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# The grammaticalizational relation between two Modern Chinese *wo xiang* 'I think' constructions

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## ABSTRACT

The main concern of this paper is with two constructions that are based on the Modern Chinese phrase *wo xiang* 'I think'. They are prosodically-dependent *wo xiang* that takes a question, an imperative, an exclamation or a conjunctural clause (referred to as W1) and prosodically-independent *wo xiang* that takes a question, an imperative, an exclamation or a conjunctural clause (referred to as W2). By contrasting phonetic and morphosyntactic properties of the two constructions, the paper takes issue with the widely accepted hypothesis (which assumes a W1 > W2 derivation) and argues that W1 is derived from W2, and that this derivational relationship can best be accounted for by using grammaticalization as a tool of reconstruction.

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## 1. Introduction

Among the many different information units characterizing both the spoken and the written use of Modern Chinese there are some that tend to be used distinctly more often than others and that appear to be particularly important for discourse planning. One of these units can be seen in the expression *wo xiang* (我想) 'I think'. *Wo xiang* can be followed by and has scope over a question clause (cf. (1)), an imperative clause (cf. (2)), an exclamation clause (cf. (3)), or a conjunctural clause (cf. (4)).<sup>1</sup>

**Abbreviations:** ACC, Accusative marker; ADV, Adverbial phrase marker; CLASS, Classifier; COP, Copula; DEM, Demonstrative; EXP, Experiential aspect marker; FP, Final particle; MOD, Modal particle; NEG, Negation; NOMIN, Nominalizer; NP, Noun phrase; PFV, Perfective aspect marker; POSS, Possessive marker; PROG, Progressive aspect marker; Q, Question particle; REL, Relativizer; VP, Verb phrase.

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<sup>1</sup> Text examples in this paper have four lines: The first line contains the text in Chinese writing, the second line provides a corresponding *pinyin* transcription, the third line interlinear glosses, and the fourth line an approximate English translation.

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- (1) 我想他不会不帮我呢?  
**Wo xiang** ta hui bu hui bu bang wo ne?  
 I think he will NEG will NEG help me Q  
 我何必自讨没趣呢?<sup>2</sup>  
 Wo hebi zi tao meiqu ne?  
 I why.on.earth self ask.for snub Q  
 'I **thought**, will he refuse to help me? Why should I ask for the snub myself?'<sup>3</sup>
- (2) 我想先请上来两个好朋友吧,<sup>4</sup>  
**Wo xiang** xian qing shang lai liang ge hao pengyou ba,  
 I think first invite up come two CLASS good friend FP  
 算是忘年交, 我们掌声欢迎  
 suan shi wang nian jiao, women zhangsheng huanying  
 count COP forget year friend we applause welcome  
 蔡国庆和常思思。  
 Cai Guoqing he Chang Sisi.  
 Cai.Guoqing and Chang.Sisi  
 'I **think**, let's invite two good friends to come up to the stage. They are good friends of different generations. Let's welcome Cai Guoqing and Chang Sisi with an applause.'
- (3) 我想你跟一群芭蕾舞演员在一起  
**Wo xiang** ni gen yi qun baleiwu yanyuan zai yiqi  
 I think you with one group ballet actress be.at together  
 多郁闷啊。  
 duo yumen a.  
 how depressive FP  
 'I **thought**, how depressive you are to stay together with a group of ballet dancers.'
- (4) 可能我现在还不能给你一个明确的  
 Keneng wo xianzai hai buneng gei ni yi ge mingque de  
 maybe I now still can't give you one CLASS definite NOMIN  
 时间表, 但是我想她在这里不会太长吧。  
 shijianbiao, danshi wo xiang ta zai zheli buhui taichang ba.  
 timetable but I think she be.at here will.not too.long FP  
 'Maybe I can't give you a definite timetable, but I **think** she will not stay here for too long, won't she?'

A further distinction needs to be made between the different usages of *wo xiang* illustrated in (1), (2), (3), and (4) above. Take *wo xiang* preceding a question as an example, the verb form may be either prosodically joined with the following clause (cf. (5a)), or it may be prosodically separated (cf. (5b)).<sup>5</sup> The former is referred to as the W1 construction, and the latter the W2 construction in this paper.

- (5) a 我想他不会不帮我呢? (W1)  
**Wo xiang** ta hui bu hui bu bang wo ne?  
 I think he will NEG will NEG help me Q  
 'I **thought**, will he refuse to help me?'  
 b 我想, 他不会不帮我呢? (W2)  
**Wo xiang**, ta hui bu hui bu bang wo ne?  
 I think he will NEG will NEG help me Q  
 'I **thought**, will he refuse to help me?'

The main concern of the paper is to look into the derivational relationship between W1 and W2. The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents two hypotheses that have been proposed on the interrelationship between the two constructions. In Sections 3.1 and 3.2 the main linguistic features of the constructions are discussed, and in Section 3.3 they are contrasted

<sup>2</sup> The current paper makes use of corpus data from the MLC Corpus (Media Language Corpus) of Communication University of China, a corpus of Modern Chinese TV talks, and BJKY Corpus (Oral Peking Dialect Corpus) of Beijing Language and Culture University, a corpus of monologues of local Beijing residents aging from 20s to 70s. Neither of the two is a pure oral corpus of Modern Chinese. This paper deals with the formation of Modern Chinese *wo xiang* 'I think' based on its grammatical changes. For that reason we still adopt the sentence examples from the two corpora.

<sup>3</sup> A literal translation should delete the comma between *I thought* and the following clause (i.e. *will he refuse to help me?*). We are adding the comma here only because it is otherwise not grammatical in English. This also applies to the translations of (2), (3), and other similar Modern Chinese sentences to be discussed in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Note that the final particle *ba* (吧), which is a particle for an imperative clause in this context, has a scope over the clause *xian qing shang lai liangge hao pengyou* (先请上来两个好朋友) '(we) first invite two good friends to come up to the stage', not over *wo xiang* and the clause. We thus say that the clause after *wo xiang* is an imperative clause. This also applies to the final exclamation clause particle *a* (啊) in (3) and the final conjunctural clause particle *ba* (吧) in (4).

<sup>5</sup> By "prosodically separated" we mean that there tends to be an intonation break between *wo xiang* and the following clause in (5b). There is no corresponding break in the case of (5a). For the convenience of the reader, the break is indicated by a comma. For a justification of this addition, see Section 3.1.

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