Tibetan

Origin

During the 7th Century AD Songstem Gampo (569-649AD), the 33rd king of the Yarlung Dynasty of southern Tibet and the first Emperor of Tibet, sent Thonmi Sambhota, one of his ministers, to India to gather information on Buddhism. The minister then reputedly devised a script for Tibetan based on the Devanagari model and also wrote a grammar of Tibetan based on Sanskrit grammars.

The new Tibetan alphabet was used to write Tibetan translations of Buddhists texts. The first Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary, Mahavyutpatti, appeared in the 9th century. Wood block printing, introduced from China, was used in Tibet from an early date and is still used in a few monasteries.

Tibetan literature is mainly concerned with Buddhist themes and includes works translated from Sanskrit and Chinese and original Tibetan works. There are also literary works about the Bon religion, a pre-Buddhist religion indigenous to Tibet. The most unusual genre of Tibetan literature is that of gter-ma (གཏེར་མ་) or 'rediscovered' texts - reputedly the work of ancient masters which have been hidden in remote caves for many centuries.

Notable features

- The Tibetan alphabet is syllabic, like many of the alphabets of India and South East Asia. Each letter has an inherent vowel /a/. Other vowels can be indicated using a variety of diacritics which appear above or below the main letter.
- Syllables are separated by a dot.
- Consonant clusters are written with special conjunct letters.

Used to write:

Tibetan (བོད), a Sino-Tibetan language spoken by about 6 million people in China (Tibet, Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan), India, Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh and Nepal. In Mongolia Tibetan is considered the Classical language of Buddhism and was widely taught until quite recently.

Before 1949-50, Tibet comprised of three provinces: Amdo, now split between the Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan provinces; Kham, now largely incorporated into the provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan and Qinghai, and U-Tsang, which, together with
western Kham, is now known as the Tibet Autonomous Region, which was created in 1965.

Dzongkha (Bhutanese) (རྫོང་ཁ།), which is spoken by about 130,000 people in Bhutan, where it is the national language, and also in Nepal and India. It is a Sino-Tibetan language which is quite closely related to Tibetan and distantly related to Chinese.

The Tibetan alphabet

The form of the alphabet shown below, known as u-chen (ཨཱ) is used for printing. Cursive versions of the alphabet, such as the gyuk yig or ‘flowing script’ (གྱུན་ཡིག) are used for informal writing.

Consonants

| ཁ་ | ka [ká] | ཇ་ | nga [ngá] |
| ག་ | ga [ga] | ཇ་ | nga [nga] |
| ང་ | ra [ra] | ཇ་ | nga [nga] |
| ཅ་ | ca [ça] | ཇ་ | nga [nga] |
| ཆ་ | cha [cha] |
| ཇ་ | ja [ja] |
| ཈་ | tha [tha] |
| ཉ་ | da [da] |
| ཊ་ | na [na] |
| ཋ་ | pa [pa] |
| ཌ་ | pha [pha] |
| ཌྷ་ | ba [ba] |
| ཏ་ | ma [ma] |
| ཐ་ | tsa [tsa] |
| ད་ | tsha [tsha] |
| ད་ | da [da] |
| ད་ | na [na] |

Extra consonants for writing Sanskrit loan words

| འ | a | མ | ma | པ | da | ག | ga | ཉ | nga |

Conjunct consonants
Vowels diacritics

\[ i \quad u \quad \text{ü} \quad e \quad o \]

Numerals

\[ 0 \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 5 \quad 6 \quad 7 \quad 8 \quad 9 \]

Tibetan Alphabet
Ta, Tha, Da, Na
TA
THA
DA

NA

Pa, Pha, Ba, Ma

PA

PHA

BA
Zha, Za, 'a, ya

Ra, La, Sha, As
Vowels

Like "a" in "alone" (a).

Like "aw" in "paw" (å).

Like "e" in "bet" (e).

Like "i" in "in" (i).

Like "ee" in "seen" (í).

Like "o" in "so" (ó).
Like "e" in "father" (ö).

Like "ue" in "glue" (ü).

Like "oo" in "soon" (ū).

Like "ee" in "seen" but with rounded lips (ü).

Like "ay" in "day" (ą).

**Consonants**

Like "k" in "skill" (k).
Like "g" in "garden" (g).

Like "ng" in "sing" (ng).

Like "ch" in "charge" (ç).

Like "j" in "jar" (j).

Like "ny" in "canyon" (ñ).

Like "t" in "stop" (t).

Like "p" in "spot" (p).
Like "ts" in "weights" (tš).

Like "ds" in "adds" (ds).

Like "z" in "zoo" (z).

Like "s" in "treasure" (ž).

A throaty "r", not rolled (r).

Like "s" in "suck" (s).

Like "sh" in "shut" (š).

Common diphthongs
Like "k" in "kill" (kh).

Like "ch h" in "punch hard" (çh).

Like "t" in "time" (th).

Like "p" in "pit" (ph).

Like "ts h" in "fights hard" (ṭh).
Verbs and Verb Phrases

CLASSES OF VERBS

(MST 8.3.1) Tibetan verbs fall into two main classes: volitional verbs and non-volitional verbs. Verbs of the first group are concerned with controllable action, and are compatible with intentional auxiliaries such as བ་ (see MST 10.4) and "jussive" suffixes that convey an order or a suggestion (such as ས་ or ཞེས་). Moreover, these verbs sometimes have a special inflected form for the imperative.

The verbs in the second class imply non-controllable processes which do not depend on the subject’s volition, and are compatible neither with intentional auxiliaries nor with imperative markers. With non-volitional verbs, non-intentional auxiliaries such as ག་ ར་ or མ་ must be used. In MST, volitional verbs are marked as “[vol.]”, while non-volitional verbs are identified as “[inv.]”

Ex. of volitional verbs:
- བལ་པ། “I looked.” བལ། “Look!”
- བལ། བལ་ “I went to bed.” བལ། ཆེན་པོ། “Go to bed! Lie down!”

Ex. of non-volitional verbs:
- བོལ། བོལ། བོལ། བོལ། “I saw.” བོལ། བོལ། “I recovered.”
Thus the following forms are incorrect because they combine a non-volitional verb with an intentional auxiliary: གཏོར་ལ་བེད་པ་, དྲན་པེད་པ་; so, too, are the following imperatives: གཏོར་ལ་བེད་, དྲན་པེད་.

The grammar of European languages does not make the opposition volitional/non-volitional. However in their vocabulary, they do differentiate between hear, see (non-volitional) and listen, look (volitional).

As in other languages, a distinction is made between transitive verbs (or polyvalent verbs) and intransitive verbs (or monovalent verbs). Transitive verbs require an object, whereas intransitive verbs do not.

Ex.: ོ་ “to look” and གཞི་ “to see” are transitive whereas དེ་བ་ “to go to bed, to lie down” and ང་ “to recover (from an illness)” are intransitive.

In MST, whether a verb is transitive or intransitive will be indicated indirectly: for each verb, the case required for the subject and, where relevant, of the direct or indirect object will be specified. Thus if an object is required, the verb must be a transitive one (see MST 8.3.2 below, “The ergative construction,” as well as section 9.3).

There are, then, altogether four basic classes of verbs: non-volitional intransitive, volitional intransitive, non-volitional transitive and volitional transitive.

In the case of transitive verbs, a distinction may be made between those which require two participants (bivalent verbs) and those which require three (trivalent verbs).

Summary of the four categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S (Erg.)</th>
<th>O (Abs.)</th>
<th>V (ergative construction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>གཏོར་</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>དྲན་</td>
<td>བེད་</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>གཏོར་ལ་</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Tsering saw the horse.”

VERB CONSTRUCTIONS

Verbs that govern this type of construction will be identified as: inv(oluntary), E(rgative) A(bsolutive).
In affective constructions, the subject is in the absolutive and the object in the dative. The construction is governed mainly by verbs of feeling such as ་“to like,” ་“to be afraid,” ་“to get angry,” ་“to be amazed,” etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S (Abs.)</th>
<th>O (Dat.)</th>
<th>V (affective construction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>་“Tsering”</td>
<td>་“of”</td>
<td>་“was afraid of the horse.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verbs that govern this sort of construction will be identified as: inv(oluntary), A(bsolutive) D(ative).

Ex.: ་“to be afraid” [inv., AD]

In possessive constructions, the subject is in the dative and the object in the absolutive. They are governed mainly by verbs relating to belonging or acquisition, such as ་“to get,” ་“to find, acquire,” ་“to be born,” ་“to dream,” etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S (Dat.)</th>
<th>O (Abs.)</th>
<th>V (possessive construction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>་“Tsering”</td>
<td>་“the”</td>
<td>་“found the horse.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verbs governing this kind of construction will be identified as: inv(oluntary), D(ative) A(bsolutive).

Ex.: ་“to find” [inv., DA]

COPULAS

**ESSENTIAL AND EXISTENTIAL VERBS**

(MST 6.3.3) Tibetan has several stative verbs or copulas corresponding to the verbs “to be” and “to have” in European languages. Two main categories may be distinguished: essential copulas, which denote an essential quality of the person or
thing; and existential copulas, which express the existence of a phenomenon or a characteristic with the implication of an evaluation by the speaker. [3] Furthermore, these “essential” and “existential” stative verbs are associated with various evidential moods, as we shall see presently.

Note: these verbs may be used for both the present and the past. [4]

**THE ESSENTIAL COPULAS: བོ, ཆོ, བོད་**

(MST 6.3.3) These express the nature or essence of the subject (equative meaning), or else an inherent quality of it (attributive meaning). They differ only in terms of the evidential mood that they convey (assertive, egophoric, testimonial, etc.).

**THE “ASSERTIVE” COPULA བོ AND ITS NEGATION བོ་**

(MST 6.3.3) The copula བོ is usually translated by the verb “to be,” and corresponds to an objective assertion or affirmation (see MST 5.4). The attribute of the subject, which immediately precedes the verb, may be a substantive (equative meaning) or an adjective (attributive meaning). Age is also expressed with the use of བོ.

- བོ་བོད་པརྗེ་ “This is Thubtän.”
- བོ་བོད་པལྷ་ “He isn’t a nomad.”
- བོ་བོད་ལོ་ “Nyima is seven.”
- བོ་ལོ་བོད་པརྗེ་ “She’s pretty.”
- བོ་བོལྷ་པལྷ་ “He isn’t mad.”
- བོ་ལོ་བོལྷ་ “He’s kind.”
In rare cases, མིན may also be used to express an essential property or an inalienable possession of the subject, in which case it corresponds to the English “to have.”

- མིན་པར། བཅོས་པར། “He has great qualities.”
- མིན་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཞེས་པ། “She has small eyes.”
- མིན་ལྷག་མཐོང་ཉིད་དེ། “He has big ears.”

THE “EGOPHORIC” COPULA: མིན AND ITS NEGATION མིན་.

(MST 6.3.3) The copula མིན functions as an essential stative verb, normally associated with the first person (see MST 3.4), and is generally translated by “I am.” The attribute of the subject may be a substantive (equative sense) or an adjective (attributive sense).

- མིན་ཐུབ་ཏན། “I am Thubtân.”
- མིན་བོད་པདྨ། “I am a nomad.”
- མིན་དེར། “I am fine.”

In rare cases, they may express an intention or an insistence on the part of the speaker.

- མིན་ལྷག་མཐོང་ཉིད་དེ། “It’s your tea [that I’m intending to give you].”
- མིན་བོད་པདྨ། “That’s my key.”

THE “REVELATORY” COPULA མིན་ཐེམ་ AND ITS NEGATION མིན་ཐེམ་.

(MST 6.3.3) The copula མིན་ཐེམ་ functions like an essential stative verb, implying that the speaker has just discovered or become aware of whatever he or
she is asserting. It may often be translated by the verb “to be” preceded by some exclamation such as “Why!” or “Hey!”

- ﾇﾝ川askanzung ﾋｯ ﾉ “Hey! It’s Thubtän.”
- ﾊﾝﾝｾmyiJl ﾇﾝ川askanzung “No, he isn’t a nomad.”
- ﾇﾝ川askanzung ﾆ “Why, he’s mad! [I’ve just realized it]"

THE EXISTENTIAL COPULAS ﾁ ﾊ ﾉ ﾊ ﾉ ﾉ

(MST 6.3.3) These verbs express existence, localization, or a circumstantial feature of the subject, often implying an evaluation on the speaker’s part. The various stative verbs differ only in terms of the evidential mood that they convey (assertive, testimonial, egophoric, etc.).

THE “ASSERTIVE” COPULA ﾆ ﾉ ﾉ ﾉ AND ITS NEGATION ﾆ ﾉ ﾉ ﾉ.

(MST 6.3.3) There are two other ways of writing ﾆ ﾉ ﾉ, but the pronunciation is the same in each case: ﾆ ﾉ ﾉ or ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ, as well as a literary form ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ.[5] The negative form of the auxiliary is ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ, for which there are also two other written forms: ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ and ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ, as well as a literary form ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ.

The copula ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ implies a definite assertion or affirmation by the speaker and is used for the second and third persons singular and plural. According to the context, it may be translated as “there is/are” (existential sense) or “to be at (a certain location)” (situational sense), or by the verb “to have” (possessive sense).

- ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ “There are airplanes in Tibet.”
- ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ “Thubtän is here.”
- ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ “He has many books.”
- ﾆ ﾆ ﾆ “Tsering has a car.”
In the past, there were no airplanes in Tibet.

At that time, Tsering had a car.

Remember that constructions expressing possession are identical to existential constructions.

The copula འི་ may also be translated by some form of the verb “to be” (attributive sense). This requires that the attribute of the subject that precedes the verb should be a qualifying adjective.

This is pretty.

This is clear.

This is hot.

It may not, however, be used with a noun:  འི་ “He is Chinese.”

THE TESTIMONIAL COPULA: འི་ AND ITS NEGATION འི་

(MST 6.3.3) This copula indicates a past or present testimony on the speaker's part and implies that the speaker is or has been a direct witness to whatever he or she is asserting. In English, it is translated by the same expressions as for འི་, i.e., according to context as “to be at” (situative sense), “to be” (existential sense), “to have” (possessive sense), or by the verb “to be” (attributive sense). The latter applies only when the verb is preceded by a qualifying adjective. Thus the only difference between འི་ and འི་ lies in the different evidential moods they express (these moods have been described above). The translation of the following phrases would therefore be exactly the same as those given above:

There are airplanes in Tibet.

Thubtän is here.
• མེད་པའི་ཐེག་པ་ “He has many books.”

• མི་ཞེས་པའི་ཐེག་པ་ “This is pretty.”

• མི་ཞེས་པ་ “This is clear.”

• མི་ཞེས་པ་ “This is hot.”

However, exactly as in the case of the assertive copula, it is impossible to say: མེད་པའི་ཐེག་པ་ “He is Chinese.”

THE “EGOPHORIC” COPULA 燹 གཞི་AND ITS NEGATION 燹

(MST 6.3.3) This copula is always associated with the first person and refers to information that directly concerns the speaker, and is generally translated as “I have” (possessive sense), or as “I am (at)” (locative sense). In certain rare cases, it may also indicate a personal or intimate acquaintance by the speaker, and should accordingly be translated by the verb “to be.”

• མི་ཞེས་པའི་ཐེག་པ་ “I have many books.”

• མི་ཞེས་པ་ “I am in China.”

• མི་ཞེས་པ་ “This tea is good (in my opinion).”

Chart of the copulas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>affirmative (without pronoun)</th>
<th>interrogative (without pronoun)</th>
<th>interrogative (with pronoun)</th>
<th>negative</th>
<th>interronegative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>མི་ཞེས།</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་ / མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས།</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
<td>མི་ཞེས་པ་</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Remark: When used with interrogative pronouns, the copulas (and the corresponding auxiliaries) གཉིས་, ཆོས་, སྲུད་ are pronounced with an opened vowel གཉིས་, ཆོས་, སྲུད་.

However, this small phonetic variation is not traditionally recorded in Tibetan orthography.

- གཉིས་ “What is it?”
- སྲུད་ “How many people are there?”

THE ESSENTIAL AND EXISTENTIAL VERBS “TO BE” AND “TO HAVE” IN THE PAST

(MST 7.3.3) The forms of the imperfective are equivalent to those of the present (see MST 6.3). For the perfective past however, there are special forms. The following full verbs are used in the construction of the (perfective) past: གོ་ “to become,” མཐོང་ “to do,” ཞེས་ “to stay,” དོན་ “to happen, to obtain.” All these verbs correspond to the (perfective) past tense of the verbs གཉིས་ “to be” and ཆོས་ “to have.” For the sake of convenience, we may distinguish between essential and existential statements.

EXISTENTIAL STATEMENTS

(MST 7.3.3) When the complement of the subject is a substantive (equative meaning), Tibetan uses the verb: མཐོང་ “to do” (in the past stem [7]: མཐོང་) or the verb
followed by past auxiliaries (in association with the various evidential moods: assertive, testimonial, egophoric).

- “He became crazy.” (assertive)
- “He became crazy.” (testimonial)
- “He became a doctor.”
- “I became a doctor.”

Note: In the case of the imperfective past, the same form as the present is used:

- “He was a doctor” (lit. “at that time he is a doctor”).

**Existential statements**

(MST 7.3.3) Possession and existence are constructed with the use of the verb in the (perfective) past tense (in association with the various evidential moods: assertive, testimonial, egophoric).

- “She had twins.”
- “He got some money.”
- “There were some problems.”
- “He had (or, there were) problems.”
- “I had problems.” (egophoric)

When the complement of the subject is an adjective, the verb in the (perfective) past is also used (in association with the various evidential moods: assertive, testimonial, egophoric).

- “It was easy.”
• “It was pleasant.” (testimonial)

• “It was pleasant (for me).” (egophoric)

To convey a locative meaning, the verb བེ་ན་ “to stay,” or its honorific བེས་ན་ is used in the (perfective) past (in association with the various evidential moods: assertive, testimonial, egophoric).

• རང་སུས་ཐབས་གངས། རོ་བོར། སེམས་ནོ། བེ་ན་ “He has been in Lhasa for three years.” (lit. stayed)

• རང་ལས་བཤེས་ཐོབ་དུགས། རོ་ངོ་ “I have been in Lhasa for three years.” (lit. stayed)

Note: In the case of the imperfective past, the same form as the present is used:

• ཐེ་ན། ཐེ་ལས་ཐོབ་དུགས། རོ་ངོ། “At that time he was in Lhasa.” (lit. is in Lhasa)

VERB INFLECTION

(MST 10.3.2) In Classical Tibetan many verbs have up to four different root forms (see MST Appendix 1). Spoken Tibetan makes indiscriminate use of verb stem forms that correspond to the “future” and the “present” in Literary Tibetan, and at the most only distinguishes between two tenses: the past and the present-future. While some verbs also have a distinctive imperative stem, in most cases this stem resembles either the present-future or the past. Very often, the verb is quite simply invariable (see MST Appendix 1, section 2.8).

The large number of invariable verbs means that inflection is practically redundant in the spoken language. Tenses are formed by using a system of auxiliaries. In MST, the present-future stem form will be marked by the number (1), the past by (2) and the imperative by (3).

AUXILIARY VERBS

THE AUXILIARY VERB གནོད AND ITS NEGATION གནོད་
The auxiliary འེར་ is similar to the verb “to be” in English. It can function either as an autonomous verb (or “copula”), or as the auxiliary of another verb. This is comparable to the English “to be” or the French “être,” which are both copulas (e.g., “he is mad,” “il est fou”) and auxiliaries (e.g., “he is working,” “il est arrivé”). Likewise, in the following Tibetan sentences འེར་ is a copula in the first and an auxiliary (associated with the nominalizer pa) in the second:

- འེར་ལེ་བ་ “he is crazy”
- འེར་ལེ་བ་པ་ “he came” (literally, “he is come”)

As a copula, འེར་ expresses the nature or the essential quality of the subject. Note that འེར་ “to be” is used to express people’s age (see also MST 6.4), just as in English.

The verb འེར་ is generally pronounced ræ’ (with a more open vowel) in sentences that have an interrogative pronoun. However, the Tibetan spelling remains unaffected.

Questions are constructed by using the final interrogative particle འཕོ (see MST 2):
- འེར་བ་ཀྱི་ “is it?”
- འེར་ལེ་བ་ཀྱི་ “isn’t it?”

Like other auxiliaries, the verb འེར་ and its negation འེར་ are used to signify “yes” and “no.” They may be preceded by the polite marker གཞན་.

**TENSE AND ASPECT**

**THE PAST TENSE**

(MST 7.3.2) The past tense [8] is formed by placing after the verb the expressions བ་མིན་ (assertive), བཞིན་ (intentional egophoric) or དེ་ (testimonial).
In English these forms can be translated by the past or sometimes by the present perfect.

The forms བ་ ་ are composed of the suffix ་ followed by the essential copula ་ or ་. The intentional form བ་ may only be used with volitional verbs in the first person.

In interrogative sentences which contain no interrogative pronoun (where, who, why, what, etc.), the egophoric form བ་ is replaced by བ ་; in sentences where there is an interrogative pronoun, བ་ is replaced by བ་.

The auxiliary བ་ is used in narratives and stories, which is why it is sometimes described as the “narrative past.” The various forms are presented in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>བ་</th>
<th>བ་ ་</th>
<th>བ་ ་ ་</th>
<th>“I stayed at home”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>home + Loc.</td>
<td>stay-Past + egophoric</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>དོམ་པ་</td>
<td>བ་ ་</td>
<td>བ་ ་ ་</td>
<td>“Nyima stayed at home”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyima</td>
<td>home + Loc.</td>
<td>stay-Past + assertive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>དོམ་པ་</td>
<td>བ་ ་</td>
<td>བ་ ་ ་</td>
<td>“Nyima stayed at home”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyima</td>
<td>home + Loc.</td>
<td>stay-Past + testimonial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table of the past tense**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>affirmative</th>
<th>interrogative (without pronouns)</th>
<th>interrogative (with pronouns)</th>
<th>negative</th>
<th>interronegative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
N.B.: The negative forms that are marked in the table with a **: བྱ + V or བྱ + V + བྱ, as well as the corresponding interronegative forms, are rarely used, and other forms are usually preferred (see the perfect tense-aspect in MST 10). The simple past forms may be used to emphasize the subject’s refusal to perform the action: “I/he didn’t go (even though I/he was supposed to).”

- བྱིམ་པོ་ལིང་ལོག་པོི་ “Nyima did not go”
- བྱིམ་ “I did not go”

**Future auxiliaries**

(MST 8.3.3) The future is formed by placing after the verb the particles: བྱིམ་ (assertive) or བྱིམ་ (intentional egophoric). These are composed by adding the essential copula བྱེད་ or བྱེད་ to the suffix བྱིམ་. In written Tibetan, བྱིམ་ has several possible variants according to the final consonant of the preceding syllable. The pattern of these variants is the same as in the case of the genitive (see MST 4.3.2) except for vowels and the letter ག་:

- after vowels and ག་, ག, ག ་ ག > བྱིམ་
- after ག, ག, ག and the *second crypted suffix* ག > བྱིམ་
- after ག, ག, ག, ག > བྱིམ་
In Spoken Tibetan, the suffix is pronounced ki in all cases.

The intentional form མི་པོ་ may be used only with volitional verbs in the first person. In interrogative sentences, the egophoric form མི་པོ་ is replaced by མི་པོ་ if the statement contains no interrogative pronoun, and by མ་ མ་ otherwise.

The different forms are given in the following table:

The future auxiliaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>affirmative (without pronoun)</th>
<th>interrogative (without pronoun)</th>
<th>interrogative (with pronoun)</th>
<th>negative</th>
<th>negative interrogative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>མི་པོ་</td>
<td>མི་པོ་བོ་</td>
<td>མི་པོ་</td>
<td>མི་པོ་</td>
<td>མི་པོ་བོ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>མི་པོ་</td>
<td>མི་པོ་བོ་</td>
<td>མི་པོ་</td>
<td>མི་པོ་</td>
<td>མི་པོ་བོ་</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- མི་པོ་བོ་འེལ་བོམ་ལེགས་པོ་ “Tomorrow I shall make momos.”
- མི་པོ་བོ་འེལ་བོམ་ལེགས་པོ་ “Tomorrow he/she will make momos.”

THE RECEPTIVE EGOPHORIC PAST TENSE AUXILIARY མ་ མ་

(MST 8.3.5) The “receptive” auxiliary མ་ མ་ is used only in the past tense. This auxiliary is associated with the first-person pronoun, whether this be the subject (“I”), the object (“me”), the indirect (“to me”) or an adverbial (“at my place,” etc.).

