PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN OLD TIBETAN

BY

NATHAN W. HILL*

The pronominal systems of various modern Tibetan languages have been described in detail¹, but the pronominal systems of earlier forms of Tibetan remain virtually unexplored. Previously, I made a short investigation (Hill 2007) of the use of personal pronouns in the Mi la ras parnam thar by Gtsaṅ smyon he ru ka rus pahi rgyan can (1452-1507). This text is chronologically at the half way point between Old Tibetan (700-1000) and the modern languages. In order to understand the development of Tibetan pronouns over time, it is necessary to also describe the pronominal system of Old Tibetan.²

First and second person pronouns occur generally only in dialogue; thus in order to research personal pronouns it is necessary to explore texts with sufficient dialogue. This criterion rather limits the choice of Old Tibetan texts. I draw the majority of examples from the Old Tibetan Chronicle (PT 1287, hereafter abbreviated ‘OTC’)³ and The envoys from Phywa to Dmu (PT 0216, hereafter abbreviated ‘Envoys’)⁴. The Old Tibetan Chronicle is a literary reworking of Tibetan imperial dynastic history⁵. The envoys from Phywa to Dmu is an etiological myth of the

¹ For example Balti (Bielmeier 1985: 76-77), Southern Mustang (Kretschmar 1995: 63), Shigatse (Haller 2000: 50), Themchen (Haller 2004: 50), Dingri (Herrmann 1989: 44-45), Brag-g.yab (Schwieger 1989: 20).
² For their help and comments on this paper I would like to thank Brandon Dotson, Guillaume Jacques, Christina Scherrer-Schaub and the audience of my talk given 26 May 2009 at Centre de Recherches Linguistiques sur l’Asie Orientale (CNRS, Paris).
³ Imaeda et al. (2007: 200-229).
⁵ I would like to thank Brandon Dotson for sharing with me his draft translation of the Old Tibetan Chronicle. Although my translations are everywhere informed by his, they sometimes differ in detail.

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571

doi: 10.2143/JA.298.1.2062444
sku-bla ritual, an imperial cult\(^6\). Third person pronouns occur less frequently in dialogue, but are found readily in legal literature. The legal text PT 1071\(^7\) provides sufficient examples to draw some tentative conclusions.

The first person singular ṅa

In the Old Tibetan Chronicle the default first person singular pronoun is ṅa. It is the form used within families. A child addresses his mother referring to himself as ṅa (OTC ll. 28-35); his mother also addresses him using ṅa (OTC l. 30). A husband calls himself ṅa while speaking to his wife (OTC ll. 165-169).


As soon as the noble son was able to stand upright, he asked his mother, «If every man and every bird has a lord, who is my lord? If every man and every bird has a father, who is my father?» He implored her: «Tell me!»

His mother said, «Little man, don’t be a big mouth! Little colts don’t have fierce mouths. I do not know.»


When they convinced Spuṅ Gyim-taṅ Rmaṅ-bu, he feared that he would leak [the plot] in his sleep, and so did not sleep with his wife, but slept in the hills, moving his bed nightly. He even told his wife, «A strange spirit has fallen upon me, but we must keep it secret!»

In addition to being used within families, ṅa is used by lords addressing their vassals. The wicked lord Ziṅ-po-rje in addressing his vassal Myaṅ Tseṅ-sku also refers to himself with ṅa (OTC ll. 140-141). The

\(^6\) My treatment of this text is based mainly on two recent studies by Ishikawa (2000, 2001).

\(^7\) Imaeda et al. (2007: 94-111).

*Journal Asiatique* 298.2 (2010): 549-571
would-be Tibetan emperor Stag-bu addressing the conspirators, his would-be vassals, also uses ʰa in reference to himself (OTC ll. 158-159). While addressing his loyal vassal Dbaṅs Phaṅ-to-re Dbyi-tshab the Tibetan emperor Khri Sroṅ-brtsan refers to himself as ʰa both in the opening lines of a speech (OTC l. 256) and a few lines later in a verse oath (OTC l. 269).

Ziṅ-po-rje na-re / / «Mñan Ḥdzī-зуṅ-las ʰa-la sñīṅ ſe myed-pa-ʰi bran-du / / khyon-ʰdaḥ ma (141) ran-la myed-do / /» (OTC)
Ziṅ-po-rje said, «There is none more dear to me than Mñan Ḥdzī-зуṅ. It is not the case that you, sir, are unsuitable as his servant.»

The emperor decreed, «Even though one of my sisters is with Ziṅ-po-rje, I will do as you say.»

(256) «sña-na ʰa-ʰi yab-kyi riṅ-la / /… (OTC)
«Previously, during the reign of my father… »

(269) «ʰa-ʰiṣ ni khyod myi gtaṅ / /
ʰa-ʰiṣ ni khyod btaṅ na / /
dguṅ mthaḥ ni sruṅ-du ruṅ / /» (OTC)
«I will not abandon you.
As for me, if I abandon you,
Better [I] be a border guard of heaven.»

