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Simulative complements in Archaic Chinese in
typological perspective: a special function of
者 $t\phi\alpha X$ in the dialect of the Zuozhuan
從類型學的角度探討上古漢語的偽裝補語結構：
《左傳》中「者」的一種特殊用法

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Abstract: This work shows that the complement-taking verb 偽 $\eta jweH$ ‘pretend’ in the Archaic Chinese dialect of the Zuozhuan specifically selects nominalized complements in 者 $t\phi\alpha X$. It then discuss the additional implications of this fact for the typology of complementation and the etymology of this verb.

Keywords: Archaic Chinese, nominalization, relativization, complementation, simulative

1 Introduction

The Zuozhuan, as the largest of all pre-Qin Archaic Chinese texts, provides linguists with a sizeable corpus reflecting a synchronically homogeneous language, allowing not only to make observations about existing patterns, but also about gaps and negative evidence.

The present paper focuses on a puzzling construction combining 偽 $\eta jweH$ ‘pretend’ and the marker 者 $t\phi\alpha X$ to build a simulative predicate ‘pretend to do X ’, a specificity of the language of the Zuozhuan, significant in being the only overtly marked complement clause type in Archaic Chinese.

This paper comprises three sections. First, it briefly discusses the main functions of 者 $t\phi\alpha X$ in the language of the Zuozhuan. Second, it presents in

detail all the uses of the verb 偽 *ŋjweH* ‘pretend’ and the attested simulative complements in this document. Third, it discusses the significance of this construction in both typological and diachronic perspectives.¹

2 The main functions of 者 *tɕæX*

The grammatical word 者 *tɕæX* has many distinct functions in Archaic Chinese, which have been the topic of a considerable amount of previous scholarship, (von der Gabelentz 1881: §455-§477, Freundlich 1988, Harbsmeier 1981: 210-227 Aldridge 2016), including some publications specifically dedicated to the dialect of the Zuozhuan (Luo and Wu 1983, He 2010: 373;389;409).

2.1 Nominalization and relativization

The most conspicuous function of 者 *tɕæX* is to nominalize verbs, or turn entire clauses into relative clauses (von der Gabelentz 1881: §462-§467, Freundlich 1988, Aldridge 2016).

Some [verb + 者 *tɕæX*] combinations are lexicalized, and frequently occur in the Zuozhuan, for instance 使者 *ʂiH tɕæX* ‘envoy’ from the passive form 使 *ʂiH* ‘be sent’ of the verb 使 *ʂiX* ‘send’,² but even these can be seen as minimal headless relative clauses.

Nominalized clauses in 者 *tɕæX* serve as the main strategy to relativize subjects of either transitive (1) or intransitive (2) verbs, and adjectival stative verbs (3) in Archaic Chinese.³ The majority of such relatives are headless, like (1) and (3), but there are also postnominal ones (2, and 13 below) in 者 *tɕæX*.

- (1) [能補過者], 君子也。

[*noŋ puX kwaH tɕæX*], *kjun.tsi jæX*
can mend fault NMLZ noble.man COP

¹In this paper, the pronunciation is cited in Middle Chinese, the oldest attested stage whose phonological system is entirely recorded, using Baxter’s (1992) transcription but converting the initial consonants to IPA. Although anachronistic, this convention is preferred over using Old Chinese reconstruction (whose degree of abstractness is closer to that of proto-Indo-European than to a lower-level branch like proto-Germanic) or Mandarin, which is too poorly informative, and unable to reflect the morphological alternations preserved in the Jingdian shiwen (Downer 1959). The English translation of the examples follows Durrant et al. (2016), except for (26), where a more literal translation was adopted.

²On the function of the tonal alternation observed in this example, see Downer (1959), Jacques (2016).

³A considerable amount of work has been on the relationship between nominalization and relativization in the Sino-Tibetan/Trans-Himalayan family (see for instance Bickel 1999).

