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紀念李方桂先生中國語言學研究學會 編
香港科技大學中國語言學研究中心

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Study of Grammar in Temporal and Spatial Perspectives: *You*³ 有 in the OBI, Ancient Documents and the Dialects*

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University of Washington

A survey of the functions of the existential verb in Chinese in temporal and spatial perspectives reveals a closer typological similarity between the oracle-bone inscription language and the Southern Sinitic languages, and a grammaticalization process observable from archaic time shows the formation of a marker for ‘affirming existence’ which provides residual evidence in the *Book of Odes* and the Eastern Min dialects for possible language contact between a ‘to-have’ language and a ‘to-be’ language.

Key words: existential verb, oracle-bone inscriptions, *Book of Odes*,
Southern Sinitic languages, grammaticalization, typology

* A first draft of this article under the title “A comparative study of the verb *you* 有 in the oracle-bone inscriptions and the Min, Yue dialects” was presented at the 8th Annual Conference of the International Association of Chinese Linguistics in Australia, July 1999. A revised version, “The verb ‘you’ in the oracle-bone inscriptions, the *Book of Odes* and the Southern dialects” was given at the 40th Anniversary Celebration Conference of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, October 30-November 1, 2003. A 2nd revised version, “A New Attempt at Research in Historical Grammar: The Verb ‘to exist’ in Ancient Documents and the Dialects”, was presented at the 5th International Conference of Ancient Chinese Grammar held at the Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica, August 20-22, 2004. A 3rd revised version with a summary in Chinese, “How to combine historical documents and dialectal data for researching the history of Chinese”, was delivered at the Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, September, 2009. To all who gave comments on these various occasions I would like to express my gratitude.

1. Preliminary

To be, or not to be: that is the question;
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die; to sleep;...

Hamlet Act III Scene 1

While Hamlet, in these famous lines, reflects on the relative value of existence, of life and death, the present article concentrates on the linguistic form through which the notion of existence and its related notions are expressed in the Chinese family of languages in its antiquity as well as in the present time.

Not a few languages of the world use one and the same linguistic form, usually the verb 'to be', to express the notions of existence, possession, copular property and location, all of which may be described as belonging to one central notion of 'existence'. We may call these languages the 'to be' language, where the verb 'to be' plays the major role in expressing 'existence'. Other languages do not use the verb 'to be' but one or more other kinds of linguistic form to express the notion of 'existence'. We may call them the 'not to be' language, among which some may be called the 'to have' language, where 'existence' is primarily indicated by the verb 'to have' ①.

The Indo-European (IE) language family, including Germanic languages such as English and German, Romance languages such as Latin, French and Italian, Slavic languages such as Russian, Indo-Iranian languages such as Sanskrit, may be called a 'to be' language family. Besides its copular and locative usage, the verb 'to be' is used to indicate existence and simple possession also. In fact the oldest method for expressing 'possession' was through the verb 'to be'. Reconstructed in the IE root form as *es- [3rd

① Isačenko (1974: 44) distinguishes between 'have' -languages [H-languages] and 'be' -languages [B-languages].

sg. indicative: Skt. *as-ti*, Gk. *es-ti*, Latin *es-t*, Goth. *is-t*, OChSl *jes-tŭ*]^① and during the so-called common Indo-European period of more than 3000 years ago, when the speech community was presumed to concentrate in a certain region where some form of the IE language with possible dialectal varieties was in general use, the verb ‘to be’ is used in conjunction with a genitive case or a dative case marking of the possessor to convey the sense of ‘to have’. This usage of the verb ‘to be’ to express the notion of ‘to have’ is seen in Greek, Latin, Indo-Iranian and the Celtic languages down to the present day (Buck 1949: 740). The separate verb form ‘to have’ in Latin, Greek and the Germanic languages, is believed to be a later development^②. The Old English ‘habban’ (‘have, hold, keep’) has its source in the Gothic ‘haban’.

Other ‘to be’ languages include Altaic languages such as Japanese (very roughly *i-ru* for [+animate] and *a-ru* for [-animate] possessee), Korean, Manchu and Mongolian, where the notion of ‘to have’ may be expressed with a dative marking of the possessor.

