She believes [**that** the conference went well]<sub>O</sub>.
- (2) [**That** your health has improved]<sub>S</sub> is really good news.

A further point to observe is that complementizers may be optional, depending on the particular constraints in force for each language. Thus, in English, the linker *that* may be omitted, particularly in less formal contexts of speech. Compare examples (1) and (3):

(3) She believes [ \_\_\_the conference went well]o.

## 2. SOURCES OF COMPLEMENTIZERS

Cross-linguistically, there are at least five main sources for complementizers:

- (i) nouns such as ‘thing’, ‘fact’ or ‘place’, e.g. Korean *kes* ‘thing’; Japanese *koto* ‘thing’,  
Thai *thîi* ‘place’
- (ii) demonstrative, interrogative and relative pronouns, e.g. German *daß* ‘that’; French  
*que* ‘what’
- (iii) dative, allative and locative case markers or prepositions, e.g. Maori *ki* LOC/DAT;  
English ‘to’ LOC/DAT (as in *I want you to go to the festival*).
- (iv) SAY verbs, e.g.; Ewe *bé*, Nepali *bhan*, Khmer *tha*:
- (iv) similative verbs meaning ‘resemble’ or ‘be like’; manner adverbials and deictics, e.g.  
Idoma *be* ‘resemble’; *ti* in Shona ‘be/do thus’

(For relevant data sources, see Lord 1976, Ransom 1988, Güldemann 2008, Heine and Kuteva 2002, Heine et al 1991: 216-7; 246-7, Hopper and Traugott 1993: 180-184.)

3. AREAL DISTRIBUTION FOR SAY VERBS > QUOTATIVE VERBS AND COMPLEMENTIZERS

The reanalysis of SAY verbs as complementizers has been well-described for many languages, including creoles, in the African, South and Southeast Asian regions (see Güldemann 2008, Lord 1993, Plag 1992, Saxena 1988 *inter alia*). However, little is known about this category for Sinitic or Chinese languages, even though they are evidently encircled by many SAY<sub>COMP</sub> languages, suggesting an areal feature which may be either genetic or diffused. SAY-complementizers are attested in languages that belong to the following language families or subgroups (see references for details):

SOUTHEAST AND EAST ASIA: Tibeto-Burman; Tai-Kadai; Hmong-Mien; Austroasiatic;

Austronesian

NORTH ASIA: Mongolian (Altaic)

SOUTH ASIA: Indo-Iranian; Dravidian

AFRICA: Semitic, Chadic (both Afroasiatic); Kwa (Niger-Congo)

Let us now consider this issue for Sinitic languages in which this syntactic reanalysis for SAY verbs appears to be an example of a language-internal development which is, nonetheless, crosslinguistically well-attested. Note that there is nothing deterministic about this grammaticalization process: it does not occur, nor need ever eventually take place, in all Sinitic languages. Rather, the possibility of such a syntactic reanalysis should be attributed to the presence of conducive typological preconditions (Chappell 2001: 343, 350), in short, a predisposition to such a development.

4. COMPLEMENTIZERS IN SINITIC LANGUAGES

Until relatively recent times, the general view was that Chinese did not possess any subordinating conjunctions, similar to *that* in English or *que* in French, used to introduce embedded dependent clauses such as indirect speech. It is not surprising then to learn that one of the earliest studies on complementizers for Chinese arose from a comparative dialectal study of Southern Mǐn and Standard Mandarin by Robert L. Cheng [Zhèng Liángwěi 鄭良偉] (1991) who was one of the first to make the extremely interesting observation that the use of *kóng* 講 ‘say’ as a clause linker in Taiwanese Southern Mǐn did not appear to have any correlates in formal Standard Mandarin. This is shown in the two following examples cited from Cheng (1991 : 378, my translation):

(4) Taiwanese Southern Mǐn:

我想講伊儻來啊。

*Goá siū<sup>n</sup> kóng i bōe lái a.*  
 1SG think **say** 3SG NEG.can come CRS

‘I don’t think that he’ll come’ (more literally: ‘I think that he won’t come.’)

(5) Mandarin:

我想(\*說)他不會來了。

*Wǒ xiǎng (\*shuō) tā bù huì lái le.*  
 1SG think **say** 3SG NEG can come CRS

‘I don’t think he’ll come’

Nonetheless, in recent studies using large corpora of spoken materials, Shuan-fan Huang 黃宣範 (2003) and Fang Mei 方梅 (2006) have been able to clearly identify the use of the verb *shuō* ‘say’ in certain highly vernacular genres of both Taiwanese Mandarin and Beijing Mandarin varieties, as opposed to formal styles of Mandarin or *pǔtōnghuà* 普通話. Kawai Chui 徐嘉慧 (1994) and Ka-Wai Yeung 楊家慧 (2003, 2006) have also discussed this property for Hong Kong Cantonese, similarly using corpus materials.

