

Tibetan *-las*, *-nas* and *-bas*

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In descriptions of Tibetan grammar it is common to treat *-las* and *-nas* together in the discussion of case marking, signaling merely that *-las* is capable of forming comparisons whereas *-nas* is not. Similarly, in the discussion of comparison most authors make no distinction between the suffixes *-bas* and *-las*. A look at a few examples of these three morphemes demonstrates that they have quite distinct syntax and semantics.

Key words: Tibetan case, ablative, elative, comparative

Dans les descriptions de la grammaire du tibétain, il est courant de traiter *-las* et *-nas* comme des marques casuelles similaires, en signalant simplement que *-las* peut former des comparaisons alors que *-nas* ne le peut pas. De même, la plupart des descriptions n'opèrent aucune distinction entre les suffixes *-bas* et *-las* en ce qui concerne la comparaison. Nous montrons à travers divers exemples illustrant l'emploi de ces trois morphèmes qu'ils ont des fonctions syntactiques distinctes et présentent également des différences sémantiques.

Mots-clés : les cas du Tibétain, ablatif, élatif, comparatif

1. THE TIBETAN CASE SYSTEM

The Tibetan indigenous grammatical tradition posits eight cases to mirror the eight cases of Sanskrit, but this analysis does violence to Tibetan morphophonemics, drawing distinctions where none are warranted and failing to draw them where they are (*cf.* Schiefner 1865:178-180, Hill 2004:79-81, Tournadre 2010:92-96).¹

Distributional considerations are the correct criteria on which to describe linguistic phenomena (Harris 1951:5-6).² In Tibetan bound morphemes are postpositional. Such morphemes divide neatly into two categories: case morphemes are those that follow noun phrases and converbial morphemes are those that follow verbs.³ For Tibetan there are twenty phonetically distinct suffixes that occur after noun phrases: \emptyset , *-kyi*, *-gyi*, *-gi*, *-ḥi*, *-kyis*, *-gyis*, *-gyi*, *-s*, *-la*, *-na*, *-r*, *-su*, *-tu*, *-du*, *-las*, *-nas*, *-dañ*, *-bas*, and *-pas*. However, only a subset of these forms may be found after any particular noun phrase. Depending on its auslaut, a given noun phrase selects one member from the three subclasses (1) *-kyi*, *-gyi*, *-gi*, *-ḥi*, (2) *-kyis*, *-gyis*, *-gyi*, *-s*, and (3) *-tu*, *-du*, *-su*, *-r*. The members of these respective subclasses are allomorphs of three distinct morphemes, which one can represent as $\{-kyi\}$, $\{-kyis\}$, and $\{-tu\}$.⁴ The suffixes *-bas* and *-pas*, are also allophonic variants

¹ Here I employ the Library of Congress system for Tibetan transliteration, with the exception that the 23rd letter of the Tibetan alphabet is transliterated 'ḥ' rather than with an apostrophe. Cited examples are glossed following the 'Leipzig Glossing Rules', with the addition of the following abbreviations: ASS 'associative', COMP 'comparative', ELA 'elative', FIN 'finite verb', SEM 'semi-final converb', and TRM 'terminative'. In the transcription of Tibetan a hyphen indicates a *tsheg*, which often—but not always—corresponds to a morpheme boundary.

² This discussion of how to define 'case' and enumerate the cases of Tibetan relies directly on Hill (2011:3-5).

³ How to distinguish nouns from verbs and other part of speech classes in Tibetan is no trivial question, and lies outside the scope of this paper.

⁴ I use braces $\{ \}$ to enclose one member of a category, when it is being used to represent that category as a whole.

of a single {-bas} morpheme, although the phonetic conditioning is less strictly observed.⁵ Thus, on morphophonemic grounds ten separate Tibetan cases may be distinguished: \emptyset , {-kyi}, {-kyis}, -la, -na, {-tu}, -las, -nas, -dañ, and {-bas}.

Many authors however follow the traditional analysis in collapsing -la, -na, and -du, -tu, -su, -ru, -r under the rubric *la don* ‘equivalent to la’ and also collapsing -las and -nas under the rubric *hbyuñ khuñs* ‘source’. Hill (2004:83) mistakenly identifies Scott DeLancey (2003) as the first researcher to correctly separate these morphemes into five distinct cases, namely -la, -na, {-tu}, -las and -nas. In fact, on June 24, 1864 Franz Anton Schiefner put forward this analysis in a presentation to the Imperial Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences (Schiefner 1865). It appears that Palmyr Cordier’s manual is the only subsequent work to have directly followed Schiefner’s analysis (1907:15-16). Hill (2004) and Tournadre (2010) also divide these forms into five separate cases. Although Schiefner, Cordier, DeLancey, Hill, and Tournadre all self-consciously reject the traditional analysis, they do not quite agree among themselves, neither on the names of these five cases nor on the names and number of the Tibetan cases overall (*cf.* Table 1).

Hahn (1994:373) credits Schiefner with describing a “Kasus absolutus” in Tibetan. Although I have been unable to locate Schiefner’s use of this term, his explicit statement that Tibetan lacks an accusative (1855:418) does suggest as much. Schiefner’s argument against the accusative is recognizable today as an argument that Tibetan is an ergative language. His account of Tibetan ergativity proceeds by 60 years Girardeau’s description of the *nominativus simplex* and *nominativus instrumentalis* (1916:iv), which Hill mistakenly claims is “la première explication correcte de l’ergativité en tibétain” (2004:80). One may see the following comment of Schmidt’s as an even earlier account of Tibetan ergativity:

⁵ Confer note 19 below.

