FROM SPEAKING TO DOING –
the case of Tibetan bya and Kurtöp nak
1. Introduction

The Classical Tibetan verbs √bya and √bgyi, Old Tibetan √brgyi both do not only mean ‘do, act’, but also ‘speak, say’. The second meaning is taken by many scholars as a mere extension of the first, as stated, e.g., by Schuessler (2007):

A few verbs with the meanings ‘to think, to say’ or other abstractions are apparently semantic extensions of verbs ‘to be, to do, to act, to go’. … WT byed-pa, byas ‘to make, fabricate, do’ > zes byas-pa ‘thus said, so called’ (i.e., marks direct discourse); … Lushei tiître / tiître < tiiitre / tiitre ‘to do, perform, act, work; act towards; say; to think, consider, feel, wish’; Mandarin Chinese → wéi³ 為 ‘do act’ in the phrase yǐwéi 以為 ‘to consider …., to think’ (lit. ‘take something to be, take something for).
Similarly, Hyslop (2017: 79), suggests that the use of Kurtöp ngak as a *verbum dicendi* and as a quotative is a mere ‘extension’ from the basic meaning ‘do’, and further (p. 237), that the “main verb ngak ‘do’ still retains its original meaning in some contexts but is also used as a verb ‘say’”.

However, cross-linguistically, the opposite development or extension seems to be more likely, cf. Heine & Kuteva (2002).
2. From ‘say’ or ‘speak’ to ‘do’ and ‘act’

Note: time constraints won’t allow reading out the examples, they will be found in your handout.

Apologies, if it is going too fast!
2.1. Etymologically related verbs and nouns

In the case of the verb √bya with the meaning ‘speak’, the relationship to potential cognates (inherited or loaned) is quite complex.

Elsewhere, I argue that quite a few speech-act-related verbs and nouns, including √bya ‘speak, say’, are related through four types of sound alternations, three of which are also common in other Tibeto-Burman languages.

These concern the instability of vowels, the alternation between nasal and voiced or voiceless oral stop, the alternation of postconsonantal glides -r ~ -y ~ -w (Tibetan only Cr ~ Cy), and the Tibetan metathesis Cr > sCr > rC (Zeisler 2023).
‘speak’: *mrao > 

1. smra > rma; smo-n (Tibetan metathesis) / > mV
2. *p/rao > *pya(o) > *by/wa > p/bV;

Hani (Caiyuan) /mi³¹/,
WrB: mrwak ~ prwak or pro ~ prô (/prɔ³/), Pattani /prəi/ or /prài/, Saker (Luish), now called Sak (Asakian) /prɨ/, Rangoon /pjɔ⁵⁵/, Jinuo /pjɑ⁴²/ or /pjɛ³¹/, Lotha Naga /phyo/, Tiddim /paːu²/, Chokri (Naga) /po/ or /po³⁵/, Gurung /põq ba/, Angami, Mikir /pu/, Athpare /pik-/; Sema (Sumi) /pi/, Lisu, /bæ³³/ ‘speak, tell, discuss, scold’, Lalo, Yi /bi³³/, Sani, Ahi, Yi /bɛ³³/ or /be⁴⁴/, Sunwar /bwaːk-/, Lushai /bia-k/ (bìa-I, bîak-II) (from STEDT)*

Plus Kurtöp /bja/ ‘invite, call, summon’ (Hyslop 2017).

*Not all forms may be etymologically related, or if they are, their relationship is not necessarily one of inheritance, but could be due to (mutual) borrowing.
There are further a few Tibetan utterance-related compounds that may point to an underlying more original function as *verbum dicendi*:

*bya.dgaḥ* (~ *bya.sga*) ‘reward’: in the olden times, rewards were most likely proclaimed and accompanied with words of praise or ‘words’ *bya* of ‘pleasure’ *dgaḥ*.

*bya.gtoṅ* ‘communication’ (*ḥphrin.gtoṅ*) or ‘secret password’ (*gsaṅ.brda*), where *bya* can only mean ‘speak’ or ‘speech’. This expression also appears in the *Mi.la.ras.paḥi rnam.thar*, though not as a compound, but as a free combination of noun and verb, cf. *ces bya btaṅ* ‘thus [she] gave the information’ or ‘warning’ (*Rus.pahi Rgyan.can*, ed. 1989: 41).

