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Tibetan Part-of-speech Conundrums: *mañ* and *yun riñ*

Abstract

This paper discusses two Tibetan expressions, *mañ* and *yun-riñ*, which give rise to vexing problems of part of speech analysis.

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The student of Tibetan and the working Tibetologist function quite well in the absence of an explicit theory of Tibetan word breaking and part-of-speech analysis. In contrast, in a part-of-speech tagged corpus of Tibetan texts, such as the project ‘Tibetan in Digital Communication’ at SOAS (University of London)¹ is building, one must decide where each word begins and ends and assign each word a word-class. The analysis of a few constructions are particularly vexing; here I discuss *mañ* and *yun-riñ*.

mañ

The root *mañ* ‘be many’ is most familiar in the guise of the adjective *mañ-po* ‘many’ (example 1).

- (1) *g.yem-pa rgyas-par spyad-nas lo mañ-po ma lon-par glan-pa-dañ mchin-pa skams-so /*
After practicing excessive fornication, after not many years her brain (? *glan-pa*) and liver dried out. (D. 236, Vol. 64, 275b).²

¹ See more on the project in Garrett et al. 2013, Garrett et al. 2015. I would like to gratefully acknowledge the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council’s support for this project.

² Citations from the Kanjur and Tanjur use a D., for Derge, followed by the text’s number in the Tōhoku catalogue.

However, *mañ* ‘be many’ also occurs as a finite intransitive verb (example 2) and as a subordinate verb in the indirect infinitive construction (example 3).³

- (2) *de-nas rgya-mtshoḥi lhas chu sñim-pa gañ bcus-nas dge-bsñen de-la sñim-pa gañ-gi chu mañ-ñam / rgya-mtshoḥi chu mañ ? / źes dris-pa-dañ*
Then, the god of the sea, scooping up a handful of water asked the upāsaka
“Are the waters of a handful many, or are the waters of the ocean many?”
(D. 341, vol. 74, 144b).
- (3) *de bsod-nams-kyi phuñ-po ches mañ-du skyeḥo /*
His collection of merit became exceedingly great. (Buton 7a).⁴

In example (4) *lo mañ* is not amenable to analysis as a noun followed by an adjective, because such an explanation would yield an inexplicable variation between the two adjectives *mañ* and *mañ-po*.⁵ However, it would also be incorrect to see *lo mañ* as a noun followed by a verb, because *lo-mañ źig* is a noun phrase that the verb *lon* governs. Consequently, *lo-mañ* like the German ‘Jahrmenge’ must be a compound.

- (4) *physis lo-mañ źig lon-pa-dañ / ḥdi sñam-du sems-so /*
Later, after some many years had passed, he thought thus... (D. 341, Vol. 74, 147b).

The direct suffixing of *-mañ* to form compounds is not uncommon. Witness *dge-sloñ-mañ* like the German ‘Mönchmenge’ in example (5).

- (5) *de tshe gañ dañ-gis ni dge-sloñ-mañ dkrugs-nas /*
At that time, some people agitated the clergy (D. 13, vol. 34, 8a).

In the light of the forgoing discussion *ḥbul-ba mañ dag* ‘many gifts’ (in example 6) and *yig-cha mañ dag* ‘many texts’ (in example 7), appear likewise to be the compounds *ḥbul-ba-mañ* and *yig-cha-mañ* followed by the plural marker *dag*.

- (6) *Nag-tshos gser-gyi ḥbul-ba mañ dag phul-baḥi khar /*
When Nag-tsho offered many offerings of gold... (Marpa 30b).⁶

³ For more on the indirect infinitive construction see Garrett et al. 2013.

⁴ ‘Buton’ refers to the digital version of the *Bu ston chos ḥbyuñ* available at Otani University (<http://web1.otani.ac.jp/crj/twrpw/results/e-texts/> [accessed 24 February 2015]). The *Bu ston chos ḥbyuñ* consists largely of quotations from previous works. I have not troubled to locate the original passages, as this is not relevant to the current project. The reader should however be aware that the linguistic usage attested in citations from this text may date to earlier periods.

⁵ To ward off this danger our project forbids monosyllabic adjectives.

⁶ ‘Marpa’ refers to the digital version of the *Mar pa rnam thar* available at Otani University (<http://web1.otani.ac.jp/crj/twrpw/results/e-texts/> [accessed 24 February 2015]).

- (7) *dpon-slob gñis-kas Rgya-dpe rnams gzigs-pas hpho-baḥi yig-cha mañ dag ḥdug-ste /*
 When the two, teacher and student, looked at the Indian books, there were many texts about Transference of Consciousness. (Marpa 34b).