	Schiefner (1865)	Cordier (1907)	DeLancey (2003)	Hill (2004)	Tournadre (2010)
-∅	[absolute]	---	zero marking	absolute	absolute
{-kyi}	[genitive]	genitive	genitive	genitive	genitive
{-kyis}	[instrumental]	instrumental	ergative/instrumental	agentive	agentive
-la	allative	allative	locative/allative	allative	dative
-na	inessive	inessive	locative/illative	locative	locative
{-tu}	illative	illative	terminative	terminative	purposive
-las	ablative	ablative	ablative	ablative	ablative
-nas	elative	elative	elative	elative	elative
-dan	---	---	---	associative	associative
{-bas}	---	---	---	---	comparative

Table 1: A comparison of case analyses among five authors

“Sehr oft trifft man auch den Nominativ in seiner Subject-eigenschaft mit der Partikel des Instrumentals an, ohne dass er deshalb die Bedeutung des letztgenannten Casus übernehme” (1839:61).⁶

Schiefner acknowledges and does not argue with the tradition of identifying {-kyi} with the Sanskrit genitive, and {-kyis} with the Sanskrit instrumental; one may thus infer that he accepts these rubrics as names for these cases in Tibetan. Although Schiefner does not explicitly list the absolutive, genitive, and instrumental as Tibetan cases,⁷ they can be directly inferred from his presentation. Consequently, in Table 1 these three are put in brackets in Schiefner’s (1865) column. Cordier (1907:15-16) omits the absolutive and explicitly includes the genitive and instrumental, otherwise his presentation is identical to Schiefner’s.

For *-la* and *-na* DeLancey employs compound case names (e.g. ‘locative/allative’). This is an unfortunate decision.

Such terminology suggests that these cases do not exist in their own right, but rather consist of combinations of more basic components. The opposite is true: the case marked with *-kyis* and the case marked with *-la* are structural components of Tibetan; how one chooses to analyze the semantics of these cases is a matter of taste. The Greek dative combines the functions which in Sanskrit are covered by the dative, instrumental, and locative. The Sanskrit instrumental combines the functions which in Finnish are covered by instructive (instrument of means) and comitative (instrument of accompaniment). It would be silly to call the Greek dative the ‘dative-instructive-

⁶ For a historical discussion of Tibetan ergativity see Vollmann (2008).

⁷ At least neither in Schiefner (1855) nor Schiefner (1865).

comitative-locative'. To do so would be to confuse a case with its use, and to describe one language by implicitly comparing it to others rather than by accepting the language on its own terms (Hill 2010b:258).

Schiefner, Cordier, Hill, and Tournadre avoid the infelicity of compound case names. Other terminological disagreements among these authors, such as 'allative' versus 'dative' or among 'illative', 'terminative', and 'purposive', are of little consequence. After all, the relationship between *signifiant* and *signifié* is arbitrary and these variations identically describe the number and nature of the cases they label.

Both Schiefner and DeLancey omit *-dan*. This morpheme has two uses, one to connect two noun phrases (*rgyal-po-dan rgyal-mo* 'king and queen') and the second called for by the rection of some verbs (such as *mjal* 'to meet', e.g. *rgyal-mo-dan mjal* 'meet with the queen'). Two factors have led *-dan* to be overlooked as a case marker: (1) it is not reckoned as a case marker in the indigenous tradition; (2) the translation equivalents of *-dan* in Western European languages are generally not case markers. Nonetheless, distributionally *-dan* behaves like other cases. In addition, Tournadre and Dorje point out that in many Tibetan dialects *-dan* takes on other case functions or other cases take on the functions of *-dan*.⁸

Dans d'autres dialectes, notamment en Ladakhi, *-dan* correspond à l'instrumental et à l'associatif. En tibétain central, *-dan* peut être remplacé par d'autres cas tel

⁸ Beyer (1992:270) presages the accounting of *-dan* as an independent case, but he does not recognize case as such in Tibetan grammar (cf. note 12 below). Hannah (1912:73-81) recognized *-dan* as a case marker, but does not clearly separate it from other cases.

que l'oblique ou l'absolutif. Comme toutes les autres marques casuelles, l'absolutif, le génitif, l'ergatif-instrumental, l'ablatif ou l'oblique, la marque associative possède deux types de fonctions: casuelles et connectives. Rappelons, en outre, qu'en Amdo la marque habituelle correspondent à la conjonction de coordination *-dan* en tibétain standard est *-la*, qui est aussi une marque casuelle (2003:368 note 13).

Since no author has presented arguments that *-dan* is not a case marker, at a minimum, the benefit of the doubt has shifted in favour of *-dan* as a case.

Tournadre proposes a tenth 'comparative' case for the suffix *-bas* (2010:98), a suggestion considered below.

It is one thing to correctly group case suffixes according to morphophonemics and quite another to account for the syntax and semantics of each case so arrived at. DeLancey (2003:258), Hill (2004:83-84, 2011:3-5), and Tournadre (2010:110-113) recognize the need to draw the distinction between *-las* and *-nas* and accord in naming *-las* 'ablative' and *-nas* 'elative', but do not provide cited examples testifying to any syntactic or semantic differences.⁹ Schiefner (1865:191-192) does include cited examples, some of which I incorporate below; the small attention his article has garnered and the considerable lapse of time since its appearance warrants renewed exploration.

⁹ Tournadre (2010) does provide textual examples but does not cite them in a manner that permits verification. Hill (2011) discusses syntactic and semantic grounds for distinguishing the allative (*-la*), locative (*-na*), and terminative {-tu}; here the focus is on the need to distinguish *-nas* and *-las*. I exclude from discussion the use of *-nas* and *-las* after verbal stems and verbal nouns. For a discussion of *-las* after verbal nouns compare Hill (2010a). Hill's decision to describe this use of *-las* as a 'converb' is unfortunate. The term 'converb' should be restricted to morphemes suffixed directly to verb stems rather than to verbal nouns.

2. THE TEXTS EMPLOYED IN THIS STUDY

The Tibetan texts cited in this study reflect my own experience and interests. Those texts with shelf numbers beginning with IOL Tib J or PT are Old Tibetan documents unearthed at Dunhuang and currently housed respectively in the British Library and Bibliothèque nationale de France (*cf.* Imaeda et al. 2007). As an *aide-mémoire*, I add prose titles to individual Dunhuang documents, whenever to do so is relatively conventional. Outside of the Dunhuang corpus, I primarily cite two other texts. The *Mdzañs-blun* and the *Mi-la-ras-paḥi rnam-thar*.

The *Mdzañs-blun* is a collection of tales found in the Tibetan Buddhist canon (*bkaḥ ḥgyur*), translated from Chinese into Tibetan by Chos grub (Chinese: 法成 *Fǎchéng*) in the ninth century. Schmidt's (1843) edition is cited here. Studies include Schiefner (1852), Jäschke (1864), Takakusu (1901), Terjék (1969), Mair (1993), and Roesler (2007). More recently than Schiefner and Jäschke's use of the text in grammatical investigations is Anderson (1987). Ueyama discusses Chos grub in the context of Buddhism at Dunhuang (1990:84-246).

