PRELIMINARY REPORT ON EVIDENTIAL CATEGORIES IN LENDE TIBETAN (KYIRONG)

Brigitte Huber
University of Berne

INTRODUCTION

The grammatical marking of evidential categories has been shown to be an important phenomenon in the verbal system of several Tibetan dialects (see DeLancey 1986 for Lhasa Tibetan, Tournadre 1996 for standard spoken Tibetan, and Felix Haller for Shigatse and Themchen Tibetan in this issue). In all these cases these categories are closely connected with a speaker vs. non-speaker dichotomy.

The hitherto undescribed verbal system of the Tibetan dialect of Lende also shows features which have to be analyzed in terms of evidentiality. The dialect of Lende is spoken in approximately ten villages in the Lende valley near Kyirong (Tsang), on the Nepalese border. It is very similar to the language varieties spoken in Kyirong and in the adjoining Tibetan speaking areas of Nepal.

The aim of this paper is to develop the necessary categories for the description of an essential part of the verbal system of Lende Tibetan. In Section 1 the two types of auxiliary verbs in Lende Tibetan, equative and existential, will be established. In 1.1 and 1.2 an analysis of the different auxiliary verbs and the comparison of their functions will be presented. It will be shown that the main distinction made in the auxiliary verb system depends on the type of knowledge the speaker has of the fact he is uttering.

The inventory of auxiliary verbs in Lende Tibetan does not differ considerably from those of other Tibetan dialects: yin and yod, the auxiliary verbs already known in Written Tibetan, and the more recent 'dug constitute the basic inventory. In Lende Tibetan they are pronounced as jīː; jøː and nyː. In addition, the Lende dialect contains two more innovative auxiliary verbs, which function to express epistemological status, jímbeː and jobajimbeː. Although in

---

1 I would like to thank Roland Bielmeier and the other members of the Tibetan Dialects Project in Berne for contributing to fruitful discussions on this subject, and Danièle Klapproth for thoroughly proof-reading this paper.
2 This is the translation of Tournadre's "Tibétain parlé standard".
3 The only paper dealing with this dialect is Bielmeier 1982.
other dialects auxiliary verbs are interpreted and classified slightly differently, the main categorization focussing on the speaker and on his way of seeing things remains comparable. What is remarkable for Lende Tibetan is the extended use of the auxiliaries ī and ā, which can be shown to be very close to Written Tibetan.

In Section 2 an overview of selected parts of the Lende Tibetan verbal system will be given. In 2.1 the imperfective category will be described in more detail. It is formed with the morphemes -ā and -nu, which are both also used independently as auxiliary verbs. The comparison of this independent use with their respective functions when they are used as auxiliary morphemes will show that the application of the same descriptive criteria is justified.

1. AUXILIARY VERBS

There are five auxiliary verbs expressing the meaning “to be” in Lende Tibetan:4 ī, jimbe, ā, nu, and jobajimbe.5 The two verbs ī and jimbe can only be used to link a noun with another noun or an adjective, in order to give a definition of the first mentioned noun or to identify it. Therefore for these two auxiliary verbs the term “equative”6 will be adopted here. The three other verbs ā, nu, and jobajimbe are mostly used to express more subjective statements. They can also have a linking function, and in such cases they will be called “attributive”. Furthermore they can be used in existential/locational contexts. As a cover term for all its different functions, this group of auxiliary verbs will be called “existential”. An overview of the findings presented in this section is given in Table 1.

---

4 Another column, entitled “not specified”, has to be added to the category “old knowledge” in Table 1. I had not investigated this category in detail before this paper was completed. It contains the equative auxiliary verb jingge and the existential auxiliary verb jokē (jingēna and jokēna: when the speaker is insisting). The difference between ī and jingē cannot be accounted for in detail yet. They both seem to express speaker’s old knowledge, which is not specified in terms of how it was acquired. But it is clear that the difference does not correspond to that between yin and red in Lhasa and standard spoken Tibetan. As far as the existential auxiliary verbs are concerned, jokē: expresses unspecified knowledge where the speaker does not need to explain how he acquired the information (he simply knows, and he is sure about it), whereas ā emphasizes the personal experience of the speaker. In this respect, jokē: seems to correspond to yod-pa-red of Lhasa Tibetan.