On the other hand, Chinese, in its antiquity, is a ‘to have’ language, with a verb indicating existence and possession and another verb indicating predicative location, as evidenced in the earliest extant documents, the oracle-bone inscriptions (OBI) of more than 3000 years ago. No unmarked verb ‘to be’ was used^③. The modern verb ‘to be’ was a secondary development from a deictic form (a demonstrative) no earlier than perhaps the 4th or 5th century B. C., while the verb ‘to have’ has a history of continuous usage in terms of time and space across all its

① See Buck (1949: 635). We shall not include the form *bhū- ‘to become’ here. Skt. = Sanskrit, Gk = Greek, Goth = Gothic, OChSl = Old Church Slavic.

② See Meillet (1923: 9). Also acknowledged in Benveniste (1960: 121). Locker (1954: 505) thought that the ‘have’ construction might ultimately be traced back to Basque, Isačenko (1974: 45) stated that Greek was the first IE language to introduce the verb ‘have’, while Lyons (1967: 392) considered the rise of the said construction in Greek, Latin and Germanic to be due to independent development.

③ I am excluding the marked copula *wei* 隹 in the oracle-bone inscriptions as well as the *ye* 也, considered by some to be a copula in classical Chinese. For the former the reader is referred to chapter 3 of Ito & Takashima (1996) and Yue & Deng (2009: 242-243), and the latter to Takashima (1997) as well as Yue (2004).

languages and dialects^①.

We shall now turn to this time honored verb ‘to have’ in Chinese, focusing on the archaic period. While the most common usage of 有 in the past 3000 odd years is to express the notion of possession and existence, we encounter some unusual usage of this verb in the earliest extant documents of Chinese. With a new approach that integrates the study of grammar in the perspectives of time and space—— combining examination of documents since the earliest antiquity with the array of modern dialects in synchronic and diachronic perspectives, we hope to throw some light on the evolution of the functions of 有 in a systematic schema.

We shall begin with two major problems: the graphic origin of 有 and the interpretation of the unusual usage of 有 in the archaic period.

2. ‘To Exist’ in Chinese

有 is one of the most basic verbs in the history of the Chinese language. From the OBI through transmitted texts up to the modern dialects, it appears with the meaning of ‘existence’ and ‘possession’^②. Semantically are these two separate notions? And if so, which of the two, ‘existence’ or ‘possession’, is the primary and which is the derived meaning^③? If we consider an abstract notion to be derived from a more concrete one^④, it seems natural to derive the concept of ‘existence’ from the meaning of ‘possession’ since at least one common kind of ‘possession’ is the possession of a concrete object such as a book, a house, a cat. Nivison (1978-1979: 30) mentions the very fact that one of the oracle-bone graphs that represents the meaning of 有, namely 𠂔, depicts the right hand, which can be related to the concrete idea of ‘to have’ or ‘to

① For some examples of the ‘to be’ and the ‘to have’ languages, see Appendix 1.

② In Northwestern Mandarin dialects such as Qinghai (Min 1989: 83) or Urumchi of Xinjiang 新疆 烏魯木齊 (Yang 1963: 21), the verb *you* ‘has’ has locative meaning also: ‘家裏有’ means ‘在家 at home’. This usage is probably an influence from neighboring non-Sinitic languages such as Amdo Tibetan.

③ See Takashima (1978-1979) and Nivison (1978-1979).

④ It is well-known that in many languages [+temporal] words are derived from [+spatial] words for example.

hold in hand’ from whence “the abstract idea ‘there exists’ is likely to evolve”^①. This kind of view of deriving the concept of ‘existence’ through ‘possession’, though attractive, may or may not necessarily correlate with the linguistic fact. Languages such as English that employ two different verbs to express each of these two notions may suggest that these are two different, equally basic concepts^②; on the other hand, languages such as Chinese that use one and the same verb to express both notions may suggest that these two are complementary or even constitute a single entity. To consider one as primary and the other as derived in meaning is thus irrelevant in both cases. Take Chinese as an example, 有 appears in the syntactic frame NP1 + 有 + NP2. It is often argued that when NP1 is a locative or a time expression or zero 有 expresses ‘existence’ and when NP1 is neither a locative nor a time expression, 有 expresses ‘possession’^③. However, even if these two concepts are distinguishable through syntactic conditioning, the two types of syntactic frames are freely used in parallel. In the following pre-Qin example:

1. 民 有 飢 色 野 有 餓 莩
 People 有 hungry countenance, countryside 有 starved corpses
 (《孟子·梁惠王上》*Mencius Ia*)

it seems equally feasible to argue that the first half expresses ‘possession’ of kind and the latter expresses ‘existence’ or vice-versa, or both halves express ‘possession’ or both express ‘existence’. Similarly in modern standard Mandarin:

2. 桌子上 有 書, 我 也 有 書
 table-on 有 book, I also 有 book
 ‘on the table there is a book and I have a book’

The same interpretation obtains. Or take Russian as another example, where the verb ‘to

-
- ① While this may be so, one can pose the basic question of how to represent abstract ideas through a graphic writing system. The answer is: it is generally through phonetic loan. For example the concept for the deictic word 其 in the OBI is represented by the graph for a basket, 𠂔. One certainly does not want to claim that the said deictic evolves from a basket!
- ② Although, given the likelihood that the Germanic verb ‘to have’ is a later introduction one can argue that ‘to have’ is not a primary notion for the Germanic languages including English, one can equally argue that since there is a need for distinguishing ‘to have’ from ‘to exist’ both are primary.
- ③ See for example Zhan (1981).

be' is used to denote both notions;

- | | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------|-----------------|
| 3. <i>na</i> | <i>stole</i> | <i>jest' kniga</i> | <i>i</i> | <i>u</i> |
| locative-marker | table+locative-case | be book | and | locative-marker |
| <i>menja</i> | <i>jest' kniga</i> | | | |
| I+genitive-case | be book | | | |
- 'on the table there is a book and I have a book'

However, in going through the usage of 有 in the OBI, there may be reason to consider that the concepts of 'existence' versus 'possession', or the functions of these two, may be distinct. We shall return to this point in section 3. 1.

3. ㄣ/ㄣ in the OBI

In the OBI, there are two graphs that can represent words with the meaning of 'possession' or 'existence' within certain linguistic environment: ㄣ and ㄣ. In this article we are concerned only with ㄣ and ㄣ in this meaning and the extended meaning of 'affirmation of existence'. ㄣ appears mostly in Period I (98%), rarely in Period II (barely 2%) and is replaced by ㄣ thereafter whereas ㄣ appears mostly during Periods III (about 56%) and IV (about 18%), especially Period III, fewer in Periods I and II (close to 13% each) and scarcely any in Period V (1+%)^①. The graphic origin of ㄣ is controversial while ㄣ is generally assumed to represent the shape of the right hand, which may be associated with the meaning of 'in the hand', 'to hold' and 'to have'. Later in the Bronze Inscriptions (BI) a symbol for 'meat' is added to the ㄣ graph and a compound graph with this combination, conveying the meaning of 'to possess' more transparently, is the basis for the modern graph 有.

① In his monumental essay of 1933 Dong Zuobin 董作賓 divided the then excavated OBI that span 273 years into five main periods: I Wuding 武丁 (1200-1181), II Zu Geng 祖庚 and Zu Jia 祖甲 (1180-1151), III Linxin 廩辛 and Kangding 康丁 (1150-1121), IV Wuyiu 武乙 and Wending 文丁 (1120-1091) and V Di Yi 帝乙 and Di Xin 帝辛 (1090-1041). This periodization has been accepted in the field ever since.

3.1 The relationship between the graphs 𠂔 and 𠂔 — does it have anything to do with the ‘ox’? Or is it a matter of the ‘hand’?

There is a series of graphs, 𠂔 as appeared mostly in inscriptions by the Shi 自 diviner group, 𠂔 in those by the Bin 賓 diviner group, 𠂔, 𠂔, etc. in the OBI that look similar enough that scholars in the field consider them as variant forms used primarily in Period I showing different functions in different contexts. The major functions include, among others: serving as the name for a kind of sacrifice, as a verb that is similar in function to the existential/possessive, and as a connector in numeral expressions^①. As mentioned above it is the existential/possessive and its derived functions that are our concern. As for the graphic forms we shall refer to the entire set as 𠂔. Beginning with Period II however, the graph 𠂔 in its various functions seemed to be replaced by the graph 𠂔 (modern 又).

