

The rhetorical¹ use of the Tibetan ergative

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Tibetan as spoken in the Central province ("Lhasa dialect") presents a standard nominal ergative structure, i.e. a specific marker for the agent² of two-place predicates, and a \emptyset marker (the absolutive) for the patient of two-place predicates as well as for the only participant of one-place predicates. The ergative marker is a case particle formally identical to the instrumental, but functionally distinct from it. Besides its semantic and syntactic functions the ergative also has a rhetorical effect that will be examined below. First we will consider the standard function.

We can distinguish four basic constructions occurring with two-place predicates:

1) the ergative construction: X(erg) Y(abs) V₂

- Ex 1: pu.gu 'di-s chang 'thung-gl.'dug
child this-ERG³ beer+ABS drink-UNAC+EVID
ra.bzi mi yong-ngas
drunk NEG UNAC-INTER
"This child is drinking beer; won't he get drunk?"⁴ (Hu)

2) the possessive construction as well as the construction of reception:

X(obl) Y(abs) V₂

a) possession

- Ex 2: khong-la deb rdzag.do yo'o.red
he-OBL book+ABS lots have+GNOMIC
"He has a lot of books."

¹ In this context, "rhetorical" would be equivalent to "pragmatic".

² I prefer, along with other authors such as T. Tilleman, D. Herforth, H. Zimmerman to avoid the highly ambiguous terms of "subject" and "transitive" in Tibetan.

³ Abbreviations: ABS: absolutive; AOR: aorist; AUX: auxiliary; C.E.: contrastive emphasis; CONNECT: connector; EGO: egophoric auxiliary; ERG: ergative; EVID: evidential; EXPRESS: expressive particle; FUT: future; HON: honorific; INTER: interrogative particle; NEG: negation; NOM: particle of nominalization; OBL: oblique; RESULT: resultative verb; UNAC: unaccomplished (aspect); V₁: monovalent verb; PART: particle; V₂: bivalent verb; VOL: volitional verb or auxiliary.

⁴ The data presented in this paper come either from Hu Tan 1989 (these examples will be indicated by "Hu") or from my personal recordings made in Lhasa (1988) mainly of the speech of Professor Thubten Wangpo (Academy of Social Sciences) to whom I am especially indebted. Last but not least, I am particularly grateful to Martine Mazaudon for her help and suggestions while I was writing this paper.

b) reception

Ex 3: *nga-r yLge gnyls 'byor-byung*
 I-OBL letter two+ABS receive-AOR+EGO NONVOL.
 "I received two letters."

3) the affective construction (verbs indicating emotional attitude):

X(abs) Y(obl) V₂

Ex 4: *khong khyi-la zhed-kyl 'dug*
 he+ABS dog-OBL afraid-UNAC+EVID
 "He is afraid of the dog."

4) the mixed ergative construction: X(erg) Y(obl) V₂

Ex 5: *kho-s bu.mo snying.rje.po de-la btas-song.*
 he-ERG girl nice this-OBL look-AOR+EVID
 "He looked at the nice girl."

As we notice the ergative marker is present only in the first and fourth construction types.

The main relevant features conditioning the appearance or the absence of the ergative are on the one hand the syntactic and semantic characteristics of the verb, and on the other hand the verbal action.

I. Syntactico-semantic categories of Tibetan verbs

The syntactic and semantic characteristics of the verb can be broken down into two main categories: volition and valency. Another optional category is causativity (vs. resultativity)⁵.

⁵ Classical Tibetan has around 180 verbal pairs that oppose causative vs. resultative forms. I have collected about one hundred of the most frequently used. They are given in the *rab gsal me long* by Kesang Gyurme, a grammar of classical Tibetan translated into French by H. Stoddard and N. Tournadre (forthcoming, 1991) with many linguistic comments about classical as well as modern central Tibetan.

