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The Flow of Eastern Tibetan Colloquial *ʔe* into Middle Tibetan

Izumi Hoshi

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

1 Introduction

1.1 Objectives

Written Tibetan abounds with colloquialisms. A historical study of the Tibetan language that involves reading biographies and history books of various periods provides many examples of colloquialisms. In this paper, I introduce one such study. It is based on the research results of a grammar writing project on middle Tibetan, that worked on over the past four years.¹

In this paper, (1) we will see the emergence of a new prefix *ʔe* to express polar interrogation in 14th-century written Tibetan, and (2) we will examine how and under what kind of sociocultural influence this prefix began to be used in written texts. Finally, (3) we will observe the three usages of this prefix and examine its historical development.

1.2 Periods and texts

In this paper, I followed the periodization by Nishida (1970: 169-175) and mainly used middle Tibetan texts written between the 13th and 16th centuries. Most of the texts are history books and biographies, which provide many examples of colloquial expressions.

I Proto-Tibetan

II Old Tibetan (?–7 c.)

III Middle Old Tibetan (7 c.–9 c.)

(a) Old Church Tibetan

(b) Middle Old Tibetan

IV Late Old Tibetan (9 c.–10 c.)

(a) Classical Tibetan (Canonical Tibetan)

(b) Literary Tibetan (Non-canonical Tibetan)

¹ The research reported in this paper was conducted under the Linguistics Dynamics Science Project (LingDy) at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

• Pt. 1287, Pt. 1283

V Middle Tibetan (10 c.–17 c.)

- 13 c.? *Sba bzhed (BZh)*
- 14 c. *Bu ston chos 'byung (SRD)*, *Rgyal rab gsal ba'i me long (GSM)*
- 15 c. *Mi la ras pa'i rnam mgur (MR)*, *Deb ther sngon po (DTN)*
- 16 c. *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston (KGT)*

VI New Tibetan (17 c.–19 c.)

VII Modern Tibetan (20 c.–)

- 20 c. *Ngos kyi yul dang ngos kyi mi dmangs (DL14)*

2 Emergence of \hat{e} -V in middle Tibetan

In this section, I present an overview of interrogative constructions in middle Tibetan and also show the historical status of the prefix type interrogative in middle Tibetan.

2.1 Two types of polar interrogatives in middle Tibetan

Out of the three interrogatives in Table 1, I examine polar interrogatives. Two types of these exist: suffix and prefix.

Table 1: Interrogatives in middle Tibetan

Polar interrogative	Alternative interrogative	Content interrogative
		Wh V (= 'am)
V1= 'am (NEG-V1)	V1= 'am V2 (= 'am)	
\hat{e} -V (= 'am)		

1. The V='am type is more common and is seen in old, middle, new, and modern Tibetan, including Buddhist sutras. The suffix 'am is also used as a disjunctive in the way that “either A or B” is used in English (e.g., *ra= 'am lug* ‘goat or sheep’).
2. The e -V type cannot be found in Old Tibetan but emerges in middle Tibetan.² However, this type is absent in Buddhist sutras. The prefix \hat{e} is also used as a dubitative in the way that “whether” is used in English (e.g., \hat{e} -*zin lta* ‘see whether you will become independent’).³

2.2 Usage of V='am and \hat{e} -V

Let me present examples of suffix type interrogatives (1a) (2a) and prefix type interrogatives

² Denwood (1999: 248) says that ‘the dubitative ’e, which is found in Classical Tibetan and very occasionally in Preclassical, usually means there “whether”.’

³ Yamaguchi (1998: 493-4) provides additional examples of V= ye. Further, I came across examples such as *'dug=ge*, *byung-nge*, and *gda'=ye*, which might be colloquial forms of V= 'am in some middle Tibetan texts.

(1b) (2b). Both of them are found in the same texts and have almost the same meaning.

- (1) a. *khyed=kyi yul=na sa kham pa yod=dam.*
 2sg=GEN homeland=LOC porcelain.clay exist=DISJ
 ‘Is there porcelain clay in your country?’ (GSM)
- b. *rab tu byung ba da lta ^e-yod.*
 ordained.monk now DUB-exist
 ‘Is there an ordained monk now?’ (GSM)
- (2) a. *bden=nam.*
 be.true=DISJ
 ‘Is it true?’ (DTN)
- b. *^e-bden.*
 DUB-be.true
 ‘Is it true?’ (DTN)

Following are some more examples of the suffix type.

