

***A Tibetan Verb Lexicon: Verbs, Classes, and Syntactic Frames*, Paul G. Hackett. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publication, 2003. xiv + 209 pages.**

**On the utility of the Tibetan grammatical tradition**

**Bettina Zeisler**

Tibetology in the West has for a long time been the study of Buddhist religious and philosophical texts, particularly texts that were no longer available in the original Prakrit or Sanskrit versions. The Tibetan language was often seen merely as a vehicle to reconstruct the original versions, particularly since many scholars feel more at home on a linguistic ground much closer to the European mind. Grammatical descriptions of Classical Tibetan are typically based on western concepts of classical languages, and thus mainly on the western understanding of Ancient Greek and Latin, and perhaps also of Sanskrit. Unfortunately, most of the philologists are not trained in modern linguistics, and similarly most comparative linguists do not know much about Tibetan. The few linguists who do know Tibetan often lack the necessary experience with Old or Classical Tibetan texts. Linguistic research on Tibetan thus mainly focuses on the modern spoken Tibetan varieties, particularly on the Lhasa dialect. Classical and Old Tibetan are taken into account only in so far as one can use their lexicon for the reconstruction of the proto-language.

Until quite recently, studies in syntax and semantics of Old and Classical Tibetan have been practically non-existent. As far as the Tibetan verbs are concerned, the available lexical resources do not sufficiently specify the valency or argument structure, and due to the Tibetan discourse structure, example sentences are usually incomplete in the sense that crucial arguments have been deleted, because their referent has been specified somewhere else in the preceding text or could have been derived from the context by a competent native speaker. Moreover, with the exception of Jäschke (1881 = JÄK), the textual source is never specified, and thus the examples are deprived of their regional and temporal context.

Any minor contribution to the study of the semantics of Tibetan verbs should thus be welcome, and so should the attempts of Paul Hackett (2003) to provide us with a description of the syntactic frames of the Tibetan verbs. Apparently the “Tibetan verb lexicon” (shortly TVL) met a high demand, particularly in the U.S., which made it practically impossible for the European reviewer to obtain a copy within the first year of the publication.

The TVL follows the traditional Tibetan description of *rnambbye* or semantic relations, but the distinction of eight verb classes, purportedly according to the syntactic behaviour of the verbs, is entirely based on Wilson (1992). Like this work, the TVL primarily addresses students and practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism. The example sentences are thus taken from a variety of religious and philosophical texts, most of which are translations from Sanskrit originals.

In most cases, unfortunately not always, the source of the example is identified by a *siglum*, but it would have been a sign of great compassion if the author would have added at least the page number if not the line. The author has included a fair number of collocations or phrasal verbs and, as an innovation in comparison to other dictionaries, these are listed under the heading of the verb entry. About perhaps half of the entries give Sanskrit equivalents for the verb.

The author is wise enough to “state that this edition [...] is consciously thought of as a ‘First Edition’ in that much work remains in additional documentation of the range of variation in Tibetan syntactic structures”. He expresses the hope that “any inadequacies of this first edition will be outweighed by its usefulness” (preface, p. xii). Unfortunately, the present version of the TVL cannot even be called a ‘trial edition’, and if books were as dangerous as household appliances or cars, the publisher would have been forced to call back the TVL immediately—or more probably: would have taken much more care to escape product liabilities.

In order to become a useful resource, the TVL must be improved in several ways. Most generally, a revised edition should come closer to the promises of the present work. It is certainly not fair to compare the content of a *belle lettres* publication with the publisher’s advertisements. In the case of academic and similar publications, however, it is typically the author him- or herself who provides the necessary information, if not the final formulation. The advertisement on the web page of snow lions ([http://www.snowlionpub.com/pages/N64\\_12.php](http://www.snowlionpub.com/pages/N64_12.php)) reads as follows:

Covering over 1700 root verb forms and phrasal verb sub-entries, this lexicon incorporates a wide range of information never before included in dictionary form. Entries contain English meanings, Sanskrit equivalents, and full classical literature example sentences along with related sentence structure information.

An extensive introduction to contemporary linguistic theory applied to Tibetan verbs presents the theoretical underpinnings of the lexicon.

The critical points are in particular: comprehensiveness and completeness, reliability and consistency of the data, theoretical background and methods of compilation. The last point will have to be discussed in greater detail.

#### COMPREHENSIVENESS

The impressive number of 1700 “root verb forms” (what exactly does that mean?) in the above-cited advertisement is highly misleading. The number of Classical Tibetan verbs can be estimated to lie in between the appropriately 1200 verbs listed in the Tibetan Chinese dictionary (Zhang et al. 1993 = TCH; some of the verbs to be found in the main body are missing in the list, which also excludes adjective-verbs, linking verbs and their contracted negated forms) and the 1550 or so entries to be found in the Comparative Dictionary of Tibetan Dialects (Bielmeier in preparation; it includes a substantial number of reconstructed verbs, not attested in Old or Classical Tibetan, but adjective-verbs are likewise not included). The TVL covers a total number of 692 classified entries and two entries without any classification (*rno* ‘be sharp’ and *hbyay* ‘be purified’). Since a single verb may have more than one entry,

one may say that the TVL covers not much more than half of the verbs to be found in the TCH.<sup>1</sup>

Not all of the entries do have an example sentence. E.g. on p. 52, which is displayed by the publisher as a sample page, three of seven entries: *khug* ‘turn (into), change (into), get, make’, *khom* ‘be free, have leisure’, *khyag* ‘be able to handle, be able to hold’ are given without example sentence. Similarly, out of 331 verbs of class V, 102, nearly one third, are without example sentences. Worse than that, most of the example sentences are syntactically intransparent. Typically, crucial arguments are deleted since they might have been mentioned somewhere else in the text from which the sentence is drawn. Most often, the missing argument is the first or ‘subject’ argument, thus the not uninteresting question whether a sentence follows the ergative pattern (use of the instrumental case or *rnamdbye gsumpa* for the first argument) or not cannot be answered. Since sentences with the full argument structure can be found only exceptionally, the chance that they provide us with information not given in any other dictionary is rather low.

No syntactic classification is offered for the collocations, although one may at times observe that the bound arguments in a collocation differ from free arguments in their syntactic behaviour, e.g. the free goal argument of the verb *ñan* ‘listen to, obey’ typically receives a locational (*ladon*) marker, independent of the question whether this argument refers to an animate speaker or an inanimate speech or sound, whereas the bound argument *skoba*, a verbal noun of the present stem of the verb *sko* ‘appoint, command’, in the collocation *skoba ñan* ‘heed the command [!]’ remains unmarked (since verbal nouns or nominal elements derived from the present stem of bivalent agentive verbs are typically agent-related *bdag*, whereas the patient orientation is typically expressed by verbal nouns and nominal elements derived from the future stem *gžan*, cf. also Zeisler 2004: 264, the translation should have been ‘follow the commander’). The change in the syntactic behaviour may be semantically motivated or may perhaps indicate a certain integration of the argument into the verb as a first step of object incorporation or compound formation. In such cases, the bound argument may give way to a new free argument showing again the original case marking and/or to a second argument without case marking. Studies on the syntactic behaviour of compound verbs or collocations in Classical Tibetan are yet to be written, and the TVL has missed the chance to fill an important gap.

#### RELIABILITY AND CONSISTENCY OF THE DATA

One of the entries without example sentence, *ḥkhul* ‘subdue, force (to do)’, is labelled as belonging to class III, which comprises so-called “Nominative-Objective Verbs” (absolutive - locational case or *ladon* marking), further specified as “verbs of motion”, “nominative action verbs”, and “rhetorical verbs” all of which would be *thamidadpa* ‘not different’ in the sense that the ‘object’ of the action (whatever that may be) is basically identical with the subject (p. 36). It is immediately obvious that the translation given in the TVL does not match this classification, since the verb ‘subdue’ involves (a) an intentional agent who is performing the act and (b) some other animate being who suffers from the act. The TCH classifies the verb as *thamidadpa*, which

in this case signifies that the subject is not an agent of a [+control] action *byedpapo*, but an experiencer of a ["control] state (for which the traditional grammar does not have a suitable term). The verb *ḥkhul* thus should be translated as 'be able to subdue'. The TCH further provides us with a full example sentence of the ergative pattern with the subject in the instrumental case and the second argument without case marking: *boḥbus g.yag miḥkhul* 'A donkey cannot subdue a yak'. Class III would yield a completely different sentence, such as *\*boḥbu g.yagla miḥkhul*. Unfortunately, the classification *thamidadpa* versus *thadadpa* as used in the TCH gives us neither unambiguous semantic information about valency and the [±control] or volitionality distinction nor unambiguous syntactic information about the case marking of the first argument (see also next section). Since the author mentions the TCH as one of his sources, one may ask: where does he get his classification from and why does he not reproduce the example with an adequate siglum?

