

Diachronic change of Manchu verbal suffix *-rA*

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1. This paper points out the inconsistency in the descriptions of Manchu grammar, and proposes that Manchu grammar has been subject to diachronic changes. Specifically, I will focus on the differing frequencies of the predicative *-rA*.
2. Previous studies (which considered Manchu as a tense-oriented language) described Manchu tense system as a 3-way distinction. Most studies described the participle *-rA* as a future tense marker. And it resulted in a 3-way distinction of *-HA* for past, *-mbi* for present, and *-rA* for future.

Table 1: Description of Manchu *-HA*, *-mbi*, and *-rA* in studiesTable 2

| | <i>-HA</i> | <i>-mbi</i> | <i>-rA</i> |
|--------------------|---|---|--|
| Verbiest (1696) | Præteritum perfectum <i>hula-ha</i> 'vocavi (I called)' | Præsens <i>hula-mi</i> 'voco (I call)' | Futurum <i>hula-ra</i> 'vo- cabo (I will call)' |

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| | <i>-HA</i> | <i>-mbi</i> | <i>-rA</i> |
|---------------------------|---|--|---|
| Möllend orff (1892) | preterite <i>ara-ha</i> 'I wrote' | present tense <i>ara-mbi</i> 'I write' | future <i>ara-ra</i> 'I shall write' |
| Aisingioro (1983) | 過去時 (past) | 現在時 (pre- sent) 將來時 (fu- ture) | 將來時 (fu- ture) |
| Gorelova (2002) | perfect par- ticipie (past) | imperfect finite (present, future) | imperfect participie (future) |

3. However, I have suggested a different conclusion, based on a close examination of Manchu texts (Park 2016, 2017a, 2017b). By surveying the earliest Manchu literatures in the 17th to 18th century including *<Tongki fuka sindaha hergen i dangse 滿文老檔>*, it was revealed that the indicative ending *-rA* could only agree with 1st person singular/plural subjects and conveyed the meaning of 'the speaker's promise with the listener.'

4. Manchu *-rA* has three variants *-ra*, *-re*, and *-ro*, according to vowel harmony with the preceding syllable, and has three syntactic functions:

(1)

a. Nominal use

bi niyalma-i jide-re be tuwa-ha

I person-GEN come-PTCP ACC see-PST

'I saw someone coming.'

b. Adnominal use

bi jide-re niyalma be tuwa-ha

I come-PTCP person ACC see-PST

‘I saw a person who was coming.’

c. Predicative use

bi jide-re

I come-PTCP

‘I will come.’

5. In this paper, I will focus on predicative *-rA*, as the tense distinction appears the clearest in the predicate of the main clause. When in nominal and adnominal use, *-rA* functions as a non-past tense marker which refers to present or future tense. It is in contrast to another participle *-HA*, which is a past tense marker.

(2)

gene-he niyalma

go-PST person

‘person who went’

gene-re niyalma

go-NPST person

‘person who is going/will go/goes’

(relative past or non-past from the time of main clause)

Here, *-re*, a variant of *-rA*, functions as an attribute of the noun *niyalma* ‘person’ and denotes non-past tense.

6. In contrast, predicative *-rA* does not denote present tense, and Gorelova (2002) described that “it is used to denote the future.”

(3)

bi sin-de

emu sain arga

tacibu-re

I you(si/sin-SG)-DAT one good method teach-PART

‘I will teach you a good method.’

7. However, there is a suffix *-mbi* which also denotes the future. In sentence-final positions, *-mbi* is the verbal suffix responsible for denoting present reference (including progressive, habitual, and generic meaning).

(4)

cooha-i niyalma gemu musi omi-fi beye erge-mbi
soldier-GEN people all grain_drink drink-CVB body rest-NPST
'All soldiers are taking a rest after drinking some grain drinks.'

8. More importantly, *-mbi* can also denote future reference.

(5)

cimari erde bi gene-mbi
tomorrow early I go-NPST
'I will go early tomorrow.'

9. Both predicative *-rA* and *-mbi* can denote the future. Then, is there any difference between the two? Is *-rA* really a future tense marker?
10. I examined various Manchu literature, and some are listed here.

