

Areal characteristics of Inner Asian clauses

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Abstract:

Inner Asia - from the Ordos Plain to the Pamirs, and from Mongolia through Tibet - constitutes a linguistic area. Particularly the Amdo plateau at its center is known as a language convergence area at all levels of grammar (Dwyer 1995, Slater 2003, Janhunen 2004). The current paper examines the development and convergence of clause structure and clause-combining in the major language families represented (Sinitic, Bodic, Mongolic, and Turkic). Clause combining is accomplished via a range of non-finite verb forms which are functionally equivalent across languages. Mongolic and Turkic clause chaining can be seen in local Sino-Tibetan, while conversely, the isolating morphology of Sino-Tibetan results in the replacement of complex predicates in Turco-Mongolic with periphrastic constructions. This tension between the pull of the serial Sinitic clause typology and the exuberant chaining typology of Turco-Mongolic manifests itself even in different dialects of the same language: one will have a Chinese clausal patterning, and the other, a Turco-Mongolic one. This clause typology split is noteworthy, since most other areas of grammar and lexis show extensive convergence, including in constituent order, phonology and prosody, and morphology. To illustrate these points, this paper focuses on converbial constructions, quotatives, and auxiliaries.

References

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