How many *-s suffixes in Old Chinese?

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November 10, 2015

1   Introduction

Downer (1959: 262): 'The present writer holds the opinion that with our present knowledge of Classical Chinese, it is better to regard chiuhsheng derivation not as a remnant of a former inflectional system of the Indo-European type, but simply as a system of derivation and nothing more. When new words were needed, they were created by pronouncing the basic word in the chiuhsheng. The grammatical regularity found in many cases would then be in a way fortuitous, being the result not of grammatical inflection, but of the need to create new words.'

Differing opinion:

Qusheng derivation comes (at least in part) from *–s suffixes (Haudricourt 1954, Forrest 1960, Sagart 1999, Baxter & Sagart 2014). The vast array of function of the *-s is due to the merger of many independent dental suffixes in Chinese, which are however distinct in more conservative languages.

2   Old Chinese

Downer (1959)'s classification of qusheng derivations:

1. verb → noun

   高 *kaw* 'be high' → 高 *kaw*^{H} 'height'

   處 *tɕʰjo*^{X} 'be at' → 處 *tɕʰjo*^{H} 'place'

2. noun → verb

   家 *kæ* 'family' → 嫁 *kæ*^{H} 'marry'

   枕 *tɕim*^{X} 'pillow' → 枕 *tɕim*^{H} 'use as a pillow'

3. causative

   飲 *ʔim*^{X} 'drink' → 飲 *ʔim*^{H} 'give to drink'

   買 *mɛ*^{X} 'buy' → 賣 *mɛ*^{H} 'sell'

+ tropative (好 *xaw*^{X} 'be good' → 好 *xaw*^{H} 'like' (distinct from causative and applicative, Jacques 2013)

4. applicative (Downer's "effective")

   渴 *kʰat* 'be thirsty' → 愒 *kʰaj*^{H} 'long for'

5. 'restricted meaning' 少 *ɕjew*^{X} 'be few' → 少 *ɕjew*^{H} 'be young'

6. Passive 散 *san*^{X} 'scatter' → 散 *san*^{H} 'be loose'

   + antipassive 射 *ʑjek* 'shoot at' → 射 *ʑjæ*^{H} 'practise archery'

7. Adverb 三 *sam* 'three' → 三 *sam*^{H} 'thrice'

8. Form in compounds

3 Comparisons

Proposed sound law (C stands for a particular subset of codas, perhaps restricted to labial and velar consonants).

(1)   *–*t* → *–*s* /C_#

Similar to the rule undergone by the present tense –*d* suffix in Tibetan, which is realized as –*s* after final stops and -*m*, as in **ɴdeb-s, btab** 'plant' vs **ɴde-d, bdas** 'chase' (Coblin 1976: 52-53). The *–*s* allomorph of *–*t* suffixes generated by this rule is then extended analogically to other contexts, in particular open syllables (this idea in particular is necessary to explain the *–*s* applicatives, see section 3.2).

Very few languages in ST clearly preserve final –*s* suffixes, and complex final clusters: Tibetan, Kiranti, Gyalrongic, Dulong/Rawang (other languages can only serve to confirm data from these three conservative branches).

3.1 Nominalization

The most obvious parallel with Tibetan, first pointed out by Forrest (1960). Well attested in Tibetan, Conrady (1896: 43), Hill (2014: 624-5)

- Patient: *za* 'eat' → *zass* 'food'

- Manner: *ɴgro* 'go' → *ɴgros* 'gait'

- Characteristic: *zab.mo* 'deep' → *zabs* 'depth', 深 *ɕim* 'deep' → 深 *ɕim*^{H} 'depth'

2

Some nouns derived from verbs are cognate between Chinese and Tibetan, eg *ɴtʰag, btags* "weave" → *tʰags* "textile", 織 *tɕik* 'weave' → 織 *tɕiᴴ* 'cloth'

Vestigial in Gyalrongic languages, but several good examples cf Jacques (2003)

3.2 Causative/applicative

The applicative and causative suffixes are most clearly preserved in Kiranti, Michailovsky (1985), Jacques (to appear)

Distinct *-s* causative and *–t* applicative suffixes in Limbu, Michailovsky 2002:

- *haːp- vi* 'weep'

- *haːps- vt* 'cause to weep' (causative)

- *haːpt- vt* 'mourn for, weep for' (applicative)

No clear example in Tibetan Hill (2014: 630), only a few isolated examples in Gyalrongic (Japhug *ɣi* 'come' → *ɣɯt* 'bring').

