Relative clauses in Kyirong Tibetan

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INTRODUCTION

Relative clauses in Central Tibetan dialects have been described in detail by Mazaudon 1977 and very recently by DeLancey 1999 for Lhasa Tibetan, and by Kim 1989 for Shigatse Tibetan. The three studies agree on several points: first, that relative clauses in these dialects are constructed with a set of nominalizers differing from dialect to dialect. And, second, that there are several syntactic ways of constructing relative clauses. In each of the cases, the rules determining the choice of the nominalizers turned out to be very complex.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the construction of relative clauses in the dialect spoken in the Lende valley, which is a variety of the Kyirong dialect. It will be shown that the set of nominalizers used in this dialect and the rules of their distribution, again, is different.

In this paper, I will first give an overview on the four nominalizers which are part of the Kyirong system, -kēː, -pa, -sā, and -tēː; and illustrate their use. A special section will be dedicated to negated relative clauses. Second, the different word orders possible in Kyirong

1. A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the 6th Himalayan Languages Symposium, June 2000, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It could be written thanks to a grant of the Swiss National Science Foundation. The paper is based on data I collected in Nepal with my two main informants, who both live in Lende (Kyirong) and occasionally spend some time in Nepal.
2. I am grateful to Martine Mazaudon and Scott DeLancey for their helpful comments, and to Danièle Klapproth for proof-reading the manuscript.
3. Kyirong lies in western Central Tibet (today's Tibetan Autonomous Region), about 70 km north of Katmandu. The Lende valley, where the variety described here is spoken, lies west of Kyirong, on the border to Nepal.
relative constructions will briefly be described. Furthermore, throughout the paper, the relative clauses in the Kyirong system will be compared to systems of other Central Tibetan dialects described so far.

1. The inventory of nominalizers – overview

The four nominalizers used in the Kyirong system are -kē:, -pa, -sā, and -tcē:. The frequency of use of these four relativizers varies greatly, as Table 1 illustrates. The nominalizer -kē: is the most widely used nominalizer in relativization. It can be used to nominalize almost all the roles, except the oblique roles for location, goal, and source. As can be seen from the table, there are overlaps in the use of -kē: and -pa. -pa can relativize instrument, patient and agent, but the latter only in few cases. The nominalizer -sā is used with head-nouns that are locations, sources, or goals, and recipients. The nominalizer -tcē:, finally, is the most restricted of all in terms of the role of the head-noun it relativizes (only patient), as well as in terms of tense and aspect. Each of the nominalizers will be described in more detail in the subsections below.

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4. Kyirong Tibetan has three phonemically distinctive register tones: a high tone (ā), a middle tone (ã), and a low tone (ã̂). In addition, there are two contour tones, level and falling: (ã̄) stands for a high falling tone, (ã̄) stands for a middle falling tone, and (ã̂) stands for a low falling tone. According to a general rule, the tone of the second syllable of a compound is always high. Thus, in this paper, those nominalizers that phonologically behave like the second member of a compound when they are attached to the verb stem, are written with a high tone (-kē:, -sā, and -tcē:). -pa, which is the only nominalizer behaving like an atonal clitic, is written without tone. Furthermore, there is allomorphic variation for each of the endings except •sā, contrasting -kē: with -gē:, -pa with -ba and -wa, and -tcē: with -dzē:, according to the preceding sound and depending on the properties of the verb.
Table 1: Distribution of the nominalizers.

1.1 The nominalizer -kë:

The morphological characteristics of the nominalizer -kë: are the following. It behaves like the second element of a compound as far as its intonation is concerned. That means that it is not an atonal clitic, but carries a high tone.5

The nominalizer -kë: is attached to the imperfective stem of the verb.6 Etymologically, it goes back to the Classical Tibetan nominalizer

5. The morpheme is either pronounced with or without nasalization of the vowel, according to the native village of the speaker. There is a homophone verbal morpheme used for habitual actions and general statements. It has not been possible to determine so far, however, whether the two share the same etymological origin.
6. In Kyirong Tibetan, three verb stems can be differentiated: an imperfective, a perfective, and an imperative stem. Stem alternations, however, only occur with a restricted number of verbs. In Kyirong Tibetan, the following four types of stem alternations occur:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>imperfective</th>
<th>perfective</th>
<th>imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 stems</td>
<td>mā</td>
<td>mè:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 stems a</td>
<td>prī</td>
<td>prī:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 stems b</td>
<td>cāp</td>
<td>cāp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 stem</td>
<td>lōp</td>
<td>lōp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**mkhan.** This nominalizer is part of the nominalizer inventories of the majority of Tibetan dialects.

In Kyirong Tibetan, -kê: can be used to relativize a big range of roles, as illustrated in table 1 above. It can thus be called the default nominalizer of this dialect. The different uses of this nominalizer are exemplified below, example 1) shows -kê: relativizing an **agent** head noun:

1) **dimi:** tê(r)-kê: pî:miː:-de kâ: pû:-so:?  
   key give-NOM woman-DEF where went-PAST  
   ‘Where is the woman who was giving the key (to so.)?’

In this sentence, the relative clause precedes the head noun “the woman”, we are thus dealing with a prenominal relative clause. This is the most widely used word order – we will come back to this point later. The head noun is mostly followed by the definite article -de.

The next sentence, example 2), at first sight seems to be almost identical to the above sentence. Here, however, the relativized head-noun is the recipient of the relative clause:

2) **khö:** dimi: tê(r)-kê: pî:miː:-de kâ: pû:-so:?  
   he.ERG key give-NOM woman-DEF where went-PAST  
   ‘Where is the woman to whom he was giving the key?’

The main clause is completely identical with example 1), and again “the woman” is the head noun. However, due to the presence in the relative clause of an **agent**, “he” in the ergative case, the head-noun “the woman” obviously cannot be the agent of the relative clause.

In example 3) the role of the head-noun is different again. Here we are dealing with a **patient** or **theme**.

3) **pî:** tandâ lô:-gê: tep-de ja:bö nu:.  
   I.ERG now read-NOM book-DEF good COP  
   ‘The book I am reading now is good.’