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## Altaic Elements in the Chinese Variety of Tangwang: True and False Direct Loans

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**Abstract:** This paper focusses on the Tangwang language, a Chinese variety spoken in southern Gansu that has been in contact with the Dongxiang language, a Mongolic language. Tangwang is believed to be a highly altaicised variety, as it demonstrates several traits that are usually absent in this language family are reputed 'typical' of the Turkic-Mongolic languages. However, most of these traits are present in the other northwestern Chinese varieties and are the result of reanalysis, thus, it is difficult to trace their exact origin. This paper aims at analyzing the influence of Mongolic languages on Tangwang from the perspective of borrowings, and in particular direct loans. Taking the formally identical features that are shared in Dongxiang and Tangwang as a starting point, we will try to determine which form can be seen as a direct borrowing due to the adstratal influence of Dongxiang and which one is probably due to an earlier Altaic influence. We will try to classify which form is a 'true' direct loan from Dongxiang and which form could be the evidence of an earlier substrate. From the results, and based on the existing models on languages contact, we will try to understand which mechanisms from relexification, grammaticalization, and language shift is the most probable in the case of Tangwang.

**Keywords:** language contact; grammatical borrowings; Tangwang; Dongxiang; hybrid dialects

### 1. Introduction

All varieties spoken in Northern China have been influenced by Altaic languages, a process known as the 'Altaicisation of Chinese' (Hashimoto 1976, 1986). It has led to the division of the Chinese dialects into two main areal-typological complexes which correspond to the northern and the southern areas (Norman 1988). During the course of history, various groups of languages, including Mongolic, Turkic, and Mandchu-Tungusic, have been in contact with the Chinese varieties spoken in Northern China and have induced changes to the phonology and morpheme structure, but also to syntax and morphosyntax. Because of the historical nature of these contacts, Chinese has received several layers of substratal and superstratal influences of the Altaic type (Janhunen 2015), and, in modern times, most direct contact between northern Chinese dialects and Altaic languages have ceased. However, some dialects also have been in prolonged contact with Mongolic languages on the local level, leading to the adstratal influence on those varieties. These include the Tangwang dialect, spoken by about 15,000 speakers in the village of Tangwang (唐汪镇), situated in the north-eastern part of the Autonomous County of Dongxiang (东乡族自治县) at the border of Gansu and Qinghai provinces, in the People's Republic of China. This region, known as the Hexi Corridor complex, is the home of speakers where languages from different families (Mongolic, Turkic, Sinitic, and Bodhic) have been in contact, leading to the formation of a linguistic area (Dwyer 1995; Janhunen 2004; Slater 2001; Szeto 2021, etc.). Tangwang, along with some other dialects spoken in this region (including Wutun 五屯话, Gangou 甘沟话, Zhoutun 周屯话, Linxia 临夏话, and Xining 西宁话), features a certain number of non-Sinitic traits including nominal case, tense, and aspectual markers, verbal dependence marker (equivalent to Mongolic converbs), dominant SOV order, multiple plural markers on unanimated objects, etc., which are believed to have been induced through language contact with Altaic languages, and in particular, with the surrounding Mongolic languages of Monguor, Bonan, and Dongxiang spoken by their neighboring communities (Peyraube 2017). The lexicon in all these dialects demonstrates only a few lexical loans, and their vocabulary remains strictly Chinese. Because of the high degree of 'mixture' of these dialects on the syntactic level, they have often been considered as a kind of Chinese-based "creoles", "mixed languages", or "Chinese hybrid dialects", which show some degree of mutual intelligibility with other Sinitic varieties (Dwyer 1992; Wurm 1995; Lee-Smith 1996; Slater 2001; Janhunen 2004; Kawasumi 2018; Bell 2020). However, most of these features are formally very different from their Mongolic counterparts, especially from the local Mongolic languages they have been in contact with, and are either the result of a calque or reanalysis

process. Another possibility would be that they were borrowed from other now extinct Altaic varieties we have not fully understood yet (e.g., para-Mongolic Khitan) or an unknown Altaic language that we do not have any written record of. In any case, the exact source of the influence is often difficult to establish, especially for cases of nominal case markers (Xu 2015). Some other forms seem to be related to those found in other Chinese dialects, especially those of the Shanxi–Shaanxi area, spoken further east, but which are yet not fully reconstructible. While the hybrid dialects of the Hexi corridor all share these syntactic features, Tangwang demonstrates a few additional direct loans from Mongolic that are found only in this variety and that will be the object of this study.

This paper aims at analyzing the influence of Mongolic languages on Tangwang from the perspective of borrowings, and in particular direct loans. Taking the formally identical features that are shared in Dongxiang and Tangwang as a starting point, we will try to determine which form can be seen as a direct borrowing due to the adstratal influence of Dongxiang and which one is probably due to an earlier Altaic influence. This paper is organized as follows: in Section 2, we provide an overview of the context, including the sociolinguistic environment and the contact-induced features found in Tangwang’s syntax that are seen as Altaic, but that are commonly shared with other northwestern varieties and should be identified as a superstratal influence. In Section 3, we give an overview of the vocabulary borrowed from and through Dongxiang in Tangwang, as seen in the previous studies, and discuss in detail one particular element found over the different Chinese hybrid dialects of the Hexi corridor, i.e., the formal distinction for the word ‘small’ (*ka* 尕 and *eb* 小) and its particularities in Tangwang compared to Dongxiang. In Section 4, we discuss the pronoun *wrlu* 喔咙 ‘1SG.LOG’ and compare it with the Dongxiang reflexive pronoun *orun* ‘1SG.LOG’. In Section 5, we describe two possessive suffixes, namely the third- person possessive *-ni* 尼 and the reflexive possessive *-ne* 呢. In Section 6, we compare two case markers, the limitative *thala* 他啦 and the instrumental *-la* 啦 with their Dongxiang counterparts. In the discussion, we will try to classify which form is a ‘true’ direct loan from Dongxiang and which form could be the evidence of an earlier substrate. From the results, and based on the existing models of contact language, we will try to understand which mechanisms from relexification, grammaticalization, and language shift is the most probable in the case of Tangwang.

## 1. Context

Tangwang is spoken in the village of Tangwang (唐汪镇) where both Han (汉族) and Hui Muslims (回族) cohabit. This village has been named after the two main families present in the village, respectively, the Tangs (唐) and the Wangs (汪). Based on the legends collected among the Tangwang people, but also on limited historical evidence as well as on genetic affinities, it has been shown that the population inhabiting this village was of different origins, including Tibetan, Mongolian, and Han Chinese (Xu 2014). Three main narratives have been developed regarding the origin of the people of the Tang family. The first one is that they were partly of Mongolian origin. Their ancestors, a Yuan general, (called *Baima jiangjun* 白马将军 ‘General with the White Horse’), and his three wives (including one of Tatar or Mongolian origin) would have led a group from Sichuan, situated south of Gansu, to settle in the actual location of the Tangwang village (Tang 2011). This general is still worshipped as the clan god by the local Han Chinese in the local temple and is believed to be the ancestor of the Tang family. The second narrative is that they are of Dongxiang or Mongolic origin that have been Sinicized and that their initial language was relexified with the Chinese lexicon; hence, there are remaining Altaic syntactic features in the Tangwang language. The last narrative is that a group of four Chinese thieves fled from Sichuan to Tangwang and that one of them had converted to Islam. Their descendants would be today’s Hui and Han communities (Lefort 2023b, Fieldwork). The Wang family is mostly constituted of Han Chinese populations that have migrated to their actual location during the Ming dynasty and have partially converted to Islam, becoming Huis (Xu 2014). In any case, the time of formation of this community would be between the late Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) and the early Ming dynasty (1368–1644), that is to say, at the junction of the XIIIth and the XIVth centuries. Because of their religious proximity, Hui males from Tangwang and Dongxiang women have frequently intermarried. The Tangwang Hui males usually do not speak Dongxiang, but the Dongxiang women are usually bilingual. Therefore, there exist differences between Hui and Han speakers of Tangwang, a phenomenon that has not been widely described so far. This study focuses on Hui Tangwang speech and data partially collected with native informants in Tangwang during August 2023.