*bya.de* ‘sb. who tells secrets’ with *bya.de skyel* ‘to tell a secret (slang)’ and *bya.shor* ‘to have a secret leak out’ similarly point to the act of speaking, rather than doing.
In the case of Kurtöp √ŋak, one can point to the etymological relationship with a set of Chinese *verba dicendi*:

* mOC *ŋaʔ ‘speak’, *ŋan ‘speak, speech, talk’, and the possibly related *ŋans ‘console’ (*ŋaʔ); ‘saying, proverb’ (*ŋam) (Schuessler 2007: 588).

In accordance with these forms, there is also a set of related Classical Tibetan counterparts:

*ṅag ~ dṅags ‘speech, talk, word’, a derived verb sṅag(s), bsṅags, bsṅag, sṅog ‘praise, (re-)commend, extol’, and a further nominalisation sṅags ‘incantation, magic formula’.

Given these correspondences, there cannot be any doubt that the speech-act-related meaning of √ŋak is primary, and that the use as a verb of action must be secondary.
2.2. *bya* ‘to be called, read’ and *byas* ‘said’ in Classical and Old Tibetan

As is well known, the gerundive participle of stem III *bya.ba*, lit. ‘to be called’, is used for naming. This function also underlies the use of *bya.ba* with letters and more permanent inscriptions, which are to be read out, i.e., to be spoken aloud.

In the 15th-c. *Mi.ła.ras.pahi rnam.thar*, there are at least two instances where the nominalised form *bya.ba* refers to the content of a letter.
(1) *Mi.la.ras.paḥi rnam.thar*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a.ma} & \text{+s} & \text{ña} & \text{+s} & \text{bskur-ba-ltar} & \text{byas-pa} & \text{+hi} & \text{yi.ge} & \text{«…»} \\
\text{mother} & \text{+ERG} & \text{I-ERG} & \text{send-NLS-like} & \text{do.PST-NLS+GEN} & \text{letter} & \\
\text{bya-ba-žig} & \text{bris-nas} & \text{rgya} & \text{byas-te} & & \\
\text{say-NLS-LQ} & \text{write-ABL} & \text{seal} & \text{do-LB} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

‘[My] mother wrote a letter, made as if I had sent it, saying / to be read as «…», sealed [it], and …’ (Rus.paḥi Rgyan.can (1452–1507), ed. 1989: 42.16–43.3)

(2) *Mi.la.ras.paḥi rnam.thar*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{yi.ge} & \text{sprad-pa} & \text{zur-žig-tu} & \text{bklags-pa} & \text{+s} & \text{«…»} \\
\text{letter} & \text{deliver.PST-NLS} & \text{side-LQ-LOC} & \text{read.PST-NLS+INSTR} & \\
\text{bya-ba-žig} & \text{hdug-pa} & \text{+s} & \text{yi.ge} & \text{+hi} & \text{don-ni} & \text{ma-go} & \\
\text{say-NLS-LQ} & \text{exis-NLS+INSTR} & \text{letter+GEN} & \text{sense-TOP} & \text{NG-understand} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

‘When [I] read the letter given [to me] aside, it was one saying / to be read as «…»; [but] I did not understand the sense of the letter.’ (Rus.paḥi Rgyan.can, ed., 1989: 43.11–44.3)
The 13th-c. *Biography of Dharmasvāmin*, shows the same use of *bya.ba* with an inscription:

(3) Biography of Dharmasvāmin, Aśoka legend

*bltas-pa+s*  
look.PST-NLS+INSTR

*sgrom.chuṅ-žig-gi.steṅ.na yi.ge ḥdug-pa-la*  
box.small-LQ-PPOS:above letter EVD.exist-NLS-ALL

«*ma-ḥoṅs-pa+ḥi dus-su*  
NG-come.PST-NLS+GEN time-LOC

*rgyal.po dbul.po dbul.po-žig-gis rñed-pa+r-ḥgyur-ro»*  
king poor poor-LQ-ERG find-NLS+LOC-become.PRS-SF

*bya-ba ḥdug-pa+s rgyal.po kbro-ste ...*  
say-NLS EVD.exist-NLS-INSTR king be.angry-LB ...

‘and when [they] had a look, there was an inscription on a small box, and when it became apparent that it said/ was to be read as: “In the future, a very destitute king will obtain it”, the king became furious.’ (see Champa Thupten Zongtse 1981: 98, 100)
In these cases, an interpretation as ‘to be said’ in the sense of ‘to be read as’ fits much better than an interpretation as ‘to be done’.

After all, a letter (or an inscription) is no longer to be done, it is done. A letter (or an inscription) itself is also not doing or saying anything. If it did so, then stem II byas should be used in a narrative.

