Some Remarks on Tabo Tibetan – A Variety of the Tibetic Language of Spiti

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My research on the language of Spiti began with a contribution to the Comparative Dictionary of Tibetan Dialects (CDTD), which was compiled by Roland Bielmeier and his team of linguists at Berne University. The CDTD is now in print but this impressive work will come out only after the sad demise of our respected teacher, who died in December 2013. This paper is dedicated to Roland, who encouraged me to venture out into Himachal Pradesh and who made it possible for me to discover a new world in Spiti.

This article presents data collected for the CDTD on three levels: In the first part, some examples from Volume 2: Nouns illustrate the geographical situation of Spiti Tibetan on the level of phonology. The second part presents verbs, verbal expressions and sentences in order to show some salient morphological features of the language of Spiti. Some remarks on case marking, especially the Spiti use of the Ergative, conclude part two. In the third part, the beginning of a coherent text is presented and some aspects of a text transmitted orally are worked out.

Before proceeding to the three main parts of this paper, I wish to clarify a terminological issue: How to refer to the language spoken in the given area. It is the Tibetan language spoken mostly in the Tehsil of Spiti, and it should therefore be called Spiti Tibetan. The reason why in all my previous publications it is called Tabo Tibetan is simply because my linguistic research is mainly based on data collected in Tabo; as such it also appears under Tabo in the CDTD. The name Tabo Tibetan (TT) does not therefore imply a different language from Spiti Tibetan, and I will also use the former in this paper in connection with data collected in Tabo.

Part One: Phonology and Language Geography

The area in which Spiti Tibetan is spoken is practically identical with the administrative unit of Tehsil Spiti in the district of Lahaul-Spiti. There is only a single village in Tehsil Lahaul in which Spiti Tibetan is spoken. It is
the uppermost Lahauli village of Khoksar, which is situated on the right
bank of the River Chandra, on the way to the Kunzum Pass and Spiti.
Following the Spiti River downstream into the district of Kinnaur, there are
also a number of Tibetan speaking villages. At the district border with
Kinnaur, however, some phonological differences occur. I will come back to
them hereafter.

Before turning to the phonological differences between Spiti Tibetan and
Kinnauri Tibetan (Khunnu) let’s see how the languages in question are
grouped in Bielmeier’s CDTD. I have selected the Written Tibetan lemma
of *sran ma* (peas) from Volume 2: Nouns, as an illustration:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BTC</td>
<td>sran ma ‘*bru’i bye brag cig’ (2971a), srad ma ‘ri skyes ’bru rigs šig’ (2970a), srad ma ‘ri skyes ’bru rigs šig ri la skye ba’i sño gañ bu can…’ (2970a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jk</td>
<td>‘1. pease, beans, lentils…’ (580a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gs</td>
<td>sran ma ‘the general name for beans, lentils, peas’ (1138b). srad ma ‘wild beans, peas’ (1138b).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAT</td>
<td>Bal <em>stranma</em> ‘peas’ (only Khaplu); Har, Kar, Tsha, Par, Thuw, Dar, Hanu <em>stranma</em> ‘peas’; KarMZ <em>stranma</em> ~ <em>ʂtanma</em> ‘peas’; Chik <em>ʂtanma</em> ‘peas’; Sapi, Shar, Mul, Lam, Wan, Khal, Nur, Nim, Nub <em>ʂanma</em> ‘peas’; Leh <em>ʂanma</em> ‘peas’ (gen.).’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 — *sren ma* in the CDTD, part 1.

The entries that are listed first are taken from 4 important dictionaries of
Written Tibetan and define as well as translate the headword: BTC by Zhang
Yisun et al., (The Great Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary), Beijing 1985; Jäschke
English and German editions, Goldstein’s New Tibetan-English Dictionary

And then the different dialect entries follow, grouped according to

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1 The term Khunnu (*khu nu*) for the Tibetan language spoken in Kinnaur was first
suggested by N. Tournadre, (Personal communication 2015).
2 The term Written Tibetan (WT) is used in the CDTD and related publications in the sense
of a written standard language, as opposed to any regional variations, and therefore comes
close to the term Classical Literary Tibetan used in Tournadre 2014.
3 PDF-Version exported on 07/07/2014.
geographical distribution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WAT</th>
<th>Western Archaic Tibetan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WIT</td>
<td>Western Innovative Tibetan (cf. Table 2 below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Central Tibetan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Southern Tibetan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Amdo Tibetan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2 — sren ma in the CDTD, part 2.**

Tabo Tibetan, as identical to Spiti Tibetan, is listed under Western Innovative Tibetan (WIT). It is followed by the languages spoken in Nako, Namgya and Nesang; the three villages of Upper Kinnaur included in the CDTD, yet, with a much smaller set of entries than the one from Tabo.

