

On the Issue of Simple Postpositions in the Tibetan Language

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*If it looks like a duck,
swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck.*
The Duck Test

nitially, I wrote this paper with the idea that it could serve as both a theoretical and practical contribution to Tibetan linguistics and the teaching of Tibetan as a foreign language, even though I was fully aware that I am not a professional linguist. However, after further reflection, I decided to focus on the practical aspect and take a more reserved approach to the theoretical side.¹ That said, I chose to keep the original epigraph, even though my final approach to the material is more cautious than the epigraph might suggest. After all, *probably* is not the same as *definitely*.

I regard this work as a logical extension of Nicholas Tournadre's illuminating paper "The Classical Tibetan cases and their transcategoriality: From sacred grammar to modern linguistics" (2010). This work systematically and coherently organized a group of the fundamental function words crucial for all levels of Tibetan learning, without being bound by the perspectives of indigenous Tibetan tradition. These function words were termed by Tournadre as 'casemarkers', and, defining them so, he followed the traditional point of view regarding their role in the Tibetan language. But he argued about their number and exact understanding of their syntactic functions.

Tournadre wrote: "This traditional analysis in 8 cases based on the Sanskrit model has created a great deal of confusion for linguistic description as well as for the teaching of Literary Tibetan. The problems connected with the Sanskrit 8 cases model have been noted by both native and foreign scholars" (p. 94). He replaced this artificial model with his own paradigm. According to him, "Literary Tibetan

¹ I am grateful to my colleagues, Marieke Meelen, Alla Sizova and Uri Gabbay, for their valuable comments. In addition, I would like to thank my students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, with whom I have discussed these and other topics since the autumn of 2022.

has ten grammatical cases: absolutive རྩོམ་ཙམ་; agentive རྩེད་ལྔ་; genitive འབྲེལ་ལྔ་; dative ལ་ལྔ་; purposive གྲུ་ལྔ་; locative ན་ལྔ་; ablative ལས་ལྔ་; elative ནས་ལྔ་; associative གྲུ་ལྔ་; and comparative བས་ལྔ་” (p. 98). Tournadre also discussed four fundamental properties of the case markers: “cliticity, multifunctionality, transcategoriality and optionality” (p. 117; see pp. 99–101, 114–116). He provided examples for each function of each marker that he defined. Thus, for every case, they were listed in the following order: “a) case functions (after nouns or NPs), b) connective functions (after verbs or nominalized verbs), c) adverbial functions, d) postpositional functions, e) sentence particle functions” (p. 102).

When considering his ideas along with all the examples, I formulated for myself the following prominent features of these lexical elements:²

- They do not change the preceding syllables, except for three situations such as, for instance, *pas*, *pa'i*, and *par*.³

- They are attached only once to the noun phrases they relate to; for instance, *bla ma la* — *bla ma mtshan ldan la* — *bla ma mtshan ldan gcig la*, and so forth.

- Some of them have close albeit not quite identical meanings, cf. *la*, *du*, and *na*; *las* and *nas*; *las* and *bas*; *gyis* and *nas*.

- They are used with virtually all parts of speech, including verbs and verbal phrases.

- Most of them can be used to form complex postpositions, e.g. (*'i*) *rgyab la*, (*'i*) *rgyun du*, (*'i*) *nang nas*, (*'i*) *rkyen gyis*, etc.

- They can work as conjunctions between clauses in complex sentences, and can be also used to form complex conjunctions for the same purpose, e.g. (*'i*) *stobs kyis*, (*'i*) *ring la*, (*'i*) *tshe na*, etc.

- They are used to compose adverbs: *dal gyis*, *ga ler*, *re shig na*, *snying nas*, etc.

- Some of them can be used in couples to form compound conjunctions, adverbs, postpositions and introductory words: *des na*; *dper na*; *mdor na*; *bltas na*; *pas na*; *mthar gyis*, etc.

The more I pondered this combination of features, the more it reminded me of the part of speech known in English and Russian,

² Some of them are common for the case markers in agglutinative languages regarded as suffixes; see no. 5.

³ Each of them has a fuller equivalent in which the function word is written separately: *pa yis*, *pa yi*, *pa ru*. In spoken Tibetan, the short forms do exhibit fusion since the host and the case marker are pronounced as one syllable. However, such a phenomenon is known in other languages, e.g., in Hebrew the prepositions *b'* and *l'* get fused with the definite article, and yet they remain prepositions. Besides, this paper is dedicated to Classical Tibetan, and there might have been no fusion in old times.

among other languages, as **simple prepositions**.⁴ In some languages, such as Panjabi, the corresponding group of function words is designated by exactly the same term. Eventually, I became convinced that this conceptualization perfectly captures the nature of the Tibetan function words under study. My conviction, however, is not supported by specialized linguistic research involving formal and functional diagnostic tests. Therefore, in this paper, I will limit myself primarily to the practical significance of this identification for teaching literary Tibetan, as this aspect allows for the simplification of subtle linguistic nuances, much as is done in normative educational programs for learning English or Russian, even as a first language.