What is still to be done, and to be done by a human being, is the reading; and in all likelihood this was done aloud.*

*Cf. the European tradition: Scholars assume that reading aloud (Latin clare legere) was the more common practice in antiquity, and that reading silently (legere tacite or legere sibi) was unusual.[8] In his Confessions, Saint Augustine remarks on Saint Ambrose's unusual habit of reading silently in the 4th century AD. (Wikipedia)
Stem II *byas* is commonly found in Old and Classical Tibetan texts as one of the various *verba dicendi* that may be used after a citation.

In the Old Tibetan texts, while there is a general preference for diversification, the use of different *verba dicendi* differentiates between different speakers in dialogues or settings with more than two speakers.

In at least some Classical texts, this strategy is used more systematically to describe differences of status or differences of focus and empathy between two dialogue partners.
In the following text fragment from the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, the dialogue partners are a group of elders who are in search of a ruler, still the narrative focus and closer to the implied ‘we Tibetans’ than the second speaker, at that moment still a complete stranger (even though he eventually becomes the first ruler according to the legend). For the speech of the elders \textit{byas} is used, for the stranger the speech introduction \textit{na.re} and closing \textit{zer} are used.
‘Now, [you], who (surprisingly/apparently) has a very wonderful tongue and fingers, do you [also] have corresponding powers?’ When saying this, he replied, saying: «[Yes,] [I] am potent (?) with very great magic powers.» «Well then, [we] should appoint [him/you] as our lord», having said [this] …’ (Mkhas.pa Lde.ḥu (fl. 13th c. ?), after 1261, ed. 1987: 226-227.)
In the *Biography of Dharmasvāmin* (Roerich 1959), likewise from the 13th century, one finds a similar strategy. In the legend of Kalidasa, who allegedly began as an idiot, who literally sawed off the branch upon which he sat, one can find the use of *byas* for persons of relatively higher status speaking to persons of relatively lower status, who then reply with *zer* (*± na.re*).

The status asymmetries (high vs. low) are as follows:

a king (*byas*) vs. his daughter (*na.re* + *zer*),
a pandit (*byas*) vs. the king (*zer*),
an idiot (Kalidasa to be) at the court only stammering (*zer*),
and the newly gifted Kalidasa (*byas*) vs. the king’s daughter.
In the *Mi.la.ras.paḥi rnam.thar*, one can observe a further perfection of the person-related distribution with five *verba dicendi*:

*gsuṅ*, *gsuṅs* ‘hon. speak’ for speech acts of narrated speakers of high status,

*žu*, *žus* ‘request’ for narrated speakers addressing persons of higher status, and

*gyis* ‘tell!’ for commands,

*zer* ‘say’ is used for narrated speakers of equal or lower status than the main narrator,

*byas* ‘spoke, told, said’ is used mainly for the main narrator’s (i.e., Mi.la.ras.pa’s) utterances towards equals or persons of lower status, e.g., Mi.la talking to his sister, (5).
‘[Pe.ta, Mi.la’s sister] asked: «Are you a human or a ghost?» When [I] said, «I am Mi.la ‘Happy-to-hear’,» …’ (Rus.paḥi Rgyan.can, ed. 1989: 158)

*byas* is also used for a narrated speaker referring to his/her own speech (the teacher Mar.pa), and, in the case of two narrated speakers of equal status, for the person more closely associated with the main narrator, e.g., Mi.la’s sister in a conversation with their aunt, (6).
The aunt appeared at one end of the bridge, and when she said (low empathy): «Niece, don’t remove the bridge, [your] aunt is coming», [Pe.ta] answered (high empathy): «Exactly because of that I’ll remove the bridge», upon which [the aunt] said (low empathy): «Niece, you are right but … Put the bridge in place! If you don’t [want to] put [it] in place, then [at least] tell [your] elder brother «(that you have seen) that I have arrived!›», and then …’ (Rus.paḥi Rgyan.can, ed. 1989, p. 180)
This distribution shows that for the classical authors *byas* was still an ordinary *verbum dicendi*.

Whether it is the speaker or the person closest to the speaker or narrator, whether it is the main personage of the narrative, or whether it is the person of relatively higher status in the dialogue, the choice of *byas* in contrast to *zer* reflects the distinction, and/or differences in empathy.

