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Egophoricity and evidentiality in Thebo Tibetan

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ABSTRACT

Thebo is a small Tibetan dialect spoken at the border of Sichuan and Gansu Provinces, China. The morphosyntactic structures that express egophoricity and evidentiality in Thebo Tibetan differ from those of other Tibetan dialects in that they involve both dedicated markers and stem alternations. This work examines how egophoricity and evidentiality are realized in Thebo using first-hand fieldwork from the variety spoken in Gyi.ba (གཡི་བ) Town. It presents both synchronic and diachronic analyses and considers how the distribution of egophoricity markers reflects the grammaticalization of these categories.

KEYWORDS

Thebo Tibetan, egophoricity, evidentiality

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province. Lin (2014) describes the phonologies of Gyi.ba (གཡི་བ) in Thebo County and Tshong.ru (ཚོང་རུ) in Mdzod.dge County. Sangsrngyas Tshering (2020) discusses the voicing of obstruents in Gyi.ba.² There is little previous research on egophoricity and evidentiality in Thebo Tibetan. Rénzēng Wāngmǔ (2010a) mentions a contrast between self-experience (亲历) and non-self-experience (非亲历) in the Steng.ka variety, but these categories are not discussed in detail. This paper presents a comprehensive description and analysis of egophoricity and evidentiality in Thebo Tibetan.

From a cross-linguistic perspective, it has been argued that egophoricity and evidentiality are two different categories (Bergqvist & Kittilä 2020; Widmer 2020; Aikhenvald 2021). This is the case in Thebo where egophoricity opposition and evidential opposition do not belong to the same semantic-pragmatic level and exhibit different morphosyntactic processes. In this article, I use ‘egophoricity’ to refer to a grammatical domain defined by a binary opposition between an egophoric category and a non-egophoric category. Thebo has a clear contrast between egophoric and non-egophoric, and non-egophoric contexts may or may not be specified for evidentiality. The most basic evidential opposition is direct versus indirect and occurs only in non-egophoric contexts.

Most of the data in this paper are taken from the author’s fieldwork in Gyi.ba Town, Thebo County, Gansu Province, with preference given to data from natural conversation and direct elicitation.

Section 2 of this paper provides a general overview of the verb system and aspectual categories. Section 3 presents an overview of the egophoricity and evidential system. Sections 4 and 5 discuss the egophoricity and evidential system of ‘stem alternation’ and ‘fixed stem’ categories, respectively. Section 6 discusses the anticipation rule for egophoricity. Section 7 discusses the diachronic evolution of Thebo’s egophoricity markers. Finally, a summary of the whole paper is presented.

2 Overview of the verb system

2.1 Classification of verbs and stem alternation

If one were to classify the verbs of Thebo Tibetan solely based on their synchronic features, transitivity, and volitionality would be the most important. These two categories intersect, as presented in Table 1.³

	Transitive	Intransitive
Volitional	tʃéʔ ‘cut off’	ⁿ dzo ‘go’
Non-volitional	tʰũ ‘see’	tʃ ^h éʔ ‘break’

Table 1. Classification of verbs

² For more information on the phonology of Gyi.ba, see Lin (2014) and Sangsrngyas Tshering (2020). Sangsrngyas Tshering (2020) presents roughly the same system as Lin (2014), but with slight differences, including the addition of the *b* and *g^h* phonemes.

³ In Thebo Tibetan, when a syllable bears a sonorant or voiceless unaspirated obstruent initial, there is a high-low register contrast, marked with é (high) and è (low).

There are three primary stem alternations found among transitive volitional verbs. These three stems will be called past, non-past, and imperative, in line with their corresponding Old Tibetan forms. A significant number of transitive volitional verbs demonstrate a ‘potential’ stem. Intransitive verbs exhibit only two stems, the indicative and the imperative. Examples of the stem alternations are given below in Table 2.

Verb type	Non-past	Past	Imperative	Potential	Gloss
VT	<i>ⁿgeʔ</i>	<i>goʔ</i>	<i>kʰo</i>	<i>kʰeʔ</i>	‘cover’
NVT	<i>tʰũ</i>	<i>tʰũ</i>	—	—	‘see’
VIT	<i>nè:</i>	<i>nè:</i>	<i>ni:</i>	—	‘sleep’
NVIT	<i>tʃʰεʔ</i>	<i>tʃʰεʔ</i>	—	—	‘break’

Table 2. Stem alternations

2.2 Predicate structure

To facilitate the discussion of morphosyntactic structures related to egophoricity and evidentiality, we begin by giving an introduction to predicate structure in Thebo Tibetan, as shown in Table 2.

