

Accusative alignment in the Old Tibetan switch reference system

Nathan W. Hill

Trinity College Dublin

The use of ལྷོ་ *-nas* to mark cross-clausal co-reference in Version I of the Old Tibetan *Rāmāyaṇa* reveals accusative alignment in Tibetan syntax, which in turn vindicates the notion of ‘subject’ applied to Tibetan.

1 Tibetan ergativity

Already Hans Conon von der Gabelentz recognized Tibetan as an ergative language, writing that the “ausschliessende Gebrauch der passiven statt der activen Redeweise findet regelmässig bei allen Transitiven statt im Tibetischen” (1861, 543). Bishop Pierre-Philippe Giraudeau even more clearly expresses Tibetan ergativity writing that “[n]ominativus qui facit actionem verbi habentis complementum, ceu *nominativus instrumentalis* aut *agens*” (Giraudeau 1916: iv, emphasis in original). Most work on Tibetan ergativity has focussed on the Lhasa dialect (Chang and Shefts 1980, DeLancey 1982, Tournadre 1991, Tournadre 1996), but there is also research on ergativity in Classical Tibetan (Andersen 1987, 280-284, Sato 1994).¹ Nonetheless, the existing research limits its scope to the description of morphological ergativity. Whether or not Tibetan is syntactically ergative or accusative (Dixon 1994: 143-181) appears not yet to have received attention. The goal of this essay is to show that Old Tibetan is syntactically accusative, i.e. with an S/A pivot (ibid., 171-175).² 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).³

2 The Co- and Switch Reference system

Although pedagogical grammars still fail to acknowledge the Tibetan system of co- and switch reference, this system has begun slowly to receive attention in specialized research (Andersen 1987, Zadoks 2000, Zadoks 2002, Haller 2009, Beer 2019). The key to the co- and switch reference system is the use of ལྷོ་ *-nas* to mark continuity of reference versus ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ *-pa-dan* to mark a change of reference. Example 1 gives a good feel for the Tibetan co- and switch reference system in action.

¹ Vollmann (2008) provides a detailed historiographical account of Tibetan ergativity.

² According to Dixon, other languages that are morphologically ergative but syntactically accusative include Watmajari, Hindi, Basque, Avar, and Enga (ibid.).

³ Manuscript A has the shelf mark IOL Tib J 0737-1 and manuscript D the shelf mark IOL Tib J 0737-3.

- (1) བདག་རྒྱུད་ན།། སྤྱི་ལུ་གསུམ་མཚེས་པ།། རྒྱུད་གདའ་བ་དང་བྲོས་ནས། ད་ལྟར་འོ་གྲོང་ཡ་བི་ན་མཚེས་ཏེ།

bdagī druñ-na // sprehu gsum mčhis-pa // khyed
 \HUM.GEN front-LOC // monkey three-ABS is\HON-NMLZ // you
gdah-ba-dañ broś-nas /
 be.present-NMLZ-ASS flee\PST-CVB.ELA /
da-ltar ri-grod ya-bi-na mčhiste /
 now.TRM mountains yonder-LOC is\HON.CVB.SF /

'Near me there were three monkeys. You came and (པ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ*) they fled and (ནས་ *-nas*) now they are on yonder mountain'. (Rama A 180-181)

Here, the three monkeys are the sole argument of the first clause. A switch in reference occurs between the second and third clauses, from 'you' as the sole argument to the monkeys as sole argument –“you (sole argument) came and (པ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ*) they (sole argument) fled.”Between the third and fourth clauses there is a co-reference; the monkeys fled and (ནས་ *-nas*) then as the sole argument of the final clause, “they abide on yonder mountain.”

