

The converb *-las* in Old Tibetan

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Abstract

In contrast to its description in available grammars and manuals, the converb *-las* in Old Tibetan is used primarily to mark off the following clause as surprising given the background of the preceding clause. The converb *-las* enters into two distinct syntactic constructions: after a reduplicated verb it indicates the interruption of a continuous event; and in a three-clause pattern with the converb *-kyis*, *-las* introduces a surprise or contrast in the second clause, but *-kyis* in the third clause returns the sentiment to that of the first clause. Although the examples which demonstrate the use of *-las* are drawn from Old Tibetan texts, this use continues in later texts.

Introduction

The use of the converb *-las* is one of many areas of Tibetan grammar to have received relatively little attention.¹ The grammars of Stephen Beyer (1992) and Philip Denwood (1999) appear to omit the converb *-las* altogether. Michael Hahn (1996: 109) writes that “*las* kann Vorzeitigkeit und Gleichzeitigkeit ausdrücken” and rarely also has “Eine kausale Verwendung”. Peter Schwieger (2006: 316–17) mentions the same two uses. Kesang Gyurme also describes “*las* en fonction de connecteur temporal” (1992: 50) but in addition describes “*las* en fonction de connecteur adversatif” (1992: 49) for cases which can generally be translated as “except for”. None of these descriptions match the most frequently found use of the converb *-las* in Old Tibetan, which is to mark off the following clause as surprising given the background of the preceding clause.

The meaning of *-las* in Old Tibetan

A survey of the various contexts in which the converb *-las* appears in Old Tibetan narrative texts reveals that the element shared by all instances of its use is that the clause following *-las* is somehow unexpected given the information in the preceding clause.

1 I follow the Mongolist tradition in calling a “converb” any non-finite post verbal morpheme which can also occur as a case marker. I would like to thank Brandon Dotson for sharing with me his unpublished translations of *Old Tibetan Annals* and *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. Any errors of translation are of course my own.

Change of direction

In the *Old Tibetan Annals* (OTA) the most frequent occurrence of the converb *-las* is between a phrase reporting that a person, or the court, went somewhere and another phrase which mentions a change to a different location.

(57) *yos.buḥi. lo.la. bab.ste / btsan.po. Ṃen.kar.na. bźugs.śiṅ / dbyar. ḥdun: Sreḥu. gźug.du: ḥdus.pa.las /* (58) *Lha.gśegs.nas / Khra.snar. ḥphoste /* (OTA)

[691] The year of the hare. The emperor stayed at Ṃen-kar and in the summer the council convened at Sreḥu-gźug, but from Lha-gśegs it moved to Khra-sna.

(112) *dgun. btsan.po: Brag.mar.na. bźugs.pa.las / po.braṅ. ḥphoste /* (OTA)

[707] In the winter the emperor stayed at Brag-mar, but the court moved.

(168) *bya. gagī. lo.la / btsan.po. dbyard: Duṅs.gyī. Stag.tsal.na. bźugs.pa.las / Rnaṅ.po: Ṃur.myīg.du. ḥphos.śiṅ /* (OTA)

[721] The year of the bird. In the summer the emperor stayed in Stag-tsal which is in Duṅs, and then moved to Ṃur-myig in Rnaṅ-po.

(197) *ḥbrugī. lo.la / btsan.po: dbyard: Mtsho.bgo: Bol.gaṅs.na. bźugs.pa.las / slar: Bod. yul.du. gśegste /* (OTA)

[728] The year of the dragon. In the summer the emperor stayed at Bol-gaṅs in Mtsho-bgo, but later returned to the land of Tibet.

(245) *spreḥu: lo.la / btsan.po: dbyard. byaṅ. roldu. gśegs.pa.las: slar: ḥkhorte /* (OTA)

[744] The year of the monkey. The emperor went north and then returned.

Death

One of the examples of a change in destination in the *Old Tibetan Annals* is metaphorical; in fact what is described is the emperor's unexpected death.

(97) *dgun. btsan.pho: chab.sriḍ.la: Mywa.la. gśegs.pa.las / dguṅ.du. gśegs /* (OTA)

[704] In the winter the emperor went to govern the Mywa, but went to heaven.

The converb *-las* is used to contrast an action with the sudden death of one of its participants in this fashion on several other occasions both in the *Old Tibetan Annals* and in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (OTC).

(25) *blon. Skyes.bzaṅ. Rgyal.khoṅ. blon. cheḥi. (26) ḥog: dpon. ḥtshal: ḥtshal.ba:las: guṃ: /* (OTA)

[757] Minister Skyes-bzaṅ Rgyal-khoṅ was being proclaimed deputy to the prime minister, but he died.

(229) *yos:buñi. lo.la / btsan.po: dbyard. chab.sriid.la: Beg.du: gśegste / sras. Lhas:bon: Dron.na. bźugs / bźugs.pa.las: (230) noñs / (OTA)*

[739] The year of the hare. In the summer the emperor went on a political campaign to Beg. The son, Lhas-bon, was residing in Dron, but he died.

(154) *huñ-gĩ hog-du Dbañs Dbyi-tshab-kyis // źaň-po (155) Mnon Bzaň-to-re Sron / blo-la btags-te // mnañ mtho bchad-pa-las // Bzaň-to-re śi-nas // (OTC)*

After that, Dbañs Dbyi-tshab convinced his maternal uncle, Mnon Bzaň-to-re Sron, but, after swearing at the oath cairn, Bzaň-to-re died.

