

Evidentials in Old Tibetan direct speech

Abel Zadoks

This paper is the third in a series on the historical grammar of Tibetan evidentiality, catchily defined by linguists as ‘the linguistic encoding of epistemology’ (Chafe & Nichols 1986). For Tibetologists, the issue is perhaps more easily identified with reference to the system of auxiliary verbs in e.g. the modern Lhasa dialect. Though already operative in the earliest datable sources, lexical and grammatical distinctions of this type were never recognized in grammars of so-called ‘Classical Tibetan’ because of a bias to grammatical categories that survive translation from Sanskrit and/or into European languages, not to mention a general lack of linguistic method (scant attention paid to essential details of diachronic and dialectal variation).

At the 9th Seminar of the IATS (2000), I have shown that the use of clause connectives such as *nas* in Old Tibetan narrative relates to the views of the referents involved, much like the modern auxiliaries. A closely connected sequel at the 8th Himalayan Languages Symposium (2002) surveyed the development of evidential and directional auxiliaries from the 10th to the 15th century. The present paper reconnects to the first and investigates the evidence from direct speech in Dunhuang manuscripts. Here the involvement and interaction of 1st- and 2nd-person interlocutors shows grammatical concerns scarcely observable in run-of-the-mill 3rd-person narrative, some peculiar to Old Tibetan, others familiar from modern dialects.