Andersen (1987, 290-292) draws attention to the use of པ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ* to mark switch reference—to block zero anaphora in his description—but he does not discuss the function of ་ནས་ *-nas* to mark co-reference. I neither attended Zadoks' 2000 presentation nor do I have any associated handout; unfortunately, I can only point out that his talk was likely relevant to the topic at hand. I do have the handout from Zadoks' 2002, despite not attending the talk. Here Zadoks refers to ་ནས་ *-nas* as marking 'continuity' and པ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ* as marking 'discontinuity'. In Haller's (2009) contribution to the examination of Tibetan switch reference, he classifies Tibetan verbs into eight groups according to the semantic roles of the noun phrases that they govern; this analysis gives him 64 different types of verb pairs.¹ I find his approach cumbersome and opaque, but it does yield him the discoveries that controlability and a certain hierarchy of the semantic roles is relevant. Beer provides a clear and simple analysis; he concludes that “*-nas* indicates co-reference, whereas *-pa dang* and *-pa las* indicate switch-reference, the latter with an added meaning of surprise” (2019, 256). One way or another, these authors all assemble the evidence necessary to show that Tibetan is syntactically accusative and they come close to saying so.² However, because they fall short of explicitly offering this analysis, there is merit in here presenting a case for this conclusion.

3 ་ནས་ *-nas* for co-reference

In exhibiting the use of ་ནས་ *-nas* to mark cross-clausal co-reference, we can distinguish four situations:

¹ Haller attended Zadoks' 2000 talk but does not cite this talk in his 2009 paper.

² In addition to the references given in text, an anonymous referee draws my attention to a project 'Semantic roles, case relations, and cross-clausal reference in Tibetan', at Tübingen University (2002-2008). Unfortunately, this project appears to have published no results regarding ་ནས་ *-nas* or པ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ*.

1. an agent (A) in one clause is followed by a co-referential sole argument (S) in the next clause,
2. a sole argument (S) in one clause is followed by a co-referential agent (A) in the next clause.
3. an agent in one clause (A) is followed by a co-referential agent (A) in the next clause, and
4. a sole argument in one clause (S) is followed by a co-referential sole argument (S) in the next clause.

The first (A/S) and second (S/A) patterns suffice to demonstrate syntactic accusativity, whereas the third (A/A) and fourth (S/S) are not germane to Tibetan’s syntactic alignment typology. As such, it suffices here to discuss only the first (§3.1) and second (§3.2) types in detail. Nonetheless, for the sake of completeness I offer one clear example of each of the third and fourth type.

In example 2 ‘you’ is the agent of both ‘deceive’ and ‘kill’.

- (2) །ཚོད་ཀོ་བདག་ལ་མཐོ་འཚོ་མམ། དཀྱའ་བྱེད་པ་འདྲའ་སྟེ། བསྐྱ་བསྐྱ་ནས། བདག་དེ་ལུ་བསད་ཀྱིས་བྱས་པ་དང་།།
 « *khyod ko bdag-la mtho htsham-mam / dkuḥ byed-pa*
 « thou FOC I\hum-ALL. superior be.fitting-INTERR / trick do\PRS-NMLZ
ḥdraḥ-ste / bslu-bslu-nas / bdag deḥu bsad » čhes
 seem-CVB.SF / deceive-CVB.ELA / I\HUM almost kill\PST » QUOT
byas-pa-daṅ //
 do\PST-NMLZ-ASS //

‘You think you are better than me? You seem to use ruses. You have deceived me again and again and (ཉོས་ -nas) you have almost killed me.’ (Rama A 197-198)

In example 3 Hanuman is the sole argument of both ‘sneak’ and ‘jump’.

- (3) ཉུ་ཐུ་མན་ཏ་འཇབ་འཇབ་ནས། མཐོངས་ནས་མཚོང་སྟེ།
Ha-nu-man-ta ḥjab ḥjab-nas / mthoṅs-nas mčhoṅ-ste /
 Hanuman sneaking sneak-CVB.ELA / window-ELA jump-CVB.SF /

Hanuman approached stealthily and (ཉོས་ -nas) jumped through the window. (Rama A 245)

3.1 Co-reference of an agent and sole argument

The examples in this section show a transitive agent in one clause being carried over to a second clause as the sole argument of an intransitive verb; ཉོས་ -nas follows the first of these two verbs, to mark the co-reference.