It is also worth noting that the causative shares some features with the imperfective aspect in insisting on the conative activity or the intention of the agent, while the resultative verbs can assume a perfective role. Compare the following Russian and Tibetan sentences: *dkar.yol bcag-pa.yin te chag ma song* lit: "I broke (causative) the cup, but it did not break (resultative)" meaning "I tried to break the cup, but didn't succeed"; or (*nga-s gnas don-de thag bcad pa yin te (thag) chod ma song*, "I (tried) to solve (causative) this problem, but I could not solve it (resultative)". This opposition between causative-imperfective and resultative-perfective also occurs in Classical Tibetan. For instance, in Milarepa's hundred thousand songs:

<i>nang</i>	<i>rang</i>	<i>sems</i>	<i>bzung</i>	<i>bas</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>zin</i>	<i>na/</i>
inside	self	mind	catch (Imperf)	CONNECT	NEG	catch(perf)	if
<i>phyi</i>	<i>gzhan</i>	<i>lus</i>	<i>bzung</i>	<i>bas</i>	<i>ci-la</i>	<i>phan.</i>	
outside	other	body	catch(Imperf)	CONNECT	what-OBL	use	

"If you try to catch the (inner) mind and cannot catch it, what is the use of catching prey (lit: outer body) outside?" (*khyi ra ba dgon po rdo rje*)

1) Volition: the intentional or unintentional nature of the action is certainly the essential feature in the description of the Tibetan verb, since it has consequences not only for case marking but also for verbal morphology and syntax. The volitional verb (V vol) has an imperative form while the non-volitional does not: *ltos shüg* "look!", but **mthong zhig* "see". Another criterion can be used to determine if the verb is volitional: only the volitional verb can take the egophoric volitional auxiliary YIN, as in *bitas-pa.yin* "I looked", but **mthong-pa.yin* "I saw"⁶

2) Valency: the majority of verbs can be defined simply and immediately according to their valency. For example, the verb *drag* "to be cured, to recover" is always monovalent (V₁), i.e., it implies only one participant, namely the person who recovers (Tib: *drag mkhan*).

Other verbs such as *gsod* "kill" are bivalent (V₂)⁷ since they imply two participants, whether these are formally present in the sentence or not.

There is another category of verbs which are monovalent, but allow a second participant in certain contexts. A typical example is *chag* "to break":

Ex 6: *dkar.yól chag-song*
teacup+ABS break(RESULT)-AOR+EVID
"The teacup broke."

But when an agent breaks the cup unintentionally, one might say

Ex 7: *kho-s dkar.yól chag-song*
he-ERG teacup+ABS break(RESULT)-AOR+EVID
"He broke the cup (not on purpose)."

This category will be referred to as V_{1/2} nonvol.⁸

To sum up, taking into consideration both valency and volition, we find four verbal categories: V₁ nonvol, V₁ vol, V₂ nonvol and V₂ vol. (The V_{1/2}

See also example 16, as well as these Russian sentences:

Ob'jasnjaj ja èto ine ob'jasnij.

"I tried to explain (imperfective) it (to him), but did not succeed in explaining it (perfective)."

Ubiwall da ne ubill

"They tried to kill (imperfective) (him), but they could not kill (perfective)."

Dolgo rešal ètu zadaču no ne rešil

"I tried for a long time to solve (imperfective) this problem, but failed to solve it (perfective)."

⁶ The egophoric non-volitional auxiliary *byung* must be used here.

⁷ V₂ indicates a verb requiring at least two participants. It includes trivalent verbs (V₃). As far as ergativity and general syntactic properties are concerned, the main dichotomy is between V₁ and V₂.

⁸ Most of the V_{1/2} verbs correspond to the resultative verbs of the verbal pairs.

nonvol are a special case of verbs which may be used either as V_1 or V_2 nonvol.)

The ergative can occur with all the categories except V_1 nonvol:

Ex 8a: **khe.sa kho-s shi-song*
 yesterday he-ERG die-AOR+EVID
 "Yesterday, he died."

However, the ergative *does* occur with V_2 non-volitional verbs such as "see"

Ex 8b: *ngas dom gnyls mthong-byung*
 I-ERG bear two-ABS see-EGO NONVOL+AOR
 "I saw two bears."

