To Stephanie W. Jamison
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Preface

The various currently available Tibetan dictionaries regularly disagree about what the four verbs stems of a particular Tibetan verb are. The dictionaries do not mention, let alone account for these discrepancies. A first step toward clarifying the stem forms of Tibetan verbs is to identify when and how such disagreements occur. Such is the goal of the present work.

Tibetan verb morphology has been the most widely researched area of the Tibetan verbal system, although few issues have been resolved (vide Li 1933, Shafer 1950-1951, Coblin 1976, Hahn 1994 and 1999, Zeisler 2004). One flaw of these studies has been to rely too heavily upon Jäschke (1881) or a small number of other dictionaries. The compilation of more reliable data will hopefully help clarify some of the outstanding problems. A provisional description of Tibetan verb morphology is provided as part of these prefatory materials.

This dictionary provides a systematic presentation of verb stems according to Tibetan grammarians. I have compiled verb stems from eight indigenous sources favoring the oldest and most authoritative. In addition, I have given the forms and definitions from Das’ (1902) dictionary because of its widespread use.

In the future these data will be compared with collations of textual citations to trace the development of the Tibetan verbal system empirically. An understanding of the indigenous presentation of verb stems in my view is a prerequisite for such empirical research, just as Westergaard’s Radices (1841) was a prerequisite for Whitney’s Roots (1885).

For clarity of presentation and considerations of time I have not compiled from the more recent indigenous verb lists nor the many western dictionaries. To have selected from more would perhaps have been beneficial, but I believe that these nine sources give a good idea of the problem areas and further compilation would have merely confused matters and added little new data. However, a list of uncollated verb lists is provided for the convenience of other researchers.

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1 The most common other dictionaries used are Das (1902), Desgodins (1899), and Chos kyi grags pa (1957), the first two of which rely directly upon Jäschke (1881).

2 I now regret this decision, because Jäschke’s dictionary is more carefully constructed than Das’ dictionary, but differs little from it in content. Initially I chose Das because of its greater size, but seeing that he introduces many errors or ambiguities not present in his predecessor, my choice is unfortunate. By the time I fully realized my mistake it was no longer feasible to correct it; however, whenever Das is unclear in his intention I have consulted Jäschke and have added the same abbreviation that Das uses (J3), in some cases also making tacit improvements of a minor kind.
The lexicographical sources consulted for their presentation of the morphology of the
Tibetan verb stems are each abbreviated by two small capital letters (e.g. DS, TC etc). A
key to these abbreviations is found at the end of this preface.

The lemmata of the dictionary itself are organized alphabetically according to the present
stem; other stems may be sought in the index. The sources reporting any particular piece
of information appear directly after the forms they report. The abbreviations are given
chronologically. When a source gives a brief note about the verb this is included in small
type in parentheses directly after the two-letter abbreviation for the source. Any longer
comments or peculiarities are included in the notes section of the appropriate lemma.

Brackets [ ] indicate that the source implies the information but does not explicitly state
it, such as the past or future of a verb in DS marked with a nubla, which DS uses to denote
that all principle parts are identical. Accordingly, I assume that all verbs in DS have present,
past, and future, but make no assumption about the presence of an imperative. Parentheses
( ) indicate that the source has listed the particular form as an inferior, rare, or alternate
form. Text critical issues have been treated in the footnotes.

The terminology of ‘transitive’ and ‘intransitive’ is not appropriate to the description of
Tibetan grammar (cf. Hill 2004). Transitivity is classically defined in reference to the
accusative case, a category which has no meaning in Tibetan. Even in the study of Indo-
European languages ‘transitivity’ as a category collapses and confuses valence, rection, and
occasionally also volition. The Tibetan indigenous grammatical tradition makes use of two
equally befuddling sets of terminology tha dad pa versus tha mi dad pa and byed ḥbrel las
tshig versus byed med las tshig. None of these categories is sufficiently nuanced or well
elaborated to adequately describe Tibetan syntax. However, it is in the nature of this work
to report the findings of previous work, whatever flaws may be contained therein. In this
dictionary sources which report a verb as ‘transitive,’ ‘active,’ tha dad pa, or byed ḥbrel las
tshig will be reported under the rubric ‘transitive,’ and sources which report a verb as
‘intransitive,’ ‘neutral,’ tha mi dad pa, or byed med las tshig will be reported as ‘intransitive.’