(6)

- a. <*Tongki fuka sindaha hergen i dangse* 滿文老檔 > (Chronicles of Early Qing Danasty, early 17C): Reflects the grammar of the earliest Written Manchu
- b. <*Ilan gurun i bithe* 三國志 > (1723-1735): Manchu translation of 三國志演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), a Chinese novel
- c. <*Gin ping mei bithe* 滿文金瓶梅 > (1708): Manchu translation of 金瓶梅 (The Golden Lotus), a Chinese novel

- d. < *Manju i yargiyan kooli* 滿洲實錄 > (Veritable Records of the Manchus, 1779): Historical record of the founder of Qing dynasty, Nurhaci. Written in three languages, Manchu, Chinese and Mongolian
- e. < *Sonjofi ubaliyambuha liyoo jai jy i bithe* 擇繙聊齋志異 > (1848): Manchu translation of 聊齋志異 (Strange Tales from Liao-zhai), a Chinese novel

11. Through investigation on electronic corpus of Written Manchu literature, I discovered the followings:

(7)

a. Predicative *-rA* can only occur with 1st-person subject:

Only *bi* 'I' and *be* 'we (exclusive)' can occur as subjects with *-rA*

b. Predicative *-rA* denotes the meaning of 'promise'

(8)

bi gai-fi alin i dele gene-fi fusihūn gida-ra

I take-CVB mountain GEN top go-CVB down attack-RA

'I will guide (them), go up the mountain and attack downwards.'

(9)

be jafa-fi suwende bu-re

we(EXCL) capture-CVB you.DAT give-RA

'We will capture (them) and hand (them) over.'

The subject of the first sentence is *bi*, a 1st-person singular, and the subject of the second sentence is *be*, also a 1st-person plural and exclusive we. The sentences both represent the speaker's promise.

Exclusive we *be* always requires a 2nd-person listener, who is the counterpart of a promise in this case. However, inclusive we *muse* cannot have a

2nd-person listener at all, which I claim is the reason it does not occur with predicative *-rA* that refers to a promise towards the listener.

12. For sentences without explicit subjects, the 1st-person subject can be inferred from the context.

(10)

Sini jui be gai-fi, sini ici ojo-ro
your child ACC marry-CVB your side become-RA
'(I) will marry your child and stand on your side.'

(11)

sini funde tese be jafa-ra
your in_place_of they ACC capture-RA
'(I) will capture them on your behalf.'

13. More evidence can be found in translations of Manchu to other languages. In < *Manju i yargiyan kooli* 滿洲實錄 > (1779) which contains Written Mongol and Chinese translations from Manchu, The predicative *-rA* is corresponding to Written Mongol *-suɣai* or *sügei* in all cases.

(12)

(Manchu) *mini niyalma be bi wa-ra*
(W. Mongol) *bi öber ün kümün iyen ala-suɣai*
'I will kill my person.'

Written Mongol *-suɣai* or *sügei* is described as 'voluntative,' (Poppe 1954: 90) which expresses a (speaker's) wish to perform an action.

14. We can also find some evidence from Korean translations in < *Cheongeo Nogeoldae* 清語老乞大 > (1765). In the text, predicative *-rA* was translated to Korean *-ma* in most cases.

(13)

(Manchu) *bi simbe tacibu-re*

(Korean) *nay nelol kolochi-ma*

'I will teach you.'

Korean *-ma* is described as 'promissive' by Sohn (1999). Just like Manchu predicative *-rA*, It occurs only with 1st-person subject.

(14) 'promissive' *-ma* (Sohn 1999: 272)

na nun ka-ma!

I TC go-PRM

'I promise that I will go.'

15. Considering the 1st-person subject constraint and its meaning of promise, it seems not plausible to consider Manchu predicative *-rA* as a tense or aspect marker. Rather, it is preferable to classify it as a 'commissive' (Palmer 2001: 72) which is a subcategory of deontic modality, where the speaker guarantees that the action will take place.
16. Among the three grammar references surveyed in this paper, Kawachi & Kiyose (2002) is the only reference that notes the 1st-person subject constraint, although insufficiently.

Table 2: Description of predicative -rA in previous studies

| | meaning of predicative -rA |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Aisingioro (1983) | 現在時 / 未來時 (present / future) |
| Gorelova (2002) | future |
| Kawachi & Kiyose (2002) | 前望終止形 (prospective finite) |

I suggest that this inconsistency results from the discordance of the Manchu literature they refer to; Kawachi & Kiyose (2002) mainly refers to literature from the 17th to 18th century, while other references additionally refer to literature from the 19th century and later, and even include Sibe literature.