(256) *sna-na na-hĩ yab-kyi riň-la // Hbriň-tho-re Sbuň brtsan-/daň (257) // Phaňs-to-re Dbyi-tshab-daň khyed gñis // chab pha rol tshu rol-gyi // guň blon řtshol chig-par dgod / (258) dgod-pa-las / Hbriň-to-re Sbuň-brtsan nĩ śi // (OTC)*

Previously, during the reign of my father, you two, Hbriň-to-re Sbuň-brtsan and Phaňs-to-re Dbyi-tshab, were being established as ministers of the near and far sides of the river, but Hbriň-to-re Sbuň-brtsan died.

Revolt

Apart from change of destination and sudden death, the most conspicuous occurrence of the converb *-las* is just before mentioning an act of treachery, treason or revolt.

(118) *lugĩ. lo.la btsan.po: dbyard. Bal:po.na. bźugs.śiň / řdun.ma. Drañi. Gro.pur. řdus.pa.las / Mgar. Btsan.ñen. (119) Guň.rton. glo.ba. riňste: (OTA)*
[695] The year of the sheep. In the summer the emperor resided at Bal-po. The council convened at Gro-pu in Dra, and Mgar Btsan-ñen Guň-rton was disloyal.

(203) *huñ-gĩ rjes-la Dags-po řbaňs-su mnañ-ba-las log-go // (OTC)*
After that, Dags-po, which had been subjugated, revolted.

(347) *Řjaň Mywa-ři rgyal-po lta źig Rgya-la lta lta-ba-las // Rgya rjes (348) dgrar blaňste // (OTC)*

Although the king of Řjaň (Nanzhao 南詔) Mywa had looked constantly to China, the Chinese lord took him as an enemy.

(392) *huñ-gĩ hog-du (393) Mywa dkar-po řbaňs-su mnañ-ba-las / glo-ba riňs-pa-ři tše / dmag-phon Hbro Ram-śags // (394) bkañ stsal-nas / Brag-rtser nol thabs bkye-ba-ři tše // Řjaň maň-po bkum-nas // (OTC)*

Later, at the time when the white Mywa became disloyal despite having been subjects [of the emperor], Hbro Ram-śags was proclaimed general, and at the time as a great battle was waged at Brag-rtse, many Řjaň (Nanzhao) were killed.

(1) *btsan-pho Khrĩ Lde-gtsug-rtsan-gyĩ (2) riň-lař // (3) // Ńan-lam Klu-khoň-gyis // (4) glo-ba ñe-baři rje blas byas-pa // (5) Hbal*

Ldoñ-tsab-dañ / Lan Myes-zigs / (6) blon-po chen-pho (7) byed byed-pa-las / glo-ba riñs-nas // (8) btsan-pho yab Khri Lde- / gtsug-rtsan-gyi (9) sku-la dard-te / (10) dguñ-du gśeḡs-so // (Žol, south)
 During the reign of emperor Khri Lde-gtsug-rtsan, Nan-lam Klu-khoñ carried out his loyal duties, but Hbal Ldoñ-tsab and Lan Myes-zigs, though acting as prime ministers, became disloyal and did harm to the body of the emperor, the father, Khri lde-gtsug-rtsan, and he departed to heaven.

Frustrated hopes

A number of the remaining examples involve the expression of a hope or plan of some kind in the first clause, followed by a second clause in which the hope is disappointed or the plan frustrated.

(42) *blon. Khri.ħbriñ.gyiš / « Dru.gu: yul.du: drañ. » źes: bgyi (43) bgyi. ba.las / phyi. Dalte / (OTA)*

[686] Minister Khri-ħbriñ kept saying, “let us lead a military campaign to Turkestan”, but this was postponed.

(9) *Lo.ñam. rta.rdzis. kyañ. « myi. phod. » (10) ces. gsol.pa.las. ma. gnañ. ste (OTC)*

Lo-ñam also said, “[I will] not match [you]”, but [emperor Dri-gum] did not allow [it].

(68) *de-ħi hog-du Mthon-myi Ĥbriñ/-po-rgyal (69) Btsan-nus byas-te // dkuħ ched-po byas-nas // kho-naħi sriñ-mo Mthon-myi Za-yar-steñ / dug bskur/-te (70) btañ-ba-las // mo-na dug Ĥthuñs-nas // Btsan-nu bkum-ba lagso // (OTC)*
 After him, Mthon-myi Ĥbriñ-po-rgyal Btsan-nu served. Making a great plot (*dkuħ ched-po*), he entrusted his own sister, Lady Thon-myī Za-yar-steñ, with poison. He sent her off, but she herself drank the poison [unknowingly], and Btsan-nu was put to death.

(229) *ħuñ-nas btsan-po-ħi (230) thugs-la dgoñs-pa // blon-po Lho-rñeḡs gchig-giš lan blan-bar thugs re-ba-las / sus kyañ ma (231) blan-to // (OTC)*
 Then the emperor thought in his mind that he hoped that one of the Lho-rñeḡs ministers would make a reply, but no one replied.