And as will be shown later (Exs. 10 and 11b), the ergative is also used with V_1 volitional verbs.

II. Aspect and the ergative

The second essential conditioning factor for the use of the ergative case is the verbal aspect. Below, I will give a brief description of its main characteristics. The Central Tibetan dialect has developed a rich and complicated aspect/modality system at the expense of the tenses, with a paradigm of forms resulting from the combination of three verbal suffixes (*gl*, *pa*, and \emptyset) with the nine final auxiliaries (*yn*, *red*, *yod*, *yo'ored*⁹, *dug*, *song*, *byung*, *shag*, *myong*). The verbal aspect can be formally divided into two morphological categories: unaccomplished and accomplished,¹⁰ the first marked by *gl* and the second without *gl*. These two broad categories of aspects can be broken down into two subcategories: *future* and *progressive* (or *general*) for the unaccomplished, and *perfect* and *aoristic*¹¹ for the accomplished.

⁹ *yo'ored* is traditionally written *yod.pa.red* in literary Tibetan. The Tibetan refugees in India also spell it *yog.red*.

¹⁰ The unaccomplished forms include the suffix *gl*, while the accomplished forms include the suffix *pa* or have no suffix at all.

¹¹ The perfect in the sense I use it indicates the present result of an action performed in the past. This use is somewhat similar to the English "present perfect". The aorist, on the other hand shows that the action was performed in the past but is not related to the present situation.

Compare for instance the following sentences:

kho-s kha.lag bzod'dug/pa.red
 he-ERG food make-PERF/AOR

Since future is the only verbal category that is semantically temporal, and since as far as ergativity is concerned it functions differently from the unaccomplished,¹² I prefer to make a three way distinction: namely *future*, *unaccomplished (progressive, general)* and *accomplished*.¹³

Judging from the data at hand, it does not seem that the difference between perfect and aorist plays a significant role in governing the ergative case, although we might expect that the ergative will occur less with the perfect aspect, since the perfect insists on the resulting state rather than on the agent's activity.

III. "Aspectual modalities"

Besides these aspects, a set of "modalities" such as volitive/non-volitive, egophoric/heterophoric,¹⁴ and centrifugal/centripetal play an essential role in the Tibetan verbal system.

1) unaccomplished ("gi" forms)

a) future

ego-volitional
neutral

gi.yln
gi.red

The perfect would mean "He has prepared the food (and the food is still here now)", while the aoristic "He prepared the food" does not say anything about the present state.

¹² Though morphologically the future belongs to the unaccomplished paradigm.

¹³ The opposition unaccomplished/accomplished is preferred to the one between imperfective/perfective since the latter would convey a meaning different from the standard opposition found e.g. in Russian and other Slavic languages. For instance, in Russian, depending on whether one sees the action as *global* or *in its development* one would use the perfective or the imperfective aspect, respectively:

on vyпил две бутылки пива "He drank (perfective) two bottles of beer."

(učera) on pil mnogo piva "Yesterday, he drank (imperfective) a lot of beer."

While in Tibetan, the same sentences would all normally be in the "accomplished",

khe.sar kho-s chang mang.po btung-song/pa.red/shag.

yesterday he-ERG beer a lot+ABS drink+ACC

"Yesterday, he drank/has drunk a lot of beer."

with *song* indicating the speaker has been an eyewitness (as opposed to *pa red*) while *shag* shows that the speaker has made an inference from what he sees (e. g. the empty bottles). The unaccomplished form could be used only in the case where the speaker insists on the process or the iterativity of the action in a clearly past narrative context such as:

de dus kho-(s) chang mang.po 'lhung-gLy'o'ored

"At that time, he was drinking a lot of beer." (lit: "At that time, he drinks a lot of beer.")

