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སྒོམ་རྫ་པ། རྒྱལ་ཀྱི་འཇུག་པ།

A Drop from the Ocean;

Introduction to Indigenous Tibetan Grammar

Through an Insider's Perspective

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Centre for Buddhist Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "*Sum Cu Pa - rTags Kyi 'Jug Pa, A Drop from the Ocean;* Introduction to Indigenous Tibetan Grammar through an Insider's Perspective" submitted by Franziska Oertle in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract of Thesis about Indigenous Tibetan Grammar

This essay emphasises the value of the study of indigenous Tibetan grammar texts, such as Thon Mi Sambhoṭa's *Sum Cu Pa* (*SCP*) and *rTags kyi 'Jug Pa* (*TKJ*) for a thorough understanding of the principles of this language. Gaining insight into these works furthermore reveals this language's interrelation with culture and religion. Not only are many examples borrowed from Buddhist texts; even some grammatical principles reflect Indian religious concepts.

This discussion highlights the insights gained from the study of various Tibetan commentaries on the *SCP* and the *TKJ* along with the indispensible oral explanations of a learned native speaker and teacher. Their main content is made accessible to the reader in a rather particular way: to illustrate native speakers' perspectives and methods, this essay follows the style of the commentaries closely. It therefore employs English grammar terms and categories only when indispensible for comprehension.

To illustrate Tibetan language's previously mentioned interrelation with culture, some traditional accounts about the time and circumstances of the composition of these two famous treatises are presented. Complete historicity is not claimed but reference is made for further investigation by the reader. The knowledge of the content of the *SCP* and *TKJ*, such as the *phrad rang dbang can - gzhan dbang can* (dependent - independent particles), the all-pervasive concept of *bdag - gzhan* (self and other) and *bya thsig tha dad pa - tha mi dad pa* (transitivity of verbs) etc. is crucial to non-native students and experts. Why? Because these are clearly the concepts by means of which Tibetans think, express themselves and teach. These concepts occasionally lack easy equivalents in other languages and understanding them thus reveals a logic otherwise covered by many rules. The main methodological approach in this essay is to provide examples drawn from old and contemporary commentaries. These

sentences not only illustrate and clarify the grammatical principles, but at the same time reflect the author's values and intention. For this reason, they provide an authentic insight into the mindset of native speaker authors.

Since unfortunately many Tibetan manuals teach the language without reference to these two texts, this research will be of interest to students and experts. Reading this introductory work in English by no means replaces the study of Thon Mi's works, it rather aims at inspiring the reader to do so - ideally in Tibetan!

ལེའུ་དང་པོ།

CHAPTER 1

༡། །འགོ་བརྗོད། Introduction

"Grammar resembles the water in the ocean. I know as much as there is water
In this flask, while you know no more than the drop on this tip of kuśa grass."[1]

Indra to the Rsi Brhaspati

While this essay can only present that drop of water on the tip of the grass, it has the potential to *point* at the ocean of Tibetan grammar. It will do so by providing a simple and understandable introduction to the two main indigenous Tibetan grammar texts: the *Sum Cu Pa* (*Thirty Verses*) and the *rTags Kyi 'Jug Pa* (*Application of Gender*). The intended audience is intermediate-level students of the Tibetan language who wish to deepen their knowledge through gaining insight into these two renowned texts. Reading this introductory work in English will not replace the study of those texts in Tibetan; rather, it encourages the reader to do so.

Since these two works were composed over a dozen centuries ago, one may wonder about their present relevance. Non-Tibetan scholars[2] tend to analyze Tibetan in terms of its relation to Sanskrit.[3] While these experts analyze the texts from a historical-linguistic perspective, this essay focuses on presenting a concise introduction to their *content* in a way

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1 Bulcso I. Siklos 1986, p. 304. *sgra ni rgya mtsho'i chu dang 'dra/ ngas shes pa ni bum pa'i chu dang khyod shes pa ni ku sha'i rtse mo'i chu dang 'dra'o//*

2 This term is more accurate than saying "Western" scholars as there are many Japanese Tibetologists, whose activity I am aware of but cannot take into consideration here.

3 For further reference regarding the relation with Sanskrit, see essays such as Verhagen's. Cabezón and Jackson ed., 1996, pp. 422-437. Or explore articles by Miller, later referred to in this essay. Generally, the Sanskrit-Tibetan relation seems to be over-emphasised by some and disregarded by others as the elaborations below will show. A position in between seems reasonable: "Tibetan language was modified and systematized by Thumi specifically so that Sanskrit literature could be translated into a uniquely Tibetan language without making the new system a mere copy of Sanskrit." Duff 2009, p. 30.

Tibetans study it. In the context of teaching the language, most of their textbooks do not present the basic Tibetan grammatical principles used by native speakers, and contained in the *SCP* and *TKJ*.[4] Such an approach, though being a useful convention for becoming able to use the language, seems too pragmatic and limited. Not only does it often leave the student with many illogical rules and exceptions; it also risks treating language without the cultural context from which it should not be separated. Being unfamiliar with the underlying concepts used by Tibetans, translation becomes difficult as many terms, particles or verbal modes lack clear equivalents in other languages. When discussing or studying their grammar with native speakers one may end up with a situation where the Tibetan needs to use modern Indo-European categorizations. As it seems plausible that it is the student's responsibility to become acquainted with the principles of the language intended to master, this essay encourages and assists the reader to do so.

The study of the indigenous grammar is a very challenging but equally interesting undertaking not only for the grammatical content itself; but also for the cultural value these old texts bear.[5] Not gaining insight into these two famous works, commentaries of which are still taught nowadays in every Tibetan monastery and school, leaves the foreign student's study of this language incomplete. It neglects the religious-cultural dimension of the Tibetan language reflected in these two main grammar works and their commentaries.[6] To try to fill in this gap an introduction to the content of the *SCP* and the *TKJ* shall be presented here, written in English but following the style of Tibetan commentaries.

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[4] One notable exception: Gyurmé Kelsang, Stoddard, Heather and Tournadre, Nicolas. *Le Clair Miroir, Grammaire Tibetaine.* Paris: Edition Prajna, 1992. The main author of this work is Tibetan and his explanations have been translated, adapted and commented on by Stoddard and Tournadre. The Tibetan and non-Tibetan authors are clearly distinguished by the usage of different fonts.

[5] It is a particularity of Tibetan grammar that, unlike English, its grammar and orthography has hardly changed over the centuries since its introduction. "New orthography (after the second language revisions) has been in effect ever since." For further reference, read Duff's chapter on the language revisions. Duff 2009, pp. 45-84.

[6] What is meant with religious-cultural dimension: The reader should be aware that most of the great grammarians in the past were also important religious figures, such as Si Tu Rin Po Che, dNgul Chu Yab Sras, etc. and Thon Mi's grammar texts are included in the various editions of the *bsTan 'Gyur.*

The introductory section of this essay very briefly presents the circumstances under which Thon Mi Samboṭha (7th century) is traditionally held to have established literacy in Tibet. It furthermore introduces some of the most important past Tibetan commentators and their works. Such traditional accounts, rather than claiming historicity, allow for an insight into how Tibetans perceive Thon Mi and his legendary journey to the noble land of India, as well as the famous past Tibetan grammarians, some of whom are seen as incarnations of Manjushri, the Buddha of wisdom.

The main part of this paper presents the actual content of the *SCP*, the eight-fold *rnam dbye* "case" division and the particles, divided into *phrad gzhan dbang can* and *rang dbang can* (dependent and independent particles).[7] Each of the *rnam dbye* is presented with its corresponding particles, subdivisions, etc. As it may seem strange to non-Tibetans that one particle is used for three *rnam dbye*s (second, fourth and seventh), their different usages will be elucidated. Finally, some thought will be given to the unresolved discussion about whether the eighth *rnam dbye*, the *bod sgra* (vocative), is an actual *rnam dbye*.

The elaborations on the non-*rnam dbye* particles, the remaining dependent[8] and all of the independent particles, are directly drawn (i.e., translated) from various Tibetan commentaries and follow their style. Thon Mi's root verses are quoted and de-coded, to illustrate their unintelligibility for a beginner student and the resulting indispensability of the commentarial literature.[9] The major teaching methods found in traditional commentaries are based on the etymology of the names of the particles as well as countless examples. These will be concisely and selectively presented in this essay. A traditional Tibetan presentation of

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[7] The name dependent particle derives from the fact that for one function not only one but a *set* of particles is used. These are mostly similar, only varying slightly in spelling, and undergo morphological rules of application. These rules allow for smooth pronunciation and are primarily based on the gender of the suffixes, a topic discussed in detail in the *TKJ*. As also one of the so-called independent particles undergoes rules of application, some people argue that this division does not fully hold.

[8] All the *rnam dbye* particles fall under the categorization of dependent particles, therefore the term "remaining" refers to those not included in the section on the *rnam dbye brgyad.*

[9] The fact that despite their illegibility, Thon Mi's root verses are often quoted in the commentarial literature illustrates the Tibetan attitude of utmost authority of the founder of literacy, Thon Mi. The author of the commentary thereby proves that he is not creating something new and original but merely elucidates Thon Mi's intent.

grammar would be incomplete if no mention was made of the points of controversy debated by past and present Tibetan grammarians. This paper will discuss these points primarily based on Si Tu Rin Po Che's[10] (17th century) commentary *Si Tu'i 'Grel Chen.*[11]

The most interesting and challenging section of this essay deals with the content of the *TKJ* that presents the subtleties of the gender of letters and major grammatical principles. The elaborations on the places of origin of the sound of the various letters and the division into *pho, mo, ma ning* (male, female, neuter) etc. are subtle and difficult to distinguish even for a native speaker's ear.[12] Of more practical relevance to the reader, and therefore elaborated upon in considerable detail, is the all-pervasive concept of *bdag* and *gzhan* (Self and Other), the controversial issue of *bya tshig tha dad pa* and *tha mi dad pa* ("transitive" and "intransitive" verbs),[13] *byed pa po gtso bo* and *phal* (main and subsidiary agent), etc. The exact usage of these interrelated principles in contemporary spoken language along with the issues of volition, direct versus inferential knowledge etc. is complex. These seem to be the points where non-Tibetans' explanations are not fully applicable and at times lack accuracy.[14] Detailed elaborations on these particular issues are therefore of utmost importance and considerable benefit to the student. A thorough understanding of these will reveal the underlying logic and uniqueness of this language which risks becoming lost under myriad rules and categorizations.

This essay's methodological approach is to present the content of the *SCP* and *TKJ* in the way indigenous and contemporary Tibetan grammarians themselves understand it, rather

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10 In English works, Tibetan names are spelled in various ways. In order to provide clarity, I spell all the Tibetan names (including the term "Rin Po Che") deriving from Tibetan sources in Wylie.

11 According to Tillemans and Herforth, Si Tu Rin Po Che is *the* crucial figure, the first to introduce a paradigm in the 17th century. Si Tu criticizes past commentators, blaming them for not having thoroughly understood Thon Mi's elaborations on the distinction of *bdag* and *gzhan,* etc. Tillemans and Herforth 1989, p. 8.

12 For this reason, unlike the *SCP,* the *TKJ* is not taught to young school children, but (to my knowledge) in monastic institutions only after class nine.

13 Using this English grammar term here is a momentary convention; the following elaborations will elucidate that the Tibetan concept is different and translating *tha dad pa* with *transitive* therefore does not hold.

14 Tournadre categorizes verbs into "ergative," "affective" and "possessive." While these are accurate terms, it would seem more elegant and accurate to introduce the Tibetan concept of *tha dad pa* and *tha mi dad pa.* Tournadre and Sangda 2003, p. 153.

than dealing with the findings of non-Tibetan linguists.[15] Therefore English grammatical terms are used only to make the Tibetan indigenous grammar accessible; they are not intended to squeeze the latter into the former. Tibetan terms with no clear equivalent are left without translation, but their content is elucidated by means of representative examples. These exemplary sentences are employed for the twofold purpose of illustrating the function of the grammatical principles, and providing insight into the authors' time, values, etc. An overwhelming amount of the examples are dharma-related, and religious principles are often borrowed for grammatical categorizations, which show the intimate relation of the two.[16] Strictly sticking to such principles and examples allows the student to dive into the ocean of Tibetan grammar and culture. The reader is encouraged to leave aside modern Indo-European categorizations or keep them only in the back of one's thoughts. Considering my and the audience's water-drop-like knowledge, this essay does not present solutions for all controversial points upon which Tibetans and non-Tibetans have debated, but occasionally points at them for the purpose of further investigation.[17]

Although recently a complete translation and extensive elucidation of the *SCP* and the *TKJ* by Tony Duff has become available in English, the information presented in this essay derives almost entirely from Tibetan sources.[18] As Thon Mi's root verses are rather unintelligible, indigenous and contemporary commentaries are consulted. These works may

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[15] Since the main focus of this work is the presentation of the Tibetan material itself, positions and arguments by non-Tibetans are - apart from the second chapter - presented in the footnotes. They facilitate further investigation by the interested reader.

[16] One Buddhist concept borrowed for a grammatical categorization: Vowels are considered female and wisdom and consonants male and method; as none of the two sets can stay on its own; they are the union of method and wisdom. dByangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 35.

[17] The best commentary to consult for such purpose is the aforementioned Si Tu Rin Po Che's *Great Explanation: Ka rMa Si Tu'i Sum rTags 'Grel Chen mKhas Pa'i mGul rGyan Mu Tig Phreng mDzes.* mThso sNgon Mi Rigs dPe sKrun Khang, 2003. Apart from presenting his theories and interpretations, mistaken points of view of past commentators are refuted in a debate-like style. This text however is considered by Tibetan and non-Tibetan experts as the most difficult commentary and is therefore only suitable for advanced students.

[18] I consider it a valuable opportunity to acquire my knowledge directly from native speakers rather than non-Tibetan experts. Therefore I only read passages of this work after having prepared a complete draft of this essay. Though by far more beautiful, I do not present this scholar's but my own translations. Such choice does not entail any lack of interest for the works of these experts. The opposite is the case. It seems a worthwhile undertaking to come to my own conclusions based on the teachings received, and to then compare and contrast them with the findings of other experts.

later become the basis of the reader's further studies. The primary source in the introductory section is *Thon Mi's Oral Instruction.*[19] The content of the *SCP* is presented mainly based on *The Tree of the Lucid Exposition,*[20] *The Key (which Gives) an Easily Understandable Short Explanation on the* SCP *and* TKJ,[21] and Si Tu Rin Po Che's *Great Explanation.*[22] The main text relied upon for the elucidations of the *TKJ,* is *The Mirror (which) Elucidates the Difficult Points (of the* TKJ).[23] Some information given does not have any written source but derives from oral instructions on both texts which I received from my teacher, Mr. Mingyur Dorje. Having studied in CUTS (Central University of Tibetan Studies), his knowledge about his language and these two famous texts is extremely vast.[24] I owe not only the little insights I gained, but also my fascination for indigenous grammar to him, for which I express my sincere gratitude.

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19 *Thon Mi'i Zhal Lung* by Tshe Ten Zhabs Drung (20th century) The full name of the text is: *Gangs Can Bod Kyi brDa sProd Pa'i bsTan bCos Sum Cu Ba Dang rTags Kyi 'Jug Gi rNam gZhag rGya Cher bShad Pa Thon Mi'i Zhal Lung Zhes Bya Ba Bzhugs So//*

20 *Legs bShad lJon dBang* by dByangs Can rDo rJe (18th century)

21 *Sum rTags 'Grel Chung Go bDe'i lDe Mig* by Zla Ba Tshe Ring (20th century)

22 *Ka rMa Si Tu'i Sum rTags 'Grel Chen mKhas Pa'i mGul rGyan Mu Tig Phreng mDzes* by Si Tu Rin Po Che (17th century)

23 *dKa' gNad gSal Ba'i Me Long* by dByangs Can rDo rJe (18th century)

24 Previously known as the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, U.P., India

ལེའུ་གཉིས་པ།

CHAPTER 2

༄༣ ཐོན་མི་དང་སྔོན་གྱི་མཁས་པ་རྣམས།

Thon Mi and the Great Commentators

2a) འགོ་བརྗོད། Introductory Notes

As mentioned in the introduction, this essay will focus particularly on the Tibetan perspective, rather than examining the findings of non-Tibetan historians and linguists. For this reason the following elaborations should be appreciated in terms of their cultural value, and not in terms of complete historical accuracy, which they cannot claim to possess. Their purpose is to provide an insight into how Tibetans perceive, learn, and teach accounts of the time and circumstances of the founder of literacy, Thon Mi Sambhoṭa, and past Tibetan grammarians. Merely to facilitate further, more scientific investigation by the interested reader, additional information is provided in the footnotes.

2b) བོད་ཡིག་གསར་བཟོ་བྱེད་དགོས་པའི་རྒྱུན།

Need and Circumstances of the Introduction of Literacy in Tibet

It is difficult to make accurate claims about the exact time, circumstances and reasons for the introduction of literacy in Tibet, but nevertheless we need to try.[25] Most experts, Tibetans and non-Tibetans alike, agree that dharma king Srong bTsan sGam po (7th century)

[25] For further historical reference about king Srong bTsan sGam Po, read: Chattopadhhyaya 1999, pp. 198-211.

was *the* initiating force for this decisive step in Tibetan history.[26] Many works such as Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung's (19th century) *Thon Mi's Oral Instructions* suggest that the absence of a written language caused considerable difficulty in political communication with Tibet's literate neighbouring countries such as China and India. Due to such inconveniences, and "because the lack of literacy makes Tibet an object of mockery by the other countries,"[27] the king made a strong resolve to introduce "a literal language which is not based on any other writing systems and in accordance with the spoken Tibetan." [28] It was the king's intent that such a system should serve two purposes: to facilitate both political communication and the translation and elucidation of religious texts.

Yet, the presence of any written language in Tibet at that time is the subject of disagreement between Tibetan and non-Tibetan scholars. For example, Zla Ba Tshe Ring, a modern Tibetan author, in his *Key*, asserts that there *was* literacy in Tibet at that time. As a support for his claim he points at the royal chronicles about the previous kings, particularly of Gri Gung bTsan Po that according to this author could not possibly have been orally transmitted.[29] A more common theory also mentioned in Zla Ba Tshe Ring's work is that the Bön pos already possessed an alphabet, called *zhang zhung*, named after its place of origin.[30]

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[26] Duff summarizes the success of Srong bTsan sGam Po's intent and subsequent introduction of literacy as follows: "The degree to which the new language was successful was quite extraordinary. Thunmi managed to create a language which apparently accommodated whatever was being spoken in Tibet prior to his new invention and carried it forward into the vision of a new Buddhist kingdom with a whole new set of literature." Duff 2009, p. 42.
Also Tibetans, such as the authors of the consulted commentaries, consider the dharma king Srong bTsan sGam Po the initial force for the introduction of literacy. Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 2.

[27] Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 3.

[28] The obvious relation with Sanskrit cannot and should not be denied. For further reference, consult works of Sanskrit specialists such as Verhagen. Cabezón and Jackson ed., 1996, pp. 422-437.
Miller points at the fact that even "the subsequent commentators managed to bring their own familiarity with Indic grammatical science to bear upon the task of elucidating these gnomic lines" (e.g., Thon Mi's root verses - essay author's note). Miller 1992, p. 106.
Already Jäschke, in the section on the introduction of the Tibetan alphabet, explains that several letters for sounds not available in Sanskrit were added. Jäschke 1972, p. 1.
Hahn compares Tibetan with the Dewanagri script: Hahn 1996, p. 20.
For all these reasons it is utterly unreasonable to deny the obvious Tibetan-Sanskrit relation and the above quote should be understood to merely emphasise the unique features of the Tibetan language and not be taken literally. The quote is translated from Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 3.

[29] Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 3.

[30] For further historical reference, read: Seigbert Hummel. *On Zhang-zhung.* Dharamsla, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Achieves, 2000.

The resolution of such unresolved questions requires further historical investigations impossible to provide here.[31]

2c) ཐོན་མི་རྒྱུ་གར་དུ་མངགས་པ། ཐོན་མིའི་སློབ་དཔོན་ཀྱི་མཚན།

Thon Mi Sambhoṭa's Journey to India and His Teacher(s)

Experts also present a considerable number of versions regarding Thon Mi's legendary journey to India. The traditional account in the *Thon Mi's Oral Instructions* describes this courageous undertaking in poetic words. After the expedition of the first learned ones sent to India had failed, the king Srong bTsan sGam Po called upon Thon Mi, a particularly intelligent boy with excellent character. "Until one should die, there is nothing one is unable to do!"[32] was the boy's response to the king's request to go to India to study the scriptural traditions. Thon Mi refused to have five hundred servants sent with him, and began his journey towards the southern neighbouring country accompanied by sixteen others. Tradition has it that, due to the kindness of the Nepalese king providing them with cooling medicines such as camphor, sandalwood, etc., they reached India safely and were able to pursue their studies. These events are said to have happened in the year 633 C.E. and a majority of scholars agree that he stayed and studied in India for seven years.[33]

There is less agreement on whether this student acquired his knowledge of Sanskrit and other Indian languages from one or multiple teachers. According to Bu sTon's[34] (14th century) *Chos 'Byung* (*History of the Dharma*) and *Deb Ther sNgon Po* (*The Blue Annals*), the two names attributed to his teachers, *lHa Rig Pa'i Seng Ge* and *Li Byin*, actually refer to

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31 For further investigation of the issue about presence or absence of any literacy before Thon Mi, Duff recommends consultation of the modern-day Tibetan history book *The Historical Annals, A Mirror That Reveals All*. Duff 2009, p. 47.

32 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 4.

33 This author says: "Even though I am not aware of *all* accounts about the numbers of years Thon Mi stayed in India, it is reasonable to presume seven years. This is what the past learned Tibetans in the holy texts say." Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 4. Such is also the dating found in Duff's work. Also according to this author, Thon Mi left in 633 C.E. and returned in 640 C.E. Duff 2009, p. 36.

34 For further specific historical reference regarding Bu sTon, read Schaeffer 2004.

one and the same person.[35] Also, traditional assertions about the number of languages present in India and studied by Thon Mi vary considerably. What scholars agree upon is that the twenty-one sūtras and tantras of the Avalokiteśvara cycle were among his first subjects of research.[36]

2d) ཐོན་མིའི་མཚན་རྣམས། ཁོང་གིས་བརྩམས་པའི་བསྟན་བཅོས་བརྒྱད།

His Names and the Composition of the Grammar Treatises

The promulgator of the Tibetan writing system and grammar is referred to in different texts by various names. The most common one used nowadays is "Thon Mi" which derives from his place of origin *Thon,* while the *Mi* means "person," thus "the person from Thon." Less common, but also correct, is the term Thu Mi, originating from the name of the Thu clan to which he belonged.[37] Others, such as Bu sTon, prefer to call him "Anu" after the name of his father,[38] while others say that in the Indian language it means "little person."[39] The term Sambhoṭa was given by his teacher(s) in India as an expression of this student's diligence; it means "the real, authentic Tibetan."[40]

Traditional texts poetically describe Thon Mi's return to his motherland and the immense gratitude of the king for the subsequent introduction of literacy. Not only did the king himself become a committed disciple, he ordered common people and ministers alike to become skilled in the art of reading and writing. According to Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung "it is clear that in those years Thon Mi established the written Tibetan language and gradually composed the grammar treatises."[41] It is a common assertion among Tibetans and non-

35 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 4.
36 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 7.
37 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 7.
38 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 6. *yab kyi mtshan*
39 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 6. *rgya gar skad kyis a nu zhes pa mi'u chung gi ming yin pas/*
40 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 6.
41 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 13.

Tibetans that he must have composed eight great treatises following the Indian model.[42] However nowadays there are only the two - the *SCP* and the *TKJ* - remaining, the other six having been lost in the dark period between the earlier and later transmission of Buddhism.[43] Due to this extraordinary loss, there is considerable disagreement and lack of clarity about various topics, "such as the word particles after the second suffix *da*, imperative forms of verbs and spellings of certain words, etc."[44] Some deny that Thon Mi wrote the above-mentioned eight treatises. They assert that the *SCP* and *TKJ* are merely chapters or sections of the eight great works.[45] Others claim that this genius not only composed these eight but also countless other works.[46] Some modern scholars, such as Miller, suggest that not only their attribution to Thon Mi but also the (supposed) introduction of literacy need further historical investigation.[47]

2e) སྔོན་གྱི་མཁས་པ་རྣམས། ཁོང་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་བརྩོམ་པའི་བརྡ་སྦྱོང་པའི་བསྟན་བཅོས།

Some Important Commentators and Commentaries on the *SCP* and *TKJ*

The root verses of the *SCP* and *TKJ* are *sūtra*-like concise and therefore require further commentarial elucidations. The composition of a considerable number of treatises which all

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42 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung says: *rgya gar na sgra'i bstan bcos chen po brgyad yod pa dang tshul mtshungs par brtsams* Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 30.
"sDe Srid Sangs rGyas rGya mTsho in his *White Lapis that Clears Encrustation*, and others in their texts say that "they were composed to match with the eight great śhāstras on grammar that existed in India…" "The eight great Indian śhāstras were: Indra vyākaraṇa; Viśhala vyākaraṇa; Śhakauṭa vyākaraṇa; Pāṇini vyākaraṇa; Samantabhadra vyākaraṇa; Patañjali vyākaraṇa; Manujandre vyākaraṇa; and Sarasvati vyākaraṇa." Duff 2009, p. 91.

43 For further reference to the dark period and king *gLan Dar Ma*, see Chapter 27 in: Chattopadhyaya1999, pp. 266-276.

44 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005 p. 31. In the context of oral teachings received, when there is a lack of clarity about a certain topic, teacher often point at the loss of these remaining six works.

45 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 32.