In Chinese, one direct trace of the applicative *–t (**?**), the other examples are due to the generalisation of the *–s allomorph (generated by the sound change 1) to open syllable verbs.

(2) 行　　　　或　使　之, 止 或　尼　　　之
　　Cə.gˤ<r>aŋ ɢʷˤək s-rəʔ tə　təʔ ɢʷˤək n<r>əl-t tə

'A man's advancement is effected, it may be, by others, and the stopping him is, it may be, from the efforts of others.' (Legge)

Fanqie 女乙反, MC *ŋit* vs 女夷切 MC *ŋij* ← **n<r>il*, cognate with Tibetan *ɲal* 'lie down, sleep' and Japhug *nɯna* 'rest' (NB: loss of final **-l* after *a is a common innovation of Burmo-Qiangic languages).

This example shows that the rule (1) does not apply after *–*l*; cases of *–*s* in open syllables and after *–*l* corresponding to *–t* in conservative languages are due to analogical levelling. Analogical levelling of the *–*s* allomorph nearly everywhere in Chinese is likely to be due to the presence of the causative *–*s*: after application of (1), the *–*s* was reinterpreted as a mixed causative/applicative.

3.3 Passive/Antipassive

Apparent cases of passive or antipassive *–*si* can be accounted for as a trace of the sibilant reflexive suffix, still productive in Kiranti and Dulong/Rawang.

In Khaling, both passive/anticausative and antipassive meanings are attested for *–si* derivation (Jacques et al. to appear).

3.3.1 Impersonal subject vs reflexive

(3) *ʔuŋʌ   sɵ   wēnd-u.*
1SG:ERG meat cut-1SG→3
I cut the meat.

(4) *sɵ   wêi-si.*
meat cut-REFL
Impersonal subject: 'The meat is cut (by someone)' OR 'The meat cuts easily.'

(5) *ʔʌ̄m sɵ   wêi-si.*
3SG meat cut-REFL
Autobenefactive: 'He cuts meat for himself.'

(6) *mu-wei-w-ʌsu.*
NEG-cut-IRR-REFL:1SG:PST
Reflexive: 'I did not cut myself.'

3.3.2 Antipassive

(7) *gʰrēm-si-ŋʌ*
be.disgusted.by-REFL-1SG:S/P
I feel disgust.

(8) *lokpei ghrēmd-u.*
leech   be.disgusted.by-1SG→3
I am disgusted by leeches.

3.4 Denominal

Denominal morphology in Gyalrongic is exclusively prefixal (Jacques 2014), examples of *–t* or *–s* suffixes in morphologically conservative languages are very rare:

Limbu *thiːn* 'egg' → *thiːnt-* 'lay an egg'

The origin of the denominal *–s* obscure, maybe some cases are in fact causative or applicatives applied to a intransitive verb that was derived from the noun by either zero-derivation or a prefixal derivation process that left no visible traces.

3.5 Adverb

Locative Situ *-s* (Lín 1993), Japhug *zɯ* (Jacques 2008: 167-9), *-s* element in Tibetan case markers (Hill 2012).

Oblique case → adverbial marker

3.6 Second member of compounds

Uebach & Zeisler (2008), –*s* suffix in the second member of compounds in Old Tibetan, eg *lag* + *riŋ* → *lag.riŋs* 'long arms'.

However, in OC, examples of this type are probably cases of nominalized verbs.

3.7 Perfective?

Some authors (in particular Jīn 2006) have claimed that some examples of *–*s* suffixes can be accounted for as traces of the *–*s* perfective suffix found in Tibetan (*bʲed, bʲas* 'do') or in Gyalrong languages (Japhug –*t* or –*z* 1/2sg→3 perfective suffix, Situ third person intransitive perfective –*s*; see Huáng 1997 for other potential examples, though many in that article come from languages that do not preserve final *–*s* and hence canot be cognate to the Tibetan or Gyalrong suffix).

Tantalizing, but hardly compelling: if the OC verb had inflexional morphology, it is not reflected in the Jingdian shiwen glosses in a way that allows systematic investigation.

4 Conclusion

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