Tangwang remains an under-described variety, both in China and in the West. Ibrahim (1985) was the first to partially describe the Tangwang language. It was only mentioned or partially described by scholars working in this area (Wurm 1995; Lee-Smith 1996; Janhunen 2004) before Xu Dan published her full monograph (Xu 2014). In

addition, a few articles on the grammatical characteristics of Tangwang and phonological changes (Mo 2015; Lei 2017; Djamouri 2013, 2015) have been published. More recent research includes Ibrahim’s work on Tang- wang vocabulary (Ibrahim 2017), Djamouri’s glossed and translated material of the Tang- wang language and the glossary of the Tangwang language (Djamouri 2022a, 2022b), along with his grammatical description of the Tangwang language (Djamouri, forthcoming). As the Tangwang village forms part of the Dongxiang Autonomous District where Dongxi- ang (or Santa Mongolian), a Mongolic language from the Shirongolic branch, is spoken, contact-induced change descriptions have mainly focused on analyzing the influence of Mongolic languages on Tangwang by taking Dongxiang as the source (Ibrahim 1985, 2017). However, the influence of Mongolic on Tangwang is more complex than has often been described, involving several layers of contact with different Altaic (possibly Mongolic) languages. Along with the other above-mentioned Chinese hybrid dialects, Tangwang is considered to be a highly ‘Altaicised’ variety due to the several non-Sinitic traits that have been identified in these languages and the resemblance to what is found in Mongolic and Turkic languages. Those include head final, nominal case markings, converbial markers, quotative, aspectual/tense markers, third-person, and distal demonstrative pronoun syncretism, multiple categories of nouns that can receive plural markers, etc. In addition, Tangwang has a reduced tone system compared to other Sinitic languages. It is unclear if Xu and Wen (2017) believe that these changes have arisen solely from contact with Dongxiang, but at least, they do not propose another scenario and state that all changes have been induced through contact with Mongolic languages. However, although these traits bare some resemblance with Mongolic (and even Turkic languages) on the functional level, they are not completely identical and, in most cases, they formally differ from Mongolic languages.

The Tangwang nominal case includes the objective case *xa* 哈 (regrouping the dative– locative and benefactive functions), the ablative case *e’e* 些~*lie’e* 里些, the comitative– instrumental case *la* 啦, locative cases *li* 里, and limitative *t<sup>h</sup>ala* 他啦 (Djamouri 2015). The limitative case marker *t<sup>h</sup>ala* 他啦 is not found with this function in Mongolic languages but could have developed based on the Mongolic converb *t<sup>h</sup>ala* 他啦. This point will be further developed in Section 6. The origin and the exact source for the nominal case have not been demonstrated (up to date) and some functions of the objective case *xa* 哈 overlap with those of the Dongxiang counterparts (Xu 2015; Lefort, forthcoming). The formally identical dative–locative–benefactive marker in Mongolic have two forms in Tangwang, the genitive and accusative cases phonetic forms have merged in Dongxiang as *-ni/ji*, but in Tangwang, we have two clear totally makers (*dzi* 底 and *xa* 哈), and the formally identical accusative– dative–benefactive marker *xa* 哈 is expressed through two different markers in Mongolic. The only marker formally identical to its Dongxiang counterpart is the instrumental *-la*, which could have been borrowed. This point will be further developed in Section 6. There- fore, the main strategies adopted for the transfer of those features are probably calques and reanalysis, and the source is most probably not Dongxiang itself, and maybe not even Mongolic at all<sup>1</sup> for the objective case (see Lefort, forthcoming for details). Consider Table 1 below:

**Table 1.** Tangwang, Dongxiang, and Middle Mongol nominal case markers.

Tangwang	Function	Dongxiang	Middle Mongol
<i>dzi</i>	Genitive	<i>-ni/ji</i>	<i>-yin, -n</i> ( <i>-Un, -in,</i> <i>-Ai/-(n)U('Ai)</i> )
<i>xa</i> 哈 ( <i>a</i> 啊/ <i>ang</i> 昂)	Accusative	<i>-ni/ji</i>	<i>-yi (-ni/-i)</i>
	Dative		<i>-du(r)/-da</i>
	Benefactive		<i>-du(r)/-da</i>
<i>li</i> 里**	Locative	<i>-de</i>	<i>-du(r)/-da/-a/-na</i> ***
<i>t<sup>h</sup>ala</i> 他啦	Terminative	-	<i>-cAA</i>
	Ablative		
<i>e’e</i> 些	Comparative	<i>-se</i>	<i>-ca (-sa/-asa)</i>
	Comitative	<i>-le/-la</i>	<i>-luga/-laa</i>
<i>la</i> 啦	Instrumental	<i>-ghuala/-la</i>	<i>-ar/-iar/-niar</i>

\* *ji* 底 is not a nominal case marker per se, as it can be combined with adjectives and verbs. However, its functions partially fulfill the definition of case marking, as it can be combined with nouns, which will be further explained in the section below. In Mongolic, the genitive case is also a part

of the case system, as it is the only case that connects two nouns. \*\* The spatial locative postposition *li* 里, ‘inside’, (along with *gā* 上 ‘on’, *tǔ* 中 ‘in’, and *xà* 下 ‘under’) are attested in Chinese, but the marker *li* 里 in Tangwang has other functions that makes it closer to a case marker. \*\*\* According to Janhunen (2003, pp. 66–68), there were two distinct forms for the locative, one dative–locative case, *-du(r) / da*, marking indirect objects as well as a variety of local and temporal functions, and a “pure” locative case, *-a / -na*, which later disappeared and was completely replaced by the dative–locative case.

