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The Classical Tibetan cases and their transcategoriality
From sacred grammar to modern linguistics
Nicolas Tournadre
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ABSTRACT
This paper proposes a new analysis of the Classical Tibetan case system. After presenting the traditional as well as modern linguistics view on cases, I introduce a new analysis of the Classical Tibetan case system in ten cases: absolutive, agentive, genitive, dative, purposive, locative, ablative, elative, associative and comparative. The present description of morphology, grammatical semantics and syntax of the cases is based on four fundamental properties of the Classical Tibetan casemarkers, namely: cliticity, multifunctionality, transcategoriality and optionality. The originality of this literary case system lies in the multifunctional, transcategorial and optional nature of the casemarkers, which largely contributes to the great syntactic complexity of this old literary language of the Tibeto-Burman family.

KEYWORDS
Classical Tibetan, syntax, typology, case system, fractal grammar, traditional grammar, transcategoriality, optionality.
The Classical Tibetan cases and their transcategoriality: From sacred grammar to modern linguistics

Nicolas Tournadre
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1 “Sacred” grammars

There are few ancient grammars in the world, which are still used on a daily basis in a modern curriculum. Among these, we can mention Pāṇini’s grammar, the Āṣṭādhyāyī (अष्टाध्यायी), which has been used to describe Sanskrit phonology and morphology since the 5th century B.C.¹ It comprises four thousand formula or rules written in the style of a sutra. Another famous Indian grammarian, Patañjali, composed in the 2nd century B.C a commentary of Pāṇini’s grammar, the Mahābhāṣya (महाभाष्य) which is also still studied by some Brahmins in contemporary India.

The same can be said about the ancient Tibetan grammatical treatises, the Sumcupa (སུམ་ཅུ་པ་) and the Rtags’jugpa (རྟགས་འཇུག་པ་) attributed to the seventh century figure Thonmi Saṃbhoṭa in modern Tibet in the 7th century. The Sumcupa and Rtags’jugpa are written in the Tibetan script, one of very few ancient scripts of Asia, which are still in use nowadays.² The Sumcupa and the Rtags’jugpa³ deal with morphology and phonology and they have been the starting point of all subsequent grammatical commentaries in Tibet until now. Just as in the case of the Indian tradition, which has heavily influenced the Tibetan grammatical tradition, the two treatises attributed to Saṃbhoṭa are written in verses and are conceived as a “sacred grammar” meant to facilitate the access to sutras and tantras.

Generally speaking, Tibetan philology had an impact, which goes well beyond Tibet itself. For example, a lama-philologist called Gromgon Phagspa Blogros Rgyalmtshan (alias Chosrgyal Phagspa), who was the nephew of the great philosopher and poet Kundga Rgyalmtshan, better known as Sasākya Paṇḍita, created the alphabet, which was named after him, ‘Phagspa script,

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¹ The uniqueness of Pāṇini’s grammar lies not only in the novelty but in the fact that it was transmitted only orally for many centuries since it was prohibited to write in Sanskrit.
² It is derived from the Gupta variant of the Brahmi script of India. The first attested document is a stela which dates back from 764.
³ Both treatises are reproduced in the appendix of the present article.
on the order of the Mongol Emperor Qubilai (1215–1294). This alphabet, which is a vertical variant of the Tibetan script, had a special destiny in the Chinese Empire. It was used e.g. in the famous treatise Menggu ziyun to study Chinese rhymes and phonology from the 13th century at least until the 18th century. The same 'Phagspa alphabet was later used as a source of inspiration for the creation of the Korean alphabet. During the 14th century, another Tibetan Lama Choskyi 'Odzer also played a substantial role in the phonetic analysis of the Uighur alphabet used by the Mongols.

In the case of Sanskrit and Tibetan languages, religion has played a fundamental role in the preservation of ancient grammatical treatises. In the various literary traditions of the word, the preservation of ancient grammars is a rare phenomenon and it is often linked to a religious tradition. In the Arabic tradition, the treatise Muqaddimah al-ağrümüyya composed by a Berber grammarian Ibn Ağurrūm as-Ṣanhāği in the 13th century played for Arabic grammar a significant role, maybe analogous to Pāṇini’s or Sambhoṭa’s grammars in Sanskrit and Tibetan traditions. The very name for “Grammar” in Arabic ağrümüyya is derived from Ibn Ağurrūm’s name.

However, even in the case of a “sacred language”, the existence of an ancient grammar is not guaranteed. For example, in the Jewish tradition, the grammarians consider the language as sacred and Hebrew dikduk דקדוק (or grammar) was thus an important part of the Bible exegesis. However, there is not any grammatical canon which would have been preserved until now and recited nowadays by young religious Jews in the Diaspora or in Israel.

Some ancient traditions do not necessarily have a canonical grammar for specific reasons. In the case of Chinese, the ancient works such as the famous Shuowen jiezi 說文解字 (2nd c. CE) or the Menggu ziyun 蒙古字韵 (13th century) etc. are mainly in the fields of lexicography, etymology and phonology. The absence of a traditional Chinese “grammar” is due to the lack of morphology

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4 The precise impact of the Tibetan 'Phagspa script in the creation of the Korean alphabet is still controversial, but there is little doubt that the 'Phagspa script had some influence on the elaboration of the Korean alphabet. As Bouchez stated (2003: 135): “À la cour de Corée, on continuait en effet à noter les prononciations [du chinois] en se servant d’un alphabet antérieur, créé en Chine en 1269, à la demande d’un empereur mongol, par le tibétain ‘Phagspa […].” On this issue see also Ledyard (1997, 1998).

5 See P. Pelliot (1925) “Les systèmes d’écriture en usage chez les anciens Mongols”.

6 My colleague, the late Sophie Kessler-Mesguich, clearly states: “[Parmi les diverses variétés d’hébreu], seul l’hébreu biblique mérite d’être décrit. En effet, les premiers grammairiens juifs sont fortement influencés par les grammairiens arabes, auxquels ils empruntent leurs concepts théoriques et leur terminologie ; comme eux, ils estiment parfaite la langue de leur texte sacré scripturaire. La Bible prend donc naturellement chez les grammairiens juifs la place prestigieuse que le Coran occupe chez leurs prédécesseurs et contemporains arabes.” (2003)

7 Among the prominent grammarians of Biblical Hebrew one should mention gaon Sa’adia (10th century); Joseph Qimhi who lived in the 12th century Provence, his son David Qimhi and his brother Moise Qimhi. David Qimhi’s grammar has become a fundamental reference in the Medieval philology both Jewish and Christian; Elijah Levita (15th and 16th centuries) and his grammar called Sefer ha-Bahur; however, according to Pablo Kirtchuk and Philippe Cassuto (p.c), none of these grammars has been considered as a canon and recited by heart as it is case for the Sanskrit and Tibetan traditions.

8 As mentioned above, this work is written in two scripts: Chinese characters and their phonetic transcription in the Phagspa script.

9 Some Chinese scholars consider however the Shuowen jiezi as a form of early grammar.
and to the fact that syntax, as an independent field, appeared only in the 20th century with the emergence of modern linguistics.

2 The Tibetan canon of Sumcupa and its classical commentaries

The *Sumcupa*\(^{10}\) (“the thirty ones”) is one of the two classical canons of Tibetan grammar. It deals mainly with morphology and (marginally) grammatical semantics but does not contain information about phonology or syntax. The *Sumcupa* is made of 30 slokas or stances written in verses of seven syllables and is probably conceived as a mnemonic device.

According to the traditional historiography, the *Sumcupa* was written by Thonmi Sambhota in the 7th century, however there are still a lot of debates about the precise time of the original redaction.\(^{11}\) For some authors, the style and the rules mentioned in the treatise, at least in the form which has reached us, suggest rather a later date, at least after the orthographic reforms, possibly in the 12th century.\(^{12}\) As Miller states (1976: 6): “Shadowy though the figure of Thon-mi Sambhota may be, there is no reason to doubt the considerable antiquity of either the SCP [Sumcupa] or the RKHP [Rtags’jugpa] texts as such, even though their attribution to Sambhota cannot be maintained.”\(^{13}\)

Apart from the *Sumcupa* and *Rtags’jugpa*, another treatise deserves a special mention: *Smrags-go Mtshoncha* “The Weapon-like introduction to speech”, probably written by Dranpa Yeshes Gragspa\(^{14}\) in the 11th century. According to Verhagen (2000), “The *Smrags-go Mtshoncha* [...] is in fact the earliest reliably datable treatise devoted [...] to Tibetan grammar, which is available to us now”.\(^{15}\)

Incidently, the two most ancient grammatical treatises available now are the *Smrags-go Mtshoncha* and the *Yige’i Shyorba* (by Saskya Pandita), which are not commentaries of the *Sumcupa* (see Verhagen 2000a, 2000b; Hill, 2004).

Many commentaries have been written about the *Sumcupa* since the 12th century and a lot have been preserved until now. Among the famous ones, we find the following ones:\(^{16}\) Dbuspa

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\(^{10}\) The transliteration of Literary Tibetan is noted in italics. Following Zeilser (2004), I write the polysyllabic words without space between the syllables.

\(^{11}\) The contemporary text of the Sumcupa presents some contradictions between the form and content. For example, the genitive YI is not mentionned among the various allomorphs of this case but it is used in the text, as we know it (See the Sumcupa in the appendix).

\(^{12}\) For example, the forms for the agentive *kyis* and the genitive *kyi* do not appear in the earliest documents (see Khubyug, 2003, 68). The same is true for the *tu* variant of the *ladon*.

\(^{13}\) For this discussion, see for example Miller (1976, 1993), Bsodnams Tshering (2003) and Blodge (2003).

\(^{14}\) According to Verhagen (2000), “The *smrags-go mtshoncha* [...] is in fact the earlier reliable datable treatise devoted [...] to Tibetan grammar, which is available to us now.

The authorship of the *Smrags-go Mtshoncha* is controversial but many scholars consider that it was the Indian scholar Smritijñanakirti (whose Tibetan name is Dranpa’i Yeshes Gragspa).

\(^{15}\) As shown by Verhagen (2000), 17 of the 30 enclitic forms described in the Smras-go are described in the 2nd section of this treatise “are also dealt with in the Sumcupa in a different order and, more importantly, frequently in different terms”.

\(^{16}\) The list of commentaries is taken from Tshetan Zhabsdrung (1989).
Blogsal’s commentary\(^{17}\) (13th century), Panchen Kundga’ Rgyalmtshan’s commentary Sumr̃tags kyi don’grel tshigscedma yige’i sbyorba (13th century), Rinchentog’s Zamatog (13th century), Gobo Rab’byams Bsodnams Sengge’s commentary (15th century), Dpa’bo Gtsuglag Phrengba’s commentary Gsalbyed Sgronme (16th century), Blogros Rgyalpo’s commentary Mkhaspa Dga’ston (16th century), Prasti Rincchen Dongrup’s commentary Sumcupa’i ’Grelba Kuntu Bzangpo’i Ddonggrogyan (17th century), Karma Situ Gtsuglag Choskyi Snangba’s\(^ {18}\) commentary mkhaspa’i ngulrgyan mutig phreng mdzes often referred to as Situ ’Grelchen (18th century), Dngulchu Dharmabradra’s commentary Situ Zhallung (1866), Gserton Blobzang Tshulkhrims Rgyamtsho’s commentary Ngomtshar Phrul gyi Lademig (1891), Dbyangscan Grubpa’i Rdorje’s commentary Ljonpa’i Dbangpo (1901). Even nowadays new commentaries are still being written nowadays in a traditional style.