I need to clarify my approach to the term 'simple postpositions' first, however. I do not believe it contradicts the term 'case markers,' as the latter's use in reference to prepositions and postpositions aligns with the concept of analytic case marking, as opposed to the synthetic case marking found in languages like Latin, Sanskrit, or Russian.⁵ At the same time, I am more reluctant to accept the terms 'clitics' or 'case particles', used by Tournadre and some other authors. This may be due to the fact that the normative approach to my native language, Russian, is quite strict (and clear!) in categorizing lexical elements into parts of speech. In this system, 'prepositions' and 'particles' refer to different parts of speech, while 'clitics' do not belong to any such category. I understand that in-depth linguistic studies may take a different approach. Therefore, what follows is intended only to show that these terms are less suitable for a simplified educational approach.

Already H. A. Jäschke (1817–1883) categorized the function words in question into two groups: particles (for Instrumental and Genitive constructions) and simple postpositions (*la*, *du* and its allomorphs, *nas*, *las*, *na*, *dang*) (Jäschke 1883: 21–24, 67–71). This approach was later supported by B. Kuznetsov (1931–1985) (Kuznetsov [n. d.]: 20–23). In the recent book by N. Tournadre and H. Suzuki, the authors remark: "Tibetic case markers are normally not considered as suffixes: it is easy to demonstrate that the markers occur once at the end of the noun

⁴ The prepositions that consist of 2 or more words are called compound.

⁵ Some languages have both synthetic and analytic case markers, and the former (inflexions) are considered 'natural' cases while the latter (prepositions or postpositions) have a role of function words that help to specify the exact meaning of the cases in particular situations. Usually, prepositions are associated with particular cases. However, sometimes, different cases can be used with the same prepositions, as, for instance, in Russian: *на доме* ('on a house') — *на дому* ('on the house' = 'at home'), where the same noun *дом* 'house' is used with the same preposition *на* 'on' and yet it has two different inflections *-e* and *-y* which refer to the Prepositional and Locative (or Second Prepositional) cases respectively. Locative in Russian is usually included, for simplicity, inside the Prepositional case, but strictly saying, these are two different cases.

phrase and they do not have other properties of suffixes.⁶ Some scholars such as DeLancey (2003a) or Strahm & Maibaum (2005: 809) have considered that Tibetan cases are actually more like postpositions” (Tournadre, Suzuki 2023: 309).

The first of the referred works is a brief overview of Classical Tibetan. Its author, Scott DeLancey, identifies seven postpositions as case markers (‘bas’ and ‘dang’ are omitted), provides them with Latin names, and characterizes them, morphologically, as clitics (DeLancey 2003: 258). This is almost exactly what I think to be a correct point of view. However, two more postpositions are to be added, and some of the Latin names of the (analytic) cases may be disputed. The second work, devoted to Jirel, one of Tibetic languages spoken in Nepal, states: “Jirel nouns and pronouns occur with the following case markers: nominative (NOM), ergative (ERG), associative (ASC), dative (DAT), locative (LOC) and genitive (GEN). The case markers could also be viewed as postpositions. In this dictionary we have regarded only free forms as postpositions, most of them indicating spatial relations. The bound forms, that is the case markers, are therefore not treated as postpositions” (Strahm & Maibaum 2005: 809–810). Analysis of what the authors classify as bound and free forms in Jirel exceeds the scope of this paper. But brief descriptions of the cases and tables of ‘declinations’ provided in their book (*ibid.*: 815–823) make me think that both types can be treated as simple postpositions rather than grammatically different entities, even though there *is* fusion in certain cases (see no. 3). In the same way, I do not see solid reasons to follow Jäschke’s categorization of these function words into two different parts of speech.

I must admit that I did not attempt to consult all the overviews of Tibetan Grammar. It is possible that the notion of all these function words being simple postpositions has already been expressed by some author(s). However, it has not yet been ascertained by practicing Tibetologists. Tournadre and Suzuki supplied the above-quoted

⁶ The authors might have intended to use the term ‘inflections’ here, as it is commonly used to designate synthetic case markers in inflective (or fusional) languages, which Tibetan does not have. However, the term ‘suffixes’ *is* used to designate case markers in agglutinative languages, including situations where they are added to the end of the noun phrase. Notably, Nathan Hill uses the term ‘suffixes’ in Hill 2012 in reference to Tibetan, clearly in this sense. While I have very limited knowledge of classical agglutinative languages, I can see some differences between, for instance, Mongolic suffixes and Tibetan simple postpositions as case markers. Mongolic suffixes lack certain functions that Tibetan simple postpositions possess, such as their ability to serve as conjunctions or to form compound postpositions (see also Yliniemi 2021: 73). One may note also that, in Tibetan, adjectives can be added both after nouns and before them (by means of Genitive construction) which seems to be untypical for the agglutinative principle.

passage with the following commentary about these words: “There are however some arguments suggesting that they behave like enclitics. First, the Tibetan case markers may never occur alone (without the noun) unlike adpositions which often have this property (cf. English, it’s under/after/on, etc.) and they form a prosodic word (together with their host). Tibetan case clitics may not be coordinated unlike some adpositions (in and out, on and off). They often undergo morphophonological alterations depending on the host phonological context, etc.” (Tournadre, Suzuki 2023: 309).