46 Most experts, such as Duff, doubt such a position: "Apart from them [the eight treatises - essay author's note], there might have been some other writings by Thumi but, except for one possibility, *Lamp in the Dark*, there is no mention at all, of such a thing, anywhere." Duff 2009, p. 89.

47 According to this author "…very few scholars have shown interest in their [the *SCP* and *TKJ* - essay author's note] dating and authenticity." He goes on mentioning one exception, Uray, whose conclusion is the following: "…Thon-mi's role was confined to a certain kind of script reform - primarily the systematization of the alphabet - and to the normalization of the literary language (grammars) but his reforms did not prevail for a long time..." Uray in Miller 1963, p. 485.

aim to give a correct interpretation of Thon Mi's intent, rather than presenting something innovative, carries on to the present day. Here only the most important among them can be introduced, for reasons of space and degree of relevance.[48]

སྨྲ་སྤྲོ་མཚོན་ཆ་ལྟ་བུ། [49] *Like a Weapon for the Speech Door* by Smri Ti Jñanakīrti

Tradition has it that the Indian scholar Smri Ti Jñanakīrti (born in 1007 C.E.) did not know any Tibetan when he reached the land of the snow lion and worked as a poor shepherd. Having studied later under the guidance of important teachers such as *'Brom sTon Pa* (a close disciple of Atīśa), he mastered the Tibetan language and translated various Indian texts. He composed the famous and oldest *dag yig* still in use today,[50] the *sMra sGo mTshon Cha lTa Bu* (*Like a Weapon (which Opens) the Door of Speech*), and translated it himself into Tibetan.[51] This controversial work is on the one hand often quoted, but on the other hand criticized by subsequent commentators. It provides a thorough investigation of the *tshig phrad* (word particles) such as *gang, 'di, na, ste,* etc., the different types of words, *'dod rgyal* and *rjes 'grub* (words without and with inherent meaning) and the classification of the letters.[52] The attribution of authorship of this work has also been questioned by some Tibetan scholars of the past.

སུམ་རྟགས་འགྲེལ་ཆེན། *Great Explanation* by Si Tu Rin Po Che

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48 For a more detailed list of relevant indigenous commentaries, consult: Tillemans and Herforth 1989, pp. 13-20.

49 This old work is commonly known under the name: *sMra sGo mTshon Cha* or its abbreviation *sMra sGo* only.

50 *dag yig* literally means "pure letters" and according to Duff's definition encompasses not only lexica but also any work which presents lists of correctly spelled words, lists of correct spelling of verb tenses, etc. Any student of the Tibetan language therefore needs to study the three, *sum rtags dag yig,* the *sum* referring to the *sum cu pa,* the *rtags* to the *rtags kyi 'jug pa* and the *dag yig.* Duff 2009, p. 131. It is common among Tibetans to say *sum rtags* for "grammar", although the correct term would be *brda sprod.*

51 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 39.

52 This information is drawn from the index of the *sMra sGo mTshon Cha.*

Probably the most renowned Tibetan commentator of the past is *Si Tu Pan Chen Chos kyi 'Byung gNas,* who was born in Dege in 1700 C.E.[53] Apart from asserting his own interpretation of the *SCP* and *TKJ,* he criticizes the earlier commentators. He claims they misinterpreted Thon Mi's root verses, and did not understand the major principles of *bDag* and *gZhan* (Self and Other).[54] In his *Sum rTags 'Grel Chen,* among many others, he explicitly refutes the Indian author of the *sMra sGo mTshon cha,* Jñanakīrti, calling his work inauthentic and full of mistakes.[55] Due to the fact that he still quotes passages from the *sMra sGo,* the above claims require further investigation. What is undisputed however, is the enormous contribution of this author.[56] He composed fourteen volumes of texts, apart from the extremely difficult *Sum rTags 'Grel Chen* and also the catalogue of the *sDe dGe* edition of the Kagyur.[57]

སི་ཏུའི་ཞལ་ལུང་ *Si Tu's Oral Explanations* by dNgul Chu Yab Sras[58]

dNgul Chu Yab Sras, also called Dharmabhadra, the author of the more accessible *Si Tu'i Zhal Lung* (*The Oral Explanation of Si Tu*) was born in 1772.[59] Tradition holds him to

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53 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 5.

54 Si Tu: "They [past commentators - essay author's note] did not know the distinction of *bdag* and *gzhan* and therefore they did not understand Thon-Mi's verse 12 [of the *TKJ* - essay author's note]." Tillemans and Herforth 1989, p. 9.

55 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 42.

56 Tillemans and other contemporary Tibetan scholars consider Situ Rinpoche the crucial figure in the history of the grammatical Tibetan tradition and attribute to him the establishment of a paradigm which was absent until that time. He therefore divides all commentaries belonging to a Pre- and Post-Situ period. Tillemans and Herforth 1989, p. 2.

57 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 6.

58 Even though traditional Tibetan commentaries commonly write about dNgul Chu Yab Sras (the father and son of *dngul chu* – the name of the place they came from), the term dNgul Chu Khu dBon (the uncles and nephews of dngul chu) would be more appropriate. "The lineage was called Ngulchu Uncles and Nephews because it consisted of gurus who were uncles and lineage-holding disciples who were nephews from the area." Duff 2009, p. 105.

59 The name of this title is not to be taken literally. At the time Si Tu Rin po che passed away, Dharmabhadra was only two years old and therefore did not receive the teachings from him directly. The title however applies in the sense that this work is nothing more than a clear condensation of Si Tu's *Ggrel Chen,* omitting the difficult points.

have been extremely intelligent, and to have acquired the skills of reading and writing on his own initiative at a young age. Following his parents' wish, he served various spiritual teachers, and in the end became a great scholar, learned in the five sciences, namely language, logic, philosophy, medicine and the arts. The most famous among his works is the *Si Tu'i Zhal Lung.*

ལེགས་བཤད་ལྗོན་དབང་། དཔྱད་གནད་གསལ་བའི་མེ་ལོང་།

The Tree and _The Mirror_ by Dbyang Can Grub Pa'i rDo rJe

The nephew and disciple of Dharmabhadra is also known as Blo bZang Chos 'Phel[60] (b. 1809 C.E.). Having become a monk at the age of eleven, he served his teacher and mastered various sciences such as grammar, astrology, poetry, etc. Tradition has it that at the age of thirty-four he took his final oral examination in front of his lama. The latter was very pleased with the skills of the disciple and gave him the name *dByang Can Grub Pa'i rDo rJe.* "Apart from his works on grammar and poetry he has also composed works on the practice of the secrete mantrayāna, in total three volumes."[61] He is the author of the currently most widely used commentaries on the *SCP* and *TKJ*, the *Legs bShad lJon dBang* (*The Tree of the Lucid Exposition* - later referred to as the *Tree*)[62] and the *dKa' gNad gsal ba'i Me long* (*The Mirror (which) Elucidates the Difficult Points (of the* TKJ*)* - later referred to as the *Mirror*). Both of these works consist of easy-to memorize root verses with an elucidating auto-commentary. A further commentary on both of these by the modern author rDor rJe rGyal Po, called *The Messenger who Brings a Lucid Exposition of the Essence of the* SCP *and the* TKJ (*Sum rTags*

60 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 7.

61 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 8.

62 The correct interpretation of the word *ljon* (tree) is the subject of disagreement among experts. While Ross translates it with *Divine Tree,* referring to the trees in the heavenly gardens, others uphold that it just means tree. Her work gives a syllable per syllable translation of *dByangs Can Grub Pa'i rDor rJe*'s root verses, elucidations and English translations in verse form suitable for English speaking students to memorize. Duff suggests that the word *ljon dbang* should be understood as follows: "Then it is the *great* tree amongst the trees in the forest of explanations…" Duff 2009, p. 121.

Kyi sNying 'Grel Legs bShad 'Dren Pa'i Pho Nya - later referred to as the *Messenger*), is very commonly taught and therefore often quoted in this essay.

2f) མཇུག་བསྡོམས། Conclusion

If this essay were a thorough historical investigation about Thon Mi and the introduction of literacy in Tibet, it would be extremely difficult to reach a universally accepted conclusion. What was intended in this section is different and more feasible: The traditional accounts described above allow the reader to appreciate the way Tibetans perceive Thon Mi as well his and subsequent commentators' works. Most commentaries present their version of history and praise Sambhoṭa in poetic words. Native speaker teachers also tend to begin their oral instructions with accounts on the hardships Thon Mi endured and his extraordinary expertise. Having come to appreciate the profundity of his works and their impact for (the introduction of Buddhism to) Tibet, I can now understand why my teacher refers to him as "bringing light into darkness." Regardless to which extent it is his own invention or an adaption to Sanskrit, Anu's works were and still are of outstanding importance. More than a dozen centuries after their composition, every monastery and school teaches commentaries on the *SCP* and *TKJ*. This is a clear indication of the universal character of the initiator's works and the mindset of the commentators who all intend to correctly elucidate these terse verses. It would be Tibetan style to remember Thon Mi's kindness when reading the below elaborations or whenever engaging in the activity of reading or writing in this language.

ལེའུ་གསུམ་པ།

CHAPTER 3

༄༣། །རྣམ་དབྱེ་བརྒྱད། The Eight Grammatical "Cases"[63]

3a) འགོ་བརྗོད། General Remarks

It is the aim of this short section to introduce the eightfold Tibetan *rnam dbye* ("case") division, along with the corresponding particles. First, the general characteristics and particularities of the *rnam dbye brgyad* will be presented. Following that, each will be briefly discussed by means of a definition, a selection of representative examples, and explanations, mostly based on oral teachings. This synthesizes the presentations of the *rnam dbye* in the *SCP* and the *TKJ*. Calling them cases (Latin, *casus* = state) might be a useful convention, which should however not lead to the conclusion that the Latin and Tibetan ones can be equated. The term *rnam dbye* (division) reflects the Tibetan concept that particles clearly separate the different constituting parts of a sentence. In this section and throughout the whole work the reader is advised to completely dive into the Tibetan language. Therefore one should let go of any Latin grammatical terms or classifications, such as nominative, dative, etc. To facilitate such an approach and let the Tibetan language speak for itself, the original terms along with elucidations will be used mainly.

What does *rnam dbye* mean? The eightfold *rnam dbye* division defines the syntactic-semantic relations between the various parts of a sentence. First of all, the reader must understand that the Tibetan language makes use of *phrad* (case marking particles) which mostly *follow* the term they specify. In other words, one can only define the *rnam dbye* of a word based on the particle applied to it. Therefore, an analysis of the *rnam dbye* cannot be

[63] "A Ninth-century Tibetan Summery of the Indo-Tibetan Model of Case-semantics" presents a historical-linguistic approach of the Tibetan *rnam dbye*-division in relation to Sanskrit. Verhagen 1992, pp. 833-844.

separated from the corresponding particles. The definitions and differences of the *rnam dbye* are the main subject of the *TKJ*, and the corresponding particles are introduced in the *SCP*. As for the etymology of the word *rnam dbye gi phrad* the introduction to the *rnam dbye brgyad* in the contemporary author Tse Tan Zhabs Drung's *Thon Mi's Oral Instruction* reads: "Case particles are words that are able to divide and discern any different words so that they do not become mixed with each other."[64] Being more specific, one could say the *phrad* make the relation between the parts of a sentence clear and unambiguous.

3b) རྣམ་དབྱེ་དང་པོ་ངོ་བོ་ཙམ། The First *rNam dBye* - Mere Essence

rDo rJe rGyal Po's *Messenger*, a commentary of the *Tree* and the *Mirror*[65] defines the first *rnam dbye* as follows: "If one were to ask what the first *rnam dbye* is, it shows the mere name (or word) or essence of any object of knowledge, whether it is general or specific."[66] The explanation continues, specifying that the first *rnam dbye* merely introduces the very thing itself and no further meaning or function. When encountering a word in this *rnam dbye* the mere thought, for example "this is a pillar,"[67] should arise. Unlike the remaining seven *rnam dbye*, this first one does not make use of any *phrad*.

At this point rDo rJe rGyal Po introduces the two types of words that Tibetans distinguish, namely *'dod rgyal* (lit. king (of one's) wish) and *rjes grub* (lit. established after).[68] *'Dod rgyal* indicates that a designation was given to a thing based on no particular reason. Traditional Tibetan oral explanations hold that the word *chu* (water) is *'dod rgyal* because it was applied to this element by someone based one this person's personal feeling or perception. In other words, the choice of designation is random, the actual thing and the term do not have

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64 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 127.

65 The afore-mentioned dByans Can Grub Pa'i rDo rJe's *Legs bShad lJon dBang* and *dKa' gNad gSal ba'i Me Long.*

66 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 61.

67 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 62.

68 Stoddard and Tournadre state that this twofold categorization only applies to verbs. This is not the case as examples above indicate. Gyurmé, Stoddard and Tournadre 1992, p. 191.

any relation apart from the latter being the name of the first. The term *snang byed* (lit. making apparent - poetic term of sun) is *rjes grub*. This name has been applied to the sun for a reason, namely that the sun has the quality of illuminating the world."[69] In this case, the name given expresses the quality of the thing it designates.

The following examples make clear that a word in the first *rnam dbye* can function as both subject and object in a sentence.[70]

ཆོས་འཇིག་རྟེན་ཏུ་གནས། = **The doctrine**[71] remains in the world.[72]

The word *chos* (the doctrine) is not marked by any particle and is therefore said to be in the *rnam dbye dang po.* In order not to equate the *rnam dbye dang po* with the subject of a sentence, one must understand the second example:

. སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱིས་ཆོས་བསྟན། = The Buddha taught **the doctrine**.[73]

Also in this example, the word *chos* is not marked by any particle and is therefore in the first *rnam dbye, ming tsam*. Unlike above, here "the doctrine" is the (direct) object and not the subject. The same applies for the sentence below.

ང་ལ་བུམ་པ་ཡོད། = I have a **vase**.[74] (lit. the **vase** is with me.)

One could include countless examples with different types of verbs, such as possession (to have), motion, need, etc. as non-Tibetan authors such as Joe B. Wilson do. The Tibetan

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69 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 62.

70 I am aware that the terms "subject" and "object" are categories derived from Indo-European languages which I intended not to use. Subject could be replaced with "the doer", reflecting *byed pa po* and the term "object" replaces the Tibetan *yul.* Since these have not been introduced yet, I use "subject" and "object" here. However these should not be equated in every situation because the concept differs. In the third sentence for instance there is a disconnection: While the English "I" is the subject, the Tibetan *nga* is marked with a *la don,* one would have to say, in dative case.

71 Students of the Latin language would define *chos* as being in the nominative case.

72 Wilson 1992, p. 631 Likewise could one say in this case that *chos* is the accusative object.

73 Wilson 1992, pp. 629-31. (All three examples)

74 This author calls the above example "object of a verb of possession", which is correct. The book presents a twelve-fold variety of types of sentences which have a word in the *rnam dbye dang po.* Whether these subdivisions contribute to the understanding of the Tibetan notion of *ngo po tsam* remains an issue of further investigation by the reader. Wilson 1992, p. 131.

definition however is simple: whatever noun or pronoun in the sentence is not marked by any case marking particle is in the *rnam dbye dang po.*[75]

3c) རྣམ་དབྱེ་གཉིས་པ། བཞི་པ། བདུན་པ། ལས་སུ་བྱ་བ། དགོས་ཆེད། རྟེན་གནས།

The Second, Fourth and Seventh *rNam dBye* - Perform an Action, Purpose, Abode

All traditional Tibetan commentaries such as the *Messenger* introduce the second, fourth and seventh case together because they use the same *la don* - particles, namely *su, ra, ru, du, na, la* and *tu*. The three *rnam dbye* also follow the same rules about which particles to apply after which suffix.[76] These rules depend on the gender of the letters as the section on the *TKJ* will show. The particles are called *la don* because they all perform the same function (*don*) as the *la,* which is the most common one.

As they use the same particles, the question might arise how the three *rnam dbye* are distinguished. The respective functions of each become clear when comparing them with one another. To put it simply, most of them mark a place or person where an action takes place, is directed towards, or an abode. The difference between the second and fourth *rnam dbye* is whether or not the object is affected by the action, while the distinguishing feature between the second and seventh is the presence or absence of action. "Furthermore, the *de nyid* (that very thing) is a subdivision of the fourth and *tshe skabs* (time, occasion) of the seventh *rnam dbye*."[77]

The following examples illustrate the second, the *las su bya ba,* which shows where an action takes place or the recipient or goal of an action.

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[75] Caution is required in the context of the eight *rnam dbye*: As the particle precedes the word it belongs to, that noun might look like standing in the first *rnam dbye.*

[76] *sa su ga ba drag mthar tu// nga da na ma ra la du/ 'a dang mtha' med ra dang ru//* rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 7.

[77] rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 63.

བདག་ཤར་དུ་འགྲོ་[78] I am going **towards** the east.

ཁོག་མ་རྨུ་ཤ་འཆོས། The meat is cooked **in** the vessel.

སེ་ར་ལ་ཆོས་ཉན།[79] Listening to the Dharma **in** Sera.

"East is the place where I am going, it merely shows the place where the action is performed, the fact I am going there does not affect the east in any way."[80] The same applies for examples two and three: neither the pot nor the monastery of Sera experience any benefit or change from the action of boiling and listening to the dharma, respectively.

The words *dgos ched* (need, purpose) and *phan thogs* (benefit) in the context of the fourth *rnam dbye* need to be understood in a broad sense.[81]

སྤྲོང་ལ་སྦྱིན།[82] Give (alms) **to** the beggar.

Not only sentences such as the above example of the root verse of the *Mirror*, where an obvious benefit comes about for the recipient, belong to the *rnam dbye bzhi pa*. Other examples include:

ཐར་པ་ཐོབ་པ་རྟོག་མེད་བསྒོམ།

Meditating on selflessness **in order to** achieve liberation!

སྐལ་བའི་དོན་དུ་འཐབ། Fighting **for** the sake of (one's own) share.

རྒྱན་དུ་གསེར་བརྡུངས།[83] To beat the gold (**to make**) an ornament.

From the above examples it becomes clear that the action has an effect on the object. (The teachings hold that) if someone meditates the selflessness, this will be influential for the

78 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 64.
79 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 26. (Two examples)
80 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 64.
81 While the term *dgos ched* is more general, the term *phan thogs* which often appears in the commentaries is misleading. Since in Colloquial it means "benefit", one may conclude that it is only fourth *rnam dbye* if there is a benefit coming about for the recipient of the action. This is not the case as the below elaborations show.
82 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 63.
83 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 26. (All three examples)

achievement of liberation. Likewise, the second example illustrates that there is a purpose, an aim of one's struggle or fight. And the third also shows that the fact the gold is beaten will turn it into an ornament occasionally. Though the translations of the *la don* differ, all examples have in common that the object is in some way or another affected or brought about by the action.[84]

Since this *rnam dbye* is difficult to understand for someone unfamiliar with the concept, there is one more example from the *Mirror* which promises to clarify the difficult points.

ཟས་བཟའ་བར་ཕོར་པ་འབྱིར།[85] To bring (one's) bowl **in order** to have food.

Again, there is a purposive, e.g., effective connection between the bringing of the bowl and the eating of the food and therefore the latter stays in the fourth *rnam dbye*.

The seventh *rnam dbye* presents fewer difficulties; it indicates the place or state in which something abides, which does not involve any action or movement:

ནགས་སུ་གཅན་གཟན་གནས། Wild animals live **in** the forest.

ལྷིང་གར་ཤིང་སྡོང་ཡོད། There are trees **in** the park.

སྟེང་ན་ཉི་ཟླ་མཛེས།[86] The sun and the moon **above** are beautiful.

One could argue that the wild animals *do* move in the forest, but the essence of the verb *gnas* is to abide, stay, stand or even to be, and therefore the first example falls under the category of the seventh *rnam dbye*. The other two examples do not require further elaboration. Not mentioned in the texts, but according to the oral explanations received, it is important to be

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84 Hahn gives an exhaustive list of any possible function of the *la don* particles, using Latin classifications and terms such as ablative, dative, etc. Hahn 1996, pp. 91-97.

85 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 64.

86 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 8 (All three examples).

aware of the fact that the place where an action *has taken* place is also considered seventh *rnam dbye.*

ཚོགས་འདུ་ལ་མི་མང་པོ་སྡིབས་འདུག[87] Many people have arrived **to** the meeting.

A subdivision of the second case, the *de nyid* (lit. the thing itself) indicates that "the object and the action are of the same essence."[88]

དམར་པོར་གྱུར། Became red

གོང་དུ་འཕེལ། Increase further

མེ་རྒྱ་འབར།[89] Burn as a fire

The action of becoming and red is not two different entities. Likewise the "further" does not apply to anything separate, but to the "increase" itself. Nor is the burning different from the fire. Therefore these examples illustrate the *de nyid,* the subdivision of the second *rnam dbye.*

A subdivision of the seventh case is called *tshe skabs,* indicating the time when an action takes place.

ཉི་མ་ཤར་བ་ན་ཆོས་སྟོན།[90] Teach the Dharma at sunrise.

ཉི་ནུབ་ཏུ། When the sun goes down.

དུས་གཞན་དུ།[91] At other time (s).

Here, the examples speak for themselves and do not need any further elucidation.

Many commentaries such as the *Messenger* present a separate detailed section on the various functions of the *la* and *na* which are considered *rnam dbye ma yin pa'i phrad* (non-

87 This example derives from the oral explanations received in fall 2010 in KTM, Nepal.
88 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 63.
89 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 9. (All three examples)
90 dNgul Chu Yab Sras, dByangs Can rDo rJe, 'Ju Mi Pham and others 2008, p. 10. (Both examples)
91 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 27.

case- particles) usages, such as *na* meaning "if" or *la* meaning "but."[92] As this is a presentation on the *rnam dbye* these are not elaborated upon but can be drawn from the various commentaries such as the *Messenger*.[93]

3d) རྣམ་དབྱེ་གསུམ་པ་བྱེད་སྒྲ། རྣམ་དབྱེ་དྲུག་པ་འབྲེལ་སྒྲ།

The Third *rNam dBye* - The Particle of the Actor and the Sixth - the Connective Particle

The third *rnam dbye*, the *byed sgra* (the particle of the agent) and the sixth *rnam dbye* the *'brel sgra* (connective particle), are presented together and summarized under the name *'ai ldan* (having "i").[94] For a non-Tibetan ear the two might sound almost the same. If one adds a suffix *sa* to the various *'brel sgra* (*gi, kyi, gyi, yi, a'i*) one will have the *byed sgra* (*gis, kyis, gyis, yis a'is*). They also undergo the same rules of application to the various suffixes.[95] Their functions however are completely different and easily distinguishable. The root verse in the *Mirror* defines the two as follows: "(Anyone) who performs an action stays in the third *rnam dbye*, the doer. If there is no action whatsoever but merely a relation between the earlier and latter (e.g., two separate entities) is shown, this is the sixth *rnam dbye*, the connective particle."[96]

The *byed sgra* has a further subdivision into *byed pa po gtso bo* and *byed pa po phal* [main, (actual) and subsidiary (instrumental) agent, respectively]. For the moment the second one

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92 For example: *dngos su bshad* ***na*** (honestly speaking), *mdor bsdud* ***na*** (in brief), *de yin* ***na*** (that being so), etc. rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 9.

93 For further reference to the *rnam dbye ma yin pa'i phrad,* read rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, pp. 9-11.

94 Caution is required here for *English* - as opposed to German or Spanish, etc. - speakers: "I" is not to be understood as it sounds but as the Tibetan vowel *gi gu*. I avoided saying "E" which would be the correct sound in English, because this one is reserved for the Tibetan vowel *'greng po*.

95 *gi kyi gyi yi a'I lnga po/ rnam dbye drug pa 'brel sgra ste// sbyor tshul na ma ra la gyi/ da ba sa kyi ga nga gi/ a' dang mtha' med a'i dang yi//* rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p.12.

96 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 13.

should be understood as the instrument or method by which the action is performed. The below example drawn from the *Messenger* illustrates the two clearly:

ལྕགས་བཟོ་བས་ཐོ་བས་ལྕགས་བརྡུངས་སོ། [97]

The blacksmith beats the iron *with* the hammer.

The *bzo ba* (blacksmith) is the *byed pa po gtso bo* (main agent) and the tool he is using, the *tho ba* (hammer) is the *byed pa po phal* (subsidiary agent) and both are marked with a *byed sgra*. The difference between them is that the main agent possesses mind while the latter does not.

In some sentences like the one below, there might be ambiguity about *byed pa po gtso bo* and *byed pa po phal*, but the context will provide clarity.

གང་གིས་བསྒྲུབས། [98]

By whom it was accomplished. By means of which it was accomplished.

As the example below illustrates there might be various agents in the same sentence.

ངྱོད་ཀྱིས་གང་གསུངས་བདག་གིས་རྣ་བས་ཉན། [99]

I listened **with my ears** to what **you** said.

The two persons, you and me, fall under the category *byed pa po gtso bo*, while the ear is the instrument, *byed pa po phal*.

According to another contemporary commentary by Zla Ba Tshe Ring, the *Key*, the sixth *rnam dbye, 'brel sgra* has eight subdivisions. As the name indicates, they all deal with the relation between two entities. For reasons of space and their rather unambiguous translations into English, only a few of them are presented here; they are *rten dang brten pa'i 'brel ba* (the relation between abode and the resident), *bdag po dang rdzas kyi 'brel ba* (the

97 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 14.
98 Thon Mi and dNgul Chu Yab Sras 2007, p. 28.
99 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 153.

relation between the owner and its thing) and the *yan lag dang yan lag can gyi 'brel ba* (the relation between the parts and the possessor of the parts, e.g., the whole), etc.[100]

གངས་སྟོད་ཀྱི་སེང་གེ The lion **of** the ice peaks. Or: The ice peak'**s** lion.