In fact young Tibetans still recite by heart some commentaries of the Sumcupa such as the very popular Ljonpa’i Dbangpo “Lord of the trees” which was written by Dbyangscan Grubpa’i Rdorje in 1901. What is amazing about this treatise is that it is similar in many ways to the Sumcupa, which was composed at least 700 years earlier.\(^ {19}\) If we compare both grammars, we find the following common features:

a) Most of the grammatical topics presented are the same
b) The grammatical terminology has remained largely unchanged over the centuries
c) The grammatical topics appear in the same order (see below)

I present in the chart below a comparison of the topics and the terms used in the two treatises. As appears clearly from the chart below, the Tibetan grammatical canons have undergone only a relatively minor evolution over many centuries. I present in the chart below a comparison of the topics and the terms used in the two treatises. As appears clearly from the chart below, the Tibetan grammatical canons have undergone only a relatively minor evolution over many centuries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of the topics</th>
<th>Sumcupa</th>
<th>Ljonpa’i Dbangpo (date : 1901)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>evocation of deities</td>
<td>'Jamdpaldbyangs (Mañjuśrī) and Rtagzhiba (Avalokiteśvara)</td>
<td>Jamdpaldbyangs (Mañjuśrī)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the four vowels</td>
<td>ali (dbyangs)</td>
<td>ali (dbyangs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the 30 consonants</td>
<td>kali (gual byed sum ca)</td>
<td>kali (gual byed sum ca)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the 10 final suffixes</td>
<td>rjes ’jug</td>
<td>rjes ’jug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the 5 prefixes</td>
<td>sngen ’jug</td>
<td>sngen ’jug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the final particle</td>
<td>slar bsdu</td>
<td>slar bsdu or rdzogtshig or zlasdud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the oblique case</td>
<td>la sgra</td>
<td>la don</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the genitive case</td>
<td>’brel ba’i sa</td>
<td>’brel sgra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the agentive case (or ergative case)</td>
<td>byed pa po</td>
<td>byed sgra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the continuative particle</td>
<td>lhag ma dang bas</td>
<td>lhag bas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the adversative particle</td>
<td>’byed sshad</td>
<td>’byed sshad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the ablative case</td>
<td>’byung khungs</td>
<td>’byung khungs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^ {17}\) According to Hill (2004), this text is the earliest available commentary on the Sumcupa.

\(^ {18}\) He is also known under the name of Panchen Choskyi Byunggnas.

\(^ {19}\) Or 1200 years, if we believe the tradition.
the vocative case | bod pa | bod sgra |
|---|---|---|
the emphatic particle | brnan pa'i tshig | brnan pa'i sgra |
|---|---|---|
demonstrative | de | de sgra |
|---|---|---|
correlative pronouns | spyi la khyab | spyi sgra |
|---|---|---|
nominal suffixes | bdag po'i sar | bdag sgra |
|---|---|---|
negation | dgag pa'i gnas | dgag sgra |
|---|---|---|
the adjunctive particle and quotative elements | _ | zhing |
|---|---|---|
orthography linked to the final | rjes 'jug bcu po ma bzhugs na, ming | gzhan shyor ba yod mi srid |

**Chart 1: the topics of the Sumcupa and the Ljonpa'i Dbangpo**

The two treatises mainly differ in the presentation of the various morphemes and the number of their variants (allomorphs). For example, in the “Lord of trees” (Ljonpa'i Dbangpo), we find seven forms for the oblique case (ladon): SU, RA, RU, DU, NA, LA, TU and a description combination of these variants (depending on the final consonant of the preceding word), while in the Sumcupa, only SU, RU, DU, NA and LA are given. The allomorph TU is not mentioned nor is the combination of the forms (see the root text and its commentary in the appendix of this paper). One additional characteristic of the Sumcupa is that the morphemes are usually not given directly and must be derived from the combination of one of the 10 final suffixes (ga, nga da, na, ba, ma, ’a, ra, la, sa) and a diacritic vowel (i, u, e, o). Thus for example, the morpheme SU is described as “the 2nd vowel [U] attached to the 10th final suffix [SA]”.

The preservation of ancient grammatical concepts is an important feature of the Tibetan tradition until today. Only during the late 20th century, did new approaches of grammar emerge and were new analyses proposed. However the traditional grammatical canons and their main commentaries are still recited and are used in the educative system.

As we have shown in the introduction, the existence of ancient grammatical canons is rare in the literary traditions of the world. Thus Sumcupa and Rtags’jugpa can rightly be considered as a great achievement of this ancient culture of High Asia. At the same time, the integration of these ancient grammatical canons in a modern Tibetan educative curriculum has some negative impacts on the teaching methods of Literary Tibetan. A lot of teachers are reluctant to use modern concepts and modern linguistics to describe Literary Tibetan. We will take the example of the case system to show that the traditional approach is not adapted for an efficient and easy description of the literary language. Although the Literary Tibetan case system is very complex and quite different from the case systems found in Indo-European languages, it could be described in a

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20 Here is another example: only one form is mentioned for the continuative particle STE in the Sumcupa, while three variants STE, DE, TE are listed in the “Lord of trees” (Ljonpa'i Dbangpo).

21 According to Miller (1976: XIV), there used to be 7 vowel graphs: “We now know of early stages in the development of the Tibetan system of writing, and something of the use of distinct graphs, later abandoned, for what were apparently allophones of i and u so that a total of seven vowel graphs were employed, to write as many vowels.”

22 In this paper we are dealing with Classical Tibetan. The notion of Classical Tibetan is understood here in a wide sense, excluding Old Literary Tibetan and Modern Literary Tibetan.
clearer and more efficient way using notions and categories derived from modern linguistics and really adapted to this literary Tibeto-Burman language.

3 The traditional approach of the Tibetan cases

The Tibetan traditional grammatical commentaries always mention eight cases. In the Ljonpa'i Dbangpo treatise, only a couple of sentences (19 verses altogether) are devoted to the case system. We reproduce them below in the same order as they appear:

- **2nd, 4th and 7th cases “oblique”**
  
  su ra du na la tu/ la don rnam pa bdun yin te/ rnam dbye gnyis bzhi bdun pa dang/ de nyid
tshe skabs rnams la 'jug/ sa su ga drag mthar tu/ nga da na ma ra la du/ 'a dang mtha' med ra dang ru/
  
  **Translation:** SU RA RU DU NA LA and TU/ the seven forms all have the meaning of “LA” They mark the 2nd, 4th and 7th cases/ For time and denyid they are also used/ After SA use SU. After GA, BA and the second ghostly suffix DA: TU/ after NGA, DA, NA, MA, RA, LA : DU/

- **6th case “ergative” and 3rd case “agentive”**
  
  gi kyi gyi 'i yi lnga po/ rnam dbye drug pa 'brel sgra dang/ de rnums sa mtha' can lnga ni/ rnam
dbye gsum pa byed sgra ste/ sbyor tshul na ma ra la gyi/ da ba sa kyi ga nga gi/ 'a dang mtha' med 'i dang yi/
  
  **Translation:** the five marks GI KYI GYI I YI / indicate the 6th case, the relation case/ These five forms with an additional “S” mark the third case, the agentive case. Their combination is the following. After NA, MA, RA, and LA: GYI / After DA, BA, SA: KYI; after GA and NGA: GI / after ‘A and vowels: ’I or YI.

- **5th case “ablative”**
  
  nas las 'byung khungs dgar sdu d/ 'byung khungs dangos la gang sbyar 'thus/ rigs mthun dgar nas
mi mthun las/ sdu d la nas sgra kho na 'jug/
  
  **Translation:** NAS and LAS mark the source, the comparison or the abbreviation. After the real source one can use either LAS or NAS. For the comparison of similar [entities], one
must use NAS and for dissimilar [entities] one uses LAS. One can only use NAS to indicate a [spatiotemporal origin] in the case of an abreviation.\(^{23}\)

**8th case “vocative”**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{kye dang kwa ye bod sgra ste/ phal cher ming gi thog mar sbyor/}
\end{align*}
\]

Translation: NAS and LAS mark the source, the comparison or the abreviation. After the real source one can use either LAS or NAS. For the comparison of similar [entities], one must use NAS and for dissimilar [entities] one uses LAS. One can only use NAS to indicate a [spatiotemporal origin] in the case of an abreviation.

Note that the **1st case**, which is called *ngebotsam “the essence alone”* in most commentaries, does not appear in the mnemonic treatise of the *Ljonpa’i Dhango*.

For cultural and religious reasons, Tibetan grammarians of the past took as a model the Sanskrit case system, which is radically different from the Tibetan case system. They tried to match the cases of the two languages. The 8 cases (*rnamdbye brgyad*) correspond to their supposed Sanskrit “equivalents” (the kāraka):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanskrit</th>
<th>Literary Tibetan</th>
<th>translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kāraka</td>
<td><em>rnamdbye</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) nominative</td>
<td>kartā གང་</td>
<td><em>ngo bo tsam</em> གནས་པ་དང་ལོ་རོ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) accusative</td>
<td>karma གམ་</td>
<td><em>las su bya ba</em> གཞི་ལས་སུ་བྱ་བ།</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) instrumental</td>
<td>karaṇa ཁཀར</td>
<td><em>byed sgra</em> གཅིག་པ་འབྲེལ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) dative</td>
<td>sampradāna ཐོས་པ་</td>
<td><em>dgos ched</em> གཟོ་བེད་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) ablative</td>
<td>apādāna དབང་པ</td>
<td><em>byung khungs</em> ཉུང་ཀུངས་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) genitive</td>
<td>sambandha མྱོད་པ</td>
<td><em>’brel sgra</em> ཉུད་པ་འབྲེལ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) locative</td>
<td>adhikaraṇa ཐོས་པ་</td>
<td><em>gnas gzbi</em> ཉུད་པ་གནས་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) vocative</td>
<td>sambodhana མོད་པ་</td>
<td><em>bod sgra</em> བོད་པ་</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{23}\) The notion of “abreviation” refers here to the construction “*from X to Y*” which allows to include all the elements of a list or a continuum by naming only the extremes.

\(^{24}\) I give here the Tibetan transliterations of Sanskrit cases. These transliterations are rarely mentioned in the traditional commentaries and usually replaced by their Tibetan equivalents.

\(^{25}\) *lassu byaba* can be translated literally “activity towards a work/for a work (see Zeisler 2006: 59)
This traditional analysis in 8 cases based on the Sanskrit model has created a great deal of confusion for linguistic description as well as for the teaching of Literary Tibetan. The problems connected with the Sanskrit 8 cases model have been noted by both native and foreign scholars (see Verhagen 2000a, Zeisler 2006). A prominent grammarian from Amdo, Dorzhi Snyemblo Gdongdrug (1987), has expressed this criticism in very clear terms:

“The analysis of Tibetan into eight cases is based on a Sanskrit model. But the model does not work in many occasions. Every scholar who pays attention to grammar knows that very well. Avoiding the bad habit of copying other languages, one should describe the Tibetan language only on the basis of its own structure and specificities”.