Some other authors define them as ‘particles’. This approach is reflected in the latest significant textbook in Classical Tibetan by Joanna Bialek, who utilized the term ‘case particles’ (Bialek 2022: 45–46). Michael Hahn suggested that they might have been considered as ‘(nominal) postpositions’ ((nominale) Postpositionen’), but he did not delve into this topic, preferring simply to call them ‘case particles’ (‘Kasuspartikeln’) (Hahn 1996: 52–53). Stephen Beyer, in his original survey of Tibetan Grammar, applied the term ‘role particles’ (Beyer 1992: 193). I believe the term ‘particles’ is not quite satisfactory since it refers, in Tibetic languages, to “[t]he class of words <...> expressing different functions, such as negative particles, emphatic particles, plural markers, discourse markers, tag words” (Strahm & Maibaum 2005: 824). Unlike these functions, postpositions (exactly like prepositions) indicate the *relationship* of nouns and noun phrases, numerals, or pronouns to other words in a phrase and in a sentence.

In my opinion, the arguments of Tournadre and Suzuki are not strong enough to contradict the postposition hypothesis. First of all, the argument that these are enclitics and, therefore, they cannot be considered postpositions does not seem valid to me, at least from practical perspective. The rationale for this approach is based on the purely phonological understanding of ‘word’ as “the smallest structural unit that can occur between pauses.” This implies that words (unlike clitics) are not phonologically bound to other morphemes and may hence be used independently, for instance, as short answers to content questions” (Yliniemi 2021: 72–73). However, in well-documented languages such as Russian, a number of clitics, including simple prepositions/postpositions, conjunctions, particles, and certain pronouns, are defined as ‘words’ based on their grammatical functions. I believe this approach works well with Tibetan material as well. (However, I must once again emphasize that a more nuanced linguistic approach may remain uncertain about what exactly constitutes a ‘word’.)

Thus, for instance, in Russian the list of simple (also called primary) prepositions includes three that consist of one consonant only (с, к, в), that is, they are purest clitics from morphological point of view, and

yet they are definitely prepositions. As a matter of fact, all the other simple prepositions of the Russian language (their list contains about twenty words) are proclitics,⁷ forming single prosodic words with their hosts. Certain morphophonological alterations and even prosodic influence on the hosts (similar to what we encounter in the Tibetan syllables *pas* or *pa'i*) are also quite typical for simple prepositions in Russian. Thus, for instance, the preposition *bez* has to add sometimes the vowel *o* at the end, e.g., *безо всех*; furthermore, its final consonant is pronounced as 's' before voiceless consonants, e.g., *без связи* [b'issv'az'i], and as 'z' before voiced consonants and vowels, e.g., *без ума* [b'izuma]. At the same time, it may influence the initial vowel *u* in its host, e.g., *без идеи* [b'izid'ei] (the second *i* transforms into *i* = *и*).

I would probably not agree that Tibetan simple postpositions cannot be coordinated in pairs, such as *in* and *out* or *on* and *off*. On the contrary, it seems to me rather plausible that nine simple postpositions plus the absolute construction may be divided into five pairs as shown in the table below:

ø (ར།)	གི of	ལ། on	ན། in	ཏུ to/at
				 ?
ངས། than	གིས། by	ལས། from	ནས། out of	ངང་' with

Furthermore, I would speculate that the suffix *-s* transforms the absolute construction and three simple postpositions of a static nature into four dynamic postpositions. The first situation (ø vs *pas*) seems intuitively clear: the absolute relates to static identification, while the second pertains to comparison, which is a dynamic type of situation. The following two diagrams illustrate my ideas about the other three instances:

⁷ Few Russian prepositions can also be used *after* the words they relate to, including one simple preposition, *для*, as in the expression *удовольствия для* 'for enjoyment'. However, the direct word order, *для удовольствия*, is much more common, while the reverse order in the modern language is perceived as a stylistic device.

ལ།	
ན།	ལས། ནས།

Subject	↔	O གི།	S གིས།	→	Object
relation			action		

The fifth pair is even more speculative, but it certainly deserves attention that both *du* (which seems to be the primary alloform of the group of five variants of this postposition) and *dang* start with the same root letter. Semantically, *du*, as a primary marker of direction, can be paired with the static *dang* to indicate the result of directed motion: A is *with* B because A has come *to* B.