¹⁴ I prefer the terms egophoric/heterophoric to the conjunct/disjunct opposition used by Scott DeLancey because first of all it seems clearer, and secondly because it corresponds perfectly to the new grammatical term used in Tibetan for this notion: *rang ngas* "self side"/*gzhan ngas* "other side". In fact the heterophoric markers *red*, *song* could rather be considered as unmarked since they also occur with first person, while the egophoric morphemes are marked forms.

b) progressive, general or iterative	evidential	<i>gl.'dug</i>
	gnomic ¹⁵	<i>gl.yo'o.red</i>
	ego-volitional or ego-modal	<i>gl.yod</i>
2) accomplished		
a) perfect	evidential	\emptyset +' <i>dug</i>
	gnomic	\emptyset + <i>yo'o.red</i>
	Inferential	<i>shag</i>
	ego-volitional or ego-modal	\emptyset + <i>yod</i>
b) aoristic	evidential	<i>song</i>
	gnomic	<i>pa.red</i>
	ego-non-volitional or ego-centripetal	<i>byung</i>
	ego-volitional	<i>pa.yin</i>
	ego-experiential ¹⁶	<i>myong</i>
	("ego done at least once")	

We can give an example of the paradigms with the verb *sdod* "to stay" (V_{vol}) (the past form of the verb is *bsdad*):

<i>sdod-kyl.yin</i>	"I will stay"
<i>sdod-kyl.red</i>	"(non-ego) will stay"
<i>sdod-kyl.'dug</i>	"I see that (non-ego) is staying or stays"

¹⁵ "Gnomic": indicates that the speaker does not purport to have any direct evidence of the narrated event. The sentence can express a general cognitive statement, generally known fact or reported indirect information ("hearsay"). The term "gnomic" is borrowed from Woodburn 1986. Sometimes, *red* corresponds to an unmarked auxiliary, as for evidentiality. In some Tibetan dialects, there is a three-way distinction among evidential, non-evidential (gnomic) and unmarked (as in Dzong dialect, personal communication, Jackson T.-S. Sun).

"Evidential": indicates that the speaker purports to see or have seen the narrated event taking place, or to perceive it in some other direct way, e.g. by hearing or feeling it taking place.

¹⁶ The auxiliary *myong* is somewhat similar to Chinese *guò* in *tā dào běijīng qù guò* "He has already been in Beijing," except that the Tibetan implies "experienced at least once," while the Chinese use has been extended in examples such as *zhè bēi chá tā hē guò* "He has already drunk from this teacup," which would not permit the use of *myong* in Tibetan.

<i>sdod-kyi.yo'o.red</i>	"non-ego is staying or stays (unmarked or generally known or usual)"
<i>sdod-kyi yod</i>	"I stay or am staying" or "I know very well that (non-ego) is staying or stays" ¹⁷
<i>bsdad-'dug</i>	"I see that (non-ego) has stayed and is still staying"
<i>bsdad-yo'o.red</i>	"(non-ego) has stayed and is still staying (unmarked or generally known or usual)"
<i>bsdad-shag</i>	"I infer from what I see (or even hear) that (non-ego) has stayed"
<i>bsdad-yod</i>	"I have stayed (and am still staying)"
<i>bsdad-song</i>	"I saw that (non-ego) was staying (and is no longer there)"
<i>bsdad-pa.red</i>	"(non-ego) stayed (unmarked or generally known or usual)"
<i>bsdad-pa.yin</i>	"I stayed there (but I am no longer there)"
<i>bsdad.myong</i>	"I stayed there (at least once)"

To illustrate the ego-nonvolitional auxiliary, we need a V_1 nonvol or a V_2 vol with the first person as beneficiary or patient. For example: *zag-byung* "I fell"; *btang-byung* "(non-ego) sent to me."

Although these "aspectual modalities" may interfere marginally with the frequency of use of the optional ergative¹⁸, we will assume that they do not significantly influence its use, and we will now discuss the behavior of the ergative according to the main aspectual categories and the syntactico-semantic verbal categories as defined earlier. The use of the ergative is compulsory or optional depending both on the semantico-syntactic categories of the verb (V_1 vol, V_2 volitional or not), and on the aspect (accomplished, unaccomplished or future). When it is optional, the ergative can assume a rhetorical function. As one might expect, the more compulsory the marker is, the less easily it can assume any other function.

