Tshangla verb inflections: a preliminary sketch

Erik Andvik
Payap University
Chiangmai, Thailand

1. Introduction

The Tshangla language is spoken predominantly in eastern Bhutan, where it is also known as Sharchhop-kha, the language of the Sharchhop or Sharchhokpa, i.e. 'people living in the East.' The number of speakers in Bhutan is approximately 140,000 (George van Driem, personal communication). As the largest of the non-official languages of Bhutan, it serves as a lingua franca for several smaller language groups in the eastern half of the kingdom.¹

Tshangla of Bhutan is equivalent to the Cangluo language of southeastern Tibet, described by Zhang Jichuan (1986), earlier presented by Sun et al. (1980) as the Motuo Menba. However, the language described by Zhang and Sun is spoken in a cluster of communities geographically separated from Bhutan by several hundred miles, namely the region formerly known as Padma-bkod, located near the point where the Tsangpo River (Siang), crosses the McMahon Line. A comparison of Bhutanese Tshangla vocabulary with the word list given in Sun et al. (1980) indicates that there are very few differences in the speech of the two communities. This was also confirmed by the author's own data taken from speakers of the Padma-bkod dialect.² Speakers from Bhutan, as well as speakers from Padma-bkod who have had contact with each other, report that they easily understand the speech of the other group.

The geographical separation of the two communities is apparently due to recent migration from Bhutan, as indicated by Aris in his Notes on the Mon-Yul Corridor (1980):

"It is known that the southern end of two of Tibet's most sacred sanctuaries ...

Tsa-ri and Padma-bkod ... are inhabited mainly by groups who were encouraged

---

¹ This paper was originally presented to the 25th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley. 14-18 October, 1992.
² Most of the data presented here was obtained from Bhutanese Tshangla speakers residing in or visiting the Darjeeling district in West Bengal, India. My thanks to Prof. R.K. Sprigg for his help in finding housing and language assistants in Kalimpong.
³ A word list was taken from two speakers of Padma-bkod Tshangla attending school in Darjeeling, who were born in Choepheling Camp, a Tibetan settlement near the village of Miao in the Chenglang (formerly Tirap) District of Arunachal Pradesh. According to these informants, most of the approximately 2,000 people living in the settlement are Tshangla speakers with roots in Padma-bkod.
by the legendary reputation of these 'hidden lands' (sbas-yul) to flee there in the 19th century to escape from oppressive taxation in the area of eastern Bhutan and elsewhere."

Tshangla is also spoken just across the border from eastern Bhutan in Arunachal Pradesh, in and around Dirang in the Kameng Region. The language of this area has been referred to as Central Monpa by Das Gupta (1968), who also reports that the Monpas used to be called Sher-chok-pa, and that their numbers were frequently added to by migrations from eastern Bhutan as well as from across the Himalayas. Central Monpa, spoken by about six thousand, is one of four dialect groups which Das Gupta calls Monpa, encompassing 21,000 speakers in all. The others are Northern Monpa, spoken in the rTawang area, Southern Monpa, spoken south of Dirang in the Kalaktang area, and Lishpa, spoken in the two villages Lish and Chug.

Yet another group given the name Monpa is the Tshona (Cuona) Monpa, centered around the town of mTsho-sna in southeastern Tibet, just north of eastern Bhutan. This language was first described by Sun et al. (1980). See also Nishida (1988).

The Monpa label is unfortunate, in that it separates languages which should be grouped together while joining under a common name languages which should not be grouped together. Thus Bhutanese Tshangla (Sharchhopkha), Cangluo Menba and Central Monpa are closely related and apparently mutually intelligible varieties of a single language, while Northern Monpa and Cuona Menba are distinct from these, and should be grouped with Bumthang of Central Bhutan (cf. Aris 1979:121-2, also Mazaudon & Michailovsky 1992). The former are unclassified under the Bodish Section, while the latter fall under Proto East Bodish (cf. Shafer's classification below.)