In examples 4 and 5, characters speak and then leave the scene.

- (4) 「...」 ཞེས་ མཚི་ནས་མཚིས་པ་དང་།
 «...» *žes mčhi-nas mčhis-pa-daṅ /*

«...» QUOT say.PST-CVB.ELA go-NMLZ-ASS /

He spoke thus and (ཉལ་ -nas) he went away and... (Rama A 143-144)

- (5) ལྷ་འི་བུ་རྣམས་ན་རེ། 「...」 ལྷུས་ནས་འདོད་ལོ།
lhañ bu rnams na-re / «...» smras-nas / doñ-ño //
 god.GEN son PL RSP / «...» say-CVB.ELA / go.away-FIN //

The Devaputras said, ‘...’ and (ཉལ་ -nas) they went. (Rama A 21-22)

In example 6 the agent of ‘take hold’, is co-referenced with the sole argument ‘ascend’ (i.e. climb and go) and the sole argument ‘arrive’.

- (6) དུར་པ་སོང་བ་འི་ཕྱི་བཞིན། གཞིག་གི་མཚུག་མ་ལ་གཞིག་འཇུས་ནས། བྲག་ལ་འཛོགས་སྟེ་སོང་ནས། ཕྱགས་ཕྱིན་ན།
nur-pa soñ-bañ pyi-bzin / gčhig-gñ mjug-ma-la gčhig
 duck go.away-NMLZ.GEN approach-CONT / one-GEN tail-ALL one
ñjus-nas / brag-la ðdzegs-ste soñ-nas / pugsu
 grab-CVB.ELA / rocky.pass climb-CVB.SF go.away-CVB.ELA / extreme.TRM
pyin-na /
 approach-CVB.LOC /

[The three monkeys] followed the ducks, each one taking hold of the tail of one [bird] and (ཉལ་ -nas) they ascended the rock and (ཉལ་ -nas) arrived at its extreme end. (Rama A 220-221)

This example shows how the co- and switch reference system allows Tibetan to avoid repeating sole arguments and agents. It is precisely the participant that does *not* actually appear in a clause that is the centre of attention. The explicit mention of the argument in question ‘the three monkeys’ is inherited from six clauses back.

3.2 Co-reference of a sole argument and an agent

In three examples, the sole argument of an intransitive verb in the first clause is carried over to the second clause as the agent of the transitive verb, again with ཉལ་ -nas following the first of the two verbs.

In example 7 a character arrives on the scene, before saying or doing something.

- (7) དེ་ནས་ལྷུ་པ་དེ། ལྷ་འི་བུ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་བྱུང་བུ་འོངས་ནས། ལྷ་འི་བུ་རྣམས་ལ། 「...」 ཞེས་བྱས་པ་དང་།
de-nas (U-pa-de) // lha-ñ bu rnams-kyi druñ-du hoñs-nas
 that-ELA Upade // god-GEN son PL-GEN before-TRM come\PST-CVB.ELA
// lha-ñ bu rnams-la / « ... » źes byas-pa-dañ //
// god-GEN son PL-ALL / « ... » QUOT do\PST-NMLZ-ASS //

Then Upade came before the Devaputras and (ཉལ་ -nas) said to the Devaputras, ... (Rama A 35-38)

In example 8, since འོངས་ *hoṅs* ‘come’ is intransitive and བུ་ *bul* ‘give’ is transitive, the converb ནས་ *-nas* appears to mark the co-reference of a sole argument and an agent.

(8) བུ་མོ་ཁྲིད་དེ་འོངས་ནས་བུ་ལ་བ་དང་།

bu-mo khrid-de hoṅs-nas bul-ba-daṅ //
 girl lead-CVB.SF come\PST-CVB.ELA offer-NMLZ-ASS //

[he] brought his daughter and (ནས་ *-nas*) offered her. (Rama D 39-40)

However, it is perhaps also possible to understand ཁྲིད་དེ་འོངས་ *khrid-de hoṅs* as a serial verb construction meaning ‘bring’. In this case, one would understand ནས་ *-nas* as marking the co-reference of an agent with an agent.