Nonetheless, in example (8) because the genitive case marker precedes *mañ*, the option to see it as the second element of a compound and the option to see it as a verb are both unavailable.

- (8) *Bod-la ma grags-paḥi mañ dag cig byuñ-ñiñ /*
 There were many (translators) who are not famous in Tibet. (Buton 145a).

The phrase *gžan dag* ('others') offers a model to analyze *mañ dag* and to speculate about its origin.⁷ Many things may follow *gžan* 'other' in a noun phrase including *ñig* (9), *kun* (10), *rnams* (11) and *dag* (12).

- (9) *gnas gžan ñig na śiñ Śa-ko-ta-ka-la bya-roḡ cig ḥdug-pa des Dbyig-pa-can de mthoñ-nas*
 In another place there was a crow on a Śakotaka tree, which saw Dbyig-pa-can (D. 341, vol. 74, 272a).
- (10) *gžan kun ni chuñ-ma-dañ ḥgrogs-te ḥoñs-na blon-po de ḥbah ñig-gi chuñ-ma ma ḥoñs-pas grogs-po dag the-tshom-du gyur-te /*
 When all others came with their wives and that the wife of that lone minister did not come, his friends began to have doubts. (D. 341, vol. 74, 148b).
- (11) *de min-gyi gdams-ñag gžan rnams khyod-rañ-la byin tshar-ro*
 I have finished giving to thee other instructions than those. (Mila, de Jong 1959: 77).
- (12) *sman de btsun-mo chuñ-ñiu gžan dag-gis ḥthuñs-te /*
 The other, junior queens, drank that medicine. (D. 341, vol. 74, 74a).

In contrast to this syntactical promiscuity of *gžan* in classical literature, in Lhasa dialect *gžan-dag* has become a single word and is the only common occasion on which the morpheme *dag* still occurs. One may suspect that *mañ dag* has undergone a similar ossification as a *locution figée*.

The difficulty with *mañ dag* for our corpus project is that on the one hand it would feel uncomfortable to regard it as a single word and thereby obfuscate that *dag* in this combination is very much the usual plural marker *dag*, but on the other hand treating *mañ* as a determiner (N *gžan dag* : N *mañ dag* :: N *gžan* [d.det] *dag* : X = *mañ* [d.det] *dag*),

⁷ We tag *gžan* 'other' as [d.det] 'determiner' along with *sogs*, *rañ*, *ka ~ kha ~ga*, *re*, *re-re*, *sna-re*, *ḥbah*, *śa-stag*, *ya*, *ya-re*, and *la-la*.

would make this determiner analysis of *mañ* available in all of the word's occurrences.⁸ The solution our project employs is to regard *mañ-po* as an adjective, *mañ* as a verb or second element of a compound except in the expression *mañ dag*, in which we treat it as a determiner. We make no pretense that better solutions are not possible, but they are not known to us.

yun(-)riñ

The phrase *yun riñ-po* 'a long time' is readily analyzable as a noun *yun* 'time' followed by an adjective *riñ-po* 'long'.⁹ The phrase *yun riñ-po* normally functions adverbially in a way that can be translated as 'for a long time'; the phrase can be case marked with at least four different cases: ablative (*-nas*), terminative (*-r*), absolutive (*-Ø*), and locative (*-na*).

The ablative case is used when an activity began in the past and continues into the present (example 13).

- (13) *bdag ni yun riñ-po-nas h̄khor-ba-na lus grañs med-pa chud gsan-te*
I, for a long time, have wasted countless bodies in Saṃsāra. (D. 341, vol. 74, 132b).

The terminative is used when an activity began and ended in the past (example 14) or for a hypothetical activity that will occur in the future (example 15).

- (14) *bcom-ldan-ḥdas yun riñ-por ḥjig-rten-na b̄zugs-te*
The Bhagavan stayed in the world for a long time. (D. 341, vol. 74, 197b).
- (15) *khyod de-b̄žin-ḡs̄egs-pa-la tshe-dañ-ldan-pa ma zer cig / yun riñ-por mi bde-bar gyur-ta-re/*
Thou, say not 'venerable' to the Tathāgata, lest thou beest unhappy for a long time. (Buton 96b).¹⁰

⁸ One may wonder whether it is right to see *mañ* as a determiner, and recognize *mañ-po*, *mañ*, and *mañ-dag* as parallel to *ḡzan-po*, *ḡzan*, and *ḡzan-dag*. From such a perspective, either *ḡzan* will be seen as a verbal root 'be otherwise' that frequently occurs in compound or *mañ* will be seen as a determiner alone, and the analysis of phrases like *lo-mañ* as a compound is to be rejected. However, this proposed parallelism fails because whereas *mañ-po* is an adjective *ḡzan-po* is a noun 'another one'. For example, *gañ-du rañ-gi kyo yañ gsod-na ḡzan-po ga-la ḥdu-ste / 'If somehow you kill your husband, where will you meet another' (D 2256, vol. 51, 202b).*

