

## A Case Grammar Explanation of Tibetan Relativization

Myung-Hee KIM

Ewha Womans' University/Kangwon National University, Korea

### 1. Introduction

This paper aims to account for the distribution of relativizers in Tibetan.<sup>1</sup> The data represent the Shigatse dialect, though most of the claims made are also applicable to the 'standard' Lhasa dialect. Both Shigatse and the better-known Lhasa dialects belong to the Central group of Tibetan dialects. Tibetan belongs to the Bodic branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family.

Tibetan has a somewhat complicated system of relativization. It is complicated mainly for two reasons; first, there is no relative pronoun as such; nominalizers are used to mark relative clauses. Second, the distribution of the relativizers is not straightforwardly explainable by any single parameter. The complexity requires both diachronic and synchronic explanations, the latter of which is my primary concern here.

In this paper, I will show that conceivable analyses based on grammatical relations cannot solve the problem satisfactorily and it is best accounted for by a case grammar analysis where case roles are viewed as prototypes. Most 'objectivist' linguists define case roles in terms of discrete criteria (perhaps in the tradition of Fillmore 1968) and are puzzled by lack of a direct correspondence between case roles and surface representations. However, Tibetan relativization suggests that case roles such as Agent are better understood if described as 'fuzzy-edged' prototypes.

*The organization of the paper is as follows: Section 2 is a general description of nominalization and relativization in Shigatse Tibetan. Section 3 closely examines the domains of the relativizers and shows that an analysis based on case roles is superior to a conceivable analysis based on grammatical relations in explaining the Tibetan relativization. Section 4 summarizes the discussion.*

---

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Scott DeLancey for his comments on earlier versions of this paper. I am also grateful to my informant Yangzom. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the 1993 Fall Meeting of Korean Linguistic Society. I give thanks to the audience for their comments. All remaining failings are, of course, my responsibility.

## 2. Nominalization and relativization in Tibetan

In Shigatse Tibetan, nominalizers historically originated as derivational morphemes.<sup>2</sup> Their distribution as derivational nominalizers is based on semantic roles, and also partly on time reference. They are: mkhan<sup>3</sup> for agentive nominalizations, sa locative, pa perfective patientive, yag imperfective patientive and instrumental.<sup>4</sup> Examples (1)-(5) illustrate this:

- (1) btsongs-mkhan  
sell-NOM;AGT  
'A seller'
- (2) ritaa-brgyab-sa  
hunt-NOM;LOC  
'A hunting place'
- (3) dras-pa  
cut-NOM;PAT;PERF  
'Something already cut'
- (4) dras-yag  
cut-NOM;PAT;IMPF  
'Something to be cut'
- (5) gzhus-yag  
shoot-NOM;INST  
'something to shoot with'

These derivational nominalizers have expanded their functions to mark sentential nominalizations, as in (6), and

---

<sup>2</sup>Diachronic evidence suggests that they are in turn derived from lexical nouns (Jäschke 1881; DeLancey 1989).

<sup>3</sup>The Shigatse examples in this paper are given in transliteration of standard Tibetan orthography, which will be cited in undelined forms as in stag 'tiger'. The abbreviations used in glosses are: AGT= Agentive; ASS= Associative; BEN= Benefactive; CONJ= Conjunctive; COP= Copula; DAT= Dative; DET= Determiner; DISJ= Disjunctive; DO= Direct Object; ERG= Ergative; EXST= Existential; FEM= Feminine; FUT= Future; GEN= Genitive; IO= Indirect Object; IMP= Imperative; IMPF= Imperfective; INST= Instrument; LOC= Locative; NEG= Negative; NOM= Nominalizer; OBL= Oblique; OCOMP= Object of Comparison; PAT= Patientive; PERF= Perfective; PL= Plural; POL= Polite; REL= Relativizer; Q= Question; SG= Singular; SU= Subject; VLZ= Verbalizer.

<sup>4</sup>All but patientive nominalizations are neutral with respect to tense/aspect; time reference is determined by time adverbs or the contexts where they occur.

relative clauses by modifying another nominal element, as in (7):

- (6) kho [ltad=mo bstan]-mkhan (kho) red  
 3SG movies show-NOM (DET) COP  
 'He is the one who shows movies.'
- (7) kho [ltad=mo bstan]-mkhan mi (kho) red<sup>5</sup>  
 3SG movie show-REL man (DET) COP  
 'He is the man who shows movies.'

