Tangut and Tibeto-Burman Morphology

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Since the earliest serious Tangut studies (Laufer 1916) it has been generally accepted that Tangut is a Tibeto-Burman language, with particular links to the Lolo-Burmese branch of the family. Despite certain embarrassing problems at the outset (Pelliot 1926), nothing has emerged in Tangut studies since that time which seriously challenges this view, which is subscribed to by both the Leningrad and Kyoto factions.1 Recently, however, a dissent to this view has been voiced by Professor Kwanten, who suggests that there may be problems with currently available reconstruction schemes for Tangut which invalidate the evidence for its TB affiliation. In a recent paper in this journal (1982) Kwanten specifically calls into question the reliability of some of the work of K.B. Kepping on Tangut verb morphology. My purpose in this paper, which is intended as a reply both to Kwanten's specific claims in that paper and to his general scepticism on the matter, is to demonstrate that the aspect of Tangut syntax which he discusses, and two other morphosyntactic systems explored in recent work by Kepping, are of indisputable TB provenience, and thus provide strong evidence for the TB affiliation traditionally claimed for that language. I will first discuss two aspects of what I will, following Wolfenden (1929), call the 'directive' category in Tangut, and then discuss the verb agreement system which is the focus of Kwanten's article.

I. The Tangut directive prefixes

Kepping (1979a) has identified a set of seven verb prefixes which serve in Tangut as markers of perfective aspect. The distribution of the prefixes is lexically governed, so that as a rule any given verb takes only one of the seven prefixes. It turns out that the classes of verb defined by the distribution of the prefixes tend to have certain semantic features in common, and from this Kepping has been able to reconstruct the original values of the prefixes. (The general line of argument, and exemplification for six of the prefixes, are given in Kepping 1971, which however was written before the discovery of the ndI2 prefix, which turns out for our purposes to be crucially important). The seven prefixes, in the Sofronov reconstruction, are:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{aI} & \quad \text{'upwards'} \\
\text{kaI} & \quad \text{'toward a reference point'} \\
\text{ndI2} & \quad \text{'hither'} \\
\text{naI} & \quad \text{'downwards'} \\
\text{viIa} & \quad \text{'away from a reference point'} \\
\text{thaI} & \quad \text{'hence'}
\end{align*}
\]

and riIa, the meaning of which is unclear.2
Now, without even looking at the forms, any Tibeto-Burmanist will immediately recognize this as describing an example of the type of 'directive' system exhaustively catalogued by Wolfenden in his classic Outlines of Tibeto-Burman Linguistic Morphology (1929). The morphosyntactic indication of deictic orientation of a verb, and the grammaticalization of such systems and their absorption into the tense/aspect system, are universal and recurrent throughout the TB family (see also DeLancey 1980, 1983). 3

When we do examine the actual forms, the TB provenience of the system is immediately obvious. First of all, the deictic pair, ndI/tha, are obviously related to a well-attested TB deictic demonstrative system 4 exemplified by Tibetan 'di, Jinghpaw ndai 'this', Tibetan de, Jinghpaw dai 'that'. 5 The remaining prefixes, and the system as a whole, bear comparison with strikingly similar systems in Qiang (from Sichuan; long reputed to be a likely close cousin, both linguistically and ethnically, of Tangut), its neighbor rGyarong, and the little known Primi of Yunnan, all indisputably Tibeto-Burman (Qiang and rGyarong forms from Sun 1981a, Primi from Lu 1980):

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
rGyarong & Qiang & Tangut & Primi \\
'up' & to- & tə- & a1 & tə \\
'down' & na & a & na1 & nə \\
'hither' & dzə & ndI2 & de \\
'hence' & tha & tha2 & t's
\end{array}
\]

The source and connections of the Tangut a1 are not clear, 6 but for the other three terms the relationship of the Tangut to the rGyarong, Qiang and Primi forms is obvious. Since all four systems are verbal prefixes with a directive and/or aspectual function (see below), it is clear that we can reconstruct not merely individual morphemes, but a prefixed directive system encoding at least deictic and vertical orientation, for the common ancestor of the four languages -- which is to say that it is clear that there is such a common ancestor. It is also clear that this common ancestor is considerably younger than Proto-TB, as no such close match can be found in other branches of the family.

