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Tibetan dining etiquette: A sociolinguistic analysis of a normative discourse text in Stau

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ABSTRACT
The primary objective of this article is to provide a transcription, glossing, and translation of a recent oral presentation called Ȧɹ་Ȭབ་བȪན་ཉི་མ་གི་ཟ་མ་ɾགས་ǰོར་ཞིབ་ཆ་དེ་དག་ȹང་Ɏེད་ (henceforth ZML), which can be translated as “Stau Tub.bstan.nyi.mā’s Detailed Commentary on Dining Etiquette,” made over social media in the Stau language. ZML provides an example of the role of social media in language use among a language with relatively few speakers in the Sichuan Ethnic Corridor of China and provides data for studying the influence of Tibetic languages on Stau from the standpoint of loanwords. ZML is also a source of anthropological and sociolinguistic data; giving insight into a prescriptive approach to behavior, normative discourse, and identity formation. In addition, a preliminary representation of Stau using the Tibetan (Sambhota) script is given in this paper.

KEYWORDS
Stau, Rgyalrongic, Tibetan, Tibetic languages, normative discourse, identity formation, loanwords
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1 Introduction

The primary objective of this article is to provide a transcription, glossing, and translation of a recent oral presentation called བོད་ལྷག་པ་བོན་བོ། (henceforth ZML), which can be translated as “Stau Thub.bstan Nyi.ma's Detailed Commentary on Dining Etiquette”, made over social media in the Stau language, which can be found at the following YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiKdGRCy1xs.

Stau is a Rgyalrongic language spoken by about 40,000 speakers primarily in Daofu County (རྦོ་བོ་རྫོང་), Ganzi Prefecture (གཙོ་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་), Sichuan Province, China; but Stau speakers can also be found in Luhuo (ལུ་བོ་རྫོང་), Danba (རྲོང་བོ་རྫོང་), and Jinchuan Counties (སྐྱིན་ཆུན་རྫོང་). Some recent publications on the Stau language include Gates & Kim (2018), Gates (2017), Jacques et al. (2017), Sun & Tian (2013), Tian & Sun (2016), and Tunzhi (2017); also see Gates (Forthcoming) for a detailed description of the Mazur dialect of Stau. Note that both Sun and Tian use the term ‘Central Horpa’ for Stau, and Tunzhi uses the quasi-Wylie spelling ‘rTa’u’ for Stau, which he also uses in replacement of Sun’s and Tian’s ‘Horpa’. ZML was written and presented by Thub.bstan Nyi.ma བོད་ལ་བོན་བོ། (posted on October 1, 2017 through the media outlet 美

* Thub.bstan Nyi.ma's primary contribution to this paper is the text བོད་ལ་བོན་བོ། ‘ZML’ and comments on the orthographic transcription. Tshe.ring Rgyal.mtsan contributed to the orthographic transcription and checked the Tibetan spellings. Jesse P. Gates is responsible for all the analysis, transcription, glossing, and technical writing. Thub.bstan Nyi.ma is a native Stau speaker; he is 42 years old and is from Rishi Village (རི་གུ་, 日西村), Xianshui Town (known locally as ṭsniqjɛv), Daofu County (རྦོ་བོ་རྫོང་), Ganzi Prefecture (གཙོ་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་), Sichuan Province, China. Glossing conventions follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules with the exception of sens for 'sensory evidential', ifr for 'inferential evidential', inv for 'inverse', and intens for 'intensifier'. Many thanks for help from 'ja’dpal ཐ་འཇའ་དཔལ་ and Tshe.ring.mtsho.mo རྟེི་རིང་མཚོ་མོ་ who helped me understand the text and who worked on a draft of the Tibetan orthographic transcription. The authors would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers who reviewed this article for their helpful comments and corrections; and special thanks to Thomas Pellard for help with the LaTex file. The authors take full responsibility for any errors in the article.
拍 https://www.meipai.com) and is transcribed and glossed in its entirety in Section 2. Despite this text being only about one minute in length, it is interesting on several levels. Firstly, ZML provides an example of how social media is used among a language community with a relatively small population in the Sichuan Ethnic Corridor of China. In addition, the use of social media is a great resource for linguistic data, and this paper serves to encourage linguists to use social media from lesser known languages to do linguistic research. Although a specialized corpus collected first-hand by a linguist is still needed, social media provides an embarrassment of riches in terms of data that often is, but should not be, overlooked.