མི་དམངས་ཀྱི་ཕྲུ་ནོར། The goods **of** the public. Or: The public'**s** good.

ལག་པའི་མཛུབ་མོ།[101] The fingers **of** the hand. Or: The hand'**s** fingers.

Gangs stod [the snow (land)] is the home of the lion, people possess their wealth and goods and the fingers are part of the hand which is a whole. These examples are not exhaustive but provide an illustration of the function of the *'brel sgra.*

3e) རྣམ་དབྱེ་ལྟ་བ་འབྱུང་ཁུངས།

The Fifth *rNam dBye* - Source or Origin

The root verse of the *Mirror* defines the fifth *rnam dbye,* the *'byung khungs* (source or origin) as indicating "the place from which something originates or a basis of making divisions."[102]

In many cases both particles *las* and *nas* can be used but they also have specific domains, as the following examples illustrate:

ཤིང་གི་ནང་ནས་ཙན་དན་དྲི་ཞིམ།

From inside e.g., **among** all (types of) wood, sandalwood has the best scent.

དབྱར་ལས་དགུན་གྱང་།[103] Winter is colder **than** summer.

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100 1) *rten dang brten pa'i 'brel ba,* 2) *bdag po dang rdzas kyi 'brel ba,* 3) *yan lag dang yan lag can gyi 'brel ba* 4) *khyad gzhi khyad chos* 5) *mtshan mtshon gyi 'brel ba,* 6) *gzhi mthun gyi 'brel ba,* 7) *ngo bo gcig gi 'brel ba,* 8) *rgyu 'bras kyi 'brel ba.* For the complete list including examples, consult Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, pp. 43&44.

101 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 42. (All three examples)

102 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 69.

103 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 69. (Both examples)

The Tibetan explanation emphasises whether the entities compared are similar or different. In the first case all types of wood are compared with each other; these are *rigs mthun po* (of the same kind) and therefore, the particle *nas* is required. The second one distinguishes two things, namely the seasons, which are *rigs mi mthun po* (of a different type), and therefore the particle *las* needs to be applied.[104]

Another division is the type of origin, namely the *'byung khungs dngos* (actual source) and the *'byung khungs cha 'dra* (seeming source). While the first indicates the real, actual source, the second indicates from where an entity originates in a particular context.

བ་རྣམ་འོ་མ།	Milk from the cow.
རྟ་ལས་ལྷུང།	Falling from the horse.

While cow-milk actually and always comes from cows and this animal therefore is its real source, the horse is only the place from where *this* action of falling originates: one could however fall from many other places. Therefore the first is a *'byung khungs dngos*, and the second a *'byung khungs cha 'dra*.

3f) རྣམ་དབྱེ་བརྒྱད་པ་འབོད་སྒྲ།[106]

The Eighth *rNam dBye* - The Vocative Particle

The root verse about the eighth *rnam dbye* indicates the particular usage of the *'bod sgra*, namely that unlike the other *phrad* it is mainly applied *before* the object of invocation.[107] The *Key* points out the various vocative particles, namely *kye*, *kwa ye*, and *wa ye* together with the division to whom they are applied.

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104 Note that in literal language the adjectives do not have comparative and superlative forms. The application of the correct particle *nas* or *las* is therefore of crucial importance. In spoken Tibetan the above sentences would be: *shing nang nas tsan dan dri ma zhim **shos** red/* And: *dbyer ka las dgun ga grang **ba** yod red/*

105 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 57.

106 The two spellings, *'bod sgra* and *bod sgra* are both used and equally correct.

107 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 21.

ཀྱེ་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཆེན་པོ།	Venerable, great king!
ཁྭ་ཡེ་འདིར་བཞུགས།	You! Sit here!
ཕྭ་ཡེ་ང་ཡི་སྤུན་ཟླ།[108]	Hey, (younger) brother!

"If the person in question is superior and higher than oneself, one uses *kye*. For friends and people alike to oneself *kwa ye* is applied, while the usage of *wa ye* is limited to beings (considered) lower to oneself."[109]

People disagree about whether or not the eighth *rnam dbye* is actually a *rnam bye* or not. Those who do not accept it point to the fact that the *bod sgra* precedes the word it belongs to and therefore does not fulfil the requirement to be a *rnam dbye'i phrad.*[110] On the other hand, the *bod sgra* is presented in every commentary as being the eighth, the vocative *rnam dbye*.

མཇུག་བསྡོམས། Conclusion

Unlike in other languages, such as for instance Latin or German, a Tibetan word on its own is unable to express in which *rnam dbye* it is.[111] This could lead to confusion and lack of clarity about what subject and object is. Native-speaker teachers explicitly teach this in the context of the *byed sgra*: Whenever it is unclear (*'khrul gzhi*) what function a word in a sentence has, the *byed sgra* needs to be applied:

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108 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 21. (All three examples)

109 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 60.

110 *brgyad pa bod sgra de rnam dbye yin nam min/ rnam dbye ma yin te/ gang red zer na/ bod pa gsal byed kyi sgra red/ rnam dbye'i phrad yin na ming tshig gang rung gi rjes su sbyar dgos shing/* Anonymous author of *dpal bkra shis gling gtan nyin slob grwa* unknown date of publication, p. 15.

111 In Latin and German, each case has its specific endings which are added to the word itself. Therefore the word with its ending gives an indication about the case in which it is.

ངས་ཁྱེད་རང་མཐོང་སོང་།[112] I saw you. (lit. by me you were seen.)

Since the word order in a sentence is not always S-O-V, if no *byed sgra* would have been attached to the *nga*, it could as well be the object and the meaning would be wrong.[113] Therefore, in order to unambiguously indicate the relationship between the constituting parts of a Tibetan sentence, *rnam dbye kyi phrad* are employed. These tiny parts of a sentence do not have a meaning themselves, but they are indispensible for the correct understanding of the content.[114] Apart from the first *rnam bye, ngo bo tsam*, all *rnam dbye* make use of these *phrad* which mainly follow the word they belong to. Each *rnam dbye* is marked by a set of particles that vary slightly in spelling. Such morphological adjustment has to do with the gender of the letters, a topic the *TKJ* deals with, and it allows for smooth pronunciation.

While some of the *rnam dbye*, such as the *'brel sgra*, are quite easy to understand for the non-Tibetan student, the various domains of the *la don* present more difficulty. Whether or not an object is affected by the action or the presence or absence of movement are clearly *not* categories foreign students are used to distinguish. Although one may try to find an equivalent grammatical term for each function, it seems more reasonable to let speak the Tibetan for itself. Such has been the intent of this section, which deliberately did not analyse the relation to the Latin cases. However, another relation Tibetan and non-Tibetan experts agree upon is its similarity to Sanskrit.[115] But the fact that the Sanskrit *"…kārakas* constitute a set of six syntactic-semantic relations…"[116] shows that the Tibetan is not a mere copy. To present the *rnam dbye brgyad* here separately and before the *SCP* and the *TKJ* is also a

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112 This example does not have any written source. From now onwards, any example which is not marked by a foot note should be understood to derive from the oral instructions received in fall 2010 in KTM or from my own side.

113 One could say for example: *khyed rang ngas mthong song/* This sentence would emphasise the *I*.

114 An exception was pointed out earlier: When the *la don* or *'brel sgra* is used between two phrases, it is called *rnam dbye ma yin pa'i phrad*. It might be translated as "but". According to the oral instructions received, the notion is the same. If one applies the *'brel sgra*, the *relation* of the two phrases is shown. While the *la don* should be understood to indicate that the first phrase is the case, and *on top of* that (marked by the *la don*) the second phrase follows.

115 Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, p. 30.
Gyurmé briefly compares and contrasts the Tibetan and the Sanskrit cases. Gyurmé, Stoddard and Tournadre 1992, Appendix III.

116 Verhagen in Cabezón and Jackson ed., 1996, p. 427.

personal choice. The reader should however be aware that in Thon Mi's works, the discussion of the *rnam dbye* and its *phrad* is included in both.

ལེའུ་བཞི་པ།

CHAPTER 4

༄༣། སུམ་རྩ་པ། *The Thirty (Verses)*

4a) འགོ་བརྗོད། General Remarks and Approach

Tibetan schoolchildren at primary level learn and memorize answers to such questions as: "What are the benefits of studying the *Legs bShad lJon dBang* (*Tree*) and the downfalls of not doing so?" Though being able to recite the condensed content of this text mechanically, the "correct" answer to the question is provided and indoctrinated: "By abandoning confusion about (different types of) words, wisdom will arise! This enables you to grasp the words of the Buddha and the treatises and will lead you to omniscience."[117] The downfalls of not studying it are slightly more plausible to a child; it reads: "Let alone achieving omniscience, etc. even worldly issues cannot turn out well due to the lack of knowledge of grammar!"[118]

What is the content of a text, the study of which promises such lofty results? After paying homage, the *SCP* (*Thirty Verses*), the first of Thon Mi's two works on grammar, introduces the alphabet along with the various functions of the letters within a word. The main content is the presentation of the *phrad* (particles), and the *rnam dbye* (cases). Though all commentaries consulted present them in two major groups, the *phrad gzhan dbang can* (dependent particles) and *phrad rang dbang can* (independent particles) the root verse does not explicitly mention this division. The first category includes all particles, which have various spellings depending on the suffix of the word they follow. This morphological adjustment has to do with the gender of the letters, the topic of the *TKJ*, not mentioned in Thon Mi's *Thirty (Verses)*. The application of the *phrad rang dbang can* is purely semantic, in

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117 Anonymous author of *dPal bKra Shis gLing gTan Nyin slob Grwa*, unknown date of publication, p. 25.

118 Anonymous author of *dPal bKra Shis gLing gTan Nyin slob Grwa*, unknown date of publication, p. 25.

other words, there is only one particle per function, which is applied regardless to (the gender of) the suffix of the preceding word.[119] Some commentaries, such as the *Messenger* add a short section on punctuation, which this essay does not present. The concluding root verses, which poetically praise those virtuous and diligent beings that are versed in the art of reading and writing, clearly reflect the author's intent and reasons for the introduction of literacy.

Since intermediate students of the Tibetan language are familiar with the functions of the *phrad,* this work's main focus is to present their *Tibetan* categorizations and subdivisions. This section is not only important for the grammatical content per se; it also provides the reader with a taste of the peculiar style of Thon Mi's root verses and the indigenous and contemporary commentaries. Every *phrad* will be briefly introduced with its root verse, explaining its etymology, function(s), subdivision(s), gender-based rules of spelling (of the *phrad gzhan dbang can*), along with illustrating examples and elucidations - all drawn from Tibetan sources.

Though the consulted commentaries all intend and claim to correctly elucidate Thon Mi's intent, their interpretations occasionally differ. These controversial points were and are still polemically debated upon. Without mentioning them, this essay would lack a typical feature of grammatical literature. The usage of these particles in the contemporary colloquial is also a subject of discussion. This challenges the common, albeit mistaken, concept that the *SCP* and *TKJ* are only relevant for literal Tibetan.

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[119] Among the six *phrad rang dbang can,* five of them have only one spelling regardless of the gender of the suffix they follow. But the *bdag sgra* has various spellings. Since those partly depend on gender and amount of syllables, some people argue that these are not *phrad rang dbang can.*

4b) མཚན་དོན། མཆོད་པ་བརྗོད་པ། བཤད་པར་དམ་བཅའ།

Meaning of the Title, Homage and Pledge to Compose

Like any Tibetan commentary on the Buddha dharma translated from Sanskrit, this work on grammar starts with:[120]

In Indian language: བྱ་ཀ་ར་ཎ་སྨྲ་ལ་ཏྲི་ཤད་ནྡ་མ།[121]

In Tibetan language: ལུང་སྟོན་པ་རྩ་བ་སུམ་ཅུ་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།[122]

This is followed by a word-by-word translation, namely: *bya ka ra na - lung bstan*[123] (grammar), *mu la - rtsa ba* (root text), *tri shad - sum cu pa* (thirty), *na ma - bya ba* (what is called).

In English language: *The Root of Grammar, The Thirty Verses*.

The previously mentioned disagreements about the *SCP* already start with the interpretation of the meaning of the title. The *Key* summarizes the various positions: some people attribute the term "thirty" to the number of consonants of the alphabet. Others argue that, in that case, all works on grammar would have to be similarly named. Instead, they connect the name to the thirty verses that comprise the work. Such position in turn is challenged by those who point at the fact that the work counts thirty-three verses if one includes homage and pledge to compose. The contemporary author of the *Key* suggests the thirty referring to the thirty verses of the actual text, which seems reasonable.[124]

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120 The reader should be aware that the *SCP* and the *TKJ* are included in different *bsTan 'Gyur* editions, namely: "The *SCP* in the Peking *bsTan 'gyur, mDo 'grel,* vol. *ngo,* 38r3-39r8 (ed. Suzuki 1955-1961, # 5835), Co ne *bsTan 'gyur, mDo 'grel,* vol. *co,* 160v1-161v4. The *TKJ* is in the Peking *bsTan 'gyur, mDo 'grel,* vol. *ngo,* 39r8-40v5 (ed. Suzuki 1955-1961, # 5835), Co ne *bsTan 'gyur, mDo 'grel,* vol. *co,* 161v5-162v7." Cabezón and Jackson ed., 1996, p. 436.

121 Thon Mi 1991, p. 1. The Sanskrit sign on top of the *tri* was not available to me.

122 Verhagen quotes Miller: "These Sanskrit titles are of course secondary and most probably represent later accretions to the texts (see Miller, 1990b: par 5)." Cabezón and Jackson ed., 1996, p. 424.

123 The term *lung bstan* can be translated in various ways: dNgul Chu Yab Sras, for example, elaborates that it means "the instruction on the definition of sounds which serves as a basis or support for later chapters." dNgul Chu Yab Sras, dByangs Can rDo rJe, 'Ju Mi Pham and others 2008, p. 2.

124 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 12.

Thon Mi first of all prostrates to the lord of speech, Manjushri and to the Three Jewels that embody all excellent qualities. Though commonly Buddhists are advised not to pay homage to worldly gods, he also prostrates to *rtag zhi ba,* to which he attributes the introduction of letters in this world. The *Key* suggests that this term refers not only to Shiva, but also to Brahma and Vishnu.[125] While the answer to the question of the founder of letters memorized by Tibetan school children is: "For the outsiders it is the Almighty, and for the Buddhists it is Manjushri."[126] Thon Mi also pays his homage to the learned ones of the past and (his) lama.

The pledge to compose emphasises the above-mentioned utmost importance of being learned in the art of letters and their combinations. "The knowledge of these is the basis for all written form of expression, worldly (political, etc.) as well as transcendent, the study of the Buddha's teaching on the three trainings (discipline, concentration and wisdom)."[127] As in the context of the composition of a religious work, the pledge to compose is taught to prevent obstacles and support the successful conclusion of this work.

4c) ཀ་ཁ་ག་ The Tibetan Alphabet

After having introduced the letters' two-fold division into *dbyangs* (melody e.g., vowels) and *gsal byed,* (clarifier e.g., consonants) Thon Mi's root verse divides the 30 *ka li* (*gsal byed*) as follows:

ཀྲྀ་ལི་ཕྱེད་དང་བརྒྱད་ཙྪེ་ནི།	The consonants are divided into
བཞི་བཞི་དག་ཏུ་ཕྱེ་ཝ་ལས།[128]	Half (less than) eight groups of four each.

125 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 15.
126 Anonymous author of *dPal bKra Shis gLing gTan Nyin sLob Grwa.* Unknown date of publication, *Dri Lan rNam gZhag,* p. 6.
127 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 16.
128 Thon Mi 1991, p. 2.

Because and in spite of the challenging nature of this task, this essay aims to enable the reader to understand Thon Mi's riddle-like root verses. A word-by-word translation followed by further elucidations seems to serve this purpose best: the thirty *ka li* (consonants) are divided into groups of four, the *ka* group (*ka, kha, ga, nga*), the *ca* (*ca, cha, ja, nya*) group, etc. All together there are seven and a half (the last one, *ha a*) groups. This concept of *sde* (groups of four) is of crucial importance and should be constantly kept in mind when one tries to decode Thon Mi's terse verses.

Not only are there varying translations and explanations of the meaning of the *gsal byed* and *dbyangs*, opinions also differ also about what constitutes a letter. Most people assert that letters are the basis of words but some consider the written shape as being the letter. The common term for consonant is *gsal byed* (clarifier), but the *Great Explanation* calls them also "*rjod byed* (expresser)."[129] The *Key* considers the *dbyangs* as the "roots or mothers of a word."[130] Contrary to what a western ear might expect, Tibetans classify the letter *a* as a *gsal byed*, and it can therefore stand on its own (for example in the word *a ma* - mother). The fact that the four *dbyangs* can be attached to the *a* is further proof that it must be a *gsal byed.* Pra Ti Don Grub elucidates that the letter *a* also belongs to the vowels in Sanskrit. The above-mentioned letters perform different functions in a word, such as being the *ming gzhi* (main letter), *'phul* or *sngon 'jug* (prefix), *rjes 'jug* (suffix), *mgo can* (super scripted) and *'dogs* (subscripted). All of these names can be understood etymologically.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned importance of the *sde*, the reader is now encouraged to try to "decode" Thon Mi's root verse about the *rjes 'jug*:

དང་པོ་གསུམ་པ་བཞི་པ་ལ།།	In (groups) one, three and four
མས་གཉིས་བྱག་པའི་གསུམ་པ་དང་།།	The lower two, the third of the sixth and

129 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 34.
130 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 19.

བདུན་པ་ལ་ནི་ཤ་མ་གཉིས།། (All) of the seventh (group) apart from *sha,*

རྣེས་འཇུག་ཡི་གེ་བཅུ་རུ་འདོད།།[131] (These) are asserted to be the ten suffixes.

In other words, the third and fourth letter of the first group (*ga, nga*), third group (*da, na*) and fourth group (*ba, ma*), the third letter of the sixth group (*a'*) and all letters of the seventh group except *sha* (*ra, la, sa*): these are the ten suffixes.

The elucidations on the remaining verses on the various functions of the letters can easily be understood in self-study by the intermediate student. They are of the type that, out of the ten suffixes, five of them can also be prefixes - the remaining ten, only main letters. The commentaries explain that these can be applied to any main letter, which leads to uncountable possibilities. Any random combination disregarding the above rules, such as *kti, taphu, cheka, thowa,* etc. is impossible.[132] None of the consulted commentaries explains why Thon Mi does not present the *yang 'jug* (second suffixes) *sa* and *da* along with the *rjes 'jug,* but the *Key* adds the rule about which letters each of them follows: "*da* after the three: *na, ra,* and *la* and as for *sa:* it is (attached) to *ga, nga* and *ba.*"[133]

4d) ཕྲད་གཞན་དབང་ཅན། The Dependent Particles

འགོ་བརྗོད། General remarks

Before entering the detailed discussion of the various particles, the reader should understand the etymology of the term *phrad.* Literally it comes from the verb "to meet," and *The Key* gives the following definition: "A particle does not have any meaning on its own.[134] If a *phrad* is not added to a word or between two phrases, their relation is not shown and

131 Thon Mi 1991, p. 2.
132 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 21.
133 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 22.
134 One could argue that there are exceptions to this rule, for example the *la* between two phrases (when not in its *rnam dbye* function) can clearly be translated with "but" and therefore can be said to have a meaning on its own.

therefore the intended meaning can not be expressed."[135] This being so, these tiny elements of a sentence are indispensible and a worthwhile subject of the following section.

The reason that the first group is called *phrad gzhan dbang can* is that every particle has various spellings. These cannot be applied to the preceding word randomly but undergo certain rules. For the most part they follow the rule of *rtags mtshungs pa* (same gender), a topic the *TKJ* thoroughly presents. This means, for example, the suffix *da* is male and therefore the main letter of the following particle also needs to be male, such as *kyi* or *kyis,* etc.: *bo**d k**yi rgyal dar* (the Tibetan flag). The *rnam dbye kyi phrad* are all *phrad gzhan dbang can,* but as they have been introduced above, only their names and corresponding page numbers shall be mentioned here. Though Thon Mi's root verse does not, Si Tu Rin Po Che in his *Great Explanation* first gives an overview of the eight (sets of) particles.[136] This seems to be useful to the non-Tibetan reader who is less likely to be able to recite them effortlessly like a Tibetan schoolchild.

๑	ཚིགས་སྡུད།	Concluding particle
๒	ལ་དོན།	Meaning of the *la* particle
๓	ཨི་ལྡན།	Having i (sound) particle
๔	རྒྱན་སྡུད།	Ornamenting particle
๕	ལྷག་བཅས།	Particle with remainder
๖	འབྱེད་སྡུད།	Dividing, gathering particle
๗	འབྱུང་ཁུངས།	Source particle
๘	འབོད་སྒྲ།	Vocative particle

[135] Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 23.
[136] Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 43.

1) The Concluding Particle སྡུད་སྒྲ། གོང་དོན་མོ་ལ་སོགས་པ།

རྩེས་འཇུག་ཡི་གེ་བཅུ་པོ་ནི།།	As for the ten suffixes
མིང་གང་གི་ནི་མཐར་སྦྱར་བ།།	(Being) added at the end of any word[137]
དེ་ལ་ཞུ་ལི་བཞི་པ་སྦྱར།།	(When) attaching the fourth vowel
སྡུད་བསྡུ་བར་ནི་ཤེས་པར་བྱ།།[138]	Is to be known as the concluding particle.

In other words: the concluding particles consist of the ten suffixes with the fourth vowel, *na ro* (letter "o") added and are attached at the end of any word.

The function of the *slar sdud* is to indicate the end of a sentence or phrase. Most people explain that *slar* means *after*, or *again*, but it might also be understood as *sla* (easy) with a *la don* particle. The verb *sdud* means to gather, to collect and to condense; therefore one could translate it into *ending particle.* Different texts refer to it with different names: In the *sMra sGo mTshon Cha* (later referred to as the *Weapon*) it is called "*zla sdud.*"[139] Another common term is *rdzogs tshig*, because this particle shows that a sentence or phrase is completed.[140] These three names are synonyms, not subdivisions. Though Thon Mi's root verse mentions only ten of them, its commentary the *Tree* adds the *to*, which is applied after the second suffixes *sa* and *da.*[141]

This particle seems well known to the reader and in terms of translation does not present any difficulty: one renders it into a full stop.

སློབ་གཉེར་ལ་དགའ་འོ།	(One) likes studying.

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137 One possible translation of *ming* is also "concept", which may reflect the function of the *slar bsdu* more clearly.

138 Thon Mi 1991, p. 3.

139 Smri Ti quoted in Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 28.

140 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 29.

141 *go ngo do no bo mo 'o// ro lo so **to** slar bsdu ste// rdzogs tshig zla sdud ces kyang bya// drag yod to dang mtha' med 'o// gzhan rnams mi mtha' rjes mthun sbyar//* dByang Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 6.

བསམ་དོན་འགྲུབ་མོ། To achieve (one's) goal.

དབྲ་བོས་ཀྱང་བསྟོད་པར་བྱེད་དོ།[142] Even (or: also) the enemy praises.

Pra Ti Don Grub advises beginning students not to confuse it with the *bdag sgra* (nominalizer), *po* and *mo,* or generally with *mo* indicating female gender such as in the following occasions: *tshong pa **po*** (seller), *btsun **mo*** (noble lady), etc.[143] It seems rather plausible, but Si Tu's *Great Explanation* elucidates that this particle can be applied after any *rnam dbye*.[144] Some examples will assist the reader in reviewing the above-introduced *rnam dbye*: *'di yis **so*** (by this),[145] *rtag tu'**o*** (always),[146] *lha sa nas **so*** (from Lhasa).[147]

Si Tu Rin Po Che raises the valuable argument whether the *slar sdud* before a *snyam* or *zhes* (indicating a thought or a quote, respectively) is a complete ending particle or not. For example the sentence: *phyag 'tshal bar bya'**o** snyam nas byed **do**/* (Having thought to prostrate, someone did.) contains two *slar sdud,* out of which some commentators consider the first to be a *slar sdud tsam po ba* (mere ending particle). The author of the *Great Explanation* argues that "since the ***'o*** before the *snyam* indicates the end of the thought, it should be considered a real *slar sdud."*[148] This supposition completes the section on the concluding particle and leads the reader to the *la don* and *ai ldan* particle, both of which have been introduced above.

142 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 7.
143 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 24 (all three examples).
144 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 48.
145 *rnam dbye gsum pa ni byed sgra*
146 *rnam dbye bdun pa'i nang gses ni tshe skabs*
147 *rnam dbye lnga pa ni 'byung khungs cha 'dra*
148 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 47.

2) The Meaning of the *La* Particle ལ་དོན། ལ་སྤྱ་རྟ་དུ་ཏུ་ལ་སོགས་པ།

As this particle has been thoroughly discussed in the section on the *rnam dbye brgyad,* it is not elaborated upon again. For the complete morphological rules, see the root verse from the *Tree* below.[149]

3) The Having I (Sound) Particle ཨི་ལྡན། གིས་བྱིས་ཀྱིས་ལ་སོགས་པ། གི་ཡི་ཀྱི་ལ་སོགས་པ།

These two are also *rnam dbye yi phrad* and therefore already discussed on page 27-29. The spelling rules of the *byed sgra* and the *'brel sgra* are presented in the footnotes.[150]

4) The Ornamenting Particle རྒྱན་སྡུད། ཀྱང་ཡང་ལ་སོགས་པ།

Closely following the principles found in Indian grammar works, Thon Mi shows that each particle can (supposedly) be drawn from the previous one.[151] Such connection is already quite artificial in the Sanskrit context and at times becomes far less obvious than in the following example:

ཨླུ་ལི་ཕྱིས་ནས་གཉིས་པ་སྦྱར།། Add the second having erased the vowel

ཚོགས་རྒྱན་གཉིས་དང་སྡུད་པར་འགྱུར།། It becomes two ornaments and a condensing.