While speaking with enemies one also uses the pronoun ʰa. The Chinese general Woṅ-ker-žaṅ-śes uses this pronoun during his exchange of boasts with the Tibetan general Mgar Khi-ʰibriṅ (OTC ll. 499-500), and Mgar Khi-ʰibriṅ uses the same pronoun in reply (OTC ll. 510-511).

(499) «Bod-kyi dmag thub-pa tsam-du brlabs-nas / / ʰa-ʰi dmag ḥdi sṇed (500) chig yod-do / /» (OTC)
[Woṅ-ker-žaṅ-śes says:] «After overwhelming and vanquishing the Tibetan army, I will still have my army so numerous as [these grains].»

[Mgar Khi-hbrin replies:] «My army—it is like a single scythe that cuts the many grasses; will it not be able to cut them? If a small arrow is shot at a great yak, will it not be able to kill it?»

In all of these examples the speaker is clearly singular. The instances of a lord addressing a vassal and a general addressing an enemy general make clear that ēna does not express any deference to the addressee. The examples of family members addressing each other with this pronoun, however, make clear that the pronoun also does not inherently carry a connotation of disrespect. This fact is also confirmed by the intimate and friendly tone of the emperor’s oath to Dbaḥs Phaṅ-to-re Dbyi-tshab (OTC II. 256-269). The pronoun ēna expresses neither humility or haughtiness; it is the most neutral, default pronoun of the first person singular.

This understanding of ēna can help to clarify the correct translation of, if not the understanding of, a difficult passage near the beginning of the Old Tibetan Chronicle (II. 21-26).


Later, Ṛhya-mo Ṛḥul-bţi-ḥuṅs and Sna-nam Btsan-Ŝoṅ-rgyal both smeared poison on the fur of the great dog of the realm, who is known as ḱon-ṛuṅs-ṣaṅ, and on both Zu-le-ma Ṣjaṅ of Nanzhao (Ṣjaṅ) and Ṣon-ruṅ. Having passed the crooked slate cliffs, they examined the signs on the male [dog] and they were good. «When [we/the assassins] near the land of Myaṅ-ro Ṣam-po, we/they will conduct the ruse. My groom will lead these dogs, with poison on their fur, and the good dog will be rubbed by Lo-nam’s hand, and because my groom will rub with his hand a dog with poison smeared on its fur, he will be killed, and we/they will have revenge.»

Because of the presence of the pronoun ēna, this passage must include a quotation. However, no verbs introduce or conclude this quotation; it is difficult to know where it begins and ends. Because the interpretation of the omens seems a logical choice for the content of the quotation, I have chosen to begin the quotation after the examination of the omens.

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571
It remains unclear who the speaker is, and whether he is himself one of the would-be assassins. However, the grammar makes certain that the speaker is singular, and thus cannot be both assassins Rhya-mo Rhul-bzib-khugs and Sna-nam Btsan-bzo-rgyal as one might otherwise be tempted to suggest.

The first person singular *bdag*

The first person singular pronoun *bdag* is used in four passages in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. All four examples of *bdag* occur in the speech of a vassal addressing the Tibetan emperor, three while making a request (OTC ll. 10-12, 248-254, 324-327) and the fourth (OTC l. 292) in an oath of loyalty. The verb of speech used in the three requests *gsol* also makes clear that speaker is of lower status than the addressee. Thus it is clear that like in the *Mi la ras pa rnam thar* and in the dialect of Gzis-ka-rtse today, in Old Tibetan *bdag* signals the humility and lower status of the speaker vis-à-vis his addressee (Hill 2007: 284).

(10) ḥun-nas Lo-nam-gyis gsol-pa / «de ltar myi gna-na / lha-hi dkor (11) mdu-ran ḥdebs-dan / ra-gyi ran gcod-dan / khra-ran gyon-dan / phub ran ḥbur-la stogs-pa / ḥphrul-gyi dkor (12) ched-po mta-hi rnas *bdag-la* stsal-na phod» ces gsol-to / (OTC)

Then Lo-nam said, «If you will not allow [our refusal] in that way, then I will agree, if you grant me your divine inheritance, the great magical treasures you possess: the spear that throws itself, the sword that cuts by itself, the armor that dresses one by itself, the shield that deflects by itself, and so forth. »


Phaṅs-to-re Dbyi-tshab made a request from the Gtsug-blon via the messenger Sña-to-re: […] «Myan was insufficient in his governance, and was disgraced. My descendants and I were not disloyal to the authority. […] I,
a mere old man requests to take an oath before dying. How would it be to grant my lineage to take an oath? As for the emperor’s father, he granted the spreading of the carpet (i.e. marriage ceremony) for my wife. Now, how would it be to make an offering as your servant at La-mo Chag-pa-prum?»


«In my father’s old age he became disloyal to the presence of the emperor, and becoming frightened, he was going to make a confession of this to Mgar Yul-zuṅ, but Yul-zuṅ indeed perceived this, and Yul-zuṅ returned. I killed my father, and cut off his head. This being so, can it be granted that [my] realm (srid) not be lost?»

