

## IX. Transitivity, Intransitivity, and *tha dad pa* Verbs in Traditional Tibetan Grammar

Tibetan grammar, one of the Buddhist “sciences” (*rig gnas*; *vidyāsthāna*), has a considerable heritage from Indic Vyākaraṇa literature, some of which is to be found in translation in the *sgra rig pa* section of the Tibetan canon. A good deal of writing on Tibetan grammar, however, is paracanonical, frequently in the form of indigenous Tibetan commentaries on the two treatises attributed to Thon mi Sambhoṭa, the *Sum cu pa* and *rTags kyi 'jug pa*.<sup>1</sup> Besides the historical interest of a tradition of Tibetan scholars’ reflections on their own language, there are also potentially significant insights to be gained from such informed investigations into the structure of Tibetan. Questions of voice and transitivity in Tibetan should be among some of the most relevant to contemporary linguists working on Himalayan languages as well as to philologists and specialists in Buddhist Studies seeking to understand better the structure of a language that was so important in the transmission of Buddhist scriptures. While it is not infrequently argued that voice and transitivity are *completely absent* in Tibetan, it seems that an examination of indigenous Tibetan grammatical literature, in particular the *rTags kyi 'jug pa* commentaries, does not actually bear that view out and instead provides arguments for a nuanced acceptance of some features of voice and transitivity. In Tillemans 2007 (chapter VIII above) I have dealt with possible connections between active-passive diathesis and the grammarians’ concepts of verbs that show “self” (*bdag*) and “other” (*gzhan*). I now turn to the grammarians’ distinction between “differentiating” (*tha dad pa*) and “non-differentiating” (*tha mi dad pa*) verbs, arguing that these notions exhibit significant connections with transitivity, especially if transitivity is taken as a feature admitting of gradation.

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<sup>1</sup> Synopses of canonical and paracanonical texts on grammar and extensive explanation of key notions are to be found in Verhagen 1994, 2001.

*Setting the stage: a dense passage from Si tu Paṅ chen*

In his lucid and savage critique of many of his predecessors' writings on Tibetan traditional grammar, the great eighteenth century grammarian, Si tu Paṅ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699-1774), lamented that his confused countrymen erred in understanding the basics of *bdag/gzhan* (self/other) because of their inadequate appreciation of distinctions between types of verbs. He wrote (Si tu p. 205, Dharamsala ed.; AACT 8-9):

*yang 'grel byed snga ma thams cad kyis 'di skabs las kyi tshig la byed pa po gzhan dang dngos su 'brel ma 'brel gyi rnam dbye ma mdzad pa ni shin tu mi legs te / de ma shes na byed po dang bya ba tha dad pa dang tha mi dad pa'i las kyi tshig so sor ngos mi zin cing / de ma zin pas 'dir bstan bdag gzhan gyi tha snyad gang la 'jug pa tshul bzhin ma rtogs par long ba'i 'khar ba bzhin gar 'dzugs med pa'i cal col mang po byung bar snang ngo //.* “Moreover, all the previous commentators in this context failed to make the distinction between verbs (*las kyi tshig*) that were directly related with distinct agents (*byed pa po gzhan dang dngos su 'brel ba*) and those that were not related. This was extremely pernicious, for when they did not know that, then they did not recognize verbs as being [of] heterogeneous [types] when the agent (*byed po*) and [focus of] the action (*bya ba*) were different (*tha dad pa*) and when they were not different (*tha mi dad pa*). And because that went unrecognized, they did not know how to apply properly the terms ‘self’ and ‘other’ that were being taught there [in Thon mi’s śloka], and much completely unfounded nonsense seems to have ensued, as if they depended upon the canes of the blind.”

