

Diachronic development of accusativity in Tibetan subject relative clauses

A general typological observation (cf. Dixon 1994) is that, in split ergative systems based on a matrix:subordinate contrast, ergative alignment is likely to be found in embedded environments. In this paper I show Tibetan, an ergative language, has developed a split exactly contrary to Dixon's generalisation through the specific diachronic device of reanalysis of an Old Tibetan (OT) lexical V to T in Classical Tibetan (CT) to C in Modern Lhasa Tibetan (MLT). These facts are important for our understanding of how uninterpretable features develop in the course of grammaticalisation-style reanalysis, and how they interact with case and alignment. My data are taken from *Old Tibetan Documents Online* and the *Derge Kanjur* corpora.

Throughout the OT (mid 7c. – early 11c. AD) and CT (11c. seq.) periods, relative clauses are introduced by a single invariant complementiser *pa/ba*, irrespective of the syntactic position of the trace (1a-b). However, in MLT, a new set of structure-sensitive complementisers has emerged. As a case in point, subject relative clauses require the complementiser *mkhan*, as shown in (2). Importantly, *mkhan* licenses extraction of not only transitive and unergative subjects (2a), corresponding to ERG-marked positions in matrix clauses, but also unaccusative and even stative subjects (2b) (cf. DeLancey 1999), corresponding to ABS-marked positions in matrix clauses. This contrasts with non-subject relative clauses (2c), where ergative alignment remains.

- (1) a. [*t_i mkho-sham chen-pho bgyI ba*] 'I rtsis-mgo_i
 administration great make.IRR COMP GEN statute/code
 '... the manuals which would create the great administration...' (OT) [Pt 1288:28]
- b. [*bdag=gis t_i bsad pa*] 'i mi de
 1SG=ERG kill COMP GEN person that
 'That person whom I killed' (CT) [D353.p76-1-184a]
- (2) a. [*t_i mog-mog bzos mkhan*] ma-byan_i de
 momo make COMP cook that
 'The cook who makes momos' (MLT)
- b. [*deng-sang t_i Lhasa=la yod mkhan*] spu-gu_i de-tsho
 these.days Lhasa=LOC exist COMP child those
 'Those children who are in Lhasa these days' (MLT)
- c. [*nga*(=s) t_i dris yag*] yi-ge de
 1SG*(=ERG) write COMP letter that
 'The letter that I write' (MLT)

In OT, *mkhan* starts out as the lexical verb 'to know', as in (3). The fact that *mkhan* can be negated directly at this stage proves its syntactic status as V (>v). [_v *mkhan*] lexically selects transitive/unergative VPs with PRO subjects, and assigns ERG case to [Spec, vP].

- (3) [_{vP} *t_{ma-mo}* [_{VP} *PRO_{ma-mo} smra*] *myi mkhan*] *gyi ma-mo...*
 speak NEG know GEN [a.female.deity]
 '[Goddess] who does not know *PRO* to speak' (OT) [Pt 1046b:2]

In CT, *mkhan* begins to appear as the functional head in nominalised patterns like (4). It is no longer a lexical V, being completely unable to be negated at this stage. I analyse CT *mkhan* as [nominal] T; the T analysis is supported by the fact that it specifies an imperfective interpretation. The position occupied by PRO in the OT grammar is reanalysed as a trace bound by a null operator.

- (4) $[_{T(n)P} [_{vP} t_i \text{ me-tog-phreng rgyud}] \text{ mkhan}_i] = \text{gyis smras-pa}$
 flower.rosary string MKHAN=ERG say.PST-PA
 ‘... said the one who (professionally) strings flower rosaries’ (CT) [D1.p3-1-22a]

The final stage of grammaticalisation from T to C happens through the reanalysis of *mkhan*-nominalisation apposited with a head – (5a) – as a gapped relative clause (5b). The GEN, obligatory in the apposition structure (5a), is no longer necessary in the RC structure (5b): its erstwhile generalised λ -abstraction operator is reanalyzed as an RC-internal trace-binding operator.

- (5) a. $[_{DP} [_{T(n)P} t_i \text{ [rgyal-po-Lha-chen-po 'i skra dang kha-spu}]$
 King-Mahadeva GEN hair and beard
 'breg $[_{T(n)} \text{ mkhan}_i]]$ $[[[_D \text{ gyi}] [_{NP} \text{ mi}]]]$
 shave MKHAN GEN person
 ‘The person who (usually) cuts King Mahadeva’s hair and beard’ (CT) [D1.p2-1-53b]
- b. $[_{DP} [_{CP} [[[_{TP} t_i \text{ rgyal-po-Lha-chen-po 'i skra dang kha-spu}]$
 'breg $[_C \text{ mkhan}]]$ $OP_i] [_{DP} \text{ mi}_i]]$

Crucially, reanalysis of the head from T to C co-variantly triggers reanalysis of the trace-licensing feature of *mkhan*: whereas in CT the feature on $[_T \text{ mkhan}]$ probes just [Spec, vP], once *mkhan* becomes a C head in MLT, the same feature also “moves one layer up”, probing [Spec, TP] instead.

The conclusion this points to is that a complementiser formed through reanalysis “up the tree” also translates the content of its uninterpretable features “up the tree”: the two changes are co-essential. In the Tibetan case, this results in the development of a nominalizing T head associated with an ergative case pattern to a nominative-probing feature on C, even in a language which remains otherwise ergative. The Tibetan facts suggest that grammaticalisation in the sense of Roberts and Roussou (2003) may result not just in the development of new functional categories, but also in changes in the grammatical systems those categories license. In particular, we expect to see grammaticalised higher functional heads being able to license structural, rather than inherent (Legate 2002, 2008), case positions.

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