Subject and Object Agreement in the Tangut Verb

by

Ksenia Borisovna Kepping
Soviet Academy of Sciences, Leningrad

[translated from the Russian by James A. Matisoff]

FOREWORD

In a letter to the translator (January 15, 1976), Dr. Kepping
explains how her article fits into the context of the present state
of Tangut studies (which have so far reached their highest level of
development in the Soviet Union, Japan, and Scandinavia), and how
it relates to important current issues in Tibeto-Burman linguistics
in general. She makes the following points:

(a) The distinguished studies of Tangut grammar by Sofronov and
Nishida [see References] were based on Buddhist texts and transla-
tions of Chinese classics, where the grammar shows considerable
Chinese influence. Kepping's work is based on secular texts like
the Grove of Classifications [see Note 2, and Kepping 1974], a col-
lection of short stories of diverse content, arranged according to
theme, where the grammar is less Sinicized and presumably more
"Tibeto-Burman."

(b) Sofronov and Nishida found no traces of pronominal verb morph-
ology in their texts. However, Kepping has uncovered strong evi-
dence for pronominal agreement markers in the Tangut verb for the
first person, and probably for the second person as well (though not
for the third person). Tangut must therefore be admitted into the
ranks of the "pronominalized" TB languages. [See the recent studies
of pronominalization in TB by Bauman (1974, 1975) and Watters (1975).]

(c) The behavior of the 1st person pronominal auxiliary in the
Tangut VP (nga) -- which can be used to mark either the subject of
an intransitive verb or the object of a transitive verb -- seems to
show that Tangut once had an ergative-type case system, and not a
"nominative-type" system, as previously supposed.

* *
*

Tangut (or Hsi-hsia) is a long-extinct Tibeto-Burman language,

once spoken by a powerful empire that bordered northwest China,
Mongolia, and Tibet. In the eleventh century a complex ideograph-
ic writing system was invented for the language, which has only
been deciphered in the last 70 years. Nishida (1976) has present-
ed persuasive evidence that Tangut belonged to the Lolo-Burmese
subgroup of TB. It thus constitutes our most ancient corpus of
data on that key branch of the family.

The transcription of Tangut that Dr. Kepping uses is based on
the reconstruction system of Sofronov. The tones of Tangut syll-
ables have been reconstructed, though Dr. Kepping does not indic-
ate them in this paper, since her concerns are grammatical, not
historico-phonological.   JAM

                    *   *
                         *

I.   The Tangut (Hsi-hsia) language has been regarded as one of
those isolating Tibeto-Burman languages in which the verb phrase
contains no indication of the person (1st, 2nd, or 3rd) of the
subject of the action.[1]

However, in Tangut texts that we have examined,[2] the first-
person pronoun 絟 nga 'I/me' sometimes occupies an unusual posi-
tion: it may stand after the verb,[3] in order to show that the
subject or the object of the verbal action involves a first-
person singular, e.g.:

(1)   絟   鵁   菻   絟   [N]
      nga   ldiə   ndźio   nga
                    ‾‾‾‾‾

      'I have wealth' (lit. "I wealth have-I").

(2)   nga   mbɪu   keuu   nɪ   ldɪe   nga   na   mi   .ôn   mi
                           ‾‾   ‾‾‾‾   ‾‾‾

      ndźi   .wei   na   ta   thɪn   .êi   .I
                         ‾‾

      '[Chang Fei 張飛] said, "[I], a general,[4] have come
      here. Why then dost thou neither surrender nor join
      battle?"'

(3)   ldɪə   tsɪwe   ndzɪwo   ndźêi   vie   ma   sa   nga   .I   [GC]
                                                  ‾‾   ‾‾‾

      '[Ts'ao Ts'ao 曹操] said, "I fear that the people
      surrounding [me] will kill me."'
                         ‾‾‾‾ ‾‾‾‾

(4) 〔Tangut characters〕
thIn sĮwo lhįə tsai ndźêi vįe źįeu ni
〔Tangut〕 〔Tangut〕 [GC]
nga .I

'[Su Wu 蘇武] said, "Why does the little state oppress me?"'

