Making and agreeing to requests in Old Tibetan

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ABSTRACT
The verbs གསོལ gsol ‘request’ and གནང gnaṅ ‘agree, grant’, because of their complementary semantics and parallel syntax, provide a convenient window through which to caste light on the two forms of subordinate clauses that they both govern, namely infinitives and terminative verbal nouns.

KEYWORDS
Old Tibetan, switch reference, subordination
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1 Introduction

The verbs གསོལ་ gsol ‘request’ and གནང་ gnaṅ ‘agree, grant’, have clearly complementary meanings; those addressed by requests either grant them or not. In addition, གནང་ gnaṅ is an honorific verb and གསོལ་ gsol ‘request’ is a humilitic verb (Kitamura 1975). The verbs གསོལ་ gsol ‘request’ and གནང་ gnaṅ ‘agree, grant’ also share a parallel syntactic ability to govern subordinate clauses. These subordinate clauses take two forms, which I call ‘terminative verbal nouns’ and ‘infinitives’. The verbal nouns are those subordinated verb forms nominalized with the suffix མ་ -pa or ག་ -ba, to which the terminative case marker ག་ -r is added. The infinitives are subordinated verb forms followed directly by ད་ -du and its allomorphs. Two verb stems make themselves available to function as infinitives, namely the present and the future. Terminologically we can thus further distinguish ‘future infinitives’ and ‘present infinitives’. The verb གསོལ་ gsol ‘request’ governs the future infinitive and གནང་ gnaṅ ‘agree, grant’ governs the present infinitive (Garrett et al. 2013). To my knowledge the grounds on which verbs select either infinitives or terminative verbal nouns, and why some verbs govern present infinitives and others future infinitives, has not yet been discussed in print.

This essay attempts to elucidate these questions from the vantage point of the behavior of གསོལ་ gsol ‘request’ and གནང་ gnaṅ ‘agree, grant’. In order to ensure that we investigate a single linguistic system, the evidence examined here comes exclusively from Version I (mss. D + A) of the Old Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa (Jong 1989), a paraphrase in Tibetan of a well known Indic epic.

1 This research builds directly on unpublished work of Abel Zadoks, in particular the sixth chapter of Zadoks (2017).
2 The reader, like one anonymous referee, may prefer a different terminology than that used here, but since the English terminology for Tibetan verbal forms remains far from conventionalized and since a subordinate verbal form by any other name smells just as sweet, I implore the reader to bear with these terminological choices.
3 Taking inspiration from the French distinction between a “complément d’objet direct” that directly follows a verb and a “complément d’objet indirect” where an à or de interposes itself between the verb and its object, one can draw a distinction between a Tibetan ‘direct infinitive’ and an ‘indirect infinitive’. Where the subordinate verb directly precedes the matrix verb, this is the direct infinitive. In Version 1 of the Old Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa, I identify only the three matrix verbs ཕུས་ nus ‘be able’ དགེས་ dgos ‘need’ ཚོས་ phod ‘dare’ as governing a direct infinitive. Where the terminative converb interposes itself between the subordinate verb and the matrix verb, this is the indirect infinitive. Nonetheless, because both གསོལ་ gsol ‘request’ and གནང་ gnaṅ ‘agree, grant’ govern the indirect infinitive, it suffices for the purposes of this essay to understand ‘infinitive’ as always meaning ‘indirect infinitive’.
4 Manuscript A has the shelf mark IOL Tib J 0737-1 and manuscript D the shelf mark IOL Tib J 0737-3.
2 The verb ཨགསོལ 'request'

Subordinate clauses governed by the verb ཨགསོལ gsol 'request' show a striking distribution, whereby infinitives occur in direct speech (§2.1) and terminative verbal nouns in the narrative frame (§2.2).

2.1 The verb ཨགསོལ gsol 'request' in direct speech

All examples of ཨགསོལ gsol 'request' governing infinitives in Version I of the Old Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa occur in direct speech. In most examples, the speaker requests of the addressee that the addressee undertake some action.

(1)

« prin-yig brdza-du gsol žes gsol-pa-dan //
« letter send\FUT-CVB.TRM request » QUOT request-NMLZ-ASS //

'I request that [you] send a letter,' he said. (Rama A 273)

(2)

« bdagi bu-mo Me-ga-si-na ḍḥul-na bě-es-su gsol »
« me.GEN girl Meghasena offer-CVB.LOC accept.HON-CVB.TRM request »

žes / bu-mo khrid-de ḍhoṁs-nas bul-ba-dan //
QUOT / girl lead-CVB.SF come\PST-CVB.ELA offer-NMLZ-ASS //

'I offer my daughter Meghasena, I request that [you] accept her,' thus [he] brought his daughter and offered her. (Rama D 39-40)

(3)

de rnams-la rmar gsol / žes mō-hi-nas //
that PL-ALL ask.HON.CVB.TRM request / QUOT say-CVB.ELA //

'I request that [you] ask them,' he said. (Rama A 181-182)

In example (4) the agent of the subordinate verb is not the addressee, but generic.

