

## On Genetic and Areal Linguistics in Mainland South-East Asia: Parallel Polyfunctionality of ‘acquire’

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This chapter raises questions concerning genetic and areal relatedness among languages of Mainland South-east Asia (hereafter MSEA),<sup>1</sup> mainly with reference to a widespread pattern of grammatical polyfunctionality involving a verb ACQUIRE. Although data are mostly from Sinitic and Tai, the issues of genetic versus areal relatedness arise across and throughout the five or more language families in the region.

I begin with introductory comments on the geographical, linguistic, and cultural situation of MSEA, including discussion of MSEA as a linguistic area. In §2, I present data from a synchronic case study of a polyfunctional verb ACQUIRE in MSEA languages, concentrating on two Tai languages (Lao and Northern

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations for branches of language families are EMK (Eastern Mon-Khmer), NMK (Northern Mon-Khmer), SWT (South-Western Tai). Abbreviations for languages used in examples are as follows: AH (Ahom [SWT; India, Burma]), CA (Cantonese [Sinitic; China]), DG (Dong [Kam-Sui, China]), KH (Khmer [EMK; Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam]), KM (Kmhmu [NMK; Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, China]), LAO (Lao [SWT; Laos, Thailand, Cambodia]), MSC (Modern Standard Chinese [Sinitic; China]), MU (Mulao [Kam-Sui; China]), NZH (Northern Zhuang [Northern Tai; China, Vietnam]), PA (Pacoh [EMK; Laos, Vietnam]), SWM (South-Western Mandarin [Sinitic; China, Laos]), TH (Thai [SWT; Thailand]), VN (Vietnamese [EMK; Vietnam]).

Zhuang) and two Sinitic languages (Cantonese and Modern Standard Chinese), with additional data from South-Western Mandarin. Section 3 brings in historical evidence from Tai(-Kadai) and Sinitic, as well as comparative evidence from Eastern Mon-Khmer. Issues arise concerning the distinction between areal and genetic relatedness, and it is noted, in addition, that while borrowing and common inheritance are two possible accounts for sharing of structures between languages, common language-internal mechanisms also need to be taken into account. The 'naturalness' of an innovation can result in a higher degree of common grammatical patterning due to independent innovation, and this naturalness may be defined with respect to human cognitive propensities, or to the semantic/grammatical developments made possible or likely by the language's given state of semantic and grammatical organization (or its *typological poise*).

### 1. Introductory discussion: the Mainland South-east Asian area

#### 1.1. GEOGRAPHY

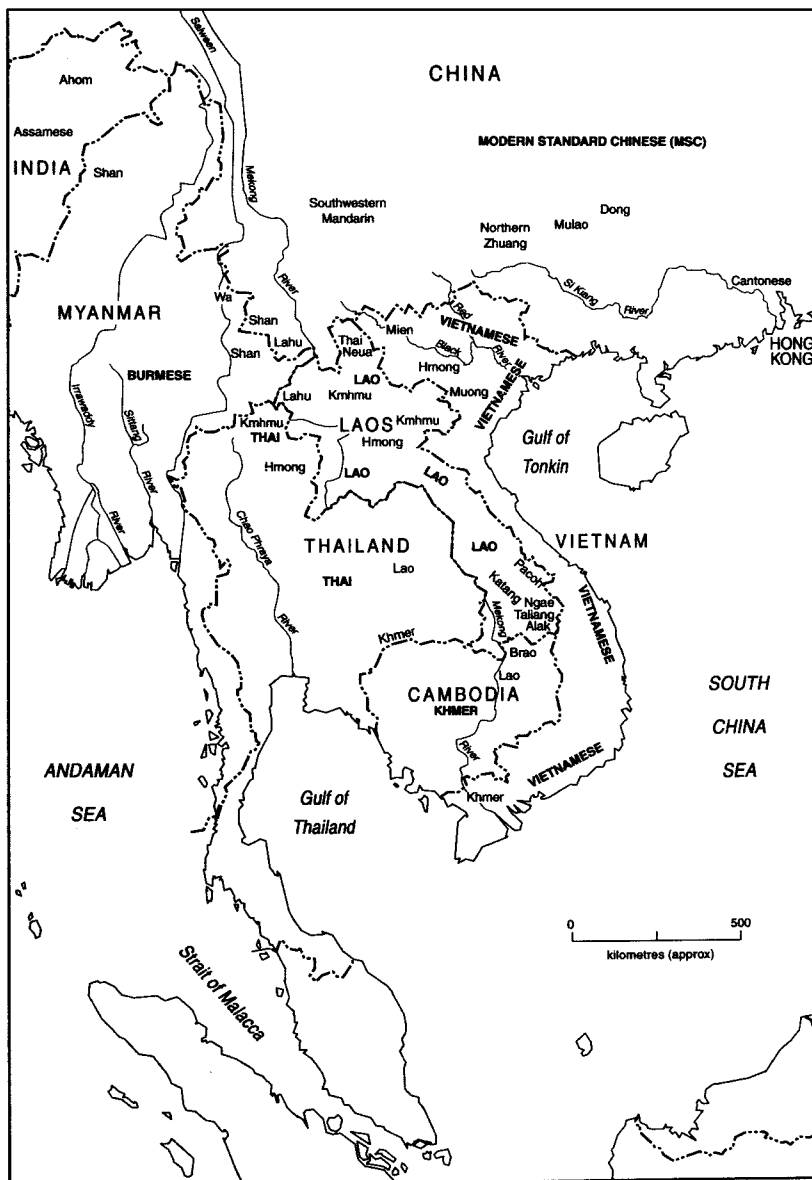
MSEA encompasses Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia, Burma, parts of north-east India, and extensive areas of southern and south-western China.

MSEA is a hilly monsoonal region with rivers descending into large basins, such as the Irrawaddy River valley in Burma, the broad Chao Phraya valley in central Thailand, and the long reaches of the Mekong from south-west China, through Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia, to the delta in southern Vietnam. Most of these flatter lowland areas have been well populated by paddy-rice farmers for centuries, and hillier regions show greater diversity, with wet-rice cultivation practised in some areas (where flat land can be found), and shifting 'dry-field' rice cultivation (on slopes) in others. Typically, those practising these different livelihoods also speak different languages.

Geography has naturally helped determine patterns of migration over the centuries, with large rivers and their tributaries hosting significant downstream southward migration, especially from south-west China into the lower hills and plains of Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam (Edmondson 1998a, b). Patterns of human movement have been complex and widespread, with ongoing juxtaposition of rather different peoples, whose relations are defined by important social and political factors (cf. Leach (1964) on north-east Burma; LaPolla, Chapter 9, on China).

#### 1.2. LANGUAGE(S)

At least five widely accepted linguistic groups are found in MSEA, namely Hmong-Mien, Sino-Tibetan (including Sinitic and Tibeto-Burman), Tai-Kadai, Austroasiatic (including Mon-Khmer), and Austronesian (not discussed in this chapter). These include the national languages of Burma, Cambodia, China, Laos,



MAP 1. Mainland South-East Asia

Thailand, and Vietnam. English and French have had a considerable recent presence, as Pali and Sanskrit have had in earlier times.

MSEA hosts great linguistic diversity, especially in the rugged mountain areas, yet these more isolated locations are unfortunately the places in which we know the least about grammar and semantics. Relatively little descriptive work has been done, and while fieldwork activity is increasing, not much of it is on grammar. Current work is mostly aimed at comparative reconstruction and especially language classification, and so is often restricted to small word lists. One reason for the general lack of fieldwork-based description has been inaccessibility of the relevant areas, due to political as well as geographical factors. With current political and economic development, research in the area is becoming easier.

### 1.3. CULTURE(S)

MSEA as a whole displays a range of cross-cutting and overlapping cultural commonalities, and cannot be considered a single distinct 'culture area'. While the religious, political, and economic influences of Sinitic and Indic cultures have been historically significant, and are obvious today, these have been predated by indigenous cultures which also have a modern presence, undercutting realms of Indic and Sinitic influence (cf. Steinberg 1987). Of relevance to the linguistic situation, many rather different groups have cohabited, and, perhaps more importantly, have been apt to fluidity in ethnic identity, for political and other reasons (cf. Evans 1999a, b, Keyes 1977, Leach 1964).

Movements of people, and associated social changes of linguistic consequence, have occurred at many levels of grain. More broadly, significant civilizations have dominated open river valleys (such as the Chao Phraya Basin), and in these circumstances, 'cohabitation' of different human groups has resulted in disappearance of cultural (and linguistic) distinctions. Consider, for example, those who are nowadays referred to as 'Tai', including significant minorities of southern China, north Vietnam, and north-east Burma, as well as dominant populations of Thailand and Laos. As an ethnic group, the Tai are defined by the 'genetic relatedness' of languages they speak (assumed by many to indicate speakers' common ancestry). This does not, however, correspond to a comparable level of genetic relatedness among the speakers themselves. There is evidence that today's Tai-speaking populations of lowland Thailand and Laos are mostly descendants of former Mon-Khmer-speaking inhabitants of the same area (Samerchai 1998). These people 'became Tai' linguistically and culturally, perhaps ultimately for economic reasons, related to superior agricultural technology that Tai-speaking populations brought with them from southern China (Hartmann 1998; cf. Leach 1964 on the same ethnolinguistic fluidity among neighbouring Kachin (Tibeto-Burman) and Shan (Tai) in north-east Burma).

There has been an epic history in MSEA of social movements and interactions,

with associated competition of fashions in both cultural and linguistic practice, between generations, and among neighbouring groups. These fluctuations, congregations, dispersals, cross-societal arrangements, and temporary 'equilibria', have resulted in today's complex cultural and linguistic situation.

#### 1.4. MAINLAND SOUTH-EAST ASIA AS A LINGUISTIC AREA

Languages of MSEA share a great deal of grammatical structure, from broad typological traits to quite specific features, with varying degrees of overlap among languages (Bisang 1991, Clark 1989, Matisoff 1991, Chapter 11, Migliazza 1996). Languages of the region lack case-marking or cross-referencing in the usual sense of these terms. Disambiguation of 'who' and 'whom' relies on semantic and pragmatic context, and in the last resort is often achieved by constituent order. These languages are extremely open to leaving interpretation (e.g. of predicate-argument relations, tense, aspect-modality) to context, and both constituent order variation and ellipsis are common. Normal utterances are often impossible to interpret properly outside the contexts in which they actually occur.