But what does *innovative* mean in the term WIT? There are several phonological features that can be distinguished. In our example, one of them is register tone. It suddenly appears as we proceed from west to east; that is from the margins towards the centre of the Tibetan speaking area. Historically, the development of register tone is connected with old initial consonant clusters that have merged, or with a preradical that was dropped.
1) WT: *gnam – sky*  
> Balti: χnam/hnam  
> Ladakhi: nam  
> Tabo: nām

2) WT: *nam – when?*  
> WAT: nam  
> Tabo: nām

Example 1 shows more data from the CDTD. Under the Written Tibetan lemma for *sky* the WAT entries of 2 Balti varieties/dialects, the Ladakhi, then finally the Spiti forms can be found. Example 2 WT *nam* English *when?* in contrast shows the unprefixed nasal initial, after which the syllable is realised in a low register tone in Spiti.

Let’s now turn to the south-eastern border of Spiti Tibetan, and look at the villages of Upper Kinnaur which appear in the CDTD. There is one prominent difference on the level of the phonetic realisation of the syllable initial consonant cluster sr-, as can be seen in 3) the example of WT *sren ma*. This is a completely regular realisation and just incidentally coincides with the border of the districts of Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur.

3) WT: *sran ma – peas*  
> Tabo: šānmā  
> Nako: ʈʂɛ nmā  
> Namgya, Nesang: ʈø nmā

Ex. 4 and 5 show more examples of the same phenomenon.

4) WT: *srog – life*  
> Tabo: šōk  
> Namgya: ʈōq

5) WT: *sruṅ ma – female protector*  
> Tabo: šūŋmā  
> Kinnaur: ʈūŋmā

To conclude the first part let me just mention an ongoing discussion: The concept of Tibetan dialects used in the CDTD has recently been questioned, especially by Nicolas Tournadre (Tournadre 2014), who suggests using the term Tibetic languages instead. For Spiti, I think it makes good sense to call it a Tibetan or Tibetic language and not a mere dialect. As for Tabo, as no distinctive features have been identified, I cannot see any reason for keeping the term “dialect of Tabo”. The Tibetan language spoken in the villages of
Upper Kinnaur between, Pooh and Sumra, on the other hand, shows only minor phonological differences, so the term “dialect” might still be useful there.

A final remark should be added here concerning the issue of how to refer to the local varieties of Tibetan of Himachal Pradesh. It has been agreed upon by some leaders of Spiti that the least controversial term in the Indian context is the term Bhoti, the Hindi word for Tibetan.5

**Part Two: Morphology**

Some remarks on the Spiti verbal system

The first volume of the CDTD ready to be published is Volume 1: Verbs. This part of the CDTD is organised in a similar way to Volume 2: Nouns, but as headwords the 1 to 4 Written Tibetan verb stems are given, followed by the relevant translations in the 4 WT dictionaries before the main part, which again consists of the dialect entries grouped into linguistic areas from west to east.

Quoted below are entries 347, 1002, and 1142 with their respective translations following Jaschke (English), Goldstein, and Tabo.

347 gcog, bcag, gcag, chog

Jk: vt, ‘to break, to break off’
Gs : va, ‘to break’
Tabo: teā (k), imp. teōk, cEA ‘to break’

The dialect entry also consists of the verb stems as far as they can be distinguished, followed by the verb type and the translation into English. In entry 347 the verb type is cEA; c referring to the category of “controllable” as contrasted to “non-controllable”.6 The capital letters indicate obligatory arguments of the given verb.

