

Negative markers in Qiangic languages*

SHIRAI Satoko

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

Summary

The study examines plain negative markers in Qiangic languages (Tibeto-Burman, spoken in Southwest China) from the geolinguistic and comparative linguistic viewpoints with special attention to tense/aspect distinctions. Qiangic languages typically use verbal prefixes or proclitics to mark the negative. Such plain negative markers are classified into four types, namely, [A] MA type, [B] MI type, [C] MV type, and [D] non-M type. Moreover, Type A has three subtypes, namely, A1 (a form maintained from the proto-language), A2 (a secondary formation from two morphemes, such as the negative and irrealis markers), and A3 (Tibetan loans). The perfective/past negative markers demonstrate the following geographical distributions: Subtype A1 is found sporadically, whereas Subtype A3 is limited to the region with a significant Tibetan influence; Type B is widely found and also located in peripheral areas; Type C has a sporadic but relatively wide distribution, and; Type D is limited. This study tentatively concludes their relative chronology as $A1 > B > C > A3$ and D because subtype A1 is the oldest from a logical viewpoint. Moreover, the imperfective/non-past negative markers demonstrate the following geographical distributions: Subtype A1 is found in the northernmost peripheral region, whereas Subtype A2 has a considerably wide distribution, including peripheral areas; Type B is concentrated in the central region; Type C exhibits a sporadic distribution, and Type D is limited. Consequently, their relative chronology is tentatively concluded as $A1 > A2 > B > C > D$.

Key words: Qiangic, negative, prefix, language contact, geolinguistics

关键词：羌语群、否定、前缀、语言接触、地理语言学

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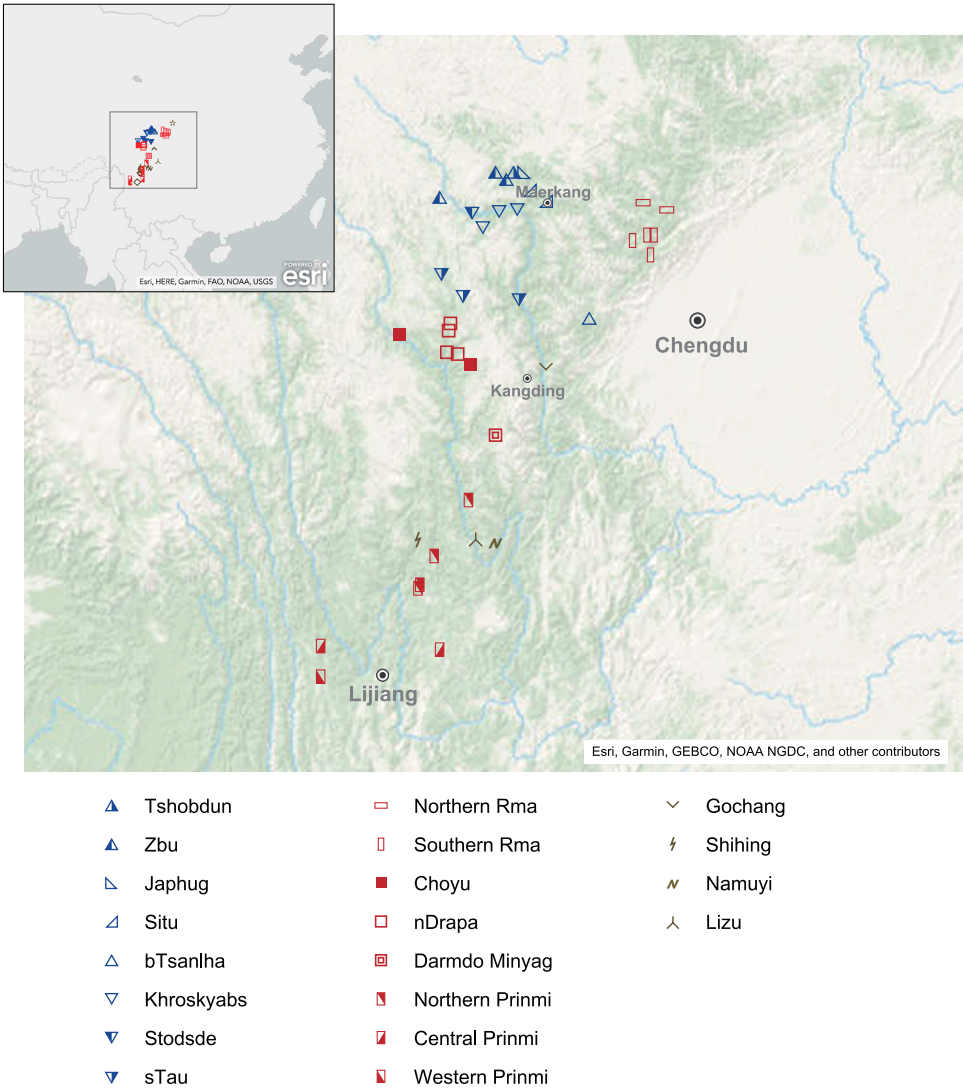