The *Mi-la ras-paḥi rnam-thar* by Gtsaṅ smyon he-ru-ka rus-paḥi rgyan-can (1452-1507) is probably the best known work of literature in the Tibetan language. The edition of de Jong's (1959) is cited here.¹⁰ To the translations listed in Hill (2007:227 note 2) one may now add Quintman (2010). Linguistic studies of the text include the rather flawed Saxena (1989), together with Dempsey's rejoinder (1993), Hill (2007), and Haller (2009).

3. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN -LAS AND -NAS

Schiefner's teacher Philippe Edouard Foucaux may be forgiven for following the traditional presentation of cases (1858:

¹⁰ One should note (*contra* Tournadre 2010:112 note 59), that de Jong's edition (1959) lacks a translation whether into English or another language.

27), but the mistake of collapsing *-nas* and *-las* together as exponents of the same ‘ablative’ case has continued unabated to our own day (Bacot 1946:26-28, Schwieger 2006:157, Sommerschuh 2008:147-151).¹¹ The suffixes *-las* and *-nas* are not in complementary distribution and therefore must be separated into two separate cases.

Meaning ‘from within’, the elative *-nas* encodes “eine aus Innen hervorgehende Bewegung” (Schiefner 1865:192), which suggests the crossing of some boundary or threshold, whereas *-las*, meaning ‘from the side/surface of’, has no such implication.¹² Examples (1) to (3) exhibit the use of *-nas* as ‘from within a container’, whether the container be a grave, ocean, river, or mouth.

(1) “*ña śi dur khuñ-nas bltaḥo*”

I-[ABS] die grave hole-ELA see-FIN

gsuñs-nas groñs-so

say-then die-FIN

(The father) said ‘I will watch **from within** the grave hole’ and then he died. (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:31, l. 25)

(2) *khyim-bdag deḥi khyim-du rgya-mtsho-nas*

householder-[ABS] that-GEN house-TRM ocean-ELA

mi źig ḥoñs-nas

man a-[ABS] came-then

¹¹ Gyurmé (1992:45-50) and Hahn (1994:105-111) list several differences between the use of *-las* and that of *-nas*, but fall short of differentiating them as separate cases.

¹² Beyer refers to this distinction as ‘bounded’ versus ‘unbounded’ in an analysis essentially identical to that presented here, but unfortunately unsupported by examples (1992:267-270). Beyer describes these morphemes as marking ‘roles’ (of which he counts five) rather than cases (1992:263). Simon also recognizes this distinction between *-las* and *-nas* (1941:385).

To the house of that householder there came **from** the sea a man. (*Mdzaris-blun*, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 269b = Schmidt 1843:268, l. 17, cf. Schiefner 1865:192)

- (3) *chu* *deḥi* *nañ-nas* *tshur*
 water-[ABS] that-GEN inside-ELA thither
śiñ-mkhan *zig*
 carpenter a-[ABS]
steḥu *kha-nas* *khyer-te* *ḥoñ-ño* //

axe-[ABS] mouth-ELA carry-SEM come-FIN
 A woodsman came thither out **from within** a river, carrying an axe **from** his mouth. (*Mdzaris-blun*, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 271b = Schmidt 1843:273, l. 2)

The woodsman emerges from the container of the river, and the axe protrudes from the container of his mouth.¹³ The expression ‘from the mouth’ is also used to introduce direct quotes, e.g. *yum-gyi źal-nas* ‘from mother’s mouth’ (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:61, l. 5), and *bla-maḥi źal-nas* ‘from the lama’s mouth’ (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:62, l. 24). This construction reflects the perception of the mouth as a container. This meaning of ‘from within’ accounts for the label ‘elative’ (*ex latere* ‘out of the side’).

A search of the Old Tibetan Documents Online database¹⁴ suggests that only *-nas* can be used with spatial nouns, in constructions which are sometimes called postpositions. One finds *nañ-nas* ‘from within’ (14 examples), *steñ-nas* ‘from above’ (3 examples) and *ḥog-nas* ‘from below’ (45 examples), but not a

¹³ A reviewer citing Hahn (1994:106-107, §12.2 c. and e.) objects to this treatment of *kha-nas*, suggesting instead ‘carried in /with the mouth’. Perhaps, but if one carries an axe in / with one’s mouth, the axe will protrude from the container of the mouth. Thus, this instance of the elative is consistent with a ‘from inside of’ interpretation, even if another analysis is preferred.

¹⁴ <http://otdo.aa.tufs.ac.jp> (accessed 18 February 2011).

single example of *nañ-las*, *steñ-las*, or *hog-las*. Because such phrases suggest the crossing of a threshold (something was low and is now high, etc.), *-las* is excluded as an option.

When light emerges from an object, the difference between *-nas* and *-las* concretely reflects a different image of the light in the mind's eye, a single shaft of light shining out of a Buddha's navel (4) versus a pillar or stūpa effulgent across its whole surface (5 and 6).

- (4) *sprul-baḥi* *sañs-rgyas* *de dag-gi*
 magically.manifest-GEN Buddha that-PL-GEN
lte-ba-nas *ḥod-zer* *byuñ-ste*
 navel-ELA light.ray-[ABS] arise-SEM
 A ray of light arose **from out of** the navel of those
 magically manifest buddhas. (*Mdzañs-blun*, Derge Kanjur
 LXXIV, 163b = Schmidt 1843:68, l. 15, cf. Schiefer 1865:192)

- (5) *bdag-gi* *khyim-na* *ka-ba* *zig-las* *rtag-par*
 me-GEN home-LOC pillar a-ABL always
ḥod *ḥbyuñ-ste*
 light-[ABS] arise-SEM
 In my house light constantly arises **from (the surface of)** a
 pillar. (*Mdzañs-blun*, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 142b = Schmidt
 1843:26, l. 1, cf. Schiefer 1865:191)

- (6) *mchod-rten* *de-las* *ñi* *zla* *lta-buḥi* *ḥod*
 stūpa that-ABL sun moon like-GEN light
chen-po-dañ / *mchod-rten* *de ḥdra*
 big-ASS stūpa that-like
mañ-po *ḥphros-te*
 many-[ABS] disperse

From (the surface of) that stūpa emerged great light like the sun and moon, and many similar stūpas. (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:54, ll. 6-7)

In the metaphor of Saṃsāra as a wheel, since wheels are more or less flat, we are bound to the wheel rather than within it.

