

Inner morphology in the verbal domain in the Tibetan language

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The majority of verbs in the modern Tibetan language has a paradigm of two or three forms, which differentiate the present, past and future tenses. The verbs in the modern Tibetan language have complicated grammatical forms. These forms are produced by the combinations of synthetic and analytical means of which synthetic ones are of particular interest to us here. In this context vowel and consonantal alternations of phonemes and also tonemes alternations within temporal forms of the verb stems will mainly be discussed below.

The morphonological description aims at discovering of regular morphemic alternations.

Within the bounds of tense category there are binominal opposition, expressed by the verbal stems:

1) present–future tense vs. past tense:

/u – y/: *ku* ‘steal, will steal’ vs. *ky*²⁴ ‘stole’;

2) present tense vs. future–past tense: /o – a/: *ny*²⁴ ‘want’ vs. *nya* ‘will want’, ‘wanted’.

This morphonological phenomenon is of typological value. Thus the distribution of the vowel and consonantal phonemes with relation to the so-called grades of alternation may be presented as follows:

Vowels representing two grades of alternations in temporal verbal stems:

/e – a/: *kem*¹ – *kam*⁴ – *kam*¹ ‘to dry’;

Vowels may represent three alternation grades:

/e – e – a/: *qe*²³, – *qe*²³ – *qa*² ‘to make’;

The regularity of vowel alternations is based on the articulatory vowel rows: front – back /i – u/, /e – o/ and back – front /o – f/, /u – y/. For example:

front–back /i – u/: *zin*²– *sung*² – *sung*² ‘to hold’, ‘to grasp’;

back–front /o – f/: *ko*² – *kf*²³ – *ko*² ‘to catch illness’, ‘to be infected’;

Consonants in the Tibetan language may have only two alternation grades:

/t – th/ *te*²³ – *the*²³ – *te*²³, ‘to follow’;

thung/ – *tung*⁴ – *tung*¹ ‘to drink’.

Essential changes of the consonant phonemes, which occur in the alternation, are as follows: desaspiration, aspiration, voicedness, voicelessness, tone changes:

a) desaspiration: /c – z/ *cong*¹ – *zong*⁴ – *zong*¹ ‘to sell’.

b) aspiration: /p – ph/ : *po*² – *pho*² – *po*² ‘to throw’.

c) voicedness: /ch – zh/ : *che*¹ – *che*¹ – *zhe*² ‘to separate’.

d) voicelessness: /zh – ch/ : *zhi*² – *chi*³ – *ch*² ‘to ask questions’, ‘to inquire’.

e) These examples demonstrate that vowel and consonant alternations can be accompanied by tone alternations. The high level tone marked as tone 1, the low rising tone – as tone 2, the rising–falling tone – as tone 3, the high falling tone – as tone 4:

/2 tone – 3 tone/ *to*² – *tf*³ – *to*² ‘to risk’;

/1 tone – 4 tone/ *ko*¹ – *ko*⁴ – *ko*¹ ‘dig out’, ‘to carve’.

Although in the Tibetan phonological system consonant phonemes outnumber of vowel phonemes, vowel alternation are more frequent than consonant alternations. Verbs of certain groups have only one form because tense forms (present, past and future) are not distinct, for example: *sum*² (present, past, future) ‘to be closed’, *hlung*¹ (present, past, future) ‘to fall’.

It should be noted that in many cases the identical phonetic word structures have different graphic forms.

As it was shown above, consonant, vowel and tone alternations (the inner inflection) in the Tibetan verbal stems participate in production of morphological forms. This inner morphology may serve the only indication of the temporal opposition in the same way as in classical Tibetan. In modern Tibetan the synthetic type of form–building exists along with the analytical type.