Some Tibetan verb forms that violate Dempsey's law

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Tib. རྒྱུ་ lcig < *gᵗ’ek ‘one’ : Chi. 馘 tsyek < *tek (1260c) ‘one of a pair’
Tib. རྲིི་ mjĩ < *mlιn (Bodman’s law) < *ml’en ‘neck’ : Chi. 領 lhengX < *reŋ? (0823f)
OTib. ལྷི་ myiĩ < *m’en ‘name’ : Chi. 名 mjieng < *C.men (0826a)
Tib. རྡིི་ hdziĩ < *h’dzen ‘quarrel, fight v.’, Ch. 争 tsreang < *m-ts’reŋ (0811a) ‘strife, quarrel’
Tib. ལྷི་ rdziĩ < *rdzen ’pond’ : Chi. 井 tsjengX < *C.tsen? (0819a) ‘well (n.)’
Tib. ལྲྷི སྲི–མོ srin-mo < *sren-mo ‘sister of a man’ : Chi. 甥 sraeng < *s.reŋ (0812g) ‘sister’s child’

The cases where Chinese has -i- before a velar show that this sound change is indeed a merger.

Tib. རྒྱུས tshigs ’joint’ : Chi. 節 tset < *tsʰik (0399e) ‘joint of

¹ This essay uses the Library of Congress system for transliterating Tibetan with the following changes: ‘ḫ’ rather than apostrophe, ‘č’ rather than of ‘c’, and ‘ǰ’ rather than ‘j’. For Chinese I provide the character followed by Baxter’s Middle Chinese (1992), an Old Chinese reconstruction taken from or compatible with the current version of Baxter and Sagart’s system (2011), and the character number in Karlgren (1964[1957]). Like in Baxter’s own recent work, for Middle Chinese I use ‘æ’ and ‘ea’ in place of his original ‘æ’ and ‘ɛ’. I do not however following him is changing ‘ɨ’ to ‘+’.

² The same change occurs in the pre-history of Latin (e.g. Lat. septingenti ‘seven hundred’ < *septem+centum, Lat. tingō ‘moisten’, versus Gk. τέγγω; Lat. quīnquē ‘five’, Gk. πέντε, Skt. pāñca cf. Leumann 1977: 45).

bamboo'  
Tib. སིག sīg 'louse': Chi. 蟑 srit < *sri[k] (0506a) 'louse'  
Tib. སྒྲིག sgrig 'tie, fasten, suffocate': Chi. 蟑 ejH < *q’ik-s (0849g) 'strangle'  
Tib. ལྷག na-niṅ 'last year': Chi. 年 nen < *C.n’iŋ (0364a) 'harvest; year'  
Tib. ཤྲིང sṅiṅ 'tree': Chi. 艮 nyin < *niŋ (0388f) 'kindness'  

Internal to Tibetan, Dempsey’s law helps to explain the failure of some laterals to undergo Benedict’s law (*lʲ > ʒ-). If Benedict’s law preceded Dempsey’s law, one can explain why all instances of li- appear in words with velar finals. The words མིན zin 'field' and ལྷེས liṅs 'hunt' were originally *līn (with *līn a subphonemic pronunciation) 'field' and *lēns 'hunt'; after the application of Benedict’s law they became *zin 'field' and *lēns 'hunt'; after the application of Dempsey’s law they became the attested མིན zin 'field' and ལྷེས liṅs 'hunt’. Dempsey’s law also accounts for the lack of palatalization in most words that contain the sequences -di- and -ni- (cf. Hill 2013: 202-203).  

If all instances of inherited -e- before velars changed to -i-, then one expects to find no native Tibetan words that contain the sequences -ein or -eg. Nonetheless, there are many such words, both nouns (སྲེག hbreṅ 'braid', རྲེང phreṅ 'rosary', རྗེ་ dreg 'dirt, རྗེས dregs 'pride', རྭེ deṅ 'these days') and verbs (སྲེག sreg 'burn', རེགས gṣegs 'go', རྭེ hdeṅ 'go', རེང sṅeg 'chase', བེན sen 'purify, clean'). Loanwords and analogical developments are the most common phenomena which lead to the apparent violation of exceptionless soundlaws (Campbell 2004: 16-120, esp. 109-111); few of the Tibetan words with rimes -ein and -eg are obvious loanwords, consequently, it is likely that some of the exceptions are analogical developments.  