- (7) “*ḥkhor-ba-las tshe ḥdir grol-baḥi chos*
 wheel-ABL that-ABS this-TRM release-GEN dharma
śig źu” byas-pas /
 a-[ABL] request say
 (I) said, ‘(I) request the dharma which releases one in one life **from** (being on) the wheel (of life).’ (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:52, l. 15)

The ground is the paragon of surfaces, so it is no surprise to meet *-las* in example (8).

- (8) *sa-las sri lan-ste chags*
 earth-ABL demon-[ABS] raise-SEM be
 The demon rose **from** the ground. (IOL Tib J 0731 recto, l. 121 = Imaeda et al. 2007:267).

An elegant instance of the contrast between *-las* and *-nas* is found in example (9), in which birds come from (within) the sky and rats come from (the surface of) the earth. The contrasting use of *gnam-nas* ‘from the sky’ and *sa-las* ‘from the earth’ makes clear that the sky is imagined as a vessel and the earth imagined as a surface.

- (9) *de kun gcig-dañ yañ ma phrad-na /*
 that all one-ASS also not meet-if
khyed-cag gnam-nas ḥoñs-na ni /
 you heaven-ELA come-if emphasis

phur-baḥi ḥdab-śog myed-la /
 fly-GEN wing-[ABS] not.exist-and
sa-las ḥdzul-te ḥoñs-na ni
 earth-ELA enter-SEM come-if emphasis
byi-ba ma yin-na /
 mouse not is-if
khyed-cag-gi tshig-la zol mañ-bas
 you-GEN word-ALL lie-[ABS] be.many-because
slar gśegs-śig !” ////
 back go-IMP

If [you] did not meet with one of them all although you had come **from** the heavens [you] have no wings although [you] had come scurrying **from** across the earth [you] are not mice. Since there are many lies in your words, go back! (*Envoys of Phywa to Dmu*, PT 126 II, ll. 127-129 = Imaeda et al. 2007:23)

But the sky is not always a container. Gods it seems do not swim about in the container of the sky like birds, but rather live on the surface of the sky.

- (10) *deḥi tshe tshañs-ris-kyi lha rñams-kyis*
 that-GEN time-[ABS] brahmakāyika-GEN god PL-ERG
bcom-ldan-ḥdas-kyi dgoñs-pa śes-śiñ
 Bhagavan-GEN thought-[ABS] know-and
rtog-nas nam-mkhaḥ-las babs-te /
 understand-then heaven-ELA descend-SEM
 At that time, the gods of brahmakāyika knew and understood the thought of the Bhagavan, and came down **from** heaven. (*Mdzañs-blun*, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 129a = Schmidt 1843:3, l. 7, cf. Schiefer 1865:191)

Other uses of *-nas* and *-las* are analogical extensions of the core meanings so far elaborated. When leaving a place the elative *-nas* is called for because one must pass through a boundary between the location departed and its adjoining location.

- (11) *blon-che* *Stoñ-rtsan* *Ḥa-ža yul-nas*
 prime.minister Stoñ-rtsan-[ABS] Ḥa-ža land-ELA
slar *ḥkhord-te*
 back return-SEM
 Prime minister Stoñ-rtsan returned **from** the land of Ḥa-ža
 (*Old Tibetan Annals* 666, l. 46 = Imaeda et al. 2007:232)¹⁵
- (12) *btsan-po* *dbyard* *Moñ-kar-nas* *chab-srīd-la*
 emperor-[ABS] summer Moñ-kar-nas-ELA campaign-ALL
Śa-gu-ñiñ-sum-khol-du *gśegs-śiñ/*
Śa-gu-ñiñ-sum-khol-TRM go-and
 In the summer the emperor went **from** Moñ-kar to Śa-gu-
 ñiñ-sum-khol on campaign. (*Old Tibetan Annals* 700, l. 132
 = Imaeda et al. 2007:236)

When leaving a person or group rather than a place the ablative *-las* is favoured, because no boundary is crossed; one leaves from next to another person rather than from within that person.

- (13) *btsan-mo* *Mañ-mo-rje-las* *myī* *mañ-po* *bkug*
 queen Mañ-mo-rje-ABL person many-[ABS] summon
 Many men were summoned **from (the side of)** queen Mañ-
 mo-rje. (*Old Tibetan Annals* 697, l. 124 = Imaeda et al.
 2007:235)

¹⁵ During the writing of this paper, Brandon Dotson kindly made his translation of the *Old Tibetan Annals* available to me prior to its publication (cf. Dotson 2009).

- (14) *Ho-lde-spu-rgyal gnam-gyī lha-las myīḥī*
 Ho-lde-spu-rgyal heaven-GEN god-ABL person-GEN
rjer gśegs-pa yon
 lord-TRM come come
 Ho-lde-spu-rgyal came **from** the gods of heaven as ruler of men. (*Prayers for the foundation of the De ga g.yu tshal monastery*, IOL Tib J 751, folio 35 verso, l. 2 = Imaeda et al. 2007:12)¹⁶

This discussion of the uses of *-nas* and *-las* is not exhaustive. A lengthy study would be necessary to account for such examples of *-nas* as “*ḥgram-lcag brgyab / skra-nas bzun phyir bton* [(He) slapped me on the face, grabbed (me) **from** the hair, and pulled (it) out]” (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:62, ll. 27-28, also cf. Beyer 1992:267 note 12), and the use of the *-las* to indicate “the origins of a transformation” (Tournadre 2010:111), a usage seen in (15) and (16).

