Functions of a Written Tibetan Instrumental Particle, -kyis, Revisited

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INTRODUCTION

Tibetan, a major Tibeto-Burman (TB) language which has the oldest written documents in that language family, has typologically been regarded as of the ergative type. Before this typological categorization, Tibetan was recognized by European scholars as an 'exotic' language in which no passive formation was found.

However, Tibetan grammarians noticed the peculiar functions of a case particle which specifies the material, method and origin of action. This particle was characterized as instrumental by them. A majority of TB languages have a similar case particle which specifies the agent of transitive sentences and/or well-developed systems of pronominalization in which ergativity is realized in a separate way from the above. It should also be noted that the traditional grammarians of Tibet recognized split-ergativity in Written Tibetan (WT) and made up very sophisticated rules of split.

The rules have been quite dominant over the normative WT after the middle ages and influential to the colloquial language too. Looking into the mechanism of Tibetan ergativity carefully, however, we notice the following:

a) It is true that Tibetan has an ergative case marker (so-called instrumental parti-
   cle), -*kyis*, which usually marks a transitive agent.

b) It marks intransitive agent too (Takeuchi and Takahashi 1994). This
   phenomenon dates back to the period of the Dunhuang manuscripts (ca. the 10th
   century A.D.).

c) The ergativity in Tibetan is not so consistent in transitive sentences either, that is
   to say, it shows split-ergativity.

d) The conditions of split are still not clear. The Tibetan traditional grammarians
   tried to define them from various angles such as 'tense', emphasis, degree of
   subjectivity on action and so on. But their results do not necessarily meet linguistic
   facts. Nagano (1987) proposed conditions according to the transitivity or mean-
   ing of verbs, but these were not sufficeint to explain every case of split.

e) Tibetan has no anti-passive structure.

f) The categorization of Tibetan verbs is somewhat reminiscent of the active type.[1]

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Tournadre (1994) claimed the 'trajectory model' for Tibetan ergativity. His theory seems to be the most comfortable to accommodate several split phenomena of the Tibetan ergativity in the descriptive level of modern Tibetan. However, it does not necessarily explain those in WT.

I attempt in this paper to review, not being biased by the traditional definitions of it, the functions of the particle on the basis of actual text data. These are written on the traditional grammar but still reflect older usages of *-kyis* (some of which are often disregarded or regarded as *ungrammatical* by grammarians).

1. TRADITIONAL DEFINITION

According to the traditional grammarians' sense, genitive particles (*'brel sgra*) and instrumental particles (*byed sgra*) belong to the same category, and the latter is distinguished from the former in that *byed sgra* can show the relationship of grammatical items more specifically. Thus, *khong gi yi ge* ("his letter") may mean both "the letter he possesses" and "the letter he writes or wrote," whereas *khong gis bris pa'i yi ge* stands for "the letter he wrote" only.

They explain the similar thing to the above in the following manner: the origin/source of action, cause, reason, method, instrument and material must exist before the action is realized onto the object. For instance, when you have the three grammatical items—"hands," "stone" and "to throw"— and the action of "to throw" is realized on "stone," the instrument for "throwing stone"—"hands"— should exist before the two other items. Thus, "hands" is supposed to be marked by *-s*.

They also say that, when the origin of action and the object on which the action is realized coincide, *byed sgra* does not occur. In intransitive sentences, therefore, it never appears.

Based on these, they classified the usages of this particles into five.

❶ formal agent in active mood (*byed pa po*; Skt. kartṛi)
(1)   *bcom ldan 'das* **kyis** *bka'stsal pa.* (Vajra.:13 > Inaba 1986: 185)
       "Buddha told."
(2)   *nga*s *khod la bshad do.* (Vajra.: 5 > Inaba 1986: 185)
       "I will explain for you."
❷ actual agent in passive mood (*byed pa po*)
(3)   *bdag* **gis** *bstan.* (SI: 18)
       "(It) is explained by me."
(4)   *nga*s *shing bcad par bya'o.* (Inaba 1986: 187)
       "A tree is cut by me."
(5)   *de*s *byin.* (DB> Inaba 1986: 187)
       "(Something) was given by him."