- མ་ མ་ “I fell ill.”
- མ་ མ་ “He phoned me.”
- མ་ མ་ “I met our uncle.”
- མ་ མ་ “He came to my place.”

PRESENT TENSE AUXILIARIES
The present tense is formed by placing after the verb the particles: སེམས་པའི (assertive), སེམས་པ་ (testimonial) and སེམས་ (egophoric). These are formed by adding an existential copula to the suffix སེམས་. The resulting auxiliaries have the same evidential value as the existential copulas. In modern conversational usage, the form སེམས་པ་ is often abbreviated to སེམས་.

In English, these forms may be translated either by the progressive or the simple present depending on the context.

The various forms are presented in the following table:

**Chart of the present tense auxiliaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>affirmative</th>
<th>interrogative (without pronouns)</th>
<th>interrogative (with pronouns)</th>
<th>negative</th>
<th>negative interrogative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>སེམས་པ།</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>སེམས་པ་ / སེམས་</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
<td>སེམས་པ་</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ex.:

- སེམས་པ་ལེགས་པ། སེམས་པ་ལེགས་པ། “I am preparing the meal.” or “I prepare the meal.” (egophoric)
- སེམས་པ་ལེགས་པ། སེམས་པ་ལེགས་པ། “I am writing a letter.” or “I write letters.” (egophoric)
- སེམས་པ་ལེགས་པ་ལེགས་པ། སེམས་པ་ལེགས་པ་ལེགས་པ། “Lobzang prepares food.” or “Lobzang is preparing food.” (assertive)
THE NOTION OF VERB ASPECT

(MST 10.3.1) The notion of aspect is essential for learning the system of verb “tenses” in most of the world’s languages. In view of the importance of aspect in Tibetan, it may be good to have a working definition of the term, following a reminder of what we mean by “tense.”

Tense is defined most immediately with respect to the moment of speech utterance. Whatever precedes this moment is the past; everything that coincides with it is the present; and whatever follows it is the future.

Aspect is concerned primarily with whether the action has or has not been completed with respect to a given point of reference (past, present or future). According to the chosen perspective, the process is regarded as perfective, that is completed, or else as imperfective, meaning that it is still going on or is a habitual event. (In either case the point of reference need not be the present.) This explains why, in many languages, the imperfective bears a strong resemblance to the present: both the present and the imperfective past are non-completed. [10] The action is regarded as still going on, and is seen as being incomplete from a given point of reference (respectively, the present and the future). In Tibetan, the present and the imperfective past are identical, whereas the perfective past is entirely different (see MST 6.4).

Only context makes it possible to distinguish between present and the past imperfective. For example, the sentences below convey a present meaning.

- འབྲོབོང་བཞིན་(བདུན་) “Lobzang is preparing food.” or “Lobzang prepares food.” (testimonial)
- ཕོ་བོར་བཞིན་འདེབུ། “Dorje writes letters.” or “Dorje is writing a letter.” (assertive)
- ཕོ་བོར་བཞིན་འདེབུ། “Dorje is writing a letter.” or “Dorje writes letters.” (testimonial)
• བཟོན་ཤུལ་གཞི་ཙམ་བཟོན་ཀྱེ་ཉེན།  "He practices a lot." [11]

• དེས་པོ་སྣང་གི་ཐུན།  "He is in Lhasa."

• སྐྱིད་ཤུལ་ཙའི་རྗེ་ན་ལས་ལྷུན་པོ་གསུམ་ཐུན།  "Tsering works in the library."

However, if each of these sentences were preceded by འཚོས་("at that time") or འཆོས་ they would correspond to the past imperfective (without any transformation of the verb).

• འཚོས་ཀྱི་གཤེགས་པར་བཟོན་ཀྱེ་ཉེན།  "At that time, Gyäntshän was a doctor." (same as: Gyäntshän is a doctor)

• འཚོས་ཀྱི་ཏེ་བོ་པོ་གསུམ་ཐུན།  "At that time he was in Lhasa." (same as: is in Lhasa)

• འཚོས་ཀྱི་ཏེ་བོ་ལྷུན་པོ་གསུམ་ཐུན།  "At that time, he used to practice a lot." (same as: He practices a lot)

• བཟོན་ཤུལ་གཞི་ཙམ་བཟོན་ཀྱེ་ཉེན།

"Perfective" means that an action is regarded as being finished (from a present, past or even future point of reference). [12]

The last two examples become in the perfective past:

• བཟོན་ཤུལ་གཞི་ཙམ་བཟོན་ཀྱེ་ཉེན།  "He practiced a lot."

• སྐྱིད་ཤུལ་ཙའི་རྗེ་ན་ལས་ལྷུན་པོ་གསུམ་ཐུན།  "Tsering worked in the library."

The perfective aspect may be subdivided into perfect and aorist (or non-perfect). The perfect signifies that the effects of an action performed in the past are still present at the moment the statement is made, while in the case of the aorist, the past action being referred to bears no relationship to the present moment. [13]

In Tibetan, as in English, there is a grammatical opposition between aorist and perfect.
In English, the aorist is marked by the preterit while the perfect is marked by the “present perfect.” [14]

- མདོར་བཤད་པའི་ “I’ve prepared the meal.” (it’s ready, we can eat)
- མདོར་བཤད་པའི་ “I prepared the meal.” (last time, some time ago, etc.)

The perfect aspect will be described in detail below in 10.3.3.

**THE PERFECT AUXILIARIES**

(MST 10.3.3) རོ་ཞིན་, འབྲ་ (or ཡུལ་) and རོ་ཞིན་ are directly connected to the past tense form of the main verb. These auxiliaries respectively represent the three evidential moods: assertive, inferential and egophoric.

- རོ་ཞིན་བུ་ “Many new houses have been built.”
- རོ་ཞིན་བུ་ “Look! Many new houses have been built.”
- རོ་ཞིན་ “I’ve made the tea.”

The range of the perfect forms is presented in the following table:

**Table of the perfect tense auxiliaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>affirmative</th>
<th>interrogative (without pronouns)</th>
<th>interrogative (with pronouns)</th>
<th>negative</th>
<th>negative interrogative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>རོ་ཞིན་</td>
<td>བུས་</td>
<td>བུས་</td>
<td>རིག་</td>
<td>རིག་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>རོ་ཞིན་/ རིག་</td>
<td>བུས་</td>
<td>སྤེན་</td>
<td>རིག་ཡུལ་</td>
<td>རིག་ཡུལ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>རིག་པད་</td>
<td>བུས་</td>
<td>སྤེན་</td>
<td>རིག་པད་</td>
<td>རིག་པད་</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The auxiliary མི་ is sometimes spelled བི་, but here we shall use the former spelling for etymological reasons: the word is derived from the verb མི་, which means “to put, leave.”

As a general rule, the use of the form བི་ (or its variant བི་) implies that the speaker is making an “inference” or a deduction in discovering the result or the enduring traces of a past action. Most of the time, the inferential mode may be translated into English by adding “Look!” or “Why!” to the beginning of a statement in the past tense. In the example given above, it’s *upon discovering* a construction site in a sector of Lhasa that the speaker says “Why, they’ve built a lot of new houses!” In certain contexts, the form བི་ may have another, purely resultative connotation: the speaker may use it to emphasize the enduring presence of a past action, even if he or she has been able to see not just these traces but the entirety of the action that is being described.

- བི་ སྲེལ། འིང་ སྦེས། “Lobzang is here (lit. has stayed here).”

In this statement, the speaker has just discovered Lobzang’s presence either by seeing him directly or from various clues (his hat, for example). Alternatively, he might have been aware of his presence for some time but is emphasizing the fact that he is still around.

(MST 10.3.3) Unlike the inferential perfect (and to a certain extent the assertive), the egophoric perfect auxiliary is not widely used. The use of this auxiliary is a complex matter, and it is restricted to a small class of volitional verbs. For example, with the non-volitional verbs གི་ “to be sick” or གི་ “to see,” the egophoric perfect aspect may not be used. Even some volitional verbs such as གི་ “eat,” གི་ “look” are not compatible with the egophoric perfect. In this case, one must instead use the perfective forms.

- གི་ སྐྱེན། གི་ སྐྱེན། “I fell ill, I have fallen ill.” and not གི་ གི་
- གི་ སྐྱེན། གི་ སྐྱེན། “I saw, I have seen.” and not གི་ གི་
• བཞིན་པོ་ “I ate, I have eaten the food.” and not བཞིན་པའི་
• བཞིན་པོ་ “I have gone (there).” and not བཞིན་པའི་

However with some volitional verbs such as བཞིན་“prepare,” བཞིན་“write,” བཞིན་“stay,” etc. the egophoric aspect frequently occurs.

• བཞིན་པོ་“I have prepared the food.” (the food is here, ready)
• བཞིན་པོ་“I have written the letter.” (the letter is here)
• བཞིན་པོ་“I have stayed at home.” (I am still there)

**Note:** The negative forms of the egophoric and assertive perfect auxiliaries are more widely used than the affirmative forms. They are often even preferred to the simple perfective, and may occur with non-volitional verbs. Thus, negation in the past tense blurs the distinction between the perfect and perfective aspects.

For example, བཞིན་“I haven’t gone” is more commonly heard than བཞིན་, and similarly, བཞིན་“He hasn’t gone” rather than བཞིན་.

Nevertheless, perfective forms may be used to emphasize the subject’s refusal to perform the action: བཞིན་“I didn’t go (even though I was supposed to).” [16]

**[deontic modality]**

**The Present Continuous**  བཞིན་པ་ OR བཞིན་

(MST 17.3.2) The continuous is more restricted than the English progressive, and signifies that the subject is actually in the process of carrying out an activity. (In English, by contrast, we might say “I’m writing a letter” even when we have taken a break from doing so.) The present continuous is formed by taking the past tense form of the main verb and adding བཞིན་ (lit. “on”) followed by the appropriate auxiliary.

• བཞིན་པ་“I’m (in the process of) writing a letter.”
• ་བོ་བཟང་བཐག་བཞི་ཤེས་པར་ཞིག་ “He’s (in the middle of) working.”

THE AUXILIARY OF GENERAL OR HABITUAL TRUTH.

(MST 24.3.2) Tibetan very commonly uses the future to indicate a habitual action or process. It is only from the context that we can determine whether it signifies the future or the generic present (also called “gnomic”).

• ཞེས་བཞི་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་སྐབས་བཅོས་པར་ཞིག་ “Rice is grown (lit. will be grown) in India and China.”
• དེ་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་སྐབས་བཅོས་པར་ཞིག་ “In Tibet, most people practise (lit. will practise) sky burial.”
• དེ་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་སྐབས་བཅོས་པར་ཞིག་ “Some people have (lit. will have) picnics.”
• དེ་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་སྐབས་བཅོས་པར་ཞིག་ “When the spring comes, a lot of people go (lit. will go) to the banks of the Kyichu River.”

THE CONSTRUCTION V + དེ་བཟང་པོ + V + དེ་བཟང་པོ

(MST 29.3.2) The construction V + དེ་བཟང་པོ + V + དེ་བཟང་པོ conveys the sense of a present gerundive, that is, two actions that are taking place simultaneously.

• དེ་བཟང་པོ་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་སྐབས་བཅོས་པར་ཞིག་ དེ་བཟང་པོ་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་སྐབས་བཅོས་པར་ཞིག་ “They’ll go back home singing.”
• དེ་བཟང་པོ་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་སྐབས་བཅོས་པར་ཞིག་ དེ་བཟང་པོ་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་བོ་བཟང་བཞི་སྐབས་བཅོས་པར་ཞིག་ “It isn’t good to eat while you’re walking.”

MOOD

EVIDENTIAL MOOD

(MST 5.3.2) These moods are conveyed by auxiliary verbs (or by copulas), and have the function of specifying the source of information on which a statement is based. There are basically four moods: [17] egophoric, testimonial, assertive and
inferential. These moods all correspond to any statement that conveys a given item of information.

The assertive auxiliary verbs མེད་ and ཀྲེང་ specify that the information being transmitted may be a **general truth** or a **specific fact**, but is something that is considered by the speaker to be **certain**. In general, the assertive implies that the speaker is letting it be known that while the assertion is certain, he or she has not personally witnessed it. Typically, the information has been obtained second-hand from some other source (reported speech, a book, the radio, etc.) or else forms a part of the speaker’s general knowledge.

However, it may happen that even though the speaker can personally testify to the validity of the assertion, he or she may use the assertive in order to present the statement as an objective or well-known fact.

*N.B.*: The assertive mood should not be confused with the marker of reported speech, which may be used in combination with any of the four moods (see MST 15) and implies a measure of uncertainty (cf. “it would seem that…”).

Testimonial or “sensorial” auxiliaries such as ཀྱི་ signify that the speaker **has personally observed** the fact or event he or she is reporting. The evidence is usually derived from the senses, most commonly sight or hearing, but occasionally also from the other three, as in the case of a pain suffered by the speaker. [18] In other words, the speaker is, or has been, a direct witness to what he or she is describing.

Thus in MST 5, the use of the constative ཀྱི་ suggests that Drölkar has actually been to Ladakh and witnessed the things she is talking about. The assertive and testimonial moods could be described as respectively objective and subjective, but as far as the speaker is concerned they are equally certain.

The egophoric mood is linked to a **personal knowledge** or intention on the speaker’s part, and has been described above (see MST 3.4).

Finally, the inferential mood (see MST 10.4) indicates that the basis of the speaker’s assertion is an **inference or a conclusion that is being drawn** from the traces or the present results of a past action.
**N.B.:** Auxiliary verbs almost always come after the main clause, at the end of the sentence. On rare occasions they may be placed after subordinate clauses.

(MST 3.3.2) Certain auxiliary verbs are associated only with the **first person** (singular or plural), irrespective of the function of that person in the sentence (subject, object, indirect object, or complement). The use of an “egophoric” [19] auxiliary expresses the speaker’s knowledge or personal intention, often directly implied in the event that is being described. Whereas this type of auxiliary does not occur in Classical Literary Tibetan, it plays an important role in the spoken language. The final auxiliaries include several kinds of egophorics: intentional, receptive, habitual, experiential (see MST 15) and allocentric (see MST 23). The egophoric auxiliaries (and copulas) are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ཚིཚ་</th>
<th>རོ་</th>
<th>རོ་</th>
<th>སོ་</th>
<th>དཔལ་</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In contrast, all the remaining auxiliaries are neutral with respect to person:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>བོ་</th>
<th>རོ་</th>
<th>བོ་</th>
<th>རོ་</th>
<th>རོ་</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- བོ་ཇི་ གཉིས། “I am Dorje.”
- བོ་ཇི་ འབུ། རུ། “I was happy.”
- བོ་ཇི་ རེ་ རོ་པོ་ རི་ རོ་ “I have many books.”
- བོ་ཇི་ རེ་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ “I have been (lit. gone) to Nagchu.”
- བོ་ཇི་ རེ་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ “[I] sent many letters.”

In all the above sentences, it is possible to dispense with the pronoun བོ་“I,” in view of the fact that the first person is indicated by the auxiliary (or the copula).

In the following sentences, the egophorics do not agree with the subject but with a complement:

- བོ་ཇི་ རེ་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ རི་ “This key is mine!”
• "He [generally] comes to my place."
• "My daughter goes to school." (cf. English “I've got my daughter in school.”)
• "He sent me a letter."
• “This is your tea (the tea that I made for you or that I intend you should drink)."

When the first person appears as a peripheral complement (other than as a subject or object), the use of an egophoric auxiliary usually stresses the personal intention or the certainty of the speaker. Where there is no such emphasis, egophoric auxiliaries may always be replaced by neutral auxiliaries. For example, some of the above sentences may be rephrased as follows:

• “This key is mine.”
• “My daughter goes to school.”
• “This is your tea (this is the tea that’s yours).”

Whereas egophoric auxiliaries need not always be used with the first person, it is incorrect to use egophorics in statements that neither contain the first person nor express the speaker’s personal involvement.

Finally, it should be noted that egophoric forms are used only when an auxiliary verb features in the main clause, but usually not in subordinate clauses.

For the time being, the important thing to remember is that the auxiliary ཞེན་ is used mainly for the first person, whereas the auxiliary རེན་ is used for the second and third persons.

(MST 10.3.5) These imply that the subject-speaker is performing an action deliberately and may be used only with volitional (or controllable) verbs. The
intentional auxiliaries are: ཡོན་(future), གྲོན་(present), ལོགས་(perfective), གོང་(perfect).

- བང་ན་འགྲོན། “I'll buy some tsampa.”
- བང་ན་བོགས་པར། “I’ve bought some tsampa.” (perfect)
- བང་ན་བོགས་པར། “I bought some tsampa.” (perfective)
- བང་ན་བོགས་པར། “I go (OR I am going) to the Norbulingkha palace.” (now or habitually)
- བང་ན་བོགས་པར། “I ate some meat.”
- བང་ན་བོགས་པར། “I've killed an insect.” (intentionally)

(MST 10.3.5) The “receptive” (non-intentional) auxiliary གཞི་, which is used only in the perfective past, implies that the subject-speaker has undergone the action, perceived it (involuntarily) or has been the recipient of it. This auxiliary is associated with the first person pronoun, whether as a subject (“I”), direct object (“me”), indirect object (“to me”) or adverbial (“at my place,” etc.). It may also signify that the action is directed (actually or metaphorically) towards the speaker. Thus we can’t say: *བཞི་པོ་སེམས་བརྒྱད། “I've lost (it)” but rather བཞི་པོ་སེམས་བརྒྱད། since the verb “to lose” implies a “distancing” from the speaker.

- བཞི་པོ། “I fell ill.”
- བཞི་ནོར་འགྲོན། “He phoned me.”
- བཞི་ནོར་འགྲོན། “I saw three rainbows.”
- བཞི་ནོར་འགྲོན། “He took me to the hospital.”

It is sometimes possible to replace the receptive egophoric auxiliary by the testimonial as shown below, with a subtle distinction in their meaning.
• བཀའ་ེ། “I understood.” or “I have understood.”
• ཆུ་ོ་ “I have understood.” (just right now)

The use of བཀའ་ indicates that the verbal action (or process) may have happened some time before the moment of speech, while the use of the testimonial ཆུ་ suggests that it has just happened just now.

(MST 10.3.5) The auxiliary ཀྲུང་ is used with reference to habitual facts that involve the speaker:

• ཁུ་ཁྲུང་ “I'm never ill.”
• དོན་ཁྲུང་ “Previously, I used to see well.”
• དེབུ་ཁྲུང་ “My daughter goes to school.”
• ཉེན་ཁྲུང་ “He often comes to my place.”

The testimonial specifies that the speaker is personally a witness to what he or she is stating to be the case. The authority is usually visual, but may also be aural or derived from any of the other senses (touch, smell or taste). In the present tense, this mood appears only in the present with ཀྲུང་ and in the past with ཆུ་. It does not appear in future constructions because of the impossibility of witnessing what hasn’t already happened!

• བཀས་ལེན་ “It snowed.” (I saw it snowing)
• བཀས་ིས་ “It’s snowing.” (I can see it snowing)
• དེབས་གཤི། བཀས་ིས་ “He drew a pretty picture.” (I saw him drawing it)

With volitional verbs and most non-volitional verbs, the testimonial mood is used essentially for the second and third persons (singular and plural), except in special
instances of self-observation (looking in the mirror, dreaming, watching a video recording of oneself, etc.) or performing involuntary actions.

- བོད་ཐོད་ བོད་ བོད་ ཁང་ "I'm going to the Norbu lingka." (I see myself going there in a dream, in a film, etc.)
- སོག་ཐོག་ "(Dammit) I've eaten meat."
- སོག་ཐོག་ "I've killed an insect." (accidentally)

These sentences are usually constructed with intentional auxiliaries.

On the other hand, when the testimonial mood is associated with certain non-volitional verb forms, particularly of perception (such as རེད་ to hear, རིག་ to see, ཁུང་ to be ill, etc.) and affect (such as ོབ་ love, གོའ་ fear), it appears naturally with the first person, and more rarely with the second and third (in which case reported or inferential speech is preferred). The perception of certain feelings or sensations is accessible only to the speaker. We refer to this as the endopathic function of the testimonial mood.

- དམེིས་ "I'm ill, I'm in pain." (I feel it)
- དམེིས་ "I remember!" (I can testify to it)
- དམེིས་ "I'm hungry." (I feel hunger)
- དམེིས་
- དམེིས་

The last two sentences are normally not acceptable because the speaker cannot have direct access to this sort of information – that is, he cannot perceive the state of pain or hunger experienced by the sufferer. [20] The two sentences would be correctly expressed, using the inferential mood (explained immediately below), as:

- དམེིས་ "He’s ill, he’s in pain."
“He’s hungry.”

The statement in each case corresponds to an inference based on an observation of the sufferer’s symptoms.

The assertive corresponds to a definite item of information, or else a historical or general truth (see MST 5.3). This mood may be used in all the tenses: future, present, and past. Note that the present includes forms similar to the future that denote a habitual state of affairs or a general truth (see MST 24.3).

“It’s going to snow.”

“It’s snowed.” or “it snowed.” (a definite fact)

“In Lhasa, it doesn’t snow much.” (general fact)

“He drew a pretty picture.” (definite fact).

“In 1969, man walked on the moon.” (historical fact)

The inferential mood implies that the authority for what is said is derived from the enduring traces or results of a past action. Even if the speaker has not taken part in the event being described, he or she considers it to be definitely factual.

“Look, it’s snowed!” (I can see the traces)

“He’s drawn a pretty picture.” (I’ve just come across it)

“They’ve put up a lot of prayer-flags.”

“(Look!) they’ve burned a lot of incense.” (we can smell it, and see the ash)
The inferential is rarely used with the first person. However, it may be used when the subject has not been aware of performing the action and only later has discovered he actually did it.

- ོགས་བུ་བརྡ་ཞི་ “Why, I’ve killed an insect.”

**Hearsay**

(MST 15.3.1) Reported speech is indicated by the marker བོ་ which corresponds to closing quotation marks. This marker བོ་, derived from the verb བོ་ “to say,” is used for both direct and indirect speech. [21] There is a special form བོ་ to convey hearsay. The distinguishing feature of reported speech in Tibetan is that it is inserted between the author of the quotation and the verb of speech. When Tibetans read or quote a text, they often conclude the citation with an བོ་ to make it clear that these were not their own words.

(MST 15.3.1) Reported speech begins by first mentioning the source and then, where applicable, the intended recipient, respectively in the ergative and dative cases. The quotation is concluded by the sound བོ་, which corresponds to closing quotation marks, followed immediately by a verb of speech. Direct speech reproduces a statement in the original words. Note that quotation marks are actually used in certain modern writings, whereas traditional Tibetan literature uses no punctuation at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>source + བོ་ [+ goal + པ] + “citation” + བོ་ + verb of speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- སྐུ་བཤད་ཀྱིས་ནུས་ཁྱབ་ལུ་མ་བུ་ཐོབ་ཀྱི་ིར་བྱོ་གསུམ་ཕུལ། The teacher said to the students, “I’ll come back immediately.”
- བདེ་ལེགས་ཆེན་པོ་ཚིག་ལེན་ལ། He said, “I’m a doctor.”
- བདེ་ལེགས་པ་དབང་ཕོ་རིམ་གིས་བོད་ལེགས། He said, “Pándän is a doctor.” or He said that Pándän was a doctor. [22]
He said to me, “You’re not a doctor!”

Dhöndrup said, “I didn’t receive the letter.”

Tsering replied, “I sent the letter.”

(MST 15.3.1) If it happens that the source of a quotation is the same person as someone who is mentioned in it, or else is the actual speaker, Tibetans prefer to substitute “hybrid” reported speech for direct speech. For example, in the statement “He said ‘I’m a doctor’,” the two pronouns “he” and “I” refer to the same person (and are therefore “coreferents”). The same is true of the statement “He said to me, ‘You’re not a doctor!’” in which the pronouns “me” and “you” are coreferents. In such cases, Tibetan generally uses a particular form of reported speech that has the following features:

A. The pronouns [23] of the original quotation and the register (honorific, humiliific or ordinary) are reformulated to suit the speaker’s current situation. This is similar to the reported speech of European languages.

B. By contrast, when the first person pronoun “I,” “me,” etc. appears in the original citation, the egophoric auxiliary (ཏིན་, ་ཏིན་, etc.) that is associated with it is preserved in the “hybrid” reported speech.