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149 *su ra ru du na la tu// la don rnam pa bdun yin te// rnam dbye gnyis bzhi bdun pa dang // de nyid tshe skabs rnams la 'jug/ sa su ga ba drag mthar tu// nga da na ma ra la du// a' dang mtha' med ra dang ru//*dByang Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 7.

150 rdo rje rgyal po. p. 12, 13 *gi kyi gyi yi 'i lnga po// rnam dbye drug pa 'brel sgra ste// sbyor tshul na ma ra la gyi// da ba sa kyi ga nga gi// a' dang mtha' med '' dang yi//* And: *de rnams sa mtha' can lnga ni// rnam dbye gsum pa byed sgra ste// sbyor tshul 'brel sgra skabs dang mtshungs//* dByang Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, pp. 12 &13.

151 Also for further reference to the typically Indic aspect in the rule ordering, read Verhagen's article. Cabezón and Jackson ed., 1996, p. 425.

Taking the previous (e.g. *'brel sgra*) particles, one erases the *gi gu,* the vowel sound, and adds instead the second among the ten suffixes, the *nga.* This is the *yang, kyang, a'ng* that has the two functions of ornamenting and of condensing. The term *rgyan* means ornament and *sdud* means to gather or to bring together. The functions of these particles are most easily understood in terms of their three divisions:

a) *mthun pa'i rgyan* indicates a concordant relation between two words or phrases

b) *mi mthun pa'i rgyan* show an opposite between them

c) *sdud pa* indicates any type of inclusion.

The third division has four subdivisions, which due to their similar nature, will not be treated separately here.[152]

a) མཛེས་ཀྱང་མཛེས། Very beautiful! Beautiful indeed!

བསླབས་ཀྱང་བསླབས་ལ་ཤེས་ཀྱང་ཤེས།[153]

(Someone) studied indeed and came to know of course!

In this case, the two verbs are not only accordant, but the same. None of the consulted commentaries presents other examples.

b) ཕྱི་ཀུན་མཛེས་ཀྱང་སེམས་ཉ་གནག

The outer appearance is nice but the character negative.

གཞན་སྐྱོན་མངོན་སུམ་ཡང་། རང་སྐྱོན་མཐོང་བར་དཀའ།

Though it is easy to see others' flaws, it is difficult to see one's own.

These examples illustrate the opposites very clearly, and do not require further elaboration. The English terms *though, despite, but,* etc. accurately express the function of the *mi mthun pa'i rgyan.*

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152 1) *shugs su sdud pa,* 2) *phan tshun sdud pa,* 3) *gong mas 'og ma sdud pa,* 4) *'og mas gong ma sdud pa* For further reference: Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 49.

153 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p.17 (both examples).

c) རྩོམ་ལའང་མཁས་ན་འཆད་རྩོད་ལ་ལྷུ་ཅི།

If one is skilled in composition no need to mention giving explanation and debating.

འདྲི་ཡང་ཤེས་ལ་སྨྲ་ཀྱང་ཤེས།[154]

(Someone) knows how to write as well as to read.

This third type of examples all express that something is also the case in addition to an already-mentioned word or phrase. As the *Tree* presents the spelling rules very clearly, other commentators quote dByang Can rDo rJe's work vividly.[155]

Si Tu quotes the *Weapon,* which points out some further functions, calling them *bskyar* (repetition) or *bsnan* (adding). These are also commonly used in spoken Tibetan: *yang nas yang du* (again and again), *yang bskyar* (again), *slar yang* (again), and to show opposites, this text suggests: *'on kyang* (well then) or *yin na'i yang* (but).[156] The author of the *Great Explanation* argues that these aren't functions of the *rgyan sdud.* He mentions two valuable reasons: Neither do the particles in these examples undergo the above-mentioned spelling rules, nor could the *yang* be replaced by its (supposedly) equivalent *kyang.*[157] Commentators also disagree upon the presence of a *gyang* and *gang,* as one would expect according to Thon Mi's root verse (there are five various spellings of the *'brel sgra*). The author of the *Key,* however, points out that there aren't any trustworthy examples of these particles found.[158] Leaving this question unresolved, the *lhag bcas* particle, which lacks clear equivalent terms in English, follows next in Thon Mi's root verses.

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154 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, pp. 48-50 (all four examples).

155 *kyang yang 'ng gsum rgyan sdud de/ga da ba sa drag mthar kyang/ nga na ma ra la mthar yang/ a' dang mtha' med 'ng dang yang/* dNgul Chu Yab Sras, dByangs Can rDo rJe, 'Ju Mi Pham and others 2008, p. 48.

156 Smri Ti quoted in Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 77.

157 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 77.

158 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 47.

5) The Particle with Remainder **ལྷག་བཅས། དེ་ཏེ་སྟེ།**

ལ་དོན་སུ་ལ་ཇུ་ཕྱིས་ནས།།	Having erased the "*u*" of the *la don "su"*,
དེ་ལ་གསུམ་པའི་དང་པོ་སྦྱར།།	One adds the first of the third (group)
དེ་ལ་ཇུ་ལི་གསུམ་པ་སྦྱར།།	To that, the third vowel is attached
དེ་ནི་ལྷག་མ་དང་བཅས་པའོ།།[159]	That is the (particle with) a remainder.

In order to see the (supposed) connection between the preceding *la don* particle and the *lhag bcas*, a considerable amount of imagination seems required. To put the verse in more legible English prose: "One starts with the *la don* particle *su*, from which one erases the vowel *u*. One uses the remaining *sa* as the head letter to the first letter of the third group, namely *ta*. In the end, one adds the third vowel, which is *e*."[160] This whole "construction" *ste*, marks in a sentence that there is something more to come.

The *lhag bcas* particle indicates that whatever is to be expressed is not yet completed. There is something left, something there, to be drawn from the phrase before *ste*. *Lhag ma* means left, remaining, *bcas* indicates having, being endowed with. Though the root verse mentions only *ste*, there are three (*ste*, *de* and *te*) and the reader can look up, or even better, memorize the spelling rules from the *Tree.*[161] If one were to ask what the three main divisions are, they are called:

a) *mtshams sbyor lhag bcas* (linking, connecting particle),

b) *dam bca' lhag bcas* (clarifying or proving particle) and

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159 Thon Mi 1991, p. 4.

160 Thon Mi and dNgul Chu Yab Sras 2007, p. 29.

161 *te de ste gsum lhag bcas te/ na ra la sa drag mthar te// de de ga nga ba ma a'// mtha' med rnams la sa ste 'thob//* dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p.16.

c) *gzhan 'dren lhag bcas* (continuative particle). Each of them is further subdivided into several categories, in total eight.[162] This is an introductory essay rather than a complete presentation; therefore it cannot treat them in their entirety but provides a rough idea by means of the following examples:

a) ལྷ་མཆོད་དེ་ལས་བྱ།

After making offerings to the God(s) one will work.

འབྲེལ་བཤད་བརྒྱབ་སྟེ་འཇུག[163] (Someone) teaches (by) explaining.

The first set of subdivisions elucidates the various relations with respect to the time between two different actions. While in the first sentence the two actions, offering and working, happen sequentially, in the second sentence the action of explaining is the method by which one teaches, so the two happen simultaneously. The author of the *Key* points out the similarity to the particle *dang, shing* and *nas*, which could be used instead in many occasions.

b) མི་རྟག་སྟེ། བྱས་པའི་ཕྱིར།

(Something) is impermanent for the reason of being made.

འདི་ནི་དགྲ་བཅོམ་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་དགྲ་བཅོམ་པའི་ཚོར་དང་ལྡན་པས་སོ།[164]

What does foe destroyer mean? It is someone who is endowed with the quality of conquering the (real) enemy, the disturbing emotions.

The first example shows how the *ste* connects the thesis (something is impermanent) and the reason or proof for it (because it is fabricated). The second one falls under the sub-category *ngas thsig* which means, the *ste* stays between a noun (foe-destroyer i.e. an Arhat) and its definition or etymological explanation (one who has conquered the disturbing emotions).[165]

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[162] The first one (*mtshams sbyor lhag bcas*) has three subdivisions, the second one (*dam bca' lhag bcas*) has four and the last one (*gzhan 'dren lhag bcas*) is without subdivision. Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, pp. 51-54.

[163] Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 52 (both examples).

[164] Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 42 (both examples).

[165] This is a work on grammar not on Buddhist terminology. It therefore only treats this example in terms of its words per se and does not take into account further doctrinal discussions about whether an Arhat has conquered all of the subtle disturbing emotions, such as the clinging to a self of phenomena, etc.

c) འདི་ནི་མི་སྟེ། འདི་ནི་ལྷའོ། As for this, it is a human, and this is a god.

བློར་ཆུབ་སྟེ་ལག་ལེན་དུ་མ་འཆྱོལ།[166]

(Someone) understood (theoretically) but is not applying.

According to the definition, all cases that do not fall under the previous two categories are collected here. Though not explicitly mentioned, many examples show a contradiction, as is the case in the second example.

Some past commentators mentioned in the *Great Explanation* criticize those who assert only one *lhag bcas* particle, the *ste*. They argue that after certain suffixes, this one is extremely difficult to pronounce. Furthermore such theory contradicts the fact that in many volumes of pechas the three are commonly used.[167] There is no argument about the fact that also in contemporary spoken Tibetan this particle is used according to some of the above-mentioned functions:

ངས་སྨན་མང་པོ་བཟས་ཏེ་ཧད་དེ་དག་སོང་།

Because I took a lot of medicine, I completely recovered.

ཁོང་ལྷོད་ལྷོད་བྱས་ཏེ་ཕྱིན་སོང་།

She left in a relax**ed manner**.

མཆོད་རྟེན་ལ་ཕྱིན་ཏེ་སྐོར་ར་ཁ་ཤས་རྒྱག་གི་ཡིན།

After going to the stupa, I will do some rounds. (Or more literally: After having gone…)

Since it seems that there is nothing left to discuss about the *lhag bcas,* the particle with remainder, this essay now presents the particle that divides and gathers.

166 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 16.

167 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 81.

6) The Dividing and Gathering Particle འབྱེད་སྡུད། གམ་ངམ་དམ་ནམ་མམ་ལ་སོགས་པ།

རྟེས་འཇུག་ཡི་གེ་བཅུ་པོ་ལ།། To the ten suffix letters

བྱག་པ་སྦྱར་ན་འབྱེད་སྡུད་ཡིན།།[168] One adds the sixth (i.e. *ma*) this is the Dividing and gathering (particle).

Since this root verse is quite straight forward, not much further explanation seems required here. The Thon Mi's verse indicates that the letter *ma* is added to the repetition of any of the ten suffixes.[169] The usage of *'byed sdud* (dividing and gathering) particle is rather simple and its rule of application similar to the *slar sdud.* The functions can be drawn from the name:

a) "either there are two or more particularities drawn from one basis of division (*'byed*) or:

b) two or more individual factors are included into one topic (*sdud*)."[170]

a) ཆོས་ནི་གཉིས་ཏེ། འདུས་བྱས་སམ། འདུས་མ་བྱས་སོ།

There are two (types) of phenomena; namely conditioned and unconditioned phenomena.

ཕུང་པོ་ནི་ལྔ་སྟེ། གཟུགས་སམ། འཚོར་བའམ། འདུ་ཤེས་སམ། འདུས་བྱེད་དམ། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་ཕུང་པོའོ།[171]

As for the aggregates, there are five: form, feeling, perception, formation and consciousness.

Both examples are clear, the basis of division easy to recognize, the *chos* in the first and the *phung po* in the second example. The *'byed sdud* clearly distinguishes the various parts from each other. Even though in another context this particle can be translated with *or*, here, it should be understood as *and*.

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168 Thon Mi 1991, p. 4.

169 As seen before, the *Tree* also includes the second suffixes and teaches therefore eleven *'byed sdud* particles: *gam ngam dam nam mam a'm// ram lam sam tam 'byed sdud de// sbyor tshul slar sdud'i skabs dang mtshungs//* rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 17.

170 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 82.

171 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 82 (Both examples).

b) མིག་གམ། རྣ་བམ། སྣ་བམ། ལྕེ་བམ། ལུས་སམ། དབང་པོ་ལྔའོ།

The eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue and the body, these are the five faculties.

ཤར་རམ། ལྷོ་བམ།ནུབ་བམ། བྱང་བཅས་ནི་ཕྱོགས་བཞིའོ།[172]

East, south, west and north are the four directions (called).

In the second case, the constituting parts are listed first, again with the *'byed sdud* in between and the basis of division is mentioned at the end.

Though not explicit in the root verse, some commentaries, such as the *Key*, add two additional domains of the *'byed sdud* particle, namely *the tshom* (doubt) and *dri ba* (question):

འཇིག་རྟེན་མཐའ་དང་ལྡན་རམ་མི་ལྡན།[173] Is there an end to the world or not?

སྔོན་འཇུག་ལྔ་པོ་གང་ཅི་ཅིད་དམ།[174] What are the five prefixes?

Here the boundaries are not so clear between the two and the author of the *Great Explanation* even asserts that questions should be included in *'byed pa* because one discerns between different options.

དཔྱོད་ཕྱག་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ཕྱད་གཞན་དབང་ཅན་ཀུན་ཤེས་སམ་མི་ཤེས།

Have the students now understood all the *phrad gzhan dbang can* - or not?

Readers can develop their own conclusions about this question. With this, the section on the *phrad gzhan dbang can* concludes by referring to the last two sets of particles. Since these have been previously introduced, it almost seems that the reader now knows all the *phrad gzhan dbang can.*

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172 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 19.

173 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 83.

174 This example is interesting for two reasons: It is a particularity of the Tibetan language that the question word is repeated when the answer will be more than one. *khe sa gsung chos la **su su** slebs song/* Lit. Who and who came to the teachings yesterday? The student should also note the difference between literal and colloquial here. While in literal the *dam* is added even though there is a question word (*ga re*) in the sentence, this is not the case in colloquial. Though it is commonly spoken, in colloquial the question particle *pas* should be dropped when there is a question word. For example: *khong la dpe cha ga tshod yod red/* How many pecha does she have? Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 55.

7) The Source Particle འབྱུང་ཁུངས། ལས་དང་ནས།

For the elaboration on the *'byung khungs*: see the section on the *rnam dbye* pages 29&30.

8) The Vocative Particle འབོད་སྒྲ། ཀྱེ་དང་ཀ་ཡི་ལ་སོགས་པ།

Also the *'bod sgra* has been previously discussed on pages 30&31.

Since the reader has hereby gained considerable insight into the first set of particles, it is now time to discuss the second one, the *phrad rang dbang can.*

4e) ཕྲད་རང་དབང་ཅན། The Independent Particles

འགོ་བརྗོད། General remarks

Though not explicitly mentioned in Thon Mi's root verse, Pra Ti Don Grub's *Explanation of the Intent* (later referred to as *Intent*) starts the section on the *phrad rang dbang can* with an overview of the six particles:

༡	ཨི་ཕྲད།	The particle which identifies and divides
༢	དང་ཕྲད།	The particle which distinguishes and gathers
༣	དེ་ཕྲད།	The particle which is applied to indicate various designations
༤	ཀྱི་ཕྲད།	The general particle(s)
༥	བདག་ཕྲད།	The particle of the actor, owner
༦	དགག་ཕྲད།	The negation particle[175]

175 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 48.

The term *phrad rang dbang can* derives from the fact that these particles do not have varying spellings depending on the preceding suffix. In other words, unlike the *phrad gzhan dbang can*, these particles are applied based on purely semantic criteria. Therefore, apart from the *bdag sgra*, one particle covers one grammatical function including its subdivisions.

1) The Particle which Identifies and Divides ནི་སྒྲ།

ཀུང་མིང་མཐའ་དང་མཐུན་པ་ཡི།། At the end of any name or its accordant[176]

བཞི་པ་ལ་ནི་ཨི་སྒྲ་བ།། One adds the fourth (suffix) with a "*i*" sound

དབང་དང་བསྟན་པའི་ཚིག་ཏུ་འགྱུར།།[177] Becomes a word of separation and emphasis.

In other words, the *ni sgra*, which consists of the fourth suffix (*na*) with an *i* attached (*ni*) is added at the end of any name or particle to indicate a distinction or an emphasis.

Generally known to the reader as the *topic marker*, most commentaries distinguish two major functions of the *ni sgra*. This particle is applied in the context of:

a) *logs su dgar ba* (separation) and

b) *nan tan du brnan pa* (emphases) or *nges par bzung* (identification).

a) The indication of a separation or distinction may be either among similar or different entities and the basis of division may or may not be explicitly mentioned:

ལྷའི་ནང་ནས་བརྒྱ་བྱིན་ནི་མིག་སྟོང་དང་ལྡན་ནོ།

Among the gods, *Indra* is the one who is endowed with a thousand hands.

ཉན་ཐོས་ལས་ནི་སངས་རྒྱས་མཆོག་ཏུ་འཕགས།[178]

Compared to the *listeners*, the Buddha is exceedingly noble.

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[176] Though the word "particle" is not in the root verse, it seems applied. Si Tu Rin Po Che (p. 95) and Zla Ba Tshe Ring (p. 61) mention it in their explanations: *gang yang rung ba'i ming tshig gi mtha' dang mthun par sbyar rung ba'i phrad/*

[177] Thon Mi 1991, p. 5.

[178] Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 49 (both examples).

The first example represents a separation among *rigs mthun pa* (similar entities), where the basis of division is mentioned, namely the gods. The second sentence falls under the category *rigs mi mthun pa* (different entities), as listeners and Buddhas cannot be said to be the same.[179]

b) As the example below illustrates, the second domain of the *ni sgra* is a mere function of emphasizing or identifying the crucial word(s) of a sentence, without any comparison being involved:

ཆོས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་ནི་རབ་ཏུ་བསྐོར།

(Someone) turned the prayer wheel with intensity.

བཅོམ་ལྡན་འདས་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ནི་ཐུགས་སུ་ཆུད།[180]

The Conqueror knew *all* phenomena.

While Pra Ti Don Grub keeps things simple, further subdivisions are mentioned in the *Key*. They do not all seem to be of particular relevance and may mostly be included in category b) as their prime purpose is to emphasize or identify.[181] The only notable exception is that the *ni sgra* can be beneficial in verse to fill the meter.[182]

In contemporary spoken Tibetan it is commonly used in the above-mentioned ways and can also have some further implied meaning.

ཚལ་ནི་འདུག ཤ་ནི་འདུག ཐྲ་ཞིབ་ནི་འདུག སྦུམ་ནི་འདུག

As for vegetables, here they are! Also meat is here, same for flour and oil.

དཔའ་རེ་བྱས་ནས་ཁ་ལག་བཟོས་མེད།

So, why have you not made the food?!

---

179 As mentioned above, this essay is a work on grammar and not on Buddhist doctrine. Though being an interesting discussion, it does not consider arguments about how listeners and Buddhas differ, etc. This essay merely presents the example, for the author of which they are *rigs mi mthun pa* (different).

180 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, pp. 49 & 50.

181 The *Tree* makes a distinction between *mchog tu dgar ba* and *dman tu dgar ba*, in other words, there are two separate categories about the thing to be distinguished being better or worse than the object of comparison. This seems a completely irrelevant distinction, grammatically speaking. dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 22.

182 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 63.

Even if the second sentence were missing it would be implied due to the usage of the *ni sgra.*

ངའི་ཨ་ལྷག་ནི་མི་ཡག་པོ་ཞེ་དགས་འདུག　　ཁོང་གི་གྲོགས་མོ་ཆོ་གང་ཤེས།

As for my sister, she is a very good person. Who knows about her friends!?

The same subtle notion also applies to this second sentence; due to the *ni sgra* in the first sentence, one can tell that something more and (most likely) opposed will follow.

It is impossible to give *one* translation of the *ni sgra* that applies in all of these contexts. Therefore it is of crucial importance to understand the subtle Tibetan connotations and then find an equivalent term or punctuation in the target language. The *ni sgra* is one particle that is used in both literal and colloquial language. The same applies for the next particle as well, the *dang sgra.*

2) The Particle which Distinguishes and Gathers དང་སྒྲ།

མིང་གང་རུང་བའི་བར་མཚམས་སུ།།　　In between any names

གསུམ་པ་ལ་ནི་གཉིས་པ་སྦྱར།།　　Add the second (suffix) to the third (suffix)

དེ་ནི་སྡུད་དང་འབྱེད་པ་དང་།།　　That (shows) the five: gathering, division

རྒྱུ་མཚན་ཚེ་སྐབས་གདམས་ངག་ལྔའོ།།[183]　　Reason, time and advice.

As the reader becomes versed in Thon Mi's style, no further elucidation of this root verse seems required. The five subdivisions, however, will be presented by means of examples.

At this point, the reader should be familiar with the various particles that apply to indicate a gathering and division; the *dang sgra* here performs the same function as the *'byed sdud* particle above.

183 Thon Mi 1991, p. 5.

a) འདས་པ་དང་། མ་འོངས་པ་དང་། ད་ལྟ་བ་རྣམས་ཚང་མ་དུས་སོ།[184]

Past, future and present are all time tenses.

b) ཕུང་པོ་ནི་ལྔ་སྟེ། གཟུགས་དང་། ཚོར་བ་དང་། འདུ་ཤེས་དང་། འདུ་བྱེད་དང་། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའོ།[185]

As for the aggregates, there are the following five: form, feeling, perception, formation and consciousness.

Note that no English word reproduces the *dang sgra* in these examples, but one could consider the column its translation.

c) In the context of *rgyu mtshan*, Si Tu points out that the *dang sgra* could be replaced by the *rnam dbye gsum pa* (*gis, kyis,* etc.) or *rnam dbye lnga pa* (*nas, las*).

ཆོས་མང་དུ་ཐོས་པ་དང་ལྡན་ཕྱག་མཐོང་འཕེལ་ལོ།

Because one listens to the dharma a lot, one's supreme insight increases.

སྨན་བཟས་པ་དང་ནད་སོས་སོ།[186]

As someone ate the medicine, one recovered from the disease.

d) The *dang sgra* indicating time is easily understandable and can be translated with *when.* Note that the verb preceding it also here obtains a *bdag sgra* (*ba, pa*).

ཉི་མ་ཤར་བ་དང་ཆོས་སྟོན།

When the sun rises, someone teaches the dharma. (Or: To teach the dharma at sunrise).

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184 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 23.

185 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 51.

186 In the first example one could say: *chos la mang po thos pas* (*byed sgra*) *lhag mthong 'phel/* And in the second sentence, the *dang* could be replaced by a *nas: sman bzas nas nad sos so/* Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 96 (both examples).

རྒྱུ་སྐར་རྒྱལ་འཆར་བ་དང་ཡུལ་དུ་ཆས།[187]

When the "king of the constellations"[188] rises, one sets out for one's (home) land.

e) Some people argue that the last domain of the *dang sgra*, the *gdams ngag* (advice) is a mere *skul tshig* (imperative) marker. The author of the *Key* however points out the difference between the two very clearly: "An advice in this context expresses the speaker's hope or wish to benefit the person addressed."[189]

ལེགས་པར་སློབས་དང་།	Study well!
ཡིད་ལ་ཟུངས་དང་།[190]	Memorize it!

Since it is non-meritorious to take life, such would not be the case if the sentence were of this kind:

ཁྱི་འདི་གསོད་དང་།[191]	Kill the dog!

Whether as advice or mere imperative, the *dang sgra* is used in contemporary spoken Tibetan as an imperative marker. Past commentators disagreed whether a *dang sgra* after a *phyir* indicates a reason (like the *phyir*) and whether this particle does have the ability to indicate reason at all. Si Tu clarifies that the *dang sgra* can indicate a reason, but it does not do so in the case mentioned. Like in a debate, he points out the absurd consequences of the assertions of his opponents.[192] Not only such refutations but also many subdivisions of the

187 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 96 (both examples).
188 Auspicious day - essay writer's note
189 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 56.
190 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 24.
191 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 65.
192 "If the *dang sgra* would incorporate the function of the preceding particle, like the *phyir* in this context, then it would follow that a *dang sgra* after a *bdag sgra* would also become an indication of the owner or actor and this is clearly not tenable!" Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 97.

next particle, the *de sgra,* illustrate Tibetan grammar and its commentators' interrelation with the dharma.

3) The Particle that is Applied to Indicate Various Designations དེ་སྒྲ།

གང་མིང་གི་ནི་[193]ཡ་མཐའ་རུ[194]།།	At the end of any name
གསུམ་པ་ལ་ནི་ཨེ་སྣྲེད་བ།།	One adds the third (suffix) with an "*e*" attached
ཐ་སྙད་དབང་དུ་གསུམ་ཡིན་ཏེ[195]།།	This particles indicates three designations
དངོས་པོའི་[196]དབང་དུ་བཞི་རུ་འགྱུར།།[197]	Four (types of) entities.
དུས་ཀྱི་དབང་དུ་གཉིས་ཡིན་ནོ[198]།།	And two (types of) times (tenses).

As this root verse presents a number of particles introduced earlier, the interested reader may review them based on the information provided in the footnotes.

The Tibetan root verse and its commentaries present manifold, purely semantic subdivisions of the *de sgra,* which are either not translated into English or rendered into *that* or *the*. If one were to wonder what these are:

"A three-fold division in the context of *tha snyad* (conventions, designations), a), b), c)

In terms of *dngos po* (things), four different *de sgra* are distinguished, d), e), f), g)

And in terms of *dus* (time), there are two." h) i)

a) The *tha snyad 'das ma thag pa de sgra* is used to replace a word which has just been mentioned in order to not have to repeat it:

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193 *ni sgra*: topic marker, emphasising and possibly used here for filling the meter

194 *ru*: *la don,* **at** the end, *rnam dbye gnyis pa, las su bya ba*

195 *te*: *lhag bcas,* indicates that there is something more to come

196 *a'i*: *'brel sgra,* in terms **of** entities *rnam dbye drug pa, 'brel sgra*

197 Thon Mi 1991, p. 5.

198 *no*: *slar sdud,* it indicates the end of a sentence or concept.