Sa and pa relative clauses are typically in the genitive construction with a genitive morpheme attached at the end,<sup>6</sup> whereas mkhan and yag relative clauses do not take the genitive morpheme, as shown in (8)-(11):<sup>7</sup>

- (8) [ngas lta=bskor=byas]-sa/sa'i sa=cha kho 'di red  
 1SG;ERG visit-REL/REL;GEN place DET this COP  
 'This is the place I visited.'
- (9) kho [ngas bzos]-pa/pa'i lto-la dga'=po 'dug  
 3SG 1SG;ERG make-REL/REL;GEN food-DAT like COP  
 'He likes the food I make.'
- (10) 'di [khyi-la rdog=rgyag=gzhus]-mkhan(\*-gyi) bu kho red  
 this dog-DAT kick-REL(-GEN) boy DET COP  
 'This is the boy who kicked the dog.'
- (11) pha=gi [khos stag-la gzhus]-yag(\*-gi)  
 that 3SG;ERG tiger-DAT shoot-REL(-GEN)  
mi=mda' kho red  
 gun DET COP  
 'That is the gun he shot the tiger with.'

Tibetan utilizes all the cross-linguistically attested types of relative clauses; it has postnominal relatives (12), prenominal relatives (13), and internal relatives (14):

---

<sup>5</sup>A relative clause is put in brackets and the head NP is underlined.

<sup>6</sup>The genitive morpheme has several allomorphs: i) -kvi after an obstruent, ii) -gyi after a nasal or liquid, iii) -gi after q or ng, and iv) -i after a vowel.

<sup>7</sup>In Lhasa, genitive marking with yag is optional in colloquial speech, while prescriptively required (DeLancey 1989). However, my Shigatse informant never used the genitive marking in yag relative clauses.

- (12) pha=gi [kha=sar ngas mthong]-pa/pa'i mi kho red  
 that yesterday 1SG;ERG see-REL/REL;GEN man DET COP  
 'That is the man whom I saw yesterday.'
- (13) pha=gi mi [khasar ngas mthong]-pa/\*pa'i kho red
- (14) ngas [khos lug bsad]-pa/\*pa'i kho mthong-byung  
 1SG;ERG 3SG;ERG sheep killed-REL/REL;GEN DET see-PERF  
 'I saw the sheep he killed.'

The genitive morpheme is optional in prenominal relatives, as in (12), but it is not allowed in postnominal and internally-headed relatives, as in (13)-(14). According to the informant, a prenominal external relative with the genitive marking seems most common, followed by pronominal, non-genitive prenominal and internal relatives, in the order named, although their relative frequency should be determined through text analysis, which is not done in this paper. This is consistent with Keenan's (1985) observation that prenominal relatives are the only or most productive form in verb-final languages.

Having examined the general characteristics of Tibetan relative clauses, I will attempt to account for the distribution of the four relativizers in the next two sections.

### 3. Distribution of Tibetan relativizers

A major problem with any analysis in explaining Tibetan relativization lies in the fact that there is no consistent relationship between head NPs and the choice of relativizers. Some relative clauses are marked by relativizers which are not supposed to be used and some can take more than one relativizer without any difference in meaning. In attempting to solve these problems, I will present a conceivable grammatical relations analysis in comparison with a case grammar analysis, and argue that, all the evidence considered, case roles best explain the state of affairs.

#### 3.1. A grammatical relations analysis

Traditional grammar and recently the relational grammar have long noted the importance of grammatical relations in language. In particular, it is the fundamental tenet of RG that grammatical relations are taken to be 'undefined primitives' (Blake 1990). From the RG's point of view, we expect that grammatical relations should play a central role in the grammar of Tibetan relativization. Thus, a plausible account for the distribution of Tibetan relativizers in this framework will be as follows: mkhan for subject head NPs, pa or yaq for direct objects depending on aspect, sa for IOs and obliques, and yaq for instruments. (15)-(18) illustrate this:

- (15) mkhan; Subject  
 ngas [lug bsad]-mkhan mi kho ngo=shes-gi yod  
 1SG;ERG sheep kill-REL man DET know-IMPF;CONJ  
 'I know the man who killed the sheep.'
- (16) sa; IO/Obliques  
 [nga sang glu=btang]-sa'i nang kho ngas mthong-byung  
 1SG tomorrow sing-REL;GEN house DET 1SG-ERG see-PERF  
 'I saw the house where I will sing tomorrow.'  
 'di [ngas deb sprad]-sa'i mi kho red  
 this 1SG book give-NOM;GEN man DET COP  
 'This is the man I gave the book to.'
- (17) pa; Direct Object (Perfective)  
 kho [ngas bzos]-pa'i lto-la dga'=po 'dug  
 3SG 1SG;ERG make-REL;GEN food-DAT like COP  
 'He likes the food I cooked.'
- (18) yag; Direct Object (Imperfective)/Instrument  
 'di [kho brgyab]-yag nang kho red  
 this 3SG VLZ-REL house DET COP  
 'This is the house he will build.'  
 nga-la [nga'i mig bris]-yag zha=snyug sprad rwua  
 1SG-DAT 1SG;GEN name write-REL pencil give IMP;POL  
 'Give me the pencil with which I will write my name.'

It turns out that the grammatical relations explanation takes care of most of the data, but it leaves quite a few exceptions. That is, not all head NPs of a relation are marked by a single relativizer consistently and not all head NPs that are marked by a relativizer bear a relation consistently. Below, I will present several pieces of evidence which can not be accommodated in this framework.

### NP Accessibility Hierarchy

Among the strongest evidence for RG, and very much taken for granted in the framework (Blake 1990), is that the NP accessibility hierarchy proposed by Keenan & Comrie (1977) is valid cross-linguistically. Here I present evidence that Tibetan relativization seems to violate the seeming universal hierarchy in a significant way. The NP Accessibility Hierarchy, which expresses the relative accessibility to relativization of NP position in simplex main clauses, is as follows:

Accessibility Hierarchy (AH)  
 SU > DO > IO > OBL > GEN > OCOMP

AH predicts, for example, that subjects are easier to relativize off of than direct objects, direct objects easier than indirect objects, and so on.

Although Tibetan is able to relativize off any NP position, we find some variability in the marking of the

head NP depending on its role within the relative clause; the lower an NP is on the AH, the more difficult it is to relativize, congruent with universal tendencies. The difficulty is resolved by using different strategies for higher and lower NPs on the AH; for subject and direct object head NPs, the choice of relativizer is the only thing that gives information about their roles within the relative clause, as in:

- (19) 'di [rgya=mi lto bzos]-mkhan bu=mo mo red  
 this Chinese food make-NOM girl DET;FEM COP  
 'This is the girl who cooked the Chinese food.'
- (20) [ngas mthong]-pa'i nang kho mi khos brgyap-kyis  
 1SG;ERG see-NOM;GEN house DET man DET;ERG build-IMPF  
 'The man is building the house that I saw.'

On the other hand, Shigatse utilizes the pronoun-retention strategy for lower NPs in the hierarchy, such as obliques, genitives, and objects of comparison:

- (21) [nga mo-dang mnyam=du phyin]-sa bu=mo mo  
 1SG she-with together go-NOM girl DET;FEM  
 'the girl with whom I went.'
- (22) pha-gi [kho-las nga thung=pa yod]-pa'i bu kho red  
 that 3SG-than 1SG shorter COP-NOM;GEN boy DET COP  
 'That is the boy than whom I am shorter.'

Indirect objects, in this respect, are in intermediate position:

- (23) 'di [ngas (kho-la) deb sprad]-sa'i mi kho red  
 this 1SG;ERG 3SG-DAT book give-NOM;GEN man DET COP  
 'This is the man I gave a book to.'

As in (23), pronoun-retention is optional for indirect objects. From the above discussion, we get a tentative hierarchy for Shigatse: Nuclear Relations > Indirect Object > Obliques, which seems consistent with Keenan and Comrie's (1977) prediction.

However, "Obliques" are somewhat problematic in that we can not account for the subcategories with one and only one strategy. Some obliques have more privileges than others: locative or instrumental head NPs do not need to retain pronouns and utilize special nominalizers:

- (24) ni [kho mchong]-sa gyang kho red  
 this 3SG jump-NOM wall DET COP  
 'This is the wall where he jumped down.'
- (25) pha-gi [khos bris]-yag zha=snyug kho red  
 that 3SG;ERG write-NOM pencil DET COP  
 'That is the pencil with which he wrote.'

