# A Brief Survey of the Controversy in Verb Pronominalization in Tibeto-Burman

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This paper aims to make a brief survey of the century-long controversy in the provenance of pronominalization or verb agreement in Tibeto-Burman (TB) and some related phenomena, which have recently aroused renewed interest in TB historical studies.

It was Brian H. Hodgson (1856), the pioneer of Himalayan studies, who made the first mention of verb pronominalization, or 'pronomenalized [sic!]' languages. Half a century later, Sten Konow(1909), through the contrastive use of 'pronominalized' (or 'complex') and 'non-pronominalized' (or 'simple') in Volume III, Part I of the *Linguistc Survey of India* (LSI), in referring to the non-Tibetan Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in the Himalayas to the west of Bhutan, established them as standard terms in Tibeto-Burman (TB) studies. Both of them also considered pronominalization as a *merkmal* for the classification of those languages.

'Pronominalization' then referred, for instance, to the use of pronominal suffixes for indicating the person and number of the subject (and sometimes the object as well) among Himalayan languages (LSI 1909). Perhaps because LSI was the only authentic source of information on 'pronominalized' languages at the time, the term soon gained popularity in the works on TB languages. Though 'pronominalization' (as well as 'pronominalized') is now widely accepted and well established among TB and Sino-Tibetan (ST) scholars in general, its use was in a way unfortunate as the same term is now used for a different coverage in present-day grammatical theories. Perhaps because of this, nowadays, more TB and ST scholars, especially those whose works are theory-oriented, tend to use 'verb agreement' or 'verbal cross-reference' instead of these terms.

However, the reason why Hodgson and Konow adopted them for such a common morphosyntactic phenomenon is obviously because they considered the verbal suffixes in the agreement systems were derived from pronominals, among others, those from the reconstructable PTB first and second singular person pronouns: *ŋa and *na(ŋ).

'Pronominalization' has since been extended its use to cover TB languages other than Himalayan languages, such as rGyarong, Trung (Dulong), Tangut (now

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extinct), Qiang and Nung outside the Indian subcontinent, Nocte (Namsangia), Tiddim Chin, Lakher and Lushai on the eastern borders of India, and the morphological elements used there may be prefixes, not suffixes and may not be pronominals in origin, but we may be still justified in retaining it in the context of TB studies.

Probably because neither of the two better-known representatives of TB languages, Tibetan and Burmese are not pronominalized languages, at first no one considered pronominalization as a feature of Proto-Tibeto-Burman (PTB), but as a secondary development in TB. Even so, there were no consensus as to how it developed in TB.

First, prior to Konow, E. L. Brandreth (1878: 19), alluding to a subgroup of TB languages of Nepal, Class X in his classification, where languages with 'a similarly complex structure of the verb' such as Limbu, Sunwar, Brámu, Chepang and Vayu are included, argued for its native origin. Thus, he mentions: 'If it is the case that all the languages referred to in this group [TB] have a common origin, including both those which have the elaborate conjugational arrangement of the class mentioned, and those which have the simple structure, the mere juxtaposition of pronoun or noun and verb, we can hardly suppose that the complex system was common to all, and that while some languages have retained it, others have so completely thrown it off as to leave not a trace behind. It seems more probable that the wild tribes who speak the languages of Class X should have developed this system in the seclusion of the valleys or hills to which they betook themselves when they separated from the common stock'.

Konow (1909: 179) suggested the influence of a Munda substratum on the development of pronominalization, together with other features, peculiar to Himalayan languages. Much later, Henri Maspero (1952: 560) attributed its development to the influence of the conjugational system of Aryan dialects surrounding them rather than that of a problematic Munda substratum.

