

Lu Lin (盧琳), A study of O.Thog Tibetan Grammar—based on the principles of “Radical Construction Grammar” and the theory of “The Creation of Meaning” (俄托藏语专题研究—基于“激进构式语法”及“意义创造论”)

Abstract

This dissertation describes the core constructions of O.Thog Tibetan based on the three major propositional act functions (reference, modification, predication). This is the first study to analyse a Tibetan variety using the Construction Grammar approach, and so it is experimental, and involved a substantial amount of innovation and creativity. The corpus used for analysis is largely natural linguistic data, which was obtained by the author during eight-months of fieldwork in the Honglong O.Thog pastoralist area, a mountainous region with an average altitude of 4,200 meters. So, it is an original empirical usage-based study.

The core linguistic view underpinning the dissertation is the theory of The Creation of Meaning, which was proposed by Randy LaPolla, and the analytical framework used is Radical Construction Grammar (Croft 2001, 2022), informed by linguistic typology. The basic unit of description in this thesis is the construction, defined as a combination of semantic content and information packaging function. Semantic content refers to object, property, and action concepts; while information packaging refers to reference, modification and predication. When describing each construction, a detailed comparison is made with similar concepts in traditional syntax, and an explanation of the reasons for analysing O.thog Tibetan using Construction Grammar is also given. Each chapter describes the constructions for one of the major propositional act functions. The constructions for each function are further subcategorized as prototypical and nonprototypical constructions. The dissertation is divided into six chapters.

Chapter one, the introduction, outlines the socio-historical aspects of the language community and the geographical features of the linguistic area being studied – the Honglong O.Thog pastoralist area, which is in Yajiang County, Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province. Additionally, this chapter describes the linguistic situation and genealogical classification of O.Thog Tibetan, as well as other details related to the collected data. Following that, the key tenets in two approaches to viewing language, “The Creation of Meaning” and “Radical Construction Grammar”, are summarised in this section. This chapter shows that the two theories are compatible with one another, and explains in detail how it is a feasible theoretical framework for documenting O.Thog Tibetan. This section concludes by outlining the chapters to come and the significance of this research.

The second chapter focus on the study of Phonology and Sound Change. It includes the syllable structure, the consonants, vowels, and tone system of O.Thog Tibetan from a synchronic perspective. The section on sound change takes Written Tibetan as a point of reference, summarising the differences in syllable structure, consonant systems and vowel systems between Written Tibetan and O.Thog Tibetan. This section also describes variations in the speech sounds in the flow of speech and other sound changes. Finally, I describe the tonal genesis phenomenon in the O.Thog variety and its types of tone in detail. O.Thog Tibetan belongs to the “partial tone” system, which means it is in the transition stage between an “atonal” and “tonal” language.

The third chapter focuses on Referring Constructions. Firstly, the prototypical referring construction, which is object reference, is introduced. The object concept is divided into three types: the individual object concept, the exclusive object concept, and the contextual object concept based on the semantic content, and how the three semantic content differ in packaging the reference information will be further analysed. Additionally, this section describes constructions with definite, indefinite, and generic reference. Subsequently, two nonprototypical constructions in O.Thog Tibetan, namely, property reference constructions and action reference constructions, are defined and analysed. In particular, this section summarises the information packaging strategies of action reference constructions at the clause level, and “action reference-taking predicates” that can co-occur with action reference constructions. Finally, the information packaging system of the referential construction, such as case marking and information structure, is discussed. It is believed that the ergative marker in O.Thog Tibetan is pragmatically-motivated, and it was also found that the second-person dual contextual reference in O.Thog Tibetan can simultaneously serve the function of topic marker.

The fourth chapter looks at Modifying Constructions. Firstly, this section outlines the main function of property modifying constructions, which is referent sorting. Next, it analyses the main categories of property concepts which serve as the modifier in the property modifying constructions, and their information packaging features is summarised. The chapter then analyses scalar admodifiers in detail. Subsequently, object modifying constructions with the “situating” function are analysed from the perspective of alienable and inalienable semantics. Finally, this section describes the “selecting” function for quantity and measurement constructions, further analysing and breaking it down into sub-categories.

Chapter five describes predication constructions. It starts with the eventive simple predication construction, then details the morphological characteristics and semantic content of action concepts. Aside from that, discusses transitivity and related constructions. This dissertation believes that transitivity is construction-specific phenomenon in O.Thog Tibetan. The chapter later takes eventive complex predication as a unit, expanding the discussion to the series of auxiliary action concepts, tense and aspect, and evidential pragmatic elements that attach to the primary information-bearing unit, to see how they constrain the information packaging features of complex predication constructions in O.Thog. Finally, the chapter gives a cursory overview of nonprototypical predication constructions, namely, object predication, property predication, locative constructions, and possession constructions. This research found that information packaging strategies for object predication and property predication in O.Thog both use the same strategy for information packaging as the equative construction.

The final chapter summarises the findings from the thesis and suggests possible avenues for future research.

Key words: O.Thog Tibetan, AmdoTibetan, The Creation of Meaning, Radical Construction Grammar, Typology