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Research Article

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Abstract: This article presents the first systematic typological survey of bridging constructions in the Sino-Tibetan language family. Bridging constructions are discourse-linking devices in which material from a preceding clause is repeated or summarized at the onset of a following sentence, thereby contributing to cohesion, discourse continuity, and information backgrounding. Despite growing typological interest in such constructions, previous cross-linguistic research has relied heavily on data from Papunesia and South America, leaving Eurasia – and Sino-Tibetan in particular – underrepresented. The study is based on a source-driven sample of 50 Sino-Tibetan languages and combines two complementary datasets: a primary corpus of unedited oral narratives from five languages and a broader comparative survey based on secondary grammatical descriptions. This mixed methodology allows for both fine-grained analysis of attested bridging constructions and broader assessment of their distribution across the family. The analysis examines their occurrence, formal realization, and relationship to morphological type, clause-linking strategies, participant-tracking resources, zero anaphora, and areal patterning. The results show that bridging constructions are widespread across Sino-Tibetan, but that their syntactic realization varies considerably. The data provide limited support for strong typological correlations. Instead, formal variation reflects the interaction of language-specific clause-linkage resources, discourse-packaging strategies, and broader areal tendencies along the Indosphere-Sinosphere continuum.

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1 Introduction

This article surveys bridging constructions across the Sino-Tibetan language family and uses the findings to reassess how such constructions relate to clause-linkage typology, discourse-packaging resources, and areal distribution.

The term "bridging constructions" refers to a discourse mechanism that connects sentences or clauses within a larger textual context. This phenomenon has been described using a variety of terms, each highlighting different formal or functional dimensions. Among these, "tail-head linkage" is the most widely used (e.g., de Vries 2005; Longacre 1968: 8–9, 1983: 9; Olguín Martínez 2023). Other terms include "head-tail linkage" (Fabian et al. 1998: 163–169), "recapitulative linking" (de Vries 2006), "lexical overlap" (Thompson et al. 2007), "backgrounding repetition" (McKay 2008), "bridging linkage" (Dixon 2009: 8), and "bridging constructions" (Guérin and Aiton 2019: 2–3; Sarvasy and Aikhenvald 2024: 19–23). In this article, we opt for the latter term in order to reduce potential ambiguity surrounding the concepts of "head" and "tail" (cf. Aikhenvald 2019: 490; Guérin and Aiton 2019: 2).

A bridging construction consists of either repeating or summarizing, in the first clause of a succeeding sentence, all or part of the final clause of the preceding sentence. After Guérin and Aiton (2019: 2–3), the former clause will hereafter be referred to as "reference clause", and the latter clause will hereafter be referred to as "bridging clause". The bridging clause typically follows the reference clause directly and serves as the initial (though non-final) clause of a new discourse unit. Sentence (1) provides an example of a bridging construction in the Lizu language (a Sino-Tibetan language spoken in Southwest China). Clauses are in square brackets. "||" marks sentence boundary.[1] Bridging constructions (reference and bridging clauses) are highlighted in bold.[2]

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1 "Clause" is defined as the smallest syntactic unit consisting of a predicate and its core or peripheral arguments, and expressing coherent information in a specific discourse context, such as an activity, property, state, or relationship (e.g., Longacre 2007: 372). "Sentence" is taken to refer to a syntactic unit that minimally consists of one clause, sometimes referred to as a "simple sentence", and may contain multiple clauses, forming a "complex sentence". In the glossed examples, sentence boundaries are identified with reference to syntactic structure, prosody, and discourse context.

2 Abbreviations used in interlinear glossing follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules (LGR, http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php). Non-standard abbreviations (those not included in the LGR) are: ANM = animate, AS = anterior sequencer, CN = loanword from Mandarin Chinese, CONTR = contrastive, EGO = egophoric, HS = hearsay, N = loanword from Nepali, OBL = obligation, SS = simultaneous sequencer, VN = verbal noun.

(1) a *[tʰe-tɕʰô ʃətɕî lœ tɕəu kû-tʰê* ***jœ̂qê*****=***bi=ke*
that-that.GEN.on really.CN and just.CN this-that child=DEF=LOC
ne-Npʃə̂ *de-dœ̂]* ||
downward-steal upward-go.PST.NEGO
'Then, in reality, you know, [that basket of fruit] **was stolen by that child**.'

b *[jœ̂qê* ***ne-Npʃə̂*** *de-dœ̂]* *[mŏ .ə̂-kœ̂=ke ne*
child downward-steal upward-go.PST.NEGO again road-strip=LOC TOP
mŏ lô-bu tê=i ɕo kʰe-budʒê] ||
again stone-item one=GEN one inward-trip
'**The child stole** [it], then on the road [he] **tripped over a stone**.'

c ***[kʰe-budʒê*** *lœ] [sesə̂=bœ de-Ngo-Ngô lœ]*
inward-trip and fruit=DEF.PL.NANM upward-pick-pick and
[mŏ dʑitsʰə̂=ke ne-kô] [Ndʑŏ=bo xăifə
again back.basket=LOC downward-put friend=DEF.PL.NANM still.CN
Ngo-Ngô kʰe-wowô] ||
pick-pick inward-help-help
'[He] **tripped over** [a stone] and picked up the fruit and put [the fruit back] into the basket, [and then] the [other] children helped [him] pick up [the rest of the fruit].' (Chirkova, field notes)

Bridging constructions appear to be extremely common cross-linguistically. As natural language data collection and analysis efforts expand, these constructions have been documented in an ever-increasing number of languages from diverse and unrelated language families, spanning all major linguistic macro-areas – Africa, Australia, Eurasia, Papunesia,[3] North America, and South America (Miestamo et al. 2016, based on Hammarström and Donohue 2014). The growing body of data has enabled robust comparative research, complementing area-specific studies (e.g., de Vries 2005, 2006; Schokkin 2014 on languages of New Guinea) with broader typological surveys. Notably, Guérin and Aiton (2019) present the first dedicated cross-linguistic study of bridging constructions, and Olguín Martínez (2023) extends this work with a typological analysis of bridging constructions in 58 languages from nearly all macro-areas. Together, these studies identify bridging constructions as discourse-linking devices whose central function is to maintain cohesion and structure discourse, especially by marking sequentiality, backgrounding prior information, tracking referents, or demarcating discourse units. They may also support processing in oral discourse, a function de Vries (2005, 2006) discusses in terms of "processing ease". Previous work also suggests that their morphosyntactic

3 Papunesia, also referred to as Multinesia, is a macro-area comprising Indo-Malaysia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

realization tends to draw on the clause-linkage resources available in a given language, with the relation between the bridging clause and the following clause marked morphosyntactically or prosodically.

At the same time, these surveys identify several issues that require further investigation. Among these is the relationship between bridging constructions and language typology: how typological features correlate with their syntactic realization, and which factors shape their cross-linguistic distribution (cf. Guérin and Aiton 2019: 32–33). Although previous research has made important progress on this issue, the available evidence remains uneven in ways that complicate both typological generalization and areal interpretation.

First, the empirical basis for assessing these correlations remains geographically unbalanced. Bridging constructions have so far been described most extensively in the languages of Papunesia and South America (Olguín Martínez 2023: 406–408), while other macro-areas remain comparatively underrepresented. This concentration has encouraged analyses that relate bridging constructions to typological features prominent in these better-described regions, including polysynthesis, zero anaphora, reference-tracking morphology, and clause chaining (Guillaume 2011: 113; Stirling 1993: 17; van Gijn et al. 2014; van Gijn and Hammond 2016). Working with Papuan languages, de Vries (2005: 372–373) proposed that the default syntactic form of a bridging construction tends to reflect a language's unmarked pattern of clause linkage. Languages that favor paratactic sequencing may therefore realize bridging constructions through conjoined independent clauses, whereas languages with clause chaining may use medial or dependent verb forms. At the same time, de Vries noted that marked alternatives occur, especially when speakers signal thematic discontinuity or backgrounded information. Although recent cross-linguistic surveys have broadened the typological discussion of bridging constructions beyond the Papuan and South American languages, the proposed correlations remain difficult to assess in other macro-areas, where such constructions are documented for fewer languages.

Second, the relationship between bridging constructions and clause-linkage type has been examined most fully for clause-chaining systems. Sarvasy and Aikhenvald's (2024) typological treatment of clause chaining shows how bridging constructions function within such systems as discourse devices for linking sentences, maintaining narrative flow, marking transitions, and managing foregrounded and backgrounded information. They also show that these functions are not restricted to a single formal type: depending on the language, bridging constructions may involve medial clauses, other non-final structures, or nominalization. This clause-chaining perspective provides an important foundation for further comparison with languages where

clause chaining is not the dominant, or not a relevant, strategy of clause linkage, and where comparable discourse functions may be realized through other grammatical resources.

Third, previous work has shown that bridging constructions may display areal patterning, sometimes extending across genealogical boundaries, as documented especially clearly for New Guinea and as relevant to broader comparative work on bridging constructions and clause linkage (de Vries 2005, 2006; Guérin 2019; Sarvasy and Aikhenvald 2024; Schokkin 2014). Such patterns complicate any simple correlation between bridging constructions and individual structural features, since their distribution may reflect not only language-internal typological development but also contact-driven diffusion or stabilization.

In light of this previous work, the present study makes three related contributions. First, it addresses the uneven documentation of bridging constructions across macro-areas by assembling a typologically broad, source-driven Sino-Tibetan language sample for their comparative study. The focus on Sino-Tibetan is motivated by the fact that Eurasia remains underrepresented in cross-linguistic research on this phenomenon, even though bridging constructions have long been noted as common in the Tibeto-Burman branch of the family (e.g., LaPolla and Huang 2003: 247).[4] Such observations, however, have largely remained impressionistic. Although previous cross-linguistic work includes Eurasian languages, among them five Tibeto-Burman languages, this evidence comes from a convenience sample (Olguín Martínez 2023: 406) and does not adequately represent the typological or areal diversity of Sino-Tibetan. The present study addresses this gap through a sample of 50 Sino-Tibetan languages, including both Tibeto-Burman and Sinitic languages.