The aspectual markers include the prospective *li* 咧, perfective *lǎo* 寮, and imperfective *tǔe* 寨. Although post-verbal aspectual markers are attested in other Chinese dialects, this paradigm is closer to what is found in Altaic languages. However, as for nominal case markers, the aspectual markers demonstrate many differences. They formally do not correspond at all to their Dongxiang counterparts, not even to Middle Mongol: Tangwang uses two different markers to express the prospective and imperfective while Tangwang uses two different markers to express the prospective and imperfective while Dongxiang uses only one, and Tangwang lacks progressive and habitual tense markers, consider Table 2 below:

Aspect	Tangwang	Dongxiang	Middle Mongol
Future	<i>li</i> 咧		
Imperfective	<i>tǔe</i> 寨	<i>-ne</i>	<i>-m~mU~-mUli</i>
Perfective	<i>lǎo</i> 寮	<i>-wo</i>	<i>-bA~-bAi~bi</i>
Confirmative	-	-	<i>-lU’A~-lU’Ai~-li’i</i>
Progressive/Durative		<i>-zhiwo</i>	<i>-nAm</i>
Habitual		<i>-zhi</i>	-

Other Gansu–Qinghai hybrid dialects also feature tense–aspect markers, including Gangou (Yang and Zhao 2021), Wutun (Sandman 2016), and Linxia (Liu et al. 1996). Aspectual and tense markers are also found in Jin languages, e.g., northern Shanxi–Shaanxi and southern Inner Mongolia (Arcodia 2021; Xing 2006, 2020), but do not function exactly in the same manner and are thought to be developed from contact with Altaic languages.

One important gap in Tangwang’s paradigm compared with the Mongolic languages is the lack of participle markers (or ‘nominalizer’), which enable verbs to receive a further nominal morphology (for example, there are three nominalizers in Dongxiang, and five participle markers in Middle Mongol).

Dependence verbal marks that could possibly be of converbial Mongolic origin include the progressive *tǔə* 着 and *t<sup>h</sup>ala* 他啦. The progressive marker *tǔə* 着 is found across all northern dialects and is believed to be an early loan from Altaic languages (Zu and Gao 2022). The form *t<sup>h</sup>ala* 他啦 is found in all Mongolic languages and the hybrid languages of the Gansu–Qinghai area, and is probably a secondary loan. It is worth noting that the Tangwang language, along with other hybrid Chinese dialects, feature only a very restricted set of converbs compared to the Mongolic languages (seven converbs in Dongxiang, for example).

Other traits include the quotative *ǰuo* 说 ‘to say’, which has been grammaticalized in most northern dialects, including the Beijing dialect, where it is found as a quotative marker, a complementizer, a topic marker, etc. (Fang 2006). In the Gansu–Qinghai complex, it is attested as a quotative and evidentiality marker in Xining (Zhang 2007), Wutun (Sandman 2016, p. 344), and Tangwang (Djamouri 2013). Those are thought to have been induced through contact with Mongolic languages and in particular, could be a calque Mongolic verb *ke*–‘say’. In Tangwang, the quotative *ǰuo* 说 also has epistemic and alethic functions that seem to be internal developments (Djamouri 2013, p. 17).

In addition, Tangwang’s distal demonstrative *nə* 呢 (and its related forms) is formally identical to the third singular personal pronoun *nə*, a phenomenon that is found across Mongolic and Turkic languages. This syncretism is also present in Wutun (third-person pronoun *gu* 箇 and distal demonstrative *gu* 箇), while in the other Chinese hybrid dialects of the Gansu–Qinghai area, the third-person form seems to be derived from the proximal demonstrative form (e.g., Lanzhou dialect third-person pronoun *la* 那 and distal demonstrative *lei* 那). Furthermore, in many dialects along the Yellow River in the area of Shanxi and Shaanxi, including in the Jin dialects, distal pronouns and the third-person form are often formally identical (Hou 2012, p. 314). Those forms are believed to have been induced by contact with Altaic languages (Zhang and Zhang 2007, p. 332; Zhen 2002). Moreover, formally

identical demonstratives and third-person pronouns are well attested in other languages in the world and are not always the result of language contact (Bhat 2013). Therefore, although contact with Dongxiang could have reinforced the calquing process, this syncretism is probably inherited from an earlier altaicised variety of Chinese.

The use of the plural marker *mu* 么 with non-animated objects in Tangwang have not been investigated in detail, but is mentioned by Xu and Wen (2017) who believe it is the result of contacts with Mongolic languages. This trait is also very common to all northern dialects, even those that have not been in contact with Mongolic languages in modern times, and the particularities of the plural marker in the other Gansu–Qinghai dialects have been extensively described (Xu 2012; Mo 2004; Yang 2014, etc.). Compared to other Mongolic languages, Dongxiang has a reduced set of plural markers, which are *-la* and *-sila* and no other Altaic language features a plural marker from which Tangwang could have borrowed the marker *mu* 么. Hence, the marker itself is not of Dongxiang origin, and if the use extension of this marker is the result of language contact, it has gone through a reanalysis process and has probably been inherited from an earlier altaicised variety.

At last, the head-final OV dominant word order has been proven to cohabit with a VO underlying word order (Djamouri 2013; Xu 2014). Therefore, there is no complete SOV to SVO word order shift in Tangwang.

All the above traits are reputed to have been induced through contact with Mongolic (or more generally with Altaic) languages, but most of them are also found in other northern dialects that have not been in contact with any language of this family in modern times. Therefore, we believe they form part of a substratal influence of Altaic languages shared in all northern dialects, including Tangwang. The only trait that is not found in dialects outside of the Gansu–Qinghai area is the case system. We have seen that it does not exactly match the Mongolic nominal case system, both functionally and formally; hence, it is unlikely to be solely the result of the contact with these languages. The other aspectual, converbial, quotative, and plural markers are formally completely different from any Mongolic markers, and therefore should also be identified as calques or reanalyzed forms. Leaving aside the calques of these syntactic features (case markers, aspect, quotative, plural markers, third-person distal demonstrative syncretism) and the loans that are found cross-dialectally in the northern region (progressive converb), in the next sections, we will turn to what can be identified as the direct influence of Mongolic languages, that is to say, lexical and grammatical borrowings that are formally identical with their Dongxiang counterparts, or formally very close to them.

### 3. Borrowed Lexicon

#### 3.1 Lexical Loans and Calques

One of the characteristics of the Tangwang language is the contrast between the very low number of lexical borrowings and the high number of non-Sinitic grammatical elements. The non-Sinitic vocabulary represents less than 1.5% of the Tangwang vocabulary (Xu 2017, p. 41) and is mainly borrowed from the Dongxiang language. Secondary sources of loans include Arabic, Persian, and Turkic, mainly related to religion, that have been borrowed through Dongxiang. This is not a feature unique to the Tangwang language, but a common trait in all other Chinese hybrid dialects of the Hexi corridor (Zhou 2023; Sandman 2016). Only two out of the two hundred words listed in the Swadesh list are of Turkic origin, namely *ana* 阿娜 ‘mother’, ‘mom’ (CT *ana*) and *ata-ada* 阿达 ‘father’, ‘dad’ (CT *ada*). It is shared in Dongxiang and could have been borrowed through the mothers when intermarriage took place. However, they are most probably the result of areal diffusion, as they are also found in other hybrid dialects of the region, including Wutun (Sandman 2016, p. 36), Linxia (Liu et al. 1996, p. 91), the Linxia city Bafang variety (Lefort 2023b, fieldwork), Hetan (Lefort 2023b, fieldwork), Gangou (Feng and Stuart 1992, p. 5), and partially in other Mongolic languages<sup>2</sup>. The core vocabulary remains strictly Chinese, mainly shared with the vocabulary of northern Chinese dialects, but with two exceptions<sup>3</sup> from southern Chinese, especially Sichuan, which, according to Xu (2020), corroborates the narratives regarding the settlement of the Tang family in the region.

