

## Tibetan Ergativity and the Trajectory Model

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## Tibetan Ergativity and the Trajectory Model

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### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper<sup>1)</sup> is to show that ergativity in Tibetan is not of the usual type and should be considered in the context of a broader semantico-syntactic system in which the agent, the patient and the goal are viewed in terms of landmarks along a trajectory.

In this article we will restrict ourselves to literary and Central Tibetan<sup>2)</sup> but our conclusions are arguably true for all the dialects.

Let us recall here that written Tibetan has a paradigm of five ‘cases’<sup>3)</sup> absolutive ( $\emptyset$ ), instrumental-ergative (*gis*+allomorphs+free variants), ablative (*nas/las*), genitive (*gi*+allomorphs+free variants) and oblique (*la*+allomorphs+free variants). We will sum up in the following chart the equivalence between written Tibetan (WT) and spoken Central Tibetan (CT) case-marking systems:

	WT	CT
Instrumental-ergative	<i>s, gis, gyis, kyis, yis, 'is</i>	/ki' / - /V+umlaut+' <sup>4)</sup>
Genitive-relative	<i>gi, gyi, kyi, yi, 'i<sup>5)</sup></i>	/ki / - /V+umlaut+:/
Oblique(dative-locative)	<i>su, ra, ru, tu, na, la, du</i>	/la / - /V+r/
Ablative	<i>nas, las, (ba)-s</i>	/nä' /
Absolutive	$\emptyset$	$\emptyset$

As we can see, the difference between ergative and genitive is quite obvious in

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- 1) I am grateful to Boyd Michailovsky and Robert Olorenshaw for their corrections and suggestions.
- 2) Spoken in Lhasa and the surrounding area (in the Central province ‘Ü’).
- 3) The Tibetan ‘cases’ are not ‘cases’ in the classical sense of ‘Russian’ or ‘Latin’. As in other Tibeto-Burman languages, they are more similar to postpositions, never modify the morphology of the noun to which they are assigned, appear only once at the end of the NP, and have several non casual functions.
- 4) Following vowels, the genitive is formed by an umlaut and a lengthening of the vowel. Thus a→ä: u→ü: o→ö:; or just by a lengthening when following /e/ and /i/. The same rule applies for the ergative but instead of a lengthening, there is a final glottal stop indicated by an apostrophe (') in our transcription which is essentially phonological.
- 5) The ergative 'is and genitive 'i are archaic forms.

WT but more subtle in spoken Central Tibetan.<sup>6)</sup> In CT, the case-marking system is much more simple, since there are only two allomorphs (maximum) for one case.

## 1. THE QUESTION OF ACTIVE TYPE IN TIBETAN

The first specificity of the Tibetan system is that the ergative construction occurs with intransitive<sup>7)</sup> intentional verbs. This phenomenon has sometimes been interpreted as a characteristic of the active type (DeLancey 1985) which is represented in several Amerindian (Sioux, Guarani, Dakota, Yucatec, Navajo, etc.) and Caucasian languages (Bats, Abkhaz to a certain extent, etc.). We will try to show here that this assumption is not valid in many ways. Active languages or, more correctly, languages in which the active constructions occur, have several features that distinguish them from 'purely' ergative languages. Klimov (1979) mentioned among others the two following characteristics:

—There is often a lack of opposition between transitive and intransitive verbs. For example, the lexemes meaning 'kill' and 'die' frequently correspond to a unique verb.

—In the active languages, the nouns are divided into two classes (morphologically unmarked) animate and inanimate.

But the main characteristic of such languages is to mark the 'intransitive subject' either in the same way as the agent of transitive constructions *or* as the patient of transitive constructions, according to the type of verb. If the verb is active (such as 'run', 'swim', 'build' etc.) and denotes a voluntary action, then an 'active' case will mark the agent, but if the verb has a stative meaning (such as 'sit', 'stay', 'die', etc.), then an 'inactive' or absolutive marker is used. Sometimes, it is possible to use either the active or the inactive case with the same verb according to the degree of intention, control, etc. Depending on the different languages, the active case corresponds either to control versus lack of control, intentional vs unintentional, dynamic vs stative, actual vs potential, stable state versus change-of-state processes. Tibetan does not partake of any of the above mentioned features that are typical for 'active languages'. Nevertheless, a number of **volitional intransitive verbs** that normally require the absolutive case on the NP subject may trigger the ergative case *in certain circumstances*, a phenomenon which can be witnessed in written as well as in spoken Central Tibetan. For instance, the 'intransitive subject' of the following verbs can occur with absolutive ( $\emptyset$ ) or ergative markers (*GIS*): *phyin* 'go' (past), *phebs* 'go, come (honorific)', *slebs* 'arrive', *yong*

