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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 རྒྱུ་ཐུབ་བསྟན་ཉི་མ་གི་ཟ་མ་ལུགས་སྒྲུབ་ཞིབ་ཆ་དེ་དག་གླེང་ (henceforth ZML), which can be translated as “Stau Tub.bstan.nyi.ma’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

This is a contribution from *Himalayan Linguistics*, Vol. 18(1): 73–81.

ISSN 1544-7502

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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 རྟཱུ་བུབ་བསྟན་ཉི་མས་ཟ་མ་ལུགས་སྐོར་ཞིབ་ཆ་དེ་དག་ལྷང་བྱེད། (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 (རྟཱུ་རྫོང་།), Ganzi Prefecture (དགའ་མངའ་སྡེ་རྫོང་།), Sichuan Province, China; but Stau speakers can also be found in Luhuo (ལུའུ་མགོ།), Danba (རྫོང་བླ་མ།), and Jinchuan Counties (རྫོང་ཆེན།). 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 རྟཱུ་བུབ་བསྟན་ཉི་མ། (posted on October 1, 2017 through the media outlet 美

* Thub.bstan Nyi.ma’s primary contribution to this paper is the text རྟཱུ་བུབ་བསྟན་ཉི་མས་ཟ་མ་ལུགས་སྐོར་ཞིབ་ཆ་དེ་དག་ལྷང་བྱེད། ‘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་ཤི་བུ།; 日西村), Xianshui Town (known locally as *rəspi qəjɛv*), Daofu County (རྟཱུ་རྫོང་།), Ganzi Prefecture (དགའ་མངའ་སྡེ་རྫོང་།), 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 འཇའ་དབལ་ and Tshe.ring.mtsho.mo ཚེ་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་ བོད་པ་ བཟླ་ཉི་ཟུ་ ཟ་མ་ འགྲུ་ཆ་ གཟབ་གཟབ་ སུ་ལྷ་ ངུ་ ཨ་ཆུ་
ŋaji pupa vdzi=pi=wu zama ngə tɕʰa ʏzɛʏzɛ və-lə də a-tɕʰə
 IPL.GEN Tibetan person=PL=ERG food eat time careful do-NMLZ:O DEM Q-DEM
- ངུ་ར་ ངུ་ལྷ་ གས་ ཟ་མ་ འགྲུ་ཆ་ ཡག་རུ་ ཟ་མ་ ཨ་སས་ རྩ་ཚེས་
də-rə tə-jə ge zama ngə tɕʰa ja=nə zama a-se rkʰə-tɕʰu
 have-SENS PFV-say LNK food eat time mouth=in food one-CLF.full put.in-NMLZ
- འགྲུ་གྲ་ བི་ ཡང་ན་ ཟ་མ་ འགྲུ་ཆ་ ཡག་ཡི་ སྒྲ་ གཞལ་གྲ་ བི་ བི་ བི་
ngə-gə pi jəna zama ngə tɕʰa ja=ji zgra ʏza-gə pi tʰi pi
 eat-IPFV like or food eat time mouth=GEN sound(n.) sound(v.)-IPFV like DEM like
- མེ་སུ་ལྷ་ ངུ་ གནད་འགག་ གས་བྱས་ ངུ་ར་
me-və-lə də nanga kɛ-cʰɛ ŋə-rə
 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་ བོད་ཡི་ རིག་གཞུང་རུ་ སྤྱད་འབྲུག་ ཆེན་མོ་རུ་ ཨ་ཆུ་ རུ་གསུང་སུ་
ŋaji pu=ji ruyzō=nə scomju tɕʰɛnmo=nə a-tɕʰə nə-χsō-sə
 IPL.GEN Tibetan=GEN culture=in Spyod.'jug great=in Q-DEM PFV-say-IFR
- གྱི་ར་ ངུ་ལྷ་ལ་ ལ་ བཀའ་བ་ དང་ སྒྲ་བཅས་ དང་
ji-rə tə-jə-la kʰa fkōwa dā dza.ftɕʰe dā
 EXIST.ANIM-SENS PFV-tell-TOP mouth full and sound.COM and
- ལ་གདངས་ནས་ བི་ ཟ་ མེ་སུ་ རུ་གསུང་སུ་ གྱི་ར་འ་ སུ་
kʰa.dō.nə ne za mə-fɕa nə-χsō-sə ji-rə-ɣa tʰə
 mouth.widely.open.ELA as.for eat NEG-do PFV-tell-IFR EXIST.ANIM-SENS-IND DEM
- ཨ་ཆུ་ ཡུ་གོ་རུ་
a-tɕʰə jə-g-o-rə
 Q-DEM say-IPFV-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) ཡ་རུ་ ཟ་མ་ ཡ་སས་ རྩ་ཆོ་ ཡང་ན་ ཡ་སས་ རྩོང་ཆོ་ ཡང་ན་ ཟ་མ་
ja=nə zama a-se rkə-tɕʰu jəna a-se rdzō-tɕʰu jəna zama
mouth=in food one-CLF.full put.in-NMLZ or one-CLF.full stuff-NMLZ or food