All languages of MSEA use classifier constructions for enumeration, individuation, and other forms of nominal grounding. With respect to verb-phrase structure, the languages all display verb serialization. In phonology, lexical tone is an obvious areal feature, although not always found (e.g. it is mostly absent among Austroasiatic languages). Phonotactically, syllable-final consonants are highly restricted, with only a fraction of full consonant inventories permissible in syllable-final position.

Table 1 shows a few MSEA areal features across five language families (ignoring some exceptions).

Further to these broader generalizations, some more specific grammatical features enable subdistinctions. Tibeto-Burman languages are distinct from the rest in being mostly verb-final rather than verb-medial. This generalization is not absolute—note the presence of verb-final constructions in Tai and Sinitic, such as the so-called 'disposal construction' (of the form 'NP<sub>SUBJ</sub> take NP<sub>OBJ</sub> V<sub>TR</sub>'), directional constructions with the likes of 'go' and 'come' in final position, and similar

TABLE 1. Some Mainland South-East Asian areal features

|                          | Austroasiatic | Tai-Kadai | Hmong-Mien | Sinitic | Tibeto-Burman |
|--------------------------|---------------|-----------|------------|---------|---------------|
| Case-marking             | –             | –         | –          | –       | –             |
| Cross-referencing        | –             | –         | –          | –       | –             |
| Fusional affixing        | –             | –         | –          | –       | –             |
| Classifier constructions | +             | +         | +          | +       | +             |
| Verb serialization       | +             | +         | +          | +       | +             |
| Lexical tone             | ±             | +         | +          | +       | ±             |

TABLE 2. Some Mainland South-East Asian areal subdistinctions

|                                     | Austroasiatic | Tai-Kadai | Hmong-Mien | Sinitic | Tibeto-Burman |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|------------|---------|---------------|
| Verb-object                         | +             | +         | +          | +       | -             |
| Prepositions                        | +             | +         | +          | ±       | -             |
| Adjective-standard<br>of comparison | +             | +         | +          | ±       | -             |
| Head-modifier                       | +             | +         | +          | -       | ±             |
| Head-relative clause                | +             | ±         | +          | -       | -             |
| Possessed-possessor                 | +             | +         | -          | -       | -             |

multiverb constructions. Some Austroasiatic languages are reportedly verb-final, and conversely, some Tibeto-Burman languages, such as those in the Karenic branch, are verb-medial, like their Tai and Sinitic neighbours. With respect to adpositions and comparative constructions, Tibeto-Burman languages have *post*-positions, and place the standard of comparison *before* the adjective predicating the quality of comparison. Sinitic languages are divided and/or mixed in these respects. Southern Sinitic languages group with the majority of MSEA languages in putting the standard of comparison after the element predicating the quality being compared. Sinitic languages in general use both postpositions (denominal) and prepositions (deverbal). Noun phrases are overwhelmingly head-initial in both Tai and Austroasiatic languages, while they are strongly head-final in Sinitic languages, and in Tibeto-Burman languages generally (different types of nominal attribution may display different head/attribute ordering; cf. Okell (1969) on Burmese). Hmong-Mien languages group with Mon-Khmer and Tai in having adjectives and relative clauses follow head nouns, but group with Sinitic and Tibeto-Burman in having possessors precede possesseds. These generalizations (again not exceptionless) are summarized in Table 2.

In some cases, specific features are common to certain languages only. For example, Vietnamese patterns with Khmer and Lao in that each have a possessive marker derived from a nominal meaning 'stuff, things' (cf. Clark 1989):

- (1) *húan khǝŋg khòj*  
 LAO house thing ('of') 1  
 'my house'
- (2) *ptěah rəbɔh kñom*  
 KH house thing ('of') 1  
 'my house'
- (3) *nhà của tôi*  
 VN house thing ('of') 1  
 'my house'

Kmhmu, however, spoken literally among and between these languages, derives a possessive marker from a verb *dé'* 'take'/'get':<sup>2</sup>

- (4) *kmuul dé' ge*  
 KM money POSS 3msg  
 'his money'

In other respects, however, Vietnamese patterns grammatically like Sinitic languages, *not* like other Mon-Khmer languages and Tai. Consider, for example, pseudo-reflexive emphatic constructions and classifier constructions (using Modern Standard Chinese as a representative Sinitic language):

- (5) (a) LAO *láaw hían 'éeng*  
           3 study self  
       (b) MSC *tā zì(-jǐ) xué*  
       (c) VN *nó tū học*  
           3 self study  
           'He learned/studied (it) by himself.'
- (6) (a) LAO *măa sǎam tǎo*  
           dog three CL  
       (b) MSC *sān zhī gǒu*  
       (c) VN *ba con chó*  
           three CL dog  
           'three dogs'

Some languages feature competing options, with one construction 'genetically acquired', another 'contact acquired'. In Mulao, alternative orderings of nominal head and modifier are often possible, either in the Tai(-Kadai) head-initial style (7a), or Sinitic head-final style (7b):

- (7) (a) *a:n<sup>1</sup> ma<sup>4</sup>*  
 MU saddle horse (cf. Lao *ʔaan mâa* [saddle horse] 'saddle')  
       (b) *ma<sup>4</sup> a:n<sup>1</sup>*  
           horse saddle (cf. MSC *mǎ ʔān* [horse saddle] 'saddle')

Another example of 'genetic' versus 'contact' acquired grammar in competition concerns causatives in Kmhmu. Mon-Khmer systems of productive derivational morphology (e.g. morphological causatives; Clark 1989: 200–2) are in decline, apparently due to areal pressure. Surrounding languages are isolating, displaying periphrastic and/or lexical causativization. In Kmhmu as spoken in northern Thailand, two types of causative construction are in competition.

<sup>2</sup> *Dé'* has other grammatical uses—e.g. as a dative marker—and may occasionally be used to refer to 'stuff'. Here, the 'stuff'/'possessive marker' polysemy has apparently been derived in the opposite direction to that assumed for the likes of Vietnamese, Lao, and Khmer (i.e. 'possessive marker' loses its initial 'possessed' complement, and refers to the possessed most generally, as 'stuff').

'Native' morphological causatives, in the following (b) examples, are formed from the simple verbs shown in the (a) examples (Suwilai 1987: 25 ff.):

- (8) (a) *nà: kà:j tà kì:*  
 KM 3fsg come here  
 'She came here.'
- (b) *rù: nà: p-kà:j*  
 KM pull 3fsg CAUS-come  
 'Pull her towards (me).'
- (9) (a) *só' pə' mäh*  
 KM dog eat rice  
 'Dogs eat rice.'
- (b) *nà: (mò:t mäh) pn-pə' só'*  
 KM 3fsg take rice CAUS-eat dog  
 'She took rice to feed to the dog.'

Periphrastic causativization provides a competing alternative. Two patterns are shown in (10), looking suspiciously like neighbouring Thai structures, shown in (11), following:<sup>3</sup>

- (10) (a) *nà: 'úan só' pə' mäh*  
 KM 3fsg give/make dog eat rice  
 'She fed the dog.'
- (b) *nà: mò:t mäh 'úan só' pə'*  
 KM 3fsg take rice give/make dog eat  
 'She took rice to feed the dog.'
- (11) (a) *kháw háj mǎa kin khâaw*  
 TH 3 give/make dog eat rice  
 'She let/made the dog eat rice.'
- (b) *kháw 'aw khâaw háj mǎa kin*  
 TH 3 take rice give/make dog eat  
 'She took rice to give the dog to eat.'

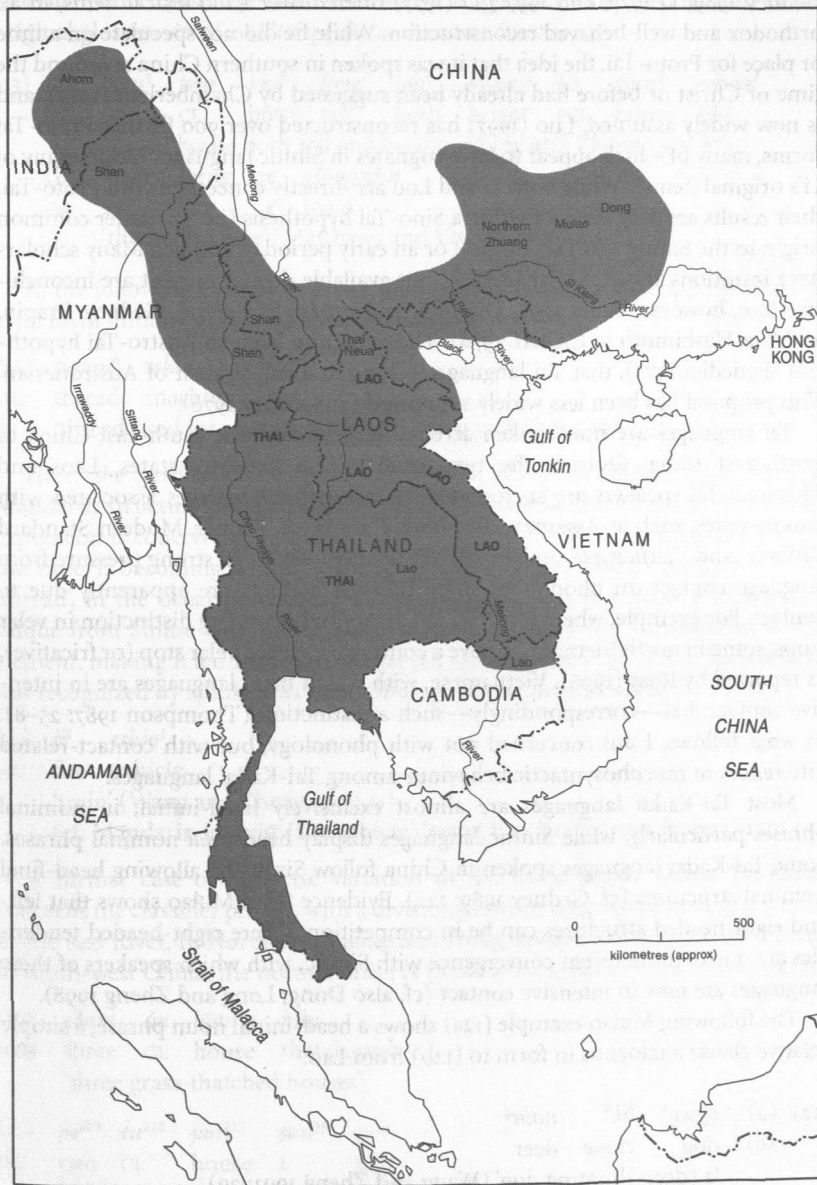
#### 1.5. VARIATION IN A LANGUAGE FAMILY DUE TO AREAL PRESSURES: THE CASE OF TAI(-KADAI)

The Tai family (a branch of 'Tai-Kadai') is standardly assumed to branch into Northern Tai, Central Tai, and South-Western Tai. Proto-Tai was probably spoken somewhere in the northern part of Guangxi Province, where there is greatest variety (Edmondson and Solnit 1997, Luo 1997, amongst others).