C. Once a sentence has been transformed into reported speech, if it contains coreferential nouns or pronouns one of the two forms is dropped.

“For example, the sentence “He said, ‘I’m a doctor’” is transformed into the hypothetical stage A): ‘ཞེས་ཐོག་ཐོག་ཞིན་པོ་ལ།’. Following the rule set out in B), the sentence preserves the egophoric auxiliary ་ཏིན་; and as a result of eliminating the first pronoun, we end up with: ‘ཞེས་ཐོག་ཐོག་ཞིན་པོ་ལ། ‘He said he was a doctor.’”
Here are some other examples of indirect reported speech:

- “He told me I wasn’t a doctor.”
- “Dhöndrup said he hadn’t received a letter.” *Note*: in this case, the subject could also be in the dative.
- “The teacher said he would come back immediately.”
- “Tsering replied that he’d sent the letter.”

“Hearsay” is formulated directly without introducing a speaker, citing and closing the assertion with the marker སྤ “it is said that,” or ངེས་ཞི་བ. “X is said to have said that…,” “X allegedly said that…”

- “They say he’s a doctor.”
- “There’s said to be a lot of gold in Tibet.”
- “Apparently he said that Trashi had gone to India.”

(MST 33.3.3) MST 6 introduced auxiliaries (or copulas) corresponding to the English verbs “to be” and “to have.” Apart from these, there are so-called “self-corrective” auxiliaries (or copulas) that are used much more rarely. They imply that the speaker has just realized that he was mistaken or that he was hitherto unaware of what he is asserting. Statements using these auxiliaries often begin with ལེགས་ “Well, well! Oh, I see!”

As in the case of other mediatory auxiliaries and copulas, a distinction may be made between “essential” and “existential.”

(MST 33.3.3) This is used instead of the auxiliary (or copula) སྐབས་.
• རོ་ཁུངས་འཛིན་པོས་ཐེ་ “Ah, it’s Thubtän!” [I hadn’t realized]
• རོ་ཁུངས་འཛིན་པོས་ཐེ་ “Oh, it’s a nomad.” [I hadn’t thought so]
• རོ་ཁུངས་འཛིན་པོས་ཐེ་ “So, he’s crazy!” [I didn’t know that]

(MST 33.3.3) These are used instead of the coplas ངད་་ and ངད་པོས. There is a subtle difference between the two. The verb ངད་པོས་ཐེ་ is generally used following a modification or rectification made by the speaker's interlocutor, whereas ངད་པོས་ཐེ་ is used after the speaker has just corrected himself or herself.

• རོ་ཁུངས་འཛིན་པོས་ཐེ་ “Ah, I didn’t know he was in China!”
• རོ་ཁུངས་འཛིན་པོས་ཐེ་ “So, Drölkar has two children!”
• རོ་ཁུངས་འཛིན་པོས་ཐེ་ “Well well, so Tsering has a car!”

(MST 33.3.4) Using this auxiliary implies that the speaker has only a vague recollection of what he is saying. It may be translated by “I seem to remember that….” or “I vaguely remember that….”

• རོ་ཁུངས་འཛིན་པོས་ཐེ་ “[I seem to remember that] the harvest festival takes place in August.”
• རོ་ཁུངས་འཛིན་པོས་ཐེ་ “[I vaguely recall that] the university summer vacation lasts seven weeks.”

**EPISTEMIC MOOD**

(MST 11.3.1) In addition to final auxiliary verbs that convey various tenses and evidential moods, there is also a set of “epistemic” final copulas and auxiliaries that express different degrees of **certainty or probability**. These correspond to the epistemic adverbs of European languages, such as “perhaps,” “probably,” “apparently” and to modal verbs such as “must,” “may,” “can,” etc. A distinction may be drawn between, on the one hand, stative verbs or copulas that figure as
independent verbs and, on the other hand, auxiliary verbs that (like evidential auxiliaries) go at the end of the sentence after the main verb. These auxiliaries are also associated with different tense-aspects, and for the most part involve the same verbs as the evidential auxiliaries, but combined in a different way (see Table 6 of MST Appendix 6, which summarizes the use of these auxiliaries in relation to tense-aspect).

(MST 11.3.1) Tibetan contains an important set of epistemic stative verbs (or copulas). These do not vary in relation to tense-aspect. As in the case of declarative stative verbs, a distinction is drawn between existential and essential copulas. The former are derived from the verb ། and the latter from the verb །.

The existential copulas and their negatives are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ཁྱུགས་ །</th>
<th>བཞི་ །</th>
<th>བཞི་བཞི་ །</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ཁྱུགས་ །</td>
<td>བཞི་ །</td>
<td>བཞི་བཞི་ །</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The essential copulas and their negatives are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ཁྱུགས་ །</th>
<th>བཞི་ །</th>
<th>བཞི་བཞི་ །</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ཁྱུགས་ །</td>
<td>བཞི་ །</td>
<td>བཞི་བཞི་ །</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These copulas express a high degree of probability and according to the context may be translated by the use of adverbs such as “surely,” “probably” or the modal verb “must.”

- ཁྱུགས་ ། བཞི་ ། བཞི་བཞི་ ། “There must be a lot of people.”
- ཁྱུགས་ ། བཞི་ ། བཞི་བཞི་ ། “There must be some nomads.”
- ཁྱུགས་ ། བཞི་ ། བཞི་བཞི་ ། “He must be Chinese.”

There is a slight difference between the auxiliaries formed with བཞི་ and those formed with བཞི་. The former suggests that the speaker's inference is based on his
direct observation of the evidence, while the latter indicates that the speaker’s inference is based on logic or on factual information not borne out by observation.

Other auxiliaries such as གཉིས་པ་, བོད་པ་, བོད་པ་ are presented in MST 18, 28 and 29.

(MST 11.3.1) These auxiliaries are effectively similar to copulas and may also be translated by the same devices. How they are used depends on the tense of the verb.

See the tables in MST Appendix 6.

- གཉིས་པ་ བོད་པ་ “It must be all right.”
- བོད་པ་ བོད་པ་ “He will probably come.”
- བོད་པ་ བོད་པ་ “[he/she] probably lies.”

(MST 18.3.2) These imply that the speaker regards his or her assertion as a probability, not a certainty.

The auxiliaries གཉིས་པ་, བོད་པ་, are based on the verbs གཉིས་, བོད་, which correspond respectively to essential and existential formulations. They are used either as copulas (linking verbs) or as auxiliaries and occur in the same position as གཉིས་ and བོད་, (see Table 6 in MST Appendix 6).

They may be translated in English by the adverb “probably.” Their negative counterparts གཉིས་, བོད་, [25] express a similar meaning with a slightly weaker probability [26], but they occur more frequently than the positive auxiliaries.

- གཉིས་པ་ བོད་པ་ བོད་པ་ (ཆོས་པོ་) “That’s maybe the bedroom.”
- གཉིས་པ་ “That’s probably the bedroom. It must be the bedroom.”
- བོད་པ་ བོད་པ་ “There’s probably a place to buy mutton.”
- བོད་པ་ བོད་པ་ “Maybe there isn’t enough butter.”
• བོད་ལྡན་ལོ་ིར་བོད་པའི། "He may have gone to the teashop."

• ལུགས་པའི་དྲུག་ཆུང་ལེགས་བཞིན། “The teacher may have this book (pecha)"

Note: The negative forms བོད་པའི་དྲུག་ཆུང་ལེགས་བཞིན། and བོད་པའི་དྲུག་ཆུང་ལེགས་བཞིན། are usually used in a positive sense, as the above examples indicate. However, exceptionally, with a falling intonation, they may also express a negative judgement corresponding to “probably not,” in which case they are similar to བོད་ལྡན་ལོ་ིར་བོད་པའི། and བོད་ལྡན་ལོ་ིར་བོད་པའི། (see MST 11).

• ལུགས་པའི་དྲུག་ཆུང་ལེགས་བཞིན། “The teacher probably doesn’t have this book (pecha).”

(MST 28.3.2) These two auxiliaries express a high degree of certainty and relate to a future event.

The speaker makes an inference from available evidence or from previous knowledge.

These auxiliaries may be translated by “undoubtedly” or “surely,” or by some such expression as “I think that.” The form བོད་ལྡན་ལོ་ིར་བོད་པའི། is neutral, whereas བོད་ལྡན་ལོ་ིར་བོད་པའི། is egophoric, and implies an event about which the speaker is privy to certain information. The auxiliary may be translated in English by “from what I know,” or “I know that in principle….”

• བོད་ལྡན་ལོ་ིར་བོད་པའི། “He’ll certainly arrive in time for his flight.”

• བོད་ལྡན་ལོ་ིར་བོད་པའི། “It would surely be better to visit a doctor.”

• བོད་ལྡན་ལོ་ིར་བོད་པའི། “Do you think it will rain this evening?”

• བོད་ལྡན་ལོ་ིར་བོད་པའི། “It’s probably going to rain this evening.”

• བོད་ལྡན་ལོ་ིར་བོད་པའི། “I know he should be coming to the meeting tomorrow.”
These commonly-used auxiliaries (and copulas) indicate that the speaker has serious doubts about what he or she is asserting. These three auxiliaries consist of the interrogative particle མ (or མ in Literary Tibetan) and the copulas པ, ག, or བ (cf. the examples below).

- མ་ཐོགས་པ་ལོ་བོད་ཇིད་ཁྲོད་པ། “I doubt that there are nomads near here.”
- མ་ལེགས་པ་ལོ་བོད་ཇིད་ཁྲོད་པ། “I doubt if there’ll be time to make tea.”
- མ་ལེགས་པ་ལོ་བོད་ཇིད་ཁྲོད་པ། “I doubt that we’ll find a doctor.”

There are two main ways of conveying the idea of “of course.” We've already seen the very common construction བེད་བོད་ཇིད་. Sometimes a verb other than བེད may be used in the same construction: V+ བོད་+V. The same idea may be conveyed by using བེད་ in association with a verb in the present-future.

- བེད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་ “May I use this pen?” བེད་བོད་ “Sure, go ahead.”
- བེད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་ “My, you study very enthusiastically!” 
- བེད་བོད་བོད་བོད་ “Studying is certainly very important.”
- བེད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་ “If I make a mistake, please correct me.”
- བེད་ “Certainly I will.”
- བེད་བོད་ “Don’t you need 70 pounds of tsampa for that?” བེད་ “Of course you do!”
THE EXPERIENTIAL AUXILIARY བོད་

(MST 15.3.2) This signifies that the subject has already, at least once, experienced the action to which བོད་ refers. The verb preceding the auxiliary བོད་ must be in the present tense. When བོད་ isn’t followed by anything, the implication is egophoric. In this case, it is used with the first person, which may be either the subject or the direct or indirect object. In other cases, བོད་ again becomes a full verb and must be followed by an assertive past auxiliary: བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་. In English it may be translated by “has/have ever…”

- བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ “I’ve been (lit. gone) to Bhutan.”
- བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ “He has (previously) hit me.”
- བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ “He’s been (lit. come) to my place.”
- བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ He has been (lit. gone) to Bhutan.”

THE ALLOCENTRIC FUTURE བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་

(MST 23.3.2) The “allocentric” future implies that the speaker intends to perform the action on behalf of his interlocutor. It can be used only in the first person singular (and occasionally plural) with volitional verbs. In this context the verbs བོད་ and བོད་ have practically the same meaning. The form བོད་ is used in a rather more formal register.

With this type of future, the verb must be in the past tense.

- བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ “I’ll tell him (for you).” but not བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་
- བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ “I’ll make it (for you).” but not བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་
- བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ བོད་ “I’ll buy some tsampa (for you).”
I’ll post this letter (for you) straight away.

If the subject is stated, it must be in the ergative even it is used with intransitive volitional verbs:

- བུ་ཁ་ཁད། “I’ll go there (for you).” *but not* ད་ཁ་ཁད།
- བུ་ས་ཁད། “I’ll come (for you).” *but not* ད་ས་ཁད།
- བུ་བན་ཁད། “I’ll stay (for you).” *but not* ད་བན་ཁད།

The auxiliary བུ་ is used when the action implies movement: བུ་ཁ་ཁད།. “I’ll go and buy it” is therefore equivalent to བུ་ཁ་ཁད། བུ་ཁ་ཁད། བུ་ཁ་ཁད།.

**THE DIRECTIONAL AND ASPECTUAL AUXILIARIES བུ་ AND བུ་**

(MST 41.3.1) Verbs of movement are often formed by using directional auxiliaries that specify whether an action is coming towards or going away from the speaker (or the point of reference).

- བུ་བཀོད་བོད་ལེགས། “He’s coming jumping.” (he’s jumping this way)
- བུ་བཀོད་བོད་ལེགས། “He’s going jumping.” (he’s jumping away)
- བུ་བརོལ་བོད་ལེགས། “I’m going back home (away from the interlocutor).”
- བུ་བརོལ་བོད་ལེགས། “I’m coming back home (towards the interlocutor).”

The two auxiliaries may also be used with non-volitional verbs to indicate the beginning of a process (inchoative sense). The auxiliary བུ་ is used with the first person (singular or plural), whereas བུ་ is used with the second and third persons (singular or plural).

- བུ་ལེགས། བུ་ལེགས། “I’m starting to fall asleep.”
He’s starting to fall asleep.

I’m starting to feel cold.

He’s starting to feel cold.

Deontic

(MST 11.3.6) When combined with modal verbs, the main verb must go in the present-future. The past form is incorrect.

There may be problems (later).

This grandmother can’t get up.

I couldn’t go to that area.

(In this case it would be incorrect to say *ཉེ་བ་རོ་བ་བོ་འབོད་*.)

is compatible with most non-intentional auxiliaries: དུ་དེར, དུ་དེར་དེར, དུ་དེར་ཟློ, དུ་དེར, དུ་དེར་དེར, དུ་དེར་དེར, དུ་དེར་དེར, དུ་དེར་དེར. It is usually incompatible with the following egophoric auxiliaries *ུ་དེར, དུ་དེར་དེར, དུ་དེར་དེར*. The compatibility of with auxiliary verbs is relatively restricted. As a rule, only the forms དུ་དེར་དེར and དུ་དེར་པ་ are encountered.

(MST 16.3.1) The verb དེར “to need, to have to” is used both either as the main verb of a sentence or as the modal verb. Finally, it is also used as an auxiliary in future tense constructions (see MST 23.3.2).

Like many other languages, Tibetan has certain defective modal verbs. This is the case with verb དེར, insofar as there are certain restrictions about how it can be combined with auxiliaries. As a main verb it means “to need” or “to want,” and occurs only with the following auxiliaries. [27]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Egophoric</th>
<th>གཉེན་འཇོག</th>
<th>“I need”</th>
<th>neg.: ོབས་པོ་ཞིག</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>གཉེན་ “I want”</td>
<td></td>
<td>neg.: ོབས་པོ་ཞིག</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimonial</td>
<td>གཉེན་འཇོག “you, he need(s)”</td>
<td>neg.: ོབས་པོ་ཞིག</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>གཉེན་པོ་ “you, he need(s)”</td>
<td>neg.: ོབས་པོ་ཞིག</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The suffix གཞི། may be inserted between the modal and the auxiliary: ོབས་པོ་ཞིག, ོབས་པོ་ཞིག, ོབས་པོ་ཞིག, but it is usually dropped in conversation. As shown above, the verb may occur alone without auxiliary ོབས་པོ་ཞིག or ོབས་པོ་ཞིག and may then be best translated as “I (do not) want,” while with the auxiliary it may be translated as “need.”

The subject of ོབས་པོ་ཞིག used as a main verb must be in the dative and the object in the absolutive. [29]

- གས་རབས་གཉེན་པོ་ “I need offering-scarves.”
- གས་ཁྲི་གཉེན་ “I don’t want any tea.”
- གཉེན་ཁྲིས་ངག་གི་བོད། “He needs/ wants water (H).”

See also the modal verb ོབས་པོ་ཞིག “to want, desire” in 26.3.2.

As a modal verb it means “to have to, need” or even “must,” [30] and goes with the following auxiliaries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future:</th>
<th>Assertive</th>
<th>ོབས་པོ་ཞིག</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present:</td>
<td>Egophoric</td>
<td>ོབས་པོ་ཞིག</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Testimonial</td>
<td>ོབས་པོ་ཞིག</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is conjugated in the same way as predicative adjectives such as ཞེས་བ་ “like, be fond of.” The forms ཞེས་བ་, ཞེས་བཔ་ and ཞེས་བཞིན་ are usually not acceptable.

The subject’s case depends on the main verb.

- བི་ནི་ལུགས་ཤེ་ན་ལེགས་པོ་ “(We) have to take binoculars.”
- དམ་པོ་བ་ཕྲོག་པ། “I have to buy offering-scarves.”
- ལེགས་བཞིན་པ་ “I had to pay (for it).”
- བི་ཐོག་དིར་བ་ཡིན་མི་ལེགས་པོ་ “He had to take the train.” (H)

(MST 19.3.2) Like other modal verbs, this one goes after the main verb and before the auxiliary. The tense of the main verb may be the present-future or the past – either will do. The verb ཞེས་ is used mainly in with the future auxiliaries: ཞེས་པ་ for future and present situations. However, other auxiliaries are sometimes used: རོག་ཞིག་ (testimonial present), རོག་པོ་ (assertive present). The combinations are sometimes used in the past but of course never occur with intentional egophoric auxiliaries The combinations are sometimes used in the past but of course never occur with intentional egophoric auxiliaries རོག་པོ་ རོག་པོ་ or རོག་པོ་.
The verb རང་ has two meanings: The first, and more usual meaning, is “to be allowed,” “may”; secondly, it can also have the meaning “to be able, can” in which case it can be substituted by བོད་.

- རང་མི་ལེན་ནས་མ་བིན་པར་ནས། “We can buy khatak in the market.”
- རང་མི་ལེན་ནས་མ་བིན་པར་ནས། “Are we allowed to take photos inside the temple?”

(MST 26.3.2) This verb, which means “to want,” requires the main verb to be in the present-future.

It appears only as a modal verb (and not as a main verb), and may be combined with the following auxiliaries. It functions in a similar way to the verb བོད་ “need.”

- in the present: བོད་(ego.), བོད་ལ་(or བོད་པ་)
- in the past: བོད་(ego.), བོད་ལ་(or བོད་པ་)
- in the future: བོད་ི་

The perfective past auxiliaries བོད་, བོད་, བོད་ may not directly follow the verb རང་:

- བོད་སང་, བོད་ལ་, བོད་མ་
- བོད་པ་སང་ “I want to go to Kailash.”
- བོད་པ་ལགས་ “Would you like to go to Tibet?”

However, the verb བོད་ and its honorific form བོད་པས་ have a regular conjugation.
(MST 27.3) The suffixes ོོ and གཉེ་ are combined with the auxiliaries ོོ་ and ཁི་ to make the following auxiliaries: ོོེ་ུ་ུ་ྲྀ་ུ་ེ་ེ། །་བེ་

- •Past: ཆེ་ེ་, ཆེ་ེ་, ཁེ་, ཉེ་, ཉེ་, ཉེ་, ཉེ་, ཉེ་, ཉེ་, ཉེ་
- •Present: ཆེ་, ཁི་, ཁི་

As we shall see below (MST 28), they may also be combined with the copulas ཉེ་ and ཁི་ to form future modal auxiliaries.

All these auxiliaries have a modal sense, and may be translated in English by the modal verbs “to be able to,” “to have to.”

(MST 27.3.1) These mean “to have had the opportunity to” and “to have been able to.” The preceding verb must be in the present-future.

- བ་ཐ་ས་བུ་(བུ་བུ་)བུ་“I didn’t get a chance to offer a khatak.”
- དེ་དགའ་བུ་མི་ཕྱོག་པོ་ཞེ་“Was he able to talk to her?”
- ཀྲེན་ཁྱིམ་ལྷ་“I was able to do some sightseeing.”
- དེ་ས་མེད་པ་དེ་བུ་པ་“Have you been able to make a pilgrimage?”
- རྟེ་དེ་དག་ཧ་“I was unable to go to sleep.”

(MST 27.3.2) This auxiliary, which is always in the negative, means “to ought not.” The preceding verb goes in the present-future.

- ཆེ་དག་ལྡེ་ཤེས་པ་“You shouldn’t eat a lot of chili!”
- ཉེ་ལྡེ་པ་ལེ་“You ought not to speak in that way!”
- ཉེ་མེད་ཤེས་པ་ལྡེ་ཤེས་པ་“You shouldn’t worry so!”
These indicate the future, and are practically the same as བོད་ལྗོང་, བོད་པར་, but with more of a sense of obligation. The forms བོད་ལྗོང་ and བོད་པར་ are egophoric, whereas བོད་པར་ and བོད་པར་ are neutral. The verb that precedes the auxiliary should be in the present-future.

- བོད་པར་ལོ་བཞིན་ “Next year, we have to build a new school.”
- བོད་པར་ལོ་བཞིན་ “We have to find accommodation.”
- བོད་པར་བཞིན་ “Do you have to leave immediately?”

In certain contexts, the forms བོད་ལྗོང་ and བོད་བར་ may also imply that something that ought to have been done already has yet to be accomplished. In this case, it may be translated by “hasn’t yet done X” or “has still to do X.” The verb preceding the auxiliary must be in the present-future.

- བོད་ལྗོང་ “I haven’t eaten yet.” (I’m about to eat.)
- བོད་བར་པ་ “He has yet to go to the opera.”
- བོད་བར་ལ་བཞིན་ “You still have to go to the post office.”
- བོད་ལྗོང་ལ་ “I haven’t yet read today’s newspaper.”

*Note:* The suffixes བོད་ and བོད་ are usually interchangeable, but not in all cases. The differences between them may be summarized here. A distinction must be made between their function as nominalizing suffixes and as auxiliaries.

**Nominalizing suffixes:**
- the patient: བོད་ (future) and བོད་ (present or future)
- the instrument: བོད་ but not *བོད་
- the substance: བོད་ and བོད་
The auxiliaries:

- “one should not”: ོ་ན་བ་Directories but not ོ་ས་བ་Directories
- “not yet”: ོ་བ་but not ོ་བ
- the imminent future: ོ་བ་and ོ་བ
- “to have had the opportunity”: ོ་བ་and ོ་བ

(MST 30.3.4) The constructions ོ’ + V + ོ’ + V and ོ’ + V ོ’ mean that the subject has to perform an action and has no choice in the matter (deontic modality). They are commonly used in Spoken Tibetan. Both may be followed by the verb ོ’.

- ོ་བ་བཀའ་བོད་པ་བོད་པ་བོད་པ་བོད་པ་“Since I’m not well, I have no option but to leave.”
- ོ་བ་བཀའ་བོད་པ་བོད་པ་བོད་པ་བོད་པ་“Since the car broke down, we had no choice but to visit the nomads.”

SECONDARY VERBS

(MST 11.3.5) There are about twenty or so “secondary” verbs that go between the principal and auxiliary verb: principal V + secondary V + AUX.

Most of these verbs are modal verbs

- ོ་བ་“to need, want, have to,” ོ་བ་“to be able,” ོ་བ་“to be possible,” ོ་བ་“to be allowed,” ོ་བ་“to know,” ོ་བ་“to dare,” ོ་བ་“to want, wish,” ོ་བ་“to wish,” ོ་བ་“to think,” ོ་བ་“to intend, plan.”

There are also a number of “tense-aspect” verbs:
“to finish,” “to stay,” “to be time to,” “to be about to,” “to be ready to,” “to have the time to,” as well as the directional verbs “to come” (action towards) and “to go” (action away from).

As in English, the modal verbs are defective insofar as they are not compatible with certain auxiliary verbs. Their compatibility will be examined as they are introduced in the course of the lessons.

**THE CONSTRUCTIONS “TO BE ABOUT TO” AND “TO HAVE JUST”**

(MST 13.3.3) The two constructions are expressed by placing ཐོས་, which is derived from the literary form ཀྲུང་, after the main verb.

To say “to be about to,” Tibetan uses the existential auxiliaries ཀྲུང་, གནས་, འོག་, ཁྲུང་ (ego), ཁྲུང་བན་, ཁྲུང་ནང་རེག་.

“To have just” is expressed by using the essential auxiliaries ཀྲུང་ or རོྣ་: ཁྲུང་ རོྣ་ (ego), ཁྲུང་རེག་.

And finally, the verb ཁྲུང་: (or its literary form གནས་) may be followed by the verb “to do” རཱེར་ to mean “all but” or “almost.”

