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:

1 Cf. Felix Haller's article in this volume.
2 "Verbal action" is used as a general term here and includes both states and events.
focus on speaker's involvement
focus on speaker's perception
focus on unspecified knowledge
speaker's inferred knowledge

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>
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<td>-teuŋ</td>
<td>-son</td>
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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) \( \eta\ddot{o} \quad t\ddot{c}a \quad th\ddot{u}\eta\ddot{-}et \)

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) \( \eta\ddot{o} \quad \eta\ddot{a}l\ddot{-}et \)

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) \( \eta\ddot{u}\ddot{i} \quad t\ddot{u}: \quad tc\ddot{o}k\ddot{l}\ddot{e}t \quad sa\ddot{-}et \)

I.GEN boy.ABS chocolate.ABS eat-PRES

'My child eats chocolate (and I agree).'

(4) \( \eta\ddot{u}\ddot{i} \quad t\ddot{u}: \quad tc\ddot{o}k\ddot{l}\ddot{e}t \quad sa: \ddot{m}\ddot{e}t \)

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) \( \eta \circ \quad c^h\circ \circ -la \quad k\circ \circ \circ \circ \quad t\circ \circ -in \)
    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) \( \eta \circ \quad k^h\circ \circ -la \quad k\circ \circ \circ \quad p\circ \circ : \quad t\circ \circ -ken \)
    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\(^6\). 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) \( \eta \circ \quad t\circ \circ \circ -l\circ \circ -k -ja \quad d\circ \circ \circ \circ \quad d\circ -peret \)
    LABS     thing-PL    all      put.away-PERF

‘I have put all the things in a safe place.’

(8) \( \eta \circ \quad n \circ \circ m \circ \circ \circ \quad d\circ -deret \)
    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):

\(^6\) Apart from a handful of irregular verbs there are a number of controllable verbs which have slightly different imperfective and perfective stems.
Let us now have a look at all the auxiliary morphemes found in the first category. If the focus of an utterance is on the speaker's involvement, the auxiliary always consists of some form related to the Written Tibetan verbs yod and yin, namely -et on the one hand and -in /-[k]en and -[w]en on the other hand. It must be noted that only the forms with -et allow the use with a non-speaker agent, as in examples (3) and (4) above. With -in /-[w]en /-[k]en this usage is not accepted by my informant.

**B) Focus on the speaker's perception**

The second category focuses on the way in which the speaker “perceives” the verbal action. The speaker’s perception can be either visual or non-visual. The speaker’s non-visual way of perceiving an action also includes feelings he has. They are mostly expressed by non-controllable verbs (11). In such utterances the speaker is in the role of patient. This is similar to category (A), where the speaker is in most cases “involved” as the agent, as opposed to category (C), where the speaker has no semantic role at all. But the auxiliary for non-visual perception is also found in utterances where the speaker merely states that he hears or feels that somebody else is doing something. The verbs are then usually controllable (13).

If an utterance expresses an experience or non-visual perception in the present, the form -arak is added to the imperfective stem of the verb.

(11) \( \etaö \quad \etaal-arak \)  
I.ABS  be.tired-PRES  
'I am feeling tired.'

(12) \( \etaan \quad tønmö \quad ts\̣ör-arak \)  
inside  warm  feel-PRES  
'It feels warm inside.'
(13) $k^h\ddot{o}$  \hspace{1cm} $jon$-arak  \\
he.ABS  \hspace{1cm} come-PRES  \\
‘I can hear him coming.’

The **present perfect tense** is usually formed by adding *-derak* to the stems of non-controllable verbs:

(14) $\eta\ddot{u}i$  \hspace{1cm} $zu$:  \hspace{1cm} $t\ddot{e}$-derak  \\
I GEN  \hspace{1cm} body.ABS  \hspace{1cm} be.warm-PERF  \\
‘My body has got warm.’