Several problems remain with the graphic and semantic aspects of 𠂔 however: its graphic origin, for which the etymological explanation remains controversial to this day; its relation to the graph 𠂔 if there is indeed a relation; and the relationship, if any, among all its functions.

The general opinion is that the graphic origin of 𠂔 is uncertain. Nevertheless, there are two interesting suggestions. One is that 𠂔 is originally the sign for the ‘ox’. Huang Xiquan 黃錫全 (1981: 195-206), for example, argues that the basic shape of the graphs for 𠂔 represents the shape of an ox head, just like the graph representing an ox being an ox head: 𠂔. For the difference in appearance between 𠂔 and ‘ox’ (not the lower part of the graph) Huang explains it as a needed differentiation between the animal and the non-animal. Semantically, he further explains, ‘ox’ is a big animal and was a symbol for ‘having’ or ‘having in abundance’ as found in pre-Qin texts such as the *Book of*

① These are commonly acknowledged ones, while scholars such as Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 have a totally different designation of function for the set of graphs in question — that it is to be identified as the graph for 之.

Rites 《禮記》 and the *Book of Odes* 《詩經》^①. The ox head design, in addition, appears in pottery excavated from Yin tomb ruins and the ox is used by some minority tribes in southwestern China—Yunnan, Guizhou, and Tibet—as a symbol for wealth. Phonologically speaking, moreover, the graph 牛 (for ‘ox’) on the one hand and the graph 𠂔 and 𠂔 on the other were supposed to rhyme in Archaic Chinese (that is, belonged to the same rime category 之部), while 牛 and 𠂔 bore initials that could interchange: 牛 having the 疑 initial and 𠂔 having the 喻 initial^②. As we shall see, the graph 𠂔 is universally accepted as derived from a symbol for the ‘hand’. In the hypothesis made by Huang about the source for 𠂔 being the ‘ox’, although the semantic and the phonological connection seems feasible, this hypothesis could not explain why a graph originated with the ‘ox’ meaning would have a connection with a graph with the ‘hand’ meaning, the latter supplanting the former in later usage. Moreover, how the salient difference between the graphs for ‘ox’ and for 𠂔 that lies in the bottom part, with an arrow-like element for the former and a straight line for the latter, became ignored was not explained satisfactorily.

Let us come back to the graphic origin of 𠂔, which is generally considered a representation of the right hand as its shape suggests (and if faced the opposite way, a symbol of the left hand)^③. In addition, it is commonly conceived that 𠂔 replaced 𠂔 in all usage beginning from Period II. Thus, the description of the usage of 𠂔 and 𠂔 is often than not lumped together, albeit their graphic origin is not considered to be related.

In going through the 41,956 inscriptions singly or in series as collected in the *Jiaguwen Heji* (henceforth *Heji*) 《甲骨文合集》[edited by Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣 et al.] and transcribed in the *Jiaguwen Heji Shiwen* (henceforth *Shiwen*) 《甲骨文合集釋文》[compiled by Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣 et al.], we found something quite

-
- ① 《禮記·曲禮》下 (*Li Ji* 2): 問庶人之富數畜以對 ‘ask about the wealth of the commoner, respond by counting the domestic animals’; 《詩·無羊》(*Ode* 190): 誰謂爾無羊三百維群誰謂爾無牛九十其犝 ‘who said you lack sheep? 300 in a flock; who said you lack cattle? 90 [of] those 7-feet black-lipped brown oxen’.
- ② The initial 疑 is generally reconstructed as a velar nasal [ŋ] for both Ancient and Archaic Chinese while 喻 as [ɣ] for Ancient Chinese that is derived from [ɣ] in Archaic Chinese à la Li Fang-Kuei.
- ③ For example, as expounded in W. Chen (1981: 248) and in C. Zhao (1983: 362). The ‘left hand’ signifies ‘hindrance’.

interesting. During Period I when both graphs appeared 𠂔 was mainly used as a verb, either as the existential/possessive verb or as the affirmative marker of a noun or of a nominal or of a noun phrase (NP), while 𠂔 was mainly used as a noun. In the expression 受 [you] [you] ‘to receive abundant aid/assistance’ the first [you] is carved overwhelmingly as 𠂔 and the second one as 𠂔: 受𠂔 𠂔 and never the other way around, *受𠂔 𠂔, while very sparingly 𠂔𠂔 also occurred. It was not until around Period II that 𠂔 assumed the verbal functions of 𠂔, including the role of the affirmative marker. It is thus not correct to presume that all along 𠂔 and 𠂔 were interchangeable in their various functions.