By definition [see note 3] we consider post-verbal nga 〔Tangut〕 to be an auxiliary morpheme (homophonous with the pronoun 〔Tangut〕 nga 'I'), which serves to put the verb into personal concord with the subject or object of the action. Whether the verb agrees with the subject or the object depends on the particular verb [Section II, below].

The auxiliary words 〔Tangut〕 na and 〔Tangut〕 ni have been defined in the scholarly literature on Tangut as suffixes indicating the appellative mood [vocative suffixes].[5] However, in our view, these auxiliary words originated as the second-person pronouns 〔Tangut〕 na 'thou' and 〔Tangut〕 ni 'you (pl.)', with which they are homophonous. (In the dictionary The Sea of Characters 文海 the auxiliary 〔Tangut〕 ni appears under No. 3405, while the personal pronoun 〔Tangut〕 ni is under No. 3406;[6] similarly, the pronoun 〔Tangut〕 na appears under No. 3625, while the auxiliary 〔Tangut〕 na is under No. 3626.[7])

Apparently, the auxiliary words 〔Tangut〕 na and 〔Tangut〕 ni fulfilled functions in the sentence analogous to those performed by the auxiliary word 〔Tangut〕 nga, inasmuch as: (a) the auxiliaries 〔Tangut〕 na and 〔Tangut〕 ni are often used in complex sentences in a way parallel to 〔Tangut〕 nga, and (b) in verb concatenations 〔Tangut〕 nga, 〔Tangut〕 na, and 〔Tangut〕 ni occupy exactly the same position.[8] Let us cite some examples of the parallel use of 〔Tangut〕 nga, 〔Tangut〕 na, and 〔Tangut〕 ni in complex sentences:

(5) 〔Tangut characters〕
tha mbu ldie .a ngIə ngəɯ ndze swê ?
〔Tangut characters〕 [GC]
khįon kai na lįə nwə nga .I

'[Tung Fang Shuo 東方朔] said, "That is why [I] know that [you] want to give me 49 jujubes." 二

(6) 䛧 䊂 䍦 拃 㧈 桃 㐃 㫧 颸 㱘
na śie ngu a ? ndu lhwi śiei na ta

陙 䴫 㳂 㲲 㲸 䍥 㚀
thI viə viə ? viə nga .I [GC]

'[Kuo P'o 郭璞] said, "You <u>took</u> a brush [from me] before. <u>Return</u> [it] <u>to me</u> at once."'

(7) 䍤 孫 䍩 䍕 㩅 㲿 㪗 忱 㰱 㪛
nga .In .u ta .we viə a nIwo na xwI

㚀 㵘 㗙 㵡 孫 㶡 忱 㪛 㲲
ni .ion nga u .In ldIe la źIe kIn

㚀 䍥 㚀
lIn nga .I [GC]

'[Wu Tzŭ Hsü 伍子胥] said, "<u>Hang ye up</u> my head on the eastern gates of the city. When the army of Yüeh comes to crush [the kingdom of] Wu, <u>may [I] see it</u>!"'

(8) 㳂 廩 䍤 拃 廩 㳩 藬 㲻 㲦
sIn nIn nga ? nIn ndo tśhiei źie nIe

䛧 䄆 㭘 桃 㐃 㧈 㪯 㳪 㱛
na ndźêi vie ndu lhwi viə ngu viə ndzIe

㚀 䍤 䄮 廩 㪚 忱 䛧 孫 䊣 㰱
.I nga ku nIn kI ndIe na .In .o viə

㲦 㭘 㭘 颸 㚀
nIe ndźêi viə na .I [GC]

'[Wu Tzŭ Hsü 伍子胥] said, "Now the Ruler (王) is catching me. When you carry [me] off to the Ruler, <u>I shall say</u> that you took the pearl and ate it. And the Ruler will certainly cut open your stomach and <u>will</u> <u>extract</u> the pearl [from] <u>you</u>."'

Between the verb and the auxiliary words 䍤 <u>nga</u>, 颸 <u>na</u>, and 㚀 <u>ni</u>, there may occur the marker of the causative construction 㧈 <u>phi</u> and/or a modal verb. The order is as follows:

V + 丽匕 <u>phi</u> + MODAL VERB + 繩 <u>nga</u>/ 风乚 <u>na</u>/ 茏 <u>ni</u> .