(292) bdagī phu-ma-nu-daṅ / bu-tsha la-la žig-gis / / sṅiṅ riṅs-su byed-na / / «sṅiṅ riṅs-so» žes kyaṅ myi ḫṭhol (293) reḥ / (OTC)

«If one among my clansmen (phu-ma-nu) or lineage (bu-tsha) acts disloyally, Never will we fail to confess, «he is disloyal.»»

The first person singular kho-bo

The pronoun kho-bo, also a first person singular, occurs seven times in two passages in the Old Tibetan Chronicle. Both of these passages involve social equals. In the first passage (OTC ll. 151-153) the co-conspirator Dbyi-tshab addresses his co-conspirator Myaṅ-tseṅ-sku. In the second passage (OTC ll. 203-214) both Seṅ-go Myi-chen and Khyuṅ-po Spuṅ-sad employ kho-bo when referring to themselves during their altercation about who will lead the campaign to Dags-po. Used by social equals, friends, and rivals, kho-bo does not have any implication of social status or attitude.


Dbyi-tshab accepted the meaning of those words (tshīg de tog ces blaṅs nas), and swore, «Tseṅ-sku, there is no truth apart from what you’ve said. As my own disaffection is nothing apart from this, [I] shall never differ from you in mind!»

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571

After that, Dags-po, although it had been taken as subject, revolted, whereupon the lord and all ministers gathered and discussed the subjugation of Dags-po Lha-de. Saying «Who will act as general?», Seṅ-go Myi-chen said, «I am capable.» Then Khyuṅ-po Ṣpuṅ-saṅ said, «You Sir, are you fit to be a general? As for a clever man, he is said to be like an awl which has been put into a bag. You Sir, since you were appointed as a retainer of the emperor many years have passed, but I have never heard anyone praise you, saying. ‘(He) is clever and capable’; so You Sir will continue to be unsuitable and will waste the people [i.e. soldiers].» Myi-chen said, «It is true that no one has ever praised me. But it is also true that because I have never stayed inside a bag before, the point has not come out. If I had stayed inside a bag, (more) than (just) the point, even the shaft would have come out, therefore today I am requesting (this): [I] am requesting to be put (into a bag) for the first time, since [I] have never stayed in anything previously.» Then the emperor granted just what Myi-chen had requested, and appointed him to be general to subjugate the Dags-po8.

As pointed out by Takeuchi (1985) this second passage is adopted from the Shiji.

平原君曰: 「夫賢士之處世也, 譬若錐之處囊中, 其末立見。今先生處勝之門下三年於此矣, 左右未有所稱誦, 勝未有所聞, 是先生無所有也。先

8 My translation closely follows that of Takeuchi (1985: 138) but differs in a few details.

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571
Pingyuanjun said, «As for a clever man in the world, he is like an awl which has been put into a bag: the point comes out immediately. Now Sir, you have been in my following for three years, (but) no one around has ever praised you, neither have I heard of you; (so) you have nothing about you. You are incapable, you should stay.» Mao Sui said, «That is why I am requesting today to be put into a bag. If I had been put into a bag previously, not only the point, but even the shaft would have come out.» (Then) Pingyuanjun finally accompanied Mao Sui.9

The only time the Chinese text has a word corresponding to Tibetan kho-bo is in the speech of Pingyuanjun. Following a normal Chinese practice, he uses his own name (勝 shēng) to refer to himself. The use of the rare pronoun kho-bo can therefore not be credited to any emulation of anything in the Chinese original. The occurrences of kho-bo are insufficient to distinguish its meaning from  nya.

The first person plural  ned

The first person plural pronoun ned happens not to occur in the Old Tibetan Chronicle, but does however occur in other Old Tibetan texts. This pronoun occurs four times in the speech of the lord of Dmu in The envoys from Phywa to Dmu (l. 105, ll. 125-127, 132-133, 139-140). These attestations can be interpreted as a simple plural (with the lord seeing himself as part of the larger Dmu polity) or as a pluralis majestatis, the lord of Dmu using the plural because of his high status. Contexts like these, where the leader of a group speaks for the group in general, lead to the ambiguous use of the plural and the emergence of the pluralis majestatis.

(105) Dmu-ḥis bkaḥ stsal-pa /
« ned-kyi Dmu yul ḫdi dag-na /
dgah ḥha byed ni nam myi naṅs-la /» (Envoys)

(105) Dmu decrees:
«In these our lands of Dmu, celebrating the joyous god, dawn does not break (naṅs).»

9 My translation closely follows that of Takeuchi (1985: 136) but differs in a few details.

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571
Dmu rjes (126) bkah stsal-pa /
«ned-kyi yul ʰdi dag-na /
sa htshams-kyi stag hphreṅ khri skugs dag-na /
gles-pa stag-daṅ (127) gzig / dom-daṅ dred las-bstogs-pa maṅ-por mchis-na /» (Envoys)
Dmu decrees:
«In these lands of ours
in such [places as] ‘the skugs of ten thousand rows of tigers’
there are many including gles-pa tigers and leopards, bears and red bears.