Application of the comparative method has led to reconstruction of a sizeable fraction of Proto-Tai, to a reasonable time depth (between one and three thousand

<sup>3</sup> Translations of (10) and (11) differ here, not because they are not synonymous, but because translations of (10) are from the original source, Suwilai (1987). Translations of (11) are mine.





MAP 2. Approximate distribution of Tai languages

years). (For historical Tai, consult Benedict 1975, Edmondson and Solnit 1997, Gedney 1989, Li 1977, Luo 1997.) Li (1977) offered over 1,200 lexical items, in an orthodox and well-behaved reconstruction. While he did not speculate on a time or place for Proto-Tai, the idea that it was spoken in southern China at around the time of Christ or before had already been suggested by Chamberlain (1972), and is now widely assumed. Luo (1997) has reconstructed over 900 further Proto-Tai forms, many of which appear to have cognates in Sinitic languages (as do many of Li's original items). While both Li and Luo are directly concerned with Proto-Tai, their results are suggestive of either a Sino-Tai hypothesis (i.e. an earlier common origin to the Sinitic and Tai families) or an early period of contact. Many scholars have intuitions about this hypothesis, but available data at present are inconclusive (see, however, Bauer 1996, Dai 1991, and papers by Egerod, Gedney, Prapin, and Yue-Hashimoto in *CAAAL* 1976). There has also been an Austro-Tai hypothesis (Benedict 1975), that Tai languages belong in a sub-branch of Austronesian. This proposal has been less widely supported (cf. Gedney 1976).

Tai languages are now spoken across a large area, from south-east China to north-east India. Outside the two officially Tai-speaking states, Laos and Thailand, Tai speakers are surrounded by influential languages associated with nation-states, such as Assamese, Burmese, Cantonese, Khmer, Modern Standard Chinese, and Vietnamese, and are therefore often subject to strong pressure from language contact. In phonology, some unusual features are apparently due to contact. For example, where most Tai languages lack a voicing distinction in velar stops, some in north Vietnam do have a contrastive voiced velar stop (or fricative), as reported by Ross (1996). Vietnamese, with which these languages are in intensive contact, has—correspondingly—such a distinction (Thompson 1987: 25–8). In what follows, I am concerned not with phonology, but with contact-related differences in morphosyntactic behaviour among Tai-Kadai languages.

Most Tai-Kadai languages are almost exclusively head-initial, in nominal phrases particularly, while Sinitic languages display head-final nominal phrases. Some Tai-Kadai languages spoken in China follow Sinitic by allowing head-final nominal structures (cf. Gedney 1989: 122). Evidence from Mulao shows that left- and right-headed structures can be in competition, where right-headed tendencies are due to more recent convergence with Sinitic, with which speakers of these languages are now in intensive contact (cf. also Dong; Long and Zheng 1998).

The following Mulao example (12a) shows a head-initial noun phrase, a simple relative clause analogous in form to (12b) from Lao:

- (12) (a) *ŋgwa<sup>1</sup> lik<sup>8</sup> na:n<sup>4</sup>*  
 MU dog chase deer  
 'a (deer-)hunting dog' (Wang and Zheng 1993: 29)
- (b) *mǎa lǎj fǎan*  
 LAO dog chase deer  
 'a deer-hunting dog' (also: 'A dog is chasing a deer.')

Compare this to the head-final noun phrase in (13a), a relative clause parallel in structure to Cantonese (and other Sinitic languages), illustrated in (13b) (with original glosses—'PCL' and 'LP' perform the same function):

- (13) (a) *ŋa:u<sup>3</sup> twa<sup>3</sup> jəu<sup>6</sup> fong<sup>t</sup> jəu<sup>6</sup> kɤang<sup>t</sup> kɔ ga:n<sup>2</sup> ngwa<sup>4</sup>*  
 MU one CL both tall both bright PCL house tile  
 'a tiled house both tall and bright' (Wang and Zheng 1993: 87)
- (b) *ngóh chéng ge gūngyàhn*  
 CA 1 hire LP maid  
 'the maid I hire' (Matthews and Yip 1994: 88)

In the following example, the nominal head is 'thread', which appears both as a Tai form initially, and as a Sinitic form finally:

- (14) *pɤa:n<sup>6</sup> tshé<sup>5</sup> sjén<sup>4</sup>*  
 MU thread machine thread  
 'thread used for sewing machine' (Wang and Zheng 1993: 31)

Here, *tshé<sup>5</sup> sjén<sup>4</sup>* 'machine thread' is borrowed whole from Sinitic (cf. head-final Mandarin structure *fī xiàn* [machine thread] 'machine thread'), and this whole expression is conceivably not analysed by speakers (i.e. is not headed one way or the other), becoming a simple modifier of the native Mulao nominal *pɤa:n<sup>6</sup>* 'thread', in the usual head-initial Tai order. However, the following example, a calque from Sinitic with noun-modifier order, includes one Tai and one Sinitic element, making it hard to imagine that the initial element (*fī* 'fire', a Tai word) is not recognized by speakers as a morphologically distinct modifier:

- (15) *fī tshja<sup>t</sup>*  
 MU fire vehicle  
 'train' (Wang and Zheng 1993: 31)  
 (cf. Mandarin *huǒ chē* [fire vehicle] 'train', Lao *lǐt fáj* [vehicle fire] 'train')

A further case of syntactic variation in the noun phrase across Tai-Kadai concerns the classifier phrase, with a division between languages north, and south, of the Red River. In Northern Zhuang and Dong, spoken north of the Red River in south-west China, the normal order is [NUMERAL-CLASSIFIER-HEAD-(MODIFIER)]:

- (16) *sǎam ǎn lâan hâa*  
 NZH three CL house thatch.grass  
 'three grass-thatched houses'
- (17) *ja<sup>212</sup> tu<sup>212</sup> jan<sup>212</sup> saw<sup>35</sup> ta<sup>33</sup>*  
 DG two CL house 2 that  
 'those two (animals) from your house' (Long and Zheng 1998: 94)

These languages pattern like Sinitic (and Hmong-Mien) languages, which similarly place classifiers before head nouns (although the distinction is not

absolute; cf. e.g. Matthews and Yip (1994: 405)—in many languages, alternative orders are available, with a semantic/pragmatic distinction). Further south, in Lao and surrounding languages, the normal order is [HEAD-(MODIFIER)-NUMERAL-CLASSIFIER], with classifiers placed *after* head nouns:

- (18) *mǎa nǎj sǒng tóo*  
 LAO dog big two CL  
 ‘two big dogs’

While Tai languages display right-headed noun-phrase organization in situations of contact with Sinitic, *no* Tai language shows the full extent of nominal right-headedness found in Sinitic languages. No Tai language allows fully productive head-final ADJ-N order in simple attributive nominal phrases. Conversely, no Sinitic language displays N-ADJ as the basic, fully productive noun-attribute ordering. Even where head-modifier order is found to some degree, such as in Cantonese and other southern Sinitic languages, the pan-Sinitic head-final pattern remains dominant in simple noun-attribute expressions. However, the extent to which mixtures of types are allowed is an issue which deserves attention, of relevance to the question of whether Cantonese (and other southern varieties of Sinitic) are related at a deeper level to Tai languages, or as some suggest, have a Tai substrate (Bauer 1996). Nevertheless, it may be assumed that Proto-Tai and its Sinitic contemporarie(s), were head-initial and -final, respectively, in core noun-phrase organization. Areal influence, even when extreme, has not overridden this distinction.

A different example of contact-related grammatical variation in Tai concerns the verb phrase. Tai languages in Assam are surrounded by verb-final languages, and similarly are verb-final (cf. Diller 1992). In modern Ahom, like in Assamese (and unlike in, say, Thai), ‘the usual order [of constituents in a transitive clause] is subject, direct object, verb’ (Grierson 1903: 102; both examples from same, with original transcription, glosses, translation):

- (19) *luk ngi pun müng jau khau-ü-koi*  
 AH son younger beyond country far entered-has  
 ‘The younger son entered a foreign country.’
- (20) *mān-ko tāng khráng-ling tāk-lū tāk-pāng kin-jau-o*  
 AH he all property diminished spent eaten-had  
 ‘He had diminished, spent and eaten all the property.’

However, Ahom manuscripts from the fifteenth century display verb-*medial* clause organization, in the manner of other South-Western Tai languages, such as Lao and Thai (examples from Terwiel and Ranoo 1992: 80):

- (21) *sang khaw pak na la ka*  
 AH if enter space front naga  
 ‘If it enters the space in front of the naga.’

- (22) *sang thuk neuw cik cong*  
 AH if reach star C.  
 'If it reaches the Cik Cong star.'

Over the last five hundred years, speakers of Tai languages in Assam have interacted with speakers of more dominant head-final languages of the Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan families, changing the way they speak accordingly.

#### 1.6. MODELLING 'LANGUAGE CONTACT' AND DIFFUSION IN MAINLAND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

The above examples of areal diffusion, along with the data presented in §2, are the product of a long and complex history of human relations, only some of which has been documented and/or inferred. For example, a fair amount is supposed about the spread of Tai speakers from southern China, west and south-west across mountains and along rivers in search of lowland river flats for paddy cultivation of rice. This often involved displacement of Tibeto-Burman and Mon-Khmer speakers, and was also often accompanied by the cultural/linguistic transformation of those non-Tai speakers (cf. Leach 1964, Condominas 1990). However, available coarse-grained descriptions of social history do not provide sufficient detail to account for the complex and context-dependent variables guiding speakers' choices about linguistic behaviour, ultimately determining the speech of their modern descendants.

