

TANGUT VERBAL AGREEMENT AND THE PATIENT CATEGORY IN TIBETO-BURMAN

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I. *Tangut studies*

Tangut is the dead Tibeto-Burman language of the Buddhist empire of Xīxià, which was destroyed in 1227 by the Golden Horde of the Mongol warlord Temüjin, more commonly known as Genghis Khan (c. 1162–1227). The Tangut empire was established in 1032 and comprised the modern Chinese provinces of Gānsù, Shānxī and Níngxià, extending from the Yellow River in the east to Kōkō Nōr (Chinese: *Qīnghǎi Hú*) in the west. The northern frontier of the Xīxià empire skirted the city of Qumul (Chinese: *Hāmi*), the river Edzin Gol (Chinese: *Ruò Shuǐ*), the Hèlán hills and the Yellow River. In the south, the empire extended down into the present-day province of Sichuān. The Xīxià capital was situated in what is now the city of Yínchuān (formerly Níngxiàfǔ) on the left bank of the Yellow River.

In 1036 the Tangut began using their own indigenous ideogrammatic script which was used for both the translation of Buddhist writings, mainly from Classical Chinese into Tangut, and for the composition of original secular works in the Tangut language. The largest collection of extant Tangut manuscripts was discovered in 1908 hidden inside a stupa in the ruins of the Tangut city of Khara-Khoto by an expedition of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society led by Colonel Pëtr Kuz'mič Kozlov, whence they were taken to Saint Petersburg, currently Leningrad. Since then, they have been kept in the library of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences.

Because Tangut was written in an ideogrammatic script, the study of Tangut phonology has always presented a daunting task. Internal sources for the reconstruction of Tangut phonology are threefold:

(1) The indigenous Tangut rime tables date from 1173 and are entitled 𐰇𐰏𐰍𐰎𐰏 *Nwə¹ ?ei² we² mbu¹*, which, according to Sergej Evgenievič Jaxontov (personal communication, Leningrad, 26 June 1990), translates literally as 'The *Fǎnqiè* Spellings and Rimes of the Five Sounds',¹ whereby 𐰇 *?ei²* 'sounds' in this context denotes 'classes of consonants'. The Tangut rime tables are set up in much the same way as traditional Chinese rime tables. All five extant editions of the Tangut rime tables are kept in the manuscript department of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Leningrad, where they have been systematically studied since 1985 by Jaxontov and Keping, who are currently preparing for publication both the original texts and their analyses of the rime tables. Appended to one of the five editions of rime tables Ksenija Borisovna Keping has discovered sheaves of annotations in which the original Tangut owner of the book had arranged by rime all Tangut ideograms known to him.

¹ *Razrezanija i rifmy pjati zvukov.*

(2) The 𐰃𐰆𐰏 $?ei^2$ *leu*² with the self-explanatory title of ‘Identical Sounds’ or ‘Homophones’ exists in an 1132 and a revised 1176 edition. In the *Homophones*, the Tangut ideograms are arranged according to nine classes of initials, but the sequential order within a given class of initial, for example velars, is completely random. The *Homophones* have been published in a Chinese edition by Lǐ Fàn wén (1986), based on the earlier, unrevised 1132 text.

(3) The Tangut dictionary entitled 𐰃𐰆𐰏 $?wə^2$ $ηôn^2$ ‘The Sea of Ideograms’ is generally known in scholarly circles by its Chinese name 文海 *Wén Hǎi*. The *Wén Hǎi* consists of three tomes. The first tome contains Tangut ideograms in the level, or first, tone. The second tome contains ideograms in the rising, or second, tone. Within each of these two volumes, the ideograms are rubricized by rime and phonetically defined by means of the *fānqiè* spelling system.

The third tome is entitled 𐰃𐰆𐰏 $?wə^2$ $ηôn^2$ *ndza*¹ *ndte*¹ ‘Miscellaneous Categories of the Sea of Ideograms’, generally referred to by its Chinese name 文海雜類 *Wén Hǎi Zá Lèi*. This third volume contains characters which do not appear to fit the classificatory scheme employed in the *Wén Hǎi* proper and which are rubricized within each tonal category by initial rather than by rime.

The second tome of the *Wén Hǎi* was lost in Leningrad sometime between 1937, when the eminent Russian Tangut scholar Nikolaj Aleksandrovič Nevskij and many other orientalists were taken away and murdered by the communists, and 1956, after the Institute had moved to its present location on Dvorcovaja Naberežnaja and a new generation of scholars had begun to concentrate on Tangut. The first and third tomes have been published in a Russian edition by Keping *et al.* (1969) and in a Chinese edition by Shǐ Jīnbō *et al.* (1983).