ད།	དང་།
A → B	A&B

Even if, from a theoretical point of view, this is pure fantasy, these schemes may still serve as useful illustrative material for mnemonic purposes.

Besides, if I am wrong and these pairs are fictive, the pairing that Tournadre and Suzuki discuss with regard to English is more of a feature of particular simple prepositions than an essential feature of this part of speech.

Moreover, if these are examples of the prepositions that can be used as independent words, should not we treat as such the numerous situations when *la'o* concludes elliptical sentences as the ending of the nominal part of the predicate with the verbal part missing? One of the most interesting examples is the sentence: *bdag kho na la'o* '[It depends] only on me',⁸ where *bdag* 'I' and *la* 'on' are separated with an adverb

⁸ BDRC: D1, 'dul ba gzhi.

kho na 'only'. It seems to be very difficult to read this expression as an agglutinative construction and, therefore, there should be no doubts that *la* functions here as a *word*.

It is evident that simple prepositions, for instance in English, can be used to form compound conjunctions ('in case of', 'on condition that', 'at the time when', etc.), compound prepositions ('out of', 'because of', 'due to', 'by means of', etc.) and adverbs ('upward', 'outside', 'backwards', 'at the same time', etc.). A clear parallel with English prepositions 'into', 'onto', 'within', 'upon', etc., in which couples of simple prepositions are glued together, is drawn in Tournadre, Suzuki 2023: 309. I could add that Russian also has such prepositions: *уз-за*, *уз-под*, *по-над* and some others.⁹ Some of the English and Russian prepositions may have similar meaning, cf. *in* and *at*, *by* and *with*; *о* and *на*, *у* and *с*, and some others. The English prepositions are normally used with gerund phrases, and the preposition 'to' is even used with the verbs to compose their infinitive forms.¹⁰

In comparison with the Russian language, English provides better equivalents for the Tibetan postpositions, as the former, with its case system, does not need any prepositions for certain situations, such as Genitive or Instrumental constructions. I believe English, an analytic language with almost no 'natural' cases, is generally quite similar to Tibetan in this aspect.¹¹ Just as we do not need to label English

⁹ It is noteworthy that the Mongolic languages have similar combinations; some authors treat them as double cases, some claim that the first suffix is a lexical formant and only the second suffix serves as a case marker (Trofimova, Shagdarsuren 2009). Perhaps both approaches may be correct depending on exact combination of elements. I would like to thank Jargal Badagarov for his consulting me in this issue.

¹⁰ Cf. with Tibetan verbal phrases containing *du sgra* such as '*gro ru 'jug, len du mngags, bsgrub tu bcug*', etc. The last example here utilizes the so-called "future" form of the verb *sgrub*. Thus, it is not a direct equivalent of the infinitive construction, yet it is close to it.

¹¹ Hua Cai, Bai Guan, and Kai Li, in their recent paper following the traditional Tibetan model of the eight cases, assert that a combination of one verb and four nouns or noun phrases can yield 24 different sentences with generally the same meaning but various perspectives in Tibetan. They argue that this feature distinguishes Tibetan syntax from that of English and Chinese (Cai, Guan, Li 2022: 203–204). However, this assertion may be contested since English also allows for various word sequences. The purported richness of variety in Tibetan structures might be more theoretical than practical. In English, even the subject and object can be reversed using the passive voice, which could be seen as a conventional equivalent to the reversed Tibetan construction with the object placed before the Ergative subject. The ergative construction, however, presents a problem since English is classified as an accusative language and by its nature cannot have a direct equivalent to it. The closest parallel is found in a somewhat artificial

prepositions with Latin terms that typically relate to real cases (formed by changing the inflections of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, etc.), we can similarly avoid doing so with simple postpositions in Tibetan. The list provided by Tournadre will remain the same: nine simple postpositions + the meaningful absence of any marker which is known as Absolutive in Ergative languages. All we need to do, at least in teaching, is to stop trying to ascribe Latin names of cases to them as these attempts bring about many controversies, such as whether the (analytic) case marked with *la* may be called ‘Dative’ and not ‘Dative-Locative’ or somehow else, or whether ‘Terminative’ is an appropriate term for the *du* marker, and so forth. However, descriptive expressions such as ‘(analytic) Genitive case’ or ‘Ergative construction’ can certainly be used when the exact functions of these words as analytic case markers need to be explained.

In my opinion, the proposed approach has a significant practical advantage: clear parallels with the material of the English language, the modern lingua franca, can make learning this aspect of Tibetan easier for students.¹² As for the theory, I hope my observations will contribute to further research on Tibetan syntax.