The problem lies in the fact that linguistic change is necessarily and primarily a ground-level social process, the relevant mechanisms pivoting on identities, judgements, actions, and responses of individual speakers in real time. Speakers can detect when speech in their community begins to sound different (phonologically and grammatically), and these differences carry social significance, in the classical sociolinguistic sense (for example indicative of a speaker's age or background). Evidence of such details in the history of South-East Asia over the last two or three millennia is difficult, if possible at all, to find. One thing which must be ascertained in every case is the identifying value of particular linguistic choices in particular contexts, and this can apply to phonological choices, lexical choices, and grammatical choices (as for example in the case of Kmhmu, whose speakers may choose between a Thai-style periphrastic causative and a native morphological causative; cf. examples (9–10), above). Adoption of novel fashion in linguistic practice publicly advertises one's identification with others who adopt the same fashion (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985), and one reason why great caution is needed in reconstruction of social conditions is that this identifying power of linguistic form goes beyond simplistic provision of absolute 'badges' or 'emblems' of imagined cultural, racial, or linguistic group membership.

A modern example from the context of this study is Ho, a South-Western Mandarin language spoken in the far north of Laos (Phongsaly and Oudom Xay provinces). Ho people are descendants of Chinese, associated with China by regular

contact with Chinese nationals, on both sides of the border. Even those who have never travelled to China are exposed to Modern Standard Chinese through electronic media, and through personal contact with travelling Chinese. The identifying value of Ho language is relative to context. In some contexts, it may signify and assert that one is 'Chinese' (in 'race') as opposed to 'Lao'. In China, it may signify and assert that one is 'south-western Chinese' (in terms of geographical affinity), as defined against other Chinese. Further, to speak Ho (a language spoken in Laos, as opposed to other Sinitic varieties spoken within the borders of China) may identify one as *non-Chinese* (in nationality). Thus, speaking Ho can signify 'being Chinese', 'being south-western Chinese', or 'not being Chinese', in different senses, and in different contexts, providing a Ho speaker with competing motivations for deciding when and if to use Ho at all. So-called linguistic 'emblems' must not be considered absolute, one-dimensional, and/or binary parameters in contact-induced change (cf. Milroy 1987). Different loyalties can be simultaneously maintained, different norms enforced.

While there is no space in this chapter to explore the relationship between social history and the contemporary linguistic situation in MSEA, any such endeavour will have to be undertaken with reference to explicit and plausible models of the ground-level social dimension of 'language contact' and change (cf. Thomason and Kaufman (1988) for some ideas; Ross (1997) and Enfield (2000) provide more explicit outlines), and will have to be genuinely informed by the findings of social anthropology, and especially sociolinguistics. Our most urgent requirement is empirically based and fine-grained multi-disciplinary research on grammar in *living cases* of speaker contact, since it is so difficult to *reconstruct* in sufficient detail the ethnography of inter-group communication.

## 2. Case study: polyfunctionality of ACQUIRE in Mainland South-East Asia

Most languages of MSEA have one verb-like morpheme which shows a strikingly similar and overlapping range of lexical and grammatical functions: a transitive verb 'come to have'; a preverbal modal/aspectual marker (typically 'get to', or 'have to'); a postverbal modal/aspectual marker (typically 'potential' or 'completive'); a marker of complex descriptive complement constructions such as resultative, adverbial, and potential expressions. I refer to this element as ACQUIRE.<sup>4</sup>

While in some languages, another verb may have the *basic* meaning 'come to have, acquire', the relevant item ACQUIRE both (a) has *some* meaning 'acquire', even if restricted, and (b) displays the basic range of secondary (both postverbal and

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, English *acquire* does not reflect the basic, everyday nature of the verb in these languages, which is more like *get* with the non-agentive/non-controlled sense in *He got a parcel in the mail*. However, as a gloss 'get' is misleading in that it also has the agentive/controlled sense in *He carefully got a parcel out of the mailbox*. ACQUIRE in these languages *never* has this agentive/controlled sense. As a main verb of acquisition, it means 'come to have'.

preverbal) grammatical functions just described. Clark (1989) and Matisoff (1991) have briefly treated the issue in an areal perspective, Clark focusing on Hmong, Matisoff on Lahu (cf. also Bisang 1991). Elsewhere (Enfield 2000), I provide a detailed survey of the functions of ACQUIRE across a number of MSEA languages. In this section we look briefly at just four languages, two Sinitic and two Tai—Modern Standard Chinese, Cantonese, Northern Zhuang, and Lao.

### 2.1. MAIN TRANSITIVE VERB 'ACQUIRE'

Modern Standard Chinese *dé* and Cantonese *dāk*, despite being usually glossed 'get, obtain, gain, acquire', do not normally appear as a main verb meaning 'acquire', but their historical source as 'acquire' is well established, and dictionaries invariably give these 'acquisition' glosses as primary meanings:

(23) *sān sān dé jiǔ*  
 MSC three three come.to.have nine  
 'Three threes are nine.'

(24) *tā dé bìng le*  
 MSC 3 come.to.have illness CRS  
 'S/he (has) got an illness.'

(25) *mī douh hei dāk gwō chéuhng*  
 CA this CL film come.to.have EXP prize  
 'This film has won a prize.'

Northern Zhuang *dáy* and Lao *dāj* as main verbs are normal with the meaning 'come to have':

(26) *kǔ dáy sǒng tuà, tē dáy sǎam tuà*  
 NZH 1 come.to.have two CL he come.to.have three CL  
 'I got two and he got three.'

(27) *phiu-nân pěn phiu dāj khwāng dāj khōng*  
 LAO person-that be person come.to.have stuff come.to.have things  
 'That person is the one who'll get many things.' (L1: 82)

### 2.2. ACQUIRE IN POSTVERBAL POSITION

Postverbal ACQUIRE has meanings associated with both 'possibility' and 'achievement'. First, in the sense of 'possibility', the following examples from Lao, Cantonese, and Modern Standard Chinese show postverbal ACQUIRE as 'can':

(28) *ʔan bɔ dāj*  
 LAO read NEG can  
 'He couldn't read it.' (L1: 49)

- (29) *háv bɔ pāj nám khǎw ka bɔ dāj*  
 LAO 1 NEG go accompany 3 FP NEG can  
 'I couldn't not go with them.' (L1: 658)
- (30) *nī go léuihjái hóu dá dāk ga*  
 CA this CL girl very fight can PCL  
 'This girl really knows how to fight.' (Matthews and Yip 1994: 242)
- (31) *jáu dāk ge lak*  
 CA leave can PCL PCL  
 '(We) can leave now.' (Matthews and Yip 1994: 242)
- (32) *yào bu dé*  
 MSC want NEG can  
 'cannot be wanted, undesirable' (Chao 1968: 453)
- (33) *shě dé*  
 MSC abandon can  
 'willing to give (something) up; can do without (something)'

The following Northern Zhuang and Lao examples illustrate an ambiguity of postverbal ACQUIRE, meaning either 'can', or signalling 'achievement' in a more finite context:

- (34) *náa tháj dāj léew*  
 LAO paddy.field plough can PFV  
 (i) '(This) field can be ploughed.'  
 (ii) '(This) field has been ploughed.'
- (35) *nàa çwǎy dáy lo*  
 NZH paddy.field plough can PCL  
 (i) '(This) field can be ploughed.'  
 (ii) '(This) field has been ploughed.'

The realis or 'achievement' readings in (34ii) and (35ii) are secondary, emerging pragmatically from literal assertion of 'possibility' in particular tense/aspect contexts. Observe the same alternation in these English examples:

- (36) *They were able to rescue only two of the children.* (Implies that they did.)  
 (37) *I can smoke whole cigars without coughing.* (Implies that I do.)

Distinct from this 'achievement' interpretation, postverbal ACQUIRE may refer to a more complex notion of 'success' in the activity described in  $V_1$ . Given 'acquire' as a simple meaning for ACQUIRE, examples like the following can be regarded as  $V_1$ - $V_2$  resultatives ('V-and-acquire'), providing bridging contexts in which 'acquisition' and 'success' refer to the same sub-event (i.e. in which 'getting' something is what makes the said event successful):



(38) *au̯ t̄ai t̄k dáy h̄u-l̄ai pȳa*  
 NZH uncle elder catch come.to.have/succeed many fish  
 'Great Uncle has caught a lot of fish.'

(39) *mán h̄a p̄m h̄a n̄n d̄j* (L̄EW)  
 LAO 3 seek book CL that come.to.have/succeed PFV  
 'He has found that book.'

In events described by verbs such as *nám* 'pursue', *h̄a* 'seek', and *cáp* 'grab', 'acquisition' and 'success' are contextually synonymous. With an acquisition verb in  $V_1$  position, ACQUIRE as  $V_2$  entails both 'coming to have' something and 'succeeding' in the  $V_1$  task.

The semantics of postverbal ACQUIRE may then generalize in favour of this 'succeed' sense, becoming compatible with  $V_1$  verbs which do not necessarily entail literal 'acquisition':

(40) *s̄ɔp n̄k-thám d̄j*  
 LAO be.examined AGT-dharma succeed  
 '(I) passed my tests as a graduate in the dharma.' (L1: 322) ['possibility' reading: 'I am able to sit my tests as a graduate in the dharma.']

(41) *f̄ng b̄ɔ d̄j*  
 LAO listen NEG succeed  
 '(It) can't be understood/heard.' ('(One) can't get a successful result from listening to (it).') (L1: 52) ['possibility' reading: '. . . can't listen to (it).']

In this way, a postverbal 'success' function is established for ACQUIRE, derived originally from its main verb 'acquire' meaning, involving a resultative role. This two-step process is illustrated here:

- (42) 1. Simple resultative  $V_2$ , ACQUIRE as 'acquire':  
 $V_{ACQUISITION} + ACQUIRE$  'V-and-acquire something' (entails 'V-and-succeed', given that the objective of  $V_1$  is to acquire something)  
 2. Meaning generalizes to 'succeed', 'V' slot opens to greater range of verbs:  
 $\rightarrow V + ACQUIRE$  'V-and-succeed'

Now, a subsequent step, from 'success' to 'possibility', is enabled by a regular pragmatic property of  $V_1$ - $V_2$  resultative constructions (associated with a high level of context-dependency in interpretation of interclausal relationships in these languages). Let us consider how it works.