Eugénie J. A. Henderson (1975: 327) may be alluded to as the first proponent of verb pronominalization as a PTB feature, who, having discovered it in some Kuki-Chin languages, suggested the possibility that 'linguists may be obliged to conclude that, contrary to what has often been supposed, pronominalization is after all a genuine TB family trait'. However, it was James J. Bauman (1975: 190) who presented a substantial argument for its PTB provenance. Based on an extensive examination of the 'pronominalized' TB languages known at the time, he rejected the influence of both the Munda and Indo-Aryan substratum and postulated a hypothesis that 'pronominal categories and morphology are traceable to very early stages of the family approximating if not identical to the stages of PTB'. This hypothesis he later stated with confidence. Thus, he claimed that as 'a significant membership of the [TB] family does exhibit such [pronominal agreement] patterns', 'the phenomenon is almost certainly reconstructable to Proto-Tibeto-Burman'(1979: 419).

This hypothesis, which I will refer to the PTB origin hypothesis, was then

strongly supported by Scott DeLancey in a series of papers (1980, 1981, 1983, 1987, 1988, 1989). To establish pronominalization as a PTB feature, he maintains, we must prove, first, the forms of the agreement affixes found in the paradigms of the TB pronominalized languages were derived from cognate roots. Second, the agreement patterns of their paradigms to be consistent, in other words, to have been derived from the same pattern, and third, the distribution of such paradigms to be attested in 'at least two branches which have no common ancestry more recent than PTB', or, in view of the fact that there is no concensus on the subgrouping of TB languages at this level, to be attested in 'nearly every branch,and most sub-branches of the [TB] family' (1989: 317-321).

As for the morphological elements in the paradigms, some of the proposed PTB agreement affixes are certainly pervasive among the pronominalized languages. This is paricularly true of the affixes derived from the first and second singular pronouns mentioned above. It should be noted here that the nasal initial pronominal affix for 'first person singular' *-ŋ attested in Rangpa (Zoller 1983) leads us to suspect that even the corresponding stop intial affixes in the 'Northwest Himalayish' group might have been developed directly from an earlier nasal initial affix by a simple phonological process of denasalaization, and not from such an innovative protoform #kya (# for a tentatively reconstructed form), assumed originally for a possessive marker by Bauman. Both Bauman and DeLancey, and van Driem (1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1993b), who recently joined their campaign as a supporter of their hypothesis, reconstructs a number of other person/ number agreement suffixes and prefixes (or clitics by DeLancey)[1], which are not as pervasive in distribution as the first and second singular forms, hence the reconstructability of their earlier forms being more or less controversial. Their reconstructed PTB paradigms are given on the following pages.

Both Bauman and DeLancey assumed that the agreement pattern was of a split-ergative type. Thus, DeLancy mentions: 'two essential characteristics of the TB suffixal paradigm, the personal suffixes 1p. -ŋa, and 2p. -na, and a split ergative agreement pattern in which agreement is always with a 1 or 2p. agreement in preference to 3p., regardless of which is subject or object' (DeLancey 1989: 317), for which see also Bauman (1979: 429).

Bauman maintains that 'no complete ergative pattern of agreement' exists in Tibeto-Burman', but 'what we see instead are rather complex variations of an idealized split-ergative model', with the principle that 'if the object of the sentence is a 1st or 2nd person pronoun then agreement is with the object; if, however, the object is 3rd person then agreement is with the subject of the sentence', which may be exemplified by the singular agreement paradigms of Hayu (=Vayu), Thulung

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1) As is seen in Table 3, van Driem's reconstruction of PTB verbal morphology is not restricted to its person-number affixes and paradigm. He attempts to reconstruct the conjugational morphology as a whole with the relative positions (slots) of PTB verbal affixes specified.

and Chepang in Table 4 on the next page.

It should be noted that the split-ergative pattern does apply only to a part of the above paradigms, i.e. singular actants, and the reconstructed singular paradigm (Tables 1b and 2). For the rest of the paradigms on which Bauman based his reconstruction (Table 1a), correspondences, or rather similarities between forms there are much less regular, and thus even the reconstructability of this part of the paradigm may be doubted.

## PARADIGMS RECONSTRUCTED FOR PTB

(Abbreviations: 1/2/3 = first/second/third person, s/d/p= singular/dual/plural number, A= Agent, P= Patient, REF= Reflexive; X → Y = Agent→ Patient.)