‘One who can make good his errors is a noble man.’ (Zhao, 7)

- (2) 民[死亡者], 非其父兄, 即其子弟

mjin [sijX mjaŋ tɕæX] pjij qi bjuX xjwæŋ
people die disappear NMLZ NEG:COP 3.POSS father elder.brother
tsik gi tsiX dejX
then 3.POSS son younger.sibling

‘Those among the people who perished were either fathers and older brothers or sons and younger brothers.’ (Xiang, 8)

- (3) 男贄, [大者]玉帛, [小者]禽鳥,

nom tɕijH [dajH tɕæX] ŋjowk bæk [sjewX tɕæX] gim tewX
male gift be.big NMLZ jade silk be.small NMLZ animal bird

‘Among gifts presented by men, the great ones are jade and silk, and the small ones are animals and birds.’ (Zhuang, 24)

The marker 者 *tɕæX* is not a verbal suffix, as shown by examples such as (1): it always occur at the end of the clause, even if it is stranded from the main verb by an object or a prepositional phrase.

Subject is not the only syntactic function that can be relativized by 者 *tɕæX* clauses. A few of them can be interpreted as relativizing the possessor or the subject, rather than the subject itself. For instance, in (4).

- (4) [弱足者]居

nyak tsjowk tɕæX kjo
weak foot NMLZ remain

‘Those who are afflicted in their feet stay at home.’ (Zhao, 7)

There are also two cases of object relativization in the Zuozhuan, as in (5) (see Luo and Wu 1983: 137): this may be evidence for a passivization, even though no phonological alternation is recorded in the Jingdian shiwen, as 拘 ‘capture’ is given here the regular reading *kju* < **k(r)o*.⁴

- (5) 及吳師至, [拘者]道之以伐武城, 克之。

gip ŋu ʃij tɕijH, [kju tɕæX] dawH tɕi jiX bjot
reach Wu army arrive retain NMLZ lead.the.way DEM use attack
mjuX.dʒeŋ, k^hok tɕi
Wucheng subdue DEM

‘When the Wu army arrived, the very ones who had been seized led it in an attack on Wucheng, and the Wu army took the settlement.’ (Ai, 8)

⁴The marker 者 *tɕæX* does occur in object relatives, but normally in combination with preverbal 所 *ʃjoX* (Aldridge 2013).

2.2 Other functions

In addition to its function as nominalizer, 者 *tɕæX* occurs in a certain number of other contexts. Some specialists of Archaic Chinese syntax ([Harbsmeier 1981](#): 210-227 or [Aldridge 2016](#)) attempt at a unified account of all functions. Since this question is not directly relevant to the topic of this paper however, I do not commit to a particular analysis, and simply provide a brief overview of the contexts where 者 *tɕæX* can be found in the *Zuozhuan*.

First, it can be used after a noun ([von der Gabelentz 1881](#): §468) to derive a related agentive noun, and can even be added to personal names, with the meaning ‘a certain person called ...’ (6).

- (6) 市南有[熊宜僚者], 若得之

dziX nom hjuwX [hjuwŋ.ŋje.lew tɕæX] ɲak tok tɕi
city south exist Xiong.Yiliao ?? if obtain DEM

‘To the south of the city there is a certain Xiong Yiliao. If we get him, ...’ (Ai, 16)

Second, 者 *tɕæX* also occurs as a topicalizer, applying to left-dislocated constituents, including noun phrases, or entire clauses (7).

- (7) 吾聞[致師者], 御靡旌、摩壘而還

ŋu mjun [tɕiH ʂij tɕæX] ŋjoH mjeX tsjeŋ ma
1SG hear challenge army TOP? drive leaning banner touch
lwijX ɲi ɣwæn
rampart LNK return

‘I have heard that in challenging the enemy, the chariot driver sets the banners streaming and touches the enemy’s ramparts, and then they return..’ (Xuan, 12)

Third, 者 *tɕæX* appears to be analyzable as a marker of (non-relative) subordinate clauses ([Harbsmeier 1981](#): 210-216), in particular the protasis of a conditional construction, as in (8) and (9).

- (8) [齊師出竟而不以甲車三百乘從我者], 有如此盟

dzej ʂij tɕ^hwit kjæŋH ɲi pjuw ɲiX kæp tɕ^hæ sam
Qi army go.out boundary LNK NEG use armor vehicle three
pæk ʂiŋH dzjowŋ ŋa tɕæX hjuwX ɲo ts^hjeX mjæŋ
hundred chariot follow 1PL ??? exist like DEM covenant

‘If the Qi army should go across its frontiers and Lu does not accompany us with three hundred chariots, then let this covenant be our pledge!’ (Ding, 10)

(9) [克敵者]，上大夫受縣

k^hok dek tɕæX dʒaŋX dajH.pju dzuX ɣwen
subdue enemy ??? upper officer receive district

‘Should we overcome our opponent, then superior high officers will receive districts.’ (Ai, 2)

While the exact analysis of the function of 者 *tɕæX* in this type of example remains controversial, it is not of direct concern to the main topic of the present paper, and in the remainder of the paper, only the function of 者 *tɕæX* as relativizer will be discussed.

