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TÜBINGEN



DFG Projekt

Valenzwörterbuch der ladakischen Verben
A Valency Dictionary of Ladakhi Verbs

**Contrasting instead of comparison.
Evidence from West Tibetan
Differentiating Property Ascriptions**

ICSTLL43

0. General information



1. The contrastive approach



- Many lesser-known languages were first documented by missionaries, whose interpretations of linguistic facts were framed by the tradition of Latin grammar.

Competent Latinists were quick to state that a certain grammatical ‘category’ was not to be found in a given language – and equally rash to take this as a sign of mental primitiveness.

Unfamiliar conceptualisations, on the other hand, could remain unrecognised.



- While innovative descriptions and cross-linguistic comparison have certainly broadened our perspectives on such ‘non-Latin’ issues as conjunct/disjunct marking or evidentiality, descriptive, and even more so comparative, linguists still get entrapped by the Latin model or its simplified English-based variants, whenever the feature to be described appears similar enough to well-known features of one’s own language.

The quest for language universals further enhances the over-emphasis of similarities and the neglect of differences in meaning or structure.



- In opposition to this comparative trend, I want to take a contrastive stance, emphasising the structural differences of Tibetan languages or non-(Indo)-European languages in general.

The differences may be subtle and hidden in the detail, and may not be apparent in standard descriptions of languages, nor may they show up in data obtained by standard questionnaires.



- I should like to exemplify this problem with expressions of dissimilitude (a.k.a. comparison).

In this case, the situation in the outside world appears to be quite manageable:

We have two entities, A (the item to be compared) and S (the standard to which something is compared), to which we ascribe, for the sake of simplicity, a perceptible and measurable, i.e. scalable property X.

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2. DPA Differentiating Property Ascriptions



- Comparison can be seen as a special case of **Property Ascriptions**.
- For a naïve speaker, Property Ascriptions would be of three types:
 - neutral ascriptions: *A is X = A has the property X*
 - likening ascriptions: *A is as X as S = A is like S with respect to property X*
 - dissimilating ascriptions: *A is X-er than S = A is unlike S with respect to property X*



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- However, it is clear that Simple Property Ascription (SPA), such as *s/he is small* or *s/he is big*, implies that the person or item spoken of has the property *small* or *big* to a degree, most other persons or items do not have.

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(If the person or item would be of average size, we would usually not assign the properties *small* or *big* in a neutral context.)

- SPA is thus inherently a special kind of Dissimilating Property Ascriptions (DPA).



- Comparison as a *linguistic concept* falls into two domains:

a) Equative Comparison (EC): describing two entities as being similar or likening one to the other in general or with respect to some property.

b) Non-Equative Comparison (NEC): describing two entities as having essentially the same individual property, but to a *different degree*:

Peter is rich, but Mary is richer.

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- To this I should like to add, as another type of DPAs,

c) Categorical Contrasting (CC): describing two entities as being essentially different, that is, as not having the same individual property or as ascribing the property in question positively only to one item and not to the other.

Peter is poor, but Mary is rich.

Unlike Peter/ In contrast to Peter, Mary is rich.

Mary is rich, but Peter is not.

Of course, this implies that Mary *is richer* than Peter.