(6) Colloquial Beijing dialect (Fang 2006)

我 总是 觉得 说, 生活里缺了 点儿 什么。

*wǒ zǒngshì juéde shuō, shēnghuó-lǐ quē-le diǎnr shénme*

1SG always **feel** SAY<sub>THAT</sub> life-in lack-PFV little something

‘I’ve always **felt that** there is something a little lacking in my life.’

(from the Peking University corpus of spoken transcriptions, my translation).

One reason, therefore, for this gap in our grammatical knowledge of Sinitic languages is not only the dearth of materials on Chinese dialect grammar up until recent times but also the lack of sufficient quantities of spoken discourse materials to analyze, wherein newly emerging grammatical phenomena such as the complementizer could be pinpointed. The use of the complementizers derived from SAY verbs is certainly not characteristic of formal genres of Chinese languages.

In Chappell (2008), I carried out an analysis of spoken discourse data for ten Sinitic languages in order to establish the stages of grammaticalization in this reanalysis process and thereby to assess variation in the degree of grammaticalization for the languages possessing this category of speech.

To begin with, the three main SAY verbs serving as complementizers in Sinitic languages are JIANG 講, SHUO 說 and HUA 話, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: SAY verbs in 10 Sinitic languages

LANGUAGE	VARIETY / DIALECT	SAY VERB	GRAMMATICALIZED FUNCTION
1. Southern Mǐn (Mǐnnánhuà 閩南話)	Taiwanese 台語	kóng 講	Stage V Complementizer
2. Cantonese Yuè 粵	Hong Kong 香港	wa <sup>6</sup> 話	Stage II-III Semi-complementizer
3. Mandarin (Gūanhuà 官話)	Standard (pūtōnghuà 普 通話)	shuō 說	— (Not acceptable in prescribed usage)
4. Mandarin (Gūanhuà 官 話)	Beījīng 北京	shuō 說	Stage IV Complementizer
5. Mandarin (Gūanhuà 官 話)	Taiwanese 台灣國語	shuō 說	Stage IV-V Complementizer
6. Hakka (Kèjiā 客家)	Sìxiàn 四縣, Táoyuán 桃 園, Taiwan	koy <sup>31</sup> 講	Stage II Semi-complementizer
7. Xiāng 湘	Chángshā 長沙	kan <sup>41</sup> 講	—
8. Gàn 贛	Nánchāng 南昌	wa <sup>6</sup> 話	—
9. Wú 吳	Shànghǎi 上海	kā <sup>34</sup> 講	—
10. Jìn 晉	Huòjiā 獲嘉	ʂuβ <sup>33</sup> 說	—

Legend: ‘—’ = Complementizer or semi-complementizer usage is not found in the sample of discourse data or in the relevant publications, but rather only the lexical use as a quotative verb. (This table is adapted from Table 1, Chappell (2008: 64).

Note that in Southern Min dialects, where this phenomenon is most markedly developed, so too is their diversity: in the Chaozhou dialect 潮州話, the main verb of saying is [tã<sup>213</sup>] 呞 (Xu and Matthews 2007), while in the Xiamen 廈門 and Quanzhou 泉州 dialects, [kio<sup>21</sup>] 叫 ‘call’, ‘tell’ may alternate as a complementizer with the main verb of saying used in this function, [kɔŋ<sup>53</sup>] 講 and [səŋ<sup>5</sup>] 說 respectively (Li Rulong 2007: 169).

Second, a continuum comprising five main stages of grammaticalization can be established through analysis of the spoken discourse materials.

#### STAGE I: QUOTATIVE CONSTRUCTION

(NP<sub>SUBJECT</sub>)(PP<sub>ADDRESSEE</sub>) V<sub>1[SAY]</sub> : [QUOTATION]

In the initial stage, the lexical verb SAY can also be used as a quotative verb introducing direct or indirect speech in the quotative complement. This sets the stage for a potential reanalysis as a complementizer.

#### Taiwanese Southern Mǐn

- (7) 伊 有 講 <MC 恩澤> 欲 送 美國 學。  
*i ū kóng Ēn-zé beh sáŋ Bì-kok ɔh.*  
 3SG have say (name) want send USA study  
 ‘She did say she would send Un-te to America to study.’ [Fate 754]

The SAY verbs in Xiāng, Gàn, Wú, Jìn and Standard Mandarin belong to this stage, since, as far as textual data is concerned, they have not embarked upon any grammaticalization process towards a complementizer usage.

STAGE II: SEMI-COMPLEMENTIZER USE in  $V_2$  position of a serial verb construction

(NP<sub>SUBJECT</sub>) VERB<sub>1</sub> (X) VERB<sub>2(SAY)</sub> CLAUSE<sub>[QUOTATION]</sub>

$V_1$  = speech act verb

This type of serial verb structure represents a bridging stage with the SAY verb being typically used at the end of a non-final matrix clause to directly introduce the embedded complement clause, a quotation.