17. Then, what can be the reason for the misanalysis of predicative -rA?

First reason is the mistranslation of -rA in some literature. The following Manchu sentence is from Gorelova (2002), which describes the -rA here as an example of predicative -rA. Since the -rA is occurring with the 3rd-person subject *haha niyalma* ‘men’, it may look like a counterexample to the 1st-person subject constraint. However, this is a mistranslation.

(15)

haha niyalma baita bici teng tang seme yabu-re

‘If men have business (to do) they do it firmly.’ (Gorelova 2002: 293)

Although Gorelova (2002) did not reveal the source of this sentence, it is clear that it comes from <*Nikan gisun kamciha manjurara fiyelen i gisun* 兼漢滿洲套話> (1730). By looking at the whole text, we can easily notice that the phrase *teng tang seme yabure* is not an example of a predicate of the main sentence, but a part of a bigger parallel structure.

(16) from <*Nikan gisun kamciha manjurara fiyelen i gisun*
兼漢滿洲套話> (1730)

haha niyalma baita bici. 漢子家有事

① *teng tang seme yabure.* 响响噹噹 的行

② *hoo hio seme arbušara oci.* 慷 " 慨 " 的動作

teni inu dabala. 纔 是罷咧

'It is right for men ① to act straightforwardly and ② to behave
bravely when they have something to do.'

Therefore, the *-rA* in this sentence is an example of a nominal use, and cannot be considered as an example of predicative *-rA*.

19. Second, there had been a dramatic decrease in the occurrences of *-rA* between the 17th and the 19th century. Because of its rare occurrence in certain texts, previous studies might have not captured the existing constraints.

20. Comparing the distribution and meaning of *-rA* in two Manchu novels from different times, <*Ilan gurun i bithe* 三國志> (hereafter, IGB) from the early 18th century and <*Sonjofi ubaliyambuha liyoo jai jy i bithe* 擇繡聊齋志異> (hereafter, LJJY) from the mid 19th century, revealed that while the 1st-person subject constraint and the meaning remained the same, the occurrence of *-rA* had dramatically declined in the latter.

21. There are 329 and 12 occurrences of predicative *-rA* in IGB and LJJY respectively.

(17) predicative *-rA* in LJJY

a. *tere i jui be wahangge yala si oci, uju gidafi mori cihai huthubu-re*

'If you are the one who killed his child indeed, I will stab (your) head and then ? tie (you) up.'

b. *yargiyan babe agu sinde ala-ra fusihūn beye hutu waka, dobi kai,*

'I will tell you the truth. I am not a ghost but a fox.'

c. *bi nehū be ušame gajifi acabu-re*

'I will bring the female maidservant and make her meet you.'

d. *gege sinde halabu-re*

'Young lady, I will change it for you.'

e. *fusihūn beye tolgin de agu be henji-re*

'I will invite you to my dream.'

f. *bi goro bade genere hamime, eiten be gege sinde afabu-re*

'Since I will soon leave far away, I will hand over everything to you.'

g. *ere jaka be inu baitalara ba akū, uthai amasi maktame bu-re*

'Since this thing is useless, I will let it go and give it to you.'

h. *garudai ujui sabu etufi uthai jici aca-ra*

'If you come in the shoes of Garuda's head, I will meet (you).'

i. *amba jobolon goro akū, hasa arga deribu-re*

'A big misfortune is coming. I will quickly think of a plan.'

j. *bi suweni funde ilan aniyai boljohon be toktobu-re*

'I will make a 3-year-long agreement in place of you.'

k. *emhun kumun de sebjele-re*

'I will enjoy the music alone.'

l. *aikabade buhiyerakū oci, dobori dasame jide-re*

'If nothing comes to your mind, I will come again at night.'

22. Likewise, the descriptions of -rA in <Manju bithei gisun de aisilara mudan i hergen 清文助語虛字> from 1730 and <Cing wen jiye ze bithe 新語清文接字> from 1899 differ; the former distinguishes -rA from ending -mbi, while no appearances of -rA as an indicative ending can be found in the latter.

23. Then, by what form has the role of predicative *-rA* been substituted?

Table 3 shows the number of occurrences of predicative *-rA* and optative *-ki* in IGB and LJJY. While *-ki* is generally analyzed as a form to express “the modal meaning of desire or intention” (Gorelova 2002: 293-294), depending on the context, it conveys the meaning of the speaker’s promise towards the listener in many cases. This indicates the predicative *-rA* may semantically have merged to *-ki* in the mid 19th century when LJJY was published.