Figure 1 Qiangic languages

1. Introduction

The Qiangic languages, which are spoken in Southwest China (Figure 1), belong to the Tibeto-Burman subfamily of the Sino-Tibetan language family and include more than a dozen mutually unintelligible languages. These languages share certain typological characteristics, such as verbal prefixes. Although the genealogical details of these languages remain under discussion (Sun 1982, 1983, 2001, 2016, Nishida 1987, Matisoff 2003, 2015,

Jacques and Michaud 2011, Chirkova 2012, among others. See also Shirai 2020), this study terms these the Qiangic group. Figure 1 distinguishes three subgroups of the Qiangic group: triangles indicate the rGyalrongic (or Northern) subgroup, boxes indicate the Central, and lines indicate the Southern (or Ersuish and Naic, which are excluded from Qiangic in Jacques and Michaud 2011: Appendix p. 6).

Qiangic languages typically use verbal prefixes or proclitics to mark the negative, with many distinguishing the prohibitive or deontic¹ ('NEG.DE') from a plain negative; for example, *ma^L=k^hu^R* {NEG=want} 'don't want (any)' and *tja^L=dzaw^H* {NEG.DE=eat.2sg} 'don't (you) eat / Don't eat!' in Prinmi (Ding 2014: 204–208). This study focuses on the plain negative marker forms in the languages shown in Figure 1, analyzes their geographical distributions, and discusses their historical developments.

The distinct negative markers used for the different tenses/aspects shared by most of the Qiangic languages are also examined. The circles (Y) marked on Figure 2 indicate that the language/dialect spoken at these spots distinguishes two or more tense/aspect negative markers and the square (N) indicates that the language/dialect does not have this type of distinction.

This study used primary fieldnote data and secondary data from previous studies, with the language data sources being as follows: Sun (2017) for Kakhoyis Tshobdun; Nagano and Prins (2013) for Ribu/Geletuo Zbu and Puxi Stodsde; Gong (2018) for rGyaltsu Zbu; Jacques (2008) for Ganmuniao Japhug; Prins (2017) for Jiaomuzu Situ; Nagano (2018) for Bhola Situ; Yin (2007) for Yelong Khroskyabs; Lai (2017) for Wobzi Khroskyabs; B. Huang (2007) for Guanyinqiao Khroskyabs; Jacques et al. (2017) for Kongse sTau; Duoerji (1998) for Geshizha sTau; Huang (2009) for Gexi sTau, Zhatuo nDrapa, Darmdo Minyag, Shihing, Lizu, and Namuyi; Liu (1998) for Mawo Northern Rma; LaPolla with Huang (2003) for Ronghong Rma; Evans (2001) for Longxi/Mianchi Southern Rma; Sun (1981) for Taoping Southern Rma; C. Huang (2007) for Puxi Southern Rma; Gong (2007) for Waduo nDrapa; Wang (1991) for Youlaxi Choyu; Suzuki and Sonam Wangmo (2018) for Lhagang Choyu; Lu (2001) for Sanyanglong/Taoba/Tuoqi Northern Prinmi, Ludian Central Prinmi, and Qinghua Western Prinmi; Daudey (2014) for Wadu Northern Prinmi, Ding (2014) for Xinyingpan Central Prinmi; Jiang (2015) for Qianxi Gochang; and my fieldnotes for Yoci bTsanlha and Mätro/Nyato nDrapa.

