The converb -las in Old Tibetan

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Abstract
In contrast to its description in available grammars and manuals, the converb -las in Old Tibetan is used primarily to mark off the following clause as surprising given the background of the preceding clause. The converb -las enters into two distinct syntactic constructions: after a reduced verb it indicates the interruption of a continuous event; and in a three-clause pattern with the converb -kyis, -las introduces a surprise or contrast in the second clause, but -kyis in the third clause returns the sentiment to that of the first clause. Although the examples which demonstrate the use of -las are drawn from Old Tibetan texts, this use continues in later texts.

Introduction
The use of the converb -las is one of many areas of Tibetan grammar to have received relatively little attention.1 The grammars of Stephen Beyer (1992) and Philip Denwood (1999) appear to omit the converb -las altogether. Michael Hahn (1996: 109) writes that “las kann Vorzeitigkeit und Gleichzeitigkeit ausdrücken” and rarely also has “Eine kausale Verwendung”. Peter Schwieger (2006: 316–17) mentions the same two uses. Kesang Gyurme also describes “las en fonction de connecteur temporal” (1992: 50) but in addition describes “las en fonction de connecteur adversatif” (1992: 49) for cases which can generally be translated as “except for”. None of these descriptions match the most frequently found use of the converb -las in Old Tibetan, which is to mark off the following clause as surprising given the background of the preceding clause.

The meaning of -las in Old Tibetan
A survey of the various contexts in which the converb -las appears in Old Tibetan narrative texts reveals that the element shared by all instances of its use is that the clause following -las is somehow unexpected given the information in the preceding clause.

1 I follow the Mongolist tradition in calling a “converb” any non-finite post verbal morpheme which can also occur as a case marker. I would like to thank Brandon Dotson for sharing with me his unpublished translations of Old Tibetan Annals and Old Tibetan Chronicle. Any errors of translation are of course my own.
**Change of direction**

In the *Old Tibetan Annals* (OTA) the most frequent occurrence of the converb -*las* is between a phrase reporting that a person, or the court, went somewhere and another phrase which mentions a change to a different location.


[691] The year of the hare. The emperor stayed at Ńen-kar and in the summer the council convened at Sreḥu-gţug, but from Lha-ţregs it moved to Khra-sna.

(112) dgün. btsan.po: Brag.mar.ṇa. bţugs:pa.las / po.برا. Ḥphoste / (OTA)

[707] In the winter the emperor stayed at Brag-mar, but the court moved.


[721] The year of the bird. In the summer the emperor stayed in Stag-tsal which is in Duṅs, and then moved to Ōur-myi in Rnaḥ-po.


[728] The year of the dragon. In the summer the emperor stayed at Bol-gaṇs in Mtsho-bgo, but later returned to the land of Tibet.

(245) spreḥu. lo.ḥa / btsan.po: dbyar:d. byaṇ. roldu. ɢţegs:pa.las: slar: Ḥkhorte / (OTA)

[744] The year of the monkey. The emperor went north and then returned.

**Death**

One of the examples of a change in destination in the *Old Tibetan Annals* is metaphorical; in fact what is described is the emperor’s unexpected death.

(97) dgün. btsan.phoon: chab.ṣrī.Ďa: Mywa.Ďa. ɢţegs:pa.las / dgu.Ďu. ɢţegs / (OTA)

[704] In the winter the emperor went to govern the Mywa, but went to heaven.

The converb -*las* is used to contrast an action with the sudden death of one of its participants in this fashion on several other occasions both in the *Old Tibetan Annals* and in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (OTC).


[757] Minister Skyes-baṇ Rgyal-khoṇ was being proclaimed deputy to the prime minister, but he died.

[739] The year of the hare. In the summer the emperor went on a political campaign to Beg. The son, Lhas-bon, was residing in Dron, but he died.


After that, Dbahs Dbyi-tshab convinced his maternal uncle, Mnon Bzaṅ-to-re Sron, but, after swearing at the oath cairn, Bzaṅ-to-re died.