In my opinion, it would be rather odd not to use a verb of speaking to mark the distinction, but to use an every-day verb for unspecified ‘doing’ instead. The use of *byas* for the distinguished speaker may be due to a higher register in which an old-fashioned and, in ordinary speech, obsolete word could have been preserved.
In the legend about the first ruler of example (4) above, the elders suggest that because of the latter’s marvellous features, they should *make* him king. This is not so much a doing but a proclamation or invitation.

In (4), *ḥchol* ‘appoint’ is used. Other variants of the same legend may have again *ḥchol* ‘appoint’ (7), *žu* ‘request’ (8), or *bya* (9) and (10).
(7) Rgyal.rabs gsal.baḥi meloṅ
«ḥdi-ni nam.khaḥ-nas hoṅs-pa+ḥi
this-TOP heaven-ABL go.PST-NLS+GEN
lha.sras yin-pa+r-ḥdug-pa+s |
god.son be-NLS+LOC-EVD.exist-NLS+INSTR
ḥo.cag-rnams-kyi rje ḥchol-lo» zer-te |
we-excl-PL-GEN lord appoint.PRS-SF say-LB

‘«As this one appears/ seems to be/ looks like/ is probably a son of the gods who has come from the heavens, let [us] appoint him as our lord!», [they] said and ...’ (Sa.skya Bsod.nams rgyal.mtshan (1312-1375)

(8) Mkhas.paḥi dgah.ston
«lha.yul gnam-nas hoṅs-pa+ḥi btsan.po+r ḥdug |
god.land heaven-ABL come.PST-NLS+GEN scion+LOC EVD.be
ḥdi-la bdag.cag rje.bo Ḻu-dgos» zer ||
this-ALL we.excl lord hum.request-need say

‘«[He] appears/ seems to be/ is probably a scion who has come from the country of gods, the heaven. We should request him [to become our] lord», [they] said’. (Dpaḥ.bo Gtsug.lag Ḫphreṅ.ba (ca.1504–1566)
(9) Bšad.mdzod yid.bžin nor.bu

«ḥdi lha+ḥi yul-nas ḥoṅ[s]-pa-ḥdug |
this god+GEN place-ABL come.PST-NLS-EVD.exist

ñe.ruṅ-gi rje bya+ḥo» žes |
we.self-GEN lord do/say.GRD-SF QOM

‘«This one ] appears/ seems to have come/ most probably came from the land of the gods. We should make/ proclaim [him] our own lord!» So [they said.]’ (Anonymous, 1400s, see Haarh 1969)

(10) Chos.ḥbyuṅ me.tog sñiṅ.po

«ḥdi-ni gnam-las byon-pa+ḥi btsan.po ṅo.mtshar.can-žig
this-TOP sky-ABL hon.arrive.PST-NLS+GEN scion marvellous-LQ
ḥdug-pa+s | ho-rnams-kyi jo.bo bya+ḥo» žer-te |
evd.be-NLS+INSTR we.excl-PL-GEN lord do/say.GRD+SF» say-LB

‘«As this one appears to be a marvellous scion, who has arrived from the heavens, [we] should make/ proclaim him our lord», [they] said and ..’. (Ñaṅ.ral Ñi.ma Ḥod.zer (1124–1192), ca. 1175–90, ed. 1988: 159)
This parallelism indicates that the latter verb also refers to an act of communication. After all, one does not *make* a ruler like one makes or produces, say, a pot or a statue of clay.

One has to introduce him(/her), explain about him(/her), get his(/her) consent, then, together with some magical formulae and other ritual performances, (s/)he is publicly proclaimed as ruler.
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If one accepts the verb √bya as a genuine *verbum dicendi*, then one can find suitable full verb usages, apart from citations, also in the Old Tibetan documents. At the very least, it becomes difficult to decide whether we deal with an utterance or with an activity.

In (11), two tribal leaders have become discontent with their lord. They decide to join the upcoming ruler of Spu on the other side of the river. This is the beginning of the historical lineage of the Tibetan emperors. When the two men approach their new overlord, they must *declare* their loyalty to him, before they can show it through their acts.
Given the political importance of formalised speech acts in general, and more particularly in the archaic aristocratic society of Tibet, it is rather unlikely that in this context an every-day verb of doing is used with an extended meaning, rather than a genuine *verbum dicendi* of high reputation.
3. The path: from saying via thinking and conjunctions to acting

Saxena (1988) has shown for several Tibeto-Burman languages that verbs with the meaning ‘say’ may develop various functions, some of which are seemingly unrelated to the notion of speaking. Among the related functions she mentions:

a) naming or labelling,
b) ‘quotative’ and ‘evidentiality’, that is, marking of personalized and impersonal or unspecific hearsay information,
c) onomatopoetic expressions,
d) the causal conjunction ‘if you say why’ for reasons or causation, and
These are attested in Ladakhi and more generally in the Tibetic languages and in Kurtöp.