1. **Bauman** (1975: 237, 247; 1975: 245, 1979: 428):

### a. PTB PARADIGM

| SUBJECT | | OBJECT | | Ø (INTRAN.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 1  s | | -na | -ŋa | -ŋa |
| d | | -naši | -ši | -ši |
| p | | -nai | -i | -i |
| 2  s | -ŋa | | -na | -na |
| d | -ŋaši | | -ši | -ši |
| p | -ŋani | | -ni | -i |
| 3  s | -ŋa | -na | -u | — |
| d | -ŋaši | -naši | -ši | -ši |
| p | -ŋai | -nai | -ni | -i |

### b. PTB TRANSITIVE PARADIGM
(Singular actants only)

| SUBJECT | OBJECT | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 1 | | -na | -ŋa |
| 2 | -ŋa | | -na |
| 3 | -ŋa | -na | -u |

## 2. DeLancey (1989: 321):

### PTB TRANSITIVE PARADIGM
(Singular actants only)

| SUBJECT | OBJECT | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 1 | | -n | -ŋ |
| 2 | P-Σ-ŋ | | P-Σ-n |
| 3 | -ŋ | P-Σ-n | -u |

## 3. van Driem (1993b: 320-328):

### TB CONJUGATIONAL PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES

| | | | | | -a ~ | -ŋ ~ -ŋ | | | -ni |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| kε- | | | | | | 1s | | | 2p |
| 2 | | | | | | | | -u | |
| a- | me- | VERB | -nši | -tε | | -na | -si | 3P -si | -i |
| 1 | pA | STEM | REF | PT | | 2 | dA | dP | 1p/2p. |
| ta- ~ na- | | | | | | | | -a | |
| marked | | | | | | -nya | | 3 | -k |
| scenario | | | | | | 1s→2 | | | 1p |

## 4. Bauman (1979: 424):

### SPLIT-ERGATIVE AGREEMENT PATTERNS
(Singular actants only)

| | Vayu | Thulung | Chepang |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 → 3 | -ŋ | -u < *-ŋu | -ŋ |
| 2 → 1 | -ŋo | -ŋi | -ta: ŋ |
| 3 → 1 | -ŋo | -ŋi | -ta: ŋ |
| 1 → 2 | -nu | -ni | -na: ŋ |
| 2 → 3 | -o | -na | -na: ŋ |
| 3 → 2 | -o | -na | -te |

The crucial point of their argumentation for the PTB origin hypothesis is, of course, whether the pronominal paradigms based on, or shown to have been derived from, such an agreement pattern, can be proved to be distributed widely enough to justify the reconstruction of their proto-paradigm at PTB.

Unfortunately, though there have been repeated attempts to classify TB languages, notably by R. Shafer (1966) and P. K. Benedict (1972), it seems to me that the situation has not been much improved since Graham Thurgood (1885: 376) pointed out ten years ago that 'Tibeto-Burman subgrouping is still at a stage where numerous questions exist about the composition of lower-level units and most

questions about higher-level units are largely open'.  Because of this, DeLancey (1989) based his argument on middle-level units on which he considered there is general agreement.  He gives as middle-level units: ① TIBETAN-KANAURI, ② EASTERN HIMALAYAN, ③ BODO-GARO-KONYAK, ④ KUKI-CHIN, ⑤ NAGA, ⑥ JINGHPAW (=KACHIN), ⑦ LOLO-BURMESE (=BURMESE-YIPHO), ⑧ KAREN, ⑨ ABOR-MIRI-DAFLA, and ⑩ RUNG (GYARONG and NUNGISH), admitting that ABOR-MIRI-DAFLA has not been well established, and that his RUNG is only a cover term for the Gyarong and Nungish languages. He then claims that the agreement paradigm of the sort is found in seven of the ten middle-level units, lacking only NAGA, LOLO-BURMESE, and KAREN, and hence enough to guarantee the PTB origin hypothesis.[2]