- (15) *btsan-poe mtshan Rgyal-gtsug-ru-las /*
 emperor-GEN name-[ABS] Rgyal-gtsug-ru-ABL
Khri-lde-gtsug-rtsan-du gsold /
 Khri-lde-gtsug-rtsan-TRM give
 The name of the emperor was changed from Rgyal-gtsug-ru to Khri-lde-gtsug-rtsan. (*Old Tibetan Annals* 712, ll. 185-186 = Imaeda et al. 2007:238)

¹⁶ Similar contexts related to the arrival of Tibet’s first emperor from the heavens with parallel grammar occur throughout Tibetan literature. For example, among the Old Tibetan inscriptions instances occur in the Rkon-po inscription (Li and Coblin 1987:198, 205), the inscription at the tomb of Khri Lde-sron-brtsan (Li and Coblin 1987:241 and 246) and the Sino-Tibetan treaty inscription of 821-822 (Li and Coblin 1987:47, 95).

- (16) *Rtsaṅ chen-gyī mñan bźī-las / gñis-su bcos-phar*
 Rtsaṅ great-GEN governor four-ABL two-TRM reduce
 (They) reduced the governors of greater Rtsaṅ from four to
 two. (*Old Tibetan Annals* 684, l. 89 = Imaeda et al. 2007:234)

The examples cited suffice to demonstrate that *-nas* means ‘from within’, and suggests the crossing of a boundary, while *-las* means ‘from the side/surface of’, and suggests that no boundary is crossed. This contrast parallels the contrast between *-na* ‘inside of’ and *-la* ‘on the surface of’ (cf. Simon 1941:385, Beyer 1992:268).

4. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *-LAS* AND *-BAS*

In one function, *-las* has generally been distinguished from *-nas*, namely that *-las* can be used to form comparisons whereas *-nas* cannot (Foucaux 1858:36-37, Bacot 1946:28). However, in this use *-las* is collapsed with another morpheme, namely *-bas*. For example, Bacot (1946:36), Hahn (1994:107, 201), Hodge (1990:57), and Sommerschuh (2008:179-180) draw no distinction between *-las* and *-bas* used to form the comparative. Even Tournadre, who reckons *-bas* to be a tenth case (2010:98), fails to elaborate on how it differs syntactically or semantically from *-las*.

H.A. Jäschke notes that *-las* is frequently used with a negative verb meaning ‘except for’ and *-bas* is suffixed to verbal nouns to compare two clauses (1883: 27).¹⁷ Here are four examples of *-las* with negative verbs (17-20).

- (17) *sñiṅ-la sems-pa khar tor*
 heart-ALL thought mouth-TRM escape

¹⁷ It is not possible for *-las* to compare two clauses, because when suffixed to a verb *-las* takes on a different meaning (cf. Hill 2010a).

ches byuñ-nas //
 thus arise-then
Dbyi-tshab smun-na hgro-ba-ñ rna-bar lhañs
 Dbyi-tshab front-LOC go-GEN ear-TRM ???
śes thos-ste //
 thus hear
Dbyi-tshab-kyis tshġg de tog ces blañs-nas //
 Dbyi-tshab-ERG word that above thus take-then
 “*Tseñ-sku khyod zer-ba-las bden-ba myed-do //*
Tseñ-sku thou say-ABL truth-[ABS] not.exist-FIN
yañ hñi-las ma-rañs-pa myed-kyis //
 also this-ABL dissatisfaction-[ABS] not.exist-because
kho-bo sems-pa-dañ myi hdraḥ re” źes
 I-[ABS] thought-ALL not similar never thus
mnaḥ bor-ro //
 oath swear-FIN

Passing in front [of Tseñ-sku’s house], Dbyi-tshab heard and understood with clarity these thoughts of [Tseñ-sku’s] heart that escaped from his mouth (*sñiñ-la sems-pa khar torches byuñ nas*). Dbyi-tshab held high (the meaning of) those words (*tshġg de tog ces blañs nas*),¹⁸ and swore, “Tseñ-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!” (*Old Tibetan Chronicle*, PT 1287 ll. 150-153 = Imaeda et al. 2007:206)

¹⁸ The phrase *thog ces blañs* is a fixed expression wherein *ces* should not be understood to indicate direct speech (cf. line 92 also in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, and line 164 in version A of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, i.e. IOL Tib J 0737/1, cf. de Jong 1989:115).

- (18) *ḥbrug-dañ klag gñis-kyis*
 thunder-ASS lightning two-INS
lce phab-nas
 meteor-[ABS] fall-then
brag-las sra-ba myed-pa yañ dral-lo //
 cliff-ABL hard-[ABS] not-exist-[ABS] also rend-FIN
Bod-kyi lha btsan-po-dañ /
 Tibet-GEN divine emperor-ASS
gnam gñis-kyis bdud bchad-na //
 heaven two-ERG demon-[ABS] cut.down-then
Ḥbal Ljī-rmañ-las che-ba myed-pa-ḥī bu //
 Ḥbal Ljī-rmañ-ABL large-[ABS] not.exist child
sa dguḥ rīm ḥog-du sbas-pa yañ
 earth nine layer below-TRM hidden-[ABS] also
bzuri-de bsad-do /
 seize-SEM kill-FIN

With thunder and lightning rain down meteors; that which is not harder **than** a cliff is rent asunder. Both Tibet's divine emperor and the heavens eradicate demons; though a child not larger **than** Ḥbal Ljī-rmañ be hidden below the nine-tiered earth, they seize and kill him. (*Old Tibetan Chronicle*, PT 1287 ll. 518-520 = Imaeda et al. 2007:228)

- (19) *khoni grogs-po rnams ni phyag-rten*
 those friends -PL-[ABS] emphasis presents
sna-re tsam-las mi gtoñ-bar ḥdug /
 few mere-ABL not send give
 Those friends offered nothing **but** some mere presents.
 (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:39, ll. 1-2)

- (20) ... *bkaḥ-bkyon-dan phyag-hbebs-las*
 scolding-ABS physical.punishment-ABL
mi yon” *byas nu-ziñ bsdad-pas* /
 not come say cry-and sit
 “Nothing comes (to me) **except** scolding and physical
 punishment...” (I) said, sitting and weeping. (*Mila*, de Jong
 1959:80, ll. 16-17)

The story of Dbyig-pa-can in the *Mdzaris-blun*, provides particularly good evidence of *-bas* used to compare two clauses. The tale includes a total of five similar examples in one passage, in each case a plaintiff before the king bemoans his own legal victory. I give one example here.