སློབ་ཁྲིད་ཁང་ཆེན་འདི་ཤ་ཅང་མཛེས་སོ། དེ་བཟོ་བཀོད་ལེགས། དེ་ཤིན་ཏུ་མཐོ། དེ་སྦ་ཞིང་བརྟན་ནོ།

This school is extremely beautiful. Its design is good, it is extremely high and it is firm and stable.

Instead of repeating the word *school* in every phrase the *de sgra* is applied as its substitute.

b) In the case of a *tha snyad rnam grangs gzhan can,* the *de sgra* is applied in the context of a list of synonyms:

ཉི་མ་སྟེ། ཤ་བདུན་དབང་པོ་ཟེར་བ་ཡང་དེ་ཡིན། མེ་རྒྱུམ་ཞེས་པའང་དེ་ཡིན། འོད་སྟོང་ཅན་བརྗོད་པའང་དེ་ཡིན་ནོ།[199]

(Synonyms of) the sun are: what is called *Indra with the seven horses*; *round fire* is another term; and what is called *having a thousand rays* also expresses it.

As the *de sgra* here replaces the word *sun,* one might wonder how this is different from category a). It is probably the mere presence or absence of synonyms. Whether or not it seems worthwhile to make a separate category remains an open question.

c) The third one, the *tha snyad lhag bcas* is the same as the *lhag bcas* seen above; it indicates there is something more to be expressed.

ལྷ་གཟུགས་མཛེས་པར་ཡོད་དེ། མིའི་གཟུགས་ལ་ལྟའོ།[200]

The gods have a beautiful body, (but) someone looks at the human form.

As the *de sgra* here has the exact same function as in the context of the *lhag bcas,* one may refer to those examples.

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199 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 69. (Both examples)

200 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 60.

Smri Ti in the root verse of the *Weapon* elucidates the four-fold division in terms of things: "There are four domains in terms of ‘things,’ the true, the secret, the one belonging to one self and the one belonging to others."[201] From a grammatical point of view, one may well argue that these subdivisions have no relevance at all. But they are of interest here because they allow for an insight into the mindset of the author (Thon Mi) who must have considered them worthy of a separate category.

d) The definition of something true is found in the *Intent* which reads: "True is what causes one to have trust and understand the very essence of (any) conventional or ultimate entity."[202] The examples mentioned for this category are the same in all the consulted commentaries; they are translations of Sanskrit technical terms:

དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད།	དེ་ཁོ་ནའོ།	དེའི་རང་བཞིན་གེ་དེ་ཉིད་དོ།	དེ་རང་ཡིན་ནོ།
That ness	Such ness	The very nature of that	Exactly that

e) "Secret is what is not suitable to be heard or known by others; the *de sgra* is applied to point at such secrets."[203]

དེ་མ་སྟོན།	དེ་མ་ཟེར།	དེ་བསྒྲགས་པར་མི་བྱ།[204]
Don't show that!	Don't say that!	Make sure that doesn't become known!

f) The *de sgra* is used for anything that is connected to oneself, or to indicate it belongs to oneself. It is important however to be aware that it is not applied for the speaker him or herself.

བདག་གི་ལྷ་དེ།	ངའི་སྐྱུ་ཀུ་དེ།	རང་གི་དེ།
That god of mine	My pen	Mine

201 Smri Ti 2002, p. 76.
202 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 60.
203 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 68.
204 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 103 (both sets of examples, d) and e)).

g) Consequently, it is easy to understand what the last category is: the entities belonging to others. Unlike in the just-mentioned category, the *de sgra* can be used to indicate the other person as well as any entity connected to it.

མི་དེ།	ཁོང་གི་དེབ་དེ།	ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་དཔེ་ཆ་དེ།	ཀ་བ་དེ།[205]
That person	His book	Your pecha	That pillar

h) i) In the context of introducing the *de sgra*, some commentators also point out the difference between *de* and *'di*. According to the oral explanations received, *'di* is generally used for concrete objects that can be pointed at with one's finger. It indicates anything close and reachable while *de* implies a further distance, whether mental or geographical. For this reason, it is clear that the *de sgra* is used for past and future and *'di* for the present.[206] The author of the *Intent* points out that the term *past* applies to a range from a second ago to an aeon ago.

ཁ་སང་གི་དུས་དེ།	རྐང་ཅིག་སྔ་མ་དེ་ལ།	སྐྱེ་བ་སྔོན་མ་དེ།[207]
Yesterday's time	A moment ago	In the previous life

Accordingly the *de sgra* has the ability to indicate any point in the future and remains often un-translated into English:

སང་ཉིན་གྱི་ཚོགས་ཐེངས་དང་པོ་དེ།	སང་ཉིན་ཉི་མ་ཤར་བའི་དུས་དེར་འགྲོའོ།[208]
The first meeting tomorrow	One goes the following day at sunrise

Also in the context of this particle, Si Tu points out that various commentators of the past had differing interpretations about what was meant with the three above-mentioned *tha*

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205 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 61 (both sets of examples, f) and g)).

206 Pra Ti Don Grub at this point (p. 61) gets caught up in an interesting philosophical monologue, reflecting on the question of whether there is actually any past, present and future.

207 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 69.

208 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 103.

snyad (designations): Some consider them equivalent to the three natures (the *kun brtags, gzhan dbang, yongs grub*) asserted by the proponents of Mind Only, others equate them to the three doors (*sgo gsum* - body, speech and mind) and still others to the three (aspects of an action), the object, actor and action (*bya byed las gsum*).[209] Even though it would be interesting to give more thought to these specific categories, this essay will now deal with the most universal of all the particles, the *gang sgra*.

4) The General Particle སྤྱི་སྒྲ།

གང་གི་བརྗོད་པའི་དང་པོ་རྣམ།། At the beginning (before) of whatever is to be said

དང་པོ་ལ་ནི་གཉིས་པ་སྦྱར།། Adding the second (suffix) to the first (suffix)

སྤྱི་ལ་ཁྱབ་པ་ཉིད་དུ་འགྱུར།།[210] It becomes (the particle which) pervades (all) generalities indeed.

The term *spyi sgra* (general particle) is applied because these particles, unlike all others, can be used in any occasion, regardless of the specific content of the sentence. As the *Messenger* reads, "the *gang* is universal and used without making any distinction."[211]

གང་ལ་ཡོན་ཏན་མཆོག་མངའ་བའི། དཀོན་མཆོག་དེ་ཞེས་པ་ནི།

As for those who possess (all) good qualities, called the three jewels…

ལྟོ་སྤྱིར་བ་དང་། ཞབས་ཞུམ་པ་དང་ཆུ་འཐུར་བའི་དོན་བྱེད་ནུས་པ་གང་ཡིན་པ་ནི་བུམ་པའོ།[212]

That which has a round belly, a deep bottom, and is capable of performing the function of carrying water, that is a pot.

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209 Also in the context of the *dngos po bzhi*, some past commentators had different interpretations; they equated them with *rigs, bya ba, yon tan* and *rdzas* (class, action, qualities and material things). Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 104.

210 Thon Mi 1991, p. 6.

211 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 25.

212 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 53 (both examples).

གང་གི་ཆེད་དུ་ལས་ཀ་བྱེད། ཁྱེད་གང་ནས་ཡོང་པ་ཡིན།[213]

What (does) one work(s) for (?) Where did you come from?

Since the *gang sgra* is of universal character, no single English term is able to replace it in all occasions. In sentences one and two, the *gang sgra* is rendered into a relative clause, recognizable by the English translation *those who,* and *that which.*

Not mentioned in Thon Mi's thirty verses, dByangs Can's *Tree* provides a useful further list of *spyi sgra* particles:

ཅི་ཇི་སུ་གང་གྱི་སྒྲ་སྤྱི།། Why, how, who and what, these are the general particles,

ཞེག་སྙེ་སྣད་འདྲ་ཕྱིར་ལ་ཅི།། Why, what for, like what, what purpose, here *ci* is used,

སྣེད་སྲིད་ལྟར་བཞིན་སྐད་ལ་ཇི།། How every many, how long, how, like, etc. *ji* is applied,

སུ་ནི་གང་ཟག་གང་ཀུན་ལའོ།།[214] *Su* indicates an individual and *gang* is used for all.

In other words, the *spyi sgra* consist of the above-mentioned combinations of for example: *ci zhig* (what, which), *ci slad* (for what purpose), *ci 'dra* (like what), *ci phyir* (why), etc.[215]

Si Tu Rin Po Che makes a three-fold division within the *spyi sgra*, emphasising that only in some contexts they do become question words (see example *gang gi ched du las ka byed*).[216] He also draws a clear distinction between *su* and the other particles such as *gang, ci, ji,* etc. making explicit that *su* is only applied for *gang zag,* and never for material matter, while the others are universal. Whether or not all classes of beings are included within the term *gang zag* remains an open question.[217] This question seems a controversial one and so is the issue around the next particle to be introduced, the *bdag sgra.*

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213 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 25.

214 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 71.

215 For reasons of space, no examples are mentioned here; the reader is kindly requested to refer to the example sentences in: rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979 (p. 25) or Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005 (p. 108) or Pra Ti Don Grub 2004 (p. 52).

216 spyi sgra la 'jug pa dngos dang/ bye brag la 'jug pa'i spyi sgra dang/ dri ba la 'jug pa'i spyi sgra// Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 110.

217 While the average Tibetan might use the term *dmyal ba'i gang zag* (a hell being), they would not use *su* for an animal. The *Key* draws the line in the following way: "Whoever is able to understand and express him or

5) The Particle of the Owner or Actor བདག་སྒྲ།

གང་མིང་གི་ནི་མ་མཐའ་ན།།	(When) at the end of any name
པུ་ལིཏྒ་ཡི་སྒྲ་མེད་པ།།	Which does not (already) have *pu linga*[218]
དེ་ལ་པུ་ལིཏྒ་སྣོར་ན།།	A *pu linga* is added
བདག་པོའི་སར་ནི་ཤེས་པར་བྱ།།[219]	(Such) is to be known as the (particle)[220] of the owner.

As traditional saying holds, there is no rule without exception; in the context of the *bdag sgra,* commentators disagree whether this particle can be considered *phrad rang dbang can.* The point of controversy is the different spellings which vary, among other reasons, depending on the gender or amount of syllables.

The *bdag sgra,* as the term indicates, is generally added to a verb or noun in order to mark the person who owns the object (noun) or performs the action (verb). Thon Mi's root verse itself teaches only two *bdag sgra,* namely *pa* and *po,* while the *Tree* mentions six of them, *pa, po, ba, bo, ma, mo.*[221] The explanations regarding these particles vary considerably. *The Key* divides them into a) *pho* (male), b) *mo* (female) and c) *ma ning* (neuter) and seems reasonable - but so does its refutation, which is subsequently presented.

a) འབྲི་པ་པོ།	ཡོན་ཏན་པ།	འབྲོག་པ།
The writer	The one with good qualities	Nomad

her self is a *gang zag.* While people would say: Who is this person over there? It is not commonly known in the world to say: Who is this dog over there?" Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 72.

218 This is the name for masculine gender.

219 Thon Mi 1991, p. 6.

220 Literally the 'place' of the owner (*sa*)

221 *na ro yod med pa ba ma/ bdag po'i sgra ste zhes so/* dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 73.

In the first sentence, the *po* is added to the verb "to write" and therefore indicates the one who does the action. The second example shows how the person marked by a *bdag sgra* is the holder or possessor of something, here the good qualities; while the *bdag sgra* in the third sentence shows the person who belongs to a certain place, namely the highlands (*'brog*).

All commentaries in this context advise beginner students not to think that all *pa* at the end of a word are *bdag sgra.* "For example in the context of *bum pa* or *ka ba,* the *pa* and *ba* are merely the second syllable of the word, they haven't been added like a *bdag sgra*."[222]

b)	གཡོག་མོ།	བྱེད་པ་མོ།	ཚང་མ།
	The female servant	The female worker	The bar waitress

The *bdag sgra ma* and *mo* indicate a woman or girl. They are added if one would like to explicitly indicate the female gender as opposed to the third category which could be either male or female:

c)	ལྷ་ས་བ།	སྒྲུབ་བསྒྱུར་བ།	རྒྱ་གར་བ།[223]
	A person from Lhasa	A translator	An Indian

In these examples it is the case that the *ba* does not indicate any specific gender, but in the context of the *bo,* such as in the word *rdzi bo* (shepherd) or *dpa' bo* (hero) one seems to naturally think of a male.

Apart from the afore-mentioned division based on gender, the *Tree* provides suffix gender-based rules about the *bdag sgra*.[224] This is the source of disagreement about the *bdag sgra* being a *phrad rang dbang can* or *gzhan dbang can.* This root verse advises the composer to add a *ba* when the noun itself has two syllables, for example *lha sa ba* (person from Lhasa)

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222 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 55.

223 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, pp. 73-75 (all three sets of examples in this paragraph).

224 *bdag po'i sgra ste ga da na/ ba ma sa dang drag mthar pa/ nga a' ra la mtha' med mthar/ bdag sgra ya 'gyur pa dang ni cha la pa nyid sbyor ba legs/ ming mth'i pa ba'ng de bzhin no/ ma ni nges med skabs dang sbyar/* dNgul Chu Yab Sras, dByangs Can rDo rJe, 'Ju Mi Pham and others 2008, p. 19.

and *pa* when the preceding word consists of one or three syllables, for example *gar pa* (dancer) or *gzhi ka rtse pa* (person from Shikatse).

Si Tu Rin Po Che argues polemically that the *bdag sgra* is a *phrad rang dbang can* because it is not the case that the rules of application with respect to the suffixes always apply! He furthermore refutes the above classifications, asserting that one could as well say *lha sa pa*[225] (person from Lhasa) or *se ra pa* (inhabitant of Sera). Another point of argument in this context is whether *ldan* and *can* should be included into the *bdag sgra*. The *Weapon* counts them as *bdag sgra* but Si Tu disagrees, stating that they are similar but not the same because *can* and *ldan* also apply to matter, which is not the case with the *bdag sgra.*[226] For example, *chu dug can* (poisonous water) does not indicate an actor or a sentient possessor. A propos refuting and negating each other; now follows the last, the *dgag sgra* (negation particle).

6) The Negation Particle དགག་སྒྲ།

གང་མིང་བརྗོད་པའི་ཡ་མཐའ་ན།།	(If) at the upper end of any name to be expressed
སྐྱེས་ལིངྒ་ཡི་སྒྲ་མེད་པ།།	There is not a letter for female gender
དེ་ལ་སྐྱེས་ལིངྒ་སྣོར་ན།།	A letter for female gender is added
དགག་པའི་གནས་སུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱ།།[227]	(Such) occasion should be understood as a negation.

The potential confusion of the *dgag sgra ma* with the mere syllable *ma* is already addressed in Thon Mi's root verse which reads: "If at the end of any word which does not already have a female letter which is part of it, adds a *ma* this needs to be understood as the *dgag sgra.*" As the term indicates, the *dgag sgra* negates the word to which it is applied and expresses its opposite. Among the two female *bdag sgra, ma* and *mo,* only the *ma* functions as a *dgag sgra.*

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225 According to Si Tu, it is merely a matter of dialect whether people say *lha sa ba* or *lha sa pa.* Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 113.

226 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 113.

227 Thon Mi 1991, p. 6.

Though not mentioned in the root verse, most commentaries also introduce *mi*, *med*, *min,* etc. as related *dgag sgra.* The *Tree* brings clarity into the student's occasional doubt about where to place it within the sentence:

> མ་མི་མིན་མེད་དགག་སྒྲ་སྟེ།།
>
> མ་མི་ཐོག་མ་མིན་མེད་འཇུག[228]།
>
> མ་ནི་བར་གྱི་གསལ་བྱེད་ལའང་།།[229]
>
> "*Ma, mi, min, med,* these are the negation particles:
>
> *Ma* and *mi* go before (the corresponding word), *med* and *min* at the end.
>
> *Ma* is also applied between the clarifications."

The various examples are straightforward and don't require much further explanation:

མ་རྟོགས།	མི་བྱ།	མི་རྟག	མི་འགལ།
Does not realize	Don't!	Impermanent	No contradiction
གཟུགས་མེད།	བྱེད་ཀྱི་མིན།	སྲིད་པ་མིན།[230]	
No form	I won't do (it)	(It) is not possible	

They illustrate that the *dgag sgra* is applied according to the above-mentioned rule regardless of the type of word, be it a noun, verb or adjective.[231]

The last line of the root verse mentions the occasion where the *dgag sgra* comes in between two words and shows the mixture of the two, used also in spoken Tibetan.

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228 According to the explanation following the root verse, this is a spelling mistake in the *Messenger;* the correct spelling would be *mjug* (end).

229 dNgul Chu Yab Sras, dByangs Can rDo rJe, 'Ju Mi Pham and others 2008, p. 20.

230 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, pp. 75&76 (both sets of examples).

231 According to the teachings received, words do not have an inherent nature of being noun, verb or adjective. This becomes clear in the context of the comparison of "adjectives." Instead of using the comparative form of the adjective, *bde ba,* one can say: *lam ka 'di nas 'gro na* ***bde kyi red****. bde po* (here: "comfortable") which may sound for us like an adjective. But in this sentence it is conjugated, so it must be understood as a verb, which means: "to be more comfortable." This clearly indicates that there are no clear boundaries between the various types of words.

ར་མ་ལུག	ལ་མ་སྐྱང་།	རྒྱ་མ་བོད། [232]
Whether goat nor sheep	Not pass nor valley	Not Chinese, not Tibetan

Some past commentators assert that the sentence *chus stong pa* (empty of water) or *drim pas dag pa* (purified from stains) also entails a negation and should therefore be counted as *dgag sgra*, but Si Tu resolutely refutes such concepts. According to his definition, *stong* and *dag* have nothing whatsoever to do with a negation as they lack the *dgag sgra* "*ma*".[233] This valuable argument concludes the presentation on the *phrad rang dbang can.* In contrast to these technical elaborations, a little time is spent on Thon Mi's concluding thoughts. The reader may well have various opinions about their relevance for a modern audience.

4f) ཐོན་མི་ཡི་མཇུག་བསྡོམས། Thon Mi's Concluding Section

Even though Thon Mi dedicates almost ten verses to the concluding section, not all of the commentaries elaborate on them. Most of their content (may) lack relevance for a twenty-first century lay person student. But they are interesting for their clear insight into the intention of the author, namely to introduce literacy mainly for the sake of the dharma.[234] The importance of the study of this text is claimed to be such that only by becoming versed in the content of this work, one will be able to correctly understand the meaning of the Tripitaka. Those skilled individuals learned in the *rnam dbye* and *phrad* are praised for being able to

232 Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 76.
233 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 116.
234 This statement might not be completely valid from a strictly historical point of view. As the elaborations in chapter two show, the attribution of the introduction of literacy to Thon Mi is a subject of disagreement among experts.

"first correctly read the words of the Buddha, later on explain the profound meaning to others, occasionally compose their own commentaries and finally defeat the enemy in debate."[235]

Such result is promised to be achieved quickly with little effort by students who fulfil the following requirements: "One has to abandon laziness of procrastination and being distracted towards negative deeds. Furthermore, one should be honest, kind hearted, of a good nature and cultivate virtuous thoughts and faith in karma cause and effect as well as the three Jewels."[236] Such passages once again underline the intimate connection between Thon Mi's grammar and the Buddha dharma.

4g) མཇུག་བསྡོམས། Conclusion

Apart from being a necessary condition for the attainment of enlightenment, why is the study of the *SCP* and its commentaries a worthwhile undertaking for the foreign student? On the one, rather practical, hand, several *phrad* lack clear equivalents in English. Therefore, without thoroughly understanding their notions and subtleties, the student, at times, is unable to translate and communicate accurately. Such is the case with the *ni sgra,* the *lhag bcas*, the *'bod sgra*, etc., for which no clear literal English translation, or only rendering into punctuation, applies. Therefore, the above explanations do not use grammatical categories derived from Indo-European languages. They rather succeed in illustrating the Tibetan categories by means of original examples. These exemplary sentences, almost entirely dharma related, furthermore provide insight into the mindset of the past and contemporary grammarians.

The above explanations closely follow, reproduce and elucidate Thon Mi's root verses as well as the style of the commentarial literature. What are these typical features? Based on

235 Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 121.
236 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 76.

his Sanskrit model, Thon Mi shows the (supposedly) morphological connection between the subsequent *phrad*. Most commentators elucidate the etymology and subdivisions of each *phrad* and fill pages and pages with examples. Even though this might not be extremely capturing to the foreign reader, s/he gains an accurate insight into the way native speakers teach, learn and discuss their language. The discussion of the *phrad* becomes more challenging if one deals with the various controversial points, which Si Tu Rin Po Che's *Great Explanation* presents in great detail and depth.

Some credit has to be given to those who argue that some Tibetan categories presented in the *SCP* seem random and useless. In the context of the *ni sgra* and the *de sgra,* which present a set of purely semantic subdivisions, this might be the case from a strictly grammatical point of view. [237] Instead of disregarding, I came to appreciate these for their religious-cultural dimension. What is meant with this term? This relation between the past authors and the dharma shines through in the examples of every section. And, more interestingly, some concepts borrowed from Buddhism are even used for grammatical categories, as the next section on the *TKJ* will show.

[237] In the context of the *ni sgra,* a purely semantic distinction is made between good and bad objects of comparison. The *de sgra* presents a nine-fold purely semantic set of subdivisions, one group of which is the distinction between: true, secrete, mine, and yours - all domains of the *de sgra.*

ལེའུ་ལྔ་པ།

CHAPTER 5

༥། །རྒྱས་ཀྱི་འཇུག་པ། *The Application of Gender*

5a) Introduction

གཟུགས་མེད་ན་གྲིབ་མ་མེད། སྒྲ་མེད་ན་ཚིག་མི་ཐོན།

Without form, there is no shadow, without sound there are no words.[238]

Tibetan proverb

The subtleties of sound and spelling as well as the major principles of Tibetan language, such as *bdag-gzhan* (self and other) and *tha dad pa-tha mi dad pa* (transitive-intransitive)[239] are the major content of the *TKJ*. Its readers tend to appreciate it as the more profound and subtle between Thon Mi's two treatises. Others, who haven't studied it, seem to disregard it, arguing that classifying letters in male, female, etc. is absurd. Under the skilled guidance of a qualified teacher, this text allows the non-Tibetan student to gain an insight into the Tibetan language, impossible to acquire from textbooks based on English grammar classifications. By thoroughly understanding the principle of *bdag-gzhan* the reader gains clarity about the interpretation and translation of any verb tense or mode. It also enables the foreign student to discuss their grammar with (learned) native speakers. And last but not least, becoming acquainted with this text reveals a fascinating insight into the profundity of Thon Mi's grammar.[240]

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238 "Sans forme, il n'y a pas d'ombre, sans son, il n'y a pas de mot." Gyurmé, Stoddard and Tournadre 1992, introduction.

239 As previously mentioned, this translation is a momentary convention; the two are not to be equated as the following elaborations will demonstrate.

240 It is important to remember that Thon Mi (supposedly) developed a literal language, which, on the one hand was based on the spoken Tibetan language at that time. On the other hand, he was, undoubtedly, strongly influenced by Sanskrit grammar.

Considering the audience of this essay, the main focus here is to elucidate the major principles that pervade the whole Tibetan language, both spoken and written.[241] These explanations are set in their original context, which is Thon Mi's gender presentation of the prefixes. The gender-classification of the main letters along with the place of origin of their sounds and the elucidations on the divisions of the suffixes can relatively easily be understood through self-study. Their explanation will therefore be concise and rather aims at giving a flavour of the *TKJ* than a complete presentation. Such selection provides considerable space for more practical insights with respect to the major principles mentioned above. What at first might sound extremely technical and dry will perhaps be the most interesting section of the entire essay.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to participate in the ongoing debate among experts about the correct interpretation of Thon Mi's most crucial verses, eleven to fifteen.[242] This essay presents one entirely Tibetan perspective, following the explanations in the *dKa' gNad gSal ba'i Me Long* by dByangs Can rDo rJe (18th century) along with oral explanations.[243] Though it is also subject of the *TKJ*, the eight-fold *rnam dbye* division has been presented previously.

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241 This essay treats in considerable detail the issue of transitivity and *bdag-gzhan*. It would also be an interesting topic to further discuss the issue of volition. The first author who explicitly makes a distinction of volition is Gyurmé. "From a grammatical point of view, the verbs in Tibetan are divided into four categories: transitive, intransitive and the volitional and non-volitional verbs." Gyurmé, Stoddard and Tournadre 1992, p. 245. These are not to be understood separately as they are always combined, for example: *za pa* = transitive, volitional, *'gro ba* = intransitive, volitional, etc. Early scholars, such as Jäschke, seem not to distinguish this issue of volition in terms of the auxiliaries: *nga mthong gin 'dug, nga 'bri gin 'dug. Song* is used for the first person, even with volitional verbs. Jäschke 1972, pp. 47-62.
Neither is the issue of direct versus inferential knowledge presented in detail in this essay. For further reference, see Gyurmé, Stoddard and Tournadre 1994, pp. 217-219. Here the various modes along with the corresponding auxiliaries are presented clearly. The issues of volition and direct-inferential knowledge are not treated in detail in this essay because they are not mentioned in Thon Mi's root verse, which is the starting point for the elaborations below.

242 As the following elaborations show, Si Tu Rin Po Che changed the reading of Thon Mi's root verse. Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, p. 185.
The five verses in question are described by Miller as such: "Five excessively gnomic slokas in the rTags kyi hjug-pa (RKJ), the second of the two early grammatical treatises traditionally attributed to Thon-mi Sam- bhota, have for centuries served as grist for the Tibetan grammarians' mill." Miller 1992, p. 103.