Within the last ten years there has been a number of proposals for the subgrouping of TB languages put forth by such scholars as Nishida (1986, 1989), Dai (1989), Sun (1989), Matisoff (1991) and Ma (1992).  A cursory examination of their subgroupings shows that what matters here is not only the number of middle-level subgroups, but the membership or composition of such subgroups as was mentioned by Thurgood.  Thus, Nishida (1989) proposed a new alignment of Trung, Rawang, Anung (Nungish) with LOLO-BURMESE.  Thurgood's RUNG as a group which includes most of pronominalized languages in China and Burma still remains as a possiblity.  Besides, we cannot bluntly refuse the suggested subgrouping of EASTERN HIMALAYAN under RUNG.  More importantly perhaps, the occurrence of pronominalization in only a small portion of such a subgroup may not corroborate its reconstructability at the proto-stage of the subgroup if we admit of the language- or dialect-specific development of such a feature through drift or diffusion.[3]

DeLancey (1989) attempts to refute the argument for verb agreement as a secondary development in PTB, maintaining that it is based on two misconceptions: first,

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2)  G. van Driem (1993b: 294) classifies, first, ST into Chinese and Tibeto-Karen, and then the latter into Karen and TB.  TB separates into three major branches: Bodic, Baric and Burmic, each of which ramifies into two or three subbranches, eight as a whole.  These subbranches are of the level that corresponds Benedict's nuclei.  However, he considers Lepcha (Róng) as a subbranch under Bodish, and Benedict's Mirish (Abor-Miri-Dafla), Barish (Bodo-Garo) and Kukish (Kuki-Naga) under one and the same subbranch Kāmarūpan.  His Burmish consists of three subgroups: Lolo-Burmese, Nàxī and Rung (Xīfān, Nung and rGya-rong).  Thus, pronominalized languages are attested in any of his major branches of TB and in five out of eight subbranches in his classification.

The classification proposed by Sun (1994), which drastically differs from his (1988) version, divides TB into five sections each with one to three branches: ① Tibeto-Himalayan section with Bodic and Himalayanic branches, ② Bodo-Naga-Chin section with Kuki-Chinic, Nagaic and Baric branches, ③ Qiang-Kachin section with Kachinic and Qiangic branches, ④ Yi-Burmese (Lolo-Burmese) section with Yipo and Burmic branches, and ⑤ Karen section with Karenic branch.  These branches may be subdivided into several subbranches.  Sun maintins that verb proniminalization is found in eight of his ten branches.  However, see fn.10 below.

'no contemporay language could, in any significant respect, be more conservative than a related language, attested from a millennium ago', exemplified by Tibetan or Burmese, and, second, the heterogeneity of TB agreement paradigm, claimed by Caughley 'cannot be maintained in the face of the available data', against which, as we have just seen above, he contends that the distribution of 'one paradigm, definable both by morphological form and paradigmatic structure' is sufficiently wide to allow us to reconstruct it at PTB.

As mentioned above by DeLancey, it was R. C. Caughley (1982: 206) who first raised an objection to Bauman's PTB origin hypothesis after an extensive survey of pronominalization in TB, maintaining that 'The wide variation in pronominal affixation between, and even within, the various Tibeto-Burman languages points to the relatively recent origins of these systems'. Caughley, who had been working on Chepang for more than ten years, showed that there are at least three factors involved in selection for pronominal affixation in Chepang, which are person hierarchy (1/2 > 3), animacy hiearchy (Human > Spirit > Non-personal Animate > Inanimate) and givenness hierarchy. The pattern of verbal cross-reference in Chepang is in fact so complicated that the split-ergative pattern can offer only a partial explanation of the pattern.[4]

One of the salient features of Caughly's study is that he has not only made clear his stance concerning TB pronominalization, but he has also attempted to reconstruct the process of development of the cross-reference system of Chepang exhaustively by applying the processes 'Topic Shift' and the 'Modified Topic Shift' proposed by T. Givón (1976).[5]

In spite of objection or doubts raised against either the PTB origin hypothesis and/ or the split-ergative pattern of pronominalization explicitly or implicitly expressed by other scholars, such as David E. Watters (1975, 1991), Yasuhiko Nagano (1984) and Paul K. Benedict (1983),[6] because of the influential works