- (21) *śiñ-mkhan-gyis smras-pa* / “*gcig-tu-na*
 carpenter-ERG say in.the.first.place
bdag-gi steḥu stor / *gñis-su-na*
 I-ERG axe-[ABS] lose in.the.second.place
bdag-gi so bcag-pa-bas
 I-ERG tooth-[ABS] break-COMP
Dbyig-pa-can rgyal-bar kyañ blaḥo”
 Dbyig-pa-can-[ABS] win even better-FIN

The woodsman said “It would be better even for Dbyig-pa-can to win **than** that in the first place I lose my axe and in the second place have my teeth broken.” (*Mdzaris-blun*, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 272b = Schmidt 1843:274, ll. 16-17)

Schwieger draws attention to another instance of clauses compared with *-bas* in the *Mdzaris-blun* (2006:289).

- (22) *byis-pa de dag-gis sañs-rgyas-kyi*
 child that PL-ERG Buddha-GEN
mtshan sñon thos-pa-bas stoñ-ḥgyur-gyis
 mark previous hear-COMP thousand-times
lhag-par bzai-ba mthoñ
 more good-[ABS] see

The children saw the marks of the Buddha, a thousand times more beautiful **than** they had heard tell of before. (*Mdzañs-blun*, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 288a = Schmidt 1843:303, l. 15)

The *Mi-la-ras-paḥi rnam-thar* also has examples where *-bas* is used to compare two clauses.

- (23) *bcom-ldan-ḥdas Mi-bskyod-pa sñar*
 Bhagavan Akṣobhya previous
yid-kyis bsgoms-pa-bas kyañ ches
 mind-ERG meditate-COMP even thus
khyad-par-du ḥphags-pa žig/
 particularly exalted a

A Bhagavan Akṣobhya that was even more exalted **than** (I) had imagined previously. (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:24, ll. 3-4, cf. Schwieger 2006:289)

Tournadre offers an additional uncited example of *-bas* used to compare two clauses.

- (24) *gžan-du yun riñ dge sbyor*
 other-TRMtime long virtue-[ABS] practice
ḥbad-pa-las // sdig-paḥi las
 strive-COMP sin-GEN action-[ABS]
spañs chos-dañ bla-ma-la // mos-gus
 abandon dharma-ASS guru-ALL devotion-[ABS]

byas-nas gnas hdir ñal-ba yañ

do-then place this-TRM sleep also

Rather than endeavour to practice virtues elsewhere, (it is better) to abandon negative acts, sleep here and develop faith for the dharma and guru... (Tournadre 2010:114)

In addition to its use to compare two clauses, Jäschke also notes a preference for *-bas* after adverbs (1883:27). Putting aside the question of what an adverb might be, his un-cited example of *sñar-bas* ‘than before’ is very similar to two examples (25-26) from Old Tibetan.

(25) *ñuñ-nas sñā-ma-bas kyañ tshe-dus*

then previous-COMP even time

ñan-pa-la babste /

bad-ALL fall

Then there came a time even worse **than** before. (IOL Tib J 733, l. 39 = Imaeda et al. 2007:274)

(26) *lha sras Lde-sroñ-gñ sku riñ-la //*

divine son Lde-sroñ-GEN body time-ALL

gtsñgs sñā-ma-bas bskyed-par /

edict previous-COMP expand

bkañs // gñañ-bañ /

command-INS agree

In the life of the divine son, Lde-sroñ, it was granted by command that the edict be expanded more **than** before. (Rkoñ-po inscription, l. 13, Li and Coblin 1987:199)

The suffix *-bas* is not limited to verbal nouns and adverbs; there are also examples where *-bas* is suffixed to nouns. The lama wishes to verify Mila's own account of his life story and sends a swift discipline.

- (27) *dehi tshe bla-ma-la grwa-pa rta-bas*
 that-GEN time lama-ALL monk horse-COMP
bari-mgyogs-pa / glai-po-che-bas stobs
 fast elephant-COMP strong
che-ba zig yod-pa de nahi
 great a have that-[ABS] I-GEN
yul-du bltar btañ-bas /
 land-TRM look send

At that time the lama had a monk who ran faster **than** a horse and was stronger **than** an elephant; he sent him to my land to examine [the veracity of my account]. (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:40, ll. 25-26, cf. Schwieger 2006:68)

In this example *-bas* is suffixed to the nouns *rta* 'horse' and *glai-po-che* 'elephant'. In example (28) Mi-la-ras-pa's erstwhile fiancée Mdzes-se criticizes his eccentric asceticism.

- (28) *khyed-kyi cha-lugs sprai-po-bas*
 you-GEN conduct beggar-COMP
hdi hdrahi chos-pa
 this like-GEN religious.person-[ABS]
ma mthoñ
 not see

As for your conduct, more vile **than** a beggar's, I have never before seen such a religious person. (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:120, ll. 24-25, cf. Schwieger 2006:289)

In the *Envoys of Phywa to Dmu* (PT 126), the envoys flatter their host by speaking of the superlative quality of his sound and smell.

- (29) *myi-dan̄i mjal-na /*
 man-ASS meet-then
myi mgon-po-bas legs
 person lord-COMP good
skad mdan̄is ni h̄brug skad-pas
 voice melody emphasis thunder voice-COMP
che-la sñan /
 great-ALL hear
dri-gsuñ̄ ni spos-kyi dri-bas gdaḥ-ḥo /
 smell emphasis incense-GEN scent-COMP be-FIN
 When we met with a man (*i.e.* you).
 The man was better **than** a lord of men.
 We heard the melody of his voice greater **than** a dragon's
 voice (*i.e.* thunder).
 His odour [better] **than** the smell of incense.
 (*Envoys of Phywa to Dmu*, PT 126 II, ll. 123-124 = Imaeda
 et al. 2007:23)

Like *-las*, *-bas* is seen with a negative verb meaning 'except for, none but'. The lama compliments Mila in his absence before a group of disciplines.

- (30) *ma-gi-bas śa-tsha-ba ma byuñ̄ /*
 down.there-COMP sympathetic-[ABS] not arise
 "No one has come who is more sympathetic **than** he down
 there." (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:39, ll. 27-28)

Because of the misery of their household, his mother is astonished to hear Mila sing.