Main part			Final part	
Main verb	Perfect auxiliaries	progressive markers Prospective markers	Egophoricity markers Evidential markers Modal markers	Mood markers
V1	V2	V3	E	M

Table 3. Predicate structure

There are five slots in the predicate structure of a finite clause. V1 is filled by the semantic main verb of the predicate, and this slot may be filled by all types of verbs and cannot be left empty. V2 is the slot for perfect auxiliaries. V3 is filled by the progressive marker *=i.de*,⁴ and the prospective marker *=lè.kʰe.jeʔ/né*.⁵ E is filled by Egophoricity, evidentiality, and modal markers. Interrogative, exclamatory, and other mood markers occur in M. Example (1) illustrates the predicate structure of Thebo.⁶

- (1) *ⁿè:* *tè* *dʒeʔ* *tú=nè.kʰe.né* *jé*
 1sg.ERG DEM break/PAST PRF/NPAST=PROS.NEGO SFP
 ‘Don't blame me for breaking that (warning). (Literally: I'm about to break that.)’

⁴ In some cases, the progressive marker *=i.de* has an allomorph *=i.de*.

⁵ *=lè.kʰe.jeʔ/né* has an allomorph *=nè.kʰe.jeʔ/né*.

⁶ Here ‘/’ is used in glossing here to indicate the stem type of a verb.

Here *dʒvʔ* is the main verb, *tú* is a perfect auxiliary, *=nè.kʰv.né* is the non-egophoric prospective marker, and *jé* is the mood marker.

Generally, the main part of the predicate is followed by markers that indicate egophoricity and/or evidentiality. In simple-habitual sentences, when the main verb is a copula or an existential verb it will undergo stem alternation according to the egophoricity of the sentence. The egophoric copula is *jí* and the non-egophoric is *rèʔ*. The egophoric existential verb is *jèʔ* and the non-ego is *né*. In prospective sentences, a similar alternation is observed for *jèʔ/né* with its marker *=lè.kʰv.jèʔ/né*.

2.3 Aspect system

It is also necessary for us to briefly introduce the aspect system of Thebo Tibetan to discuss the language's egophoricity and evidential system. As we will see in Section 3, aspect conditions the appearance of egophoricity and evidential markers. The aspect system is divided into perfective, progressive, prospective, and habitual. The habitual has a secondary future meaning. A slightly simplified aspect system in Thebo is shown in Table 4.

Aspect type		Main verb	Perfect auxiliaries	Progressive Prospective
Perfective	Simple	Past	—	—
	Perfect	Past	<i>rʂ/ɣv</i>	—
Progressive	Simple	Non-past	—	<i>=i.de</i>
	Perfect	Past	<i>túʰdʒuʔ</i>	<i>=i.de</i>
Prospective	Simple	Non-past	—	<i>=lè.kʰv.jèʔ/né</i>
	Perfect	Past	<i>túʰdʒuʔ</i>	<i>=lè.kʰv.jèʔ/né</i>
Habitual	Simple	Non-past	—	—
	Perfect	Past	<i>túʰdʒuʔ</i>	—

Table 4. The aspect system of Thebo

3 Overview of the egophoricity and evidential system

In recent years, scholars of Tibetan languages have tended to include egophoricity within evidentiality (Tournadre & LaPolla 2014; Hill & Gawne 2017; Tournadre 2017), considering it to be a category of evidentiality expressing ‘personal knowledge’. However, some scholars argue that egophoricity should be regarded as a distinct category. Widmer (2020) discusses the relationship between evidentiality and egophoricity in detail, arguing that although they are closely related, they should be treated as distinct categories from a cross-linguistic perspective. He suggests that egophoricity specifies the quality of one’s knowledge in terms of a diatomic opposition that distinguishes between an epistemically privileged and an epistemically non-privileged perspective, while evidentiality specifies the source of one’s knowledge.

In Thebo Tibetan, we find both functional and formal differences delineating the categories of egophoricity and evidentiality. The key semantic-pragmatic features involved in Thebo egophoricity are ‘**controllability**’ and ‘**authority**’. Evidential contrast occurs only under non-egophoric conditions and specifies the **information source**. It is possible to argue that egophoricity is obligatory in any finite sentence, while evidentiality is only realized in non-egophoric situations.

In terms of lexical source, egophoricity markers can be divided into three sets, primary markers (=v/=i)⁷, existential verb markers (jèʔ/né), and copula markers (=ɲà/=nè.rèʔ)⁸. Of these, primary and existential verb markers are roughly complementary in distribution and can be used in combination in the progressive aspect, suggesting that they may be grouped. Copula markers are found in all aspect categories in non-egophoric contexts, but cannot appear in the habitual and prospective in an egophoric context. The egophoricity markers may thus be explained as belonging broadly to two groups, primary-existential markers (type A) and copula markers (type B). While both classes express egophoricity, type B markers also encode assertion in non-egophoric situations. In an egophoric context, there is no such distinction.