Jaxontov (personal communication, Leningrad, 18 and 26 June 1990) explains that the *Wén Hǎi*, contrary to what Sofronov (1968: I, 85) maintains, does not antedate the dated Chinese documents from the year 1124 on the reverse side of which it was printed, but is of later date. Paper was in short supply in the Tangut empire and was obtained from the Chinese by trade as well as by force during raids on Chinese settlements. Tangut wood-block prints, such as the *Wén Hǎi* and *Wén Hǎi Zá Lèi*, were often printed on the back of such stolen paper.

Moreover, Jaxontov furnishes the following philological evidence that the *Wén Hǎi* must also be of later date than the revised 1176 edition of the *Homophones*:

Within each of the two Tangut tones or first two tomes of the *Wén Hǎi*, the author arranged all Tangut ideograms by rime, and within each rime the author divided the ideograms into a group of non-labialized syllables followed by the labialized syllables. Then, in turn, within each of these two groups, the ideograms were arranged by initial. Herein, according to Jaxontov, lies a major contribution of Tangut scholarship to philology, for the *Wén Hǎi* is the first lexicographical source in which ideograms are arranged in a strict order according to phonological principles. In contemporaneous Chinese dictionaries characters were still arranged at random within a given rime group or *shēng*.

The arrangement by initial within the individual rime groups in the *Wén Hǎi*

was based on the order of a Chinese list of consonants which the author had at his disposal. This list is reproduced by Sofronov and Kyčanov (1963: 15). Because the inventory of initial consonants in Tangut and Chinese differed substantially, the author of the *Wén Hǎi* did not differentiate certain pairs of Tangut consonants not distinguished in the Chinese list, most notably the pairs of consonants reconstructed by Sofronov (1968) as $ld \sim l$, $\eta g \sim \eta$, $nd \sim n$ and $mb \sim m$. Furthermore, in closely adhering to the Chinese list, the Tangut author made certain apparently fictitious distinctions which did not obtain in Tangut.

The third tome of the dictionary, the *Wén Hǎi Zá Lèi*, contains all Tangut ideograms representing syllables with the three Tangut initials not appearing in the Chinese list, corresponding to ndz , $nd\dot{z}$ and lh in Sofronov's reconstruction, as well as a number of other ideograms which the author for unknown reasons was unable to classify in the first or second tome of the *Wén Hǎi*. As pointed out above, all ideograms in the *Wén Hǎi Zá Lèi* are divided into the first and second tone, and are arranged by initial, rather than by rime, within each of the two tones. Within a group of ideograms with the same initial, the arrangement of the ideograms is completely random. Jaxontov has discovered that this random pattern of ideograms in the *Wén Hǎi Zá Lèi* is virtually identical to the random sequential order of ideograms in the 1176 revised edition of the *Homophones*.

Finally, there is an untitled Tangut dictionary in manuscript form approximately five metres in length, kept in the manuscript department of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Leningrad. This manuscript is being investigated by Keping; it appears to be either a preliminary draught or another version of the *Wén Hǎi* (personal communication, 27 August 1990).

The main external sources for the reconstruction of Tangut phonology are twofold (Sofronov 1968: I, 70–81):

(1) There are twenty-three manuscript fragments of manuscripts and one fragment of a wood-block print discovered at Khara-Khoto with interlinear Tibetan transcriptions of the Tangut ideograms. This material is described and analysed by van Driem and Keping (forthcoming a, b, c) who are preparing a complete concordance of all known Tibetan transcriptions of Tangut ideograms.

(2) A textbook entitled 很能解疑 張龍 魏 駁 駁 駁 $Mi^2 \dot{z}q^1 \eta wu^1 ndzte^1 mbu^1 pq^1 \eta u^2 nie^2$ 'Tangut-Chinese Timely Pearl in the Palm' was written both for Tangut speakers wishing to learn Chinese and for Chinese desirous of learning Tangut. The pronunciation of Tangut characters is explained in terms of Chinese ideograms and *vice versa*, with the use of additional diacritics, the exact meaning of which was supposed to be explained to the reader by a living instructor. The *Tangut-Chinese Timely Pearl in the Palm* has been published in a Japanese edition (Nishida, 1966), in an American edition by the expatriate Flemish linguist Luc Kwanten (1982), and most recently in a Chinese edition (Zhèng Jiàn huá *et al.*, 1989).