Not included in Volume 1: Verbs of the CDTD are examples that illustrate the use of each dialect listed. For 347 in Tabo there are examples 6 and 7.7

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5 Lochen Tulku, personal communication 2016.
6 Huber 2005: 84 defines “controllable” as follows: “If the action expressed by a verb is usually carried out intentionally, that is, if the person doing it can control the action, then the verb is considered controllable.”
7 The sentences given here to illustrate the usage of some verbs were recorded together with the verbs in field sessions in Tabo with my local assistants Pema Dorje and Sonam
In Ex. 6 there is a 3rd person pronoun as an agent and an object, and both are in the absolutive case, which means there is no case marker.

The verb stem is formally the same for imperfective and perfective and the auxiliary morpheme designates the verb as in the past tense. VIS stands for visual perception. It means that the speaker has seen the action, i.e. the breaking of the glass. Ex. 7 on the other hand has an agent in the ergative case (always -su in Spiti Tibetan). The object is again in the absolutive case and the verb stem is again the perfective stem followed this time by -taŋ that expresses clear intention of the agent. This is a good illustration of the fact that ergative case is only used for emphasis in Spiti.

Two more verbs from the CDTD may illustrate different verbal endings. Only this time they are non-controllable verbs and therefore take different auxiliary morphemes:

8) \(\eta\)ūi \(\eta\)go  
My head(ABS) a.lot
minm  
feel.pain(IPFV):IPFV.NVIS
\(ts^b\)āːrak
‘My head is stinging with pain.’

9) \(t\)irṃ  
Today boy.PL(ABS)
\(t\)ū-ja  
stick(ABS)
\(j\)ukpā  
endure(PFV).AOR.NVIS
\(z\)ōt-ɕuŋ
‘Today the boys endured the stick, I feel.’

Ex. 8 means that the speaker is feeling pain in his head. And in (9) the speaker feels that somebody else had to suffer.

Especially when I was collecting non-control verbs, it became clear that

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Tsering. The sentences were later transcribed, interlinearised and glossed and were originally meant to be published in a separate volume of the CDTD entirely dedicated to the syntax of the major dialects collected in the CDTD.

8 Cf. Section 2 on Ergative below.
in Spiti Tibetan there are auxiliary morphemes that are not distinguished in central Tibet and I could establish the following verbal endings for Spiti:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of evidentiality</th>
<th>I Focus on speaker’s involvement</th>
<th>II Focus on speaker’s unspecified knowledge</th>
<th>III Focus on speaker’s perception a) visual b) auditory</th>
<th>IV Focus on speaker’s inferred knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tense/aspect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present/imperfective</td>
<td>-et</td>
<td>-kak/-ak</td>
<td>a) tuk/-uk b) -arak</td>
<td>-ken jinkak -ken jinuk -ken jindarak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future/imperfective</td>
<td>-in</td>
<td>-kak/-ak</td>
<td></td>
<td>-tee jinkak -na jinkak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present/perfective</td>
<td>-deret</td>
<td>-dekak</td>
<td>a) -deruk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-peret</td>
<td>-pekak</td>
<td>b) -derak</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past/perfective</td>
<td>-wajin &gt;</td>
<td>-wa ak &gt;</td>
<td>a) -soŋ</td>
<td>-wa jinkak &gt; -anak .wa jinuk &gt; -anuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-wen</td>
<td>-wak</td>
<td>b) (?)-təŋ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 — Categories of Evidentiality in Spiti Tibetan (Hein 2007).

The system is organised according to how the speaker has come to know about the action or state expressed through the verb in question. In the first category, the focus is on the speaker’s direct involvement, it is also called egophoric. The second category are the default forms, which do not specify in any way how the speaker has come to know of the verbal action or state. Category III is the most interesting one, as it contains a subdivision that is only found in Western Tibetic languages. The morpheme -tuk/-uk, -deruk, -peruk and -soŋ always express visual perception, e.g. the speaker sees or has seen the action or state. There is a different set of auxiliary morphemes expressing all the other sensory perceptions, i.e. auditory and others like feeling or touching: -arak, -derak/-perak and -təŋ.

The basic verbal system that I have presented here fits in well with other linguistic descriptions of Tibetic languages. But with its great variety of forms, especially in the verbal category of evidentiality, it makes an important contribution to the linguistic research on Tibetan.
Some remarks on Ergative constructions in Spiti Tibetan

The ergative case and ergative constructions in Tibetan have been widely discussed in modern linguistics.⁹ As shown above, in the CDTD the verbs are subsumed under different verb types according to the categories of “control” on the one hand, and “arguments” or “case” on the other hand.