The verb *žon* 'mount, ride', on the other hand, is labelled as belonging to class V "Agentive-Nominative Verbs" (p. 36), which should comprise only sentences of the ergative pattern. The example sentence *rtala mḥonpar žon bžindu* 'like someone who is mounted upon a horse' not only does not give us any clue about how the subject is treated, but it also does not fit the definition of class V, because the second argument, the horse, has a locational *ladon* marker. If the subject were in the instrumental case, we would expect the verb to be in class VI "Agentive-Objective Verbs" (p. 36) as in the case of the honorific counterpart *ḥchib*, where the first argument is likewise missing (note that the example for *ḥchib* in the TCH, lacking a first argument, shows a second argument without case marking, which together with the classification *thadadpa* yields the standard ergative pattern and thus class V, while according to Jäschke 1881 the second argument of *ḥchib* should have the dative/locative marker, nothing being said about the first argument). If the subject were unmarked the verb should be in class III. The translation 'mount', which seems to be closest to the original meaning, would correspond to the second alternative.

The TCH classifies the verb *žon* as *thadadpa*, which indicates that the subject should be in the instrumental case. The examples, which are all incomplete, not showing the first argument, indicate that the second argument might be unmarked or in the dative/locative case. The examples in JÄK indicate that the second argument is preferentially in the dative/locative case, but they are likewise all incomplete. Sarat Chandra Das (1902) gives an additional example with the first argument in the instrumental case, but no second argument. Goldstein, Shelling, and Surkhang (2001) finally provide us with a complete example of the ergative pattern for Modern Tibetan: *khos rta žonnas Lhasar phyinpared* 'He went on horseback to Lhasa'.

In the *Gzermiyig*, a Bonpo text of considerable antiquity, we find the following sentences: *khyodkyis ḥbrugrta sḥonpo žonla | khugla šogcig* 'You take (lit. ride/mount) the blue dragon horse, and go and summon [him]!' (*Gzermiyig*, Francke 1924-30, Fol. 87a2), following the ergative pattern, but also *bagma rtala žonnas* 'as/when the bride rides/rode (on) a horse' (*Gzermiyig*, Francke 1924-30, Fol. 14a4), following the pattern of class III. It is possible, that the different sentence patterns convey a subtle difference in meaning. Similar to English *ride* vs. *ride on/get a ride*, the two constructions might perhaps express

a difference in control over the horse (Christopher Beckwith, personal communication). Francke contrasts the two phrases in his translation as ‘mount a horse’ and ‘arrive on horse back’. Particularly in the context of a wedding, a bride might be expected not to ride a horse as she might do at other times, but to sit on it passively and let herself be taken away. But the first example does not necessarily imply more than just mounting the horse, which is a simple motion. The notion of eventually getting to another place (which would be implied in the connotation of driving the horse) is typically expressed by a different motion verb. It is also possible that the two sentence patterns were for some time used alternatively without much difference in meaning. They may also reflect differences in the underlying spoken varieties that were fused in the literary language. It is interesting to note that speakers of modern Central Tibetan varieties prefer the ergative pattern, but might use the motion pattern in combination with another motion verb (Jampa Lobsang Panglung, personal communication), while the Ladakhi people only use the motion pattern, whether in combination with another motion verb or not.

Another problematic case are the obviously etymologically related verbs *gtse* | *gtses* (| *gtse* | *gtses*) ‘harm, endanger’ without example and *ḥtshē* | *btses* | *gtse* | *gtses* ‘cause harm, be harmful’, both labelled as belonging to class V, although the first example for the latter verb shows that the second argument is in the JĀK dative/locative, which would again yield class Vi or III: *galte gžanla ḥtshē byedpa* | *byispa rnamskyi ranbžin na* | ‘if it were the nature of children to cause harm’. The second example: *bstanpa semscanla tsheba medpa* ‘teachings that are not harmful to any sentient being’ is invalid, since the only verb is *medpa* ‘not existing’, while *ḥtshēba* functions as a noun ‘damage, harm’ (TCH) or ‘enemy, persecutor’ (JĀK). Similarly, the form *ḥtshē* in the preceding example is not necessarily a verb. It could equally be a noun ‘harm’ as accidentally reflected in Hackett’s translation, or an adjective-verb ‘be harmful’ (Goldstein, Shelling, and Surkhang 2001 give both readings), but in that case, it should have only one argument, namely the entity of which it is predicated. The noun phrase *gžanla* ‘to others’ is an additional beneficiary (or in that case: maleficiary) argument or adjunct. *ḥtshē* (as a verbal form) and *btses* are not attested in the TCH. For the verb *gtse* | *gtses* one can find two sentences without first argument and one complete sentence with inverted word order, all of them showing that the second argument has a dative/locative marker, cf. *ralugla spyankis gtseba* ‘goats and sheep being threatened by wolves’. Only the fourth example shows that the second argument can remain unmarked: *tshigrtsbkyis miḥi sems gtse* ‘a harsh word hurts a human heart’.

JĀK gives two incomplete examples, showing that the second argument might either remain unmarked or be in the dative/locative case. They are formed with the auxiliary causative verb *byed* ‘do’, similarly to the first example of the TVL. According to an interesting observation of Hackett (p. 31, note 11) this auxiliary would not affect the case marking of the first argument. This is, however, not generally true as a counter-example from the *Bkaḥgdams glegsbam* (264v.3, Herrmann 1983) shows: *Ḥbrom-Rṅog gñis minna* | *Kabadaṅ khobo khyedkyis ḥbralbar byas* | ‘If the two, Ḥbrom[ston] and Rṅog [Legspaḥi Shesrab] had not been, you would have managed to get Kaba [Śākya Dbaṅphyug] and me separated’.

Since modal and auxiliary verbs might interfere, it would be save to shift such examples into an appropriate subentry.

Mention should also be of the verb *thuy* ‘drink’ which is correctly labelled as belonging to class V, although the only example given, illustrates the possible use of the dative/locative marker for a patient, either for emphasising it or for deriving a partitive reading (ablative function of *la*; cf. Zeisler 2006: 77, no. 9): *smigrgyuḥi chula ḥthuyba bžin* “[it] is like drinking within [!] the water of a mirage”. The sentence should be better translated as ‘like the drinking from the water of a mirage’.

The reviewer was quite surprised to find the adjective-verb *mdzes* ‘be beautiful’, which is not even accepted as a verb in the TCH, within class V (agentive verbs) with the translation (a) as a transitive-causative verb “ornament”, which is not corroborated by the example sentence, and (b) as an intransitive-inagentive verb “be beautiful”, but the perhaps most striking example is *ḥbab*<sup>2</sup>, translated (a) as a transitive-causative verb “send down, pour (down), cause to come down”, although none of the two examples justifies such a translation, and (b) as “to alight (from), dismount” which could have been given under *ḥbab*<sup>1</sup> “descend, fall, flow downwards” labelled correctly as belonging to class III. The whole entry for *ḥbab*<sup>2</sup>, however, is labelled as belonging to class V. The transitive-causative counterpart *ḥbebs*, on the other hand, is translated (a) as “settle, cast down” (more or less correctly, but the basic meaning ‘cause to come down’ should have been mentioned first) and (b) as an intransitive and inagentive verb “fall”. Again the entry is labelled as belonging to class V, which would be correct for the first reading, but incorrect for the second reading, if this ever exists. The mistranslations of *ḥbab*<sup>2</sup> (a) and *ḥbebs* (b) concern the weather phenomenon *rain* and its figurative application: the *rain* or *rain of flowers* can be presented either as coming down by itself (*ḥbab*) or as being sent or caused by an unnamed mythical or cosmic force (*ḥbebs*). The choice of one or the other representation by Tibetan authors might be rather arbitrary and due to stylistic considerations. Unlike in English, the difference between intransitive and transitive-causative verbs is a fundamental category in the Tibetan language, reflected in the verb lexicon as much as in the syntax.

If the frequency of obvious mismatches between classification and example sentence, like those presented here, still appears to be almost tolerably low, this is merely due to the fact that more often than not the appropriate example sentences are not given, as well as to the fact that the classification of Tibetan verbs should have been relatively unproblematic in about 30 to 50% of the cases (including the verbs *ḥbab* and *ḥbebs*). Nevertheless, the examples given also indicate that although the author is skilled in the handling of computer linguistic tools for natural language processing and text retrieval he does not seem to be able to run a simple consistency proof.

The examples also show, that Tibetan verbs do not necessarily have a single or fixed frame, but that the frame can vary considerably without a significant shift in meaning. As far as the reviewer could observe, variations in the frame are taken into account only in so far they accompany a considerable shift in meaning. E.g., according to Wilson (1992: 630), the verb *ḥdod* ‘desire, assert’ is frequently found in both meanings with an absolutive instead of ergative first argument, in the TVL, however, the verb is only labelled as belonging to class V (perhaps because the double absolutive construction does not match the semantic definition of class I?).

In this connection, the non-consideration of verbal valency (see also below) proves to be extremely unfortunate. E.g. the verb *hbyed* with the meaning ‘open, divide’ (certainly not also “be divisible, be divided”) has a valency of two and follows the standard ergative pattern. With the meaning ‘divide up (into)’ it has a valency of three. The third argument, the resulting or produced state of the *x parts*, might be understood as belonging to the second *rnamdbye* relation, (cf. Situ Pañchen 1744: 224 ad *Rtagskyi Hjugpa* 24a-d for *bdudrtsir bsgyur* ‘transformed into nectar’) or as belonging to the fourth *rnamdbye* relation (cf. Prati Rinchen Dongrub, ed. 1992: 24 for *rgyandu gser brduñs* ‘hammered gold for/into an ornament’). Following the perhaps greater authority of Situ Pañchen, and the underlying principle (if there is any) of labelling all those ergative verbs as belonging to class VI that have one argument in the second *rnamdbye* relation, the verb *hbyed* with the meaning ‘divide up (into)’ should accordingly be labelled as belonging to class VI.