a) CT: with frozen quote verb ces ‘such’: ces bya.bahi X ‘the one to be called X’, Balti: zer-b.i X, Ladakhi: zer-k(h)an-e X ‘called X (say-NLS-GEN)’; Kurtöp: sako tsho ñak-khan-gi ‘(the lake) called Sako Lake’ (say-NLS-GEN) (Hyslop 2017: 116, ex. 101)

b) CT: with frozen quote verb ces ‘such’: ces byas ‘such said’, LT: -s (< zer), Balti, Ladakhi: lo, zer(s) ‘said’; Kurtöp ñaksi wenta ‘is said’ (say-NF be) (Hyslop 2017, e.g., p. 76, ex. 23)

c) Ladakhi: e.g., thu zer! ‘say thu!’ , i.e., ‘spit!’; Kurtöp: tankalin tonkalin ñaksi ‘saying dingeling dongeling’ (say-NF) (Hyslop 2017: 85, ex. 54)

d) CT only with frozen quote verb: ce-na ‘if [someone] says’ Balti tʃa zerbana, Ladakhi tʃia zerna ‘why say’; Kurtöp: zhâ ñaksi ‘why’ (what say-NF) (Hyslop 2017: 168, ex. 229)
Among the seemingly less related functions, Saxena (1988) mentions:

e) question word complementizer and embedded questions,
f) purpose conjunction,
g) conditional conjunction,
h) marking of deliberate acting, and
i) “expletive” (possibly the same as d) above).

Functions e) to g), might be described more generally as a strategy for extracting embedded propositions.
3.1. The first part: *zer(d)e* in West Tibetan

As for embedded propositions e), Ladakhi speakers clearly prefer a “direct” quote closed with an adverbial form *zere* or *zerde* (say-LB) to embedded nominal constructions, cf. examples (12) with embedding and (13) with the *zer(d)e*-construction.

(12) Shamskat, dialect of Teya (Lower Ladakh)

\[
\text{gergan-is} \ \text{ṭhugu-un-la} \ \text{ma-sil-khan-ifia} \ \text{jat} \ \text{ṣoks.}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{lllll}
\text{teacher-ERG} & \text{child-PL-ALL} & \text{NG-study-NLS-PPOS} & \text{memory} & \text{frighten.PST} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘The teacher scolded the children harshly for not having studied’. (Possible, but not common.)

(13) Shamskat, dialect of Teya (Lower Ladakh)

\[
\text{gergan-is} \ \text{ṭhugu-un-la}, \ «\text{sil-ma-sil-ba!}\)» \ \text{zer-e, jat} \ \text{ṣoks.}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{lllll}
\text{teacher-ERG} & \text{child-PL-ALL} & \text{study-NG-study-emp} & \text{say-LB} & \text{memory} \ \text{frighten.PST} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘The teacher scolded the children harshly, *saying*: «[You] did not study at all!» (Preferred construction.)
In the West Tibetan languages, the non-finite form *zer(d)e* may also be used to extract mere thoughts (14) and (15).

(14) Ladakhi, dialect of Domkhar (Shamshkat)

```
danʧik  ë+i  gadi  Ḳku-se-kher-tsok.
```

some.days.ago I+GEN car steal-LB-take.away-PST.INF

«*su-s khaers*»  *zer-e*  samba  tean-tsana,  ...

who-ERG take.away.PST say-LB thought give.PRS-when

‘Some days ago, my car was stolen. When I thought about who [could] have stolen [it], …’ Lit.: When I thought about [it], saying [to myself]: ‘Who [could] have stolen [it]’, …’