Secondly, ZML is an example of a prepared speech in Stau. Linguists emphasize natural and spontaneous speech in data collection, and this emphasis has been a good thing, especially as a balance to the philological tradition that focuses entirely on written texts. However, linguistics still has much to learn from philology: the study of a language should also include how a language community prepares and redacts a well-crafted text (if a language community has this practice). Granted, it may be difficult to find well-crafted texts; especially for a language without a written tradition.

Thirdly, as Section 3 demonstrates, ZML provides data for studying the influence of Tibetic languages on Stau from the standpoint of loanwords. Fourthly, as Section 4 discusses, ZML provides a source of anthropological and sociolinguistic data; particularly with insight into a prescriptive approach to behavior, normative discourse (see Section 4.1), and identity formation (see Section 4.2). We can see elements of identity formation and prescription, “If you are to be a good Tibetan, then you must not overly stuff your mouth with food and make excessive eating noises, especially in a formal setting with important guests.”

A representation of Stau using the Tibetan (Sambhota) script is given in this paper. This is primarily to open up the possibility to Stau speakers of using the Tibetan script to write in their own language, and is not a finalized orthography. In many ways, Stau does not need an orthography since by and large it can use the Tibetan script and spelling rules. There are, however, times when the spelling rules needed to be adjusted as there is no equivalent spelling in Tibetan to represent certain Stau consonant clusters and vowel sounds. It has been essentially Stau speakers who have developed the spelling choices in this paper. The philosophy of the speakers who have made spelling choices is to cause as little disruption to the traditional Tibetan spelling system as possible, and yet still provide as much of a consistent phonological representation as possible. Anyone who has tried to apply an old traditional orthography (with a history of grapholotry) to a modern language knows that this is a hard balance to strike. In addition, any word that can be recognized as a Tibetic language loanword is spelled according to the Tibetan spelling convention, even at the cost of phonological representation. This is primarily to respect the sociolinguistic and political situation. Of course this is not the best choice from a purely phonological perspective. Again, the purpose of the Tibetan orthographic representation of Stau in this paper is not to provide a canonical or finalized orthography, but to encourage a dialogue about orthographic issues for Stau.
2 The text: ZML

Below we present ZML in its entirety. The text has been divided into seven sentence groups. Each new sentence occurs after a final copula + sensory evidential suffix -rə, which marks the end of a complete thought that is based on the speaker's sensory experience. Readers are encouraged to watch the ZML video (found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiKdGRCy1xs) pausing where needed while reading the transcription and translation found below.

(1) ང་ཡི་  jahi 1pl.gen བོད་པ་ pu=ji Tibetan བɲི་ཉི་ vdzi=ɲi=wu person=pl=erg ཟ་མ་ zɑmɑ food འǻ་ nɡə eat ཆ་ tɕʰa time གཟབ་གཟབ་ ɣzɛɣzɛ careful Ɍɾə do-nmlz:O DEM q-dem 

dɒ-ɾə ɹə nə-χsɔ-sə pfv-tell-ifr have-sens LNK food eat time mouth=in food one-clf.full put.in-nmlz

ngɑ-gɑ pi jɪ=na zama nga tɛ=a ja=ji zgra ɣa-ga pi tʰi pi eat-iffv like or food eat time mouth=gen sound(n.) sound(v.)-ipfv like dem like ⿣e-ma-la də nanga ke-cʰe ɲə-ra neg.pfv-do-nmlz:O DEM important.matter intens-big cop-sens

Our Tibetan people, ask what to carefully do while eating. When eating, it is an important thing not to stuff your mouth full of food and make sounds with your mouth.

(2) ང་ཡི་  jahi 1pl.gen བོད་ཡི་ pu=ji Tibetan=gen རིག་གུང་ȶə ruɣʑɒ=nə culture=in ཐོད་འསྒུ་ scomɟu Spyod.'jug དེ་ཆེན་མོ་ tɕʰɛnmo=nə great=in ⿣a-ʃə jə-rə ɹə exist.anim-sens cop-sens

In our Tibetan culture, in the great Spyod.'jug, if asked, “What is written?” It says, “Do not eat with your mouth full, with sound coming out of a widely opened mouth.” What does this mean?
(3) བཞི་ ཆོས་ གཅོད་ མཛོད་ གཅོད་ ཤེས་ རྩ་ བར་
ja=na zama a-se rk-gl jāna a-se rdz-gl jāna zama
mouth=in food one-clf.full put.in-NMLZ or one-clf.full stuff-NMLZ or food

(4) བཞི་ ཁ་ ལ་ སྩོལ་ གྲུ་ ཏུ་ ཁ་ ལ་ སྩོལ་ གྲུ་ ཏུ་
tʰə ka-qʰoma qa ma-ga rtsi-g-o-ra
DEM INTENS-bad COP NEG-CLF COUNT-IPFV-COP-SENS
This is considered very bad.