5 The complex morphological structure of the verbs jimbe and jobajimbe will not be analyzed further.

6 This is the term used by van Driem (1997:125), whereas DeLancey (1990:295) calls this category *equational*. Tournadre (1996:228) also differentiates between *équatif* ("correspond à une définition, à un trait définitoire ou essentiel à propos duquel le locuteur ne formulé pas d’appréciation") and *attributif* ("correspond à une qualification impliquant une appréciation du locuteur").
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of knowledge</th>
<th>OLD knowledge</th>
<th>NEW knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Way of acquiring information</strong></td>
<td>-not specified (jī:); experienced (jø:)</td>
<td>direct sensory evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equative auxiliary verbs</strong></td>
<td>jī:</td>
<td>jimbê:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existential auxiliary verbs</strong></td>
<td>ø:</td>
<td>ny:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1. Auxiliary verbs of Lende Tibetan**

As a general rule, the difference between sentences containing equative jī: and sentences containing an attributive jø: is the following: jī: is used by the speaker to identify the object/person described by referring to its intrinsic nature, whereas with jø: he emphasizes a particular, more or less subjective quality of the object/person in question. Often with jø: a personal experience or subjective evaluation is involved. In many cases the choice of the linking verb depends only on the perspective or focus adopted by the speaker, as examples (1) and (2) show:

1. ηε-ge adziı barø jī:.
   L.GEN-GEN sister.ABS rich.ABS be
   'My sister is rich.'

2. ηε-ge adziı barø jø:.
   L.GEN-GEN sister.ABS rich.ABS be
   'My sister is rich.'

---

7 The general labels "old" and "new" knowledge used here have been suggested by DeLancey (1986:204) for Lhasa Tibetan.
8 Similar systems can be found in Nepali (ho vs. cha) and in Spanish (ser vs. estar) etc.
9 I collected the linguistic material presented in this paper during field research in Nepal in spring 1998. The man who acted as my informant lives in Sale, one of the bigger villages in Lende, and was at the time 27 years old. I am much indebted to him for his valuable collaboration and for enduring the heat of Kathmandu for ten weeks.
10 In my phonological transcription ä stands for high register tone and ø for low register tone. In the course of future research, another feature, breathy voice, will probably turn out to be phonologically relevant. It is not taken into consideration in the present transcription.
11 This genitive is marked twice, with the genitive marker -ge attached to ηε:, which is already the genitive of ηα "I". This phenomenon of double marking can be observed with all the nouns ending in a vowel, whereas nouns with consonantal endings can only form their genitives with -ge.
In example (1) the speaker focusses on an essential, generally accepted quality of his sister, in example (2) on the fact that the quality he is describing is part of his personal appreciation of his sister, regardless of whether other people think the same or not. The difference between such sentences thus depends on the context and is not always easy to account for.

1.1. Equative auxiliary verbs

The equative auxiliary verbs *jīː* and *jimbēː* are used in sentences with defining character, which convey objective information. The difference between the two equative verbs *jīː* and *jimbēː* is the following: whereas with *jīː* the speaker shows that what he is saying is a general truth, and moreover that he is certain about what he is saying because he has known it for a long time, with *jimbēː* he implies that to him the content of the sentence is new knowledge, in the broadest sense of the term.

(3) \[ \etaː \quad pēmbā. \ tēndūp \quad jīːː. \]
I.ABS Pemba.Tondrup.ABS be

'I am Pemba Tondrup.'

(4) \[ mōrāː \quad ūbū-de \quad kēkēː \quad jīːː. \]
she-(GEN) brother-DEF.ABS teacher.ABS be

'Her brother is a teacher.'

(5) \[ pōdžā \quad lū \quad tāŋge:-de \quad pāsāː \quad jīːː. \]
child song.ABS singing-DEF.ABS Pasang.ABS be

'The child who is singing a song is Pasang.'

In the three examples above the speaker identifies either himself or another person. These identifications are general truths, of which the speaker has been aware for a long time. With his statements he mainly focusses on the general validity of what he is saying and on his certainty about it, rather than on the degree of his personal involvement.

In the case where a speaker has only recently come to realize a generally valid fact, rather than having known it for a long time, the auxiliary verb *jimbēː* will be used. As with *jīːː* the use of *jimbēː* does not depend on whether the speaker or a non-speaker is the subject of the sentence. It is, however, less likely