Previously, during the reign of my father, you two, Hbrin-tho-re Sbuṅ-brtsan and Phangs-to-re Dbyi-tshab, were being established as ministers of the near and far sides of the river, but Hbrin-tho-re Sbuṅ-brtsan died.

Revolt
Apart from change of destination and sudden death, the most conspicuous occurrence of the converb -las is just before mentioning an act of treachery, treason or revolt.


[695] The year of the sheep. In the summer the emperor resided at Bal-po: The council convened at Gro-pu in Dra, and Mgar Btsan-ṇen Guṅ-rton was disloyal.

(203) ḥuṅ-gī rjes-la Dags-po ḍbaṅs-su mnāḥ-ba-las log-go // (OTC)

After that, Dags-po, which had been subjeguated, revolted.

(347) Ḥjaṅ Mywa-ḥi rgyal-po lta źig Rgya-la lta bta-ba-las // Rgya rjes (348) ḍgar blaṅste // (OTC)

Although the king of Ḥjaṅ (Nanzhao 南詔) Mywa had looked constantly to China, the Chinese lord took him as an enemy.


Later, when the when the white Mywa became disloyal despite having been subjects of the emperor, Ḫбро Ram-šags was proclaimed general, and at the time as a great battle was waged at Brag-ṛtse, many Ḫjaṅ (Nanzhao) were killed.

(1) btsan-pho Khrī Lde-gtsug-ṛtsan-gyī (2) rin-laḥ // (3) // ṅan-lam Kluk-khoṅ-gyis // (4) glo-ba ṇe-baḥi rje blas byas-pa // (5) Ḥbal
During the reign of emperor Khri Lde-gtsug-rtsan, Nan-lam Klu-khoñ carried out his loyal duties, but Ḫbal Ldoṅ-tsap and Lan. Myes-zigs, though acting as prime ministers, became disloyal and did harm to the body of the emperor, the father, Khri lde-gtsug-rtsan, and he departed to heaven.

Frustrated hopes
A number of the remaining examples involve the expression of a hope or plan of some kind in the first clause, followed by a second clause in which the hope is disappointed or the plan frustrated.

Minister Khri-hbrin kept saying, “let us lead a military campaign to Turkestan”, but this was postponed.

Lo-ňam also said, “[I will] not match [you]”, but [emperor Dri-gum] did not allow [it].

After him, Mthon-myi Ḫbrin.-po-rgyal Btsan-nu served. Making a great plot, he entrusted his own sister, Lady Thon-my Za-yar-sten., with poison. He sent her off, but she herself drank the poison [unknowingly], and Btsan-nu was put to death.

Then the emperor thought in his mind that he hoped that one of the Lho-rng ministers would make a reply, but no one replied.

I intended to bestow my favour in a suitable manner, but the monk himself, adhering to the custom of a follower and subject and the proper way of a bhiksū, begged not to receive my favour. But despite this, because recompense for a contribution is the rule in bestowing favour; therefore by my command:

I intended to bestow my favour in a suitable manner, but the monk himself, adhering to the custom of a follower and subject and the proper way of a bhiksū, begged not to receive my favour. But despite this, because recompense for a contribution is the rule in bestowing favour; therefore by my command:
Although [I] granted favour to the appropriate degree in keeping with the circumstances of his contribution, the monk himself begged not to receive [my] favour.


In the year of Jinglong (景龍 710), Jincheng Gongzhu (金成公主) was taken to the court of the emperor [the emperors of China and Tibet], became uncle and nephew and were happy. But from time to time ministers of the respective borders (so) were bent on (riul) mischief. Despite that they acted in accordance with the true spirit of their intimate relationship.

In the next example of a failed plan, understanding that the converb -las has the contrastive meaning “but” or “although” proves to be key in correctly understanding the passage. Nag-re-khyuñ, the son of Khyuñ-po Spun-sad Zu-tse, appears before the emperor with the severed head of his father, asking that the emperor excuse his father’s reported disloyalty and leave the family estates intact.