⁹ The parallel construction *yun thuñ-ñu* 'a short time' is also attested, although much more rarely, e.g. *sañs-rgyas-kyi žiñ phun-sum tshogs-pa-la ser-ba bab-pas / lo stoñ tshañ-bar gnas-pa yun thuñ-ñur lhag-ma tsam-du byas so / 'Because [you] brought down hail on the excellent realm of the Buddha, [you] shortened the duration of [the Doctrine of the Buddha and] have reduced [it] to mere remainder that was [otherwise supposed] to endure for a complete [period of] 1000 years' (Buton 91a).*

¹⁰ As modern English does not distinguish singular and plural second person pronouns, I prefer to translate in a somewhat antiquated form of English with singular *khyod* as 'thou' and plural *khyed* as 'you'.

To say ‘not long’ the head noun *yun* is typically omitted and *riñ-por* is used with the negated verb *lon* ‘pass (of time)’.

- (16) *btsun-mos de-dag ḥthuñs-nas riñ-por ma lon-par so-so-nas sems-can-dañ ldan-par gyur-te*
The queens, after having drunk these [medicines], before long respectively became with child. (D. 341, vol. 74, 74a).

With an example like (16) in mind, it is a bit surprising that when used in the positive the verb *lon* ‘pass’ governs the absolutive rather than the terminative (examples 17 and 18).

- (17) *bdag-gis lus kun-tu sdug-bsñal sna-tshogs myoñ-nas yun yañ riñ-po žig lon-te*
It has been a long time that I have experienced various sufferings in all bodies. (D. 341, vol. 74, 132b).
- (18) *ston-pa ḥdas-nas lo brgya-dañ sum-cu-rtsa-bdun lon-pa-na*
(...) when, after the liberation of Muni, 137 years had passed... (Buton 99a).

Although the pattern of the positive verb with the absolutive and the negative verb with the terminative prevails, the absolutive also occurs with a negated verb (example 19). This alternation between *riñ-po ma lon-par* and *riñ-por ma lon-par* merits further study.

- (19) *riñ-po ma lon-par rluñ chen-po lañs-te*
After not long, a great wind arose. (D. 341, vol. 74, 197b).

In examples (18) and (17) the absolutive is selected because the rection of the verb *lon* demands so. However, in examples such as (20) the absolutive case is used adverbially, i.e. does not participate in the rection of a verb.

- (20) *Bi-bhu-ti-dañ Dā-na-śī-las Bod-du yun riñ-po bžugs te*
Vibhuti and Dānaśīla stayed in Tibet a long time. (Buton 156a).

The locative case is used with regard to a single moment in the past.

- (21) *snion ḥdas-paḥi dus yun riñ-po-na / ḥdzam-buḥi gliñ ḥdir rgyal-po chen-po Kha-dog-dam bgyi-bal ḥjig-rten ḥdi-la dbaḥ sgyur-ba žig byuñ-ste /*
In a former long time past, there was in this world a great king called Kha-dog-dam, who ruled this world. (D. 341, vol. 74, 130a).¹¹

¹¹ Example 21 juxtaposes the two nouns *dus* and *yun*, both referring to spans of time, but *dus* the more appropriate thing to ‘pass’ (*ḥdas*) and *yun* the more appropriate to be ‘long’ (*riñ-po*).

The adjective *riñ-po* is not the only means available for saying that the time (*yun*) is long. In examples (22) and (23) the imperfective converb *-ñiñ*, which can only be affixed to a verb, makes clear that there is an intransitive verb *riñ* ‘be long’ to mirror the adjective *riñ-po*.

- (22) *mi de phyugs-kyi śiñ-rta-la Źon-te lam der Źugs-nas / de yun riñ-ñiñ dus riñ-mo Źig-na dpag-tshad brgyar phyin-pa-las /*

That man boarded the cattle cart and set off on his way. He, in a long time, the time being long, had gone a hundred miles, when... (D. 202, Vol. 62, 64a).

- (23) *rnam-par rtse-ba śiñon byuñ-ba ḥdas-paḥi dus na bskal-pa grañs med-pa-bas kyañ ches grañs med-pa / yun riñ-ñiñ tshad med/ bsam-gyis mi khyab / dpag-tu med-paḥi śna-rol deḥi tshe deḥi dus-na*

In a time past, the pinnacle of what is early, countless greater than countless eons, the time being long, without measure, unpervaded by the mind, in that time, that time of yore which is measureless... (D. 198, vol. 61, 277b).