2.3 Elision

As noted by [von der Gabelentz \(1881: §477\)](#), the nominalizer 者 *tɕæX* can be elided, and a simple bare verb used in nominal function.

Thus, alongside the frequent nominalized form 從者 *dzjowŋ tɕæX* ‘follower’ in the *Zuozhuan*, we find an example of a bare nominalization of the verb 從 *dzjowŋ* ‘follow’ (10).

(10) 晉、楚之[從]，不聞達者

tsinH tɕ^hjoX tɕi dzjowŋ pjuw mjun dat tɕæX
Jin Chu GEN follow NEG hear attain NMLZ

‘Among his followers in Jin and in Chu we have heard of no able men.’ (Zhao, 13)

Bare relatives are always short, the longest ones being verb + noun or negation + verb phrases (11).

(11) 會于溫，討[不服]

ɣwajH hju ʔwon t^hawX pjuw bjuwk
meet LOC Wen: chastise NEG submit

‘They met at Wen: this was to chastise those who would not submit.’ (Xi, 28)

A particular case of obligatory elision of 者 *tɕæX* occurs where a nominalized verb or verb phrase is embedded within another nominalized clause: there is never more than one 者 *tɕæX*, due to a rule of haplology. Thus, in (12), [敬逆[來者]] [*kjæŋH ŋjæk [loj tɕæX]*] ‘One who receives visitors respectfully’, the nominalized verb 來者 *loj tɕæX* ‘visitor, person who comes’ (a term which occurs 11 times in the *Zuozhuan*) is the object of the verb

逆 *ɲjæk* ‘meet, receive’,⁵ in another relative clause similar in structure to (13).

(12) [敬逆來者], 天所福也

[kjæŋH ɲjæk loj tɕæX] t^hen ɕjoX pjuwk jæX
 respect meet come NMLZ heaven NMLZ:OBL bless COP

‘One who receives visitors respectfully is one blessed by Heaven.’
 (Zhao, 3)

(13) 國人[逆喪者]皆髻

kwok ɲin [ɲjæk saŋ tɕæX] keɣ tɕwæ
 country man meet mourning NMLZ all tie.hair

‘The inhabitants of the capital who met the dead being brought back all had their hair tied in hemp strings.’ (Xiang, 4)

Thus, one could have expected a form such as †[敬逆[來者]者] †[kjæŋH ɲjæk [loj tɕæX]tɕæX],⁶ but due to the obligatory haplology rule, the second 者 *tɕæX* was removed.

3 Simulative complements in the Zuozhuan

In the dialect of the Zuozhuan, 者 *tɕæX* presents a very specific function in combination with 偽 *ɲjweH* ‘pretend’, as illustrated by (14), which appears to be distinct from the four main functions of this marker presented above (§2).

(14) 陽虎偽[不見冉猛者]

jaŋ.xuX ɲjweH [pjuw kenH ɲemX.mæŋX tɕæX]
 Yang.Hu pretend NEG see Ran.Meng ???

‘Yang Hu pretend[ed] not to see Ran Meng.’ (Ding, 8)

The existence of this construction, which occurs ten times in the Zuozhuan, has been previously pointed out by Luo and Wu (1983: 140). In this section, I discuss the part of speech of the words written by the character 偽 *ɲjweH*, and then propose a more detailed analysis of the construction in (14).

⁵This verb generally means ‘go against’ in Classical Chinese, but in the Zuozhuan it can express the meanings ‘meet’ or ‘receive’. For instance, Chen (2013: 1117) glosses it as 迎接 and 領受, without any derogative overtone.

⁶In this paper I reserve the use of the asterisk for reconstructed forms, and adopt the dagger symbol † for incorrect sentences.