Second, the study uses this language sample to assess how bridging constructions relate to the clause-linkage resources available in individual languages. In doing so, it builds on earlier proposals concerning typological features associated with bridging constructions and the relationship between bridging-clause form and dominant clause-linking patterns, as well as on more recent work on bridging constructions in clause-chaining languages. Sino-Tibetan is especially well suited to this investigation because its languages range from highly analytic to highly synthetic and employ a wide range of clause-linking resources, including paratactic sequencing, particles and conjunctions, nominalization-based linkage, and clause chaining. This diversity makes it possible to assess previous insights across a broader range of linkage profiles and grammatical resources.

Third, the study investigates the areal distribution of bridging constructions within Sino-Tibetan. Since Sino-Tibetan languages extend across several linguistic

4 Here Tibeto-Burman is used in the conventional sense of much of the earlier Sino-Tibetan literature, as a broad cover term for the non-Sinitic languages of the family (cf. LaPolla 2003: 22).

areas, display substantial internal diversity, and have been shaped by long-term contact, they offer a useful perspective on how typological profile, language-specific grammatical resources, and areal patterning interact in shaping the distribution of bridging constructions.

Methodologically, the study combines detailed primary-data analyses of a typologically diverse set of Sino-Tibetan languages with a broader comparative survey based on secondary sources. This mixed approach makes it possible to bring attested cases together in a coherent comparative dataset and to examine them from a controlled, family-wide perspective.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a brief overview of the Sino-Tibetan language family, with particular attention to the typological and areal diversity relevant to clause linkage. Section 3 introduces the language sample and examines where bridging constructions are identifiable in the consulted materials, using the full dataset to assess broad correlations with previously proposed typological features. Section 4 focuses on the subset of languages in which bridging constructions are reported and analyzes the formal resources they recruit. Section 5 examines the areal distribution of these attested bridging-clause types. Section 6 summarizes the main findings, discusses their implications for the typology of bridging constructions, and identifies directions for future research.

2 The Sino-Tibetan language family: typological and areal background

The Sino-Tibetan language family is widely treated as a genetic entity, with broad consensus on the identification of its core members – languages and lower-order groupings characterized by clear historical, cultural, and linguistic cohesion, such as Sinitic, Tibetic, Lolo-Burmese, Kiranti, and Bodo-Garo. By contrast, there is considerable disagreement over how these recognized members should be organized into higher-order subgroupings, and numerous competing proposals have been advanced over the past century (see, e.g., Handel 2008; Thurgood and LaPolla 2017). The present study does not seek to take a position on these higher-order historical-comparative questions. Its primary concern is the analysis of bridging constructions as attested in the consulted materials. Accordingly, bridging constructions are identified and compared on the basis of their documented forms and functions in individual languages; higher-order subgrouping is relevant here only as a way of organizing the sample, not as an analytical basis for the comparison. Since a family-wide comparative corpus nevertheless requires a consistent reference system for arranging languages, cross-referencing sources, and producing spatial

representations, the present study uses Glottolog (Hammarström et al. 2026) for this purpose. Its open-access format, standardized language identifiers, bibliographical coverage, and geolocation data make it useful for these tasks. Where subgrouping remains controversial, Glottolog's labels are used only as convenient organizational reference points and do not imply endorsement of its higher-order classification. Figure 1 uses these reference labels to provide a geographical overview of the Sino-Tibetan sample and to facilitate cross-reference with the languages discussed below.

As shown in Figure 1, the Sino-Tibetan language family is notable for its wide geographical distribution, extending across regions with distinct typological profiles. At one end of the continuum are languages spoken in or near South Asia, which often show richer morphology, clearer finite/non-finite contrasts, and extensive use of dependent verbal forms in clause linkage (Hock and Bashir 2016; Masica 1976, 1993). At the level of discourse organization, clause chaining constitutes a prominent strategy: sequences of one or more non-finite or medial clauses culminate in a finite final clause that carries the primary inflectional marking (Hock 2016: 578–581; Longacre 1985/2007; Sarvasy and Aikhenvald 2024: 3). At the other end are languages associated with Mainland Southeast Asian areal patterns, which are often more analytic and isolating, relying more heavily on word order, particles, prosody, and paratactic sequencing of formally independent clauses, which may function as

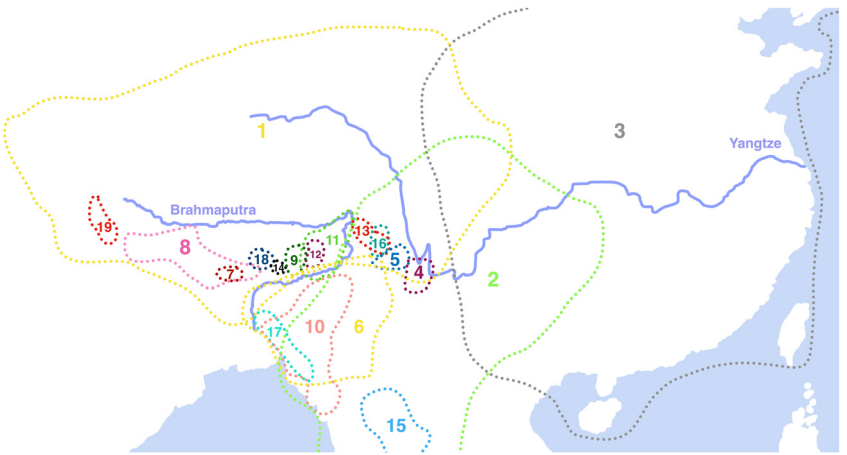

Figure 1: Geographical distribution of living Sino-Tibetan languages, with labels corresponding to the reference groupings used in this study: 1: Bodic, 2: Burmo-Qiangic, 3: Sinitic, 4: Macro-Bai, 5: Nungish; 6: Brahmaputran, 7: Dhimal-Lhokpu-Toto, 8: Himalayish, 9: Kho-Bwa, 10: Kuki-Chin-Naga, 11: Macro-Tani, 12: Miji, 13: Digarish, 14: Gongduk, 15: Karenic, 16: Kman-Meyor, 17: Mruic, 18: Olekha, 19: Raji-Raute (based on https://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/sino1245.bigmap.html#4/26.35/98.61).

complete utterances (e.g., Bisang 1998, 2001; Enfield 2021; Enfield and Comrie 2015; Li and Thompson 1981).

Within Sino-Tibetan linguistics, this typological diversity is commonly discussed in terms of the Indosphere and the Sinosphere. In Matisoff's formulation (1990, 1991, 2003: 6–7), the Indosphere comprises languages shaped by contact with Indo-Aryan and other South Asian languages to the west, whereas the Sinosphere comprises languages shaped by contact with Sinitic languages to the east. The Indosphere is broadly associated with South Asian-type patterns, including richer morphology, stronger finiteness contrasts, and more extensive use of dependent verbal forms. The Sinosphere, by contrast, is centered on Sinitic influence and is associated with Sinitic-type patterns such as minimal inflection, relatively fixed word order, topic-comment organization, extensive zero anaphora, particles, and clause linkage without rich dependent verbal morphology. In this respect, the Sinospheric profile overlaps with broader Mainland Southeast Asian areal patterns, especially in its analytic structure, reliance on particles, and paratactic clause linkage.

The subspheric model has been criticized because transitional languages often display mixed or misaligned typological properties, including divergences between prosodic and morphosyntactic patterns (Hildebrandt 2007 on Bodic; Post 2012, 2015 on Tani). Nonetheless, given the widely recognized role of areal factors in shaping the morphosyntax of Sino-Tibetan languages (e.g., Bickel 1999; Bisang 1998),[5] the present study uses Indosphere and Sinosphere as practical, well-established labels for broad areal tendencies in typological profile and clause-linking strategies within the family.

For the purposes of this study, the distinction is applied heuristically. Following Matisoff, Indosphere and Sinosphere are understood as prototypical areal categories: each refers to an idealized constellation of structural and functional features that individual languages approximate to varying degrees. Transitional zones include, among others, Bodic languages, which have been shaped by both Indian and Chinese areal influences and often combine limited inflectional morphology with less elaborate morphological systems than core Indospheric languages. Matisoff treats the Yangtze River as the northern limit of the Sinosphere, while Hildebrandt (2007: 85–87) takes the Brahmaputra River as an approximate western boundary, with Indospheric languages occurring primarily to its west. In the present study, these boundaries are used as practical reference points rather than as strict lines of demarcation. Because the language sample covers both Sinitic and Tibeto-Burman languages, Sinospheric is used in an extended sense. It covers all Sinitic languages, including those spoken north of the Yangtze River; Tibeto-Burman languages in the

5 Broad areal characterizations of Sino-Tibetan typological diversity are well established, but detailed language-specific studies of the contact processes behind these patterns remain relatively limited; see, for instance, Post and Burling (2017) on Tibeto-Burman languages of Northeast India.

middle Yangtze region that overlap geographically with Sinitic varieties; and adjacent non-Sinitic languages extending into Mainland Southeast Asia. Indospheric refers to languages located to the west of, or immediately adjacent to, the Brahmaputra River. Remaining areas, especially zones of overlap among Sinitic and Tibeto-Burman languages, are treated as transitional.

3 Sample construction and distribution of evidence

Our interest in bridging constructions stems from their prominence in several Sino-Tibetan languages of Southwest China with which we have firsthand working experience. For the purposes of the present survey, this primary-text corpus was supplemented with a broader secondary-source sample in order to expand the typological and areal coverage of the study. The two components of the dataset are presented in turn below, followed by an overview of the distribution of evidence in the full sample.