Paradigms provide one source of inspiration for the creation of analogical forms. Tibetan nouns are invariant across the noun paradigm; examples of paradigmatic analogical changes in the nominal system will be difficult to find. However, Tibetan verbs have intricate inflectional paradigms that provide ample models for analogical innovations (Coblin 1976, Hill 2010: xv-xxii). The remainder of this essay explores analogical explanations for the forms བེན seṅ 'purify, clean', རེང sṅeg 'chase', བེས gṣegs 'go, come', and བེས ldeg 'teeter'.  

The verb བེན seṅ 'purify, clean' is explainable as an alternative present to the verb (present) བསྟན sāṅs / བསྟན bsaṅ, (past) བསྟན bsāṅs, (future) བསྟན bsaṅ, (imperative) བསྟན soṅs 'cleanse, purify’. Stems of this
verb are well known from Tibet's religious vocabulary, with བསོ། sāns appearing in the compound བསོ། རྒྱས sāns-rgyas 'buddha' and the stem བསོ། bsāns used as a noun 'juniper fumigation ritual' in its own right. Analogy well motivates the from སེན sēn that violates Dempsey's law. A verb such as སྒྲ གྱེས byed, རྒྱས byas, སྒྲ bya, རྒྱས byos 'do' serves as a convenient model: སྒྲ byas : སྒྲ byed :: བསོ། bsāns : X, in which X was solved for with སེན sēn. The other two available present stems བསོ། sāns and བསོ། bsān are also explainable as analogical developments. The stem བསོ། sāns is arrived at through the removal of the b- past prefix. The past suffix -s was not removed because final -s may appear in present stems; compare སྒྲགས hchags, སྒྲུས bṣags, སྒྲུས bṣag, བྱུང་ sogs 'confess'. The opposite strategy results in the present stem བསྟན bsan; in this case not the past suffix -s, but the prefix b- remains, this time on the model of a verb such as ལྷོས bgro, ལྷོས bgrōs, ལྷོས bgro, རློ་ gṛs 'argue, discuss'. The existence of three alternative presents སེན sēn, བསོ། sāns, and བསོ། bsān, and the ease with which analogy accounts for them both suggest that an inherited present was ousted from this paradigm. In this case the etymological present བོས་ gsīn < *gsen 'strain, purify' occurs as an independent verb; the inherited paradigm was བོས་ gsīn, བསོ། bsāns, བསོ། bsān, བོས་ sons.

The form བོས་ sieg 'chase' is also explainable as an analogical development. Although Hill gives separate verbs བོས་ sneg (སྒྲ སྒྲགས, སྒྲུས bṣags, སྒྲུས bṣags, བྱུང་ sogs) 'chase after' and བོས་ sneg (སྒྲས bṣogs, སྒྲུས bṣags, སྒྲུས bṣags, བྱུང་ sogs), 2010: 108-112), a single passage from the Old Tibetan version of the Rāmāyaṇa attests all four forms of this verb, yielding the paradigm བྱུང་ sogs, སྒྲུས bṣags, སྒྲུས bṣags, བྱུང་ sogs.


When a precious deer arose, the lady requested 'lord chase [imperative] (it)!'. The king said, 'this is a deceitful deer, it is not appropriate to chase [future] (it).' If I were to chase [present] it, thou wouldest be absconded.' The lady said, 'how can a deer be deceitful...' The king said, 'I will chase [future] the deer, but Lakṣaṇa, going nowhere, guard the lady!' He chased [past] the deer. (I.O.L. Tib J 0737.1, ll. 144-150, cf. de Jong 1989: 113)
Even if later texts do distinguish the verbs √sñeg (ེག sñeg, བེག bsñegs) and √sñag (ེག sñogs, བག bsñags, སེང bsñag, སོག sñogs), this passage makes clear that forms with the vowel 'e' started life in the present stem སེག sñegs. The reanalysis of the final -s as a past suffix allows for the creation of a new present √sñeg, with the past སེག bsñegs and future སེག bsñeg, deriving from this stem through the normal application of the affixes b- and -s. If the verbal root were in fact √sñeg, the imperative would not undergo 'o' ablaut. However, the salience of 'o' for marking the imperative led to the suppletive borrowing of the original imperative instead of an ablautless form such as ∗sñegs. These considerations demonstrate that the entire paradigm of √sñeg is born from the present stem སེག sñegs, but this stem itself is a violation of Dempsey’s law and requires explanation. The inherited present ∗sñigs (< ∗sñegs) was analogically restored to སེག sñegs just as སིང gsiṁ < ∗gsen was replaced with སིང sen, but whereas སིང gsiṁ enjoyed a new life as a verb with specialized semantics, the attested verb √sñig ‘discard’ (ེག sñig, བེག bsñigs, སེང bsñig, སོག sñigs, cf. Hill 2010: 109) blocked this possibility for ∗sñigs.