Example 9 is somewhat complex, but for our purpose the essential is that སྐྱོད་ *khros* ‘be angry’ is intransitive and བོར་ *bor* ‘cast’ is transitive, and that Prahasti is both the one enraged and the one who curses.

(9) སྤྱི་ཉེ་སྤྱི་ཁོས་ནས། །ང་ཡང་ཕན་བར་དགའ་སྤྱི་དོས་སྤྱི་བྱིན་ན་སྤྱི་འདོད་ན
 །སྤྱི་འདོད་ ཆེས་བྱས་པས་ཚག་མོད། །ངན་པ་སྤྱི་ཉེ་དང་འདྲའ་བ། ཞེས་སྤྱི་ན་བརྗོད་ཇི་དགོས།
 ཞེད་ནམ་ཆེག་ན་སྤྱི་ཉེ་གྲིས་བརྒྱལ་པར་གྱུར་ཆེག། ཆེས་དམོད་པ་བོར་རོ།

Pra-ha-ste khros-nas / « na yaṅ phan-bar
 Prahasti be.angry-CVB.ELA / « me ...FOC assist-NMLZ.TRM
dgaḥ-ste dños-grub byin-na myi ḥdod-na « myi ḥdod »
 be.delighted-CVB.SF siddhi give-CVB.LOC NEG want-CVB.LOC « NEG want »
čhes byas-pas čhog mod // « ṅan-pa spreḥu-daṅ ḥdraḥ-ba »
 QUOT do-NMLZ.AGN may necessary // « villainous monkey-ASS seem-NMLZ »
žes skyon brjod ji dgos ? // khyed nam čhig-na spreḥu-gyis
 QUOT criticise what reason ? // thou when ART-LOC monkey-AGN
brlag-par gyur-čhig ! » čhes dmod-pa bor-ro //
 destroy-NMLZ.TRM become-IMP ! » QUOT curse cast-FIN //

Prahasti became angry and (ནས་ *-nas*) said, 'Even I was delighted to assist - if you do not desire to give the siddhi, it suffices to say that you do not desire to. Why is it necessary to speak ill, saying 'villainous as a monkey'? May you once be destroyed by a monkey!' So he cursed them. (Rama A 45-47)

4 ་དང་ *-pa-daṅ* to mark switch reference

We have now seen evidence that ་དང་ *-nas*, by identifying a transitive agent in one clause with an intransitive sole argument in an adjacent clause, exhibits accusative alignment. It would perhaps strengthen the case for this pattern if one coupled it with the claim that a transitive agent or intransitive sole argument on either side of ་དང་ *-pa-daṅ* are *never* coreferential. This claim does appear to hold for Version I of the Old Tibetan *Rāmāyaṇa*.

In a manner analogous to that seen in the treatment of རྣམ་ -nas above, in exhibiting the use of ལོ་དོ་ *pa-dañ* to mark cross-clausal switch reference, we can distinguish four situations:

1. an agent (A) in one clause is followed by a distinct sole argument (S) in the next clause
2. a sole argument (S) in one clause is followed by a distinct agent (A) in the next clause.
3. an agent in one clause (A) is followed by a distinct agent (A) in the next clause, and
4. a sole argument in one clause (S) is followed by a distinct sole argument (S) in the next clause.

All four types help to show that ལོ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ* marks cross-clausal switch reference, so examples of each type are given in turn.

4.1 Switch reference from an agent to a sole argument

Example 10 (which continues example 8) shows a switch from the father as agent of བྱེད་ *bul* ‘offer’ to the Seer as the sole argument of དགྲེས་ *dgyes* ‘be pleased’.