IV. The ergative with (V_1 : monovalent) volitional verbs

With the unaccomplished non-future aspect, the ergative does not seem to occur with monovalent verbs:

¹⁷ The ego-modal forms indicate that the speaker gives an epistemic evaluation implying that he has a good and close knowledge of the narrated event. In Tibetan, those forms were called *cha.yod rgyu.yod* by Kesang Gyurme which means literally "to know (very) well," as in:

kho nga'i nang-la sdod-kyi yod
 he+ABS I-GEN home-OBL stay-UNAC+EGOMODAL
 "He is staying in my house."

(Kesang Gyurme is a professor at the Central Institute of Nationalities of Beijing.)

¹⁸ For instance, the ergative occurs more frequently with ego volitional.

Ex 9a: *mo las.khung nang-la nyal-gyi yo'o red*
 she+ABS office in-OBL sleep-UNAC+GNOMIC
 "She sleeps in the office."

On the other hand, with the accomplished V_1 vol (and more rarely with the future), the marker can be present. It is then accompanied by a specific intonation¹⁹ as well as a stress on the agent (the case particle is generally enclitic but it can sometimes be stressed). It indicates a contrastive emphasis on the agent. Compare 9a and 9b:

Ex 9b: *Mo las.khung nang-la nyal-song*
 she+ABS office in-OBL sleep-AOR+EVID
 "She slept (or went to sleep) in the office."

With the ergative *mo-s* (she+ERG), the same sentence means:

Ex 9c: "She slept (or went to sleep) in the office (but he did not)."

With the future paradigm (GI-YIN/GI-RED), the ergative can also occur:

Ex 10a: *nga-s rjes.ma lha.sa-r yin.ci min.ci*
 I-ERG after Lhasa-OBL definitely
 'gro-gi.yin
 go(pres)-FUT+EGOVOL
 "I will definitely go to Lhasa." (Hu)

This example would seem to support the common conception that the use of the ergative with a one place predicate ("intransitive verb") indicates volition or control²⁰ on the part of the participant. But the following example clearly shows that the ergative has nothing to do with control or volition:

Ex 10b: *kho-s lo gnyis.shu rtson.khang nang-la*
 he-ERG year twenty jail in-OBL
bsdad-pa.red
 stay(past)-AOR+GNOMIC
 "He stayed twenty years in jail (but Lobsang did not)."

¹⁹ Out of context and without proper intonation, these sentences are rejected by native speakers as ungrammatical.

²⁰ Betty Shefts Chang and Kun Chang (1980) even assume that "purpose" is conveyed by the ergative marker. While explaining the sentence *nga-s sleps-yong* (I-ERG arrive-FUT), the authors write that "certainly purpose, not just control, is conveyed here."

It would be hard to argue that the subject chose to stay in jail for twenty years. The ergative is clearly used in this example with a rhetorical function.

Contrastive emphasis is also evidenced in the following example:

Ex 11a: *kha.nub* *dgong.dag* *slob.khang-la* *su-s*
 day before yesterday evening classroom-OBL who-ERG
bsdad-pa.red
 stay-AOR+GNOMIC
 "In the evening of the day before yesterday, who stayed in the classroom?"

Ex 11.b: *nga-s* *ma* *bsdad*
 I-ERG NEG stay-AOR+EGO
 "I didn't stay"

Ex 11c: *bkra.shi* *gcig.po-s* *bsdad-pa.red*
 Tashi alone-ERG stay-AOR+GNOMIC
 "Only Tashi stayed." (Hu)

Again compare (12) and (13):

Ex 12: *da* *nga* *'gro-gl.yin*
 now I+ABS go (pres)-FUT+EGOVOL
 "Now, I'll go (leave)."

In 12, "I" is the topic and the comment is "will go", the main information being that it is time to leave; while in 13 the action of the speaker is contrasted with that of the interlocutor:

Ex 13: *khyed* *zhugs* *a* *nga-s* *phyin²¹-dgos*
 you stay(HON) PART I-ERG go(past)-MODAL AUX
 "(Please) you stay, I will go (for you)."