Despite the fruitful and valiant efforts of eminent Tangut scholars such as

Nevskij, Nishida, Sofronov and others, the last word has not been spoken on Tangut phonology. In this article, Tangut forms, including Keping's Cyrillized transcriptions, are given in accordance with Sofronov's reconstruction, using his original inventory of Roman phoneme symbols for Tangut (Sofronov, 1968: I, 138–44). Superscripts indicate tone. A dot beneath a vowel indicates that the vowel belongs to the second or fourth of the four Tangut rime cycles (S. E. Jaxontov, personal communication to Ks. B. Keping and P. K. Benedict, 15 April 1989).

II. Tangut pronominal system

Tangut pronouns and conjugational suffixes have been studied by Keping in her monumental work on Tangut morphology (1985: 42–45, 217–42). According to Keping's studies, the regular Tangut first singular pronoun is 𐰇 ηa^2 'I'. Keping identifies the Tangut form 𐰇 $m\iota o^2$ 'I' as a more formal first singular pronoun often used by high-ranking officials. Sofronov (1968: I, 238–9), however, identifies 𐰇 ηa^2 'I' as the *cāsus rēctus* of the first singular pronoun and 𐰇 $ʔa^1$ 'me' as the *cāsus oblīquus* of the first singular pronoun which occurs before postpositions. In addition, Sofronov, identifies a regal first singular pronoun 𐰇 $ʔi a^1$ 'I'.

Sofronov's readings ηa^2 'I' and $ʔa^1$ 'me' are strikingly similar to the first singular pronouns in some other Tibeto-Burman languages, e.g. Qiāng ηa^1 'I' and $q a^1$ 'me' (Sūn, 1981: 78) or Lohorong ηa 'I' and ka 'I' (the difference in use of ηa and ka is discussed in my forthcoming Lohorong grammar). Here it is of interest to note that the initial /ʔ/ in Sofronov's reconstruction of Tangut phonology is generally rendered by the letter 𐰇 in the Tibetan transcriptions of Tangut texts (Sofronov 1968: II, 99) and for 𐰇 Nishida (1966: 496) reconstructs *yafi*.

The orthographic difference between the ideogram 𐰇 $m\iota o^2$, which Keping identifies with the personal pronoun 'I', and the ideogram 𐰇 $ʔa^1$, which Sofronov identifies as 'me' but Nishida (1966: 496) defines as 'pebbles' and Keping (personal communication, Leningrad, May 1990) accurately defines as 'hunger', lies in the way the right-hand portion of the ideogram is written in the *Wén Hǎi*. In the ideogram 𐰇, reconstructed by Sofronov as $ʔa^1$, the upper of the two horizontal strokes or *héng* in the lower right-hand radical intersects the *shù* on the left and the *gōu* on the right, whereas the lower *héng* intersects neither. Furthermore, the *gōu* is truly a hook with its barb, as it were, facing to the right: 𐰇. On the other hand, the right-hand portion of the ideogram 𐰇, reconstructed by Sofronov as $m\iota o^2$, appears in the *Wén Hǎi* with both upper and lower *héng* in the lower right-hand radical intersecting the *shù* on the left and the *gōu* on the right. The *gōu* ends in a straight downward stroke: 𐰇.

However, in the Tangut translation of the *Sūn Zī Bīng Fǎ*, a Chinese treatise on military strategy dating from the latter part of the Spring and Autumn period of the Zhōu dynasty (Keping, 1979), the ideogram denoting the first person pronoun appears in a form distinct from both of the above: 𐰇. The two *héng* in the lower right-hand radical both intersect the *gōu* on the right but not

the *shù* on the left. The *gōu* is truly hook-shaped with its barb facing right. This third variant suggests that we are dealing with orthographic variation of a single ideogram. The Tangut ideogram may have represented two homophonous words meaning 'I/me' and 'hunger' respectively, like the Chinese character 里 in the modern simplified orthography, or *jiāntǐ zǐ*, which represents both *lǐ* 'inside' and *lǐ* 'Chinese mile'. Alternatively, the Tangut ideogram may have had two distinct readings, as Nishida's (1966: 496) reconstruction would suggest, like Chinese 地, which represents both *dì* 'earth' and the adverbial phrase particle *de*. In this connexion, it should be kept in mind that the comparative evidence adduced above would favour Sofronov's reconstruction $?a^1$ and Nishida's reconstruction *yaŋ* for the first person personal pronoun, rather than Sofronov's reconstruction *mto*² or Nishida's (1966: 496) reconstruction *mafi*.

In the first person plural, Tangut distinguishes an inclusive pronoun 𐞑𐞑 $\eta a^2 mi^2$ 'weⁱ' and an exclusive pronoun 𐞑𐞑 $\eta I^2 mi^2$ 'we^e'. Note that the first component 𐞑 ηa^2 of the first plural inclusive pronoun 𐞑𐞑 $\eta a^2 mi^2$ 'wei' is distinct from the homophonous first singular pronoun 𐞑 ηa^2 'I'. Both the first and second syllables of the first plural inclusive pronoun 𐞑𐞑 $\eta a^2 mi^2$ 'wei' are attested as monosyllabic clitic or short forms in conjunction with another pronoun (Keping, 1985: 48–9).