- དེས་ལོང་བཞིར་ལ་ཐོས་བཞིར་བཤད་པར་ “Are you about to eat?”
- མཐ་གཤ་བཞི་དེ་ཐོས་བཞི་ལེགས་པ་ “He almost died in this river.”
- ངོན་པར་ཁྲུང་ཁྲུང་བཞི་ “We’re about to arrive at the airport.”
- དབང་ལྔ་ལུག་ཁྲུང་ཁྲུང་བཞི་ “I’ve just come from Bhutan.”

**THE SECONDARY VERBS ཁྲུང་ “TO HAVE TIME,” AND འོག་ “TO BE TIME”**
(MST 32.3.3) The verbs ལ་ and ལ་ are “secondary verbs” (see MST 11) that take the same place as modal verbs. The main verb, which precedes them, should be in the present-future and not the past. In the present, the verb ལ་ is followed by the egophoric auxiliary ལ་ or the constative auxiliary ལ་. In the past, the verb ལ་ is followed by the auxiliary ལ་ (egophoric) or ལ་ (constative), in the future by the auxiliary ལ་.

The verb ལ་ is generally used in the past with the following past auxiliaries: ལ་ or ལ་ and ལ་ and sometimes in the present: ལ་.

• ལ་ལ་ལ་ “I haven’t got time to drink tea.”

• ལ་ལ་ལ་ “Have you got time to read this letter?”

• ལ་ལ་ལ་ “You probably haven’t got time to make tea.”

• ལ་ལ་ལ་ “It’s time I went to the office.”

THE SECONDARY VERB ལ་ “TO FINISH”

(MST 36.3.2) This belongs to the category of secondary verbs, which occupy the same syntactic position as the modal verbs (after the main verb and before the auxiliary). Apart from its usual meaning of “to finish,” it may also have the adverbial meaning of “already” or “completely,” according to context. When it is used in the first person, the verb may be used without an auxiliary.

• ལ་ “(I’ve) already washed.”

• ལ་ “(He’s) already washed.”

• „Then (he) was completely cured.”

• ལ་ “Have you really gone completely crazy?”
Note: Depending on the context, the adverb “already” may be translated by the auxiliary བེན། ("to have experienced") or by the auxiliary ཏོན། ("to finish"): 

- བེན། “I’ve already been there.” (just a while ago, so I don’t need to go again)
- ཏོན། “I’ve already been there.” (to India – it’s something I’ve experienced)

### The Aspectual Function of བེན། “To Stay”

(MST 40.3.1) The secondary verb བེན། “to stay” has an aspectual sense. The main verb, which is followed by བེན།, must take the past tense. The connective བེན། may optionally be placed between the main verb and the secondary verb: V + (བེན།) བེན། + AUX.

The secondary verb བེན། indicates that an action that was begun in the past is **in the process of happening** either in the present or from a past point of reference, or that the state of affairs resulting from this action is still present. The secondary verb may be followed by:

a) perfective auxiliaries བེན།པ་ (egophoric), བེན།པ་ (assertive), བེན། སྡེ། (testimonial).

b) perfect auxiliaries: བེན།པ་ (egophoric), བེན།པ་ (assertive), བེན།འཛིན། (inferential).

The former constructions (a) may be translated by the perfective, and the latter (b) by the imperfective or the present perfect continuous according to the context. The use of adverbs such as “still” may help to convey the meaning of these constructions.

- བེན། བེན།་བེན།འཛིན། “When Dorje got back home, Nyima was still reading a book.”
Yesterday, when I met her in the market, she was buying butter.

She’s been crying constantly.

He’s been talking all the time in class.

The construction may also indicate a resulting state.

He’s still unwell.

She’s up. (lit. she got up and she’s stayed up) (Compare this with the sentence:  དེ་བོད་བཅོས་ནས། “she got up”)

SIMPLE VERBS

COMPOUND VERBS AND VERBALIZERS

(MST 14.3.1) In Spoken Tibetan, compound verbs are more common than simple verbs (verbs comprising only one syllable). For the most part, these consist of a noun and a “verbalizer.” Verbalizers (Tib. གོང་མེན་པར་) are verbs that do not convey a specific meaning or else mean “to do” in a general sense. Compound verbs of this sort generally comprise two or three syllables, but some contain up to five.

The three basic verbalizers are: གོང་ / ངོང་ (H) “to do, act”; གོང་ / ངོང་ (H) “to make”; and གོང་ / ངོང་ (H) “to send, do.” [34]

Other verbalizers – some of them used only rarely – include: གོང་ “to make,” གུང་ (h) “to say, to take,” གུང་ “to take,” གུང་ “to lift,” གུང་ “to get up,” གུང་ “to go,” གུང་ “to let go,” གོང་ “to be caught or hit,” གོང་ “to circulate,” etc.

The choice of verbalizer is determined partly by whether the verb is volitional or non-volitional. The verbalizers གི་, གི་, གི་ and གི་ are used in the formation of non-volitional verbs.
Compound verbs retain a certain syntactic flexibility: the noun can be separated from the verbalizer by an adverb or a negation, and may also be marked by a complement:

- བོད་ལ་ཐོབ་ལྡན་ངོས་བོད་ལྡན་ “(We) have to give it a lot of thought.”
- རུང་རྒན་ལ་ཐོབ་ལྡན་ངོས་བོད་ལྡན་ “The girl sang a lovely song.”
- རུང་རྒན་ལ་ཐོབ་ལྡན་ངོས་བོད་ལྡན་ “If you’re not careful, it’s risky.”

The semantics of a verb offer no clue to the verbalizer that should be used. As a general rule, compound verbs take only one verbalizer:

- བོད་ལ་ “to work” but not བོད་ལ་ or བོད་ལ་
- བོད་ལ་ “to marry” but not བོད་ལ་ or བོད་ལ་

In certain cases, however, there is a choice of which verbalizer may be used:

- བོད་ལ་ or བོད་ལ་ “to use”; བོད་ལ་ or བོད་ལ་ “to move”

In some exceptional instances, different verbalizers may be used but the overall meaning is different in each case.

- བོད་ལ་ “to call” but བོད་ལ་ “to shout”
- བོད་ལ་ “to set fire” but བོད་ལ་ “to light, make a fire”
- བོད་ལ་ “to reply” but བོད་ལ་ “to send a message”

Like all verbs, verbalizers must be followed by auxiliaries. Here is a list of the “conjugations” (in all the tense-aspects and moods) with the auxiliaries we have
encountered so far. Knowing all these forms will enable you to conjugate most verbs in Standard Tibetan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbalizer ཁུ་</th>
<th>Verbalizer ཁུ་</th>
<th>Verbalizer ཁུ་</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ཁབ་(ལོག་)གཞོན་</td>
<td>ཁབ་གཞོན་</td>
<td>ཁབ་གཞོན་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཁབ་(ལོག་)ནི་</td>
<td>ཁབ་ནི་</td>
<td>ཁབ་ནི་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཁབ་(ལོག་)པོ་</td>
<td>ཁབ་པོ་</td>
<td>ཁབ་པོ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཁབ་ལོག་</td>
<td>ཁབ་ལོག་</td>
<td>ཁབ་ལོག་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཁབ་བཟོ་</td>
<td>ཁབ་བཟོ་</td>
<td>ཁབ་བཟོ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཁབ་དཔོན་</td>
<td>ཁབ་དཔོན་</td>
<td>ཁབ་དཔོན་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཁབ་བཟོ་</td>
<td>ཁབ་བཟོ་</td>
<td>ཁབ་བཟོ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཁབ་དཔོན་</td>
<td>ཁབ་དཔོན་</td>
<td>ཁབ་དཔོན་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཁབ་བཟོ་</td>
<td>ཁབ་བཟོ་</td>
<td>ཁབ་བཟོ་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཁབ་དཔོན་</td>
<td>ཁབ་དཔོན་</td>
<td>ཁབ་དཔོན་</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The egophoric auxiliaries and the perfect auxiliaries are not compatible with all verbs. For example, for a verb such as མིག་ཏུན་ “to call,” depending on context it is possible to use either the intentional auxiliary or the receptive auxiliary: མིག་ཏུན་ “I called,” མིག་ཏུན་ “I was called, (someone) called me.” On the
other hand, for a non-volitional verb such as ཨོ་ལ་ལོག བཅོས། “to dream,” the intentional auxiliary is incorrect རོག་ལ་ལོག བཅོས། and instead the receptive auxiliary must be used རོག་ལ་ལོག བཅོས།.

Some verbs can take a complement in the form of a direct or an indirect object, whereas others cannot. The verbalizer gives no indication as to whether a verb is “transitive” or “intransitive.” The following verbs all take an object:

- སོགས་ལ་ལོག བཅོས། “He studied (Chinese).”
- སོགས་ལ་ལོག བཅོས། “He used (the computer).”
- སོགས་ལ་ལོག བཅོས། “The teacher called (the student).”
- སོགས་ལ་ལོག བཅོས། “I dreamed (about you).”
- སོགས་ལ་ལོག བཅོས། “The teacher presented (the situation).”
- སོགས་ལ་ལོག བཅོས། “He practices (the Dharma) a lot!”

Unlike the verb “to study,” the verb “to work” is not transitive, and we can’t say: སོགས་ལ་ལོག བཅོས། “He worked the wood.”

Note: Several “intransitive” compound verbs take an ergative construction, whereas in the case of “simple” verbs this construction occurs only with transitive verbs. This may be explained by the fact that the noun that precedes the verbalizer can be assimilated to an “internal” object. In other words, the verbalizer acts as if it were an autonomous transitive verb.

**Causative and Resultative Verbs**

(MST 35.3.1) There is an ancient morphological verb opposition in Tibetan which corresponds to a causative derivation. This morphological opposition has generated verb pairs: a causative verb, both transitive and volitional, is derived from a basic verb which is usually both intransitive and non-volitional. This basic verb stem is referred to here as the resultative form.
The two verbs that comprise each pair are phonetically very close, and in most cases their pronunciation differs only in terms of tone or aspiration.

The causative derivation is essential in many Tibeto-Burman languages as well as in Classical Tibetan (with over 200 verb pairs) and in some archaic dialects of Amdo, but in Central Tibetan and in the Standard Spoken language, it applies only to a few dozen verbs.

Ex.: བུ་ “to break” (caus.), གུ་“to lay” (caus.), དབུ་ “to lie” (res.); ང་ “to stop” (caus.), ང་ “to stop” (res.); དབུ་“to raise” (caus.), དབུ་ “to rise” (res.); གུ་ “to scatter” (caus.), གུ་,“to scatter, be scattered” (res.); ང་ “to boil” (caus.), ང་ “to boil” (res.); ང་ “to stir, turn” (caus.), ང་ “to stir, turn” (res.); ང་ “to take out” (caus.), ང་ “to go out” (res.); ང་ “to bring down, take down” (caus.), ང་ “to descend, get down” (res.); ང་ “to free” (caus.), ང་ “to be freed” (res.); ང་ “to tear” (caus.), ང་ “to tear” (res.); ང་ “to cut” (caus.), ང་ “to be cut” (res.), etc.

Compared to the basic resultative stem, the causative always has an additional argument corresponding to an intentional agent performing the action.

If the resultative is intransitive, the causative is transitive.

If the resultative is transitive, the causative is ditransitive (see the examples below)

It emerges from the above that all the causative verbs are transitive and volitional since they imply an agent is intentionally performing an action on an object or a patient. Resultative verbs are usually intransitive and non-volitional.

- ལོ་ལུ་ “to break” [resultative: “The rope broke.” [the rope got cut by itself, without any intentional cause]
- དབུ་ དབུ་ “to cut” [causative: “He cut the rope.” [an agent cut the rope intentionally]
resultative: “The pane broke.” [the pane broke by itself, without any intentional cause]

causative: “The children broke the pane.” [the children intentionally broke the pane]

resultative: “The prayer wheel is still spinning.” [Nobody is now making it spin, it spins by itself]

resultative: “The old lady has turned the prayer wheel.” [An agent has intentionally turned the wheel]

resultative: “The letter is torn.”

causative: “He tore the letter (intentionally).”

Certain resultative intransitive verbs may, in some cases, allow the use of an unintentional agent.

“He tore [res.] the letter (unintentionally).”

“The children broke [res.] the pane (unintentionally).”

However, this construction is rather rare in Standard Spoken Tibetan. Some speakers prefer to use other constructions such as the sentence below which has a similar meaning:

“Because the children were not careful, the pane broke.”

The resultative verbs include a few intransitive volitional and transitive volitional forms. In such cases, the corresponding causative verbs have a supplementary actant that itself acts on another agent.

“The child herself put on [res.] her chuba.”
• ལ་མ་དེ་གནས་པའི་དོན་མེས་སུ་ “The mother put the chuba on [caus.] the child.” [36]
  (ditransitive)
• རྩོང་བུ་མཚན་གསུམ་ེན་ཅིང་། “The old lady can’t get up [res.].”
• རྡོ་རྗེ་མགོན་མཛོད་པོ་ “I helped the old lady to get up [caus.].”

Causative and resultative verbs can appear in the same sentence. The causative puts emphasis on the cause of the process and the effort of the agent in performing the action, while the resultative verb is concerned only with the result or the consequence of that action. Such constructions may therefore be translated by using the verbs “to succeed,” “to manage,” “can” or other modal expressions.

These constructions which frequently occur in the literary language also appear in the spoken language.

• ཤུས་པར་ཐེ་སེམས་དཔའི་དོན་མེས་ མཐོང་པོ་ “After the ngagpa had (performed a ritual to) make rain fall, rain did indeed fall!”
• རྗེ་མགོན་མཛོད་པོ་ལྡན་འབད་པའི་དོན་མེས་ བོད་ “This cloth is very strong, I can’t tear it!” (lit. however much I [try to] tear it it won’t tear)

The following examples are taken from literary texts:

• འཕྲི་མི་དགོས་གཏིགས་བེད་དགེ་ཡུལ་མི་དོན་མེས་ “Even if one rubs, one cannot rub out the undrawn lines on the heart.” [caus.: མི་ res.: མི་]
• དུས་ངེ་མི་དེ་བར་འབད་པའི་དོན་མེས་ བོད་ “If you try to control your own mind inside and you don’t succeed, then what’s the use of catching somebody else’s body outside.” [caus.: ཞིང་ res.: ཞིང་]
• ཤུན་ཚུལ་ནམ་མཁྱེན་ཤེས་གོང་ཤེ་ལོག་པོ་དེ་བེད་དགེ་ཡུལ་མི་པའི་དོན་མེས་པ། “[Once], he [saw] a mouse trying to move a turquoise that was on his mandala. But the mouse could not lift the jewel on its own, so…” [caus.: མི་ res.: མི་]
Notes

[1] With some non-volitional verbs which imply a certain degree of control, such as “lose” or “go to sleep,” the imperative forms are also possible.

[2] In order to avoid the linguistically problematic notion of “subject” in Tibetan, verbs may be defined according to their valency, e.g., the number of participants they require. See the Glossary of linguistic terms.

[3] The distinction between existential and essential is similar to the difference between the verbs ser and estar in Spanish.

[4] The present and the past have the same form, with the meaning depending on the context. However, as we shall see in MST 10.4, this applies only to the past imperfective: for the perfective past, there are specific forms.

[5] The variant yog red has been retained here because it is the one most commonly used in contemporary writing. Moreover, the spelling is based on the etymology of the expression: yog red is in fact derived from yog pa red, whereas the forms yog red and yo’o red are purely phonetic.

[6] The notions of perfective and imperfective aspects are explained in 10.4. Here we need only bear in mind that the imperfective past forms are equivalent to the present.

[7] About the verb stems, see MST 10.

[8] As we shall see in MST 10.4, this is the perfective past.

[9] I.e., verbs in which it is implied that the subject has control over the action. This class of verbs is described in MST 8.

[10] In English for example, the progressive formed with the present participle “ing” and the auxiliary “be” corresponds to an imperfective aspect. The progressive past, present and future are all formed with the same present participle. I.e.: was practic-ing, is practic-ing and will be practic-ing.

[11] In the present and the future, the mark for the agent is often left out. See the “remarks” section in MST 12.
More precisely, with the imperfective aspect, no limit of the process is overstepped or reached, while with the perfective the final limit (or sometimes the initial limit) has been reached. The above definition is based on D. Cohen’s theory in *l’Aspect verbal* (1989). Let us quote here also Comrie’s definition of these aspects: “The imperfective pays essential attention to the internal structure of the situation. Perfectivity indicates the view of a situation as a single whole” Comrie (1987: 16). The French imparfait, Spanish imperfecto, Russian imperfective (*nesovar$sennyj vid*), the English progressive all bear the basic features of the imperfective, while the French passé composé, the Russian perfective (*sov$r$sennyj vid*), the Spanish preterito all bear the basic features of the perfective. The English preterite however is neutral and may be translated depending on the context either by perfective or imperfective forms in other languages.

The opposition between the perfect and the aorist in Tibetan corresponds to the opposition we find in literary French between the passé composé and the passé simple; in English between the present perfect and the preterite, and in Spanish between the preterite and the passado compuesto “composed past.”

In Tibetan, however, this opposition is not as pervasive as in English. The simple past perfective may convey both perfect and aorist meanings in the absence of specific perfect form.

In most cases, the compatibility of the perfect depends on whether the object of the transitive verb (or the subject of an intransitive verb) exists objectively after the completion of the action and is still present.

The ergative case is sometimes used with intransitive volitional verbs in order to put an emphasis on the subject. (see MST 12).

These moods are essential in Central Tibetan, and appear in different forms in several other Tibetan dialects (Dzongkha, Ladakhi, Kham, Amdo, Sherpa, etc.). However, they are practically nonexistent in Literary Tibetan.

Or by the original source of the assertion in the case of reported speech.

Etymologically, “egophoric” signifies “bearer of ‘I’ or ‘ego’.”

The Japanese language has similar restrictions regarding the endopathic function.
These categories are not always relevant. For certain statements there is only one type of discourse, and they may therefore be translated into European languages by either direct or reported speech. However, as we shall see below, it is sometimes possible to distinguish between direct and “hybrid” indirect speech.

In this case only one form of reported speech is possible.

The pronouns “I” and “you” and, more generally, the “deictics,” that is, words connected to the statement like the adverbs “here” and “now,” as well as demonstratives such as “that” which can only be interpreted in relation to the context of the dialogue.

This form should not be confused with its literary homonym, which has the same meaning as yò:re’.

With a rising intonation.

In English it corresponds rather to “maybe” than to “probably,” but the meaning also depends on the intonation.

The various tenses (future, present, past) have to be deduced from the context.

The negation is not pronounced “mi” as expected but rather is “mu.”

In terms of grammatical roles, the beneficiary comes first and the patient second.

In Tibetan, unlike European languages, modal verbs such as thub “can,” ágos “need, must,” chog “may” do not have an epistemic function and may not indicate probability or certainty (as in “he may be there, he must be there, etc.”). There is a special set of auxiliaries devoted to this function (see MST 11.3.1) as well as the modal epistemic verb srid “may.”

In all four cases, the corresponding egophoric forms may also be used.

For example, the modal verbs have no infinitives (*to can, *to may, *to must), and they cannot be conjugated (*he cans, *he mays, *he musts).

See MST 15.3.2.

Losang Thonden, Modern Tibetan Language (1986), volume 2, provides a substantial list of compound verbs involving these three verbalizers.
Many of the causative verbs were formed by a morpheme "s" attached to the verb. This is still visible in the Tibetan orthography: 'khol (resultative) > skol (causative), nyal (res.) > snyal (caus.), lang (res.) > slang (caus.), 'khor (res.) > skor (caus.), etc.

The verb skon belongs to the literary or formal register. In the conversational language, the verb g.yogs is used instead.

NOUNS

Nouns

INTRODUCTION

COMMON NOUNS

GENDER

(MST 2.3.3) Grammatical gender (masculine, feminine, neuter) does not exist in Tibetan.

Articles, demonstratives, adjectives and verbs are therefore invariable with respect to gender. Male and female sex are, however, sometimes marked within the lexicon (by distinct words) or else by means of suffixes (རམ for the male and བམ or བམ for the female) in the case of certain pronouns and substantives denoting animate beings.

N.B.: some pronouns make no distinction between “he” and “she”: གཞན་ཐོན་པ།
“He/she is rich.”

PRONOUNS

PERSONAL PRONOUNS

(MST 3.3.1) There are three registers of personal pronouns: ordinary, honorific and high honorific. In Literary Tibetan, as well as in some dialects (Tsang), a humiliific form (བོད) is used for the first person. This form is not used in Standard Spoken Tibetan.

In Literary Tibetan and in certain dialects (including Kham and Mustang), there are distinct forms for the exclusive and inclusive first person plural. This opposition, too, is absent in Standard Tibetan.

For the second person, it is safest to use the honorific form བོད་ /བློ་བོད་, for the third person, བོད་ /བོད་. The ordinary forms བོད་ “you,” བོད་ “he,” བོད་ “he” and བོད་ or བོད་ “she” imply familiarity. The forms བོད་ and བོད་ “you” carry pejorative connotations in Standard Tibetan, whereas they are the normal terms in Literary Tibetan and certain dialects (Kham, Hor, Amdo).

In Standard Tibetan and many other dialects, as well as in Literary Tibetan, there is a special dual form for both personal pronouns and demonstratives: བོད་ “we two,” བོད་ “you two,” བོད་ “the two of them” བོད་ “those two.”
The number འཇིགར་ “one” has several meanings. We have already come across (in MST 10) the pronominal use of འཇིགར་. It means both “someone” and “something.” On the other hand, in certain contexts, འཇིགར་ means “once” or “a little.”

- འཇིགར་་ལེགས་པར་ “Someone came here.”
- འཇིགར་་ལེགས་པར་ “Lend me a little money.”
- འཇིགར་་ལེགས་པར་ “I’m going to have a bit of a quarrel with him.”

INTERROGATIVE

Tibetan has several expressions that mean “why”: འཇིགས་ིབས་, འཇིགས་མི་རུལ་, and འཇིགས་མི་རུལ་. It may be translated as “What do you mean by + gerundive.” It often figures in reproaches:

- འཇིགས་མི་རུལ་་ཁང་ “Why did you break the cup?”
- འཇིགས་མི་རུལ་ “Why did you throw stones?”
- འཇིགས་མི་རུལ་ “Why didn’t you do any work?”

PRE-NOMINAL MODIFIERS

SPECIAL CASES: ADJECTIVES IN FOCUS
**ADJECTIVES**

**DETERMINATIVES**

**NUMERALS**

**THE CARDINAL AND ORDINAL NUMBERS**

(MST 7.3.4) Numbers come after the noun. Unlike Burmese, Chinese, and several other Asian languages, Tibetan has no classifiers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>བ (20)</th>
<th>བ (30)</th>
<th>བ (40)</th>
<th>བ (50)</th>
<th>བ (60)</th>
<th>བ (70)</th>
<th>བ (80)</th>
<th>བ (90)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Remembering these particles is made easier by the fact that, with the exception of བ, they are all derived from the term for the set of ten in question. For example, བ, the particle for the thirties, is derived from བ "three." The same is true of the forties, where བ is a modification of བ "four," and so on.

| ༢༠ བ "20" |
| ༢༡ བ "21" through བ "29" |
| ༢༠ བ "30" |
| ༢༡ བ "31" through བ "39" |
| ༢༠ བ "40" |
| ༢༡ བ "41" through བ "49" |
| ༢༠ བ "50" |
| ༢༡ བ "51" through བ "59" |
| ༢༠ བ "60" |
Between 100 and 199, the number “hundred” is followed by the connective "and." For example: ངོ་བོད་ “150.”

“thousand”: རྩེ་བོད་ “one thousand,” རྩེ་ཁྲུང་ “two thousand,” ཞུ་མན་ “three thousand.”

“ten thousand”: རྩེ་བོད་ “one myriad,” རྩེ་ཁྲུང་ “twenty thousand (two myriad),” ཞུ་མན་ “thirty thousand.”

“hundred thousand”: རྩེ་བོད་ “one (unit of a) hundred thousand,” རྩེ་ཁྲུང་ “two hundred thousand,” ཞུ་མན་ “three hundred thousand.”

After “million,” the numbers are treated as substantives and must be followed (not preceded) by the number of units.

“million”: རྩེ་བོད་ “one million,” རྩེ་ཁྲུང་ “two million,” etc.
“ten million”: མཚུང་ ་“(one unit of) ten million,” མཚུང་ ་“twenty million,” etc.