(15) Purikpa, dialect of Kargilo

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s院副院长  doʧs-et,  samba  manmo  jon-et,
```

heart-ALL be.iritated-ASS thought a.lot come-ASS

*tfi  bo-ok  zer-e.*

what do-POT say-LB

‘(I) have sorrows, (I) have a lot of thoughts, saying [to myself] ‘what should I do?’’ (Zemp 2018: 529, ex. 628, adapted, my translation)
Saxena (1988: 383) points to the use of *zere* for the complementiser function e) and the purposive function f) in what she calls “Ladakhi,” but which is a Baltipa dialect of Khaplu in Pakistan (cf. Read 1934: 67). The purposive function f), as in (16), is not commonly used in the Ladakhi dialects,* but I have observed it in a Baltipa dialect spoken in Ladakh, cf. (17) and (18). Bashir (1996) gives further examples for the dialect of Skardo. Read (1934: 67), accordingly treats *zere* as a fullfleged conjunction.

*We find *zer(d)e* with prayers, where it can be still be interpreted literally. In the context of consulting a doctor, some speakers use *zer(d)e* for the implied wish that the visit may yield an improvement of his/her or his/her child’s condition, e.g., dialect of Sumur (Shamskat): «phan-tik!» *zer-tse, thuu doktar-la stan-pin.* *‘[In the hope/ wishing] *that* [he] will recover*, I showed [my] child to a doctor. One speaker from Fāsum also mentioned a conventionalised use with *putting a padlock in order that* no thief will come in or rather: *thinking/ hoping that* ...
‘In order that he might have no trouble on the road, I sent my servant with him’. (Adapted from Read 1934: 67, cf. Saxena 1988: 383). Alternative translations could be ‘Saying: «there is no need for you to have trouble on the way»,/ Thinking [i.e., saying to myself]: <he does not need to have trouble>, I sent a servant with him’.
Baltipa, dialect of Tyaksi (India)

rdo-s-po mi ljaχ-la doafari intsuk : rdo-s təŋ-se-met-na,
lock-DF person good-ALL therefore be-INF/DST lock apply-LB-NG.EXIST=PERF-CD
de nəŋ-p+eanu ljaχmo laχʃe thoŋ-na,
that room-DF+PPOS good thing see-CD
kho-e-san  sıɲ  khjør-et. ...  
he-GEN-fm heart go.astray-ASS=PRS
rχunma-la rdo-s-i  sı-faŋ  rtsiruk-tsí met.
thief-AES lock-GEN what.at.all esteem-LQ NG.have.ASS
amma mi ljaχ-la sıɲ  khjør-et zer-e,
but person good-AES heart go.astray-ASS=PRS say-LB
rdo-s təŋ-ma-in-tsuk.
lock apply-NLS-CP-INF/DST

‘The lock is [only] for the reputable persons because of that: if a lock is not applied, [one who] sees a precious thing, will yield to temptation (lit. his heart will go astray). ... The thief has no respect at all for a lock, but lest a reputable person’s heart may go astray, [one] applies a lock’. Lit. ‘saying/ thinking that a reputable person’s heart may go astray’, one applies a lock’.
(18) Baltipa, dialect of Tyaksi (India)

`safar-i straŋb-i bale ataapo+n-ena`  
`safar-GEN street-GEN soup father.grandfather.PL-PPOS:ABL`

`drul-en-jot-p+î las'tsir-tfik in-tsuk.`  
go-CNT-EX-DF.GEN work.row-LQ be-INF/DST

`d+o defila in-tsuk :`  
`that·DF that.for be-INF/DST(=GEM)`

`bala-bantsat-na struŋ-se-du⁰k-tfik! zer-e.`  
`accidence-calamity-ABL protect-LB-stay-DM say-LB`

‘The ‘street soup’ of the second Islamic month (`ṣafar`)’ is a tradition that comes from our forefathers. That one is for that [reason]: `that it may protect against all calamities [associated with this month].’

Note “=” is used for “equals”; it does not mark clitics; the latter will be marked as “··” further below.
3.2. Use of √bya as conjunction and for thinking

In Standard Spoken Tibetan, the verb form *byas* /ʨhɛː/ can be used to chain items in enumerations of the type X *byas*, Y *byas*, then Z ..., here example (19), and as a clause-chaining conjunction, indicating sequentiality, and as connector for a durative construction with *bsdad* ‘stay’, here example (20).

In the first case, the meaning ‘do’ is less appropriate than a notion of thinking or saying, and in the second case, which may have developed from the enumerative function ‘that said’, the lexical meaning is completely bleached out, and this seems to be the stage that may lead from one meaning (‘say’) to the other (‘do’).
(19) Standard Spoken Tibetan (Tournadre, Sangda Dorje 2003)

spags byas, lug.štɕa bcos.pa byas, done/said
kneaded.tsampa done/said mutton.meat boiled

denäs žo byuñ-na, ḥgrig-gi.min-gro.
then curd appear-CD be.ok-NG.FUT-PROB