As Tournadre, in his analysis of the case markers, only listed the main functions of these words and suggested that other minor functions might be added (Tournadre 2010: 117) I decided to provide below an extended table based on his model (with minor

sentence of the type: ‘Through Norbu, Yeshe drowned’; cf. Tibetan, *nor bus ye shes chus bsmubs*, and a standard accusative parallel in English: ‘Norbu drowned Yeshe’. Note that, if the same sentence is expanded with a part with an intransitive verb, the translation will be ‘Norbu drowned Yeshe and went home’, and not ‘Through Norbu, Yeshe drowned and went home’. It is important to mention, finally, that there are languages where ergative (or agentive) markers are treated as prepositions or postpositions. I know at least two examples: Panjabi with the postposition ‘ne’ (Tolstaya 1981: 60) and Egyptian that has three types of “ergativoid” constructions, one of them with the preposition ‘jn’ (Satzinger 2001: 174–178).

¹² For instance, English word ‘of’ can help in understanding the full forms of compound postpositions, such as *khang pa’i nang la* ‘inside **of** the house’. I am less certain about complex verbal predicates in Modern Tibetan, such as *nga na gi* (or *yi*) ‘*dug*. Perhaps it could be rendered as ‘There is me [in the aspect] **of** being sick’. A similar situation occurs with subordinate clauses attached to the main clause by means of the *pa’i* construction, as in the phrase *skra ring po yod pa’i bu mo* ‘a girl **who** has long hair’. A literal translation might be ‘a girl [in the aspect] **of that [who]** has long hair’. However, I am not sure whether this is a productive way to help students clearly understand the connection between the two parts of the phrase or sentence. It may be preferable to treat *pa’i* directly as a conjunction in which *pa* equals ‘that’. I plan to expand on this topic in a separate paper.

modifications¹³). I am also uncertain whether it is exhaustive. Perhaps, it may be extended further in the process of continued studies of the syntax of Classical Tibetan. I marked the added functions with an asterisk and provided them with examples in the footnotes.¹⁴ The examples of functions described by Tournadre may be found in his paper (Tournadre 2010: 102–114).

Tib	Eng (Basic equi- valent) ¹⁵	Primary grammatical roles	Connective function	Adverb- ial function	Compound post- positions & conjunctions	Predicate- part & sentence- particle
ø	ø	1*) both subject and nominal part of the predicate in the equation sentences; 2) medium-voice subject; ¹⁶	* a subordinate clause that functions equivalently to 1) a subject in equation sentences; 2) a direct object in	—	—	—

¹³ The main modifications are as follows. 1) Simple postpositions can be used to form not only compound postpositions, but also compound conjunctions. There are instances where the same compound word functions as both a postposition and a conjunction. (Compare with English: ‘He stood *before* the man’ vs. ‘I saw the man *before* I went home’.) Further research is needed to establish precise criteria for distinguishing between these two roles. 2) In the last column, I observe some instances where postpositions are utilized as part of the predicate rather than as (final) sentence particles.

¹⁴ They were borrowed from canonical texts (siglum D in the quotations refers to their numbers according to the Derge Kangyur and Tengyur) and Tibetan texts composed in the pre-Modern period — all the quotations are easily found in the rKTs and BDRC online libraries. Therefore, I do not provide the references to exact texts in the List of literature. More examples might have been added from the recently published texts written in Literary Tibetan, as well. The footnotes also include references to some functions that are typical for Modern Central Tibetan; they should be treated separately from the analysis of Classical Tibetan constructions.

¹⁵ I tried to find the closest parallels in English. Of course, most of them are not exact, additional equivalents are provided in the next column.

¹⁶ I am not sure whether Tournadre includes this function into the one designated as “Single Argument of monovalent verb”. In any case, I prefer to consider the

		3) patient: direct object in active voice 4*) patient: syntactical subject in passive voice; ¹⁸ 5*) active- voice subject in certain cases; ¹⁹	active-voice sentences ¹⁷			
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equation separately, because it can operate with two nouns and/or pronouns: the subject and the nominal part of a complex predicate, e.g., *nga bla ma kun dga' grol mchog yin* 'I am Lama Kunga Drölchok' (tA ra nA tha/ gsung 'bum (dpe bsdur ma). Vol. 34). I use the term 'medium-voice' since the definition of *tha mi dad pa* verbs suggested by the Tibetan grammarians clearly refers to this linguistic concept. However, it requires further research.

¹⁷ This construction seems to be very productive in modern literary Tibetan, and I did not have to spend much time searching for a few good examples for each situation in canonical texts either (in these and subsequent examples, I assign numbers to clauses, starting the count from the main one): 1) ②**bdag** *cag 'di nyid na gnas bzhin du bcom ldan 'das la bsnyen bkur mi byed pa ni* ①**bzang** *po ma yin* 'The fact that we, while staying here, are not serving Bhagavān is not good' (rKTs: D1, 'dul ba gzhi); 2) ①**tshe dang ldan pa shA ri'i bus kyang** ②**khyi de** ③**bdag gi thad nas phyir ldog pa'i 'og tu** ②**khyi gzhan dag gis ji ltar bsad pa** ①**shes so** 'Venerable Śāriputra was aware of how this dog, upon returning home from him, was killed by other dogs' (rKTs: D340, las brgya tham pa pa).