¹ Ding (2014: 206) describes the 'deontic' negation in Xinyingpan Prinmi as follows: "The central meaning of *tja* is to convey one's desire and/or expectation as differing from others in an interpersonal communication context where two parties do not agree. Such circumstances typically prompt the occurrence of *tja* in a negated imperative sentence. Nonetheless, its usage is not confined to expressing negation in the imperative." The prefix *tha-* in nDrapa (my fieldnotes) shows a similar behaviors as Prinmi *tja*.

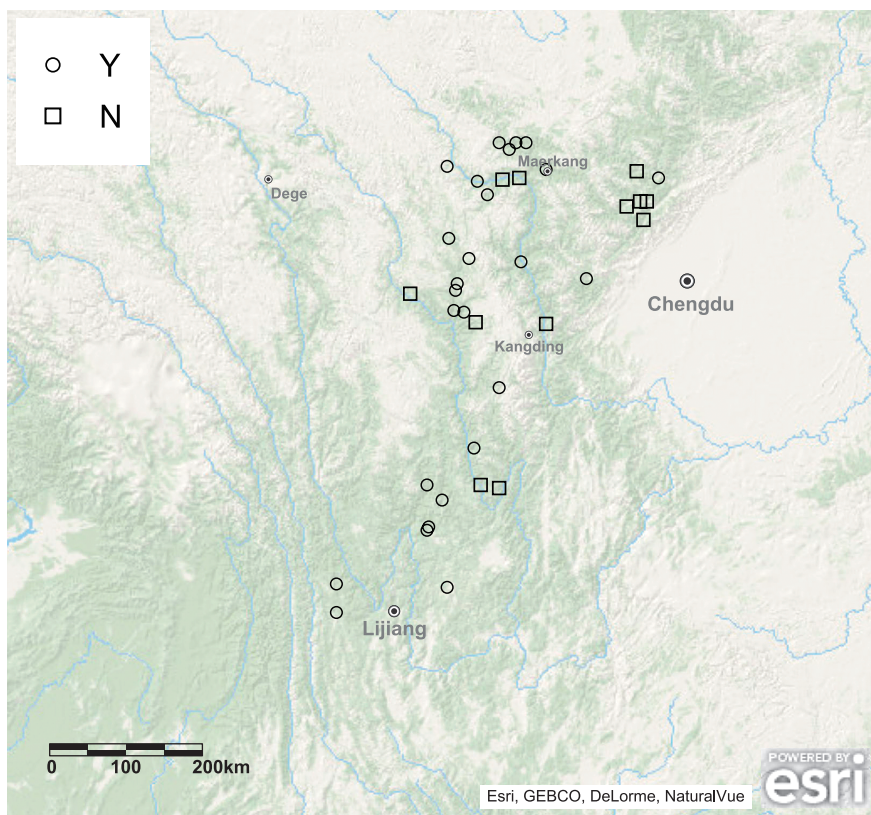


Figure 2 Negative marker tense/aspect distinction

2. Classification of the forms

The Qiangic plain negative markers are classified into the following four types:

- [A] MA type, which consists of an initial *m*- and a low vowel.
- [B] MI type, which consists of an initial *m*- and a front vowel.
- [C] MV type, which also has an initial *m*- but the vowel is neither low nor front (ə, ɤ, etc.). Typically, the vowel is variable and has an assimilation with the verb stem vowel.
- [D] non-M type, which does not have an initial *m*-.