- (3) *srin bu 'di kun bsad=na sdig che='am mi-che*
 worm this all kill=HYP sin big=DISJ NEG-big
 ‘If you kill all these worms, is it sinful or not?’ (BZh)
- (4) *rgyal bu 'di chos=la dga'='am.*
 prince this Dharma=DAT like=DISJ
 ‘Does this prince like Dharma?’ (BZh)
- (5) *khyed mi-shes=sam.*
 2sg NEG-know=DISJ
 ‘Don't you know?’ (SRD)
- (6) *nga=la tshad pa='i nad byung=ba khyod=kyis ma-tshor=ram.*
 1sg=DAT fever=GEN illness occur=NMLZ 2sg=ERG NEG-realize=DISJ
 ‘Haven't you realized that I have a fever?’ (GSM)

Following are examples of the prefix type.

- (7) *khyed rang rig pa can yin=pas thabs ^e-yod.*
 2sg learned.person be=CONJN means DUB-have
 ‘As you are a learned person, do you have any good idea?’ (GSM)

- (8) *mi la shes rab rgyal mtshan=la bu skyes ^e-'dug .*
 PN=DAT son born DUB-aux.v
 ‘(Did you know) a son has been born to Mila Sherab Gyaltshe?’ (MR)
- (9) *sku khams ^e-bde.*
 health DUB-well
 ‘Are you in good health?’ (DTN)

2.3 The emergence of the written form of \hat{e} -V in the 14th century

Table 2 explains the frequency of the two types V= 'am and \hat{e} -V. The most important point here is that the prefix type is a newcomer in the history of written Tibetan; it emerged in written texts from the 14th century onward at the latest. It is small in number, but spreads gradually in the texts.

Table 2: Frequency of V= 'am and \hat{e} -V

	V='am	\hat{e} -V
Pt. 1287 (OT ⁴)	17	0
Pt. 1283 (OT)	16	0
BZh (13 c.?)	22	0
SRD (14 c.)	54	0
GSM (14 c.)	26	2
MR (15 c.)	21	3
DTN (15 c.)	185	10
KGT ⁵ (16 c.)	150	16

3 Discussion

3.1 Sociocultural background of the transition of \hat{e}

We first examine how and under what kind of sociocultural influence this prefix began to be used in written texts.

3.1.1 Polar interrogative in Eastern colloquial Tibetan

As previous studies show, only the suffix type interrogative is used to express polar questions in Western and Central Tibet⁶, while the prefix type interrogative is often used in Eastern Tibet.

\hat{e} -V, which can be traced to \hat{e} -V in written Tibetan, is the most commonly used polar

⁴ Old Tibetan. Pt. 1287 and Pt. 1283 are both Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang.

⁵ I have studied data from p. 279 to p. 864.

⁶ Jin (1958), Kitamura (1977), Koshal (1979), Qu and Tan (1983), Sprigg (2002), etc.

interrogative form in Eastern colloquial Tibetan (in both Kham and Amdo).⁷

- (10) *ho t̪əhi ə-yě.*
 2sg PN DUB-AUX
 ‘Are you Tahi?’ (*Trhindu*⁸, *Kham*)
- (11) *tɛ^ho hjənts^ho ə-jən.*
 2sg PN DUB-AUX
 ‘Are you Yumtsho?’ (*The Chapcha*⁹, *Amdo*)

This type of \hat{e} -V interrogative must have already been used in Kham and Amdo long before the 14th century, because examples of this type can be found in the colloquial portion of texts written in the fourteenth century, as we have seen already.

3.1.2 Why did the written form emerge in the fourteenth century?

I now attempt to explain why the \hat{e} -V interrogative began to be written down in the fourteenth century even though the V=*'am* interrogative, which seems to have been more standard, was widely used. The history of Tibetan Buddhism may explain this phenomenon.

After the collapse of the Tibetan empire in the middle of the 9th century, Buddhism is believed to have declined in Central Tibet and to have flourished in some parts of Eastern Tibet.¹⁰ This situation triggered an exodus of monks from Central to Eastern Tibet. They studied in Eastern Tibet and returned to their homeland to revitalize Buddhism.

Furthermore, during the renaissance of Buddhism in Central Tibet (11 c.--12 c.), influential monks from Eastern Tibet, particularly from Kham, played important roles in the development of Tibetan Buddhism, as shown in Table 3.