In an effort to propose a more coherent analysis, some authors such as Skalbzang 'Gyurmed (1981: 3) stated that:

“The 8 cases are marked only by 4 marks (rkyen): the genitive ('brel sgra), the agentive (byed sgra), the oblique (la don) and the ablative ('byung khungs kyi sgra). These casemarkers not only indicate grammatical meanings related to nominal cases but also other meanings not related to the cases.”

In the Chinese edition of his grammar (1988), Skalbzang 'Gyurmed adds the absolutive (ngobotsam or zero marking), which makes 5 casemarkers. Such commentaries reflect a new analysis, which sharply departs from the traditional “Sanskrit model”. However, we will see later that a five casemarkers analysis does not allow for a faithful description of Literary Tibetan grammar.

The main flaws of the traditional approach to cases relate to the differences between Sanskrit and Tibetan. The two languages differ in fundamental ways: a) The number of cases; b) The grammatical semantics of the cases; c) The syntax of the cases.

Most Sanskrit cases have no match in Tibetan: nominative ≠ “essence case” (absolutive), accusative ≠ “object case”, instrumental ≠ agentive, dative ≠ purposive. The other cases such as ablative, genitive and locative share some common properties but they have a different function in the two languages. The so called “vocative case” (bod sgra) is not a case in Literary Tibetan but corresponds to a series of interjections that such as kye, kwa ye, etc., which precede the noun, unlike the other cases, which always follow the noun.

The correspondance between Tibetan cases and Sanskrit cases is particularly problematic for the core cases (nominative and accusative), because the fundamental morphosyntactic constructions in the two languages follow a different logic. In Tibetan, the dominant construction of transitive verbs is of the ergative type, while in Sanskrit, it reflects the accusative type. The consequence is that there is no equivalent of nominative and accusative in Tibetan, and correlatively, there is no perfect match for absolutive and ergative in Sanskrit.

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26 Dorzhi (1987) has a similar analysis.

27 Zeisler (2006) analyses in details the way Tibetan grammarians understood the Sanskrit case system.
Thus if we take in account these important characteristics, we can easily understand the complex relations between the two case systems, whereby a single case of Sanskrit may correspond to two core grammatical roles in Tibetan and vice versa. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanskrit</th>
<th>Classical Tibetan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kartā (nominative)</td>
<td>ngo bo tsam (absolutive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>byed sgra (ergative-instrumental)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>karma (accusative)</td>
<td>ngo bo tsam (absolutive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>las su bya ba (oblique)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kartā (nominative)</td>
<td>byed sgra (ergative-instrumental)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>karaṇa (instrumental)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 3

The last significant problem of the traditional analysis is linked to the status of the “oblique case” traditionally called ladon. The notion of ladon is very confusing in the traditional approach because it merges together 3 different casemarkers: du (and its variants tu, su, ru, r²⁹), la and na into a kind of “supercase” which convey the functions of the 2nd “accusative”, the 4th “dative” or the 7th “locative” cases. In the grammatical treatises, the ladon is always considered as an important notion and there are intense debates about the identification of the grammatical meaning as an instance of the 2nd, the 4th or the 7th case.

The main difficulty of the traditional approach of the ladon is that the differences between the 3 cases (reflecting their Sanskrit equivalents) are entirely based on semantic criteria, while the morphological and syntactic properties are ignored: The traditional grammarians generally consider that the 2nd, the 4th and the 7th cases may be marked by all the seven forms of the ladon (oblique): su, ra, ru, du, na, la tu, even if most authors admit that there are serious restrictions for the 2nd and 4th cases. Moreover, as we will show later, the seven marks not only have different case functions, but they also differ in their use as connective or adverbials.

One of the best criticisms of the concept of ladon has again come from a native grammarian Dorzhi Gdongdrug who has shown that the variants of the ladon “supercase” are by no means equivalent.

This chart below corresponds to my analysis. The native grammarians usually stick to the analysis proposed in the chart 2.

²⁹ The allomorph r is pronounced /r/ but is traditionally written ra because of the syllabic nature of the Tibetan script: a letter without vowel diacritic sign is pronounced with the inherent vowel /a/. Thus according to the tradition, it is impossible to write a consonant without a vowel. Unlike other Brahmic scripts, Tibetan does not have a virama, i.e a sign which “kills” the inherent vowel.

³⁰ For some functions of the 2nd case, only la and r may be used. For the 4th case, na is usually not used.
“The combination rules of the 6 variants [su, ra, ru du, na tu] are distinct but their semantic functions are rather similar to the la. That is the reason why [these 7 forms] have been called la don [the meaning of la]. However, these seven forms [litt. “letters”] correspond to various [grammatical] categories and their frequency is quite distinct” (Dorzhi, ibid).

Thus it is clear from Dorzhi’s commentary that the so called ladon should not be considered as a single “supercase” and should be divided into several cases depending on various morphological, syntactic and semantic parameters.

Even native scholars, such as Dorzhi Gdongdrug Snyemblo or Skalbzang 'Gyurmed, who are well aware of the problems generated by the canonical approach, are reluctant to abandon it and come up with a full revision or deconstruction of the traditional case system. So far, none of the native grammarians has proposed an entirely new approach of the case system of Literary Tibetan based on modern linguistic notions.

4 A new analysis of the case system

It is now possible to propose a new analysis of the case system based on morphological, syntactic and semantic parameters. As we will see below in 4.2, the Classical Tibetan case system is one of the most complicated literary case system of the world.31 This complexity is not due to a great number of cases, nor is it due to a highly irregular morphology. Indeed Russian or Latin nominal morphologies are much more complex than the Tibetan one. The main reason for this complexity comes from the syntax and the grammatical semantics of the various marks.

Let us first consider the morphology of the various cases markings.

4.1 Morphology of the various cases

The casemarkers of Literary Tibetan are neither nominal suffixes like the classical cases of Latin, Russian or Greek nor adpositions like those found in French or English (e.g. the indirect object à in French or to in English): They are clitics and attach at the end of a noun phrase.32 The casemarkers never occur independently. Another difference directly related to their clitic nature is that Tibetan cases occur only once for each NP, unlike “classical” case systems, where a case, for example dative, is marked on each constituent of the NP whether nouns, adjectives, demonstratives, quantifiers or pronouns.

Another consequence of the clitic nature of the cases is that the various constituents of the NP never undergo any morphological variation. The only morphological variation is related to the clitic morpheme itself, which may undergo a variation depending on the final consonant or vowel of the preceding word.

Some casemarkers are clearly allomorphs and represent formal variations of a single morpheme in a certain environment. The variation is linked to an old morphophonological rule and does not reflect any difference in terms of grammatical semantics.

This is for example the case for gi, kyi, gyi, 'i and yi, which are allomorphs of the same genitive case as well as gis, kyis, gyis, 'is and yis, which are allomorphs of the same ergative case, which can also be called agentive case.

31 Some Tibeto-Burman languages have similarly complex case systems but none of them has an old literary tradition.

32 For a discussion on the distinction between clitics, affixes and words in TB languages, see Genetti (1993)
Zero marking (Ø) should also be considered as a casemaker although it is formally void. The reason is that the absolutive case, traditionally referred to as ngobotsam, plays an essential role in the ergative constructions. The absolutive is used for both the unique participant of an intransitive construction and the patient of a transitive construction.

For example: a) བུ [ABS] bsad-do '(X) killed (the) insect' b) བུ [ABS] shi'o '(the) insect died'. In a) the absolutive case or zero marking on 'bu (insect) indicates the Grammatical Patient (or "Direct Object") of the transitive verb bsad while in b) the absolutive indicates the Single Argument (or "Subject") of the intransitive verb shi.

If we now consider the distribution of the seven forms of the traditional ladon, some are clearly not allomorphs. The forms du (and its variants), la and na may occur in the same phonological environment but they have distinct semantic and syntactic functions. For some functions, only certain forms of the ladon are suitable. Thus for example, with the Beneficiary role (or "Indirect Object") we find only the forms la and its variant r. The other forms su, ru, du, tu and na can not normally be used for this function: ཁྱོད་དུ་སྟེར། 'to look at the shape', གཟུགས་སུ་བལྟ། 'to listen to the sound', སྒྲ་ལ་ཉན། 'to smell a fragrance', ཆེས་སྣོམ། 'to see a shape', ཆེས་སྣོམ། 'to hear a sound', ཆེས་སྣོམ། 'a fragrance'. The fact that for certain functions of the Beneficiary only la and r may be used has been noted by some native authors, such as Skalbzang Gyurmed (1981) and Dorzhi (1987):

For the real object (dngos yul), among the forms of the ladon, only la and r may be used. [...]. For the object of a causative construction, only la and r may be used. The other forms are not suitable.”

We will call the two casemakers la and r “dative” in English and la sgra in Tibetan34. The form r has somehow a problematic status. On the one hand, it is clearly an allomorph of the dative la in a vocalic context. On the other hand, it is also considered as an allomorph of du (see Hill 2004: 83) used as a free variant of ru in a vocalic environment.

The variants su, ru, du and tu are clearly allomorphs. The distribution of the 4 marks, which is entirely complementary, has been described in all traditional commentaries: su occurs after the consonant s, ru occurs after a vowel and the consonant 'a, du occurs after ng, d, n, m, r, l and tu after g, b and the second suffix d. The original morpheme is probably du which occurs in most environments. It has undergone transformations in some phonological contexts such as a rhotization (after vowels as ru or r), a sibilantization (after s as su) and a devoicing36 after plosives

31 These examples are taken from Dorzhi (1987).
34 This term has been used in the Sumcupa to refer to the ladon. I propose to restrict la sgra to the form /la/ and its variant /tc/
35 For example, it is possible to use both r and ru in the following sentence: 'dus byas ni mi rtag pa ru/ mi rtag par nges.
36 The allomorph tu is often replaced by du in the oldest documents and it is likely that the devoicing of du after the final plosives b and g respectively pronounced /p/ and /k/ took place progressively. (See Bsodnams Tshering, 2003).
(g, b and “hidden d” as tu). I propose to call this case ངོ་བོ་ཙམ་ du sgra in Tibetan and **purposive** in English, following Wilson’s (1992) terminology. The term of **terminative** has been proposed for this function by Jäschke (1883) but its meaning is not obvious and confusing.  

One of the main functions of the purposive is to indicate the aim, the purpose of performing the verbal action. For example:

1) གོས་སུ་སྣམ་བུ་འཐག gos su snam bu 'thag ‘to weave a piece of woollen cloth for garment’

2) སྐུ་ཚབ་ཏུ་འདེམ་བསྐོ་བྱེད། sku tshab tu 'dems bsko byed ‘to choose as a representative’

3)ཁང་པ་རུ་རྡོ་ཚིག་རྒྱག་ khang pa ru rdo tshig rgyag ‘to make a wall for a house’  

As we will see later, with this function, the case is frequently used after verbs.

Then we have the ངོ་བོ་ཙམ་ na sgra which corresponds to the locative case. It can be used only for location without movement and not for direction.