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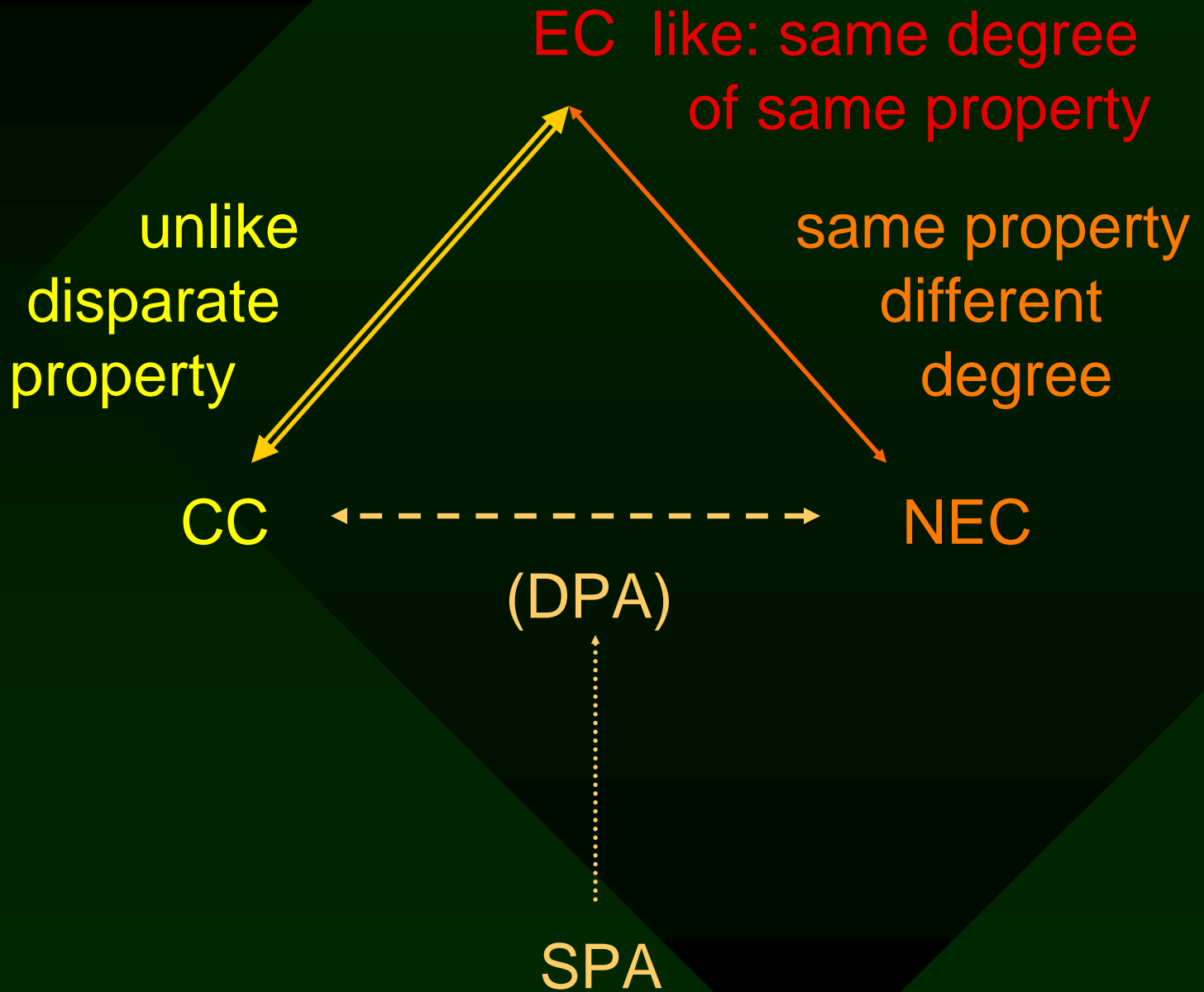
- CC is thus the true opposite of EC, while NEC takes an intermediate position. What is common to all three conceptualisations is that in each case there is one item (**S**) singled out as a standard, against which the second item (**A**) is judged. All three conceptualisations thus seem to stand in opposition to SPAs, where no standard is explicitly mentioned.



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However, as already noted, it is also clear that a property will be ascribed only if it is noteworthy with respect to an implicit average standard.





3. DPAs in Tibetan

U
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- Despite the terminology used in various modern grammatical descriptions, Tibetan did not originally have a class of *basic* adjectives (nominal adjectivals), but a class of verbal adjectivals, which, like other state or inchoative-resultative verbs, originally had two verb stems.

In Old Tibetan, it is only these verbal adjectivals that can be used for *predication*: *A is X* or rather *A X-es*.

In most of the Modern Tibetan varieties, the verbal usage is preserved in *relational predications* (corresponding to comparison in European languages or in Ladakhi, also implying some kind of *dynamicity*).



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- Nominal attributive adjectives (*the X(ing) A*) are derived from the mono-syllabic verbal root in several ways, most often by *po*, *bo*, *mo*, and *ma*, the nominaliser *pa/ba*, the suffix *can* /tʃän/ ‘having’, etc. They can be used in EC, but typically not for DPA where the verbal noun (VN) would be used. Balti and Ladakhi, however, increasingly allow the use of adjectives for DPA.