(4)

myi sdug gzugs čhan ḍhī-las prog-du gsol žes
NEG pretty form possess this-ABL rob\FUT-CVB.TRM request\HON QUOT
Example (4) may lead us to wonder whether examples (1), (2), and (3) are also amendable to interpretation as passives, viz. 'request that a letter be sent', 'request that she be accepted', and 'request that they be asked'. If so, the implication in these sentences that the addressee is the one meant to undertake the action of the subordinated verb is a pragmatic result of the discourse situation rather than a syntactic consequence of the construction. Two further considerations weigh in favor of this passive interpretation. First, passives are cross-linguistically typical of the indirectness appropriate to polite requests; to say 'please be seated' lacks the impatient air of 'please sit down'. Second, a patient focused meaning characterizes the future stem in general (Tillemans 1988, Tillemans and Herforth 1989, Tillemans 1991a, Tillemans 1991b). There are also considerations that speak against an analysis of examples (1)-(4) as passives; for instance, in example (2) the speaker is of course only offering his daughter to the Rṣi and not simply asking that she be taken of his hands. Nonetheless, if we permit outselves to entertain the hypothesis that that the future infinitive, when governed by གསོལ་gsol 'request', is syntactically passive and pragmatically a polite request, this hypothesis dovetails nicely with the wider tendency for future infinitives of transitive verbs to put the patient in focus.5 Example (5), with the unambiguous transitive subordinated verb 'hunt', makes this patient prominence clear.

(5) ༩༢༧ རྗུ་བླུ་བའྐོ་རི་དགས་ཡིན་བས།  བསོག་དུ་མྱི་རུང་སྟེ།  This is a deceptive deer and is not suitable to be hunted (Rama A 145-146)

The clause བསོག་དུ་མྱི་རུང་ bsñag-du myi ruṅ ‘is not suitable to be hunted’, in which མྱི་རུང་ myi ruṅ ‘is not suitable...’ governs the future infinitive, includes no overt noun phrase, neither the hunter nor the quarry, but the unsuitableness obtains only to the quarry.

2.2 The verb གསོལ་gsol ‘request’ in the narrative frame

In the narrative frame the verb གསོལ་ gsol ‘request’ governs the terminative verbal noun and not the infinitive. Naturally, those making the requests, those to whom these requests are made, and

5 Obviously, when the subordinated verb is intransitive it is the sole argument that is in focus, e.g. འབུ་ཌོ་བཟོ་བྲན་པོ་ལེགས་པ་ནཱ་ནཱར་  འབུད་དུ་ཐུར་དུ་གནས་མ་མཐིས་ // Ducks and geese which live on the lake have nowhere to fly for shelter (Rama A 348).
those who would engage in the requested activities are in the narrative frame all third person. Still, a variety of co-reference relationships are available among these parties; let us distinguish the three parties as ‘speaker’, ‘addressee’, ‘undertaker’.

In example (6) the addressee and the one performing the requested activity are both the king (speaker ≠ addressee = undertaker).

(6) र्ग्याल-པོ་གཤེགས་པར་གསོལ་ནས།  
rgyal-po gšegs-par gsol-nas  //  
king go\HON-NMLZ.TRM request-CVB.ELA //

They asked the king to come. (Rama A 115)

In example (7) the one requesting and the one performing the requested activity are both Lakṣana (speaker = undertaker ≠ addressee).

(7) གཅུང་ལག་ཤ་ནས་སྔར་བརྒལ་བར་གསོལ་ནས༎  
gčuṅ Lag-śa-nas sṅar brgal-bar  //  
younger.brother Lakṣana.ERG first-TRM cross-NMLZ-TRM

gsol-nas // request\HON-CVB.ELA //

The younger brother Lakṣana asked to cross first. (Rama A 314-315)

In example (8) the Devaputras are requesting a boon from Mahadeva, when the goddess of speech interferes. The request is for supernatural abilities; since no action is requested it is not meaningful for either the speaker or addressee to undertake the requested action (speaker ≠ addressee, no undertaker).