3.1 Primary-text corpus

The primary corpus consists of unedited oral texts from five languages examined directly for this study: Baima, Lizu, Shuhi, Niesu Yi, and neighboring varieties of Southwestern Mandarin. These languages represent distinct lower-order groupings and regional clusters within Sino-Tibetan whose identification is generally uncontroversial. Baima represents Tibetic, Niesu Yi represents Loloish, and Southwestern Mandarin represents Sinitic. Lizu and Shuhi are included as languages of the southwestern China contact zone often discussed under the label Qiangic; this label is used here as a practical regional and typological reference point. The Southwestern Mandarin data come from five locations: Muli Tibetan Autonomous County, Yanbian County, Xichang City, Miyi County, and E'bian Yi Autonomous County (see Figure 2).[6] Firsthand data for Baima, Lizu, Shuhi, and Niesu Yi are available in open archives and published sources (Chirkova 2017a–c; Ding 2020).

All stages of data handling – transcription, translation, glossing, and annotation – were conducted by the authors. For Baima, Shuhi, Lizu, and Niesu Yi, the

6 Muli SWM data are from first-hand fieldwork, collected by Li Lan. Data on the remaining SWM varieties derive from the online database "Data Collection, Recording, and Display Platform for the Chinese Language Resources Protection Project" (available at https://zhongguoyuyan.cn/, accessed on July 15, 2026).

Table 1: Primary corpus: languages, texts, genres, speakers, and corpus size.

Language	No. of texts	Genre	Speakers	Total clauses
Baima	4	Traditional oral narratives	2	1,037
Niesu Yi	6	Traditional oral narratives	6	550
Lizu	5	Traditional oral narratives; Pear story	5	836
Shuhi	5	Traditional oral narratives	4	997
Southwestern Mandarin	6	Traditional oral narratives	5	745

analysis draws on existing ELAN-based interlinear annotations, some of which are publicly accessible. The Southwestern Mandarin materials were newly annotated for this study: spoken texts were transcribed in Chinese characters and accompanied by Pinyin romanization. Table 1 summarizes the number of texts, genres, speakers, and approximate corpus size for each language.

Direct access to the primary corpus allows for fine-grained analysis of the syntactic types of bridging constructions and provides a limited corpus-internal measure of their relative prominence in the selected texts. Here, relative prominence is calculated as the number of attested bridging constructions per total number of clauses. This clause-based denominator was chosen because the primary corpus includes both clause-chaining languages and languages in which clause chaining is not the dominant, or even a relevant, linkage strategy. It therefore differs from the measure used by Sarvasy (2022) in her corpus-based study of Nungon, where bridging linkage is calculated against clause-chain sentences – a denominator well suited to a language in which clause chaining provides the relevant discourse environment. The clause-based measure adopted here offers a broader, though necessarily coarser, basis for comparison across languages with different clause-linkage systems. The resulting figures should be read as corpus-internal indicators of prominence in the sampled texts, not as language-wide frequency estimates.

3.2 Secondary-source sample

The secondary-source sample was constructed according to two criteria:

1. Breadth of coverage: the sample includes languages from as wide a range of Sino-Tibetan branches, regions, and typological profiles as the available sources allow.
2. Sufficient depth and quality of sources: priority was given to comprehensive, corpus-based grammatical descriptions, since these are most likely to provide usable evidence for identifying bridging constructions.

The second criterion is especially important because bridging constructions are often difficult to identify from secondary data. Grammatical descriptions tend to privilege written-language norms and clause-internal syntax over discourse organization (Linell 1998, 2005), whereas bridging constructions are primarily characteristic of spoken discourse and operate at the syntax-discourse interface. In addition, transcribed oral texts may omit features that appear repetitive or redundant when judged against written norms, thereby obscuring evidence for bridging constructions (cf. Thompson et al. 2007: 277–278 on back-reference in New Guinea; see also the contributions in Guérin 2019).[7] This issue is visible in our own materials: bridging constructions occur frequently in the Niesu Yi corpus, but are not discussed in Gerner's (2013) grammar of the closely related Nuosu Yi, whose data consist largely of published oral texts (e.g., Chen and Wu 1998) that may have been edited for conciseness. This interpretation is consistent with the observation of an anonymous reviewer of the present article, who notes that bridging constructions are robustly attested in Nuosu Yi.

To increase the likelihood of identifying bridging constructions, we prioritized comprehensive, corpus-based grammars and, where possible, consulted multiple descriptions of the same language. In languages with more than one available description, bridging constructions are often noted in at least one source, as in Lisu (Hope 1974; Yu 2007) and Muya/Munya (Bai 2020; Gao 2015). Where the present study relies on only a single description, lack of discussion of bridging constructions in that source is treated as inconclusive.

Applying these criteria, we expanded the five-language primary corpus by 45 additional grammatical descriptions. In order to make the coverage of the language sample transparent and to facilitate comparison with the geographical overview in Figure 1, the sampled languages are grouped in Table 2 according to the same reference labels used there. In this representation, the consulted sources cover languages associated with 12 of the reference groupings. Seven further groupings – Digarish, Karenic, Kman-Meyor, Mruic, Olekha, Raji-Raute, and Gongduk, comprising 31 living languages in Glottolog – could not be included because no suitable comprehensive, corpus-based grammatical descriptions were available.

Table 2 summarizes the number of selected languages, drawing on both primary and secondary sources, in relation to the total number of living Sino-Tibetan languages listed in the same reference system. Appendix A provides the full list of languages, including language names, ISO codes, reference grouping

7 Exposure to language with written traditions and exposure to literacy in general have also been noted to provide a stimulus for the overt marking of grammatical structures (cf. Mithun 1988: 356–357 in relation to the grammaticization of coordinating conjunctions).

Table 2: Language sample in relation to the reference groupings used in this study.

Higher-order Grouping	Glottolog		Languages examined in this study	
	Major subgroupings	Total languages	Major subgroupings	Total languages
Bodic	4	83	2	5 *Primary: 1 Secondary: 4*
Burmo-Qiangic	3	161	2	17 *Primary: 3 Secondary: 14*
Sinitic	4	30	2	4 *Primary: 1 Secondary: 3*
Macro-Bai	2	6	2	2
Nungish	2	3	1	1
Brahmaputran	4	42	4	5
Dhimal-Lhokpu-Toto	3	3	1	1
Himalayish	2	44	3	7
Kho-Bwa	3	7	1	1
Kuki-Chin-Naga	6	94	5	5
Macro-Tani	2	12	1	1
Miji	2	2	1	1
Total	37	487	25	50

labels, consulted sources, and the letters and numbers used to identify languages on Figure 2.

The resulting sample represents approximately 10 % of the living Sino-Tibetan languages in the reference inventory used for this study. Although source-driven rather than strictly genealogically balanced, it is broad enough to assess regional-typological correlations proposed in earlier work on bridging constructions. In particular, it includes languages relevant to proposed associations with morphological profile, reference tracking, zero anaphora, and clause chaining. It covers a broad morphological range: analytic languages with little or no inflectional morphology (19 languages), agglutinating languages with extensive affixation and relatively transparent morpheme-to-function mapping (20 languages), and highly synthetic languages with complex verbal morphology encoding multiple grammatical categories per word (11 languages, including Rgyalrongic and Kiranti languages; see Arcodia and Basciano 2020; Jacques forthc. for recent overviews of morphological variation in Sino-Tibetan). The sample also includes languages with different clause-linking profiles, chiefly paratactic sequencing of independent clauses and clause chaining with dependent or non-final verbal forms, and many sampled languages are described as making extensive use of zero anaphora. Finally, while Sino-Tibetan

languages are not generally reported to have unambiguous canonical systems dedicated to tracking participant alternation across clauses, three languages in the sample – Kham, Galo, and Daai Chin – nevertheless show resources relevant to this domain. In Kham, the relevant contrast is analyzed in terms of referential continuity versus discontinuity across dependent clauses (Watters 2002: 322–330, 329). In Galo, constructions associated with continuing or changing subjects are available in contexts of high referential density, although they do not amount to a grammaticalized subject-continuity constraint (Post 2007: 56). In Daai Chin, tracking across clause chains involves the interaction of agreement, case marking, topicality, and changes in grammatical function (So-Hartmann 2009: 352–354). These languages therefore represent cases within the corpus where clause linkage includes identifiable mechanisms for managing reference across clauses.

3.3 Identification of bridging constructions and limitations of the dataset

Identification of bridging constructions in both datasets follows the comparative concept introduced in Section 1, based on Guérin and Aiton (2019: 2–3), together with their criteria for distinguishing bridging constructions from ordinary repetition (2019: 29–31). In the primary-text corpus, these criteria were applied directly to the texts. In the secondary-source sample, bridging constructions are included when they are identified or exemplified as such in the consulted grammatical descriptions, or when the examples provided clearly match the same criteria.

Of the 45 secondary-source descriptions consulted, 26 explicitly discuss bridging constructions. The most common label for constructions corresponding to the definition adopted here is “tail-head linkage” (19 sources), while one source uses “head-tail linkage” (Jiaomuzu Rgyalrong; Prins 2016: 615). Other labels include “recapitulations” (Thulung, Lahaussois 2002; Dolakha Newar, Genetti 2007), “reduplication” (Dulong, LaPolla 2001: 2; 2017: 643; Dhimal, King 2009: 219–220), and “repetitions” (Kurtöp, Hyslop 2017: 363–364; Borchers 2008: 210; Schultze and Bieri 1973). Despite this terminological variation, the descriptions and examples clearly correspond to bridging constructions as defined in this study.[8] In two further cases, Lisu (Hope 1974) and Garo (Burling 2004), bridging constructions are not identified as

8 In Sunwar, Schultze and Bieri (1973: 389–391) distinguish the relevant construction from ordinary repetition by prosodic and distributional criteria, including exactly two linked tokens and contrasting non-final versus final intonation. For Kurtöp, established diagnostics – especially clause dependency, sentence status, and shared arguments – support treating the constructions labeled “repetitions” as bridging constructions under the definition adopted here.

a separate analytical category, but the discussions of clause-linking strategies and accompanying examples provide clear evidence for their occurrence.[9]

The secondary-source data differ from the primary corpus in the level of detail they provide. Grammatical descriptions rarely offer extended discussion of bridging constructions or systematic information on the texts from which the examples are drawn, such as the number of speakers, number of texts, or internal frequency of the construction. The most consistently comparable information concerns genre. The examples cited in the consulted descriptions are predominantly oral or oral-derived, including narratives, folktales, procedural accounts, and expository or historical texts; in one case, Bantawa (Doornenbal 2009), everyday conversation is also represented.

