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SOME TIBETAN FIRST-PERSON PLURAL INCLUSIVE PRONOUNS

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INTRODUCTION

In three previous papers I have explored the development of the personal pronoun system in different periods of Tibetan literature (Hill 2007; 2010; 2013). I offer a further contribution in this direction to Per Kvaerne with deep regard and admiration. Abel Zadoks may be the first to have noticed an inclusive-exclusive distinction in the personal pronouns of Tibetan texts (2004). In Old Tibetan he notes two inclusive first person plural pronouns 'u-bu-cag ~ yu-bu-cag, which he refers to as “plain diction”, and 'o-skol, which he sees as “elegant/honorific” (2004: 2). These two inclusive pronouns he regards as corresponding respectively to the exclusive first person plurals nged and bdag-cag (2004: 2). In the Mi la ras pa’i rnam thar Zadoks notes three inclusive first person plural pronouns 'o-skol “hapax, not honorific”, 'u-cag ~ 'o-cag “mostly used within the nuclear family”, and rang-re, used with “equals or inferiors” (2004: 2). Unfortunately, Zadoks’ observations on Tibetan pronouns have not reached publication and the observations on his conference handout are not exemplified with specific textual passages.

Independently of Zadoks, I also studied the behavior of personal pronouns in both Old Tibetan (Hill 2010) and the Mi la ras pa’i rnam thar (Hill 2007). In Old Tibetan I identified 'o-skol as the only first person plural inclusive pronoun (Hill 2010: 559). In the Mi la ras pa’i rnam thar I observed rang-re and 'u-cag as two first person plural inclusive pronouns, but failed to distinguish their function, and did not notice that this text also uses 'o-skol (Hill 2007: 278–81). Here I attempt to augment these findings with gleanings from version A and (where the passage in question is missing in A) version E of the Old Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa (de Jong 1989), the Mdzang-blun, and sections of the Mi la ras pa’i rnam thar (de Jong 1959) not considered in Hill (2007).
Old Tibetan texts display at least the two inclusive plural pronouns yu-bu-cag and 'o-skol. The pronoun yu-bu-cag occurs twice in the story of Rama, both in the same episode of version E.


Viṣṇu said, “we two are superior to others and it is not proper to fight like dogs that meet each other...” (Rama E 73–75)


Daśāgriiva became angry and said: “Come here! We two will fight.” (Rama E 77)

In example 1, Viṣṇu’s (ironic) use of the honorific plural khyed (cf. Hill 2013: 249–51, 254–59) conflicts with Zadoks’ interpretation of yu-bu-cag as non-honorific.

Both examples 1 and 2 have dual antecedents. Other evidence supports the interpretation of yu-bu-cag as an inclusive first person dual. In the story of Dbyig-pa-can in the Mdzangs-blun, known to generations of first year Tibetan studies from Michael Hahn (1994), the pronoun 'u-bu-cag occurs five times as a first person inclusive dual; it appears in nearly identical passages (cf. example 3), when the hapless Dbyig-pa-can harms someone and that person insists that the two of them appear before the king to adjudicate their dispute.

3. tshur shog rgyal-po'i drung-du 'dong-dang/ des 'u-bu-cag-gi zhal- che gcod-du 'ong-ngo zhes smras-nas

Come here! We shall go before the king and he shall decide our dispute. (Mdzangs blun, Derge Kanjur, vol. 74, p. 272a)

The Old Tibetan funerary ritual PT 1070 provides further support for interpreting 'u-bu-cag as a dual form, by placing the numeral gnyis “two” after the word on the three occasions it occurs in the text (II. 66–73). I am aware of no Old Tibetan examples of 'u-bu-cag ~ yu-bu-cag with explicitly non-dual antecedents, so one may tentatively conclude that this pronoun is specifically a dual form.

The inclusive first person pronoun ('o-)skol occurs four times in version A of the story of Rama, three times as skol and once in the more familiar form 'o-skol. Three of the attestations occur in the speech of Marīcī to his lord Daśāgriiva (examples 4 and 5).
The fourth example occurs when Hanumanta defends Sīta’s honor before Rama (example 6).