འགྲུ་ཆ་ སྒྲ་ གཞུ་འགྲུ་ བི་ ཡ་རུ་ སྒྲ་ གཞུ་འགྲུ་ རྩ་ཡུ་ལ་
ngə tɕʰa zgra yʒa-gə pi ja=nə zgra yʒa tə-jə-la
eat time sound(n.) sound(v.)-IPFV like mouth=in sound(n.) sound(v.) PFV-say-TOP

ཟ་མ་ འགྲུ་ཆ་ *.....* བི་ བི་ འགྲུ་རྩ་འ་ བི་ བི་ རྩ་བ་ལྟེ་ འགྲུ་ཆེ་
*zama ngə tɕʰa *.....* tʰi pi ngə-rə-ka tʰi pi rtsavane ngə rge*
food eat time *eating.sound* DEM like eat-SENS-IND DEM like never eat basically

དུ་གྲུ་ ལྷ་ཅན་
də-gə mja-rə
have-IPFV NEG.COP-SENS

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.

- (4) ལྷ་ ག་ལྷ་མ་ དུ་ མ་གྲུ་ རྩི་གྲུ་དུ་ཅན་
tʰə ka-qʰəma ŋə ma-gə rtsi-g-o-rə
DEM INTENS-bad COP NEG-CLF COUNT-IPFV-COP-SENS
This is considered very bad.

- (5) ལྷ་ག་པར་དུ་ བཞི་ སྤེས་ཡོན་ཅན་ རེ་གས་ བཞི་ ག་ལྷ་མ་སས་ བི་ བི་ ཉི་མ་
laperdə vdzi ɕejotɕen rege vdzi kɛ-cʰɛ-mɛ tʰi pi ji=pʰa
especially person intellectual and person INTENS-big-INTENS DEM like PL=COM

རྩ་འུ་ལ་ ཆོགས་འདུ་ ཆེན་པོ་ བི་བི་ཉི་ལྷ་ ལྷ་འལུ་ཅ་ཆོ་ ཟ་མ་ འགྲུ་ཆ་ གར་ཉི་
tə-ŋu-la tsʰondi tɕʰenpo tʰi-pi-pi=nə kə-nkʰərva-tɕʰu zama ngə tɕʰa kati
PFV-COP-SUBJ meeting great DEM-like=PL=in PFV-turn-NMLZ food eat time if

ཉི་མི་ ཉ་བ་ ཟ་མ་ ལྷ་འལུ་ལ་ ལྷ་གྲུ་ ཉི་འ་ མཐོང་ལྷ་ ཐབ་གྲུ་དུ་ཅན་
ji tʰi tava zama nə-ŋgi-la tɕʰəgə ji=ka mtʰōtɕʰō tʰɛv-g-o-rə
2 DEM like food PFV-eat.2-SUBJ then 2=ALL contempt receive-IPFV-COP-SENS

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.

- (6) ཉི་ རིགས་གནས་ མ་འལུ་ཡི་ བཞི་ རེ་གས་ རྩོང་གསེབ་ཡི་ བཞི་ ལྷ་ ལྷ་
ji royne ma-nkʰə=ji vdzi rege tɕʰōseɐ=ji vdzi rta rja
2 cultured.person NEG.have-NMLZ:A=GEN person and rural=GEN person see wide

མཐོང་ རྒྱ་ མ་འཁྱེད་ བཞི་ ཐི་ བདག་པོ་ རྩོམ་འཛིན་
mt̪õ ɾja ma-nk̪ə=ji vdzi t̪i dakpo ɣundzən
 see.HON wide not.have-NMLZ:A=GEN person DEM kind recognize

ཅེ་གུ་བྱ་བ།
tɕe-g-o-rə

become-IPFV-COP-SENS

You will be thought of as an ignorant, backwards [lit: rural], narrow-minded kind of person.

- (7) ཅུ་རེ་ཚེ་ གསུ་འབྲུ་ལུ་ ང་ཡི་ ཟ་མ་ འགྲུ་ཆ་ གཟབ་གཟབ་ བྱ་ལུ་ དུ་ གནད་འགག་
tɕ̥ʰəretɕ̥ʰu ɣsəmbə=wu ŋaji zama ngə tɕ̥ʰa ɣzeyzɛ və-lə də nanga
 therefore all=ERG 1PL food eat time careful do-NMLZ:O DEM matter