If the utterance refers to a sensory perception in the **past**, *-t\ddot{u}n* or *-jon* is used. With non-controllable verbs and the speaker in the role of patient, this corresponds to the present tense usage, as in (11):

(15) $dan$  \hspace{1cm} $\eta\ddot{o}$  \hspace{1cm} $n\ddot{a}$l-t\ddot{u}n  \\
yesterday  \hspace{1cm} I.ABS  \hspace{1cm} be.tired-PAST  \\
‘Yesterday I felt tired.’

But with non-speaker agents and controllable verbs, the manner of perception is no longer specified. *-t\ddot{u}n* simply indicates that the action happened in a direction towards the speaker.

(16) $k^h\ddot{o}$  \hspace{1cm} $b\ddot{a}z\ddot{a}r$-la  \hspace{1cm} $l\ddot{e}$p-t\ddot{u}n  \\
he.ABS  \hspace{1cm} market-DAT  \hspace{1cm} come-PAST  \\
‘He came to the market.’ (towards to speaker)

**The speaker’s visual perception** is normally expressed in utterances with non-speaker agents or patients. By adding the auxiliary *-(t)uk* to the imperfective stem a progressive meaning is often conveyed. It can refer to the **present** or the **past**

(17) $k^h\ddot{o}$  \hspace{1cm} $c\ddot{i}n$  \hspace{1cm} tc\ddot{a}k-tuk  \\
he.ABS  \hspace{1cm} wood.ABS  \hspace{1cm} break-PRES  \\
‘He is/was breaking wood.’

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7 There are also two narrative past forms ending in *-tuk* which are not included in this description.
The speaker in the verbal system of Tabo/Spiti Tibetan

Example (18) shows that the auxiliary -(t)uk is also used with non-controllable verbs.

The present perfect tense is formed by adding -deruk or -peruk to the perfective stem of the verb. -deruk goes with non-controllable verbs and some verbs of motion, whereas -peruk is used with controllable verbs.

In the past tense, the speaker’s visual perception is expressed by the auxiliary -son added to the perfective stem of the verb. This usage works with both categories of verbs, controllable and non-controllable:

In such utterances the speaker is only present through the marker for visual perception. It is possible, though, to use -son with the speaker in the role of patient; the verb then is non-controllable (23). But the more common case is to express such a situation with -cun as an instance of non-visual perception by the speaker (24):

'I won the wrestling match.'
'I won the wrestling match.'

-son in (23) does not strictly speaking express visual perception, but rather a kind of knowledge which is less of a personal experience or feeling than is conveyed through -tən. It is often used with speaker plural patients, if the speaker wants to indicate that even though he is a member of a group he can only express his own sensory perception or feeling. This is how my informant explains his preference of -son in the following situations:

'We got separated on the way.'

'Today we won the cricket match.'

Another difference between -tən and -son is one of deixis. As shown in example (16), -tən marks verbal actions as directed towards the speaker, whereas with -son in example (21) the direction is away from the speaker. This phenomenon has been described for Central Tibetan8. What is special for the dialect of Tabo is that another aspect to be considered is the distinction among different manners of perception. For the sake of simplicity the latter distinction has been given priority in this system, since it accounts for the vast majority of cases. But it must be acknowledged that there is a small number of verbs with which deixis takes priority over perception for semantic reasons. Normally most feelings (expressed by non-controllable verbs) can be understood as appearing to(wards) the speaker/patient:

'Yesterday I felt tired.'

'I lost my earring.' or 'My earring got lost.'

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8 Cf. Tournadre (1996). For byung (Tabo tən) see p. 233 ("L'emploi ego-centripète"). Here the process is also seen as directed towards the speaker.
Since cāl in (27) is a non-controllable verb, the form cālγunγ could be expected, as it expresses an experience felt by the speaker. But my informant refuses this on the grounds that the act of losing is seen as happening away from the speaker.