Linguistic research on the Tibetan verbal system has increasingly emphasized the category
of ‘volition,’ alternatively know as ‘control.’ This is a category unknown to the indigenous
grammatical tradition. When linguistic studies (esp. Hoshi 2003, and Tournadre and Dorje
2003) report a verb as ‘voluntary’ or ‘involuntary’ this is duly noted. Voluntary verbs have
an imperative stem whereas involuntary verbs do not. Therefore, when the traditional
sources report an imperative stem they can be understood as categorizing the verb as
voluntary, and when they fail to report an imperative stem they can be understood as
categorizing the verb as involuntary. Sources which report some verbs with and some verbs
without an imperative are interpreted in this fashion and are listed under the headings
‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ for each verb as appropriate. However, since DK and LZ give
an imperative for every verb I have not considered their testimony as evidence for volition.
The English definitions from CD and DK are given throughout, though I have taken the liberty to correct obvious mistakes, change punctuation, and replace unnecessary ‘or’s with commas. The definitions from DS are my own translations, as are most definitions from TC. However, the translation of TC into English (Skorupski 2001) has been employed up until the letter ņ.

As for the da drag, I list forms as they appear in my sources. It should be kept in mind that only some sources give a da drag (KY₆, ND, TD, LZ, DK). When the stem of a particular verb is given by one of these sources as lacking a da drag, it should be understood that the source in question claims that that verb stem lacks a da drag. Other sources never report a da drag (KY₃, CD, DS. TC). The evidence of these sources should be understood as in no way remarking upon the question of whether a particular verb form originally had a da drag. The failure of these sources to mark a da drag on a particular verb form is a consequence of their failure to do so everywhere. Consequently rather than reporting that a da drag is absent they should simply be taken as silent on the question of whether a verb form originally had a da drag.

Syntactical information is taken from Tournadre and Dorje (2003) and Hackett (2003). Rection is marked by putting the abbreviation for the case of noun appearing in a clause first, followed by the abbreviation for the second noun to appear in the clause, e.g. [Erg. Abs.] would mean the first noun is ergative and the second absolutive. For this purpose the following abbreviations have been used: Erg. ergative, Abs. absolutive, Instr. instrumental, Ela. elative, Abl. ablative, Obl. dative, Ass. associative. Due to the idiosyncrasies of Hackett (2003) it has been necessary to reinterpret his system; for this, as well as my own understanding of the case system and verb syntax, consult Hill (2004).

Hoshi (2003) and Tournadre and Dorje (2003) refer to the spoken language of Central Tibet. However, because they are the most thorough and sophisticated works on Tibetan syntax, I felt it was appropriate to include them here. It may be found that the syntax of a particular verb will have changed from Classical Tibetan to the spoken language of Central Tibet, but in most cases it will probably be the same. These studies will at least provide a point of departure for syntactic research geared more specifically at Classical Tibetan.

The spelling of English has been regularized to confirm to American habits. This was necessitated as much by the irksome interference of word processing software as by my own desire for uniformity.

I compiled this dictionary between 2000 and 2004. Apart from minimal correction of minor errors no changes have been made since 2004.

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Brief overview of Tibetan Verb Morphology

The dictionary in your hands is but a small stepping stone in the long path leading to a complete description and analysis of Tibetan verb morphology. The goal of the dictionary is to present morphological data as it is reported in the grammatical tradition in a systematic way. A full digestion of these data and the subsequent comparison of them with forms attested in texts is research which remains for the future. Until such work is undertaken the best that I can do here is to present those facts which seem to have been relatively well established based on the hitherto available data.

At first glance there seems to be almost no pattern to how Tibetan verbs form their stems, however over the decades a number of researches have made progress in bringing order to this madness. In particular, strides have been made by Li Fang-kuei (1933, 1959) and his student W. S. Coblin (1976). The system I present is essentially that of W. S. Coblin. In addition to changes of presentation, the analysis presented here incorporates a discovery made by de Jong (1973) and a significant alteration put forward by Christopher Beckwith (1996).

The internal reconstruction Coblin puts forward enables Tibetan verb stems to be derived from a root through the application of a very small number of affixes. However, a number of sound changes must be applied after the affixes. Presumably the Tibetan verbal system was originally more regular than it is attested and these sound laws subsequently obscured the system. The root of a verb is most easily visible by examining the future stem, and removing a d-, g-, or b- prefix if there is one.

For clarity of presentation, I present the sound changes first and then discuss the application of affixes, invoking the previously presented sound changes to account for the difference between the regularly derived reconstructed form and the attested verb stem.