It remains the secret of Wilson and Hackett, why the trivalent verbs of class VI are not classified with respect to the (second or third) absolutive argument like the trivalent verbs of the give type (second argument in the fourth *rnamdbye* relation) or why there is no extra class for the bi- and trivalent verbs having one argument in the fourth *rnamdbye* relation.

A final note on the introduction (p. 1-34), the specification of the verb meaning and the translations of the example sentences: When mixing active and passive forms, verbs and nouns, the English entries are hardly equivalents, not even approximations to the meaning of a particular Tibetan verb. The author has made no attempt to make the essential difference between agentive and inagentive verbs transparent (cf. *hbab/hbebs*). He is likewise not concerned with the possible dynamic or non-dynamic connotations of a verb, and the translations of the example sentences demonstrate that both might be due to a more general unfamiliarity with the basics of Tibetan grammar, such as the function of the verb stems and case markers. The introduction shows that the author has some theoretical insight into specific linguistic problems (syntactic frames, collocations, and translation divergences) although this insight does not find any practical reflection in the main body of the work.

The rest of the introduction, particularly the sections on “verbal forms” (p. 10-21), are beyond discussion. Since they neither introduce the reader into modern linguistic concepts nor have much to do with the theoretical underpinnings of the lexicon, these parts should be simply omitted. To give only one example: The Tibetan construction: verbal noun plus locative purposive (*x-par*), falling under the second *rnamdbye* relation *las/yul* according to the traditional grammar, is classified by Hackett (p. 18-20) as “locative absolute” in reference to Whitney (1889, §§ 303b/e) (p. 33, notes 29, 30; the bibliographical reference for the Harvard edition under the title *Sanskrit Grammar* is to be found on p. 14, note 9; the first edition with the full title *A Sanskrit grammar: including both the classical language, and the older dialects, of Veda and Brahmana* was already published 1879 in Leipzig by Breitkopp & Haertel).

If, according to linguistic convention, “absolute” should indicate a non-relational or “non-case usage” of case morphemes with verbs or verbal nouns, functioning “as syntactic particles” or “conjunctions” (cf. Wilson 1992: p. 636 for the ‘objective’, p. 638 for the ‘agentive’, p. 644 for the ‘originative’, p. 651 for the

‘connective’),<sup>2</sup> why does Hackett not list all other ‘absolute’ constructions? Why is the non-case usage of the ablative marker *nas* following a verb—which does *not only* indicate “an action performed by the same agent/subject of the main verb” and, particularly in the case of a same subject, *not necessarily* an action or event “temporally prior to the main verbal action” (p. 17; why is the almost identical function of the *lhagbcas* {*ste*} not mentioned at all?)—why is this syntactic, clause chaining function not called ‘ablative absolute’ but “gerund”?<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it should have been self-evident that no Tibetan construction becomes a “progressive” (or whatever grammatical entity) just because it is translated with the help of the English present participle of *to be* (or any other English construction), such as in *rigspadan lungis rabtu bstanpar ranji hdodpa grub* “One’s own assertion is established within [!] being demonstrated through reasoning and scripture” (p. 19). The construction in question can be translated alternatively and perhaps even more elegantly as a noun: ‘in/with respect to a demonstration’.

As an exceptional positive point in the section on “verbal forms” one should mention the hitherto undescribed experiencer-oriented prospective verbal noun in *-kama* (p. 20) expressing that someone is about to experience an event. The classification as “future active” participle may not be the best solution (as it remains unclear whether the verbal noun might also be applied to agentive verbs), and it is certainly totally wrong for the description of the patient-oriented prospective verbal noun in *-rgyu* (p. 20f.) referring to an entity to be acted upon.

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND METHODS OF COMPILATION

The examples demonstrate how urgently we are in need of a valency dictionary for Tibetan verbs. But they also show that the matter is quite intricate and much more research is needed. Some of the problems of the TVL, however, lie in the academic and theoretical background of the author and Joe Wilson, who provided the classificatory scheme. The target of Wilson’s (1992) textbook and Hackett’s lexicon are primarily the students of the Tibetan language, and particularly those with an interest in the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. Within this setting it is certainly legitimate to chose a methodological background with which most Tibetan teachers are familiar. It is likewise legitimate to compile text-specific lexical resources for the study of religious and philosophical texts. In that case, however, one should be somewhat more careful with statements about the nature of the Tibetan language, such as those in the preface (p. ix) of the TVL:

A unique feature of Tibetan literature is its unprecedented level of morphological, grammatical, and semantic consistency over the span of more than twelve centuries, from the earliest translations of the *bKa’ ’gyur* and *bsTan ’gyur* to compositions of the twentieth century. This book, therefore, [...] reflects an analysis of texts written by educated Tibetan scholars well-versed in their literature. [...] The recognition of deviant grammatical forms implies a knowledge of standard grammatical patterns.

According to the author, all other texts, which might not correspond to the rather idealised or even fictional norms of the scholarly elite, are either “pre-standard” Tibetan, an attribute that should have been applied also to “the earliest translations” of the ninth century, or are even disqualified as “texts ‘written’ by illiterate authors” (p. ix). Why are there ironical citation marks for the word *written*? Should they indicate that the authors in question were not only uneducated (the weaker reading



of *illiterate*), but even unable to read and write (the stronger reading of *illiterate*)? One wonders how these texts could have come into written form, at all.

Given the more than inconsistent spellings of Tibetan verb stems (sometimes in one and the same text) and in view of possible case variations as mentioned above, the reviewer is particular sceptical with respect to the “morphological and grammatical consistency”, which might exist only in the wishful thinking of the Tibetan scholars. It seems that the ‘standard’ depends on time, region, and perhaps also on particular monastic schools. If we can interpolate from the ongoing discussions in Ladakh, the scholarly elite is in extreme disagreement about particular spellings. It should be mentioned, *en passant*, that the elitist stance against the writing of “illiterate authors” has serious socio-political repercussions as it is directed against any modest attempt of adapting the Tibetan script for the writing of the spoken varieties, which differ at least as much from Classical Tibetan as Italian and French from Latin or Hindi and Bengali from Sanskrit. Allowing only the classical ‘standard’ for writing, ultimately means that, e.g., the children of Ladakh are deprived from their right to get their education in their own language.

One should also not forget that the need of standardisation was only felt for the translation of religious and philosophical texts from Sanskrit, not for the production of autochthonous texts, such as biographies or historiographic work. Are the historiographers illiterate? Are the Bonpo scholars, who follow the Old Tibetan orthography (or an idealised version of it), illiterate? And, finally, are the grammarians illiterate who consistently use the ‘non-standard’ *dadrag*? Furthermore, many texts, whether autochthonous or translated, have been re-edited according to the latest orthographical fashion, some of them several times, so that particularly the important religious and philosophical treatises have been ‘normalised’ in due course. Unfortunately, Western scholars have always accepted the Tibetan fiction of a ‘standard’ and have likewise emended or ‘corrected’ ‘deviant’ spellings, which might, at best, be found in their footnotes. If one looks at the original versions, particularly of genuinely Tibetan texts, one might wonder, how many of the classical texts really qualify for the ‘standard’ or what the ‘norm’ might be. If we take the early Tibetan grammatical treatises as the sole normative source, then the texts of the 20th century certainly would have to be classified as ‘post-standard’.<sup>4</sup>

Couldn’t it be the case, that the grammar of the highly technical religious and philosophical translation genre is—not a deviation, but a very special sub-set of the grammar of the literary language of the 10th to 19th century? And shouldn’t we first try to have an understanding of the overall structure of the whole language before formulating judgements about ‘standards’ and ‘deviations’?

The question thus is not so much about the legitimacy of certain restrictions it is more about their usefulness. Is the restriction to a subset of all literary genres useful for the targeted audience? No doubt, it is. Is the traditional paradigm of *rnamdbye* or semantic relations useful for the beginner or advanced student of the Tibetan language? Miller (1991: 368) is very much in favour of the Japanese model where students begin their training with the *Sumcupa* and the corresponding commentary literature and thus become “to some degree at least familiar” with it. He complains that

In Europe, the grammarians and their tradition were aspects of Tibetology that the student came to late, and slowly, if at all. As a consequence, they remained secondary, subsidiary subjects, tangential to the mainstream of Tibetological tasks.

The reviewer has serious doubts about the benefits of a merely superficial familiarity. The point is not so much, that a Western student would be more acquainted with the traditional Western concepts. Practically, most of the students would not bother (as they might have forgotten all the basics learned in school). The point is also not that the underlying conceptualisations of the traditional Tibetan grammar have been developed for the structurally quite different nominative-accusative language Sanskrit, and do not match the case system of the ergative-absolutive language Tibetan. The Tibetan grammarians were not clumsy in adapting the Indian model to the Tibetan facts. The problem lies in the highly sophisticated nature of the Indian model itself. If it would supply only a description of syntactic behaviour or only a description of semantic roles, the mismatch between nominative-accusative and ergative-absolutive case marking could be easily sorted out. The Indian *kāraka*-relations, however, which provide the base for the Tibetan *rnamdbye* terminology, are intentionally ambiguous, they are basically semantic roles, but they are defined according to the syntactic behaviour of verbal arguments in a particular sentence type.

