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Person marking in Stau

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers an overview of the verb system and person marking in a hitherto poorly described Sino-Tibetan language. We posit the existence of six verb classes based upon alternations of the final stem vowel, both for transitive and intransitive verbs. Person marking is described in comparison with that of closely related Rgyalrongic languages and is found to be of interest for the reconstruction of the protosystem.

The data analysed show that Stau is also interesting from a typological point of view as it illustrates a hitherto undescribed subtype of hierarchical agreement.

KEYWORDS

Stau, Rgyalrongic, Zbu, hierarchical agreement, direct/inverse, transitivity

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1 Introduction

This paper deals with the verbal flexion of Stau (locally known as *rəsɲəske*), a Rgyalrongic language[1] spoken in Rta'u country (Chinese Daofu 道孚), Sichuan province, China.

Previous work on Stau include Huang (1991), Sun (2007) and especially Sun & Tian (2013). The variety presented here represents the dialect of Khang.gsar spoken in the North of Stau county, and differs slightly from the varieties studied by other authors.

2 Morphophonology

Core Rgyalrong languages (Situ, Japhug, Tshobdun and Zbu) present complex ablaut patterns conditioned by TAM, number and direction (direct vs. inverse) as was first discovered by Sun (2000). Morphophonological alternations based on person however are rather limited, except in Zbu (where it appears that some verbs have irregular first person singular forms, see Gong 2014).

Languages of the Tre-Hor branch have a less complex verbal morphology, but present an elaborate system of vowel alternations marking person and transitivity. In this section, we describe the attested alternations and propose a historical hypothesis to account for them.

In Stau, there are two groups of conjugations that we can call intransitive and transitive respectively, thought the exact detail is quite complex. Intransitive conjugations only distinguish two forms, while transitive conjugations have four distinct stems which combined with the inverse prefix make up to six different forms.

2.1 Intransitive conjugations

Verbs with intransitive conjugations in Stau never have more than two stem forms. The first stem appears with first person subject (singular or plural), while the second stem is present with second and third person forms.

The first person forms only have limited array of possible rhymes: only open syllable nasal rhymes *–ã* and *–õ*, velarized vowels *–o^{ɣ}* and *–a^{ɣ}* or the back rounded *–u*: we never find front or central vowels.

*This paper follows the Leipzig Glossing rules, to which the following are added: EVD evidential, INV inverse, TESTIM testimonial (on this term see Tournadre 2008 and Hill 2013). We wish to thank two anonymous reviewers for useful comments.

[1] See Sun (2000) for an overview of the Rgyalrongic subbranch of Sino-Tibetan.

In the non-first person (henceforth 2/3) form however, almost all possible rhymes are attested, including open and closed syllables (except non-velarized *–o*). The first person forms is generally predictable from the 2/3 form except in a few irregular verbs (cf table 3), thus it is legitimate to analyse the 2/3 as the base form, and the first person form as being derived from it by a morphological process.

Six classes of alternations are found in verbs with open syllables; class 6 includes verbs without alternation, whose rhyme can be any of *–u*, *–oʸ*, *–aʸ*, *–õ* and *–ã*:

	1	2	3	4	5	6
meaning	look at	move	like	be full	be ill	be hot
1	*scəqã*	*mbəɕã*	*ɾgã*	*fkõ*	*ŋõ*	*cʰu*
2/3	*scəqi*	*mbəɕe*	*ɾga*	*fkə*	*ŋɞ*	*cʰu*

Table 1: Vowel alternations in open-syllable intransitive verbs in Stau

The alternations can be stated in a straightforward way: centralized vowels *–ə* and *–ɞ* change to *-õ*, and front and open (unrounded and non-velarized) vowels change to *–ã*.

In the case of verb with stems ending in*–r* or *–v*, the first person is always derived by the replacing the entire rhyme by *–ã* or *õ* depending on the main vowel of the rhyme:

meaning	sleep	hide
1	*ɲɬã*	*ɲcʰã*
2/3	*ɲɬev*	*ɲcʰer*

Table 2: Vowel alternations in closed syllable intransitive verbs in Stau

Stems ending in *–m* (the only other final consonant available) are always Tibetan loanwords and do not present any alternation.