For a majority of the dialects included in the CDTD, the presence or absence of an ergative case as a core argument can be used as a defining criterion for the verb type.

But in some WAT and WIT dialects, as well as in Tabo (Spiti) Tibetan, the use of the ergative case is not quite as straightforward as it seems from the way it is applied in the definition of the verb types and therefore a more precise description of the Tabo/Spiti ergative is given here.

In Ex. 6 and 7 above, we have seen that the Tabo verb tɕāk can be used with the agent either in the absolutive case (no case marker) or in the ergative case (with the case marker -sū).

A unique feature is the form of the ergative marker. So far I have not come across -su in this function anywhere else but in Spiti. Regarding its etymology, the only likely origin I can think of is the WT interrogative pronoun sū (English *who*), which exists as a free morpheme in TT, too.

The second point about the TT ergative that is worth mentioning is its usage. As illustrated above in ex. 7, it is only used to put emphasis on the fact that the agent in an utterance executed a certain action, in other words, the ergative stresses the fact that a certain person did something and not somebody else. This use is purely pragmatic, i.e. depending on the situation and what the speaker wants to emphasise. That means to say that there is no verbal construction that triggers off a compulsory ergative as is the case with other Tibetic languages.

A third point about the morpheme -su in TT is the fact that in its emphatic function it also occurs in combination with other case morphemes, e.g. as part of the ablative case. An example of this can be found in the text presented in Part Three below (cf. sentence 11 of the story of Lingsing Gyalwo).

10) \[ \text{Then EXCL I Ling man like that people many.GEN} \]
\[ \text{mouth.ABL.EMPH meeting call-NOM like this I enemy.DIR} \]

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⁹ Cf. Tournadre 1996.
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mando-na  nā  tsʰā-je  jinuk
NEG.go.  if  shame  take-NOM  COP

‘Then, lo! I, like that, from so many Ling people speaking at a meeting, like this, if I don’t go to the enemy, it will be shameful.’

mi māŋpōi kʰānaisukun literally means “from so many people’s mouth”, as the source of the words “mouth” is marked with the ablative morpheme -naisukun or, probably more accurately, -nai as ablative marker followed by -sukun for emphasis.

For ablative marking the following morphemes have been identified in TT:
-nai /-naki, naisu/-naisu, -naisulo/-nakisulo, -naisukun/-nakisukun, -nailo/-nakilo

As -nai can also have a clearly instrumental function in TT, let me add some more examples from my own collection of sentences to illustrate the point.

11)  kʰō  kāŋpā-nai  nō-la  ey-joŋ
He(ABS)  foot.INST  I.DAT  hit.PAST

‘He kicked me with his foot.’

12)  nō  tʰōā-naisu  zi-rū-la  ey-wen
I(ABS)  hammer.INST  nail.DAT  hit.PAST

‘I hit the nail with a hammer.’

13)  nō  tʰōā-nai  zi-rū-la  ey-wen
I(ABS)  hammer.INST  nail.DAT  hit.PAST

‘I hit the nail with a hammer.’

The complete set of instrumental morphemes in TT is identical with the set marking for ablative.

That is why I consider -su to express ergative only, as in:

14)  sōnām-su  ī  pēteā  tēt-cuŋ
Sonam.ERG  this  book(ABS)  give.PAST.NVIS

‘It was Sonam who gave me this book.’

As a rather surprising conclusion from examples 7 and 10 to 14, it can be stated that in Spiti Tibetan the ergative morpheme -su is only used as an emphasising marker, whereas the instrumental and the ablative case take the same set of complex morphemes, which are clearly distinct from the ergative.
This is another difference with other Tibetic languages, where we find the same morphemes for ergative and instrumental,\(^\text{10}\) and different ones for ablative. The split in the set of case morphemes is drawn differently in Spiti Tibetan.

**Part Three**

As I have also done some work on oral tradition,\(^\text{11}\) in order to show more features of the spoken language of Spiti, I would like to present a text that has been passed down to the present day purely orally.\(^\text{12}\) It is the beginning of the story of Ling Singsing Gyalwo, the Spiti version of the Gesar epic. Although written versions of the Gesar epic exist, the women storytellers of Spiti do not normally read Tibetan but retell from memory the stories they once heard.