(20) *bkaħ (21) drin ĥos par sbyiñ-bar dgoñs-pa-las // ban-de ñid rjes Ĥbañ s-kyi (22) lugs-dañ / dge-sloñ-gi tshul ĥdzin-ciñ / bka-drñ myi nod-par gsol-gyis (23) kyañ / źo-śaħi lan / bka-drñ sbyin-paħi chos yin-bas // ñaħi / bkas / (Žwa-baħi, west)*

I intended to bestow my favour in a suitable manner, but the monk himself, adhering to the custom of a follower and subject and the proper way of a bhikṣu, begged not to receive my favour. But despite this, because recompense for a contribution is the rule in bestowing favour; therefore by my command:

(6) *źo śaħi rkyen bźiñ (7) bkaħ-drñ ĥos-pa tsam-du gnañ-ba-las / ban-de ñid-kyis (8) / bkaħ-drñ myi nod-par gsol-nas // (Žwa-baħi, East)*

Although [I] granted favour to the appropriate degree in keeping with the circumstances of his contribution, the monk himself begged not to receive [my] favour.

(27) *Keñ-luñ-gĩ lo-[la]* (28) *[Ki]m-śeñ koñ-co // btsan-poñi khab-du blañ s-na // dbon žañ-du gyur-te* (29) *dgyes-pa-las // bar ḡgaḡ phan tshun-gyĩ soñi blon-pos gnod-pa dag rñul-gyis kyañ // gñen-baḡi [ch]ab gañ-du bya-ba //* (Treaty of 821–822, east)

In the year of Jinglong (景龍 710), Jincheng Gongzhu (金成公主) was taken to the court of the emperor [the emperors of China and Tibet], became uncle and nephew and were happy. But from time to time ministers of the respective borders (*so*) were bent on (*rñul*) mischief. Despite that they acted in accordance with the true spirit of their intimate relationship.

In the next example of a failed plan, understanding that the converb *-las* has the contrastive meaning “but” or “although” proves to be key in correctly understanding the passage. Nag-re-khyuñ, the son of Khyuñ-po Spuñ-sad Zu-tse, appears before the emperor with the severed head of his father, asking that the emperor excuse his father’s reported disloyalty and leave the family estates intact.

(324) « *bdagĩ pha rgas-kyi / (325) la gar // btsan-po-ñi ža sñar glo-ba rñ s-nas // tshams bsdal-bar chad-paḡ // Mgar Yul-zuñ-la ḡthol-bar bgyis-pa-las / (326) Yul-zuñ-gis kyañ tshor-te / Yul-zuñ ni slar mchis // bdagis pha bkum-nas // mgo bchad-de mchis-na // srid myi brlag (327) par jĩ gnañ » žes gsold-to //* (OTC)

“In my father’s old age he became disloyal to the presence of the emperor, and becoming frightened, he was going to make a confession of this to Mgar Yul-zuñ, but Yul-zuñ indeed perceived this, and Yul-zuñ returned. I killed my father, and cut off his head. This being so, can it be granted that [my] realm (*srid*) not be lost?”

In isolation the phrase *Mgar Yul-zuñ-la ḡthol-bar bgyis* would appear to mean “he made a confession to Mgar Yul-zuñ”, but the presence of the converb *-las* and the fact that Mgar reported the treachery of Khyuñ-po Spuñ-sad Zu-tse to the emperor both indicate that Khyuñ-po Spuñ-sad Zu-tse did not actually succeed in making his confession to Mgar yul-zuñ. The past stem *bgyis* ‘made’ is in this case used to show a failed attempt.

This use of the past stem is discussed by Zeisler (2001: 175–7) who cites an example of a past stem showing failed attempt from an earlier part of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*.

(17) *btsan-po Dri-gum Lde-bla* (18) *Guñ-rgyal-gyis gnam-du drañs-na / Lo-ñam-gyis mchan-nas spreḡu pyuñ-bas Lde-bla Guñ-rgyal ni Ti-tse gañs* (19) *rum-du ḡphañste gśegs-so //* (OTC)

When Lde-bla Guñ-rgyal tried to draw emperor Dri-gum into heaven Lo-ñam took a monkey from his armpit and Lde-bla Guñ-rgyal departed, cast into the glacial womb of Mount Kailash.

In a more recent publication Zeisler reiterates this example and adds various parallel examples from classical Tibetan texts and modern Tibetan languages, along with six closely parallel examples from the Old Tibetan version of the *Rāmāyana* (Zeisler 2004: 408–16). I provide one of those six here.²

(30) *lha-ñi bu-rnams yi chad-de / (31) Ma-ha-de-ba-ñi dños-grub sgrubs-so // Ma-ha-de-bas kyañ sems-kyi rtog-pa ñan-par / thugsu chud-de / gśe-gs-su (32) ma gñañ // (Rāma A l. 30–32)*

The sons of the gods despairing tried to realize the *siddhi* of Mahadeva, but even Mahadeva understood that the intention of their minds was evil and did not deign to come.

Pleasant surprises

The examples of the converb *-las* in Old Tibetan discussed so far make clear that this converb introduces an unexpected change. Most examples, such as death, revolt or disappointment are unwelcome changes. However, in some examples the clause following *-las* expresses a pleasant surprise or a stroke of luck.

(341) *Rgya-ñi nor mañ-po stod pyogs-su ḥdon-pa rnams // Kwa-cu-na (342) tshogs byas-pa-las // thams-chad Bod-kyis phab-ste bzes-pas // blar yañ dkor mañ-po brñes // (OTC)*

Many Chinese riches, taken to the upper regions, were gathered in Guazhou (瓜州), but all of this was sacked by Tibet and taken, and again many riches were acquired.