Compare these with (21)-(22), where the oblique head NPs require their pronominal forms within the relative clauses. A revised NP accessibility hierarchy for Shigatse is the following:

Nuclear Relations  
 Locatives > IO > OBL > OCOM  
 Instrumentals

This directly contradicts the Primary Relativization Constraint proposed by Keenan & Comrie (1977) that if a primary strategy in a given language can apply to a low position on the AH, then it can apply to all higher positions (p.68). This suggests that grammatical relations might not be the proper units for describing the grammar of Tibetan relativization.

#### Variability in subject marking

First of all, according to the grammatical relations explanation, subject head NPs should be marked off by the relativizer mkhan. However, we find a substantial number of exceptional cases. First of all, subjects of copulas and existential verbs do not take mkhan, but pa, the DO relativizer, as in;

- (26) [bod=pa yin]-pa/\*mkhan mi kho-la tūü  
 Tibetan COP-REL man DET-DAT look;IMP  
 'Look at the man who is Tibetan.'
- (27) [khyi yod]-pa'i/ \*mkhan mi  
 dog EXST-REL;GEN man  
 'the man who has a dog'

It is not at all clear what the subjects of these verbs and direct objects have in common syntactically.

More puzzling is that some other subjects may take either mkhan or pa without any difference in meaning. They include intransitive verbs such as shi 'die' and brlags 'be lost':

- (28) [kha=sar shi]-mkhan/pa mi kho kho'i pa-lags red  
 yesterday die-REL man DET 3SG-GEN father COP  
 'The man who died yesterday is his father.'
- (29) pha=gi [kha=sar brlags]-mkhan/pa mi kho red  
 that yesterday be;lost-REL man DET COP  
 'That is the man who got lost yesterday.'

and stative verbs such as tshig=pa=za 'angry' and na 'sick':<sup>8</sup>

- (30) khyod=rang-gis [tshig=pa=za]-pa/mkhan mi kho  
 2SG-ERG angry-REL man DET  
 'the man who is angry'

- (31) ngas bu [na]-pa/mkhan kho mthong-byung  
 1SG;ERG boy sick-REL DET see-PERF  
 'I saw the boy who was sick.'

In fact, these examples conflict with both grammatical relations and case roles hypotheses; if mkhan relativizes off subjects, we should expect it to be obligatory with these verbs, while if it relativizes off agents, we should expect it to be impossible. However, I will argue that while the grammatical relations hypothesis can not account for this alternation (because grammatical relations are 'undefined primitive concepts' in RG), this can be supporting evidence for a semantic roles hypothesis if semantic roles are viewed as prototypes. I will return to this question shortly.

So-called dative subjects (or Inversion in the RG literature) are also problematic; some dative subjects take pa, but do not accept mkhan nor sa:

- (32) [chams=pa brgyap]-pa'i/\*mkhan/\*sa'i phomo mo  
 cold VLZ-REL;GEN woman DET;FEM  
 'The girl who has cold'

Notice that the relativizer is not sa the IO relativizer, even though a dative nominal is relativized, as shown in (33):

- (33) mo-la chams=pa brgyap yod-pa red  
 3SG;FEM-DAT cold VLZ IMPF;DISJ  
 'She has a cold.'

More puzzlingly, other dative subjects can take either mkhan or pa, but again sa is not acceptable:

- (34) 'di [lto=rigs dgos]-pa/mkhan mi kho=tsho'i sa=cha red  
 this food need-REL man DET;PL;GEN place COP  
 'This is the place for people who need food.'

- (35) ngas [rgya=mis lto-la dga'-po yod]-pa/mkhan mi  
 1SG-ERG Chinese food-DAT like-REL man  
 'the man who likes Chinese food.'

---

<sup>8</sup>In Tibetan stative verbs form a distinct category from active verbs and adjectives. They usually report internal state, physical sensations, and emotions. They include 'sick', 'hot', 'angry', and so on (see Phillips (1988)).



In the framework of RG, the occurrence of mkhan might be explained by the Inversion rule, where the dative cased nominal is posited as the initial subject of the sentence (see Perlmutter (1979) for discussion), but it still does not explain why we get the DO relativizer pa at all but not the IO relativizer sa.

### Variability in direct object marking

We find the same kind of variability in direct object marking. While DO head NPs are supposed to be marked with the DO relativizer pa, we find sa-marked relatives with seeming perfectly good DO head NPs. Compare (36)-(37):

(36) [ngas bsad]-pa'i      lug    kho  
       1SG;ERG killed-NOM;GEN    sheep DET  
       'the sheep I killed'

(37) [khyi rmug]-sa'i      bu    kho  
       dog;ERG bite-NOM;GEN    boy DET  
       'the boy who the dog bit'

While the DO of 'to kill' is marked with the DO relativizer pa, that of 'to bite' is marked with the IO relativizer sa.

