

Tibetan zero nominalization

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Several researchers draw attention to the ability of Tibeto-Burman languages to use nominalized verb forms in finite contexts (Matisoff 1972, Coupe, ed. 2008, DeLancey 2011), but the reverse pattern—morphologically finite forms occurring in nominal contexts—has received less attention. Here I collect a few examples from Classical Tibetan and Old Tibetan texts of affixless verb forms occurring in syntactically nominal contexts.

In example (1) the nominalized present verb stem *ḥdzin-pa* 'taker' is coordinated with *gzuñ*, the finite future stem of the same verb. The meaning of *gzuñ* in this passage is unequivocally 'that which is taken', as if the form were *gzuñ-pa* or *gzuñ-bya*. The choice of *-dañ* as coordination marker guarantees the interpretation of *gzuñ* as a nominal form, since *-dañ* occurs only after nouns and never after verbs (Schwieger 2008: 161, 274-276). The expected phrase *gzuñ-pa-dañ ḥdzin-pa* is attested, as seen in example (2).

(1) *gzuñ-dañ ḥdzin-paḥi sgrib gñis bral*
'free from the two obscurations of 'taken' and 'taker'.
(Marpa 67a)

(2) *de ltar yoñs-su sbyaṅs-nas gzuñ-pa-dañ ḥdzin-pa-las rnam-par grol-ziñ*
'being thus completely purified, one is liberated from 'taken' and 'taker' (Tenjur, vol. 13, p. 229)

One might suppose that in example (1), although the form in question looks verbal, in fact it is a noun derived from a verb just as 'a run' derives from 'to run' in English or *gnas* 'place' form *gnas* 'to stay' in Tibetan. Although 'zero nominalization' is a fine term for this type of derivation of nouns from verbs, it is a derivational rather than an inflectional process and may not be synchronically productive. Nonetheless, there are other examples in which the zero-nominalized form functions verbally to the left and nominally to the right, just as in the case of productive inflectional nominalization such as *-pa* suffixation.

The noun phrase *rtse-la dgahḥ dañ sdug-pa* 'amorous play and

beauty' of example (3) consists of two component phrases *rtse-la dgah* 'amorous play' and *sdug-pa* 'beauty', coordinated by the associative case *-dañ*. The first constituent of the coordination, *rtse-la dgah* 'play and love', itself clearly consists of two finite verbs coordinated by the converb *-la*. Thus, *dgah* functions as a verb to the left (taking the verbal coordinator *la*) and a noun to the right (taking the nominal coordinator *dañ*).

- (3) *nad-kyis hjigs-pa hdi ltar śin-tu mi bzad-pa // skyes-bu mkhas-pas gnas hdi mthoñ-nas ji lta-bur // rtse-la dgah dañ sdug-paḥi hdu-śes bskyed-par hgyur //*
 The threats of illness are thus quite unbearable. The wise man, having seen this circumstance, how will he engender the notion of amorous play and beauty? (D. 96, vol. 46, p. 94a)

To my taste the passage should have read *rtse-la dgah-žin sdug-paḥi*, with the verbal coordinator-*žin* in place of the nominal coordinator case *-dañ*. Tshogs drug rañ grol (1781-1851) shares this preference, as seen in his quotation of the passage in example (4).

- (4) *nad-kyis hjigs-pa hdi ltar śin-tu mi bzad-pa / skyes-bu mkhas-pas gnas hdi mthoñ-na ji lta-bur // rtse-la dgah žin sdug-paḥi hdu-śes ci phyir skye //*
 The threats of illness are thus quite unbearable; the wise man, if he sees this circumstance, how will the notion of amorous play and beauty arise? (Tshogs drug rañ grol 2002, vol 4, p. 413)

In example (5) the phrase *ma rig* looks like a finite 'didn't know', but functions as an attribute 'ignorant' as if the text had *gsuñ ma-rig-pa*. The presence of the negation marker *ma* ensures that *rig* is acting verbally to the left.

- (5) *bla-maḥi gsuñ // ma-rig min-pa dbyiñs-su dag /*
 The words of the guru, which are not ignorant, are as pure as space. (Marpa 67a)

The expected phrase **ma-rig-pa min-pa* appears not to be attested. The ninth Karmapa Dbañ phyug rdo rje (1556- c. 1603) employs the finite equivalent *ma-rig-pa min* (example 6). The non-occurrence of **ma-rig-pa min-pa*, together with the use of *gsuñ-dañ hdzin-pa* (example 1) in place of *gsuñ-pa-dañ hdzin-pa* (example 2), suggest that the Tibetans do not like a construction to contain too many *pa*'s and omit the first

when two appear in quick succession.