After the auxiliaries 繩 <u>nga</u>, 风乚 <u>na</u>, or 茏 <u>ni</u> may stand the auxiliary 絼.<u>In</u> 'to intend, have the intention of,' which in certain cases gives the verb the meaning of future time; and the interrogative particle 謝 <u>mo</u> 'really?; is it the case that?'. The word-order is as follows:

V + 繩 <u>nga</u>/ 风乚 <u>na</u>/ 茏 <u>ni</u> + 絼.<u>In</u>   + 謝 <u>mo</u> .

Thus there is every reason to suppose that the auxiliary words 风乚 <u>na</u> and 茏 <u>ni</u> were originally the second-person pronouns 扤 <u>na</u> 'thou' and 椛 <u>ni</u> 'you,' whose attachment to the verb signalled that the subject (and object?) of the verbal action was second-person (singular or plural, respectively). However, in the language of the texts studied, the attachment of the auxiliary words 风乚 <u>na</u> and 茏 <u>ni</u> to the verb already distinguishes singular vs. plural number of the subject of the action.[9] For example:

(9)

椛	散	繩	繩	干匕	喬	风乚	繩	繩
ni	pha	ngi	mbIn	ndu	śiei	na	nga	mbIn

翡	慌	茏	好	
v̥ie	mi	ngIe	.I	[GC]

'[The wife of Ch'iu Hu 秋胡] said, "Take thou another wife, I do not want to be [thy] wife."'

(10)

椛	菌	旆	舵	惼	狝	拌	傻	瓃
ni	si̯wa	mbi	won	.u	śwê	a	ndzwə	ri̯ə

纷	风乚	[GC]
v̯io	na	

'Write a poem in the time it takes you to make seven steps!'

(11)

椛	辨	散	屍	狝	嫁	拌	茷	繩	茷
ni	ni̯e	ldI̯ə	ldI̯ə	tsI̯we	lda	wə	źie	rhiu	śiei

拌	慌	茏	疅	芈	膟	慌	茏	[S]
a	nwə	ni	si	ndzI̯wo	nda	nwə	ni	

'[Sun Tzŭ 孫子] asked, "Do <u>you</u> <u>all</u> <u>know</u> how to examine your heart, left and right hands, and back?" The women replied, "<u>We</u> <u>know</u>."'

Thus the supposition that the category of person received no formal expression in the Tangut verb is not corroborated by the texts we have studied. In the course of the language's history, in order to indicate the person of the subject or object of the action, there came to be affixed to the verb auxiliary words that were homophonous to the first and second person pronouns. (It is worth mentioning that the addition of these auxiliaries did not depend on the tense or aspect of the verb.) It is possible that the third person did not receive any special marking on the verb. In the language of the texts under study, person-marking in the verb-phrase for the first person was maintained only in the singular.

II. According to their orientation to the subject and object, Tangut verbs may be divided into two groups: (a) verbs which show agreement with the <u>subject</u> of the action (henceforth "Verbs A"); and (b) verbs which show agreement with the <u>object</u> ("addressee") or with a possessive attribute of the object of the action (henceforth "Verbs B"). These groups which may be set up on formal grounds are each internally diverse, in that each of them comprises verbs of various semantic types. Let us present some lists of verbs from both groups.

<u>Group</u> <u>A</u> <u>Verbs</u> [with subject-concord]

(1) <u>verbs</u> <u>of</u> <u>thinking</u>, <u>feeling</u>, <u>utterance</u>

纤纸 绵	sIwə nga	'I think'	纩牛彥 绵	nIe nəɯ nga	'I rejoice'
忱 绵	nwə nga	'I know'	纛 绵	mIo nga	'I listen'
猾 绵	ndwu nga	'I know'	飛 绵	lIn nga	'I see'
譀彡 绵	kIwa nga	'I weep'	纾子 绵	.I nga	'I say'
顭夏 绵	mbe nga	'I laugh'	女彡 绵	the nga	'I tell, recount (?)'