How during a hundred years would it be possible to sleep with the demon? He could not even look at her. We have brought her back. (Rama A 428-29)

The four examples of ('o-)skol in the story of Rama occur in the mouths of inferiors addressing superiors, so Zadoks’ interpretation of ('o-)skol as an honorific appears to be valid for this text. However, in The Envoys from Phywa to Dmu (ll. 165–168) the use of 'o-skol is explicitly non-honorific. The lord of Dmu uses nged to refer to himself and his kinsmen while addressing the messengers of Phywa (example 7), whereas the messengers refer to themselves with the humble bdag-cag (example 8). When the lord of Dmu uses an inclusive pronoun to address the envoys, he chooses 'o-skol (example 9), thus, at least in this text, 'o-skol is the inclusive equivalent of nged, and not as Zadoks posits, the inclusive equivalent of bdag-cag.¹

(7) « nged-kyi Dmu yul 'di dag-na ... 
In this our land of Dmu... (l. 105, also cf. ll. 126, 132, 140)

(8) « bdag-cag ni 'Phywa-'i 'bangs / 
We are the subjects of 'Phywa. (ll. 110–11, also cf. ll. 114, 120, 129, 131,

¹ Example 9 also shows that 'o-skol is not always dual, although the examples from the story of Rama (examples 4–6) are compatible with analysis as a dual.
With example 9 in mind, Shiho Ebihara suggests that although both "Zadoks (2004) and Hill (2010) state that 'o skol is an INCL pronoun ... it is doubtful that it can be used as an INCL pronoun on its own, without the second-person singular [sic] pronoun khyed" (Ebihara 2013: 94). Nonetheless, examples 4–6 show that there is no cause for this doubt; the inclusive pronoun 'o skol can and does occur without an accompanying khyed.3

Although much remains to learn about 'u-bu-cag ~yu-bu-cag and 'o skol, it appears that 'o skol is the generic Old Tibetan first personal inclusive pronoun, whereas 'u-bu-cag ~yu-bu-cag has a more specifically dual meaning.

THE Mi la ras pa'i rnam thar

In a study of personal pronouns in chapter three of the Mi la ras pa'i rnam thar, I was unable to distinguish the use of the inclusive first person plural pronouns 'u-cag (a clear descendant of Old Tibetan 'u-bu-cag) and rang-re (Hill 2007). Because my earlier study was restricted to chapter three, I failed to notice that 'o skol occurs as a third first personal plural inclusive in this text.

3 Even in example 9 my own understanding of the syntax is that khyed and 'o skol are treated as distinct noun phrases; their juxtaposition is fortuitous.
In light of the evidence that 'u-bu-cag ~ yu-bu-cag is a dual in Old Tibetan, the hypothesis presents itself that 'u-cag is also a dual form. Three instances of 'u-cag occur when Mila’s mother takes him aside to advise him before he departs for Central Tibet; these occurrences of 'u-cag have explicitly dual antecedents (examples 10–12). His mother also addresses Mi-la with rang-re (examples 20–22).

(10) bu 'u-cag ma-smad-kyi las-skos-la ltos-la/
“Son, attending to our fate mother and children...” (Mi la, p. 38, l. 6)

(11) khong-tsho’i mthu-dang 'u-cag-gi mthu mi ’dra’o
“Their magic and our magic are not the same.” (Mi la, p. 38, l. 8)

(12) 'u-cag ma-smad sdug thug-pa’i mthu yin-pas
“Since our magic is on account of we mother and children having met misfortune.” (Mi la, p. 38, l. 9)

Later in the text a passage of dialogue occurs between Mar-pa and his wife Bdag-med-pa, in which the pronoun 'u-cag appears in the spelling ‘o-cag (example 13); here also the antecedent is dual.

The lady said, “Great magician has not abandoned us, but has returned. Will you allow him to come and prostrate himself?” “It is not that he hasn’t abandoned us, it is that he has not abandoned himself. If you (want to) send him to prostrate, then send him,” [Marpa] said (Mi la, p. 69, ll. 22–24).

There are two cases in the text in which the context does not specify a dual meaning for 'u-cag. First, near the end of chapter three some hunters hankering to do Mi-la harm use the pronoun (example 14).

(14) gzhon-pa rnams na-re /« thos-pa-dga’ kho yin thag chod / khos ’u-cag mthong-ba med-pas ... »
The youngsters said, “Certainly he is Thos-pa-dga’. He has not seen us...” (Mi la, p. 48 l. 21).

The context gives no indication as to the number of youths. In light of the mounting evidence that 'u-cag is a dual form, one might suspect that only two hunters are present. Nonetheless, much later in the Mi la ras pa’i rnam thar is an example of 'u-cag that cannot be interpreted
as dual. A group of hungry hunters happen upon Mi-la meditating in a cave and are irritated that he has no provisions to offer them. When some of the hunters lift him up to see whether he is sitting on any provisions another hunter objects in the words of example 15.

(15) 「'u-cag lugs-pa khong-gis lan-pa ni min de ’dra ma byed!」zer /
He is not responsible for our hunger. Do not do that! (Mi la, p. 128, ll. 9–10).

After desisting from their harassment of the yogin the others (i.e., not the one who objected) ask for Mi-la’s blessing (example 16).