In his work on the Tangwang vocabulary, Ibrahim (2017) has listed about 150 loan-words in Tangwang that he believes were borrowed from Dongxiang (including words of Mongolic, Turkic, Persian, and Arabic origin). Most of them are direct loans, but some others are more probably Chinese borrowings to Dongxiang (most likely from Linxia) rather than the contrary. For example, *vuəvuə* 窝窝 ‘a kind of doughnut’ is identified as a Dongxiang loan but was borrowed first from Linxia *wəwə* 窝窝 to Dongxiang and then loaned to Tangwang, if not already present in Tangwang initially. Furthermore, a significant number of the words listed are common to the hybrid Chinese dialects and the Mongolic languages of the region. For example, Tangwang *aka* 阿尕; Linxia *aka* 阿尕 ‘elder brother’; Wutun

*aka* ‘elder brother’; Gangou *akə* ‘elder brother’; Dongxiang *aga* ‘elder brother’; Mongguor *aga* ‘elder brother’; eastern Yughur *ağa* ‘elder brother’; Bonan *a’gha dou* ‘brothers’, etc. Therefore, it should be considered as a common areal lexicon, or regionalism, probably the result of different contact layers, rather than direct loans from Dongxiang.

Dongxiang has undergone important phonological changes compared with Middle Mongol, which most of its Mongolic vocabulary has been inherited from (Field 1997; Lefort 2012). Therefore, the Dongxiang vocabulary in Tangwang is easily identifiable. Most of the Mongolic vocabulary borrowed from Dongxiang is related to everyday life and includes words from kin relationships to cultural-related matters through cuisine and animal names. Most of the borrowings are nouns, followed by verbs, while only a few adjectives and adverbs have been loaned. A few examples are provided hereunder (Ibrahim 2017; Djamouri 2022a):

TW 苏唤赤 *sux<sup>w</sup>ēntɕʰə ~ suxētɕʰə* ‘bridesmaid’ < DX *sux<sup>w</sup>ēntɕi*

TW 粘连 *tɕēlʰē* ‘companion; friend’ < DX *dʒənlɪən*

TW 窝咧称 *wɔlʰetɕʰə* ‘orphan’ < DX *oliətɕin* [< MMo Muqaddimat *onecit*]

TW 哈眯柔 *xamizɯ* ‘a person who squints’ < DX *χamirəu* ‘squinted-eyed’ TW 合里哦屋 *xəliəvu* ‘hawk’ < DX *həliəwu* [< MMo HY *hele* ‘e’]

TW 猴娃 *xuwa* ‘spinning top’ < DX *χauwa* ‘spinning top’

TW 马且 *mate<sup>h</sup>e* ‘steamed twisted rolls’ < DX *mateiə* ‘steamed twisted rolls’ TW 哈楼 *xalə* ‘ugly’ < DX *χalao* ‘ugly’

TW 果果 *k<sup>w</sup>ɔk<sup>w</sup>ɔ* ‘breast’ < DX *gogo* [< MMo HY *köken*].

One of the most often used adverbs borrowed from Mongolic is *ətə* (< *ede*) ‘now’, which is not attested in other hybrid languages. It is almost certain that it is a direct loan from Dongxiang, as neither Shirongolic language forms (Mongguor *do*; Bonan *da ~ de*; Kangjia *da*; Eastern Yughur *ədo*;) nor Middle Mongol ones (MMo SHM *edo* ‘e’; HY *edö* ‘e’) are likely to be the source:

(1) 阿德 三十 年 成寮  
*ətə sēŋ nē tɕʰə -lɔ*  
 now thirty year finish—PFV.

‘It happened thirty years ago’. (Djamouri 2022b, p. 2)

In addition, a few Turkic, Persian, and Arabic loans have been borrowed to Tangwang, e.g.:

吾心 *vucin* ‘face’ < *ucin* (Turkic)

罗波罗 *l<sup>w</sup>ɔp<sup>w</sup>ol<sup>w</sup>ɔ* ‘a kind of meat congee’ < *loporo* (Persian)

杜瓦纳 *tuvana* ‘a kind ritual bread used during funerals’ < *duwana* (Arabic).

Those words are also present in Dongxiang and have probably been loaned to Tangwang via Dongxiang. Other non-Mongolic lexical borrowings are mostly related to religious matters (Xu 2017, pp. 127–28).

In addition to lexical loans, there are a certain number of expressions that are similar to those found in Dongxiang. Their meaning and structure are copied from the Mongolic languages by using Chinese morphemes, and therefore should be identified as calques rather than lexical loans per se. A few examples are provided below (Ibrahim 2017):

TW 压黑 *jaxi* (lit. ‘press black’) ‘to have a nightmare’ < DX *qara daru* lit.: black + press ‘have a nightmare’.

TW 五形没有 *wue<sup>h</sup> mɔju* lit.: face + have.not ‘ugly’ < DX *ucin wiwo* lit.: face + have.not ‘to be ugly’ (not ‘loose face’ as in other Chinese dialects).

TW 往前来 *wātē<sup>h</sup> lə* lit.: from before + come ‘to recover from a serious illness’ < DX *maliə irə* lit.: from before + come ‘to recover from a serious illness’.

Some of those expressions, such as 压黑 *jaxi*, ‘to have a nightmare’, are clearly calques from Mongolic as they are attested in Middle Mongol and have even been conserved in Modern Mongolian: *qara daruqu* lit.: black + press ‘have a nightmare’. They could be loans from earlier contact with other Mongolic varieties rather than from Dongxiang itself, but this is unlikely to be the case.

To conclude, although a certain number of lexical borrowings can be found in Tangwang, the influence of Dongxiang on the vocabulary is sporadic and most of the Tangwang lexicon remains Chinese.

### 3.2 Formal Distinction of the Word ‘Small’





‘He told me that he will go to Peking tomorrow’ (Lefort 2023b, fieldwork).

- (10) *aminə kialia bi jian-nə gojə waka-ne tʃi goye-ne*  
 Amin say be clothes-REFL self wash-IPFV 2SG self-REFL  
*nadu-le etʃi.*  
 play-PUR go

‘Amin said, “I’ll wash my clothes myself, you go and play!”’. (Lefort 2023a)

In Tangwang, *wɹlũ* 喔咙 is also attested as a logophoric pronoun (Ibrahim 1985, 2017; Djamouri 2022a):

- (11) 呢个人 我哈 说着咧, “喔咙 明个 北京  
*nekeʒə̃ wɹ=xa ʃʷɔ-tʃəʎ'e: wɹlũ mĩkɛ peiteŋ*  
 DEM-CL-MAN 1SG-ACC say- IMPF 1LOG tomorrow Beijing  
 去哩 说。  
*tɛʰi=li ʃʷɔ*  
 go-FUT QUOT

‘The man said to me: ‘tomorrow, I will go to Beijing’ (Fieldwork, Lefort 2023b)

*wɹlũ* 喔咙 can be used as the first person when stating a long-term situation, such as identity, and be used in place of the regular first person pronoun *wɹ* 我. Consider the examples below (Lefort 2024, fieldwork):

- (12) 喔咙 是 老师 是  
*wɹlũ ʃl lɔʃl ʃl*  
 1LOG COP teacher COP  
 ‘I am a teacher’

- (13) 我 看 书  
*wɹ kʰɛ ʃu*  
 1 read book  
 ‘I am reading a book’

It is also used as an inclusive first-person plural pronoun corresponding to standard Chinese *zánmen* 咱们, ‘ourselves; we’ (inclusive) (also attested in Ibrahim 1985) which is the counterpart of *wɹ-mu* 我仝 ‘we’ (non-inclusive)<sup>8</sup>:

- (14) 喔咙 庄稼人 当寨  
*wɹlũ tʃʷãtɛ'azə̃ tã-tʃɛ*  
 1SG.LOG peasants be-IPFV  
 ‘We are (all) peasants’ (Lefort 2023b, fieldwork).