Indeed, it became a cardinal tenet of Si tu’s interpretation that *bdag* and *gzhan* could only apply to verbs “directly related with distinct agents” (*byed pa po gzhan dang 'brel ba*) and could not apply to verbs such as “to go” (*'gro ba*)<sup>2</sup> or “to become/change into” (*'gyur ba*). In these cases,

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<sup>2</sup> Tibetan-Tibetan dictionaries classify *'gro ba* as *byed med las tshig* (“a verb without a [distinct] agent”) or *tha mi dad pa* (“[agent and object] not being different”). See e.g., *Dag yig gsar bsgrigs* and *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, s.v. *'gro (ba)*. Note, however, that this classification in terms of *byed med las tshig* versus *byed 'brel las tshig* is not to be confused with another important distinction to be made between Tibetan verbs, i.e., those showing volitional or nonvolitional actions. See the Appendix below.

a distinct agent does not directly appear (*byed pa po gzhan dngos su mi snang ba*; see AACT p. 69 §8); the usual traditional explanation is that when one says “I go,” there is supposedly no real distinction between an agent, i.e., the goer, and the object/patient, i.e., what receives the action of going. Si tu’s commentator, dNgul chu Dharmabhadra (1772-1851), expressed the basic idea in following way in his *Si tu ’i zhal lung*, pp. 50-51 (Japanese translation in Inaba 1986, 369; text Inaba 1986, 444):

*de yang byed pa po gzhan mi snang zhes pas / dper na / bdag ‘gro ’o lta bu ’i tshe / ‘gro ba de bya tshig yin kyang / ‘gro bya ‘gro byed gnyis ka bdag yin pas / ‘gro bya las gzhan pa’i ‘gro byed med pas na ‘di la bdag gzhan gyi dbye ba’ang mi byed pa yin no /* “Now, when [Si tu] says ‘A distinct agent does not appear,’ [he means that] in cases such as ‘I am going/I go,’ although ‘go’ is a word for an action [i.e., a verb], that which undergoes [the action of] going (*‘gro bya*) and the goer (*‘gro byed*) are both I, and thus there is no goer distinct from that which undergoes [the action of] going. Therefore, in such a case, the division in terms of self and other (*bdag gzhan gyi dbye ba*) is not made, either.”

Let’s try to demystify the central ideas, as they can be seen to make interesting and important sense when seen in the context of transitivity and intransitivity.

### ***Unpacking tha dad pa-tha mi dad pa and other synonymous traditional classifications of verbs***

As the passages cited above show, the principal elements of traditional Tibetan grammar’s analysis of verbs—*bdag* and *gzhan*, or agents and objects/patients, as well as their corresponding actions—are, from the time of Si tu Paṅ chen on, considered to be applicable only to actions that have a genuine, full-fledged agent. Following Si tu, the key element in an agent being genuine is that it must be a distinct entity from that which receives the action, the patient. And thus Si tu speaks about “distinct agents” (*byed pa po gzhan*) and about verbs where agent and patient are distinct (*tha dad pa*). *Bdag*, *gzhan* etc., do not apply when such a distinct agent is simply lacking, or where the existence of a distinct person instigating the action is not explicit in the sentence and is at most only situationally implied. A merely situationally implied agent is ruled out by the specification that the action must be “directly (*dngos su*) related” to the agent. This specification

serves to exclude verbs like “to become,” “to turn into” (*gyur*) where some or another human agent may have been remotely responsible in making something become something new but is unmentioned in the sentence and indeed not referred to at all. Thus, e.g., *lcags gser du 'gyur ba* “The iron turns into gold.” Here the existence of an alchemist is at most situationally implied, providing one has also subscribed to alchemy as the likely way in which such a transformation happens. Of course, for unbelievers in alchemy or personal karma, the sentence can be understood perfectly well as asserting that some sort of mysterious natural evolution occurs without any agency at all.

So much for the intra-systemic explanation. Is it possible to find a more universalizable theoretical schema in which to place these two types of verbs that Si tu speaks about and that others apparently failed to appreciate properly? Is there a way of unpacking the traditional grammarian’s notion in more recognizable terms, like transitivity? I’ve long held that there is. But unpacking Tibetan grammar is certainly not without problems, and indeed recently various such issues have been raised by Heather Stoddard and Nicolas Tournadre. It is thus worth revisiting the question as to whether the division between verbs that do or do not have distinct agents, i.e., *byed 'brel las tshig* and *byed med las tshig*, or *bya byed tha dad pa/ tha mi dad pa*, is legitimately explicable as indigenous Tibetan grammar’s version of a transitive/intransitive distinction.