3.1 Which part of speech does 偽 *ɲjweH* belong to?

Before discussing the syntax of simulative complements in Archaic Chinese, it is necessary to address the nature of the words written by the character 偽 *ɲjweH*. According to [Chen \(2013: 116\)](#), it represents either an adjective meaning ‘false; hypocritical’ (虛假: 虛偽), or a ‘state word’ (狀態詞)⁷ meaning ‘pretending’ (表示動作行為的不真實, 假裝).

However, there is clear evidence that 偽 *ɲjweH* rather represents a noun ‘deceit’ and a verb ‘pretend to, feign’.

First, as shown by (15), 偽 *ɲjweH* occurs in the meaning ‘deceit’ in conjunction with 情 *dzjeŋ* ‘inner feelings, true state’, and can only be analyzed as a noun in this context. There are three such examples in the *Zuozhuan*.

(15) 民之情偽, 盡知之矣

mjin tɕi dzjeŋ ɲjweH dzinX tje tɕi hiX
people GEN feeling deceit completely know DEM SFP

‘the people’s true state and deceits he knows to the last detail.’ (Xi, 28)

Second, example (16) illustrates 偽 *ɲjweH* occurring before the verb 顛 *ten* ‘fall’. One could in principle either argue that it is analyzable as an adverb ‘pretendingly’ in this context.

(16) 猛逐之, 顧而無繼, 偽顛

mæŋX djuwk tɕi, kuH ni mju kejH ɲjweH
Ran.Meng pursue DEM look.back LNK not.exist follower pretend
ten
fall

Ran Meng went after the Linqiu forces, but looking back and seeing that there was no one to second him, he pretended to fall. (Ding, 8)

However, such an analysis would not account for examples like (17), where 偽 *ɲjweH* precedes the noun 足疾 *tsjowk dzit* ‘foot illness’, and has to be analyzed as a transitive verb.

(17) 光偽足疾

kwaŋ ɲjweH tsjowk dzit
Gongzi/Guang pretend foot ill(ness)

⁷This category includes ‘words that are close to adjectives in meaning but do not combine with negative or measure adverbs’ ([Zádrapa 2021: 39](#)), in particular ideophones.

‘(Gongzi) Guang feigned an illness of his feet.’ (Zhao, 27)

The character 疾 *dzit* can be used to write a noun ‘disease’, an intransitive verb ‘become ill’, or a transitive verb ‘resent’, and 足疾 *tsjowk dzit* could be alternatively viewed as a complement clause ‘(feigned that) his feet were affected by a disease’, but even under this analysis, 偽 *ɲjweH* must be analysed as a complement-taking verb, not as an adverb.

3.2 Simulative constructions in the Zuozhuan

We have established in the previous section that 偽 *ɲjweH* is to be necessarily analyzed as a transitive (or complement-taking) verb ‘pretend’ in (17), rather than as an adverb.

There is one additional example in the Zuozhuan of 偽 *ɲjweH* followed by what could be analyzed as a noun phrase (18), but even in this example it is unclear whether 癘疾 *pjojH dzit* is a Verb-noun complement clause ‘fall ill’ or whether it is a noun ‘chronic illness’, otherwise attested in the Zuozhuan (19).⁸

(18) 司徒老祁、慮癘偽[癘疾]

si-du lawX.gi ljoH.kjwɨjX ɲjweH
supervise-conscripts Lao.Qi Lü.Gui pretend
pjojH.dzit
(chronic?).illness

‘The supervisor of conscripts Laoqi and Lü Gui pretended to have fallen ill.’ (Zhao, 14)

(19) 哀公有癘疾

?oj kuwɲ hjuwX pjojH.dzit
Ai lord have chronic.illness

‘Lord Ai had a chronic illness.’ (Zhao, 8)

Excluding the potentially ambiguous (17) and (18), and the three instances of 偽 *ɲjweH* as a noun ‘deceit’, and one possible attestation as an intransitive verb ‘be fake’ (20), all the remaining 19 examples of this character in the Zuozhuan, such as (21), are followed by verbal clauses (in square brackets).

(20) 使乘車者左實右偽

⁸A third potential example of 偽 *ɲjweH* with a nominal object is (30b) discussed below, which is also ambiguous.