There have been doubts, whether the Tibetan grammarians ever understood the full dimensions of the Indian *kāraka*-relations and their implications for the Tibetan language. Although Miller (1991: 376) cannot laude them highly enough for their “intricate reworking of Indic grammatical models ingeniously recast in order to fit the structure of Tibetan”, he has to admit that they did not adopt the Pāṇinian model, but a “somewhat simplified and less involved version of the Indic tradition as popular among the Buddhist schools [...] and as exemplified by the *Kātantra*”. The Tibetan grammarians thus have resolved the syntactic-semantic ambiguity in favour of semantics (cf. Verhagen 2000: 291f.). It can also be observed that by doing so, they have, at times, taken the semantic categories a bit too literal (see below).

Fact is that certain parts of the *rnamdbye* theorems figure prominently again and again in the discussion of the ‘difficult points’ *dkaḥgnad* or *dkaḥgnas* of the basic grammatical texts. Unfortunately, until the present day, this did not give rise to a deeper metatheoretic reflection or a challenge of the theoretical foundations of the Tibetan grammar. It might not be too exaggerated or snobbish to claim that the average Tibetan teacher, the average Geshe, and perhaps even the average grammarian has no explanation for the reasons of the insolvability of the ‘difficult points’. And even if they had, could that be of any practical use to the students? The difficulties can be illustrated with the *ladon* markers, which already played a certain role in the examples given above.

Old and Classical Tibetan have eight morphemes to express various semantic relations between verbs and their arguments or between nouns: genitive {*kyi*}, instrumental {*kyis*} (obviously derived from the genitive), locative *na*, dative/locative *la*, locative/purposive (also known as ‘terminative’) {*tu*}, the two ablative morphemes *nas* and *las* (obviously derived from the first two locational morphemes),<sup>5</sup> the comitative (also known as ‘(as)sociative’) *daṅ*, while some quite important relations do not receive any morpheme. The Tibetan classification of

eight *rnamdbye*, however, follows the outline of the Sanskrit nominal endings, given here in the latinised case terminology:

1. <i>dñospo</i> ‘entity’, <i>miñtsam</i> ‘name only’	(‘nominative’)	no marker
2. <i>las, lasu byaba, byabañi yul, yul</i>	(‘accusative’)	<i>ladon</i>
3. <i>byedpa(po)</i> ‘doer’	(‘instrumental’)	{ <i>kyi</i> }
4. <i>dgos(-)ched</i> ‘purpose’, <i>sbyin</i> ‘charity’	(‘dative’)	<i>ladon</i>
5. <i>ñbyunñkhuñs</i> ‘origin’	(‘ablative’)	<i>nas, las</i>
6. <i>ñbrelpa, ñbrelsgra</i> ‘relation’	(‘genitive’)	{ <i>kyi</i> }
7. <i>gnas, gnasgñi, rtengnas</i> ‘location’	(‘locative’)	<i>ladon</i>
8. <i>gdagspa, ñbod</i> ‘calling’	(‘vocative’)	interjections

The mismatch is obvious. However, in the Indian grammatical theory, the second, third, fourth, fifth, and seventh case endings express specific semantic-syntactic relations between the verb and its arguments, called *kāraka*. Following this model, the eight *rnamdbye* do not specify eight ‘cases’ as morpho-syntactic entities, but eight (more or less) prototypical functional or semantic relations (of which the first, the sixth, and the eighth do not concern relations between a verb and its arguments). All polemics against the Tibetan *rnamdbye* system, that focus on the wrong number of case morphemes (e.g. Tournadre 1990: 192-198, Hill 2004: 81-84) miss the essential point.<sup>6</sup>

The Tibetan grammarians are certainly justified in assigning three functional relations to the group of the seven *ladon* markers, which consist of three separate morphemes: the locative marker *na*, the dative-locative marker *la*, and the locative-purposive marker {*tu*} with its phonetically conditioned allomorphs *du*, *-r*, *ru*, and *su*. According to the Tibetan grammatical mainstream, all three morphemes should have exactly the same function(s), although one can observe that with respect to the function *deñid*, most commentators would deny the applicability of *na* and *la*.

Rather exceptionally, one of the earlier texts, the 13th century (?) *Mkhaspañi khargyan* (Its authorship remains doubtful, although the colophon names Sakya Pañdita (Thupten Kunga Chashab [2000]: 189f.) establishes a specific relation between each of the morpheme and one of the three semantic relations: {*tu*} for the second, *la* for the fourth, and *na* for the seventh relation (verses 122, 130, 140, Thupten Kunga Chashab [2000: 203-210]), a distinction that comes quite close to the facts: in Old and Classical Tibetan, each of the three morphemes has one or more particular function(s) not (or rather infrequently) shared by the other morphemes: the locative morpheme *na* is predominantly used for the static location of an entity or action in space or time, additionally for the direction of a movement without destination (such as *leftwards*), the dative/locative morpheme *la* predominantly refers to a recipient or beneficiary, frequently to the direction and goal of an action or movement, rarely to a location, but occasionally also to the source of the movement, and the locative/purposive morpheme refers to the direction or goal of a movement, as well as to the purpose of an action, the resulting state after a transformation, and the content of a proposition, rarely a location.<sup>7</sup> There is, however, a certain functional overlap, particularly in the non-dynamic locative function, and this may have prevented the mainstream grammarians from making a categorical distinction.

The functional distinction for the application of *ladon* markers (as a totality) according to the mainstream grammarians is likewise not so far away from the above description of facts: the second *rnamdbye*, called *las(su byaba)* or (*byabaḥi*) *yul* (any translation would be misleading, see below), corresponds to a directed movement or attitude towards a particular target or goal (roughly the allative function). The fourth *rnamdbye* with the name *sbyin* ‘charity’ or *dgosched* ‘purpose’ corresponds roughly to the dative function. The seventh *rnamdbye*, called (*rtēn*)*gnas* ‘location’ or *gnasgzi* ‘local base’ designates a non-dynamic local relation.

However, the functional distinctions of the Tibetan grammarians are in several points somewhat against the naïve intuition. It is probably safe to say that most languages make a (grammatical or semantic) distinction between a non-dynamic spatial relation between two entities that are situated with respect to each other: *in*, *at*, *on*, etc. and a dynamic spatial relation between two entities that move towards each other: *to*, *towards*, etc. But the dynamic versus non-dynamic distinction of the Tibetan grammarians does not refer to the type of spatial relation but to the question whether the situation described is a non-dynamic state or a dynamic event or action *byaba*. The *rnamdbye* relation *gnas* ‘location’ is reserved solely for non-dynamic states. Therefore, since any movement or development *at* a particular place is a dynamic event, the turning of a wheel *in* a factory as well as the killing *on* the battlefield cannot be captured by the *rnamdbye* relation *gnas* ‘location’ (Skalbzanḥgyurmed 1981: 47, 1992: 29, Dmudge Bsamgtan 1990: 51ff.), it has to be subsumed under the second *rnamdbye*. This distinction has no counterpart in the Indic tradition, but it seems to be based on some misunderstanding of the Sanskrit term *kriyā* ‘action’. The critical comments of Dmudge Bsamgtan (1990: 49) indicate, that there have been dissident voices in the Tibetan grammatical tradition, which allowed the seventh *rnamdbye* relation *gnas* also for a dynamic event taking place *at* a particular location.

Similarly the fourth *rnamdbye* relation has been defined in a too narrow interpretation of the Sanskrit terminology (*tād*)*arthya* ‘purpose’ or *saṃpradāna* ‘recipient’ as a relation expressing the ‘beneficiary’ of an action. In this sense, all negative effects to a recipient are excluded. Throwing an apple *at* or *to*(wards) a cow can be interpreted as being beneficial for the cow, and thus the fourth *rnamdbye* does apply, but throwing a stone *at* or *towards* the cow cannot be interpreted as being beneficial for the cow, and thus the fourth *rnamdbye* does not apply. Likewise, an enlightened being, having transgressed all human needs and desires, cannot benefit from an offering (cf. also Wilson 1992: 635). The discussion about what is beneficial or not can become over-subtle and one can even hear the argument that if you give sweets to a child, which is ultimately not beneficiary for the child’s health or behaviour, then the fourth *rnamdbye* relation does not apply (Thupten Kunga Chashab, personal communication). All cases of non-beneficial actions involving a *ladon* marker are thus subsumed under the second *rnamdbye* relation.

The discussions may also concern the question about who is the real beneficiary: the recipient to which an object is transferred, e.g. the tree to which the water is drawn, or the agent who draws benefit from the prospering of the tree. Lce Khyiḥbrug, the author of the ninth century treatise *Gnas brgyad chenpo* ‘Eight [linguistic] topics, in great (detail)’, opts for the second solution, thus although the recipient has the *ladon* marker, the meaning is that the agent has the profit (Verhagen 2000: 287f.). This solution could at least heal the possible objection

that an inanimate tree cannot be a true beneficiary of its watering as it could have healed the objections in the case of *offering to the Buddha*.