The following  $V_1$ - $V_2$  resultative constructions in Lao (same- and different-subject, respectively) have two interpretations, depending on whether the predicated  $V_2$  'result' is understood as a finite event ('it is true that  $V_1$  resulted in  $V_2$  on a given occasion'), or less finitely, as habitual or potential ('if/when/whenever  $V_1$  is the case,  $V_2$  results'):

- (43) *n̄n̄n̄ bɔ̄ thǎng*  
 LAO reach.for NEG reach  
 (i) '(I) didn't reach (it).' (on a given occasion, (I) reached for (it) and didn't reach (it))  
 (ii) '(I) can't reach it.' (if/when (I) reach for (it), (I) don't reach (it))
- (44) *khòj sāj p̄n̄n̄ kabòk n̄i n̄ing to-sāang tǎaj*  
 LAO 1 use gun CL this shoot CL-elephant die  
 (i) 'I shot an elephant dead with this gun.' (on a given occasion, I shot an elephant with this gun and it died)  
 (ii) 'I can shoot an elephant dead with this gun.' (if/when I were to shoot an elephant with this gun, it would die)

With the 'potential'/'possibility' interpretation in (43ii) and (44ii), postverbal ACQUIRE as resultative  $V_2$  'succeed' thus expresses the most widely applicable sense of 'potential success', namely 'can' (i.e. 'if/when someone Vs, they succeed').<sup>5</sup> This step may be added to the two steps described in (42):

- (45) 1. Simple resultative  $V_2$ , ACQUIRE as 'acquire':  
 $V_{ACQUISITION} + ACQUIRE$  'V-and-acquire something' (entails 'V-and-succeed', given that the objective of  $V_1$  is to acquire something)  
 2. Meaning generalizes to 'succeed', 'V' slot opens to greater range of verbs:  
 $\rightarrow V + ACQUIRE$  'V-and-succeed'  
 3. In non-finite contexts, resultative ' $V_1$ - $V_2$ ' is interpreted as 'can  $V_1$ -and- $V_2$ '  
 $\rightarrow V + ACQUIRE$  'can V-and-succeed',  $\rightarrow$  'can V'

Now, once this 'can' meaning for postverbal ACQUIRE is established as a distinct meaning, recall that by a different pragmatic inference (cf. (34–7), above), it can give an 'achievement' meaning (sometimes very close to the 'succeed' meaning).

The point of this more detailed discussion of semantic/pragmatic alternation for Lao postverbal ACQUIRE has been to show that (a) different pragmatic forces can encourage interpretations in more than one direction (i.e. from 'succeed' to 'can', and from 'can' to 'achievement'), and (b) typological features can encourage/account for such shifts. In this case, two areally widespread features—namely, scarce formal specification of dependency relationships among grammatically associated predicates (with corresponding high context-dependency in their interpretation), and  $V_1$ - $V_2$  resultative constructions—combine to give 'potential result' readings for the  $V_1$ - $V_2$  resultative strings (see further discussion, below).

<sup>5</sup> This simplified proposal requires refinement, in particular to account for a distinction between two kinds of 'potential success' which arise with certain telic verbs (e.g. 'intentional object' verbs; Quine 1960: 219 ff.). For example, in most of these languages, 'seek' marked by postverbal ACQUIRE may mean 'can seek' or 'can find' (cf. similar examples (40–1), above). The emergence of a simple 'can' meaning out of 'potential success' would most likely have emerged through combination with verbs which entail their own result (e.g. 'kill'), and/or verbs of simpler semantic structure (although the path suggested here begins with semantically more complex verbs such as 'seek'). See Enfield (2000) for details.

In Cantonese, as in Lao and Northern Zhuang, we find similar interaction between the semantics of ‘possibility’/‘potential’ and ‘success’/‘achievement’, associated with postverbal ACQUIRE. The following means ‘did you *successfully* sit your exam?’ (i.e. ‘did you sit your exam and get a result?’; cf. (40–1), above), and not simply ‘were you able to sit your exam?’:

- (46) *léih háau-síh dāk-m-dāk a*  
 CA 2 take-exam succeed-NEG-succeed PLC(Q)  
 ‘Was your exam okay? [i.e. Did you pass?]' (Matthews and Yip 1994: 243)

There are traces in both Cantonese and MSC of a ‘success’ meaning of postverbal ACQUIRE in combination with certain other verbs. The following example shows postverbal *dé/dāk* in the usual idiom for ‘remember’:

- (47) *tā jì de (zhù)*  
 MSC 3 remember succeed (be.placed)  
 ‘S/he remembers (it).’
- (48) *léih m-gei-dāk-jó àh*  
 CA 2 NEG-remember-succeed-PFV PCL(Q)  
 ‘Have you forgotten?’ (Matthews and Yip 1994: 33)

There is less conclusive synchronic evidence in modern Sinitic of the semantic/pragmatic relationships described for postverbal ACQUIRE in Lao, especially since the main verb functions of ACQUIRE (e.g. as ‘acquire’ or ‘succeed’) are more restricted. However, in line with the pattern of development I have suggested for Lao here, Lamarre (forthcoming) argues on the basis of synchronic comparative evidence that postverbal ACQUIRE in Sinitic became a marker of ‘success’ or ‘realization’ before its development into a marker of ‘potential’.

### 2.3. ACQUIRE IN POSTVERBAL DESCRIPTIVE COMPLEMENTS

A well-documented function of Modern Standard Chinese *dé* ACQUIRE and etymons in other Sinitic languages (such as Cantonese *dāk*, or Taiwanese Southern Min *tit*; Lien 1997) is its appearance in a class of complex postverbal descriptive complement constructions. Focusing only on MSC in this section (for details on similar patterns in Cantonese, see Matthews and Yip 1994), I make the distinctions set out in Table 3 for the purpose of this discussion.

Following are examples of the first type of construction, Manner (both examples from Li and Thompson 1981: 624):

- (49) *tā zǒu de hěn màn*  
 MSC 3 walk MC very slow  
 ‘S/he walks very slowly.’
- (50) *tā chuān de hěn piàoliang*  
 MSC 3 dress MC very beautiful  
 ‘S/he dressed very beautifully.’

TABLE 3. Types of 'V *de* COMP' construction in Modern Standard Chinese

| Construction              | Form                                                                                                         | Meaning                                                                  | Pattern of negation                                                         |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Manner (MC)            | $v_{1[\text{active}]}$ <i>de</i> $\grave{v}_{2[\text{stative}]}$                                             | ' $v_1$ in a $v_2$ manner'                                               | $v_1$ ( <i>de</i> ) 'neg' $\grave{v}_2$<br>' $v_1$ , not in a $v_2$ manner' |
| 2. Potential Manner (PMC) | $\dot{v}_{1[\text{active}]}$ <i>de</i> $v_{2[\text{bare stative}]}$                                          | 'can $v_1$ in a $v_2$ manner'                                            | $\dot{v}_1$ 'neg' $v_2$<br>'cannot $v_1$ in a $v_2$ manner'                 |
| 3. Potential Result (PRC) | $v_{1[\text{active}]}$ <i>de</i> $v_{2[\text{non-stative}]}$ (O)<br>( $[v_1-v_2(O)]$ is <i>resultative</i> ) | 'can [ $v_1$ and $v_2$ (O)]'<br>( $[v_1-v_2(O)]$ is <i>resultative</i> ) | $v_1$ 'neg' $v_2$ (O)<br>'cannot [ $v_1$ and $v_2$ (O)]'                    |
| 4. Extent (EC)            | $v_{1[\text{active}]}$ <i>de</i> $v_2/S$                                                                     | ' $v_1$ until $v_2/S$ ;<br>'So $v_1$ that $v_2/S$ '                      | negation internal to $v_2/S$<br>'so $v_1$ that not $v_2/S$ '                |

The grave accent signifies stress.

The second type—Potential Manner—shows a familiar ambiguity (cf. §2.2) between 'potential' and 'realized':

- (51) *tā pǎo de kuài*  
 MSC 3 run PMC fast  
 (i) 'He can run fast.' [potential manner]  
 (ii) 'He runs/is running fast.' [manner]

The third construction type shown in Table 3 requires that the verbs involved be in a resultative relationship, such as in the following, with  $V_1$  *tiào* 'jump' and  $V_2$  *guò-qu* 'go across':

- (52) *tā tiào guò-qu le*  
 MSC 3 jump cross-go PFV/CRS  
 'S/he (has) jumped across.' (Li and Thompson 1981: 55)

Insertion of *dé* between  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  here gives rise to the Potential Result construction, by which 'the action or process denoted by the first constituent of the compound *can* have the result denoted by the second constituent of the compound' (Li and Thompson 1981: 56):

- (53) *tā tiào de guò-qu*  
 MSC 3 jump PRC cross-go  
 'S/he can jump across.' (Li and Thompson 1981: 56)

- (54) *tā xǐ de gānjīng nèi ge xiāngzi*  
 MSC 3 wash PRC clean that CL chest  
 'S/he can wash that chest clean.' (Li and Thompson 1981: 477)

In the Extent complement construction (Type 4 in Table 3), 'the event in the first clause is done to such an extent that the result is the state expressed by the

stative clause or verb phrase' (Li and Thompson 1981: 626; both examples from same):

(55) *tā xiào de zhàn bu qǐ lái*  
 MSC 3 laugh EC stand NEG rise come  
 'S/he laughed so much that she couldn't stand up.'

(56) *tā jiāo de lèi le*  
 MSC 3 teach EC tired CRS  
 'S/he taught so much that s/he is tired.'