The way bridging constructions are identified in the secondary-source sample also clarifies the main limitations of the dataset. First, both datasets are weighted toward traditional narratives, with limited representation of conversation, ritual, and other discourse genres. The study therefore cannot assess genre-based variation in the distribution or formal types of bridging constructions, and the frequency values reported for the primary data should be read as corpus-based tendencies within the available materials.

Second, the data are strongly skewed toward recapitulative linkage, one of the three types of bridging constructions distinguished by Guérin and Aiton (2019: 3–4, 11–23), alongside summary and mixed types.[10] In the secondary-source data, 24 of the 28 languages with identifiable bridging constructions show only recapitulative constructions in the consulted sources. Summary linkage is reported or otherwise identifiable in the remaining four – Muya, Galo, Lisu, and Mongsen Ao – although the relevant evidence differs across sources and includes cases where summary linkage co-occurs with recapitulative linkage or is reflected in a grammaticalized linking element. In the primary-text corpus, both recapitulative and summary constructions occur, but recapitulative constructions again predominate. For consistency and comparability, the analysis therefore focuses on recapitulative constructions.

9 Hope (1974: 65) on "presupposition-creating topics" in Lisu: "To English speakers such overt identification of the presuppositions seems very redundant, but in Lisu texts, especially in myths and fables where events and the participants in those events are not of the kind easily presupposed, topicalized sentences which identify the presuppositions occur with monotonous frequency. In such cases a readable translation into English requires whole sentences to be rendered by *so*, *then* or some other connector of this type". "Such summaries of presupposition mark the beginning of new episodes in the discourse, roughly equivalent to new paragraphs".

Burling (2004: 316) on subordinating clauses in Garo: "A common rhetorical strategy for tying together the sentences of a discourse is to introduce a new sentence with a verb that echoes the final verb of the previous sentence but that ends with a subordinating suffix".

10 Guérin (2019: iv) uses "mixed linkage" for cases that combine recapitulative linkage, where the bridging clause repeats the reference clause, with summary linkage, where it refers back through a summarizing predicate rather than repetition.

Third, because the study focuses on morphosyntactic properties, especially the realization of verbal predicates in bridging constructions, semantic aspects are not treated in detail. For the same reason, we do not distinguish among the subtypes of recapitulative constructions proposed by Guérin and Aiton (2019: 11–12), since these distinctions do not affect the structural properties central to the present analysis.

Finally, for the secondary-source sample, the analysis necessarily depends on the descriptions, examples, and terminology provided in the consulted grammars. Since the study surveys 28 languages in which bridging constructions are reported or otherwise identifiable from secondary sources, it cannot independently verify the full range of possible bridging strategies in each language. The classification of bridging-clause type is therefore source-sensitive and should be read as a cautious interpretation of the available evidence, rather than as an exhaustive account of language-wide variation. This qualification is especially important where grammars discuss relevant discourse-linking constructions only briefly, or where the consulted sources represent different dialects or varieties.

3.4 Distribution of the evidence in the full language sample

Table 3 summarizes the evidence for bridging constructions across the full language sample, using the same reference groupings as Table 2 and Figure 1 to facilitate cross-reference between sample coverage and geographical distribution. Bridging constructions are reported or otherwise identifiable in 33 of the 50 sampled languages (66 %), covering 11 of the 12 reference groupings represented in the sample.

With the limitations outlined in the previous section in mind, the distribution summarized in Table 3 suggests several broad patterns. The full sample provides no robust support for categorical correlations between the reported presence of bridging constructions and the typological features previously associated with them in regions where bridging constructions have so far been most extensively documented, especially Papunesia and South America.

First, morphology does not predict the reported presence of bridging constructions in the consulted sources. Bridging constructions are identifiable in analytic, agglutinative, and synthetic languages alike, indicating that degree of synthesis alone is not a determining factor.

Second, participant-tracking resources do not show a clear correlation with bridging constructions of the kind often discussed in relation to other areas (Stirling 1993: 17; van Gijn et al. 2014; van Gijn and Hammond 2016). As noted above, the sample does not include languages with unambiguous canonical systems dedicated to tracking participant alternation across clauses. Of the three languages described as having clause-linking resources relevant to referential continuity or

Table 3: Reporting status of bridging constructions in the sampled languages. "Reported" indicates identifiable bridging constructions in the consulted materials; "unknown" indicates no relevant evidence in the available materials.

Higher-order grouping	Reported	Unknown	Specification: Unknown
Bodic	4	1	Tshangla
Burmo-Qiangic	13	4	Guiqiong, Namuyi, Yongning Na, Zaiwa
Sinitic	2	2	Hui'an, Yichun
Macro-Bai	1	1	Southern Bai
Nungish	1	0	
Brahmaputran	3	2	Rabha, Konyak
Dhimal-Lhokpu-Toto	1	0	
Himalayish	4	3	Lepcha, Kham, Thangmi
Kho-Bwa	1	0	
Kuki-Chin-Naga	2	3	Daai Chin, Meithei, Kabrang Tangkhul
Macro-Tani	1	0	
Miji	0	1	West Kameng Sajolang
Total	33 = 66 %	17 = 34 %	

discontinuity – Kham, Galo, and Daai Chin – bridging constructions are reported in Galo, but not in the consulted sources for Kham or Daai Chin. The available evidence therefore does not support a categorical link between bridging constructions and identifiable mechanisms for managing reference across clauses.

Third, clause chaining likewise does not provide a simple predictor. In the present sample, bridging constructions are identifiable not only in clause-chaining languages, but also in analytic and isolating Sinospheric languages, where clause chaining is not the dominant linkage strategy.

Finally, zero anaphora likewise does not show a categorical correlation with the reported presence of bridging constructions in the present sample. In this respect, it patterns with the other features considered here. At the same time, its relevance is somewhat different. Unlike morphological profile, participant-tracking systems, or clause chaining, zero anaphora is not a bounded structural environment or a specific clause-linkage resource, but a general discourse strategy for maintaining referential continuity across clauses, especially where a referent remains accessible from the preceding context (Comrie 1999; Givón 1983, 2017a, b; Kibrik 2001; Oh 2005, 2006). Its relationship to bridging constructions is therefore better understood in functional rather than predictive terms. Where zero anaphora and bridging constructions co-occur, they may jointly contribute to discourse cohesion: bridging clauses recapitulate prior events and link them to the following discourse, while zero anaphora maintains reference to already accessible participants.

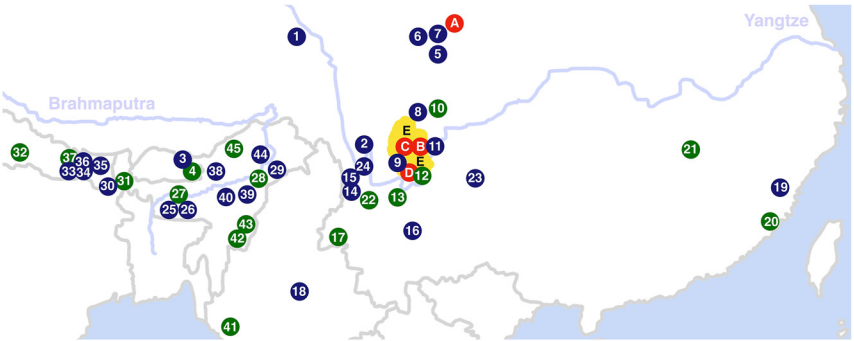

Figure 2: Sampled languages and reporting status of bridging constructions. Red letters mark primary-corpus languages, including Southwest Mandarin (E), whose five sampled counties are highlighted in yellow; numbers mark secondary-source languages. Labels correspond to Appendix A. Blue indicates identifiable bridging constructions; green indicates no identifiable evidence in the consulted sources.

Figure 2 adds the geographical dimension to the distribution summarized in Table 3, distinguishing languages in which bridging constructions are identifiable in the consulted sources from those for which no relevant evidence was found.

As shown in Figure 2, reporting status does not display clear geographical clustering that would, by itself, point to a straightforward genealogical or areal explanation. Closely related and geographically adjacent languages may differ in whether bridging constructions are identifiable in the consulted sources. This is illustrated by two Sinitic languages, Shaowu and Hui'an, marked as 19 and 20 on the map: the former includes a dedicated discussion of bridging constructions, whereas the latter provides no identifiable evidence. Such contrasts suggest that reporting status is strongly shaped by the degree to which available descriptions attend to discourse-level phenomena. At the same time, the fact that bridging constructions are identifiable in two-thirds of the sampled languages indicates that they are widespread across Sino-Tibetan, while the remaining "unknown" cases are better treated as evidential gaps than as cases of demonstrated non-occurrence.

4 Bridging constructions and clause-linkage resources

The preceding section considered the distribution and reporting status of bridging constructions across the full sample. This section turns to the subset of languages in which such constructions are attested in the primary corpus or identifiable in the

consulted secondary sources, and assesses how they relate to the clause-linkage resources available in individual languages.

4.1 Coding principles

The analysis first requires a set of coding principles. Since the aim is to compare the form of bridging clauses with the clause-linkage resources available in individual languages, the syntactic status of bridging clauses must be distinguished from their discourse function. The coding therefore covers four dimensions: morphological type, dominant clause-linking pattern, bridging-clause type, and additional discourse-oriented elements occurring in bridging clauses.