“hundred million”: བོད་ ་“one (unit of a) hundred million,” བོད་ ་“two hundred million,” བོད་ ་“one billion.”

From a hundred up to a hundred thousand, units may be placed afterwards, and the number is therefore treated syntactically as a substantive. In the case of “thousand,” the suffix བོད་ ་is added: བོད་ ་“two thousand,” བོད་ ་“thirty thousand,” བོད་ ་“three hundred thousand.”

From one hundred up, when there is a zero in the tens, hundreds or any higher column, as in 108 or 1015, the column name (10, 100, etc.) is followed by བོད་ ་“without.” This expression is optional: བོད་ ་“1407,” བོད་ ་“1016.”

*Note:* The numbers 1, 2, 3 and 10 are spelled differently according to the other numbers with which they are combined, as in the case of 15 (10+5), 18 (10+8), 20 (2x10), 30 (3x10), etc. The written variants represent a formalization, from the classical period, of different pronunciations of the numbers in question.

```plaintext
པོ་ ་> ཐོ་ ་in ཐོ་ ་“15” and ཐོ་ ་“18”

པོ་ ་> ཐོ་ ་in ཐོ་ ་“20”

པོ་ ་> ཐོ་ ་in ཐོ་ ་“30” and in ཐོ་ ་“60,” etc.

ཕོ་ ་> གཞི་ ་in གཞི་ ་“1000”

ཕོ་ ་> གཞི་ ་in གཞི་ ་“20”

ཕོ་ ་> གཞི་ ་in གཞི་ ་“2000”

ཕོ་ ་> ཐོ་ ་in ཐོ་ ་“30”
```
Note that round tens and hundreds may be followed by བཀྲ་. For example: བཀྲ་པ་ “a hundred,” བཀྲ་དང་པ་ “thirty.”

Ordinal numbers present no difficulties. With the exception of “first,” which has a special radical, they are formed simply by adding the suffix བ. For example: བཀྲ་པ “first,” བཀྲ་པ་“second,” བཀྲ་པ་“third,” བཀྲ་པ་“tenth,” བཀྲ་པ་“eleventh,” etc.

The percentages and fractions are formed by using the word དེ་“part.” Thus:

One hundred percent དེ་བཀྲ་པ་ “100%”

Fifty percent དེ་བཀྲ་བྲུ་ “50%”

One third དེ་བཀྲ་ཅན་ “1/3”

Three quarters དེ་བཀྲ་དཔེ་ “3/4”

DEMONSTRATIVES

PROXIMAL/MEDIAL/DISTAL

(MST 1.3.3) The demonstratives function both as adjectives and as pronouns. As adjectives, they always come after the noun (or after the noun phrase), and carry a case or plural marker as appropriate.

- བེནོ་ “What is this?” (“This is what?”)
- བེནོ་ལྡན་ “What is this paper?”
- བེནོ་ལྡན་ལྡན་ “What are these papers?”

The demonstratives བེནོ (proximal), བེན (medial) and བེན (distal) denote three degrees of removal: nearby, distant and far-off, corresponding to the English expressions “here,” “there” and “over there.”
The demonstratives བི, བོ and བོཝ function as pronouns and adjectives. When used as adjectives, demonstratives always come after the noun (or after the noun phrase); they are given a case particle and, where appropriate, a plural particle.

The demonstratives བི and བོ are employed not only to draw attention to something/point out/show something (deictic function), but also to refer to elements previously mentioned (anaphoric function) in a text or conversation. The expression བོཝ, however, is used only to indicate spatial distance.

The demonstrative བི is linked to the present moment; བོ, on the other hand, is associated with the past or the future, and with the notions of “the beyond” and the invisible.

- བིཝཝཝཝཝ “I said that”
- བིཝཝཝཝཝཝ “I’ll say this”
- བིཝ “this year” (present)
- བིཝ “that year” (past or future)
- བིཝ “this book”
- བིཝ “that book”
- བིཝཝ “that book over there”

The demonstratives བི, བོ, and བོཝ are used to form the adverbs བིཝཝ “here” བིཝ “there” and བིཝཝ “over there.” In the spoken language they have undergone a small variation in their pronunciation བིཝ (བིཝ), བིཝཝ (བིཝཝ) and བིཝཝ “here, there, and over there.”

**SINGULAR/DUAL/PLURAL**

**QUANTIFIERS**
Number and the Plural Marker

(MST 2.3.2) Number is never marked in verbs, adjectives or the majority of nouns. Plurality is usually implied either by context, or by quantifiers such as “many,” “all,” “some, certain,” “two,” etc.

However, there is a plural marker, [38] which appears with demonstratives and personal pronouns: ཀ་ “these,” ག་ “those,” ཁ་ “those, those over there,” གི་ “they,” etc.

The marker by itself is used with nouns denoting people only when the people in question are specified/defined: གནོད་ “the mothers,” གནོད་ “the teachers,” གནོད་ “the students,” etc. (but not *mothers, *teachers, etc.). The non-specific plural is not marked with the plural particle: གནོད་ “mothers,” གནོད་ “teachers.”

This suffix is not used with animals or inanimate objects: *ལུག་ “[the] sheep,” *ལུག་ “[the] tables,” *ལུག་ “[the] thangkas.”

Consequently, unambiguous renderings of the plural/indications of plurality require the use of demonstratives: གནོད་ “those sheep,” གནོད་ “those tables.”

Number is only marked once per noun or noun phrase; the marker, which is placed at the end of the group, is therefore never redundant.

- གནོད་ “those little girls”
- གནོད་ “those high snow-mountains”
- གནོད་ “the young mothers”
- གནོད་ “the other companions”
N.B.: the following demonstratives also occur in conversation:

- གྲིང་། “these” (nearby), བྲིང་། “those” (distant)
- གྲིང་པོ་ “all these,” བྲིང་པོ་ “all those”

These last two expressions are used to make a selection from a group.

- བྲིང་པོ་ “all these books” (and not the others)

**The singular indefinite article བོད་**

(MST 6.3.1) The article is not generally used in Tibetan.

For example, according to the context or the situation, བོད་ ཞེས་བཞི་ བཞི་ may mean “Have you got a/ the/ any pen(s)?”

However, this statement ought to be slightly modified: first, as we saw earlier, the use of the plural marker འདེར་ implies that the (human) noun so qualified is definite, and that it should be preceded in the English translation by the use of the (plural) definite article “the.” Secondly, Tibetan does indeed have a singular indefinite article བོད་ that is placed after the noun, but that is used only when the noun is specific:

- བོད་ཀྱིས་ བོད་ “a (certain) teacher,” བོད་ཀྱིས་ བོད་ “a (certain) student”

but not when the noun is generic:

- བོད་ སྨིན་པོ་ བོད་ “he is a teacher,” but བོད་ སྨིན་པོ་ བོད་ “He’s one (of the) teacher(s)”

The form of the indefinite article བོད་ “a” should not be confused with that of the cardinal number “one” ཞེས་, although the pronunciation of the two is the same. In Literary Tibetan, the indefinite article has three variants – བོད་, བོད་, བོད་ – depending on the final letter of the preceding word.
• after ར, ཡ, ་, and the ད་པ། ། ་ > འོག

• after vowels and འ, ས, ང, ཆ, ཉ ་ > འོག

• after ར > འོག

In the spoken language, only the form འོག is used.

Finally, the demonstrative ག་ is often used in much the same way as a (specific) definite article in the European languages.

• གཉིས་བཤད་ཀྱི་དེ་བུ། “Where is that/ the new book?”

• རྒྱལ་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་ཨོ་རིེ་རེ་ཨེ་ “He’s the brother of Lobzang.”

CASE

GENERAL REMARKS ON CASES

(MST 4.3.1) Both the spoken and literary languages contain case-marking particles that specify the function of a noun within a sentence.

There are six cases: the absolutive (unmarked), the agentive བཞིས, the genitive བཞི, the oblique བ, the ablative བས་ and the associative བཞི་. The following lessons will discuss each one in turn.

In English, these cases are represented by prepositions such as “to,” “of,” “in,” “by,” or “for,” or else are not translated at all.

The system of cases in Tibetan is quite distinct from that of European languages such as Latin, Greek, German and Russian, for a number of reasons:

First of all, contrary to the case of these languages, the noun remains invariable. Instead, it makes use of particles or suffixes that vary in form. Some case suffixes, for example, vary according to the final letter (or sound) of the preceding word.
Literary Tibetan and to a lesser extend the spoken language show some features of agglutinative morphology. That is, the case suffixes and the other grammatical suffixes are added on in a series. For example, the plural marker is marked by a suffix distinct from the case (unlike the cases in Latin or Russian). In the following sentences in Literary Tibetan, the head nouns རྣ་ “body” and རྣ་མ་ “learned” are followed by three suffixes including a plural marker and then a case marker (genitive or agentive):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learned-plural-agentive-additive</th>
<th>Negation see (H)</th>
<th>“Even the learned ones have not seen (it).”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>རྣ་པ་དང་པོ་</td>
<td>རྣ་</td>
<td>“The karma of those who have a body…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases have a range of functions that are not confined to the noun, but also relate to the verb. Thus all case markers have two basic functions: a case-related function and a connective function. The latter is comparable to a coordinating or subordinating conjunction in European languages. (See the discussion on the ablative case in MST 9.)

The following are the main case-related and connective functions:

- རྣ་, the **agentive**, traditionally referred to as རྣ་མ་, literally “agent-sound,” indicates the agent of the action (“by”), the instrument (“with”), the cause (“because of,” “by”), and the manner (“with”); it also marks causal subordinate clauses, in which case it may be translated by “since,” “because,” etc.

- རྣ་, the **genitive**, traditionally referred to as རྣ་མ་, literally “link-sound,” designates the complement of the noun, and is translated by “of”; it may also correspond to the conjunction “but” (L).
,’ the **oblique**, (or dative-locative), traditionally referred to as འི་ཇི་ཇུག, literally “meaning of ‘to’,” indicates the person or goal to which an action is directed, as well as place and direction, and corresponds to the English prepositions “to” or “at”; it may also mark a subordinate purpose clause, in which case it is translatable by “to” or “in order to.”

Ø, the **absolutive**, traditionally referred to as འི་ཇི་ཇུག, literally “just the essence,” or “the meaning in essence,” is the unmarked case. It denotes the patient, i.e., the person or thing that undergoes the action (in the case of transitive verbs), and the single participant (in the case of intransitive verbs).

རོ་, the **ablative**, traditionally referred to as བགོ་བོད་ཞེས་, literally “sound of the source,” indicates provenance (“from”); it also marks causal or temporal subordinate clauses, in which case it may be translated by “because” or “after,” or simply by “and.” Another ablative marker མོ་ is also used in Literary Tibetan. However, this form is restricted to the use of comparative marker in the spoken language.

ནོ་, the **associative**, traditionally referred to as བགོ་བོད་ཞེས་, literally “sound of ‘with','’ has the sense of “with,” “against” or “from”; it may also mean simply “and,” and may function as a temporal connective meaning “as soon as” (literary).

There is no agreement on the basis of function within a noun group: the case appears just once, at the end of the noun phrase, and there is consequently no redundancy.

For example, if the noun is not followed by any qualification such as adjectives, demonstratives and so forth, the case particle is suffixed directly:

- བགོ་བོད་ཇི་ཇུག "by the leader” (agentive)

- བགོ་བོད་ལ་ "to the leader” (dative)

But if the noun is qualified, the final element of the noun group is followed by a case particle:
“by these two great leaders”

“to these two great leaders”

The case may be omitted in the literary language (mainly in order to preserve the metre in poetic writing) as well as in the spoken language, in circumstances that will be discussed below.

**THE ABSOLUTIVE**

(MST 4.3.3) The absolutive is marked by the absence of any overt case particle: it is morphologically void. Because it lacks a formal mark, the absolutive in Tibetan isn’t always easy to identify at first. Remember that a case marker is always to be found at the end of any noun group (or phrase).

The absolutive indicates the grammatical role of patient. This role typically refers to the animate or inanimate participant that undergoes or suffers a given action performed by an agent (in the case of transitive verbs), or a single participant in a process (in the case of intransitive verbs).

In syntactic or relational terms, it designates both the object of a transitive verb and the subject of an intransitive verb.

- བོད་ལྕམ། “Drink the tea,” གཞི་བརྙན། “The tea is hot”

In both these examples, the “tea” (ཇ་) is in the absolutive case. However, in the first sentence it is a direct object, while in the second it is the subject of the verb. By contrast, the subject of a transitive verb is marked by the agentive case (see MST 8).

**THE AGENTIVE**
Traditional grammars refer to this mark as གཉིས་ (lit. agent-sound). The agentive is formed by adding an བ to the genitive. The variants follow the same pattern as in the case of the genitive: གྲིས་, གྲིས་, གྲིས་, བ.

- after vowels and བ > བ
- after བ, བ > བ
- after བ, བ, བ and the བ་ ་ བ > བ
- after བ, བ, བ, བ > བ

In Classical Tibetan, vowels may also be followed by the variant གྲིས་, or even by the more archaic form གྲིས་.

In conversation, the three particles གྲིས་, གྲིས་, གྲིས་ are pronounced in exactly the same way, as an unstressed syllable: /-ki'/. Remember that adding the variant བ produces a glottal stop (or a modulated tone) in the pronunciation, and that in the case of /a, u, o/, an umlaut is effectively added: a+s > /ä'/, u+s > /ü'/, o+s > /ö'/. The vowels /e, i/ do not change: e+s > /ë'/, i+s > /ë'/.

- གྲིས་ “sun” > གྲིས་
- གྲིས་ “drawing” > གྲིས་
- གྲིས་ “water” > གྲིས་
- གྲིས་ “man, person” > གྲིས་
- གྲིས་ “fire” > གྲིས་
- གྲིས་ “arrow” > གྲིས་
- གྲིས་ “teacher” > གྲིས་
FUNCTIONS

(MST 8.3.2) The agentive particle has two case-related functions: the ergative and the instrumental: [44] The ergative function is used to mark the grammatical role of agent. In transitive clauses, this role typically matches the semantic agent or causer who performs an action on a patient, but also includes the agent of “mental” and “verbal” actions and the perceiver of a sensation. However, it does not refer to the experiencer of an emotion, which is marked as the patient (the absolutive or zero case). In syntactic or relational terms, the agentive particle generally marks the subject of transitive verbs governing an ergative construction. Most transitive verbs require an ergative construction but some non-volitional transitive verbs require other constructions (affective or possessive, see MST 9.3).

(MST 8.3.2) Ergative constructions may seem strange at first, to the extent that they work in the opposite way to accusative constructions in European languages. However, even though ergative-absolutive constructions are not familiar to speakers of European languages, they are as logical as accusative constructions. As discussed in Chapter 4, the main point is that all languages need a mechanism or device to distinguish “who does what to whom,” or, in other words, to distinguish between the Subject and the Object of a transitive verb. In nominative-accusative European languages, as well as in Chinese, it is not the subject that is marked, but the object, either by using a distinct accusative case marker (as in Latin and Russian), or by opposition in the sentence, i.e., being placed after the verb (as in French, English and Chinese) [45]. In English, for example, word order is used to distinguish between “the policeman killed the fugitive” and “the fugitive killed the policeman.”

Tibetan chooses to mark not the object, but the transitive subject, by using a distinct case marker – the ergative. It is called ཕི་ད་པ་ལེགས་ “main ergative” in the traditional grammars.
A subject that is marked by the ergative is almost always a human or other animate. The object lacks an overt formal marker (Ø); in linguistic terminology this is known as the “absolutive,” and in traditional Tibetan grammars as འི་ི་, “just (the word) in the absolute.”

Here are some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S (erg.)</th>
<th>O (abs.)</th>
<th>V (ergative construction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>འ། །ཐེ། །ཐོ་།</td>
<td></td>
<td>འི་ི་ཐོ་།</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I + Erg.</td>
<td>book + Abs.</td>
<td>read-past “I read the book.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Basque, the only ergative language of Europe, the structure is similar:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S (erg.)</th>
<th>O (abs.)</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ni-k</td>
<td>liburu-a-Ø</td>
<td>irakurri d-u-t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I + Erg.</td>
<td>Book-def + Abs.</td>
<td>Read Abs-Aux-Erg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other examples:

| འ། །ཐེ། །ཐོ་། | འ། །ཐེ། །ཐོ་། | འ། །ཐེ། །ཐོ་། |
| lama + Erg. | tea (H) + Abs. | drink (H)-past |
| འ། །ཐེ། །ཐོ་། | འ། | འ། །ཐེ། །ཐོ་། |
| Tsering + Erg. | horse + Abs. | buy-past |

“Tsering bought the horse.”

Verbs that take the ergative construction will be identified as: E(rgative) A(bsolutive).

- དང་ “to buy” [vol., EA]

It should be noted that there is also an **indirect ergative** in which the subject is in the ergative and the object in the dative (indirect object).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S (erg.)</th>
<th>O (dat.)</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>(mixed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>རིག་པོ་</td>
<td>དབང་</td>
<td>རྩ་མ་བཞིི་</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsering</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>horse+Dat.</td>
<td>look-past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erg.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Tsering looked at the horse.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verbs governing this type of construction will be identified as: E(rgative) D(ative).

- ལོག་ “to look (at)” [vol., ED]

This construction appears mainly with compound verbs (which usually have three syllables), such as ་“to be interested (in),” ་“to be careful (of),” ་“to make a phone call (to),” ་“to have faith (in).”

The ergative also appears with verbs involving three participants (ditransitive):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S (erg.)</th>
<th>O (indirect)</th>
<th>O (abs.)</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>རིག་པོ་</td>
<td>དབང་</td>
<td>རྩ་མ་བཞིི་</td>
<td>རྩ་མ་བཞིི་</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>he + Dat.</td>
<td>book a</td>
<td>give (h)-past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erg.</td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Abs.</td>
<td>past</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“We gave him a book.”

Verbs that take this type of construction will be noted as: E(rgative) D(ative) A(absolutive).

- ལོག་ “to offer” [vol., EDA]

In exceptional cases, the ergative may also be used to mark the agent of volitional intransitive verbs, especially verbs of movement (see MST 27). The effect of the ergative in this case is to emphasize the agent or his/her volition.

(MST 8.3.2) The instrumental is used to convey three main meanings: the instrument or implement; the manner; and the cause. It may be used either with an agent (explicit or implicit) or without one.
These medicines are made with medicinal herbs.

He drew this picture with chalk.

The shepherd hit the dog with a stick.

He got better thanks to the medicine.

**THE ABLATIVE (མེ་)**

(MST 9.3.2) This invariable case-particle indicates spatial or temporal provenance.

- གཞན་ནས་དོན་པ་ “from Lhasa to Chamdo”
- འཕགས་པ་དོན་དབྱངས་པ་ “from three to five o’clock”

*N.B.*: The ablative is often associated with verbs indicating acquisition, such as ངོན་ “to find,” དོ་ “to buy,” ཀོན་ “to obtain,” ཚོས་ “to borrow,” ཤན་ “to get, find,” and verbs of movement such as རི་ “to go.”

- གཞན་ནས་དོན་པ་ “bought from the market”
- གཞན་ནས་དོན་དབྱངས་པ་ “I found it on [lit. from] the road”
- རི་ “go through [lit. from] here”

When it follows an animate being, the ablative may also assume the role of the ergative, and thus becomes a marker for the **agent of the action**. Used in this way, it is the same as the agentive case. While this usage is common in Literary Tibetan, it is rare in the spoken language.

- གཞན་ནས་དོན་དབྱངས་པ་ “Rinpoche[^46] gave a teaching.”
What (lit. how much) salary does the government give him?

The particle ཀན་ may be used in the composition of postpositions and adverbs.

- ཀན་པ་ adverbalizer, “in an X way”
- ཀན་པ་ adverbalizer “in an X way”
- ཀན་ེ་ “absolutely (not)”
- ཀན་ེ་ “absolutely (not),” etc.

As in the other cases, the particle ཀན་ may function as a **subordinating conjunction**. When used in this way it means “after,” “then,” “because,” or it may be used to form gerundives (see MST 14.4).

**THE ASSOCIATIVE (རྒྱ་)**

(MST 9.3.3) This particle, which we have met earlier, is used mainly as a coordinating conjunction (or connective) meaning “and”; however, it also corresponds to a case, the **associative**, which is generally translated as “with” or “against,” or else is not translated at all. In the spoken language, this case-related function is little used (for the literary language, see section 3.3 in Appendix 1).

Contrary to normal practice in the European languages and in Chinese, Tibetan inserts a pause (when one is required) after, not before, the conjunction. In fact, the particle ཀན་ is often followed by a punctuation mark, the གཉེན་, which indicates a pause.

- གཉེན་པའི་ རྣམ་བཞག་ རྣམ། “father, uncle, and aunt”

To reproduce the Tibetan rhythm, we would have to say: “the father and… the uncle and… the aunt.”
The conjunction ཆོས་ is distributive with respect to case and number. This means that the noun group which precedes it has no number or case marker: these markers appear only once, at the end of the whole group. Thus in the following examples, the plural marker appears only once.

- ཁུང་བའི་སྐྱེལ་ཚང་ཁྲིམས་ལ། “the mother and the children” (Tibetan would not say: ཁུང་བ་

In the following examples, the case marker appears only once:

- ིའི་བུང་ཚོང་ལོག འབྲུང་ ཤེར ཐོང་ལོག བོད་ བྲོང་ དོ་ “(They) gave presents to the boys and (to the)
girls.”

- རྒྱུ་བཤེར་སྟོང་དབྱིན་པོ་ “Tsering and Lobzang drank some alcohol.”

In the spoken language, the associative case applies to a very limited number of verbs. Furthermore, it may sometimes be replaced by other cases such as the absolutive or the oblique. Here are some verbs that still take this case in oral usage:

- བུ་ “to get on with,” དབུས་ “to break (a law),” སྤོང་ “to exchange (for),” སྤོང་
to mistake (for),” གཞི་ “to separate (from),” and certain adverbial constructions: སྤོང་ “with,” etc.

- མཚོ་ “I exchange it for tsampa.”

- རྒྱུ་བཤེར་སྟོང་དབྱིན་པོ་ “Tsering gets on well with Lobzang.”

- བོད་་ “I’m going to separate from her.”

THE GENITIVE གྷེ་}
Traditional grammars refer to this marker as འ་ (lit. link sound, relation sound), and it is commonly translated in English as “of.”

The genitive has several variant forms depending on the final letter of the preceding word. These variants are:

- after a vowel and བ’ > བ
- after བ, མ > བ
- after བ, བ, བ, and the བཀྱ > བ
- after བ, བ, བ, བ > བ

In Classical Tibetan, vowels and the letter བ may be followed by the variant བ; this is especially true in poetry, to suit the requirements of the meter.

The genitive is used not only to form noun complements, possessive pronouns and adjectives, but also relative clauses. In this case, it may be translated by a relative pronoun such as “that,” “who,” “where,” etc. The complement that is marked by the genitive always precedes the noun to which it refers.

- བ་ལེགས་པར “my friend” (lit. “the friend of me”)
- བ་ལེགས་པོ་ “his pen” (lit.: the pen of him)
- བ་ལེགས་བཞི། “Tashi’s son”
- བ་ལེགས་པ་ “the lama’s disciple”
- བ་ལེགས་བཞི། “government civil servant”
- བ་ལེགས་བཞི། “the teacher’s book”
- བ་ལེགས་བཞི། “the photo that’s in the book”
THE OBLIQUE (ལ་)

(MST 5.3.1) The oblique particle ལ་ has two main case-related functions: as the locative and as the dative. In Spoken Tibetan there are two variants, [47] one of which depends on the final letter of the preceding word. These markers are: ལ་, ལ་:

After vowels or ལ་ > ལ་:

After all endings (consonants or vowels) > ལ་

In the conversational register, the particle ལ་ is sometimes pronounced ལ་ or even ལ་. Note also that the variant ལ་ is rarely used with monosyllabic words for the dative (except in the case of personal pronouns, as well as demonstrative and interrogative adjectives).

Thus ལ་ “to the mountain” is used in preference to ལ་, and ལ་ “to the boy” in preference to ལ་.

LOCATIVE FUNCTION

(MST 5.3.1) The locative is used to mark complements of place (with or without movement) or time (date, time), and is generally translated by English “at,” “to,” “in” or “on.”