C) Focus on the speaker's unspecified knowledge

In this category the speaker is neither associated with the verbal action nor has he experienced or perceived it directly. The morphemes of this category are mainly used with non-speaker agents and patients. The auxiliary -(k)jak is added to the imperfective stem to express the speaker’s knowledge of the verbal action without specifying how this knowledge is/was gained. This present-tense form usually denotes a general state or even future. Contrasting with -(t)uk marking visual perception and therefore usually expressing new knowledge, verbs ending in -(k)jak denote assimilated knowledge. Formally, the auxiliary -(k)jak is most likely a contraction of some particle -ka- to which the morpheme -ak is added, as the negative form in (30) implies.⁹

28) kʰō  cīŋ  tɕāk-ak
   he.ABS wood.ABS break-PRES
   ‘He breaks wood.’ (habit) or ‘He will break wood.’

29) kʰō  pʰɪru  tōptɕā  sā-ak
   he.ABS there  food.ABS  eat-PRES
   ‘He eats food there.’ or ‘He will eat food there.’

30) ʔi  kʰō  chāʔ-la  tēʔ-ka-mak
   this  he.ABS  you-DAT  give-PART-NEG.PRES
   ‘He will not give you this.’

It is possible to use -(k)jak with the speaker in the role of agent. It expresses that it is the speaker’s duty to perform the action, i.e. in Haller’s terms the verb is not volitional:

31) nō  dji-la  dqo-ak
    l.ABS Delhi-DAT  go-PRES
    ‘I am to go to Delhi.’

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⁹ The negative particle mi and the auxiliary morpheme -ak are again contracted.
Corresponding to the other categories the **present perfect tense** is formed by adding `-dekak` or `-pekak` to the perfective stem of the verb.

(32) \( p\tilde{\text{n}} \) \( \text{tc\text{\text{\`}}\text{n\text{\text{\`}}}}\text{-la} \) \( l\tilde{\text{\`}} \) \( n\text{\text{\`}}\text{-dekak} \)
that willow-LOC naga.ABS dwell-PERF

‘In that willow tree there is a naga.’

(33) \( \tilde{\text{\`}}\text{i} \) \( \text{l\text{\text{\`}}\text{\`}}\text{\`}} \) \( \eta\text{\text{\`}}\text{-la} \) \( m\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\`}}\text{:i} \) \( t\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{-pekak} \)
this work.ABS I-DAT consider do-PERF

‘This work has been done for me.’

To express this kind of general knowledge which is not based on the speaker's direct perception, there is also a **past tense** formed by adding -(w)ak to the perfective stem. Let's contrast such an utterance (34) with visual perception, past tense (21):

(21) \( k\tilde{\text{n}}\text{o} \) \( \text{b\text{\`}}\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\`}}\text{-la} \) \( p\text{\text{\`}}\text{-son} \)
he.ABS market-DAT go-PAST

Where is he? ‘He went to the market. (I saw him leave.)’

(34) \( k\tilde{\text{n}}\text{o} \) \( \text{d\text{\`}}\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{-la} \) \( p\text{\text{\`}}\text{-ak} \)
he.ABS Delhi-DAT go-PAST

Has he ever been to Delhi? ‘He has been to Delhi. (I know.)’

To summarize the categories of “speaker’s knowledge” presented so far, let us use the same controllable verb ‘jump’ in the present tense, with the speaker in the role of the agent:

(35) \( \eta\text{o} \) \( \tilde{\text{l}} \) \( \text{c\text{\`}}\text{n} \) \( \text{t\text{\`}}\text{n\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{-su} \) \( \text{t\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{-et} \)
I.ABS this wall top.from jump-PRES

‘I am jumping from this wall.’

\( \eta\text{o} \) \( \text{t\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{-arak} \)
I.ABS jump-PRES

‘I am jumping (I can feel it).’