(8) གང་ལ་མདའ་འཕངས་ཕོག་ཆིང་འགུམ་བར་གསོལ་བར་བསམས་པ་དང་། མདའ་དང་པོ་འཕང་སྟེ་འགུམ་བར། ལྷ་མོས་བསྒྱུར་ཏོ༎  
gaṅ-la mdaḥ ḏphaṅs phog-čhiṅ ḩgum-bar gsol-bar  //  
who-ALL arrow shoot.PST hit.PST-CVB.CONT die-NMLZ.TRM request-NMLZ.TRM

bsams-pa-daṅ / mdaḥ daṅ-po ḩphaṅ-ste ḩgum-bar /  
think.PST-NMLZ-ASS / arrow first shoot.PST-CVB.SF die-NMLZ.TRM /

lha-mos bsgyur-to //  
goddess.ERG change.PST-FIN //

‘They intended to ask that whoever they shot would be hit lethally, but the goddess changed it so the first arrow they shot would be lethal.’ (Rama A 52-54)
In sum, the co-reference relations among the speaker, addressee and undertaker are in no way encoded by this construction.

3 The verb གནང་ gnaṅ ‘agree, grant’

The verb གནང་ gnaṅ ‘agree, grant’ also governs both infinitives and terminative verbal nouns, but the obvious division of labor that worked in the case of ཁྲེལ་ gsol ‘request’ with infinitives in direct speech and terminative verbal nouns in the narrative frame, does not here obtain. Instead, the present infinitive construction is used when the subordinate verb is intransitive and its sole argument is the same as the agent of གནང་ gnaṅ (§3.1), whereas if either of these criteria is not met, we instead find the terminative verbal noun construction (§3.2).

3.1 Present infinitives with the matrix verb གནང་ gnaṅ

All examples of the verb གནང་ gnaṅ ‘agree, grant’ governing infinitives in Version I of the Old Tibetan Rāmāyana happen to take the motion verb གཤེགས་ gśegs ‘go, come’ as their subordinate verb. Nonetheless, as we will see when we look at the distribution of terminative verbal nouns governed by གནང་ gnaṅ ‘agree, grant’, it seems likely that the plot of the story and not some grammatical constraint is the reason that we see infinitives only with this verb. The intransitivity of the subordinate verb is probably the salient factor.

(9) མྱི་འགྲོ་འོ་ཞེས་བྱུང་ནས། གཤེགས་མ་གནང་ངོ།

«myi ḥgro-ḥo » žes byuṅ-nas // gśegsu ma
«NEG go\PRS-FIN » QUOT arise\PST-CVB.ELA // go\HON.CVB.TRM NEG
gnaṅ-ḥo //
gnaṅ\HON-FIN //

He said: ‘I shall not go’ and did not agree to go. (Rama A 35)

(10) མ་ཧ་དེ་བ་ནི། གཤེགས་གནང་བ་ཡང་མྱི་འདྲའ་ན།

Ma-ha-de-ba nī gśegsu gnaṅ-ba yaṅ myi
Mahadeva NF go\HON.CVB.TRM grant\HON-NMLZ WF NEG

ḥdraḥ-na //
seem-CVB.LOC //

‘It doesn’t seem like Mahadeva will agree to come.’ (Rama A 37)
‘Would you nephews agree to go to Laṅkāpūra sometime?’ (Rama A 8)

Looking for other examples of the present infinitive construction in the text, we find that among the verbs that Garrett et al. (2013) give as governing this construction our text offers only byed ‘do’ and this only in one instance.

The horse-head ‘swoosh’ was cut off. [The demon] lost his magical power. He swayed to and fro and made (as if) to fall on the army of the men and monkeys. (Rama A 319-20)

So, it is fair to say that co-reference between the subject of the super-ordinate and subordinate verb is part of the meaning of the present infinitive construction.

3.2 *Terminative verbal nouns with the matrix verb*  གནང་ gnaṅ

The terminative verbal noun is used whenever one of the two conditions (viz. coreference and intransitivity, §3.1) calling for the present infinitive construction do not obtain. Thus, we have
examples of co-reference but with transitive subordinate verbs (§3.2.1) and examples with intransitives but no co-reference (example 20).6

3.2.1 *Examples of co-reference, but with transitive subordinate clauses*

In example (14) the speaker, a Ṛṣi, agrees to himself accept in marriage Meghasenā, the daughter of Man-lya-pan-ta.