This evidence for the connection of the Tangut with the Primi system gives both of them particular importance in the study of TB historical morphosyntax, since together they form a hitherto missing link between young directive systems which still retain their original motional significance and old fossilized morphology of the Tibetan type, thus validating the seminal hypothesis of Wolfenden (1929). We find, preserved in Tibetan orthography, verbal prefixes of apparently aspectual force, the origins of which have been the subject of considerable but not always productive speculation. There is some reason to believe that the attested distribution of the prefixes
is not identical to the original system, which has been obscured by assimilation and dissimilation between prefix and initial. Nevertheless the distribution of the prefixes is clearly lexically governed. The original semantic force of the prefixes has likewise been obscured over time, but on the basis of internal and comparative evidence Wolfenden was able to infer an original directive sense for several of the prefixes, most particularly for the r- and l-, whose association with verbs that have some sort of motional sense is especially striking. However, while productive directive systems abound in TB, as does the development of aspect marking from grammaticalized motion verbs (see DeLancey 1980, ch. 4, for copious examples of the former and several clear examples of the latter), we have until now lacked attestation of the necessary intermediate stage between a productive directive system and the thoroughly lexicalized system found in Tibetan. Tangut, in which the distribution of the prefixes is completely lexically governed, is an example of the system which would have had to exist in the ancestor of Classical Tibetan if Wolfenden's theory is correct, and the existence in Tibeto-Burman of such a system thus provides indirect support for Wolfenden's claim. Primi represents a slightly earlier stage of this line of development, and thus represents a link between younger systems and the Tangut and, eventually the Tibetan situation. In Primi many verbs can occur with any of the directive prefixes, so that for example the verb stó 'look' can occur in the constructions te-stó 'look up', ne-stó 'look down', t'ae-stó 'look there', de-stó 'look hither', k'ae-stó 'look outwards', and xe-stó 'look inwards'. Other verbs are restricted to only one prefix -- in some cases, at least, on fairly obvious semantic grounds. Thus gy 'buy' can take only de- 'hither'. Lu does not explicitly discuss the aspectual force of these prefixes, but he glosses, for example, de-gy as mài-le 'buy-PERFECTIVE', suggesting at least an incipient perfective sense for the directive prefixes. Thus in Primi we have the initial stages of lexicalization of what are still primarily directive morphemes (i.e. still retain a primarily directional sense) with some perfective force, while in Tangut we find a more thoroughly lexicalized set with strong perfective force but recoverable directive sense. In Tibetan, of course, we find the final stage, a completely lexicalized set of prefixes with purely aspactual force, but where the pattern of association of prefixes with lexical verb sets still vaguely suggests an origin in an older directive system.

For the remaining three Tangut prefixes we do not have obvious TB etymologies. kí̈ 'towards' might well be related to Qiang kwa 'toward the mountains', and, lacking a gloss for riê, there is nothing to stop us from speculating about a relationship to rGyarong rö 'toward the mountains' and/or ri 'toward the river'. However, the semantic equations here are not compelling, and since we do not yet have sufficient control of the phonological correspondences among these languages, we cannot confidently suggest etymological equations without a solid semantic argument.
Tangut viē^2 'away' is suggestive of the Lahu postverbal "particle of transportatory motion" ve (Matisoff 1973:317-8), and both are ultimately related to the widespread TB motion verb *wa (DeLancey 1980); but the details of the etymology remain to be worked out. Nevertheless the cognates which can be identified, the general congruity of the system with a well-attested TB morphosyntactic category, and its perfect congruence with the Qiang-rGyarong systems, establish the Tibeto-Burman provenience of the system beyond reasonable doubt.

II. The secondary directive system

Like many other TB languages, Tangut has a younger, more transparently motional directive construction which has developed as the older system became morphologized and passed into the aspectual system. This system, described in Kepping 1982, involves the use of independent deictically specified motion verbs to provide deictic specification for other verbs. In this construction these verbs may provide either the sense 'go/come and V', as in (1), or 'V in this/that direction', as in (2):

1) jion^1 nga^1 u^1 in^1 la^1 zie^1
   Yue army Wu OBJECT destroy come when
   'When the Yue army comes to destroy Wu ...'

2) sìu^1 zie^1 sìe^1 ni la^1 zie^1
   Shu send messenger arrive come when
   'When the messenger sent from Shu arrives [here] ...'

The verbs which enter into this construction are la^1 and la^2 'come' and zie^1, ta^1, rie^1, and viei^1 'go'. (More precise glosses are not yet available. It is worth pointing out that a multiplicity of motion verbs is a common feature of TB languages, and one which must be reconstructed for PTB and for the proto-language of each of the modern branches of the family (DeLancey 1980). Among the distinctions which are commonly lexicalized in the basic motion verb set are vertical orientation -- a distinction between 'go', 'go upwards', and 'go downwards' -- and boundedness -- the distinction between 'go off' and 'go somewhere in particular'. It would also be common to find a directive construction like this one in Tangut including such verbs as 'arrive', 'leave', 'enter', and 'emerge').

Of these verbs, la^1 and ta^1 have straightforward TB etymologies. *la^1 is clearly reconstructable as a Proto-Lolo-Burmese verb 'come' (Burling 1967:77, Bradley 1979:356). The same etymon is apparently found in Qiang li^3 'come down' (Sun 1981b:212; cp. Proto-Loloish li^3 'come down' (Bradley 1979:356)). As far as I can determine this form is not found elsewhere outside of LB, which supports the traditional classification of both Tangut and Qiang as close to the LB branch, and thus confirms their association with one another. *ta is a widespread TB root,