Dmu rjes bkah stsal-pa / /
«khyed-cag-gi tshig-la yoṅ zol yod-pas /
ñed (133) Dmu-hi gcans-pa gles-pa lcags-kyi myi rta žub rluṅ ltar ni phyo-la /
glog ltar ni myur-ba /» (Envoys)
Dmu decrees:
«In your words there are deceptions
The gles-pa scouts of our Dmu, the armored horsemen of iron, bound like
the wind as fast as lighting.»

Dmu rjes bkah stsal-paḥ /
(140) «ho-na Phywa-ʰi pho-ṅa ñed-kyi sku-bla-la mchod gsol-du hoṅs-na /
mchod-paṅi rkyen ci yod? /» (Envoys)
Dmu decrees:
«Well, if you messengers of Phywa have come to offer an oblation to our
sku-bla what do you have as an oblation?»

Although these examples do not provide conclusive evidence, they do
suggest that in Old Tibetan ñed is the plural equivalent of ʰna, and can be
used both as a simple plural and as a pluralis majestatis of a single high
ranking individual.

The first person plural bdag-cag

The pronoun bdag-cag, the plural of bdag, occurs frequently in The
envoys from Phywa to Dmu. The envoys of Phywa emphasize their low
status vis-à-vis the lord of Dmu by using this pronoun with regards to
themselves. In many of the examples (e.g. Envoys l. 110, 114, 118, 120)
the envoys further emphasize their low status with the adjective ʰnan-pa
‘vulgar’.

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571
The messengers answered:
«We are the subjects of Phywa.
... We vulgar fellows,
come before [you] merely offering oblation to the god
and offering an appointment to the lord of Dmu, are messengers.»

The messengers reply,
«When we came thither from Rtsa-smad-md (Tibet).
[We] lost the way....
[We] met with a man...
[He] asked us «Whose men are you?»
We answered him straight;
when [we] said «[we] go as messengers of Phywa to Dmu.»

An elegant contrast between the singular bdag and the plural bdag-cag
occurs in the following passage from the Old Tibetan Chronicle (ll. 248-254).
Speaking to the emperor, the elderly minister Phaṅs-to-re Dbyi-tshab uses bdag of himself, but bdag-cag of himself and his kinsmen together.


Phaṅs-to-re Dbyi-tshab made a request from the Gtsug-blon via the messenger Sña-to-re: [...] «Myaṅ was insufficient in his governance, and was
disgraced. My descendants and I, we were not disloyal to the authority. [...] I, a mere old man requests to take an oath before dying. How would it be to grant my lineage to take an oath? As for the emperor’s father, he granted the spreading of the carpet (i.e. marriage ceremony) for my wife. Now, how would it be to make an offering as your servant at La-mo Chag-pa-prum?»

The first person plural ÿo-skol

The pronoun ÿo-skol is used twice in one passage in *The envoys from Phywa to Dmu* (ll. 165-168). The lord of Dmu has up until this point always used ſed to refer to himself and his kinsmen while addressing the messengers of Phywa. This passage, however, marks the incorporation of these messengers into the community, and as a consequence the exclusive pronoun ſed is replaced with the inclusive pronoun ÿo-skol10.

«de-lags khyed ÿo-skol mchis-pa yañ / phu ni ston sde / (166) mdañ ni rgya sde /
 rje gcig-gi ʰbañs-la
 yul cīg-gi ni myi /
 sa cīg-gi ʰbras /
 ri cīg-gi (167) rdo /
 khyed ÿo-skol-la dbyar myed-pas /
 khyed-kyis nas kyañ cēhu yag-dañ log men dag ltos! /
 ruñ-ziñ (168) šis-par gyur-na /
 bdaq-cag [...] bkah ʰgos dag [b]gyis-la /
 khyed-la bkah-luñ dag sbyiñ-gis /» (Envoys)

«You are us. Above a myriarchy, below, a hecatontarchy
As subjects of a ruler,
men of the land,
rice of the earth,
stone of the mountain,
you are not distinguished from us.»

The second person singular khyod

The neutral second person singular pronoun is khyod. This pronoun is used by a mother to her child (OTC l. 31), a wife to her husband (OTC

10 Two further examples of ÿo-skol clearly being employed as a first person plural inclusive can be found in ITJ 0737/1 (ll. 136-137, cf. de Jong 1989: 112).

*Journal Asiatische* 298.2 (2010): 549-571
l. 169), the conspirator Dbyi-tshab to the conspirator Myaṅ-tseṅ-sku (OTC ll. 151-152), the emperor to his vassal Žaṅ-snaṅ Peṅu-zur Ḥbruṅ-po (OTC l. 232), the emperor in his oath to his minister Dbaḥs Phaṅ-to-re Dbyi-tshab (OTC ll. 268-269), and Mgar Khī-ḥbruṅ’s to the Chinese general Ḥwoṅ-dker Žaṅ-še (OTC l. 509).