- རིེཕྱར “to/ in Ladakh”
- རིེཕྱར “to/ in America”
- རིེཕྱར “to/ in India”
- རིེཕྱར “at two o’clock”
- རིེཕྱར “on the fifth [of the month]”
- རིེཕྱར “in winter”
**DATIVE FUNCTION**

(MST 5.3.1) The dative is used to indicate the grammatical role of goal, i.e., the person or thing to which the action is directed, or the owner of something in possessive constructions. This particle corresponds to English “to,” or else is not translated at all. It is also used to form adverbs.

- མདོར་ སེམས་བྱེད་པ་མི་ིག་པར་ེན། “He sent a letter to Lobzang.”
- མདོར་ མཐུན་ལེགས་ེན། “He has money.”
- རྣམ་པར་ “clear” > རྣམ་པར་ “clearly”

As we have just seen, possessive constructions in Tibetan are formed with the dative: Subject (dat.) + Object (abs.) + Verb. This structure follows the pattern: [to X there is Y], and may be translated literally as “to him there is money.” It has exactly the same form as constructions of existence.

Thus the sentence ོགས་པའི་དོན་དུས། may mean both “There are books at the school” and “The school has books.”

*N.B.:* Be careful not to confuse this construction with the genitive: ོགས་པའི་དོན་དུས། “There are (some of) the school’s books.”

**NOMINALIZERS**

**OVERVIEW**

**Nominalizing suffixes**

(MST 11.3.2) In Tibetan, any verb may be followed by a nominalizing suffix (or “nominalizer”). Nominalization converts a verb or even an entire clause into a noun (or rather a noun phrase). It is an important and complex feature of Tibetan grammar.

The most common suffixes are: བ་, ད་, ཆ་, ང་, ཆུ་, ཉ་, འོ་, ཆུ་, དུ་ (*L), and བྱུང་ (*L) [49].
Most of these suffixes are used for three main purposes:

1. They form nominal clauses [50] functioning like any noun phrase as subject, object, complement, etc. The nominalized verb (or the proposition) becomes the head of the noun phrase: i.e., it operates as a noun and may be followed by a demonstrative and a case marker like any other noun (see MST 11.3.3 and MST 18, 20, 25, 40).

2. They form relative clauses [51] functioning as modifiers of noun phrases like an adjective (see MST 26).

3. Finally, it may be noted that most of these nominalizers may combine with final auxiliary verbs to form fléctional endings: བ་ (see MST 7.3.2), བ་ (see MST 20.3.1), བ་ and བ་ (see MST 28.3.1), etc.

**RELATIVE CLAUSES AND NOMINALIZATION**

**RELATIVE CLAUSES**

(MST 26.3.1) As a general rule, we can agree with the observation by the linguist Émile Bénvéniste that "however [a relative clause] may be attached to its head noun […] it acts like a ‘determinate syntactic adjective’."\

Tibetan forms relative clauses by nominalizing the verb. Thus, instead of relative pronouns such as we use in English, Tibetan uses nominalizers (see MST 11, 18, 20 and 25) that follow the verb of the relative clause. Relative clauses are formed by using the following nominalizers: བ་, བ་, བ་, བ་.

The construction of relative clauses is a rather complicated matter in Standard Tibetan grammar, insofar as the nominalizer that is used depends not only on the function of the head noun with respect to the verb of the relative clause (subject, object, indirect object, instrument, etc.), but also on the tense and, in some cases, even the class of the verb. [53]

The following table offers a summary of the uses of nominalizers that operate as “relative pronouns.”

“Relative pronouns”
Structure of following relative clause:


Examples of preceding relative clauses:

- ཤིང་དེ་ཉིན་གཞིས་བྱུང་སེམས་དཔེ་བོ་ “Where’s the new shirt that you bought?”
- ཤིང་དེ་ཉིན་གཞིས་བྱུང་སེམས་དཔེ་བོ་ “Those mountains that are famous are in Tibet.”

Examples of following relative clauses:

- ཤིང་དེ་ཉིན་གཞིས་བྱུང་སེམས་དཔེ་བོ་ “Where’s the new shirt that you bought?”
- ཤིང་དེ་ཉིན་གཞིས་བྱུང་སེམས་དཔེ་བོ་ “Those mountains that are famous are in Tibet.”

Following relative clauses are also referred to as “head-internal,” because the head noun appears inside the clause. If the verb comes after the head noun (in the example cited above, གཅོན་, “to buy,” comes after the head noun རིང་བུ་ “shirt”), the latter can precede the subject of the relative clause, and the head noun is embedded within the relative clause (as in the example ཤིང་དེ་ཉིན་གཞིས་བྱུང་སེམས་དཔེ་བོ་ “shirt” is preceded by the subject ཤིང་དེ་ཉིན་ “you,” which belongs to the relative, not the main, clause, “where is the new shirt?”).

It should be noted that in most cases the verb in the relative clause stands by itself, without an auxiliary, followed by the nominalizer. In certain rare instances, however, auxiliaries may be used to indicate the tense-aspect of the relative clause, in which case they must be followed by the nominalizer དགེ་.
- \( V + \text{བོད་} \) present progressive
- \( V + \text{མོང་} \) present progressive
- \( V + \text{ལོན་} \) perfect

Below are some illustrations of the different functions of the head noun. The nominalizers have been selected in accordance with the rules laid out above in the table.

1. Subject (intransitive): “who, which”

In this case the nominalizer depends on the tense-aspect. For the present, the future and the imperfective past, the nominalizer ་ is used, whereas for the perfective, it is the form བ་ that is used.

- \( \text{བོད་ལ་ལ་པ་} \) “Who is the teacher who is going abroad?”
- \( \text{བོད་ལ་ལ་པ་} \) “Who is the teacher who went abroad?”
- \( \text{བོད་ལ་ལ་པ་} \) “Who is the teacher who went abroad at that time?”
- \( \text{འོ་ལས་པ་} \) “Those are carpets that have been produced in [lit. have come out of] Tibet.”
- \( \text{བོད་ལ་ལ་པ་} \) “Who is the teacher who will be going to Tibet?”

2. Subject (transitive): “who, which”

The subject of a transitive verb can always be marked by the nominalizer བ་ irrespective of the tense-aspect. However, in the case of benefactive verbs in the past tense, the nominalizer ་པ་ is usually used.

- \( \text{བོད་ལ་ལ་པ་} \) “Nomads who are literate are few.”
“Do you know the Khampa who played the lute yesterday?”

“The student who took first place in the competition is from the same village as I am.”

3. Direct object: “whom, that, which”

In this case the nominalizer depends on the tense-aspect. For the present, the future and the imperfective, the nominalizer ཁ་ is used, whereas the perfective past uses the nominalizer ཁ་.

“The food that you have made is very good.”

“The horse that he is riding is very fast.”

“The book that I’m reading now is very interesting.”

4. Adverbial complement of tense “when”

“I remember the day when he came.”

“The time at which he is to come hasn’t been confirmed.”

5. Indirect object (in the dative) and adverbials of place: “to whom,” “to which,” “that,” “where.”

With adverbs of place, the tense-aspect of the relative clause may be specified. ཁ་ is used to indicate the present, future and imperfective past (the “imperfect”), whereas ཁ་ is used for the perfective past. On the other hand, this distinction is
not usually made with indirect objects or goals, and only the nominalizer ལ་ is used, irrespective of the tense-aspect.

- འདས་ནི། ཤེས་པའི་སྡོད་པ་དག་ “Where is the trunk where the clothes are kept?”
- འདས་ནི། ཤེས་པའི་སྡོད་པ་དག་ “Where is the trunk where the clothes were put?”
- མ་ལྷུག་ཚོགས་དང་ཞིོང་གི་ལམ་ནོར་ོག་གི་ལོ་ “Bring the table on which the television was placed.”
- མ་ལྷུག་ཚོགས་དང་ཞིོང་གི་ལམ་ནོར་ོག་གི་ལོ་ “Bring the table on which the television is kept.”
- མ་ལྷུག་ཚོགས་དང་ཞིོང་གི་ལམ་ནོར་ོག་གི་ལོ་ “The restaurant where we used to go before doesn’t exist any more.”
- རྡེ་ཏུང་མོ་ཚོ་བ་དམིགས་པར་ོ་མཁས་པ་ “The girl he loved is already married.”

6. Instrument, cause and purpose: “with which,” “for which.”

In order to situate a head noun in an instrumental, causal or purpose clause, the nominalizer ལ་ is used irrespective of the tense-aspect. It should be noted that the head noun is marked in the same way whether it is a direct object or an instrument (or cause, etc.). The head noun may be taken as an instrument only if the verb is preceded by the direct object. Compare the following:

- རྩམ་དབྱིངས་པ་ཅི་ཐུན་ལས་དབྱིངས་པ། “Who bought the meat that I’m cutting?”
- རྩམ་དབྱིངས་པ་ཅི་ཐུན་ལས་དབྱིངས་པ། “The knife for cutting meat isn’t sharp.”

The following examples illustrate the instrumental and causal functions:

- མིག་འགྲུབ་གསུམ་ཟེར་གི་ཚར་ “Where’s the cloth for wiping the blackboard?”
“This is the reason why we're holding a meeting.”

When the head noun of the relative clause denotes the substance of which the object is made, མ་ may be replaced by the nominalizer མོ་: “with, of which,” “for.”

“The wood for making the lute [of which the lute is made] is dry.”

(add tibetan, the tib in the file was garbled)“Where can we get the cloth for making the chuba?”

“This meat for making momos is excellent.”

**Nominal Clauses**

(MST 41.3.2) Like relative clauses, nominal clauses (whether as subject, object or complement) are formed with the use of a nominalizer, but it is important to distinguish between the two types. For this purpose the nominalizers མ་, མོ་, and མི་ are used (see MST 11, 25). They may be followed by the genitive or oblique case (when the function of the clause requires it). The syntactic position of the nominal clause in the sentence depends on its function as subject, object or complement.

“I hope you'll be able to come.” (nominal clause = complement of the noun རིག་)

“I pray that you should be in good health and that you study well.” (nominal clause = object of the verb ཨོ་ཐོབ་)
“She realized that the girl was her own sister.” (nominal clause = object of the verb ཞེས་)

“Did he think all Tibetans were poor?” (nominal clause = object of the verb འདེབས་) བཞིན་ཆེན་པོའི་ ལྷུན་བོད་

THE NOMINALIZER

(MST 20.3.1) In a more formal register, this nominalizer is pronounced -(n)khen, whereas in conversation it is usually pronounced as བཞིན་, and even འབྲེལ་. The verb to which it is attached takes the present-future.

- ཞེས་/ བཞིན་ “but not ཞེས་/ བཞིན་
- བཞིན་/ བཞིན་ “but not བཞིན་/ བཞིན་
- བཞིན་/ བཞིན་ “but not བཞིན་/ བཞིན་

Like other nominalizers, it can form nominal clauses as well as relative clauses (see MST 26). This nominalizer prototypically indicates the agent of the verbal action, but also extends to the subject of transitive verbs and even (in most cases) to the subject of intransitive verbs.

- རེ་མོ་ “the person who writes, the writer”
- རེ་མོ་ “the person who is speaking, the speaker”
- རེ་མོ་ “the person who is eating”
- རེ་མོ་ “the person who is selling, the vendor”
- རེ་མོ་ “the dreamer”
Formulations with དཔལ་ may sometimes be translated by terms for agents in European languages. In English, the suffix –er or the name of a profession often best conveys the sense of this nominalizer.

- དཔལ་བོད་པའི་མིག་པར་བོད་པ་རེ་ "He’s a baker." (lit. he’s a bread-maker)
- དཔལ་བོད་པའི་མིག་པར་བོད་པ་རེ་ "Our Chinese friend is a film-maker."
- དཔལ་བོད་པའི་མིག་པར་བོད་པ་རེ་ "Who’s the person who’s smoking?” or “Who’s the smoker?”
- དཔལ་བོད་པའི་མིག་པར་བོད་པ་རེ་ "The person who has the black car is the mayor of a district," or “The owner of the black car is…”

In certain cases, verbs that are nominalized with དཔལ་ are practically the same as conjugated verbs. For example, the sentence: དཔལ་འབུམ་(བོད་པ་)བོད་པ་རེ་ “I’m also going,” which literally means: “I’m also a goer” is similar to: དཔལ་འབུམ་(བོད་པ་)བོད་པ་རེ་ idem.

Remarks on the tense of nominalized verbs.

The nominalizer, as we have seen, marks the subject of both transitive and intransitive verbs. In the former case, the tense-aspect of the verb is unspecified, and must be deduced from the context. Thus the sentence “Who is the person who is smoking (or who smokes)” could just as well be translated by the imperfective past as “Who is the person who was smoking? (or who used to smoke?)” or the past perfective, “Who is the person who (has) smokedc”

- By contrast, when the nominalizer is used with an intransitive verb, it indicates the present or the future (or else the imperfective past). To indicate the past
(perfective) corresponding to the English perfect or preterite, Tibetan uses another nominalizer: ་་.

- བ་ཀོ། “the person who is going, goes, will go, was going”
- བ་ཀོ། “the person who is staying, who stays, will stay, was staying”
- བ་ཀོ། “the person who went, has gone”
- བ་ཀོ། “the person who stayed, has stayed”

**THE NOMINALIZER ་་ (AND བ་ཀོ།)  
(MST 25.3.1)**

Historically speaking, of the nominalizing suffixes (see MST 11.4, 18.4 and 20.4), the suffix ་་ occupies an essential place to the extent that it is the basic marker of nominalization in Literary Tibetan. In Standard Spoken Tibetan, however, it has far fewer functions.

In Literary Tibetan, the suffix ་་ sometimes appears in the variant form: [54] ་་.

- After the consonants བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། > ་་
- After vowels and the consonants བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། བ་ཀོ། > ་་
- In the spoken language, this rule is not followed, and the form ་་ is used in all contexts. [55]

In colloquial speech, the suffix བ་ཀོ། sometimes replaces ་་, but this suffix is never written, and has no known spelling.

The suffix ་་ is associated only with the past tense form of the verb, and refers to a past perfective action.

- བ་ཀོ། but not བ་ཀོ།
A nominalized verb may be followed by a demonstrative, an indefinite article or other determinants such as any substantive.

- བཞིན་ "Those that [you] mentioned."

**FUNCTIONS OF ཁ**

(MST 25.3.1) The suffix ཁ has two essential functions:

1. It denotes prototypically the **grammatical patient** of the verbal action in the perfective past. That is, it refers to the direct object when it is used with a transitive verb or the subject when it is used with an intransitive verb.
   - ཚུགས་ "that which has been built"
   - རེད་ "that which has been written"
   - རིན་ "that which has been washed"
   - ཡིད་ "[the person] who lived, sat"
   - ཁྲེད་ "[the person] who came"
   - ཉིན་ "[the person] who cried"
   - དུན་ "[the person] who went to bed"

   However, it also extends to the subject of transitive benefactive verbs:
   - འིན་ "[the person] who has"
   - རིབས་ "[the person] who has obtained"

2. The suffix ཁ may also be neutral and nominalize the entire clause.
In this case, the suffix is not oriented towards any grammatical role and nominalizes the entire clause. From a syntactic point of view, the nominalized verb functions as a head noun and may be translated in English by a verb in the infinitive, an -ing clause, a that clause or even by a noun.

- "The fact that she took first place made me happy."
- "It’s very important to know Tibetan.” or “Knowledge of Tibetan is very important.”
- "To be able to plant hair on the head is incredible!"

It is only from the context that we can distinguish between the two functions described above, as the following examples show:

- “Who’s the person who came a short while ago?”
- “It was a good thing/ idea [for us] to come here today!”

What is being nominalized in the first case is the verb “to come” modifying the head noun “this one,” and in the second the clause “we came here today.”

**THE NOMINALIZER**

(MST 32.3.1) Like other nominalizers, this one is directly suffixed to the verb, which goes in the present-future.

- "way of speaking"
- "way of writing"
- "way of eating"
- "way of looking, considering"
The following forms, in which the verb is in the past, are incorrect:

- འཇིག་ཤེས་
- འོགས་དབང་
- འབདུལ་བརྙན་

This nominalizer shows the way in which the action designated by the verb is performed.

- གཞན་པའི་དོན་པ་ཤེས་པ་ནི་སྨོན་པ་ལ་དགེ་བོ་བཞིན་རེི་“The way they build houses in Tibet today is not as it was in the past.”
- གཞན་པའི་དོན་པ་ཤེས་པ་ནི་སྨོན་པ་ལ་དགེ་བོ་བཞིན་རེི་“The way men and women wear the chuba is different.”

The nominalizer may also be translated by a noun.

- དབྱེ་བབྱེད་ཟིན་ the lifestyle (lit.: the way of leading one’s life)
- དབྱེ་བབྱེད་ནས་ the production of tormas

**THE NOMINALIZER འཇིག་**

(MST 36.3.1) Like other nominalizers, this one is attached directly to the verb, which takes the present-future form.

- གཞན་པའི་དོན་པ་ཤེས་པ་ནི་“This is what we usually say.”
- གཞན་པའི་དོན་པ་ཤེས་པ་ནི་“When we make a chang offering, this is how we usually sing.”
- གཞན་པའི་དོན་པ་ཤེས་པ་ནི་“As they say, ‘to exchange a horse for a donkey’.” (i.e., to make a bad deal)

**THE NOMINALIZERS འཇིག AND འབྲུག**
(MST 39.3.1) The nominalizer གོང་, derived from a noun “method, way,” has a first meaning similar to གོང་ (see MST 32), but occurs mainly in Literary Tibetan or in a formal spoken language. It expresses the way or the manner the verbal action is performed.

• གོང་བོད་ལུང་བོད་གི་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་ བོད་„He explained how Tibetan paper is made."

The nominalizer གོང་, and its literary homologue གོང་ “manner,” has a second meaning when used with reported speech. It indicates that the speaker is not necessarily subscribing to what he or she is reporting. It may be translated by “they say that” or “apparently.”

• གོང་བོད་ལུང་བོད་གི་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་ བོད་„They say that there used to be seven thousand seven hundred monks in this monastery."
• གོང་བོད་ལུང་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་བོད་ བོད་„He claimed to be a lama."

THE NOMINALIZERS གོང་ AND གོང་

(MST 11.3.3) The suffixes གོང་ and གོང་ are associated only with the present-future form of the verb.

• གོང་ but not གོང་
• གོང་ but not གོང་
• གོང་ but not གོང་

The suffix གོང་, which is sometimes spelled གོང་, does not occur in Literary Tibetan, which instead uses the nominalizer གོང་. The form གོང་, on the other hand, is used both in Spoken Tibetan and in the literary language.
THE FUNCTIONS OF དབུ།

Verbs followed by the nominalizer དབུ། indicate the present, future or imperfective past according to the context. Furthermore, they often convey a sense of obligation (deontic sense).

The nominalizer དབུ། is used to form nominal and relative clauses. A distinction needs to be made between two functions:

The nominalizer indicates the grammatical patient of the verbal action (the object of a transitive verb or the subject of an intransitive verb) in the present and future. [57]

- རྩེས་བུ། “that (which) needs to be written, that (which) one writes”
- དབུས་བུ། (L.: དབུས་བུ།) “that (which) is to be offered, that (which) one offers”
- འཞེས་བུ། “that (which) is to be visited, that one visits”
- མཐོས་བུ། “that (which) is to be built, that (which) one builds”
- སྤེལ་བུ། བུའི་ལུན་པ་ “Where are the cups to be washed?”
- དབུས་བུ། རུ་བུ། ། སེམས་ལུན་ལུན་པ་ “The things (that have) to be taken are over there.”
- འཐབས་བུ། བུ་བུ། བུ་བུ། བུ་བུ། བུ་བུ། བུ་བུ། “Have you brought the book that we’re going to present?”

The suffix also operates as a neutral nominalizer: it nominalizes the entire clause.

In this case, the suffix is not oriented towards any grammatical role and nominalizes the entire clause. From a syntactic point of view, the nominalized verb functions as a head noun and may be translated in English by a verb in the infinitive, by an ing- clause, a that- clause or even by a noun:

- རྩེས་བུ། “(the fact of) writing”
- དབུས་བུ། (L.: དབུས་བུ།) “(the fact of) offering”
Only the syntactic context allows one to distinguish between the neutral nominalizer and the patient-centered nominalizer.

**THE FUNCTIONS OF ར་**

Verbs followed by the nominalizer ར་ correspond to the future or the imperfective, often with a sense of obligation. The functions of the nominalizer ར་ are analogous to those of བ་, though it has more formal, and rather literary, overtones.

- བེས་བོད་བེད་པས་ལ། ང་ “I've forgotten to bring the book.”
- ཁེ་སྤུང་སོ་དེ་ཚེ་སེམས་པོ་ཏིང་ “There are many small monasteries to visit.”

**THE NOMINALIZER ར་**

(MST 18.3.1) MST 11 introduced nominalizers that transform a verb (or an entire clause) into a noun phrase. Like other nominalizers, this one can form nominal clauses as well as relative clauses (see MST 26).

The verb to which the suffix ར་ is attached appears in the present-future stem form, but it may be used in the context of the past, present or future.

- ར་ (but not ར་)
The nominalizer བོད་ད་ relates to the location or the goal of the verbal action. [58]

- བོད་ད་ “the place where one writes, or upon which one writes”
- འོགས་པ་ “the place where one makes an offering, the person to whom one makes an offering”
- བོད་ད་ “the person to whom one speaks, the place where one speaks”
- བོད་ད་ “the place where one sleeps”
- བོད་ད་ “the place towards which one goes, the trail”

Formulations with བོད་ད་ are very common in Tibetan, and may sometimes be translated by nouns in European languages.

- བོད་ད་ད་པ་ “Is there a room here?”
- བོད་ད་ད་པ་ “Where’s the gas station?”
- བོད་ད་ད་པ་ “The ticket office is over there.”
- བོད་ད་ད་པ་ “Is that a teashop?” or “Is that a teacup?”

In these examples, the four substantives “room,” “gas station,” “ticket office” and “teacup” would be translated literally as “sitting place,” “gasoline pouring place,” “ticket buying place” and “tea drinking place.”

The nominalizer བོད་ད་ provides no clues about the tense-aspect of the verb, which has to be deduced from the context.
Notes

[37] Between 200 and 999 dang is optional and is usually dropped.

[38] When the marker is not accentuated it is pronounced without stress: -tso.

[39] There are no exceptions to this rule in the written language, and very few in Spoken Tibetan.

[40] Our presentation of case does not reflect the Tibetan grammatical tradition which is based on Sanskrit, a sacred language for Tibetans (Sanskrit is an Indo-European language entirely different in its structures from the Tibeto-Burman languages). The Tibetan tradition usually mentions eight cases corresponding to the eight Sanskrit cases in the following order: first case: ngo bo tsam ‘absolutive’ (Ø), second case: las su bya ba ‘accusative’ (la or its variants), third case: byed sgra ‘agentive’ or ‘instrumental’ (gis and its variants), fourth case: dgos ched ‘dative’ (la or its variants), fifth case: 'byung khungs ‘ablative’ (nas or las), sixth case: 'brel sgra ‘genitive’ (gi or its variants), seventh case: gnas gzhi ‘locative’ (la or its variants), eighth case: ‘bod sgra ‘vocative’ (Ø).

[41] In traditional grammars, dang is not considered to be a case (rnam dbye) but a particle (tshig phrad). See MST 9.3.3 and Appendix 1, section 3.3 for an explanation of why it is treated as a case in this Manual.

[42] Unlike the other cases which are overtly marked by a particle, the absolutive is not distinguished by any formal marker.

[43] The role of patient also includes the experiencer of an emotion.

[44] In traditional grammars, the first is referred to as the particle of “the main agent” (byed pa po gtso bo), while the second is referred to as the particle of “the secondary agent” (byed pa po phal ba).

[45] We may compare the same transitive statement in five different languages, which all operate according to an accusative model. Latin: ego ill+um libr+um legi Russian: ja èt+u knig+u procél I + Nomin. this + Accus. book + Accus. read (past) Chinese: wo kan-guo zhe+ben shu French: j’ ai lu ce livre English: I read this book

[46] A title, accorded to certain lamas, meaning “precious.”

[47] In Literary Tibetan, there are seven forms. See MST Appendix 1, section 3.3.
The same structure is used in Russian, Hebrew and numerous other languages that lack a proper verb “to have.”

All these nominalizers are used in Literary Tibetan with the exception of ya’ and nkyo’. The latter is used exclusively in a familiar register, and despite the frequency of its occurrence doesn’t figure in grammars. The spelling given here is purely phonetic. All the other suffixes are clearly derived from nouns and have kept a grammatical role linked with their original meaning.