243 This text is referred by its author to as: *rTags 'Jug dKa' gNad gZugs brNyan Kun gSal Bar 'Char Ba'i Me Long*. dByangs Can rDo rJe in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1997, p. 77.

5b) The Main Letters མིང་གཞི།

སྤྱིར་ན་དབྱངས་མོ་གསལ་བྱེད་ཕོ།།[244]

In general, the melodies are female, the clarifiers male.

The word for vowel in Tibetan is *dbyangs* (melody, tune, harmony, voice) and consonants are called *gsal byed* (clarify [-ier]; to make clear, to explain). *The Mirror* further elucidates that the four *dbyangs* are female and have the nature of *shes rab* (wisdom) while the thirty *gsal byed* are considered male and *thabs* (method).[245] As neither of the two sets of letters can stand on its own, they are considered the union of wisdom and means, a concept most likely borrowed from late Indian Buddhism.[246]

Thon Mi's following root verse is simplified by his commentators and reads as follows: "Only the male letters (e.g. consonants (translator's note)) are subdivided into the following five categories:

ka, ca, ta, pa and *tsa* are male,

kha, cha, tha, pha and *tsha* and neutral,

ga, ja, da, ba, dza, wa, zha, za, 'a, ya, sha and *sa* are female,

nga, nya, na, and *ma* are very female

and *ra, la, ha* and *a* are barren.

a is also called characterless."[247]

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244 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 35.

245 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 35.

246 The interpretation of the union of *dbyangs* and *gsal byed* derives from oral teachings. Their nature being *shes rab* and *thabs* respectively is stated in the root verse.

247 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 35. (The table itself is not in his work but has been applied for the sake of clarity.)

To show the above category more legibly:

ཀ་	ཁ་	ག་	ང་
ཅ་	ཆ་	ཇ་	ཉ་
ཏ་	ཐ་	ད་	ན་
པ་	ཕ་	བ་	མ་
ཙ་	ཚ་	ཛ་	ཝ་
ཞ་	ཟ་	འ་	ཡ་
ར་	ལ་	ཤ་	ས་
ཧ་	ཨ་		

The author then elucidates that these categories are equivalent to the strength of their sound and the effort (*rtsol ba*) involved when these letters, which originate from different parts of the body, such as throat, tongue, etc., are expressed. "Male letters (require) big effort, neutral ones medium one, female letters quite small one, very female ones small one and the barren ones, an effort which is even less.[248]

The list on the next page summarizes the parts of the body from which sounds of letters originate and the different degrees of effort involved:

248 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 36.

Place of origin:	**From outside (aspirated)** Big effort	**From outside (aspirated)** Small effort	**From inside (non aspirated)** Big effort	**From inside (non aspirated)** Small effort	Instrument:[249]
Throat	ཁ་	ག་	ཀ་	དགའ་	Throat
Nose			ཨ་	ང་	Throat
Palate	ཆ་	ཇ་	ཅ་	ཉ་	Tongue (middle)
Nose			ཉྭ་	ཉ་	Tongue (middle)
Teeth	ཐ་	ད་	ཏ་	ན་	Tongue (tip)
Nose			ཎ་	ན་	Tongue (tip)
Lips	ཕ་	བ་	པ་	ཨབ་	Lips
Nose			ཨཾ་	མ་	Lips
Palate	ཚ་	ཛ་	ཙ་	ཚ་	Tongue (middle)
Palate			ཥ་	ཞ་	Tongue (middle)
Teeth			ས་	ཟ་	Tongue (tip)
Throat	ཧ་		ཧ་	ཨ་	Throat
Lips			དབང་	ཝ་	Lips
Tip of tongue	ཨ་		དབྱལ་	ར་	Near tip of the tongue
Teeth	ཨྱ་		ཡ་	ལ་	Tongue (tip)
Palate			གཡག་	ཨ་	Tongue (middle)[250]
			དབྱངས་		

[249] The term "instrument" is a convention, a rough translation of the Tibetan *byed pa*. It indicates the second part of the body (apart from the actual place of origin) involved in producing the sound in question.

[250] rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 36. Some information contained in this table that differs from *The Mirror* is based on the oral explanations received. (The table itself is not in his work but has been applied for the sake of clarity.)

The above list is one possible categorization; it differs slightly from the information given in *The Mirror*. In this text, the top of one's head and one's stomach are also considered places of origin of certain letters. The main concept however of sounds differing due to three factors, namely *skye gnas*, *byed pa* and *rtsol ba* (place of origin, instrument and effort) remains the same.[251] To present the letters in groups of four similar sounds is a principle vividly used by native teachers.[252] Unlike one might expect, these are not the four letters of the same *sde* (group, row)! The four sounds consist of the first three letters plus the third with its prefix or super-scripted letter.

For example: ཀ་ ཁ་ ག་ དགའ[253]

While the difference of sound between letter *ka* and *kha* is very clear, untrained non-native speakers may have a hard time distinguishing *ga* from *kha*, and find it almost impossible to hear whether or not *ga* has a prefix or super-scribed letter.[254] The lack of attention to such subtleties occasionally leads to misunderstandings as many words sound very similar. Even non-literate Tibetans pronounce them correctly due to conditioning from childhood. Since the foreign student lacks this "privilege," attention to such subtleties of spelling is crucial, if one aims to have correct pronunciation.

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251 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 36.

252 Comparing this group of four sounds with the Sanskrit alphabet, it seems that these four sounds represent four Sanskrit letters, for example: ka, kha, gha, ga.

253 For more linguistic investigations about aspirated-non-aspirated, read Durr quoted by Snellgrove. "Durr insists: the effect of annulling aspiration of an original aspirate or prefix has protected an originally non-aspirate from subsequent aspiration." Snellgrove 1954, p. 181.

254 When the third letter of the *sde* stands on its own, it is aspirated, and such aspiration is absent when a prefix or super-scribed letter is added. For example: *ja* (tea) is aspirated, but *'ja'* (rainbow) is not. The same applies for super scripted letters: *gangs* (snow) is aspirated, and *sgang* (on top of) is non-aspirated.

5c) The Suffixes རྗེས་འཇུག

Though the gender classification of the suffixes comes later in the root verse, this essay presents it at this point and saves the most challenging section (on the prefixes) for the end. Regardless of the gender these ten letters have when being a main letter, as suffixes they are newly subdivided into male, neutral and female.

Gender:	Effort:	Suffixes:	Example:
Male ཕོ་	Strong	ག་ ད་ བ་ ས་	སྐད་ སྐྱབས་ སྐྱོགས་
Neutral མ་རྟེད་	Medium	ན་ ར་ ལ་	དཀོན་ སྒྲོར་ བསྒྲལ་
Female མོ་	Weak	ང་ མ་ འ་	ཀང་ དབའ་ བཀྲམ་[255]

To explain the table using the author's words and style: "the four male suffixes *ga*, *da*, *ba* and *sa* are considered to involve the biggest amount of effort to be pronounced. Slightly less is the effort to bring about the sound of the neutral letters *na, ra* and *la.* The female letters *nga, ma* and *'a,* involve an even smaller amount of effort to produce them."[256] Each gender has further subdivisions, which are not all presented here for reasons of space. To give a brief example: "When a male suffix *ga* has a second suffix *sa*, its sound is strongest. This combination is considered "supreme being," again a concept found in Buddhist texts dividing the various spiritual dispositions of people."[257]

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255 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 55. (The table itself is not in his work but has been applied for the sake of clarity.)

256 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 55.

257 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 57. The three different spiritual dispositions which are distinguished are: *skye bu rab, skye bu 'bring ba, skye bu chung ba*, people with highest, middling and

For example: རྐང་བྱགས། བཀྲགས། དཀྱིགས།[258]

These differences of sound are extremely subtle and difficult to hear even for a native speaker.

What is of more practical application for someone who wishes to compose is the second issue regarding suffixes: The reader might want to know that suffixes are often followed by letters (of the second syllable) of the same gender.[259] This is called *rtags mtshungs* (same gender) and, as seen above, is relevant to the various spellings of the *phrad gzhan dbang can.*

a) Male suffixes draw male letters: དགག་པ། ཚོད་པ། སྒྲུབ་པ།

b) Neutral suffixes draw neutral letters: དགྱེ་བ། གསེར་བ། སྨོལ་བ།

c) And female suffixes draw female letters: བྱང་མ། དགའ་མ། དམ་བཅ[260]

The suffixes *ga, da* and *ba* are male and therefore followed by a male main letter, *pa* or *po.* Note that the presence of a vowel does not have any influence on the gender of a main letter. The remaining examples - with the help of the lists above - are self-explanatory. One may argue that this rule does not always apply! The text agrees that there are many occasions where the *brjod bde* (easy to express) rule applies.[261] This means that the combination of suffix and second syllable easiest to express is chosen. The *rtags mtshungs* have the same objective; the difference remains unrevealed to me to the present moment.

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lowest capacity. Those of lowest capacity for example are taught to go for refuge in order to become liberated from suffering and get material goods, etc.

258 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 57.

259 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 59.

260 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 60 (all examples).

261 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 60.

5d) The Prefixes སྔོན་འདྲུག

The presentation of the classification of the prefixes (and suffixes) comes down to the elaborate answers of the following four questions:

གང་གིས་འདྲུག་པ།	Which are the (prefixes)?
གང་ལ་འདྲུག་པ།	Which (letters) does (each of them) precede?
ཇི་ལྟར་འདྲུག་པ།	How do they apply (with how much strength)?
དགོས་པ་ཅི་ཕྱིར་འདྲུག་པ།[262]	(And) for what purpose are they applied?

The first three questions will be answered only briefly as their complete elaborations can easily be drawn from the relevant commentaries. Before attempting to answer the fourth and most crucial question, the principles of the Tibetan language must be grasped and will be elaborated upon in considerable detail.

Before addressing these four questions, the reader needs to know the gender of each prefix. Also here, there is no relation to the gender they have when being a main letter.

སྔོན་འདྲུག་ལྔ་ཡི་བ་ཡིག་ཕོ།	(Among) the five prefixes, *ba* is male,
ག་ད་མ་ནིང་འ་མོ་ཡིག	*Ga*, and *da* are neuter, *'a* is a female letter.
མ་ནི་ཤིན་ཏུ་མོ་ཡིན་ནོ།[263]	(And) as for *ma*, it is extremely female.

[262] dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, pp. 38-42. Thon Mi's root verse reads: *gang la 'jug byed gang gis byed// ji ltar 'jug byed ci phyir byed//* Thon Mi 1991, p. 11.

[263] dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 38.

5d 1+2) Which Prefix Precedes which Main Letters གང་གིས་འཇུག་པ། གང་ལ་འཇུག་པ།

The *gang* in the first sentence refers to the prefix and is therefore marked with a *byed sgra.*[264] The second *gang*, as the *la don* clearly indicates, is the object, e.g., the corresponding main letters. Since the answer to the first question would be simply the names of the five prefixes, these two answers make more sense to be given together:[265] In commentaries like the *Messenger* the reader finds endless lists which present each of the five with its corresponding main letters. These are further subdivided into *rkyang, 'dogs* and *brtsegs* (alone, with sub-scripted and super-scripted letters). The amount of examples is overwhelming and not reproduced here due to risk of boredom.

The example of the prefix *ba* will suffice for the reader to gain insight into the various domains of this male *sngon 'jug*: These are the letters that can be preceded by the male prefix *ba* (colours indicate the gender of the main letters as introduced above):[266]

ཀ་		ག་	ང་
ཅ་		ཇ་	ཉ་
ཏ་		ད་	ན་
ཙ་		ཛ་	ཟ་
ཞ་	ཟ་		་
ར་		ལ་	ས

[264] Note the usage of the *byed sgra* in these two sentences. It is applied to indicate clearly which *gang* is the prefix and which is the main letter. This is the aforementioned principle of *'khrul ghzi*: Whenever there is doubt (lit. basis of confusion) the *byed sgra* needs to be applied.

[265] This is the reasoning and the way all consulted commentaries proceed.

[266] rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 39. (The table itself is not in his work but has been applied for the sake of clarity.)

Two rules can be drawn from this table very clearly: The vertical blank above the *za* indicates that neutral letters (second column, *kha, cha, tha,* etc.) are never preceded by the male prefix *ba.*[267] The second rule which applies to all prefixes requires that none of them precedes letters of its own *sde* (row). In other words, the prefix *ba* cannot be applied before the letters *pa, pha, ba* and *ma* because this is its own *sde.* Being familiar with such rules, the discussion of the identification of main letters becomes completely unambiguous. For example in the word *gangs* (snow) there is no longer any doubt whether the *ga* is the prefix or the main letter as *ga* and *nga* are in the same *sde.*

Rather to illustrate the style of the *TKJ* and to fulfill the requirement of completeness, the following table summarizes the main letters that are preceded by the male prefix *ba* in their various combinations mentioned above.[268]

Prefix:	Main letter:	Alone, sub and super scripted:	Examples:
བ་	ཀ་ཁ་	Alone, sub- and super scripted	བཀའ་མོལ། བབྱངས། བརྐལ།
བ་	ཏ་ཙ་ད་	Alone and super-scripted	བཙལ། བདན་པོ།
བ་	ང་ཇ་ཉ་ཌ་	Only super-scripted	བརྣན།
བ་	ཅ་ཞ་ཤ་	Only alone	བཤད།
བ་	ཟ་ས་	Alone and sub-scripted	བཟོད་པ། བསྒོད།
བ་	ར་	Only sub-scripted	བབྷིང་།[269]

[267] Some commentators such as Si Tu also elaborate on Thon Mi's rules of "non-domains," such as: "male does not precede neutral, female does not precede male, etc." Situ Rinpoche 2005, p. 152.

[268] For further reference, see rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, pp. 38-41.

[269] rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 39. (The table itself is not in his work but has been applied for the sake of clarity.)

Since the rules and combinations are of considerable number one may wonder about their practical application. Depending on the type of learner one is, it may or may not be worth memorizing them. The observation that an average exile Tibetan on the street's ability to spell is not one hundred percent accurate may raise the question about the present relevance and applicability of such rules.[270] Having treated the issue of spelling in some detail, the question of the phonological effect of the prefix will now be discussed.

5d 3) How (with which Strength) do they Apply? ཇི་ལྟར་འཇུག་པ།

ཇི་ལྟར་འཇུག་པར་བྱེད་ཅེ་ན།།

ཕོ་ནི་སྒྲ་རྩེལ་དྲག་པར་འཇུག།

མ་ནིང་རན་པར་འཇུག་པ་ཡིན།།

མོ་ནི་ཞན་པའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་ཏེ།

ཕིན་ཏེ་མོ་ནི་མཉམ་པས་སོ།།[271]

The Mirror inquires and at the same time answers: "If one were to ask how the prefixes apply (to their respective main letters): The male applies with a strong sound, the neutral ones with moderate, the female with weak and the extremely female with the weakest sound."[272] In other words, being mostly silent themselves, the prefixes still have an influence on the sound of the main letter they precede. These differences of tone are extremely subtle and difficult to distinguish even to a native speaker's ear. But according to the above categorization, the pronunciation of these two words is slightly different:

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270 In this context, I cannot refer to my own experience either. At the point when I studied these rules, I knew how to spell relatively well. I had acquired this skill, however, based on reading and writing practice and not based on gender rules. The practical application of these therefore is subject to further investigation.

271 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 41.

272 The term *mnyam pa* for the extremely female prefix may be confusing to the reader; it does not mean "equal" or "same." But according to the oral instructions received and the elaborations in the *Mirror,* the effort and strength of sound is *ha cang chung ba,* extremely small, and therefore *mnyam* cannot be translated with those terms. dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 41.

བཀའ། and དཀའ།

As the prefix *ba* is male, the sound of the word *bka'* (speech) is slightly stronger than of the word *dka'* (difficult), the prefix of which falls under the category *neuter.*

According to the oral instructions received, it is not the case that any native speaker could clearly distinguish them. However, listening to the speech of an educated individual who pronounces according to these subtle rules would be extremely clear and pleasant to hear. The thorough investigation of the subtleties of spelling and sounds is an extremely vast topic. It seems more suitable for the reader's further study with a native speaker than the format of this essay. Therefore it is now time for the most interesting among the four questions, namely *why* the prefixes are applied.

5d) 4) For which Purpose are (the Prefixes) Applied? དགོས་པ་ཅིའི་ཕྱིར་འཇུག་པ།

To introduce exactly at this point the major principles of the Tibetan language is not a personal choice; it follows the advice given in the *Mirror,* which starts this section with:

ཅི་ཕྱིར་འཇུག་པར་བྱེད་ཅེ་ན།། ཐོག་མར་འདི་ལྟར་ཤེས་དགོས་ཏེ།།[273]

"If one were to ask, for what purpose the prefixes are applied, then one

first needs to know the following."

The following extensive elaborations are not part of Thon Mi's root verses but are drawn from the oral explanations and the *Mirror,* which clarifies the difficult points.[274] They are an indispensible preparation for being able to grasp the meaning of Thon Mi's root verses eleven through fifteen, the most debated section of the whole work. Experts disagree about the

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273 dBangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 42.

274 The name of the commentary is: *dKa' gNad gSal ba'i Me Long - The Mirror which Reveals the Difficult Points.*

correct interpretation of one of Thon Mi's root-verses here.[275] Such lack of clarity has lead to the composition of countless commentaries by Tibetans and non-Tibetans in the past and present. Dealing with the controversies of these works would require considerable historical-linguistic investigation. Since this paper has a different focus, it suffices to present the principles of *bdag-gzhan* and *tha*(*mi*)*dad pa* from a primarily grammatical point of view. These seem of uttermost importance and benefit to the intermediate Tibetan student reader. The explanations provided here become even more valuable as, for the most part, they do not derive from the text directly, but from indispensible oral explanations, making its complex content accessible.[276]

5d) 4a) Issues of Transitivity ཐ་དད་པ། ཐ་མི་དད་པ།

The issue of transitivity is a controversial one and the Tibetan and non-Tibetan definitions do not completely overlap. According to the commentaries and the instructions received, the Tibetan concept of transitivity is different from the one in English grammar. For example: I ate an apple. The verb "to eat" is transitive, because it has a direct object, namely, the apple.[277] A *bya tshig tha dad pa* implies that the agent and the place where the action takes place are different.

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275 The point experts disagree upon is the following: *mo ni bdag **da** ma 'ongs phyir/* is a modified reading of Thon Mi's root verse which originally read: *mo ni bdag dang ma 'ongs phyir/* This change has been undertaken by Si Tu Rin Po Che who argued that the previous commentators had completely misinterpreted Thon Mi's root verses. The difference of the two readings is whether present tense (*da*) is the domain of the prefix *a'* or it should be *dang* which merely means *and.* For further reference, see Tillemans and Herforth 1989. pp. 18-20.
Another point of disagreement is that: "These slokas teach (but do not explain) the technical terms bdag 'self,' gzhan 'other,' da-itar 'present,' hdas 'past,' and ma-hongs 'future' as meta language tags for morphemes with prefixed b-, g- and d-, h-, and m- " Miller 1992, p. 104.

276 Since most of the example sentences derive from my notes taken during the instructions, I will not reference them all separately. From now onwards, to facilitate the reading flow, I will only add footnotes to the examples that have a written source.

277 In the Latin categorization, this would be called the *accusative* object, and a common definition is to say: The direct object is what answers the question "what." What did you eat? - I ate an apple.

ངས་ཀྱུ་ཤུ་གཅིག་བཟས་པ་ཡིན།

I (agent- marked by the *byed sgra*) ate an apple (direct object).

According to the Tibetan mindset, the act of eating takes place on the apple which is separate from the agent who is endowed with volition, and therefore the verb is *tha dad pa.*

In most cases, such as the apple example, these two definitions overlap, but in some cases they do not: The verb "to find" in English is transitive, as there is a direct object, namely the thing which is found. For example, in the sentence: "I found five rupees," the money is the direct object. In Tibetan, the verb *rnyed pa* (to find) is *tha mi dad pa* for two reasons: First of all, the "agent" does not have control or volition over the process of finding and secondly, the action of finding happens on the "agent" and is therefore not *tha dad* (separate) from him. The fact that the "agent" is not really the agent becomes clear in the Tibetan sentence:

ང་ལ་སྒོར་མོ་ལྔ་སྐྱེད་བྱུང་།

Lit: The action of finding five rupees happened on me.

The *la don* clearly indicates that *nga* is not the agent, but the place where the action takes place.[278] It would be wrong to put a *byed sgra* (agentive particle) instead of the *la don* particle. The absence of intention is shown by the choice of the non-volitional auxiliary *byung.* Such examples are an indication that it is not only incorrect to equate the term "transitive" with *tha dad pa*, but they also illustrate that the underlying concept is different and therefore needs to be understood.

Tibetans distinguish a five-fold division of intransitive verbs, presented below. Their comparison with the English definition is left for the reader.

a) Verbs of motion: *'gro,* (to go), *'phur* (to fly), etc. are *tha mi dad pa.* They involve volition, but the action of going and flying does not take place anywhere separate (*tha dad*) from the agent.

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[278] The *nga* fulfils the requirements to be marked with a *la don*; it is the "place where an action takes place or is directed towards." (Above definition of the *la don*, see pp. 23-27) In terms of *rnam dbye*, *nga* is in *rnam dbe bzhi pa*, because one is affected by the finding of something.

b) Resultative verbs: *'khor,* (to turn), *'khol* (to boil), etc. Though there might have been a separate actor who has turned (*bskor*) the wheel or boiled (*bskol*) the water, at the moment in question, this actor is not actually present (anymore) and therefore the verb is *tha mi dad pa.*

c) Fruition verbs: *thub,* (to be able), *shes* (to know, to be able), etc. are *tha mi dad pa* because while during the process of training there was a separate actor and effort involved, at the stage of *thub,* and *shes,* there is no longer volition.

d) Verbs of sensing: *Mthong,* (to see), *go* (to hear), etc. are *tha mi dad pa* as there is no volition involved and the action takes place on the "agent."[279]

e) Natural verbs: with *shi,* (to die), *skye* (to arise), etc. neither volition nor a separate actor are involved in these processes, as they happen naturally.[280]

The above classification may help the reader to let go of the English-grammar based definition and try to understand the Tibetan view instead.

Among the four- or eight-fold classification (see below) of all verbs in Tibetan, *bya tshig tha mi dad pa* mostly fall under the fourth *cha mnyam* (balanced).[281] A considerable

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279 According to the instructions received, such a notion could be argued. It is related to the philosophical question about where the seeing takes place and whether or not there is an external object present which is independent from the apprehender, etc. Since such discussions, though of interest, are of more philosophical than grammatical nature, they cannot be treated here.
This is mainly the group of verbs where Tibetan and Western teachers' categorizations differ. Tournadre classifies these as transitive. Tournadre and Sangda 2003, p. 142.

280 The written source of this five-fold classification is unknown to me. My presentation derives from the teaching notes taken in Fall 2010 in KTM, Nepal.

281 The Tibetans assert a four- or eight-fold categorization of verbs depending on the morphological changes they undergo when conjugated in the three times. They are called *spyi, bye brag, mthor bu* and *cha mnyam* (general, specific, miscellaneous and balanced) and if their *cha 'dra* (subdivision, similar to the main division) are also counted, they encompass every possible full verb.

1) + 2) The *spyi* follows straightforwardly Thon Mi's root verse:
All verbs of the category *spyi* are characterized as follows: The prefix ***ba*** (*pho)* for the past tense, the present tense requires a prefix ***a'*** (*mo),* and the future is marked with the neutral prefixes ***da*** and ***ga***. There is no prefix applied for the imperative, but sometimes there is a second suffix. Examples of these types of verbs (past, present, future, imperative) are: ***b****tul,* '*dul,* **g***dul, thul* (to tame) or *phye, 'byed,* ***d****bye, phyes* (to open) the *spyi cha 'dra* is almost the same, but instead of a *ba* another prefix is used for the past.

3) + 4) The second category is called *bye brag* (the specific) and it obtains its name because only one prefix, *ba,* is used for all three tenses. The rule of this category is: past has both pre- and second suffix, the present none, the future pre- and imperative only second suffix. Two examples for this category (past, present, future and imperative) are: *sgom,* ***b****sgom****s****,* ***b****sgom, sgom****s****,* (to cultivate, to meditate) or *sub,* ***b****sub****s****,* ***b****sub, sub****s*** (to erase). Its subdivision, *cha 'dra* can only be distinguished by the presence of a *ma* prefix in place of a *ba.*

5) + 6) The miscellaneous third categorization obtains its designation by being a combination of the *spyi* and *bye brag.* Verbs falling under this categorization are characterized by a *ba* prefix in the past and future and an *a'* in present tense and sometimes in the future. The rule of the second suffix is mostly the same as in the *bye*

number of *tha mi dad pa* verbs interestingly have a main letter which is *ma ning* (neuter, *kha, pha, tha, cha*). This is not a coincidence but an expression that *bya tshig tha mi dad pa* cannot be classified according to the category of *bdag* or *gzhan* (self and other). Since these are associated with *pho* and *mo* (male and female), certain *tha mi dad pa*-verbs often have *ma ning* main letters.[282] Thus, the categorization of *bdag* and *gzhan*, to which the next section is dedicated, does not directly apply to *tha mi dad pa* verbs.[283]

5d) 4b) Notion of Self and Other[284] བདག་གཞན།

According to the oral explanations, the notion of *bdag* and *gzhan* originates from the Buddhist concept of *gang zag gi bdag* (the self of the person) and *chos kyi bdag* (self of phenomena).[285] All phenomena of the world - and therefore of a sentence as a designation of the appearing world - are divided into *bdag* and *gzhan*. They depend on each other: if there is no *bdag*, there cannot be any *gzhan*. The division of *gang zag gi bdag* and *chos kyi bdag* becomes relevant in the discussion of the agent. This needs to be divided into *bsam pa dang*

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brag category. To give two examples: ***b****tungs, 'thung*, ***b****tung, 'thungs* (to drink) or ***b****krus, 'khrud*, ***b****kru, khrud* (to wash). Its counterpart, *cha 'dra*, is characterized by the absence of any prefix in the past and future tense.