Morphological type is coded on the basis of the grammatical analysis of the corpus in the case of the primary languages, and explicit statements in the consulted descriptions in the case of the secondary-source sample. The categories used here are broad typological labels – analytic, agglutinative, and synthetic – and are intended to capture the extent to which grammatical relations and clause-linking distinctions are morphologically encoded.

Dominant clause-linking pattern refers to the clause-linking pattern most frequently used in narrative mainline contexts, as identified either from the primary corpus or from explicit statements in the consulted descriptions. Where such evidence is limited, the classification is treated as provisional. Across the sample, two recurrent patterns are especially prominent: paratactic sequencing of independent clauses and clause chaining. Some languages, however, show more than one clause-linkage resource, with parataxis coexisting with dependent or non-final forms. This is attested in the primary data from Niesu Yi and appears to characterize Ersu in the secondary-source sample: Zhang (2013) identifies parataxis as the dominant linkage pattern, while Chirkova and Wang (2017) document additional dependent or non-final verbal forms.

Examples (2) and (3), taken from the same text, illustrate two clause-linking patterns in Niesu Yi: paratactic linkage between prosodically integrated but syntactically independent clauses, and dependent non-final linkage marked by /ta^{33}/.

(2) *[ha^{44}dzŋ^{33} ȵi^{33} dzɻ^{33} tɕa^{55} tuɪ^{33}] [vɛ^{33} sa^{55}] [ndo^{33} sa^{55}] ||*
who also together gather DUR go all drink all
'Everyone came together, then they all went and drank [the foolish water].'
(Ding, field notes)

(3) a *[t^{h}a^{44}zuɪ^{33} a^{44}zɻ^{33} ts^{h}ɻ^{33} ma^{33}=ko^{33} t^{h}u^{33} ʂu^{33} t^{h}uɪ^{33} ndo^{44} sa^{55} ta^{33}]*
jar:son big this CLF=LOC 3PL do t/here drink all CVB
'[… they] quickly drank all [the water] in the big jar,'

b *[kuɹ^{33}ʐ̩^{33} ŋu^{33} ta^{33}]*
stupid:water COP CVB
'it was foolish water,'

c *[t^{h}a^{44}zuɹ^{33} a^{44}ʐ̩^{33} ts^{h}ʅ^{33} ma^{33} t^{h}u^{33} ka^{33} ndo^{33} ta^{33}]*
jar:son big this CLF 3PL take drink CVB
'they drank all [the water] in the big jar,'

d *[do^{21}ma^{33} hi^{21} a^{21}=ku^{55} muɹ^{33} t^{h}uɹ^{33} ŋga^{33} vɛ^{33}* sa^{55}] ||
word say NEG=know.how do t/here pass go all
'[and as a result, they] were no longer able to speak.' (Ding, field notes)

Bridging-clause type is coded according to the morphosyntactic properties of the verbal predicate in the bridging clause. Clause types are classified in accordance with the terminology of Sarvasy and Aikhenvald (2024: 3–9), in order to ensure consistency across languages and descriptive traditions. We use dependent for verbal predicates underspecified for one or more major inflectional categories, such as tense, mood, modality, or polarity, and independent for predicates formally identical to those of independent clauses. This yields a broad distinction between dependent and independent bridging clauses.

In addition to these features, which capture the syntactic status of the bridging clause, the analysis also records discourse-oriented elements that recurrently co-occur with bridging clauses in the dataset. These include topic markers, temporal markers such as 'when', 'at the time when', or 'after', and clause-linking particles or conjunctions such as 'and', 'then', or 'and then'.

These elements are relevant because they show how bridging clauses are integrated into the following discourse beyond the morphosyntax of the verbal predicate itself. Topic markers are important because bridging clauses often function as discourse frames: they reactivate a preceding event and establish it as the basis for the following clause. Their occurrence in bridging clauses is therefore consistent with analyses of topic-like clauses as structures that provide a frame for the interpretation of the following assertion (Chafe 1976; Gundel and Fretheim 2004; Haiman 1978; Lambrecht 1994). Temporal markers may serve a similar framing function by presenting the recapitulated event as backgrounded or ancillary to the main assertion, a function widely associated with temporal subordination and temporal framing cross-linguistically (Bril 2010; Givón 1984; Hopper 1979; Thompson et al. 2007). Clause-linking particles and conjunctions are relevant because, in discourse use, they may mark continuity, sequential progression, or inferential connection across clauses without necessarily encoding temporal subordination of the 'when' type. In this sense, forms glossed as 'and', 'then', or 'and then' may organize discourse sequence rather than simply encode clause syntax (Chafe 1982; Du Bois 2003; Fraser 1999; Givón 2017a, b; Schiffrin 1987; Schourup 1999).

Coding these elements separately from bridging-clause type is especially important for temporal markers, since clauses containing them may resemble embedded adverbial clauses. In the present study, the presence of a temporal marker is not by itself taken to make a bridging clause an ordinary embedded adverbial clause. Rather, temporal marking is treated as one possible means of framing the recapitulated event, while the syntactic status of the clause is assessed independently. In the primary texts, temporally marked bridging clauses are distinguished from ordinary embedded adverbial clauses by their recapitulative relation to a preceding clause, their position at a discourse-unit boundary, and, where available, prosodic separation. In secondary sources, this distinction sometimes depends on the analysis provided by the grammar. This treatment is consistent with analyses in which temporal or sequential markers may form part of non-embedded clause-linking structures, rather than automatically turning the marked clause into an ordinary embedded adverbial clause, as illustrated by Korean, Adyghe, and Buryat clause-linking constructions discussed in Sarvasy and Aikhenvald (2024: 17, 594, 686–687).

The separate coding of discourse-oriented elements is further justified by the fact that they are attested with both independent and dependent bridging clauses. Example (4), from the Miyi variety of Southwestern Mandarin, contains an independent bridging clause with both the sequential marker /ji^{213}xoʊ^{42}/ 'afterwards' and the topic marker /le^{55}/. The clause is analyzed as independent because its verbal predicate can occur as a fully independent utterance and is formally identical to the reference clause in (4a).

(4) a *[wɔ^{213}-mən^{21} taʊ^{42}=laʊ^{21} tɕ^{h}i^{21}tɕi^{213} njɛn^{213}] [wɔ^{213}-mən^{21} tɕoʊ^{42}* ***ts^{h}eŋ^{21}=laʊ^{21}*** *tɕa^{55}] ||*
1-PL reach=PFV 1970s year 1-PL just become=PFV family
'By the 1970s, we **already settled down as a family**.'

b *[ts^{h}eŋ^{21}=laʊ^{21}* ***tɕa^{55}*** *ji^{213}xoʊ^{42} le^{55}] [wɔ^{213}-mən^{21} xu^{42}ɕaŋ^{55} paŋ^{55}tsu^{42}] ||*
become=PFV family afterwards TOP 1-PL mutually help
'Once [we] **settled down as a family**, we supported one another.' ("Data Collection, Recording, and Display Platform for the Chinese Language Resources Protection Project", https://zhongguoyuyan.cn/)

By contrast, example (5) from Shuhi shows that topic marking may also follow a formally dependent bridging clause.

(5) a *[èlá ʁɛ̀̃=nɑ̃́ mjè-tɕ^{h}ò=sé=̣́] [sjɛ́* ***tú****=ʎo=wɛ̃=jí] ||*
there neck=inside downward-insert=CVB=TOP blood suck=NMLZ.PST=COP=PROG
'[… his brother's wife, holding a copper straw,] inserted it into the [brother's] neck and **sucked his blood**.'

b *[tʰɦí* ***sjɛ́*** ***tú****=se=˩]* *[tɕʰɦɪ̀=ʎɛ=˩]* *[è-jú=˧́*
that blood suck=CVB=TOP drink=turn.out=TOP KNSP-elder.brother=TOP
è-jɛ̀ *pɛ̀=sé]* *[ɛè-ɛé* *gɑ̃́=ʎo=wɛ̃=jí]* ||
cry.of.pain speak=CVB extremely be.ill=NMLZ.PST=COP=PROG
'[She] **sucked his blood** that way, drinking deeply, while his brother writhed in agony, crying out, "Aaah!"' (Chirkova, field notes)

Clause-linking conjunctions pattern similarly: in sentence (1c) from Lizu, an independent bridging clause is followed by 'and', whereas in sentence (6b) from Baima, a dependent bridging clause is followed by a comparable conjunction.

Following these coding principles, the tables below record, for each language, its morphological type, dominant clause-linking pattern, bridging-clause type, and any accompanying discourse-oriented elements.

4.2 Primary-text corpus: directly attested bridging-clause types and frequencies

Table 4a applies the coding principles outlined above to the primary-corpus languages, where bridging constructions can be identified and counted directly in the selected texts. Blank cells indicate that the relevant element is not attested in the texts examined.

The primary-corpus data show considerable diversity both in the syntactic form of bridging constructions and in the discourse-oriented elements that accompany them. Most languages in the primary sample show both independent and dependent bridging clauses, regardless of their dominant clause-linking pattern. This is true not only of Niesu Yi, where parataxis coexists with dependent clause-linkage forms, but also of Baima and Shuhi, both predominantly clause-chaining languages, and of Lizu, where parataxis is dominant. Southwestern Mandarin is the only primary-corpus language in which only independent bridging clauses are attested, in line with its dominant pattern of paratactic sequencing.

Where both syntactic types coexist, however, their relative frequency generally corresponds to the dominant clause-linking profile of the language. The clearest cases are Baima and Shuhi. Both are agglutinative languages with clause-chaining as a dominant clause-linking strategy, and both show a clear preference for dependent bridging clauses: these account for 73 % of bridging clauses in Baima and 80 % in Shuhi. In this respect, the primary-corpus data support the expectation that, in clause-chaining languages, recapitulative bridging will often draw on dependent or non-final clause-linkage resources.

Table 4a: Primary-corpus languages: morphological type, dominant clause-linking pattern, attested bridging-clause types, accompanying discourse-oriented elements, and their relative frequencies. TOP = topic marker; TEMP = marker of temporal relations; LNK = clause-linking particles or conjunctions; SWM = Southwestern Mandarin.