In example (24) the verb takes on transitive morphology, with a *s-* prefix, although the meaning appears unchanged.

- (24) *ñas bla-ma ḥdiḥi druñ-du yun bsriñs-nas bsdad-ruñ /*

Although I stayed for a long time in the presence of that lama... (Marpa 4a).

With the use of *riñ* as an intransitive verb in mind (as in 22 and 23), the most natural interpretation of the sequence of *riñ-du* before a verb is as a subordinate verb in the indirect infinitive construction (examples 25 and 26).

- (25) *skyes-bu dam-pa ḥdi btsun-moḥi ḥkhor-du yun riñ-du bŹugs-na /*

when this wiseman had remained in the court of the queen for a long time (Buton 67a).

- (26) *dge-baḥi las-dañ / sdig-paḥi las ni yun riñ-du lon-kyañ med-ciñ Źig-par mi ḥgyur-ro /*

(His) good deeds and evil deeds will not fail to exist nor be destroyed for a long time. (D. 341, vol. 74, 190b).

The reader tempted to regard *riñ* in examples 25 and 26 as an ‘adjective’ should note that *che* ‘be large’ (example 27) is also an intransitive verb and that this verb occurs as a subordinate in the indirect infinitive construction (examples 28). The intransitive verb *mañ* ‘be many’ also occurs in both these usages (examples 2 and 3 above).

- (27) *deḥi bsod-nams ni rab-tu cheḥol*

His virtue is very great. (D. 341, vol. 74, 174a).

- (28) *de-nas khyeḥu cher skyes-nas pha-ma gñis-la ḥdi skad ces gsol-to /*
Then, after the child had grown it asked its two parents the following.
(D. 341, vol. 74, 196b).

Although the analysis of *riñ* as an intransitive verb is available for examples (27) and (28), in example (29) the presence of the indefinite marker *ḥig*, which requires a preceding nominal, forbids this interpretation. In this passage *yun-riñ* is a compound.

- (29) *ḥgro-baḥi yod-byad bśams-te / ri-nags-tshal ñam-ña-ba kun-du tshol-du soñ*
soñ-ba-las yun-riñ-ḥig lon-pas śin-tu ñam thag-nas/ dbyar tsha-baḥi dus-su
bye-ma tsha-ba pus-mo-nub tsam ḥig tu phyin-pa-dañ ṅal chad-de / skom-
gyis gduñs-pas srog chad-la thug-pas
Arranging the necessities for travel, he went about in the fearsome mountain glades, after a while, he was very fatigued, in the hot summer he went knee-deep in hot sand, exhausted and stricken with thirst he was at the point of death... (D. 341, vol. 74, 172a).

In what must be a clipped version of the noun *yun-riñ* ‘long time’ the syllable *riñ* can itself be used alone as a noun (example 30).

- (30) *lus sa-la brdabs-te brgyal-lo / riñ-ḥig lon-pa-dañ*
They fell to the ground unconscious. A long while passed and... (D. 341, vol. 74, 139b).

A noun *yun-riñ* in the absolutive case functioning adverbially is likely the best explanation for the word’s appearance in examples 31 and 32.

- (31) *bstan-pa yun-riñ gnas-byaḥi phyir / mdo-yi de-ñid-don sdud byed /*
In order for the teaching to remain a long time, the real meaning of the sūtra is outlined. (Buton 106a).
- (32) *yun-riñ bde-ba rje myoñ-nas /*
After experiencing bliss for a long time... (Buton 106a).

With the use of *yun-riñ* as a noun in mind (as in examples 29–32), the most natural interpretation of the sequence of *yun-riñ-du* before a verb (as in examples 25 and 26) is as a noun case marked in the terminative for an adverbial interpretation. Thus, using the part-of-speech tags of our project (Garrett et al. 2015), the sequence *yun riñ du bźugs* may either be interpreted as *yun* [n.count] *riñ* [v.invar] *du* [cv.term] *bźugs* [v.invar] or as *yun-riñ* [n.count] *du* [case.term] *bźugs* [v.invar]. This structural ambiguity is an inherent characteristic of the Tibetan language. Because of it, the desire for an unequivocal analysis of Tibetan word breaking and part-of-speech must remain forever unrealized.¹²

¹² Because it is impossible to leave the analysis indeterminate in a corpus linguistics project, for the sake of consistency we have arbitrarily chosen to treat *yun-riñ-du* as a case marked noun in examples such as 25 and 26.

Abbreviations

d.det = determiner
n.count = count noun
v.invar = intransitive verb
cv.term = converb terminative
case.term = terminative case

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