

Verbal Agreement in Tangut:

A Conflicting Opinion

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In a series of three articles published in this journal, the Russian scholar K.B.Keping advanced a theory of verbal agreement in Tangut (Hsi Hsia).¹ In her theory, she states that both transitive and intransitive verbs agree with the subject and the object of the verbal action when they are expressed by a personal pronoun. In essence, the verbal agreement takes place through the use of the personal pronoun as a verbal suffix, the suffix being named by Mrs. Keping the agreement indicator. This theory stands in sharp contrast to the theory advanced by M.V. Sofronov,² and in part too by Nishida Tatsuo³, according to whom verbal agreement does not occur in Tangut (Hsi Hsia).

Although the work of Mrs. K.B.Keping is impressive, her theory raises some disturbing questions both as to methodology and research hypothesis required for the analysis of this, after all, Central Asian language.⁴ Virtually all the references cited by Mrs. Keping cannot be verified as the texts are available in manuscript form only and are rather inaccessible in Leningrad. Since the publication of her articles, one text, namely Sun Tzu's Art of War,⁵ has been published in facsimile. However, the few examples quoted from this text can virtually not be located in this rather voluminous text (about 100 pages). This is a problem, albeit a minor one, for it is notoriously difficult

to accurately punctuate a Tangut (Hsi Hsia) text, especially when no Chinese original is available.

Thus, it is the nature of the selected texts that raise very serious methodological questions. Indeed, the texts cited by Mrs. Keping in her work appear to have been original Tangut (Hsi Hsia) compositions; there is no evidence that they were translated from another language and, even if they were, we cannot determine the original material used. It should be kept in mind that we have no native Tangut- foreign language dictionaries, except for the relatively short glossary known as the Fan Han ho shih chang chung chu. Hence, dictionaries have to be made using known translated materials. By proceeding with the study of the language using nearly exclusively native, untranslated materials, Mrs. Keping may have put the cart before the horse. As I have pointed out elsewhere, access to the language has to come through an initial study of translated materials, especially those that have been translated from Chinese.⁶ Thus a strict comparison between the Tangut text and the Chinese text of, for example, the Analects and the Mencius will yield invaluable information that will permit us a more scientific access to original native material.

It is precisely the analysis of the Chinese classics that have been translated into Tangut that raises serious doubts about the validity of the theories of Mrs. Keping. According to her theory, the characters of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd personal

pronouns are used not only to indicate the personal pronouns themselves but also, when suffixed to the verb, the verbal agreement. The characters cited by Mrs Keping are 能, 尔, 能 respectively the first person singular, the second person singular and plural. She disagrees with the interpretations given by M.V. Sofronov that the latter two characters are vocative suffixes.⁷ The evidence she advances for her position is, however, far from convincing.

An analysis of the Tangut versions of the Analects and the Mencius,⁸ however, does not confirm the statements made by Mrs. Keping with regards to the personal pronouns in Tangut. The characters 尔 and 能 are not attested as personal pronouns. The investigation of the pronouns in Tangut reveals features that have not been noticed by other researchers. The results of the investigations have been tabulated hereafter :

	Nominal	Oblique
1st person	能	尔
2nd person	尔	not attested
3rd person	能	尔

The plural of all the attested forms was made by the suffixation of the character 尔 . The character 尔 was used to make the genitive case, as distinct from pure possessive pronouns, of the personal pronouns through suffixation of the oblique forms.

The analysis of the Tangut versions of the Confucian classics did not yield any instances of verbal agreement. This in spite of the fact that, according to the theory advanced by Mrs. Keping, numerous instances of verbal agreement should have occurred. The only apparent instance of verbal agreement with the personal pronoun of the first person and an omitted subject, namely ᠠᠨᠠᠨ, I,10d (Kitaiskii,p. 13), cannot be explained according to these theories.

a) 朕 躬 非 我 能 行 也

b) 三 子 非 行 我 不 也

c) 非 我 也 夫 三 子 也

d) ... the disciples were wrong, it is not me (who) did it.

a : original Tangut; b : literal Chinese translation; c : original Chinese; d : translation of the Tangut)

Without the specific indication of the first person, the Tangut sentence would not be intelligible as the subject of the second clause would again have been "the disciples."

Although an analysis of two texts is not sufficient to either validate or invalidate the theories on verbal agreement advanced by Mrs. Keping, the results of this analysis raise disturbing questions about them and clearly indicate that further detailed examination of both original and translated materials is required. The preliminary investigation of the pronominal functions of the

language,⁹ also raises serious questions about the nature of the language as a whole. Indeed, the form and the syntactic behavior of the Tangut pronouns is more reminiscent of Altaic forms than of Tibeto-Burmese forms.¹⁰ Without a correct phonetic reconstruction of the language, however, - and the present one is far from satisfactory - and further investigations into the language, no formal answers can be given, merely the suggestion that it may be appropriate to re-examine the hypothesis put forth by B. Laufer more than three-quarters of a century ago.¹¹

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NOTES

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¹K.B.Keping, "Subject and Object Agreement in the Tangut Verb," 1976; Agreement of the Verb in Tangut," 1981; "Once Again on the Agreement of the Tangut Verb," (in this volume).

²M.V. Sofronov, Grammatika tangutskogo yazika, Moscow, 1968, vol. 1, p. 186.

³Nishida Tatsuo, Seikago no kenkyū, Tokyo, 1964-66, vol. II, pp. 571-72.

⁴On the area where the language was used, L. Kwanten, Imperial Nomads. A History of Central Asia, 500-1500, (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 81-88, 97-99; and L. Kwanten, " A History of the State of Hsi Hsia," Handbuch der Orientalistik, China Abteilung, H. Franke, editor (Forthcoming).

⁵K.B.Keping, Sun' Tzsi v tangutskom perevode, Pamyatniki pis'mennosti vostoka XLIX, Moscow, 1979, pp. 477-578.

⁶L. Kwanten and S. Hesse, Tangut (Hsi Hsia) Studies : A Bibliography, Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 137, Indiana University, 1980, pp. 27-33.

⁷M.V. Sofronov, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 217-218.

⁸Published in facsimile by V.S. Kolokolov and E.I.Kychanov, Kitaiskaya klassika v tangutskom perevode, Pamjatniki pis'mennosti vostoka IV, Moscow, 1966, pp. 1-49; 53-131.

⁹On the entire subject see my forthcoming studies, provisionally entitled, " Pronominal Functions in the Tangut (Hsi Hsia) Language and " Negations in Tangut (Hsi Hsia)."

¹⁰On this, W. Kotwicz, Les pronoms dans les langues altaïques, Mémoires de la Commission Orientaliste, no. 24, Krakow, 1936, 80 pp.

¹¹B. Laufer, " The Si-hia Language : A Study in Indo-Chinese Phonology," T'oung Pao, vol. 17, 1916, pp. 1-126.