“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-zuñ, but Yul-zuñ indeed perceived this, and Yul-zuñ returned. I killed my father, and cut off his head. This being so, can it be granted that [my] realm (srid) not be lost?”

In isolation the phrase Mgar Yul-zuñ-la ḥthol-bar bgyis would appear to mean “he made a confession to Mgar Yul-zuñ”, but the presence of the converb -las and the fact that Mgar reported the treachery of Khyuñ-po Spun-sad Zu-tse to the emperor both indicate that Khyuñ-po Spun-sad Zu-tse did not actually succeed in making his confession to Mgar yul-zuñ. The past stem bgyis ‘made’ is in this case used to show a failed attempt.

This use of the past stem is discussed by Zeisler (2001: 175–7) who cites an example of a past stem showing failed attempt from an earlier part of the Old Tibetan Chronicle.


When Lde-bla Guñ-rgyal tried to draw emperor Dri-gum into heaven Lo-ṇ am took a monkey from his armpit and Lde-bla Guñ-rgyal departed, cast into the glacial womb of Mount Kailash.
In a more recent publication Zeisler reiterates this example and adds various parallel examples from classical Tibetan texts and modern Tibetan languages, along with six closely parallel examples from the Old Tibetan version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Zeißer 2004: 408–16). I provide one of those six here.²

(30) lha-hi bu-rnams yi chad-de / (31) Ma-ha-de-ba-hi dnos-grub sgrubs-so // Ma-ha-de-bas kyan sems-kyi rtog-pa nian-par / thugsu chud-de / gšegs-su (32) ma gnañ // (Rāma A l. 30–32)

The sons of the gods despairing tried to realize the siddhi of Mahadeva, but even Mahadeva understood that the intention of their minds was evil and did not deign to come.

**Pleasant surprises**

The examples of the converb *-las* in Old Tibetan discussed so far make clear that this converb introduces an unexpected change. Most examples, such as death, revolt or disappointment are unwelcome changes. However, in some examples the clause following *-las* expresses a pleasant surprise or a stroke of luck.

(341) Rgya-hi nor mañ-po stod pyogs-su ḍdon-pa rnams / / Kwa-cu-na
(342) tshogs byas-pa-las / / thams-chad Bod-kyis phab-ste bźes-pas / / blar yain dkor mañ-po brñes / / (OTC)

Many Chinese riches, taken to the upper regions, were gathered in Guazhou (瓜州), but all of this was sacked by Tibet and taken, and again many riches were acquired.

(521) de-nas Rgya-hi dmag // Weñ-ker-źan-šes bdahste byuñ-ba-las // Bod-kyi dmag-pon / blon Khri-ʰbrin-gis / dgra thabs / [---] (522)-dañ g.yag ltar byas-nas / / go-bar-du g.yul spraw-de / / Rgya mañ-po bthuins-na (OTC)

Then Weñ-ker-źan-šes convoked the Chinese army, and they came, but the Tibetan general, Minister Khri-hprüṅ, fought and, acting in the manner of a yak, he met them in battle and slew many Chinese.


[Hbal Ldon-tsab and Lañ Myes-zigs] came close to harming the body of the emperor, the son, Khri-sroñ-lde-brtsan. They put the polity of black-headed Tibetans into strife, but Klu-khoñ offered the reports of Ḍbal and Lañ’s disloyalty to the ears of the emperor, the son, Khri Sroñ-lde-brtsan. Then Ḍbal and Lañ became truly disloyal and they were disgraced. Klu-khoñ was loyal.

Although the decree of Kar-po was granted in the time of the divine son, the emperor, Khrī-sroṅ-lde-brtsan, in the time of the divine son Lde-sroṅ it was granted by royal command that the decree be made more extensive than previously.

Other surprises
The unifying semantic feature that all of the examples share is an element of surprise, an unexpected contrast. Most of the remaining examples of the converb -las in Old Tibetan are consistent with this meaning and can be translated as “but” or “although”.