(10) ལུ་མོ་ཁྲིད་དེ་འོངས་ནས་བྱེད་པ་དང་། ལྷོ་སྲོང་རབ་དུ་མྱོ་དགྲེས།

bu-mo khrid-de hoñs-nas bul-ba-dañ // drañ-sroñ
 girl lead\pst-cvb.sf come\pst-cvb.ela offer\pst-nmlz-ass // seer
rab-du myĩ dgyeste/
 very-trm neg pleased\pres-cvb.sf /

He brought his daughter and offered her and (ལོ་དོ་ *pa-dañ*) the seer was very displeased.
 (Rama D 40)

4.2 Switch reference from a sole argument to an agent

Version I of the Old Tibetan *Rāmāyana* only offers one clear example of this type. In this example (11) shows a switch from ‘my father’, inherited from a previous clause, as the sole agent of འདུག་ *hdug* ‘sit’ and the demon as agent of འཕངས་ *hphañs* ‘throw’.

(11) ངལ་མོ་ཞིང་འདུག་པ་དང་། སྲིན་པོས་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་གླུ་ལུ་མ་དམར་པོ་གཞིག་འཕངས་པ་དང་།

ñal so-ziñ hdug-pa-dañ / srin-pos lcags-kyi thu-lum dmar-po
 rest recover-cvb.sem sit-nmlz-ass / demon.agn iron-gen lump red
gčhig hphañs-pa-dañ //
 ART throw-nmlz-ass //

‘(My father) sat resting and (ལོ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ*) the demon threw down a lump of red iron ...’
 (Rama A 236)

4.3 Switch reference from an agent to another agent

Examples of this type are the easiest to find. In example 12, the agent before ལོ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ* is the younger brother Lakṣmaṇa and the agent after ལོ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ* is the older brother Rama.

- (12) གཞུང་སྐྱེས་ཏེ་བཟུང་ཞེས་བགྲིས་པ་དང་། གཞུང་གི་ཞེས་པ་དང་།
 「འདི་སེམས་ཚན་ཉམ་ཐག་པ་ཞིག་གི་ཁྱེད་ལ་ཡིན་ཏེ། བཙོན་གྱིས་མ་འཐུང་ཤིག། ཆེས་བགྲིས་པ་དང་།
gčun skyem-ste bthuñ zes bgyis-pa-dañ /
 younger.brother be.thirsty-CVB.SF drink QUOT do-NMLZ-ASS /
gčhen-gyi źal-nas « hdi sems-čhan ñam thag-pa źig-gi khu-ba
 older brother-GEN face-ELA « this being injured ART-GEN fluid
yin-te / brtsog-gis ma hthuñ-śig ! » čhes bgyis-pa-dañ
 is-CVB.SF / be wicked-CVB.AGN NEG drink-CVB.IMP ! » QUOT do.PST-NMLZ-ASS
 //
 //

The younger brother, being thirsty, made as to drink and (ལོ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ*) the elder brother said: 'This is the fluid of a being who has been injured. It is impure. Do not drink it!' (Rama A 171-173)

The reference in example 13 moves from the Devaputras who are the agent of བསམས་ *bsams* 'think' to the goddess who changes their request as the agent of བསྐྱེད་ *bsgyur* 'change'.

- (13) གང་ལ་མདའ་འཕངས་ཕོག་ཆེད་འགྲུམ་བར་གསོལ་བར་བསམས་པ་དང་།
 མདའ་དང་ཕོ་འཕངས་སྟེ་འགྲུམ་བར། ལྷ་མོས་བསྐྱེད་ཏེ།
gañ-la mdaḥ hphañs phog-čhiñ ḥgum-ba gsol-bar
 who-ALL arrow shoot.PST hit.PST-CVB.CONT die-NMLZ.TRM submit-NMLZ.TRM
bsams-pa-dañ / mdaḥ dañ po hphañ-ste ḥgum-bar /
 think.PST-NMLZ-ASS / arrow first shoot.PST-CVB.SF die-NMLZ.TRM /
lha-mos bsgyur-to //
 goddess.AGN change.PST-FIN //

They intended to ask that whoever they shot would be hit lethally (ལོ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ*), but the goddess changed it so the first arrow they shot would be lethal. (Rama A 52-54)

In example 14, Upade is the agent of བྱས་ *byas* 'do', with ལོ་དོ་ *-pa-dañ* then marking a switch in reference to the Devaputras as the agents of སྐྱོད་ *smras* 'say'.