¹⁸ It is a debatable issue whether Tibetan has passive voice. Some complex verbal predicates, primarily those that combine past participles with auxiliary *intransitive* verbs such as *'gyur*, do look like passive constructions, e.g., *sangs rgyas 'bum gyis chos bstan par gyur*, which may be translated as 'Dharma was taught by one hundred thousand Buddhas' (rKTs: D82, 'phags pa sangs rgyas thams cad kyi gsang chen thabs la mkhas pa byang chub sems dpa' ye shes dam pas zhus pa'i le'u zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo). However, it is not entirely clear to me whether *'gyur* should be understood as an impersonal main clause, with the preceding part functioning as a subordinate clause: "[It] turned so that one hundred thousand Buddhas taught Dharma". The same question applies to the future/optative construction, see no. 31.

¹⁹ Involuntary actions can be rendered this way. I have encountered several examples in Classical Tibetan literature, as, for instance, in stanza 20 of Chapter XV of Aśvaghoṣa's "Buddhacarita": *de nas kha cig 'di yi na bza' blangs pa ste* 'Then, one [of the five ascetics] took his [Gautama's] garment [against his own will]' (rKTs:

		6*) direct address ²⁰				
gis, kyis, gyis, yis, °s	BY	1) ergative; ²¹ 2) instrument, cause, manner; 3) specification	1) connection between clauses: 'while, and'; 2) causal / temporal <i>pas/bas</i> : 'when, because'; 3) adversative: 'although' 4*) causal: <i>dbang gis</i> , etc., also <i>pa / ba des</i> ²³	<i>rim gyis</i> 'consequently', <i>rab kyis</i> 'at best', <i>skad cig gis</i> 'instantaneously', etc.	ppos. & conj.: <i>stabs kyis</i> 'because, use, since', <i>dbang gis</i> 'because, by means of', etc.	a promise, an intention ²²

D4156, *sangs rgyas kyi spyod pa zhes bya ba'i snyan dngags chen po*). In modern Central Tibetan, the subject of active-voice sentences often lacks the Ergative marker (as well as possession), potentially indicating a shift in the language from Ergative to Accusative.

²⁰ This function is not mentioned by Tournadre. Of countless examples that could be provided here, I would like to refer to all the names of Tārā from the famous canonical hymn to this goddess in 21 stanzas. Being put in Vocative in the Sanskrit original, they are rendered in Tibetan without any markers, starting from the first line: *sgrol ma myur ma dpa' mo* 'Tārā, the Swift One, Heroine!', etc.

²¹ This may include cases where the ergative construction is used with intransitive verbs for emphatic purpose. While it is a well-known feature of Spoken Tibetan, it is not typical of literary texts. However, at least one example appears to be attested in canonical literature—though only as an alternative to the normative absolutive construction (both variants appear in different editions of the Bstan 'gyur): *mi bskyod pas ni rjes zhugs pas* vs. *mi bskyod pa ni rjes zhugs pas* 'Akṣobhya enters' (rKTs: D1796, *sgrub pa'i thabs mdor byas pa*). This sentence is discussed in Bendor, Penpa Dorje 2024: 151; the ergativized variant is preferable here, as the other may be ambiguous. A series of examples of this kind is also contained in Milarepa's song to the hunter in a famous episode from his *Mgur 'bum* (chapter 26), starting with: *bla ma 'di gsum gyis 'ong na ras pa'i phyi la shog* 'If these three gurus fit [you], go after [Mila]repa!' Some other old texts, including the famous *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, also contain such examples.

²² In Modern Tibetan, the construction of the type 'main verb + *gyi* + 'dug' is often shortened to 'main verb + *gyis*' (Bartee, Droma 2000: 62–63). It is unclear whether it has any connection with the construction of a promise or intention encountered in Classical Tibetan. Besides, in Modern Tibetan, *pas / bas* serves as an interrogative particle at the end of the sentence.

²³ E.g., ② *smon lam btab pa'i dbang gis* ① *'di lta bur skyes pa yin no* 'By power of a prayer that was offered, [she] was born like this' (rKTs: D6, 'dul ba phran tshogs kyi gzhi). The expression *smon lam btab pa* is a complex predicate that consists of a nominal part (originally, a direct object of the Ergative construction) and a verb.