ʃiX ʒiŋ tɕʰæ tɕæX tsaX ʒit hjuwH ŋjweH
 send ride vehicle NMLZ left be.real be.fake

‘They had sent chariots, with real soldiers on the left and fake ones on the right.’ (Xiang, 18)

(21) 子偽[不知], 我將不墮

tsiX ŋjweH [pjuw tje] ŋaX tsjaŋ pjuw xjwie
 you pretend NEG know I FUT NEG let.fall

‘You pretend not to know, and I will not raze the walls.’ (Ding, 12)

It is more economical to treat all of these 偽 *ŋjweH* as complement-taking verbs, rather than supposing an additional adverb ‘pretending’ to account for examples such as (16) and (21). The verbal clauses following 偽 *ŋjweH* are henceforth referred to as ‘simulative complement clauses’.

Of these 19 attestations, 8 involve short complement clauses containing either only one verb (16, 21) or a verb followed by its object (22, 23), never longer than two characters.⁹

(22) 華亥偽[有疾]

ɣwæH.ɣojX ŋjweH [hjuwX dzit]
 Hua.Hai feign have illness

‘Hua Hai feigned an illness.’ (Zhao, 20)

(23) 冉猛偽[傷足]而先

ŋemX.mæŋX ŋjweH [ɕaŋ tsjowk] ni sen
 Ran.Mang pretend wound foot LNK be.first

‘Ran Meng preceded it, pretending to have been wounded in the foot.’ (Ding, 8)

Whenever the simulative complement clause is longer than two characters, a 者 *tɕæX* clause is used, whether the length of the clause is due to a preverbal prepositional phrase as in (24) or to an object as in (25) below and (14) above.

(24) 宵坎血加書, 偽[與子儀、子邊盟者]

sjew kʰomX xwet kæ ɕo, ŋjweH [joX tsiX.ŋje
 night pit blood add written.document pretend with Zi.Yi
 tsiX.pen mjæŋ tɕæX]
 Zi.Bian covenant NMLZ

⁹I prefer to count by character, rather than by ‘syllable’ or by ‘word’, since we cannot take for granted that each character corresponds to one syllable in Old Chinese (Baxter and Sagart 2014).

‘Then in the night dug a pit, smeared blood there, and added a document, feigning that they had sworn a covenant with Dou Ke and Qu Yukou.’ (Xi, 25)

(25) 我出師以圍許, 偽[將改立君者]

ŋaX tɕ^hwit ʃij jiX hjwɨj xjoX ŋjweH [tsjaŋ kojX
we send.out army use surround Xu, pretend FUT change
lip kjun tɕæX]
establish ruler NMLZ

‘We will send out troops to lay siege to Xǔ, pretend that we are planning to establish another ruler, ...’ (Cheng, 9)

Shorter simulative complements can also be 者 tɕæX clauses (26, 30b).¹⁰

(26) 諸臣偽[劫君者]而負罪以出

tɕo dʒin ŋjweH [kjæp kjun tɕæX] ni bjuwX dzwojX jiX
all subject pretend abduct ruler NMLZ LNK bear fault LNK
tɕ^hwit
go.out

‘All of us, your subjects, will pretend to have abducted you, accept responsibility for it and leave (Lu).’ (Zhao, 25)

The frequency of this clause type indicates that it was highly grammaticalized in the language of the Zuo zhuan. Of the four main functions of 者 tɕæX (§2), the one closest to the use in simulative clauses is its function as relativizer (§2.1).

In view of the optional elision of 者 tɕæX in shorter relative clauses (§2.3), it is likely that simulative clauses without 者 tɕæX (examples 21, 22, 23 above) are analyzable as cases of elision.

Its historical origin lies probably in the use of 偽 ŋjweH as a transitive verb taking a nominal object referring to the act of deception (as in 17 above) In (30b), the clause 糴者 dek tɕæX can thus either be analyzed as a nominalized verb ‘(grain) purchaser’ as suggested by Durrant et al.’s (2016) translation (‘pretend (to be) purchasers’), or as a 者 tɕæX simulative complement (‘pretend to purchase (grain)’).

(27) 使師偽[糴者]負甲以息於昔陽之門外

¹⁰Due to the haplology rule (§2.3), it is possible that in fact some instance of the 偽 ŋjweH + 者 tɕæX-clause construction are in fact nominalized. Thus, Durrant et al. (2016) translate 諸臣偽[劫君者] tɕo dʒin ŋjweH [kjæp kjun tɕæX] in (26) as ‘all of us, the subjects who have forced you into this action against your better judgment’, analyzing this clause as a postnominal relative. In this view, the single 者 tɕæX marks here both the relativization of the subject of 偽 ŋjweH ‘pretend’ (§2.1) and the simulative complement itself.