6) It lies in a glottal stop which is often realised as a falling tone (as opposed to a flat tone for the genitive) or as a slight opening of the vowel /ki'/'→[ke], [ge] which does not occur with the genitive.

7) The term intransitive is used by commodity. In fact it would be preferable to speak of 'one place predicate'/'two place predicate' or 'monovalent' vs 'bivalent' since in Tibetan, the arguments corresponding the English 'subject' or 'object' are always optional.

'come', *thon* 'come out', *bsdad* 'stay', *zhugs* 'stay' (hon.), *nyal* 'lie down, go to sleep', *byon* 'arrive' (WT), 'dzul' 'enter', 'dzegs' 'climb', *zhon* 'ride', *mchongs* 'jump', *log* 'come back', *lang* 'get up', *ngu* 'cry', etc. These verbs are mainly motion verbs and they all belong to the class of intentional verbs since they admit the adjunction of the intentional suffix (*pa.yin*) and the jussive morpheme (*dang*). As I wrote in a previous paper (Tournadre 1991), the ergative marker when it appears with those verbs is not determined by the agent's degree of volition or control or by any semantic feature but solely by discursive parameters: the ergative indicates that the locutor *focuses* or places a *contrastive emphasis* on the agent. Compare the following sentences:

- 1a) *khō*      *tsōnkhang* *nang-la* *yün* *ringpo* *tä'*-pare'  
 he(ABS) jail      in-OBL long time stay-PFCT+GNOM<sup>8)</sup>  
 "He stayed a long time in jail." (WT: *kho btsonkhang nang-la yun ringpo bsdad. pa. red*)
- 1b) *khō'*      *tsōnkhang* *nang-la* *yün* *ringpo* *tä'*-pare'  
 he+ERG  
 "He stayed a long time in jail (but his friend did not)."  
 (WT: *kho-s btsonkhang nang-la yun ringpo bsdad. pa.red*)

See again the example below where the ergative is also justified by a contrast between the two agents:

- 2) *khāshā'-ki'* *chī-la*      *tä'* *khāshā'-ki'* *khāngpä:*      *nang-la* *tsü:*  
 some-ERG outside-OBL stay some-ERG house+GEN in-OBL come in  
 "Some stayed outside, others came into the houses." (Roerich 1978: 161).  
 (WT: *kha, shas-kis phyi-la bsdad kha.shas-kyis khang. pa'i nang-la 'dzul*)

Examples 1) and 2) where the verb *bsdad* /*tä'*/'stay' appears, clearly show that the marking of the agent is not related to the control or volition or to the degree of dynamics of the action, which would be the case if Tibetan had been of the active type.

It's worth noticing that the *emphatic function of the ergative* is not restricted to intentional intransitive verbs but also frequently occurs with transitive verbs when

8) Abbreviations used in glosses: ABL=Ablative, ABS=absolutive, AOR=orist, CO=connector, EGO=egophoric auxiliary, ERG=ergative, GEN=genitive, GNOM =gnomic or non-evidential (the speaker either utters a gnomic statement or implies that he has no direct knowledge of the event),

The words 'perfective' and 'imperfective' are used here for the sake of simplicity and tradition but as I have shown it in a previous article (Tournadre 1991), the opposition relevant in Tibetan is: completed/non completed or accomplished/unaccomplished. It is also worthwhile noting that in the perfective or completed aspect, there is a distinction between perfect and nonperfect (or aorist).

the aspect is imperfective as shown in the following examples:

3a) *khōng khāla' sɔ̄-kiyo:re'*  
 he (ABS) food (ABS) make-IMPF + GNOM

3b) *khōng-ki' khāla' sɔ̄-kiyo:re'*  
 he-ERG food(ABS) make-IMPF + GNOM

3c) *khāla' khōng-ki' sɔ̄-kiyo:re'*  
 food(ABS) he(ERG) make-IMPF + GNOM  
 (WT: a. *khong kha.lag zo-gi.yod.pa.red*; b. *khong-gis kha.la zo-gi yod.pa.red*; c. *kha.lag khong-gis zo-gi.yod.pa.red*)

3a) answers the question 'what does he do?': 'he prepares the meals'.