There are two irregular verbs with intransitive morphology in Stau, which have *–ã* in the first person instead of expected *–õ* (cf table 3).

meaning	go	say
1	*ɕã*	*jã*
2/3	*ɕə*	*jə*

Table 3: Irregular intransitive verbs in Stau

If we disregard the irregular verbs, it is always possible to determine the first person from the second/third person form. Thus, we may posit that the 2/3 person represents the bare stem, and that the first person is derived from it by fusion with a suffix *–ã*, which is realized as *–õ* when the rhyme is centralized.

2.2 Transitive conjugation

The transitive conjugation includes at most six different forms, illustrated by the paradigms in tables 4 and 5 (these paradigms are in the perfective form with directional prefixes, which can be neglected for the purpose of the present paper). Some of these forms are distinguished by the presence of a prefix *ɬ- / v-* whose nature is analysed in more detail in section 3 If we disregard this prefix, only four different stems at most are distinguished: 1SG→3, 2→3, 1PL→3 (which has the same vocalism as 2/3→1) and third person (which has the same vocalism as 1→2).

A \ P	1S 1P	2	3
1S		*nə-se*	*nə-sow*
1P			*nə-sã*
2	*nə-fsã*		*nə-sej*
3		*nə-fse*	

Table 4: *fse* 'kill'

A \ R	1	2	3
1S		*tə-k^{h}ɒ*	*tə-k^{h}ow*
1P			*tə-k^{h}õ*
2	*tə-fk^{h}õ*		*tə-k^{h}e*
3		*tə-fk^{h}ɒ*	

Table 5: *ɬ-k^{h}ɒ* 'give'

As with intransitive verbs, six classes of verb alternation are attested in transitive conjugations, depending on the final vowel of the verb stem. Table 6 presents all six classes (it contains the verbs stems without the inverse prefix *ɬ-/v-*.) Class 6 includes all verbs with stem ending in *-u*, *-o^ɣ*, *-a^ɣ*, *-õ* and *-ã*.

meaning	1 drink	2 kill	3 dig	4 dress up	5 give	6 cut
1SG→3	*-t^{h}u*	*-sow*	*-ɴq^{h}ɒrow*	*-zgu*	*-k^{h}ow*	*-tsu*
1PL→3, 2/3→1	*-t^{h}ã*	*-sã*	*-ɴq^{h}ɒrã*	*-zgõ*	*-k^{h}õ*	*-tsu*
2→3	*-t^{h}i*	*-sej*	*-ɴq^{h}ɒrej*	*-zgi*	*-k^{h}ej*	*-tsu*
3→3, 1→2	*-t^{h}i*	*-se*	*-ɴq^{h}ɒra*	*-zgə*	*-k^{h}ɒ*	*-tsu*

Table 6: Vowel alternations in open-syllable transitive verbs in Stau

As with intransitive verbs, it is possible to regard the third person form as the basic one; the 1PL→3 and 2/3→1 stems can be analysed as resulting from fusion with the first person *-ã* suffix. The 1SG→3 form presents rounding of the vowels with an additional *-w* glide in the case of mid-low

and low vowels. These alternations can be accounted for by assuming the existence of a suffix whose underlying form is *–w*.

The 2→3 form has vowel fronting with an additional *-j* glide for mid-low and low vowels. Here the underlying form *–j* can be posited.

In closed syllables, final consonants differ as to their behaviour with the person suffixes. Final *–v* drops with the 1SG→3 *–w* and first person *–ã* suffixes; the second person *–j* suffix does not cause final *–v* to drop but nevertheless induces vowel fronting as in *–zgriv* 'you accomplished'. Final *–m* is immune to any change from the suffixes and verbs ending in this consonant present no stem alternations. Final *–r* drops with all three suffixes *–w*, *–ã* and *–j* and the final consonant is preserved on the in the third person and 1→2 forms.

meaning	accomplish	give back	close	rob
1SG→3	*–zgru*	*–xsow*	*–zdəm*	*–stow*
1PL→3, 2/3→1	*–zgrõ*	*–xsõ*	*–zdəm*	*–stõ*
2→3	*–zgriv*	*–xsev*	*–zdəm*	*–stej*
3→3, 1→2	*–zgrəv*	*–xsev*	*–zdəm*	*–stər*

Table 7: Vowel alternations in closed syllable transitive verbs in Stau

All the morphophonological rules observed in this section are summarized in Table 8.