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1) I am not saying that Tibetan is an active language. Tibetan does not meet some characteristic features of typical active type (cf. Klimov 1973, 1984).

❸ method, means (*byed pa*; Skt. karaṇa)

(6)   *gser* **gyis** *byugs.* (SI: 18)
        "(Someone) gilt/plated with gold."

❹ cause, reason

(7)   *pho brang 'phang thang chus khyer ro.* (ZY: 74)
        "Palace Phangthang was carried away by flood."

(8)   *de rnams chos byas pas lan.* (ZY: 72)
        "Those occurred because they practiced Buddhism."

❺ adverbializer

(9)   *rim* "grade, order"   ⇨   *rim* **gyis** "in order, gradually"
        lhun "mass, bulk"   ⇨   *lhun* **gyis** "abruptly"

Besides these primary rules, a number of complicated split rules have been written by the Tibetan grammarians as well as foreign scholars. Inspite of their energetic efforts, however, the results seem to show a number of discrepancies against linguistic facts.

2. DISCREPANCIES

2.1 A straightforward discrepancy occurs in one of their principles that *-kyis* never appears in intransitive sentences. Actually, the particle appears in intransitive sentences. The oldest examples are found in the Dunhoung manuscripts. Thus,

(10)   *khyo 'da's dmag pon ong ngam.* (DH 106> TT 652)
        "You sir, are you fit to be a general?"

(11)   *myi yongs* **kyis** *skyid do.* (DH 113> TT 652)
        "Everyone is happy."

(12)   *myang* **gis** *kyang glo ba ring ste,* (DH 109> TT 652)
        "Myang, too, became disloyal, and ..."

Chang and Chang (1980) also points out a similar phenomenon in modern Tibetan. These examples show that *-kyis* is related to the intransitive structure too.

2.2 Tibetan has three kinds of productive ways of adverbialization by suffixing the following:

a) locative particle,[2]

b) ablative particle (*nas*),[3] and,

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2) Particle *-na* is out of consideration in this paper, since *-na* does not adverbialize anything. *-du* has four allomorphs; *-su, -ru, -ra and -tu*, depending upon sandhi rules of the preceeding consonants on orthography. *-la* has no sandhi rules.

3) I do not include another particle *-las* in this paper.

c) instrumental particle (*-kyis*).[4]

Thus,

'di "this"	⇨	*'di*r "here"
gsal po "clear"	⇨	*gsal po*r "clearly"
rtsa "root[rt.]"	⇨	*rtsa* **nas** "totally, basically"
rim "grade, order"	⇨	*rim* **gyis** "in order, gradually"
rang bzhin "nature"	⇨	*rang bzhin* **gyis** "naturally"

These morphological procedures are regular and their results as adverbs are also quite stable in their meanings, except for one case. The exception is *rang bzhin gyis*.

This adverb is very often used in Buddhist canons as well as commentaries. Looking over about 300 usages of this particle, almost all of them correspond to Sanskrit adverbs standing for "naturally, by nature." However, in *Prajñā-pāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra*, a well-known Buddhist canon, we find the following sentence:

Skt.   *paṃca skaṃdhas tāṃś ca svabhāvaśūnyān vyavalokayati.*[5]

Widely accepted translation for this sentence is like "There are the five Skandhas, and those he considered as something by nature empty" (Müller 1927:145).[6] But we do not have any adverbials in this Sanskrit phrase. Instead, *svabhāva* is the object of *śūnya*. Therefore, this Sanskrit sentence must be read as "(Avalokiteśvara) discerned that five elements of being are devoid of substance/nature." A positive meaning for *śūnya* "emptiness" in a later period[7] seems to have caused the misunderstanding mentioned above.