(521) *de-nas Rgya-ñi dmag // Weñ-ker-zañ-śes bdaḥste byuñ-ba-las // Bod-kyi dmag-pon / blon Khri-ḥbrñ-gis / dgra thabs / [---] (522)-dañ g.yag ltar byas-nas // go-bar-du g.yul sprad-de // Rgya mañ-po bthuiñ-na (OTC)*

Then Weñ-ker-zañ-śes convoked the Chinese army, and they came, but the Tibetan general, Minister Khri-ḥbrñ, fought and, acting in the manner of a yak, he met them in battle and slew many Chinese.

(11) *btsan-pho sras Khrī-sroñ-lde-brtsan-gyi (12) sku-la ni dard-du ñe // Bod (13) mgo nag-poḥi srid ñi ḥkhrug-du (14) byed-pa-las / Klu-khoñ-gis / Ḥbal-dañ / (15) Lañ glo-ba riñs-paḥi gtan gtsigs // btsan-pho sras Khrī-sroñ-lde-brtsan-gyi (17) sñan-du gsold-nas (18) Ḥbal-dañ / Lañ glo-ba riñs (19) / bden-par gyurd-te/ khoñ-ta ñi (20) bkyon phab-ste // Klu-khoñ glo-ba ñeḥo (Žol, South)*

[Ḥbal Ldoñ-tsab and Lañ Myes-zigs] came close to harming the body of the emperor, the son, Khri-sroñ-lde-brtsan. They put the polity of black-headed Tibetans into strife, but Klu-khoñ offered the reports of Ḥbal and Lañ's disloyalty to the ears of the emperor, the son, Khri Sroñ-lde-brtsan. Then Ḥbal and Lañ became truly disloyal and they were disgraced. Klu-khoñ was loyal.

2 I follow de Jong's (1989) text and not that cited in Zeisler (2004).

(12) // *btsan-po lha sras Khrī-sroñ-lde-brtsan-gyī riñ-la* // *Kar-poḥiḥ gtsigs gnañ-ba-las* (13) *lha sras Lde-sroñ-gi sku riñ-la* // *gtsigs sna ma bas bskyed-par* // *bkaḥis / gnañ-baḥis / (Rkoñ-po)*

Although the decree of Kar-po was granted in the time of the divine son, the emperor, Khrī-sroñ-lde-brtsan, in the time of the divine son Lde-sroñ it was granted by royal command that the decree be made more extensive than previously.

Other surprises

The unifying semantic feature that all of the examples share is an element of surprise, an unexpected contrast. Most of the remaining examples of the converb *-las* in Old Tibetan are consistent with this meaning and can be translated as “but” or “although”.

(93) *de-ḥi hog-du Khyuñ-po Spuñ-sad Zu-tses* / (94) *byas-pa-las* // *Ḥo-ma-lde-Lod-btsan-dañ regs ma mjal-nas* // *mkhar Khri-boms-su mchīs-te* // (OTC)

After him, Khyuñ-po Spuñ-sad Zu-tse served but, disagreeing (*regs ma mjal*) with Ḥo-ma-lde Lod-btsan, he went to the stronghold of Khri-boms.

(56) *sñon Myaṅ Dbaḥs sñiñ ñe-ziñ zo-śa phul-bar ḥdra-ba-las* // *dbaḥs-kyi zla-dañ sbyar-na* / (57) *Myaṅ bkaḥ-drin chuñs-pa ḥdra-nas* // (Žwa-baḥi, West)

Formerly, while the Myaṅ and the Dbaḥs were similar in having been loyal and having made contributions, yet, if compared with the corresponding case of the Dbaḥs, the favour (shown) the Myaṅ appears to have decreased.

(8) *gtsiḡs* (9) *ran-par dpags-pa-las kyaṅ phri-ziñ smad-pa zo* (10) *śaḥi rkyen-tu ma bab-ste* / *bka-drin chuñs sñis pham-bar* (11) *gyurd* / (Žwa-baḥi, east)

Although the decree was appropriately proportioned, it has diminished and become reduced, falling short of the circumstances of his contribution; [my] favour has become small and wanting.

In the following example the converb *-las* shows that people did not expect that Khyuñ-po Spuñ-sad Zu-tse's supposition would turn out to be correct and were surprised that it did. In English this instance is not very easily translated by “but” or “although”; however the context of the Tibetan remains one of contrast. The converb *-las* has the same meaning in this example as it does elsewhere.

(98) *bya pyir ḥphur-ba* (99) *yañ bgrañs-pa-las* // *bya chig ma tshañ-na* // « *khras bsad-pa ḥdraḥs ltos !* » *śes mchī-nas* // *myi* (100) *yoñs-kyis bltas-pa-las* // *bya chig khras bkum-ste* // (OTC)

When the pigeons flew back and there was one bird missing from his count, [Khyuñ-po Spuñ-sad Zu-tse] said, “Go and see if a hawk killed one”. And everyone looked and [discovered] that a bird had been killed by a hawk.

In the next example the converb *-las* contrasts a potential crime with the surprising leniency with which it will be dealt.

(24) *bkaḥ gyod-gyī* (25) *tshigs cī-la bab-pa-las* // *bkaḥ gyod* (26) *na gcīg-gis smad-cīñ bskyuñ-bar* (27) *gnañ-ño* // (Zol, north)

Although he should fall to any sentence of judgement, it is granted that in that judgement [the punishment] should be lowered and reduced by one.