(5) བྱོ་ ཚོས་ བྱོ་ སྲུང་ ཞུང་ ཤིས་ ལེ་ མཐོང་ བྱོ་
kaperdə vdzi qejoten rege vdzi ke-cʰ-me tʰi pi ni=pʰa
especially person intellectual and person INTENS-big-INTENS DEM like PL=COM

(6) བྱོ་ ཚོས་ མས་ བྱོ་ སྲུང་ སྲུང་ རུལ་ བྱོ་
ni royne ma-nkʰ=ji vdzi rege tšösev=ji vdzi rta rɑ
2 cultured.person NEG.have-NMLZ:A=GEN person and rural=GEN person see wide

Food stuffed full in the mouth, or making sounds when eating like this; if one is making sound in the mouth while eating *smacking sound* like this, one must not eat like this.

Especially if you are with educated people and great people; in a grand meeting around a table while eating; if you eat like this then you will be disdained.
Gates et al.: Tibetan dining etiquette

...see. hon wide not. have-nmlz: A=gen person dem kind recognize

tee-g-o-ra
become-1PFV-COP-SENS
You will be thought of as an ignorant, backwards [lit: rural], narrow-minded kind of person.

(7) 
therefore all=erg 1PL food eat time careful do-nmlz:O dem matter

Therefore, for all of us to be careful while we are eating is a very important matter.

3 Tibetic loanwords

Stau is not a Tibetic language, but like all Rgyalrongic languages Stau has had contact with Tibetic languages for many centuries. Despite the fact that Stau is not a Tibetic language, Stau speakers are no less a part of the Tibetan nationality than speakers of Tibetic languages, from their own perception, from the perception of other Tibetans, and from the political views and enacted policies of the Chinese government. The amount of Tibetic loanwords in Stau is quite large. Although a large number of Tibetic loanwords are in the religious domain, as Stau speakers are largely adherents of Tibetan Buddhism, there are also many Tibetic loanwords for other domains in daily life (including food, clothing, general adjectives, etc.). This high number of loanwords in multiple domains, increasing especially in recent years, is indicative of the high level of contact between Stau speakers and speakers of Tibetic languages. As has been mentioned, Stau speakers are primarily followers of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan is the language by which Tibetan Buddhism has spread to Stau speakers. Thus, Tibetan Buddhism has also been a vehicle for language change with the introduction of loan words in the domain of religious vocabulary.

In ZML, we identify no less than twenty-six Tibetic loanwords, not including a sentence long quotation from Classical Tibetan literature. In this section, we divide loanwords into common loanwords (Section 3.1) and higher register loanwords (Section 3.2). This way of dividing loanwords is based primarily on the perception of Stau speakers as well as the researchers’ familiarity with Stau texts and conversations. At this stage these divisions could be useful as a hypothesis, but in order to move beyond the hypothetical a statistical analysis should be conducted, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

1 ‘Tibetic’ includes languages e.g., Lhasa, Kham, Amdo, etc. Based on speaker perceptions, Lhasa, Kham, and Amdo are closer to each other than they are to Stau, but Stau speakers generally consider Stau as part of the sociolinguistic macro-language ‘Tibetan’. 
Common loanwords are loanwords that show up regularly in texts and daily conversations and are often perceived as Stau words. Many Stau speakers who are bilingual in a Tibetic language easily divide words as röśke ‘farmer language’ and mbraske ‘herder language’, roughly corresponding to the Stau language and a Tibetic language (typically Northeastern Amdo; Tournadre 2013: 106, 122), respectively. Many common loanwords will be identified as röśke ‘farmer language’, although some more highly educated Stau speakers will identify some common loanwords as mbraske ‘herder language’. Higher register loanwords are not used as regularly as common loanwords. These words usually have a more restricted domain usage, e.g., the religious context. Higher register loanwords are also partially identifiable by the way they are used to replace a more typical native Stau term. Some potential reasons for using higher register loanwords may be to display erudition, a sense of formality, and solidarity with the Tibetan nationality.