(93) de-hī ḥog-du Khynū-po Spun.-sad Zu-tses / (94) byas-pa-las // Ḥo-ma-lde-Lod-btsan-daṅ regs ma mjal-nas // mkhar Khri-boms-su mchis-te // (OTC)
After him, Khyun-po Spun-sad Zu-tse served but, disagreeing (regs ma mjal) with Ḥo-ma-lde Lod-btsan, he went to the stronghold of Khri-boms.

(56) snon Myān Dbus sūṅ ṅe-ziṅ zo-ša phul-bar ḥdra-ba-las // dbuḥs-kyi zla-daṅ sbyar-na / (57) Myān bkaḥ-drin chuṅs-pa ḥdra-nas // (Ẓwa-bahi, West)
Formerly, while the Myān and the Dbus were similar in having been loyal and having made contributions, yet, if compared with the corresponding case of the Dbus, the favour (shown) the Myān appears to have decreased.

(8) gtsig (9) ran-par dpags-pa-las kyaṅ phrī-ziṅ smad-pa zo (10) ṣahī rkyen-tu ma bab-ste / bka-drin chuṅs sūṅs pham-bar (11) gyurd / (Ẓwa-bahi, east)
Although the decree was appropriately proportioned, it has diminished and become reduced, falling short of the circumstances of his contribution; [my] favour has become small and wanting.

In the following example the converb -las shows that people did not expect that Khyun-po Spun-sad Zu-tse’s supposition would turn out to be correct and were surprised that it did. In English this instance is not very easily translated by “but” or “although”; however the context of the Tibetan remains one of contrast. The converb -las has the same meaning in this example as it does elsewhere.

(98) bya pyir ḥphur-ba (99) yaṅ bgraṅs-pa-las // bya chig ma tshaṅ-na // « khras bsad-pa ḥdraḥs tlos ! » šes mchis-nas // myi (100) yoṅs-kyis bītas-pa-las // bya chig khras bkum-ste // (OTC)
When the pigeons flew back and there was one bird missing from his count, [Khyun-po Spun-sad Zu-tse] said, “Go and see if a hawk killed one”. And everyone looked and [discovered] that a bird had been killed by a hawk.
In the next example the verb -las contrasts a potential crime with the surprising leniency with which it will be dealt.

(24) bkαḥ gyod-gyī (25) tshigs cī-la bab-pa-las // bkαḥ gyod (26) na gcig-gis smad-cīn bs kyūn-bar (27) gnañ-ño // (Žol, north)

Although he should fall to any sentence of judgement, it is granted that in that judgement [the punishment] should be lowered and reduced by one.

Further along in the list of royal beneficences awarded, in the same inscription an example of the verb -las occurs where the contrast is not immediately obvious.

(47) Nαn-lam Gsas-slebs-gyi (48) bu tsha rgyud Ḫpheld / nam žar gyañ sde sku (49) sruñs-su gnañ-ba-las / sde cha gudu myī spoḥ myī (50) bs gyur-bar gnañ-ño // (Žol, north)

When the son or descendant of Nαn-lam Gsas-slebs has been permanently granted as district body guard, it is granted that he shall not be moved or transferred to an inferior district.

If someone is granted a position permanently it is not surprising that he would not be removed from it. However, given how frequently -las carries a contrastive meaning in Old Tibetan, it is best to understand -las as presenting the following information as a surprise, even if it is not so surprising objectively. The implication is that the emperor normally reserves the right to restation his officials even if they have been permanently granted their positions in principle. However, in this case the emperor publicly waives the right to recall his officers if they are from among the descendants of Nαn-lam Gsas-slebs. The surprise lies not with a contrast between a permanent position and a lack of redeployment, but rather with the customary rights of the emperor and his stunning act of generosity.

**The verb -las in Old Tibetan contracts**

So far the explanation of the meaning of -las has been based on examples from a corpus of narrative texts including the Old Tibetan Annals, the Old Tibetan Chronicle, and the imperial inscriptions. The test of this explanation is whether it describes equally well examples from a corpus independent of these texts. The meaning of “but” or “although” for -las fits very well with the use of the verb -las in the Old Tibetan contracts collected by Tsuguhito Takeuchi (1995). In some cases Takeuchi has already translated the relevant passages in a way consistent with this interpretation of -las.