The text transcribed here below is rendered without a morpheme analysis, using only simplified glosses. They are meant to facilitate reading a coherent text without providing the basis for a detailed linguistic analysis.

**The story of Lingsing Gyalwo**

1) \(ta\) līŋ sīŋsīŋ jālwō jinuk ŋgo hōsē
Now King Ling Singsing COP beginning EXCL
Now this is King Ling Singsing, the beginning, ok?

2) \(tenē:\) līŋ sīŋsīŋ jālwō \(tenē:\) līŋ kārsāŋ ngksāŋ
Then King Ling Singsing then Ling Karsang Naksang
sūmpō dynmā tcō:wak
the three meeting called.PAST
Then King Ling Singsing, Ling Karsang and Naksang, the three, convened a meeting.

3) \(tenē:\) līŋ kārsāŋ ngksāŋ sūmpō dynmā
Then Ling Karsang Naksang the three meeting.DIR
tcō:je dĭmtūk ptsā teīkpō dynmāla
call.NOM Dimtuk boy only meeting
majoṃwak NEG.come.PAST
Then, when Ling, Karsang and Naksang, the three of them had

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\(^{10}\) Haller 2000, Huber 2005.


\(^{12}\) The text presented here was audio-recorded during fieldwork in July 2003 as part of a project on oral tradition run by the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. Sonam Tsering from Tabo introduced me to Tsering Palzom from Lari who narrated two episodes of the story. Later I worked on the audio recording with Sonam Tsering and together we transcribed the text and then translated it into English.
called a meeting, only the boy Dimtruk did not come to the meeting.

4)  
\[\text{tenē: dynmāla majoŋwa līŋpi}\]  
Then meeting.DIR NEG.come.NOM Ling.GEN
\[\text{miŋa dym kʰō teŋkpō tēŋ gọtpō jînani}\]  
People EXCL he only what powerful be.QUEST.EMPH
Then (as) he did not come to the meeting, the people of Ling all (said) how powerful he is!

5)  
\[\text{woā takpō dynmāla lēpteken teākla}\]  
We all meeting.DIR came.PER.NOM as
\[\text{dimtūk putśā teŋkpō teīla majoŋwani}\]  
Dimtruk boy only why NEG.come.QUEST.EMPH
We have all come to the meeting, why has only boy Dimtruk not arrived?

6)  
\[\text{waŋa tenē: dgmōla midēt naŋmō}\]  
We.PL then proper NEG.stay tomorrow
\[\text{nātōk teʰātpāla ḡaḷa ndō gueyin}\]  
morning punishment.DAT enemy.DIR go need.FUT
\[\text{saːk tɕi se}\]  
say.PAST tell!.IMP like this
We are all not going to stay like this, it was said, tomorrow morning, as a punishment he needs to go to the enemy, tell him!

7)  
\[\text{tenē: ḡa tūldu sōŋ tej}\]  
Then enemy destroy.TERM go !.IMP tell !.IMP
\[\text{teŋ:wak}\]  
said.PAST
Then go to destroy the enemy, tell him! It was said.

8)  
\[\text{tenē: ḡa tūldu sōŋ teg:je tenē:}\]  
Then enemy destroy.TERM go !.IMP said.NOM then
\[\text{miŋa dzu:ran seken majoŋwak}\]  
people many.EMPH say.NOM NEG.come.PAST
\[\text{kʰōla dzǐ:je kʰō gọtpō jokae}\]  
he.DAT be afraid.NOM he powerful COP
Then having said, go to destroy the enemy! Then there were not many people who said (like this) as they were frightened of him, he was powerful (you know).

9)  
\[\text{tenē: naŋmō nātōk sgrsena dimtūk}\]  
Then tomorrow morning say.when Dimtruk
putsā ŋōtla deṭna meṭ
boy you.EMPH stay.NOM NEG.COP
Then, when speaking about tomorrow morning, boy Dimtruk, you can’t stay!

10) ndaŋ dynmāla majonywa ŋōtla
Yesterday meeting.DIR NEG.come.NOM you
dala ndo gueyin setuk
enemy.DIR go need.FUT say.IMPF
Not having come to the meeting yesterday, you have to go to the enemy, it was said.