Stoddard and Tournadre, in a number of publications (joint and separate) on Tibetan grammar and linguistics, have preferred not to adopt this rapprochement and maintained a translation of the terms that mirrors the Tibetan—thus *tha dad pa* becomes “différentiatif” and *tha mi dad pa* “indifférentiatif”—on the grounds that the traditional distinction is semantic, while the transitive-intransitive distinction is morphosyntactic. Other separate arguments are also used by these authors against imputing transitivity, so that it behooves us to cite the whole passage from their book written in collaboration with sKal bzang gyur med, *Le Clair miroir*. There they distance themselves somewhat from the position of traditional Tibetan grammar—and from sKal bzang gyur med 1981 as well—on the matter of *tha dad pa/tha mi dad pa* in order to argue that *tha dad pa/tha mi dad pa* is not the same as, or even significantly similar to, transitivity/intransitivity. In fact, their arguments seem to arrive at two separable conclusions, the first a weak thesis about the grammarians’ *tha dad pa* verbs not being transitive verbs (or not being enough like

what we mean by “transitivity” for the rapprochement to be meaningful) and the second a considerably stronger thesis to the effect that Western notions of transitivity *do not apply at all* to Tibetan. Of course, if Western transitivity-intransitivity distinctions do not apply to the Tibetan verb at all, then we wouldn’t find such verbs by examining those that grammarians dub *tha dad pa*.<sup>3</sup> Can we show that what grammarians are talking about is a bona fide feature of Tibetan and does in fact mesh with a Western distinction between transitive and intransitive, so that we can henceforth rest easy in using the schemata of transitivity and intransitivity in talking about Tibetan? Things aren’t quite that neat. To state my conclusion at the outset: the grammarians’ ideas of *tha dad pa*, etc., are indeed *not* straightforwardly identical with usual conceptions of transitivity but do capture important elements in the notion of transitivity, a notion which, duly expanded, is applicable to Tibetan.

Let us, however, begin with Stoddard and Tournadre’s own arguments, quoting a representative passage from *Le Clair miroir*. (I won’t translate the French, but will paraphrase the points raised):

“Nous avons préféré utiliser le terme de différentiatif traduisant littéralement le tibétain *tha dad pa* plutôt que celui de transitif car ce dernier réfère davantage à un caractère syntaxique (le verbe admet un objet). La notion de verbe différentiatif (*bya tshig tha dad pa*) est par contre essentiellement sémantique. Ainsi, en français, dans la phrase suivante: Il a rejoint Lhasa, le verbe ‘rejoindre’ est transitif, tandis qu’en tibétain quel que soit le verbe employé (*byon/slebs*), Lhasa étant un circonstant de lieu (du point de vue sémantico-référentiel), il sera forcément marqué à l’oblique et le verbe sera donc considéré comme indifférentiatif. Par ailleurs, il semble difficile d’appliquer sans adaptation le concept de transitivité dans une langue ergative

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Tournadre 1996, 82, who argues against the use of the notion of transitivity (“contre l’emploi de la notion de transitivité”) and quotes with apparent approval the remarks of James Matisoff 1973. Matisoff’s remarks concern Lahu, but it is clear that they are taken by Tournadre to be relevant to other Tibeto-Birman languages, too. We cite the whole passage on p. 82: “La nécessité de remanier le concept de transitivité n’est pas une spécificité du seul tibétain. Citons James Matisoff à propos de lahu, une autre langue tibéto-birmane du groupe lolo: ‘Such distinctions as transitive/intransitive and active/passive are basically alien to Lahu grammar (1973:195).’”

ne possédant ni sujet, ni opposition actif/passif. ... Les seuls critères formels donnés par les auteurs tibétains pour déterminer le caractère différentiatif ou indifférentiatif d'un verbe sont liés aux marques actanciennes. Ainsi, l'agent d'un verbe différentiatif est marqué à l'ergatif (*byed sgra*) tandis que le patient est à l'absolutif (*ngo bo tsam*). En revanche lorsque l'agent est à l'ergatif et l'autre participant à l'oblique, le verbe n'est pas considéré comme différentiatif (Stoddard and Tournadre, 1992: 246)."