(2) **modal** **verbs**

kâi nga   'I want'

nI̯wi nga   'I can'

ngI̯e nga   'I want'

mI v̯i̯ei nga 'I cannot'

mI ki̯e nga 'I dare not'

(3) **verbs** **of** **motion**

śi̯e nga   'I go away'

nI ldI̯e nga 'I arrive'

ldIe nga   'I come'

la nga   'I come'

(4) **stative** **verbs**

sI nga   'I die'

si nga   'I die'

mI̯e nga   'I sleep'

ndźi̯e nga   'I am (in a certain place)'

we nga   'I resign myself; I am submissive'

(5) **verbs** **of** **possession**

ndźi̯o nga 'I have'[10]

.o nga   'I have'

wə nga   'I have'

mIn nga[11]   'I do not have'

(6) **copular** **verbs**

ngu nga   'I appear'

we nga   ' become'

(7) **other** **verbs**

ndźi̯o nga 'I eat'

thi nga   'I drink'

ri̯uo nga   'I receive'

lhi̯ə nga   'I take'

vi̯o nga   'I do'

khIe nga   'I give'

thu phIn nga 'I place, set down'

Group **B** **Verbs** [with object-concord]

(1) verbs with a "bad" connotation

sa nga   'kill me'

thI nga   'drive me away'

mI keɯ v̯i̯e nga 'be disrespectful to me'

zieɯ ni nga 'scorn me'

ldio nga   'bury me'

phoɯ nga   'attack me'

lhwi v̯i̯e nga 'capture my [cities]'

? nga 'seize my [profit]'

źwon nga 'grab my [hand]'

(2) <u>verbs</u> <u>with</u> <u>two</u> <u>complements</u>

𗗕 𗦟 khi̯on nga 'give [it] to me'

𗉟 𗦟 ldi̯e nga 'bring [it] to me'

𗖌 𗦟 ? nga 'return [it] to me'

𗰔 𗦟 tsha nga 'return [it] to me'

𗗙 𗦟 nai nga 'show [it] to me'

(3) <u>causative</u> <u>verbs</u>

𗴺 𗺉 𗦟 thi phi nga 'give me to drink'

𗧃 𗺉 𗦟 ndzu phi nga 'seat me; cause me to sit'

𗅳 𗺉 𗦟 ndz̯i̯e phi nga 'lodge me; allow me to dwell'

(4) <u>other</u> <u>verbs</u>

𗔆 𗦟 ndzIe nga 'eat me up' [but 𗉆 𗦟 ndzio nga 'I eat']¹²

In order for the auxiliary 𗦟 <u>nga</u> to refer to the <u>subject</u> of the action after verbs of Group B, the auxiliary word 𗅬 <u>si</u> is placed after 𗦟 <u>nga</u> in the verb-phrase.¹³ Thus:

VERB_{Group B} + 𗦟 <u>nga</u> : action performed <u>on</u> me

𗰔 𗦟 sa nga 'kills me'

[Chinese 殺我]

VERB_{Group A} + 𗦟 <u>nga</u> : action performed <u>by</u> me

𗰔 𗦟 śi̯e nga 'I go'

[Chinese 我去]

VERB_{Group B} + 𗦟 𗅬 <u>nga si</u> : action performed <u>by</u> me

𗰔 𗦟 𗅬 sa nga si 'I kill'

[Chinese 我殺]

III. In the language of the texts we have studied, objective relationships are regularly expressed via an object-complement that stands before the verb. However, the use of the auxiliary word 𗦟 <u>nga</u> shows that historically in the Tangut language there apparently existed other ways of expressing objective relationships. Let us examine constructions with verbs of Group B.

The subject of a predicate expressed by a Group B verb may

be followed by a special marker 朝稅 ndźêi vie, meaning liter-
ally "do action." For example:

(4) thIn sIwo lhiə tsai ndźêi vie zieɯ ni
     nga .I [GC]

   '[Su Wu 蘇武] said, "Why does the little state
   oppress me?"'

   However, the subject may also not have any marker following
it, e.g.:

(12) tIn viei źIe ma phoɯ nga .I [S]

   '[He] said, "I fear that the enemy will fall upon
   me suddenly."'

(13) na tIn nga .In ldIə thI nga ku tha
      tsI viə thI na [N]

   'If indeed thou drivest me out, then I shall drive
   her out also.'