(31) mas kyaṅ gnod bstan-te / «khyod-kyi phaṅ nī Rhyas bsad-do / khyod-kyi / jo-bo (32) btsan-po nī / Lo-nam rta-rdzīs bkroṅste / (OTC )

His mother showed him what he wanted, «Your father was killed by the Rhya clan. Your lord, the emperor, was killed by Lo-nam the groom.»

(168) Ḥuṅ-nas (169) kho-yo mo na-re / / «khyod lto bo che-la / yī-dags ma bab-kyi / / lto sbyor-du ņes-so» ņes byas-so / (OTC)

Then his wife said, «You are a liar! [You] haven’t been possessed by a spirit, but are surely planning some deceit!»


Dbyi-tshab accepted the meaning of those words, and swore, «Tseṅ-sku, there is no truth apart from what you have said. As my own disaffection is nothing apart from this, I shall never differ from you in mind.»


Then [the emperor] noticed Žaṅ-snaṅ Peṅu-zur Ḥbruṅ-po, who was wishing not to be noticed, and asked him, «If you are [your] father’s loyal son, will [you] sing a song?» Žaṅ-snaṅ requested, «I will sing.»

(268) da-nas nī phan chad-du / khyod (269)-[k]yịs nī ṅa ma ṅtaṅ / ṅa-hiṅ nī khyod myi ṅtaṅ / / ṅa-hiṅ nī khyod btaṅ-na / /

dguṅ mṭahīḍ ni sruṅ-du ruṅ / / khyod-kyis nī (270) [n]a btaṅ-na / /
 Ńas-po nī rmad-du ruṅ» ņes bkaṅ sṭsal-to / / (OTC)

The emperor declared «From now on, henceforth, You—do not abandon me. I will not abandon you.»

_N. W. Hill_

*Journal Asiatique* 298.2 (2010): 549-571
As for me, if I abandon you,
Better I be a border guard of heaven.
As for you, if you abandon me,
Na-po will be well suited [for you].»


«Your army—it is like flies on the lake, numerous and churning but useless. It is like the mist on the hills; it is not cumbersome to men. My army—it is like a single scythe that cuts the many grasses; will it cut them? If a small arrow is shot at a great yak, will it be able to kill it?»

The second person singular khyön-hdañ

A rather rare pronoun of the second person singular is khyo(n)-hdañ. This pronoun occurs once as khyön-hdañ in the Old Tibetan Chronicle (l. 140) and in the form khyo-hdañ three times in a second passage of the same text (l. 205 to 208). I am unaware of any other example of its occurrence. Takeuchi (1985) has suggested regarding the second passage, which is adapted from the Chinese Shiji and quoted above, that khyo(n)-hdañ is a calque of the Chinese 先生 xiansheng. The first passage, however, has no known Chinese inspiration. I am tempted to see this as a genuine Tibetan word, in some kind of relation with khyod. The variation of -d, -n, and open syllables is a widely attested if poorly understood phenomenon in Old Tibetan (cf. Lalou 1953). It would be hasty to draw any conclusions about the meaning of khyo(n)-hdañ based on these two passages. However, the two passages do make it clear that it is a second person singular pronoun, and both passages also share a sense of haughtiness or disdain toward the addressee.

(140) Zhi-po-rje na-re // «Mñan ḣdzì-zuñ-las ḣa-la sñiṅ ᴳe myed-pa-hi bran-du // khyon-hdañ ma (141) ran-la myed-do // (OTC)
Zhi-po-rje said, «There is none more dear to me than Mñan ḣdzì-zuñ. It is not the case that You Sir, are unsuitable as his servant.

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571
Then Khyu-po Spu-sad said, «You Sir, are you fit to be a general? As for a clever man, he is said to be like an awl which has been put into a bag. You Sir, since [you] were appointed as a retainer of the emperor many years have passed, but I have never heard anyone praise [you], saying: '(He) is clever and capable'; so You Sir will continue to be unsuitable and will waste waste the subjects.»

The second person plural khyed

The second person plural pronoun is khyed. This pronoun is used by the father of the first Tibetan emperor, communicating to a group of conspirators, when he agrees to lead their conspiracy (OTC l. 159). Although Stag-bu Sña-gzigs himself does not live to see the success of the plot, and is never made Tibetan emperor, the text regards him retroactively as an emperor.


Then Myaṅ, Dbahs and Mnon—the three—[heard] the message from Tshes-poṅ Nag-seṅ: «[I] proclaimed [our intentions] to the ears of Stag-bu, the Spu-rgyal, and the emperor said, ‘Even though one of my sisters is with Ziṅ-po-rje, I will do as you say.’ So he decreed.

The following passage, in which the emperor is agreeing to grant his minister Dbyi-tshab an oath, makes the contrast between singular khyod and plural khyed very clear. When the emperor addresses Dbyi-tshab individually he uses khyod but employs khyed whenever someone else is included in the reference.