**Sound laws**
Coblin refers to a number of sound changes first proposed by Li (1933) by the cover term ‘deaspiration’. These sound changes are in fact superfluous. Aspiration is not a phonemic contrast in Old Tibetan (Hill 2007). Consequently, aspiration can be safely ignored in the analysis of Tibetan verb morphology. The remainder of this discussion will transliterate kh, ch, th, and ph as simply k, c, t, and p.

*Loss of prefixes (Coblin’s law)*
Prefixes are lost when the resulting cluster is not phonotactically possible.
Epenthesis after ḥ (Li Fang kuei’s law)
When an ḥ precedes a fricative, lateral, or r, a dental stop is inserted between ḥ and the following consonant. For laterals this change is followed by metathesis (Simon’s law).

Distribution of final -s and -d
In Old Tibetan -s and -d are in complementary distribution as finals of an Auslaut cluster, -d appearing after n, r and l, and -s after g, b, and m. Formerly these two consonants were distinct in these environments. The paradigm of verbs with open roots like √bya (present byed, past byas, future bya, imperative byos) indicate that the suffix -d is typical of the present stem and -s is typical of the past stem. In a verb like √sam (sems, bsams, bsam, soms) the present was originally *semd and subsequently changed to sems.

s > d after n, r, and l, e.g. √ñan ‘listen’, past *bñans > mnand  
d > s after g, b, and m, e.g. √zug ‘plant’, present *hzugd > hdzugs

Assimilation of b before nasals (Chang’s law)
Betty Chang (1971: 738) discovered that cluster initial b- assimilates to the labial nasal m before nasals.

bn > mn, e.g. √ñan ‘suppess’, past *bñans > mnand  
bñ > mñ, e.g. √ñan ‘listen’, past *bñans > mñand

Loss of final ḥ
Roots ending in final -b lose the -b before a suffix -s.
*ḥs > s, e.g. √caḥ ‘make, prepare’, past *bcaḥs > bcas

**Spelling conventions before voiceless laterals (de Jong’s rule)**
The voiceless lateral /l/ as a simple initial is spelled as <lh>. The prefix /g-/ is written as <k-> before a voiceless lateral. In other cases no distinction in spelling is made between the voiced and voiceless lateral, e.g. <bl> can represent /bl/ or /bł/. The four stems of the verbal root √łag ‘read’ are thus spelled klog, blags, klag, lhogs but have the phonemic interpretations /głog/, /błags/, /głag/, and /łogs/.

**The ablauts** a > e and u > i
The present suffix -d causes the following ablauts in the present stem.

* a(C)d > e(C)d, e.g. √bya ‘do’, present *byad > byed
* aṅd > end, e.g. √laṅ ‘take’, present *laṅd > lend
* uṅd > ind, e.g. √byuṅ ‘take out’, present *ḥbyuṅd > ḥbyind

The change ńd > nd of the second rule does not take effect in roots beginning with a velar, e.g. √gaṅ ‘fill’ present *ḥgaṅd > ḥgeṅs (and not *ḥgaṅd > *ḥgens as one might expect).

**The ablauts** a > o
The present prefix g- causes this ablaut.

* g(C)Ca > g(C)Co, e.g. √sab ‘complete’, present *gsab > gsob

The same ablaut occurs unconditioned in the imperative stem. All roots with the vowel a take the vowel o in the imperative, e.g. √rgal ‘step over’, imperative rgol.

**The future prefix** d- > g-
The prefixes d- and g- for the future stem are in complementary distribution. We take d- to be underlying since g- has already been used as a prefix for the present.

**The devoicing prefix** *X (Beckwith’s prefix)
In the past and imperative of some verbs a devoicing prefix *X devoices the initial of the root. This prefix causes the same dental epenthesis before fricatives as ḥ.

* Xg > k, e.g. √gag ‘block’, past *bXgag > bkag, imperative *Xgogs > kogs
* Xd > t, e.g. √dud ‘bow to’, past *bXdud > btud, imperative *Xduds > tuds
* Xb > p, e.g. √byuṅ, ‘take out’ past *bXbyuṅ > pyuṅ, imperative *Xbyuṅs > pyuṅs
* Xź >Xdź > c (=tś), e.g. √ẓal ‘measure’, past *bXźald > bcald

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**Brief overview of Tibetan Verb Morphology**
Paradigms
Coblin classifies those Tibetan verbs with four separate stems into eight paradigms.