-Bodic Division
  -Bodish Section
    -Tsangla Branch (Tshangla =Sharchhopkha, Central Monpa, Motuo/Cangluo Menba)
    -Bodish Branch
      -West Bodish
      -Old Bodish
      -East Bodish (Bumthang, Northern Monpa, Cuona Menba)
    -rGyarong Branch
    -Gurung Branch

**Figure 1: Shafer's classification (1955, 1966)**

The purpose of this paper is to sketch the structure of three types of verb phrase in Tshangla, and to examine the function of their various inflectional markers. After a brief discussion of compound verbs and verb classes in
section 2, an overview of the three verb phrase types is presented in section 3. Sections 4 through 6 contain a description of the inflections peculiar to each verb phrase type. Finally, in section 7, negation is described with respect to the various verb phrase types.

2. The Tshangla verb

2.1 Compound verbs

One of the distinctive characteristics of Tshangla is its compound verbs, in which two or more grammatical words combine to form a single semantic concept. In some cases each of the two elements in the compound may occur as an independent verb. For some of these, the compound may be understood literally as a combination of the meaning of the two terms (dang-dile, lit. 'walk-go': 'to walk somewhere', kham-tsukpe, lit. 'injection-put': 'to give an injection'); or else the compound may take on a new, idiomatic meaning (yen-bile, lit. 'wear-give': 'to teach', nyinang-khule, lit. 'mucus-come.out': 'to be shy').

In other cases, one or both of the elements in the compound does not occur independently. Of these, the dependent element may be semantically obscure (go-tsukpe, lit. '?-put': 'to begin'), or it may have a meaning of its own but still never be used except in a compound (ha-gole, lit. 'heart-put': 'to understand', ha-chhatpe, lit. 'heart-stop': 'to be amazed').

As an example of the idiomatic and semantically unpredictable nature of these compounds: yitka-mile (lit. 'memory-think') means 'to forget', while yitka-ale (lit. 'memory-do' means 'to remember'. Yitka occurs only as an element in these two compounds, while ale 'to do' and mile 'to think' are common verbs.

The compound verbs may be classified according to the word class of the individual elements. The combinations attested are verb + verb, instrument + verb, object + verb, and location + verb.

---

4 The non-past perfective is used as the citation form. It is the most frequent form, occurring both as "goal" (see Figure 3) and as main verb. Also, the entire paradigm is always derivable from the non-past form, while the root itself may be ambiguous. For an explanation of the phonological values of the orthography used herein, see the phoneme chart in Appendix B.

5 This, of course, creates a problem for interlinear glossing: whether to gloss the individual items or the compound as a whole. The grossly inelegant solution chosen for this paper has been to gloss the individual items when the meaning is known, but when obscure, to connect the lexemes with a '=' and gloss the compound as a whole. What is obscure to one informant, however, is known to another, so in time, more of the meanings of these compound elements should be recovered.
2.1.1 Verb + Verb

These are composed of two verbs, the first element a verb root, the second a fully inflected verb:

(1) yen-bile (lit. 'wear-give') = to teach
    thup-thale (lit. 'throw-leave') = to throw away
    dang-dile (lit. 'walk-go') = to walk somewhere
    chot-thale (lit. 'prepare-leave') = to establish, to fix
    ge-dakpe (lit. 'give-say') = to request

2.1.2 Instrument + Verb

The first element is an instrument which is used to perform the action of the verbal second element:

(2) biting-phile (lit. 'leg-do') = to kick
    kha-shole (lit. 'mouth-release') = to confess
    kha-dokpe (lit. 'mouth-receive') = to admit, confess

2.1.3 Object + Verb

The first element is the nominal object of the second verbal element:

(4) sem-shorbe (lit. 'mind-lose') = to grieve
    yong-khele (lit. 'shadow-be affected by') = to be afraid

2.1.4 Location + Verb

The locative adverbial shows the location of the event encoded by the verbal element:

(5) tha-chatpe (lit. 'here-cut') = to decide
    ha-gole (lit. 'heart-put') = to understand

2.1.5 Compounds with phile, khele, ale

A few verbs tend to occur frequently as the second element in a compound. Among these are phile 'to make, to do', khele 'to be affected by, to suffer' (i.e. to have happen to), and ale 'to do'.

(6) shonang-phile 'to be happy'
    nyen-phile 'to marry'