The traditional approach groups together two marks ཅར་ las and ཇོ་ nas under the term 'byung khungs (litt. source [case marking]). These two markers correspond in reality to two different cases, which differ both in their syntax and in their semantics. DeLancey (2003) and Hill (2004) call them respectively ‘elative’ and ‘ablative’. In Tibetan they may simply be called ཅར་ sgra (las sgra) and ཁྲུ་ sgra (nas sgra).

Finally, one should take in account a case marking, which so far has been considered as a variant of the agentive or simply ignored, the mark ངོ་ bas. Although it is fairly marginal and functions only as a comparative, it should be recognized as a casemaker.

In summary, according to the above morphological analysis, **Literary Tibetan has ten grammatical cases**: absolutive ངོ་; agentive ངོ་; genitive ངོ་; dative ངོ་; purposive ངོ་; locative ངོ་; ablative ངོ་; elative ངོ་; associative ངོ་; and comparative ངོ་.

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The devoicing of du did not happen after the final d probably because the place of articulation is the same. This recalls the behaviour of the devoicing with gi, the genitive case: kyi occurs after the plosives d, b pronounced /t/ and /p/ but does not take place when the place of articulation is the same: after g we find gi and not *ki.

37 Jäschke (1883: 21) proposed the following terms for the cases: “nominative-accusative, genitive, instrumental, dative, locative, ablative, **terminative** and vocative”. Bacot used the term “déterminatif” in his grammar (in French). Since “purpose” is one of the main functions of the du sgra, Wilson’s term “purposive” is a lot clearer. In French, I have proposed the term “destinatif” (seminar of typology, University of Provence, 2007-2008). The term “destinative” has also been used independently by Haller (2009) with a meaning restricted to one of the functions of the du sgra.

38 For simplicity’s sake, I will keep the label “ablative”, although as we will see later the las case is somehow more complicated than a simple ablative.

39 In synchrony the comparative mark bas can not be analysed as a morpheme ba+s (agentive), unlike the agentive pas or bas, which can easily be divided into pa/ha (nominalizer)+s (agentive). The form of the nominalizer pa or ha depends on the last letter of the preceding word. Moreover, the nominalizer may be followed by any of the cases: pa+i (pa+genitive), pa+s or pa+ys (pa+agentive), pa+la (pa+dative), pa+nas (pa+elative). On the contrary, the comparative bas does not have a form as pas. Unlike what I proposed earlier (Tournadre, 2003), the morpheme bas can’t be analysed as ba+s since the meaning of ha, which follows a noun, is not a nominalizer and remains obscure in synchrony.

40 A similar case analysis has been proposed by Hill (2004) which was based on DeLancey (2003) and Tournadre (1996). The main difference introduced here is the inclusion in the case system of the comparative bas and the analysis of la, which is called “allative” by Hill and which I analyse as “dative”. 

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4.2 Syntax and semantics of the cases

The main characteristic of the Literary Tibetan cases is that they are **multifunctional**, **transcategorial** and sometimes **optional**. They are multifunctional in the sense that every case has a wide array of functions. For example, the agentive not only marks the agent, but also the instrument and the cause, etc.

This characteristic is found in most case systems around the world. That is for example true for Latin, Russian or Sanskrit. The Latin accusative indicates both the object and the direction of the predicate (allative), duration, attribute of the object, etc. Much more characteristic is the fact that the Tibetan cases are transcategorial, i.e. most of the casemarkers may be used not only with nouns, adjectives, pronouns, quantifiers, adverbs but also with verbs and verbal auxiliaries.

Transcategoriality is variously exploited by languages. Some languages such as Baka make an intensive use of this property as shown by Heine and Kilian-Hatz (1994) and Robert (2004). For example, the morpheme \( \text{tɛ} \) has various uses which “are organized in a complex network of semantic and syntactic values: \( \text{tɛ} \) may behave like a particle, a preposition, an auxiliary, or a coordinating or subordinating, conjunction, involving various semantic domains such as space, time, aspect, cause, purpose, manner, instrument, case marking and more. [...] In English, for instance, participles (such as considering) can be used as prepositions, inflected verb forms as subordinating conjunctions (suppose, imagine...), or temporal adverbs as discourse particles (now, still), but there is nothing comparable to the Baka \( \text{tɛ} \).” (Robert 2004). Well, Literary Tibetan might also be a good example that makes an extensive use of transcategoriality as we will see below!

The various cases of Literary Tibetan indicate **grammatical roles**, when occurring at the end of a noun phrase. They indicate its grammatical role or function such as Agent, Patient, Beneficiary, Instrument, Source, etc.

The casemarkers also have **connective functions**, when placed after a verb or a nominalized verb. They function as coordinators or subordinators. The functioning of casemarkers both as nominal cases and connectives seems to be a widespread feature of the Tibeto-Burman case systems (cf. Genetti (1991)). Apart from these main functions, one also encounters **adverbial functions** after nouns or adjectives and **postpositional functions** mainly after nouns.

Finally one also finds **discursive and pragmatic functions** when the casemarkers are used after an NP or at the end of a sentence.42

The first two functions (grammatical role and connective) as well as the discursive function belong to flexional morphology, while the latter (adverbial and postposition) belong to derivational morphology and thus are related to the construction of the lexicon. They are no longer productive in Literary Tibetan. As expected, the case-marked adverbs and postpositions have a different syntactic behaviour. While the adverbs function independently, the postpositions trigger a complement usually marked with the genitive case.

The reason for the multifunctional nature of Tibetan cases may be found in a cognitive representation of a scene whereby the participants are either interpreted as a source, as the center or as the goal of the process. This has been described within the **trajectory model** of the cases (Tournadre 1995). In order to describe ergativity and more generally the case system of Literary

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41 About the notion of transcategoriality, see e.g Plungian (2003) and Robert (2004).

42 Both the agentive and the dative may have various discursive functions (emphasis, contrastive focus, topicalization) as shown by Tournadre (1994, 1996) and Zeisler (2006).
Tibetan, one should postulate the existence of the “supercases” of Source and Goal. The Source includes agentive, ablative, elative and comparative, while the Goal includes purposive, dative, locative and associative. The various Source cases share a morphological characteristic. They are compositional and exhibit a final $s$ (see LaPolla 1995: 192). Historically Source cases combine the genitive, the dative, the locative and a form $ba$ with a $s$ ($gi+s$, $la+s$, $na+s$, $ba+s$) and share core grammatical semantics (spatial, temporal and agentive sources and causes).

The explanation for the transcategorial nature of the cases, especially the fact that they occur after verbs and function as connectives, is probably due in part to a nominalization of the verb. However, the nominalizer has disappeared in most instances and the verb is directly followed by the casemaker. As for the functions of postposition and adverb, it is not surprising to see that they are marked with grammatical cases, because nearly all the postpositions in Tibetan are originally nouns (and still used as such synchronically) and most adverbs are either nouns or adjectives.

Of course, it would also be possible to consider Tibetan case morphemes no longer the same morphemes when they function as connective and that it is purely homonymy (at least in synchrony). In this perspective, the $nas$ as elative case ‘from’ and the $nas$ as a connective after a verb would then be different morphemes. However, by choosing this analysis, we miss a fundamental property of the Tibetan case system that reflects a “fractal grammar” (see Robert, ibid). It is not a coincidence if 5 cases out of 10 are entirely transcategorial (see chart below) and 4 are partially transcategorial.43

It is also interesting to note that the contemporary native grammarians are fully aware of this transcategoriality although they lack the notion as such. Dorzhi Gdongdrug Snyemblo (1987) for example speaks of byedgra brtsegsma-can ‘stacked agentives’ and gives the following examples:

4) $\text{rimo\ m\ dzes+p\ s\ nga+s\ mig+gis\ bltas.}$
   picture be beautiful+NOM+AGT I+AGT eye+AGT look (Past)
   ‘Since the pictures was nice, I looked (at it) with my (own) eyes.’

5) $\text{khros+p\ s\ dbyug+p\ s\ shed+kyis\ brdungs}$
   angry+ NOM+AGT stick+AGT force+AGT beat
   ‘Because (he/she) was angry, (he/she) beat strongly with a stick.’

6) $\text{byaba\ d\ ka\’khag\ c\ e+b\ s\ ngatsho+p\ s\ thabs+kyis\ rim+gyis\ bsgrubs}$
   task hard great+ NOM+AGT we+AGT method+AGT step+AGT achieve
   ‘Because the work was hard, we had to achieve it progressively with a skilled method.’

In the examples above, the various forms of the agentive (the allomorphs $s$, $gis$, $gyis$, $kyis$) appear 3 or 4 times within the same sentence with various functions, related to different categories.

43 The absolutive is formally zero-marked so it is difficult to apply the criterion of transcategoriality.
nouns, pronouns or verbs. We see in the above sentence that the agentive case corresponds to the definition given by Robert (2004) of a transcategorial morpheme: “By definition, a transcategorial morpheme is used on different syntactic levels with a different syntactic scope (for instance, as a noun, as a preposition, as a subordinating conjunction).”

The semantics of any transcategorial morpheme must of course be correlated at each level with a set of syntactic properties: “At each level of the syntactic hierarchy a number of specific syntactic properties are attached” (Robert 2004).

Before I list and illustrate the various functions of each case, a few additional remarks ought to be made about the syntax of the cases.

First, when marking the grammatical role, casemakers occur at the end of the noun phrase and may occur only once per NP. However a few non casual marks may occur after the case at the end of the NP. These are essentially 'ni (the topicalizer), 'kyang (the adjunctive) and, in a marginal way, 'so (the final particle). For example, the sequences N+gis+ni (AGT+TOP), N+gis+kyang (AGT+ADJCT), N+nas+ni (ELA+TOP), N+nas+kyang (ELA+ADJCT), N+las+ni (ABL+TOP), N+las+kyang (ABL+ADJCT), N+gis+so (AGT+FP) are correct, while the reverse order (e.g *N+ni+CASE, *N+kyang+CASE, *N+FP+CASE...) is not found.

Second, one sometimes finds sequences of two cases, such as an agentive followed by a locative: s+na used after a nominalized verb (V+ba-s+na) ‘since, therefore if’, and adverbs such as debasna ‘therefore, hence, for that reason’.

Third, in Literary Tibetan, just as in all the modern Tibetic languages, the verb is the only compulsory element of the sentence. There is no verbal agreement, whatsoever, with any argument, unlike many Tibetan-Burman languages, such as the Kiranti languages. All the arguments whether Agent (“subject”) or Patient (“object”) can be omitted, so that grammatical roles are often not marked at all.

Fourth, a case is usually governed by the verb that follows the noun or the NP but in many occurrences, the case may also be governed by a subsequent verb. The governing verb is sometimes placed very far from the noun phrase it governs, after several clauses, at the end of the final clause.

Fifth, in some contexts, the grammatical cases are optional and may be dropped or exchanged. Optionality has various motivations. It is either because the verb class allows some flexibility in the case marking or because the case marking may be triggered by several verbs (usually two subsequent verbs).

I will list below the main functions of each mark and give illustrations for each function. The sentences are taken from various rnamthar (Milaraspa, sNangsa 'Od'bum, etc.) etc. or classical texts (such as Saskya legsbshad, etc.). For the sake of conciseness, some examples are also taken from various grammars (Skalbzang 'Gyurmed, 1981, Dorzhi, 1987, Dpa'ris Sangsrgyas, 1987). Skalbzang 'Gyurmed was probably the first native grammarian to base his analysis on the vast corpus of the Tibetan literature. New technologies applied to Tibetan already allow for automatic search which will considerably facilitate the constitution of a corpus to illustrate the evolution and the variation in the case system throughout the long history of Tibetan literature.