- (14) དེ་ནས་ལྷ་པ་དེ། ལྷ་འི་བྱ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་དྲུང་དུ་འོངས་ནས། ལྷ་འི་བྱ་རྣམས་ལ། 「...」 ཞེས་བྱས་པ་དང་།
 ལྷ་འི་བྱ་རྣམས་ན་དེ། 「...」 ཆེས་སྐྱོད་སོ་
De-nas (U-pa-de) // lha-ñi. bu rnams-kyi druñ-du hoñs-nas
 that-ELA Upade // god-GEN son PL-GEN before-TRM come\|PST-CVB.ELA //
lha-ñi bu rnams-la / « ... » zes byas-pa-dañ // lha-ñi bu //
 god-GEN son PL-ALL / « ... » QUOT do\|PST-NMLZ-ASS // god-GEN son

rnams-na-re / «...» *čhes smras-so*
 PL-RSP / «...» QUOT say\PST-FIN

Then Upade came before the Devaputras. She said to the Devaputras (*པ་དཱ་ཎ་ -pa-dañ*), ...
 The Devaputras then said, ... (Rama A 35-39)

In example 15, *པ་དཱ་ཎ་ -pa-dañ* marks a switch from the ones closing their eyes, i.e. the agents of *བཏུམས་ btsums* ‘close’, to the woman commanding them, the agent of *གསུང་ gsuñ* ‘say’.

- (15) 「དམྱིག་ཚུམས་!」 ཤེས་བྱུང་། དམྱིག་བཏུམས་པ་དང་། 「ད་དམྱིག་བྱེ།」 ཞེས་གསུང
 « *dmyig tshums !* » *śes byuñ / dmyig btsums-pa-dañ / « da dmyig pye !*
 « eye close.IMP ! » QUOT occur / eye close-NMLZ-ASS / « now eye open !
 » *žes gsuñ*
 » QUOT say

She said, 'Close your eyes!' and (*པ་དཱ་ཎ་ -pa-dañ*) they closed their eyes. She said, 'Now, open your eyes!' (Rama A 224)

Example 16 (which continues example 11) shows a switch from the demon as agent of *འཕངས་ hphañs* ‘throw’ and ‘my father’ as the agent of *དཔྱད་ dpyad* ‘conclude’.

- (16) སྲིན་པོས་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྤུལ་དམར་པོ་གཟིག་འཕངས་པ་དང་།
 བདག་པ་འཇིག་ལམ་ན་ཁ་ཟས་ཤིག་ཡིན་བར་དབྱད་ནས། ཟེས་པ་ལས། སྲིད་ཚིག་ནས་ཤི་སྟེ།
 སྲིན་པོས་ལྷ་མོ་ཁྲིད་དེ་སོང་ངོ་ཞེས་ཟེར་རོ།
srin-pos lcags-kyi thu-lum dmar-po gčhig hphañs-pa-dañ // bdaḡi
 demon.AGN iron-GEN lump red ART throw-NMLZ-ASS // me.GEN
pha hi sñiñ-lam-na kha-zas śig yin-bar dpyad-nas /
 father-GEN mind-LOC food ART be-NMLZ.TRM inspect-CVB.ELA /
zos-pa-las / sñiñ tshig-nas śi-ste // srin-pos lha-mo
 eat-NMLZ-ELA / heart burn-CVB.ELA die-CVB.SF // demon.AGN queen
khriḡ-de soñ-ño žes zer-ro//
 lead-CVB.SF go away-FIN QUOT say-FIN //

The demon threw down a lump of red iron and (*པ་དཱ་ཎ་ -pa-dañ*) my father concluded in his mind that it was food. He ate it. His heart was burned, and he died. The demon took the queen away’ (Rama A 236-238)

4.4 Switch reference from a sole argument to another sole argument

Example 17 shows a switch from Brahma as sole argument of *གཤེགས་ gśegs* ‘go’ to the devaputras as sole argument of *ཡི་ཚད་ yi čhad* ‘disappointed’.