In English, nominal clauses correspond to *that* clauses, -*ing* clauses, and infinitive clauses. See MST 11.3.3.

In English, relative clauses are introduced by *wh*-pronouns or *that* (including zero-*that*). See 26. 3.1.

Remember that the marker nkyo’ is also used instead of pa in colloquial language.

That is, both tense and aspect. Remember that the term “present” actually refers to the imperfective present and past, and that the term “past” denotes the perfective past (see MST 10).

But be careful! This modification applies only to verb suffixes, and not to suffixes with other functions such as noun or adjective suffixes. Thus Standard Tibetan says *khang pa* “house” and *stong pa* “empty,” not *khang ba* and *stong ba*.

Some speakers do, however, follow the rule. In this case, they apply the phonological rule of omitting the bilabial /w/ described in section 1.1 of MST Appendix 1: nang wa > nang nga, phül wa > phül la, tshar wa > tshar ra.

In the same way as the nominalizer མཆོད་, see MST 11.

From a syntactic point of view, the nominalized verb functions here as a head noun or as a modifier of the head noun and may often be translated in English by using a relative clause (see also MST 26) as the examples show.

In other words, the suffix indicates locative adverbials and indirect objects.
Postpositions and Postpositional Phrases

WORD ORDER AND POSTPOSITIONS

(MST 7.3.1) As we have seen above, basic word order in Tibetan is Subject-Object-Verb. As is often the case in languages with this SOV word order, there are no prepositions but postpositions. The head nouns of the relative clauses are usually placed after the relative clauses. Moreover, the main clause, which goes at the end of the statement, is always placed after the subordinate clauses (object, causal, etc.). The main information is therefore almost always deferred to the end of the sentence.

Word order within a noun phrase is as follows: the substantive comes first, followed by the qualifying adjective, the article (or demonstrative adjective), the plural marker and the case. The case particle takes last place in the noun phrase (although it may happen that the case marker is followed by a topicalizer བོད་).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun + [Adj. + Det.+ Pl.] + Case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>girl pretty those+Dative “to those pretty girls”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Tibetan, then, there are no prepositions but only postpositions: the equivalents of “in,” “on,” “with,” and so on all follow the noun to which they relate. We don’t say “in the water” but “water in”; not “on the table” but “table on.”

Postpositions are always followed by a case particle, usually the locative case (but also sometimes other cases such as the genitive or the ablative). They also
command the genitive, which is inserted between the noun group and the postposition. The structure of the prepositional phrase is therefore:

- Noun + [Gen.: ་] + Postposition + Loc. ་

E.g., “water of inside-in,” which would correspond to the English word order “in [the inside of] the water.”

*Note:* The postpositions are all clearly derived from substantives. They require that the preceding noun (or noun group) be followed by a genitive particle. While the genitive is always used when the preceding word ends in a vowel, its use is optional with certain postpositions when the preceding word ends in a consonant. This is particularly the case with: ་ “in,” ་ “on,” ་ “behind,” ་ “in front of.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Postposition</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>park</td>
<td>in</td>
<td>“in the park”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཤེས (ཤེ)</td>
<td>འ</td>
<td>“in the book”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>book</td>
<td>in</td>
<td>“in the book”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For Example:* ་ “under the table,” ༣༠༠ “in the world,” ༣ “in the lesson,” ༣ “next to the school.”

### Adjectives and adjectival phrases

*POSITION*
In the spoken language, adjectives always come after the nouns they describe, and may be followed by determinants such as articles and quantifiers: N. + Adj. + Art.

Although adjectives are invariable they have a long and a short form, a subject which will be tackled in MST 17.

Constructions involving an attributive adjective bear a superficial resemblance to constructions with a predicative adjective.

- “The pen is black,” or “(This) is a black pen”

The ambiguity may be avoided by using a demonstrative. Compare:

- “The pen is black.”
- “The pen is black.”

ADJECTIVAL SUFFIXES

Generally speaking, adjectives strongly resemble verbs and may even be “conjugated” with certain auxiliary verbs. Adjectives usually consist of a radical and a suffix, or else a doubled radical.

There are a number of suffixes that specify the degree of the adjective: positive, comparative, superlative (see MST 21 and 22) and intensive, admiral, excessive, attenuative, intensives, as well as interrogative suffixes and expressive suffixes (see MST 31).

THE LONG OR “POSITIVE” FORM OF ADJECTIVES

The positive form of adjectives is formed by using or by doubling up the radical, which represents a long form of the adjective.

The short form is the monosyllabic root of the adjective. In the case of double forms, the short form is the first, unrepeated, syllable, while in the case of adjectives consisting of a radical and a suffix, the latter is simply dropped. An important
exception to this rule is the adjective ལེགས་པ ་ “big,” of which the short form is ལེགས་ and not ལེགས་པ ་.


Certain adjectives are formed by means of an expression comprising a substantive followed by an adjective such as སྣྲུལ་པ ་ “hot” (often pejorative), སྣྲུལ་པ ་ “big,” སྣྲུལ་པ ་ “well,” སྣྲུལ་པ ་ “shape, appearance,” etc.


**SHORT FORMS OF ADJECTIVES**

(MST 17.3.1) All adjectival suffixes are attached to the short form of the adjective, which hardly ever appears alone.

For example: གཉིས་ “small” > གཉིས་ “smaller,” གཉིས་ “too small,” གཉིས་ “how small?,” གཉིས་ “the smallest,” གཉིས་ “a bit small,” གཉིས་ “how small!,” etc.

**EXCESSIVE: དེ་ཤེས་ “TOO”**
This suffix is placed directly after the short form of the adjective, and can be translated by “too.”

- བོད་པ་ “heavy” > བོད་པ་པ་ “too heavy”
- བོད་པ་ “few” > བོད་པ་པ་ “too few”
- བོད་པ་ “big” > བོད་པ་ “too big”

The Interrogative: སྲོལ་ “HOW…”

This suffix is used to ask quantitative questions like “how big?,” “how heavy?,” etc.).

- བོད་པ་ “heavy” > བོད་པ་ “how heavy?”
- བོད་པ་ “grand” > བོད་པ་ “how big?”
- བོད་པ་ “far” > བོད་པ་ “how far?”

Expressive Adjectives and Adverbs

Trisyllabic Expressions

The short form of certain adjectives is associated with repeated syllables with an expressive meaning. This formulation is used especially with adjectives of colour.

- སྦྱེ་ཙྭ་སྦྱེ་ “quite calm”
- སྦྱེ་ཙྭ་སྦྱེ་ “bright blue or green” (the grassland, the sky)
- སྦྱེ་ཙྭ་སྦྱེ་ “bright red” (blood)
- སྦྱེ་ཙྭ་སྦྱེ་ “blazing, burning red” (fire)
- སྦྱེ་ཙྭ་སྦྱེ་ “warm as toast” (pleasant heat)
• བི་ཚིགས་སེར། “biting cold”
• རྣ་ཚིགས་སེར། “clean as a whistle”

There is another commonly-used adjectival construction:

Adj (long) + Adj (short) + བ་, which is used to form expressive constructions implying “completely” or “entirely.”

• འཕྲེབས་གཞག་ཏུ། “completely new”
• འཕྲེབས་གཞག་ཏུ། “really hot”
• འཕྲེབས་གཞག་ཏུ། “pure white”
• འཕྲེབས་གཞག་ཏུ། “utterly stupid”

QUADRISYLLABIC EXPRESSIONS

(MST 31.3.3) Tibetan contains a number of adjectival and adverbial expressions consisting of four syllables. The general pattern is that the first syllable is phonologically associated with the third, whereas the second is linked to the fourth, according to the pattern: XYX’Y.’

Here are a few very common expressions:

• བི་ཨེ་ལེ་ཨེ། “anyhow”
• བི་ཨེ་ལེ་ཨེ། “scatty, piecemeal”
• བི་ཨེ་ལེ་ཨེ། “nervous, shaky”
• བི་ཨེ་ལེ་ཨེ། “hastily”
• བི་ཨེ་ལེ་ཨེ། “messy”

ADJECTIVAL CONSTRUCTIONS
**SUPERLATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS**

(MST 21.3.1) These are formed with the superlative form of the adjective. Remember that the latter consists of adding the suffix རྒྱ་ to the short form of the adjective. In the case of relative superlative constructions, the comparison must be introduced by means of the adverb དཔལ་ “among, out of,” preceded by the genitive.

- ཆོམ་ལྕང་མ་ཞེས་པ་ཞི་གཞི་ཐོབ་པར་བསྐྲ་ “Jhomolungma is the highest mountain in the world.”
- དད་པོང་ཐོང་བུ་ཞེས་པ་ཞི་གཞི་ཐོབ་པར་བསྐྲ་ “Dräpung is the biggest of the monasteries.”
- སེ་བསྟོན་པ་སྐྱེན་ “This book is the best.”
- མི་གྲོས་པས་བུ་ཕྱོགས་པར་བསྐྲ་ “The Brahmaputra is the longest river in Tibet.”
- སྨི་བཞེན་པ་སེམས་དབྱངས་པ་ལྐག་ “Samyä is the oldest monastery in Tibet.”
- སེ་མེད་ཐེ་ཞི་ཧོ་ལྕན་པ་སེང་གུང་ “Today is the finest day of my life.”
- སེ་མེད་ཐེ་ཞི་ཧོ་ལྕན་པ་གཅེས་འཕྲེང་ “This is the most beautiful of these flowers.”

**COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF SUPERIORITY**

(MST 22.3.1) Comparative constructions are formed by taking the comparative (short) form of an adjective and adding the suffix དཔལ་. The term being compared is followed by ལབ་. The markers ལབ་ and དཔལ་ are the two forms of the ablative that are used in Literary Tibetan, but in the spoken language it is only དཔལ་ that denotes the ablative, whereas ལབ་ is reserved for comparative constructions.

- དཔལ་ལོའི་ལོང་བུ་དལ་ “There is more than that.”
Chang is better than beer.

That book is better than this one.

Are yaks bigger than dzo?

Yaks are bigger than dzo!

The auxiliary བྱ། is optional in declarative sentences, whereas it is obligatory in negative and interrogative sentences.

Note that the position of the item being compared is not fixed; it may also come first: བྱ། མངོན་མངོན་བྱ། “Compared with beer, chang is better.”

When the adjective is an attribute of the subject, another construction is also commonly used: the short form of the adjective is followed by the auxiliary བྱ།.

There is more than this.

Chang is better than beer.

Yaks are bigger than dzo.

It’s colder in Lhasa than in Beijing.

It’s better to ride a nalo (gentle, hornless yak).

Won’t it cost more to send it by air?

Tibetan has no special constructions for marking comparatives of inferiority. “Less than” is expressed simply reversing the order of comparison or by using an opposite adjective.

For example, to translate the expression “He is less poor than I am,” Tibetan would say:

I’m poorer than him.
or

- མེད་ལྡན་མཐུན་མི་ཚོགས་ “He’s richer than me.”

or according to the context

- མི་ལྡན་མཐུན་མི་ཚོགས་ “He isn’t poorer than me.”

The comparative and superlative forms of adjectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>སྨའོང་ “new”</td>
<td>སྨའོང་ སྨའོང་ (L)</td>
<td>སྨའོང་ཁོང་།</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>བདོན་ སྨ། “bad”</td>
<td>བདོན་ སྨ། (L)</td>
<td>བདོན་ཁོང་།</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>རྫོང་ “many”</td>
<td>རྫོང་ རྫོང་ (L)</td>
<td>རྫོང་ཁོང་།</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཡུལ་ “few”</td>
<td>ཡུལ་ ཡུལ་ (L)</td>
<td>ཡུལ་ཁོང་།</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>བཀྲ་ རྩོམ་ “long”</td>
<td>བཀྲ་ རྩོམ་ (L)</td>
<td>བཀྲ་ཁོང་།</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>སྲོང་ སྲོང་ “small”</td>
<td>སྲོང་ སྲོང་ (L)</td>
<td>སྲོང་ཁོང་།</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>རྩོམ་ རྩོམ་ “big”</td>
<td>རྩོམ་ རྩོམ་ (L)</td>
<td>རྩོམ་ཁོང་།</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཕྱིམ་ ཕྱིམ་ “pleasant”</td>
<td>ཕྱིམ་ ཕྱིམ་</td>
<td>ཕྱིམ་ཁོང་། (L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>སྨད་ སྨད་ “clear”</td>
<td>སྨད་ སྨད་ (L)</td>
<td>སྨད་ཁོང་།</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ཕྱིམ་ སྨད་ “elderly”</td>
<td>ཕྱིམ་ སྨད་</td>
<td>ཕྱིམ་ཁོང་།</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>འབྲུང་ འབྲུང་ “sweet”</td>
<td>འབྲུང་ འབྲུང་ (L)</td>
<td>འབྲུང་ཁོང་།</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The construction སྨད་ + V: “more than”
(MST 23.3.1) The marker མ་ may also precede a verb, in which case it is translated by “more than.”

- བཞི་ལེགས་དུ་བཟོན་པའི་སི་དོན་རྒྱུ་རི་ “That won’t take more than twenty minutes.”
- བཞི་ལེགས་དུ་བཟོན་པའི་སི་དོན་རྒྱུ་ “At that time he wasn’t more than eight years old.”

THE SUFFIX མ་

(MST 23.3.1) This suffix, which we have already met, may be used with adjectives (in their short form) as well as with substantives, numbers and verbs. In the conversational register, the suffix མ་ is usually pronounced མ’/ts/. Its meaning varies according to context:

After an adjective, it means “a little,” or “a little more.”

- མ་རོ་“a little more”
- མ་ཞེས་“a little cheaper”
- མ་སྐྲོ་“a little faster”
- མ་དུ་“a little red”
- མ་ནུང་“a few more”
- མ་ཐོས་“a little earlier (or early)”

After a number, it means “about.”

- མ་ཉིན་“about 100 people”
- མ་ཉིན་“about two hundred thousand gormo (yuan)”
- མ་འགྲུང་“about a quarter of an hour”
After a noun, a verb or a nominalized verb, depending on context this suffix may mean “only,” “simply,” “mere,” “just,” “almost.”

- བོད་ “only the name, purely nominal”
- ་ ་ “The mere fact that he came created problems.”
- ་ ་ “Just touching it with my hand makes it hurt.”
- ་ ་ “He was beaten almost to death.”
- ་ ་ “Almost from head to foot.”

The suffix also appears in certain adverbial formulations such as:

- ་ ་ “quite, not bad”
- ་ ་ “just there”

**THE CONSTRUCTION: ADJ (SHORT FORM) + བོད /བོད་**

(MST 28.3.4) This construction is used to form verbs from adjectives as follows:

- ་ ་ “big” > ་ ་ “to grow, get bigger” ་ ་ “to make bigger”
- ་ ་ “good” > ་ ་ “to get better” ་ ་ “to improve, make better”

The past form of ་ ་ is ་ ་.

In Literary Tibetan, the form that the oblique takes follows the usual rules.

- ་ ་ “long” > ་ ་ ་ (L) “to lengthen”
- ་ ་ “short” > ་ ་ ་ (L) “to shorten”
- ་ ་ “fast” > ་ ་ ་ (L) “to accelerate”
Notes

[60] In Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, most adjectives are formed on this pattern.

[61] As a general rule, idiomatic expressions of four syllables are very common (see Sangye T. Naga and Tsepak Rigzin, *Tibetan Quadrisyllabics, Phrases and Idioms* [New Delhi: LTWA, 1994]).

**Adverbs and adverbial phrases**

**ADVERBS WITH བོད**

(MST 18.3.3) Adjectives can be transformed into adverbs by the addition of the suffix བོད, which is derived from the verb “to do,” as the following example shows:

- རྩུས་ “pleasant” རྩུས་པོད་ “pleasantly”
- རྩུས་པོད་ལྟར་བཞིན་ཏེ། “Let’s sit here quietly.”

**THE ADVERBS འོ་གཙོ་ AND འོ་ལྟར་ “HOW.”**

(MST 30.3.1) The literary form of འོ་ལྟར་ is འོ་ལྟར་.
The suffix མི of the words གཞལསི, ཁགསི, མིགས་པི is sometimes also spelled མི [62]: གཞལསི, ཁགསི, མིགས་པི.

The form གཞལསི is associated with nouns and adjectives.

• བོད་བོད་པ་ནི གཞལསི་ “How’s your health these days?”
• བོད་བོད་པ་ནི གཞལསི་ “How’s the dairy production this year?”
• བོད་བོད་པ་ནི གཞལསི་ “Look! How quickly he’s walking!”

The form གཞལསི is associated with verbs. This adverbial form makes it possible to ask about the way in which an action is performed.

• གཞལསི་ལ་ནི གཞལསི་ “How should it be done?”
• གཞལསི་ལ་ནི གཞལསི་ “How did he come from Tibet?”

**EXPRESSIVE ADVERBS**

See under “Expressive Adjectives”

---

**Notes**

[62] The first spelling is preferred for etymological reasons: the “s” is in fact derived from the verb མི, “to say.”
Clauses and sentences: propositions

CONNECTIVES

SUBORDINATORS

The connective ཀྲ་

(MST 14.3.2) This particle, which is the same as that used to form the ablative case, is placed after the verb in a temporal or causal subordinate clause to link it with a following clause. It is always placed directly after the verb, and may not be preceded by an auxiliary. The marker ཀྲ་ is translated, according to the context, by the conjunctions “and” or “then,” or else by “after” or “since.”

- གླེང་བོད་ལུང་གི་ཟོས། “I’ll come after I’ve eaten.”
- དུས་རིགས་པའི་ནོར་ཁུལ་ཐུབ། “How long has he been in Lhasa?” (lit. since he came to Lhasa how much [time] has passed)
- དུས་ཁྲིམས་པའི་སྲོལ་འབུམ་པོ་ཆེ། “I get up early and go to school.”

The construction མ་ + གྲ་

(MST 14.3.3) The expression མ་ is derived from the form གྲ་, which consists of the nominalizer གྲ་ and the demonstrative གྲ་ “just that” or “just there.”
This expression, which is always attached to a verb in the past tense, means “to have just” or “as soon as.” In Literary Tibetan, it is replaced by འབདོ་རྟེན་ or རབ་གྲོང་.

- འབདོ་རྟེན་ལོ་བཟང་ལོག་པ་འདི་ལོ། “I came as soon as I’d eaten.”
- འབདོ་རྟེན་ཞེ་སྒངས་ལོ་བཟང་ལོག་པ་འདི་ལོ། “Tsering has just arrived.”
- འབདོ་རྟེན་ལོ་བཟང་ལོག་པ་འདི་ལོ། རྒྱ་གྱི་རྒྱ་གི་རབ་གྲོང་ གཅིག བདེ་ལེགས་པ་འདི་ལོ། “As soon as we got into the tent, we drank some hot tea.”
- འབདོ་རྟེན་ཞེ་སྒངས་ལོ་བཟང་ལོག་པ་འདི་ལོ། དེ་སྟེ་བསྡུས་འཕྲིན་པ་འདི་ལོ། “The Jhokhang has just been opened.”

**TEMPORAL CONNECTIVES**

(MST 24.3.1) “Subordinating conjunctions” or “temporal connectives” are usually attached directly to the verb or to its nominalized form. Each connective takes the present-future or past form of the verb.

(MST 24.3.1) These connectives go directly after the verb. They are always associated with the present-future form.

- འབདོ་རྟེན་ལོ་བཟང་ལོག་པ་འདི་ལོ། ཚིག ཡི་འེད་ལོ་བཟང་ལོག་པ་འདི་ལོ། “When they picnic, they have fun.”
- འབདོ་རྟེན་ལོ་བཟང་ལོག་པ་འདི་ལོ། རྒྱ་གྱི་རྒྱ་གི་རབ་གྲོང་ བདེ་ལེགས་པ་འདི་ལོ། “While he was living in China, he ate dog-meat.”
- འབདོ་རྟེན་ལོ་བཟང་ལོག་པ་འདི་ལོ། རྒྱ་གྱི་རྒྱ་གི་རབ་གྲོང་ བདེ་ལེགས་པ་འདི་ལོ། “While he was living in Peking, Thubtän studied Chinese medicine.”
- འབདོ་རྟེན་ལོ་བཟང་ལོག་པ་འདི་ལོ། རྒྱ་གྱི་རྒྱ་གི་རབ་གྲོང་ བདེ་ལེགས་པ་འདི་ལོ། “They talked a lot while they were making momos.”
- འབདོ་རྟེན་ལོ་བཟང་ལོག་པ་འདི་ལོ། རྒྱ་གྱི་རྒྱ་གི་རབ་གྲོང་ བདེ་ལེགས་པ་འདི་ལོ།

(MST 24.3.1) These are always associated with the past form of the verb. The verb that precedes these connectives must be nominalized by the suffix ང་ and followed by the genitive case.
While I was in India I went on a lot of pilgrimages.

When I bought the camera, I asked about its quality.

He passed through Nepal on his way to Tibet.

We shouldn't have the radio on too loudly while he's working.

**The connective བོད་ “IN ORDER TO”**

(MST 36.3.3) This connective is used after nominalized verbs to form purpose clauses. It is an elegant construction that also occurs in Literary Tibetan.

In order to go to Tibet, you should learn Tibetan properly.

In order to be in good health, you should do take regular exercise and keep clean.

**COORDINATORS**

**The connective བོད་ “ALSO”**

(MST 5.3.3) In Spoken Tibetan, བོད་ is pronounced བོད་. In Literary Tibetan, this connective has three possible forms, depending on the last letter of the preceding syllable.

- after the consonants ཐ་ན་མ་པ་ ག་ ་ > བོད་
- after the consonants ཐ་ན་མ་པ་ ཐ་ན་ ་ and the ཞ་ ་ > བོལ་
- after vowels and ད་ ་ > བོལ་ / བོལ་
It also appears in the expression བོད་དང་, meaning “but, nevertheless,” and pronounced བོད་དང་ in Spoken Tibetan.

**THE CONJUNCTION ལ་“BECAUSE,” “SINCE,” “FOR”**

(MST 11.3.4) This very common conjunction is suffixed directly to the verb or to certain auxiliaries. It appears in the following combinations: བོད་དང་, པ་དང་.

However, the following combinations are incorrect: བོད་དང་, བོད་དང་, བོད་དང་.

- བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ “Since I haven’t got much time I won’t be able to go there.”
- བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ “That may be difficult because I don’t speak Hindi well.”
- བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ བོད་དང་ “I’m not very sure, as this is the first time I’ve been to Europe.”

**THE ENUMERATIVE CONNECTIVE ལ་**

(MST 22.3.2) When objects are being enumerated, the connective ལ་, derived from the verb “to do,” is commonly interposed between the items in the series.

- ལ་ ལ་ ལ་ ལ་ ལ་ ལ་ “Kneaded tsampa, boiled mutton; then with some yogurt, that should be enough.”
- ལ་ ལ་ ལ་ ལ་ ལ་ ལ་ “Please give us one stew, one soup, and some momo.”

**THE CONNECTIVE ལ་“BEFORE”**

(MST 34.3.1) This connective is associated with the verb in the past tense form. The verb itself must be preceded by a negation. [63]
"I really must finish this work before going."

"You should take three pills before sleeping."

**THE CONNECTIVES དགིས་ "AFTER" AND གཞིན་ "AFTER"**

(MST 34.3.2) These connectives accompany the verb in the past tense. Moreover, the verb is nominalized with the suffix གཞིན་ and takes the genitive case.

- གཞིན་ནི་གནས་ལེགས་པ་ལེའི་ལེགས་པར་ཟོན་པའི་རབ་ཀྱི་འདྲ་བ། "After holding a discussion, they reached a decision."

- དེས་ཇི་ཤི་རྩིས་དིང་ཤིང་ལེགས་པ་ལེའི་ལེགས་པར་ཟོན་པའི་རབ་ཀྱི་འདྲ་བ། "After reading this book, he understood the situation."

**THE CONNECTIVE གཞིན་**

(MST 34.3.3) This has the same meaning as the ablative གཞིན་ in its connective function (that is, when གཞིན་ is used after a verb). This usage exists only in the spoken language.

- གཞིན་ནི་གནས་ལེགས་པ་ལེའི་ལེགས་པར་ཟོན་པའི་རབ་ཀྱི་འདྲ་བ། "After you go to bed, you have to sweat."

- ཡུང་ནི་གནས་ལེགས་པ་ལེའི་ལེགས་པར་ཟོན་པའི་རབ་ཀྱི་འདྲ་བ། "When they've eaten well, they sit and sing Tibetan operatic songs."

