Functions of a Written Tibetan Instrumental Particle, *-kyis*

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Tibetan, a major Tibeto-Burman (TB) language that has the oldest written documents in that language family, has typologically been regarded as of the ergative type. Before this typological categorization, Tibetan was recognized by European scholars as an "exotic" language in which no passive formation was found.

However, Tibetan grammarians noticed the peculiar functions of a case particle that specifies the material, method, and origin of action. This particle was characterized as instrumental by them. A majority of TB languages have a similar case particle that specifies the agent of transitive sentences and/or well-developed systems of pronominalization in which ergativity is realized in a separate way from the above. It should also be noted that the traditional grammarians of Tibet recognized split-ergativity in Written Tibetan (WT) and made up very sophisticated split-rules.

The rules have been quite dominant over the normative WT since the middle ages and influential on the colloquial language too. Looking into the mechanism of Tibetan ergativity carefully, however, we notice the following:

a) *It is true that Tibetan has an ergative case marker (so-called instrumental particle),* *-kyis (-gyis, -gis, -yis, -s* or- *'is),* which usually marks a transitive agent.

b) It marks intransitive agent too (Takeuchi & Takahashi, 1994). This phenomenon dates back to the period of Dunhuang manuscripts (ca. the 10th century A.D.).

c) The ergativity in Tibetan is not so consistent in transitive sentences either, that is to say, it shows split-ergativity.

d) *The conditions of split are still not clear. The Tibetan traditional grammarians tried* to define them from various angles, such as "tense," emphasis, degree of subjectivity on action, and so on. But their results do not necessarily fit with linguistic facts. Nagano (1987) proposed conditions according to the transitivity or meaning of verbs, but these were not sufficient to explain every case of split.

e) Tibetan has no anti-passive structure.

f) The categorization of Tibetan verbs is somewhat reminiscent of the active type, although I am not saying that Tibetan is an active language.

Tournadre (1994) claimed the "trajectory model" for Tibetan ergativity. His theory seems to be the most comfortable to accommodate several split phenomena of the Tibetan ergativity on the descriptive level of modern Tibetan. However, it does not necessarily explain those in WT.

I attempt in this paper to review, not being biased by the traditional definitions of it, the functions of the particle on the basis of actual text data. These are written according to the traditional grammar but still reflect older usages of *-kyis* (some of which are often disregarded or regarded as *ungrammatical* by grammarians).

TRADITIONAL DEFINITION

According to the traditional grammarians' sense, genitive particles (*'brel sgra*) and instrumental particles (*byed sgra*) belong to the same category, and the latter is distinguished from the former in that *byed sgra* can show the relationship of grammatical items more specifically. Thus, *khong gi yi ge* 'his letter' may mean both 'the letter he possesses' and 'the letter he writes or wrote,' whereas *khong gis bris pa'i yi ge* stands for 'the letter he wrote' only.

They explain a similar thing to the above in the following manner: the origin/source of action, cause, reason, method, instrument, and material must exist before the action is realized onto the object. For instance, when you have the three grammatical items—'hands,' 'stone,' and 'to throw'—and the action of 'to throw' is realized on 'stone,' the instrument for 'throwing stone'—'hands'—should exist before the two other items. Thus, 'hands' is supposed to be marked by -*s*.

They also say that when the origin of action and the object on which the action is realized coincide, *byed sgra* does not occur. In intransitive sentences, therefore, it never appears.

Based on these, they classified the usages of these particles into five:

1 Formal agent in active mood (*byed pa po*; Skt. **kartri**)

(1)   *bcom ldan 'das kyis bka'stsal pa.* (Vajra.:13 > Inaba, 1986, p. 185)
         'Buddha told.'

(2)   *ngas khod la bshad do.* (Vajra.: 5 > Inaba, 1986, p. 185)
         'I will explain for you.'

2 Actual agent in passive mood (*byed pa po*)

(3)   *bdag gis bstan.* (SI: 18)
         '(It) is explained by me.'

(4)   *ngas shing bcad par bya'o.* (Inaba, 1986, p. 187)
         'A tree is cut by me.'

(5)   *des byin.* (DB > Inaba, 1986, p.187)
         '(Something) was given by him.'

3 Method, means (*byed pa*; Skt. karana)

(6)   *gser gyis byugs.*(SI: 18)
         '(Someone) gilt/plated with gold.'

4 Cause, reason

(7)   *pho brang 'phang thang chus khyer ro.* (ZY: 74)
         'Palace Phangthang was carried away by flood.'

(8)   *de rnams chos byas pas lan.* (ZY: 72)
         'Those occurred because they practiced Buddhism.'

5 Adverbializer

(9)   *rim* 'grade, order'   ⇒   *rim gyis* 'in order, gradually'

         lhun 'mass, bulk'   ⇒   *lhun gyis* 'abruptly'

Besides these primary rules, a number of complicated split rules have been written by the Tibetan grammarians as well as foreign scholars. In spite of their energetic efforts, however, the results seem to show a number of discrepancies with linguistic facts.