All these subtleties are nothing against the conceptual problems underlying the second *rnamdbye*. Since the Tibetan term *las* corresponds to Sanskrit *karman*, describing *inter alia* the semantic role of a patient, the word *las*, as well as its substitutes, is commonly translated as expressing the syntactic relation of a ‘(direct) object’ and is similarly often treated as being equivalent to the ‘accusative case’ in Sanskrit or other Indo-European languages. However, the Sanskrit *kāraka*-relation *karman* (and Sanskrit accusative case marking) also includes the semantic role of a goal of motion as well as other particular constellations. Although, in Tibetan, the patient of an action (as the semantic counter part of the direct object) is not marked by any case morpheme at all in a neutral sentence,<sup>8</sup> it is nevertheless possible to say that the Tibetan *ladon* markers express the *rnamdbye* relation *las = karman*, since they are applied, *inter alia* for the goal of motion, the target of an activity, or the focus of attention or emotion, corresponding to several subtypes of the Indian *kāraka*-relation *karman* (see Zeisler 2006: 64-71 for more details). But the translation of *las/yul* as ‘(direct) object’ or ‘accusative’ or the use of similar designations such as Wilson and Hackett’s ‘objective’ is more than misleading.<sup>9</sup>

Confronting the beginner in Tibetan Studies with the Tibetan grammatical tradition seems to be a clear case of the application of the second *rnamdbye*. It is certainly not enough to make the students superficially familiar with the specific terminology and the dogmatic tenets. If the fourth *rnamdbye* should ever be applicable for the students, one has to teach them a lot more than just the *Sumcupa* and the Tibetan commentaries. The reviewer would suggest that these teachings are postponed until the students have sufficiently mastered the Tibetan language.

As for the TVL, a consistent categorisation along the conceptualisations of Tibetan grammar would do no harm to a beginner, as it could be ignored easily, but could still be beneficial for a linguist who knows best how to re-translate the terminology of one school into that of another, even though the conceptualisations underlying the Wilson system afford a certain amount of lateral thinking. In Wilson’s system, class II and III describe the same case marking pattern, as do class VII and VIII, while class IV on the other hand includes three different syntactic patterns. If the difference between class II and III is to make sense, at all, it must be based on the traditional Tibetan semantic distinction of *gnas* (only non-dynamic verbs) and *las* (dynamic verbs), while the difference between VII and VIII is based on the semantic distinction of *gnas* and *dogshed*. The last function, however, is only minimally accounted for by “class VII”, which consists of the single verb *dogso* ‘need’. Wilson himself (1992: 289-294) goes even further in stating, that the difference between class II and VIII is *not* meant to be a truly syntactic one, but merely a heuristic device “as a convenience for those who speak and think in English” (p. 291). He goes on to say (p. 292)—correctly—that the syntax of verbs of existence and verbs of possession is different and that

verbs of existence take nominative subjects and, sometimes, locative qualifiers. When the same verbs are used as verbs of possession, they take locative subjects and nominative objects (p. 293),

only to switch back to the warning

It must be kept in mind that this description of syntax is based on the English conception of subject and object. Translating Buddhism from Tibetan is an attempt to balance Tibetan grammar and syntax with a use of terminology that reflects English preconceptions about sentence structure (p. 293). [...] The syntax of sentences ending in verbs of existence is that (1) the things or people that exist are in the nominative case, as they are with verbs of possession, and (2) the places they exist are in the locative case, as is the possessor in the possession sentence. The reason for analyzing the syntax differently (distinguishing between existence and possession) is, again, for the benefit of those who mainly think and speak in English (p. 294).

In sum, there is a syntactical difference, but only in English, while the Tibetan syntax for the two verb meanings is identical. Wilson completely overlooks the fact that there is, actually, a syntactical difference between the two constructions. While the semantic relation of location can be expressed by all three locational case markers as well as by more specific locational postpositions, the semantic relation of possession can only be expressed by the dative/locative marker. This morphological restriction together with greater restrictions concerning changes in the word order could be taken as an indicator for a weak syntactic subject (Zeisler [2002]/to appear).

Wilson's classification is by no means meant to be a syntactic one and it fuses English sentence analysis along with case names of the traditional grammar ("nominative") with semantic role descriptions ("agentive") as found in modern linguistics and with functional descriptions along the lines of the Tibetan *rnamdbye* relations although in latinised form ("locative", "objective", "purposive"). The terminological and theoretical hodgepodge appears to be not very "convenient". Nevertheless, with six sentence patterns, the classification seems to be an improvement with respect to earlier descriptions, such as Tournadre (1996): 5 or Haller (2000): 4 basic sentence patterns. Note, however, that the total number of basic or main sentence patterns is eleven (see the table below, cf. also Zeisler [2002]/to appear and the discussion on <http://www.sfb441.uni-tuebingen.de/b11/b11fieldwork#case>, section 1-2).

Wilson's verb classification as presented by Hackett (p. 5) can be easily ridiculised, as it does not allow for other than binary argument structures (should Tibetan really have no single monovalent or trivalent verb?), but it might be still acceptable as a possibly didactically valuable selection of constellations that need a special attention. To avoid any misunderstanding, Wilson's verb classes, although eight in number (an auspicious number for the Indian or Tibetan grammarian), are not at all based on the Tibetan tradition. They are an innovation, meant to be didactically relevant. One may ask, however, whether the superficial reference to the Tibetan grammatical tradition and the likewise superficial reference to syntactic structures is not cheap showmanship. In a publication meant to be linguistically relevant—by its very title, which includes "syntactic frames", and by explicitly referring to the work of, e.g., Beth Levin (p. xiiif., note 5, p. 31, note 12, p. 32, note 18)—this kind of showmanship is simply unacceptable.

The originally psychological term 'frame' was introduced into linguistics by Fillmore (1968) within the theory of transformational grammar in the sense of a 'conceptual framework' of 'case relations',<sup>10</sup> but similar concepts of argument structure were developed in many other linguistic schools. The concept of valency and actancy was introduced by Tesnière (1959). Valency indicates the number of

arguments (actants or players) of a verb. There are, in principle, two possibilities to define the valency of a particular verb: either to count all possible arguments or to count only the obligatory and/or the semantically constitutive core arguments. The first approach faces the difficulty that the number of possible arguments varies from situation to situation and that some rather obvious semantic distinctions get lost. The second approach faces the difficulties of defining the necessary or obligatory arguments.

To give an example: In the sentences *The king died in the battlefield*, *The king killed his enemy in the battlefield*, the location *battlefield* is not constitutive for the meaning of the verb, since all states and events hold or take place somewhere. One may call such arguments, which are not motivated by the specific verb semantic, “satellites” (cf. Dik 1989: 184) or “adjuncts” (cf. Denwood 1999: 202-205). However, both verbs involve a player who either undergoes the *dying* or performs the *killing*, and the second verb further involves a second player who suffers the *killing*. These are the core arguments. The first verb has thus a (core) valency of one and the second verb a (core) valency of two. In the case of the sentences *The king went* and *The king went to the battlefield*, the location *battlefield* is obviously not obligatory for the understanding of the first sentence, but as a goal of the motion it is motivated by the verb meaning *going (somewhere)*. One may classify the verb thus as having a minimal valency of one or as having a maximal valency of two, or as being ambivalent having a valency of one or two, depending on the situation.

Hackett follows neither one nor the other approach: he includes adjuncts (but of course not all possible adjuncts) for verbs with a core valency of one, but he neglects them all when it comes to a higher valency.

A verb is an argument-taking lexical item which denotes an action, state, or process involving one or more participants. To know the meaning of a verb is to know both the number and type of arguments it requires (subject, agent, object, etc.), and the semantic relationship each argument has with the verb. The premise of this lexicon—and of Joe Wilson’s text—is that this set of properties built around the predicate-argument structure (or subcategorization frame) of a verb yields a classificatory scheme from which a student may infer the complete structure of a sentence based primarily on the terminal verb and number and type of accompanying arguments (p. 4).

Despite the linguistic insight expressed in his introduction to Wilson’s classification, Hackett is not able to realise that this classification does not at all allow a student (or linguist) to infer the complete structure of a clause and does *not* “provide a substantial basis for a verb subcategorization scheme” (p. 6). This lack of understanding is more shocking than complete ignorance (which still has a touch of innocence). Unfortunately, knowing the English meaning of a Tibetan verb approximately is not equivalent with knowing the number and type of arguments of that verb, and a fragmentary classification is thus—useless.