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3)  Three TB languages reported to have a verb agreement system have been found recently. The first is Dolakha Newari described by Genetti (1990). Though she contends that its agreemt system reflects that of Proto-Newari, evidence for her argument does not seem to be firm enough to exclude the possibility of being a dialect-specific innovation. Its provenace, I think, still remains open. The second is Sangkong, a Lolo-Burmese language reported by Li Yongsui (1992), and further analysed and explicated by Matisoff (1994). Without some more details supplied, however, we may suspect that its "pronominal suffixes" are evidential rather than person agreement markers. Whether they represent an evidential or an agreement system, it is a language-specific innovation. The last is the Western dialect of Black mountain Mönpa or 'Olekha, briefly introduced by van Driem (1994). The agreement paradigm and pattern of 'Olekha may not be innovative, but comparable with those of some other TB pronominalized languages. The problem in this case is that the genetic classification of 'Olekha and, for that matter, that of his East Bodish as a whole among TB may need a further consideration.
4)  Caughley prefers the use of cross-reference to agreement for TB pronominalization.
5)  Givón, T. 1976. Topic, pronoun and grammatical agreement. In C. Li (ed.). *Subject and Topic*. New York: Academic Press, 149-88.

arguing for the reconstruction of a verb agreement system as a feature of PTB by Bauman and DeLancey, and 'the lack of any strong oposition, many scholars have begun to accept the existence of a verb agreement system in Proto-Tibeto-Burman as received knowledge' (LaPolla 1992a: 298). Randy J. LaPolla's argument against both the hypotheses of PTB origin and split-ergativity of TB pronominalization, is concerned more with theory and principle.

First, LaPolla (1992a: 299), suggesting a classification of TB with only six major (middle-level) subgroups as against ten and the possibility that almost all pronominalized languages fall under one and the same subgroup such as RUNG, insists that 'Tibeto-Burman would have only six major subbranches, with three out of the six showing no agreement system'. However, as I have mentioned above, we are not yet in the position to give the definitive answer to the question of the distribution of such a feature. LaPolla (1992a: 300) then suggests the possibilities of language contact, shared innovation within a subgroup, or a combination of the two among pronominalized languages, as the languages are all located in an geographically contiguous area of large-scale language contact, multilingualism, and mutual influence and the possibility of independent innovation of agreement systems in some subgroups or some languages in TB with their eventual spread in the area, against Bauman's denial of the possibility of independent innovation.

His argument against DeLancey's second contention is persuasive. The case in point is Tangut, a TB language attested in the twelfth century, which had an optional agreement system with only two etymologically transparent pronominal affixes, -nga 'first person singular' and -na 'second person singular' (cf. the resepective PTB pronouns, *ŋa and *na (ŋ)) with a clear pragmatic function of marking that speech act participant (SAP) most affected by the action of the predication (SAP affectedness), not grammatical or semantic function.[7] Such an agreement system, which is also shared by most of the TB languages is, LaPolla contends, a relatively recent grammaticalization of discourse prominence. Then, he maintains: 'It is highly unlikely that Tibetan, Burmese, Newari and Yi, would all have lost every trace of their agreement system while Tangut's did not age at all'. Further, 'If we were to accept a Proto-Tibeto-Burman verb agreement system along the lines of what DeLancey is suggesting, then we would be in effect saying that Tibetan completely lost that agreement system while retaining remnants of the earlier system of prefixes and suffixes', reconstructable for PTB and perhaps even for PST'(1992a: 301).

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6) See Benedict (1983: 96, fn. 15). Since then he has gradually changed his view. Thus, he (1991: 138) refrains from drawing a conclusion, saying that 'the case can be said to remain moot', and he (1994) has come to recoginze pronominalization as well as the affix-al (verbal agreement) form of the second person pronoun *-na- in contradistiction to the independent form *na (·) ŋ as features at the PST level.

7) Note, however, that K. B. Kepping (1975) considers another suffix -ni as the pronominal affix for 'second person plural', while Nishida (1985) prefers to take it as a subordinating suffix for protasis.