གས་ཁྱས་ བྱ་བ།
kɛ-c̥ʰɛ ŋə-rə

INTENS-big COP-SENS

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.¹ 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 *rōske* ‘farmer language’ and *mbroske* ‘herder language’, roughly corresponding to the Stau language and a Tibetic language (typically Northeastern Amdo; Tournaire 2013: 106, 122), respectively. Many common loanwords will be identified as *rōske* ‘farmer language’, although some more highly educated Stau speakers will identify some common loanwords as *mbroske* ‘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་པ།, from (1)
2. *zama* ‘food’ ཟ་མ།, from (1), (3), and (5)
3. *yze* ‘careful’ གཟབ།, from (1)
4. *nanga* ‘important.matter’ གནད་འགག།, from (1)
5. *pu* ‘Tibet’ བོད།, from (2)
6. *zgra* ‘sound’ སྒྲ།, from (1) and (3)
7. *rtsi* ‘consider’ རྟེན།, from (4)
8. *ts^hondi* ‘meeting’ རྟེན་འཕྲུ།, from (5)
9. *nk^hərva* ‘turn’ འཁྱུ་བ།, from (5)
10. *t^hotē^hō* ‘contempt’ མཐོང་ཆུང་།, from (5)
11. *royne* ‘cultured.person’ རིགས་གནས།, from (6)
12. *dakpo* ‘kind’ བདག་པོ།, 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. *jāna* ‘or’ ཡང་ན།, from (1) and (3). The common word to express ‘or’ is *jəmāna*.
2. *ruyṣō* ‘texts of Tibetan culture/philosophy’ རིག་གཞུང་།, from (1)
3. *scomju* ‘Spyod.’jug’ སྤྱད་འབྲུག།, from (2). Spyod.’jug is an abbreviation of བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤྱད་པ་ཉིད་འབྲུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།, 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. *tɕʰenmo* ‘great’ ཆེན་མོ།, from (2). Typically the native Stau term *cʰe* is used for the concept ‘great’ or ‘big’. In ZML, *tɕʰenmo* is used as an adjective to modify *scenju* ‘Spyod.’jug’. Also see higher register loanword number 9.
5. *χsō* ‘speak.HON’ གསུང་།, 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. *kʰa fkōwa dā dʒa.ftɕʰe dā kʰa.dō.nə ne za mə-fɕa* ‘do not eat with your mouth full, with sound coming out of a widely opened mouth’ ཁ་བཀང་བ་དང་སྒྲ་བཅས་དང་ཁ་གདངས་ནས་ནི་ཟ་མི་བྱ།, from (2). See Section 4.2 for a discussion of this quote from Tibetan literature.
7. *rdzō* ‘stuff’ རྫོང་།, from (3)
8. *rtsavane* ‘never’ རྩ་བ་ནས།, from (3)
9. *ɬaperdə* ‘especially’ ལྷག་བར་དུ།, from (5). Typically the native Stau term *tʰinōji* is used for the concept ‘especially’.
10. *ɕejotɕen* ‘intellectual’ ཤེས་ཡོན་ཅན་ལ།, from (5)
11. *tɕʰenpo* ‘great’ ཆེན་པོ།, from (5). As mention for higher register loanword number 4, *cʰe* is more commonly used as an adjective for ‘great’ or ‘big’.
12. *tʂōsev* ‘rural’ ཁྱོང་གསེབ།, from (6)
13. *rta rja mtʰō rja* ‘see wide perceive wide’ ལྟ་རྒྱ་མཐོང་རྒྱ།, from (6).
14. *ɲundzən* ‘recognize’ རོས་འཇིན། 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. <ung> → *ō*, both <ong> and <ung> have merged as *ō*
2. <ag> → *a*
3. <aC> → *ɛC*

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 *royne ma nkʰə* ‘ignorant’ རིག་གནས་མ་འཇུ།, *tʂōsev* ‘rural’ ཁྱོང་གསེབ།, and *rta rja mtʰō rja ma nkʰə* ‘narrow-minded’

ལྷ་རྒྱ་མཐོང་རྒྱ་མ་ལུག། 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) *k^ha* *fkōwa dā dza.ftɕ^he* *dā k^ha.dō.nə* *ne za mə-fɕa*
 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་སྒྲ་བཅས་དང་ཁ་གདངས་ནས་ནི་བཟའ་བར་མི་བྱ། from the Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra spoken with Sichuan Amdo pronunciation. Notice that the speaker does not pronounce the formative suffix བར་ after བཟའ་ ‘eat’.

In (6), a proverb from Tibetan is quoted: *rta rja mt^hō rja* ‘see wide perceive wide’ ལྷ་རྒྱ་མཐོང་རྒྱ།. 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 *a* is inconsistently represented as an unmarked vowel and with the consonant final ཁ།. This is because Tibetic loanwords without a vowel marking can be pronounced either as *a* or *ə* in Thub.bstan Nyi.ma’s dialect of Stau. If it is a native word with *a* we always use the consonant final ཁ།, but if it is a Tibetic loanword with *a* we stay faithful to the Tibetan spelling, even if the word is spelled without the consonant final ཁ།; e.g., *zama* ‘food’ ཟ་མ།.

The vowel *a* 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 འ། final, e.g., *yza* ‘sound’ ལམ་འ།, but do not use the འ། final for morphemes without a preinitial, e.g., *tɕ^ha* ‘time’ རྒྱ་མ།. This use of the འ། 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.

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