In the corresponding Tibetan text,[8] we see the following:

(13)   *phun po lnga po de dag la yang rang bzhin gyis stong par rnam par lta'o.*

It is generally believed that Tibetan translations of Buddhist canons are so exactly literal that we can even reconstruct the Sanskrit text on the basis of the Tibetan. Since philologues attested that this canon was translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan between 790 and 840 A.D. (Conze 1978:24), we may be able to appropriately define the grammatical function of *rang bzhin gyis* with the aid of the Sanskrit text.

Firstly, *rang bzhin gyis* is not an adverbial phrase, since, in the Sanskrit text, we do not find any adverbials. Secondly, *stong pa* "empty, lacking in" does not

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4)   *-kyis* has five allomorphs; *-gyis*, *-gis*, *-yis*, *-s* and *-'is*, depending upon sandhi rules of the preceeding consonants on orthography.

5)   This text is cited from Nakamura & Kino 1960:175-177. See Conze 1978:31-55 for details of editions.

6)   Conze (1958:78-79) gives a closer English translation: "Avalokita saw that in their own-being they were empty."

7)   See Tachikawa 1994 for the details of interpretations of *śūnya*.

8)   The full title of this canon is *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i snying po* (Derge Kangyur vol.34 f.144b-146a, The Toyo Bunko).

require instrumental case. Thirdly, *rang bzhin* "nature, substance" is a noun.

What then is the function of *gyis* here? As far as these data are concerned, the only logical choice is for me to hypothesize that this -*gyis* is a focus marker or a new information carrier.

In that case, why do we have an instrumental particle, -*kyis*, in the Tibetan text? The reason is that Skt. *śūnya* requires the instrumental case for its object and the translator of this canon automatically put a Tibetan instrumental case particle before *stong pa*. Inspite of this, Tibetan Buddhists understood what the original Sanskrit sentence meant, and, for instance, *Tshong kha pa*, the founder of the *dGe lugs* sect, comments on this sentence "As for the five elements of being, they do not have any nature."

3.   MISUSE? OR THE TRUTH?

3.1 My hypothesis above is supported by several examples from the older manuscripts which almost all the Tibetologists disregarded or wanted to delete from their grammars.

Yamaguchi (1974) cites an example from Dunhuang folk literature (whose source is not shown) as a wrong usage. It is,

(14)   *des   me tog   sna tshogs* **kyis**   *gtor.*
         he-ERG · flower   various   scatter (PFT)
         "He scattered various flowers."

Jäschke shows a very similar example.

(15)   *me tog* **gis** *gtor ro.* (JA: 209)
         "They strewed flowers."

In sentence (14), -*s*, an instrumental case marker, after *de* "it, he" marks the transitive agent and -*kyis* does the patient, *me tog sna tshogs* "various flowers." According to the Tibetan traditional grammars, this usage of -*kyis* is totally wrong, and Yamaguchi claims that this Tibetan phrase is ungrammatical (p.c. from Professor Yamaguchi) although he writes in his grammar that this particle may be an 'emphasizer.'

Some colleagues (Tournadre and Takeuchi) suggest that *sna tshogs kyis* may make an adverbial phrase, under the analogy of the usage ❺, standing for "in various manners." However, no dictionary nor glossary lists that form, whereas we find *sna tshogs su/du*.

In sentence (15), the situation is more simple; the patient is marked by -*gis*.

The Dunhuang manuscripts often reflect colloquial aspects of Tibetan as a natural language and their so-called misuses constitute precious clues to grope for the earlier stage of Tibetan before the establishment of traditional grammar of the language. Now that we have this particular usage of -*kyis* in written forms, we must accept the linguistic fact as it is.

I have found several sentences which substantiate my idea. The new findings after my 1994 paper are:

(16)   *sad dang ser ba bca' dang mu ge byung* **gis** *dogs pa'i tshe,* (MN> JB 92)
       "Being afraid that frost, hail and starvation should happen,"

(17)   *bdag ni rdza ma bgyid par 'gyur la 'di*s *kyang gcog par 'gyur ro.* (DU> JB 32)
       "If I make pots, he will destroy them."

(18)   *bgegs rigs stong phrag glud* **kyis** *'jal, 'dre dgu sri bcu bskyas* **kyis** *'debs.* (ZJ 70)
       "(The man) pays with ransoms the thousands of obstructions, and dispatches the nine demons and ten vampires."