Moreover, Some dative head NPs may take either pa or sa without any difference in meaning, as in:

(38) [khod=rang-gis rogs=byas]-sa'i/pa'i mi  
       2SG-ERG                    help-REL;GEN            man  
       'the man who you helped'

(39) [kho dga'=po byas]-sa'i/pa'i bu=mo  
       3SG like-REL;GEN                    girl  
       'the girl he likes.'

The verbs rogs=byas 'help' and dga'=po byas 'like' may accept either pa or sa, though sa is more common. Again, if we view the data in terms of grammatical relations, it is hard to explain these anomalies.

So far, I have presented several pieces of evidence against analysis based on grammatical relations. It seems that the general picture of Tibetan relativization does not fit into the framework of Relational Grammar. The following section will discuss the problematic cases from a different perspective.

### 3.2. A case roles hypothesis

It is not accidental that there has been an effort among Relational Grammarians to link initial relations with meaning in spite of the tenet of grammatical relations as primitive concepts. Perlmutter and Postal (1984) propose the following:

# Universal Alignment Hypothesis (UAH)

Roles are related to GRs in a universal way, i.e. that initial GRs could be assigned on the basis of semantic roles. (1984:97)

Although the strict version of the UAH has been abandoned for the reason that semantic roles fail to consistently predict the grammatical relations cross-languages (Rosen 1984), the very reason seems to be strong evidence for semantic accounts for syntactic patterns. That is, this is just another reflection of the fact that the objective world can be conceived of in different ways (Lakoff 1987). As DeLancey (1985c) puts it, "the cross-linguistic variability is supporting evidence for case theory; a sufficiently rich theory of semantic roles makes it possible to fairly precisely predict the major areas of indeterminacy and cross-linguistic variability and to argue that the attested surface patterns do, in a legitimate sense, directly reflect underlying semantics". I argue that semantic roles, if they are viewed as prototypes, provide the best explanation for the distribution of relativizers in Shigatse Tibetan.

The distribution of the Tibetan relativizers based on semantic roles is as follows: mkhan for Agent, sa for Loc/Goal, pa for Theme in perfective sense, and yaq for Instrument and Theme in non-perfective sense (cf. DeLancey 1986). The prototype theory suggests that speakers will use the relativizer inconsistently when the head NP is not a prototypical exemplar of a given case. In the remaining section, I will characterize the semantic categories in terms of event schemas, and show how they are reflected in the choice of relativizers.

## Gradation from Agent to Theme

I tentatively hypothesize that the relativizer mkhan marks off a prototypical Agent head NP. Example (40) illustrates this:

- (40) 'di [bu-la mu?]-mkhan khyi kho red  
 this boy-DAT bite-REL dog DET COP  
 'This is the dog which bit the boy.'

As seen above, however, we find a great deal of variability in the marking. If we use a criterial definition of Agent, it inevitably leaves a class of residue which does not satisfy all of the criteria. Prototype theory explains nicely why this happens; speakers will use the relativizer inconsistently when the head NP is a nonprototypical Agent.

Then, what is a prototypical Agent? In order to find a prototypical Agent conceived of relative to the Tibetan relativization, I have first looked at other areas within the language. For there have been a number of studies on activity in the areas of case marking and verbal system in Tibetan (DeLancey 1981, 1984b, 1985a, 1985b, 1990). In accounting for the distribution of the ergative case, DeLancey (1989) claims that with intransitive predicates it

(ii) nga gcags-byung  
1SG fall-PERF  
'I fell (from a high place).'

Let us reconsider, in this context, the problematic cases involving mkhan discussed in the previous section. (44) summarizes them:

- (44) Prototypical agent <-----> Prototypical patient  
mkhan only <-----> mkhan or pa <-----> pa only  
 kill die/be lost be  
 bite angry/sick have  
 fall need/like have a cold

What we see here is a continuum of two layers going together: prototypical to non-prototypical Agent and consistent to inconsistent choice of mkhan. This is exactly what the prototype theory predicts. We can clearly see the differences between the mkhan-only predicates and the rest; the actor of a mkhan-only predicate creates an event and is the cause of the event, deliberately or not:

\*  
 (Volition) ---> Act ---> Event

This schema shows that the agentive relativizer mkhan will be assigned whenever the relativized actor is involved in the Act node of an Event or the cause of an event, where the volition node is irrelevant unlike as in the ergative case.