3b) states that '*He* prepares the meals', as opposed to Lobsang, for instance, who serves the food. (*losang-ki 'khala' khye:ki yo:re'*)

3c) places a focus on the agent: "He is the one who prepares the meals."

As we see, in these examples, the ergative case is not linked either with intention or volition.

It is interesting to note that all the native grammarians consider the use of the ergative with intentional intransitive verbs to be incorrect. See for instance sKal.bzang 'Gyur.med (1981: 15):

*bya.tshig tha.mi.dad.pa zhid yin-na de-r byed.sgra thob. thang gtan.nas med pa-s [...] nga tsho-s grong.gseb-tu 'gro zer srol med*

"When the verb is 'indifferentiative' (intransitive), the ergative is forbidden (has no right), [...] so that it is not correct to say «we (ERG) go to the countryside»."

See also Dor.zhi Dong.drug sNyem.blo (1987: 37–38):

*'gro [...] nyal, 'phur, log, 'ong, ngus bros, slebs, thon. sogs byed.pa.po gzhan dang ma 'brel-ba' i bya.tshig ste bya ba byed pa'i dngos.po-la sbyar-na byed.sgra mi thob.*

"It is not right to add the ergative case to the 'subject' of the action when the verb is not linked to an external agent (different from the object of the action)." [i.e. when the verb is intransitive] which is the case for the following verbs: '*gro* 'go' [...] *nyal* 'lie down', *phur* 'fly', *log* 'come back', *ong* 'come', *ngus* 'cry', *bros* 'flee', *slebs* 'arrive', *thon* 'go out'.

'Phrin. las rGya.mtsho's analysis also follows this tradition but puts forward a new category that he calls 'simple agent' (*byed.pa.po tsam*) opposed to 'alien or external agent' (*byed.pa.po gzhan*). The former term corresponds to the unique actant of a monovalent verb and the latter to the agent of a bivalent verb.

Here is the author's comment (1986: 13) about the 'simple agent':

*bya.ba'i las gang yang mi sgrub pa'am mi byed.pa-r 'gul skyod tsam-mam  
sems-kyi nyams'. gyur-tsam byed-mkhan-la byed.pa.po.tsam zer [...] byed.pa.po tsam-la byed.sgra sbyar mi rung*

"The 'subject' of verbs that indicate a *movement* or a mental (emotional) state are called 'simple agents' as opposed to 'external agents' that are acting upon objects [...]. It is not correct to use the ergative with such verbs."

If the position of the native philologists seems true for perhaps a majority of cases, it clearly contradicts the facts, for a certain number of *oral as well as written occurrences* since verbs of movement *do* appear with the ergative marker (see Chang & Shefts 1980, as well as above examples 1) and 2)).

## 2. THE TIBETAN ASPECTUAL SPLIT-ERGATIVE TYPE

The second specific feature of the Tibetan system is due to the presence of a **particular aspect split**: As it is the case in many ergative languages, the ergative case is required with the perfective aspect (though it may exceptionally not appear when the agent is strongly topicalized). So that, for example, if we put the sentence 3a into the perfective, we obtain the following clause:

3d) khōng-ki' khāla' sō'-pa.red  
he-ERG food (ABS) make (past)-PFCT+GNOM  
"He prepared the food." (WT: *khong-gis kha.lag bzos-pa.red*)

But with the imperfective aspect, the ergative becomes *optional* (see DeLancey 1985; Tournadre 1991; Takeuchi and Takahashi 1993). As shown in 3a and b, when the ergative marker is used, it creates a focus or a contrastive emphasis on the agent. In this way, the Tibetan ergative split is different from the ergative splits of many other more canonical 'ergative languages' in which the imperfective is not compatible with the ergative case or agreement (for instance Georgian, etc.).