I don't think these arguments prove the inapplicability of transitivity to Tibetan, but they do bring out relevant features of the Tibetan language and merit a step by step analysis.

**A.** First, Stoddard and Tournadre complain that *tha dad pa/tha mi dad pa* is essentially a semantic distinction, while transitivity/intransitivity is syntactic. Let us try to unpack the traditional grammarians' distinction and take it beyond its semantic formulations of agents/doers and patients being somehow the same things or different. The clear syntactic implication of an action being "directly related with a distinct agent" (*byed pa po gzhan dang dngos su 'brel ba'i las*), or in other terms having a "patient and agent that are different" (*bya byed tha dad pa*), is that the verb has at least two genuine actants. And equally "not having an agent distinct from a patient" implies that the verb, like intransitive verbs generally, has only one actant, or in other words has a valence of one. There seems to be sufficient connection with the idea of valence that one could reasonably venture that such semantic formulations—be they in Tibetan or, e.g., in Sanskrit, where instead of having/not having a distinct agent one speaks of "having or not having an object/patient" (*sakarmaka-akarmaka*)—do express, in admittedly semantic garb, the usual syntactic considerations of verb valence that are taken as indicators of transitivity/intransitivity. Traditional Tibetan grammarians had a predilection for a semantic formulation of things because that is very often what traditional grammars do; we may, for our reasons, find it justifiable on occasion to read their works with somewhat different eyes.

**B.** Another qualm Stoddard and Tournadre have about making the leap to transitivity is that the latter concept has little or no bearing if there is no active and passive opposition in Tibetan. This argument for the strong thesis turns on showing that there is no diathesis *at all* in Tibetan—it is thus one to which I have tried to reply in detail elsewhere (see chapter

VIII above). In short, grammarians' explanations on *bdag* and *gzhan* seem to go significantly beyond purely semantic matters of highlighting agents and patients and tend towards an alternation of specifically correlated verb flexions.

C. Let's go to the end of the quote from *Le Clair miroir*. I am somewhat puzzled by Stoddard and Tournadre's claim that the label *tha dad pa* ("différentiatif") would only be applied when the patient is in the absolutive (i.e.,  $\emptyset$ ), and not when it ends in an oblique case-marker, like *la*.<sup>4</sup> Their argument is, I take it, for the weaker thesis of *tha dad pa* not being, or not being much like, transitivity: verbs with a patient ending in  $\emptyset$  or in *la* could both be taken as biactantial and thus would be transitive in the usual sense of having two actants; but for indigenous grammarians the latter sort, i.e., verbs taking a patient ending in the particle *la*, would supposedly not (or never?) be *tha dad pa*. Alas, I am not at all sure that traditional grammar would maintain that the *simple* presence of the *la* must change the verb from *tha dad pa* to *tha mi dad pa*. Indeed if we take, e.g., the explanations of A lag sha Ngag dbang bstan dar (1759-1840) on *bdag*, *gzhan*, and *bya byed las gsum*, in his *Sum rtags* commentary, *sKal ldan yid kyi pad ma 'byed pa'i snang ba'i mdzod*, he manifestly treats the usual "woodcutting example" (where the patient, wood = *shing*, does not usually have the *la* particle) in just the same way as he treats "Form is to be looked at with the eyes" (*mig gis gzugs la blta bar bya*), where the patient, form = *gzugs*, does take *la*. Both example-sentences have verbs to which an analysis in terms of *bdag/gzhan* applies, implying that the verbs are *byed pa po dang 'brel ba/tha dad pa*. Indeed, all the usual classifications of agents, patients, actions etc., are given in an absolutely parallel fashion in the two example-sentences even though in the case of "form being looked at" one marks the patient, form, with the *la*. The mere presence of *la*, in short, is not a sufficient reason for Ngag dbang bstan dar to classify the sentence *gzugs la blta bar bya* as having a type of *tha mi dad pa* verb, one to which self/other (*bdag/gzhan*) wouldn't apply.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The terminology adopted for designating Tibetan cases is that of Tournadre 1990.