Examples of each type are given in the following. Language/dialect names with each of the given type are given in the parentheses. The tense/aspect functions of the negative markers are indicated in brackets <>. If the form used is irrelevant to the tense/aspect, it is

indicated as <either>. If the form distinguishes the tense/aspect under certain conditions, such as a finite clause, but otherwise is generally used, ‘/default’² follows the tense/aspect distinction.

- [A] MA type
 /ma-/ (Geletuo Zbu <IPFV>, Situ <NPST>, Mawo Northern Rma <IPFV>, nDrapa <IPFV>, Puxi sTodsde <PFV>, sTau <PFV>, bTsanlha <PFV>, Yelong Khroskyabs <either>, and Choyu <either>)
 /ma-/ (Wobzi Khroskyabs <PST>, Wadu Northern Prinmi <IPFV/default>, Xinyinpan Central Prinmi <IPFV/default>, and Qinghua Western Prinmi <IPFV>)
 /mɛ-/ (Tshobdun <IPFV>, rGyaltsu Zbu <NPST>, and Darmdo Minyag <PFV>)
 /ma-/ (Taoba/Tuoqi Northern Prinmi <IPFV> and Ludian Central Prinmi <IPFV>)
 /mæ-/ (Wobzi Khroskyabs <PST>, Lizu <either>, and Namuyi <either>)
- [B] MI type
 /mi-/ (sTau <IPFV>, Shihing <PRS>, Mawo Northern Rma <PFV>, Prinmi <PFV>, Yelong Khroskyabs <either>, and Southern Rma <either>)
 /me-/ (Puxi sTodsde <PFV>, Central Prinmi <PFV>, Southern Rma <either>, and Shihing <IPFV>)
 /mɛ-/ (bTsanlha <IPFV>, Geshizha sTau <PFV>, and Guanyinqiao Khroskyabs <either>)
- [C] MV type
 /mə-/ (Tshobdun <PFV>, rGyaltsu Zbu <PST/default>, nDrapa <PFV/default>, Puxi sTodsde <IPFV>, Wobzi Khroskyabs <IPFV/default>, Ronghong Northern Rma <either>, and Gochang <either>)
 /mɿ-/ (Japhug <NPST>)
 /mu-/ (Japhug <PST/default>)
 /mɔ-/ (Shihing <FUT>)
 /mu-/ (Shihing <PFV>)
- [D] non-M type
 /mjə-/ (Geletuo Zbu <PFV/default>)
 /ja-, ji-/ (Bhola Situ <PST>)
 /ji-/ (Jiaomuzu Situ <PST>)
 /mtə-, mətə-/ (Guanyinqiao Khroskyabs <FUT>)
 /ŋə-/ (Darmdo Minyag <IPFV>)

² This type is termed ‘general’ in Ding (2014) and Daudey (2014).

Table 1 Forms and tense/aspect negative marker distinctions

	A	B	C	D
Prinmi	IPFV/default	PFV	—	—
nDrapa	IPFV	—	PFV/default	—
Situ	NPST	—	—	PST
sTau, etc.	PFV	IPFV	—	—
sTodsde	PFV ₁	PFV ₂	IPFV	—
Darmdo Minyag	PFV	—	—	IPFV
Southern Rma, etc.	—	either	—	—
Yelong Khroskyabs	either ₁	either ₂	either ₃	—
Guanyinqiao Khroskyabs	—	either	—	IPFV

These examples show that the tense/aspect form distinctions vary in the Qiangic languages. Table 1 shows the form-function set variations, with the subscribed numbers indicating that it has a distinction other than a tense/aspect distinction.

The situations illustrated in Table 1 indicate that the Qiangic languages that have tense/aspect distinctions typically use Type A, the MA type, for one of their tense/aspect forms, with some languages, such as Situ and nDrapa, using Type A as the non-past or imperfective form, and other, such as sTau and Darmdo Minyak, using Type A as the past or perfective form. However, other languages, including most varieties of Rma, Khroskyabs, and Choyu, do not have any tense/aspect distinctions for their negative markers.