(1) hbrug-gi loḥi dpyid / Stoñ-sar-gyi sōg-mkhan Šαn he-hdos / blon Rgyal-zigs-la sōg sōg yug riüns yug ſis brgyaḥ ĺig chags-pa-las / hjal-du ma meḥis-te// (Contract 13 recto)

In the spring of the dragon year, Šαn he-hdo, a paper maker (sōg-mkhan) in the Stoñ-sar [thousand]-district, borrowed two hundred bolts of
long-bolt (yug riṅs) paper from blon Rgyal-zigs; but [the loan] has not been repaid. (Takeuchi 1995: 180)

(2) slar ḡbul baḥi dus ḡbrug-gi loḥi dbyar sla ḡbrīṅ-po tshes lña-la ḡbul-bar (3) dam byis-las / kho-tas gya-gyu-daṅ / bgyis-nas / ma phul (Contract 13 recto)

As for the time of repayment, it is promised that the payment should be made on the fifth of the middle summer month of the dragon year; but the borrower conspired and did not repay. (Takeuchi 1995: 180)

In four other cases Takeuchi’s translation does not reflect the contrast indicated by las. However, translating -las as “but” or “although” improves the coherence of the translation and is in all cases contextually relevant.

Example 1

In the winter of the tiger year, from Skyo yan-legs in the Se-toṅ-pa [thousand]-district, priest Canḵ leṅ-hyen bought a female horse; afterwards, Yan-legs asked to borrow this horse. (Takeuchi 1995: 194)

If a person buys a horse from a man it is somewhat surprising for the latter to ask immediately for the horse back. I would venture translating the sentence:

In the winter of the tiger year, the bhiksū Canḵ leṅ-hyen bought a mare from Skyo yan-legs in the district of Se-toṅ-pa, but Yan-legs asked to borrow this horse [back].

Example 2

(1–2) Canḵ kun-tse in the unit (tshan) of Canḵ ka-dзо in the Rgod-sar [thousand]-district borrowed one-and-a-half ḡkhal and four ḡbre of wheat from the grain levied last year (lit. previously) by Lo byi-brtsan, the former (lit. old) grain official. (2–3) It was decided by the rtse-rje that [the wheat]

3 In quotations from Takeuchi I have modified the transcription system to agree with that employed here.
should be repaid in the autumn of the boar year; the register was accordingly altered. (3–5) Afterwards, the levy officials (gñer-pa) Dar rgyal-ma, Tre mye-slebs, and so on, collected [the loaned wheat] back, saying “There came a dispatch (phyag-rgya) stating that the general is granting (i.e. donating) wheat to mkhan-po Thub-brtan in the middle spring month of the boar year”. (Takeuchi 1995: 257–8)

This passage involves two surprises which Takeuchi’s translation fails to bring out. First, Cañ kun-tse would have been expected to pay back the grain before the autumn of the boar year. It is only the intervention of the rtse-rje that allows him to repay the debt in that year. Second, once the registry is changed to reflect the new arrangement, circumstances would have been expected to proceed in accordance with the amended registry. It is only the intervention of levy officials which necessitates the grain to be returned sooner than expected. The following translation of mine captures these two surprises, indicated grammatically with -las:

(1–2) Cañ kun-tse in the unit (tshan) of Cañ ka-dzo in the Rgod-sar district borrowed one-and-a-half khal and four bre of wheat from the grain levied the previous year by Lo byi-brtstan, the former grain official, but (2–3) it was decided by the rtse-rje that [the wheat] should be repaid in the autumn of the boar year; the register was accordingly altered. However, (3–5) the levy officials (gñer-pa) including Dar rgyal-ma and Tre mye-slebs collected [the loaned wheat] back, saying “There came a dispatch (phyag-rgya) stating that the general is donating wheat to mkhan-po Thub-brtan in the middle spring month of the boar year”.