- (6) *gal-te bu ñan-pa-la bu ma-yin zer-ba bzin-du ses-rabs ñan-pa ni ma rig-paḥo že-na / ses-rab ñan-pa ni ma rig-pa min-te/ ñon-moñs-can-du gyur-paḥi lta-ba yin-paḥi phyir*
 If one says 'evil knowledge' is ignorance, like one says to an evil son 'he is not (my) son', evil knowledge is not ignorance because it is a view that gives rise to kleśas. (Dbañ phyug rdo rje 2001)

Analogous to the *ma-rig* 'ignorance' of example (5) is *ma-dad* 'lack of faith' in example (7); the negation of the verb stem suggests it must be understood verbally to the left, but the use of the noun coordinator *-dañ* requires it to be understood nominally to the right.

- (7) *ña-rgyal-dañ ni ma-dad-dañ // don-du gñer-ba-med-ñid-dañ // phyi-rol-rnam-g.yeñ-nan-bsdus-dañ // skyo-ba-ñan-paḥi dri-ma yin //*
 Pride and lack of faith, lack of interest and being distracted outward, being withdrawn inward and dejection, (these) are flaws of listening. (Bu ston 22b)

Example (7) offers a second more interesting case of zero nominalization, viz. *don-du gñer-ba-med-ñid*. The clitic *-ñid* typically follows a noun phrase; a phrase *don-du gñer-ba med-pa-ñid* 'non-existence of searching after meaning' would pose no problem. This example is in meter, but a *causa metri* explanation for the lack of *-pa* is unsatisfying, since one could have swapped the *-ñid* with a *-pa* and thereby improved the syntax without substantially changing the meaning.

In example (8) *bzugs* looks like a finite verb 'sits', but in context it means 'those who sit', as if the form were *bzugs-pa*. Because *bzugs* 'sit' governs the *ḥdir* 'here' to its left, it cannot be analyzed as a noun. Example (9) is exactly analogous, but with the verb *tshogs* 'assemble'. The expected phrases *ḥdir bzugs-pa* (10) and *ḥdir tshogs-pa* (11) also occur. In these cases, the explanation for the zero-nominalized forms is certainly that the passages in examples (8) and (9) are verse whereas examples (10) and (11) are prose.

- (8) *ḥdir bzugs gsan-cig !*
 'listen, O you who sit here !' (Marpa 50a)
 (9) *ḥdir tshogs grwa-pa bu-slob kun //*
 'O all you monks and disciplines gathered here!' (Marpa 83a)

- (10) *dkyil-ḥkhor chen-po ḥdir bžugs-pa-la snod-du gyur-pa-daṅ /
snod-du ma gyur-pa brtag mi ḥtshal-lo*
There is no need to examine whether or not those sitting
at this great maṅḍala are suitable for taking prātimokṣa
vows. (Tenjur, vol. 29, p. 300)
- (11) *bdaḡ-caḡ mched-lcam-dral ḥdir tshogs-pa rnam-s-kyis mchod-
paḥi žal-zas ḥdi-dag tshul bžin-du byin-gyis brlabs-nas*
We siblings assembled here, having blessed in this way
these victuals which we offer (D 846, vol. 99, p. 192a)

In example (12) the verb *lta* 'watch' acts verbally to the left, governing *gar* 'dance' in the allative case, and it acts nominally to the right, as an argument of *mtshuṅs* 'be similar'. A nominalized form *lta-ba*, as seen in example (13), would have been expected.

- (12) *ḥgro-baḥi skye-ḥchi gar-la lta daṅ mtshuṅs //*
The birth and death of creatures is like watching a dance.
(D.96, vol. 46, page 88a)
- (13) *pha-mas bu ḡciḡ-pa la lta-ba daṅ mtshuṅs //*
Like parents looking at their only child (D.120, vol. 53,
page 130b)

Zero-nominalization is also attested in Old Tibetan, although the smaller size of the corpus limits one's abilities to find closely parallel passages with and without the zero-nominalization. In example (14) the word *dṅos-grub* 'siddhi' is modified by the verb phrase *srid-pa gsum-la dbaṅ byed* 'rule over the three worlds'.

- (14) *srid-pa gsum-la dbaṅ byed dṅos-grub gsum //*
The three siddhis (which) rule over the three worlds
(Rama C I. 12).

One would usually expect a nominalized clause to modify its head to the right, i.e. *dṅos-grub gsum srid-pa gsum-la dbaṅ byed-pa*, or, if the modifier is to the left of its head, one expects both nominalization and the genitive case, i.e. *srid-pa gsum-la dbaṅ byed-paḥi dṅos-grub gsum*.

The examples given above suffice to demonstrate the existence of zero-nominalization in Classical and Old Tibetan.

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