The Tangut second person singular pronoun is 𐞑 na^2 'you^s'. Tangut also has a more formal, honorific second person pronoun 𐞑 ni^2 'you', also employed as a plural, a usage which Keping has reason to believe to be archaic (1985: 49–51). In twelfth century Tangut, the regular second person plural pronoun is 𐞑𐞑 $ni^2 ni^2$ 'you^{pl}', an analytic form consisting of 𐞑 ni^2 'you' and the enumerative suffix 𐞑 ni^2 .

Table 1: *Tangut first and second person pronouns*

𐞑 ηa^2	Keping: 'I, me' Sofronov: 'I' (<i>cāsus rēctus</i>)
𐞑𐞑 mto^2 $?a^1$	Keping: formal 'I, me' Sofronov: 'me' (<i>cāsus obliquus</i>)
𐞑 $?Ia^1$	Sofronov: regal 'me'
𐞑𐞑 $\eta a^2 mi^2$	'we' (inclusive)
𐞑𐞑 $\eta I^2 mi^2$	'we' (exclusive)
𐞑 na^2	'you' (singular)
𐞑 ni^2	'you' (honorific or plural)
𐞑𐞑 $ni^2 ni^2$	'you' (plural)

III. *Tangut verbal agreement*

The Tangut verb may have any one of three different overt agreement

suffixes. The first singular agreement suffix $\text{𐰚} \eta a^2$ is written with the same ideogram as the homophonous first singular pronoun $\text{𐰚} \eta a^2$ 'I' and marks a first singular actant in an intransitive verb. The second person singular agreement suffix $\text{𐰚} -na^2$ marks a second singular actant in an intransitive verb and appears to be cognate with the homophonous second singular pronoun $\text{𐰚} na^2$ 'you^s'. The agreement suffix $\text{𐰚} -ni^2$ marks a first or second person plural actant in an intransitive verb and might be cognate to the homophonous second person plural pronoun $\text{𐰚} ni^2$ 'you^{pl.}'. Involvement of a third person actant is marked by zero in all Tangut verb forms. The three Tangut verbal agreement suffixes are given in table 2, and the distribution of these suffixes in the transitive paradigm is diagrammed in Table 3.

Table 2: *Tangut verbal agreement suffixes* (Keping, 1985: 217–42)

$\text{𐰚} \eta a^2$	first singular
$\text{𐰚} na^2$	second singular
$\text{𐰚} ni^2$	first or second plural

Table 3: *Tangut Transitive Verbal Paradigm*

		P	A	T	I	E	N	T
		1			2			3
A	1sg.							$-\eta a^2$
	G	1pl.						
E		2sg.						
	N	2pl.						
T		3sg.						
		3pl.						

The Tangut conjugation reflects an ergative agreement system. The first principle underlying this system is that the verb shows agreement with a single actant only. For an intransitive verb this actant is the subject. A transitive verb agrees with its patient, unless the patient is marked by zero. The semantic nature

of these syntactic roles indexed in the Tangut verb is of great importance in the comparative context and forms the topic of the next section.

The second principle underlying verb agreement in Tangut is that the third person, in terms of formal markedness, is a non-entity or non-person (Keping, 1985: 45).

IV. *The Tangut verb in Tibeto-Burman perspective*

As I have argued elsewhere (van Driem, 1990b: 568), the category of patient in Tibeto-Burman languages which have retained a verbal agreement system requires a definition. As Wierzbicka (1988: 391) points out in her study of the Polish dative, 'in those languages in which the recipient (as a human participant) is treated like a direct object, over and above the things given, the core meaning of the case marking the recipient is different from its counterpart in European languages, and, consequently, it cannot be regarded as the same case'. This observation holds true just as much for the syntactic roles of actants indexed in the verb. The syntactic role of patient in Tibeto-Burman shows some semantic similarity to the category of a verbal actant marked with the dative case in a language such as Polish. Of course, in the Polish context, we are talking about dependent-marking at clause level, whereas the indexing of a patient in a Tibeto-Burman verb is a head-marking phenomenon.

Typological considerations are significant in the discussion of the historical status of verbal agreement in Tibeto-Burman. With regard to the relevance of syntactic parameters to the demonstration of genetic relatedness between languages, Matisoff (1978: 75) brandished a two-edged sword, claiming that 'syntactic similarities are no guarantee of genetic closeness' and that 'syntactic differences are no guarantee of genetic remoteness'. Most of the data adduced by Matisoff in support of these claims concerned the borrowing of element order and grammatical words such as subordinators. It is in this light that we must view Matisoff's conclusion that 'isolated facts of syntactic resemblance may therefore be of merely *typological* interest, no more' (1978: 76).