(16) gzhan rnam pa na-re 「nged-kyis kyang khyed bteg yod-pas nged-tsho yang chug-cig!」zer /
The others said, “Because we have lifted you up, protect us!” (Mi la, p. 128, ll. 12–13).

Because there is a disagreement among one hunter and others (gzhan rnam), the total number of hunters must be more than two, so the antecedent of ‘u-cag in example 15 cannot be dual.

If ‘u-cag is not specifically a dual, it is necessary to find some other explanation for its use. Ebihara suspects that ‘u-cag “might be a dialectal feature” (2013: 94), but this explanation is not very satisfactory, because some characters use ‘u-cag in contexts where they also use other pronouns. For example, of the three times that the first person plural inclusive ‘o-skol occurs in the Mi la ras pa’i rnam thar, the first is in a speech of Mar-pa to his wife Bdag-med-ma (example 17), but Mar-pa also refers to himself and his wife with ‘o-cag (example 13).

(17) bdag-med-ma ‘o-skol-la g-yu ‘di ga-nas byung gsung-ba
He said, “Bdag-med-ma, this turquoise of ours, where did we get it from?” (Mi la, p. 66, 28–29).

The other examples of ‘o-skol occur in a song that Mi-la addresses to his sister (example 18) and in an address of Mi-la to his disciples shortly before his death (example 19).

Give up the eight worldly dharmas and come to La-phyi Gangs. We brother and sister together, shall go to La-Phyi Gangs. ... We, brother and sister together, shall go to La-phyi Gangs. Brother and sister, both fortunate, shall go together to the court of La-Phyi Gangs (Mi la, p. 146-48, ll. 25-29).

(19) 'dir tshogs-pa'i grwa-pa bu-slob lha mir bcas-pa rnams / 'o-skol tshe sngon smon-lam bzang-pos mtshams sbyar-bas / da lan phrad-nas dkar-po'i chos-kyis 'brel-ba yin-no //

Monks and students assembled here as gods and men, it is by virtue of the excellent prayers we made in precious lives that we meet today and are connected through the pure dharma (Mi la, 169, ll. 11-14).

Example 18 is in verse and example 19 is nearly in verse. Perhaps these are passages that Gtsang smyon He-ru-ka incorporated directly from his source material and the use of 'o-skol will be more convincingly accounted for within the context of this source material.

Whereas the pronouns 'o-skol and 'u-cag (< 'u-bu-cag) have antecedents in Old Tibetan, the inclusive first person pronoun rang-re, found in the Mi la ras pa'i rnam thar, appears to lack an Old Tibetan ancestor. This pronoun occurs in the speech of his mother to Mi-la (example 20, 21, and 22), Mi-la to his friends (23), his friends to Mi-la (24), elders to a crowd (25), and townspeople to Mi-la’s uncle (26).

(20) mi khyim-mtshes rang-re ma-smad-la sdog-po gtong-mkhan
“The neighbors who do evil to us mother and children” (Mi la, p. 37, l. 12).

(21) bu rang-re ma-smad-pas sdog-pa sa thog-na med-pa-la khyod glu len-pa dran-pa rang ’dug gam /
“Son, since we mother and children have nothing but suffering, how do you even think of singing” (Mi la, p. 37, l. 3).

(22) rang-re ma-bu gnyis-ka’i phyir-du srog zon dam-par gyis ! /
“For both our sakes, mother and son, watch out for our lives!” (Mi la, p. 46, ll. 3).

(23) nga yang mthu slob-tu ’gro-bas rang-re rnams bsdebs ’gro » byas-pa
“I said, ‘because I am also going to study curses, let us go together’” (Mi la, p. 37, l. 24).

(24) khong rnams na-re « rang-res bsnyen-pa skyel nus-na gdams-ngag de kun zab-mo rang dug ...
They said, “if we are able to use these teachings, they are all rather profound instructions …”
The elders said, “what good is it to kill the woman? her son will bring us destruction similar to this” (Mi la, p. 43, ll. 23–25).

“If you do this without killing the woman’s son, then we [i.e., the group of we villagers and you] shall fight” (Mi la, p. 43, ll. 30–31, cf. Hill 2007: 281).

All of the examples of rang-re in the text occur in the speech of characters from Mi-la’s home region of Gung-thang. Perhaps this distribution indicates that this pronoun is a dialect feature of Gung-thang. In contrast, both ‘u-cag and ‘o-skol are used by speakers both from Gung-thang and from Lho-brag.

Unfortunately, the occurrences of rang-re, ‘u-cag, and ‘o-skol in the Mi la ras pa’i rnam thar are insufficient to make the difference in usage among these words clear. One can, however, hope that examination of other narratives will help to further elucidate the picture.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


