

Title: Kurtöp Verbal Morphology and the Tibeto-Burman Typology

Category: Oral

Tibeto-Burman languages are known to make wide use of nominalization as a way to innovate main clause grammar (e.g. DeLancey to appear). For example, a diachronic account of finite verbal morphology in a number of Tibeto-Burman languages will exhibit some evidence the following construction: stem+nominalizer+copula. Verbal morphology in Kurtöp, a Tibeto-Burman language of Bhutan, is examined in this context, illustrating a system that is formally familiar but perhaps functionally unusual.

Based on fieldwork on Kurtöp in Bhutan and comparative research, this paper outlines Kurtöp finite verbal morphology in the context of the Tibeto-Burman typology. Of the eight most productive finite clause strategies, six can be described as consisting of a nominalization. Two forms are briefly discussed; *-shang* marks perfective aspect (direct evidence) and is of unknown origin; *-ta* marks imperfective aspect and may have come from one of two verbs synchronically in use in the language (*ta* ‘see’ or *tak* ‘become’).

The bulk of this paper describes the origin and use of the six other constructions. The Proto-Tibeto-Burman nominalizers *-ma* and *-pa* are used in marking future (controlled) and perfective (indirect evidence), respectively, when used in conjunction with the old copula *-la*. The nominalizer *-pa* is also used in conjunction with the suffix *-ra* to mark doubt. Another nominalizer, *-ki*, is used by itself as a hortative, but when used in conjunction with *-na*, a synchronic copula in the language, it signals future (uncontrolled). The copula *na* (8) itself can be used directly with a bare stem as a way to mark perfective aspect yet again (direct evidence, unaffected).

With regard to form, Kurtöp verbal morphology is somewhat unremarkable. The nominalizer *-pa* is widely reported in the Tibeto-Burman language family as is the copula *na*. The nominalizer *-ki* is found in other Bodic languages such as Tshangla (Andvik to appear) and the copula *la* may have cognates in Tamang (Poudel 2006) and Lahu (Matisoff 2003), amongst others. What is of particular interest in Kurtöp is the detailed functions which have evolved from the combination of these forms. While marking tense and aspect, Kurtöp verbal morphology also incorporates a rich system of evidentiality and concern for agency.

Kurtöp, like most Tibeto-Burman languages and many languages around the world, relies heavily on nominalization as a means to innovate finite verbal morphology. However, it is not clear the complex interactions with evidentiality and agency found in Kurtöp nominalizations are also widespread through Tibeto-Burman, let alone other language families.

References

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