- (31) “*ci*” *zer* “*skad ḥdi ni nāḥi*
 what say voice this-[ABS] emphasis I-GEN
buḥi skad ḥdra / nēd ma-smad-pas
 boy-GEN voice similar we mother.child-COMP
sdug-pa ni sa thog-na med-pas
 suffering-[ABS] emphasis earth above-ABS not.be-because
kho ni glu len mi thad”
 he-[ABS] emphasis song-[ABS] take not appropriate (?)
sñam-nas yid ma ches-par bltas-pas /
 think-then mind not believe look
 “What?” She said. Thinking, “This voice is like that of my son. Because there is no suffering on this earth **except for we**, mother and child, he cannot be singing.” in disbelief she looked... (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:36, l. 15)

In the *Mi-la-ras-paḥi rnam-thar*, *-bas* is also affixed to *de* as *de-bas*, meaning ‘other than that’ or ‘apart from that’.

- (32) *lcebs-na de-bas sdig che-ba ci yod / ?*
 kill.oneself-then **that-COMP** sin big what exist
 If one kills oneself, what greater sin is there **than that**?
 (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:79, l. 16)

- (33) *bla-ma ran-laḥan de-bas lhag-pa med*
 lama self-ALL-even **that-COMP** remnant not.exist
gsuṅ-gin ḥdug-pas
 say is
 “Even the lama himself says there is no [magic] remaining **apart from that**.” (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:39, l. 18)

One story in the *Mdzanis-blun* abounds with both *-las* and *-bas* in comparisons. The god of the sea attempts to wrest a boat from a group of merchants. He appears before them and insists that they should give him their boat because he possesses a series of superlative qualities. A cleric in their midst each time refutes his claim, pointing to those in Buddhist cosmology who possess this quality even more than he.

- (34) “*gru hdi ña-la byin-cig!*” *ces smra-ste /*
 boat this-[ABS] I-ALL give-IMP thus said-SEM
tshoñ-pa-la hdi skad ces driho /
 merchant-ALL this speech thus ask-FIN
 “*ñjig-rten-na gañ dag ñjig su-ruñ-ba*
 world-LOC where PL fear whoever
ña-las hdañ-ba yod-dam?” *zes dris-pa-dañ /*
 I-ABL pass exist-INT thus ask
 “Give me this boat!” (he) said, and asked the merchants thus. “Who in the world is more terrifying than I? (lit. in the world, who passes **beyond** me in being terrifying?)” (He) asked.

- (35) *dge-bsñen-gyis smras-pa/ “khyod-pas śin-tu*
 Upāsaka-ERG say thou-COMP very
lhag-bar ñjigs-pa yod-do /... de ni /
 remain fearsome exist-FIN ... that emphasis
khyod-pas śin-tu yañ lhag-bar ñjigs-su-ruñ-ño”
 thou-COMP very even remain fearsome-FIN
zes smras-pa-dañ /
 thus say-ASS
 The Upāsaka said, “There are those much more terrifying **than** you. ... Those are much more terrifying **than** you.”

- (36) *h̄jig-rten-na rid-ciñ ñam-thag-pa ña-las*
 world-LOC meagre-and afflicted I-COMP
lhag-pa yod-dam?” *zes dris-pa-dañ/*
 remain exist-INT thus ask-ASS
 (He) asked, “Is there anyone in the world who is **more**
 meagre and afflicted than I?” (lit. remaining **other than** me
 who is meagre and afflicted?)
- (37) *dge-bsñen-gyis smras-pa/ “khyod-pas śin-tu*
 Upāsaka-ERG say thou-COMP very
lhag-bar ñam-thag-ciñ rid-ba yod-do / ...
 remain-TRM afflicted-and meagre exist-FIN
de ni khyod-bas kyañ śin-tu lhag-bar
 that emphasis thou-COMP even very remain-TRM
rid-do” zes smras
 meagre-FIN thus say
 The Upāsaka said, “There are those much more afflicted
 and meagre **than** you... Those are much more meagre even
than you.”
- (38) *h̄jig-rten miñi nañ-na ña tsam-du*
 world person-GEN inside-LOC I as.much-TRM
gzugs-byad bzañ-la mdzes-pa yod-dam/?
 physique good-ALL beautiful exist-INT
 Among the men of the world, is there one beautiful in good
 physique like me?
- (39) *dge-bsñen-gyis smras-pa/ “khyod-bas brgya*
 Upāsaka-ERG say thou-COMP hundred
h̄gyur-bas lhag-bar bzañ-ba yod-do / ...
 times-INS remain-TRM good exist-FIN

de ni khyod-bas brgya ḥgyur stoñ
 that emphasis thou-COMP hundred times thousand
ḥgyur-bas lhag-ste /
 times-INS remain-SEM

The Upāsaka said, “There are those a hundred times better **than** you... Those are a hundred and a thousand times more **than** you.” (*Mdzais-blun*, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 144b = Schmidt 1843:29-30, ll. 7-14)

This passage contains six uses of *khyod-pas*¹⁹ or *khyod-bas* and two of *ria-las*. However, it is possible to analyse the instances of *ria-las* as normal uses of *-las* in the rection of the verbs *ḥdaḥ* ‘pass’ and *lhag* ‘remain’, just as *-las* appears in the rection of the verbs *byuñ* ‘arise’, *ḥphros* ‘disperse’, *ḥgrol* ‘become free’, *lañ* ‘arise’, *ḥoñ* ‘come’, and *ḥbab* ‘fall’ in examples (4) to (10). As seen in examples (40) to (42) the verbs *ḥdaḥ* ‘pass’ and *lhag* ‘remain’ often demand the ablative, even when no comparison is made.

(40) *mya-rian-las ḥdaḥs-paḥi yon-tan*
 sorrow-ABL pass-GEN quality
 Qualities passing beyond sorrow... (*Prayers for the foundation of the De ga yu tshal monastery*, PT 16, l. 23r1)

(41) *ḥjig-rten-dañ ḥjig-rten-las ḥdas-paḥi loñs-spyod*
 world-ASS pass-ABL pass-GEN enjoyment

¹⁹ The form *khyod-pas* demonstrates that Tournadre’s claim that “the comparative *-bas* does not have a form *-pas*” (2010:98 note 38) is not correct. Jäschke describes *-bas* as appearing after *-ñ*, *-r*, *-l* and vowels, whereas *-pas* occurs after *-g*, *-d*, *-n*, *-b*, *-m* and *-s*, but he remarks that some texts “prefer, even after these consonants, the form *-bas*” (1883:26).