ṣa-na ṇa-hi yab-kyi riṅ-la / / Ḥbrin-tho-re Sbuṅ-brtsan / (257)-daṅ / / Phaṅs-to-re Dbyi-tshab-daṅ khyed gniṅ / / chab pha-rol tshu-rol-gyi / / guṅ blon htshol chig-par dgod / (258) dgod-pa-las / Ḥbrin-to-re Sbuṅ-brtsan ni śi / / khyod ni ṣas-ste ni ma ḡder gnaṅ-ste bṣag / / Myaṅ Žaṅ-

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571
Previously, during the reign of my father, you two, Hbris-to-re Sbu-brtsan and Phaṅs-ro-re Dbyi-tshab, were being made ministers (guṅ-blon) of the near and far sides of the river. However, Hbris-to-re Sbu-brtsan died, and you being old were granted leave to rest in the sun. Mya Zan-snã was appointed as prime minister. My father died. That very Mya was disloyal and was duly disgraced. Now as for you all, Dbaṣ [clan] patriarchs, from beginning to end [you] have not been disloyal, and so [you] may make offerings (pyag-thab gsol) at La-mo Chag-pa prum. I also grant [you] an oath.» So he decreed.

The emperor also employs khyed in reference to Dbyi-tshab and his clansmen in the text of his oath (OTC ll. 278-280, 286-289).

In general, descriptions of Tibetan grammar treat khyed as the honorific equivalent of khyod, and do not recognize a singular versus plural distinction (e.g. Beyer 1992: 208). In the Mi la rnam thar the pronoun khyed is used, just like vous in French, both as a neutral second person plural and as an honorific second person singular. The neutral use of khyed for the plural can be seen in the following example where a lama addresses two students.

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571
The honorific use of khyed can be seen in this example, in which Myaṅ-tsha-dkar-rgyan addresses her dead husband.

yab Mi-la-šes-rab-rgyal-mtshan khyed-la bu hdi ḥdra skyes-so
«O father, Mi-la-šes-rab-rgyal-mtshan, to you such a son as this was born!»
(de Jong 1959: 36, ll. 21-22)

In Old Tibetan it appears that khyed functioned only as a neutral plural and not yet as an honorific singular.

Third person pronouns kхо-na, mo-na, and khoṅ-ta

Because pronouns in Tibetan can be understood as carrying over from a previous sentence unless otherwise made clear there is very little need for third person pronouns, and they tend to have an emphatic or clarifying force. In the Old Tibetan Chronicle the third person pronoun kхо-na occurs twice (l. 69, 193), and the feminine equivalent mo-na is used once (l. 70).

de-hī ḥog-du Mthon-myi Ḥbruṅ / (69)-po rgyal Btsan-nuṣ byas-te / / dkuḥ ched-po byas-nas / / kхо-na srīn-mo Mthon-myī ya Yar-steṅ / dug bs[kar / (70)] te baṅ-ba-la-s / / mo-na dug ḥthuṭ-sas-nas / / Btsan-nu bkum-ba lagso / / (OTC)
After him, Mthon-myī Ḥbruṅ-po-rgyal Btsan-nu served. Making a great plot (dkuḥ ched-po), he entrusted his own sister, Lady Mthon-myī Yar-steṅ, with poison. He sent her off, but she drank poison [unknowingly], and Btsan-nu was put to death.

de-nas Gnam-ri Slon-mtshan-gyīs pyag lcag-gis / / (191) dras-te / / Myaṅ Tseṅ sku ḥī bya dgahr / / Mīnā Ḥdzī-zuṅ-gi mkhar Sdur ｂa-daṅ / bran khyīm stoṅ līa bṛgyāḥ tsa[lto / (192)[…] Mnon Ḥdroṅ- (193) poḥi bya dgahr / kхо-na-ḥī pu-nu-po Mnon-la stsogs-pa bran khyīm stoṅ līa bṛgyaḥ tsa[lt-o / / (OTC)
Then Gnam-ri Slon-mtshan pointed with his whip and granted Sdur-ba, the stronghold of [Myaṅ’s enemy,] Mīnā Ḥdzī-zuṅ, along with one thousand five hundred bondservant households as Myaṅ Tseṅ-sku’s reward.…. As Mnon Ḥdroṅ-po’s reward he granted one thousand five hundred bondservant households from his own Mnon clan, and others.

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571
Interestingly, it is only kho-ta and kho-n-ta which occur in the ergative case in these documents. Further examples occur nearly verbatim (r018, r030, r044, r054, r068, r089, r113, r122, r144, r160, r188, r200, r225, r235, r255, r268, r279, r292, r303, r314). In order to further elucidate the meaning of these pronouns it is useful to restrict examination to a single legal text where two of these pronouns occur each multiple times. The hunting law PT 1071 contains many examples both of kho-na and khoń-ta.