3. Previous studies

Some previous studies examining the historical development of the Qiangic languages include sound changes. From a comparative linguistic perspective, the Proto-Tibeto-Burman (PTB) negative form is reconstructed as *ma (Matisoff 2015: 1113). Moreover, the vowel *a in the proto language changed into a high front vowel in many Qiangic languages, through a change that was called ‘brightening’ in Matisoff (2004). For example, Tangut, an extinct Qiangic language from the 11th–14th centuries, had negation morphemes such as *mih* (平11), *meh* (上33), and *mi* (平30) (Nishida 1989: 416, the Chinese Characters and numbers in the parentheses indicate the tones), all which had ‘brightened’ vowels.

However, recent studies (Matisoff 2019) proved that brightening had not occurred in some Qiangic languages, including most rGyalrongish varieties (Tshobdun, Zbu, Japhug, Situ, and bTshanlha of the languages in Figure 1). Chirkova (2012) also claimed that there were no common phonological innovations in the Qiangic languages; therefore, it is necessary

to be careful when analyzing the relative time depth of Type A and the other types.

Because negative markers are typically prefixes, another expected change is reduction, which is when the vowel is reduced to indicate an assimilation with the stem vowel. For example, Evans (2004) reconstructed *mV with an unspecified vowel for the negative Proto-Northern Rma prefix, which is a Type C in the classification used in this paper, and reconstructed *mi in Proto-Southern Rma, which is a Type B in the classification.

This paper is also based on geolinguistics (or linguistic geography), which is another method of historical linguistics (Sibata 1969: 11). Several studies have previously been conducted by the present author (Shirai 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019, 2020) focused on certain lexical items and morphemes in the Qiangic languages; however, as far as is known, there has not yet been a geolinguistic study conducted on the negative morphemes in the Qiangic languages.

4. Discussion

4.1 Hypotheses on Type A

As mentioned, it is expected that the history of Type A was complicated. In the following, three hypotheses on its etymon are proposed, which are tentatively termed Type A subtypes that fit each hypothesis: A1, A2, and A3.

- i. The vowel *a in the proto language is maintained, which indicates that no brightening occurred. (A1)
- ii. It originally consisted of two morphemes; for example, a compound of the negative and an irrealis marker. (A2)
- iii. It was borrowed from Tibetan. In Classical Tibetan, *ma* marks a perfective negative, *mi* marks an imperfective negative, and the vowel *i* corresponds to a mid-unrounded vowel in the modern dialects spoken in this area. (A3)

In the next section, each hypothesis is discussed, from which it is concluded that these three origins are all possible and that there are three Type A subtypes.

4.2 Geolinguistic Analysis

4.2.1 Past or perfective negative markers

Figure 3 shows the geographical distributions for the past or perfective negative markers, in which the triangles indicate Type A, the pins indicate Type B, the rectangles indicate Type C, and the arrows indicate Type D. The overlapping gray square indicates that the dialect does not distinguish a tense or aspect negative marker (see also Figure 2). This map tells us the following tendencies:

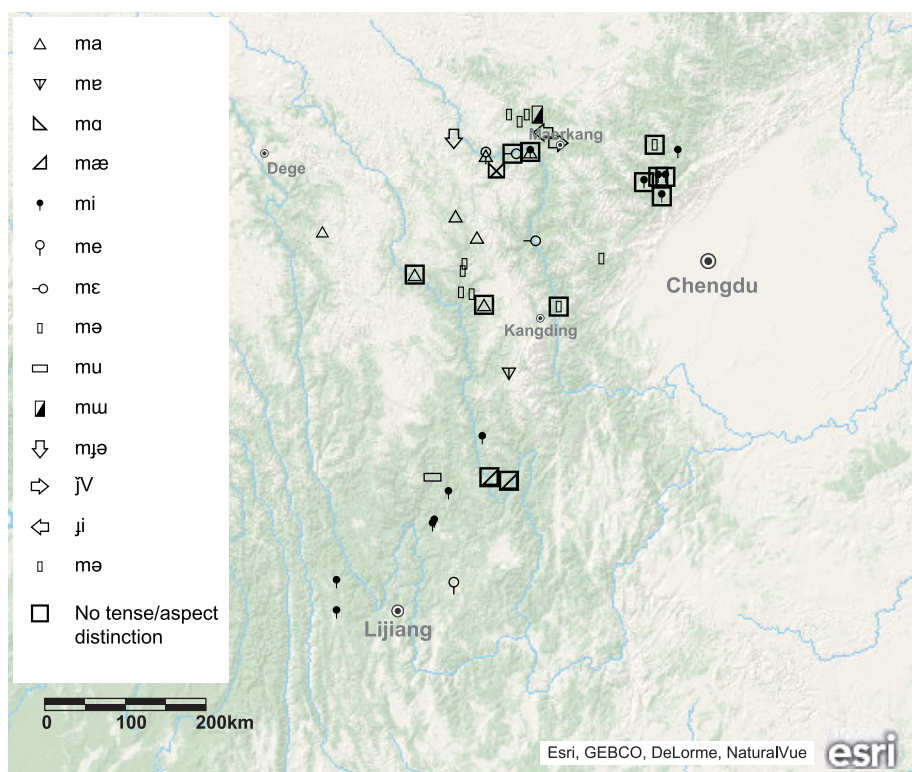


Figure 3 Negative past or perfective markers

- i. Type A has a relatively concentrated distribution in the western and central region. The triangles without a gray square, which indicate the dialect with tense/aspect distinctions and the use of Type A for the perfective or the past, are concentrated along the northern route between Dege (Derge) and Kangding (Dartsendo).
- ii. Type B is widely found and is also in peripheral areas.
- iii. Type C has a sporadic but relatively wide distribution.
- iv. Type D is limited.

Two Type A patterns were found: those with and those without tense/aspect distinctions. The Type A without tense/aspect distinctions were found in Kyroskyabs, sTodsde, Choyu, Lizu, and Namuyi. Although this geographical distribution is somewhat sporadic, it is natural to classify the MA-type negative markers in these languages as Type A1, that is, the form inherited from PTB *ma (the first hypothesis in Section 4.1). Therefore, from a logical viewpoint, this type is the oldest.