Although སེག sñegs 'go, come' is an invariant verb already in Old Tibetan, there is evidence that it originates as a present stem. Jáeschke points out that the form སིང sog, synchronically the imperative of རིན ᾅིི 'come', is “properly” the imperative of སེག sñegs (1881: 503). With the paradigm of a verb like √laṅ ‘take’ (ལེན lend, སོག blaṅs, ལོན blon) ‘take’ in mind, one might speculate that སེག sñegs originally had the following paradigm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>pres. bsñegs</th>
<th>past. ∗bsags</th>
<th>fut. ∗bsag</th>
<th>imp. ∗sog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Róna-Tas reconstructs an unattested form of this verb ∗gsaṅs on the basis of Balti dialect ṣaṅs ‘go’ and the Monguor loan from Tibetan šiaṅla ‘pass away’ (1966: 95 #670). In a review R. A. Miller highlights that “the Monguor form and the Balti reflex are particularly important since they give evidence for an original ∗a-grade” (1968: 156). Sprigg confirms the Balti word ṣaṅs with the meaning ‘come, go, sit’ (2002: 151).
Some Tibetan verb forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written Tibetan</th>
<th>Balti</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>རེག reg</td>
<td>rjaxs</td>
<td>'begin'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཡཞེན hthen</td>
<td>thjan</td>
<td>'limp'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>རེས deg</td>
<td>ldjaq</td>
<td>'swinging up and down'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>རེཇ theg</td>
<td>thjaq</td>
<td>'be able to list'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The correspondence of Written Tibetan -e- to Balti -ja-
(after Zemp 2006 qtd. in Jacques 2009)

The Monguor form supports the reconstruction of a nuclear vowel *a, but it is not entirely clear that Balti also supports this reconstruction. Jacques demonstrates that western Tibetic languages undergo a change of e > ja before velars (2009). In general the presence of medial -j- signals whether the Balti reflex derives from Tibetan -e- or -a-, thus Balti thjaq < Tib. རེག theg 'be able to list' versus Balti thaaqa < Tib. རེལ thag-pa 'rope' (cf. Sprigg 2002: 163, 239). However, since ས- is already a palatal consonant this distinction does not manifest after this consonant; the vowel of Balti སེgs reconstructs to either *-e- or *-a- with equal ease.

Róna-Tas’ reconstruction of a prefix *g- in the ancestor of Balti སེgs appears unmotivated. Eunice Jones, a linguist who has lived in Baltistan for many years, informs me that although some Balti dialects, such as that of Khapalu, retain many of the etymological cluster initials in verb stems, she is unaware of any dialect that has a cluster initial in the word སེxpha ‘go’ (imp. སེxs) (letter, 4 February 2013). Balti thus supports the reconstruction of a past stem *སེgs (or possibly *སེgs) and an imperative *སོgs.3 More significant than the Balti form is the pronunciation of སེགས gśegs ‘die’ in Lhasa dialect as /ˈshaa/, which Kitamura renders orthographically as སེགས gśegs (1975: 60).

Even without evidence for pronunciation of the past with an ‘a’ vocalism, the absence of the ག- prefix from the attested Tibetan imperative སོg sog guarantees that the ག- and the -e- of the form སེག་མ gśegs are derivational and not elements of the root. Furthermore, the ‘e’ vowel and the final -s, which takes the form -d after open syllables and grave consonants, seen in སེག་མ gśegs are characteristic of a present stem (cf. Coblin 1976: 51-54).

The invariant verb སེག་མ gśegs is a generalized present stem, but this stem itself is a violation of Dempsey’s law and requires

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3 Bielmeier’s grammar of Balti does not include this words (1985: 245).
explanation. The anticipated inherited form is \( *g\text{-}\text{śigs} \) (< \( *g\text{-}\text{ṣegs} \)), which is as far as known to me unattested in any meaning.

The only way to tie the two attested forms, \( \text{གསེགས} \) \( *g\text{-}\text{ṣegs} \) and \( \text{ཤོག} \) \( *\text{ṣag} \), or, following the evidence of Balti for an unprefixed past, \( *g\text{-}\text{ṣegs} \), \( *\text{ṣags} \), \( *\text{ṣag} \), \( \text{ཤོག} \) \( *\text{ṣog} \). Dempsey’s law then led \( *g\text{-}\text{ṣegs} \) to become \( *g\text{-}\text{ṣigs} \). Next, analogy replaced the present \( *g\text{-}\text{ṣigs} \) with \( \text{གཤེགས} \) \( *g\text{-}\text{ṣegs} \), when \( *(b)\text{-}\text{ṣags} \) and \( *(b)\text{-}\text{ṣag} \) were still current. Finally, paradigmatic leveling led all stems except \( \text{གཤེགས} \) \( *g\text{-}\text{ṣegs} \) to fall into disuse; \( \text{ཤོག} \) \( *\text{ṣog} \) remained as a suppletive member of another verb (viz. \( \text{འོེ} \) \( \text{hoṅ} \) ‘come’).

