

Report on *Epistemic modalities in Spoken Standard Tibetan*

by Zuzana Vokurková

I regard the thesis on *Epistemic modalities in Spoken Standard Tibetan* submitted by Zuzana Vokurková to be of high quality and to be a basis for the author's receiving the doctoral degree. The main quality of the book is, of course, that it offers a detailed and totally new account of the epistemic verbal endings in Spoken Standard Tibetan, based on the author's own fieldwork. This account also deals with tense, aspect and evidentiality meanings, and the relations between these and epistemic meanings. This is obviously of interest to the specialist of Tibetan, but no less also for the typologist, for the epistemic meaning often attaches to a verbal form which is already marked for evidentiality, which may well be a cross-linguistically unusual situation.

The thesis is furthermore well-structured, clearly written, and nearly always in good English.

I understand that it is my duty to make critical remarks.

1. Chapter 1 introduces the notion of tense, aspect and modality. A great number of concepts and classifications are discussed. The reader expects the author to take a clear stand with respect to the use and meaning of the concepts and relevance. This expectation is indeed met for some matters. Thus the author makes it explicit that she will distinguish epistemic and evidential modalities (p. 35, 44, 67 and *passim*) and that she will accept volitives and evaluatives as deontic modality (p. 51), but for many other issues, the author does not express any personal opinion, nor is it always clear whether or not the concepts discussed will be relevant in the rest of the dissertation. A good example is the discussion of the models of modality by Palmer, Dik and Gosselin. On pages 58 to 65 each model is described (quite adequately, I find, for Palmer and Dik, but not for Gosselin). It is not obvious why the 3 models are discussed (and it is not clear why Palmer only counts for his 1986 book, and not for his 2001 book). On page 66 there is a beginning of a comparison, but it is not developed. It is true that the author makes clear (on the top of page 67) that some of the parameters in Gosselin's model will be important, but most of these are not strongly tied with Gosselin's

model. In other words, independently of the modalisation by Gosselin, it is not surprising that e.g. degree of commitment, temporal relations, discursive relations or the type of marking of modality will be relevant. A second example: on pages 20-21 we learn about Moeschler's view on temporal reference. This is interesting, but it is unclear to what extent it will be relevant in the rest of the dissertation. A third and final one: on page 25 we find out how Tournadre modifies Dik's modal of aspectuality. It is not clear, at this stage, just how much of this modification will be relevant for what follows.

2. On glossing. The author opts for not identifying negative morphemes (p. 14, 58). In the case of evidential constructions, this would nevertheless be possible, at least in most cases. So what is the value of not having one's glosses as precise as possible?

It is furthermore not quite clear what the interlinear gloss informs us about, at least not in constructions in which the form and the meaning seem to diverge (p. 152-153). Example (195a) is said on page 152 to be 'formally negative', on account of *med*. One would expect a claim like this to be reflected in the interlinear gloss, but it isn't.

This is probably a more general point, viz. a decision of the author to treat many endings as synchronically non-analyzable, even though the linguist will easily discern the diachronic components (p. 149) - see point 3.

3. The double suffixation strategy involving both epistemic and evidential marking is of high cross-linguistic interest, for it relates to the question of whether epistemic modality and evidentially occur in the same structural position and whether one is in the scope of the other. A question: if the 'first formant' of an epistemic marker is formally identical to an evidential marker yet functionally different, what does that mean? Does that mean that this first formant isn't really evidential then? Yet if one takes the form seriously, how can't one avoid taking the form to mean evidentiality, not just evidentiality, of course. If this is correct, then it seems to me that in Spoken Standard Tibetan epistemic modality outscopes evidentiality. I would have liked to see a general discussion of the positional and scopal properties of evidentiality vs. epistemic modality. For Palmer and Dik, it would seem, both notions would occupy the same slot, and there would therefore be no prediction as to the surface order. So why does Spoken Standard Tibetan consistently put epistemic modality on the periphery? Interestingly, not all evidential first formants are possible (p. 99). Why is that? And first formant evidentials are not quite necessary (p. 100). Why not? Both epistemic and evidential markers derive from

nominalization-copula constructions? Relatedly, though the thesis focuses on the synchrony, a more general discussion of this (diachronic) link would have been welcome. Why is that certain copulas, when grammaticalized as endings, only yield the modal meanings they do (see p. 115)?

4. I find it surprising that there is no mention of any epistemic meaning for a 50%-50% degree of certainty. This is simply the case in which a speaker uses the epistemic marker with positive polarity and can then go on using the same marker but with the content marked for negative polarity, as in in English *The butler may have done or he may not have done it; I really don't know*. This kind of meaning is not reported for adverbs (p. 146) and it is not for verbal endings either (p. 157). At the risk of being Eurocentric, I would expect that this kind of true uncertainty is communicatively useful and may have found expression in Spoken Standard Tibetan as well. At least I would have liked to see a discussion as to whether or not it exists.