²¹ Note here that though the meaning indicates the future, the verbal form is based on what is traditionally called the past form of the root (in Tibetan *dus 'das pa't gzugs 'gyur*). An attempt to explain this phenomenon would be that the past or accomplished form emphasizes the completion of the action. Since this type of construction (namely a first person with a volitional verb in the past stem followed by a modal auxiliary like *dgos* [gɔ] "need, must" or *chag* "allow, may") occurs generally when the speaker proposes to do some action for the benefit of the interlocutor, it would be a sort of guarantee that the action will be done. Those constructions are in some ways similar to the Russian *pošli* ("go" perfective-3p), literally "we went", meaning "let's go," or the Chinese with the same meaning *wō-mēn zōu le* *ba* (I-PL go-perfective PART).

We also find an ergative in 14a:

Ex 14a: *khong-gts phyin-pa.red*
 he-ERG go(past)-AOR+GNOMIC
 "He is the one who went."

Professor Thubten Wangpo of Lhasa gives the following context for this sentence:

Ex 14b: *gclg-la 'gro dgos-kyl yo'o.red-da*
 one-OBL go need-UNAC+GNOMIC-EXPRESS
'gro skabs-la.ya gzhan 'gro-mkhan
 go when-OBL other go-er
med-pa byas anl khong-gts phyin-pa.red
 not-NOM CONNECT so he-ERG go(past)-AOR+GNOMIC
 "Someone needed to go to a place but when it was time to
 leave, then nobody else (wanted) to go, so he was the one who
 went."

V. The ergative with the bivalent (V₂) volitional or non-volitional verbs

With the accomplished aspect and the future (to a lesser extent) the ergative is normally used. With the unaccomplished, the ergative remains optional. When used in this latter context, it creates a focus or a contrastive emphasis on the agent:

Ex 15a: *nga dpe.cha lta-gl.yod*
 I+ABS book(Tibetan)+ABS look(pres)-UNAC+EGOVOL
 "I'm reading (a Tibetan book)." (possible answer to: "What are you doing?")

vs. Ex 15b: *dpe.cha de nga-s lta-gl.yod*
 book(Tibetan)+ABS this I-ERG look-UNAC+EGOVOL
'khyer ma 'gro a
 take not go PART
 "I am the one who is reading this book, don't take it (away)!"
 (Hu)

In Ex 15b the focus is created by the presence of the ergative marker as well as by the inversion of the participants (the intonation is also specific).

The rhetorically flat order (for V₂) is:

Agent (ABS)	Patient (ABS)	V ₂
<i>topic</i>	<i>comment</i>	

With a focus on the agent the order becomes:²²

Patient (ABS)	Agent (ERG)	V ₂
<i>topic</i>	<i>comment</i>	

In the examples below, we will see that the ergative (with V₂ nonvol) can also indicate a contrastive emphasis on the agent:

Ex 17a: *khong mkhyen-gyi-mi-'dug*
 he know-UNAC-NEG-EVID
 "He doesn't know (or understand)."

Ex 17b: *khyed.rang gnyis grog.po yin tsang khong-gi*
 You two friend are since he-GEN
gnas.tshul khyed.rang-gts mkhyen-gyi yod.kyi.red
 situation you-ERG know(HON)-UNAC+probably
 "Since you two are friends, you probably know his situation."
 (Hu)

Ex 18a: *nga nor.phrul de-tsho yo.bsrang byed-kyi yod*
 I+ABS mistake that-PL correction do-UNAC+EGOVOL
 "I am correcting those mistakes."