DISCREPANCIES

A straightforward discrepancy occurs in one of their principles that *-kyis* never appears in intransitive sentences. Actually, the particle appears in intransitive sentences. The oldest examples are found in the Dunhoung manuscripts. Thus,

(10)   *khyo'da's dmag pon 'ong ngam.*(DH 106>TT 652)
         'You sir, are you fit to be a general?'
(11)   *myi yongs **kyis** skyid do.*(DH 113>TT 652)
         'Everyone is happy.'
(12)   *myang **gis** kyang glo ba ring ste,*(DH 109>TT 652)
         'Myang, too, became disloyal, and ...'

Chang and Chang (1980) also point out a similar phenomenon in modern Tibetan. These examples show that *-kyis* is related to the intransitive structure too.

Tibetan has three kinds of productive ways of adverbialization by suffixing the following:

a) locative particle (except for *-na*, which does not adverbialize anything),
b) ablative particle *-nas*, and,
c) instrumental particle *-kyis*.

Thus,

'di 'this'	⇒	*'dir* 'here'
gsal po 'clear'	⇒	*gsal por* 'clearly'
rtsa 'root[rt.]'	⇒	*rtsa **nas*** 'totally, basically'
rim 'grade, order'	⇒	*rim **gyis*** 'in order, gradually'
rang bzhin 'nature'	⇒	*rang bzhin **gyis*** 'naturally'

These morphological procedures are regular and their results as adverbs are also quite stable in their meanings, except for one case. The exception is *rang bzhin gyis*.

This adverb is very often used in Buddhist canons as well as commentaries. Looking over about 300 usages of this particle, I find that almost all of them correspond to Sanskrit adverbs standing for 'naturally, by nature.' However, in *Prajñāpāramita-hṛdaya--sūtra*, a well-known Buddhist canon, we find the following sentence: Skt. *paṃca skandhas tāṃś ca svabhāvaśūnyān vyavalokayati* (Nakamura & Kino, 1960, pp. 175–177; see Conze, 1978, pp. 31–55 for details of editions).

A widely accepted translation for this sentence would be something like "There are the five Skandhas, and those he considered as something by nature empty" (Muller, 1927, p.145). But we do not have any adverbials in this Sanskrit phrase. Instead, *svabhāva* is the object of *śūnyā*. Therefore, this Sanskrit sentence must be read as "(Avalokiteśvara) discerned that five elements of being are devoid of substance/nature." A positive meaning for *śūnyā* 'emptiness' in a later period seems to have caused the misunderstanding mentioned above (Tachikawa, 1994).

In the corresponding Tibetan text (Derge Kangyur 34 f.144b-146a), we see the following:

(13)   *phun po lnga po de dag la yang rang bzhin gyis stong par rnam par lta'o.*

It is generally believed that Tibetan translations of Buddhist canons are so exactly literal that we can even reconstruct the Sanskrit text on the basis of the Tibetan. Since philologists attested that this canon was translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan between 790 and 840 A.D. (Conze, 1978, p.24), we may be able to appropriately define the grammatical function of *rang bzhin gyis* with the aid of the Sanskrit text.

First, *rang bzhin gyis* is not an adverbial phrase, since, in the Sanskrit text, we do not find any adverbials. Secondly, *stong pa* 'empty, lacking in' does not require instrumental case. Thirdly, *rang bzhin* 'nature, substance' is a noun. What then is the function of *gyis* here? As far as these data are concerned, the only logical choice is for me to hypothesize that this *-gyis* is a focus marker or a new information carrier.

In that case, why do we have an instrumental particle, *-kyis*, in the Tibetan text? The reason is that Skt. *śūnyā.* requires the instrumental case for its object and the translator of this canon automatically put a Tibetan instrumental case particle before *stong pa*. In spite of this, Tibetan Buddhists understood what the original Sanskrit sentence meant, and, for instance, *Tshong kha pa*, the founder of the *dGe lugs* sect, comments on this sentence, "As for the five elements of being, they do not have any nature."

MISUSE? OR THE TRUTH?

My hypothesis above is supported by several examples from the older manuscripts which almost all the Tibetologists disregarded or wanted to delete from their grammars.

Yamaguchi (1974) cites an example from Dunhuang folk literature (whose source is not shown) as a wrong usage. It is,

(14)   *des   me tog   sna tshogs kyis   gtor.*
        he-ERG flower   various   scatter (PFT)
        'He scattered various flowers.'

Jäschke shows a very similar example:

(15)   *me tog **gis** gtor ro.* (JA, p. 209)
        'They strewed flowers.'

In sentence (14), *-s*, an instrumental case marker, after *de* 'it, he' marks the transitive agent and *-kyis* does the patient, *me tog sna tshogs* 'various flowers.' According to the Tibetan traditional grammars, this usage of *-kyis* is totally wrong, and Yamaguchi (personal communication) claims that this Tibetan phrase is ungrammatical, although he writes in his grammar that this particle may be an "emphasizer."

Some colleagues (N. Tournadre and T. Takeuchi, personal communication) suggest that *sna tshogs kyis* may make an adverbial phrase, under the analogy of the usage **5**, standing for 'in various manners.' However, no dictionary nor glossary lists that form, whereas we find *sna tshogs su/du*.

In sentence (15), the situation is simpler; the patient is marked by *-gis*.

The Dunhuang manuscripts often reflect colloquial aspects of Tibetan as a natural language, and their so-called misuses constitute precious clues to grope for the earlier stage of Tibetan, before the traditional grammar of the language was established. Now that we have this particular usage of *-kyis* in a written form, we must accept the linguistic fact as it is.