gi, kyi, gyi, yi, °i	OF	genitive	a) relative clause marker (with <i>pa / ba</i> : <i>pa'i, ba'i</i> , <i>pa / ba de'i</i>): 'that, who, which', etc. b) adversative: 'but, while'	—	* initial element in full forms of comp- lex ppos.: <i>[de]i</i> <i>nang la</i> 'inside of [it]', etc.	* a pro- mise, an inten- tion ²⁴
la	ON	a) dative (benefici- ary); b) possessor; c) super- essive location: 'on, at'; d) allative: 'to, in, into'	connective for adjective and verbs: 'and', ²⁵ while'	<i>mtshan</i> <i>mo la</i> 'at night', etc.	ppos. & conj.: <i>ring la</i> 'du- ring', <i>rjes la</i> 'after', <i>rgyab la</i> 'be- hind', etc.	Sente- nce final par- ticle: an excla- mation ²⁶
du, tu, ru, r, su	TO/AT (cf. Latin <i>ad</i>)	1) purposive: 'for, as'; 2) inessive: 'in, at'; 3) allative: 'towards, to';	<i>par / bar</i> : 1*) relative clause marker: 'that, about that', etc. 2*) gerund phrase;	<i>myur du</i> 'swift- ly', <i>shin</i> <i>tu</i> 'very, much', <i>legs par</i> 'well',	1) ppos. & conj.: <i>ring du</i> 'while', <i>rgyab tu</i> 'be- hind', <i>dus su</i>	1) final clause marker: 'to, in order to' ²⁷ ; 2*) <i>par / bar</i> :

²⁴ This variant appears to be less frequent than the one with *gis*, etc. I encountered it in songs ascribed to the Sixth Dalai Lama, e. g., ② *sha 'dris pags 'dris byung kyang* ① *ri yar rgyag grab gnang gi* 'Although treated with "flesh and skin", [you] are still ready to flee up to the mountains [like a wolf]' (Zorin 2023: 343). However, it is also attested in canonical literature: ② *dper na skyes bu mde'u dug can zhig his phog na* ① *yid la byed pa gzhan mi skyed kyi* 'For instance, if a man is hit by a poisonous dart, [he] does not produce another thought [but...]' (followed by the formulation of the thought) (rKTs: D12, 'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa brgyad stong pa). In Modern Tibetan, *gi* and its allomorphs are used to make constructions for the present and future 'tenses' (the term is used conventionally, while it is not quite adequate in the context of Tibetan).

²⁵ Note that it often has a sequential meaning; therefore, the conj. 'upon' can be also used here.

²⁶ I agree with Tournadre 2010: 108 that we cannot be sure whether it is the same function word *la* and not something else (e.g., an alteration of the copula *lags*).

²⁷ This construction is very similar to the infinitive, see no. 10.

		4) trans- formative: 'into'; 5*) possessor ²⁸	<i>par / bar</i> , also <i>pa / ba der</i> ; ²⁹	<i>yongs</i> <i>su</i> 'fully', etc.	'when', etc.; 2*) conj.: <i>par / bar</i>	part of com- plex predi- cate ³⁰
na	IN	locative	1) conditional: 'if' (often with <i>gal te</i> , etc.); 2) temporal: 'when'; 3*) adversary: 'although, while' ³¹	—	1) ppos. & *conj.: <i>tshe na</i> 'when', <i>steng na</i> 'upon', etc. ³² 2*) intro- ductory	* middle part of a com- plex verbal predi- cate with a verb that

²⁸ E.g., *rgyal po der bu mo zhig yod pa dang ming la bsod nams sgrol ma zer* 'That king had a daughter, and her name was Sönam Drölma' (BDRC: Lho kha'i dmangs rtsom legs btus byis pa dga' ba'i gnam, Vol. 1). Note that in his 2010 paper, Tournadre considers the postposition *-r* an allomorph of *la*, admitting that it can also serve as an allomorph of *du* (Tournadre 2010: 97, 106). In the recent monograph, however, *-r* is only considered an allomorph of *du* (Tournadre, Suzuki 2023: 311). In my paper, I also hold this position, although I see some advantages in the idea that *-r* and *la* may be allomorphs.

²⁹ E.g., 1) ② *de ni sngags kyi mthu las byung bar* ① *shes par bya'o* '[One] should know that it will appear by the power of the mantra' (rKTs: D2626, bcom ldan 'das de bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brji); 2) *de ma bshad par sgrub pa'i lung mi sbyin* 'Not having explained it, [I] will not grant permission to practice [it]' (BDRC: shAkya mchog ldan / gser mdog paN chen shAkya mchog ldan / gsung 'bum, Vol. 13). The second function may turn out to be mistaken—perhaps *par/bar* always functions as a relative clause marker. The given example could instead be understood as: 'While [I] have not explained [it] I will not grant permission to practice'.

³⁰ See an example of possible past passive construction in no. 17. A standard example of the future passive / optative construction is: *de'i dkyil du 'khor lo bsam par bya'o* 'In the center, a circle should be visualized' (rKTs: D1188, byed pas na lus la gnas zhes bya). It is not entirely clear whether examples like this should be syntactically treated as impersonal sentences, such as '[One] should visualize a circle in the center' (unlike English, many languages do not require any subject here).

