

The Category of Direction in Tibeto-Burman*

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Recent descriptive and historical work on Tibeto-Burman has shown that personal indices on the verb in the "pronominalized" languages generally reflect not semantic roles or grammatical relations, as in more familiar languages, but a hierarchy of person in which first and second person are always indexed in preference to third. It is shown here that in PTB and in a few modern languages this hierarchy was also reflected in a direction marking system, in which a transitive verb is morphologically marked according as the patient is higher or lower on this hierarchy than the agent.

1. Tibeto-Burman verb agreement

In most of the Tibeto-Burman languages which manifest verb agreement (the so-called "pronominalized" languages) the agreement pattern is primarily governed by the person of the various arguments of the verb, rather than by their semantic or grammatical role. The most straightforward example of the typical pattern of agreement is the Tangut¹ system described by Kepping (to appear; cf. also Kepping 1975). First and second person arguments of the verb can be indexed in Tangut by postverbal *nga* '1st', *na* '2nd', and *ni* '1st or 2nd plural'; third person cannot be indexed. With intransitive verbs, of course, agreement can only be with the subject,² but with transitive verbs it may be with either agent or patient:

- 1) ni pha ngi-mbIn ndI-ſiei-na
you other wife choose-2nd
'You choose another wife!'
- 2) Mei Swen ma-nə na khê-na
formerly you hate-2nd
'Mei Swen formerly hated you.'

- 3) nga-mi ^šie-u ^žie žwon-vje-ni
 we at first river guard-Plural
 'At first we guard the river (crossings).'
- 4) ndz^lwo ngI nga In lda kI-žwon-nga
 someone I ACC hand grasp-1st
 'Someone grasped my hand.'³

In (1-4) we see that if there is only one first or second person argument, it governs agreement, regardless of its role. When there are two such arguments, agreement is with patient in preference to agent:

- 5) ni ti s^ləw-ž^lei nga-mi ng^lu-na
 you don't worry we save-2nd
 'You don't worry, we'll save you.'
- 6a) ni tIn nga In ldlə thI-nga
 you if I ACC indēd chase-1st
- b) ku tha tsI v^lə-thI-na
 then her also chase-2nd
 'If indeed you are chasing me, then chase her too.'

(5) shows agreement with second person patient in preference to first person agent, while (6a) shows agreement with first person patient in preference to second person agent. (Note the contrast of (6a) with (6b), where agreement is with the second person agent when patient is third person.)

This pattern or some variation on it is characteristic of TB agreement systems; many other examples are discussed in Bauman (1975) and DeLancey (1980a). Bauman (1977) and DeLancey (1980a) have shown that this is the original TB agreement pattern, and that the subject-agreement patterns of the Kuki-Chin and Kanauri-Almora groups are secondary developments.⁴ This pattern of agreement is of considerable theoretical interest. Bauman (1975, 1977) points out the parallelism between an agreement hierarchy which ranks first and second person above third, but equal to one another, to the so-called "split ergative" pattern of case marking which has attracted considerable attention in recent linguistic literature (cf. Silverstein 1976, Comrie 1978, Dixon 1979). In the split ergative pattern, which is found in a number of the pronominalized TB languages, third person transitive agents are marked for ergative case, but first and second person agents receive no case marking. A Tibeto-Burman example of the pattern is Kham (Watters 1973):

- 7) nga: nxn-lay nga-poh-ni-ke
 I you-ACC 1A-hit-2P-Perfective
 'I hit you.'
- 8) nxn nga-lay nx-poh-na-ke
 you I-ACC 2A-hit-1P-Perfective
 'You hit me.'
- 9) nxn no-lay nx-poh-ke
 you he-ACC 2A-hit-Perfective
 'You hit him.'
- 10) no-e no-lay poh-ke-o
 he-ERG he-ACC hit-Perf-3A

(The affixes glossed 1A, 2P etc. are subject (A) and object (P) agreement markers. These reflect the person hierarchy discussed here in a rather unusual fashion; they are discussed in detail in DeLancey (1980a,b)). Here we have the typical split ergative pattern: the third person agent of (10) is marked for ergative case, but first and second person agents, as in (7-9), are not. Thus the split ergative pattern, like the Tangut and other TB agreement patterns, reflects a fundamental distinction between the participants in the speech act and third persons.

2. Direction systems in Tibeto-Burman

Also analogous to the TB agreement pattern is the morphological category which has been called direction by Algonquianists. Direction marking, best known from the Algonquian languages but also attested elsewhere in North America as well as in a few Siberian, Australian, and Dravidian languages, marks a transitive verb to indicate the relative place of its agent and patient on the person hierarchy. This category has not, as far as I know, been reported previously from TB, but it is to be found in Jyarong, Nocte (Namsangia) and probably Rawang, and with interesting variations in Chepang and some closely related languages.

2.1 Jyarong⁵

Note that the agreement pattern described for Tangut provides the hearer with very little information; the verb forms indicates whether or not there is a first or second person participant, but tells nothing about the role of the participant. In Jyarong we find a similar agreement pattern, but with an added set of affixes which do provide some information about the semantic roles of the two arguments of the verb. The paradigm of the transitive verb in unmarked aspect is (Jin et. al. 1958,⁶ cf. also Wen 1944):

1-2s	tə-a-V-n
1s-3	V-ŋ
2s-3	tə- V-u
3s-3	V-u
3d,p-3	u-V
3-2s	tə-u-V-n
3-1s	u-V-ŋ
2-1s	kə-u-V-ŋ

(1-2s indicates that the 1st person agent may be singular, dual or plural without affecting the verb form, but the number of the 2nd person patient will be reflected in the suffix). The -ŋ and -n suffixes are respectively 1st and 2nd person agreement markers, cognate with Tangut nga and na. Except for the peculiar 2s-3 form in -u, the distribution of these suffixes is identical to the Tangut pattern, with patient agreement in the 1-2 and 2-1 configurations, and agreement with 1st or 2nd person in any role elsewhere.

The prefixed morphemes tə- and kə- are historically as well as synchronically rather perplexing.⁷ They occur only, and one or the other of them always, when there is a 2nd person participant in the event (tə- is prefixed to intransitive verbs with 2nd person subjects). But if the meaning of the category is 2nd person participant, then we must explain the significance of the t/k alternation. In order to do so we must first consider the second slot prefixes -u- and -a-.

The -u- prefix occurs in the 3-1, 3-2, and 2-1 configurations -- all and (deferring for a moment discussion of the 3p-3 form) only those configurations in which the agent is lower than the patient on a 1 > 2 > 3 hierarchy. Its function must then be to mark these configurations as being such -- it is what Algonquianists call an inverse marker. Direction systems in the Algonquian languages characteristically distinguish four direction categories: inverse, in which agent is lower than patient on a person hierarchy, direct, in which agent is higher than patient, and two so-called local categories (Hockett 1966), 1st agent acting on 2nd patient, and 2nd patient acting on 1st patient. Note that, like the split ergative pattern, such a system sets off 1st and 2nd person against 3rd, as does the Tangut and, to an extent, the Jyarong agreement pattern. Thus the Tibeto-Burman languages, like the Algonquian, recognize 1st and 2nd person as a distinct category, which Bauman (1975) has labelled the Speech Participant Category, and which I have referred to elsewhere (DeLancey 1980a,b) as the Speech Act Participants (SAPs). This suggests that we might also expect a direction marking Tibeto-Burman language to distinguish the local categories from the direct and inverse categories. There is no obvious direct morpheme in the Jyarong paradigm, but the 1-2 category does have its own mark, the -a- prefix, which occupies the same slot as the inverse marker -u-.