In order to demonstrate the gaps in Wilson’s classification the following table shows on the left side a condensed version of the verb classes, including the number of class members, and on the right side a possible syntactic classification of the corresponding sentence patterns according to valency and the type and position of arguments.<sup>11</sup>

## Wilson's verb classes in the TVL in contrast to a classification of sentence patterns

Class	Description of verbs	No.	Val.	Pattern	Case		
I	Nominative-Nominative	3	2	02	Abs	Abs	-
II	Nominative-Locative	85	1	01	Abs	-	-
			2	03a	Abs	~Loc	-
III	Nominative-Objective	203	1	01	Abs	-	-
			2	03a	Abs	~Loc	-
IV	Nominative-Syntactic	31	2	04	Abs	~Abl	-
			2	15a	Abs	~Instr	-
			2	05	Abs	Com	-
V	Agentive-Nominative	331	2	07	Erg	~Loc	-
				08	Erg	Abs	-
			3	09a	Erg	~Loc	Abs
				09b	Erg	Abs	~Loc
			3	10a	Erg	~Abl	Abs
				10b	Erg	Abs	~Abl
			3	11a	Erg	Abs	Com
				11b	Erg	Com	Abs
VI	Agentive-Objective	30	2	07	Erg	~Loc	-
			3	09a	Erg	~Loc	Abs
			3	09b	Erg	Abs	~Loc
VII	Purposive-Locative	1	2	06	~Loc	Abs	-
VIII	Locative-Nominative	8	2	06	~Loc	Abs	-

**Class**

Wilson's verb classes II and III contain mostly verbs with a core valency of one. Some emotion or attitude verbs imply a necessary second focus argument and can be assigned a core valency of two. Except for the motion and emotion verbs, the second argument is merely an adjunct, describing the location of the event.<sup>12</sup> But if the correspondence of class II with the seventh *rnamdbye* relation *gnas* were to hold, it could tell us something about the semantic property of its class members, namely that all verbs of class II describe non-dynamic states—at least in the eyes of the Tibetan grammarians. But why is that never mentioned? Could it be that Wilson and Hackett, both were unaware of this important fact? Wilson (1992: 652f.) mentions only three types of verbs for which the 'locative' could be applied: verbs of dependence, verbs of existence, and verbs of possession, to which Hackett (p. 5) adds "verbs expressing attitudes". Indeed, they are all states, but this is never made explicit. And on the other hand, the verbs of class III and IV are, with the exception of



the motion verbs, mostly not ‘action’ verbs, but inagentive, possibly dynamic verbs, such as ‘die’ or ‘fall ill’.

Moreover, the goal or focus of the ‘attitude’ or affection might be either generally subsumed under the second *rnamdbye* relation *las/yul* (Skalbzang Hgyurmed 1981: 40, 1992: 24), generally subsumed under the seventh *rnamdbye* relation (Dmudge Bsamtan 1990: 50), or partly under the first in case of positive emotions and partly under the second in case of negative emotions (Tshetan Žabsdruṅ 1988: 120f., cf. also Dmudge Bsamtan 1990: 50). The latter distinction, however, comes close to systematic arbitrariness.

Nevertheless, if correctly annotated and in a form that is more transparent for the non-linguist user, the information about dynamicity (even though perhaps distorted by theoretical preconceptions) could be invaluable since state verbs in Tibetan, and particularly the adjective-verbs, such as *rga* ‘be, become old’ or *na* ‘be, become ill’ appear to the linguist’s eye as inherently ambiguous between the non-dynamic description of an ongoing state *being x*, and the dynamic description of the transition from a previous different state into this new state *becoming x* (inchoative or resultative perspective).

The distinction of dynamic transitions and non-dynamic states is certainly not trivial, particularly since a verb might have both meanings, and thus one would like to know, who was responsible for, or more precisely whose intuitions underlie, the identification of class II and class III verbs. Were the classifications ever cross-checked with Tibetan grammarians or at least native speakers of Tibetan? Were the notions of dynamicity as the critical feature ever discussed among the compilers? Looking at all the *be x* translations within group III, the reviewer fears that at least the last question must be answered in the negative. Why, e.g., is the adjective-verb *dkaḥ* ‘be difficult’ labelled as belonging to class III? What are its dynamic properties? Why, on the other hand, is *lkug* ‘be mute (non-dynamic), lose one’s voice (dynamic inchoative), be stuck dumb (dynamic resultative/non-dynamic)’ labelled as belonging to class II (non-dynamic)? Why are *bkres* ‘be hungry’ and *skom* ‘be thirsty’ classified as non-dynamic (class II)? Is it not the case that one often simply *becomes* hungry or thirsty? And if this *becoming* does not matter in the case of these two words, why does it matter in the case of *rga* ‘age’ i.e. ‘become old’ and *na* ‘fall ill’ i.e. ‘become ill’ (class III, dynamic)? And how is it possible, on the base of the Tibetan tradition, to classify *ḥkhrog* ‘have internal activity etc.’ as non-dynamic (class II)? Why is *grag* ‘be heard’ dynamic (class III), but the obviously related *grags* ‘be renowned, known’ non-dynamic (class II)? Is there something wrong with all the classifications? Are they perhaps merely arbitrary?

There are other obvious contradictions, which indicate that the complex system of *rnamdbye* relations has not been sufficiently mastered by the compilers: the above-mentioned verb *ḥtshé* ‘cause harm, be harmful’ is labelled as belonging to class V, which means that the first argument should be in the instrumental case and the second argument should be without case marker. While the status of the first argument is unclear, the second argument has in all instances the dative/locative marker. As can be inferred from the discussion above, this should be a typical case for the second *rnamdbye* relation *las/yul*, since ‘harming’ someone is a dynamic action (hence not the seventh *rnamdbye*

relation *gnas*), not beneficial for the second argument (hence not the fourth *rnamdbye* relation *dgosched*). If sentences with an ergative first argument and the second argument in the *las/yul* relation should not qualify for the ‘Agentive-Objective’ class VI, which sentences should?

Class VI verbs, or more precisely: bivalent verbs of the pattern ergative first argument with dative/locative second argument are typologically of great interest, since they violate the standard definition of ergativity (Zeisler [2002]/to appear). While there are only about thirteen verbs in Themchen Amdo (Haller 2004: 111f), and as much as 65 verbs in Ladakhi, allowing this sentence pattern in at least one reading (Zeisler [2002] cf. also <http://www.sfb441.uni-tuebingen.de/b11/b11fieldwork#> case, section 4), it is completely unknown how many verbs of this type might be found in Classical Tibetan. A concise classification in the TVL could have been of great help. However, at a closer look it turns out, that out of the 30 class VI verbs only 20 conform to the bivalent pattern. The rest consists for the greater part of trivalent verbs (Erg ~Loc Abs) but also of verbs showing the standard ergative pattern as the sole (e.g. *ḥdor* ‘discard, eliminate, cast off, be lost’) or an alternative possibility. On the other hand, quite a few bivalent verbs of the pattern ergative first argument with dative/locative second argument can be also found in Class V.

Within class VI one further finds the verb *ḥdzeg* ‘climb (up), ascend’, classified as *thadadpa* in TCH, although the second example sentence *spreḥu śinrtsar ḥdzegspa* ‘a/the monkey having climbed the top of a tree’ indicates that it belongs to the motion pattern of class III (the other example is given without a first argument). The TVL example sentence, on the other hand, *riḥdzeg rukhag gis ribor ḥdzegs pa* “The mountaineering team climbed [!] up the mountain” given without *siglum*, looks rather like 20th century Lhasa Tibetan (which allows for the contrastive use of the instrumental marker with the first argument of motion verbs).

Trivalent verbs of the *give* type are more often found under class V than under class VI, as the second argument would fall under the fourth *rnamdbye* relation *dgosched*. Predictably, group V also contains trivalent verbs of the *take* type (Erg Abl Abs; *len* cf. *blama bzanḥlas sdompa blaḥ* “one takes [!] the vow from a good guru”; as the future stem typically conveys the connotation of obligation, the example should be translated as ‘one should take the vow from a good guru’) as well as of the *combine* and *exchange* type (Erg Abs Com, *rje, sbrel*). In the context of the above discussion about the applicability of the fourth *rnamdbye* relation *dgosched*, it is worth noting the entry *ḥbul* ‘offer, present’ labelled as belonging to class V. The example sentence, however, *ḥjigrten mgonla phul* “[I] offer [!] [this] to the protector of the world (the Buddha)” would not fall under the fourth but under the second *rnamdbye* relation, as the Buddha is beyond the state of benefiting from offerings! Cf. also the classification of *mchod* VI ‘offer’. According to the subtle semantic distinctions of the Tibetan grammarians the verb *ḥbul* might thus belong to class VI, as well. The translation of the sentence should, of course, be either ‘offered (past stem) to the protector of the world’ or more preferable ‘offer (imperative stem) [this] to the protector of the world’ (the past stem can in rare cases, within an adequate context, express a state of completion in the future ‘will/shall have offered’).

As already indicated, Class V contains quite a few bivalent verbs that could or should have been annotated as belonging to class VI. Cf. also *ñan* ‘listen’ without specific example for that particular meaning, as well as its honorific counterpart *gsan*, despite the example *bdagñidla gsoncig* ‘listen to me!’, and despite the classification of *mñan* ‘listen’ (why two verbs?) as class VI. Only the second and third example for *ñan*, or rather for the collocation *skoba ñan* “heed the command [!]” conform to class V, but the collocation should then have been treated as a subentry with its own classification. Another example is *sbyoṅ* ‘train, cultivate, purify’, with examples clearly showing the dative/locative marker.

According to Hackett (p. 5), all the verbs in group V should be ‘different’ *thadadpa*. This is not the case. Class V contains 16 *thamidadpa* verbs plus the totally mistranslated and thus misclassified verb *ḥbab*<sup>2</sup>. According to the authoritative use of the *thadadpa/thamidadpa* terminology as used in the TCH, *thadadpa* refers only to agentive [+control] verbs with instrumental case marking for the first argument, but not to inagentive [–control] perception verbs following the standard ergative pattern. All verbs with an unmarked (absolutive) first argument, independent of their valency and agentivity as well as the inagentive ergative verbs are classified as *thamidadpa*. Thus the verb ‘see’ [–control], following the ergative pattern is classified as *thamidadpa*. The classification is recent and may perhaps be associated with the éminence grise behind the compilation of the TCH, Tshetan • absdruṅ (cf. • absdruṅ 1980: 235-238). Although this terminology is formulated in the context of the *bdag gžan* theory, which the reviewer would take as the Tibetan counterpart to the Western ergativity approach (the reason for this view is mentioned in Zeisler 2006: 71), the authoritative *thadadpa/thamidadpa* distinction does not help to solve the problem of when to use the instrumental marker for the first argument (this is experienced as quite irritating by Tibetan students and scholars alike, Thupten Kunga Chashab, personal communication).