ʃiX ʃij ŋjweH [dek tɕæX] bjuwX kæp jiX sik ?jo
 send army pretend buy.grain NMLZ carry army use rest LOC
 sjek-jaŋ tɕi mwon ŋwajH
 Xiyang GEN gate outside

‘(Zhonghang Wu) had his troops disguise themselves as grain purchasers, hauling their armor on their backs and then resting outside the gate at Xiyang.’ (Zhao, 22)

This type of ambiguous construction is the pivot form which allowed reanalysis from 者 *tɕæX* headless subject relative clauses (§2.1) to grammaticalized simulative complements.

The 者 *tɕæX* simulative complements are a specificity of the language of the Zuozhuan. The only potential example of the 偽 + CLAUSE-者 construction in another text known to me is (28) from the Mengzi.

(28) 然則舜偽[喜者]與

ɲen tsok ɕwinH xiX tɕæX joX
 thus LNK Shun preteng rejoice NMLZ SFP

‘In that case, then, did not Shun rejoice hypocritically?’ (Mengzi, Wanzhang A)

This innovative construction thus appeared in the dialect of Zuozhuan, but never gained foot in the written language and disappeared in late Archaic Chinese.

4 Typological perspective

4.1 Participial clauses as simulative complements

Despite the absence of a detailed crosslinguistic survey of simulative complements in the languages of the world, it is clear that the use of 者 *tɕæX*-clauses as simulative complements in the dialect of the Zuozhuan is not typologically isolated.

Verbs and constructions meaning ‘pretend to’ can select infinitive clauses (‘pretend to do’), finite clauses (‘he pretends that he does’), but also participial clauses (‘pretend doing’). English happens to allow all three types of constructions, but some languages only select one of the three: for instance, in Japhug, all verbs meaning ‘pretend, feign, disguise as’ select subject participial clauses, rather than infinitive or finite complements (Jacques 2021: 896, 1339).

Although 者 *tɕæX* is not a participle marker in Archaic Chinese, since its locus is not on the verb of the clause (§2.1), nominalizing 者 *tɕæX* clauses do

functionally resemble subject participial clauses, as shown by the comparison of the constructions in (29) and (30) in Japhug and Archaic Chinese.

- (29) a. ku-ra-χtu
PCP:SBJ-ANTIP-buy
'A buyer.'
- b. 糴者
dek tɕæX
buy.grain NMLZ
'A grain purchaser.'
- (30) a. [ku-ra-χtu] to-zɣɣ-pa
PCP:SBJ-ANTIP-buy IFR-pretend
'He pretended to buy things.' (elicited)
- b. 偽[糴者]
ɲjweH [dek tɕæX]
pretend buy.grain NMLZ
'X pretended to buy grain.' (from (30b) above)

What really stands out in this construction is not specifically the fact that the verb 偽 *ɲjweH* selects a 者 *tɕæX*-clause as complement, but rather that it appears the only verb with such a selection restriction in Archaic Chinese, whereas for instance in Japhug, other verbs are compatible with participial clauses (Jacques 2021: 1334). Of the 620 occurrences of 者 *tɕæX* in the Zuozhuan, there is no other complement-taking verb requiring this type of clause.

4.2 Etymological analysis

There is consensus that 偽 *ɲjweH* 'pretend' is etymologically related to 為 *hjwe(H)* 'do' (Wang 1982: 434, Baxter and Sagart 2014: 121). Baxter and Sagart account for the alternation between MC 疑 *ŋ-* and 喻三 *hjw-* by a **N-* prefix: they reconstruct 為 *hjwe* < **G^w(r)aj* and 偽 *ɲjweH* < **N-G^w(r)aj-s* respectively.

At the same time, an etymological relationship with 訛 *ɲwa* 'false' (also written 譌) is likely (Schuessler 2007: 223), though Baxter and Sagart reconstruct **[m]-q^{whs}aj* and do not imply any etymological relationship. This character is not attested in the Zuozhuan, but occurs in the earlier texts, including the Shijing, as an adjective (31).