The doublet of verbs \( \text{མེ} \text{ ldig} \) ‘shake’ and \( \text{ིི} \text{ ldig} \) ‘shake’ looks like another case in which Dempsey’s law changed \( *-\text{eg} \) to \( -\text{ig} \), only to be counteracted by analogical restoration. The \( \text{Mdzañs blun} \) provides a clear example of \( \text{ིི} \text{ ldig} \) meaning ‘teeter’.

(2) \( \text{lhaḥi pho-brāṅ kun ldig-čiṅ g:\text{yos-nas lha rnams dñaṅs-te}} \) \( \text{bltas-nal} \) \( \text{byān-chub-sems-dpas lus-kyi pags-pa sbyin-par byas mthoṅ-nas/} \)

All the palaces of the gods teetered and shook, when the gods, afeared, looked, they saw that the Mahāsattva had offered the skin of his own body. (\( \text{Mdzañs blun}, \) Derge Kanjur, vol. 74 folio 172b)

The inherited present \( \text{ིི} \text{ ldig} \) occurs in the phrase \( \text{མི} \text{ mldeg paḥi chos} \) ‘unwavering dharma’ (cf. Derge Kanjur, vol. 40, p. 42a, vol. 45, p. 41a).

The presents \( \text{ིི} \text{ ldig} \) (inherited) and \( \text{ིི} \text{ ldeg} \) (renewed) should derive from a root \( √\text{lag} \), with a paradigm that includes past \( *\text{blags} \), future \( *\text{blag} \), and imperative \( *\text{logs} \). The verb \( \text{blags} \) ‘incline’, seen in the phrase \( \text{rña-ba blags} \) ‘incline one’s ear’ (cf. de Jong 1973), is semantically close enough to ‘teeter’, to warrant its interpretation as the past stem of \( \text{ིི} \text{ ldig} / \text{ིི} \text{ ldeg} \). De Jong does not provide a textual citation for \( \text{rña-ba blags} \) ‘incline one’s ear’, instead relying on the \( \text{Mahāvyutpatti} \) and other lexical sources. Nonetheless, the Kanjur offers a number of attestations of \( \text{rña-ba blags} \) ‘incline one’s ear’.

(3) \( \text{mdor-na dud-hgro-ḥi skye-gnas-su gtogs-paḥi sems-can dag} \) \( \text{kyan sgra sñan-pa de-la rña blags-te sñan-to// de-nas bcom-ldan-ḥdas-kyis dge-slon} \) \( \text{rnams-la bkah-sitsal-pa/} \)
In sum, even the beings who belong to the real of animals inclined their ears to that mellifluous sound and listened. Then the Bhagavan addressed his disciplines. (*Vinaya-kṣudraka-vastu*, Derge Kanjur, vol. 10, 42b)

(4) des tše-dan-ldan-pa sñan-pa Bzañ-ldan-gyi skad-kyi gtæn-rag thos-nas kyaṅ yaṅ rña-ba blags-te mi g.yo-bar sdod-do/

Having heard the words of the speech of the venerable and renowned Bhadrika, he inclined his ears and sat immobile. (*Vinaya-kṣudraka-vastu*, Derge Kanjur, vol. 10, 42b)


He went in the direction of the Jetavana grove, slowly arrived at the Jetavana grove, and sat inclining his ear, at the gate of the Jetavana grove (*Vinaya-kṣudraka-vastu*, Derge Kanjur, vol. 10, 43a)

Recognizing that लेग ldeg 'teeter' and ग्लाङ blags 'incline' are two stems of the same verb permits one to notice the (lack of) parallelism between the phrases लेग चिं g.yos 'teeter and shake' in example 2 and ग्लाङ उ च लेग blags-te mi g.yo 'incline and not move' in example 4.

Not all examples of ग्लाङ blags in the Kanjur are proceeded by र्ना rna-ba 'ear'. The *Vinaya-vibhaṅga* offers two identical examples of लुं-गि rluṅ-gis blags-pa 'shaken by the wind'.