7) + 8) The fourth category makes use of only one prefix for all tenses. Though Thon Mi specifies the female prefix *ma*, all of them can be found: *'khor, 'khor, 'khor*, (to turn by itself), *mthong mthong mthong* (to see), *mkhas, mkhas, mkhas* (to be skilled). Non-volitional verbs logically do not have an imperative form. If a sense of imperative is required they are combined with the verb *byed*, for example: *mthong bar byed 'a* (Make sure you see (it!)) Its subdivision is characterized by the presence of a second suffix in the past and imperative tenses.

[282] The source of these observations as well as the eight-fold verb classification is unknown to me. The presentation here derives from the notes taken in Fall 2010 in KTM, Nepal. Following the traditional Tibetan style of oral instructions, the teacher did not give any written paper but merely explained them to me. Gyurmé briefly mentions this division, but leaves out the *cha snams.* Gyurmé, Stoddard and Tournadre 1994, p. 191.

[283] The *bdag gzhan* categorization does apply in the sense that tenses are related to it (future to *gzhan*, present to *bdag*, etc.). But the constituting part of a sentence with *tha mi dad pa*-verb is not classified in terms of *bdag* and *gzhan.*

[284] The discussion of this topic in this essay is not exhaustive at all; it treats *bdag-gzhan* merely from a rather practical point of view. For a more historical-linguistic perspective, I recommend consulting articles by experts such as Snellgrove, Miller, Verhagen, etc. Their findings go much further and take into account, for example, the relevance of these principles for past grammarians. Snellgrove suggests that: "those well-meaning grammarians have lost all true sense of perspective with their exaggerated preoccupation with the problem of bDag and gZHan, and even the distinctions made between these concepts, in themselves quite valid, have become largely artificial." Snellgrove 1954, p. 180.

[285] Tournadre supports such theory. He explains that the grammarians were often also experts in the other four great sciences, in particular in Buddhist philosophy. It is therefore plausible that they borrowed philosophical principles for grammatical categorizations. Gyurmé, Stoddard and Tournadre 1994, p. 270.

ldan (having intention) versus inanimate matter. The concept of *bdag-gzhan* displays in every occasion of the spoken as well as literal language. As in a situation of *spoken* language, the speaker is always *bdag*; these two occasions need to be treated separately.[286] A thorough understanding of it by the foreigner is important. We lack conditioning to *bdag-gzhan* from childhood, as is the case with native speakers. The following elaborations will relate to discussions of tenses, volition, active and passive, auxiliaries, etc. This shows clearly the all-pervasiveness and subtlety of this Tibetan concept, which, surprisingly, is typically ignored in manuals composed by non-Tibetans.

All constitutive parts of a written sentence can be classified into *dngos po bdag* or *dngos po gzhan.* Considering that the term *dngos po* ("entity") is not used by the author of the root verse makes the whole undertaking considerably speculative.[287] All consulted commentaries and my teacher presume that *dngos po bdag* is meant when the original root text reads *bdag.*[288] Rendering this term into English is not simple either; the closest translation is the phrase "constituting part of a sentence," as the term "thing" used by some commentators is misleading.[289]

The *Mirror* uses the (for Tibetans) famous woodcutter example to illustrate the division into *dngos po bdag* and *dngos po gzhan.*

ཤིང་བཟོ་བས་སྟ་རེས་ཤིང་བཅད་དོ།[290] The woodcutter cut the wood with the axe.

The *shing bzo* (woodcutter) as well as his instrument the *sta re* (axe) that are in Tibetan classified *byed pa po* (agent) and *byed pa* (instrument) are *dngos po bdag.*[291] They are also

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286 This, however, does not imply that the term *bdag* is always *dngos po bdag.* For example: *bdag la nyon/* In this sentence, the term *bdag* is *dngos po gzhan*, clearly marked by the *la don.*

287 For further historical reference to the relation with the Sanskrit term *bhāva,* read Miller 1992. According to this expert "the whole Tibetan grammatical tradition has uniformly treated the five lines almost entirely in terms of Indic bhāva theory." Miller 1992, p. 103.

288 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 42. Further commentaries which use *dngos po bdag* for *bdag* and *dngos po gzhan* for *gzhan* are: Tshe Tan Zhabs Drung 2005, Si Tu Rin Po Che 2005, Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, etc.

289 It is not always a thing, but can be a place or an individual as well. One could consider translating *dngos po* with "entity," which according to definition has "the ability to perform a function." Such term would also reflect the notion of *dngos po* in this context.

290 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 43.

referred to as *byed pa po gtso bo* (main agent) and *byed pa po phal* (subsidiary agent), respectively. The spelling of the verb *bcad* indicates to the skilled reader that the verb is *tha dad pa,* involves *rtsol ba* (effort) from the side of the main agent who is animated, and that the action is completed.[292] These "constituting parts of the action" are under control, or "owned" by the actor and therefore *dngos po bdag.* One may call *shing* the object, or the place where the action takes place, in Tibetan *las* or *bya ba'i yul.* As the wood is the thing upon which the action is performed, it does not have control and is therefore considered *dngos po gzhan.* One could also add another *bya ba'i yul,* namely, the forest where this woodcutting takes place. In that case, both the larger place of the action, the forest, and the wood are considered *dngos po gzhan.*

A common mistake which happens to beginners is to think that such categorization is fixed and applies in any sentence. This is not the case:

བདག་གི་གྲོགས་པོས་ཤིང་གིས་ཤིང་བཟོ་བ་བརྡུངས་སོ།

My friend hit the carpenter with the wood.

Here, the *grogs po* (friend) and the *shing* (wood) are *dngos po bdag,* namely the *byed pa po gtso bo* and *byed pa po phal* (main agent and instrument). And consequently the carpenter is the place of the action of beating and therefore *dngos po gzhan.*

Having understood this relatively simple principle, one considers more complex situations like the following. These are related to the notion of *bya las* and *byed las* (active and passive). Here not only the agent and object but also the mode of the verb is adjusted according to *dngos po bdag* and *dngos po gzhan*.

ཁོང་ཇ་འཐུང་བཞིན་པ་རེད།

She is in the middle of drinking tea.

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291 Note that the *sa* is the agentive particle, referred to usually as instrumental usage of the agentive particle.

292 If the wood would fall apart by itself one would say *chad.* The same applies if the agent had no intention of breaking the wood; also in such a case, the *bya tshig tha mi dad pa - chad* would be used.

ཁོང་བཀྲང་བཞིན་པའི་ཇ་འདི་ཞིམ་པོ་འདུག

The tea she is in the middle of drinking is tasty.

The first sentence falls under the category of *byed las* (active) and the *bzhin pa* is related to *khong* (the agent) and therefore *dngos po bdag*. The *pa* transforms a mere verb into a *dngos po*, which subsequently can be classified into *bdag* or *gzhan*. Thon Mi's rules, wherein spelling of the verb is required, will be elaborated later. The *bzhin pa* in the second sentence pertains to the *ja* (tea), the object. It therefore falls under the category *gzhan*, and the sentence is *bya las* (passive).

A fundamental difference between active voice and passive voice or *byed las* and *bya las* is lacking in the Tibetan language.[293] The difference between the two is merely a question of emphasis. To put it simply: Although placed at the end of a sentence, the verb is paramount, and whatever immediately precedes it is emphasised and therefore transforms the sentence into an active or passive mode.

ཁེ་ས་ཁོང་གིས་མེ་ཏོག་སྨིན་རྩེ་པོ་གཅིག་ཉོས་སོང་།

Lit. A beautiful flower was purchased by him yesterday.

ཁེ་ས་མེ་ཏོག་སྨིན་རྩེ་པོ་གཅིག་ཁོང་གིས་ཉོས་སོང་།

Yesterday he bought a beautiful flower.

Consequently, the first sentence would be considered *bya las* as the verb is preceded by the object, *me tog* (flower) and the second sentence is *byed las* because the agent *khong* (he) immediately precedes the verb.[294]

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293 Such was my conclusion reached based on the oral instructions received. Gyurmé agrees with this statement. For further reference see Appendix 5 in his work. Gyurmé, Stoddard and Tournadre 1992, pp. x-xii.

294 According to the oral explanations received, the difference is not of fundamental nature and therefore not always reproduced into English. The first sentence would also commonly be translated with: Yesterday he bought a beautiful flower. The principle of emphasis with respect to the immediacy to the verb however is important:

ཁོང་གིས་མེ་ཏོག་སྨིན་རྩེ་པོ་གཅིག་ཁེ་ས་ཉོས་སོང་།

In such a sentence the word *yesterday* is crucial and needs to be emphasised in some way in the English translation in order to reflect the particular Tibetan word order.

The notion of *bdag* and *gzhan* is of foremost importance with respect to the verb "to be." According to the instruction received, the usage of the three persons is a mere imputation and adoption to the Latin grammar foreign to Tibetan.[295] Such theory finds support in the fact that Tibetan only knows *yin* and *red* which represent *bdag* and *gzhan* respectively.[296] In other words, since the second and third person makes use of the same auxiliaries, there is no grammatical reason to distinguish them.

Leaving this question unresolved, this essay aims at the reader's understanding of the underlying notion of the two poles of *yin* and *red, bdag* and *gzhan.* These should *not* be understood as essentially linked with the first and second/third person respectively as it is commonly taught! According to the teachings received, both of them have their respective domain: *yin* introduces something that is unknown while *red* is used to point out a fact, something that is known. Being versed with this principle, the foreign student comes to understand and use the considerable variety of modes and implied meanings of the auxiliaries used in spoken Tibetan.

Beginner-level Tibetan students are commonly taught that *yin* belongs to *nga* (I) and *red* belongs to *khyed rang* (you) and *khong* (he/she). It would be foolish to argue against this, but this Tibetan grammar emphasises that *yin* essentially pertains to *bdag*. This does not, however, mean that one only uses it with *nga.* Likewise *red* pertains to *gzhan,* but this does not prevent it from being used for oneself when the circumstances require it. One might wonder which occasions require such "exceptional" usage. *Red* has to be used for oneself when talking about something that others (*gzhan*) already know and in any situation where one reports about oneself, such as in a movie or dream. When stating a fact to someone who

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295 It is the case that Sanskrit makes use of the three persons. Unfortunately, unfamiliar with this language, I cannot make any statement about a possible relation here. It is important also to remember that Tibetan does use the personal pronouns, *nga, khyed rang, khong,* so there is a notion of three persons. But with respect to *bdag* and *gzhan,* and the auxiliaries *yin* and *red,* there are only the two.

296 And their negations: *min, ma red,* and its existential equivalent: *yod med* and *yod red, yod ma red.*

knows the statement to be true, it would be grammatically incorrect to use any auxiliary other than *red*, for example:

ང་དགེ་རྒན་རེད།	I am a teacher.
བློག་བརྙན་ནང་ལ་ང་རྒྱལ་པོ་རེད།	In the movie, I am a king.

This usage of *red* in the second example indicates that the speaker did not have a choice to take up his or her role or that everyone (*gzhan*) already knew the statement to be true.

In the same way, *yin* and *yod* have to be understood to express a connection to the speaker, which is always *bdag*. If one says:

འདི་ངའི་སྐྱུ་ཀུ་ཡིན།	This is my pen.
བཀྲ་ཤིས་ནང་ལ་ཡོད།	Tashi is at home.

Using *yin* one is introducing what another might not know, emphasising the relationship between the pen and oneself. Not only is *bkra shis nang la **yod*** a correct sentence, it carries a very particular notion of oneself being either the reason for him to be there or having special information about his abiding there. When little children play with dolls, they use those notions correctly saying:

འདི་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཡིན།	འདི་རྒྱལ་མོ་ཡིན།	This is the king (and) this is the queen.

The child is saying *yin* because the doll does not have the ability to express that itself, and it emphasises the relation to the child imputing these roles on the dolls.

5d) 4b) 1) *Bdag-Gzhan* and the Auxiliaries in the Three Times བདག་གཞན་དང་དུས་གསུམ།

To merely emphasise the fact that auxiliaries indicate any of the three times ignores their additional function which is related to the notion of *bdag* and *gzhan.*[297] In other words, understanding the auxiliaries in their entirety goes far beyond a mere indication of whether an action has happened, is in the process of happening or is yet to happen. Things become challenging since in spoken Tibetan (most) sentences indicate whether the speaker has direct knowledge of the information conveyed or only an inferential one and whether or not volition is involved.

The **past tense** has the highest number of subdivisions and issues to be discussed because distinctions are to be made concerning whether the speaker saw the action taking place or only the result of the action. The examples illustrate that the notions of *yod, yod red,* etc. when used as auxiliaries remain the same as in their function as a main verb.[298]

ཁོང་གིས་མོག་མོག་བཟོས་ཡོད་རེད།

This sentence should be translated as "she must have made momos," rather than just saying: "she has made momos." The speaker neither saw the process of making them nor has a direct knowledge of the result, the momos.[299] The *yod* in this sentence indicates that the speaker has some knowledge, some experience, that this person sometimes makes momos, etc. All this is expressed by the word *yod,* which is associated with *bdag.* The word *red* just indicates that this *is,* that this presence of experience is the fact. Again, if one wanted to particularly indicate that oneself is the reason for the other person to have made the momos, one would have to say:

ཁོང་གིས་མོག་མོག་བཟོས་ཡོད།

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297 Tibetan lexica tend to classify verbs with respect to four times, past, present and future along with imperative. In terms of their relation to *bdag-gzhan,* as mentioned earlier, future is *gzhan,* present *bdag* and imperative is related to both of them.

298 Whether this is the reason that Hannah calls the verb "to be" the only real verb in Tibetan remains an open question. Hannah 1996, preface.

299 In that case, one would have to say: *khong gis mog mog bzos song* or *khong gis mog mog bzos 'dug,* respectively.

The notion of *yod,* indicating the presence of something, becomes very clear by the two following contrasting sentences: One cannot say:

ངས་མོག་མོག་དེ་ཟོ་བཟས་ཡོད། (I have eaten those momos)

It would go against the logic of the law of the senses; momos that are eaten are not visible objects, they are not present, *yod pa.* Likewise, one cannot say: *nga phyin yod* (I have gone), because, having gone, one is no longer present; it is correct to say: *phiyn* ***med*** (I haven't gone).

An interesting subtlety, which tends to be ignored or explained incorrectly, is the difference between the past auxiliaries *'dug* and *bzhag.* It is not the case that there is any difference of amazement, etc.[300] The difference is that the auxiliary *'dug,* in this context, is associated with *bdag,* while the auxiliary *bzhag* is connected to *gzhan,* the situation itself. For this reason, only *'dug* can be used as a question or as a negation.

ཁོང་སྤྱིའས་འདུག་གས། Has she arrived? ཁོང་སྤྱིའས་མི་འདུག She has not arrived

ཁོང་སྤྱིའས་བཞག་གས། ཁོང་སྤྱིའས་མི་བཞག

While the first versions are correct and commonly used, the second ones would be incorrect and therefore not used (by native speakers). *bZhag* emphasises *gzhan,* the mere *situation* and not the addressed person's knowledge about it. For this reason it is not used in an interrogative context. To be able to answer the question, the person would need a personal insight into the situation which is related to *'dug,* connected to *bdag.* The same is true with a negation: One could only say that something is *not* the case based on direct evidence. For this reason, one never says *bzhag gas* or *mi bzhag.* The speaker is, however, able to express that s/he hasn't had the direct evidence of the arrival of the person (*mi 'dug*).

The next set of examples, using the same sentence with different auxiliaries, concisely summarizes and concludes the various notions of the past auxiliaries and their relation to *bdag* and *gzhan*:

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300 This is what people commonly think. The source of this misinterpretation is unclear to me.

1) དས་འབུ་ཅིག་བསད་པ་ཡིན། 2) དས་འབུ་ཅིག་བསད་སོང་།

3) དས་འབུ་ཅིག་བསད་འདུག 4) དས་འབུ་ཅིག་བསད་པ་རེད།

Since English does not differentiate notions of volition or evidence, all of them would be translated as "I've killed a bug." Sentences one and two are different in terms of volition, the first related to *bdag*, the agent, and the second to *gzhan*, the insect. Sentence three focuses on the result of the action, which is visibly present, while in the case of the fourth, the emphasis is on the mere act with no mention or indication of volition.

Having discussed the *grammatical* past in some detail, it is important to be clear about another peculiarity of Tibetan language, the so-called “present tense auxiliaries," which are commonly used to talk about the semantic past. If one wishes to say, "When I was small, I used to play with my friends," there is no other option than to use *gi yod*, which one tends to associate with present tense. The *yod* is associated with *dngos po bdag*, indicating volition from the side of the actor and also the *yod pa* (presence) of the knowledge about it:

ང་ལོ་ཆུང་ཆུང་ཡིན་དུས་རོགས་པ་དང་མཉམ་དུ་རྩེད་མོ་མང་པོ་རྩེ་གི་ཡོད།

"**Present tense** auxiliaries" have the capacity to either indicate a generality or to show an action while it is happening. In terms of *bdag* and *gzhan*, present tense is associated with *bdag*. People have the illusion of being able to control the present, as opposed to the past or future. This is nicely illustrated by the Tibetan verb *bdag po rgyag*, which means to own, to be in charge, or to have power over. In spoken Tibetan, when no indication of time is made, one infers that it is present tense at the moment the conversation takes place. Accordingly, to say:

ཁྱེད་རང་ཤ་ཟ་གི་ཡོད་པས།

This sentence can mean two different things and only the context can provide clarity. In its first and more pervasive function, this sentence would have to be translated with: "Are you a carnivore?" It is important to note that no meat-eating activity is happening here, it is a mere discussion of a habit, a generality. The second function, related to the present moment, would have to be translated with: "Are you eating meat at the moment?" The *yod* also in this context means *having*. One is asking whether one *has* the habit of doing so, or whether one is *endowed* with the action of meat eating. For reasons of space, this essay does not present further details about volition, direct versus inferential knowledge, etc. [301] This paper emphasises, however, that any auxiliary can be combined with "so-called volitional" or "in-volitional" verbs without changing the function of the auxiliary in the slightest. Despite a lack of volition with respect to the sickness, in order to express, "I get sick every year," one uses the same auxiliary as to say "I go to India every single year."

ང་ལོ་རྟག་པར་ན་གི་ཡོད། [302]

ང་ལོ་རྟག་པར་རེ་བཞིན་རྒྱ་གར་ལ་འགྲོ་གི་ཡོད། .

To use the same sentence in different modes illustrates that also in the present tense, emphasis of either *bdag* or *gzhan* can vary considerably. To express that the process of relinquishing the momos is happening, one has a three-fold choice of expression:

ངས་མོག་མོག་ཟ་གི་ཡོད།

ང་མོག་མོག་ཟ་བསྡད་ཡོད།

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301 As mentioned above, these would be interesting topics to consider in detail. They are, however, not mentioned in Thon Mi's root verses, which are the major topic of elucidation here. For a very complete reference about modes of verbs, volition, etc. read Gyurmé, Stoddard and Tournadre 1992, pp. 180-260.

302 To make this point more clear: It is not the case that the auxiliaries are essentially linked with the type of verb (volitional and in volitional). Every "so-called" volitional verb can be performed by mistake. In such a situation, the "so-called" in volitional auxiliary *song* would be used for oneself, which clearly indicates that all combinations are possible. For example: *ao, ngas khyed rang gi ja btung song/* = Oh, I drank per mistake your tea! The fact that one did not do it on purpose is only indicated by the *song.*

ང་མོ་གཉ་མོ་བཟས་པའི་སྐྱང་ཡིན།

While in the first, the focus is on the momos, which pertain to *gzhan*, in the second sentence the situation of eating itself is emphasised and the particular focus in the last one is the person eating them, pertaining to *dngos po bdag.*

Apart from indicating that an action is yet to happen, the **future** tense also expresses the nature of something. Such a notion comes about due to its association to *dngos po gzhan.* Because it is *gzhan,* one has no choice. Again it is only by context that it can be understood which mode is meant.

སྤྲ་ཤ་ཟ་གི་རེད།

As the reader knows, this sentence on the one hand indicates that the tiger *will* eat the meat. What one might be less aware of is that it could also mean that meat eating is the tiger's inherent nature and that he eats it without any choice or free will. To further illustrate this lack of control:

ལམ་ཀ་འདི་ནས་འགྲོ་ན་འབུ་གསོད་ཀྱི་རེད།

If one takes this path, one will kill bugs.

This expresses that it is the very nature of this path to be inhabited by bugs that risk being stepped upon.

ཁ་ལག་འདི་བཟས་ན་བྱོད་ཁོག་ན་གི་རེད།

If one eats this food, one will get a stomachache.

Since English does not have these different modes, the translation would not vary, but in Tibetan, it can either mean future or asserting that this is the very nature of this food. Having fully grasped this, it is not surprising that *gi red* is used with so called "volitional verbs" for oneself.

ང་ཚོ་འདི་འདྲས་ཟེ་ལབ་ཀྱི་མ་རེད། We do not say it in this way.

This may sound like an incorrect conjugation, but it is correct, and unambiguously indicates the fact that we express something in a certain way, and this is not our own choice, it is *dngos po gzhan.*

Also to talk about the semantic future, it is sometimes correct to use "present tense auxiliaries" which strictly follow the division of direct perception versus inference. Since no such distinction is made in English, these auxiliaries seem to present difficulty to the foreign student. For this reason, examples with elucidations are provided in the footnotes. These sentences could all be translated with "she is coming to tomorrow's party."

སང་ཉིན་ཁོང་ཐུགས་སྤྲོ་ལ་ཡོང་གི་རེད།

སང་ཉིན་ཁོང་ཐུགས་སྤྲོ་ལ་ཡོང་གི་འདུག

སང་ཉིན་ཁོང་ཐུགས་སྤྲོ་ལ་ཡོང་པ་འདུག

སང་ཉིན་ཁོང་ཐུགས་སྤྲོ་ལ་ཡོང་པ་ཡོད།

1) The first sentence without ambiguity indicates future; this is easily recognizable due to the *gi red*. 2) The second one would be said in a specific occasion, namely of looking at a list of names indicating the invited guests. As the speaker has the direct experience of seeing her name there, he has to say *gi 'dug.* 3) Likewise *pa 'dug*, which indicates a very high degree of probability for her to come, is used on an occasion where the speaker, due to the direct perception of something (such as her buying a nice shirt for the party) infers that she is coming. 4) The last sentence ties these different notions presented above together. The *yod,* which is associated with *dngos po bdag*, indicates that the speaker has insider knowledge about the person coming to the party. Or, more specifically, the speaker is the very cause or reason for her to come.

5d) 4d) The Actual Explanation of the Root Verse རྩ་བའི་འགྲེལ་དངོས།

Having understood the principles explained above, the reader is now at the point of appreciating Thon Mi's controversial root verse about why the various prefixes are applied.

ཕོ་ནི་འདས་དང་གཞན་བསྟན་ཕྱིར།	Male to make past and other (entity)
མ་ནིང་གཉིས་ཀ་དང་ལྡན་ཆེད།	Neutral for both and for the present (tense)
མོ་ནི་བདག་དང་མ་འོངས་ཕྱིར།	Female for self, present[303] and future
ཤིན་ཏུ་མོ་ནི་མཉམ་ཕྱིར་རོ།[304]	And extremely female for (all) equally.

In other words, the male prefix *ba* marks past tense and other (entity), the two neutral prefixes *ga* and *da* indicate self and other (entity) as well as present tense, the female prefix *a'* is used for self (entity) present and future tense, while the extremely female prefix *ma* is applied equally for self and other as well as the three times. Given the overlap one may wonder how useful these rules are. The answer remains open for further investigation, but it is certain that they need to be studied along with the eight-fold classification of Tibetan verbs presented on pages 85&86.

The *Mirror* presents each of them separately with illustrating examples. Here the female prefix *a'* will suffice to provide an insight into the style of the elucidations while the remaining prefixes are to be drawn from the relevant commentaries.[305]

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303 It is important to note at this point that the reading *mo ni bdag **da** ma 'ongs phyir/* is a modified reading of Thon Mi's root verse which originally read: *mo ni bdag **dang** ma 'ongs phyir/* This change has been undertaken by Si Tu Rin Po Che who argued that the previous commentators had completely misinterpreted Thon Mi's root verses. The difference of the two reading is whether present tense (*da*) is the domain of the prefix *a'* or it should be *dang* which merely means *and.*
It goes by far beyond the scope of this essay to resolve such type of debates. For further reference, see Tillemans and Herforth 1989, pp. 18-20. Or consider Miller's (critical) book review of this work called "Indic Models in Tibetan Language" 1992.

304 Thon Mi 1991, p. 12.

305 For example: rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, pp. 45-49, Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, pp. 90-96 or: Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, pp. 105-118, etc.

Prefix	Domain	Example
འ·	Agent of a *tha dad pa* verb in present tense:	དགྲ་ལ་འཐབ་པ་པོ། The one who fights with the enemy.
འ·	Agent of a *tha mi dad pa* verb in present tense:	མགོ་བོ་འཁོར་བ་པོ། The one who is deceived.
འ·	*Active* (As opposed to passive)	སྣུམ་མ་འཁེལ་བར་བྱེད། Someone spins the yarn.
འ·	Present continuous	འཁེལ་བཞིན་པ་རེད། Someone is in the middle of spinning the yarn.
འ·	Future:	མཐའ་མ་འབྲལ་བར་འགྱུར། In the end (something) will be separate.[306]

As explained above, *dngos po bdag* is the agent or the instrument of a *bya tshig tha dad pa* such as in example one.[307] The third example, due to being active voice, is also related to the agent and therefore *dngos po bdag*. Examples four and five merely indicate the time, namely present and future, which is clearly shown by the present and future auxiliary *bzhin* and *'gyur*, respectively.