Language	Morphological Type	Dominant clause-linking Pattern	Independent bridging Clauses	Dependent bridging Clauses	Markers attested		
					TOP	TEMP	LNK
Baima	Agglutinative	Clause chaining	✓ (27 %)	✓ (73 %)			*ɲi* ‘and’ (48 %)
Lizu	Analytic	Parataxis	✓ (97 %)	✓ (3 %)	*le*, *ne* (20 %)	*kʰœ* ‘time when’, *gəŋy* ‘back’ (60 %)	*lœ* ‘and’ (9 %)
Shuhi	Agglutinative with analytic	Clause chaining	✓ (20 %)	✓ (80 %)	*ɻ̩* (70 %)		
Niesu Yi	Features	Parataxis; dependent/non-final forms also attested	✓ (69 %)	✓ (31 %)		$(a^{44})nj\varepsilon^{33}$ ‘after’; $(t^{h}ɯ^{33})^{-}ko^{33}$ ‘(time) when’ (69 %)	$lɯ^{44}$ ‘and’ (8 %)
SWM	Analytic	Parataxis	✓ (100 %)		*ne* / *le* (25 %)	*yihou* ‘after’ (25 %)	

Examples (6) and (7) illustrate the two bridging-clause types in Baima. The bridging clauses in (6b) /pī=ɲi/ 'blew fire' and (6c) /ɲìtɕʰô kʰû=tɕʰè/ 'brought forth a gun' instantiate the dependent pattern. They lack the evidential morpheme /ʃə/, a non-egophoric perfective marker required in chain-final clauses, as shown in the final clauses of (6a) and (6b).

(6) a *[kʰûɲê tɕʰù̀nô ɲê… ɲê ɲā tɕaǹtɕəu* ***pī=ʃə]*** ||
3SG home fire fire a.little be.particular.CN blow.PST=PFV.NEGO
'[In the meantime], he **blew fire**.'

b *[pī=ɲi] [tʃʰə̂ ɕē=ʃə]* || *[ɲìtɕʰô* ***kʰû=tɕʰɛ̀=ʃə]*** ||
blow.PST=and what do.PST=PFV.NEGO gun bring=go.PST=PFV.NEGO
'[He] **blew fire** and what [else] did he do? He **brought forth a gun**.'

c *[ɲìtɕʰô kʰû=tɕʰè] [dî nò dzè=ʃə]* ||
gun bring=go.PST ogre exist speak.PST=PFV.NEGO
'[He] **brought forth a gun** [and] said: "There are ogres here."' (Chirkova, field notes)

By contrast, the bridging clause in (7b) is structurally identical to the reference clause in (7a) and is linked to the following clause prosodically, without dependent verbal morphology.

(7) a *[dì-mô tê ìtɕîŋ ɕiàotè] [tʃʰòkậ ɕē=ᵐbo=ʃə]* ||
ogre-mother that already.CN know.CN harm do.PST=COMPL=PFV.NEGO
'The ogress already knew that [that man] **had inflicted harm [upon her husband]**.'

b *[tʃʰòkậ ɕē=ᵐbo=ʃə] [sèsê nậ ⁿdʑî tê lù̀gò mù=ⁿdʑî=ʃə]* ||
harm do.PST=COMPL=PFV.NEGO everyday here go that other NEG=go=PFV.NEGO
'[She knew that he] **had inflicted harm [upon her husband]**, [so] every day she would return there, never venturing elsewhere.' (Chirkova, field notes)

The coexistence of dependent and independent bridging clauses in the primary languages is consistent with earlier observations that a single language may have more than one bridging-clause type, and that these types may differ in discourse function (de Vries 2005; Guérin and Aiton 2019: 32; Sarvasy and Aikhenvald 2024: 23–24). Baima illustrates this pattern: dependent bridging clauses, which align with the language's dominant clause-linking strategy, tend to serve local sentence-to-sentence cohesion, whereas independent bridging clauses are less expected in this

clause-chaining profile and more often occur at larger discourse transitions, such as the opening of a new paragraph, passage, or narrative line.

Niesu Yi occupies an intermediate position in the primary corpus. Although both independent and dependent clause-linkage resources are available, independent bridging clauses predominate, accounting for 69 % of the attested cases. Its bridging profile is therefore closer to the analytic and paratactic pattern represented by Lizu and Southwestern Mandarin than to the clause-chaining profile represented by Baima and Shuhi. Lizu and Southwestern Mandarin show this alignment most clearly: 97 % of Lizu bridging clauses are independent, while only independent bridging clauses are attested in the Southwestern Mandarin texts examined.

Additional discourse-oriented elements provide a second dimension of variation. The frequency figures in Table 4a refer to the proportion of bridging clauses in which each element occurs. All primary-corpus languages show at least one such element, and most show more than one. Lizu is the most diverse language in this respect: bridging clauses may occur with the topic markers *le* and *ne*, temporal expressions such as *kʰœ* 'time when' and *gəɲy* 'back', and the linker *lœ* 'and'. Temporal marking is especially frequent, occurring in 60 % of Lizu bridging clauses. Niesu Yi shows a comparable preference for temporal framing: 69 % of its bridging clauses contain temporal markers such as /(a^{44})njɛ^{33}/ 'after' and /(tʰur^{33})ko^{33}/ '(time) when', whereas the linker /luɹ^{44}/ 'and' is much less frequent. Southwestern Mandarin shows a smaller but similar pattern, with topic markers *ne/le* and the temporal marker *yihou* 'after' each attested in 25 % of bridging clauses. Baima and Shuhi show less diverse profiles, each with only one type of additional element: conjunctions in Baima, occurring in 48 % of bridging clauses, and topic marking in Shuhi, occurring in 70 %.

The primary-corpus data thus point to a probabilistic alignment between bridging-clause type and dominant clause-linking pattern, while also showing that this alignment is mediated by language-specific discourse-packaging resources. Because the primary corpus is small and the frequency values are corpus-internal, these patterns should be treated as suggestive rather than generalizable on their own. They therefore require comparison with the broader, though less fine-grained, secondary-source sample.

4.3 Secondary-source sample: reported bridging-clause types

Table 4b summarizes the 28 secondary-source languages for which bridging constructions are reported or otherwise identifiable. It records the bridging-clause types and accompanying discourse-oriented elements that can be identified from the

consulted descriptions. Blank cells indicate that the relevant information is not reported or not identifiable from the source.

A comparison with Table 4a shows that the secondary-source data make less variation visible than the primary corpus, both in bridging-clause type and in the additional elements accompanying bridging constructions. This contrast reflects differences in evidential resolution: the primary corpus allows all attested instances to be examined directly, whereas many secondary descriptions mention bridging constructions only briefly or illustrate them with a small number of examples. The classifications in Table 4b should therefore be understood as source-based identifications, not as evidence for the full range of strategies available in each language.

Most consulted descriptions report only one bridging-clause type. The only tentative exception is Jiaomuzu, where more than one type can be inferred from the examples in Prins (2016). Some bridging clauses are introduced by /kʰonə/, which is described as marking syntactically dependent clauses with temporal, causal, or conditional functions. Others are introduced by /tʃeʔ=tʃe/ 'this time/LOC', a marker with primarily discourse-pragmatic functions. Clauses introduced by /tʃeʔ=tʃe/ are not uniformly dependent: in some contexts they function as backgrounded clauses, while in others they retain the assertive status of independent clauses. The Jiaomuzu evidence is therefore treated as suggestive of more than one bridging-clause type, but not as sufficient for a full account of their distribution.

With these caveats in mind, Table 4b suggests a broad association between reported bridging-clause type and the clause-linkage resources available in individual languages. In the clearest cases, bridging constructions align with the dominant morphosyntactic profile of the language. This alignment, however, is not mechanical: the secondary-source data show that languages may recruit several kinds of clause-linkage and discourse-packaging resources for recapitulative bridging.

Among clause-chaining languages in the secondary-source sample, bridging clauses often take the form of dependent or medial clauses; Yulshul, Dongwang, Kurtöp, Qiang, and Muya illustrate this pattern. At the same time, bridging constructions in clause-chaining languages are clearly not limited to medial clauses. This is consistent with the broader typology of bridging constructions in clause-chaining systems discussed by Sarvasy and Aikhenvald (2024), where recapitulative linkage may involve medial clauses, nominalized clauses, or other non-final structures.

In the present dataset, Galo provides a well-described Sino-Tibetan example of this non-medial dependent pattern. Sarvasy and Aikhenvald (2024: 20) mention Galo recapitulative linkage as marking a transition between episodes, and Post's fuller grammar shows that the relevant bridging clauses take the form of "framing clausal nominalizations" marked by the realis event nominalizer *-nam* and followed by the topic marker *əə* (Post 2007: 778–780). This differs from the ordinary clause-chain

Table 4b: Secondary-source languages: morphological type, dominant clause-linking pattern, reported or otherwise identifiable bridging-clause type, and accompanying discourse-oriented elements. TOP = topic marker; TEMP = marker of temporal relations; LNK = clause-linking particle or conjunction.

