

On some endangered Sinitic languages spoken in Northwestern China: Tangwang, Gangou, Linxia

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The Yellow River plateau in the Qinghai-Gansu border region in China is unquestionably a hotbed of cultural and linguistic contact. In the districts of Linxia in Gansu province, which is situated to the south of the Yellow River at the confluence of the Daxia River, and of Tongren and Huangnan in Qinghai province, there are several languages descended from at least four different language taxa: Sinitic, Tibeto-Burman (Amdo Tibetan), Turkic, Mongolic.

Nine ethnic groups are located in the region: Chinese (Hàn 漢); Huí 回 (Muslims); Dōngxiāng 東鄉 (Santa); Bǎoān 保安 (Baonan); Tǔzú 土族 (Monguor); Dōngbù Yùgù 東部裕固 (Eastern Yugur or Yellow Uighur); Xībù Yùgù 西部裕固 (Western Yugur); Sālā 撒拉 (Salar); Ānduō Zàngzú 安多藏族 (Amdo Tibetan).

They speak a dozen different languages: (i) Sinitic languages, more specifically Northwestern dialects such as Linxia 臨夏 (or Hezhou 河州), Tangwang 唐汪 (in the Gansu Dongxiang zone), Gangou 甘沟 (in the Minhe county 民和縣 of the Qinghai province), Wutun 五屯 (in the Tongren district 同仁縣 of the Qinghai province); (ii) Mongolic languages such as Santa, Baonan, Monguor, Eastern Yugur; not to mention (iii) Turkic languages such as Salar, Western Yugur; and (iv) Tibeto-Burman languages, namely, Amdo Tibetan.

These languages share many syntactic structural properties and it has been suggested that they could form a *Sprachbund*, or linguistic area, and also that some of these languages might be viewed as ‘mixed’.

This paper will examine one of the most characteristic syntactic properties, namely the case system, for the following endangered Sinitic languages: Linxia [or Hezhou], Tangwang, Wutun and Gangou that have been considered as endangered languages.

An answer to the following main question will be tentatively suggested in the conclusion: Do we really have case suffixes in these languages (cases are a morphological notion) or simply thematic roles expressed by postpositions (thematic roles are a semantic notion)? Do we really have a Qinghai-Gansu linguistic area? Can these Sinitic languages be characterized as being mixed languages?