11) tenē: wo wo na līnpā ŋūk mi mnpōi
Then EXCL I Ling man like that people many.EMPH
kʰānaisukun dynmā teō je ŋūk ŋa dala
mouth.ABL meeting call.NOM like this I enemy.DIR
mando na ŋo tsʰā-je jinuk
NEG.go if shame take.NOM COP
Then, lo! I, like that, from so many Ling people speaking at a meeting, like this, if I don’t go to the enemy, it will be shameful.

12) tenē: tsūk jīna kʰānpi zimēt tgpō ŋimdze
Then how be.NOM house.GEN family all leave.NOM
ŋa dala ndo gycuk ŋamdze
I enemy.DIR go need.IMPF think.NOM
kʰōmpa tenē: kʰōmpī teʰkʰāndu mōnlām
he then this prayer room.LOC prayer
tāptu putak
do.TERM went.PAST
Then, anyway, leaving all the family members, thinking I have to go to the enemy, he then went to his prayer room to pray.

13) tenē: teʰūkpō mĭnāŋ jokak tenē: kʰōmpa
Then rich very COP then he
teʰkʰāndu mōnlām tāptū putak
prayer room.DIR prayer do.TERM went.PAST
He was very rich. He then went to his prayer room to pray.

14) tenē: kʰōmpa jōtsenani kʰōmpī teʰkʰāŋ
Then he be.when.EMPH his prayer room
koṃmāna sēr sērwōik dola jē:kör
upper.LOC gold golden.INDEF stone.DIR right.round
Then, when he was there, in his upper prayer room, a yellow golden bell (?) went round the stone to the right side, but then, when he was going the next day, it went round to the left side.

Then, in his middle prayer room, a light silver (bell?) went round the stone to the right side.

Then, when he was going to the enemy, the same (happened), when staying at home, it went round to the right, when he said he was going to the enemy, it went round to the left.

That means there are mane (prayer wheels) to turn, in each of his prayer rooms he has mane to turn, as you know.

If he always stays on and on, it turns to the right.

The people have no knowledge, his ‘house-’ wife (also) does not know.
I shall put a melody:

21) ęōlala lāmōi lūre
(Beginning of) Goddess’ song!

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tsʰūr} & \quad \etaōla \quad \mu̠ₙdāŋ \quad \text{tsʰāmō} \quad \mu̠ₙt \\
\text{To this side, I.DIR listen.REQUE wife you}
\end{align*}
\]

To this side, to me, please listen, wife, you!

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{jaŋ} & \quad η̠ₙla \quad \mu̠ₙdāŋ \quad \text{tsʰāmō} \quad \mu̠ₙt \\
\text{Again I.DIR listen.REQUE wife you}
\end{align*}
\]

Again, listen to me, you, wife!

22) puṭūkwi teʰōkʰāŋ bukeōna
Boy.GEN prayer room upper.SUP.LOC
In the uppermost of the boy’s prayer rooms

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sēr} & \quad \text{sērōi} \quad \text{dōla} \quad \text{jēːwōr} \quad \μ̠ot \\
\text{gold golden.INDEF stone.DIR right.turn COP}
\end{align*}
\]

A yellow golden (bell) has a right turn around the stone.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tekun} & \quad \text{jōnkōr} \quad \text{jepsena} \\
\text{That.EMPH left.turn go.when}
\end{align*}
\]

That, when it goes to the left

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{puṭūk} & \quad \text{q̠̠ala} \quad \text{ndōna jin} \\
\text{boy enemy.DIR go.FUT}
\end{align*}
\]

I, the boy, will go to the enemy

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{dimṭūk} & \quad \text{q̠̠ala} \quad \text{ndōna jin} \\
\text{Dimtruk enemy.DIR go.FUT}
\end{align*}
\]

I, Dimtruk, will go to the enemy.