It might seem that the irrelevance of certain syntactic parameters would hold *a fortiori* for other typological traits, but recently Nichols (1986) has demonstrated that the morphosyntactic criteria of headedness and the morphological marking of syntactic relations are two major typological parameters of great importance to the historical linguist concerned with the genetic relatedness of languages. Indeed, it is because of the conservative nature of morphological marking of syntactic relationships that the historical study of morphology has, alongside lexical comparison, traditionally constituted the mainstay of historical-comparative linguistics.

Nichols defines two fundamental language types on the basis of these criteria, languages with a predominantly head-marking morphosyntax versus those with a predominantly dependent-marking morphosyntax, and demonstrates the stability of these types through time. In other words, genetically related languages tend to be typologically close in terms of their morphosyntactic marking systems. Certain languages are purely of the head-

marking type such as Abkhaz, whereas others, like Chechen, are dependent-marking languages. Many languages are typologically somewhere along the spectrum between these two poles. The Kiranti language Limbu, for example, has both a case system marking the syntactic function of the nominal dependents of the verb in the syntagm alongside an elaborate verbal agreement system marking these nominal dependents in the verbal head. Limbu likewise has a double marking system in possessive constructions, where the syntactic relationship is marked on both dependent and head:

- (1) *a-ndzum-ille ku-him*
 my-friend-GEN his-house
 ‘my friend’s house’

Nichols points out that not all languages have a place on the typological spectrum between the two poles of a thoroughly head-marking morphosyntax and one which is wholly dependent-marking. Certain languages have little or no morphology. Such a language is Chinese. In view of the complex morphologies of a great number of Sino-Tibetan languages, the total or near total lack of morphology in a large number of Sino-Tibetan languages, such as Chinese, requires an explanation (*vide* van Driem, forthcoming).

In comparing, say, the meaning of the Polish dative to that of the Tibeto-Burman patient category in some of its senses, the present discussion will focus on the semantic content of the morphosyntactic categories in question notwithstanding their typological disparity.

In Limbu, the verb *<-khutt-/-khut->* can both conjugate intransitively, in the meanings ‘to be stolen’ and ‘to steal, to be a thief’, and transitively, in the meanings ‘to steal something’ or ‘to rob someone’. Conjugated intransitively the verb *<-khutt->* agrees with the subject, e.g. *sapla khutte* ‘the book was stolen’, *andzumin khutte* ‘my friend committed a theft’, *kheŋ mənə:n khuʔl* ‘that guy steals’ or ‘that guy is a thief’.

Conjugated transitively, the verb *<-khutt->* agrees with the object stolen, e.g. (2), unless a beneficiary is expressed, e.g. (3) and (4). In other words, the verb shows preferential agreement with the malefacted actant, if there is one:

- (2) *Mε-n-ni-baŋ-ba mənə-lle a-yaŋ-in*
 NEG-NEG-see-1s→3/PT-NOM man-ERG my-money-DEF
khutt-u.
 steal-3P

‘A man I didn’t see stole my money.’

- (3) *A-ndzum-ille sapla khutt-aŋ*
 my-friend-ERG book rob-1sPS/PT
 ‘My friend robbed me of my book.’

- (4) *Kheŋ? yaŋ kε-ghuit-u-si-i?*
 you^{sg.} money 2-rob-3P-snP-Q
 ‘Did you rob them of their money?’

In Tibeto-Burman languages in which transitive verbs show patient agreement, the verb 'to give' agrees with the beneficiary, not with the object given. In this way, Tibeto-Burman 'to give' resembles English 'to endow' more than English 'to give'. The syntactic role of patient in Tangut and quite a few other Tibeto-Burman languages can be semantically characterized in terms of saliency, animacy and the *mode* of affectedness. The following example sentences from Keping's study of Tangut morphology (1985: 236–8) illustrate the semantics of the syntactic role of patient in Tangut.

- (5) 微 𠵹 𠵹 𠵹 𠵹 𠵹 𠵹 𠵹
NdzIwo² ɲi² ɲa² ?In¹ lɔq¹ kɪ¹ ẓwon² ɲa².
 person some I/me ABSOLUTE hand PERFECTIVE grab -1sg.
 'Someone *grabbed* my hand.' ('Someone *grabbed* me by the hand.')