Paradigm 1: ḥ —, b —, b —, —s
Paradigm 2: ḥ —d, b —, b —, —s
Paradigm 3: —d, b —, b —, —s
Paradigm 4: g —, b —, b —, —s
Paradigm 5: g —, b —, d —, —s
Paradigm 6: ḥ —d, b —, d —, —s
Paradigm 7: ḥ —, b —, d —, —s
Paradigm 8: ḥ —d, b —, d —, —s

Beyer divides all verbs into ‘intransitive’ and ‘transitives’ and offers one paradigm for the intransitives and four for the transitives. Beyer believes that ‘intransitive’ verbs has not future or imperative stem.

‘intransitives’
Class 1: ḥ —, —s
‘transitives’
Class 1: ḥ —, b —, b —, —s
Class 2: ḥ —, b —, d —, —s
Class 3: g —, b —, b —, —s
Class 4: g —, b —, d —, —s

Beyer’s inclusion of verbs which do not have a b- prefix in the past is a welcome addition. However, no study has established that there is a relationship between verbal morphology and verbal syntax. The division of Tibetan verbs into two syntactic categories is not sufficiently precise, and the terms ‘transitive’ and ‘intransitive’ are wholly inappropriate in the description of Tibetan grammar, because the traditional definition of these terms relies on the notion of the ‘accusative’ and no category of Tibetan case grammar can coherently be labeled ‘accusative’ (cf. Hill 2004). I propose that verbs which do not take a b- in their past stem be called ‘weak’ verbs and verbs which do be called ‘strong’ verbs.

I rather doubt that all of the weak verbs can be subsumed under Beyer’s single conjugation category, and whether they indeed lack future and imperative stems. However, since the weak verbs have never been the subject of peculiar study, Beyer’s suggestion is the only point of departure.

Beyer’s classification of the strong verbs simply ignores the present suffix -d and the fact that some verbs lack a present prefix altogether. His version is in no way an
improvement on Coblin’s analysis. However, Coblin’s eight paradigms are themselves not sufficiently nuanced. Coblin made his classification before Beckwith demonstrated that voicing alternation within verb paradigms is due to a lost prefix X-. Adding Beckwith’s prefix X- to Coblin’s paradigms results in a total of eleven paradigms for strong verbs.

Weak Verbs
Paradigm: ḥ—, —s

Strong Verbs
Paradigm 1: ḥ—, b—s, b—, —s
Paradigm 2: ḥ—d, b—s, b—, —s
Paradigm 3: —d, b—s, b—, —s
Paradigm 4: g—, b—s, b—, —s
Paradigm 5: g—, b—, d—, —s
Paradigm 6: ḥ—d, b—, d—, —s
Paradigm 7: ḥ—d, b—s, d—, —s
Paradigm 8: ḥ—, bX—s, b—, X—s
Paradigm 9: ḥ—, bX—s, d—, X—s
Paradigm 10: ḥ—d, bX—, d—, X—s
Paradigm 11: ḥ—d, bX—s, d—, X—s

These paradigms can be exhibited, each with one example, as follows.

Weak Verbs
Paradigm: ḥ—, —s
√byon ‘arrive’, ḥbyon, *byons > byond ‘go’
√laṅ ‘arise’, *ḥlaṅ > ldaṅ, laṅs

Strong Verbs
Paradigm 1: ḥ—, b—s, b—, —s
√kal ‘spin’, ḥkal, bkal, bkal, kol ‘spin’
√rṇān ‘reward’, *ḥrṇān > rṇān, *brṇāns > brṇānd, brṇān, *rṇōns > rṇond
Paradigm 2: ḥ—d, b—s, b—, —s
√kru ‘bathe’, ḥkru, bkrus, bkru, krus
√tso ‘cook’, ḥtsod, btsos, btso, tsos
Paradigm 3: —d, b—s, b—, —s
√bya ‘do’, *byad > byed, *bbyas > byas, *bbya > bya, byos
√sam ‘think’, *samd > sems, bsams, bsam, soms
### Paradigm 4: \( g \rightarrow b \rightarrow s \)  
\( \sqrt{sab} \) ‘complete, fill’, gsob, bsabs, bsab, sobs  
\( \sqrt{myaṅ} \) ‘taste’, *gmyaṅ > myoṅ, *bmyaṅs > myaṅs, *bmyaṅ > myaṅ, myoṅs

### Paradigm 5: \( g \rightarrow b \rightarrow d \rightarrow s \)  
\( \sqrt{taṅ} \) ‘give, send’, *gtaṅ > gtoṅ, btaṅ, *dtaṅ > gtaṅ, toṅs  
\( \sqrt{nan} \) ‘suppress’, *gnan > gnon, *bnan > mnan, *dnan > gnan, nond