The most clear cleavage in opinion between LaPolla and others is concerned with the principle of morphological reconstruction. Thus, he claims that 'DeLancey, Bauman, van Driem and others reconstruct the most complex system possible, attempting to combine all the attested forms and features, considering those languages that have the most complex system, such as Gyarong, as the most conservative', while he suggests that only the features with no clear line of development and the shared patterns with no motivation, which is what is obtained only after stripping off all the layers of grammaticalization should be reconstructed.

LaPolla's last but not least important contention against the PTB origin hyposthesis relies on the observations and sugestions by Johanna Nichols (1986), based on her typological studies of a core sample of sixty languages across the world. Thus, as one of the methodological principles induced from her studies, she suggests that 'in the event that we have two clearly related languages with clearly cognate morphology, one of them strongly head-marking and one strongly dependent-marking, we should reconstruct the dependent-marking type' (1986: 89). This is indeed the situation in TB.[8] Following her suggestion that head-marking patterns 'may arise as isolating languages become agglutinating, and pronouns are cliticized to verbs... or they may develop from dependent-marking languages, through migration and clisis' (1986: 88), he then insists that as such cliticization of pronouns to verbs is what we find in TB pronominalized languages, the TB original pattern must be dependent-marking system.

If her suggestions were to turn out to be not just tendenceies but approved universals, then, of course, any argument for the PTB origin hyposthesis of pronominalization would be meaningless. However, I think that the question whether the study of typology and universals so far made can definitely contribute to historical reconstruction is still open.

Finally, LaPolla shows that DeLancey's definition of ergativity or split-ergativity as marking person regardless of semantic role or syntactic function diverges from the standard definition of the term, and then points out the logical error of Bauman's argument for ergativity in TB agreement patterns, such as Tangut, Vayu and Chepang, as mentioned above. As their basic pattern of agreement, he contends, is 'with any SAP in the sentence, regardless of role, if the other participants in the clause are non-SAPs, so his [Bauman's] "ergative" pattern will work only when the subject is a non-SAP, and the single SAP in the clause is the object'(1992a: 310).

In conclusion, he remarks: '... Tibeto-Burman began as a morphologically simple 'role-dominated' language, similar to Chinese, with which we must eventual-

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8) Against Nichols' hypothesis van Driem (1993b) insists on the improbability of languages which range in her proposed parameter from head-marking to dependent-marking to form a genetically related group. However, I think that TB or ST is indeed a family of genetivally related languages which includes languages that can be placed closer to one or another end of the parameter.

ly link it.   The various daugther languages later developed various means of coding
either pragamatics (Tangut), syntactic function (Kham, Kuki-Chin), or semantic
role (Tibetan), or some combination of these three.   On this view, the typical Lolo-
Burmese role-dominated system ... is closest to the original Proto-Tibeto-Burman
system of grammatical relations, rather than being the most degenerate, as assumed
by those proposing a Proto-Tibeto-Burman verb agreement system' (1992a: 311).

In China, Sun Hongkai (1993) considers pronominalization as a PTB
feature.[9]

In Japan, Tatsuo Nishida (1989a: 185, 1989b: 816-818) suggests to reconstruct
pronominalization at as early as PST, not just PTB with a system closest to that of
rGyarong.   However, so far he has shown only a bare outline of its development in
TB.   Thus, only his shematic diagram of the reconstructed VP of PST and the
processes of its development in different branches of ST is given below.   The
problem of his reconstructed PST pattern is that we are nowhere informed of how
he has worked out it in his works.

TYPE I      S   —   O   —   PA      —   V (STEM) —   PA
                                (S AGR)                        (O AGR)