Further along in the list of royal beneficences awarded, in the same inscription an example of the converb *-las* occurs where the contrast is not immediately obvious.

(47) *Ñan-lam Gsas-slebs-gyi* (48) *bu tsha rgyud ḥpheld / nam źar gyañ sde sku* (49) *sruñs-su gnañ-ba-las / sde cha gudu myī spoḥ myi* (50) *bsgyur-bar gnañ-ño* // (Zol, north)

When the son or descendant of Ñan-lam Gsas-slebs has been permanently granted as district body guard, it is granted that he shall not be moved or transferred to an inferior district.

If someone is granted a position permanently it is not surprising that he would not be removed from it. However, given how frequently *-las* carries a contrastive meaning in Old Tibetan, it is best to understand *-las* as presenting the following information as a surprise, even if it is not so surprising objectively. The implication is that the emperor normally reserves the right to restation his officials even if they have been permanently granted their positions in principle. However, in this case the emperor publicly waives the right to recall his officers if they are from among the descendants of Ñan-lam Gsas-slebs. The surprise lies not with a contrast between a permanent position and a lack of redeployment, but rather with the customary rights of the emperor and his stunning act of generosity.

The converb *-las* in Old Tibetan contracts

So far the explanation of the meaning of *-las* has been based on examples from a corpus of narrative texts including the *Old Tibetan Annals*, the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, and the imperial inscriptions. The test of this explanation is whether it describes equally well examples from a corpus independent of these texts. The meaning of “but” or “although” for *-las* fits very well with the use of the converb *-las* in the Old Tibetan contracts collected by Tsuguhito Takeuchi (1995). In some cases Takeuchi has already translated the relevant passages in a way consistent with this interpretation of *-las*.

(1) *ḥbrug-gi loḥi dpyid / Stoñ-sar-gyi śog-mkhan Śaṅ he-ḥdos / blon Rgyal-zigs-la śog śog yug riñs yug ñis brgyaḥ zig chags-pa-las / ḥjal-du ma mchis-te/* (Contract 13 recto)

In the spring of the dragon year, Śaṅ he-ḥdo, a paper maker (*śog-mkhan*) in the Stoñ-sar [thousand]-district, borrowed two hundred bolts of

long-bolt (*yug riñs*) paper from *blon* Rgyal-zigs; but [the loan] has not been repaid. (Takeuchi 1995: 180)³

(2) *slar ḥbul baḥi dus ḥbrug-gi loḥi dbyar sla ḥbriñ-po tshes lña-la ḥbul-bar* (3) *dam byis-pa-las / kho-tas gya-gyu-dañ / bgyis-nas / ma phul* (Contract 13 recto)

As for the time of repayment, it is promised that the payment should be made on the fifth of the middle summer month of the dragon year; but the borrower conspired and did not repay. (Takeuchi 1995: 180)

In four other cases Takeuchi's translation does not reflect the contrast indicated by *las*. However, translating *-las* as “but” or “although” improves the coherence of the translation and is in all cases contextually relevant.

Example 1

(1) *stagḥ loḥi dgun // Se-toñ-paḥi s[d]e Skyo yañ-legs-las // Cañ ban-de leñ-hyen gyis // rta rgod-ma mchig mjald-pa-las // rta ḥ[dī]* (2) *slar // Yañ-legs-gyis g.yar-te ḥtshald-nas //* (Contract 17 recto)

In the winter of the tiger year, from Skyo yañ-legs in the Se-toñ-pa [thousand]-district, priest Cañ leñ-hyen bought a female horse; afterwards, Yañ-legs asked to borrow this horse. (Takeuchi 1995: 194)

If a person buys a horse from a man it is somewhat surprising for the latter to ask immediately for the horse back. I would venture translating the sentence:

In the winter of the tiger year, the bhikṣu Cañ leñ-hyen bought a mare from Skyo yañ-legs in the district of Se-toñ-pa, but Yañ-legs asked to borrow this horse [back].

Example 2

(1) */:/ Rgod sar-gyi sde / Cañ ka-dzoḥ tshan / Cañ kun-tses / stsañ mñan rñiñ Lo-byi-brtsan-gyi gñer* (2) *rñiñ-gi stsañ-las gro khal phye-dañ gñis-dañ bre bži chags-pa-las // phagḥ loḥi ston ḥbul* (3) *bar rtse-rjes gnañste // dkar-chag spos-pa-las // phagḥ loḥi dpyid sla ḥbriñ-poḥi gno-laḥ* (4) *mḥhan-po Thub-brtan-la dmag dpon-gis stsañ žig gnañ-baḥi phyag-rgya mchis žes mchiste /* (5) *gñer-pa Dar rgyal-ma-dañ Tre mye-slebs lastsogs-pas bdaḥste* (Contract 33 recto)

(1–2) Cañ kun-tse in the unit (*tshan*) of Cañ ka-dzo in the Rgod-sar [thousand]-district borrowed one-and-a-half *khal* and four *bre* of wheat from the grain levied last year (lit. previously) by Lo byi-brtsan, the former (lit. old) grain official. (2–3) It was decided by the *rtse-rje* that [the wheat]