Apart from this aspectual split, the domain of extension of the ergative construction is even more restricted in Tibetan, due to the fact that only the class of 'ergative verbs' requires the ergative construction. There are two other classes of verbs: 'benefactive or possessive verbs' (such as *thob* 'get', *byor* 'receive', *dug* 'have', *rag* 'obtain', *brnyed* 'find', etc.) and 'emotional or affective verbs' (such as *dga* 'like', *zhed* 'fear', etc.).

To conclude this section about split ergativity, it should be stated that there is no trace of a lexical split in Tibetan. The first and second person pronouns inflect ergatively just as animate or inanimate nouns (when used metaphorically).<sup>9)</sup>

9) Statistically, the ergative even appears more frequently with the first person pronoun than with the other pronouns.

### 3. THE SIMILARITY BETWEEN INSTRUMENTAL-ERGATIVE AND ABLATIVE IN THE LIGHT OF THE TRAJECTORY MODEL

The third important point which differentiates Tibetan ergativity from other more classical types is that the ergative marker is neither derived from an instrumental-passive construction nor from a genitive-possessive<sup>10</sup> construction (as seems to be the case in many languages, see Anderson 1977; Garrett 1988) but from an ablative one. With this approach, the ergative is no longer an *isolated* agentive marker but a part of a holistic **trajectory model** which depicts any action on a object or a patient (at the center of the predication) as proceeding from a source (ergative) corresponding to the agent and oriented towards a goal or a direction (oblique<sup>11</sup> case).

We claim that the so-called instrumental-ergative marker *GIS* is prototypically derived from an ablative case. This representation allows one to account for many interesting 'coincidences' of behaviour between the ergative-instrumental case and the ablative.

- Both markers (instrumental and ablative) can indicate the ergative
- Both markers are used also as connectors between a 'source' proposition and the following proposition in order to show anteriority
- Both serve as adverbializers.

We will now examine these common features between ergative and ablative. In literary Tibetan, the ablative is used *quite often* in place of the ergative as we will see in the examples below:

- 4) *bod.dmag-nas rgya.nag-gi yul mang.po bcoms*  
 Tibetan army-ABL China-GEN territory many+ABS conquer  
 "The Tibetan army conquered a lot of Chinese territories." (Dalai Lama 1963: 66)

In this sentence, the ablative case can be replaced by the ergative without any semantic change: *bod.dmag-gis rgya.nag-gi yul mang.po bcoms*.

We witness the same phenomenon in the following clause which can be used in written as well as in oral Tibetan:

- 5) *gong.sa chen.po mchog-nas bka'.slob gnang-song*  
 sovereign high supreme-ABL teaching+ABS give-PFCT+EVID  
 "The Dalai Lama gave (some) teachings."

Here again, the ergative would convey the same meaning: *gong.sa chen.po mchog-gis bka'. slob gnang-song*.

The difference between ablative and ergative is by no means semantic unlike the opposition occurring in some ergative languages such as Lezgin where the ablative

10) Or dative-possessive construction.

11) By 'oblique', I mean the dative-locative-accusative morpheme *LA* and its allomorphs (*su, ru, du, tu, r* and *ra*).

indicates an involuntary action. In Tibetan, it seems to be purely a stylistic matter and the frequency of the ablative functioning as ergative varies a lot according to the different texts. The fourteenth Dalai Lama seems to appreciate this construction a lot which we illustrate with a last example:

- 6) *mi mang-nas [nga-la] bdag gces byed-kyi.yod.pa.red*  
 people-ABL [me-OBL] take care-IMP+GNOM  
 "The people were taking care (of me)." (Dalai Lama 1963: 86)

Again the replacement of *nas* by *gis* does not change the meaning.

The coincidence between ablative and instrumental-ergative is not restricted to written or Central Tibetan. In Amdo dialects, there is evidence that corroborates the common origin of these marks. In those dialects, the instrumental-ergative functions as an ablative marker as shown in the example below<sup>12)</sup>.