When we consider the graphic origin of 𠂔 and the interrelationship of 𠂔 and 𠂔 it is important to bear this in mind. We shall now venture to give an integrated interpretation of the graphic source of 𠂔. While 𠂔 was a symbol of the right hand *per se* with its derivative meaning of ‘aid’ and thus was used as a noun, 𠂔 was also a symbol of a hand attached to a reference point. That is, the upper part of the graph represents the hand, irrespective of whether it is the right hand or the left hand, and the bottom part—the line at the base—indicates the reference point. Furthermore, the reference point, that is, the line at the base, was added to the hand as a symbol to indicate its verbal usage, ‘to hold’. At this point it is appropriate to compare it with the graph for 之, 𠂔, which depicts something like a big toe on the ground, the line at the base being representative of a reference point, which may be taken to be the ground. The upper part, 𠂔, being a graphic representation of 止, can be regarded as the ‘toe’ and the reference point or the base line too indicates a verbal usage^①. The graph for 𠂔 was conceived in a similar way. With this interpretation, it can easily be perceived that 𠂔 and 𠂔 were closely related graphically. The later replacement of 𠂔 with 𠂔 altogether is but an instance of the extension of the usage of 𠂔 to cover both the nominal and the verbal functions^②.

In many languages of the world, the verb ‘to possess’ was derived from or related to the verb ‘to hold’, as mentioned before in Gothic and also in the Greek word *ekho*

① See Yu (1963: 122).

② See Yue (2008) and Yue (forthcoming) for a detailed exposition of the graphic relationship and the graphic origin for 𠂔 and 𠂔 as well as more pairs of examples showing the reference line as indicator of verbal usage.

(έχω) ‘have, hold’. The above assumption for the derivation of the OBI graph in question from ‘to hold’ to ‘to possess’ and ‘to exist’ is thus not unique.

3.2 The functions of 𠬪 / 𠬫 as Vex/poss

We shall now give some examples of 𠬪 / 𠬫 as an existential/possessive verb (Vex/poss) occurring in the frame NP1 + 𠬪 / 𠬫 + NP2. Recalling the distinction in NP1 in the syntactic structure NP1 + 有 + NP2 as expounded in section 2, when NP1 is [+locative] or [+temporal] or zero the structure in question expresses ‘existence’ and when NP1 is [-locative] or [-temporal] the said structure expresses ‘possession’. In the OBI however, more often than not, NP1 is not expressed, namely, only 𠬪 / 𠬫 + NP2 occurs. It is then through cases when NP1 is expressed that we can discern the difference. During Period I, in the structure (NP1) + 𠬪 + NP2 when NP1 is [+human] 𠬪 expresses ‘possession’ as shown in the following examples^①:

- 4a. 辛丑 卜 殷 貞 帚 好 𠬪 子 二 月 (合 94.1)
xin-chou [-day] divine Nan test Lady Hao have son second month
- 4b. 貞 王 𠬪 夢 不 佳 乎 余 [𠬫] 𠬪 (合 376.6)^②
Test king have dreamnot BE call-upon Xu [exorcise] [sick] -bones
- 4c. 甲午 卜 爭 貞 貯 其 𠬪 困 (合 672.1)
Jia-wu [-day] divine Zheng test Zhu may have misfortune
- 4d. 貞 母 丙 允 𠬪 蠱 (合 2530.3)
Test Mother Bing surely have baleful-influence
- 4e. 癸未 卜 爭 貞 旬 亡 𠬪
Gui-wei [-day] divine Zheng test 10-day no misfortune [on the]
三 日 乙酉 夕 月 𠬪 食 聞
third day yi-you [-day] evening moon have eclipse informed

① All OBI examples are given English glosses. Translation is given where necessary. In addition, it is rendered minimally to reflect the gloss. 合 stands for *Heji* and ‘r’ after a number signifies the ‘reverse’ side of a plastron. Archaic graphs in the OBI are represented with modern graphs wherever possible.

② We consider 佳 an emphatic copula.