In contrast to Keping's Russian translation of the Tangut (*Kto-to sɣvatil moju ruku*) 'Someone grabbed my hand'), the patientive character of the first singular actant indexed by the agreement suffix <-ɲa²> in the Tangut verb is perhaps more faithfully expressed in the alternative English translation 'Someone grabbed me by the hand'.

Similarly, the Dutch translation of the following Tangut sentence (*U heeft me op onwettige wijze de steden ontnomen* 'You have unlawfully taken the cities from me') is possible more true to the sense of the Tangut original than the Russian translation (*Vy nezakonno zaxvatili moi goroda* 'You unlawfully seized my cities') because, in the Dutch translation, the patientive character of the first singular actant, indexed in Tangut verb by the agreement suffix <-ɲa²>, is expressed by the direct object *me* 'me'.

- (6) 𠵹 𠵹 𠵹 𠵹 𠵹 𠵹 𠵹 𠵹
Ni² nɪ² mɪ¹ wo² ɲu² we² lhwi² vie¹ ɲa².
 you PLURAL NEGATIVE proper means city seize do -1sg.
 'You unlawfully *seized* my cities.'

In both of the above Tangut sentences, the first person singular *patient* is the affected actant, and a rendering in a European language is readily found where the first person singular actant is the *direct object*.

However, I should like to argue that the Polish dative affords a neater semantic parallel to the syntactic role of patient indexed in the Tangut verb in view of the tendency in Tibeto-Burman to show preferential patient agreement with the benefacted or malefacted actant. It is possible in Polish and Czech, but not in Russian, to construct sentences like Polish *Zabili mu żonę* 'they killed his wife' (Wierzbicka, 1988: 405) or Czech *Zavraždili mu manželku* 'they killed his wife', whereby Polish *żonę* and Czech *manželku*, in the accusative singular, express the direct object 'wife', and the masculine singular dative pronoun *mu* 'him' expresses the malefacted verbal actant.

The preceding Tangut sentence (6) can be rendered in Polish² as ‘*Bezprawnie zabrałście mi miasta*’, whereby the first singular actant indexed by the agreement suffix <-*ŋa*²> in the Tangut verb corresponds to the dative verbal actant *mi* ‘me’ in the equivalent Polish rendering.

It would be inaccurate, if not misogynous, to argue that the patients indexed by the verbal agreement endings are the most affected actant in the following two Tangut sentences:

(7)	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗
	<i>Thi</i> ²	<i>ta</i> ¹	<i>ki</i> ¹	<i>ndie</i> ²	<i>xion</i> ²	<i>tshio</i> ¹
	this	TOPIC MARKER		definitely	Fen	Chan
	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗
	<i>ndžei</i> ²	<i>vie</i> ¹	<i>ni</i> ²	<i>?In</i> ¹	<i>ŋi</i> ²	<i>mbIn</i> ²
	ERGATIVE		you	ABSOLUTIVE	spouse	wife
	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗
	<i>tha</i> ²	<i>sa</i> ¹	<i>vie</i> ¹	<i>na</i> ²	<i>si</i> ²	
	PERFECTIVE	kill	do	-2sg.	thus	

‘That means that Fen Chan was the one who *killed your* wife.’

(8)	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗
	<i>Ŋi</i> ²	<i>mi</i> ²	<i>?In</i> ¹	<i>mbIn</i> ²	<i>ni</i> ²	<i>ti</i> ¹
	we	PLURAL	ABSOLUTIVE	wife	PLURAL	don’t
	EXCLUSIVE					
	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗	𐞗		
	<i>sa</i> ¹	<i>vie</i> ¹	<i>ni</i> ²	<i>?I</i> ¹		
	kill	do	1p/2pl	said		

‘[The inhabitants of the city] said [to the conquerors]: “Do not *execute our* wives!”’

The semantic function of the patient category in the preceding two Tangut sentences is akin to that of the Polish dative actant in that the patient category designates the benefacted or malefacted actant as opposed to the object of the transitive action. This is illustrated by the equivalent Polish renderings of these Tangut sentences: *To znaczy, że właśnie Fen Czan zabił ci żonę*. ‘That means that Fen Chan was the one who killed your wife’, whereby *ci* is the dative of the Polish second person singular pronoun *ty* ‘you’, and *Nie zabijajcie nam żon!* ‘Do not kill our wives’, whereby *nam* is the dative form of the Polish first person plural pronoun *my* ‘we’.

²I thank Ewa Zakrzewska for kindly sharing with me her Polish native-speaker intuitions.