For example, like the various leaves of trees, shaken by the wind, fall and sit together, although you are monks, from various lineages, clans, and houses, because of my nobility you (all together) enter the enlightened mind
Another use of \textit{blags} is in the phrase \textit{mchi-ma blags}, which Btsan lha ṇag dban tshul khrims equates with \textit{mchi-ma śor} 'cry' (1997: 185). I wonder whether, the literal meaning 'for tears to teeter' might instead more precisely mean 'to hold back tears'. Example 7 is one of many attestations of \textit{mchi-ma-śor} in the Kanjur that could be cited.

\textit{(7) gcan-gzan-gyis khod ciḥi phyir ḥdi ltar mi ḏgahi žes dris-na/ mchi-ma blags-nas rgyas-par smras-pa daṅ/}

When the creature asked 'why art thou unhappy like this', after crying, he explained in detail. \textit{(Mdzangs blun, Derge Kanjur, vol. 74 folio 172a)}

It is difficult to locate unambiguous future stems of the verb in question. In example 8, \textit{mi blag} 'not incline' is either a future or a present. If it is a present, then it is built analogically to the past \textit{blags}, replacing the inherited present \textit{ldig}.

\textit{(8) kha-cig rna mi blag gus-par mi ṇan-ciṅ bkaḥ-ṅan-paṅi sems Ṉe-bar mi ḥjog-la/ ḍhos-kyi rjes-su ḥthun-paṅi chos-la nan-tan mi byed-na …}

If someone does not incline his ear, does not listen, does not establish a loyal and obedient mind, and does not act diligently for dharma that accords with dharma... \textit{(Asṭādaśasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra, Derge Kanjur, vol. 31, page 76b)}

The expected imperative *\textit{logs} appears not to occur. One might explain that 'teeter' is not a voluntary verb, but at least in English one can use the imperative 'incline thine ear unto my sayings' (Proverbs 4:20). With the orthographic form \textit{logs} in mind, it is perhaps not too far fetched to suggest that the noun \textit{logs} 'the side' is derived from the same root as this verb.

This investigation of exceptions to Dempsey's law permits the conclusion that the verbs \textit{seṅ} \textit{seṅ} 'purify, clean', \textit{sṁeg} \textit{sṅeg} 'chase', \textit{gṣegs} \textit{gsegs} 'go, come', and \textit{ldeg} \textit{ldeg} 'teeter' are analogical present formations; the inherited presents of these verbs, with \textit{-i-} vocalism, have been replaced with the \textit{-e-} vocalisms more typical of the present stem. The
inherited paradigms, together with brief remarks on subsequent developments, can be summarized as follows:

\[
\sqrt{\text{saṅ}} '\text{cleanse, purify}'.
\]
- pres. \(\sqrt{\text{gsiṅ}}\) (exists alongside the analogical \(\sqrt{\text{sen}}\))
- past \(\sqrt{\text{bsaṅs}}\)
- fut. \(\sqrt{\text{bsaṅ}}\)
- imp. \(\sqrt{\text{soṅs}}\)

\[
\sqrt{\text{sñag}} '\text{chase, pursue}'
\]
- pres. \(*\sqrt{\text{sñigs}}\) (replaced by analogical \(\sqrt{\text{sñegs}}\))
- past \(\sqrt{\text{bsñags}}\)
- fut. \(\sqrt{\text{bsñag}}\)
- imp. \(\sqrt{\text{sñogs}}\)

\[
\sqrt{\text{sag}} '\text{go}'
\]
- pres. \(*\sqrt{\text{gśigs}}\) (replaced by analogical \(\sqrt{\text{gśegs}}\))
- past \(*\sqrt{\text{(b)sags}}\) (replaced through paradigmatic leveling by \(\sqrt{\text{gśegs}}\))
- fut. \(*\sqrt{\text{(b)sag}}\) (replaced through paradigmatic leveling by \(\sqrt{\text{gśegs}}\))
- imp. \(\sqrt{\text{śog}}\) (continues as imperative of \(\sqrt{\text{hoṅ}} '\text{come}',
  
  replaced in this paradigm through paradigmatic leveling by \(\sqrt{\text{gśegs}}\))

\[
\sqrt{\text{lag}} '\text{teeter, incline}'
\]
- pres. \(\sqrt{\text{ldig}}\) (exists alongside the analogical \(\sqrt{\text{ldeg}}\))
- past \(\sqrt{\text{blags}}\)
- fut. \(\sqrt{\text{blag}}\)
- imp. \(*\sqrt{\text{logs}}\) (but cf. \(\sqrt{\text{logs}} '\text{side}'\)

References