This semantic distribution of pronouns (logophoric and reflexive) shows that *wɹlũ* 喔咙 was probably borrowed at an early stage and further developed to an inclusive pronoun based on the original Dongxiang reflexive pronoun.

In addition, both the Dongxiang *oruŋ* and the Tangwang *wɹlũ* (*vəlũ*) 喔咙 are used in an idiomatic expression in which it refers to the person’s overconfidence: Dongxiang *oruŋ gie* (lit.: ‘to do self’) ‘to be arrogant’, and Tangwang *wɹlũ* ‘to be arrogant’:

- (15) 你 喔咙 什么咧?  
*ni wɹlũ ʃɹma-li*  
 2SG arrogant what-PF

‘Why are you being so arrogant (toward me)? (Lefort 2023b, fieldwork).

The use of the reflexive pronoun \**öxer* in the meaning of ‘arrogant’ is not attested in Middle Mongol, but the semantic derivation between ‘self’, ‘selfish’, and ‘arrogant’ is quite easy to make and this lexical development in Tangwang is most likely based on the reflexive pronoun itself: it was probably first borrowed in Tangwang as a reflexive pronoun that later extended its semantic meaning in Tangwang and was borrowed back to Dongxiang<sup>9</sup>. The use of *gie*, ‘do’, after *oruŋ* in Dongxiang could indicate that it is borrowed from Chinese, as *gie* is also a borrowed verb

auxiliary<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, *wrlū* 喔咙 ‘to be arrogant’ is also attested in Hetan, but not as a logophoric pronoun. However, as far as we are aware, it is not attested in other Chinese hybrid dialects. Hetan is structurally closer to Linxia than to Tangwang, but has also been extensively in contact with Dongxiang, which strongly suggests that the loan of this lexical item is the result of language contact.

## 5. Possessive Markers

There are two direct loans from Mongolic languages, and most probably Dongxiang, which are found in Tangwang, namely the third-person possessive marker *-ni* 尼 and the possessive marker *-ne* 呢. These two suffixes are solely found in Tangwang and no other hybrid Chinese dialect of the region. As this subject has been discussed by other scholars (Xu 2014, pp. 93–99), we will only make a condensed description here.

Reflexive and possessive suffixes are found in all Mongolic languages and share more or less the same functions. There are specific first, second, and third-person forms that can be added to nouns. In addition, there are two other reflexive–possessive markers whose forms vary from one language to another and have been developed on the possession marker *\*-ni* and possessive reflexive marker *\*-xAn*.

In Dongxiang, the connective (genitive-accusative) marker *-ni* is formally identical to the third-person marker, as in other Mongolic languages, with reference to the possessor. It is usually attached to the possessed noun phrase, and can also be used when the subject is omitted:

- (16) *kiəli-ni fugiə fugiə tɛingəŋ olu da-ne*  
 belly-3 big big at.last give.birth cannot-IPFV  
 ‘Her belly was extremely big but she could not give birth.’ (Lefort 2012)

Tangwang possessive suffix *-ni* functions in a similar manner, and is also attached to the possessed noun phrase:

- (17) 我 呢 杂桶尼      bjɛ̃ä:底      气着      撂着      过给寮  
*wr nə katʰũ -ni bjɛ̃ä:-tɛi tɛʰi -tʂə lʋ-tʂə kʷɔ-ki-lʋ*  
 1SG 3SG bucket-POSS ONOM-SUB angry-PFV throw-SUBv pass-CAUS-PFV

‘I was so angry at him I took his bucket and throw it on the floor with a crash’ (Djamouri 2022b, p. 27)

Both in Tangwang and Dongxiang, the possessive marker *-ni* can be preceded by other case markers.

In addition, Dongxiang features a reflexive possession marker, *-ne*, which derives from the common Mongolic suffix *\*-xAn*. As the marker *-ni*, it is affixed to the possessed noun phrase (not the possessor), but unlike *-ni*, it can be used with first, second, or third- person forms. It indicates that one owns X, where X is the possessed noun phrase (Field 1997), and can be translated as ‘own’ most of the time:

- (18) *Bi aguli-nə a-lə ətʂi-yə*  
 1SG wisdom-REFL fetch-PUR go-DES  
 ‘I will go (to) fetch my own wisdom’ (Lefort 2023b, fieldwork).

It is also found used in the same manner in Tangwang and, as in Mongolic languages, it can be used in combination with other cases:

- (19) 腰里呢      还      背寨些,      背寨      –      圪塔  
*jɔ-li-nə xɛ̃ pi-tʂɛ ɛʰɛ pitʂɛ ĩ keta*  
 hips-LOC-POSS also carry-IPFV carry-IPFV one a.few

‘(We were) also carrying it on our hips and a little bit on our back.’ (Djamouri 2022b, p. 22).

In this case, it is certain that Tangwang has borrowed these two reflexive suffixes from Dongxiang because they are identical on the formal and the functional levels while the set of suffixes differ in all other Mongolic languages of the Hexi corridor, i.e., Bonan 3SGR *-ne* and POSS *-ne*; Shira Yughur 3SGR *-(i)ni* and POSS *-y-aan*; Mongghul 3SGR *-ni* and POSS *-naa*; Mangguer 3SGR *-ni* and POSS *-nang*.

## 6. Case Markers

There are two case markers in Tangwang that are formally identical with two Mon- golic markers: the limitative case *-ʰala* and the instrumental *-la*. The following section examines the possibility of a borrowing from

Dongxiang in both cases.

### 6.1 Limitative Case/Terminative Converb *t<sup>h</sup>ala*

The limitative (also found as terminative in the scientific literature) *-tala* is a Mongolic aspectual converb already attested in Middle Mongol that can be used after verbs to express ‘until X is complete’, where ‘X’ is an action:

- (20) *Ger-ün belge sün tusür-äd esüg-i-yen söni-de üdür*  
 yurt-GEN sign milk pour.out-after kumiss-REFL night-LOC day  
*cayi-tala büle-ku bü-lee.*  
 dawn-LIM churn-NMLZ be-PFV

‘The sign of the yurt (was that) after pouring the milk there would be churning of the kumiss at night until day dawned’. (Street 1957, p. 38)

In Dongxiang (21) and Tangwang (22), the limitative converb is used in a similar manner:

- (21) *qara olu-tala wiliə giə-wo*  
 black arrive- LIM work do- PRV  
 ‘He worked until dark’ (Kim 2003, p. 360).