Moreover, in the 14th century, monastic universities in Central Tibet seem to have been full of monks from Kham and Amdo. At the time, merchants from Kham seem to have assisted monks in completing the long journey to and from Kham and Lhasa.

⁷ Note that the suffix type interrogative is also used in both Kham and Amdo, although the meaning is different from that of the prefix type.

⁸ The Trhindu dialect is spoken in Trhindu county in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (T. A. P.) in Qinghai. I collected this example myself.

⁹ Chapcha dialect is spoken in Chapcha county in Hainan T. A. P. in Qinghai. This example was cited from Ebihara (2008: 434)

¹⁰ See Deshayes (1997), Gruschke (2004), Davidson (2005), Kapstein (2006), Iuchi (2008) and van Schaik (2011).

Table 3: A historical sketch of Central and Eastern Tibet

7 c.	[1] King Songtsen Gampo annexes a part of Eastern Tibet. [2] A minister of Songtsen Gampo is sent to India to study the art of writing, and he introduces the Tibetan script upon his return.
8 c.	[3] Buddhism becomes the state religion of Tibet.
9 c.	[4] King Relpacen builds 20 teaching temples in Kham and Amdo. [5] King Darma suppresses Buddhism and is assassinated by a Buddhist. [6] The Tibetan empire collapses, and Buddhism declines in Central Tibet. [7] Central Tibetan monks seek refuge in Kham and Amdo
10 c.	[8] Buddhism develops in Kham and Amdo.
11 c.	[9] Monks returns to Central Tibet from Eastern Tibet. [10] Lumey, after studying in Kham, renovates the Samye monastery. [11] Dromton returns to Central Tibet after studying in Kham for 20 years and founds the Kadampa sect. ⁷
12 c.	[12] Influential monks from Kham found Kagyupa's main subsects: Phagmo Drupa, Karma Kagyupa, Drigung Kagyupa, and Yelpa Kagyupa. [13] Karma Kagyupa found two big monasteries in Lhasa and Kham. [14] Wealthy Khampa individuals are sometimes granted noble titles in connection with government service.
13 c.	[15] Central Tibet is under the Sakya regime.
14 c.	[16] Central Tibet is under the Phagmo Drupa (a subsect of Kagyupa) regime. [17] Longchenpa complains that "Sangpu is dominated by students from Kham." ¹¹

Against the above backgrounds, I hypothesize that the \hat{e} interrogative emerged in written Tibetan under the strong influence of Eastern Tibetan dialects. Notably, monks accounted for the authors and readers of these texts.

3.2 Historical development of \hat{e} —the colloquial Tibetan perspective

3.2.1 Three usages of \hat{e} -V in middle and modern colloquial Tibetan

Modern colloquial Tibetan contains constructions that can be traced to the middle Tibetan \hat{e} -V, such as the \bar{e} -V and \bar{a} -V of Lhasa Tibetan and ∂ -V of Kham and Amdo Tibetan. In both modern and middle Tibetan, these constructions have three types of usages: the dubitative, polar interrogative, and negative inference. A study of these usages would be useful in examining the

¹¹ Longchenpa was a major teacher in the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. Sangpu was a big monastic university in Central Tibet. This episode was cited from Van Schaik (2011: 93).

historical development of \hat{e} .

3.2.2 Dubitative usage

Middle Tibetan contains two dubitative constructions: \hat{e} -V and \hat{e} -V *mi*-V; the former is common and the latter is rare.

- (12) *nga yun ring \hat{e} -sdod mi-shes=pas*
 1sg longtime DUB-stay NEG-know=CONJN
 ‘As I don’t know whether I will stay long.’ (MR)
- (13) *\hat{e} -bden ltos=shig*
 DUB-be.true look:IMPR=IMPR
 ‘See whether it is true or not.’ (MR)
- (14) *tshe ’di=r sangs \hat{e} -rgya mi-rgya=yang ston=pa yin=te*
 life this=TRNS become.enlightened.or.not=AP show:IPF=NMLZ AUX=CONJN
 ‘It will show whether you will become enlightened or not in this life.’ (MR)

The dubitative use of \hat{e} -V seems to be predominant in earlier middle Tibetan texts and is rarely found in later ones.