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44 or its allomorphs 'ang and yang.
45 or its allomorphs go, ngo, do, no, bo, mo, ro, lo, so
List of the functions of ten cases

For every case, the functions will be listed in the same order: a) case functions (after nouns or NPs), b) connective functions (after verbs or nominalized verbs), c) adverbial functions d) postpositional functions, e) sentence particle functions.

Absolutive (Ø)

A. functions: a) case functions: Single Argument of monovalent verb, Patient of a bivalent verb. The other functions b), c) d) and e) are absent.

B. illustrations:

a1) single argument

\[
\text{ི་ལ་རྩ་ནི་མི་འདུག} \quad \text{ri+la rtsa+Ø[grass+ABS]} \ni \text{mi ‘dug ‘There is no grass on the mountain.’}
\]

\[
\text{ཏབ་ཏུ་མེ་འབར་} \quad \text{thab+tu me+Ø[fire+ABS]} \text{ ‘ba ‘The fire is burning in the stove.’}
\]

\[
\text{ཁྱིམ་དུ་མི་མེད} \quad \text{khyim+du mi+Ø[person+ABS]} \text{med ‘There is nobody [litt. not a person] in the house.’}
\]

a2) patient

\[
\text{བླ་མས་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་བཞེངས} \quad \text{blama+s dkyil’khor+Ø [mandala+ABS] bzhengs ‘The lama built a mandala.’}
\]

\[
\text{གསེར་ཉོས་ནས་རྒྱ་གར་ལ་ཁྱེར་འགྲོ་} \quad \text{gser+Ø[gold+ABS] nyos+nas rgyagar+la khyer ‘gro ‘Having bought some gold, [I] will bring it to India.’}
\]

\[
\text{རིང་པོ་ཆེ་ལེན་དུ་སོང་} \quad \text{rinpoche+Ø [precious (stone)+ABS] len+du song ‘(X) went to fetch precious (stones).’}
\]

Agentive (kyis, gis, gyis, is, yis)

A. functions: a) case functions: ergative indicating the Agent (‘by’, often not translated) and instrumental (‘by’, ‘with’) marking the Instrument, the Manner, the Cause or the Specification; b) connective functions: causal and time subordination (‘because, since’). Also used after PA གས་(pas) (or its allomorph གས་ bas): causal subordinator (‘because’) and coordinator (‘and’); adversative connector c) adverbial functions, d) postpositional functions, e) sentence final particle functions.

B. illustrations:

a1) the Agent

\[
\text{བླ་མས་[lama+AGT:ERG]} \text{ dkyil’khor+Ø bzhengs ‘The lama built a mandala.’}
\]

\[
\text{ཡི་གེ་སུས་བྲིས་} \text{yige+Ø su+s [who+AGT:ERG] bris ‘Who wrote this letter?’ or ‘This letter was written by whom?’}
\]

\[
\text{ཨ་ཁུ་དང་ཨ་ནེས་སྡུག་པོ་བཏང་} \text{akhu dang ane+s [aunt+ AGT:ERG] sdugpo btang ‘(My) uncle and aunt treated (me) badly.’}
\]

\[
\text{བུ་ཁྱོད་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་གཞོན་ནུ་ནས་མཐུ་དང་སེར་བས་སྡིག་ཆེན་པོ་བསགས} \text{bu khyod+kyis+kyang [you+AGT:ERG+also] gzhonnu+nas mthu dang serba+s sdig chenpo+Ø bsags ‘My son, you too, since your young age, have accumulated great sins because of magic and hail.’}
\]

\[
\text{ཡུམ་གྱིས་ལེགས་པར་གཟིགས་ནས་སྤྱན་བསིལ་} \text{yum+gyis [mother+AGT:ERG] legs pa+r gzigs nas spyamchab+Ø bsil ‘Mother looked carefully}
\]

47 In the examples below, the first abbreviation indicates the case and after the semi colon the second abbreviation indicates the case function. Ex: AGT:ERG designates the agentive case and the ergative function.
and then cried.', \[ bdag+gis [me+AGT:ERG] rtsa rlung thig+Ø bsom \]
'I meditated upon the channels, the breath, the essence.'\(^{48}\)

\textbf{a2) Instrument, Cause and Manner}

\textbf{a3) Specification}

This function is quite peculiar and is linked to specificative adjectival or verbal predicates, which are always stative. A specificative verb or adjective governs two arguments, one in the absolutive (in some cases in the dative) and the other in the instrumental. Most adjectival predicates such as \textit{phyug} 'rich', \textit{mtho} 'high', \textit{thung} 'short', \textit{mkhas} 'expert', \textit{ring} 'long', \textit{che} 'big' may have an argument in the instrumental conveying specification. Some specificative verbs also trigger the same construction. Among the most frequent, one should mention: \textit{khengs} 'to be filled (with)', \textit{bskor} 'to be surrounded by', \textit{gyogs} 'to be covered by', \textit{brgyan} 'to be adorned with, ornamented, bejeweled', \textit{spras} 'to be adorned with, decorated by', \textit{gtso} 'to be chiefed by' ('with as main figures'), \textit{khyab} 'to encompass, to pervade, to be covered with', \textit{mnar} 'to be oppressed by', \textit{mchod} 'to worship with'. In English, this function is translated by various prepositions depending on the context: 'by', 'as', 'in', 'with' or 'of'.

\textbf{b1) Adjunctive and causal connective}

The agentive may be used directly after the verb to indicate a connexion between two clauses. However, for this function, the agentive case alone is rarely used, while the elative case is very frequent (see elative case below).

\footnote{48 For other illustrations, see Nagano (1997).}
bod+kyi gtamdpe zhig kyang dran+byung ‘I was really moved and I remembered a Tibetan proverb.’

Again here the agentive kyis may be replaced by the elative nas.

b2) Adjunctive and causal connective with the nominalizer PA/BA

This function is very frequent. The pa or ba may occur after verb or an adjective functioning as a predicate.

bcomldan+das+kyi drung+du phyin pa+s [NOM+AGT:CO] khyed+kyi lhayul mthong+gam ‘He went in front of the Bhagavan and he (the Bhagavan) asked: have you seen paradise?’, chu+la biskyur+ba+s [throw+ AGT:CO] rtsa+ba lji+ba+s [heavy+ NOM+AGT:CO] thur+du song ‘[he] threw them to the river and because they were heavy the roots went down.’, shing bcad+pa+s [cut+ NOM+AGT:CO] ma chod ‘He tried to cut the wood but did not succeed.’

b3) Adversative

This adversative function is rather rare. For this function, the agentive usually appears twice in a construction involving two verbs, a causative and a resulative verb separated by a negation, as in the following examples from Milaraspa’s Rnammgur:

phyi lus sms spang+gis mi phongs+kyis ‘Although you try to abandon you external body, you don’t succeed.’, phyi snang ba btau+gyis mi thul+gyis ‘You try to subdue the external phenomena but you will never succeed.’

bdag+gis bkag+na+yang ma thub+kyis ‘Although I tried to prevent it, I could not.’.

c) adverbs

The agentive is used to derive a lot of adverbs, usually from a noun, such as:


d) postpositions

The agentive is used for the formation of various postpositions. Historically, these postpositions are made of a noun followed by the agentive case. They may also function as causal subordinators, when preceded by a clause.

Postpositions normally govern an argument (a noun, an NP or a nominalized clause) in the genitive case. stabs+kyis ‘because, since’, dbang+gis ‘because, by means of, due to’, rkyen+gyis ‘because, due to, on account of’, babs+kyis ‘because, since’.

---

49 The construction is : V( caus)+AGT+NEG+ V(Res)+AGT.

50 These sentences taken from Milaraspa’i Rnammgur are mentionned in Tournadre (1991: 94) and Kesang Gyurme (1992: 20).

51 This example is quoted by Zeisler (2004: 415).
In some cases, the agentive may be used at the end of a sentence to express a promise. It is often used with first person Agent. Since the grammatical semantic relation with the other functions of the agentive is not obvious, it is not clear whether this marking is historically derived from the agentive. This function has first been described by Beyer (1992: 353-354) who calls it the ‘promise particle’.

Genitive

A: functions: a) case functions: genitive (‘of’), b) connective functions: marker of relative clauses (‘which’, ‘that’, etc.), adversative ‘but’, c) no adverbial function, d) no postpositional function, e) [no sentence final particle function.]

B: illustrations:

a) Noun modifier

a) Noun modifier

b1) Relative clause marker (with a nominalizer)

This function may be translated in English by a past participle or a relative clause.

b2) Adversative (‘but’, ‘while’)
Dative ལ་སྒྲ་ (ེབ LA and མ R):

A. functions: a) case functions: marks the role of Beneficiary (‘to’ or not translated) and Possessor (usually not translated), locative (superessive ‘on’, inessive ‘in’, ‘at’, allative ‘towards’, ‘to’). b) connective functions: connective for adjectives and verbs ‘and’, [c) no adverbial function], d) postpositional function; e) sentence final particle function.

B. illustrations:
a1) Beneficiary
ལྷ་ལ་འབུལ་ lha+la 'bul to offer to the deity', གྲོགས་ལ་ཡི་གེ་སྟོན་ grogs+la [friend+DAT:BEN] yige ston 'to show the letter to a friend', སློང་མོ་བར་བཟའ་ bza' btung byin 'to give food and drink to the beggar'. It is also used with affect verbs: སྟག་ལ་སྐྲག stag+la [tiger+DAT: BEN] skrag 'to be afraid of the tiger', དགྲ་ལ་སྡང་ dgra+la [ennemy+DAT: BEN] sdang 'to hate the ennemy', གཉེན་ལ་བྱམས་ g n y e n+la [relative+DAT:BEN] byams 'to love one’s relatives'.

a2) Possessor
ཡུམ་ལ་སྲས་ཤིག་འཁྲུངས། yum+la [mother+ DAT:POS] sras shig+Ø 'khrungs 'The mother gave birth to a son (litt. To the mother a son was born).', འབྲས་བུ་ལ་རྒྱུ་ ybrasbu+la [result+DAT:POS] rgyu+Ø yod 'The result (the fruit) has a cause.', ཅུ་མོ་བདག་ la phama+Ø los kyang yod 'Of course the girl that I am has parents!'.

The Beneficiary is marked in the same way as the Possessor but their syntactic position is different. In unmarked sentences, the Possessor occurs as the first argument while the Beneficiary occurs as the second or third argument. However in marked sentences it is possible to place the possessor in the second position:
བདེན་པ་ང་ལ་ yod 'I have the truth.' The unmarked sentence is: ང་ལ་བདེན་པ་ yod 'I have the truth.'.