Stem \ Suffix	1SG→3 *–w*	1 *–ã*	2→3 *–j*
i	*u*	*ã*	*i*
e	*ow*	*ã*	*ej*
a	*ow*	*ã*	*ej*
ə	*u*	*õ*	*i*
ɤ	*ow*	*õ*	*ej*

Table 8: Vowel fusion in Stau verbs

These vowel fusion rules are not restricted to the verbal system, but also apply to the ergative *–w* and genitive *–j* case markers. Table 9 illustrates some examples of vowel fusion in nouns.

base form	meaning	ergative	genitive
kəta	dog	*kətow*	*kətej*
vdzi	man	*vdzu*	*vdzi*
xə	hybrid of yak and cow	*xu*	*xi*

Table 9: Vowel fusion in Stau nouns

3 The structure of person marking paradigms in Stau

With the morphophonological rules presented in the previous section, it is possible to present the Stau paradigms in condensed format as in Table 10.

<table>
<tr><th>P
A</th><th>1</th><th>2</th><th>3</th></tr>
<tr><td>1S</td><td rowspan="3"></td><td rowspan="2">Σ</td><td>Σ-w</td></tr>
<tr><td>1P</td><td>Σ-ã</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td rowspan="2">v-Σ-ã</td><td>Σ-j</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td colspan="2">v-Σ</td></tr>
<tr><td>INTR</td><td>Σ-ã</td><td colspan="2">Σ</td></tr>
</table>

Table 10: Stau transitive and intransitive paradigms

The absence of the suffix *–ã* in 1→2 is not surprising. In all Rgyalrongic languages, as well as in neighbouring languages such as Tangut (see for instance Jacques 2009: 18, Gong 2014, Lai to appear), in local 1→2 and 2→1 forms suffixes are coreferent with the P (except in the case of double suffixation). Since the second person S/P suffix is zero, the absence of any suffix in the 1→2 form is expected.

3.1 The inverse prefix

The *ɾ-* / *v-* prefix appears in 2/3→1, 3→2 and 3→3 forms. Its presence in 2→1 precludes an analysis as a third person agent marker, and it is best to treat it as an inverse marker.

The inverse appears in 2→1, as in Situ, Tshobdun, Zbu Rgyalrong (DeLancey 1981, Sun & Shidanluo 2002, Gong 2014) and Khroskyabs (also known as Lavrung, cf Lai 2013), but unlike Japhug (Jacques 2010), implying a person hierarchy 1 >2 > 3.

The inverse *v-* prefix appears in all 3→3 forms in Stau, a feature shared with Khroskyabs. Both Stau and Khroskyabs differ from Rgyalrong languages, where two 3→3 forms are found: the *direct* and the *inverse* form. Table 11 presents the Zbu Rgyalrong transitive paradigm, with inverse forms coloured in green; non-coloured slots are direct forms.

	1SG	1DU	1PL	2SG	2DU	2PL	3SG	3DU	3PL	3’
1SG							Σ_3-ŋ	Σ_3-ŋ-ndʑə	Σ_3-ŋ-ɲə	
1DU				*tɐ*-Σ_1	*tɐ*-Σ_1-*ndʑə*	*tɐ*-Σ_1-*ɲə*		Σ_1-*tɕə*		
1PL								Σ_1-*jə*		
2SG	*tə-wə*-Σ_1-*ŋ*							*tə*-Σ_3		
2DU	*tə-wə*-Σ_1-*ŋ-ndʑə*	*tə-wə*-Σ_1-*tɕə*	*tə-wə*-Σ_1-*jə*					*tə*-Σ_1-*ndʑə*		
2PL	*tə-wə*-Σ_1-*ŋ-ɲə*							*tə*-Σ_1-*ɲə*		
3SG	*wə*-Σ_1-*ŋ*									Σ_3
3DU	*wə*-Σ_1-*ŋ-ndʑə*	*wə*-Σ_1-*tɕə*	*wə*-Σ_1-*jə*	*tə-wə*-Σ_1	*tə-wə*-Σ_1-*ndʑə*	*tə-wə*-Σ_1-*ɲə*				Σ_1-*ndʑə*
3PL	*wə*-Σ_1-*ŋ-ɲə*									Σ_1-*ɲə*
3’							*wə*-Σ_1	*wə*-Σ_1-*ndʑə*	*wə*-Σ_1-*ɲə*	
INTR	Σ_1-*ŋ*	Σ_1-*tɕə*	Σ_1-*jə*	*tə*-Σ_1	*tə*-Σ_1-*ndʑə*	*tə*-Σ_1-*ɲə*	Σ_1	Σ_1-*ndʑə*	Σ_1-*ɲə*	

Table 11: Zbu Rgyalrong transitive and intransitive paradigms (adapted from Gong 2014)

The 3→3 inverse forms appear when the agent is less salient than the patient; they are obligatory when an inanimate acts upon an animate. Verbs in inverse form have the inverse prefix (*wə–* in Zbu) and the number suffixes agree with the patient.