(14) Ḍīb gyi bu mo yan // kha b-du bžes par gna-n-no žes
you-GEN girl WF // wife-TRM take-NMLZ-TRM grant\HON-FIN QUOT
byu-n-nas // occur-CVB.ELA //

‘I consent to take your daughter as consort,’ he replied. (Rama A 1)

In example (15) the addressees, the Devaputra, are asked to agree to themselves take revenge against the gods.

(15) Tsa bo khyed kyi lan glan ži lha rmams //
nephew you.HON-ERG answer answer-CVB.CONT god PL //

kha gdag par ji gna-n žes gsol pa las
kha gdag-NMLZ-TRM what grant\HON QUOT request-NMLZ-ABL //

‘Would you agree to take revenge and vanquish the gods?’ he asked. (Rama A 20-21)

In (16) it is both Rama who does not agree and Rama who would rule (if he agreed to).

(16) Ṛgyal srid mdzad par myi gna-n-na yan // ...
reign do-NMLZ-TRM NEG grant\HON-CVB.LOC WF // ...

‘Even if you don’t agree to reign […]’ (Rama A 88-89)

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6 An anonymous referee proposes that examples (14)-(17) do not necessarily involve co-reference, and thus one can thus draw the stronger conclusion that the infinitive is used for coreference and the terminative verbal noun is used for switch-reference. I remain open minded about the possibility of this analysis, but believe it is appropriate for me to stay with the weaker analysis and hope that the referee will pursue this matter elsewhere.
In a letter to king Rama, Hanumān requests that Rama does not rebuke him.

(17) \[
\text{bkaḥ myi ḥub-par jī gnaṅ žes gsol-nas}
\]
word NEG send down.FUT-NMLZ.TRM what grant\HON QUOT request-CVB.ELA

‘Would you agree not to rebuke me?’ he asked. (Rama A 351-352)

3.2.2 Examples where there is no co-reference between the one agreeing and the one acting

In examples (18) and (19) the addressee is asked to agree to let the speaker(s) do something. In both examples the subordinate verb is transitive.

(18) \[
\text{bdag nī chags ḥog-gi blon-po bgyid-par jī gnaṅ żes}
\]
me NF shoe below-GEN minister do.PRS-NMLZ.TRM what grant

‘... would you allow me to act as minister under your shoe?’ (Rama A 88-89)

(19) \[
\text{lha-mo-la pyag ḥtshal-bar jī gnaṅ żes gsol-pa-dāṅ //}
queen-ALL salute do-NMLZ.TRM what grant'HON QUOT request-NMLZ-ASS //

‘Would you allow us to salute the queen?’ they asked. (Rama A 414-415)

In example (20) a demon accidentally asks for the boon of sleep. The one granting the boon and the one sleeping are not the same. This example is intransitive.

(20) \[
\text{re sig-na srin-po Bum-rna žes bya-ba // spun sems šan}
\]
while ART-LOC demon Many-Eared QUOT do-NMLZ // fellow creatures

‘... would you allow me to act as minister under your shoe?’ (Rama A 88-89)
'Once there was a demon named ‘Many-Eared’ who practised to acquire the power to eat all fellow creatures but, by the power of the gods, a goddess of speech transformed onto his tongue tip and changed [his request] into ‘would you allow me to sleep,’ whence he would sleep all the time.’ (Rama A 301-303)

The goddess of speech also interfered with the wording of a request for a boon earlier in the narrative (example (21)). This example includes both གནང་ gnaṅ and གསོལ་ gsol as matrix verbs. The verb བགྱིད་ bgyid ‘do’, which is subordinate to གནང་ gnaṅ, is transitive.

Example (22) is interesting because the second person addressee is potentially co-referenced as the subject of མཇལ་པར་ mjal-par and it is not entirely obvious whether མཇལ་པར་ mjal-par should be considered a transitive or intransitive verb. Nonetheless, since the terminative verbal noun is not used when both the subordinate verb is intransitive and there is coreference between the subjects of the matrix and subordinate verbs, we can conclude from the use of the terminative verbal noun that either the verb མཇལ་ mjal is transitive (‘you consent to meet me’) or at least that there is no coreference (‘you consent to us meeting’).
‘If it were not an option not to meet, would you consent to meeting once?’ (Rama A 380-381)

4 Conclusions

In conclusion, future infinitives constitute a sort of passive that can be used as a polite imperative and present infinitives require an intransitive subordinate verb and coreference between the agent of the matrix verb and the sole argument of the subordinate verb. When neither the future or present infinitive are appropriate, the terminative verbal noun is used.

ABBREVIATIONS

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REFERENCES


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