For the functions of grammatical Beneficiary and Possessor, only ར and ལ may be used. According various authors (e.g. Skalbzang ‘Gyurmed (1981) and Dorzhi (1987)), the purposive and the locative cases are not suited for this meaning.

a3) superessive location (‘on, at’)
ཁྲི་ལ་བླ་མ་ bbra+la [throne+ DAT:SUPER] blama+Ø bzhus 'The lama is on the throne.', ས་ལ་རྩྭ་ sa+la [ground+ DAT:SUPER] rtsva+Ø skyes 'Grass grows on the ground.', མཁའ་ལ་ཉི་མ་ mkha'+la [sky+ DAT:SUPER] nyima+Ø shar+snang 'The sun has risen in the sky.', རི་ལ་ ri+la [mountain+DAT] rtsva+Ø ni mi 'dug 'On the mountain, there is no grass.', རིང་ཁྱི་ལྜྷོ་ lhri+la [wood dog (year)+ DAT:SUPER] 'khrungs 'to be born in the wood dog [year].'

52 Native grammarians call this function dngos yul la 'jug pa bya ba (Dorzhi, 1987: 16), 'jug yul dngos or las su bya ba gtso bo ( Skalbzang ‘Gyurmed, 1981: 40)
53 Alternatively, the possessor can be called “recipient”. Skalbzang ‘Gyurmed (1981: 59) calls this function “dngos po'i bdag po la ston pa”.

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For this function, other cases such as the purposive (du) and sometimes the locative (na) may also be used. There is however a slight semantic difference between na and la. The locative na indicates rather the ‘inessive’ or a location inside a volume, while the spatial function of the dative la is more used with a superessive meaning. Thus it is difficult to accept the following sentence: ṣam sa+na [ground+DAT] rtswa+Ø skyes ‘The grass grows in the earth.’ Conversely, for spatial reference, la often conveys a “superessive” meaning, referring to an entity, which is on a surface rather than inside a volume.

This contrast is still found in some modern Tibetic languages such as Drengjong-ke (or Lhoke): ambig sa+la(?na) bvyu+zhe ‘A mango fell on the ground.’

b) Connective for adjective and verbs

For this function, la can not connect nouns but may appear after adjectives or verbs: gsal+la [bright+DAT:CO] zlumpa’i zlaba ‘a bright and round moon’, nyon+la [listen+DAT:CO] yid+la zungs shig dang ‘Listen and remember!’, klung cheng dal yang ring ’gro+la [go+ DAT:CO] rbarlabs drag kyang cher mi ’gro ‘The waters of] the big rivers are calm and go far while the waves are violent but do not go far (litt. go big),’ legspar brtag+la [DAT:CO] nga+yi bka’/ blang+barbya+yi’gus phyir min/ ‘Examine my words carefully and do not accept them simply out of respect.’.

c) no adverbal function

d) Postpositions

The dative is used for the formation of various postpositions. Historically, these postpositions are made of a nominal or adjectival radical followed by the dative case. The postpositions may also function as causal subordinators, when preceded by a clause. Postpositions normally govern an argument (a noun, an NP or a nominalized clause) in the genitive case.

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54 The v is used here in the transliteration to note the labial b with a tsalag, i.e. a special sign used in Drengkong-ke to transcribe the labial pronunciation of bya (versus the palatal affricate , which is written without a tsalag)
55 Only r may be used to form adverbials. I consider it in this case as an allomorph of the purposive. See below.
56 For this postpositional function, the dative may be replaced by the purposive. See below.
e) Sentence final particle

In some cases, the dative may be used at the end of a sentence, after an adjectival predicate (often followed by the nominalizer pa/ba) to express an exclamation. Since the grammatical semantic relation with other functions of the dative is not obvious, it is not certain that this marking is historically derived from the dative.

དེ་རིང་འགྲོ་བའི་ལམ་བུ་རིང་བ་ལ།
"Oh, the road today is so long!"

Purposive (DU and its variants):

A. functions: a) case functions: purposive ('for, as'), locative (inessive: 'in, at', superessive 'on'), allative ('towards, to, into'), transformative, b) connective functions: final clause connective ('in order to'), c) adverbial function, d) postpositional function, [e) no sentence final particle function].

B. illustrations:

a.1) purposive ('for, as')

རོང་བས་ལྟོ་གོས་སུ་ཞིང་བཏབ་
"The farmer ploughs the field for his subsistence."

སྐུ་ཚབ་ཏུ་འདེམ་བསྐོ་བྱེད།
"Elect X as representative."

ས་བོན་དུ་འབྲུ་རིགས་ཉོ།།
"to buy seeds for grain."

a.2) inessive ('in, at')

ཐབ་ཏུ་མེ་འབར་།
"The fire is burning in the stove."

དེའི་དུས་སུ།
"at that time"

ཁྱིམ་ན་མི་མེད།
"There is nobody in the house."

བོད་སྐད་དུ་།
"in Tibetan (language)."

For this inessive function, du may usually be replaced by the locative na:

ཁྱིམ་དུ་མི་མེད།
"There is nobody in the house."

a.3) allative ('towards', 'to')

འཕྱི་བ་ཁུང་དུ་འཛུལ།
"The marmot entered into the hole."

a.4) transformative

This function indicates the transformation of an entity. It is traditionnally called denyid. For this function, du (and its allomorphs) may be used and more rarely the dative, but na is not suitable.
The purposive case is directly attached to a verb and indicates the purpose of the action performed in the main clause. This function is very frequent.

The purposive case is used to form many adverbs. One both has intensity adverbs and manner adverb. For this lexical function, only du (and its variants) can be used. The dative la and the locative na are not normally suitable for this function:

\[ \text{shin+tu 'very', rab+tu 'extremely', khyadpar+du 'especially', lbagpar+du 'particularly', ngespar+du 'definitely', blobur+du 'suddenly', myur+du 'rapidly', phral+du 'immediately', rgyun+du 'continuously', myurba+du 'rapidly', legspa+du 'well', rimpa+du 'progressively', gsalpo+du 'clearly', yongs+su 'entirely'.} \]

Historically, various postpositions are formed by adding the purposive case to a radical. These postpositions govern the genitive case. They may also function as causal or time subordinator when preceded by a nominalized clause.

The majority of the postpositions are originally nouns which have undergone a grammaticalization leading to a change of grammatical category (from noun to postposition) and to a semantic derivation: bshad 'roof' > 'on, over', rjes 'trace' > 'after', mjug 'tail' > 'after', gram 'cheek' > 'near'.

Most of the postpositions are originally nouns which have undergone a grammaticalization leading to a change of grammatical category (from noun to postposition) and to a semantic derivation: bshad 'roof' > 'on, over', rjes 'trace' > 'after', mjug 'tail' > 'after', gram 'cheek' > 'near'.

For this lexical function, du (or one of its variants) is sometimes omitted. Thus the two constructions below are equivalent: bstan po'i skabs+su 'at the time of the Tibetan Emperor' = bstan po'i skabs+du 'at the time of the Tibetan Emperor'.
Locative མགོ་ (NA):

A. functions: a) case functions: inessive locative (without movement: ‘in’, ‘at’). b) connective functions: conditional connective and temporal connective c) adverbial function d) postpositional function [e) no sentence final particle function]

B. illustrations:

a) locative མགོ་ lag+na 'phrengba+Ø bzung ‘(X) held a rosary in the hand.’, ma'ongspa+na ‘in the future’

b1) conditional connective ‘in the case, if’

In this function, the locative case indicates a hypothesis or a condition. In the initial position of the protasis, galte is often added.

galte bsdad+na [stay+ LOC:CO] nga 'dra nges par mthong/ ‘If you stay (that old) you will look like me.’,

galte bu khyod+kyis yul+du mthu+’i rtags ma thon+pa+r log byung+na [come back+ LOC:CO]/ nga morgan khyedrang+gi bdun+du lcebs+nas shi sdod+do zer/ ‘If you boy come back to the village without showing signs of magic, your old mother will commit suicide and die right in front of you.’.

b2) temporal clause connective ‘when’

For this function, the verb is followed by the nominalizer pa/ba.

rgyamtsbo mthong+bana khronpa+i sbalpa shi skad ‘It is said that when the frog in the well saw the ocean, it died.’.

[c) no adverbial function]

d) postposition

The locative case is used to form postpositions. For this lexical function, na is sometimes omitted.

tshe+na ‘at that moment’, steng+na ‘on’, nang+na ‘in’

[e) no sentence final particle function]

Ablative མགོ་ (LAS):

A. functions: a) case functions (after nouns): ablative (‘from’) and comparative (‘than’). b) connective functions (after verbs, together with the nominalizer BA or its allomorph PA (ba+las/ pa+las): temporal subordinator ‘when’, adversative ‘but’, ‘although’, ‘other than V’, ‘rather than V’ [c), d), e) no function].

57 About the connective function of las, Hill (2010) adds a semantic nuance of surprise in some contexts, which is frequently found in Old Tibetan and even Classical Tibetan. In this paper, las is described as a “converb”.

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B. illustrations:

a.1) Spatiotemporal origin

The meaning of the ablative is rather specific and much more restricted semantically than the elative nas. Semantically, it indicates the spatial origin when the figure is on the surface of the referent (and not inside). Thus for example rta+las babs *(X) dismounted the horse.* X was on the back of the horse (and not inside the horse!). It is the same with: brag+las lhung *(X) has fallen from the rock.* For this meaning, las and nas are practically equivalent: brag+nas lhung *(X) has fallen from the rock.* and rta+nas babs *(X) dismounted the horse.*

However in most examples, las does not simply indicate the spatial origin but rather the **origin of a transformation**: the object (or the being) from which, something is extracted, generated or produced.\(^{58}\) In these cases, the replacement of las by nas is impossible as show the examples below.

\[
\text{ba+las na [cow+ABL:ORI] 'oma+Ø byung 'The milk comes from the cow',}
\]

\[
\text{oma+las [milk+ABL:ORI] mar+Ø blangs 'One take (extract) butter from milk',}
\]

\[
\text{piwang+las [violin+ABL:ORI] sgra snyan+Ø byung 'Out of the piwang (traditional Tibetan violin) came a nice sound',}
\]

\[
\text{drol+Ø skyes 'Heat comes from the fire',}
\]

\[
\text{ma+las [mother+ABL:ORI] bu+Ø skyes 'The mother gave birth to a son (litt. From the mother a son was born)',}
\]

\[
\text{dpecha+las [book+ABL:ORI] goba+Ø rnyed 'to get understanding from a (traditional) book',}
\]

\[
\text{kbod+nyid+las broba sbes 'to know the taste by the colour itself.'}
\]

\[
\text{legsbsad byis+dag+las+kyang [child+PL+ABL:ORI+Also] mkhaspa+rnams+ni yongssu len 'The scholars get inspiration for their aphorisms even from children',}
\]

\[
\text{Sabon+las [seed+ABL:ORI] myugu skyes 'A sprout was born from the seed.'}
\]

For this function, the replacement of las by nas is really problematic:

\[
\text{? ba+nas 'oma+Ø byung 'The milk comes from the cow',}
\]

\[
\text{? oma+nas mar+Ø blangs 'One take (extract) butter from milk',}
\]

\[
\text{? ma+nas bu+Ø skyes 'A son was born to (litt. from) the mother',}
\]

\[
\text{? sabon+nas myugu skyes 'A sprout was born from the seed.'}
\]

The use of nas in the above sentences would be acceptable only if one wants to indicate only a spatial origin.

a.2) Comparative construction (after a NP)

srogchags groma mig med+kyang mig+ldan gzhan+las [other+ABL:COMP] lhagpar myogs 'Ants don't have eyes but are faster than

\(^{58}\) One could say that las has the symmetric value of the transformative function conveyed by the purposive du. See the purposive section.
those who have eyes.