23) puṭūkwi teʰōkʰāŋ banmāna
Boy.GEN prayer room middle.LOC
In the boy’s middle prayer room

\[
\begin{align*}
m̠ųl & \quad kʰāmpī \quad \text{dōla} \quad \text{jēːwōr} \quad \mu̠ₙt \\
\text{silver light.INDEF stone.DIR right.turn COP}
\end{align*}
\]

The light silver (bell) turns to the right side around the stone.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tekun} & \quad \text{jōnkōr} \quad \text{jepsena} \\
\text{That.EMPH left.round go.when}
\end{align*}
\]
That, when it goes round to the left

\begin{align*}
pu\text{ṭūk} & & d\text{gła} & & cōrcū \text{jǐn} \\
\text{boy} & & \text{enemy.DIR} & & \text{run away.FUT}
\end{align*}

I, the boy, will run to the enemy

\begin{align*}
dimṭūk & & d\text{gła} & & cōrcū \text{jǐn} \\
\text{Dimtruk} & & \text{enemy.DIR} & & \text{run away.FUT}
\end{align*}

I, Dimtruk, will run to the enemy.

24) \begin{align*}
pu\text{ṭūkwi} & & tɛʰōkʰāŋ & & jɔkʰeōña \\
\text{Boy.GEN} & & \text{prayer room} & & \text{low.SUP.LOC}
\end{align*}

In the boy’s lowest prayer room

\begin{align*}
tuŋ & & kʰāmpī & & d\text{gła} & & jēː\text{wōr} & & jot \\
\text{Conch} & & \text{light.INDEF} & & \text{stone.DIR} & & \text{right.turn} & & \text{COP}
\end{align*}

A light conch (bell) turns right round the stone.

\begin{align*}
teqkun & & jōnkōr & & jepseña \\
\text{That.EMPH} & & \text{left.turn} & & \text{go.when}
\end{align*}

That, when it goes round to the left

\begin{align*}
pu\text{ṭūk} & & d\text{gła} & & cōrcū \text{jǐn} \\
\text{boy} & & \text{enemy.DIR} & & \text{run away.FUT}
\end{align*}

I, the boy, will run to the enemy

\begin{align*}
dimṭūk & & d\text{gła} & & cōrcū \text{jǐn} \\
\text{Dimtruk} & & \text{enemy.DIR} & & \text{run away.FUT}
\end{align*}

I, Dimtruk, will run to the enemy.

\textbf{Some comments on the transcribed text}

The given text consists of the beginning of a story and includes the first of a series of songs. The songs render important direct speech in the course of the story. In this way the storyteller switches between her speaking voice and her singing voice without any pause. The text shows some specific characteristics of oral tradition such as repetitions of lines with small variations, e.g. the last two lines of each stanza of the song. Other instances are the precious substances that occur in three forms: gold, silver, and conch shell/mother-of-pearl; each of these substances is often used in religious songs and stories for their symbolic meaning.

Linguistically the text illustrates the use of a number of saying verbs and provides a lot of examples of direct speech (cf. sentences 11, 12 and 22 to
24) and reported speech (sentences 6 to 10). The storyteller also makes frequent use of subordinate clauses in order to link the main clauses. The story thus provides a lot of material for an analysis of the syntactic level, which I have not yet touched upon in this article.

**Conclusion**

The stories I have collected and worked on are an invaluable source of information for linguists. The collection of texts has provided me with a corpus of spoken language that forms the basis of my linguistic description of Spiti Tibetan. In the process of my research I have been allowed to get a glimpse of the rich oral tradition still alive in Spiti. But old songs and stories are getting lost quickly under the pressure of the dominating influence from the plains of India.

That is why I also see my involvement in Spiti as a contribution to create awareness among the local population about the particular aspects of Spiti Tibetan and its expressions in the oral tradition of stories and songs.

**Abbreviations**

A, ABS: absolutive case  
AOR: aorist  
c: controllable  
COP: copula  
DAT: dative  
DIR: direction  
E, ERG: ergative case  
EMPH: emphasis  
EXCL: exclamation  
FUT: future  
GEN: genitive  
IMP: imperative  
IMPF: imperfective  
INDEF: indefinite article  
INTENT: intentional modality  
LOC: locative  
nc: non-controllable  
NEG: negative  
NOM: nominaliser  
NVIS: non-visual perception  
PAST: past tense  
PF: present perfect tense
PFV  perfective stem
PROG  progressive
QUEST  question
SUP  superlative
TERM  terminative
VIS  visual perception

Bibliography