The actors of the other groups deviate from the notion of the prototypical agent; pa-only predicates represent Themes. On the other hand, the predicates which can take either mkhan or pa represent state, but the actors are conscious and sentient experiencers, though they do not have control over the state. For instance, 'need' and 'catch a cold' are both in dative subject constructions but they show difference in the choice of relativizer. It seems that the reason has to do with the fact that 'need' can only be conceptualized as an internally-generated state, while 'catch a cold' is normally conceptualized as coming from outside. Further interesting evidence comes from the stative verb 'angry':

- (45) [tshig=pa=za]-mkhan/pa'i mi kho  
 angry-REL man DET  
 'the man who is angry'
- (46) [tshig=pa=za=pa'i bzo='dra]-pa'i/\*mkhan mi kho  
 look angry-REL man DET  
 'the man who looks angry'

While 'angry' usually allows either mkhan or pa without meaning difference, as in (45), it permits only pa in (46). It seems that by switching the perspective to the speaker, the actor of 'angry' can no longer be assigned the causal end of the event.

Another puzzling case includes 'sneeze' type verbs as in (47)-(48):

- (47) kho-la hab=brid brgyap-pa red  
 3SG-DAT sneeze-PERF;DISJ  
 'He sneezed (involuntarily).'
- (48) [hab=brid brgyap]-mkhan/\*pa'i phomo mo  
 sneeze-REL woman DET;FEM  
 'the woman who is sneezing'

In (48), only the agentive relativizer mkhan is accepted, although the verb 'to sneeze' appears to involve an involuntary, forced action. (In the case of deliberate sneezing in (41), the subject is in the ergative case.) The verb 'to yawn' shows the same phenomenon. Note, however, that these verbs "produce a perceptible event external to the actor" (DeLancey 1985c) and it is true that the actor is the Cause of the event (see DeLancey (1985c) for more discussion on 'sneeze' type verbs).

In sum, it is claimed that cause is the most important semantic parameter in defining the Agent. If an argument deviates from this prototype, the selection of the Agentive relativizer mkhan becomes inconsistent in such a way that the Theme relativizer pa is allowed. It seems clear that a grammatical relations analysis is unable to explain this pattern.

#### The semantic expansion of the Locative relativizer

Languages tend to utilize spatial terms for non-spatial domains. The Loc/Goal relativizer sa in Tibetan illustrates this well. Sa originated as a derivational nominalizer indicating 'a place', as in:

- (49) btsongs-sa  
 sell-NOM;LOC  
 'selling place'

Over time, sa has developed to become a general locative nominalizer/relativizer including spatial goal and source:

- (50) [nga sang glu=btang]-sa'i nang kho  
 1SG tomorrow sing-REL;GEN house DET  
 'the house where I will sing tomorrow'
- (51) [kho phyin]-sa'i grong=khyer kho  
 3SG go-REL;GEN city DET  
 'the city he went to'
- (52) [laka=brgyugs-kyu 'go=btsugs]-sa'i grong=khyer kho  
 run-NOM start-REL;GEN city DET  
 'the town where the race starts'

In (50)-(52), sa indicates location, goal, and source respectively. From this spatial sense, as in many other languages, the relativizer sa acquires a more abstract sense of Goal, as in:

- (53) pha=gi [nga chang=sa brgyab]-sa'i bu=mo mo red  
 that 1SG marry-REL:GEN girl DET;FEM COP  
 'That is the girl whom I will marry.'
- (54) 'di [ngas deb sprad]-sa'i mi kho red  
 this 1SG;ERG book give-REL:GEN man DET COP  
 'This is the person to whom I gave a book.'
- (55) 'di [ngas lto bzos]-sa'i mi kho red  
 this 1SG;ERG food make-REL:GEN man DET COP  
 'This is the man for whom I cooked food.'
- (56) 'di [ngas skad=cha=bshad]-sa'i mi kho red  
 this 1SG;ERG talk-REL:GEN man DET COP  
 'This is the person to whom I talked.'

In (53)-(56), the head NPs are human Goal arguments within the relative clauses.