Example 3

(2) // Kog-hi[n] glas-pah i rin-dan. // žag grañs-gyi myi bla-las (3) [-i?] sby i[n-bar bgis-pa-las // tho-ma sla-ba gehig ni / gla yañ than bžin-du stsal-pa lags // sla-ba gñis (4) [gsum?] ni / dgun sla tha [cuins] [...] tshun chad / le lo bgvis-te ma[h] tshald / (Contract 37)

It is decided that the wage of hiring [Kog-hin] and [...] the work for the number of days [should be] granted. (3) Then, for the first one month, the wage was paid in accordance with the rate. (3–4) [But] for the second month [on and after?], [the employer] neglected and did not pay [the wage] up through [...] the last winter month. (Takeuchi 1995: 268–9)

Takeuchi places the “but” in his translation based on the context, but the grammar places the contrast immediately after the statement of agreement. In English one might capture this by translating:

Although it was decided that the wage of hiring [Kog-hin] and [...] the work for the number of days [should be] granted, (3) and for the first one month, the wage was paid in accordance with the rate, (3–4) for the second month [on and after?], [the employer] neglected and did not pay [the wage] up through [...] the last winter month.
Example 4


(1) In the middle spring month of the boar year, (1–2) the crop field of Ḥkal-rgyaḥ-bzaṅ teṅ-teṅu in the [thousand]-district of the Thoṅ-kyab Se-toṅ-pa is at Pog-peṅu yu-ba phu-reṅ; (2–3) it is decided that Teṅ-teṅu, without a bullock for ploughing and tools, will collaborate with (tha-zla bar?) priest Caṅ leṅ-hyen [and his] brother. (Takeuchi 1995: 310–11)

The underlying assumption present in this example which allows for the contrast is that if someone owns a field he will have the facilities to service it. A translation reflecting this assumption might be

Although the crop field of Ḥkal-rgyaḥ-bzaṅ teṅ-teṅu ... is at Pog-peṅu yu-ba phu-reṅ; (2–3) Teṅ-teṅu being without a bullock for ploughing and tools, it is agreed that the priest Caṅ leṅ-hyen [and his] brother will collaborate with him [in the field’s cultivation].

Syntactic constructions involving the converb -las

Now that the semantics of the converb -las in Old Tibetan has been determined it is worth considering whether this improved understanding of the converb can facilitate the understanding of larger syntactic constructions in which the converb regularly occurs. In the examples surveyed in this paper the converb -las appears recurrently in two syntactic constructions: after a reduplicated verb, and in a three-clause construction with the converb -kyis.

The converb -las after a reduplicated verb

A large number of the examples of the converb -las found in Old Tibetan occur suffixed to a reduplicated verb.

(42) blon. Khrīḥbrin.gyis/ « Dru.gu: yul.du: draṅ. » žes: bgyi (43) bgyi. ba.las/ phyī. dalte/ (OTA)

[686] Minister Khrī-ḥbrin kept saying, “let us lead a military campaign to Turkestan”, but this was postponed.


[739] The year of the hare. In the summer the emperor went on a political campaign to Beg. The son, Lhas-bon, was residing in Dron, but he died.

[757] Minister Skyes-bzang Rgyal-khoṇ was being proclaimed deputy to the prime minister, but he died.


Previously, during the reign of my father, you two, Ḥbraṅ-to-re Sbuṅ-brtsan and Phaṅs-ro-re Dbyi-tshab, were being established as ministers of the near and far sides of the river, but Ḥbraṅ-to-re Sbuṅ-brtsan died.

(347) Ḥjaṅ Mywa-hi rgyal-po lta žig Rgya-la lta Ita-ba-las // Rgya rjes (348) dgrar blaṅste // (OTC)

Although the king of Ḥjaṅ (Nanzhao) Mywa had looked constantly to China, the Chinese lord took him as an enemy.

This reduplicated structure with -las appears to indicate that the action preceding the -las was still being performed when it was abruptly ended by the action in the following clause. As Uray Géza points out (1954: 195), the same construction appears repeatedly in the Ḥdzāṅs-blun. The examples from that text also indicate an interrupted action, but the sense of contrast or surprise so consistently found in the Old Tibetan material appears to have diminished considerably.