³¹ This grammatical function is employed to indicate a contradiction between a previous action or state and a subsequent one, e.g., *bdag cag sngon ni bcu bdun sder gyur na da ni bcu drug sder gyur* 'While previously we were a group of seventeen, now we are a group of sixteen' (rKTs: D3, 'dul ba rnam par 'byed pa).

³² An example of sentences where these words are conjunctions and not postpositions is: ③ *sems can thams cad sangs rgyas pa'i tshe na* ② *sangs ma rgyas pa'i sems can med par* ① *thal* 'It follows logically that, when all the sentient beings get enlightened, there will be no non-enlightened sentient beings' (BDRC: *se ra rje btsun chos kyi rgyal mtshan / gsung 'bum*. Vol. 7).

					words: <i>dper na</i> 'for instance', 'o na 'now then', <i>des na</i> 'there- fore', etc.	denotes a wish to do some- thing ³³
las	FROM	1) ablative - 'from' *- 'except for', ³⁴ 2) compa- rative 'than'	relative clause marker (after <i>pa/ba</i>): 1) adversa- tive: 'but, other than, apart from'; 2) temporal: 'while'; *3) tempo- ral/ causal: 'when; since' ³⁵	—	* <i>nang las</i> 'from inside', <i>rjes las</i> 'after', etc.	—
nas	OUT OF	1) elative 'out of, from'; 2) ergative; 3*) compa- rative 'among', ³⁶	relative clause marker (with past forms of verbs): 1) sequential: 'after, and'	<i>gzhi nas</i> 'fun- damen- tally', <i>gtan nas</i> 'absolu- tely', etc.	<i>thog nas</i> 'from the top of, on', <i>nang nas</i> 'from inside, among', etc.	—

³³ E.g., *ngas sba gsang med par drang brjod byed na 'dod* 'I want to tell sincerely, without keeping [anything] secret' (BDR: *sprel nag pa blo bzang rgyal mtshan / mi yul la bzahag pa'i bsam gzhi*, Vol. 1). In such sentences, *na* can be translated as 'to'.

³⁴ The meaning of separation or exclusion aligns with the semantic function of the Ablative case. E.g., *'tsho ba'i thabs ni de las med de gzhan du na nges par 'chi bar 'gyur ro* 'There is no way to survive apart from that, in any other case [you] will certainly die' (rKTs: D6, *'dul ba phran tshegs kyi gzhi*).

³⁵ E.g., ② *des de lta bus rkyen byas te gnas de nas song ba las* ① *dbyar ral na ltung ba med do* 'When/since he leaves that place for such a reason, there is no violation of the summer retreat' (rKTs: D1, *'dul ba gzhi*).

³⁶ E.g., *lha rnam s kyi nang nas brgya byin gzugs mdzes* 'Out of all [among] the gods, Indra is the [most] beautiful one' (see Duff 2009: 17).

		4*) inclu- sive 'from [up to]' ³⁷	2*) connective ³⁸			
bas, pas ³⁹	THAN	compara- tive	comparative (after <i>pa/ba</i>): 'rather than, more than'	—	—	—
dang	WITH	1) associa- tive: used directly with certain verbs and adverbs; 2) conne- ctive: used with nouns and noun phrases ⁴⁰	clause and temporal connective (after <i>pa/ba</i>): 'and, along with'	—	—	— ⁴¹

Conclusion

This paper builds on Nicholas Tournadre's studies of Classical Tibetan 'case markers' and their transcategoriality, fully endorsing his view that these elements do not fit into the traditional Tibetan scheme of eight cases.

My approach differs from his only in how I categorize these elements, viewing them as simple postpositions with broad functionality in the Tibetan language.

I believe this perspective may simplify the study of Tibetan for students familiar with English, an analytical language that almost entirely lacks 'natural' cases. Just as students of English learn to use various prepositions, students of Tibetan may only need to understand

³⁷ E.g., *spyi gtsug nas rkang mthil gyi bar* 'from the top of the head to the soles of the feet' (Duff 2009: 18).

³⁸ E.g., *gshog pa brkyangs nas 'phur* '[The bird] flies by flapping wings' (borrowed from the Monlam dictionary). It remains unclear to me whether this should be classified as a gerund phrase.

³⁹ On the allomorph *pas*, see Hill 2012: 29, no. 19.

⁴⁰ Although the correct literal translation would be 'with', it is more natural in English to translate it as 'and'.

⁴¹ Tournadre considers the word *dang* as an Imperative particle. In my view (of course, just tentatively), it is the verb *dang* 'to be sincere, pure, clear' that is used as an auxiliary verb (similarly to English 'please'), rather than the homonymous simple postposition.

these simple postpositions in a similar way. The terminology for analytical cases, such as ‘ergative construction’ or ‘genitive construction,’ remains valid within this framework as well.

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Online resources

(access 27.02.2024)

BDRC: <https://library.bdrc.io/>

Monlam dictionary: <https://monlamdic.com/>

rKTs: <http://www.rkts.org/index.php>