- 7a) *dge.rgan-gis don'grub-ba rgya.yig bslabs-ni.red*  
 professor-INST(ERG) Dondrup-OBL Chinese teach-PFCT  
 "The teacher has taught Chinese to Dondrup."

- 7b) *nga ziling-gis yong-ni red*  
 I Ziling-INST (ABL) come-PFCT  
 "I came from Ziling (Xining)." (sKal.bzang 'Gyur.med 1964: 234, 268)

In 7a) the instrumental functions as an ergative while in 7b) it clearly becomes an ablative marker.

All these remarks about the proximity of ablative and ergative support S. DeLancey's statement (1982b):

"I have argued, [...], for an underlying unity of the notions of cause, transitive agent and volitional agent, and briefly suggested an analogy to spatial source. Elsewhere (DeLancey 1981, 1982a) I have presented arguments for the inclusion of temporal structure on this list of source-goal schemata, with the onset of an event counting as Source. In Tibetan we find all of these source categories at least sometimes marked with an \*s morpheme [still present in the contemporary Tibetan orthography] of ultimately Proto-Sino-Tibetan provenience."<sup>13)</sup>

Thus, in order to describe Tibetan ergativity, it seems suitable to postulate the existence of an underlying 'supercase' of SOURCE (morphologically represented

12) This example of Labrang Amdo dialect was given by sKal.bzang Gyur.med in his manuscript 'Tibetan Dialects' (zangyu fanyan gaiyao) 1964. The example is given in a literary transliteration.

13) About the origin of the 'S' morpheme, see also Benedict 1990.

by *S*<sup>14</sup>) subdivided into two cases indicating the ‘cause’ and the ‘spatio-temporal source’. The ‘cause’ case marks both the cause (instrumental function) and the causee or the agent (thus the ergative function). Symmetrically, and in a less original way<sup>15</sup>), we should also postulate the existence of a ‘supercase’ of ‘GOAL’ (or ‘incidence’) which subsumes the spatio-temporal locative case and the benefactive case.<sup>16</sup>)

The analogy between ergative and ablative can be further confirmed by the fact that the two markers have the same non-casual meanings. For instance, the ‘ablative’ *nas* functions as a connector indicating anteriority of the first clause as in the following exemple:

8) *ngā-tsho* *shotarreshin* *ngāpo-nā'* *lāng-kiyö'* [...]
   
I-PL every morning early-ABL get up-IMP+EGO<sup>17</sup>)

*khāla' sã'-nā'* *chütshö'* *ci'-ts* *ngā:so kyap-nā'* *kongta' yã*
  
meal +  $\emptyset$  eat(past)-ABL hour one-about rest make-ABL evening again

*rāngcong* *chütshö'* *n̄yi sūm-ts* *chã-nā'* *ngā:so kyã'-kire'*
  
homework +  $\emptyset$  hour two three-about do(past)-ABL rest make-GNOM

“We get up (from) early every morning...after having eaten, we rest for about one hour and then in the evening we study again for about two or three hours before resting.” (Hu Tan 1989: 90)

(WT: *ngā.tsho zhogs ltar bzhin snga.po nas lang-gi yod ... kha.lag bzas-nas chu tshod gcig tsam ngal gso brgyab nas dgong.dag yang rang.sbyong chu tshod gnyis gsum tsam byas-nas ngal.gso rgyag-gi.red*)

As we see, except for the first occurrence, *nas* functions as connector and indicates that the action ‘eat the meal’/*khāla' sã'*/is prior to ‘resting’/*ngā:so kyap*/which is itself anterior to ‘making one’s homework’/*rāngcong chã'*/which precedes the ‘rest’/*ngā:so kyã'-kire'*/.

The trajectory model may shed a new light on the interpretation of the *S* type connectors (*s*, *nas*, *gis*): since they indicate ‘SOURCE’ clauses i.e., clauses which

14) i.e. consists of all the cases composed of the *S*: *s*, *gis*, *gyis*, *kyis*, *yis*, ‘*is*, *nas*, *las*, (*ba*)-*s* (Instrumental-ergative and ablative forms).