- (22) 学校里 去-他啦 你 这里 来  
*ε<sup>u</sup>εε<sup>o</sup> li tʂ<sup>h</sup>i-t<sup>h</sup>ala ni tʂli le*  
 school inside go-LIM 2SG here come

‘Before going to school, come here’ (lit. until you go to school) (Ibrahim 1985, p. 44)

In addition, *-tala* and *-t<sup>h</sup>ala* are found both Dongxiang (23) and Tangwang (24) in comparative constructions:

- (23) 坐-他啦 睡觉咧  
*tsu-t<sup>h</sup>ala ʂ<sup>w</sup>iε<sup>o</sup> li*  
 sit-LIM sleep-PF  
 ‘Sleeping is better than sitting’ (Ibrahim 1985, p. 44)

- (24) *bi-ta badz sao-dzi*  
*Landzou la a*  
 Lanzhou be-L Linx live-PR  
 IM ia OG

‘Better live in Linxia than in Lanzhou’ (Kim 2003, p. 360)

In Middle Mongol sources, in addition to its terminative functions, *-tala* is sometimes used with the meaning of ‘although’, and the alternative meaning ‘rather than’ ‘instead’ or ‘better’ is found in rare case. E.g.

edö'e naya'a-dača asaqtala qahan soyurqa'asu tenggeri-yin jayā-'ar ečige eke töre'ülüksen mariyan-nača asaqu'asu ke'en öči'üljü'tüi [SH 197] 'Now, instead of asking of Naya'a, if the Qahan favour me, if he ask of the flesh which by the destiny of Heaven, my father and mother did beget [she ] said.' (from Orlovskaya 1999 – Gruntov 2025 personal communication).

Therefore, the comparative functions of this suffix probably derive from the Middle Mongolian suffix.

In addition, Tangwang has developed the word *nünt<sup>h</sup>ala* 弄他啦 (<*nü* 弄 ‘this.way (v.) + *t<sup>h</sup>ala* 他啦 LIM (conv.) ‘before doing X’, ‘rather’, which has become an indecomposable adverb:

- (25) 你 东乡里些 买 山野 去着 弄他啦 这它些  
*ni tūε<sup>o</sup>āε<sup>o</sup>ε<sup>o</sup>-li-ε<sup>o</sup>ε me ʂεʂε te<sup>h</sup>i-tʂə nünt<sup>h</sup>ala tʂət<sup>h</sup>a-ε<sup>o</sup>ε*  
 2SG dongxiang-LOC-ABL buy potato go-PROG better here-ABL

买	吧啦!
<i>mɛ</i>	<i>pala</i>
buy	PF

‘You are going to Dongxiang to buy potatoes, (you’d) better buy them here’ (Djamouri 2022a)

In Dongxiang, the equivalent expression *ingie-tala* is not attested, which suggest that *-tala* in Tangwang also functions as a productive suffix that developed independently and is not due to language contact.

It is most probable that the converb *-t<sup>h</sup>ala* is a direct loan from Mongolic languages, but it is not certain that it was loaned from Dongxiang. Indeed, it is found in all Mongolic languages (except Moghol) as a terminative converb and is attested in the Shirongolic languages as a comparative converb in Bonan and Mangghuer (but not in Shira Yughur nor in Mongghul). Moreover, both terminative and comparative functions are found in Dagur. In the Chinese hybrid dialects of the Hexi corridor, *-t<sup>h</sup>ala* is found as a terminative converb in all dialects but is not attested as a comparative converb in Xining, Wutun, and Linxia.

In addition to the terminative converb 他啦, Peyraube (2018) has identified a terminative nominal case in Tangwang, *t<sup>h</sup>ala* 他啦, which sets the boundaries of a moment in a given set of actions:

(26)	你	早上-些	这	会-他啦	做	嘛寨
	<i>ni</i>	<i>sɔʃɛ-xie</i>	<i>tʃɛ</i>	<i>x<sup>wi</sup>-thala</i>	<i>tsu</i>	<i>ma-tʃɛ</i>
	2SG	morning-ABL	DEM	time-LIM	do	what-IPFV

‘What have you been doing from this morning until now?’ (Xu 2017, p. 97)

A marginal nominal terminative marker *\*-cAA* is attested in Middle Mongol, Buryat, Mongol proper, Ordos, and Oirat (with Kalmuck) (Schönig 2003, p. 416), which is also used in equative constructions. It is rarely used, and the dative-locative case is preferred. The terminative functions of the Mongolic marker *\*-cAA* are similar to Tangwang’s *t<sup>h</sup>ala* 他啦 but is formally very different and unlikely to be the source of a borrowing.

The most common strategy in Mongolic languages to express ‘until’ is usually verbal, through the use of converbs (*\*tala*), verb-based postpositions developed by the aggregation of the verb and the terminative converb *-tal* (e.g., Modern Mongolian *hurteᠮᠦᠷᠢᠮᠤ* ‘until’ < *hur-* ‘arrive’ + *-tel* TERM; *boltoᠯᠤᠷᠢᠮᠤ* ‘until’ < *bol-* ‘arrive’ + *-tol* TERM), or verbs in combination with the ablative case on the head-closed noun (which sets the beginning of the action).

Examples from Dongxiang are provided below:

(27)	<i>bi</i>	<i>eqiemagva-se</i>	<i>yizhi</i>	<i>gongzuo</i>	<i>gie-zhuo</i>	<i>xieni</i>	<i>kuru-wo</i>
	1SG	early.morning-ABL	all.the.way	work	do-PROG	night	arrive-PFV

‘From this morning, I have been working until dark’ (Buhe 1987, p. 31)

(28)	<i>Jiu</i>	<i>ede</i>	<i>liaoze</i>	<i>hhe</i>	<i>goyene</i>	<i>xiaojiao-ne</i>	<i>usu-de</i>	<i>nie</i>	<i>chujie-gve-se</i>
	so	now	until	3SG	own	shadow-REFL	water-LOC	one	see-CS-SEQ
	<i>daishun</i>	<i>qiorun-ne</i>			<i>taila-ne</i>				
	right.away	head-REFL			raise-IPFV				

‘So, until now, each time he sees his reflection in the water, he raises his head up right away’. (Buhe 1987, p. 71)

It is most probable that the terminative case *t<sup>h</sup>ala* was developed from the limitative converb borrowed from Mongolic languages’ *t<sup>h</sup>ala* and is the result of an internal development rather than a reanalysis of the Middle Mongol terminative case.

## 6.2 Comitative-Instrumental Case -la

Tangwang features a comitative case (29) and an instrumental case (29), which are formally identical:

(29)	我	呢啦	气	打哈寨	(Xu 2017, p. 91)
	<i>wɿ</i>	<i>nə-la</i>	<i>te<sup>hi</sup></i>	<i>ta-xa-tʃɛ</i>	

1SG      3SG-COM      angry      fight-RES- IPFV  
 ‘I have quarreled with him’.

- (30) 这      个      老奶奶      过来过去      簸箕啦      护寨 (Djamouri 2022b, p. 39)  
*tʂə      kə      lənɛnɛ      kʷɔle-kʷɔtɛʰi      pɔtʰei-la      xu-tʂɛ*  
 DEM      CL      old.woman      come-go      sieve-INST      cover-IPFV  
 ‘This old woman was coming and going covering (her body) with a sieve’.