Peacocks are more beautiful than cranes.’.

b1) adversative ‘but’, ‘other than’ (after a nominalized verb)

I, at that time, thought of meeting with my mother one more time, but fearing my enemies I fled quickly, I went toward Gnya’nam.’,

If one throws an egg in the air, what would happen to it other than breaking?’.

b2) ‘while’ (after a nominalized verb)

‘While he was staying in the state of great compassion, a black deer came towards him.’.

Elative (NAS):

A. functions: a) case functions (after nouns): elative (‘from’) and ergative (indicating the Agent), b) connective functions (after verbs): causal and temporal subordinator (‘because, since’, ‘after’, ‘and’), c) adverbial function, d) postpositional function, e) no function.

B. illustrations:

a.1) Spatiotemporal origin

‘The word escaped from the mouth.’,

‘X came from the East.’.

a.2) Agent

‘The Tibetan army conquered a lot of Chinese territories.’.

b) skye+nas ‘one is born and then dies, that is the fate of all in this world’,

‘The king sent a messenger and took the girl as his bride.’.

c) adverbs

‘only just, fundamentally’, ‘absolutely, once and for all’, ‘at all, simply’, ‘thoroughly, completely’.

---

59 This example is taken from Hill (2010) and the English translation from de Jong (1959). I had myself noticed this example, which is translated in a similar way in French by Bacot (1971:63). “A ce moment je songeai à voir une seule fois ma mère, mais effrayé par mes ennemis, je m’enfuis rapidement et courus à Nyanang.” [italics are mine]
d) postposition


Associative (ཀླེན་ DANG):

A. functions:

a) case functions (after nouns): associative (‘with’, ‘against’) and coordinative for nouns and adjectives (‘and’).
b) connective functions (after verbs): together with the nominalizer BA or its allomorph PA (ba+dang/pa+dang), ‘as soon as’ or ‘and’ (connector for verbs).
[c), d) no function]
e) verb imperative particle.

B. illustrations:

a1) Associative ‘with’

བླ་མ་དང་མཇལ་ blama+dang mjal ‘to meet the lama (litt. to meet with the lama),
ང་ཨ་མ་དང་ཡུད་ཙམ་ཞིག་འཕྲད། nga ama+dang yud+tsam zhig ‘phrad ‘I will meet my mother just for a
short while.’.

འོ་ན་ངས་མར་པ་དང་སྤྲད་ཀྱིས། ona nga+s marpa+dang sprad+kyis ‘Well, I will introduce you
to Marpa.’.

a2) Noun or NP connective

ཟི་དང་ཆུ་ ri+dang chu ‘moutains and rivers’, ལེ་དང་ mc+dang rlung ‘fire and air’.

b.1) Clause Connective (after a nominalized verb)

ཐབ་རྒོད་འཕྱི་བ་ཁུར་བ་དང༌། བྲམ་གྱིས་འུག་པ་མཆོད་ལ་ལྟོས། byargod ‘phyiba khur+ba+dang sram+gyis ‘ugpa mchod+la
ltos. ‘Look at the way vultures carry marmots and otters make offering to owls.’.

b2) Temporal connective.

ཉི་མ་ཤར་བ་དང༌། བད་མ་རྣམས་ཁ་ཕྱེ་བར་འགྱུར། nyima shar+ba+dang padma+rnams kha phye ba+r ‘gyur ‘As
soon as the sun rises, the lotus flowers opens up.’.
[c), d) : no function]
e) Imperative particle

ལྷ་མོ་དྲང་པོར་སྨྲོས་དང་། lhamo drangpo+r smros+dang ‘Goddess, please speak frankly!’.

Comparative (སློབ་ BAS):

A. functions:

a) case function: comparative, b) connective functions (after verbs): together with the nominalizer BA (ba+pas/bas) ‘rather than’.

B. illustrations:

a) Comparative

tsandan gser+bas [gold+CMP] rin cheba ‘Sandal wood is more precious that gold.’,
glangpoche+bas [elephant +CMP] stobs cheba zbig ‘a (man) stronger than an elephant’.
b) Comparative after a nominalized verb: ‘rather than’, ‘more than’

Let us summarise the various types of function of the cases in the chart below. It shows that 5 cases (agentive, dative, purposive, locative and elative) show a high degree of transcategoriality, while 3 cases (genitive, associative and ablative) only exhibit two types of functions. The absolutive case is an exception since it only indicates one type of function. However, the absolutive is zero-marked and thus is difficult to draw any conclusion from this specific behaviour.

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<td>Ablative: las</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associative: dang</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative: bas</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutive: Ø</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 4: types of case functions

5 Case marking and optionality

As mentioned briefly in the section 4, one of the remarkable features of Classical Literary Tibetan is that case marking is optional in a number of contexts. There are various kinds of optionality for the Grammatical Role functions of the case. a) Case variation depends on a single verb b) Case variation depends on two or more verbs c) Case omission for metric reasons in a poetic style.

There is also some optionality and variation in the other functions of the cases as well. When used as connectives, the various case markers (nas, las, gis, bas, gi, dang, la, na, du) cannot normally be dropped. However, they may be replaced in many contexts, by non-case connectives.
such as ste, zbing, ched, etc. The adverbial functions of cases correspond to lexicalized forms; these can not be dropped. (For example ཉིན་ gzhi-nas ‘only just, fundamentally’, བཀྲ་ཤིས་ gtan-nas ‘absolutely, once and for all’, ཨས་ rtza-nas ‘at all, simply’, དེ་ལེགས་ khyon-nas ‘thoroughly, completely’). In their postpositional functions the cases may again be dropped. (See the functions of purposive in the section 4.2).

a) Case variation depending in a single verb

In many occurrences, the NP may receive various cases with an identical (or rather quasi identical) meaning. For example, the ergative (gis) may be replaced by the elative (nas) in some contexts especially when the agent is an authority or an institution. The ablative (las) is generally used for the comparative constructions but the comparative (bas) may replace for this function. In some contexts (location without movement), the purposive (du) and even the dative (la) may replace the locative (na) [see section 4].

With controllable monovalent verbs, the absolutive (Ø) is normally used but it may be replaced by the ergative (gis) for discursive reasons 60 (see Tournadre 1996: 357-358), 

ng(-s) der lo mang po ma bsdad ‘I+ABS (/ERG) did not stay there many years.’)

(Milaraspa’i rnamthar).

b) Case variation depending on two or more verbs

In Classical Tibetan, no argument is compulsory and in the case of coreference, the arguments are usually deleted. Haller (2009) has shown that “certain reference relations are characteristic for specific subordinators” but the deletion of coreferring arguments has also consequences on case variation. Two (or more) verbs belonging to different classes may govern distinct case marking on the same argument. For example, a noun phrase may be followed by two verbs, the first verb being monovalent and the second a bivalent ergative verb. In that context, the case on the noun phrase may either be absolutive (if governed by the first verb) or ergative (if governed by the second verb).

Dorzhi (1987: 46-47) is, to my knowledge, the only native grammarian who has analyzed this phenomenon. He gives the following examples:


61 marking emphasis or contrast.
8) \(\text{ང} (\text{ས}) \text{tshongkhang-la song-nas nompa nyos} \) ‘I went to the shop and bought some items.’

9) \(\text{གླིང་དེར་སློབ་དཔོན་(+gyis) bzhugs+}\) te 'phagspa spyanrasgzig+s+ang sgrolma+i sku rdo+la bzhengs \(\) ‘The master stayed on that island and built stone statues of the Noble Avalokitesvara and Tara.’

In the above examples, the use of the ergative instead of the absolutive creates an emphasis on the agent.

From a typological point of view, this second type of case variation is quite specific. It is linked to several other properties of the Tibetan case system, such as the lack of any compulsory argument, the reluctance to repeat any cross-referenced argument and the clitic nature of the cases.

c) Case optionality for metric reasons

In many poetic or religious texts where the metrics (tshigs bcad) plays a significant role, the Grammatical Role case markers may be dropped. Grammatical roles then have to be interpreted from the context.

10) \(\text{ལེགས་བཤད་བྱིས་པ་དག་ལས་ཀྱང་།} \text{mkhaspa+rnams (+kyis)+ni yongssu len}. \) ‘The scholars can draw aphorisms even from children’s [behaviour or speech].’

11) \(\text{མཁས་པ་(+la) yontan dpagmed kyang gzhan gyi yontan chungngu+’ang len}. \) ‘Even if the scholar has an immense knowledge, he takes always benefits from the small teachings he can get from others.’

6 Conclusions

Tibetan grammar is one of the few ancient grammars of the world, which are still used in the modern curriculum. The traditional canons of the sumcupa and the rtags’jugpa or some of their modern commentaries are still read and recited nowadays. This very ancient grammatical tradition is of course precious from a historical point of view and is even considered as sacred since it is related to the language of the sutras and tantras. Moreover, it clearly shows that the Tibetan scholars have inherited the great knowledge of their Indian predecessors in the field of phonology and morphology. Among the main topics of the traditional commentaries, one finds the case system (rnamdbye) of Literary Tibetan. However, the Sanskrit model of 8 cases, which native grammarians have been using until now for the description of Tibetan, is no longer suitable for a modern and scientific description of the language. It has created a lot of obstacles for the analysis and the teaching of Literary Tibetan in the schools and the universities. Some contemporary native grammarians who are trained in both modern linguistics and traditional philology are fully aware of the problem but they have not proposed, so far, a complete reanalysis of the case system based on modern linguistics.

\[\text{62 In the example taken from the text Rgyagar chos’byung, the ergative is used in the original version.}\]
For a better understanding of the case system functioning, I have proposed an analysis in 10 cases and shown that the CLT case system has four fundamental properties: cliticity, multifunctionality, transcategoriality and optionality. The originality of the system lies much in the transcategorial and optional nature of the use of case markers, which largely contributes to the great syntactic complexity of this literary language.

I have listed the main functions of the various cases; however, this list is certainly not exhaustive and other minor functions may be added within this model.