e.g.      我      狗      吾   —   打   —   之

⇩

TYPE II     S — O — DA — V —   PA
                                          (S AGR)                    ⇩
             我   狗   下 — 打 —   吾
                        ⇩
TYPE III    S — O — V—AUX          TYPE IV   S — V — O
             我   狗   打   了                      我   打   狗
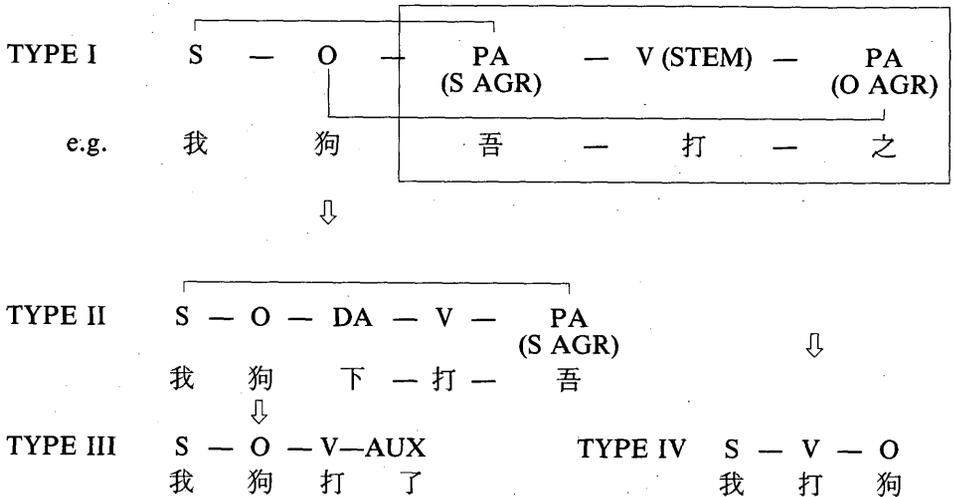
(Abbreviations: S= SUBJECT, O= OBJECT, V= VERB (STEM), PA= PRONOMINAL
AFFIX, DA= DIRECTIONAL AFFIX, AUX= AUXILIARY, AGR= AGREEMENT/
CONCORD)
Examples:
TYPE I: PST/ PTB; e.g. rGyarong, ? (Archaic) Qiang(several centuries BC)

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9)   Some of his arguments are hard to accept.   For instance, Sun (1994) considers the
vocalic coda -o (/-u) of the pervasive imperative marker among TB languages as a vestige
of the second person pronominal suffix.   The base or underlying form of this marker,
whose intial varies from language to language, is often difficult to decide.   Besides,
the"verb pronominalization"of Sangkong may be considered as an innovative rather than
a retained feature. See fn.3) above.

TYPE II: e.g. QIANG, PUMI (SUBJECT/OBJECT CASE
     -MARKERS DEVELOPED)                              ⇓
     (INTERMEDIATE TYPE : e.g.  TRUNG)
TYPE III: NO EXAMPLES GIVEN (?LOLO-BURMESE)      ?BAI
TYPE IV: CHINESE-TAI, MIAOYAO, KAREN

    My view on the PTB origin hypothesis has been expressed in my paper read at the 20th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics at University of British Columbia in 1987.  Basically, I thought and still think that the distribution of this feature was not wide enough to corroborate its reconstruction as a PTB feature.  My opinion was and still is, as I stated above, that the occurrence of pronominalization in a few languages of a subgroup does not prevent us from considering it as a language- or dialect- specific development.

    As one who still has a considarable attachment to Lolo-Burmese, I am pleased to see LaPolla's conclusion that its typical form would represent the grammatical system of PTB (1992a: 311).  However, it does not seem to me that LaPolla's concluding remark would end the century-long controversy on the problems of TB pronominalization.

    I believe that there may probably be no one among TB and ST scholars who would deny the contributions made by Bauman and DeLancey to stimulate our interest in the study of TB syntax and morphosyntax in general.  However, as for the historical aspects of their studies, I have always felt, though I think some may raise an objection, that we need to pay more attention to the reconstruction of the protolanguage of each lower-level subgroup, desirably before we talk about the reconstruction of PTB morphology, or at least side by side with it, as such an attempt is not feasible for all the recognized subgroups.  For this reason, I personally appreciate what has been done and is still being done by scholars, such as van Driem and his colleagues (see, for instance, R. Rutgers (1994) and G. J. Tolsma(1994)) in the Kiranti group of languages of Nepal.  With such reconstructions at hand, I think, we will be able to talk about such features as agreement with more confidence.

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