Predictably, the spatial meaning of sa is more basic than other extensions, so that if the choice is open, the locational meaning is selected. Consider (57):

- (57) [khod=rang kha=sar gthugs]-sa'i mi kho  
 2SG yesterday meet-REL:GEN man DET  
 'the man you met yesterday'

If we delete the head noun, the resultant nominalized clause indicates 'the place where you met', but can not have the reading 'the one whom you met'.

Sa covers Source as well as Goal as in (58):

- (58) pha=gi [nga kho-nas sgrung go]-sa'i mi kho red  
 that 1SG 3SG-from story hear-NOM;GEN man DET COP  
 'That is the person from whom I heard the story.'

Note, however, that the head NP has retained its pronoun form within the relative clause, which indicates sa alone can not give enough information about the role of the head NP in the relative clause. That, in turn, indicates that the source meaning of sa is secondary and, thus, harder to be retrieved.

To sum, the semantic development of -sa is shown in

(59):

- (59) Goal < --- goal <--- sa Loc ---> source ---> Source

(59) shows that the locative derivational nominalizer sa has expanded its domain to include an abstract sense of Goal and Source.

#### Gradation from Theme to Goal

The ~~case~~ roles hypothesis predicts that pa and yag will mark off a prototypical theme depending on the time reference, as in:

- (60) 'di [ngas nyos]-pa'i deb kho red  
 this 1SG;ERG buy-REL;GEN book DET COP  
 'This is the book I bought.'
- (61) [ngas bkurs]-yag sder=ma kho=tsho ganas 'dug-gas  
 1SG;ERG wash-REL dish DET;PL where EXST-Q  
 'Where are the dishes I will wash?'

Again the prototype theory expects areas of indeterminacy. What we find here is a continuum of prototypical Theme to Goal. (62) summarizes the problematic cases involving pa discussed in 3.1.1:

- (62) Prototypical Theme <-----> Prototypical Goal  
pa <-----> pa or sa <-----> sa  
 kill help marry  
 break like hit  
 buy bite

It seems that the more conscious the undergoer of the event is, the more chance there is for it to take the Loc/Goal relativizer sa. For instance, the person to 'marry' is a conscious goal, which, if affected, is as affected as the actor of the event. In the case of the verb dga=po byas 'like', it is used only with humans and has the connotation that the feeling is mutual. If the actor is non-human, the verb takes a different form and sa is not accepted:

- (63) ngas [kho dga='po yod]-pa'i/\*sa'i lto bzos-pa yin  
 1SG;ERG 3SG like-NOM;GEN food make-PERF  
 'I made the food which he likes.'

This is not surprising precisely because inanimate objects can only be undergoers.

Another piece of evidence that the undergoers of 'marry', 'help' and 'like' are not Themes lies in that they are in the dative case in the simple clauses, as in:

- (64) ngas kho-la rogs=byas-pa yin  
 1SG;ERG 3SG-DAT help-PERF;CONJ  
 'I helped him.'

However, the verb 'bite' still appears to be contradictory to this hypothesis. It seems to be as much transitive as 'kill'. They both involve some sort of change in state. The actor is responsible for initiating the change while the object undergoes the change (Givón, 1984). The difference between 'kill' and 'bite' also can be seen in the case marking in the simple clauses:

- (65) ngas lug kho bsad-pa yin  
 1SG-ERG sheep DET killed-PERF;CONJ  
 'I killed the sheep.'

- (66) khyi pisa-la mu?-pa red  
 dog boy-DAT bite-PERF;DISJ  
 'The dog bit the boy.'

The undergoer of 'kill' is coded in absolutive case, as in (65), whereas that of 'bite' is coded in dative case, as in (66). We can solve this puzzling problem by considering the verb 'hit':

- (67) ngas kho-la dru=gu phū?-pa yin  
 1SG;ERG 3SG-DAT ball hit-PERF;CONJ  
 'I hit the ball to him.'

The case markings in (67) clearly show that the 'ball' is viewed as the Theme rather than the Instrument, and 'he' as the Goal rather than the Theme (cf. Fillmore 1970). The same logic applies in the relative clause:

- (68) kho [bskor=srung phū]-sa'i mi kho red  
 3SG police hit-NOM;GEN man DET COP  
 'He is the man whom the policeman hit.'