A competing view, which comes closer to the original distinctions within the *bdag gžan* theory (or at least those of Situ Paṅchen), as well as to the Western transitive-intransitive distinction, is presented by Skalbzang Ḥgyurmed (1981: 364ff., 1992: 250ff.): *thadadpa* refers to all ergative-subject verbs, *thamidadpa* to all absolutive-subject verbs. The semantic distinction of agentivity, volitionality, or [±control] is captured by the distinction of *raṅdbaṅcan* ‘self-controlled’ and *gžandbaṅcan* ‘controlled by something other’. The verb *mthoṅ* is thus classified as *thadadpa* and *gžandbaṅcan*.

Hackett does not seem to know how to handle this problem. The inagentive (*thamidadpa*) but ergative experiencer verbs *thos* ‘hear’ and *mthoṅ* ‘see’, supplied with more than one full example are—with respect to the syntactic behaviour—correctly labelled as belonging to class V. The experiencer verb *tshor* ‘perceive’, however, which follows the same ergative pattern, is—without giving any example—labelled as belonging to class III, although TCH gives a (Modern Tibetan) example of the (inverted) ergative pattern: *khoḥi skadcha ṅas tshorbyuṅ* ‘As for his speech, I heard it’. Similarly the above-mentioned verb *ḥkhul* ‘be able to subdue’ is labelled as class III, despite the ergative pattern found in the TCH example. Hackett mentions TCH as one of his sources.

Could it be that he was trapped by the TCH designation *thamidadpa* and his own definition of group V?

In citing all the conceptual and annotatory errors, the reviewer does not simply want to carp at the current problematic state of the TVL, but to contribute towards a future edition by illustrating how intricate the argument structure of Tibetan verbs can be and how little help can be obtained from a merely superficial acquaintance with, and even from a profound knowledge of, the Tibetan grammatical tradition. Besides a more transparent and perhaps also linguistically more adequate classification scheme and the filling of the various gaps, it would be specifically important to pay more attention to “the range of variation in Tibetan syntactic structures” in a future edition. In this respect, and within a comparative diachronic approach towards the differing ‘standards’ and classifications among Tibetan grammarians, the study of the Tibetan grammatical tradition might, in fact, generate new insights. For better evaluating the ‘standard’ and not so standard verb forms it could be beneficial to use the forms given in the TCH as a base of reference in the main entry and to specify which texts show different forms (and whether these forms are applied systematically within the particular text). Given the modern technological possibilities, a new edition should be accompanied by a CD or an online version, allowing thus a more comfortable search. In a solely printed version, there should be at least an index of the (correct) English translations.

Finally, the reviewer sincerely hopes that the obvious shortcomings of the present work prove to be useful in that they stimulate further linguistic research into syntax and semantics of the Classical Tibetan language—the persistent self-references are given in the same spirit.

## Notes

1. The number of verb roots is certainly much lower, since a considerable number of verbs are etymologically related, forming derivational pairs or groups, and thus sharing a common root. At least ten derivational types have been observed, which have been partly reorganised into two paradigmatic groups of inagentive-intransitive two-stem verbs and their transitive-causative four-stem counterparts. Many verbs do not have the full set of stems, and so we find verbs with three stems or with only one. 1700 verb forms, i.e. stems, in the TVL would indicate a ratio of 2.45 stems per verb. I would like to thank Nicola Westermann for counting all the entries of the TVL and for sorting them according to their respective verb class.
2. The Oxford English Dictionary (<http://dictionary.oed.com>) gives the following definition of the linguistic use of *absolute* (9): “Standing out of (the usual) grammatical relation or syntactic construction with other words, as in the *ablative absolute*.”
3. Cf. again the Oxford English Dictionary for the definition of *gerund*: “A form of the Latin verb capable of being construed as a noun, but retaining the regimen of the verb. Hence applied to forms functionally equivalent in other languages, e.g. to the English verbal noun in *-ing* when used rather as a part of the verb than as a noun” (abbreviations reconstructed). The Tibetan form: verb plus *nas* in its entirety can by no means be construed as a (verbal) noun: Unlike the English *-ing* form it cannot replace a noun, it cannot be qualified by an adjective, it cannot take plural or case markers, etc..

4. Note, e.g., Tshetan Žabdrunġ's (1980) spelling *Sumcuba* for the title of the well known basic grammatical text *Sumcupa*, a spelling that possibly goes back to the inference of his Amdo dialect or to a particular regional transmission, but is certainly not due to the lack of erudition on the part of the author.
5. While they do have complementary functions as verbal connectors or conjunctions, the functional difference with respect to the semantic relation of local or abstract source or origin is rather subtle (cf. Hahn 1985 or any other edition, section 12, Skalbzarġ Hġyurmed 1992: 44-50), if not neutralised. The 'relative' function, i.e. the expression of a motion out of a particular location is not the particular function of the morpheme *nas* (as indicated by the terminology of DeLancey 2003 and explicitly stated by Hill 2004: 84), but of the more specific ablative postpositions, as e.g. {*kyi*}-*najnas*.
6. While conceived of as a primarily grammatical category of the nominal inflection, the traditional term 'case' has always been understood also as a functional (prototypical) relation. This relational understanding underlies the somewhat antiquated formulations found in the first Western descriptions of Tibetan, such as *case x is expressed by y*. Such sentences can and have to be interpreted as 'the relation as expressed by case x in a prototypical (i.e. active) Latin sentence, is expressed in Tibetan by the morpheme or construction y'.
7. Hill (2004: 83) is thus perhaps somewhat over-hasty when he mentions DeLancey (2003: 258) as the first scholar to correctly distinguish these three case morphemes according to their function, although DeLancey might be the first one to use the particular designative combination "locative/allative" for *la*, "locative/illative" for *na*, and "terminative" for {*tu*} etc. The use of 'illative' describing a movement into a location is as much misleading as the use 'relative' for the ablative marker *nas*, see note 5 above; the 'illative' relation *into* is typically expressed by a specialised postposition, e.g. {*kyi*}-*najdu*. The functional distinction of the *ladon* morphemes has also been well observed in the West from the very beginning, and most often they are treated as separate morphemes, although not always as case markers, expressing case-relations identified by case names. In view of the multifunctionality of the morphemes the 'correct' designation is perhaps more a matter of taste. The first pioneering authors obviously did not see the functional difference between the dative/locative and the locative/purposive marker clearly (Csoma de Kőrös 1834: 39f., Schmidt 1839: 61-63, and Foucaux 1858: 25-27). While JĀK classifies *na* and *la* as postpositions and {*tu*} as case affix, he is clearly aware of the functional distinctions between the designation of a "place" (*na*), "local relations in quite a general sense, in answer to the questions where and whither" (including the allative function), the directional function as expressed by Latin *erga* and *contra*, the marginal ablative function, as well as the prominent "dative" function of *la*, and the "terminative", i.e. allative function "the direction to a place" of {*tu*}. Note that "terminative" has always been used in the sense of what is nowadays more commonly known as "allative" describing the motion towards a goal. Hahn (1985, sections 11 and 13) on the "case particles" clearly distinguishes between a "locative in the narrow sense" for *na*, a "locative in the wider sense" for *la*, and the "terminative" for {*tu*} (Hahn 1985, section 9.2. also emphasises the case-marking function of the morpheme *daj*. I am not sure whether he is the first one to do so). Beyer (1992: 268) distinguishes between "bounded" i.e. non-dynamic (*na*) and "unbounded" i.e. dynamic or more general "locus" (*la*), but seems to have forgotten the {*tu*} morpheme. The reviewer prefers the designations 'dative/locative' (*la*) and 'locative/purposive' ({*tu*}) to the designations 'dative/allative' and 'allative/purposive', partly for technical reasons (to be able to use a simple variable '~Loc'), partly because both morphemes can

- be used in the non-dynamic locative function and are thus functionally related to the purely ‘locative’ morpheme *na*.
8. The dative/locative marker can be used for special emphasis or contrast as well as for a partitive reading, although modern grammarians would condemn such uses as non-standard or ungrammatical (see Zeisler 2006: 73-80).
  9. Wilson (1992: 273) has to admit: “Given the name of the second case—*lassu byaba* or *objective*—the syntax just exemplified would seem to be the normal manner in which verbs operate. Nevertheless, they do not. Many agentive verbs take nominative, and not objective objects.” Note that the illustrative ‘object’ in the sentence *khos miggis gzugsla bltas* ‘He [!] looked at forms with [his] eye[s]’ is all but a (direct) object—even or particularly not in English.
  10. Although Fillmore originally thought that the underlying universal system of deep structures is of a syntactic nature, a frame is a cognitive and thus ultimately semantic concept. Fillmore himself has elaborated this concept as a description of perspectivised scenes (1977a), schemata or prototypes (1977b).
  11. Abbreviations: Abl: ablative, Abs: absolutive, i.e. no case marking, Com: comitative, Erg: ergative (use of the instrumental for a ‘subject’), Instr: instrumental, Loc: locational. The sign “~” indicates a case variable. The variable “~Loc” refers to the locative *na*, the dative/locative *la*, the locative/purposive {*tu*}, as well as to all locational postpositions. Likewise the variable “~Abl” refers to the two ablative morphemes *nas* and *las*, as well as to the ablative postpositions. See <http://www.sfb441.uni-tuebingen.de/b11/b11fieldwork#case> for an actual version of the classification. Although this classification is based on the dialects of Ladakh, the ‘main patterns’ 01 to 11 are all found in Classical Tibetan, and as the second element of Wilson’s class IV (pattern 15a: Abs Instr) shows, some of the manifold ‘marginal’ patterns might be found in Classical Tibetan as well. Note that many verbs allow more than one pattern.
  12. While Wilson (1992: 226f.) still indicates that class II verbs require a ‘locative’ qualifier only optionally and that “the same holds true” for class III and class IV verbs, this optionality is completely lost in Hackett’s representation. As for class IV verbs, the statement about optionality is not exactly true, since the ablative as well as the comitative second argument are semantically necessary. Nevertheless, in the case of the comitative argument, at least, the core valency of two can be reduced with the help of a collective expression for the first argument.