- (31) 民之訛言、寧莫之懲。

mjin tɕi ɲwa ɲjon neŋ mak tɕi dɲ
people GEN false word why NEG DEM punish

‘The false calumnies of the people, - How is it that you do not repress them?.’ (Shijing, 沔水 - Mian Shui)

A complete account of the morphological relationship between these forms, in particular that between A-type (訛 *ɲwa*) and B-type (為 *hjwe* and 偽 *ɲjweH*) syllables is not possible, but one can nevertheless propose an explanation for the *ɲ*- initial.

The verb 為 *hjwe*, in addition to the meaning ‘do, make’, can be used as a quasi-copula ‘become, assume the function of’ already in Archaic Chinese (32).

(32) 趙衰為原大夫，狐溱為溫大夫。

djewX-tʂ^hjwe hjwe ɲjwon dajH-pju ɣu.tʂin hjwe ?won
Zhao.Chui become Yuan officer Hu.Zhen become Wen
dajH-pju
officer

‘Zhao Cui became the high officer for Yuan, and Hu Zhen became the high officer for Wen.’ (Xi, 25)

It is easy to find typological parallels for a semantic from ‘do’ to the meaning of ‘pretend to’. In Omaha (Siouan), one of the many functions of the verb *gáxe* ‘make’ is to serve as a complement-taking verb meaning ‘pretend to’ (Marsault 2021: 320).

Some languages in addition develop the meaning ‘pretend to’ in the reflexive/middle form of ‘do’. In Japhug, the verb *ɣɣɣ-pa* ‘pretend’ derives by the reflexive prefix *ɣɣɣ-* (Jacques 2021: 896) from the verb *pa* ‘do’, which also occurs in the meaning ‘become’ (Jacques 2021: 1233). In Ancient Greek, the verb *προσποιέομαι* ‘pretend’ is a middle form of *ποιέω* ‘make’ (with the preverb *προσ-*), whose semantic evolution appears to have been ‘procure for oneself’ > ‘take to oneself what does not belong to one’ > ‘pretend to’.

A potential candidate for a middle voice prefix which could yield the *ɲ*- initial in Middle Chinese is the prefix reflected as *ɲ*- in several Kuki-Chin languages, including K’cho and Dai Chin (So-Hartmann 2009: 203-209, Mang 2006: 57, Konnerth 2021), as *a-* (from **ɲa-*) in Japhug (Jacques and Chen 2007: 904-905) and as *ɸ-* in Khroskyabs (Lai 2017: 354). In K’cho, Mang (2006: 57) describes passive, reflexive, reciprocal and antipassive uses of the *ɲ*- prefix.

Jacques and Chen (2007: 904-905) and Zhang et al. (2019) previously argued that some of the voicing transitivity alternations found in Old Chinese reflect a cognate of this intransitivizing **ɲ*- prefix, rather than the anticausative derivation (on which see Sagart and Baxter 2012). In this view, the **ɲ*- prefix turns following obstruents into voiced obstruent in Middle

Chinese, but remains η - when occurring before non-nasal sonorants, entailing a reconstruction 偽 $\eta jweH < * \eta - waj - s$.¹¹

The fact that 偽 $\eta jweH$ ‘pretend’ is syntactically transitive in the Zuozhuan (§3.2) could appear to be a counterargument to this analysis. However, one should note that in Japhug, although the reflexive zyr - (Jacques 2021: 896) is indeed a transitivity-decreasing derivation, $zyr - pa$ ‘pretend’ is actually a semi-transitive verb (Jacques 2021: 532), lacking transitive morphology, but taking absolutive semi-object. This provides an exact typological parallel for the etymology proposed for 偽 $\eta jweH$ in this section.

Conclusion

The question treated in this paper may appear to be anecdotal, as it is limited to a single verb, but it has implication for several issues of Chinese linguistics and linguistic typology.

First, it documents a syntactic specificity of the dialect of the Zuozhuan, which appears to be unique among received texts. If a similar feature is found in the future in an excavated text, this could provide useful evidence for the datation of that text and for the dialectology of Archaic Chinese.

Second, this work contributes to the typology of simulative complements, in showing the existence of a language where this type of complement presents a unique construction, not shared with any other complement-taking verb.

Third, it also provides data relevant to the the historical origins of simulative predicates and simulative constructions in panchronic perspective.

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¹¹This reconstruction implies rehabilitating initial $*w$ -, as opposed to Baxter and Sagart’s $*G^w$ -, in Old Chinese.

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