	OT
V	<i>che, ches</i> ‘be, get big’
VN	<i>che-ba</i> ‘big-ing’
ADJ	<i>che-po</i> ‘big’

	LAD
V	/tʃhe/ ‘get big’
VN	/tʃhea/
ADJ	/tʃhe-nə/



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- Unlike some Inuit and North American Indian languages and some artificially designed languages, Tibetan verbs do not have a comparative morphology either.
- Hence (most varieties of) Tibetan do not or cannot make use of analytical constructions with the help of quantitative adjectivals as these would be verbs again.



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The standard construction for a situation, where *A is X-er than S* is:

S-BLACKBOX **A X-ing**



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The standard construction for a situation, where *A* is *X-er* than *S* is:

S-BLACKBOX *A* *X*-ing

which might be paraphrased as

‘in blackbox-relation to *S*, *A* *X*-es’.



- The morpheme in question takes the forms

-(i)-(b)a-saŋ ~ *-saŋ* in Shamskat

-e-saŋ ~ *-saŋ* in Kenhat

-la-s or *-ba-s* in Old and Classical Tibetan

-i or *-e* is the genitive marker, which typically appears in postpositions

-ba is a non-analysable morpheme

-la corresponds to the dative-locative marker

Classical Tibetan *-s* and West Tibetan *-saŋ* might be related to the originally syllabic morpheme *-sV*, introduced into Tibetan to derive ablative and instrumental markers from the dative-locative and genitive marker respectively.



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From our perspective, we would expect a relation in terms of graduality or *more* or *less*.

In fact, in many cases, an interpretation in terms of graduality is *possible*.



- Warning:

All translations are given as literal or analytical as possible, but even then **they merely reflect the current state of art of *my* understanding.**

For better comprehension I will add in italics more *literary* paraphrases, based on the closest possible rendering of the intended meaning in the goal language English.

Such paraphrase **should not be mistaken for the intended meaning *in Ladakhi*** or as the only possible interpretation. It is only expected to be the most common interpretation in a particular situation.



A

ŋi sem dela jotpari[gi] miŋun
I-Gen heart that-D/L existing-Gen people-Pl

S

rintfani ser-basaŋ
costly-Gen gold-blackbox

X

rkon.
be.scarce

‘The people [who I bear] in my heart scarce [i.e. are precious] in blackbox-relation to [all the] costly gold.’
~ *The people [who I bear] in my heart are dearer to me than [all the] costly gold.*
(Sham-KHAL96, *Ñilza Aŋmo*)



- In other cases, however, this interpretation becomes problematic:



A

Ladakse *trhims*
Ladakh-Gen custom

S

tʃhircjalpe *trhims-**asan***
foreign-Gen custom-**blackbox**

X

soso *thonduk.*
different look-Prs

‘The Ladakhi customs, **in blackbox-relation** to the foreign customs, **look different** (visual knowledge).’
(Sham-TYA, elicited)



- Are the Ladakhi customs really more different than the foreign customs, that is, do the foreign customs and the Ladakhi customs share the property of being different???



- Are the Ladakhi customs really *more different* than the foreign customs, that is, do the foreign customs and the Ladakhi customs share the property of being different???

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Or does the expression simply describe a contrast?

~ *The Ladakhi customs differ visibly from the foreign ones.*



4. Other usages of the blackbox-morpheme





4.1 The relations

earlier than, before

below

above

The relations below and above are typically expressed by the corresponding postpositions. As a third option besides the use of the blackbox-morpheme, an ablative may be used. The choice of the particular construction depends on the distance of speaker and addressee from the standard item. The blackbox-morpheme is preferred when location **S** is in considerable distance to speaker and addressee, but it *does not* imply that location **A** is *further* down or up. Location **A** could thus be *closer* to speaker and addressee.

*ŋa skje-**asan***
I be.born-**blackbox**

ŋe atfo
I-Gen elder.bother

*lo khatfige-**ŋonla***
year some-early-DatLoc

tronŋs.
die-Past

‘**In blackbox-relation to** my being born, at some years early, my elder brother died.’

~ *My elder brother died some years **before** I was born.* (Sham-TYA, elicited)

*ŋa **kjesan***
I be.born-**blackbox**

kha manbo ta lo.
snow much fall-Past QoM

*zak nise-**ŋana***
day two-early-DatLoc

‘**In blackbox-relation to** my being born, at two days early, a lot of snow fell down, [they] say.’

