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Tibetan Part-of-speech Conundrums: maṅ and yun riṅ

Abstract

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

Keywords: corpus linguistics, Tibetan grammar, parts-of-speech

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 maṅ and yun-riṅ.

maṅ

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

(1) g.yem-pa rgyas-par spyad-nas lo maṅ-po ma lon-par glan-pa-daṅ 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, maṅ ‘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 gaṅ bcus-nas dge-bsñen de-la sñim-pa gaṅ-gi chu maṅ-ṇam / rgya-mtshoḥi chu maṅ? / žes dris-pa-daṅ
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 phuṅ-po ches maṅ-du skyeḥo /
His collection of merit became exceedingly great. (Buton 7a).⁴

In example (4) lo maṅ 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 maṅ and maṅ-po.⁵ However, it would also be incorrect to see lo maṅ as a noun followed by a verb, because lo-maṅ žig is a noun phrase that the verb lon governs. Consequently, lo-maṅ like the German ‘Jahrmenge’ must be a compound.

(4) phyis lo-maṅ žig lon-pa-daṅ / ḥdi sñam-du sems-so /
Later, after some many years had passed, he thought thus... (D. 341, Vol. 74, 147b).

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

(5) de tshe gaṅ daṅ-gis ni dge-sloṅ-maṅ dkrugs-nas /
At that time, some people agitated the clergy (D. 13, vol. 34, 8a).

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

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

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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 hbyuṅ available at Otani University (http://web1.otani.ac.jp/cri/twrpw/results/e-texts/ [accessed 24 February 2015]). The Bu ston chos hbyuṅ 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/cri/twrpw/results/e-texts/ [accessed 24 February 2015]).
(7) dpon-slob gñis-kas Rgya-dpe rnams gzigs-pas ḥpho-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-pahi mañ dag cig byuṅ-ţiṅ /
There were many (translators) who are not famous in Tibet. (Buton 145a).

The phrase gzan dag (‘others’) offers a model to analyze mañ dag and to speculate about its origin. Many things may follow gzan ‘other’ in a noun phrase including ŋig (9), kun (10), rnams (11) and dag (12).

(9) gnas gzan ŋig na śiṅ Śa-ko-ta-ka-la bya-rog cig ḥdug-pa des Dbyig-pa-can de mthoṅ-nas
In another place there was a crow on a Šakotaka tree, which saw Dbyig-pa-can (D. 341, vol. 74, 272a).

(10) gzan kun ni chuṅ-ma-dañ ḥgrops-te ḥoins-na blon-po de ḥbāḥ ŋig-gi chuṅ-ma ma ḥoins-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-ṅag gzan rnams khyod-raṅ-la byin tshar-ro
I have finished giving to thee other instructions than those. (Mila, de Jong 1959: 77).

(12) sman de btsun-mo chuṅ-ṅu gzan dag-gis ḥthuṅs-te /
The other, junior queens, drank that medicine. (D. 341, vol. 74, 74a).

In contrast to this syntactical promiscuity of gzan in classical literature, in Lhasa dialect gzan-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 gzan dag : N mañ dag :: N gzan [d.det] dag : X = mañ [d.det] dag),

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7 We tag gzan ‘other’ as [d.det] ‘determiner’ along with sogṣ, raḥ, ka ~ kla ~ ga, re, re-re, sna-re, ḥbāḥ, ša-stag, ya, ya-re, and la-la.
would make this determiner analysis of maṅ available in all of the word’s occurrences. The solution our project employs is to regard maṅ-po as an adjective, maṅ as a verb or second element of a compound except in the expression maṅ 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(-)riṅ**

The phrase yun riṅ-po ‘a long time’ is readily analyzable as a noun yun ‘time’ followed by an adjective riṅ-po ‘long’. The phrase yun riṅ-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 riṅ-po-nas ḥkhor-ba-na lus graṅs 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-lṭan-ḥdas yun riṅ-por ḥjig-ṛten-na bţugs-te

The Bhagavan stayed in the world for a long time. (D. 341, vol. 74, 197b).