The  $V_2$  SAY verb does not, at this stage, form a verb complex with the preceding matrix verb since other material may intervene between  $V_1$  and  $V_{2(SAY)}$ , including adverbs, prepositional phrases, direct objects, discourse particles and aspect marking, represented by X in the syntactic configuration above. Importantly,  $V_1$  shows a restriction to speech act and other kinds of communication verbs, including ASK, ANSWER, TELL, MOCK, ADVISE, WRITE and HEAR.

This stage is neatly represented by Sixiàn Hakka *koŋ*<sup>3/</sup> 講 and by Hong Kong Cantonese *wa*<sup>6</sup> 話 whose semi-complementizers are largely restricted to co-occurrence with verbs of communication.

(8) Hong Kong Cantonese

噉 後尾 就 有 工人 出嚟 報 就 話 ,  
*gam<sup>2</sup> hau<sup>6</sup>mei<sup>5°</sup> jau<sup>6</sup> yau<sup>5</sup> gung<sup>1</sup>yan<sup>4</sup> chut<sup>1</sup>-lei<sup>4</sup> bo<sup>3</sup> jau<sup>6</sup> wa<sup>6</sup>,*  
 so in.the.end then have servant exit-come **report** then **say**<sub>SEMI-COMP</sub>

已經 死 咗 嘞 = 。

*yi<sup>5</sup>ging<sup>1</sup> sei<sup>2</sup>-joh<sup>2</sup> lak<sup>3</sup> = .*

already die-PFV P<sub>CERT</sub>

‘Finally, a servant came out to announce that she was dead’ (from the narrative *Reborn Lady in Red*, lines 356-358).

This could also be aptly translated as ‘Finally, a servant came out to make an announcement, *saying* that she was dead’ since semi-complementizers are not entirely bleached of their original lexical meaning of ‘say’. Furthermore, both V<sub>1</sub> and V<sub>2</sub> belong to the same semantic field with V<sub>1</sub> denoting a more specific type of speech act than the general SAY verb of V<sub>2</sub>.

STAGE III: COMPLEMENTIZER USE with cognition verbs

(NP<sub>SUBJECT</sub>) VERB<sub>1</sub>-COMPLEMENTIZER(<SAY) CLAUSE

V<sub>1</sub>= speech act and *cognition verbs*

The reanalysis of V<sub>2</sub> as a complementizer is reached at Stage III, the switch context, and is shown in the extension of V<sub>1</sub> to cognitive verbs such as THINK, KNOW and PLAN. Perception verbs

come under this umbrella since they tend to be interpreted as cognitive verbs in this complex construction: HEAR > UNDERSTAND; SEE > THINK.

The Taiwanese Southern Mǐn example (4) from above and the following example from Taiwanese Mandarin both illustrate this stage with cognitive verbs.

(9) Taiwanese Mandarin:

260. .. 他們 不 知道 說、

*tāmen* *bù* *zhīdao* *shuō*

3PL NEG know SAY<sub>COMP</sub>

261. .. 係裏面 最近 有 什麼樣的 事情。

*xì-lǐmian* *zuìjìn* *yǒu* *shénmeyàng* *de* *shìqing*.

department-inside lately have what.kind LIG matter

‘They didn’t know what was happening in the department.’ (Huang 2003: 440)

The  $V_1-V_2$  complex evolves into a tightly bound unit of  $V_1$ -COMPLEMENTIZER(<sub><SAY</sub>) where the original  $V_{2(SAY)}$  becomes an invariant particle introducing the complement clause . Furthermore, the constructional meaning is no longer compositional, as is the case of speech act verbs typifying Stage II. Example (9) may not be interpreted as :\**They didn’t know saying what was happening in the department.*

STAGE IV : Extension of  $V_1$  to additional verb classes

$V_1$ = speech act, cognition, *emotion and stative verbs*

This stage witnesses a broadening in scope of the verb classes permitted in the  $V_1$  slot to emotion and stative verbs including FEEL, BE ANNOYED, BE ANXIOUS, and BE HAPPY. Note also that if no further features associated with bonding of the complementizer with  $V_1$  can be detected in a particular language, this stage can be conflated with stage III.