Language	Morphological type	Dominant clause-linking Pattern	Independent bridging Clauses	Dependent bridging Clauses	Markers attested		
					TOP	TEMP	LNK
Yulshul	Agglutinative			✓		*dʉ* 'time'	
Dongwang		Clause-		✓			
Kurtöp		Chaining		✓			
Qiang				✓			*tu* 'and'
Muya	Agglutinative			✓			*tsəkú* 'and'
Prinmi	With analytic			✓	*kʰi̱*=*bù* 'time'=TOP		
Ersu	Features	Parataxis; dependent/non-final forms also attested	✓	✓	*nɛ̀*		
Zauzou	Analytic with		✓		*ni*^{31}		
Lisu[a]	Agglutinative		✓		*nya*		
Khatso	Features		✓		*nɛ*^{55}		
Burmese		Parataxis		✓		*əkʰa* 'time', *nauʔ* 'back', *jī* 'when'	
Shaowu	Analytic		✓		*le*^{22}		
Caijia			✓		*nɛ*^{55}		
Dulong	Agglutinative			✓			
Garo				✓			
Atong							*ətəkəymə̱ŋ* ~ *ətəkəymu* ~ *ətəkəy-muna* ~ *ətəkəymuŋ* ~ *ətkəy-muŋna* 'so then'
Hakhun Tangsa		Clause-chaining		✓			
Dhimal				✓			
Duhumbi				✓			*oloʔ* ~ *=loʔ* 'and then'

Table 4b: (continued)

Language	Morphological type	Dominant clause-linking Pattern	Independent bridging Clauses	Dependent bridging Clauses	Markers attested		
					TOP	TEMP	LNK
Jiaomuzu	Moderately to		✓	✓		*tʃeʔ=tʃe* 'this time/LOC'	*kʰonə*
Japhug	Highly		✓				*tɕe* ~ *qʰe* 'then'
Bantawa	Synthetic		✓				*-ki* 'and then'
Sunwar				✓		*nu* 'while', 'during', 'as'	*shɑ* ~ *sh liik-shɑ* 'finish and then'
Thulung			✓				*ma*, *lo* 'and'
Dolakha Newar				✓		*-ho* 'when'	
Mongsen Ao				✓			
Karbi				✓			*ánke* 'and then'
Galo				✓	*əə*		

[a]Lisu is coded here as having independent bridging clauses with topic marking on the basis of Hope's (1974: 63–70, 169–172) discussion of topicalized subordinate and presupposition-creating clauses. The relevant examples contain discourse-initial clauses that resume preceding material, but the repeated predicate is not clearly marked by dependent verbal morphology. This coding is further supported by Manaster-Ramer's (1988) analysis, which suggests that the clause preceding the topic marker *nyɑ* is not dependent in Lisu. Yu (2007), the other Lisu source consulted, describes a different variety and does not discuss bridging constructions as such; its text examples provide only limited and therefore inconclusive evidence for a possible bridging-like construction with dependent sequential marking, apparently involving summary rather than recapitulative linkage. A reviewer notes, however, that Lisu bridging clauses are often dependent, ending in a non-final marker that cannot occur in independent clauses and that links them to a following independent clause; this would make Lisu closer to Niesu Yi, as expected given their close relationship. The sources consulted here, however, do not allow this variation to be assessed systematically.

pattern based on non-final clauses marked by *-là(a)* (Post 2007: 803; Post and Modi 2024). Galo therefore illustrates partial alignment: bridging clauses are dependent, but they recruit nominalization-based backgrounding rather than the most canonical clause-chain morphology. Duhumbi shows a comparable use of nominalized locative phrases marked with *=ba-kʰo*, alongside medial clauses, in bridging constructions (Bodt 2020: 615–616).

A further pattern, especially visible in the Sino-Tibetan sample, involves independent or independent-like bridging clauses in morphologically complex languages, including Japhug, Bantawa, Thulung, and possibly Jiaomuzu. This pattern differs from the intra-language variation discussed for the primary corpus, where independent bridging clauses coexist with dependent ones and are generally less frequent or more marked. In the secondary-source data, by contrast, the available descriptions of these languages report only independent or independent-like bridging clauses, despite the availability of morphologically marked dependent forms in other clause-linking contexts. Thulung illustrates this pattern especially clearly. Although Thulung is a clause-chaining language with an elaborate system of converbs (Lahaussois 2002: 241–261), its bridging clauses are formed with the sequencers *-ma* and *-lo*. These sequencers are functionally comparable to converbs in expressing simultaneity or sequentiality, but differ in finiteness: they attach to finite verb forms, whereas converbs are non-finite (pp. 261–283). Sequencer-marked bridging clauses therefore retain the structural properties of independent clauses and can function autonomously as main clauses when the sequencer is omitted, as illustrated in example (8).

(8) a *[dzho-si myny kɔk-si myny] [meram ham-ʔe ra-ki-lo]*
plow-VN NEG.OBL dig-VN NEG.OBL that what-HS say-1P.INCL/3SG-SS
[bari si-eʔ] ||
N.field die.3SG-HS
'Plowing, digging are not allowed, we say this is because that **the fields will die**.'

b *[bari **si-ʔe** ma] [mi-kɔ-ki mi-dzho-ri muɯ nem tsahi]*
N.field die.3SG-HS AS NEG-dig-1PI NEG-plow-1PI that day CONTR
[ŋemsi-m basi] ||
rest-NOM OBL
'**The fields will die** and [so] we do not dig or plow on that day and we must rest.' (Lahaussois 2002: 281)

The analytic and analytic-leaning languages in the secondary-source sample show the complementary side of this pattern. Where robust dependency marking is absent or marginal, bridging constructions are usually realized through forms identical, or nearly identical, to independent clauses, linked to the following clause by prosody or by discourse-oriented material. Since prosody is rarely described in sufficient detail in the consulted sources, the analysis focuses on the discourse-oriented material

identifiable in the available descriptions. In several analytic or analytic-leaning languages, including Khatso, Zauzou, Ersu, Shaowu, and Caijia, bridging clauses are reported with topic markers or other discourse-pragmatic particles. This is consistent with broader observations on analytic languages, where discourse organization is often expressed through word order, particles, topic-comment structure, and pragmatic marking rather than through dependent verbal morphology (cf. Chafe 1976; LaPolla 1995; Li and Thompson 1976, 1981).

The analytic profile does not, however, exclude the use of dependent backgrounding resources. Burmese illustrates this point. It frequently links clauses paratactically, often by juxtaposition, while also possessing clause-final subordinating linkers (Jenny and San San Hnin Tun 2016). The bridging constructions reported by Romeo (2008: 226–227) involve temporal backgrounding structures, including constructions headed by temporal nouns such as [nauʔ] 'back, after' and [ək^{h}a] 'time', as well as clauses marked by the temporal subordinator [jĩ] 'when'. These cases are coded as dependent, since the recapitulating clause lacks the formal status markers typically found in independent clauses, including *-tɛ/-dɛ* for non-future realis, *-mɛ* for future irrealis, and *-pi/-bi* for new-situation marking (Jenny and San San Hnin Tun 2016, §6.2.8, §7.2.2.3.6). Burmese thus differs from cases such as Lizu and Niesu Yi, where temporal markers may accompany bridging clauses whose predicates remain formally independent. It shows that even in languages where parataxis is prominent, recapitulative bridging may be realized through temporal subordinate structures.

Discourse-oriented elements are also reported in morphologically complex languages, where they most often take the form of conjunctions, sequencers, or discourse-linking particles. In the secondary-source sample, this pattern is visible in languages such as Qiang, Muya, Atong, Duhumbi, Jiaomuzu, Japhug, Bantawa, Sunwar, Thulung, and Karbi, where bridging clauses may be accompanied by forms glossed as 'and', 'then', 'and then', or comparable sequential linkers. Temporal markers are also attested in morphologically complex languages, though less prominently in the consulted sources, as in Yulshul, Prinmi, Jiaomuzu, Sunwar, and Dolakha Newar. These patterns suggest that, even in languages with rich resources for dependent clause linkage, recapitulative bridging may also draw on discourse-level linking devices and temporal framing. The areal distribution of these accompanying elements is discussed further in the following section.

Taken together, the primary-corpus and secondary-source data support de Vries's (2005) proposal that bridging-clause form tends to reflect a language's dominant clause-linking pattern, but only as a probabilistic tendency. Analytic languages with paratactic clause linkage tend to use independent bridging clauses, whereas languages with richer dependent verbal morphology and clause-chaining resources more often use dependent or non-final forms. At the same time, the

Sino-Tibetan evidence shows that this relationship is not mechanical. Across both datasets, bridging constructions draw on the clause-linking and discourse-packaging resources available in individual languages, including medial clauses, nominalized or otherwise backgrounded dependent structures, temporal structures, topic markers, conjunctions, discourse particles, and formally independent clauses. In this respect, bridging linkage is compatible with Halliday and Hasan's (1976) conception of cohesion as a text-forming relation. Its cohesive function operates across discourse units rather than within the syntax of a single clause, while its formal realization remains sensitive to language-specific patterns of clause linkage and discourse organization. The following section turns from language-specific resources to their areal distribution, examining how bridging-clause types and their accompanying discourse-oriented elements pattern across the Sino-Tibetan sample.

5 Areal distribution of bridging-clause types and accompanying resources

This section examines the areal distribution of the bridging-clause types and accompanying discourse-oriented elements identified in the preceding section, using the primary-text and secondary-source data together. The discussion is organized around the broad Indosphere-Sinosphere continuum introduced in Section 2: languages toward the Indospheric side of the sample tend to have richer dependent clause-linkage resources, whereas languages toward the Sinospheric side more often show analytic structure, particles, topic-comment organization, and paratactic clause linkage. Figures 3a and 3b plot the two main dimensions of the analysis. Figure 3a shows the distribution of bridging-clause types, while Figure 3b shows the distribution of additional discourse-oriented elements recorded in bridging clauses.

The maps should be interpreted with the limitations of the dataset in mind. As discussed in Section 3, the reporting of bridging constructions is strongly shaped by descriptive practice, and the primary and secondary datasets differ in evidential resolution. The primary-text data make it possible to identify intra-language variation and combinations of bridging-clause type with accompanying discourse-oriented elements, whereas secondary descriptions often report only the most salient or explicitly discussed pattern. The apparent concentration of mixed patterns in the central part of the sample, especially Southwest China, may therefore partly reflect the greater detail available for the primary-corpus languages located there. Even in that case, the maps reveal broad areal tendencies that are consistent with the areal typological profiles discussed above.