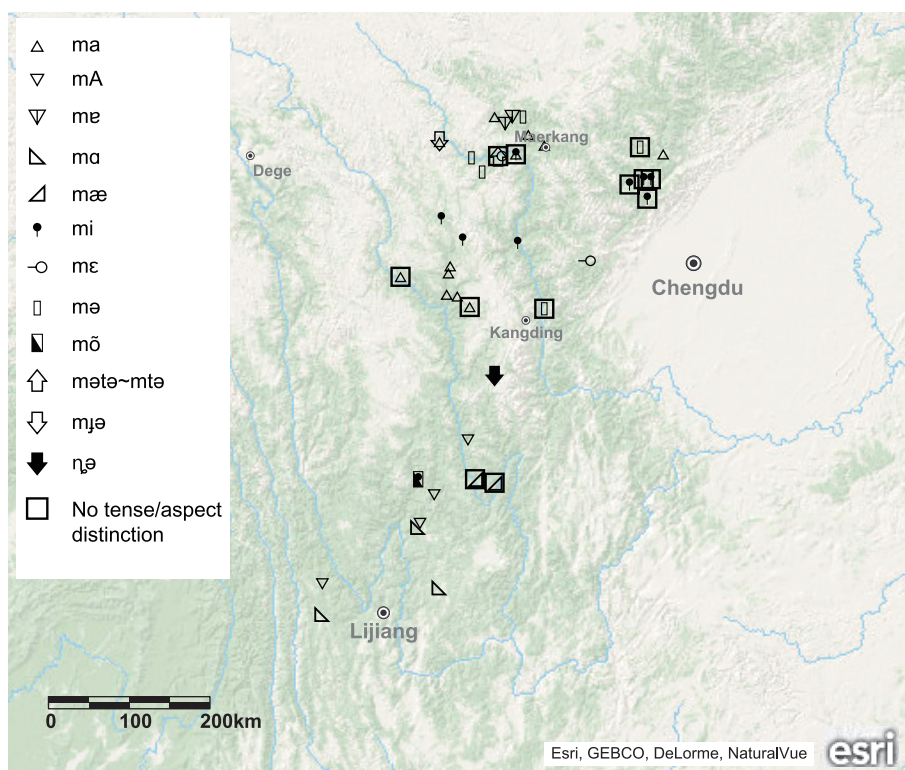


Figure 4 Negative non-past or imperfective markers

The distribution of the Type A that has tense/aspect distinction (the triangles without a gray square) is similar to the region that has a significant Tibetan influence that extends to the basic vocabulary (Shirai 2018a). As Tibetan also uses *ma* for perfective negation, the third hypothesis (Type A3) could be applied to this type: therefore, it is highly possible that the perfective negative marker was borrowed from Tibetan.

The geographical distribution suggests that Type B is relatively old, Type C is newer than B, and Types A3 and D are relatively new.³ It also appears that Type C logically developed from Type B through reduction; therefore, the relative chronology is surmised to be A1 > B > C > A3, D.

4.2.2 Non-past and imperfective negative markers

Figure 4 illustrates the geographical distributions of the non-past or imperfective negative marker forms, in which the general markings are the same as in Figure 3: the triangles

³ Nagano (2018: 51) points out that *ǵa-* and *ǵi-*, Type D past negative markers in Situ, are new innovation.

indicate Type A, the pins indicate Type B, the rectangles indicate Type C, the arrows indicate Type D, and the overlapped gray squares indicate no tense/aspect distinctions. This map shows the following tendencies:

- i. The Type A distribution is considerably wide, including peripheral areas.
- ii. Type B is concentrated in the central region.
- iii. Type C is found sporadically.
- iv. Type D is limited.

In the following, the Type A non-past or imperfective etyma is examined. For example, Situ is a rGyalrongish language that has not undergone a brightening vowel change (Matisoff 2019) and does not have a Type B or C, but does have Types A and D. Therefore, the first hypothesis (Section 4.1) can be applied to this language, that is, the Type A in this language was maintained from the proto language (A1). The same hypothesis can be applied to Tshobdun and Zbu, both of which belong to a rGyalrongish subgroup. As these languages are found in the northernmost peripheral region, they fit the center-versus-periphery theory (Yanagida 1930) that states that peripheral varieties tend to maintain old forms.

However, Type A is also widely found in languages that have exhibited a brightening vowel change, which means that hypotheses (i) and (iii) in Section 4.1 are unable to explain these forms. Therefore, a further hypothesis is proposed: ‘(ii) it originally consisted of two morphemes.’

nDrapa is an example that uses Type A for the imperfective but also exhibits brightening. Further, Type C is the default negative prefix in this language, that is, the Type C use is irrelevant to the tense/aspect in the subordinate or interrogative clauses even though it is used for the perfective negative in the declarative main clause. See nDrapa examples (1)–(3). In (1), a Type C negative marker (*mi-* ‘NEG₁’) is attached to the imperfective auxiliary (*tɿ* ‘IPFV’) inside a nominalization. However, in (2), the imperfective auxiliary has a Type A negative marker (*ma-* ‘NEG₂’) in the main predicate. In (3), the perfective auxiliary (*w-a* ‘PFV-FAC.PFV’) has a Type C negative marker.

- (1) *somuŋi3* *ko3* *zama3* *tsi3* *mi-tɿ-pi1* *ŋa=rA3* *phe3* *rɛ3*.
 tomorrow here meal eat NEG₁-IPFV-NMLZ 1SG=GEN father COP₄

‘The person who will not have meal here tomorrow is my father.’