Mundane and supermundane (lit. which passes beyond the world) enjoyments... (*Prayers for the foundation of the De ga yu tshal monastery*, PT 16, l. 31v4)

- (42) *hdi-las* *lhag-paḥi* *nor*
 this-ABL pass-GEN wealth
 The wealth which remains aside from this... (*Dialogue between two brothers*, PT 1283, l. 411)

It is difficult to confirm examples of *-las* used in a comparative function of the straightforward type *rta-las khyi chuñ-ba yin* ‘a dog is smaller than a horse’, without an accompanying *ḥdaḥ* or *lhag*. Nonetheless, this example is very popular in the manuals (Jäschke 1883:26; Hahn 1994:107, Hodge 1990:57; Sommerschuh 2008:179). Among Schiefner’s evidence example (43) comes closest to a straightforward comparison. A boy, after his parents refuse to let him take ordination, decides to kill himself.

- (43) *hdi* *sñam-du* *lus* *hdi* *med-par*
 this-[ABS] thought-TRM body this-[ABS] not-exist-TRM
byas-la/ rigs *tha-mal-ba* *cig-tu* *skyes-te/*
 make-ALL family ordinary one-ABS be.born-SEM
rab-tu-ḥbyuñ-bar *gsol-na/* *hdi-las* *sla*
 ordination-TRM request-if this-COMP easy
yañ-srid *sñam-du* *bsams-nas/*
 rebirth-[ABS] thought-TRM think-then
 (He) thought: ‘If having eliminated this body, I were born into an ordinary family and requested ordination, rebirth would be easier **than** this [life].’ (*Mdzañs-blun*, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 146a = Schmidt 1843:33-34, ll. 18-1, cf. Schiefner 1865:191)

The evidence of this example notwithstanding, it is tempting to propose that *-bas* is the default comparative morpheme whether suffixed to nouns, adverbs, or verbal nouns, whereas *-las* is favoured by negative verbs and in the rection of particular verbs.

5. IS *-BAS* A TENTH CASE?

Tournadre (2010:98) proposes *-bas* as a tenth case marker. However, as Tournadre himself points out (2010:114), the distinction between case marker and verbal suffix can be rather weak. For example, the verbal suffixes *-te/-ste/-de* and *-ho*, etc. also occur suffixed to nouns.

Schwieger draws attention to an example of *-te/-ste/-de* suffixed to a noun phrase in the *Mi-la-ras-paḥi rnam-thar* (2006: 267-268).

- (44) *Ti-lo Nā-ro Mar-pa la-sogs-te bla-ma grub-thob*
 Tilo Nāro Mar-pa and.so.on-SEM guru siddha
goñ-ma rnams-kyis kyañ rañ-rañ-gi
 eminent PL-ERG even own-GEN
rnam-thar gsuñs-pas
 life.story-[ABS] say

“The eminent gurus and siddhas, *i.e.* Tilo, Nāro, Marpa, etc. have told their life stories.” (*Mila*, de Jong 1959:26, ll. 9-10)

In Classical Tibetan it is perhaps reasonable to view *la-sogs-pa* ‘and so on’ as part of the nominal phrase, but this expression originates from Old Tibetan *-las stsogs-pa* ‘gathered from’. It is consequently possible to see the *-te*, which occurs in *la-sogs-te* in the example above as the normal post verbal function of this affix. The *Mdzari blun* offers a more clear cut example of *-ste* suffixed to a noun phrase.

- (45) *ña ni rgyal-po chen-po-ste gliñ*
 I-[ABS] emphasis king big-SEM continent
bži-la dbaṅ-ba yin-na / khyod-kyi rgyal-po
 4-ALL power-[ABS] is-if thou-GEN king
glen-pa des cihi phyir bkaḥ
 stupid that-ERG what-GEN because command
mi ñan /
 not listen

“I am a great king; if I rule over the four continents, why does that stupid king of yours not obey (my) commands.”
 (*Mdzais-blun*, Derge Kanjur LXXIV, 213a = Schmidt 1843:161, ll. 14-15, cf. Schwieger 2006:269)

Hahn (1994:151-153, §15.3-15.4), Schneider (1993:31), and Zeisler (2004:276-277) offer further examples and discussion of *-te/-ste/-de* suffixed to nouns.

Schwieger also offers examples of *-ho* suffixed to noun phrases.

- (46) *dehi sras Sum-ston Ñi-maḥo*
 that-GEN son Sum-ston Ñi-ma-FIN
 “His son [is] Sum-ston Ñi-ma.” (*Deb ther stion po* 170, ll. 3-4 qtd. in Schwieger 2006:306)

Proposing that *-ste* and *-ho* are case markers would lead to a total of twelve cases. However, since *-ste* and *-ho* are far more typically used after verbs than after nouns it is preferable to exclude them from the cases. In contrast, *-bas* never occurs directly suffixed to a verb, but rather only ever to a noun or verbal noun. This distribution is parallel to the other case markers, and sets it apart from verbal suffixes or sentence adverbs like *yañ* and *ni*. Thus, Tournadre is correct to count *-bas* as a tenth case.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Although many researchers treat *-nas* and *-bas* as indistinct from *-las*, the three morphemes are as distinct in function as they are in form. The elative *-nas* means ‘from within’, and suggests the crossing of a boundary; the ablative *-las* means ‘from the side/surface of’, and suggests that no boundary is crossed. Distinguishing *-las* in its comparative function from *-bas* is not quite so straightforward. One may concur with Jäschke (1883:27) that typically *-las* is used after a noun with a negative verb and *-bas* is used to compare two clauses and after adverbs. Both *-las* and *-bas* are found affixed to nouns with positive verbs, but *-bas* is more typical in this function, the cases of *-las* often analysable as dictated by the rection of the accompanying verb. Tournadre (2010:98) is correct to posit *-bas* as a tenth ‘comparative’ case.

Distinguishing *-las*, *-nas*, and *-bas* is necessary not only for the correct description of Tibetan grammar and the typological and comparative contextualization of Tibetan, but distinguishing these morphemes will also enable philologists to better understand Tibetan texts, and thereby yield greater accuracy in the use of Tibetan sources in all academic disciplines.

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