Tai languages do not display closely parallel patterning of these postverbal complement construction types, which are evidently more grammaticalized in Sinitic languages. Lao and Northern Zhuang do have adverbial constructions of Type 1 (in Table 3) and similar, in which postverbal ACQUIRE takes a stative verb complement. Here are some Lao examples:

(57) *hāw hēt dāj nòj tam-tām*  
 LAO 1 do/make MC small low-RDP  
 'I made it small, quite low.' (L1: 90)

(58) *cá' 'òk-mĕĕ-phĕĕ-lúuk dāj dī nǝ'*  
 LAO IRR give.birth.to-mother-propagate-child MC good PCL  
 'They'll breed well, won't they.' (L1: 26)

Lao and Northern Zhuang also allow nominal complements in these adverbial constructions, such as the following temporal complement expressions marked by ACQUIRE:

(59) *ki 'yū ki-ni dáy çip pi*  
 NZH 1 live here TC ten year  
 'I've lived here for ten years.'

(60) *tǝn nân khòj pāj nǝng-kháaj dāj sǝm dǝn*  
 LAO time that 1 go N. K. TC three month  
 'At that time, I'd been in Nong Khai for three months.' (L1: 596)

This type of temporal complement construction exists in MSC and Cantonese, but does not involve ACQUIRE (see §3.1 below, for discussion).

The Potential Manner construction (Type 2 in Table 3) is available in Lao and Northern Zhuang, resulting straightforwardly, as in the following Lao example, from the role of postverbal *dāj* ACQUIRE as 'can':

(61) *mán læn dāj vāj*  
 LAO 3 run can fast  
 'S/he can run fast.'

Neither Potential Result nor Extent constructions (Types 3 and 4 in Table 3) marked by ACQUIRE in Sinitic are available in Lao and Northern Zhuang. However,

there are identical constructions to these involving markers other than ACQUIRE (see §3.1 below, for discussion).

#### 2.4. ACQUIRE AS A PREVERBAL MARKER

Lao *dāj* ACQUIRE often directly precedes a main lexical verb, giving an aspectual/modal meaning translated in a range of ways—‘get to’, ‘have to’, ‘happen to’, ‘did’. The following example illustrates different context-dependent interpretations (assuming a past-tense context):

- (62) *kúu dāj n̄āaj h̄ián*  
 LAO 1 RPE move house  
 (i) ‘I got to move house.’  
 (ii) ‘I had to move house.’

The invariant meaning here is that ‘the main verb is the case because of something else that has happened before it’ (thus the gloss ‘(R)esult of (P)rior (E)vent’). Example (62) literally means ‘I moved house; this was because something else happened before this’, for which there is no direct translation equivalent in English. (A vaguely helpful rendition could be *It happened that I moved house.*) In specific contexts this meaning results in narrower interpretations. The ‘got to’ interpretation in (62i) would emerge if someone had been *given permission* to move, while ‘have to’ in (62ii) would emerge if someone had been *ordered* to move. The latter reading is normal for ACQUIRE as a modal in Tibeto-Burman languages like Burmese and Lahu; Okell (1969), Matisoff (1973) (in contrast to the ‘fortuitous’ or ‘benefactive passive’ usage of preverbal ACQUIRE in Vietnamese; Thompson 1987: 229).

Preverbally, Northern Zhuang *dáy* has a similar ‘resultant’ interpretation, typically expressed in translation by the likes of ‘manage to’, ‘get to’:

- (63) *pó-n̄āa dáy k̄in pyōng tōy h̄ou-s̄ou*  
 NZH uncle RPE eat half bowl porridge  
 ‘Uncle got the chance to have half a bowl of porridge.’

- (64) *t̄ai dáy h̄ot kyí çòn*  
 NZH grandma RPE speak several words  
 ‘Grandma managed to speak a few words.’

This more complex modal meaning is sometimes weakened, especially under negation, producing a kind of ‘assertive’ or realis expression (often translated into English using emphatic *do*):

- (65) *té bóu dáy p̄y*  
 NZH 3 NEG RLS go  
 ‘He didn’t go.’

- (66) *láaw bɔ̌ dâj bəŋg*  
 LAO 3 NEG RLS look  
 'He didn't (get to) look at them.' (L1: 41)
- (67) *láaw dâj sâw vɛɛn-tǎa nám cék*  
 LAO 3 RLS buy spectacles accompany Chinaman  
 'He did buy the spectacles from the Chinaman.' (L1: 55)

Turning to Sinitic, MSC *dé* does not have this preverbal aspect/modality function. Note, however, the preverbal modal, *děi* 'should, must', which is written with the same character as *dé*, and which is widely presumed to be cognate:

- (68) *wǒ děi zǒu le*  
 MSC 1 must/should walk CRS  
 'I must/should go now.'

No such preverbal usage of Cantonese *dāk* is attested.

#### 2.5. COMPARATIVE DATA FROM SOUTH-WESTERN MANDARIN

Let us now consider data from South-Western Mandarin, a dialect chain mostly spoken in Yunnan, China (in parts alongside Tai languages such as Shan/Tai-Lue and Lao). South-Western Mandarin is of interest due to its divided typological affiliation in the Sinitic family, between Modern Standard Chinese (with whom it also falls in terms of genetic grouping), and geographically more proximate languages (Sinitic and non-Sinitic) of peninsular MSEA.

The more common productive pattern for expressing 'can' in South-Western Mandarin uses postverbal *de* ACQUIRE (exactly as in Lao and Northern Zhuang), rather than preverbal *néng* as is usual in Modern Standard Chinese:

- (69) *nǐ bù néng zuò*  
 MSC 2 NEG can do  
 'You can't do it.'
- (70) *nǐ zuò bu de*  
 SWM 2 do NEG can  
 'You can't do it.'

Questions are normally formed in Northern Sinitic languages with a *p-not-p* construction:

- (71) *nǐ mài-bu-mài nǐ de zì-xíng-chē*  
 MSC 2 sell-NEG-sell 2 POSS bicycle  
 'Are you selling your bicycle (or not)?'

In Modern Standard Chinese, it is the preverbal modal *néng* 'can' which is targeted in question forms (and given as an affirmative answer), rather than the content verb, which follows:

- (72) *nǐ néng-bu-néng qù*  
 MSC 2 can-NEG-can go  
 'Can you go (or not)?'

The affirmative answer is *néng (qù)* '(I) can (go)'. In South-Western Mandarin, the first verbal element may be repeated—as in Modern Standard Chinese—but this is the content verb rather than the modal:<sup>6</sup>

- (73) *nǐ kě-bu-kě de*  
 SWM 2 go-NEG-go can  
 'Can you go or not?'

Postverbal *de* 'can' in South-Western Mandarin displays less of the 'full verb' or clausal head trappings than Modern Standard Chinese's preverbal *néng* 'can'. The affirmative answer to (73) is *kě de* '(Yes, I) can go', and *de* cannot appear alone as a yes-answer.

In Cantonese, as in Modern Standard Chinese, it is the modal which is more main-verb-like, since it is usually the target of *p-not-p* question formation, and may appear alone as an affirmative answer. However, in contrast to Modern Standard Chinese, the relative order of modal and content verb is reversed:

- (74) Q: *léih hui dāk-m-dāk*  
 CA 2 go can-NEG-can  
 'Can you go?'  
 A: (*hui*) *dāk*  
 (go) can  
 '(Yes, I) can (go).'

While South-Western Mandarin falls within the same low-level branch of Sinitic (i.e. Mandarin) as Modern Standard Chinese, the grammatical differences correspond in part to geographical proximity with languages from outside this grouping. South-Western Mandarin is like closely neighbouring languages in some ways, and like languages which belong to its own 'family' in other ways. This is manifest in contrasting grammatical behaviour associated with postverbal ACQUIRE as a modal.

## 2.6. SUMMARY

Table 4 summarizes the extent of overlap of some functions of ACQUIRE in the sample languages.

We may now consider how these findings relate to the question of 'genetic' versus areal relatedness in languages of MSEA.

<sup>6</sup> Other patterns of question formation, including use of a preverbal interrogative marker, are also found in SWM. There is evidently significant grammatical variation among SWM 'dialects'.



TABLE 4. Functions of ACQUIRE in five Mainland South-East Asian languages

| Function                                                                                         | Lao<br>( <i>dâj</i> ) | Northern<br>Zhuang<br>( <i>dây</i> ) | Cantonese<br>( <i>dāk</i> ) | South-<br>Western<br>Mandarin ( <i>dé</i> ) | Modern<br>Standard<br>Chinese ( <i>dé</i> ) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| (i) main verb 'acquire'                                                                          | +                     | +                                    | +                           | +                                           | +                                           |
| (ii) preverbal modal<br>'get to'/'must'                                                          | +                     | +                                    | -                           | +                                           | +                                           |
| (iii) postverbal modal<br>marking                                                                | +                     | +                                    | +                           | +                                           | +                                           |
| (iv) temporal adverbial<br>complement<br>( $V_{ACQUIRE} t'$ = 'V<br>has been the case for $t'$ ) | +                     | +                                    | -                           | -                                           | -                                           |
| (v) extent complement<br>( $V_1 ACQUIRE V_2$ ' =<br>'So $V_1$ that $V_2$ ')                      | -                     | -                                    | +                           | +                                           | +                                           |
| (vi) potential result<br>complement<br>( $V_1 ACQUIRE V_2$ ' =<br>'Can $V_1$ -and- $V_2$ ')      | -                     | -                                    | +                           | +                                           | +                                           |
| (vii) manner complement<br>( $V_1 ACQUIRE V_2$ ' =<br>' $V_1$ in a $V_2$ way')                   | +                     | +                                    | +                           | +                                           | +                                           |

### 3. Discussion

The complex pattern of grammatical behaviour surrounding ACQUIRE, sketched for just a few languages in §2, is uncannily replicated in dozens of other MSEA languages, also including languages of the Hmong-Mien and Mon-Khmer families (see Enfield (2000) for detailed treatment). What could explain the distribution of these complex grammatical patterns throughout MSEA? We may first consider historical evidence, where data is available. Second, we may expand our base for comparison, and look at further possible synchronic instantiations of the polyfunctionality of 'acquire'. Third, we may consider the possibility of common language-internal motivations for the emergence of patterns like the ones described.

