

## THE PUZZLE OF da-drag IN TIBETAN

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### ABSTRACT

In the ninth century, the post-suffixial letter -d (ཏ da-drag) of ancient Tibetan was abolished by the "Standardization of Writing". This means that the final stop -d of final consonant-clusters, which must have been pronounced in Tibetan some time before the ninth Century, was already missing from the pronunciation of the ninth century. We do not find the post suffix letter -d in written documents or "dictionaries" after the ninth century. In the pronunciation of modern Tibetan we do not find this -d as a post final consonant either. However, in certain cases the tones of those words which historically ended with this post final -d are different from the tones of those words which historically did not end in -d despite the other conditions of their tone formation being similar. In the period before this post final consonant disappeared, it might have first become a glottal stop under certain conditions. In turn, this glottal stop may have influenced the formation of the tones in these words.

In Modern Literary Tibetan we see syllables ending with the written finals -g(l), -ng, -d, -n, -b, -m, -v, -r, -l and -s, and cluster-final -s. But in the classical literary Tibetan from before the 9th century A.D., we see, in addition to the final consonants and the cluster-final consonants mentioned above, another cluster-final -d which in traditional Tibetan grammar is called da-drag. Table I shows the written forms of all the possible combinations of the ten finals and the two cluster-finals.

Table I(2)

suffix post-suffix	g	ng	d	n	b	m	v	r	l	s
d	/	/	/	nd	/	/	/	rd	ld	/
s	gs	ngs	/	/	bs	ms	/	/	/	/

Today, scholars of Tibetan phonetics are generally in agreement that classical Tibetan writing represents the actual pronunciation at the time when the Tibetan script was invented (the 7th-8th century, A.D.)(3). The present paper does not challenge this supposition. The written forms in Table I can be transcribed as Table II:

Table II

	-g (4)	-ŋ	-d	-n	-b	-m	-ʔ	-r	-l	-s
--d	/	/	/	-nd	/	/	/	-rd	-ld	/
--s	-gs	-ŋs	/	/	-bs	-ms	/	/	/	/

In the chapter "The Chronicles" of TIBETAN HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS FROM DUNHUANG(5), which can be reliably dated as being written 650-747 A.D., we find the

following words with final consonant clusters ending in -d.

Tibetan(6)	Page & frequency of occurrence
dbyard	pp.16, 18(4), 19, 21, 22(2), 23(3), 24(3), 25(2), 26, 27(3), 28(2), 29(2), 30(3), 31(2), 32(3), 33(3), 34(3), 36
gnyerd	pp.16
gsold	pp.18(2), 19(2), 27
vtsald	pp.19, 22, 23(4), 24, 27, 29, 32(3), 33(4), 34(3), 38
rild	pp.21, 22, 29(2)
stsald	pp.23, 25(2), 30, 31, 32(3), 37, 38, 41(3)
dold	p.23
bstand	p.27
vkhard	pp.28, 32
sbyard	p.31
khrald	p.31
tshald	p.38
vrshald	pp.35(2), 28, 40
rold	p.35
stord	p.37
brgald	p.37
vond	p.38

All the words above are verbs except dbyard 'summer', so we will try to concentrate our attention on verbs. In ancient Tibetan verb lexicons we find more words with -d. For instance, in the verb table appendix to "Gser-tog"(7), among the 878 verbs there are 245 with da-drag. However, not all the tenses or moods of those 245 verbs have da-drag. It appears only in the past tense and/or imperative mood. Only in rare cases is da-drag seen in the present tense, and never in the future tense. This, perhaps, has something to do with the semantics of the words, a topic with which I hope to deal in another paper.

Besides the two lexicons mentioned above, I have also checked another relatively complete Tibetan verb lexicon Gser-tog-sum-rtag(8) as well as the inscriptions in TU BO JIN SHI

LU(9). In all these documents it be seen that the only consonants occurring before da-drag are the three letters n, r, or l. This is noted in the Grammar section of the "Gser-tog"(Please refer to Table I)(10). Since those words are too numerous to list, thirty words have been selected from the Gser-tog and the Tu-mi as examples (Appendix).

Historically, the letter d could be used either as a final or a cluster-final. When it was used as a final, -d was pronounced as a stop, according to many scholars(11). It still exists as a voiceless final stop exists in some Tibetan dialects today. Prof Zhang Ji-chuan went a step further, affirming that -d had been pronounced in Ancient Tibetan as a stop when it was used as cluster-final(12). Nevertheless, the letter -d in Modern Tibetan (Lhasa dialect) is not pronounced phonetically as [d] whether found used as a final or a cluster-final. In the words where it is a final, -d caused a change in the vowel, and at the same time correlates with a tonal split. This point, thoroughly analyzed by many authors, will be discussed further below. But among the words in ancient Tibetan where -d acts as a cluster-final, the influence it has had on the development of the finals and tones is still an unanswered question. This influence, especially as it relates to tones, is the central focus of this paper.

In the 9th century(13), the Tibetan scripts were given an official "skad-gsar-bcad"(14), that is, the written forms of the Tibetan language were standardized. This royally authorized standardization abolished the cluster-final d. This means that da-drag, which might once have been pronounced, had disappeared from the actual pronunciation of the colloquial language, or at least from the standard pronunciation of that time and that area ( meaning the Central Tibetan Area where the king was.)(15). The criteria for the Standardization was "to make Tibetan in keeping with the time and the place." Therefore, since the Ancient Tibetan Script reflected the actual pronunciation, the Tibetan writing immediately after the Standardization was a well-documented close representation of the actual pronunciation.

Before da-drag had disappeared from the pronunciation and had been abolished from the orthography, some other phonetic means must have appeared to compensate for the loss, so that the related words could still be semantically differentiated. In Sino-Tibetan languages,