Table 3: Occurrences of *-rA* & *-ki* in IGB & LJJY

| Verb stem | IGB | | LJJY | | Verb stem | IGB | | LJJY | |
|-----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | <i>-rA</i> | <i>-ki</i> | <i>-rA</i> | <i>-ki</i> | | <i>-rA</i> | <i>-ki</i> | <i>-rA</i> | <i>-ki</i> |
| <i>aca</i> | – | 49 | 1 | 33 | <i>guwebu</i> | 22 | 5 | – | 3 |
| <i>acabu</i> | – | 8 | 1 | 9 | <i>halabu</i> | – | – | 1 | 1 |
| <i>afabu</i> | 2 | 5 | 1 | 5 | <i>huthubu</i> | – | – | 1 | – |
| <i>aisila</i> | 5 | 22 | – | 3 | <i>ilibu</i> | 3 | 30 | – | 2 |
| <i>ala</i> | 12 | 21 | 1 | 17 | <i>isibu</i> | 3 | 15 | – | 5 |
| <i>alibu</i> | 16 | 17 | – | 11 | <i>jafa</i> | 1 | 50 | – | 10 |
| <i>ali</i> | 2 | 3 | – | 4 | <i>ji(dere)</i> | 3 | 12 | 1 | 4 |
| <i>aliya</i> | 1 | 9 | – | 22 | <i>karma</i> | 1 | 1 | – | 3 |
| <i>ara</i> | 2 | 18 | – | 22 | <i>karula</i> | 3 | 24 | – | 17 |
| <i>bai</i> | 1 | 16 | – | 24 | <i>mekte</i> | 1 | 6 | – | 1 |
| <i>bederebu</i> | 6 | 3 | – | 6 | <i>naka</i> | 1 | 6 | – | 2 |
| <i>bedere</i> | 3 | 93 | – | 41 | <i>nei</i> | 1 | – | – | 2 |
| <i>bene</i> | 6 | 12 | – | 4 | <i>obu</i> | 19 | 55 | – | 27 |
| <i>bibu</i> | 1 | 5 | – | 9 | <i>o(joro)</i> | 7 | 39 | – | 34 |
| <i>bi(sire)</i> | 2 | 4 | – | 2 | <i>okdo</i> | 3 | 8 | – | 1 |
| <i>buce</i> | 3 | 24 | – | 17 | <i>omi</i> | 1 | 1– | – | 1– |
| <i>bu</i> | 27 | 22 | 1 | 32 | <i>sa</i> | 1 | – | – | 1 |
| <i>dabu</i> | 1 | 1 | – | 2 | <i>sebjele</i> | – | 2 | 1 | 1 |

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| Verb stem | IGB | | LJJY | | Verb stem | IGB | | LJJY | |
|-----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | <i>-rA</i> | <i>-ki</i> | <i>-rA</i> | <i>-ki</i> | | <i>-rA</i> | <i>-ki</i> | <i>-rA</i> | <i>-ki</i> |
| <i>dahabu</i> | 2 | 7 | – | 2 | <i>sinda</i> | 3 | 7 | – | 1– |
| <i>daha</i> | 4 | 68 | – | 7 | <i>suwele</i> | 1 | – | – | 1 |
| <i>dasa</i> | 1 | 6 | – | 1 | <i>tacibu</i> | 2 | 3 | – | 3 |
| <i>dedu</i> | 1 | 9 | – | 1– | <i>tebu</i> | 1 | 28 | – | 2 |
| <i>deribu</i> | – | 20 | 1 | 2 | <i>temgetule</i> | 2 | 1 | – | 1 |
| <i>donji</i> | 3 | 9 | – | 3 | <i>toktobu</i> | – | 19 | 1 | 4 |
| <i>dosimbu</i> | 1 | 3 | – | 5 | <i>tucibu</i> | 5 | 27 | – | 7 |
| <i>dosi</i> | 4 | 48 | – | 9 | <i>tuci</i> | 1 | 44 | – | 1– |
| <i>duri</i> | 1 | 44 | – | 5 | <i>tuwabu</i> | 5 | 7 | – | 3 |
| <i>facuhūra</i> | 1 | 2 | – | 1 | <i>tuwa</i> | 1 | 75 | – | 18 |
| <i>fonji</i> | 1 | 33 | – | 22 | <i>uji</i> | 2 | 2 | – | 2 |
| <i>gaji</i> | 7 | 4 | – | 16 | <i>unggi</i> | 15 | 20 | – | 4 |
| <i>gene</i> | 19 | 177 | – | 83 | <i>wa</i> | 3 | 211 | – | 7 |
| <i>gisure</i> | 1 | 40 | – | 25 | <i>weri</i> | 1 | 5 | – | 1 |
| <i>gosi</i> | 1 | 1 | – | 1 | <i>wesimbu</i> | 1 | 2 | – | 1 |