15) Many languages with relators or prepositions give the same treatment to the indirect object and the movement towards a place. (For instance French ‘à’, Hebrew ‘ל’, English ‘to’)

16) It seems that the trajectory model and the notions of source and goal can also apply to a certain extend in Burmese.

17) EGO stands for the egophoric suffixes (*yod*, *yin*, *byung*) which are opposed to the *neutral* suffixes. Egophoric suffixes refer only to the first person (singular and plural) while the neutral suffixes (‘*dug*, *red*, *song*) are used for all persons (singular and plural) including the first one. Within egophoric suffixes, one should distinguish intentional (*yin*, *yod*) and unintentional (*byung*).

describe prior actions or states, they are commonly used to show a chronology or succession of actions but they also can be assigned to causal clauses.

In oral Tibetan, among the casual ‘source’ morphemes, only *nas* functions as a connector between clauses, but in written Tibetan all the ‘source’ morphemes may serve as connectors as we will see below in an extract from a tale:

9) *sngon rdzing.bu*      *zhig-na*    *sbal.ba*    *gcig*    *dang*    *ngang.ba*    *gnyis*  
 In the past water tank    one-OBL    frog      one    and    duck      two-ABS

*yun ring-du*      *gnas.pa-s*    *phan.tshun*    ‘*dza*’      *zhing*    *gcugs*  
 long time-OBL    stay-CO    mutually    be friendly    and    loving

“In the past, a frog and two ducks had lived a long time in a water tank and were friendly and loving toward each other.”

It is possible to interpret the connector ‘s’ either as a causal marker or as a simple coordination. In the former case, it would be more appropriate to translate: “since a frog and two ducks had lived a long time (together) in a water tank, they were friendly and loving each other.”

In literary Tibetan even the morpheme *gis* (the instrumental-ergative morpheme and its allomorphs) may occur as a ‘conjunction’. This occurs in the two examples below from “*My land and my people*” (14th Dalai Lama).

10) *khyod-tsho*    *gra.sgrig-gis*    *sgug sdod-cig*  
 You-PL +  $\emptyset$     prepare-CO<sup>18)</sup>    wait stay-JUSSIVE  
 “You get prepared *and* wait.” (Dalai Lama 1963: 209)

This sentence would be the equivalent to the two following sentences:

*Khyod-tsho gra.sgrig-nas sgug sdod-cig*  
*Khyod-tsho gra.sgrig*      *byas-nas sgug sdod-cig*  
 preparation +  $\emptyset$     make-CO

11) *Khong-gnyis*    *phyir.log-gis*    *chu tshod*    *gcig*    *song rjes*  
 he-two      return(ing)-CO    hour      one    passed after  
*yang bskyar*    *yong*  
 again come    back  
 “The two returned and, after one hour, came back again.” (Dalai Lama 1963: 209)

As in the former example, it is possible to replace *gis* by *nas* or *brgyabs-nas* with the same meaning. The lexemes *gra.sgrigs* and *phyir.log* occurring in 10) and 11), may function as nouns or as verbs. In these contexts, it seems though that only

18) CO stands for ‘connector’ which indicates that the morpheme has no longer a casual meaning but serves to connect two clauses.

the verbal interpretation is correct.

Last but not least regarding the similarity between ablative and instrumental-ergative, both may occur as adverbializers as one can see from the following examples:

*rtsa.ba-nas* ‘completely, totally’, *khyon-nas*+NEG ‘never, not at all’, *gzhi.nas* ‘only then, finally’, *rkang.btsugs-nas* ‘deliberately’, *gting-nas* ‘deeply’, *mu.mthud-nas* ‘continuously’, *rang.bzhin-nas* ‘naturally, spontaneously’, etc., *rang.bzhin-gyis* ‘naturally, spontaneously’, *mu.mthud-kyis* ‘continuously’, *mnyam. ’brel-gyis* ‘jointly’, *rim-gyis* ‘gradually’, *thabs.shes-kyis* ‘expediently’, *gang.thub-kyis*, ‘as far as possible’, *ngang-gis* ‘slowly, gradually’, etc.

#### 4. THE SYMMETRY BETWEEN ERGATIVE AND OBLIQUE CASES

In the last section, we will also try to argue that ergative, being part of a trajectory representation, functions symmetrically with the oblique case (or ‘goal case’) and that these two cases share many features.