The head NP in (68) refers to 'the man who was hit by the policeman'. However, if we use the Theme relativizer pa, it refers to 'the man the policeman employed to hit somebody'. However, if the medial cause is inanimate, only the instrumental relativizer yag is accepted as in (70):

- (69) khos stag-la mi=mda' phū?-pa red  
 3SG-ERG tiger-DAT gun shoot-PERF;DISJ  
 'He shot the gun to the tiger.'
- (70) phaki [khos stag-la pū?]-yag mi=mda' kho red  
 that 3SG;ERG tiger-DAT shoot-NOM gun DET COP  
 'That is the gun he shot the tiger with.'

This clearly shows that the undergoers of 'hit' and 'bite' have different underlying semantic roles from those of 'kill'.

To summarize, a case roles hypothesis predicts that the choice of the Theme relativizer pa or the Loc/Goal relativizer sa depends on the underlying case role of the head NP in the relative clause. It also predicts that there will be areas of indeterminacy where either of the relativizers is allowed.

#### 4. Conclusion

It has been shown that the distribution of the relativizers in Shigatse Tibetan is determined by the semantic role of the head NP in the relative clause rather than by the grammatical relation. An overall picture of how the four Tibetan relativizers distribute themselves is summarized as follows:



(71) mhkan                      pa                      sa  
 Agent <-----> Theme <-----> Goal <--- Loc ---> Source  
                                  yag  
                                  Inst.

It turns out that the domains of the relativizers in Tibetan are not clean-edged. Over time, the relativizers have expanded their semantic domains in such an extent that they overlap each other. It has been my attempt to show in this paper that the development is not totally unexpected, although there are still unresolved residues.<sup>10</sup> A semantic roles analysis based on prototypes seems most adequate to account for Tibetan relativization. That is, the relativizers expand their domains with reference to the prototypes, and the farther we move from the prototypes, the less consistent the marking of the relative clause we get.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blake, Barry 1990 Relational Grammar. London: Routledge.

DeLancey, Scott 1981 An interpretation of split ergativity and related patterns. Language 57:626-57.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1983 Agentivity and causation: Data from Newari. BLS 9: 54-63.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1984a Notes on agentivity and causation. Studies in Language 8:181-213.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1984b Transitivity and ergative case in Lhasa Tibetan. BLS 10:131-40.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1985a Lhasa Tibetan evidentials and the semantics of causation. BLS 11:65-72.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1985b Categories of non-volitional actor in Lhasa Tibetan. Proceedings of the Conference on Participant Roles in South Asia and Adjacent areas, A. Zide et al. (eds), 58-70.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1985c Agentivity and syntax. Paper presented at the CLS Parasession on Agentivity and Causation.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1986 Relativization as nominalization in Tibetan and Newari. Paper presented at the 19th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1990 Ergativity and the cognitive model of event structure in Lhasa Tibetan. Cognitive Linguistics 1:289-321.

---

<sup>10</sup>Among other things, mhkan and pa may be used interchangeably on the basis of evidentiality in some circumstances.

Fillmore, Charles 1968 The case for case. In Universals in Linguistic Theory, P. Cole and J. Sadock (eds.), 59-82. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1970 The grammar of hitting and breaking. In Readings in English Transformational Grammar, R. Jacobs and P. Rosenbaum (eds.), 120-133. Waltham, MA: Ginn.

Givón, Tamly 1984 Syntax: A Functional-Typological Introduction, Vol. I. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Jäschke, H.A. 1881 A Tibetan-English Dictionary. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Keenan, Edward 1985 Relative clauses. Language Typology and Syntactic Description, Vol II, T. Shopen (ed.), 141-170. Cambridge: University Press.

\_\_\_\_\_ and Bernard Comrie 1977 Noun phrase accessibility and universal grammar. Linguistic Inquiry 8:63-99.

Lakoff, George 1987 Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind. Chicago: University Press.

Perlmutter, David 1979 Working 1s and inversion in Italian, Japanese, and Quechua. BLS 5:277-324.

\_\_\_\_\_ and Paul Postal 1984 The 1-advancement exclusiveness law. Studies in Relational Grammar, D. Perlmutter and C. Rosen (eds.). Chicago: University Press.

Phillips, Audra 1988 Categories in Shigatse Tibetan. Master's Thesis, the University of Oregon.

Rosen, Carol 1984 The interface between semantic roles and initial grammatical relations. Studies in Relational Grammar, D. Perlmutter and C. Rosen (eds.). Chicago: University Press.