The distribution of the inverse prefix in Stau (and its cognate in Khroskyabs) differs from that of Zbu only in that the direct 3→3 form have disappeared in this language, and the inverse 3→3 have been generalized to all 3→3 forms. This probably represents a common innovation of Stau and Khroskyabs, and suggest that Stau and Khroskyabs languages form a clade within the Rgyalrongic branch of Sino-Tibetan.

The inverse *v–* prefix presents phonological alternations and phonotactic constraints. It is prefixed to the first syllable of the verb stem, even when polysyllabic. In verbs with reduplicated stem, such a 'wipe' (Table 12, *nə–* here is the directional prefix, see section 4), reduplication also applies to the inverse prefix.

<table>
<tr><td>P
A</td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td></tr>
<tr><td>1S</td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2">nə-ɕəɕe</td><td>nə-ɕəɕo-w</td></tr>
<tr><td>1p</td><td>nə-ɕəɕ-ɑ̃</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td rowspan="2">nə-fɕəfɕ-ɑ̃</td><td></td><td>nə-ɕəɕe-j</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td colspan="2">nə-fɕəfɕe</td></tr>
</table>

Table 12: *f-ɕə-f-ɕe* 'wipe'

The *v–* prefix is assimilated to *f–* when prefixed to a verb stem with unvoiced initial consonant (as in *f-se* [INV-kill] 'he kills'). It cannot be inserted whenever any of the following three conditions apply:

- When the stem-initial consonant is a labial (either /*p*/, /*b*/, /*m*/, or /*v*/) or the voiced uvular /*ʁ*/, the inverse cannot be prefixed. Thus the third person form of *və* 'do' *ʁə* 'help' are identical to the corresponding bare stems.

- The inverse prefix is not compatible with most stem-initial clusters. The only clusters that allow prefixation of *v–* are /stop+r/ clusters. For instance, the root /*kʰrə*/ 'hold' (1SG→3 *kʰru*) thus has a 3→3 form *f-kʰrə*, whereas *zjə* 'sell' has a third person form identical to the bare stem (the cluster **vzj–* is not allowed in the variety of Stau under study).

- The inverse does not appear in transitive verbs with final *–v*, due to a dissimilatory constraint. For instance, the 3→3 forms of /*kʰev*/ 'scoop' and /*ɕev*/ 'take out' are *kʰev* and *ɕev* respectively, not **fkʰev* or **fɕev*.

3.2 Transitivity in Stau

The morphologically based distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs in Stau must be refined by taking into account case-marking on arguments.

Stau, as all Rgyalrongic languages, is a strict verb-final language with postpositions. Case markers include the ergative *–w*, the genitive *–j*, the dative *–gi* and the instrumental *–kʰa*. Only animate

referents can receive ergative marking, inanimates can only be marked with the instrumental. SAP pronouns are not normally marked with the ergative (except in some subordinate clauses).

Some verbs with intransitive morphology, such as 'like', do require ergative marking on the argument whose person is indexed on the verb, as illustrated by examples 1 and 2.

(1) *ŋa tə-gi rga-ã-rə*
I he-DAT like-1-TESTIM
'I like him/her.'

(2) *tə-w ŋa-gi rga-rə*
he-ERG I-DAT like-TESTIM
'(S)he likes me.'

Some verbs with transitive morphology agree with only one of their arguments. Thus, /si/ 'know (somebody)' indexes the person knowing, while the P is always third person by default, as shown in Table 13.

A \ P	1	2	3
1S		*su*	
1P		*sã*	
2	*si*		*si*
3	*fsi*		

Table 13: *f-si* 'know'

When the person known is an SAP, an overt pronoun must be used, and appears in the absolutive form (example 3).

(3) *tə-w ŋa f-si*
he-ERG I INV-know
'S/he knows me'.

Ditransitive verbs that index the recipient as the P (*secundative* in Malchukov et al. 2010's terminology), the recipient still receives dative marking despites being indexed in the verb morphology, as in example 4 with the verb /xsev/ 'give back'.