Figure 3a shows a general contrast in bridging-clause type along the Indosphere-Sinosphere continuum. Languages toward the Indospheric side of the sample more often show dependent or non-final bridging clauses, while languages toward the Sinospheric side more often show independent bridging clauses. This alignment is not categorical. Japhug, Thulung, and Bantawa are morphologically complex languages in which the consulted sources report independent or independent-like bridging clauses despite the availability of morphologically marked dependent forms in other clause-linking contexts. Conversely, Burmese draws on dependent temporal subordinate structures in reported bridging constructions, although paratactic clause linkage is otherwise prominent. These cases show that regional profile helps

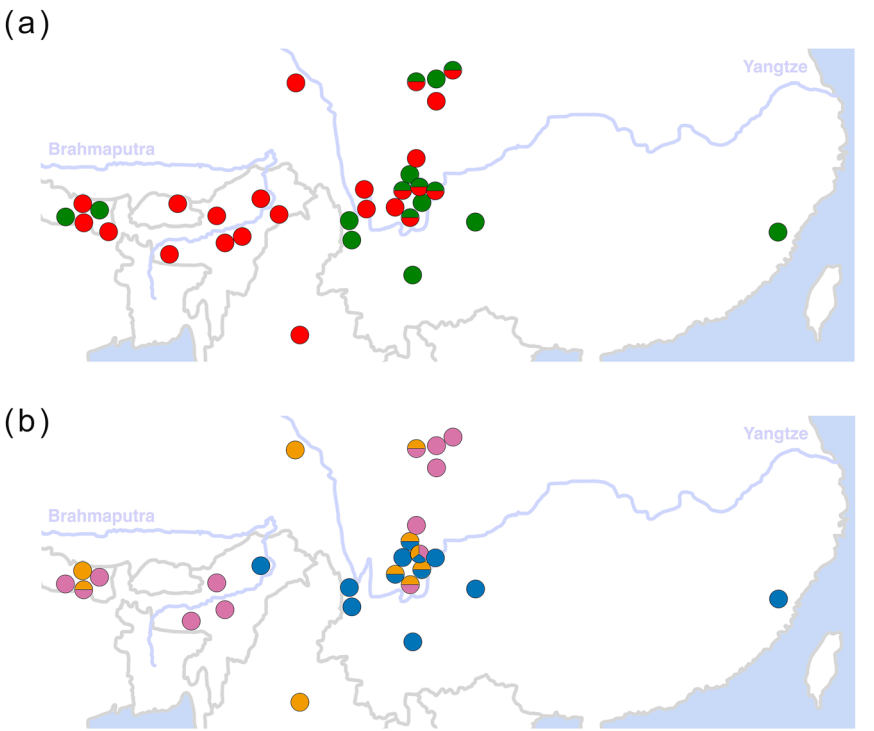

Figure 3: Areal distribution of bridging-clause types and accompanying discourse-oriented elements among languages with identifiable bridging constructions. (a) Reported bridging-clause types: green indicates independent bridging clauses and red indicates dependent bridging clauses; split symbols indicate that both types are attested or reported. (b) Additional discourse-oriented elements accompanying bridging constructions: blue indicates topic markers, golden ochre indicates temporal markers, and magenta indicates clause-linking particles or conjunctions; split symbols indicate that two or more elements are attested or reported.

identify broad preferences, but does not replace language-specific analysis of the resources used for bridging linkage.

Figure 3b shows a related but distinct pattern in the discourse-oriented elements that accompany bridging constructions. Topic markers are especially visible toward the Sinospheric side of the sample, where discourse organization is often carried by particles, word order, and information-structural marking rather than by dependent verbal morphology. Toward the Indospheric side, accompanying elements more often include clause-linking particles, conjunction-like forms, or temporal expressions, reflecting a broader set of resources for linking or backgrounding repeated material.

Temporal markers require separate comment because they cross-cut the broader Indosphere-Sinosphere contrast. They occur in both analytic and morphologically complex languages and therefore do not align straightforwardly with either end of the morphological continuum. This is visible, for example, in Yulshul, an agglutinative language; Prinmi, an agglutinative language with analytic features; and Lizu, an analytic language. At the same time, their occurrence is not random. Temporal markers appear especially prominent in the transitional central part of the map, in both primary-text and secondary-source languages. In this area, temporal expressions are often the only additional element recorded in bridging clauses; in some languages, such as Yulshul and Prinmi, they are described as regular or obligatory, and in several primary-corpus languages, such as Lizu and Niesu Yi, they are among the most frequent accompanying elements. By contrast, in some Indospheric languages, such as Dolakha Newar, temporal marking is reported only in a less frequent type of dependent bridging clause, whereas the more frequent type involves medial clauses (Genetti 2007: 471). This concentration suggests that temporal framing is not merely a general option available to individual languages, but may also be an areally favored strategy for marking the relation between the recapitulated event and the following discourse.

Taken together, Figures 3a and 3b support a resource-based interpretation of bridging constructions. Languages tend to recruit clause-linkage and discourse-packaging resources that are structurally available, discourse-frequent, and, in some cases, regionally reinforced. Typological profile constrains the likely formal options, but it does not determine them mechanically; areal patterning helps explain where particular resources are favored, but it does not replace language-specific analysis. This interpretation is consistent with typological work showing that discourse-related features are especially susceptible to diffusion in contact settings (Haig 2001; Matras 1998, 2007; Mithun 2008; Ross 2001, 2007; Schokkin 2014). The Sino-Tibetan data examined here therefore suggest that the formal realization of bridging constructions is shaped by the interaction of clause-linkage resources, discourse-packaging strategies, and areal patterning.

6 Conclusions and directions for future research

This study has examined recapitulative bridging constructions in a source-driven sample of 50 Sino-Tibetan languages, drawing on documented or otherwise identifiable evidence from 33 languages. Its first contribution is empirical and methodological: it brings Sino-Tibetan more systematically into the comparative study of bridging constructions through a coherent family-based language sample that includes both Tibeto-Burman and Sinitic languages. The resulting dataset provides a controlled basis for comparison in a macro-area that has remained underrepresented in previous cross-linguistic work, while also showing the limits of source-based evidence. Bridging constructions are identifiable across a wide range of Sino-Tibetan languages, but the 17 languages for which the consulted sources provide no relevant evidence should be treated as "unknown" rather than as languages without bridging constructions, since secondary descriptions vary considerably in their attention to discourse-level phenomena.

A broader typological finding is that the Sino-Tibetan evidence does not support a categorical correlation between the reported presence of bridging constructions and any single structural feature previously associated with them in better-documented macro-areas. Bridging constructions are identifiable in analytic, agglutinative, and synthetic languages; in languages with clause chaining as well as in languages where paratactic sequencing is dominant; and the available data do not indicate a categorical link with dedicated participant-tracking resources. The same is true of zero anaphora, although its relevance is of a somewhat different kind: rather than a bounded structural environment or a specific clause-linkage resource, it is a broad discourse-organizational strategy that may converge with bridging constructions in maintaining cohesion and referential continuity. The Sino-Tibetan data therefore support a resource-based approach in which the central question is not whether a single typological feature predicts the occurrence of bridging constructions, but how individual languages recruit available grammatical and discourse resources for recapitulative linkage.

The second contribution concerns the relationship between bridging-clause form and clause linkage. The findings support earlier proposals that bridging-clause form often reflects a language's dominant clause-linking profile, but only as a probabilistic tendency. Languages with analytic profiles and paratactic linkage more often use formally independent bridging clauses, whereas languages with richer dependent verbal morphology and clause-chaining resources more often use dependent or non-final forms. At the same time, this alignment is mediated by language-specific resources for discourse packaging. Bridging constructions may draw not only on independent or dependent clause forms, but also on

nominalization, temporal framing, topic marking, prosodic integration, discourse particles, conjunction-like forms, and sequential linkers. This point is especially clear in analytic and analytic-leaning languages, where formally independent bridging clauses may be integrated into discourse through prosody, topic marking, temporal framing, or discourse-linking particles. Conversely, in morphologically complex languages, dependent morphology may coexist with independent or independent-like bridging clauses, nominalized backgrounding structures, finite sequencer-marked forms, or other discourse-linking devices. The comparative value of the Sino-Tibetan dataset thus lies in showing, within one geographically extended language family, how recapitulative bridging is realized through different configurations of clause-linkage and discourse-packaging resources.

The third contribution concerns areal distribution. The attested patterns broadly align with the Indosphere-Sinosphere continuum, but not categorically. Languages toward the Indospheric side of the sample more often use dependent or non-final bridging clauses, while languages toward the Sinospheric side more often use formally independent bridging clauses accompanied by topic markers or other discourse-pragmatic material. The central zone, including Southwest China, is especially informative because it shows the coexistence of several strategies: independent and dependent bridging clauses, topic marking, temporal framing, and linking particles. Temporal framing is particularly noteworthy. It cuts across morphological type, but appears especially prominent in this transitional region, suggesting that some strategies for marking recapitulative linkage may be regionally reinforced.

Taken together, these findings show that the syntactic realization and distribution of bridging constructions in Sino-Tibetan are shaped by the interaction of three factors: dominant clause-linking patterns, language-specific discourse-packaging resources, and areal patterning. Typological profile constrains the likely formal options, but does not determine them mechanically. Areal patterning helps explain where particular resources are favored, but does not replace language-specific analysis. The result is a model in which bridging-clause form reflects not one structural predictor, but the interaction of clause linkage, discourse organization, and regional contact history.

The study also highlights the importance of discourse-oriented documentation. Bridging constructions may be missed in descriptions focused primarily on clause-internal grammar or based on edited textual materials, and classifications based on secondary sources necessarily depend on the detail, genre coverage, and analytical categories of the consulted descriptions. Future work based on larger naturalistic corpora, broader genre coverage, and more consistent discourse-oriented documentation will be needed to examine how bridging constructions vary across speakers, registers, genres, dialects, and time periods. By bringing Sino-Tibetan into the comparative study of bridging constructions, the present study shows how their formal

realization emerges from the interaction of clause linkage, information packaging, and areal patterning within a single typologically and areally diverse language family.

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