3 In quotations from Takeuchi I have modified the transcription system to agree with that employed here.

should be repaid in the autumn of the boar year; the register was accordingly altered. (3–5) Afterwards, the levy officials (*gñer-pa*) Dar rgyal-ma, Tre mye-slebs, and so on, collected [the loaned wheat] back, saying “There came a dispatch (*phyag-rgya*) stating that the general is granting (i.e. donating) wheat to *mkhan-po* Thub-brtan in the middle spring month of the boar year”. (Takeuchi 1995: 257–8)

This passage involves two surprises which Takeuchi’s translation fails to bring out. First, Cañ kun-tse would have been expected to pay back the grain before the autumn of the boar year. It is only the intervention of the *rtse-rje* that allows him to repay the debt in that year. Second, once the registry is changed to reflect the new arrangement, circumstances would have been expected to proceed in accordance with the amended registry. It is only the intervention of levy officials which necessitates the grain to be returned sooner than expected. The following translation of mine captures these two surprises, indicated grammatically with *-las*:

(1–2) Cañ kun-tse in the unit (*tshan*) of Cañ ka-dzo in the Rgod-sar district borrowed one-and-a-half *khal* and four *bre* of wheat from the grain levied the previous year by Lo byi-brtsan, the former grain official, but (2–3) it was decided by the *rtse-rje* that [the wheat] should be repaid in the autumn of the boar year; the register was accordingly altered. However, (3–5) the levy officials (*gñer-pa*) including Dar rgyal-ma and Tre mye-slebs collected [the loaned wheat] back, saying “There came a dispatch (*phyag-rgya*) stating that the general is donating wheat to *mkhan-po* Thub-brtan in the middle spring month of the boar year”.

Example 3

(2) // *Kog-hi[n] glas-paḥi rin-daḥ / źag graḥs-gyi myi bla-las* (3) [*-i?*] *sby [i]n-bar bgyis-pa-las // thog-ma sla-ba gchig ni / gla yaḥ thaḥ bźin-du stsal-pa lags // sla-ba gñis* (4) [*gsum?*] *nĩ / dgun sla tha [cuḥs] [...]* *tshun chad / le lo bgyis-te ma[h] tshald /* (Contract 37)

It is decided that the wage of hiring [Kog-hin] and [...] the work for the number of days [should be] granted. (3) Then, for the first one month, the wage was paid in accordance with the rate. (3–4) [But] for the second month [on and after?], [the employer] neglected and did not pay [the wage] up through [...] the last winter month. (Takeuchi 1995: 268–9)

Takeuchi places the “but” in his translation based on the context, but the grammar places the contrast immediately after the statement of agreement. In English one might capture this by translating:

Although it was decided that the wage of hiring [Kog-hin] and [...] the work for the number of days [should be] granted, (3) and for the first one month, the wage was paid in accordance with the rate, (3–4) for the second month [on and after?], [the employer] neglected and did not pay [the wage] up through [...] the last winter month.

Example 4

(1) *phagi lohi dpyid sla hbrin-po-la / Thoñ-kyab Se-toñ-paḥi sde / Hkal-rgyaḥ-bzañ teḥu-teḥu-gyi rkyah-ziñ / Pog-peḥu [yu]* (2) *b[a?]ḥ phu-reñ-la mchis-pa-las / teḥu-teḥu rmoñ-pa glañ-bu-dañ lag spyal ma mchis-pa-dañ // dge-sloñ Cañ-leñ-hyen spun-la [tha?]* (3) *zlaḥ-bar bgyis-ste* (Contract 55 A)

(1) In the middle spring month of the boar year, (1–2) the crop field of Hkal-rgyaḥ-bzañ teḥu-teḥu in the [thousand]-district of the Thoñ-kyab Se-toñ-pa is at Pog-peḥu yu-ba phu-reñ; (2–3) it is decided that Teḥu-teḥu, without a bullock for ploughing and tools, will collaborate with (*tha-zla bar?*) priest Cañ leñ-hyen [and his] brother. (Takeuchi 1995: 310–11)

The underlying assumption present in this example which allows for the contrast is that if someone owns a field he will have the facilities to service it. A translation reflecting this assumption might be

Although the crop field of Hkal-rgyaḥ-bzañ teḥu-teḥu ... is at Pog-peḥu yu-ba phu-reñ; (2–3) Teḥu-teḥu being without a bullock for ploughing and tools, it is agreed that the priest Cañ leñ-hyen [and his] brother will collaborate with him [in the field's cultivation].

Syntactic constructions involving the converb *-las*

Now that the semantics of the converb *-las* in Old Tibetan has been determined it is worth considering whether this improved understanding of the converb can facilitate the understanding of larger syntactic constructions in which the converb regularly occurs. In the examples surveyed in this paper the converb *-las* appears recurrently in two syntactic constructions: after a reduplicated verb, and in a three-clause construction with the converb *-kyis*.

The converb *-las* after a reduplicated verb

A large number of the examples of the converb *-las* found in Old Tibetan occur suffixed to a reduplicated verb.

(42) *blon. Khri.ḥbriñ.gyis/ « Dru.gu: yul.du: drañ. » zes: bgyi* (43) *bgyi. ba.las/ phyi. dalte/ (OTA)*

[686] Minister Khri-ḥbriñ kept saying, “let us lead a military campaign to Turkestan”, but this was postponed.