306 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 41.

307 The issue around *dngos po* is a very controversial one as this term is not explicitly mentioned in Thon Mi's root verse. Though Tibetan commentators unequivocally assert that *dngos po bdag* is meant when *bdag* is written in the root verse, Western scholars disagree about its relationship with the Sanskrit notion *bhāva*. Miller criticises Tillemans and Herforth: "T and H appear unaware of any of this (e.g. the relationship of *dngos po* and *bhāva* - essay author's note). Whenever they encounter dngos-po = bhdva, which happens hundreds of times in a wide variety of contexts even within the relatively small corpus of the Tibetan commentators that they treat, they routinely render the term as 'entities', never once calling attention to the grammatical problem that this term presents, or indeed ever giving any indication that they have even recognized that dngos-po = bhdva is a grammatical term." Miller 1992, p. 105.
Myself not being familiar with Sanskrit, no comment can be made to clarify this issue. The traditional Tibetan Buddhist definition of *dngos po*, "that which is able to perform a function," works. A certain part of the sentence performs the function of either falling under the category of self or other. Being aware of such, it is a fine convention to translate it with "entity." However this essay would recommend "constituting part of a sentence" as a most accurate translation for *dgos po.*

As various domains are overlapping, it is almost impossible to make unambiguous rules. It is however useful to thoroughly know the eight-fold division of the verbs mentioned above. The *Messenger* provides at the end a rough summery which could be useful for the intermediate student reader: "Well then, in the context of a verb which has a separate agent, the prefix *a'* is never and the prefixes *ga* and *da* are rare in the context of past tense.[308] The prefix *ba* is hardly found for present tense and is certain that *ba* never precedes a verb which has a super-scribed letter and is in present tense."[309]

What is furthermore of practical application is the famous rule about the *bye brag* verbs presented at this point in the commentary. It clearly illustrates a main domain of the male prefix *ba*. This rule relates to the Tibetan assumption that letters and words have a certain weight. The root verse of the *Mirror* reads:

འདས་ལ་བས་འཕྲལ་ཡང་འཇུག་ཡོད།	Past has prefix *ba* and second suffix
ད་ལྟ་བ་ལ་གཉིས་ཀ་མེད།	Present tense has none of them
མ་འོངས་འཕྲལ་ཡོད་ཡང་འཇུག་མེད།	Future has the prefix but no second suffix
སྐུལ་ཚིག་འཕྲལ་མེད་ཡང་འཇུག་ཡོད།[310]	Imperative has no prefix but the second suffix.

According to oral teachings, generally speaking, the more letters a word consists of the "heavier" it becomes. In terms of simple nouns for example, *gro* or *nas* (wheat and barley) are "lighter" than the word *'bru* (grains) which implies a plural. The same is the case with verbs.[311] When there are more persons and objects involved in an action, an additional *sa mgo* (super-scribed *sa*) is commonly applied, as is the case with many *bya tshig tha dad pa*. For

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308 As mentioned above, "a verb which has a separate agent" is the Tibetan definition of a *bya tshig tha dad pa*.

309 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 50.

310 dByangs Can rDo rJe quoted in rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 50.

311 Non-Tibetan experts in the past have made similar observations. Snellgrove asserts that "verbs that have a head letter *sa* are more likely to be causative - but not always." Snellgrove 1954, p. 180. "Causative" is a term used also by Tournadre together with its "resultative." Causative would be: *slangs*, (to wake, get someone up) and its result would then be *langs* (to get up oneself). Tournadre and Sangda 2003, pp. 352-356.

example, the verb *bskol* (to boil something - agent and object involved) is heavier than its *tha mi dad pa* companion *'khol* (to boil - only the thing itself).

This theory holds with respect to the tenses of verbs, the *bye brag* verbs: Presuming the prefix *ba* being heavier than a second suffix (which seems plausible, as a second suffix has less effect on a word than the prefix) one ends up with the following scale of "weight": A past action weighs most, as it has been completed.[312] When the action is in the process of going on, the effort is the least - the action almost seems to happen by itself, and it is therefore the lightest. Since it is related to the present tense, imperative is taught to be almost as light as present. "Related" means that an order is given in the present - its implementation is in the future.[313] And future tense, which has a prefix, would therefore be the second heaviest on the scale.

These elaborations derive from the oral teachings received and are subject to further scientific-linguistic investigation. They are, however, an interesting complementation to the highly technical nature of the actual content of the *TKJ*. So are Thon Mi's concluding thoughts, which deal with human qualities rather than grammatical finesses.

5e) Last Section and Thon Mi's Concluding Remarks of the *TKJ* ཐོན་མི་ཡི་མཇུག་བསྡོམས།

As the last section of the *TKJ* is neither of particular difficulty nor profundity it will not be extensively elaborated upon. It deals with plausible issues such as the insight that a word on its own cannot be classified as a certain *rnam dbye*. Only in combination with its respective *phrad* is it able to perform a function within a sentence. For example: The word Lobsang does not provide any indication about this individual. rDo rJe rGyal Po explains: "If

312 Remember that the past tense has both prefix and second suffix; present tense has none, etc.

313 This is the reason why imperative is related to both *bdag-gzhan* and therefore often has its main letter *ma ning.*

one intends to express the action Lobsang has performed one applies the *byed sgra*, while in order to show the qualities belonging to this individual, the *'brel sgra* is used, etc."[314]

In the last section, the author contemplates the fact that a main letter cannot stay on its own; it always needs a suffix in order to be a complete syllable. Such a statement needs to be understood in its historical context. It does not apply to contemporary spoken Tibetan where there are words consisting of only one letter, such as *ra* (goat), *la* (pass), *nya* (fish), etc. This is an achievement of the language revisions before which such words would have had a suffix *a'*.[315] Even though at first sight, a main letter seems just as indispensible, the suffix is emphasised here and throughout the whole *TKJ*.[316] It literally says that "if there were no suffixes, there would be no syllables, without these tiny pieces no word could be built and as words and phrases carry the meaning no verbal or literal expression whatsoever would be possible."[317]

The concluding verses again underline in poetic language the uttermost importance of the study of this grammar text. The first reason is that words may sound very similar but their meaning is completely different! This seems a plausible one to all, Tibetans and students of the language. The second reason is that without this knowledge one is completely deprived of the ability to teach, compose or debate, which seems to illustrate the intended audience and background of the commentators.[318] The author warns that those individuals, who do engage into these activities without having studied thoroughly, resemble a "fox wearing a lion's fur."[319] The dedication is in line with the content of the text: Instead of offering the virtue accumulated by the composition of this work towards the enlightenment of all beings, it is

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314 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 72.

315 For a further, more thorough exploration about the three language revisions, read Duff, 2009, pp. 45-85.

316 The discussion about the *phrad gzhan dbang can* has to do with the gender of the suffixes. Also the fact that Thon Mi's root verses do not teach the *slar sdud to* after the second suffix is a clear indication that the *suffixes* but not the *second suffixes* are the main focus of this work.

317 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 76.

318 As previously mentioned, some of them were important religious figures and versed in the five major sciences, of which Buddhist philosophy is a part.

319 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 77.

dedicated that all beings may be able to understand the above-presented works.[320] As seen in the introduction to the *SCP*, schoolchildren learn that the latter is a necessary condition for the former.

5f) Conclusion མཇུག་བསྡོམས།

Rather than only following the highly technical content of the *TKJ*, the previous elaborations deal with the major principles of the Tibetan language. Non-Tibetan authors and scholars still tend to (mistakenly) equate *tha dad pa - tha mi dad pa* with grammatical categories derived from Indo-European languages.[321] This may lead to a lack of clarity and varying conclusions.[322] Other Tibetan concepts, such as the all-pervasive dichotomy of *bdag - gzhan*, do not possess equivalents in English. A thorough understanding of these Tibetan principles thus provides clarity about the correct usage of this language. More importantly, it enables the student to discuss their grammar with native speakers. The above explanations are, however, not only useful, they also reveal one more peculiar feature of the Tibetan language: some late Indic religious concepts are reflected in Thon Mi's grammar. This seems to be an indication for the relation between language, its grammar and culture. For example, the notion

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320 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 79.

321 Das, who was the first author to introduce the *SCP* and the *TKJ* to modern scholarship, already explains the following: "The study of Tibetan grammar in the West began with the attempt to classify all the words of this agglutinative language according to the grammatical categories of Latin. This at first unavoidable method has gradually been relaxed and the study of the native grammarians ought to free the grammar still more from the incongruous classifications imposed upon it." Das 1915, p. 856. Such has been the intent of this essay, which, almost a hundred years later, lets the Tibetan grammar speak from its own side.

322 Tillemans says that the verb *mthong* in the *bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* is *mistakenly* classified as *tha mi dad pa.* "There is a rather unfortunate confusion in the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo (Zang Han da cidian)* of Zhang Yisun (et al.), where verbs like *mthong ba ('to see'), shes pa* ('to know') and others are designated as *tha mi dad pa.*" Tillemans 2007, p. 9. This scholar is aware that *tha dad pa* "is indeed *not* identical to transitivity, but does capture important elements in the notion of transitivity, a notion which, duly expanded, is applicable to Tibetan." Tillemans 2007, p. 4. It remains an open question whether the Tibetans I consulted are copying this mistake from the grammarians who composed these dictionaries. On the one hand, this is reasonable to presume since being critical towards past grammarians is not a common attitude among Tibetans. On the other hand, the definitions and explanations about *mthong, she, go,* etc. being *tha mi dad pa,* received, seem very plausible.

of *bdag - gzhan* is related to the two types of self, the absence of which is an aim of realization on the Buddhist path.[323]

Of how much relevance is the gender-division of letters to a foreign student? I have not memorized all of them yet nor come across any non-Tibetan who has done so; therefore this question is left to further exploration. What *did* fascinate me was the profound connection between the sound of letters and grammatical principles. For example, the *ma ning* letters relate to both *bdag-gzhan.* Such connection is reflected in their usage in *bya tshig tha mi dad pa* and *skul tshig.* Such "secrets" remain unrevealed if one does not study their grammar with a learned native speaker teacher.

It appears that knowing all of these lists would allow one to not only read, but also compose in Tibetan. The issue of sound related to spelling is certainly of relevance to the colloquial student. Extensive explanations on these subtleties of pronunciation fill many introductory pages in Tibetan manuals.[324] Paying more attention to these phonological details enables the student to pronounce words more correctly. This avoids misunderstandings when communicating with native speakers, whose ears are conditioned from childhood to correctly distinguish those subtleties.

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323 *gang zag gi bdag* and *chos kyi bdag* (self of the person and self of phenomena).

324 Tournadre and Sangda's *Manual of Standard Tibetan* for example spends about 20 pages on pronunciation and spelling issues.

ལེའུ་དྲུག་པ།

CHAPTER 6

མཇུག་བསྡོམས། Conclusion

After diving into the ocean of Tibetan grammar, it is now time to return back to the surface and draw conclusions from this "excursion." I will analyse the relevance of Thon Mi's works for the foreign student on a practical and then more sophisticated level.[325] Before dealing with this complex issue, some concluding thoughts about each chapter may help the reader to recall the various topics.

It seems enriching for the foreign student to have an idea about the way Tibetans think about and study the origin of the grammar of their language. The second chapter of this essay therefore narrates about Thon Mi's legendary journey to India in a style that a native Tibetan teacher would. The paper in general and this section in particular are not to be read as a historical-linguistic analysis. This research's particular function is to allow the reader a tiny insight into the native speaker's perspective. Generally speaking, Tibetans are not particularly interested in critically analyzing these traditional accounts. The inquiring reader, however, may want to further investigate these unsolved questions: Was there *any* literacy present in Tibet before Thon Mi? Did he study from *one* or *several* teachers? And: *is* Thon Mi really the author of the *TKJ* or not?

The next section on the eight-fold *rnam dbye* division is probably less entertaining for the reader. It opens, however, a whole new world of categories and concepts.[326] Particularly the distinctions of the three *rnam dbye,* which all use the *la don*-particle may create puzzling

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325 If not explicitly mentioned otherwise, whenever I say "Thon Mi's works," I also mean to include their commentaries.

326 For students of, for example, Sanskrit and Latin, case-divisions are nothing new. This section is still interesting because of the particular usage of particles.

and curiosity.[327] Here, the student is encouraged to throw overboard familiar grammatical terms like subject, nominative, etc. and completely dive into the ocean of Tibetan grammar. Based on illustrating examples, the reader understands the utmost importance of the usage of the various *phrad.* This is a peculiarity of the Tibetan language to which most of the content of the *SCP* is dedicated.

Trying to decode Thon Mi's root verses may lead the reader to the conclusion reached by the past grammarians, namely, that elucidating commentaries are required. These gnomic lines are extremely terse and, at times, the experts disagree in their interpretations.[328]

Probably not all Tibetan subdivisions are equally plausible to the foreign reader. The reason I still consider them worthy to introduce, is that they bear social-cultural value: apart from favouring dharma-related examples, the authors also tend to morally educate their students:

ལེགས་པར་བསླབས་པ་དང་མཁས་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།[329]

Because of having studied well, someone will become learned.

Are such educational motives the reason that the author of the *Tree* makes explicit distinctions about the quality of the basis of comparison in the context of the *ni sgra*?[330] Examples for *mchog tu dgar ba* like the following support such presumptions:

ཡོན་ཏན་ཅན་ནི་མི་ཡི་མཆོག[331]

The ones who have good qualities are sublime (among) people.

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327 *rnam dbye gnyis pa las su bya ba, rnam dbye bzhi pa dgos ched, rnam dbye bdun pa rten gnas*

328 As previously mentioned, Si Tu Rin Po Che changed the reading of the Thon Mi's root verse about the prefixes. See p. 98 in this essay
Duff translates the first line of the root verse on the *ni sgra* as follows: "In harmony with the ending of whatever name…" Duff 2009, p. 546. According to my understanding based on the explanations in the *Key* this is an inaccurate translation. *gang ming mtha' dang mthun pa yi*// should be translated as: "At the end of any word or its according (particle)…" There are two reasons for my argument: first of all the *ni sgra* is a *phrad rang dbang can* and can therefore by applied regardless of the suffix of the preceding word. Secondly, the *ni sgra* is often attached to particles rather than only to words and the *Key* mentions the *phrad* in its elucidation. Zla Ba Tshe Ring 2004, p. 21.

329 Pra Ti Don Grub 2004, p. 51.

330 *ni zhes pa ni dgar sa'i gzhi nas* ***mchog tu*** *dgar ba'm/* ***dman par*** *dgar ba'm/ tha dad tsam du dgar ba zhi la 'jug ste/* rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 22.

331 rDo rJe rGyal Po 1979, p. 22.

Whatever the case might be, these exemplary sentences illustrate that foreign and Tibetan mindsets differ and so do the resulting grammatical concepts. Such realization becomes even more crucial in the context of the chapter on the *TKJ*, which deals with the major Tibetan grammatical principles.

More than half of the explanations in the last section do not derive from the *TKJ* itself, but from the clarifying explanations I received. This seems an indication that one cannot just pick Thon Mi's work from the bookshelf and read it. The student would most likely consider this work rather unintelligible, extremely technical and boring. The complete opposite was the case, when I scrutinized these profound lines in endless question-answer sessions with my teacher. His extensive explanations not only revealed the subtleties of sounds and spellings, it led me to a thorough understanding of the principles of this language. I had not gained such insight in many years of study and it felt like finally fathoming the depth of the ocean of grammar.[332]

Tying these conclusions together, we can ask, how relevant is the study of Thon Mi's work to the foreign student? This question is complex and I'd like to comment on it on three different levels. The first is the most pragmatic one: using the language, being able to communicate, read and write. The second is to be able to discuss the grammar of their language with (learned) native speakers and teach it to the foreign student. The third and most abstract is to fathom language and grammar's intimate interrelation with culture. Treating these three issues separately is a convention for the sake of analysis, in reality, there are no clear boundaries.

First, is knowledge of Thon Mi's texts an indispensible condition to be able to functionally use the Tibetan language? To argue so would be a clear exaggeration. There are, however, subtle disconnections between how the language is normally taught and the way it is

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[332] As Tournadre points out, "familiar concepts of subject, object, transitivity … are not always very relevant in Tibetan, and do not always help us to grasp the peculiarity and genius of the language." Tournadre and Sangda 2003, p. 23.

used by native speakers.[333] For example: Even though the auxiliaries are commonly taught: *nga = yin, yod,* etc. *khong = red, yod red,* etc. a native speakers correctly say:

ང་ཚོ་འདི་འདྲས་ཟེ་ལབ་ཀྱི་མ་རེད།	We do not say (it) like this.
ང་ཁྱེད་རང་གི་རོགས་པ་རེད།	I am your friend.

As demonstrated in the chapter of the *TKJ,* the future auxiliary *kyi ma red* indicates that this is not our own choice, it is *dngos po gzhan. Red* in the second sentence indicates that this is a common piece of information, also *gzhan.*

བློ་བཟང་ད་ལྟ་དགོན་པ་ལ་ཡོད།	Lobsang is at the monastery now.

གལ་སྲིད་ཁོང་གིས་བདག་གཞན་གྱི་དབྱེ་བ་ཤེས་པ་ཡིན་ན་ཡན་ཏན་ཞོགས་ཆེན་པོ་ཡོང་པ་ཡོད། [334]

It would have been beneficial if he would have known about the division of *bdag-gzhan*.

The "egophoric" auxiliary *yod* here is *dngos po bdag* and indicates the speaker's particular knowledge, as I explained in chapter five. Such subtle notions have to do with the principle of *bdag-gzhan,* the knowledge of which is therefore of crucial relevance to the student.[335] I would like to emphasise that *understanding* these subtle connotations, rather than simply perceiving them as "exceptions," enables one to communicate accurately on a more sophisticated level.

Another topic which may create headache for foreign students is spelling and pronunciation. Depending on ones learning style, the student, inspired by Tibetan school

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333 There might always remain a certain disconnection coming about due to the various dialects, etc. The disconnection I am referring to here is the absence of introducing the Tibetan principle *bdag-gzhan* which would provide clarity to the student. In the *Clair Miroir*, Tibetan Kelsang Gyurmé, who is the main author, explicitly presents it, however only with reference to literary Tibetan. Gyurme, Stoddard and Tournadre 1992, pp. 262-267. This seems to be one fundamental difference between this work and the *MST*, where no reference is found to these principles.

334 These examples have no written source; they derive from communication with native speakers.

335 Tournadre mentions some of these subtleties, calling them "rare" cases. They are, however, neither referred to later in the book nor elucidated in terms of *bdag-gzhan.* Tournadre and Sangda 2003, p. 120.

children, may memorize the various rules about pre- and suffixes.[336] Knowing by heart the rule about the *bye brag* verbs allows the reader to correctly identify their tense.[337] Also the subtleties of sound taught in the *TKJ* seem extremely important in the everyday-usage of the language. The foreign student, not conditioned to these sounds since childhood, can improve pronunciation only by paying (more) attention to these phonological details.[338] Since many *phrad*, such as the *lhag bcas, ni sgra,* etc. do not have a clear equivalent in English, the study of the *SCP* is also of practical relevance. Some non-Tibetan works I came across, however, succeed well in rendering the *phrad* into categories derived from Indo-European languages.[339] So, why would one then still choose to study indigenous Tibetan grammar?

A less practical but probably more crucial reason to study Thon Mi's works is being interested in the grammar which regulates and classifies the language. Only if acquainted with these grammatical principles, is the inquiring student able to engage in linguistic discussions with (learned) native speakers. Such exchange reveals to us outsiders, insight into the way Tibetans themselves understand, categorize, teach and study their language. Doing so, I encountered a number of interesting points of disconnection between native speakers and non

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336 What is meant with "type of learner": Some people prefer to learn based on rules, others are more visually oriented, etc.

337 *'das la bas 'phul* (prefix) *yang 'jug yod// da lta ba la gnyis ka med// ma 'ongs 'phul yod yang 'jug med// skul tshig 'phul med yang 'jug yod//* "Past tense has pre- and second suffix, present none, future has pre- but no second suffix and imperative (is marked) by a second suffix but no prefix." These are teaching notes taken in fall 2010 in KTM, Nepal.

338 The above made suggestions are open questions rather then scientific findings. I cannot even use my own experience for reference here. (I knew spellings and correct pronunciation relatively well before studying the *TKJ*.)

339 For example: Wilson 1992, Hahn 1996, Tournadre and Sangda 2003 and Gyurmé, Stoddard and Tournadre 1992.

Tibetan experts' explanations.[340] Rather then arguing that one or the other is right, I'd like to mention that, at times, the Tibetan explanations seemed more logical and elegant to me.[341]

Being a Tibetan language teacher, I've been pondering some dilemmas: *when* is the ideal time in their studies for foreign students to consult the *SCP* and *TKJ*? On the one hand, the explanations on the alphabet, subtleties of pronunciation, parts of the body from which sounds originate, etc. seem extremely important and basic. On the other hand, they are considerably complicated. Is the fascination about the profound nature of this text able to make up for the eventual boredom of memorizing lists of letter genders? Should the content of the *SCP* and *TKJ* be introduced to students *before* they are able to study them in Tibetan?[342] And if so, how useful is it to explain their content using modern linguistic categories derived from Indo-European languages? Leaving aside the issue of feasibility of doing so, it seems that sometimes this is an extra (unnecessary) step. The average foreign student is not particularly well versed even in the grammatical terminology of the English language.[343] It would therefore, probably, be most useful to introduce the Tibetan principles right at the beginning. Generally speaking, the question about how much grammar knowledge is required to learn a language, is an interesting and controversial one which can, however, not be discussed here.[344]

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340 While every native speaker I have discussed with categorizes verbs such as *mthong, go, shes,* etc. as *tha mi dad pa,* the conclusions reached by non-Tibetan experts are different. Tournadre equates *tha dad pa* with "transitive" - but as seen in chapter 5, these two have a large overlap but cannot be equated. Tournadre and Sangda 2003, p. 142. Tillemans, who also categorizes them as *tha dad pa,* explains that the source of this confusion is the following: "Tournadre suggests that past Tibetan grammarians simply tended to not accurately distinguish between the dichotomy *tha*(*mi*) *dad pa* and *rang-gzhan dbang can.*" Source: mail received after a thorough discussion comparing our diverging understandings. For further reference about the issue of transitivity, read: Tillemans 2007.

341 For example the usage of the *byed sgra,* which is regulated according to the presence or absence of a *'khrul gzhi* made more sense to me than the rules I had previously come across.

342 Such would require non-Tibetan language teachers to be versed in the *SCP* and *TKJ*. It cannot be expected and is extremely difficult for a native speaker teacher to introduce these principles in English.

343 This is not a statistical data, rather my little observation when teaching Tibetan to international students at university level at RYI in KTM, Nepal and discussing it with western colleagues.

344 Opinions about this issue differ considerably and it is still an open question to me. It is certain, that not every student acquires the various linguistic skills in the same way. Some might find rules most useful. Others rely on the Rassias® Method of drill. For further reference about this technique, consult online articles like: "Rassias method isn't a snap for everyone at Dartmouth; some students have trouble with the auditory focus of John Rassias's famed language instruction technique", by Sarah Gerry, News Editor, published on February 16, 1998.

Last but not least, the insight into Thon Mi's work is extremely relevant from a socio-cultural point of view. The merely pragmatic study and usage of this language without reference to these testimonies of the past, misses a fascinating and valuable aspect. These verses, commentaries of which are still taught in every school and monastery in exile, are an important piece of Tibetan history.[345] Familiarity with them - or at the very least, a rough idea about their content - seems a must for the foreign student. Studying them with a native speaker teacher allows the reader to explore Tibetan culture from within: these texts reflect their authors' time, and circumstances of the composition of those commentaries. Thon Mi and past commentators, for example, borrow late Indian Buddhist principles for grammatical categories.[346] This illustrates how interwoven Tibetan grammar and culture was and is.

Since non-Tibetan scholars have already presented extensive socio-linguistic and historical analysis for scholars, I chose to do something different.[347] In order to synthesize all the afore-mentioned reasons of relevance of these works for the intermediate-level Tibetan student, my approach is quite unusual: to provide at the same time some insight into the style *and* content of Thon Mi's work. This was a challenging undertaking. In order for their peculiar style not to be lost, I followed these works and my teacher's words closely and faithfully - like a Tibetan commentator. On the other hand, their complex and foreign content requires not only linguistic "translation" in order to become accessible to the foreign student. Fully aware that these explanations are not exhaustive, I hope they inspire readers to deepen their knowledge through the study of indigenous grammar.

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345 Again, I'd like to emphasise, that when I say "history", I do not necessarily mean historical data which hold western academic analysis. This essay merely aims at presenting the Tibetan version of their history. Regardless of whether Thon Mi is the author of the *SCP* and *TKJ*, these accounts are of cultural value.

346 For example, to categorize the vowels as *shes rab* and the consonants as *thabs*, etc.

347 Some references of these experts, such as Miller, Verhagen, Tillemans, Gyurmé, Snellgrove, Tournadre, etc. have been provided in the footnotes and are highly recommended to consult.

Following the traditional Tibetan style until the very last word, I'd like to conclude with: by whatever little merit I have accumulated composing this essay, may all (foreign) students gain a fascinating insight into the "peculiarity and genius of this language!"[348]

348 These descriptive nouns are used by Tournadre, but reflect also my opinion about the Tibetan language. Tournadre and Sangda 2003, p. 23.

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