**THE CONNECTIVE བོད་**

(MST 38.3.1) In Literary Tibetan, the adversative connective བོད་ "but" has several variants according to the last letter of the preceding syllable.
In speech, the three are all pronounced –te. This particle has a range of functions in Literary Tibetan. In the spoken language, by contrast, it is used only to introduce an opposition between two phrases or a concession, and may be translated by “but” or “although.”

- The particle ངེས་ is used after only certain auxiliaries. It usually appears in the following combinations: དེ་དེ, དེ་དེ་དེ, འབྲ་བྲ, ཡེ་ེ་, ཆེ་ཆེ.

- བདོ་བཅོས་དེ་བཞིན་པའི་ བདོ་བཅོས་དེ་བཞིན་པའི་ “Even though they’re similar, they’re not quite identical.”

- རེ་བོད་ཀུན་ལུས་ཟིན་ཏེ། རེ་བོད་ཀུན་ལུས་ཟིན་ཏེ། “He has money but he doesn’t use it.”

- འབད་པོ་ལེགས་པ་ཞིག་པ་དཔེ་ཞིོལ་ འབད་པོ་ལེགས་པ་ཞིག་པ་དཔེ་ཞིོལ་ “Although she has a nice voice, she doesn’t sing.”

Notes

[63] The connective “before” is associated with the negation in various languages. This is the case for example in Literary French: “avant que + negation.”
Speech acts and types of sentences

QUESTIONS

THE **FINAL INTERROGATIVE PARTICLES** ་་, ་པ, ་ཙ

(MST 2.3.1) Interrogative sentences end with **final interrogative particles** (f.i.p.), the precise form of which is determined by the last letter of the preceding auxiliary. [65]

- after ་ > ་ཙ
- after ་ > ་ཙ
- in all other cases > ་ཙ

For example: ་ཙ, ་ཙ, ་ཙ, ་ཙ, ་ཙ, ་ཙ, ་ཙ, ་ཙ.

Final interrogative particles are not used with the copulas and auxiliaries mentioned above when a sentence already contains an interrogative pronoun (such as ་“what,” ་“who,” etc.).

However, with the verb ་, a final interrogative particle ་ is sometimes used.

If there is no interrogative pronoun in the question, the sentence ends with ་.
the interrogative form of the verb ིིན་; if the question does contain an interrogative pronoun, the sentence ends in ིིན་ or ིིན་.  

- བིན་གེགས་པོ་ལེགས་པ། “Are you a teacher?”  
- བིན་གེགས་ = བིན་གེགས་ “Who are you?”  

Interrogative pronouns are usually placed before the verb. The pronoun རིེ་ means both “what” and “which,” and corresponds to the literary forms རིེ་ and རེ་ (it is in fact derived from the latter). The interrogative pronouns རིེ་ “what” and རེ་ “who” may be doubled (ཨེ་རིེ་, རེ་རེ་) to elicit an enumeration in the reply or to mean “what types of…?” or “what kinds of…?”  

**THE RULE OF ANTICIPATION**  

(MST 3.3.4) In the case of interrogative sentences that directly concern the person being addressed (that is, sentences containing second-person pronouns), the questioner must anticipate an answer containing an “I” or a “we” by making advance use of an egophoric auxiliary in the question itself.  

- བིན་གེགས་པོ་ལེགས་པ། “Are you well?”  
- རང་ལེགས་ / རེ་ “I'm well/not well.”  

This exchange might be rendered literally in English as “Am you well?,“ since the anticipated reply, whether positive or negative, is “I am well/ not well.”  

The rule of anticipation operates in a similar way, but with a reverse result, when the speaker is asking a question about him− or herself. In this case, since the reply will of course contain a “you,” the rule requires that the first person be represented by a neutral, not egophoric, auxiliary.  

- རང་ལེགས་ / རེ་ “Am I mad?”
• ཡོད་་བོད་(་)རེང་། “You are (not) mad!”

A more literal English rendering of this exchange would be:
• — “Are I mad?”
• — “You are(n’t) mad.”

This “anticipatory mood” is a distinctive feature of Tibetan. It appears not only in Standard Tibetan but in all other Tibetan dialects too, though not in the classical literary language.

**QUESTIONS WITH ALTERNATIVES**

(MST 10.3.6) Questions involving alternatives, such as “Would you like this or that?,” are formed by placing the final interrogative particle པ་ (for the future) and བ་ (for the past) after each of the alternative sentences.

• ལ་ཇ་པ་ བ་ ་“Shall I bring you tea or coffee?”

• སྐབས་བཏོན་པ་ བ་ ་“Will you go for a stroll or will you stay in?”

This formulation is sometimes referred to as a consultative construction.

**THE ECHO QUESTION**

(MST 31.3.2) When someone hasn’t heard what the speaker has said, or wishes to make him repeat it, he can use the particle ཡོན་, which raises a question about the preceding word. In a similar situation English would use interrogative pronouns.

• འབྲུ་བུ་བོད་ལ་ ཡོན་ ་“In the tent? ལེོ་བོད་ལ་ — Sure!”

• བོད་པ་བོད་ལ་ ཡོན་ ་“There’s a phone call, come! རྒྱ་ ཡོན་ — "Who? Me?”

**INDIRECT QUESTIONS**
In order to form nominal interrogative clauses, one uses alternative constructions made of positive and negative copulas: རོ་ཏོ་རོ་, འོ་ལོ་རོ་.

And after the main verb, the following auxiliaries:

- Future: \( V + \) རོ་ཏོ་རོ་
- Present: \( V + \) འོ་ལོ་རོ་
- Past: \( V + \) འོ་ལོ་ལོ་. [66]

These constructions are translated by clauses formed with “if” or “whether” or by interrogative pronouns “what,” “who,” etc.

- རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ཞིི་ི་ཆུ་འི་ཞིི་རོ་ རོ་ཏོ་རོ་ “Today we’ll know who the champion is.”
- རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ཞིི་ི་ཆུ་འི་ཞིི་རོ་ འོ་ི་དུ་ “I don’t know if he has a radio.”
- རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ཞིི་ི་ཆུ་འི་ཞིི་རོ་ རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ “Do you know whether they’re coming?”
- རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ཞིི་ི་ཆུ་འི་ཞིི་རོ་ རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ “Ask him if they’ve gone to India.”
- རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ཞིི་ི་ཆུ་འི་ཞིི་རོ་ རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ “I don’t know what’s in the box.”
- རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ཞིི་ི་ཆུ་འི་ཞིི་རོ་ རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ “I don’t know if he is Tibetan.”

**RHETORICAL QUESTIONS**

Rhetorical questions are very commonly used in both Spoken and Literary Tibetan. They entail the speaker asking a question and immediately replying to it himself.

- རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ “If you ask why” = because.
- རོ་ཏོ་ཏོ་ “If you ask when” = when.
“When was it instituted? It was after the regent had renovated the Potala palace” [i.e., It was instituted when the regent had rebuilt the palace]

“What was its aim? It was to commemorate the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama” [i.e., its aim was to commemorate the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama]

**IMPERATIVES**

**THE IMPERATIVE WITH THE VERB ALONE**

(MST 4.3.4) The imperative mood may be formed by means of a verb without an auxiliary. In most cases, as we shall see (MST 9), verbs in the imperative mood are followed by “jussive” particles (see MST 19). Moreover, some verbs have a special form (an inflection) to mark the imperative.

**THE IMPERATIVE SUFFIX**

(MST 13.3.2) This suffix may be attached to any volitional verb, preferably an honorific one, to formulate a request or a polite command.

- གངས་འཛིན་བྱ། “Look.” or “Buy.”
- སྟོན་འཛིན་བྱ། “Close it.”
- བོད་འཛིན་བྱ། “Come.”

**IMPERATIVE MARKERS**

(MST 19.3.1) We have already seen (MST 10) that some volitional verbs have an imperative form.

- ལོག་ > ལོག་ “Listen”
- རོག་ > རོག་ “Get up”
These forms are not used for the negative imperative, which instead takes the present-future form.

- ཐེ་ཏུ། “Don’t listen”
- ཐོ། “Don’t eat”
- ཐི་ཏུ། “Don’t come”

However, there are many verbs that have no special form to denote the imperative. In such cases, the verb may be used by itself.

- བོད་སྐྱེས། “Have some tea”
- ཞེས་ལེན། “Go over there”

In most cases, the imperative (command) and optative (wish) moods are formed by using particles.

The main particles are: ཀོ།, དོ།, ངྲ།, དོ།, ཐེ།, and the construction ཐེ་མ་

THE PARTICLE ཀོ།

(MST 19.3.1) This particle is used to form the first person plural imperative: the exhortative.

- གཉེར་ཁྱ། “Let’s go.”
- ཞེས་ཁྱ། “Let’s sit down.”

Apart from ཀོ།, which is used to form the first person imperative, the other markers all indicate the second person singular or plural imperative, and differ from one another only in terms of nuance or register.

THE EXPRESSION དོ་རྒྱལ་
(MST 19.3.1) This is the most polite form in which to phrase a command or a request. It is used only with honorifics, and takes the present-future (not the imperative) form of the verb.

- བོད་ལྔ་ལ་ "Please go" or "Please come"
- རུགས་ལྔ་ལ་ "Please say"
- རུགས་ལ འཇིག་ "Please stay"
- རུགས་ལ འཇིག་ "Please eat"
- རུགས་ལ འཇིག་ "Please stop" (the car, the dog, etc.)
- རུགས་ལ འཇིག་ "Please ask."

*Note:* There is also the non-honorific version བོད་ལྔ་ལ་.

**THE PARTICLES ་ AND ཆོས**

(MST 19.3.1) These very common particles have exactly the same meaning as the expressions described above, but refer to a lower register. In conversation they are pronounced respectively ་ and ཆོས. They may be used with both honorific and non-honorific forms.

- དེ་ཞིག་ "Say it"
- ཆོས་ "Go"
- ཆོས་ "Go"
- དེ་ཞིག་ "Sit down"
- དེ་ཞིག་ "Sit down"
- མོང་ "Eat"
THE PARTICLE ག

(MST 19.3.1) This particle, too, is very common, and may also be used with both honorific and ordinary forms. It conveys a sense of urgency or danger, or implies a greater degree of coercion.

- པོ་ཤ ང་“Don’t worry!”
- ང་པོ་ཤ ང་“Be careful!”
- ང་པོ་ཤ ང་“Just don’t talk!”

THE PARTICLE ཤ

(MST 19.3.1) This form, which is less common, is also used with both honorific and non-honorific formulations. It conveys immediacy, and implies that the person addressed is hesitant to do what he or she is being told. It may be translated by “Go on!”

- ང་པོ་ཤ ང་“Go on, say it!”
- ང་པོ་ཤ ང་“Come here, will you!”
- ང་པོ་ཤ ང་“Go on, buy it!”

THE EXPRESSION ཤ་ཤ

(MST 19.3.1) We have seen above (MST 8.3) that non-volitional verbs cannot take an imperative. However, the verb may be followed by the expression ཤ་ཤ which means “to see to it that.”
“Don’t forget!” (see to it that you don’t forget)

“Don’t lose the child!”

INTERJECTIONS

EXPRESSIVE PARTICLES

(MST 33.3.2) We have already encountered a number of expressive particles. These are common in both Standard and Literary Tibetan. Some go at the beginning of a sentence and some at the end, after the verb.

Of those that go at the beginning, the commonest are: ལྷུ། “Oh!,” སེམས་ “Well, well,” རེ་ “Rats! Darn! Bugger!,” འོ་ “Ow!,” ཆུ། “Oo, that’s cold!,” གོ་ “Ouch, that’s hot!,” ལྷུ། “What a shame!,” ཉུ ་ “Oh Lordy (lit. O mother)!”

The particles that appear most frequently at the end of a sentence are: རྐྱི་ and བྱ (and their variants རྐྱི།, བྱ།). རྐྱི། often implies that the speaker is not in agreement with the person to whom he’s speaking, or is emphasizing the surprising or threatening nature of the situation in question.

• རྐྱི་རོལོ་ “It’s pretty amazing, huh?”

• རྐྱི་ཁས་ “But you’ll be robbed!”

• རྐྱི་སྤྱོད་ “But there is some danger!”

• རྐྱི་ཐོས་ “Watch out, the horse has escaped!”

རྗེ་ and its variants རྭ, རི་ are subject to the same modifications [67] as the interrogative particles རལེ་, རལ།, རལ་ (see MST 2). Using these implies that that speaker is trying to elicit agreement with what he is saying, and correspond to tag
questions. They may therefore be translated in English by “isn’t that so?” or “don’t you think?” or conveyed by the intonation.

- རིང་ཤིས་ཐུབ་ཏུ་ཐོས་པ་ཨི་བུ། “My God, how your child has grown!”
- རྒྱ་གྲུབ་ཐུབ་ཏུ་ཐོས་པ་ཨི་བུ། “It’s late now, isn’t it?”
- རྒྱ་གྲུབ་ཐུབ་ཏུ་ཐོས་པ་ཨི་བུ། “It was very pleasant! Eh?”
- རྒྱ་གྲུབ་ཐུབ་ཏུ་ཐོས་པ་ཨི་བུ། “I told you, didn’t I?”
- རྒྱ་གྲུབ་ཐུབ་ཏུ་ཐོས་པ་ཨི་བུ། “You study really hard, don’t you?”

---

Notes

[64] Tibetan final interrogative particles may be compared to Burmese /'la/ and Chinese /ma/.

[65] From a historical point of view, the interrogative particles *ngas* and *gas* probably correspond to variants of the particle *pas*. The phonological assimilation rule is explained in Appendix 1, section 1.

[66] The perfective form *V + ལ་* is not used.

[67] However in the allegro speech, they are all pronounced /wa/.

QUESTIONS

**THE FINAL INTERROGATIVE PARTICLES** རྒྱ་, རྒྱ་, རྒྱ་

(MST 2.3.1) Interrogative sentences end with *final interrogative particles* (f.i.p.), the precise form of which is determined by the last letter of the preceding auxiliary. [65]

- after རྒྱ་ > རྒྱ་

- after རྒྱ་ > རྒྱ་
• in all other cases

Final interrogative particles are not used with the copulas and auxiliaries mentioned above when a sentence already contains an interrogative pronoun (such as བོ་“what,” ཉོ་“who,” etc.).

However, with the verb འིན་, a final interrogative particle བོ is sometimes used. If there is no interrogative pronoun in the question, the sentence ends with འིན་, the interrogative form of the verb འིན་; if the question does contain an interrogative pronoun, the sentence ends in འིན་ or འིན་.

• འིན་པ་མོ་བི་མི་མ་“Are you a teacher?”
• བོ་ཨོ་“Who are you?”

THE RULE OF ANTICIPATION

(MST 3.3.4) In the case of interrogative sentences that directly concern the person being addressed (that is, sentences containing second-person pronouns), the questioner must anticipate an answer containing an “I” or a “we” by making advance use of an egophoric auxiliary in the question itself.

• འིན་པ་མོ་བི་མི་མ་“Are you well?”
I’m well/not well.”

This exchange might be rendered literally in English as “Am you well?,” since the anticipated reply, whether positive or negative, is “I am well/ not well.”

The rule of anticipation operates in a similar way, but with a reverse result, when the speaker is asking a question about him– or herself. In this case, since the reply will of course contain a “you,” the rule requires that the first person be represented by a neutral, not egophoric, auxiliary.

“Am I mad?”

“You are (not) mad!”

A more literal English rendering of this exchange would be:

— “Are I mad?”
— “You are(n’t) mad.”

This “anticipatory mood” is a distinctive feature of Tibetan. It appears not only in Standard Tibetan but in all other Tibetan dialects too, though not in the classical literary language.

**QUESTIONS WITH ALTERNATIVES**

(MST 10.3.6) Questions involving alternatives, such as “Would you like this or that?,” are formed by placing the final interrogative particle བ་ (for the future) and བ་ (for the past) after each of the alternative sentences.

“Shall I bring you tea or coffee?”

“Will you go for a stroll or will you stay in?”

This formulation is sometimes referred to as a consultative construction.
(MST 31.3.2) When someone hasn’t heard what the speaker has said, or wishes to make him repeat it, he can use the particle ཡིན་, which raises a question about the preceding word. In a similar situation English would use interrogative pronouns.

- ཡིན་་འཇམ་ “In the tent? བོད་དང་། — Sure!”
- ལུགས་ཞིག་མཐུན་དེ། ལོ་བ་བཏམ་པར། “There’s a phone call, come! ཚུ། སྤེལ། —  ༆་ཏུ། རོལ།  “Who? Me?”

**INDIRECT QUESTIONS**

(MST 32.3.2) In order to form nominal interrogative clauses, one uses alternative constructions made of positive and negative copulas: ཆོས་ཆཱིི།, ཆོས་ཆིར་ཆོས་.

And after the main verb, the following auxiliaries:

- **Future:** V + ཆོས་ཆཱིི།
- **Present:** V + ཆོས་ཆཱིི།
- **Past:** V + ཆོས་ཆཱིི་. [66]

These constructions are translated by clauses formed with “if” or “whether” or by interrogative pronouns “what,” “who,” etc.

- འོ་ེ་དོ་ཞུགས་པ་ཐིང་ཐོང་ཐོང་པོ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ཐེ། “Today we’ll know who the champion is.”
- བོད་བོད་ཐེ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ “I don’t know if he has a radio.”
- བོད་ཐེ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ “Do you know whether they’re coming?”
- འོ་ེ་ཞུགས་པ་ཐིང་ཐོང་ཐོང་པོ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ “Ask him if they’ve gone to India.”
- འོ་ེ་ཞུགས་པ་ཐིང་ཐོང་ཐོང་པོ་ “I don’t know what’s in the box.”
- བོད་བོད་ཐེ་ཐེ་ “I don’t know if he is Tibetan.”
RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

(MST 38.3.2) Rhetorical questions are very commonly used in both Spoken and Literary Tibetan. They entail the speaker asking a question and immediately replying to it himself.

- གཉིས་པ་“If you ask why” = because.
- གཉིས་པ་“If you ask when” = when.

“When was it instituted? It was after the regent had renovated the Potala palace” [i.e., It was instituted when the regent had rebuilt the palace]

“What was its aim? It was to commemorate the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama” [i.e., its aim was to commemorate the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama]

IMPERATIVES

THE IMPERATIVE WITH THE VERB ALONE

(MST 4.3.4) The imperative mood may be formed by means of a verb without an auxiliary. In most cases, as we shall see (MST 9), verbs in the imperative mood are followed by “jussive” particles (see MST 19). Moreover, some verbs have a special form (an inflection) to mark the imperative.

THE IMPERATIVE SUFFIX གཉིས་པ་

(MST 13.3.2) This suffix may be attached to any volitional verb, preferably an honorific one, to formulate a request or a polite command.

- གཉིས་པ་“Look.” or “Buy.”
- གཉིས་པ་“Close it.”
• ལེགས་ཞོན་ལྡན་“Come.”

**IMPERATIVE MARKERS**

(MST 19.3.1) We have already seen (MST 10) that some volitional verbs have an imperative form.

• རེག > རེ་“Listen”

• དབང་> དབང་“Get up”

These forms are not used for the negative imperative, which instead takes the present-future form.

• རེག་དེ།“Don’t listen”

• རེག་ཚོ།“Don’t eat”

• རེག་དེ།“Don’t come”

However, there are many verbs that have no special form to denote the imperative. In such cases, the verb may be used by itself.

• རོགས་ནམ་མཁའ།“Have some tea”

• དབང་བཞེད་“Go over there”

In most cases, the imperative (command) and optative (wish) moods are formed by using particles.

The main particles are: བོད་, དབང་, དབང་, ནོག, སོགས་, and the construction དབང་དབང་.

**THE PARTICLE བོད་**

(MST 19.3.1) This particle is used to form the first person plural imperative: the exhortative.


- གོང་། “Let’s go.”
- སྐྱེབས་ཏེ་ “Let’s sit down.”

Apart from གོང་།, which is used to form the first person imperative, the other markers all indicate the second person singular or plural imperative, and differ from one another only in terms of nuance or register.

**THE EXPRESSION གོང་།**

(MST 19.3.1) This is the most polite form in which to phrase a command or a request. It is used only with honorifics, and takes the present-future (not the imperative) form of the verb.

- གོང་བོད་པ་ དང་ “Please go” or “Please come”
- གོང་བོད་པ་ དང་ “Please say”
- གོང་བོད་པ་ དང་ “Please stay”
- གོང་བོད་པ་ དང་ “Please eat”
- གོང་བོད་པ་ དང་ “Please stop” (the car, the dog, etc.)
- གོང་བོད་པ་ དང་ “Please ask.”

*Note:* There is also the non-honorific version གོང་དུས་.

**THE PARTICLES ཉན་ AND བོད་**

(MST 19.3.1) These very common particles have exactly the same meaning as the expressions described above, but refer to a lower register. In conversation they are pronounced respectively ཉན་ and བོད་. They may be used with both honorific and non-honorific forms.

- ཉན་དུས་ “Say it”
• བོལ་ “Go”
• བོལ་ “Go”
• བུལ་ “Sit down”
• བུལ་ “Sit down”
• སེར་ “Eat”
• པོར་ “Listen”
• བོར་ “Speak”
• དོར་ “Look”

THE PARTICLE ང་ (MST 19.3.1) This particle, too, is very common, and may also be used with both honorific and ordinary forms. It conveys a sense of urgency or danger, or implies a greater degree of coercion.

• ཡོལ་ “Don’t worry!”
• ཡེལ་ “Be careful!”
• འབུལ་ “Just don’t talk!”

THE PARTICLE ་ (MST 19.3.1) This form, which is less common, is also used with both honorific and non-honorific formulations. It conveys immediacy, and implies that the person addressed is hesitant to do what he or she is being told. It may be translated by “Go on!”

• ཡོལ་ “Go on, say it!”
• ཁེང་ལོང་། “Come here, will you!”
• ཉོན་ལོང་། “Go on, buy it!”

THE EXPRESSION གཞི་སོན།

(MST 19.3.1) We have seen above (MST 8.3) that non-volitional verbs cannot take an imperative. However, the verb may be followed by the expression གཞི་སོན། which means “to see to it that.”

• གཞི་སོན་པོ་ལོང་། “Don’t forget!” (see to it that you don’t forget)
• གཞི་སོན་པོ་ལོང་། “Don’t lose the child!”

INTERJECTIONS

EXPRESSIVE PARTICLES

(MST 33.3.2) We have already encountered a number of expressive particles. These are common in both Standard and Literary Tibetan. Some go at the beginning of a sentence and some at the end, after the verb.

Of those that go at the beginning, the commonest are: བྲི་ “Oh!,” བཞི་ “Well, well,” ཞེན་ “Rats! Darn! Bugger!,” བོར་ “Owl!,” རྗེ་ “Oo, that’s cold!,” རྫེ་ “Ouch, that’s hot!,” ལོབ་ “What a shame!,” བོན་ “Oh Lordy (lit. O mother)!”

The particles that appear most frequently at the end of a sentence are: ཀ ༄ and ལ ༄ (and their variants ཀ་, ལ་).

ཀ ༄ often implies that the speaker is not in agreement with the person to whom he’s speaking, or is emphasizing the surprising or threatening nature of the situation in question.

• ཁེང་ལོང་པོ་ལོང་། “It’s pretty amazing, huh?”
“But you’ll be robbed!”

“But there is some danger!”

“Watch out, the horse has escaped!”

་ and its variants ཏ་, ས་ are subject to the same modifications [67] as the interrogative particles ང་, ཁ་, ད་ (see MST 2). Using these implies that that speaker is trying to elicit agreement with what he is saying, and correspond to tag questions. They may therefore be translated in English by “isn’t that so?” or “don’t you think?” or conveyed by the intonation.

“My God, how your child has grown!”

“It’s late now, isn’t it?”

“It was very pleasant! Eh?”

“I told you, didn’t I?”

“You study really hard, don’t you?”

**Notes**

[64] Tibetan final interrogative particles may be compared to Burmese /'la/ and Chinese /ma/.

[65] From a historical point of view, the interrogative particles *ngas* and *gas* probably correspond to variants of the particle *pas*. The phonological assimilation rule is explained in Appendix 1, section 1.

[66] The perfective form *V + ད་+ ཇི་* is not used.

[67] However in the allegro speech, they are all pronounced /wa/.