~ *[They] say that two days **before** I was born, a lot of snow came down.* (Ken-GYA, elicited)



- a *Juru-(b)asan̄ thurla / gjenla* (blackbox) >
 b *Juru-na thurla / gjenla* (Abl) >
 c *Jur-i-thurla / -gjenla* (PPos)

‘below Lamayuru’

(a: S is far away; b: S is close by, same height; c: neutral position; a is preferred, since Lamayuru is far from Leh)

- a *khamb-e-thurla /-gjenla* (PPos) >
 b *khamba-(b)asan̄ thurla /gjenla* (blackbox) >
 c *khamba-na thurla /gjenla* (Abl)

‘below the house’

(a: neutral position; b: S is far away; c: S is close by, same height; a is preferred, since the actual location of the house remains unspecified)
 (Sham-TYA, elicited)



4.2 The relation

between generations

(as an alternative to the possessor construction)



meme-gjape,
ancestor-king-Gen

do-basan *meme-gjape* [tʃhagraps]
that-blackbox ancestor-king-Gen genealogy

‘[the genealogy/ history] of the ancestor king(s)
(and) **in relation to that/those**, the ancestor king(s)’
~ *the history of the ancestor king(s) **and again** of
the ancestor(s) of that king/ of those kings*
(Sham-KHAL06-04a, *Langdarma*)



api-(b)asan

grandmother-blackbox

ama

mother

‘mother in blackbox-relation to grandmother’
 ~ *grandmother’s mother*

api-(b)asan

grandmother-blackbox

meme

grandfather

‘the grandfather in blackbox-relation to grandmother’

trhugu-basan

child-blackbox

trhugu

child

‘the child(ren) in blackbox-relation to the child(ren)’
 (Sham-TYA, elicited)



4.3 The relation

not only ..., but ...
in addition to, beyond



hapo-(ba)saŋ *hupoan* *tʃhatsoŋ.*
 morsel-Df-blackbox sip-Df-also get.cut.off-Past

‘In **blackbox-relation** to the morsel, the sip also has finished.’

~ *Not only the morsel, but also the sip got lost.*
 (Sham-TYA, proverb)

Said when a greedy person, not being satisfied with what s/he has, loses what s/he already had; also used as a warning against risky behaviour.



Juru-basaŋ,
(Lama-)Yuru-blackbox

mana,
absolutely

<i>gaŋma(:)</i>	<i>tʃhu</i>	<i>gaŋsejotsok</i>	<i>le.</i>
entire(-DatLoc)	water	fill.up[-ctr]-Perf	Hon

‘In **blackbox-relation** to Lamayuru, absolutely into the entire [region] water had filled.’

~ ***Not only** Lamayuru, **but** the entire [region] was totally filled with water.*

~ *The entire [region] of Lamayuru **and beyond** was totally filled with water.*

(Sham-KHAL06-04b, discourse on various topics)



«*l̥tos, aʒaŋ!*
look.Imp uncle

rgja-basaŋ *ston* *ʃaren*»
hundred-blackbox thousand rise-Prs

zere
say-CC

‘«Look uncle, **in blackbox-relation to** a hundred, a thousand [suns] are rising», [he] said’

~ ... **not only 100, but 1000** [suns] are rising, ...

~ ... **instead of 100, 1000** [suns] are rising, ...

(Sham-DOMc07 / KHAL07-01b, *Lhönpo Rikpacän*)



4.4 The relation

instead
rather than
not ..., but ...



snambu-basan *gofen* *khjon!*
 wool.cloth-blackbox brocade bring-Imp

‘In **blackbox-relation** to the woolen cloth, bring brocade!’

~ *Bring brocade **instead of** the woolen cloth!*

(Sham-KHAL06-04a, discourse on changing customs)

Comment (TYA): With persons and places, the preferred interpretation is *besides/ in addition to*. The interpretation *instead* needs additional support from the context. The preferred interpretation with other items than persons and places would be *instead*, but one could interpret the above sentence also as *Bring brocade besides/ in addition to the woolen cloth!* The latter interpretation would be enhanced by the addition of *yan* ‘also’ after *gofen*.



rdzunfik tʰaŋba-basan kho ʃi:n.
 lie-LQ tell-Nom-blackbox s/he die-Fut

‘In **blackbox-relation** to telling a lie [s/he] will die.’
 ~ *Rather than lying s/he would be dying.*
 (Sham-DOM, elicited)

tranbo jad-esan zunte tontrak tanduk.
 honest tell-blackbox lie-CC 1000 give-Prs

‘In **blackbox-relation** to talking honestly, lying [s/he] gives a thousand (visual knowledge).’
 ~ *Rather than/ Instead of speaking the truth, s/he would give a thousand lies.*
 (Ken-Gya, elicited)