<sup>5</sup> See f. 185.2-4: *gnis pa rgyas par bshad pa la / bdag gzhan gyi don dang / sngon 'jug gi 'jug tshul lo / dang po ni / spyir bya byed las gsum ni / sta res shing gcod pa lta bu la mtshon na sta re byed pa / shing las / gcod pa bya ba dang / de bzhin du mig gis gzugs la blta bar bya zhes pa la mig byed pa / gzugs las / blta ba bya ba dang / ... des na de lta*

Indeed, a patient can on occasion be marked by *la*—in Ngag dbang bstan dar’s example, the marker *la* does not indicate a circumstant, but marks a genuine actant. As far as I can see, the *tha dad pa-tha mi dad pa* (“différentiatif-indifférentiatif”) opposition in traditional grammar does *not* depend on the patient being marked with or without *la*.<sup>6</sup>

D. Stoddard and Tournadre cite the specific case of the verbs *byon pa* (“go,” “reach”) and *slebs pa* (“come,” “arrive”) as showing that biactantial (and thus normally transitive) verbs are nonetheless classified as *tha mi dad pa* because of the use of *la*. The peculiarities of these verbs *byon pa*, ‘*gro ba*, *slebs pa*, etc., especially “going to X,” “going to Lhasa” (*lha sa la* ‘*gro ba*), etc. have given special difficulties to traditional grammarians, especially because of the connections with grammatical arguments used in Indian Madhyamaka Buddhist analyses of the Sanskrit verb  $\sqrt{GAM}$ . I have taken up some of those issues in Tillemans 1991a. Suffice it to say here that it does not seem to me that the fact that “going to Lhasa” is classified as *tha mi dad pa* militates against the general applicability of any notions of transitivity-intransitivity to *tha dad pa-tha mi dad pa*. These are specific anomalies and have to be seen as such.<sup>7</sup>

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*bu byed pa la bdag dang las la gzhan gyi tha snyad byed pa yin pas de'i skabs kyi las la bya rgyu'i las dang byed bzhin pa'i las gnyis yod de .../.*

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, Tournadre 1995 brings up this type of phenomenon in spoken Tibetan and compares it to the use of the ergative as giving emphasis. Thus, the difference between *g.yag zhon pa red* and *g.yag la zhon pa red* is a pragmatic one like that between “He rode a yak” and “It is a yak that he rode.” See Tournadre 1995, 272. In literary Tibetan, however, the emphatic use of the ergative does not seem possible. It is a problem as to how precisely to interpret sentences like *shing la gcod do /.*

<sup>7</sup> The mere fact of certain verbs in English and French having usual morphosyntactic coding associated with transitivity while their counterparts were not classified as *tha dad pa* in Tibetan doesn’t itself prove much once we have granted a graded phenomenon of transitivity. Gradation being accepted, the recurring phenomenon that a verb such as “to like” is handled differently in different languages is itself explicable by the fact that this is generally a verb with a relatively low degree of transitivity à la Hopper-Thompson: it is not telic, nor volitional, nor punctual and the object is little affected. In short, the fact that “I like beer” in, say, Tibetan or Spanish (i.e., *Me gusta la cerveza*), is handled with morphosyntactic coding more in keeping with the intransitive verbs of those languages, seems to be something that regularly happens with verbs of reduced transitivity.