‘Kneaded tsampa, that done/ said, boiled mutton, that done/ said; then with some yogurt, that should be enough’.

(20) Standard Spoken Tibetan (Tournadre, Sangda Dorje 2003)

kha.lag rgyas.po že.drags bzas byas,
food extensive very eat.PST-CONJ

gžas.rnam.thar btañ-byas-bstad-kyi.red.
opera.song give -CONJ-stay-FACT.FUT

‘When they’ve eaten well, they sit and sing songs from the Tibetan opera’. Or rather: “they sing songs from the Tibetan opera for quite a while.” – Perhaps originally: ‘They have eaten well, that said, they sit and sing…’
‘He fled, **and that done/said**, when he had come (lit. completely fled) down [the stairs], having gotten outside of the gate, well, he called out: «the queen’s pants have been stolen!», **and that done/said**, well, he ran away [back home]’.
The past tense form *byas* has also been observed as representing thoughts. Justifiably, Vokurková (2008) treats it as an instantiation of the verb ‘do’, and analyses the phrase *byas-na* as “if I did”. However, the phrase might be equally reinterpreted as ‘if I said’ or more loosely as ‘I’d say’.

(22) Standard Spoken Tibetan (Vokurková 2008: 148, ex. 186, adapted)

*na-s*  *byas-na*  *khoṅ*  *naṅ-la*  *yod.ma.red.*
I-ERG  do.PST-CD  s/he.hon  home-ALL  NG.FACT.exist

‘I don’t think he is at home./ In my opinion, he is not at home’. Lit.: ‘As I said (to myself)/ thought he is not at home.’ Or: ‘I’d say he is not at home’.
3.3. The Kurtöp data

A closer look at the Kurtöp data reveals a complex picture. First of all, /ŋak/ as a lexical verb unrelated to speaking does not simply mean ‘do’. Several of Hyslop’s examples point to a broader meaning ‘happen, be the case’, see (23)–(25), even ‘be, exist (at a certain place)’, see (26)–(28):

‘Nothing happened at all’. (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 79 ex. 35.)

‘It will be this much’. (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 289, ex. 516.)

*Note “LPO” stands for limited personal observation, Hyslop’s ‘mirative’; “··” is used for clitics.
(26) Kurtöp

\[ \text{khako } \text{ŋak-nani tsama gor-ta} \]
uphill  \text{ŋak-COND some take.time-PRS/SIM.LPO}

‘If it is [located] uphill, it takes a while’. (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 144, ex. 169.)

(27) Kurtöp

\[ \text{mau chötshok } \text{ŋak-si dethoni } \text{ŋaŋ-na} \]
down religious.office \text{ŋak-NF immediately receive-PST.LPO}

‘As their religious office is/ was [located] down there, [we] got [it] immediately’. (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 351, ex. 652.)

(28) Kurtöp

\[ \text{khwe thamca rō-ña } \text{ŋaŋ} \]
water all valley·LOC \text{ŋaŋ}

‘All water being [located] in the valley…’ (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 141, ex. 160.)
Like zer(d)e in West Tibetan, it is very common in Kurtöp to use ɲaksi as an unspecific (and bleached) verbum dicendi before more specific verba dicendi or other speech-related verbs, such as insist, persuade, etc.

(29) Kurtöp

ŋai kwa ɲak-si lap-male
I.ERG tooth ɲak-NF tell-NLS

‘I will utter, (by) saying: «tooth»‘. ≈ ‘I will utter the word [for] «tooth»‘. (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 237, ex. 391.)

(30) Kurtöp

ciŋku·gi ga·na nāmlo ɲak-si çu-male
small·GEN time·LOC year ɲak-NF hum.say-NLS

‘To tell, (by) saying: «at the time, the year, when [we] were small»’
(Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 236, ex. 390.)
(31) Kurtöp

\[
\text{khit pra } \text{jur-lu } \eta\kappa\kappa-si \text{ mōlam tap-si}
\]

s/he monkey become-IMP \(\eta\kappa\kappa\)-NF prayer do-NF

‘uttered a prayer, (by) saying: «turn into a monkey!», and...’ ≈
‘prayed that she should become a monkey, and ...’ (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 372, ex. 705.)
(32) Kurtöp

And again they [the king’s assistants] insisted, saying: «open the door», and then, when the inside door was opened, and then —, then [the couple] told [them], saying: «there is no hunting dog» and then they [the king’s assistants] deceived [the couple], saying: «[we] don’t want your jewel inside» and …’ (Excerpt, adapted from Hyslop 2017: 347f., ex. 646.)
Related to this is the likewise very common use of \( \eta ksi \) or \( \eta ak \) alone to close up propositions that are embedded under mental verbs as if they were direct thoughts spoken aloud. The proposition is indicated here with angled brackets.