Narrative concerning the Indo-Pakistan war 47/48

The Pakistani army had conquered Lower Ladakh. A smaller troop was residing at a place near the narrator's village. They had engaged a soothsayer, who then predicted a bomb attack by the Indians and suggested to move to a second place where they would be safer. While the troop was staying there...

ne do-basan diandu bam jonspa,
 then that-Df-blackbox this-into bomb come-CC

'Then, in blackbox-relation to there, the bomb came [down] here, and ...'

~ *the bomb did not come down over there, but here*
 (Sham-KHAL06-04b, Pakistan war)



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Such a view would not necessarily preclude that one of the relations might be gradual, and one might be tempted to argue that the relation expressed in DPAs is such a gradual one.

However, there is no reason to do so, except our linguistic conceptual bias, derived from the constructions we use in our own languages.





- None of the relations just presented implies a difference in terms of grades, but a categorical positioning of one item in relation to another (standard or anchor point). Even the relation *earlier* or *before* does not imply any kind of graduality, but simply a positioning on the time arrow 'left' of the anchor point.

Ladakhi DPAs could be understood as categorical relations of difference or contrast with respect to a certain property X. S either lacks the property totally (e.g., a very small person to which a tall person is contrasted) or remains unspecified with respect to the particular property (e.g., a person of average height, of whom one would hardly ever state in a neutral context by an SPA that s/he is big or small).



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- The literal translation for the blackbox-morpheme is thus something like *in relation to* or, more specifically: *in contrast*. In DPAs it should perhaps be translated as *unlike*.

The morpheme might be best characterised as a relational morpheme (Rel).



dezaktʃik
these.days

ze:nak,
say-Prs

mana,
ever

«*Siatʃheni*
Siachen-Gen

Kaŋriŋunla,
glacier-Pl-DatLoc

mana,
ever

elmet
carelessness

matʃo!
do-Prhb

snön-i-basaŋ
early-Rel
Imp

intizam
preparation

tʃose *ʃruŋseduk!»*
do-CC guard.stay-

‘These days (I) heard [the Prime Minister] saying, truly: «Do not, ever, be careless at the Siachen glacier etc., **in contrast to/ unlike earlier** guard [it] by being prepared!»’

~ ... *guard it by **being better prepared than earlier**...* (Sham-KHAL06-05a, Pakistan)



- The last example illustrates that NEC, such as *better than*, which imply a gradual relation, may be used in English and other European languages for situations of categorical contrast. In many, if not most, cases, where one says *take better care this time*, it is implied that the addressee *did not* take care, at all, previously.



- Similarly, in Tibetan CC must be used in situations of rather gradual differences:

tʃaŋma *khampesaŋ*
tree house-Rel

miʃar *tʃige* *thoŋak.*
meter one-Gen/Instr be.high-Prs

‘The tree, **in relation to** the house, high-**es** by one meter (generic knowledge).’

~ *The tree is one meter **higher than** the house.*
(Ken-GYA, elicited)



5. Conclusion

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CC focuses more on the difference as such, defocussing from, or even denying, a shared property,

NEC is based on an implicit basic similarity, the shared property and focuses thus more on the gradual difference.

The two constructions are not fundamentally opposed to each other as both may be found in the primary domain of the other.

- The fact that CC can be used in the primary domain of NEC and *vice versa* is no proof for the semantic or functional identity of both constructions. It rather illustrates the flexible, non-categorical character of grammatical forms or constructions, ...



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... which allows us to *roughly* understand what the other person means, even if s/he speaks a structurally different language.



- Linguists, however, should go beyond such *Quick and Dirty Operating Systems* of understanding, ...



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... and while trying to work out the similarities in languages, we should not forget the differences and the reasons why they are there.



Leh after the flood

I should like to thank those persons who were *different enough* to make me come closer to an understanding of their language:

meme Tundup Tshering, Khalatse
Menggyur Tshomo, Gya
Tshering Dolkar, Tya
Tshewang Tharchin, Domkhar

*Tshanmala
skudrintfhe!*