(15) khyod de-bţin-gšegs-pa-la tshe-dān-lṭan-pa ma zer cig / yun riṅ-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

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8 One may wonder whether it is right to see maṅ as a determiner, and recognize maṅ-po, maṅ, and maṅ-dag as parallel to gzan-po, gzan, and gzan-dag. From such a perspective, either gzan will be seen as a verbal root ‘be otherwise’ that frequently occurs in compound or maṅ will be seen as a determiner alone, and the analysis of phrases like lo-maṅ as a compound is to be rejected. However, this proposed parallelism fails because whereas maṅ-po is an adjective gzan-po is a noun ‘another one’. For example, gaṅ-du raṅ-gi kyo yaṅ gsd-na gzan-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 thuṅ-nu ‘a short time’ is also attested, although much more rarely, e.g. sanṣ-rgyas-kyi žin phun-sum tshogs-pa-la ser-ba bab-pas / lo ston tshaṅ-bar gnas-pa yun thuṅ-nuṛ 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 riṅ-po is used with the negated verb lon ‘pass (of time)’.

(16) btsun-mos de-dag ḥtuṅs-nas riṅ-po ma loṅ-par so-so-nas sems-can-daṅ 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 sduṅ-bṣaṅl sna-tshogs myoṅ-nas yun yaṅ riṅ-po źig 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-daṅ sum-cu-ṛtsa-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 riṅ-po ma lon-par and riṅ-po ma lon-par merits further study.

(19) riṅ-po ma lon-par rluṅ chen-po laṅs-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-daṅ Dā-na-ṣī-las Bod-du yun riṅ-po bzung 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) sṅon ḥdas-paḥi dus yun riṅ-po-na / ḥdzam-buḥi gliṅ ḥdir rgyal-po chen-po
Kha-dog-dam bgyi-baḥ ḥjig-rten ḥdi-la dбаṅ sgyur-ba źig byuṅ-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

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

(22) mi de phyugs-kyi śiṅ-rta-la ẓon-te lam der žugs-nas / de yun riṅ-źiṅ dus riṅ-mo žig-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 sṅon byuṅ-ba ḍhas-paḥi dus na bskal-pa graṅs med-pa-bas kyaṅ ches graṅs med-pa / yun riṅ-źiṅ tshad med/ bsam-gyis mi khyab / dpag-tu med-paḥi sna-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) ṅas bla-ma ḍdiḥi druṅ-du yun bsriṅs-nas bsdad-ruṅ / Although I stayed for a long time in the presence of that lama… (Marpa 4a).

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

(25) skyes-bu dam-pa ḍhi btsun-moḥi ḍkhor-du yun riṅ-du bžugs-na / when this wiseman had remained in the court of the queen for a long time (Buton 67a).

(26) dge-baḥi las-daṅ / sdig-paḥi las ni yun riṅ-du lon-kyāṅ med-ciṅ ẓig-par mi ḍgyur-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 riṅ 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 maṅ ‘be many’ also occurs in both these usages (examples 2 and 3 above).

(27) deḥi bsod-nams ni rab-tu cheḥo/ His virtue is very great. (D. 341, vol. 74, 174a).
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(28) *de-nas khyehu cher skyes-nas pha-ma gñis-la ḡdi 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 *riṅ* as an intransitive verb is available for examples (27) and (28), in example (29) the presence of the indefinite marker źig, which requires a preceding nominal, forbids this interpretation. In this passage *yun-riṅ* is a compound.


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-riṅ* ‘long time’ the syllable *riṅ* can itself be used alone as a noun (example 30).

(30) *lus sa-la brdabs-te brgyal-lo / riṅ-źig lon-pa-daṅ*

They fell to the ground unconscious. A long while passed and… (D. 341, vol. 74, 139b).

A noun *yun-riṅ* 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-riṅ gnas-byahi phyir / mdo-yi de-ṅid-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-riṅ bde-ba rje myoṅ-nas /*

After experiencing bliss for a long time… (Buton 106a).

With the use of *yun-riṅ* as a noun in mind (as in examples 29–32), the most natural interpretation of the sequence of *yun-riṅ-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 riṅ du bţugs* may either be interpreted as *yun* [n.count] *riṅ* [v.invar] *du* [cv.term] *bţugs* [v.invar] or as *yun-riṅ* [n.count] *du* [case.term] *bţugs* [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

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12 Because it is impossible to leave the analysis indeterminate in a corpus linguistics project, for the sake of consistency we have arbitrary chosen to treat *yun-riṅ-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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