3.1 Common loanwords

This section will simply list common Tibetic loanwords used in ZML accompanied by a common Tibetan spelling.

1. *pupa* ‘Tibetan person’ བོད་པོ, from (1)
2. *zama* ‘food’ རླ་, from (1), (3), and (5)
3. *yze* ‘careful’ རྭོས་, from (1)
4. *nanga* ‘important.matter’ རྒྱལ་དཀར་, from (1)
5. *pu* ‘Tibet’ བོད་, from (2)
6. *zgra* ‘sound’ རྒྱལ་, from (1) and (3)
7. *rtsi* ‘consider’ རྒྱལ་, from (4)
8. *tsʰondi* ‘meeting’ རྒྱལ་བོད་, from (5)
9. *nkʰərva* ‘turn’ རྒྱལ་, from (5)
10. *tʰotɕʰõ* ‘contempt’ རྒྱལ་མོང་, from (5)
11. *roɣne* ‘cultured.person’ རིགས་གནས, from (6)
12. *dɑkpo* ‘kind’ རྒྱལ་, from (6). In Tibetan this word isn’t used to mean ‘a kind of person’ but is used to mean ‘lord, master’ (among a few other meanings, including ‘self’ and ‘essence’), thus this semantic shift seems to be a Stau innovation.

3.2 Higher register loanwords

This section will simply list higher register Tibetic loanwords used in ZML accompanied by a common Tibetan spelling.

1. *jə̃na* ‘or’ དང༌, from (1) and (3). The common word to express ‘or’ is *jamana*.
2. *ruŋzö* ‘texts of Tibetan culture/philosophy’ རིག་པ་, from (1)
3. *scomɟu* ‘Spyod.’jug’ རིག་, from (2). Spyod.jug is an abbreviation of རིག་པའི་སྤྲོལ་དབྱིས་སུ་སེམས་དཔའི་ལྷ་ལོག་པ་, which is a translation of the Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra (A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life) a book written in Sanskrit in the 8th century A.D. explaining how to develop the “mind of the enlightened” (Chodron 2007).
4. \textit{tɕʰɛnmo} ‘great’ སྣ་སྤོན།, from (2). Typically the native Stau term \textit{cʰe} is used for the concept ‘great’ or ‘big’. In ZML, \textit{tɕʰɛnmo} is used as an adjective to modify \textit{scenɟu} ‘Spyod.’jug’. Also see higher register loanword number 9.

5. \textit{χsõ} ‘speak.HON’ ཀུན།, from (2). This is an honorific verb for ‘speak’, reserved for the domain of speaking done by lamas, great teachers, gods, and other higher beings.

6. \textit{k’a fıkòwa dà dza.ite’e dà k’a.dó.na ne za ma-fea} ‘do not eat with your mouth full, with sound coming out of a widely opened mouth’ གཞན་ལེགས་བཞག་པ་ལ་དང་བདེན་པ།, from (2). See Section 4.2 for a discussion of this quote from Tibetan literature.

7. \textit{rdzö} ‘stuff’ རྡོད།, from (3)

8. \textit{rtsavane} ‘never’ རུས།, from (3)

9. \textit{taperdo} ‘especially’ མཉན་ཆེན།, from (5). Typically the native Stau term \textit{tʰinõji} is used for the concept ‘especially’.

10. \textit{ɕejotɕɛn} ‘intellectual’ ཤེས་ཡོན་ཅན།, from (5)

11. \textit{tɕʰɛnpo} ‘great’ སྣ་སྤོན།, from (5). As mention for higher register loanword number 4, \textit{cʰe} is more commonly used as an adjective for ‘great’ or ‘big’.

12. \textit{tʂõsɛv} ‘rural’ གོང་གསེབ།, from (6)

13. \textit{rtarɟamtʰõrɟa} ‘see wide perceive wide’ ཉེ་བ་དང་ཁ་བཅོད།, from (6).

14. \textit{ŋündzən} ‘recognize’ སྣོན།, from (6)

3.3 Sound changes in Tibetic loanwords

Below is a list of some interesting sound changes that have occurred in Tibetic loanwords as seen in ZML.