O father, while I was walking for pleasure outside I saw many people suffering because of clothing and food, they performed various unvirtuous deeds, killing one another, lying, and abusing power.

Then while they went along the guide asked, “now, do you see a white mountain appearing?” The prince answered, “such a one appears.” “That is the mountain of silver”, said [the guide]. Then while they went along [the guide] asked, “now, do you see a blue mountain appearing?” [The prince] answered, “such a one appears”. “That is the mountain of vaidūrya”, said [the guide]. Then while they went along [the guide] asked, “now, does a yellow mountain appear?” [The prince] answered, “such a yellow mountain appears”. “That is the mountain of gold”, said [the guide]. Then they approached the mountain of gold.

(17) de-nas bya-ṅaṅ-pa kun-tu ḡphur-ṅiṅ tshol-tshol-ba-las / skyed-mos-tshal de-na rgyal-buhi skad grags-nas (Ḥdzaṅs-blun, 219)
While the duck, flying everywhere, was searching [for him], the voice of the prince was heard in the park.

(3) bu-mo skyed-mos-tshal-du ḡchag-ciṅ soṅ soṅ-las rgyal-bu Dge-don ḡdug-pa-daṅ phrad-nas (Ḥdzaṅs-blun, 220)
While the girl was walking in the park, she met the prince Kalyāṇāṃkara, who was staying there.

While the king with his four armies was going to the woods to amuse himself, he met with a game animal; while chasing after the game the king alone without his retinue went into a thick wood.

An example also involving wild animals and a thick wood is found in the story of the Hungry Tigress.

While [the others] rested for a while, the three sons went along into the woods; then, they saw a tigress who had just given birth, and because of having suffered from hunger and thirst for many days, was at the point of eating her own children.

The converb -las in a three clause construction with the converb -kyis
The second identifiable construction is one in which the converb -las occurs in a series of three clauses, the first and second separated by the converb -las and the second and third by the converb -kyis. Only two examples of this construction occur among the examples surveyed here.
In the year of Jinglong (710), Jincheng Gongzhu (金成公主) was taken to the court of the emperor, they became uncle and nephew and were happy. But from time to time ministers of the respective borders (so) were bent on mischief. Despite that they acted in accordance with the true spirit of their intimate relationship.

I intended to bestow my favour in a suitable manner, but the monk himself, adhering to the custom of a follower and subject and the proper way of a bhikṣu, begged not to receive my favour. But despite this, because recompense for a contribution is the rule in bestowing favour; therefore by my command:

In these two examples it is clear that there is a contrast between the first and second clauses, and that then there is a larger contrast between the second and third clauses in such a way that the first and third clauses are similar in sentiment. This construction has a three-part structure: (a) statement, (b) hesitation or qualification of that statement, and finally, (c) a restatement in even firmer terms or with more determination.

The converb -las in Classical Tibetan

That use of the converb -las noticed here, meaning “but” or “although”, continues into more recent texts can be seen from the following passage of the Mi la ras pa rnams thar by Gtsan smyon he ru ka rus paḥī rgyan can (1452–1507).

An example of an unpleasant surprise is also found in the story of the Hungry Tigress.

A thorough search of Classical Tibetan texts would surely turn up more examples fitting the pattern established in the Old Tibetan data.
Conclusion

Although the use of the converb -las to emphasize a following surprise has not previously been remarked upon in descriptions of Tibetan grammar, it is the primary function of -las in Old Tibetan, and continues in use in later Tibetan writings. The contexts which lead to such an analysis include such events in the clause following -las as an unexpected change of direction, death, revolt, frustrated hopes, and a variety of pleasant surprises. The converb -las occurs in two identifiable syntactic constructions, after a reduplicated verb where it indicates the interruption of a continuous event, and in a three clause pattern with the converb -kyis, where it indicates a small contrast and -kyis a more significant contrast returning to the sentiment of the first clause, which precedes -las.

References

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