(33) Kurtöp

\[ \text{tshewang} \cdot \text{gi} \quad \langle \text{karma} \cdot \text{gi} \quad \text{khit} \cdot \text{na ga} \rangle \quad \text{\( \eta ak \)} \quad \text{\text{bran-ta}} \]

Tshewang\cdot\text{ERG} <Karma\cdot\text{ERG} s/he\cdot\text{LOC} like> \eta ak know-PRS/SIM.LPO

‘Tshewang knows that \text{\( <\text{Karma loves him}>\)}’. (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 95, ex. 61.)

(34) Kurtöp

\[ \langle \text{\eta ara} \cdot \text{ko} \cdot \text{ja}[\eta] \quad \text{\etaen} \quad \text{go-ikina} \rangle \quad \text{\( \eta ak \)} \quad \text{\text{sam-si}} \]

\<\text{I.self}\cdot\text{LOC}\cdot\text{also} marriage need-FUT/POST\> \eta ak think-NF

‘Thinking that \text{\( <\text{I also need a marriage}>\)}…’ (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 187, ex. 274.)
‘Now when (we) say «corpse», now (we) should think of it as <a cow’s ... umm ... a water buffalo’s corpse>‘. (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 220, ex. 343.)
Finally, ŋak may also follow other verbs. Depending on what affix follows, ŋak may function as a temporal coordinating conjunction, (32), line 2, and (36) to (38), but it may also indicate a more abstract causal relationship or reason (39). The coordinating conjunction corresponds to the use of Standard Spoken Tibetan /ʨε̊/ (< byas) for clause chaining, exx. (20) and (21) above.

(36) Kurtöp

bas·gi su·ko ge ŋak-si dot ni·pala
bus·GEN below·LOC go ŋak-NF sleep stay-NLS

‘[I] went under the bus and [then] slept there’. (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 112, ex. 88.)
(37) Kurtöp

\[\text{tshe tshon\textsc{\textcdot}na ge } \etaak\text{-si } \text{tshe lok ra-taki wen-ta}\]

DM business\textsc{\textcdot}LOC go DM return come-PRS/SIM be-LPO

‘[He] had gone for business and [thereafter] was coming back’. (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 350, ex. 651.)

(38) Kurtöp

\[\text{chorten-the kora thun } \etaak\text{-mo}\]

chorten-INDEF circling do \etaak\text{-CT}

\[\text{mi-the ra-ta\textsc{\textcdot}ri}\]

man-INDEF come-PRS/SIM-LPO\textsc{\textcdot}REP

‘Reportedly, a man came, while [she] was circumambulating the chorten’. (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 290, ex. 522.)
‘Now, because we were going to see a sick person, we didn’t take many gifts’. (Adapted from Hyslop 2017: 339, ex. 634.)
4. Conclusion

The examples of Kurtöp /ŋak/ and West Tibetan zer corroborate the development from speaking to doing via thinking and intermediate bleaching as conjunction.

While the intermediate step, the use of a conjunction, particularly for embedded propositions, is completely unattested in the case of √b(r)gyi, and only marginally reconstructable for √bya, the Kurtöp verb √ŋak not only shows a use as a conjunction, but it also has a clear etymological base as *verbum dicendi*.

In the case of zer, which seems to be in the initial stage of becoming a mere conjunction, there is likewise no doubt that we deal with a verb of saying and not of doing.
The Tibetan verb √bya as a *verbum dicendi* has an immediate counterpart in Kurtöp /bja/ ‘invite, call, summon’, has other cognates, and its basic utterance-related meaning also shows up in some nominal compounds. Traces of the development into a conjunction are still found in Standard Spoken Tibetan.

It is uncontested that the Old and Classical Tibetan verb forms *bya* and *byas* are commonly used as *verba dicendi*, but there are also ambiguous cases, where our preconceptions about whether such usage is just a secondary meaning extension or the original meaning of √bya lead to different results.

It may thus be expedient not to take the meaning ‘do’ always as the self-evident default meaning.
Following Saxena (1988), one can sketch a general path-way for the development from speaking to doing, that may apply also to other such doublets, as in Lushei or elsewhere in the Tibeto-Burman languages:*

(specific type of utterance) > unspecific saying > extraction of embedded propositions <> thinking > conjunction > unspecific state of affairs > unspecific doing and acting (> making).

*Similarly, Campbell (2008) describes the first part, namely the development from SAY into a conjunction for various Sinitic languages.