- a. Both ergative and oblique cases function as syntactic markers of ‘subject’ and ‘indirect object’<sup>19)</sup> which correspond symmetrically to the semantic notions of *source* and *goal*.
- b. ‘Source’ cases function as connectors of *causal* clause while ‘goal cases’ function as connectors of *purposive* clause.
- c. In WT, both function as simple clause conjunctions.
- d. Both enable one to create a contrastive emphasis upon the NP to which they are assigned.
- e. Both serves as adverbializers.

These various points are going to be examined below.

a) If the ergative indicates the onset of the action lying in the agent’s will (or the agent’s responsibility), the ‘goal case’ represents the incidence, the end or the aim of the process.

- 12) khō      kh̄yi-la      to      yū’-song  
 he-ERG    dog-OBL    stone+ø    throw-PFCT+EVID  
 “He threw stone(s) to the dog.” (WT: *kho-s khyi-la rdo g.yugs-song*)

From a syntactic perspective, the unmarked argument ‘the stone’, being at the center of the process, is probably the most essential element and has the closest relations with the verb. Even if omitted, it would designate a previously mentioned object by zero anaphora: /khō’ khyi-la [ø] yū’-song/ meaning “He threw *it* to the dog.” Whereas the arguments marked by the ergative and oblique cases (‘he’ and ‘the dog’) are merely complements which specify the starting and the ending of the

19) The notion of ‘subject’ is a highly ambiguous and inadequate notion in Tibetan, we use it here for commodity purpose but prefer to talk of ‘grammatical agent’ and ‘grammatical patient’ following Bechert’s view (1979).

action, both of them being optional and referring to the extremities of the process. If those two complements were to be unnecessary, the sentence /tə yu'-song/ would still mean "Stones were thrown."

b) The symmetry between 'source cases' and 'goal cases' is also obvious at the clause level since the former indicate causal clauses and the latter indicate purposive clauses. Compare the sentences 13), 14) (WT), and 15), 16) (WT):

- 13) *kyä:pö: shā.khyi lā'-nä' tshā:-ka' chiñ*  
 king+GEN hunting dog+Ø lose-CO find-to go  
 "The king lost his dog and went to look for it" or "Since the king lost his dog, (he) went to look for it." (Hu Tan 1989: 201)  
 (WT: *rgyal.po-'i sha.khyi brlags nas 'tshal ba-r phyin*)

- 14) *nga-la dad.pa yod-pa-s mchod.mjal zhus-payin*  
 I-OBL faith has-NOM-CO religious visit+Ø do(past)-PFCT+EGO  
 "Because I have faith, (I) made a religious visit (to a temple)." (Goldstein 1991)

- 15) *phö'kä' lōpcong che'-ya'-la thep ti yakpo tu'*  
 Tibetan language study+Ø make-to-CO book this good is (EVID)  
 "This book is good to learn Tibetan." (Goldstein 1991: 127)  
 (WT: *bod.skad slob.sbyong ched-ba'i ched-du-deb'di yag.po 'dug*)

- 16) *glu.gar nyan-du 'gro*  
 song dance listen-CO go  
 "(we) go (in order) to listen to songs and dances."

In written Tibetan, there are also various postpositions followed by 'source' and 'goal' cases: *dbang-gis* 'because of', *stabs-kyis* 'because, since', *rkyen-gyis* 'due to'; *ched-du* 'in order to', *don-du* 'for the purpose of', *slad-du* 'in order to'.

c) As mentioned earlier, in WT, the 'source' case and the 'goal' case may be used to indicate the simple coördination 'and'. In example 9) 's' can be interpreted in such a way and the sentence below shows that 'la' also has this role:

- 17) *tshogs.pa de'i nang-du zhing.pa yod-la 'brog.pa yang 'dug*  
 association this+GEN in-OBL farmer+Ø exist-CO nomad+Ø also exist  
 "There are nomads as well as farmers in that association." (Goldstein 1991: 257)