**kho-na**

In PT 1071 the singular pronoun kho-na only refers to the accused.

gage-tan-dkar bchu gnis-da kho-na btdag bchu gsum / bro stsaldo (PT 1071, r009)

Twelve members of the jury, the accused himself the thirteenth, swear an oath.

mdu hpo'n / hpo'n-ba / kho-na hbras sig bkumste (PT 1071, r056)

The accused alone, who shot the arrow, is himself executed.

mdu hpo'n / hpo'n-ba kho-na sgor rabs bcade (PT 1071, r020)

The accused, who shot the arrow, suffers the extinction of his household lineage.

Interestingly, it is only kho-ta and khoń-ta which occur in the ergative case in these documents.

Further examples occur nearly verbatim (r018, r030, r044, r054, r068, r089, r113, r122, r144, r160, r188, r200, r225, r235, r255, r268, r279, r292, r303, r314).

Further examples occur nearly verbatim (r071, r100, r103, r123, r162, r201, r236).

Two further examples occur nearly verbatim (r31 and r070).
khol yul-daṅ baṅ-za pyugs-nor-gyi pyed-pho ni kho-na stsalde / (PT 1071, r174)\(^{15}\)

As for the [other] half of the service tenure lands, goods, and chattel, they are given to the accused

The corresponding term for plaintiff in PT 1071 is the noun yus-bdag.

dkar gyis chaṅs taṅ / mdaṅ phogs pāṅ / gum-daṅ / myi stoṅ / (r11) sraṅ khri baḥste / yus bdag-daṅ / ḡdam-po phyed mar dbaṅo / ḡdam-po ma mchis na / sraṅ khri yus bdag dbaṅo / (r12) mdaś phogs-pa / (PT 1071)

If the jury establishes guilt and the one hit by the arrow was killed, then blood money of 10,000 sraṅ is imposed and half is the share of the plaintiff, the other half that of his lawyer. If there is no lawyer, 10,000 sraṅ is the share of the plaintiff.

**khoṅ-ta**

Each section of the law is prefaced by a description of those persons to whom that section of the law pertains. In these prefaces the pronoun khoṅ-ta is used with plural antecedents.

(r2) $ / / żaṅ-lon chen-po-daṅ / khoṅ-taṅ myes-po-daṅ pha-daṅ ḡdi rnam / naṅ ḡcig-gis / ḡcig ri-dags-la / maṅs drṅul-bas phog-pa-daṅ (r3) żaṅ-lon ḡdi rnam-labh / żaṅ-lon g.yuṅ g-yi-pa maṅ-cad / mnaṅs mthah-ma yan-cad /-kyi ḡri-dags-la mdaṅs drṅul-baḥdi khrim / (r4) -la (PT 1071)

The law [covering cases when] while hunting someone from among the great ministers, their grandfathers, or fathers hits one of their own with an arrow, or if such ministers are hit by an arrow shot by a minister of turquoise down to the lowest commoner.


The prime minister, the great minister of the interior, the emperor’s maternal uncle in charge of political affairs, and the deputy prime minister, these four great ministers themselves, their grandfathers and fathers are all of equal status regarding compensation for being shot by an arrow.

\[^{15}\] Two further examples occur nearly verbatim (r210 and r243)

*Journal Asiatique* 298.2 (2010): 549-571
spad tshun-cad / yi-ge ma mchis-paḥi rnams /-daṅ ma-yar-mo-daṅ / bnah-ma / (r40)-daṅ / khyo-mo-daṅ / bu-sriṅ khyo ma mchis-pa-daṅ / Ḫḍi rnams / (PT 1071)

The ministers with a turquoise insignia themselves, grandfathers and fathers of those with a turquoise insignia, from the phu-bo-spad of the four great ministers to their pha-spun-spad without insignia, their step-mothers, daughters-in-law, wives, and unmarried sisters.


The prime minister etc., from the four great ministers to those with a silver gilt insignia, the ministers themselves and the grandfathers and fathers of these ministers, their grandmothers and mothers, from their bu-po-spad to their pha-spun-spad, who do not hold insignia, their step-mothers, daughters-in-law, wives, and unmarried sisters.

This preliminary investigation of the use of kho-na and khoṅ-ta in PT 1071 indicates that the primary grammatical difference between them is that kho-na is singular whereas khoṅ-ta is plural. It remains for future research to demonstrate whether this distinction holds true for other texts and how the meanings of these two pronouns interact with those of the other third person pronouns kho-ta, khoṅ-ta, and khoṅ-na which occur in legal texts.

**The reflexive pronoun raṅ**

Both objects and persons can be the referent of the reflexive pronoun raṅ, as the following three examples from the Old Tibetan Chronicle (ll. 10-12, 93-96, 322-323) indicate.


\(^{16}\) For similar contexts compare r351, r353, r354, r362, r364, and r376.

