THE ROLE OF THE SPEAKER IN THE VERBAL SYSTEM OF THE TIBETAN DIALECT OF TABO/SPITI

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INTRODUCTION

The dialect of Tabo in the Lahul and Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh, India, belongs to the group of “Western Innovative Tibetan” (Bielmeier 1998) and is therefore related to the dialects of Upper Ladakh, Zanskar and Lahul on the one hand, and to some dialects of Upper Kinnaur and Ngari (Tsanda) on the other.

This first attempt at a description of the verbal system of the Tabo dialect tries to integrate phenomena found in Ladakhi by Koshal (1979) as well as categories used for Central Tibetan (Haller 1995, Tournadre 1996), in order to work out the peculiarities of this dialect.

As the role of the speaker has been found to be important in different distinctions applied to the description of Tibetan dialects, e.g. evidentiality (Haller), personal knowledge vs. acquired knowledge (van Driem 1998), orientation (Koshal), this paper describes the auxiliary system of the Tabo dialect in terms of categories related to the speaker. To be more precise, it is the speaker's knowledge of the verbal action that is seen as the guiding principle. Unlike many other descriptions, this system is not broken up into binary oppositions, but tries to distinguish a range of different categories of the speaker's knowledge.

For this description, the lexical category "control" is another important parameter. Furthermore it has to be kept in mind that there is no distinction of grammatical person except through the opposition "speaker" versus "non-speaker".

THE SPEAKER'S KNOWLEDGE

The speaker's knowledge of the verbal action is taken as the guiding principle. In a given utterance the focus can be on different aspects of this speaker's knowledge. The following aspects can be distinguished:

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2. "Verbal action" is used as a general term here and includes both states and events.
Table 1. Aspects of speaker’s knowledge

The distinctions suggested here range from intimate knowledge at the extreme left to incomplete knowledge on the right. Although it is difficult to establish a strict hierarchy or order among them, these distinctions constitute the different ways by which the speaker perceives or knows of the verbal action, and thus serve as useful categories for the description of the verbal system.

This paper focuses mainly on the first three categories, since they form a fairly coherent system, whereas the category called “inferred knowledge” is limited to some present perfect forms. A full description of inference would have to include a number of modal particles expressing probability or uncertainty.

Under each category of speaker’s knowledge the auxiliary morphemes can now be listed, grouped according to the stems to which they are added, or tenses that can be identified in this dialect. As for the category “speaker’s perception”, the following table shows that it can be either visual or non-visual (i.e. auditory or any other sensory perception).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on speaker’s involvement</th>
<th>Focus on speaker’s perception</th>
<th>Focus on speaker’s unspecified knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-visual Perception</td>
<td>visual perception</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present -et</td>
<td>-arak</td>
<td>-(t)uk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>future -in</td>
<td>-(k)en</td>
<td>-(k)ak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present -peret</td>
<td>-derak</td>
<td>-peruk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present perfect</td>
<td>-deret</td>
<td>-peruk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past -(w)en</td>
<td>-tcun</td>
<td>-(w)ak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Auxiliary morphemes

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3 In this paper the English terms are used for the tenses. In the case of the present tense, the term “imperfective” would be more adequate, since some such forms denote either present or past. But “imperfective” here refers to the first verbal stem.

4 Some of these morphemes are complex and cannot be analysed completely in this paper.
CATEGORIES ESTABLISHED FOR TABO TIBETAN

A) Focus on the speaker's involvement

In the first category the speaker is directly involved in the verbal action, normally either in the semantic role of agent or patient. It is therefore related to what Tournadre (1996) calls “egophoric”. The morpheme -et is added to the imperfective stem if the focus of a present-tense utterance is on the speaker's involvement. Usually in such a sentence the speaker is in the role of the agent and the verb is controllable (1):

(1)  nö  tca  tʰun-et
     I.ABS tea.ABS drink-PRES

'I drink tea.' or 'I am drinking tea.'

It is also possible to use -et with verbs which are non-controllable. In such a sentence, the speaker is in the role of patient and the auxiliary expresses a habitual state only. Because of this use of -et Haller's term "volitional" does not cover this category completely.

(2)  nö  nal-et
     I.ABS be.tired-PRES

'I am (always) tired.'

If -et is used with a controllable verb in an utterance where the agent is not the speaker, there is the implication that the action expressed happens according to the speaker's intention or wish. In this case, the verb could be called "volitional":

(3)  nūi  ṭū:  tcōklēt  sā-et
     I.GEN boy.ABS chocolate.ABS eat-PRES

'My child eats chocolate (and I agree).'</n

(4)  nūi  ṭū:  tcōklēt  sā: meṭ
     I.GEN boy.ABS chocolate.ABS eat-NEG.PRES

'My child doesn't eat chocolate.'

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5 All my Tabo material was collected on several field trips to the Spiti Valley 1996-98, and made accessible through the invaluable help of Pema Dorje, my informant from Tabo.
The morpheme -in is added to the imperfective stem of the verb to express the speaker's promise to perform an action. It is therefore similar to English "(Don't worry) I will do it". This type of future can only be formed with controllable verbs:

(5)  
\[ \eta \bar{o} \quad c\text{h}\bar{o}-\text{la} \quad k\text{u}\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{u}} \quad t\text{\text{\`e}}r-\text{in} \]
LABS you-DAT apple.ABS give-FUT

'I will give you an apple.'

There is a second type of future ending in -(k)en. It also consists of the auxiliary jin but is preceded by the particle -ka- which appears in the spoken form only after unvoiced consonants. With this form of the future the speaker expresses his strong intention to perform the verbal action, which again makes it possible only with controllable verbs:

(6)  
\[ \eta \bar{o} \quad k\text{h}\bar{o}-\text{la} \quad k\text{u}\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{u}} \quad n\text{i}: \quad t\text{\text{\`e}}\text{l}-\text{ken} \]
LABS he-DAT apple two.ABS give-FUT

'I intend to give him two apples.'

For the present perfect tense the auxiliaries are -peret or -deret. They are added to the perfective stem of the verb. I consider the morphemes -per- and -der- to be grammaticalized verbs functioning as perfective markers. -per- (Written Tibetan: byed 'to do') is used with controllable verbs (7) and -der- (WT bsdad 'to stay') with a number of verbs of motion (8).

(7)  
\[ \eta \bar{o} \quad t\text{c}\text{\`a}-\text{la}-\text{ja} \quad d\text{o}\text{l}\text{\`e} \quad d\text{o}-\text{peret} \]
LABS thing-PL all put.away-PERF

'I have put all the things in a safe place.'

(8)  
\[ \eta \bar{o} \quad n\text{\`i}-\text{ma} \quad d\text{\`e}-\text{deret} \]
LABS sun warm.up-PERF

'I am basking in the sun.'

The focus can also be on the speaker's involvement in an utterance with a verbal action in the past tense. It is formed by adding -/[w]en to the perfective stem of the verb. This is only possible with controllable verbs (and a small group of verbs which are considered to be either controllable or non-controllable):

\[ \quad \]

\[ \quad \]

6 Apart from a handful of irregular verbs there are a number of controllable verbs which have slightly different imperfective and perfective stems.