This type of analysis should not only facilitate the syntactic description of Classical Literary Tibetan but also the teaching of this language. The modernization of the language description could thus go along with the extraordinary development of Literary Tibetan on the internet (email, wikipedia, websites, blogs, youtube, etc.) and the development of new technologies applied to this language and to this script.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABL</th>
<th>Ablative</th>
<th>ELA</th>
<th>Elative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Absolutive</td>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Final Particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADJCT</td>
<td>Adjunctive</td>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>Genitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADVR</td>
<td>Adversative</td>
<td>INES</td>
<td>Inessive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGT</td>
<td>Agentive</td>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>Locative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AST</td>
<td>Associative</td>
<td>PURP</td>
<td>Purposive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLT</td>
<td>Classical Tibetan</td>
<td>SUPER</td>
<td>Superessive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMP</td>
<td>Comparative</td>
<td>SPEC</td>
<td>Specification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>Dative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Mudge Bsamgtan (མུ་དགེ་བསམ་གཏན་). 1980. *Brda gsar Grol pa`i khridrgyun rabgsal melong* (བརྡ་སྤྲོད་ལྡོག་པའི་ཁྲིད་རྒྱུན་རབ་གསལ་མེ་ལོང་). Lankru (ལན་ཀྲུ): Kansu’u Midmangs Dpeskrunkhang (ཀན་སུའུ་མི་དམངས་དཔེ་སྐྲུན་ཁང་).
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APPENDIX: THE GRAMMATICAL TREATISES

This appendix contains the traditional grammatical treatises sumcupa and rtags'jugpa (7th century) as well as the famous commentary Ljonpa'i Dbangpo composed in 1901.
༄༅། །དང་པོ་ལ་ནི་གཉིས་པ་སྦྱར།
༄༅། །སྤྱི་ལ་ཁྱབ་པ་ཉིད་དུ་འགྱུར།
༄༅། །གང་མིང་གི་ནི་མ་མཐའ་ན།
༄༅། །པུ་ལིངྒ་ཡི་སྒྲ་མེད་པ།
༄༅། །དེ་ལ་པུ་ལིངྒ་སྦྱར་ན།
༄༅། །བདག་པོའི་སར་ནི་ཤེས་པར་བྱ།
༄༅། །གང་མིང་བརྗོད་པའི་ཡ་མཐའ་ན།
༄༅། །སྟྲཱི་ལིངྒ་ཡི་སྒྲ་མེད་པ།
༄༅། །དེ་ལ་སྟྲཱི་ལིངྒ་སྦྱར་ན།
༄༅། །དགག་པའི་གནས་སུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱ།
༄༅། །ཚིགས་སུ་བཅད་པའི་མཚམས་སྦྱོར་རྣམས།
༄༅། །ཅུང་ཟད་བསྡུས་པ་ཡོད་ན་ཡང་།
༄༅། །དེ་ནི་དེ་བཞིན་སྦྱར་བར་བྱ།
༄༅། །སྔོན་འཇུག་ཡོད་དམ་མེད་ཀྱང་རུང་།
༄༅། །མིང་གཞིའི་ཡི་གེ་གང་ཡིན་ལ།
༄༅། །ཉིས་འབྲེལ་ཡོད་དམ་གསུམ་འབྲེལ་ཡོད།
༄༅། །ལུང་ལི་བཞི་ལས་གང་ལྡན་ཡང་།
༄༅། །རྗེས་འཇུག་བཅུ་པོ་མ་ཞུགས་ན།
༄༅། །མིང་གཞན་སྦྱོར་བ་ཡོད་མི་སྲིད།
༄༅། །རྗེས་འཇུག་བཅུ་ཡི་དོན་ཤེས་ན།
༄༅། །འབྲི་དང་ཀློག་དང་བཤད་རྣམས་ཀྱི།
༄༅། །མཚམས་སྦྱོར་སྒྲ་ལ་ཐོགས་མེད་ཅིང་།
༄༅། །འབྲེལ་པ་སྨྲ་བའི་མཆོག་ཏུ་འགྱུར།
༄༅། །གཞན་ཡང་རྗེས་འཇུག་ཤེས་པ་ཡིས།
༄༅། །དོན་གྱི་སྦྱོར་བ་མ་མཐོང་ཡང་།
༄༅། །དོན་དང་མཐུན་པའི་སྦྱོར་བ་ཤེས།
༄༅། །རྗེས་འཇུག་སྦྱོར་བ་མཁས་པ་ན།
༄༅། །ལུང་གི་དོན་དང་སྦྱོར་བ་དང་།
༄༅། །བླ་མའི་མན་ངག་གསུམ་སྦྱར་ནས།
༄༅། །དོན་གྱི་ཐོག་ཏུ་དབབ་པར་བྱ།
༄༅། །བསླབ་ལ་བརྩོན་པའི་གང་ཟག་གིས།
༄༅། །དང་པོར་ང་རོ་རྣམས་ལ་སྦྱང་།
༄༅། །སྔོན་འཇུག་མིང་གཞི་རྗེས་འཇུག་གསུམ།
༄༅། །ཀློག་གི་ཆེད་དུ་བསླབ་པ་ཡིན།།རྗེས་འཇུག་བཞི་ཡི་སྦྱོར་བ་ནི།
༄༅། །མཉན་བསམ་བསྟན་པའི་དོན་དུ་སྦྱར།
༄༅། །ཡན་ལག་དེ་དག་མཐུ་ཡིས་ནི།
༄༅། །འབྲས་བུའི་ཆེད་དུ་དོན་ལ་དབབ།
༄༅། །བསླབ་པའི་རིམ་པ་འདི་ཡིས་ནི།
༄༅། །གང་ཞིག་འབད་པ་ཆུང་ངུས་ཀྱང་།
༄༅། །སྐྱེས་རབ་མྱུར་དུ་གྲོལ་བར་འགྱུར།
༄༅། །དེ་ཕྱིར་དང་པོར་འདི་ཉིད་བསླབ།
༄༅། །ལུང་དུ་སྟོན་པ་རྟགས་ཀྱི་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་ཞུགས་སོ།།
༄༅། །རྒྱ་གར་སྐད་དུ།
༄༅། །བྱཱ་ཀ་ར་ཎ་ལིངྒ་བ་ཏཱ་ར་ནཱ་མ།
༄༅། །བོད་སྐད་དུ།
༄༅། །ལུང་དུ་སྟོན་པ་རྟགས་ཀྱི་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།
གནས་དང་བོད་པའི་སྒྲ་ཡང་དྲང་།
བསྐྱར་བ་ཡོད་དང་མེད་པ་དང་།
བསྡུ་རྒྱུ་ཡོད་དང་མེད་པ་དང་།
ལས་བྱ་བླང་བྱ་བསྒྲུབ་པར་བྱ།
མཐའ་སྦྱར་འོག་མའི་མིང་དོན་ལས།
སྔ་མ་སྔོན་འཇུག་ལྔ་བཞིན་སྦྱར།
དོན་ནི་རྣམ་པ་གཉིས་ཡིན་ཏེ།
དེས་ན་འགྱུར་དང་མཚན་གཉིས་དང་།
མ་ནིང་གསུམ་དུ་གང་གཏོགས་པ།
དྲག་གིས་བཅུ་པོ་དེ་དག་གིས།
ཕོ་ཡིག་བརྗོད་པ་མེད
དེ་ལྟར་གྱུར་ན་འཇིག་རྟེན་དུ།
ཉན་ཐོས་རང་རྒྱལ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི།
ཐོན་མིའི་ལེགས་བཤད་སུམ་ཅུ་པའི།
བོད་ཡི་ཨི་ཨུ་ཨེ་ཨོ་བཞི།
གསལ་བྱེད་ཀ་སོགས་སུམ་ཅུ་ཡིན།
ག་ང་ད་ན་བ་མ་འ།
ར་ལ་ས་རོམ་རྗེས་འཇུག་བཅུ།
ད་དང་ས་གཉིས་ཡང་འཇུག་སྟེ།
ད་ནི་ན་ར་ལ་གསུམ་དང་།
ས་ནི་ག་ང་བ་མར་འཐོབ།
ག་ད་བ་མ་འ་སྔོན་འཇུག
གོ་ངོ་དོ་ནོ་བོ་མོ་འོ།
རོ་ལོ་སོ་ཏོ་སླར་བསྡུ་སྟེ།
རྫོགས་ཚིག་ཟླ་སྡུད་ཅེས་ཀྱང་བྱ།
དྲག་ཡོད་ཏོདང་མཐའ་མེད་འོ།
གཞན་རོམ་མིང་མཐའི་རྗེས་མཐུན་སྦྱར།
སུ་ར་རུ་དུ་ན་ལ་ཏུ།
ལ་དོན་རོམ་པ་བདུན་ཡིན་ཏེ།
རྣམ་དབྱེ་གཉིས་བཞི་བདུན་པ་དང་།
dེ་ཉིད་ཚེ་སྐབས་རོམས་ལ་འཇུག
ས་སུ་ག་བ་དྲག་མཐར་ཏུ།
ང་ད་ན་མ་ར་ལ་དུ།
འ་དང་མཐའ་མེད་ར་དང་རུ།
ཀྱི་ཀྱི་གྱི་འི་ཡི་ལྔ་པོ།
rོ་ལོ་སོ་ཏོ་སླར་བསྡུ་སྟེ།
དོན་ཚན་ཆེན་མོ་རྫོགས་པ་དང་།
ལེའུའི་མཚམས་སུ་བཞི་ཤད་དགོས།
ན་རོ་ཡོད་མེད་པ་བ་མ།
བདག་པོའི་སྒར་སྟེ།
ཆ་ལ་པ་ཉིད་སྦྱོར་བ་ལེགས།
mིང་མཐའི་པ་བའང་ཕལ་ཆེར་འདྲ།
m་ནི་ངེས་མེད་སྐབས་དང་སྦར།
m་མི་མིན་མེད་དགག་སྒར་སྟེ།
m་མི་ཐོག་མ་མིན་མེད་མཇུག
m་ནི་བར་གྱི་གསལ་བྱེད་ལའང་།
ཚིག་ཕྲད་ཞིངསོགས་ང་ན་མ།
m་དང་ར་ལ་མཐའ་མེད་ལ།
ག་ད་བ་དང་ད་དྲག་མཐར།
ཅིང་ཅེས་ཅེ་འོ་ཅེ་ན་ཅིག
mས་མཐར་དམིགས་བསལ་ཞེས་མ་གཏོགས།
ཞིང་ཞེས་ཞེ་འོ་ཞེ་ན་ཞིག
g་ད་བ་དང་ད་དྲག་མཐར།
ཅིང་ཅེས་ཅེ་འོ་ཅེ་ན་ཅིག
mསེད་སྲིད་ལྟར་བཞིན་སྐད་ལ་ཇི།
སུ་ནི་གང་ཟག་གང་ཀུན་ལའོ།
ན་རོ་ཡོད་མེད་པ་བ་མ།
bདག་པོའི་སྒར་སྟེ།
b་མ་ས་དང་དྲག་མཐར་པ།
ང་འ་ར་ལ་མཐའ་མེད་ལ།
བདག་སྒར་ཡར་གྱར་བ་དང་ནི།
cི་ལ་པ་ཉིད་སྦྱོར་བ་ལེགས།
mིང་མཐའི་ཆ་དང་མ་ནོར་གཅེས།
རྐྱང་པ་འཕུལ་ལ་འ་མཐའ་དགོས།
གུག་ཀྱད་བརྩེགས་འདོགས་ཅན་ལ་སྤང་།
lུག་པའི་དོན་མང་མིང་མཚམས་དང་།
dོན་འབྲིང་འབྱེད་དང་དོན་ཉུང་རྫོགས།
ཚིགས་བཅད་སྐྱ་དང་ནི།
ཅིང་ཅེས་ཅེ་འོ་ཅེ་ན་ཅིག
mིང་གི་ལོ་མས་མ་བསྒྲིབས་ཤིང་།
dོན་གྱི་འབྲས་བུ་གཡུར་ཟ་བའི།
lེགས་བཤད་ལྗོན་པའི་དབང་པོ་འདི།
དབྱངས་ཅན་གྲུབ་པའི་རྡོ་རྗེས་སྤེལ།