(10) 我驚講伊會自殺。

*Goá kiã kóng i ōe chū-sat.*

1SG afraid SAY<sub>THAT</sub> 3SG can suicide

‘I’m afraid that he will commit suicide.’ (Liu Hsiu-ying 1996:16, my glossing)

STAGE V : Onset of conventionalization of the complementizer usage

$V_1$ = speech act, cognition, emotion, stative and *modal verbs*

Southern Mǐn appears to possess the most highly grammaticalized complementizer of all the languages found in Sinitic so far. While the classes possible in  $V_1$  have extended to modal verbs, as shown in (11), the complementizer itself may even co-occur with its lexical verb ‘say’, as revealed in (12):

(11) Taiwanese Southern Mǐn

伊頭腦好不一定講伊就看做生意。

*I thâu-náu hó bô-it-tēng kóng i toh gâu chò seng-lí.*  
 3SG brains good not.necessary SAY<sub>THAT</sub>3SG then clever do business  
 ‘Having good brains does not necessarily mean that you are good at business.’ (*Fate* 384)

(12) Taiwanese Southern Mǐn

恁 尪叔仔 共 我 講 講 ,  
*lín ban-chek-à kah goá kóng kóng*  
 2SG.PL youngest: uncle COM 1SG say SAY<sub>THAT</sub>

我 還也 有 做 善事 啦 .  
*goá oân-á ū chò siān-sū là*  
 1SG also have<sub>PFT</sub> do good-deed PRT

‘Your youngest uncle told me that I had also done some good deeds.’ (*Fate* 77-78)

The stage of conventionalization will be fully achieved when the complementizer becomes obligatory in use in all contexts that involve a complement or subordinate clause. This is not yet the case, however, in Sinitic languages, where the complementizer is still optional, given that simple juxtaposition of main and dependent clauses is always a possible alternative. In some languages, though again, interestingly not in Sinitic, the original lexical use of the complementizer as a verb meaning ‘say’ becomes obsolete during the process.

The expansion of verb classes throughout the various stages is summarized in the following figure (adapted from Chappell 2008: 54).

Figure 1: *Implicational hierarchy of verb classes co-occurring with quotative complementizers*

- (1) modal verbs  $\supset \acute{E}$  (2) stative and emotion verbs  $\supset \acute{E}$   
(3) cognition and perception verbs  $\acute{E} \supset$  (4) speech act verbs

## 5. SINITIC LANGUAGES WITHOUT COMPLEMENTIZERS

At the present time of research, recorded narrative texts examined for representative dialects from the Sinitic languages of Xiāng, Wú, Hakka, Gà and Jin show no evidence of SAY developing into a complementizer (see Chappell 2008 for details). They remain at Stage I as simple quotative verbs. Southern Mǐn appears to be the most highly grammaticalized (Stage V), since *kóng kóng* 講講 ‘say-COMP’ is permitted, while Beijing and Taiwanese Mandarin follow closely behind in their development (Stage IV), given that the use of *\*shuō-shuō* \*说说 ‘say-COMP’ is not (yet) possible in either. Taiwanese Mandarin and Southern Mǐn also both allow modal verbs in  $V_1$  position, but not the Beijing dialect. In contrast to this, Hakka and Cantonese represent the semi-complementizer stage (Stage II). Nonetheless, a small number of cognitive verbs, typifying Stage III, are textually attested which do combine with Cantonese *wa<sup>6</sup>* 話 ‘say’, albeit in looser  $V_1$ -X- $V_2$  structures. Cantonese thus straddles Stages II and III.

Finally, it should be remarked that other kinds of grammaticalized uses of SAY have been identified in all ten Sinitic languages, including those documented crosslinguistically, such as the development into topic markers, the conditional conjunction ‘if’, the consequence conjunction ‘so’, hearsay evidentials, clause-final discourse markers of surprize or strong affirmation, and even a marker of the negative comparative ‘to be not like’ in Xiāng. Further research is certain to turn up more cases of this complementizer pathway in Sinitic languages, once more large-scale discourse studies are undertaken.

#### TRANSCRIPTIONS :

1. *Fate*. Family conversation covering a variety of topics in the Southern Min language. Recorded in Taipei, Taiwan. Transcription manuscript by Hilary Chappell and Ng Chan Kam Chi. Paris: CRLAO.
2. *Reborn Lady in Red*. Narrative in Cantonese of an opera story. Recorded in Hong Kong. Transcription manuscript by Hilary Chappell and Yu-chin Chen. Paris: CRLAO.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

CERT modal marker of certitude; CRS currently relevant state modal marker; LIG marker of ligature; MC Mandarin Chinese; NP noun phrase; PP prepositional phrase; PRT clause-final modal particle; SAY<sub>THAT</sub> SAY verbs in complementizer function; V verb. Symbol: <...> Quotation.

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*Autobiography*

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She has published over 50 articles and book chapters on Chinese languages while her books include *Sinitic grammar: synchronic and diachronic perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), *The grammar of inalienability. A typological perspective on body parts terms and the part-whole relation*, co-edited with William McGregor (Mouton de Gruyter 1996), and *A grammar and lexicon of Hakka* (EHESS, Paris, 2005), co-authored with Christine Lamarre.