In Standard Chinese, comitative and instrumental functions are borne by the prepositions *gen* 跟 ‘with’ and *yong* 用 ‘with’<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, the Tangwang marker *la* 啦, being formally very close to Mongolic languages, is most probably a direct loan. However, this marker does not seem to be directly related to Dongxiang (see Table 3 below). The Middle Mongol instrumental case *\*-xAr* > *\*-AAr* is not attested in any of the Mongolic languages of the Hexi corridor, except Shira Yughur. As stated by Rybadki (2003, p. 337), this could mean that the instrumental case was never present in these languages, but it is more likely that it was secondarily lost and that it has been replaced by the comitative case. The use of the comitative case for the instrumental case is also quite common among other languages in the world (Heine and Kuteva 2005, p. 139). In Mongghul and Mangghuer, the function of the instrumental case is filled by the comitative case in *\*-IUxA* > *\*-IAA* > *\*-la* and has developed an alternative form, *-tai* and *-dii*, based on the possessive case, like in modern Mongolian. In Dongxiang, the comitative and the instrumental cases feature two distinct forms: *-le* and *-ghuala~ghala*. The Dongxiang (and maybe Bonan) instrumental case *-ghuala* ~ *ghala* (*ghua-la* lit.: two-PL ‘the two’) is probably a secondary development and a calque from the Linxia instrumental case marker *liangge* 两个 (lit.: two-CL ‘the two’), which has then been replaced by the marker formally identical to the comitative<sup>12</sup> case.

The different forms of the instrumental and comitative cases in the Mongolic languages of the Gansu–Qinghai area are summarized in Table 3 below:

**Table 3.** Instrumental and comitative case in the Mongolic language

	Middle Mongolian	Mangghuer	Mongghul	Dongxiang	Bonan	Shira Yughur
Instrumental	<i>-ar~-iar~-niar</i>	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	<i>-ghuala~ghala</i>	<i>-ghuala~ghala</i>	<i>-aar</i>
Comitative	<i>-IU'A</i> > <i>-laa</i>	<i>-la</i> <i>-tai (poss)</i>	<i>-la</i> <i>-dii (-poss)</i>	<i>-le ~ -la</i>	<i>-ghuala~ghale</i>	<i>-la</i>

Tangwang instrumental and comitative could have been borrowed either from other Mongolic languages in the region, or even from other Mongolic sources. Given the geographic distance between Mangghuer and Mongghul, it is quite unlikely that Tangwang borrowed the instrumental and comitative case ‘as is’ from those languages through relatively recent contacts. It is more probable that, as it is the case in other Mongolic languages of the Hexi corridor, the instrumental case has been first replaced by the comitative case in Dongxiang, from which Tangwang borrowed both the instrumental and the comitative cases. Later, the instrumental case has been replaced by a calque of Linxia *liangge* 两个 (lit.: two-CL ‘the two’) in Dongxiang, developing the secondary form *ghuala~ghala* (*ghua-la* lit.: two-PL ‘the two’), while only the comitative form *la* 啦 remained in Tangwang for both the comitative and instrumental cases. Another hypothesis is that Tangwang borrowed (or inherited) the comitative and the instrumental cases at its early stage of formation from Middle Mongol and, as other Mongolic languages of the region, has replaced the instrumental case by the comitative case form. This would be an internal development.

## 7. Discussion

Although Tangwang features many characteristics that resemble Altaic languages, only a few can be attributed to direct contact with Dongxiang. Dongxiang and Tangwang partially share formally identical functional words and suffixes, but the direct borrowing from Dongxiang is certain only for the possessive markers (third-person possessive *-ni* 尼 and reflective marker *-ne* 呢) and the logophoric pronoun (*wɹlũ* 喔咙). Other syntactic features (instrumental *-la* and limitative *tʰala*) are probably of Mongolic origin, but the certainty of Dongxiang being the source cannot be established. From the above, we can classify Tangwang’s ‘Altaicised’ features resulting from in

contacts in at least three types:

- (1) Regionally shared features: Western northern Chinese common Altaic features (plural markers on unanimated objects, tense, and aspectual markers, distal demonstrative and third person syncretism, progressive converb, quotative markers);
- (2) Areally shared features: features shared in the Gansu–Qinghai area (partial SOV word order, cases, terminative converbs, formal distinction for the world ‘little’ with attributive and predicative functions);
- (3) Tangwang-specific features: Dongxiang loans (few direct content words, first-person logophoric pronoun, reflexive suffix, possessive suffix).

The first type of contact has probably preceded the second and third type, but the development between the second and the third type is uncertain. Certain evidence, such as the mismatch between the comitative–instrumental case form with the Dongxiang form, or the fact that the distinction for the world ‘little’ is shared in all Gansu–Qinghai hybrid Chinese languages, tend to point at an earlier influence from Mongolic languages on the areal level and a formation context common to other Chinese hybrid dialects.

The mechanisms involved in the contact-induced process based on the existing models have been partially discussed by Xu and Wen (2017), who believe that the language shift with imperfect learning from Dongxiang to Sinitic is not possible given the results of their genetic analysis<sup>13</sup>. Rather, and according to them, the situation of Tangwang (partially) corresponds to Thomasson and Kaufman’s borrowing scale’s “very strong cultural pressure: heavy structural borrowing structure” (which includes word order, inflectional morphology, and other major syntactic changes). However, the problem is that the ‘strong cultural pressure’ can be only partially proved<sup>14</sup> and that those kinds of heavy pressure situations are ‘preceded by more casual contact situations, characterised by borrowings of content and function words’ (Thomason and Kaufman 1988). In the same manner, Heine and Kuteva’s (2005, p. 14) concept of grammaticalization is defined as a process leading from lexical to grammatical forms and from grammatical to more grammatical forms. This does not correspond to the situation of Tangwang, as we have seen, in which borrowings are scarce. For the most part, the Tangwang vocabulary remains strictly Chinese, and only little evidence of borrowings from the Mongolic lexicon can be seen. A good part of the vocabulary that is listed as a Dongxiang loan in previous studies is, in fact, common Mongolic areal vocabulary that can be found across most of the other Chinese hybrid languages spoken in the region.

Another scenario would be relexification, which would explain the scarcity of non-Chinese vocabulary and would involve the hypothesis that the population initially spoke a Mongolic language. According to Xu and Wen’s genetic evidence, this could be possible (Xu and Wen 2017). Relexification can occur in two kind of situations: bilingualism (Muysken 1981) and second language acquisition with imperfect learning in a dominance situation, such as in the case of the emergence of creole languages (Lefebvre 1998). In the case of bilingualism, recent evidence from bilingual communities which speak both Mongolic languages and Chinese has shown that the syntactic elements remain, for the most part, Mongolic, while the content items are replaced by their Chinese counterpart—see, for example, Dörbed Mongolian (Bao 2011) and Shineken Buriat (Yamakoshi, forthcoming). In that case, how could the formal discrepancies with the Mongolic case system be explained? If further grammatical reanalysis, or ‘relabeling’ in Lefebvre’s meaning (Lefebvre 1998), with Chinese material had occurred in Tangwang, the functions of the Mongolic nominal cases would have remained, as this process involves the use of equivalent stems from the receiving language. Moreover, more diverse converbial and participle markers would have been found, mirroring the complexity of the Mongolic verbal system. In the case of second language acquisition with imperfect learning, the process of relabeling involves a “very limited access to the superstrate data” (Lefebvre 1998). This means that Chinese would have been the dominant language, but not accessible to the Tangwang speakers. However, we lack historical evidence to confirm this fact. In any case, the main point of opposition for the relexification hypothesis is that it contradicts the scenario which involves the migration of the Tangwang people from Sichuan and fails to explain why traces of the Sichuan dialect are still found in today’s lexicon.