### Paradigm 6: \( b \rightarrow d \rightarrow s \)  
\( \sqrt{zuṅ} \) ‘take’, *ḥzuṅd > ḥdzind, bzuṅ, *dzuṅ > gzuṅ, zuṅs

### Paradigm 7: \( ḥ \rightarrow d \rightarrow s, d \rightarrow o-s \)  
\( \sqrt{draṅ} \) ‘take’, ḥdraṅd > ḥdrend, *bdraṅs > draṅs, *ddraṅ > draṅ, droṅs

### Paradigm 8: \( ḥ \rightarrow bX \rightarrow s, b \rightarrow X \rightarrow s \)  
\( \sqrt{dud} \) ‘bow to’, ḥdud, *bXduds > btud, bdud, *Xduds > tud

### Paradigm 9: \( ḥ \rightarrow bX \rightarrow s, d \rightarrow o-s \)  
\( \sqrt{gum} \) ‘kill’, ḥgum, *bXgums > bkums, dgum, *Xgums > kums

### Paradigm 10: \( ḥ \rightarrow d \rightarrow bX \rightarrow o-s \)  
\( \sqrt{byuṅ} \) ‘remove’, *ḥbyuṅd > ḥbyind, *bXbyuṅ > pyuṅ, dbyuṅ, *Xbyuṅs > pyuṅs  
\( \sqrt{gag} \) ‘obstruct’, *ḥgagd > ḥgegs, *bXgag > bkag, dgag, *Xgag > kogs

### Paradigm 11: \( ḥ \rightarrow d \rightarrow bX \rightarrow s, d \rightarrow X \rightarrow o-s \)  
\( \sqrt{bu} \) ‘blow’, ḥbud, *bXbus > pus, dbu, *Xbus > pus  
\( \sqrt{zug} \) ‘plant’, *ḥzugd > ḥdzugs, *bXzugs > btsugs, *dzug > gzug, *Xzugs > tsugs

### Irregular verbs

Some verbs, such as \( \sqrt{za} \) ‘eat’ (za, bzas / zos, bzaḥ, zos), have conjugations which are sui generis and must be considered as part of a class of frequently used irregular verbs, as one would expect with any language. Other verbs, such as \( \sqrt{źig} \) ‘destroy’ (ḡjig, bśig, gźig, šigs), although they do not belong to any of the foregoing eleven paradigms are more likely to be misunderstood than insufficiently classified. Research on a small number of verbs, such as \( \sqrt{įlig} \) ‘read’ (klog, blags, klag, lhogs, cf. de Jong 1973) and \( \sqrt{ri} \) ‘write’ (ḥdri, bris, bri, ris, cf. Hill 2005), has shown that their Old Tibetan paradigms are not what the standard dictionaries of Classical Tibetan report. Further research into individual verbs based on early textual attestations is the direction that future work on Tibetan verb morphology must take. Verb roots beginning with laterals or \( r \) are likely to continue to be fruitful. Another phenomenon which has not been studied but may have far reaching ramifications
for Tibeto-Burman historical linguistics in addition to an understanding Tibetan verbal morphology is the presence in Old Tibetan of the cluster sts- where Classical Tibetan simply has s-, e.g. gtsan / gsan ‘listen’, stsogs / sogs ‘gather’, stsel / sel ‘clear’. The system outlined above is as far as the classification based on dictionary entries can be taken. Philological study of verbs as used in Old Tibetan texts will doubtless refine this analysis extensively.

It may even be necessary to abandon the grammatical tradition’s classification of four stems. It seems as a working hypothesis reasonable to assume that each morpheme found in a verb paradigm has a specific meaning. The reason why some verbs take their present in g- while others take their present in h- most probably has to do with a compatibility between the significance of those morphemes and the syntax and semantics of the verbal stems they prefix. The way to resolve conflicting reports in the dictionaries about the use of a present prefix g- or h- may be to establish both forms as separate stems with separate meanings rather than to judge one to be erroneous.
Abbreviations


Other Verb Lists Not Here Consulted


Dpal ḥbar dge bśes luṅ rtogs ņi ma (1980). “Dus gsum rnam dbye bya ḥdas gzugs gcig.” *Yul gaṅs can paḥi tbog maho śes bya miṅ gi brda dag ka sphreṅ glog gi sgron me*. Yol mo: Dge rgyas ri khrod. 266-272.

“Dus gsum reḥu mig som ņiḥi dra gcod paḥi ral gri.” India: 1964 [Cited by Goldstein 2001, but I have been unable to locate this text.]


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