- (17) ཚོངས་པས་བཀའ་སླུལ་དཔ། 「...」 ཚེས་གསུངས་ནས་ཕྱིད་ཚེས་གཤེགས་པ་དང་།
ལྷ་འི་བྱ་རྣམས་ཡི་ཚད་དེ། མ་ཉ་དེ་བའི་དངོས་གྲུབ་བསྐྱབས་སོ།

Tshans-pas bkah stald-pa // « ... » čhes gsuñs-nas phyod
Brahma.ERG word speak\PST-NMLZ // « ... » QUOT speak\HON-CVB.ELA haste
čhes gśegs-pa-dañ // lha-ñi bu rnams yi čhad-de /
QUOT go\NMLZ-ASS // god-GEN son PLR mind cut-CVB.SEM /
Ma-ha-de-ba-ñi dños-grub bsgrubso //
Mahadeva-GEN siddhi accomplish\PST.CV.FIN //

Brahma said: `...' saying thus, he left with great haste and (པ་དང་ -*pa-dañ*) the Devaputras were disappointed and tried to achieve the siddhi of Mahadeva. (Rama A 30-31)

In example 18, somewhat complex, what is important for our current concern is that the herbs pricked but the brothers awoke.

- (18) དལ་སོ་ཞིང་གཞི་ལ་སྐྱོམ་ཚུགས་བཆས་པ་ལས། གཉིད་ལོག་ནས།
དབྱར་དང་པོ་སྐྱེས་པ་འི་རྩ་གཞི་ལ་ཁྲིས་པ་སྣང་བྱུག་པ་དང་སད་དེ།

ñal so-ñin gži-la skom-tshugs bčhas-pa-las / gñid log-nas /
weary so-ART bow-ALL support make-NMLZ-ABL / sleep return-CVB.ELA /
dbyar dañ-po skyes-pañi rtswa gži-la khri-pa snar
summer first be born-NMLZ.GEN herbs bow-ALL wind-NMLZ nose.TRM
zug-pa-dañ sad-de //
pierce-NMLZ-ASS awake-CVB.SF //

They rested and placed their chins on their bows. They fell asleep and woke up when herbs which had grown in the beginning of the summer, had wound around the bow and pricked into their noses and (པ་དང་ -*pa-dañ*) they awoke. (Rama A 167-168)

Note that whereas `prick' in English is typically transitive, the Tibetan verb ཚུག་ *zug* is intransitive (Hill 2010, 258).

5 Conclusion: The cross clausal indexing of subjecthood

In noting that the Tibetan grammatical tradition lacks a notion corresponding to the ‘subject’ of occidental grammar Tournadre remarks that this is appropriate since the notion of the subject “est particulièrement inadéquat pour décrire la structure de leur langue” (1996: 74). Nonetheless, we have seen that, at least with reference to the patterns of co-reference indicated by the converb ལྷོས་ -*nas*, Tibetan treats sole arguments of intransitive clauses and agents of transitive clauses identically. Thus, in this context an analysis that collapses the distinction of sole arguments and agents under the term ‘subject’ will increase the elegance of the description at no loss of accuracy. In other words, ལྷོས་ -*nas* marks a continuity in the subject across two clauses and Tibetan is a syntactically accusative language.

This conclusion contradicts that of Dixon (1994, 155), who cites Andersen's remark that “Tibetan is a pivotless language” (Andersen 1987, 306). Andersen does not discuss རྩོམ་ -nas, the subject of this essay, basing his conclusion on a number of considerations not touched on here. The behavior of རྩོམ་ -nas certainly exhibits syntactic acusativity, but future research must contextualize this finding within a comprehensive account of the syntax of Tibetan clause chaining morphology.

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