As far as this grammatical function is concerned, it seems that there is a neutralisation of the opposition between 'source' and 'goal' case-marking since both of them end up meaning 'and'. In fact, this is merely a consequence of the wide range of grammatical meanings of these two morphemes but remains coherent and perfectly logical inside the system. The 's' case creates a chronology between clauses: P1-s P2-s P3-s, etc. (i.e., first P1, second P2, third P3, etc.) which sometimes just corresponds to a concatenation, thus giving the meaning of coordination. Whereas the 'la' case indicates an incidence of the type: P1-la P2-la

P3-la... (i.e. to P1 [is next] P2, to P2 [is next] P3, etc.) which can be interpreted at an abstract level as P1 is besides P2 is besides P3 etc., so that while the ‘source’ case would indicate a coordination through the representation of a chronological proximity, the ‘goal’ case would convey the same meaning through the representation of a spatial proximity.

d) As we have seen in section 1) (see examples 1) and 2) another typical feature of the Tibetan ergative is to indicate an emphasis *on the agent* when the marking is optional. This feature is also shared by the oblique case but applies to *the patient* as we will see in the following examples:

- 18a. yā' shōn-pare'  
yak ride-PFCT+GNOM  
‘He rode a yak.’ (WT: *g.yag zhon-pa.red*)

If we add the oblique or ‘goal case’:

- 18b. yā'-la shōn-pare' (WT: *g.yag-la zhon-pa.red*)

The sentence means then: ‘it is a yak that (he) rode’ or ‘(he) rode *a yak*, not a horse’. The difference between a. and b. is not semantic but only a difference of focus on the object. We find the same difference when we compare 19a) and 19b):

- 19a) lō(p)sang yā'-ki' tung-song  
P.N+ø yak-ERG hit-PFCT+EVID  
‘Lobsang was hit by a yak (‘s horn).’ (WT: *blo bzang g.yag-gis brdung-song*)

- 19b) yā'-ki' lō(p)sang-la tung-song  
yak-ERG P.N+OBL hit-PFCT+EVID  
‘The yak hit *Lobsang* with its horns (and *not Dorje* or *Tshering*)’ or ‘It is *Lobsang* who was hit by the yak.’ (WT: *yag-gis blo. bzang-la brdung-song*)

e) Finally, we will see that oblique case functions as adverbializer (just like ‘source cases’, see section 3). It seems that this role corresponds also to a neutralisation of the opposition between *s* and *la* cases since they convey the same meaning. Those adverbializers are historically fixed and can not be changed.

<i>gsal.po</i>	‘clear’	→	<i>gsal.po-r</i>	‘clearly’
<i>mg-yogs.po</i>	‘rapid’	→	<i>mg-yogs.po-r</i>	‘rapidly’
<i>rang.bzhin</i>	‘nature’	→	<i>rang.bzhin-du</i>	‘naturally’
<i>thad.ka</i>	‘straight’	→	<i>thad.ka-r</i>	‘straightly’
<i>brtan.po</i>	‘firm, steady’	→	<i>brtan.po-r</i>	‘firmly, steadily’

We will now sum up the functions of the ‘source’, ‘center’ and ‘goal’ cases in the following chart.

	SOURCE S	CENTRE ø	GOAL LA
<b>CATEGORIES</b>			
<i>Case-marking functions</i>			
NP	agent instrument cause, manner origin comparison selection ('among') restriction ("except" + V + Neg.)	patient intr.subject duration	benefactor possessor location destination goal
<i>Other functions</i>			
Clause	causal Coordination	coordination	purposive coordination
Other	adverbial emphasis, focus (agent)		adverbial emphasis, focus (object)

## 5. CONCLUSION

This conception of an 'ablative' ergativity in Tibetan represents a type distinct from the ergativity diachronically derived from possessive (like Eskimo, etc.) and passive constructions (like Hindi, Nepali or ancient Indo-European such as Hittite, Luvian, Lycian, etc.). The Tibetan 'cases' at an abstract level function in the same way when marking NPs (actants or circonstants) or entire clauses. Such a description is valid for Central Tibetan and works *perfectly* for literary Tibetan. This 'perfection' might suggest that literary Tibetan has something artificial, and never reflected a real spoken language which after all is not a unique case among the literary languages of the world.

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