The use of the dative in these sentences in Polish is semantically unmarked. For example, alongside the more usual Polish sentence *Nie niszczy mi książki* 'Do not wreck my book', with the dative first singular pronoun *mi*, there exists the sentence *Nie niszczy mojej książki* 'Do not wreck my book', with the properly declined form of the possessive pronoun *mojej* 'my'. The use of the possessive pronoun here is contrastive, however, and the latter sentence is therefore appropriate to a context in which the implication is 'Do not wreck my book; wreck someone else's book'.

(9)	玆	訖	覓	覓	覓	覓	覓
	<i>Nie</i> ²	<i>na</i> ²	<i>ndžei</i> ²	<i>vie</i> ¹	<i>ndr</i> ²	<i>lhwi</i> ²	<i>vie</i> ¹
	pearl	you	ERGATIVE		PERFEC- TIVE	seize	do
	報	覓	覓	覓	覓	覓	覓
	<i>ŋu</i> ²	<i>viə</i> ²	<i>ndzie</i> ¹	<i>ʔr</i> ¹	<i>ŋa</i> ²	<i>ku</i> ¹	<i>nIn</i> ²
	means	PERFEC- TIVE	eat	say	-1sg	if	king
	覓	覓	覓	覓	覓	覓	玆
	<i>kr</i> ¹	<i>ndie</i> ²	<i>na</i> ²	<i>ʔIn</i> ¹	<i>ʔo</i> ¹	<i>viq</i> ¹	<i>nie</i> ²
	definitely		you	ABSOLU- TIVE	belly	tear open	pearl
	覓	覓	覓				
	<i>ndžei</i> ²	<i>vie</i> ¹	<i>na</i> ²				
	extract	do	-2s				

'I will tell that you took the pearl and swallowed it, and then the king will most certainly slit open your stomach and take out the pearl.'

In the previous Tangut sentence, the second singular actant indexed by the ending $\langle -na^2 \rangle$ in the Tangut verb can be expressed in Polish (and in this one instance in Russian too) with a dative verbal actant: ... *i wtedy król na pewno rozkraje ci żołądek i wyjmie perłę* '... and then the king will certainly slit open your stomach and take out the pearl', with the dative second singular pronoun *ci*.

In Tangut, however, the agreement ending $\langle -na^2 \rangle$ appears on the verb 'to extract' rather than on the verb 'to slit open', and although the sentence ... *i wtedy król na pewno rozkraje żołądek i wyjmie ci perłę* is not infelicitous in Polish, the implication would be that the king will extract the pearl for the benefit of the second person singular actant, and without a context it would remain unclear whose stomach will be subject to the king's surgical intervention.

The grammatical function of the patient category indexed in the Tangut

verb can be best understood by attempting to define the semantic value of this syntactic role. In Kiranti languages, which generally preserve reflexes of the Tibeto-Burman directive suffix **<-t>* in verbs, differences in the type of patient indexed in the verb are often determined by a verb's lexical meaning, e.g. Hayu *<bu->* 'porter quelqu'un ou quelque chose' vs. *<but->* 'porter quelqu'un ou quelque chose pour quelqu'un (= patient)', *<hv->* 'chercher quelqu'un ou quelque chose' vs. *<hvt->* 'chercher quelqu'un ou quelque chose pour quelqu'un (= patient)' (van Driem 1990b: 567–8), Limbu *<-haj->* 'send an object (= patient)' vs. *<-hakt->* 'send something to someone (= patient)', although this need not involve reflexes of the Tibeto-Burman directive suffix, cf. Limbu *<-pajns->* 'send someone (= patient) somewhere'. Defining the grammatical function of the patient category in any given Tibeto-Burman language is to some extent a language-specific problem.

As pointed out at the end of the previous section, third person actant is unmarked in the Tangut verb. Underlying the widely observed phenomenon in the world's languages that a third person may be a non-entity in terms of agreement indices is the fundamental opposition between first and second person, actants which, outside the realm of fable and fairy tale, inherently partake in 'l'allocution personnelle qui est exclusivement interhumaine', as opposed to the third person which 'effectue l'opération de la référence et fonde la possibilité du discours sur quelque chose, sur le monde, sur ce qui n'est pas l'allocution' (Benveniste, 1974: 99). It does not follow from the Tangut data, however, to contend, as LaPolla (1989: 5) does, that agreement in the Tangut transitive conjugation is 'not a grammatical function'. Semantic complexity is typical of grammatical categories, and the fact that it presents no mean challenge to the linguist to provide satisfactory semantic characterizations of such fundamental grammatical categories as subject in English, aspect in Russian or the ergative in modern Tibetan does not warrant treating these categories as merely rhetorical or pragmatic phenomena.