Ex 18b: *nga-s bod-skad shod-stang nor-pa-de-tsho*
 I-ERG Tibetan speak-way mistaken-NOM-that-PL

nor.bu-s yo.bsrang byed-kyi.red yang nor.bu-s
 Norbu-ERG correction do-FUT and Norbu-ERG

skad.cha-shod-dus nya-skad rkyang rgyag-gi.red
 talk-speak-when Chinese only make-FUT

²² Note that a patient-topic + agent-comment word order can reflect a simple topicalization of the patient by left dislocation, as in Ex 16:

Ex 16: *thug.pa 'di nga-s shugs gang yod*
 rope this+ABS I-ERG strength what have
brgyab nas bcad na't chad-kyi-mi-'dug
 make after cut(Caus) but cut(Result)-UNAC-NEG-EVID

"This rope, I tried to cut it with all my strength, but I couldn't cut it." (lit: "It did not cut.")
 Nevertheless, the topicalization of the patient and the focus on the agent often go together as in Ex 15b.

<i>khong-gis</i>	<i>ngya.skad</i>	<i>shod-stang</i>	<i>nor-pa-de-tsho</i>
he-ERG	Chinese	speak-way	mistaken-NOM-that-PL
<i>nga-s</i>	<i>lam.sang</i>	<i>yo.bsrang</i>	<i>byed-kyt yod</i>
I-ERG	immediately	correction	do-UNAC+EGOVOL

"When I make mistakes in Tibetan, Norbu corrects me, and when Norbu speaks, he speaks only in Chinese. When he makes mistakes (in Chinese), I immediately correct them."
(Hu)

- Ex 19: *khyog ma thub-pa ga'l-byed-kyt-ma-red*
 carry not able-NOM nothing-matters-UNAC-not-GNOMIC
nga-s rogs byas dgos
 I-ERG help do(past)-MODAL AUX
 "If (you) can't carry it, it doesn't matter. I will help (you)."
 (Hu)

We note that in all the sentences where the modal final auxiliaries *dgos* or *chog* occur with the first person, meaning that the agent-speaker proposes to do something for the benefit of the interlocutor, the ergative is always used (whether with a V_1 or V_2 : see Ex 12b and Ex 19). This is logical if we consider that the rhetorical function of the marker is to outline the agent's role.

VI. The ergative with V_1/V_2 verbs

With a $V_1/2$ verb²³, the ergative marker is compulsory, if the agent is at all mentioned. See Ex 6 and 7 or the following:

- Ex 20a: *da ja-dam de su-s chag-pa.red*
 so tea-flask this+ABS who-ERG break(result)AOR+GNOMIC
 "So who broke (involuntarily) this thermos flask?"

- Ex 20b: *nga-s chag-med*
 I-ERG break(result)-NEG+PERF
 "It's not me who broke it."

²³ See Ex 7. These verbs belong to the V_1 type, but allow a second participant. Discussing the notion of *bdag/gzhan* ("agentive/objective") in their treatment of the verb in classical Tibetan, T. Tillemann and D. Herforth (1989) use the term "patient prominent". In fact, this expression would fit fairly well to describe the $V_1/2$ (non volitional) verbs, since they are concerned mainly with the patient.

In this case, the simple presence of the agent indicates some kind of focus, and the use of the ergative with it adds no more, but the use of an absolutive form (no focus) would be impossible.

Note also that all the examples involving V₁ or V₂ verbs (see Ex 9, 10, and 15a) can also appear without an overt agent. Thus we might represent the agent's "presence" by a three-grade scale:

- 1) zero anaphora (being the topic, the agent is implied but not formally mentioned)
- 2) the agent is marked with the absolutive (rhetorically flat)
- 3) the agent is marked with the ergative (emphasis)

In brief we can sum up the functioning of the ergative in the following chart:

Verbal categories	Tense/Aspects		
	Unaccomplished	Future	Accomplished
V ₁ vol	ABS	ABS (flat) ERG (focus or C.E.)	ABS (flat) ERG (focus or C.E.)
V ₂ (non-vol or vol)	ABS (flat) ERG (focus or C.E.)	ERG	ERG

Conclusion: This paper did not intend to explain in detail all the fluctuations in the occurrences of the ergative, since too many factors are involved; but rather simply to show that it clearly has a rhetorical function whose aim is to underline or "highlight" the agent. This is also corroborated by the fact that conversely, when the agent is not needed (because s/he is the topic, or undefined or not known), s/he is not present in the sentence.

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