Other models involving restructuring, such as metatypy, which Ross (Ross 2006) defines as a diachronic process whereby the morphosyntactic constructions of one of the languages of a bilingual speech community are restructured on the model of the constructions of the speakers’ other language, which is preceded by lexical loans and calques, seem to match better, as they can involve ‘imitation’ rather than direct copying. However, this kind of syntactic change emerges in situations where the features are replicated from the model language (in this case Mongolic), a dominant language, and very often, in bilingual communities. In the modern contexts, Dongxiang is not a dominant language and bilingualism is only partially shared among the Tangwang community. The partial

bilingualism with Dongxiang can only explain the direct loans. If bilingualism had happened, it would have been during the Mongolian period, before the supposed settlement of the Wang family in the region.

Therefore, it is possible that the ancestors of the Tangwang people already spoke a Chinese variety before their settlement to their actual location. Prolonged contact with Dongxiang would have helped to maintain the Altaic changes that were already present in their speech. The superstratal influence visible in all northern Chinese dialects has evolved differently in dialects spoken further east, because the contact with Altaic languages had ceased. Due to the local contact with Dongxiang, Tangwang has further developed. However, the presence of nominal case and even direct loans cannot be solely explained by the contact with Dongxiang.

## 8. Conclusions

This paper analyzed the formally identical function words found in Tangwang and Dongxiang and it has been shown that, like the direct loans of content words, Tangwang's direct loans of function words from Dongxiang are rare and can be certain in only three cases. Generally speaking, Tangwang is very hermetic to direct loans and adopts a calque strategy, which makes it difficult to fit in the existing models of language contact. However, this trait is not exclusive to Tangwang and is shared by all Chinese dialects.

Although the Tangwang people are surrounded by Dongxiang speakers and partial bilingualism is attested in today's Tangwang community, it is difficult to prove that Dongxiang was the sole source language of influence that can explain both syntactic changes and the presence of function words resembling their Mongolic counterparts. On the contrary, the Dongxiang influence seems to be sporadic and several layers of Altaic influence can be identified. However, we still lack historical evidence to fully understand the process, and further research should be made in that direction.

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**Notes on Transcriptions:** I have used IPA transcriptions for Tangwang as in Djamouri (2022b) and Ma and Chen (2001) for Dongxiang. Chinese pinyin has been used for Standard Chinese.

## Abbreviations

GQ	Gansu–Qin Hai
HY	<i>Hua yi yiyu</i> 华夷译语
(Sino-barbarian Dictionary) MMo	Middle Mongol
SHM	<i>Secret history of the Mongols</i>
1SG	first singular person
1LOG	first singular
logophoric pronoun ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
BEN	benefactive
CL	classifier CONT continuative COP copula
DEM	demonstrative FP final particle
INST	instrumental
IPFV	imperfective
LIM	limitative
LOC	locative
PFV	perfective PROG progressive PURP purposive

SUB	nominal subordinator
SUBS	substantiviser
SUBV	verbal subordinator
NEG	negation
POT	potential
QUOT	quotative
REFL	reflexive
RES	resultative

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Krueger (1961, p. 102) notes that, in Modern Chuvash, a Turkic language spoken west of the Urals in central Russia, “The function of the objective relational morpheme (...) combines most features of the dative and the accusative cases of other languages, or the functions of direct and indirect object”. However, other Turkic languages have formally distinct markers for dative and accusative cases, and contacts between the hybrid languages of the Gansu–Qinghai area and Chuvash are not attested. Therefore, this is most likely to be an internal development in those Chinese dialects.
- <sup>2</sup> Similar forms are also found in Shaanxi dialects (e.g., *da* ‘dad’) and could be the remains of an older substrate rather than evidence of a modern borrowing (Sun 2018).
- <sup>3</sup> She cites [kəu<sup>22</sup>ʮ<sub>1</sub><sup>44</sup>] ‘Buttocks’ and possibly the self-referential pronoun [kuə<sup>24</sup>zə̃<sup>22</sup>].
- <sup>4</sup> Chinese dialects spoken in Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, also feature a similar form, which could indicate it was inherited from an earlier substrate. In the case of Tangwang, it could corroborate the legend of the Sichuan origin of the Tangwang people, but then the areal diffusion would be very difficult to prove, as the groups of speakers of the other Chinese hybrid dialects seem to have formed differently.
- <sup>5</sup> This word is not attested in Linxia as *ɛʮteʮawu* 小家屋 (?), but as *ɛʮɛʮatsu* 小家族, which is probably the source of the calque.
- <sup>6</sup> However, the word *milaa~milaan* ‘short-handled whip’ (E’erdengtai 1980, p. 225) could be the source which has been used to express small things in general through a process of semantic analogy.
- <sup>7</sup> Gansu Bonan has also developed a logophoric pronoun based on the same reflexive pronoun (BN *ojang* MMo < \**öxer-*), while Shira Yughur has developed the logophoric pronoun *ejien* (< \**ejen* ‘master’) based on the reflexive pronoun *ejien*. Dongxiang has developed the alternative form *egven* (< \**ejen* ‘master’) for the third singular person pronoun based on the same word, while all other Mongolic languages have developed other reflexive possessive pronouns.
- <sup>8</sup> The distinction between inclusive and non-inclusive 1PL is absent in Lanzhou and Linxia.
- <sup>9</sup> This phenomenon has already been observed: Linxia first borrowed or calqued Mongolic features (probably from Dongxiang) which further extended their functions, and which have then been calqued or borrowed back in Dongxiang (See Lefort 2020).
- <sup>10</sup> See Bao and Lefort (2024) on borrowed verb morphology in Dongxiang.
- <sup>11</sup> e.g.,:
- |                             |                                     |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 我跟他一道去                      | 用手蒙住眼睛                              |
| <i>wə̃ gə̃ntā yida’o qu</i> | <i>yə̃ngshu me’ngzhu’ yā njīng</i>  |
| 1SG with 3SG together go    | with hands cover eyes               |
| ‘I am going with him’;      | ‘to cover the eyes with the hands’. |
- <sup>12</sup> Previous researchers have also suggested that this marker was of Mongolic or Turkic origin (see Dwyer 1995, pp. 165–69) and borrowed in Linxia as a calque, but I believe it is the contrary as the source of the form *-ghuala* cannot be reconstructed from Mongolic sources.
- <sup>13</sup> In their studies, Xu and Wen (2017) and Xu (2020) have used 151 samples from males living in the village of Tangwang, which demonstrated that most males were of Mongolian and Chinese Han origin, but not of central Asian origin, as were the great- est majority of the Dongxiang people. However, it is unclear why they used only male samples for their analysis, and their conclusions can only reflect their analysis based on this data

sample.

- 14 Even though we have partial historical evidence, we cannot be certain of the type of contact and the populations involved in the formation of the Tangwang people, nor of the social environment in which the Tangwang language has formed. If we accept the scenario proposed by Xu and Wen that the Mongolian pressure was so strong on Chinese speakers that they started to modify their speech in order to copy their masters, then the lack of lexical loans is difficult to explain.

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