#### 3.1. HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FROM SINITIC AND TAI

Li (1977: 108, 285) reconstructs *\*?dai* (ACQUIRE) for Proto-Tai, probably spoken around the same time as Old Chinese (500 BC–AD 200 or after; Sun (1996: 3)). In Sinitic languages at this time, according to Sun (1996), most of the relevant functional extensions of *dé* ACQUIRE had not yet developed. Leading scholars in comparative and historical Tai linguistics (Tony Diller, Jerry Edmondson, and Luo Yongxian in personal communication, Bangkok, July 1998) agree that the Tai lexical item itself

(\*ʔdai and descendants) could conceivably have been a borrowing from Sinitic, but none argue that it definitely is or is not. And Sinitic scholars do not say that the word originally came into Sinitic from Tai, but again this is conceivable. As it is, arguments for etymological relatedness of the ACQUIRE words in Tai and Sinitic are tenuous. Proto-Sinitic \*tak has a voiceless unaspirated initial, whose counterpart in modern Tai is normally a voiceless aspirated stop (*th-*), not the voiced stop (*d-*) found in Lao *dāj*, Northern Zhuang *dáy*, and elsewhere (or the voiced lateral (*l-*), as in Shan *lái*; cf. Dong *li<sup>323</sup>*). Further, while the Proto-Sinitic form has a final stop, the Tai forms do not.<sup>7</sup> In the absence of further evidence, a fair conclusion is that \*tak and \*ʔdai are etymologically unrelated, and the close parallelism in function of the modern morphemes suggests long-term development of the *functional application* of the morpheme in each language family, either separately, or through borrowing of the semantic/grammatical ideas through contact. But even if \*tak and \*ʔdai were etymologically related, the parallel functional patterns are *just as likely* to be the result of this kind of separate and parallel development (possibly encouraged by diffusion), since at the time the lexical borrowing would have to have taken place (i.e. by the time of Proto-Sinitic and Proto-Tai), the various grammatical functions were hardly developed (at least for Sinitic; Sun 1996). In such a scenario, both genetic and areal factors would contribute to the widespread occurrence of a complex semantic and grammatical pattern.

The point is that *functions* may be duplicated closely without duplication of, or reference to, phonological form (i.e. by calquing). Sometimes particular functions are performed by similar structures in neighbouring languages, but the lexical material recruited to mark the structure is not the same. Recall the non-overlapping range of functions of ACQUIRE as head of a temporal adverbial complement, and extent adverbial complement, in Tai, and Sinitic, respectively, as shown in Table 4 (an extract of which is reproduced as Table 4a).

Sinitic languages use ACQUIRE as a complement head in expressions meaning ‘VP<sub>1</sub> to such an extent that VP<sub>2</sub>’ (examples (55, 56) above), while Lao and Northern Zhuang do not. However, Lao and Northern Zhuang have structurally identical expressions which use ‘until’ where Sinitic languages use ACQUIRE:

(75) *tě káang tâng pàak nài pǎy*  
 NZH 3 speak until mouth tired go  
 ‘He spoke so much his mouth got tired.’

(76) *mán hēt siang dǎng cǒn phúak háw nǒm-bɔ-láp lǎj*  
 LAO 3 make sound loud until group 1 lie-NEG-sleep at.all  
 ‘S/he made such a racket we couldn’t get to sleep at all.’

<sup>7</sup> As Tony Diller points out in personal communication, if the original Sinitic form had a palatal stop final \*-c, this would make an etymological relationship to Proto-Tai \*-j more plausible. While there is no *phonemic* final stop in modern Tai reflexes of \*ʔdai, the final -j is in various dialects consistently accompanied by a glottal stop; e.g. Stung Treng Lao (north-east Cambodia) [dajʔ<sup>55</sup>] ‘ACQUIRE’, Thai Neua (Laos) [lajʔ<sup>55</sup>] ‘ACQUIRE’. (Data from fieldnotes.)

TABLE 4a. Extract from Table 4

| Function                                                                                                       | Lao<br>( <i>dāj</i> ) | Northern<br>Zhuang<br>( <i>dáy</i> ) | Cantonese<br>( <i>dāk</i> ) | South-<br>Western<br>Mandarin ( <i>de</i> ) | Modern<br>Standard<br>Chinese ( <i>dé</i> ) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| (iv) temporal adverbial complement<br>(‘V ACQUIRE t’ = ‘V has been the case for t’)                            | +                     | +                                    | -                           | -                                           | -                                           |
| (v) extent complement<br>(‘V <sub>1</sub> ACQUIRE V <sub>2</sub> ’ = ‘So V <sub>1</sub> that V <sub>2</sub> ’) | -                     | -                                    | +                           | +                                           | +                                           |

Conversely, while Lao and Northern Zhuang use ACQUIRE in heading temporal complements (‘V for a period of t’; cf. examples (59, 60) above), Sinitic languages do not. However, the latter display an identical construction, as in the following Cantonese and Modern Standard Chinese examples, with a perfective particle in place of ACQUIRE (compare the Lao example (79)):

- (77) *ngóh ga chē jā jó léuhng līhn géi*  
 CA 1 CL vehicle drive PFV two year some  
 ‘I’ve been driving the car for over two years.’ (Matthews and Yip 1994: 205)
- (78) *zhù le wǔ nián*  
 MSC live PFV five year  
 ‘lived (there) for five years’ (Lamarre, forthcoming)
- (79) *jūu dāj hāa pīi*  
 LAO live TC five year  
 ‘lived (there) for five years’

### 3.2. COMPARATIVE EVIDENCE FROM EASTERN MON-KHMER

Table 5 shows forms and functions of ACQUIRE in nine Eastern Mon-Khmer languages, two of the Vietic branch (Vietnamese, Muong), three Katuic (Ngae, Pacoh, Katang), one Khmeric (Khmer), and three Bahnaric (Taliang, Alak, Brao).

The only forms known to be cognate among this set are Katuic [ɕʰeən] (Ngae), [ɕoon] (Pacoh), and [ɕəən] (Katang). Despite apparent formal similarity to these, Khmer [ɕaan] is unlikely to be etymologically related. Table 5 shows that in a relatively small geographical area (see the cluster of these languages in the south-eastern corner of Laos on Map 1), among languages of a single sub-branch of one among many neighbouring language groups, there are as many as seven separate etymons instantiating the complex pattern of ACQUIRE described above. Furthermore, none of these are likely to be related to Sinitic \**tak* or Tai \**dai*. With further forms realizing the pattern in MSEA (e.g. in Hmong-Mien) there are

TABLE 5. Functions of ACQUIRE in some Eastern Mon-Khmer languages

| <i>Functions of ACQUIRE</i>                 | Vietnamese<br><i>d'uaʔk</i> <sup>21</sup> | Muong<br><i>an</i> <sup>23</sup> | Ngae<br><i>ʔeən</i> | Pacoh<br><i>ʔoon</i> | Katang<br><i>ʔəən</i> | Khmer<br><i>ʔaan</i> | Taliang<br><i>ʔəəʔ</i> | Alak<br><i>d'uj</i> | Brao<br><i>dɔu</i> |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| (i) Main-verb 'acquire', non-agentive       | 1                                         | 1                                | 1                   | 1                    | 1                     | 1                    | 1                      | 1                   | 1                  |
| (ii) Preverbal aspectual/modal              | 1                                         | 1                                | 1                   | 1                    | 1                     | 1                    | 1                      | 1                   | 1                  |
| (iii) Postverb 'with success'               | 1                                         | 1                                | 1                   | %                    | 1                     | 1                    | 1                      | 1                   | 1                  |
| (iv) Postverb 'can'                         | 1                                         | 1                                | 1                   | 0                    | 1                     | 1                    | 1                      | 1                   | 1                  |
| (v) Marks postverbal descriptive complement | 1                                         | 1                                | 1                   | 1                    | 1                     | 1                    | 1                      | 1                   | 1                  |

% signifies 'indeterminate'.

thus over ten distinct etymons displaying the areally highly consistent semantic/grammatical pattern of ACQUIRE described in this study.

These data from Eastern Mon-Khmer strikingly demonstrate how languages which are both areally and genetically related can produce complex and near-identical patterns of grammatical polyfunctionality associated with lexical items which are from historically different sources (i.e. not 'the same word'). The borrowing of *ideas* for linguistic organization (without borrowing the attached phonological material) can include the whole polyfunctional potential of a particular semantic item, and not just one or another of its functional extensions. Thus, even if exponents of ACQUIRE in two languages may ultimately be cognate, their shared repertoire of grammatical and semantic functions (as opposed to their phonological form) is not necessarily due to this common 'genetic' origin.

In Tai languages, the pattern of ACQUIRE is associated with a single etymon, and it is known that Tai speakers moved relatively recently to the areas where Eastern Mon-Khmer languages are now spoken. The diversity in form of ACQUIRE in the latter languages suggests that at a stage when many of today's Eastern Mon-Khmer languages had already separated, speakers of these languages encountered and widely emulated a fashion of speech already long in vogue among Tai speakers, influential newcomers to the area.

### 3.3. SYSTEM-INTERNAL SOURCES FOR THE COMMON INNOVATIONS

Discussion so far has concerned lexical items and the sharedness of their functional behaviour among languages, due either to borrowing, or to common 'genetic' inheritance. Borrowing and inheritance can be regarded as external sources to a synchronic language system (i.e. an idiolect), since in both 'inheriting' and 'borrowing' an idea, a speaker relies on his social associates (be it his own kind or his neighbours) as sources. However, innovations can also be originated by creative individuals, and the creative imagination constitutes a synchronic system-internal source for innovation (which, if popular, becomes fashionable, takes hold, and eventually becomes common structural change; Durie and Ross 1996a: 15, Harris and Campbell 1995: 54, Ross 1997: 214–15). This is important in the present context because it reminds us that borrowing and inheritance do not provide the only common sources for separate linguistic systems.

Two issues which arise when considering the likelihood or possibility of system-internal innovations are, first, their conceptual naturalness, relating to constraints and propensities of human cognition and imagination, and second, the typological 'poise' of a linguistic system, i.e. how existing semantic/grammatical configurations may constrain or encourage stages of semantic and grammatical development. These concern degrees of naturalness both in a universal sense (relating to human cognition) and a relative sense (dependent on given typological configurations). I will argue in §3.3.2 that some functions of ACQUIRE (e.g. postverbal 'can') are distributed widely due to the corresponding distribution of a certain typological precondition (namely the area-wide availability of 'potential'

reading for resultative constructions), which enables common occurrence of the same semantic/functional development.