1. \textit{<ung>} → \textit{õ}, both \textit{<ong>} and \textit{<ung>} have merged as \textit{õ}
2. \textit{<ag>} → \textit{a}
3. \textit{<aC>} → \textit{eC}

4 Anthropological and sociolinguistic observations

4.1 Normative discourse

Normative discourse is discourse about how things should be or how things are when everything is normal from the viewpoint of a particular culture (Taylor 1961). ZML is a quintessential example of normative discourse.

From observation and interviews, I have found that most Stau, and Tibetans in general, do not pay particular attention to the amount of noise that one makes with one’s mouth while eating food in most everyday, informal settings. ZML is especially addressing formal situations, as can be understood from (5). However, in (1-4) the focus could be understood as developing normative dining etiquette habits for any context, informal or formal.

The warning of why one should conform to the dining etiquette habits outlined in ZML is quite interesting. In (6), the feared result of eating with your mouth stuffed with food and making excessive noises while eating is that others dining with you will consider you \textit{royne ma nk’a} ‘ignorant’ ིང་མ་ཀུན།, \textit{tråsɛv} ‘rural’ རུས།, and \textit{rtia ma mə} ‘narrow-minded’ རྒྱན་མ་མི་, and \textit{rtia ma mə} ‘narrow-minded’.
This equating of urbanity and good behavior and rural with bad or ignorant behavior is not uncommon in China, nor is it uncommon around the world. It reveals the general acceptance of the unstoppable urbanization trend.

4.2 Identity formation

Notice the quotation from Classical Tibetan literature in (2) as a means of evoking a sense of ‘traditional Tibetan identity’, repeated in (8).

(8) kʰa fḵo wā dā dza.fte’ e dā kʰa.dø.nə ne za ma.fca
mouth full and sound.com and mouth.widely.open ela as.for eat neg-do
Do not eat with your mouth full, with sound coming out of a widely opened mouth.

The quotation in (2) and repeated in (8) is the Tibetan phrase ཁ་བཀང་བ་དང་Ȭ་བཅས་དང་ཁ་གདངས་ནི་བཟའ་བར་མི་Ȭ from the Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra spoken with Sichuan Amdo pronunciation. Notice that the speaker does not pronounce the formative suffix ㎞ after ㎞ ‘eat’.

In (6), a proverb from Tibetan is quoted: rta nga mt’ö nga ‘see wide perceive wide’ མི་ཁ་བྱེད་ི་. The use of a Tibetan proverb is also a sign of identifying with the larger Tibetan nationality and a means of displaying education and gentrification.

There is also an evocation of ‘modern Tibetan identity’ by the visual context in the ZML video. In the video, Thub.bstan Nyi.ma is wearing a western suite and necktie, sitting behind a desk, holding a red espresso cup. Located behind Thub.bstan Nyi.ma are various brands of wine and liqueur in a liqueur cabinet. Modern Tibetan music (using Tibetan lyrics) is dubbed into the background soundtrack of the video.

5 A few remarks on spelling choices

In the orthographic representation using the Tibetan script, the vowel ə is inconsistently represented as an unmarked vowel and with the consonant final ཊ. This is because Tibetic loanwords without a vowel marking can be pronounced either as ə or ə in Thub.bstan Nyi.ma’s dialect of Stau. If it is a native word with ə we always use the consonant final ཊ, but if it is a Tibetic loanword with ə we stay faithful to the Tibetan spelling, even if the word is spelled without the consonant final ཊ; e.g., zamə ‘food’ ལེ་སྟེ།.

The vowel ə is typically represented without any vowel marking for native words and Tibetic loanwords. However, if there is a preinitial in the native morpheme, Stau speakers typically prefer to use the ཊ final, e.g., ɣəa ‘sound’ གཞ་ ཊ, but do not use the ཊ final for morphemes without a preinitial, e.g., tə’u ‘time’ བཀ་. This use of the ཊ final follows the rules of Tibetan.
6 Conclusion

Although brief, ZML is quite insightful in providing a window on Tibetic loanword usage, normative discourse, and identity formation in Stau over social media. This paper has helped sort out Tibetic loanwords in Stau used in ZML and has given some anthropological and sociolinguistic commentary, paying particular attention to the normative discourse and identity formation discourse of ZML. It is hoped that this paper will inspire linguists and anthropologists to use social media better in the analysis of languages with smaller populations, low-resourced languages, and under-researched languages in the Sichuan Ethnic Corridor and around the globe.

References


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