   In the last sentence, besides the auxiliary word 纞 nga
after the verb, indicating the object of the action, there is
an object-complement expressed by the combination of the first-
person pronoun 纞 nga 'I' and the postposition 秝 .In; that
is, in this sentence there is a redundant double indication of
the object.

   The following sentence is imperative, without a subject.
There is also no object-complement. However, the object is ex-
pressed by placing the auxiliary word 纞 nga after the verb:

(14) nga sI nIwo rię tha tsha ni .a mbiu
      na ldə nga [GC]

   'After I die, bury me at the gates of the house
   of T'ao Ch'ien [陶潛].'

When it appears after verbs which may take two object-complements (e.g. 'give'), 纙 nga agrees with the indirect object [dative] which refers to the person affected, but not with the direct object [accusative] referring to the thing affected. For example:

(6) 《script characters》
na śie ngu a ? ndu lhwi śiei na ta
《script characters》 [GC]
thI viə viə ? vie nga .I

'[Kuo P'o 郭璞] said, "You took a brush [from me] before. Return [it] to me at once."'

(15) 《script characters》
nga .In sa men kwie ndu khion nga [N]

'Give me a sha-men fruit.'[14]

In the last sentence there is a redundancy: the goal of the action is expressed by an object-complement consisting of the pronoun 纙 nga plus the postposition 孫 .In, and is also signalled by the auxiliary word 纙 nga after the verb.

The auxiliary 纙 nga after the verb may also indicate a possessive attribute of the object, e.g.:

(16) 《script characters》 [GC]
ni nI mI wo ngu we lhwi vie nga

'You have illegally seized my cities.'

(17) 《script characters》 [GC]
ndzIwo ngI nga .In lda kI źwon nga

'Someone has grabbed my hand.'

In the last sentence, before the word 孫 lda 'hand'[15] there is a possessive attribute, expressed by the combination of the pronoun 纙 nga 'I' and the postposition 孫 .In, while after the verb stands the auxiliary word 纙 nga. That is, here

too there is a redundant indication of the possessive relationship.

IV. Up to now the Tangut language had been considered to belong
to the class of languages with a "nominative-type" case-system.
However, the similar grammatical treatment of the subject of
Group A verbs (intransitives) and the object of Group B verbs
(transitives) allows us to conjecture that historically the Tangut
language was not of the nominative, but rather of the _ergative_
type. This whole question requires a special study.

In our opinion, the language of the texts we have studied is
from a transitional period, when the language was passing from the
ergative to the nominative type, although the older ways of ex-
pressing objective relationships had still not completely died
out. This probably explains the redundancy of certain sentences
(Exs. 13, 15, 17) in which the objective relationships are expressed
both "in the old way" -- in the verb -- and "in the new way" --
in the object-complement.

* * *

Notes

1. Thus, M. V. Sofronov writes, "The person of the verb is defined
only by the meaningful morphemes which make up the linguistic con-
text, so that the person of the verb does not constitute a formal
category." Cf. Sofronov 1968, Vol. I, p. 186.

2. I have in mind certain translations into the Tangut language
of Chinese works, now preserved in the Institute of Oriental Stud-
ies (Institut Vostokovedenija) of the Soviet Academy of Sciences
(Leningrad). Examples are taken from the following sources:
[a] The Grove of Classifications 類林, abbreviated "GC."
    [Translator's note: In Russian   this work is called Les
    Kategorij, and is abbreviated "LK" by the author.]
[b] Sun Tzŭ ["Descendants"] 孫子, abbreviated "S."
[c] The dictionary of N. A. Nevsky (1960), abbreviated "N."

3. The word-order in the Tangut sentence is SOV. After the predi-
cate-verb only auxiliary words relating to the verb may occur.

4. The character 敚 nga[2] (上声) is an element in the compound
敚縉 nga-mbɪu 'general' (軍将), and is not to be confused with
縋 nga[1] (平声) 'I.'

5. Sofronov 1968, Vol. I, pp. 217-218.

6. Kepping et al, 1969, Vol. II, p. 39.

7. Ibid., p. 57.

8. [Translator's note] Kepping's phrase glagol'naja tsepochka, literally "verbal chain," is quite similar to the term "verb concatenation" that has recently been used in the descriptions of modern TB (and other Southeast Asian) languages. See, e.g. Matisoff 1969, 1974; Trần Trọng Hải 1976.