### 3.3.1. *Conceptual naturalness*

It is generally accepted that some functional extensions are cognitively more easily made than others, and indeed that some conceivable extensions are almost certainly made, while others almost certainly are not (cf. for example Hopper and Traugott (1993), Traugott and Heine (1991), Wilkins (1996), among others). The greater the naturalness of a semantic or structural extension, the more likely it is to occur in languages separately and spontaneously, with the effect that it may *appear* in retrospect as if borrowing/diffusion or common inheritance has occurred, when in fact none has—especially when the lexical items recruited for the extension in each case happen to be cognate (as may have been the case for ACQUIRE in Tai and Sinitic). Similarly, the greater the naturalness of a semantic or structural extension, the more readily the *idea* of making that extension may be *borrowed*. So, the presence in two languages of the same particularly ‘natural’ semantic extension does not help much in defining whether given words or grammatical elements are shared due to diffusion or inheritance, or indeed, coincidence.

It is intuitively easy to judge the conceptual naturalness of many lexical/idiomatic extensions, such that idiosyncratic expressions like ‘pig-crazy’ for ‘epileptic’ and ‘tooth-insect’ for ‘dental decay’ in many MSEA languages (Matisoff 1978: 70) seem less likely to be independently innovated than more globally attested expressions such as ‘foot’ for ‘tyre’ or ‘fire’ for ‘light’. So when we encounter relatively idiosyncratic semantic/grammatical extensions in languages of a single region, the likelihood that these have emerged coincidentally is low, and we may more readily suspect a non-coincidental relationship, such as borrowing/diffusion or common inheritance. But intuitions about semantic ‘naturalness’ are less forthcoming when it concerns the simpler or more abstract semantics of grammar, as for example with respect to various extensions from ‘acquire’, described above (i.e. to ‘possibility’, ‘success’, ‘necessity’, and so on).

In the present study, one pragmatic extension which seems conceptually ‘natural’, and likely to occur universally, is the inference from ‘possibility’ to ‘actuality’ in a finite context, by which *They were able to save two children*, implies, but does not entail, that they did (§2.2). The current study would benefit from further cross-linguistic work on the relevant semantic extensions of ‘acquire’, to gauge whether or not the functions examined here are typologically so ‘natural’ that their shared presence in the area is likely to be unremarkable, or even purely coincidental.

### 3.3.2. *Typological poise*

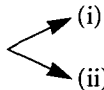
It has been claimed that structural diffusion is more likely to occur among languages which are already structurally similar (cf. references in Harris and

Campbell 1995: 123), or at least that syntactic borrowings should 'fit with innovation possibilities of the borrowing language' (Harris and Campbell 1995: 125). The result is a self-perpetuating process which gives rise to linguistic areas, since structural borrowing or copying naturally increases the structural compatibility of the languages, thereby increasing the likelihood of further common structural borrowing or development, and so on.

The nature of a grammar sees a language 'poised' for particular semantic/grammatical developments, and less for others, determining the readiness or susceptibility of a language to realize a given extension. In at least this sense, speakers 'make do with what's historically presented to them' (Lass 1997: xviii). Similarly, if a language is *not* poised for a certain development, it may be less likely to occur. Note that the common poise of two neighbouring languages is logically independent of their areal or genetic relatedness, and it may be due to former contact, or to substratum interference. Also note that typological poise is more a measure of the likelihood of languages to independently make the same innovations, than of the likelihood of structural borrowing.

Let me illustrate with an example from this study. I have argued in §2.2 that the extension from a resultative  $V_2$  'succeed' to 'can' is licensed by a combination of two typological features of MSEA languages: (a) a lack of overt marking of relations of subordination/dependency among grammatically associated predicates (e.g. verbs in series) with corresponding context-dependent openness in interpretation of those relations, and (b) resultative constructions of the form  $V_1$ - $V_2$ .

$V_1$ - $V_2$  resultatives in many MSEA languages may be interpreted as either 'finite'/'realized', or 'non-finite'/'habitual'/'potential' (cf. (43-4), above):

- (80)
- |                                                  |                                                                                     |                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| $V_{1\text{cause/condition}}-V_{2\text{result}}$ |  | (i) finite, on a given occasion<br>' $V_1$ and as a result $V_2$ '         |
|                                                  |                                                                                     | (ii) non-finite, whenever<br>'can/would $V_1$ with the result that $V_2$ ' |

As described for Lao in §2.2, when ACQUIRE as 'succeed' appears in resultative  $V_2$  position, it similarly may be interpreted as non-finite/potential (80ii), just like any other resultative. Thus,  $V_1$ -'succeed' may mean ' $V_1$ -and-succeed', or 'can/would  $V_1$ -and-succeed'. 'Succeed' is the most general expression of 'result', and thus in this function occurs with the widest range of  $V_1$  verbs. With this widest usage, under a non-finite/potential interpretation, postverbal resultative 'succeed' comes to have the simple meaning 'can', the most general expression of 'potential' (see note 5). A conceivable path is as follows (cf. (45), above):

- (81)
- (i) 'V-and-acquire' > (ii) 'V-and-succeed' > (iii) 'can V-and-succeed' > (iv) 'can V'

Assuming this order of development, we would expect that if a language had not made step (ii) (in which ACQUIRE generalizes, from 'success' as result of a verb of acquisition to 'success' more generally), then ACQUIRE in this language cannot

have made step (iv), to 'can'. This is borne out by the only MSEA language I have found to lack the 'can' reading for postverbal ACQUIRE—namely, Pacoh (see the conspicuous anomaly on Table 5). Pacoh *boon* ACQUIRE as resultative  $V_2$  expresses 'success' only by implication (as in (i)), as long as the aim of  $V_1$  is to 'acquire' something. In these cases a non-finite/potential interpretation (available as a general property of unmarked  $V_1$ - $V_2$  resultatives; cf. (80)) does allow a translation using 'can':

- (82) *kiù kòp kuusên boon*  
 PA 1 catch snake acquire  
 (i) 'I caught a snake/snakes.'  
 (ii) 'I can catch snakes.'

However, unlike its analogue in surrounding languages, *boon* ACQUIRE has apparently so far not taken the generalizing step (8iii), remaining inapplicable as a resultative  $V_2$  whenever 'success' of  $V_1$  does not involve 'acquisition'. *Boon* has thus not appeared as resultative  $V_2$  with a sufficiently broad range of  $V_1$  verbs to have extended to simple 'can':

- (83) \**pooq semuej (lêjq) boon*  
 PA go S. (NEG) acquire  
 ((You) can (not) go to Samoy.)

Pacoh speakers express 'can' using the postverbal modal *hooj*:

- (84) *pooq semuej (lêjq) hooj*  
 PA go S. (NEG) can  
 '(You) can (not) go to Samoy.'

In other MSEA languages examined, I assume step (8iii) has been taken, and the typological poise of these languages is what has allowed/encouraged the essential further steps (8iii–iv) in every case. Given the typological poise of Pacoh (specifically, its having  $V_1$ - $V_2$  resultatives *combined with* its lack of an obligatory formal distinction between finite and non-finite readings of  $V_2$  in a  $V_1$ - $V_2$  string), there is no reason to think that it would not have done the same had it generalized a 'success' meaning for *boon* ACQUIRE (as in (8iii)).

It is thus implied that MSEA languages with rather different typological poise (such as verb-final Tibeto-Burman languages whose multiverb constructions are structured somewhat differently) may fail to realize certain functional/semantic developments such as those described here, or at least may fail to realize them in the same ways. In Burmese and Lahu, ACQUIRE does appear as both a main verb 'acquire', and as a verb-marking modal (see Okell (1969) on Burmese *yá* and Matisoff (1973) on Lahu *ǵa*), but it has been beyond the scope of this study to determine the nature and extent of the parallels in polyfunctionality of ACQUIRE with those languages. Further research is required to isolate the 'poise effects' I have suggested here, and test the hypothesis that similar typological poise can



provide an account for common structural development in languages. For the particular claim I have made concerning the grammatical development enabled by the combination of (a) non-marking and open interpretation of relations among verbs in series, and (b)  $V_1$ - $V_2$  resultatives, one approach would be to isolate these two typological conditions in a sample of languages and look for evidence that it is indeed the combination of these two features which has the said effect.

In sum, it is important not to underestimate the significance of a language's typological poise, as a set of factors determining relative naturalness or likelihood of possible innovations. (Evolutionary biology may provide useful metaphors or even explanations here.) Conceptual 'naturalness' in linguistics is usually defined in terms of putative cognitive/conceptual universals (biologically based), and the parameter of typological poise introduces an idea that such 'naturalness' is often relative, or context-dependent.

#### 4. Conclusion

The case study described in this work has demonstrated that the diachronic continuity of phonological forms and semantic/grammatical patterns associated with those forms can be separate matters altogether. The complex polyfunctionality of ACQUIRE is closely replicated among MSEA languages, yet is associated with a total of ten or more distinct etymons. We have compared Tai and Sinitic languages in particular, and have seen that close parallelism of function between Tai and Sinitic ACQUIRE is not accompanied by regular phonological correspondence. One might be tempted to overlook the imperfect correspondence between Sinitic \**tak* and Tai \**?dai*, and appeal to their uncannily similar functional behaviour as an indication of greater likelihood that they are 'genetically related'. But this would be unjustified, since, as the Mon-Khmer data presented in §3.2 show, even greater parallelism in semantic/grammatical polyfunctionality can be observed of words with no conceivable etymological relatedness at all. Even if the ACQUIRE words in Tai and Sinitic were commonly inherited, most if not all of their common complex semantic and grammatical behaviour has developed *since* the possible time of borrowing anyway. It is the *functional application*—not the form—that is shared, and most likely this has been in part borrowed, and in part independently innovated, given existing similarities in the semantic and typological profiles of these languages.

In addition to a distinction between 'genetic' and 'areal' relatedness of shared forms and/or functions, it is also important to investigate the possibility that similar or identical language-internal innovations have occurred, not due to mere coincidence, but encouraged by shared grammatical preconditions, by shared propensity for the said innovation, given already similar typological poise of the languages concerned. The more natural an innovation—and this 'naturalness' may be relative to the existing grammatical system—the more possible it is that

an areally shared feature is not directly due to diffusion but to parallel yet independent innovation.

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