(4) *təɲu ŋaɲəgi kəxsã*

tə-ɲə-w ŋa-ɲə-gi kə-v-xsev-ã.
3-PL-ERG 1-PL-DAT PFV-INV-return-1

They gave it back to us.

4 Directional prefixes and stem alternation

As in all Rgyalrongic languages, Stau has a system of five directional prefixes used to indicate both direction and TAM. The prefixes come in two series, one used for perfective and imperative forms

(with *ə* vocalism), and another one for perfective interrogative (with *i* vocalism and stress), as indicated in Table 14.

Direction	Perfective / Imperative	Interrogative
Up	*rə–*	*rí–*
Down	*nə–*	*ní–*
North	*kə–*	*kí–*
South	*ɣə–*	*ɣí–*
No direction	*tə–*	*tí–*

Table 14: Directional prefixes in Stau

The prefixes *kə–* and *ɣə–* are here glossed as 'north' and 'south' rather than 'translocative' (离心) and 'cislocative' (向心) as in Huang (1991: 26). At least in the variety under study, the use of these two prefixes is not determined by the relative direction towards or away from the main referent. For instance, in example 5, the prefix *kə–* appears with the verb *ʂɸa* 'come out, appear' (which is compatible with all directional prefixes) to express motion towards the main referent.

(5) *tʰaʸdʑi tʰaʸdʑi-jəkʰa raca kə-ʂɸa vdə-sə ŋə-rə*
far far-from horseman PFV:NORTH-come.out see-EVD be-TESTIM
(Akhu stonba) saw a horseman coming from afar (towards him from the south to the north).
(Akhustonba and the horseman, 4)

Unlike Rgyalrong languages and Khroskyabs, there is no regular stem alternation in Stau related to TAM categories. However, there are two types of irregularities in TAM marking.

First, a handful of verbs are never used with directional prefixes: this is the case of *vdə* 'see' (example 5 above; the evidential form in *–sə* normally requires a directional prefix), *ste* 'finish', *si* 'know'.

Second, the motion verbs 'come' and 'go' are exceptional in that they allow directional prefixes in the non-past. The presence vs absence of directional prefixes is the only difference between perfective and non-past in most verbs, but in the case of *ʁde* 'come' and *ɕə* 'go' the suppletive stems *–kʰi* and *–vi* respectively are used in the non-past with directional prefixes, as summarized in Table 15.[2]

Meaning	Perfective	Non-Past	Non-Past with directional prefixes
go	*ɕə*	*ɕə*	*–vi*
come	*ʁdi*	*ʁde*	*–kʰi*

Table 15: Directional prefixes in Stau

The verb 'come' has distinct perfective and non-past stems. In the perfective *ʁdi* is most often used without directional prefix (example 6), but using it with directional is nevertheless possible, unlike verbs such as *vdə* 'see'.

[2] There is in addition a defective motion verb *rja* 'leave' only used in the third person perfective form; for the first and second person, corresponding forms of the verb *ɕə* must be used instead.

(6) *sa ʁjikʰoᵛ rə ɮdi-sə ŋə-rə.*
place Gyukhog up come-EVD be-TESTIM
He came (up there) at the place (called) Gyukhog. (The thieves, 39)

The non-past stem *ɮde* occurs in the non-past and imperative forms, and it is homophonous with the transitive verb |*ɮde*| 'bring' (whose 3→3 form is *vɮde* with the inverse prefix, thus never ambiguous with the intransitive verb).

5 Conclusion

This paper is the first step toward a description of Khang.gsar Stau verbal morphology. It presents all regular and irregular stem alternations, as well as a complete account of the person marking system.

Khang.gsar Stau verbal morphology presents two remarkable features from both a historical and a typological perspective.

First, unlike previously described Rgyalrongic languages, the inverse prefix *v-* in this variety of Stau undergoes reduplication together with the verb stem.

Second, in the transitive paradigm, the only unmarked form is the 1→2 one, which corresponds to the bare stem in this variety, while the 3→3 form has a specific marking. While the historical reason for this phenomenon is quite clear (In all Rgyalrongic languages, the 1→2 has no inverse marking and has the same suffixes as the corresponding intransitive second person, which is zero in the Khang.gsar dialect), it is quite rare for a local form to be the unmarked one in a poly-personal paradigm; the only other example known to us is Nez Percé (Rude 1997, Zúñiga 2006: 166-167).

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