*Journal Asiatique* 298.2 (2010): 549-571
Then Lo-nam said, «If you will not allow [our refusal] in that way, then I will agree, if you grant me your divine inheritance, the great magical treasures you possess: the spear that throws itself, the sword that cuts by itself, the armor that dresses one by itself, the shield that deflects by itself, and so forth. »

de-ḥi ḋog-du Khyu-po Spuñ-sad Zu-tses / (94) byas-pa-las / / ḋo-ma-lde Lod-btsan-daṅ regs ma mjal-nas / / mkhar Khri-boms-su mchis-te / / Khri-boms (95) dkuṅ gaṅ pub-nas / btsan-po Sroṅ-brtsan ston-mo gsol-bar byas-te / / glo-ba riṅs-pa / Mgar Yul-zuṅ (96) gis tshor-nas / raṅ-gī mgo bchad-de gum-mo / / (OTC)

After him, Khyu-po Spuñ-sad Zu-tse served, but disagreeing (regs ma mjal) with ḋo-ma-lde Lod-btsan, he went to Khri-boms stronghold. He filled Khri-boms to the roof with plots, and offered a banquet for the emperor, [Khri] Sroṅ-brtsan. Mgar Yul-zuṅ sensed the disloyalty, and [Zu-tse] cut off his own head and died.


Yul-zuṅ went to Khri-boms and examined it, and Yul-zuṅ perceiving that it was filled up with plots, Yul-zuṅ fled back and offered [this information] to the ears of the emperor. After Yul-zuṅ had fled back, Khyuṅ-po Spuñ-sad killed himself and died, cutting off his head.

Conclusion

Old Tibetan has three pronouns for the first person singular: ġa, bdag, and kho-bo. The pronoun ġa is the neutral default pronoun of the first person singular. The pronoun bdag shows humility or deference to a higher status addressee. The examples occurring in the corpus of texts studied here does not permit a clear description of the meaning of kho-bo, but it may express haughtiness or indignation. The plural pronouns corresponding to ġa and bdag are ġed and bdag-cag, which are both exclusive first person plural pronouns. There is also an inclusive first plural pronoun, ḋo-skol. The second person pronouns include two singulars, khyoḍ and khyo(n)-ḥdah, as well as a plural, khyeḍ. Unlike classical and modern Tibetan khyeḍ appears not to be used as an honorific

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571
singular in Old Tibetan. Third person pronouns do not occur frequently in narrative texts, but rather are more typical of legal literature. This study has uncovered three third person pronouns: kho-na, mo-na and khoñ-ta. The first two, kho-na and mo-na, are third person singular pronouns, and mo-na is specifically feminine. The remaining pronoun, khoñ-ta, appears to be a plural third person pronoun. These findings are preliminary and must be confirmed by attestations in other Old Tibetan texts. Old Tibetan has a reflexive pronoun, rañ, which can be used of both people and things. The available examples are all third person, but this does not indicate that it cannot be used with a first or second person reference.

If we compare the system of personal pronouns in Old Tibetan with that of the Mi la ras pa rnam thar, the system of first person pronouns is seen to be very similar. The first person singular pronoun kho-bo drops out of use in Mi la, and the inclusive first plural is rañ-re rather than the ḥo-skol of Old Tibetan. The system of second person pronouns has undergone more change, with the disappearance of khon-ḥdah and the extension of a honorific singular to the plural meaning of khyed. Third person pronouns were not included in my earlier study of the Mi la ras pa rnam thar, so I cannot offer any comparison on that point.

Much work remains to be done on both the synchronic use of personal pronouns in various periods of Tibetan literature and the diachronic relationship among these systems. The few facts established here can, however, perhaps aid in the philological treatment of Old Tibetan texts, and serve as a point of departure for further studies on Tibetan pronominal systems.

REFERENCES


Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571
The pronominal systems of early forms of Tibetan remain virtually unexplored. Old Tibetan has three first person singular pronouns ha, bdag, and kho-bo, as well as three first person plural pronouns ned, bdag-cag, and ho-skol. The second person pronouns include two singulars khyod and khyo(n)-bdag and a plural khyed. The current study uncovers three third person pronouns kho-na, mo-na,
and khoñ-ta. Old Tibetan also has a reflexive pronoun rañ. Through the examination of attested examples of each of these pronouns in Old Tibetan literature, this article attempts to distinguish the meanings among these diverse forms.

Keywords: Old Tibetan, personal pronouns

Résumé

Les systèmes pronominaux du tibétain ancien restent pratiquement inexplorés. La langue tibétaine ancienne a trois pronoms pour la première personne du singulier na, bdag et kho-bo, et trois pronoms pour la première personne du pluriel ned, bdag-cag et ho-skol. Les pronoms de la deuxième personne comprennent deux pronoms singuliers khyod et khyo(n)-ḥḍaḥ et le pluriel khyed. L’étude actuelle révèle trois pronoms de la troisième personne kho-na, mo-na, et khoñ-ta. Le tibétain ancien a également un pronom réfléchi rañ. Grâce à l’examen des exemples attestés de chacun de ces pronoms dans la littérature du tibétain ancien, cet article tente de faire la distinction entre la signification de ces diverses formes.

Mots-clés: tibétain ancien, pronoms personnels

Journal Asiatique 298.2 (2010): 549-571