(229) *yos:buḥi. lo.la/ btsan.po: dbyard. chab.sriḍ.la: Beg.du: gśegste / sras. Lhas:bon: Dron.na. bźugs / bźugs.pa.las: (230) noñs / (OTA)*

[739] The year of the hare. In the summer the emperor went on a political campaign to Beg. The son, Lhas-bon, was residing in Dron, but he died.

(25) *blon. Skyes:bzañ. Rgyal.khoñ. blon. cheḥi. (26) ḥog: dpon. ḥtshal: ḥtshal.ba.las: gum:/ (OTA)*

[757] Minister Skyes-bzañ Rgyal-khoñ was being proclaimed deputy to the prime minister, but he died.

(256) *sna-na ña-hĩ yab-kyi riñ-la // Hbriñ-tho-re Sbuñ-brtsan/-dañ* (257) // *Phañs-to-re Dbyi-tshab-dañ khyed gñis // chab pha rol tshu rol-gyi // guñ blon ðtshol chig-par dgod /* (258) *dgod-pa-las / Hbriñ-to-re Sbuñ-brtsan ni ši //* (OTC)

Previously, during the reign of my father, you two, Hbriñ-to-re Sbuñ-brtsan and Phañs-ro-re Dbyi-tshab, were being established as ministers of the near and far sides of the river, but Hbriñ-to-re Sbuñ-brtsan died.

(347) *Hjañ Mywa-hĩ rgyal-po lta žig Rgya-la lta lta-ba-las // Rgya rjes*
(348) *dgrar blañste //* (OTC)

Although the king of Hjañ (Nanzhao) Mywa had looked constantly to China, the Chinese lord took him as an enemy.

(1) *btsan-pho Khri Lde-gtsug-rtsan-gyi* (2) *riñ-laḥ //* (3) // *Ñan-lam Klu-khoñ-gyis //* (4) *glo-ba ñe-baḥi rje blas byas-pa //* (5) *Hbal Ldoñ-tsab-dañ / Lañ Myes-zigs/* (6) *blon-po chen-pho* (7) *byed byed-pa-las/ glo-ba riñs-nas//* (8) *btsan-pho yab Khri Lde-gtsug-rtsan-gyi* (9) *sku-la dard-te/* (10) *dguñ-du gśegs-so//* (Žol, South)

During the reign of Emperor Khri Lde-gtsug-rtsan, Ñan-lam Klu-khoñ carried out his loyal duties, but Hbal Ldoñ-tsab and Lañ Myes-zigs, though acting as prime ministers, became disloyal and did harm to the body of the emperor, the father, Khri Lde-gtsug-rtsan, and he departed to heaven.

This reduplicated structure with *-las* appears to indicate that the action preceding the *-las* was still being performed when it was abruptly ended by the action in the following clause. As Uray Géza points out (1954: 195), the same construction appears repeatedly in the *Ḥdzañs-blun*. The examples from that text also indicate an interrupted action, but the sense of contrast or surprise so consistently found in the Old Tibetan material appears to have diminished considerably.

yab bdag sñon-gyi phyi rol-tu ḥchag-tu mchi mchi-ba-las / mi mañ-pos gos-dañ zas-kyi phyir thams-cad ñon-moñs-te / gcig-la gcig gsod-pa-dañ / brdzun-dañ dbañ-za-ba-dañ mi-dge-baḥi-las rnam-pa sna-tshogs bgyid-pa mthoñ-nas (Ḥdzañs-blun 187, l. 1–2)

O father, while I was walking for pleasure outside I saw many people suffering because of clothing and food, they performed various unvirtuous deeds, killing one another, lying, and abusing power.

de-nas soñ soñ-ba-las ded-dpon-gyis « da ni ri dkar-po žig snañ-baḥi rigs-na mthoñ-ñam ? » žes dris-na / rgyal-bus kyañ « de ḥdra-ba žig snañ-ño » žes smras-pa-dañ / « de ni dñul-gyi ri yin-no » žes zer-ro // de-nas soñ soñ-ba-las « da ni ri sñon-po žig snañ-baḥi rigs-na mthoñ-ñam ? » žes dris-na / « de ḥdra-ba žig snañ-ño » žes smras-pa-dañ / « de ni bai dū ryaḥi ri yin-no » žes smras-so // de-nas yañ soñ soñ-ba-las « da ni ri ser-po žig snañ-baḥi

rigs-so ? » zes dris-na / « ri ser-po ḥdra-ba žig snañ-no » zes smras-pa-dañ / « de ni gser-gyi ri yin-no » zes smras-so // de-nas gser-gyi riḥi druñ-du phyin-te / (Ḥdzañs-blun, 216, lines 12–16)

Then while they went along the guide asked, “now, do you see a white mountain appearing?” The prince answered, “such a one appears”. “That is the mountain of silver”, said [the guide]. Then while they went along [the guide] asked, “now, do you see a blue mountain appearing?” [The prince] answered, “such a one appears”. “That is the mountain of vaiḍūrya”, said [the guide]. Then while they went along [the guide] asked, “now, does a yellow mountain appear?” [The prince] answered, “such a yellow mountain appears”. “That is the mountain of gold”, said [the guide]. Then they approached the mountain of gold.

(17) de-nas bya-ñañ-pa kun-tu ḥphur-žin tshol-tshol-ba-las / skyed-mos-tshal de-na rgyal-buḥi skad grags-nas (Ḥdzañs-blun, 219)

While the duck, flying everywhere, was searching [for him], the voice of the prince was heard in the park.