24. Based on Table 3, we can note the followings. First, the usage of predicative *-rA* has dramatically decreased with time. While the numbers of *-ki*'s occurrence in IGB and LJJY (1508 and 617 respectively) are roughly proportional to the volumes (467,176 and 214,176 words respectively), the occurrence of *-rA* shows an asymmetrical and rapid decrease from 250 in IGB to 11 in LJJY. Second, with most verbs, *-ki* is more frequently used than *-rA*. Optative *-ki* can convey a meaning different from that of predicative *-rA* since its usage has a wider range. However, it can also refer to a same meaning with predicate *-rA* as in the following examples from LJJY.

(18)

a. *yargiyan babe agu sinde ala-ra fusihūn beye hutu waka, dobi kai,*

I will tell you the truth. I am not a ghost but a fox.

a'. *yargiyan babe agu de ala-ki*,

I will tell you the truth.

b. *aikabade buhiyerakū oci, dobori dasame jide-re*

If nothing comes to your mind, I will come again at night.

b'. *šolo be tuwame jai ji-ki*,

I will come when I have free time.

c. *ere jaka be inu baitalara ba akū, uthai amasi maktame bu-re*

Since this thing is useless, I will let it go and give it to you.

c'. *jui be agu sinde amasi bu-ki*,

I will send the child back to you.

25. As a result of diachronic changes, in modern-day Spoken Manchu which succeeds Written Manchu, the predicative *-rA* with similar meanings as in Written Manchu cannot be found. It seems the function of predicative *-rA* has been partly substituted by the reflex of *-ki*.

(19) Spoken Manchu *-ki* (from work in progress)

a. *bo sakəmə sində šoxol šənda-ki*

we(ex.)well2sg.DLstoryrelease-KI

‘We will be dedicated to talking.’

b. *təšəxəbi gisəl-ki*

in_that_way I speak-KI

‘I will speak in that way.’

26. In modern-day Sibe, which can be considered as a dialectal descendant of Written Manchu, predicative *-rA* does not exist. Instead, it is reported that the reflex of Written Manchu’s optative *-ki* is used as “voluntative” to express the speaker’s will or intention.

(20) Sibe voluntative -*ki(e)* (Zikmundová 2013: 147-148)

a. *ši tə, bi iškⁱa-kie*.

Lit.: You sit-IMPER, lsg. arrange-VOL.

‘You sit, I will clean it up.’

b. *ši-maq əm bait gizər-kie*.

Lit.: 2sg.-IS. one matter talk-VOL.

‘I would like to tell you something.’

c. *bi šim-b eli-kie*.

Lit.: lsg. 2sg.-ACC. wait-VOL.

‘I will wait for you.’

27. Through this paper, I reach an assumption that -rA which had a highly limited distribution and meaning (first-person subject and promise) has been merged to -ki which has a wider range of meanings (desire, suggestion, command, future tense and more), to lighten its functional load.

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ABSTRACT

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This paper points out the inconsistency in the descriptions of Manchu grammar, and proposes that Manchu grammar has been subject to diachronic changes. Specifically, I will focus on the differing frequencies of the predicative *-rA*.

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I suggest that this inconsistency results from the discordance of the Manchu literature they refer to; Kawachi & Kiyose (2002) mainly refers to literature from the 17th to 18th century, while other references additionally refer to literature from the 19th century and later, and even include Sibe literature. Comparing the distribution and meaning of *-rA* in two Manchu novels from different times, < *Ilan gurun i bithe* 三國志 > from the early 18th

century and < *Sonjofi ubaliyambuha liyoo jai jy i bithe* 擇繙聊齋志異 > from the mid 19th century, revealed that while the 1st-person subject constraint and the meaning remained the same, the occurrence of *-rA* had dramatically declined in the latter. The declined occurrences indicate the predicative *-rA* may semantically have merged to *-ki* in the mid 19th century. Thus, I reach an assumption that *-rA* which had a highly limited distribution and meaning (first-person subject and promise) has been merged to *-ki* which has a wider range of meanings (desire, suggestion, command, future tense and more), to lighten its functional load.