(19)   *kun tu bzang po glo bur ba, tshig dang ming* **gis** *mtshon pa tsam.* (ZJ 230)
       "It is the spontaneous 'All Good', of whom names and terms are mere indications."

From these evidences, I hypothesize that *-kyis* is a new information carrier.

3.2   In connection with these examples above, we have the following group of sentences:

(20)   *nged la mi ster na rgyal khams mes bsreg* **gis**. (MN>JB 132)
       "If you don't give me (the princess), I definitely am going to burn with fire the kingdom."

(21)   *rgyal po'i zhal nas da yang rgya srang ma nor bar rang rang so so'i khyim du song cig. khyim ngo shes pa la bu mo sbyin* **gyis**. (MN> JB 69)
       The king said to them, "Now, go back to your own house without mistake. I will, for sure, give my daughter to a man who recognizes her house."

(22)   *bal yul du rtol te bal rje dang mjal bas kyed gang nas 'ongs pa yin zer du 'ong gis de tsa na nged mtha' 'khob kyi rgyal po srong btsan sgam po'i blon po yin* **gyis**. (MN>JB 131)
       When you arrive at Nepal and meet the Nepalese king, and if the king is to ask from where you are, then, at that moment, say, "I am a minister of Srong-btsan-sgam-po, a king of frontier area."

All these examples of *-kyis* seem to simply introduce the future stem of *bsreg* and *sbyin* as well as *yin* as new information and, as a result, they 'emphasize' the agent's strong intent for their action or statement.

The following two sentences also seem to represent 'strong intent':

(23)   *bu mo ster ba*s *dris shog zer.* (MS 19a)
       "I (have an intent to) give my daughter to him. Ask (if it is all right)." So he said.

(24)   *phyis jo bo spyan 'dren pa'i dus su gser 'tshol bar byon pas gar log gi rgyal
pos bzung.* (MS 38)
"Afterwards, when Jo-bo was invited, the Qarluk, who had come in search
of gold, took the king prisoner."

4. AFTERWORD

Summarizing the discussion, we have found the following:
① According to the grammars by traditonal grammarians of Tibet as well as
Western scholars, the WT instrumental particle, *-kyis,* is an ergative marker.
② The facts show that the particle can mark other cases than transitive agent.
③ They also show that it can introduce verbs, with the implication of agent's
'strong intent.'
④ I believe that the original function of *-kyis* was a new information carrier, which
was re-defined by the early grammarians of Tibet as the ergative-agentive
marker.

My argument may also be of some help in reconsidering, in the descriptive
level, the peculiar behavior of a Burmese particle, *-kou_,* for instance, and in
sifting through whether ergativity can be reconstructed in the PTB level or the
PO/SO system was earlier.

Abbreviations

DB	Dharma-bhadra: *Si tu'i shal lung.*
DH	J. Bacot, F. W. Thomas and Ch. Toussant: 1940 *Documents de Touen-houng relatifs à l'histoire du Tibet.* Paris: Librairie Orientale Paul Geuthner.
DU	'Dul ba > JB
JA	H. A. Jäschke: 1881 *A Tibetan-English Dictionary.* London: Trübner, reprinted in 1934, 1965, by Routledge & Kegan Paul.
JB	Bacot 1948
MN	*Mani bka' 'bum.*
MS	*Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* > Tucci: 1971 *Deb T'er dMar po gSar ma.* Rome: IsMEO.
PFT	perfect
SI	Si tu: *Si tu'i sum rtags.* > S.C.Das: 1915 *An Introduction to the Grammar of the Tibetan Language.* reprinted in 1983, Delhi:Motilal Banarsidas.
TT	Takeuchi and Takahashi 1994.
Vajra.	Vajracchedika-prajñāparamitā
ZJ	*gZi brjid* > Snellgrove: 1980 *The Nine Ways of Bon.* Boulder: Prajña Press.
ZY	Yamaguchi 1974.

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