5. Somehow or other one must make a distinction between conventionalized semantic meanings and the more contextual pragmatic meanings, while admitting that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between them. Isn't this a problem for Spoken Standard Tibetan as well? What does it mean to say that epistemic meanings may also 'communicate various deontic and other derived meanings' (p. 159)? What does it mean to say that the proper study of such meanings should bring in an illocutionary perspective (p. 159)? It is correct that the author uses the distinction between semantics and pragmatics: many of the subsections in Chapter IV are announced as dealing with both semantic and pragmatic characteristics of the markers in question. It is (?often) not clear which characteristics count as semantic and which as pragmatic though.

6. Very many of observations are fine-tuned and thus describe fine nuances. This is most valuable, esp. for the specialist of Tibetan. The present reader thus fully appreciates this, but would like to see more of an explanatory type of investigation. For example, Spoken Standard Tibetan has two strategies for a past counterfactual conditional, one with an evidential marker and the other with an epistemic marker, and apparently the epistemic strategy expresses a higher degree of certainty (p. 180-181). A reader like me then immediately asks why this should be the case or at least if and why this division of semantic labor makes sense within the Standard Spoken Tibetan verbal system.

Some details

Though the English is usually excellent, some fine tuning would be desirable, e.g. with respect to article use (so not *In the Slavic studies*, but *In Slavic studies* - p. 27 - and not *Concept of modality* but *The concept of modality* - p. 30). Also, non-restrictive relative clauses should normally be preceded by a comma (e.g. page 33, line 33 or page 39 line 6).

The reference to Dryer et al (2004) is infelicitous. One should refer to the individual contributions. Furthermore the book itself appeared in 2005 and the order of the editors is different.

Page 68 lists deontic adverbs and all of them express shades of necessity, and not possibility. The text on top of the page suggests that this is no accident. It would be interesting to expand this point.

I fail to see that Radford's feature-based classification adds to our understanding of auxiliaries (p. 72).

I don't see how it follows from the idea that auxiliaries are a paradigmatic class that the presence or absence of inflections is essential (p. 73).

I find it surprising that the dialects of the nomads are more archaic (p. 79). One might think that moving around makes one meet speakers of other dialects and that this contact leads to change, as is perhaps the case for the Tibetan of the diaspora (p. 155). So why is this not the case for nomadic Tibetan?

On page 91 I understand that simultaneity is important. How does that notion relate to concomitance, introduced on page 23 and promised to be important?

It is a little strange to see spoken Tibetan categorized into more categories than literary Tibetan (compare pages 80 and 93). One would expect the opposite, given one's further expectation that the older language probably only survives in the literary register.

Why do pages 102 focus on the three-stage grammaticalization of only 3 nominalizers (*mkhan*, *yag* and *rgyu*) and no more, and why precisely these three? Curiously, for *mkhan* the

third stage cannot be illustrated, and the author there switches to an example with the nominalizer *gi*.

Even though the section on the syntax is fairly restricted (p. 124-144), it is not clear how much of it is actually relevant for the dissertation. As an example, consider the one page account of comparative clauses on p. 138-139. It is not indicated how this could of relevance for the study of epistemic modality and the suspicion is that is indeed devoid of relevance. This contrasts with the account of conditionals, for which the author explicitly claims relevance (p. 141).

Adverbs of high probability apparently involve reduplication (p. 147). It would have been interesting to put this fact within a wider account of the uses of reduplication, in Spoken Standard Tibetan, but also cross-linguistically, if possible.

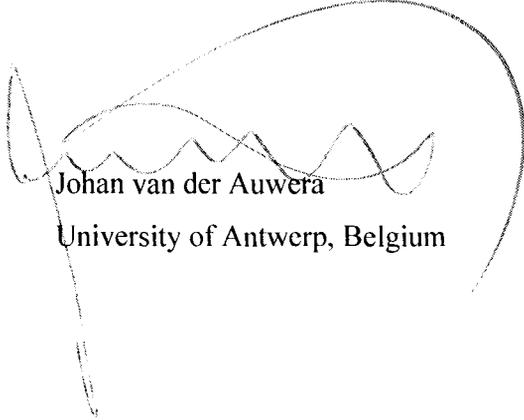
From page 175 onwards, examples are no longer numbered.

In what sense does a complement clause associated with a mental state predicate like *bsam* 'think' correspond to a relative clause in European languages (p. 177)?

Chapter III ends abruptly, for there is no conclusion, and chapter IV starts equally abruptly, for there is no introduction. Chapter IV has a surprisingly short conclusion.

Chapter IV has 11 sections. Each section treats one construction type, except for the first section, which treats two (*pa. 'dug* and *pa.yod.*). Why this difference?

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