I concur with LaPolla (1989: 5) in his criticism of methodologies whereby 'comparisons are done on highly simplified and selected parts of the total agreement system, and little is said of how the affixes are really used' (e.g., Ebert, 1987 and 1990, DeLancey, 1989). Clearly the mere juxtaposition of unanalysed portions of conjugations is unsatisfactory, and agreement systems of individual Tibeto-Burman languages should be subject to a rigorous morphemic analysis in order to isolate the formally and semantically defined entities which are known as morphemes and are required for systematic comparison of genetically related morphological systems. Yet inconsistently LaPolla himself provides only a portion of the person and number agreement pattern of the Tangut verb, whilst arguing that the Tangut conjugation constitutes a rudimentary verbal agreement system.

When the complete Tangut transitive conjugation, as diagrammed above, is compared with the more elaborate conjugations of Kiranti languages, Tangut looks *prima facie* just as much like a degenerated and simplified Kiranti system as it does like a primitive and rudimentary Kiranti system, and although

LaPolla dismisses the former alternative, he provides no convincing arguments for the latter. LaPolla views it as 'highly unlikely that Tibetan and Burmese would both have lost every trace of their verb agreement systems while Tangut (twelfth century) had a totally regular, etymologically transparent verb agreement system that shows no signs of age' (1989: 3).

First, the contention that simpler conjugations such as that of twelfth-century Tangut are older than the more elaborate Tibeto-Burman verb agreement systems is an *a priori* assumption, and the apparent etymological transparency of Tangut conjugational affixes constitutes no unequivocal support for this assumption.

Secondly, the loss of an inflectional system in one group of languages, including the loss of verb agreement systems with '*no trace whatsoever*' (the italics are LaPolla's), and its retention in another genetically related group is a widely attested phenomenon, not a 'highly unlikely' one. Particularly in the case of Tibeto-Burman, developments in the phonology of many language groups, such as the Draconian restrictions on syllable structure and polysyllabicity, provide typological reasons which readily account for the widespread loss of a verb agreement or other inflectional system.

In the historical study of morphology, derivational affixes are occasionally borrowed, e.g. French *-age* in *percentage* borrowed into Dutch to form new nouns with native Dutch roots such as *vrijage*, *slijtage*, *lekkage*. However, the borrowing of inflectional affixes between languages is rare, and the wholesale borrowing of an elaborate inflectional system such as a verbal conjugation is unattested outside the context of language death or creolization. Analogous developments, such as the Old Lithuanian illative, allative, adessive and inessive cases modelled after neighbouring Finno-Ugric case systems, constitute no exception. Therefore, it cannot be taken seriously when LaPolla (1989: 2), in an attack on Bauman (1975), suggests 'language contact' as a possible explanation for the complex conjugational systems observed in Tibeto-Burman languages such as the Kiranti languages, rGya-roñ or Tangut. It is more plausible to ascribe the *loss* of verbal agreement systems to language contact. In fact, Sherard (1986: 199) has recently felt compelled to conclude 'that morphological structure is less susceptible to change than phonological structure'.

LaPolla's alternative suggests that 'shared innovation' may explain the verbal agreement systems observed in Tibeto-Burman languages. The elaborate system of correspondences between the many verbal conjugations of Kiranti languages leaves little doubt as to the reality of some common verbal system, periphrastic or otherwise, ancestral to the Kiranti languages. In this connexion, Matisoff has put forward an alternative view that a 'tendency' to pronominalize, i.e. to agglutinate pronouns, could have existed at the Proto-Tibeto-Burman stage and may have persisted in certain groups whilst petering out in others (personal communication, Paris, 14 July 1989).

Whether the verb agreement systems in various branches of Tibeto-Burman are shared innovations, reflecting some tendency at the Tibeto-Burman level toward inflection or toward periphrasis with the incorporation of clitic pro-

nouns, or whether these conjugations reflect a common Tibeto-Burman verbal agreement system must be resolved on the basis of detailed evidence and sound argumentation. Neither these two possibilities may be dismissed *a priori*.

To LaPolla (1989), the Tangut conjugation and other Tibeto-Burman verb agreement systems are 'clearly pragmatically-based grammaticalizations of the discourse prominence of speech act participants [i.e. of first and second person actants].' However, evidence has yet to be adduced to support the idea that any coherent pragmatic marking system indexing discourse prominence can be ancestral to Tibeto-Burman or that Tangut and Kiranti conjugations are 'relatively recent grammaticalizations of discourse prominence'.

For a proper understanding of a grammatical category, the descriptive linguist has to open his mind to perceiving the subtle, language-specific semantics of morphosyntactic categories, such as for example that of patient in a Tibeto-Burman language or that of the definite vs. indefinite article distinction in a western European language. Such problems of comparative ethnosyntax demand the rigour of 'radical semantics' and can benefit little from the vagueness of 'radical pragmatics'.

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