\( \eta\text{o} \) \( \text{t\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{\text{\`}}\text{-uk} \)
I.ABS jump-PRES

‘I am/was jumping.’ (in a dream)
ηð tcsbðø-ak
I.ABS jump-PRES

'I am supposed to jump'

In the first sentence the focus is on the speaker's involvement: the speaker is the agent, who is performing the verbal action. If the verbal action is presented as felt by the speaker, the second category (-arak) is applied. This category expresses a sensory perception, here the sensation or feeling of jumping. The verbal action can be even further removed from the speaker, i.e. it can be presented as if seen from outside. In such an unusual situation as in a dream, in which no conscious control can be exercised, the auxiliary expressing visual perception can be used. In the last example the morpheme for unspecified knowledge indicates that although the speaker is the agent, the decision to perform the action lies outside him.

As has just been shown, all the categories distinguished here allow a speaker agent with controllable verbs. But only the first one (category A) is unmarked usage. In category (B), the unmarked usage for non-visual perception is expressed with speaker patients and non-controllable verbs, although non-speaker agents and patients are possible. But with visual perception, non-speaker agents or patients predominate. In category (C), non-speaker agents or patients constitute the unmarked usage.

D) Inferred knowledge

Inferential forms are actually described more adequately in a system of their own. Only its basic structure can be outlined here. Leaving aside verbal forms with any kind of modal particle, there are three forms to be considered as expressing inferential knowledge.

Firstly, two of the categories introduced above illustrate a fundamental distinction: Either the speaker states that he perceives a certain fact and infers some action from that, or his inference is based on his unspecified knowledge. This can be summarized as:

speaker's (sensory) perception vs. speaker's unspecified knowledge

Secondly, the speaker's perception is specified according to the way it is perceived, i.e. visual versus auditory or other manners of sensory perception. This creates the tripartite distinction that has been found for inferential utterances:
I speaker's visual perception of some fact from which a verbal action is inferred: -(w)anuk

II speaker's auditory or other sensory perception of some fact from which a verbal action is inferred: -(w)anak

III speaker's unspecified knowledge of some fact from which a verbal action is inferred: -(w)a jinkak

Examples:

(36)  \( k\hbar \)  \( \hbar r\)  \( t\hbar \mu n\)-wanuk
      he.ABS  liquor.ABS  drink-PERF
      'He must have had liquor. (I can see it.)'

(37)  \( k\hbar \)  \( p\hbar t\hbar \) \( s\hbar \) \( a \)-anak
      he.ABS  book.ABS  read-PERF
      'He must have read the book. (I can hear it.)'

(38)  \( k\hbar \)  \( t\hbar p\hbar t\) \( s\hbar :\)-wa jinkak
      he.ABS  food.ABS  eat-PERF
      'He must have eaten. (Otherwise he would be hungry.)'\(^{10}\)

The complex structure of these forms cannot be clarified completely at this point. They basically consist of morphemes related to the WT particle \( pa \) marking verbal nouns, and the WT auxiliary \( yin \) to which the markers for sensory perception are added in I and II. Form III is irregular inasmuch as \(-kak\) normally follows unvoiced sounds. Although the evidence in my material is not very strong, this irregularity is understood as marking an opposition to form II, which in full must be \(*-(w)ajinarak\).

CONCLUSION

This paper does not provide a complete analysis of all the verbal forms of the Tabo dialect, but attempts to give a survey of some of its guiding principles on the basis of which the verbal system can be described.

The main difference from Central Tibetan Dialects is that Tabo Tibetan shows a more differentiated system of evidentiality, in other words, the binary opposition "evidential" versus "non-evidential" are not sufficient to describe this system, because the sort of perception also has to be specified. This leads to

\(^{10}\) So far there is only one example of this type in my material.
a definition of the remaining categories according to the different ways they are opposed to "getting knowledge through perception". For example, the category of the speaker's direct involvement in the verbal action is clearly a different aspect of having or gaining knowledge of an action. This first category is very close to Haller's term "volitionality." In this paper I have attempted to show why it is not used in this description, although the phenomenon can be found in the Tabo dialect. The last two categories seem to be less controversial.

The categories I have proposed to describe the verbal system of Tabo have proved useful. I suggest that they be called "epistemic categories".
REFERENCES