The case of “going to Lhasa” (*lha sa la* ‘*gro ba*), however, is potentially more of a problem, because more of the Hopper-Thompson features of higher transitivity are satisfied,

To sum up, the traditional grammarians' talk about verbs like "cut," etc. being *tha dad pa* (the agent and patient being different) and *byed pa po gzhan dang 'brel ba* (having a distinct agent), can be seen as connected with two features on the morphosyntactic level: (a) these verbs have a valence of two or more;<sup>8</sup> (b) these verbs invariably have the agent marked with the ergative marking. This suggests that we are dealing with a recognizable phenomenon when Tibetan grammar speaks of *tha dad pa*,

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such as "going" being volitional and "Lhasa" being well individuated. It might seem that Stoddard and Tournadre would be right in saying that the fact that grammarians say that this verb is *not* classifiable as *tha dad pa* is a problem for the relevance of *tha dad pa* to transitivity. It could be replied, however, that here again comparison with other languages is of some relevance in resolving the anomaly. When the patient is totally or very significantly affected, the verb should approach high transitivity, as other strong indicators of transitivity will also be present. That much is straightforward. When, however, the would-be patient (e.g. Lhasa) is not affected at all or only very partially so, we do find uses of coding usual to intransitive verbs. As Hopper and Thompson 1980, 254 points out, there seems to be a quite considerable leeway to use intransitive coding when the patient is not a "true patient" in the sense of receiving the action:

... [A]lthough the presence of a true patient participant is a crucial component of transitivity, that of a second participant which is not much of a patient (i.e., which does not receive any action) is not. ... [S]uch clauses with less than ideal patients are coded in many other languages with various of the trappings found in intransitive clauses.

I would, thus, tend towards a double conclusion: Stoddard and Tournadre's argument about "going to X" shows an odd feature of the Tibetan treatment of these verbs but does not seriously challenge the position that *tha dad pa* / *tha mi dad pa* capture certain core features of transitivity/intransitivity.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, it could be argued (as does Tournadre elsewhere) that Tibetan has the feature of being able to omit actants—be they agents or patients—and that this would create some problems for attributing valence to verbs and using the traditional definition. Tournadre 1996, 80: "Malheureusement la définition donnée ci-dessus [i.e., celle de *tha dad pa* / *tha mi dad pa*] présente un inconvénient dans le cas du tibétain; en effet, ainsi qu'on l'a déjà souligné, aucun complément n'est obligatoire en tibétain et cela contrairement à ce qui se passe en français (et dans de nombreuses langues indo-européennes) où un verbe transitif exige la présence d'un objet..." Indeed one would have to account for such a phenomenon of "argument-omission." An analysis of Tibetan zero-anaphora, as Derek Herforth had proposed in AACT, may well be what is needed to show how and when nouns for agents and patients that had figured overtly in a preceding discourse can be dropped, all the while preserving co-reference.

*byed pa po gzhan dang 'brel ba*, etc. It suggests that “transitivity” is not a complete misnomer. The question is what exactly we should henceforth mean by “transitivity.”

### *Transitivity à la Hopper and Thompson*

The intuitive notion of transitivity, as Paul J. Hopper and Sandra A. Thompson characterize it, is that an action is “carried over,” or “transferred,” from an agent to a patient. The agent is thus a genuine and fairly high-potent instigator of the transfer and, in ergative languages, will be marked. Implicit in the carry-over of action due to an agent is the need for a patient/object that will receive such an action: we therefore should expect to find transitive verbs generally having two or more actants.

But, in fact, this is only part of transitivity for Hopper and Thompson, who see the notion as admitting of grades in function of the presence or absence of ten different factors—the intuitive type of transitivity is thus one that is very high on the continuum outlined in Hopper and Thompson 1980.<sup>9</sup> We’ll henceforth speak of “transitivity” as meaning transitivity as analyzed in Hopper and Thompson 1980, 1982.

Now, both in Spoken Tibetan and Written Tibetan, there are verbs with differing grades of transitivity, if one adopts the tenfold criterion. Thus the nonvolitional verb “to see” (*mthong ba*) in *ngas khyed mthong ngo* “I see you” is much less transitive than the verb “to kill” (*gsod pa*) in *ngas khyed gsod do* “I am killing you,” in that the killing is volitional, and moreover the patient is totally affected, a test that “seeing” obviously does not satisfy. If we apply the *tha dad pa-tha mi dad pa* distinction as being

<sup>9</sup> See the table in Hopper and Thompson 1982, 3:

	<b>High transitivity</b>	<b>Low transitivity</b>
A. Participants	2 participants or more (A and O)	1 participant
B. Kinesis	action	nonaction
C. Aspect	telic	atelic
D. Punctuality	punctual	nonpunctual
E. Volitionality	volitional	nonvolitional
F. Affirmation	affirmative	negative
G. Mode	realis	irrealis
H. Agency	A high in potency	A low in potency
I. Affectedness of O	O totally affected	O not affected
J. Individuation of O	O highly individuated	O nonindividuated

a Tibetan attempt at distinguishing transitivity-intransitivity, then there is the following problem: I would argue that both verbs are best taken as on the same side of the traditional grammarians' fence, i.e., *tha dad pa* (see Appendix). For a certain class of nonvolitional verbs (e.g., to see, to know, to hear, etc.), therefore, the Tibetan *tha dad pa* would not correspond to the intuitive notion of action "carried over from agent to patient," in that no action is carried over from agent to patient in the case of seeing and knowing, etc., if by that we understand that the patient would have to be significantly or totally affected. (After all, my seeing something usually does little, if anything, to it).

Also, *tha dad pa-tha mi dad pa*, or transitivity-intransitivity *à la grammaire tibétaine*, would differ from the transitivity continuum of Hopper and Thompson in that indigenous Tibetan grammar would fix a quite clear border separating verbs that are *tha dad* from those that are *tha mi dad*, instead of adopting a shaded continuum with high and low grades. That said, it looks to me that at least the middling to high levels of Hopper and Thompson's transitivity are captured by the traditional grammarians' categories of *tha dad pa*, or equivalently *byed pa po gzhan dang 'brel ba'i las tshig* (verbs where the agent and patient are different; verbs that have a distinct agent). And, equally, the other side of the border, i.e., *tha mi dad pa*, *byed pa po gzhan dang ma 'brel ba'i las tshig* (verbs where the agent and patient are not different, or what is the same, do not have a distinct agent) does capture much of what would be very low on the Hopper-Thompson scale. This is probably not a surprise at all, in that Hopper and Thompson themselves claim that their approach does account more or less for much of our "folk theories" and traditional notions about transitivity. A strong thesis to the effect that *the*, or *any* meaningful, notion of transitivity is completely inapplicable to Tibetan would thus be wrong. A bit of Tournadre's weaker thesis would, however, remain. Although we do not subscribe to Stoddard and Tournadre's own arguments against linking *tha dad pa* and transitivity, there is at least one very important factor militating against an *outright* identification. Simply put, *tha dad pa/tha mi dad pa* involves a rigid border while transitivity may well be best seen as a complex graded phenomenon.

***Appendix: On the use of tha (mi) dad pa  
in the Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary***

There is a rather unfortunate confusion in the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (*Zang han da cidian*) of Zhang Yisun *et al.*, where verbs like *mthong ba* (“to see”), *shes pa* (“to know”), and others are designated as *tha mi dad pa*. This is the standard dictionary used by tibetologists nowadays. Cf., however, the *Dag yig gсар bsgrigs* of Blo mthun bSam gtan *et al.* in which *mthong ba* and *shes pa* are clearly (and rightly) designated as *byed ‘brel las tshig* (= *byed pa po gzhan dang dngos su ‘brel ba’i las tshig* = *tha dad pa*). A similar critique of the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*’s treatment of verbs like *mthong ba* is found in Tournadre 1996, 191, n. 20. What seems to have happened is that the authors of the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* assimilated nonvolitional—what sKal bzang ‘gyur med 1981 designates as *bya tshig gzhan dbang can*—with *tha mi dad pa*. They are not the same thing. See AACT p. 27-28, Stoddard and Tournadre 1992, 250-252 on the differences to be made between *tha dad pa-tha mi dad pa* and the opposition *rang dbang can/gzhan dbang can*, sometimes rendered as “autonomous/dependent,” but less literally, “controled/uncontroled,” or “volitional/nonvolitional.” [*Nota bene*: In the introduction to the present volume, I have analysed the arguments of a twentieth century grammarian and editor of the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, viz., rDo rje rgyal po, in favor of the classification of *shes pa* and the like as *tha mi dad pa*].