## References

- Beyer, Stephan V. 1992. *The Classical Tibetan language*. New York: State University of New York. Reprint 1993, (Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica series, 116.) Delhi: Sri Satguru.
- Bielmeier, Roland. In preparation. *Comparative dictionary of Tibetan dialects (CDTD)*. Volume I: verbs. [Preprint No. I, 1997].
- Csoma de Körös, Alexander. 1834. *A Grammar of the Tibetan language in English*. Prepared under the patronage of the government and the auspices of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press. Reprint 1984. (Collected works of Alexander Csoma de Korös, 2.) Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- DeLancey, Scott. 2003. ‘Tibetan’. In Graham Thurgood and Randy J. LaPolla (eds.), *The Sino-Tibetan Languages*. New York: Routledge: 255-267.
- Denwood, Philip. 1999. *Tibetan*. (London Oriental and African language library, 3.) Amsterdam, Philadelphia, PA: Benjamins.
- Dik, Simon C. 1989. *The theory of functional grammar. Part I: The structure of the clause*. (Functional grammar series, 9.) Dordrecht: Foris.
- Dmudge Bsamgtan. 1990. *Brdasprod blogsal dgaḥston*. 5th edition, Gansu People’s Publishing House.

- Fillmore, Charles J. 1968. 'The case for case'. In Emmon Bach and Robert T. Harms (eds.), *Universals in Linguistic Theory*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1-88.
- 1977a. 'The case for case reopened'. In Peter Cole and Jerrold M. Saddock (eds.), *Grammatical Relations*. Syntax and Semantics 8. New York, London: Academic press, 59-81.
- 1977b. 'Scenes-and-frames semantics'. In Antonio Zampolli (ed.), *Linguistic structures processing*. Fundamental studies in computer science, 5. Amsterdam: North-Holland, 55-81.
- Foucaux, Philippe Édouard. 1858. *Grammaire de la langue tibétaine*. Paris: Librairie Orientale de Benjamin Duprat.
- Francke, August Hermann. 1924-30. *Gzermiyig, a book of the Tibetan Bonpos*. *Tibetan text according to the Berlin-manuscript*. AM 1 (1924): 243-346, 3 (1926): 321-339, 4.2/3 (1927): 161-239, 4.4 (1928): 481-540, 5 (1928): 1-40, 6 (1930): 299-314.
- Goldstein, Melvin C., Shelling, T.N., Surkhang, J.T. (eds.). 2001. *The new Tibetan-English dictionary of Modern Tibetan*. Berkeley etc.: University of California Press.
- Hahn, Michael. 1985. *Lehrbuch der klassischen tibetischen Schriftsprache*. (Indica et Tibetica: Monographien zu den Sprachen und Literaturen des indo-tibetischen Kulturraumes, 10.) Bonn: Indica et Tibetica.
- Haller, Felix. 2000. 'Verbal categories of Shigatse Tibetan and Themchen Tibetan'. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 23.2: 175-191.
- Haller, Felix. 2004. *Dialekt und Erzählungen von Themchen*. (Beiträge zur tibetischen Erzählforschung, 14). Bonn: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag.
- Herrmann, Silke. 1983. *Die tibetische Version des Papageienbuches*. (Beiträge zur tibetischen Erzählforschung, 5.) St. Augustin: VGH-Wissenschaftsverlag.
- Hill, Nathan W. 2004. 'Compte Rendu: Paul G. Hackett. A Tibetan Verb Lexicon. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2003'. *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 78-98.
- Jäschke, Heinrich August. 1881 (JÄK). *A Tibetan-English dictionary. With special reference to prevailing dialects; to which is added an English-Tibetan vocabulary*. London: Secretary of State for India in Council / Routledge & Kegan Paul. Reprinted 1992, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Miller, Roy Andrew. 1991. 'On the utility of the Tibetan grammarians'. In Ernst Steinkellner (ed.), *Tibetan history and language. Studies dedicated to Uray Géza on his seventieth birthday*. (Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, 26.) Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien: 353-381.
- Prati Rinchen Dongrub (17th - 18th century). 1992. *Bodkyi brdaḥi bstanbcos Sumcupaḥi žes byabaḥi nmabšad kuntu bzannoḥi dgoḥspa rabtu gsalbar byedpaḥi rgyan*. Ed. by Gragspa. 4th edition, Qinghai People's Publishing House.
- Sarat Chandra Das. 1902. *A Tibetan-English dictionary*. Revised by Graham Sandberg and A. William Heyde. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot. Reprint 1985, Jalandhar: Gaurav.
- Schmidt, Isaak Jakob. 1839. *Grammatik der tibetischen Sprache*. St. Petersburg: Gräff; Leipzig: Voss.
- Situ Pañchen Choskyi-hbyunḡnas (1699-1774). 1744. *Yul gaḥscanpaḥi brda yaḥdagpar sbyarbaḥi bstanbcoskyi byebtag Sumcupadaḥ Rtagskyi ḥjugpaḥi gžunḡi rmpar bšadpa mkhaspaḥi mgulrgyan mutig phreḡmdzes*. Ed. as *Karma Situḥi Sumrtags ḥḡrelchen Mkhaspaḥi mgulrgyan mutig phreḡmdzes* by Ḥphrinlas. 6th edition 1993, Qinghai People's Publishing House.
- Skalbzang Ḥgyurmed. 1981. *Bodkyi brdasprod rigpaḥi khridrgyun rabgsal meloḡ*. Sichuan People's Publishing House.

- 1992. *Bodkyi brdasprod rigpaḥi khridrgyun rabgsal meloḥ: Le clair miroir. Enseignement de la grammaire tibétaine*. Traduit, adapté et commenté par Heather Stoddard et Nicolas Tournadre. Arvillard: Editions Prajñā, Collection Tibétaine.
- Tesnière, Lucien. 1959. *Eléments de syntaxe structurale*. Paris : Klincksieck.
- Thupten Kunga Chashab. [2002]. *System of Classical Tibetan Grammar. Based on Dngul chu Dharmabhadra's treatise Si tu'i zhal lung (1806)*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Uniwersytet Warszawski.
- Tournadre, Nicolas. 1990. Présentation de la grammaire traditionnelle et des cas du tibétain. Approche classique et analyse moderne. *Tibet, civilisation et société: colloque organisé par la Fondation Singer-Polignac à Paris, les 27, 28, 29 avril 1987*. Paris: Éditions de la Fondation Singer-Polignac: 189-198.
- 1996. *L'ergativité en tibétain. Approche morphosyntaxique de la langue parlée*. (Bibliothèque de l'information grammaticale, 33.) Paris, Leuven: Peeters.
- Tshetan Žabsdruḡ. 1988. *Gaṅscaṅ Bodkyi brdasprodpaḥi bstanbcos Sumcubadaḡ Rtagshjugi rnamgžag gyacher bšadpa Thonmiḥi žalluḡ žes byaba*. 4th print, Gansu People's Publishing House.
- Verhagen, Pieter Cornelius. 2000. *A history of Sanskrit grammatical literature in Tibet*. (Handbuch der Orientalistik: Abt. 2, Indien, 8.) Leiden etc.: Brill.
- Wilson, Joe Bradford. 1992. *Translating Buddhism from Tibetan*. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion.
- Zeisler, Bettina. 2004. *Relative Tense and aspectual values in Tibetan languages. A comparative study*. Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs, 150. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, New York.
- 2006. 'The Tibetan understanding of karman: Some problems of Tibetan case marking', in Christopher I. Beckwith (ed.), *Medieval Tibeto-Burman languages II, PIATS 2003: Tibetan studies: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford 2003*. Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, 10. Brill, Leiden etc.: 57-101.
- [2002]/to appear. 'Case patterns and pattern variation in Ladakhi: a field report', in: Bielmeier, Roland and Felix Haller (eds.), *Himalayan linguistics and beyond. Papers submitted to the 8th Himalayan Languages Symposium, held at the university of Berne, Switzerland, Sept 19-22, 2002*. Mouton de Gruyter
- Zhang, Yisun [Kraḡ Dbyisun] et. al. (eds.). 1993. *Bod Rgya tshigmdzod chenmo*. Vol. 1-2. Beijing: People's Publishing House. (TCH)