- (2) *higeŋe3* *tɕuu2* *tsheri=ta1* *ɕettɕul* *ma-t-ɛ*.
 teacher now PN=MAL be.angry NEG₂-IPFV-FAC.IPFV

‘The teacher is not angry at Tseri now.’

- (3) *koro3* *khəmbel* *kə-mmei3* *mi-w-a1*.
 this peach INW-get.ripe NEG₁-PFV-FAC.PFV

‘This peach is not ripe enough.’ (Lit. This peach has not got ripe.)

Therefore, it could be expected that Type A was secondary and was formed to mark the imperfective negative in the main clause in this language. The possible origin of the open vowel is an irrealis prefix *a-*, which is found in Japhug (Jacques 2008: 295). While this prefix is not productive in nDrapa, it is found in the prohibitive directional prefix form; e.g., *ko-tsu2* {INW-eat} ‘Eat (it)!’ vs. *ka-tsu2* {INW.PROH-eat} ‘Don’t eat (it)!’. Therefore, it is logical to hypothesize that in this language, Type A was a secondary formation from the negative and irrealis markers. This same hypothesis could also be applied to Mawo Northern Rma and the Prinmi dialects; however, in contrast to nDrapa, Type A is a default negative marker in the Prinmi dialects (Ding 2014, Daudey 2014). This Type A subtype, which was formed through a merger of two morphemes, is A2 (Section 4.1).

From a geographical viewpoint, A2 is widely distributed from the northeastern periphery to the southwestern end, which suggests that it is relatively old even though it is a secondary development. A possible hypothesis is that this type was formed before the brightening was completed, that is, before Type B was formed, which blocked the change.

Languages with the Type B exclusive non-past/imperfective (the pins without a gray square) are concentrated along the northern route between Dege and Kangding, which suggests they borrowed the imperfective Tibetan negative marker *mi*.

Therefore, this study tentatively concludes that the negative Type A1 morpheme is the oldest and then changed into a Type B or C through brightening and/or reduction, and that Type A2 was formed through a merger of two morphemes. The geographical distributions suggest that A2 could be older than Type B. Type D developed later in fewer dialects such as Geletuo Zbu and Guanyinqiao Khroskyabs, which use Type D for the imperfective. It is therefore logical to hypothesize that Type D was formed to distinguish the tenses or aspects in these languages. Consequently, the provisional relative time depth is A1 > A2 > B > C > D.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the Qiangic language plain negative markers, with particular attention being paid to the tense/aspect distinctions. It was concluded that there are three Type A, MA-type subtypes: (i) a form maintained from the proto language; (ii) the merger of two morphemes; and (iii) Tibetan loans. The relative chronology of the types was examined and it was tentatively concluded that for the perfective/past negative markers, (i) A1 > B > C > A3, D, and for imperfective/non-past negative markers, (ii) A1 > A2 > B > C > D.

The situations examined in this paper suggest that the tense/aspect distinction has been

crucial in the Qiangic languages from an early development stage, even though it has been difficult to ascertain the distinguishable forms in the proto language. Most language varieties appear to have developed a distinction through mergers (Type A2), borrowing (Type A3), or even by using another morpheme (Type D) as shown in Figure 2, which shows which languages have different negative markers for different tenses/aspects: ‘Y’ means that the dialect had such a distinction while ‘N’ means that it did not. While the Type Y spots are distributed across the whole area, Type N are only found sporadically, which suggests that Type Y is an older type than Type N.

Abbreviations

1	first person	NMLZ	nominalizer
COP	copula	NPST	non-past
DE	deontic	PFV	perfective
FAC	factual	PN	proper name
FUT	future	PROH	prohibitive
GEN	genitive	PRS	present
INW	inward directional prefix	PST	past
IPFV	imperfective	PTB	Proto-Tibeto-Burman
MAL	malefactive	SG	singular
NEG	negative		

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