9. Probably for this reason the second person pronouns 肏牝 na and 楍肔 ni came to be written in post-verbal position with different characters: 凤㇀ 𝗇𝖺 and 芢 ni.

10. [Translator's note] This verb [see Sentence (1), third character] ndźjo looks as if it might be cognate to Lahu cɔ̀ 'have, be there' < PLB *N-dzaŋ. The verb .o (next example) might be cognate to Chinese 有 *gǐug/jjǝu.

11. [Translator's note] The modern Sherpa word for 'do not have' is also min, derivable from ma 'not' + in 'possessive copula.' Whether this is a cognate of the Tangut form or merely a "lookalike" must await detailed comparative work to determine. But see also the graph 祌 .In, which sometimes seems to have possessive function (Sentence 17, below).

12. [Translator's note] Perhaps 'eat me up' could be included in Class (1) above, "Verbs with a 'bad' connotation."

13. The functions of the auxiliary word 荒 si have still not been fully discovered. Thus, e.g., Sofronov calls it a "word-forming suffix" (1968, Vol. I, p. 155).

14. Chinese 沙門果 sha-men-kuo "sand-gate fruit."
[Translator's note] The characters sha-men were used in Chinese to transliterate the Sanskrit word śramaṇa 'Buddhist priest.'

15. [Translator's note] This Tangut form is very similar to Jinghpaw lǝtá? 'hand', which is the only other TB language so far discovered to have a dental stop after the lateral in whis word, perhaps < PTB *g-lak (cf. Benedict 1972, notes 102 [p. 32] and 109 [p. 34]).

*   *   *

REFERENCES

Bauman, James J. 1974. "Pronominal verb morphology in Tibeto-Burman." LTBA 1.1, 108-155.

----------------. 1975. Pronouns and pronominal morphology in Tibeto-Burman. University of California, Berkeley, dissertation. xx + 319 pp.

Benedict, Paul K. 1972. Sino-Tibetan: a Conspectus. Cambridge University Press.

Grinstead, Eric. 1972. Analysis of the Tangut Script. Scand-
    inavian Institute of Asian Studies, Monograph Series
    #10. Studentlitteratur. Lund, Sweden.

Kepping, K. B. 1971. "A category of aspect in Tangut." Acta
    Orientalia 33, 283-294.

--------------. 1974. "Utračennaja kitajskaja lei-shu v tangut-
    skom perevode." [A lost Chinese lei-shu 類書 in Tangut
    translation.] In Narody Azii i Afriki 類書 [Peoples
    of Asia and Africa], 152-157. Moscow.

--------------, V. S. Kolokolov, E. I. Kychanov, and A. P. Teren-
    t'ev-Katanskij. 1969. More Pis'men. [The Sea of Char-
    acters: facsimile edition of the Tangut xylographs.
    Translation from the Tangut, with introductory articles
    and appendices. 2 vols. Moscow.

Matisoff, James A. 1969. "Verb concatenation in Lahu: the syntax
    and semantics of 'simple' juxtaposition." Acta Linguistica
    Hafniensia 12.1, 69-120.

-----------------. 1974. "Verb concatenation in Kachin." LTBA
    1.1, 186-207.

Nevsky, N. A. 1960. Tangutskaja Filologija. [Tangut Philology.]
    2 vols. Moscow.

Nishida Tatsuo. 1964; 1966. Sei-ka-go no Kenkyū. [A Study of
    the Hsi-hsia Language.] Vol. 1 (1964); vol. 2 (1966).
    Zauhō Kankōkai. Tokyo.

--------------. 1975. "Hsi-hsia, Tosu, and Lolo-Burmese." Paper
    circulated at the Eighth International Conference on Sino-
    Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, Berkeley (October).

Sofronov, Mikhail Viktorovich. 1968. Grammatika Tangutskogo
    Jazyka. [Grammar of the Tangut Language.] 2 vols.
    Moscow.

Trần Trọng Hải. 1976. "Verb concatenation in Vietnamese." LTBA
    2.2 [this issue].

Watters, David E. 1975. "The evolution of a Tibeto-Burman pro-
    nominal verb morphology." LTBA 2.1, 45-79.

* * *