Table 4: Frequency of the interrogative and dubitative

	Interrogative	Dubitative
GSM (14 c.)	2	4
MR (15 c.)	3	27
DNT (15 c.)	10	9
KGT (16 c.)	16	4

In modern colloquial Tibetan, the dubitative seems to be rarely used. I found only two examples of \bar{e} -V and \bar{e} -V *mi*-V in the Lhasa Tibetan folktales¹², and I also found an ∂ -V *m ∂* -V construction in the Trhindu dialect of Kham Tibetan.¹³ However, I could not find such an example in Amdo Tibetan.

- (15) *’oma \hat{t} hiñii ’maa \bar{p} hap \bar{e} -thuu \bar{t} ta=ki \hat{y} oo ’dra.*
 breast those.two downward bring.down DUB-be.able.to look=AUX

¹² *Texts of Tibetan Folktales Vol. I-VII*. Michiyo Hoshi ed., The Toyo Bunko (Oriental Library) 1979-1990.

¹³ In Trhindu dialect, the dubitative meaning can be expressed only with the ∂ -V *m ∂* -V construction.

‘He seems to be seeing whether the two (long) breasts (of the witch) can be brought down (from her shoulders).’ (*Lhasa, Central Tibet*)

- (16) $\hat{n}a\hat{n}i\hat{i}$ *’trhoko* \bar{e} -*yon* *’miyon* $\bar{k}a$ *ca* *’shi-nää* *’yon*.
 2dl friend DUB-become NEG.become talk only.then be.possible
 ‘Only then can we start talking about whether we can be friends or not.’ (*Lhasa, Central Tibet*)
- (17) k^h *o* $t\bar{a}$ *hi* \bar{a} -*re* *m* \bar{a} -*re* *tawä* *hi* *ma-t^hi*.
 3sg PN DUB-AUX NEG-AUX clearly know NEG-AUX
 ‘I didn’t know whether he was Tahi or not.’ (*Trhindu, Kham*)

Note that the extent of the use of the dubitative is more limited in later middle Tibetan and modern colloquial Tibetan. Accordingly, the dubitative may be older than the other usages.

3.2.3 Negative inference usage

To the best of my knowledge, the oldest examples of negative inference are the three found in the 15th-century text. However, more examples can be found in modern Tibetan texts.¹⁴

- (18) *da* *nga=yang* *yul=du* \hat{e} -*sleb*.
 now 1sg=AP homeland=TRNS DUB-reach
 ‘I don’t think I can come back to my home.’ (*DTN*)
- (19) *lung pa* *’di=na* *nga rang=las* *drag=pa* \hat{e} -*yod* *dgongs pa byung*.
 country this=LOC 1sg=ABL superior=NMLZ DUB-AUX idea:hon AUX
 ‘I don’t think there is a better person than me in this country.’ (*DTN*)

The verbal prefix \bar{a} [ə] in Lhasa Tibetan expresses negative inference. Note that \bar{a} is used only with three auxiliary verbs, that is, *’yin*, *’yöö*, and *’yon*, and not with other auxiliary verbs such as *’ree*, *’duu*, *’ñon*, *’chun*, and \bar{s} *on*.

- (20) \bar{s} *ibi* \bar{a} -*yin*.
 measles DUB-AUX
 ‘I’m not sure, but it’s not measles, I think...’
- (21) *’ti* *’nam* \bar{t} *huuki* \bar{a} -*yöö*.
 this bring can DUB-AUX
 ‘I don’t think you can bring this.’

¹⁴ The autobiography of the 14th Dalai Lama contains 10 examples of negative inference *e*-V but only 3 examples of a polar interrogative and no example of a dubitative.

- (22) *ʔhowa ʔthee ʔa-yon.*
 understanding receive DUB-AUX
 ‘I don’t think they will understand me.’

Jin (1958) suggests that Shigatse dialect of Central Tibetan contains this kind of usage. Its usage might have emerged later in Central Tibetan. As the author of the 15th-century text was born in Lhoka, Central Tibet, I infer that this development occurred in Central Tibet at least before the 15th century.

As negative inference (“I don’t think that A”) can be traced to self-questioning (“Is it A? No, I’m afraid not.”), negative inference might have developed from self-questioning.

3.2.4 Idiomatic usage of the polar interrogative in Lhasa Tibetan

Although *ʔa-V* in Lhasa Tibetan is mostly used as a negative inference, the polar interrogative can be used idiomatically to express a high degree of politeness.

- (23) *ʔroo=ci ʔnan=taa ʔshu=ko ʔyöö=pää=ni, ʔcoo*
 help=INDF do:hon=IMPR ask=NMLZ AUX=CONJN=TOP be.able.to.cope
ʔnan ʔa-yon.
 HON DUB-AUX
 ‘I hope you could help me. Would it be possible for you?’

