

Analysis of intransitive-transitive verb pairs in rGyalrong

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This paper provides a morphological analysis of intransitive-transitive verb pairs in rGyalrong (Tibeto-Burman; Sichuan, China).

rGyalrong employs prefixes to derive intransitive/transitive verbs. It prefers causative derivation, but also has anticausative derivation—in the rGyalrong verb list collected along with Haspelmath's list of 31 verb pairs (Haspelmath 1993), we find 38.8% causative, 24.3% anticausative, 20.4% equipollent, 14.3% suppletive and 12.2% labile pairs.

Among the prefixes available to derive intransitive/transitive verbs, *sə-* (causative) and *ŋa-* (anticausative) are significantly productive. Regarding their historical origin, *sə-* originates from a Proto-Tibeto-Burman causative prefix **s-*, while *ŋa-* is grammaticalized from the first person pronoun. They can precede a transitive verb formed with a causative suffix, for example, *kə-nna* ‘to stop’ (intransitive); *ka-sə-nna* ‘to stop (sth.)’ (transitive); *ka-sə-sə-nna* ‘to let (sth.) stop’ (*sə-* + transitive); *kə-ŋa-sə-nna* ‘to be stopped’ (*ŋa-* + transitive).

The function of the causative prefix *sə-* is rather simple: it either adds the causer argument to a verb, or indicates indirect/unintentional action by the agent (causee). In contrast, the prefix *ŋa-* is multifunctional: it is found in reciprocal, reflexive and passive-like forms, e.g., (1). Interestingly, *ŋa-* is absolutely unacceptable with an overt agent, e.g., (2). I conclude that the function of prefix *ŋa-* is detransitivization that abstracts the responsibility of the agent.

- (1) *ʔəjo ʔow-rak ʔej-ŋa-mut.*
3SG 3-liquor PFV.TRNL-DTR-drink
‘His liquor was drunk.’
- (2) *losaŋ ʔow-rak tsherjaŋ=kə {ʔə-mut / *ʔej-ŋa-mut }.*
PSN 3-liquor PSN=ERG {PFV-drink / PFV.TRNL-DTR-drink}
‘Losang's liquor was drunk by Tseryang.’

References:

Haspelmath, Martin (1993) More on the typology of inchoative/causative verb alternations. In: Bernard Comrie and Maria Polinsky (Eds.) Causative and transitivity, 88-120. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.