(3) bu-mo skyed-mos-tshal-du ḥchag-ciñ soñ soñ-las rgyal-bu Dge-don ḥdug-pa-dañ phrad-nas (Ḥdzañs-blun, 220)

While the girl was walking in the park, she met the prince Kalyāṇaṃkara, who was staying there.

deḥi tshē rgyal-po dpuñs-rnam bži-dañ bcas-te / tshal-gyi nañ-du rtser soñ soñ-ba-las / ri-dwags-dañ phrad-de ri-dwags-kyi phyi-bžin rgyugs rgyugs-pa-las / rgyal-po gcig-pu ḥkhor-dañ bral-te tshal stug-por phyin-nas (Ḥdzañs-blun, 248 lines 10–12)

While the king with his four armies was going to the woods to amuse himself, he met with a game animal; while chasing after the game the king alone without his retinue went into a thick wood.

An example also involving wild animals and a thick wood is found in the story of the Hungry Tigress.

(6) cud-zad cig ñal-bso-baḥi bar-du sras gsum-po tshal-gyi nañ-du doñ doñ-las / stag-mo žig bu byuñ-nas (7) žag du-ma lon-pa bkres-šin skompas ñen-te / phyir yañ bu za-la thug-pa žig-nas / (Hahn 1996: 174).

While [the others] rested for a while, the three sons went along into the woods; then, they saw a tigress who had just given birth, and because of having suffered from hunger and thirst for many days, was at the point of eating her own children.

The converb *-las* in a three clause construction with the converb *-kyis*

The second identifiable construction is one in which the converb *-las* occurs in a series of three clauses, the first and second separated by the converb *-las* and the second and third by the converb *-kyis*. Only two examples of this construction occur among the examples surveyed here.

(27) *Keñ-luñ-gĩ lo [la]* (28) *[ki]m-šeñ koñ-co // btsan poñi khab-du blañs na // dbon žañ-du gyur-te* (29) *dgyes-pa-las // bar ḡgaḡ phan tshun-gyĩ soñi blon pos gnod-pa dag riñul-gyĩs kyañ // gñen-baḡi [ch]ab gañ-du bya-ba //* (Treaty of 821–822, East)

In the year of Jinglong (710), Jincheng Gongzhu (金成公主) was taken to the court of the emperor, they became uncle and nephew and were happy. But from time to time ministers of the respective borders (so) were bent on (riñul) mischief. Despite that they acted in accordance with the true spirit of their intimate relationship.

(20) *bkaḡ* (21) *drin ḡos par sbyĩn-bar dgoñs-pa-las // ban-de ñid rjes ḡbañ s-kyi* (22) *lugs-dañ / dge-sloñ-gi tshul ḡdzin-ciñ / bka-drĩn myĩ nod-par gsol-gyis* (23) *kyañ / žo-šaḡi lan / bka-drĩn sbyin-paḡĩ chos yin-bas // ñaḡĩ / bkas /* (Žwa-baḡi, West)

I intended to bestow my favour in a suitable manner, but the monk himself, adhering to the custom of a follower and subject and the proper way of a *bhikṣu*, begged not to receive my favour. But despite this, because recompense for a contribution is the rule in bestowing favour; therefore by my command:

In these two examples it is clear that there is a contrast between the first and second clauses, and that then there is a larger contrast between the second and third clauses in such a way that the first and third clauses are similar in sentiment. This construction has a three-part structure: (a) statement, (b) hesitation or qualification of that statement, and finally, (c) a restatement in even firmer terms or with more determination.

The converb *-las* in Classical Tibetan

That use of the converb *-las* noticed here, meaning “but” or “although”, continues into more recent texts can be seen from the following passage of the *Mi la ras pa rnams thar* by Gtsañ smyon he ru ka rus paḡi rgyan can (1452–1507).

(25) *ña de dus a-ma-dañ lan cig ḡphrad sñam-pa-las / dgras ḡjigs-te myur-du bro-s-te Gñāḡ-nam bskor phyin-pas /* (de Jong 1959: 48 l. 25).

I, at that time, thought [of] meeting with [my] mother one (more) time, but fearing [my] enemies, [I] fled quickly, [I] went toward Gñāḡ-nam.

An example of an unpleasant surprise is also found in the story of the Hungry Tigress.

(6) *phug-ron gsum žig kun-tu ḡphur-žing rtse-ba-las/ nañ-gi chuñ-ñu gcig khras khyer-ba* (Hahn 1996: 191)

The three doves flew and frolicked everywhere, but a falcon carried off the youngest among them.

A thorough search of Classical Tibetan texts would surely turn up more examples fitting the pattern established in the Old Tibetan data.

Conclusion

Although the use of the converb *-las* to emphasize a following surprise has not previously been remarked upon in descriptions of Tibetan grammar, it is the primary function of *-las* in Old Tibetan, and continues in use in later Tibetan writings. The contexts which lead to such an analysis include such events in the clause following *-las* as an unexpected change of direction, death, revolt, frustrated hopes, and a variety of pleasant surprises. The converb *-las* occurs in two identifiable syntactic constructions, after a reduplicated verb where it indicates the interruption of a continuous event, and in a three clause pattern with the converb *-kyis*, where it indicates a small contrast and *-kyis* a more significant contrast returning to the sentiment of the first clause, which precedes *-las*.

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