This usage appears to greatly resemble the aforementioned negative inference usage.

3.2.5 Historical development of *ʔe*

We now examine the occurrences of the three types of *ʔe-V* and its related colloquial forms.¹⁵ In Table 5, “x” indicates the existence of an example of the usage. The most frequent usage is shaded, while “(x)” indicates that the usage is rare or limited.

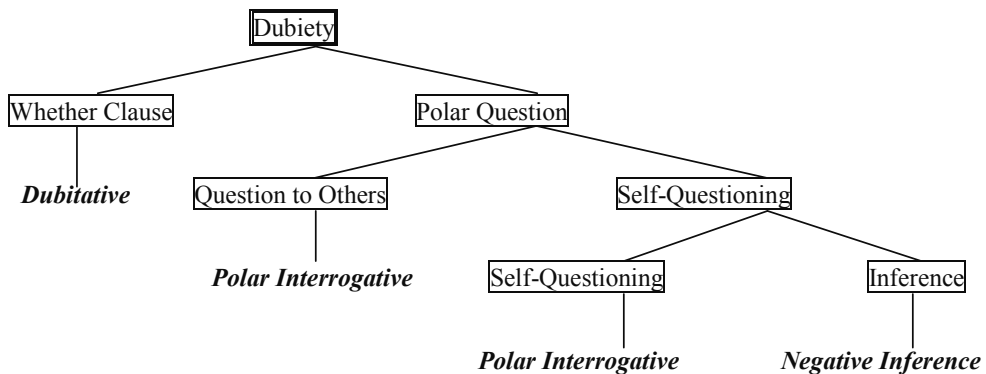
In the previous sections, we have seen that the dubitative usage might be older than the interrogative one and that the negative inference usage seems to be an offshoot of the interrogative one. From this assumption, the core concept of these usages seems to be dubiety. In earlier stages of its development, *ʔe* may have been used to represent something unknown, which resulted in the dubitative and interrogative usages, and the latter usage led to inference as is shown in Figure 1.¹⁶

¹⁵ I put the Lhasa Tibetan prefix *ʔa* as being in the same category as *ʔe*.

¹⁶ Although examining the ancient stage of the development of *ʔe* is beyond the scope of this paper, a noteworthy hypothesis in this regard was advanced by Nagano (1997: 67): “this interrogative particle seems to have originated from a TB negative marker **ta*. The reflex of this older negative marker is found only in folklore and modern

Table 5: Occurrences of the three types of \hat{e} -V

	Dubitative	Interrogative	Inference
GSM (14 c.)	x	x	---
MR (15 c.)	x	x	---
DTN (15 c.)	x	x	x
DL14 (20 c.)	---	x	x
Amdo	---	x	---
Kham	(x)	x	---
Lhasa	(x)	x	x

Figure 1: Correlation between three usages of \hat{e} -V

At the end of this section, let me try to organize the three usages chronologically. Although this is just a tentative hypothesis, I think it is natural to think that

1. the dubitative and interrogative usages were brought into central Tibet by eastern Tibetan people during the renaissance of Buddhism, which is reflected in 14th-century texts.
2. In central Tibet, the polar interrogative usage somehow developed into the negative inference usage, which is reflected in 15th-century texts.

4 Conclusion

1. The ཅེ-V interrogative emerged in written texts from the 14th century onward at the latest.
2. Under the strong influence of Eastern colloquial Tibetan after the renaissance of Buddhism in Central Tibet, ཅེ-V emerged in written texts.
3. The three usages of ཅེ-V are the dubitative, polar interrogative, negative inference. Among them, the oldest seems to be the dubitative and the most recent seems to be negative inference, which seems to have been derived from the interrogative usage.

Abbreviations

ABL	ablative	ERG	ergative	NMLZ	nominalizer
AP	adverbial particle	GEN	genitive	PF	perfect
AUX	auxiliary	HYP	hypothesis	PL	plural
CONJN	conjunction	IMPR	imperative	PN	person name
DAT	dative	INDF	indefinite	Q	question word
DEF	definite	INFER	inference	SG	singular
DIS	disjunctive	IPF	imperfect	TOP	topic
DL	dual	LOC	locative	TRNS	translative
DUB	dubitative	NEG	negative	V	verb

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