In terms of evidentiality, the direct evidential marker rè and the indirect evidential marker zə can occur with any aspect except for the perfect-habitual, with which only the direct marker can occur. The direct evidential marks information obtained directly through the five senses, while the indirect evidential suggests the acquisition of information through inference or evidence. In general, it is sufficient for the speaker to express egophoricity alone, yet if the source of information is to be further expressed, an evidential marker is used. The whole egophoricity and evidential marking paradigm are presented in the following Table 5.

Aspect type	Egophoricity markers				Evidential markers (NEGO)	
	Primary-existential (type A)		Copula (type B)		Direct	Indirect
	EGO	NEGO	EGO	NEGO(assertion)		
Perfective	jèʔ	né	=ɲà	=nè.rèʔ	rè	zə
Progressive	jèʔ=(v)	né = (ⁿ gi)	=ɲà	=nè.rèʔ	rè	zə
Prospective	=v	=(ⁿ gi)	—	=nè.rèʔ	rè	zə
Habitual	=v	=i	—	=nè.rèʔ	rè	zə

Table 5. The egophoricity and evidential marker paradigm

What has been presented thus far is generally true of verbal predicates, but as mentioned in 2.2, in the simple-habitual, when the main verb is a copula or an existential verb, it must first undergo stem alternation to combine with type A egophoricity markers (jì/rèʔ and jèʔ/né). In the prospective, the jèʔ/né component of the prospective marker =lè.k^hv.jèʔ/né requires a similar change and is essentially a stem alternation of an existential verb. When stem alternation occurs in existential verbs, they are followed by the primary marker =v (egophoric) or =ⁿgi (non-egophoric), where =ⁿgi can often be omitted. In the case of a copula clause, only stem alternation is used, without a primary

⁷ There are two allomorphs for =i, =ⁿgi and =ki.

⁸ ɲà is a contraction form of nè.jĩ.

marker. To some extent, this is ‘isomorphic’ to the alternation of copular and existential verbs in the simple-habitual. Thus, we will refer to prospective, existential verb clause (Simple-Habitual), and copula clause (Simple-Habitual) as ‘stem alternation class’. The following table shows the paradigm of the ‘stem alternation class’.

Aspect type	Egophoricity markers (Stem alternation+(Primary marker))	
	EGO	NEGO
Prospective	=lè.kʰv.jèʔ=v	=lè.kʰv.né=(ⁿ gi)
Existential verb clause (Simple-Habitual)	jèʔ=v	né=(ⁿ gi)
Copula clause (Simple-Habitual)	jì	rèʔ

Table 6. The paradigm of ‘stem alternation class’

When verbs in any of these three categories are paired with type B egophoric markers and evidential markers, they do not undergo stem alternation and pair with either the default copula stem *jì* or the existential verb stem *jèʔ*. We refer to all clauses that do not exhibit stem changes as the ‘fixed stem class’. In the ‘fixed stem class’, the main verb itself does not undergo stem alternation and needs to be followed by a specific marker to express egophoricity.

Since copula and existential verb markers play an important role in egophoric opposition, we first examine the key semantic-pragmatic oppositions behind the stem alternations of the copular and existential verbs as main verbs or aspect markers, and then use this as a foundation upon which to further examine the ‘fixed stem class’.

4 Stem alternation class

4.1 Copula clause

In a copula clause, the copula is the main verb. In Thebo, the copula may take one of two stems: *jì* or *rèʔ*. In the simple-habitual, stem alternation expresses egophoricity. If further clarification of evidentiality is needed, the main verb will appear with its default stem followed by the evidential markers.

4.1.1 Egophoricity

In a copula clause, we can see that stem alternation in the copula itself expresses an egophoric-non egophoric contrast, as in (2).

- (2) a. *ŋè* *ge.gẽ* *jì*
 1SG teacher COP.EGO
 ‘I am a teacher’

- b. *tʂè.fʰi: ge.gẽ rèʔ*
 tashi teacher COP.NEGO
 ‘Tashi is the teacher’
- c. *ŋà.jò fǔ=yə lè.fè.pè jǐ*
 1PL town=GEN cadre COP.EGO
 ‘We are township officials’
- d. *tè.jò lúʔ lé=nà rèʔ*
 3PL electric fix=NMLZ COP.NEGO
 ‘They are electricians’

In the examples above, the copula stem *jǐ* is chosen when talking about oneself or one’s involvement in a given situation, while *rèʔ* is used for non-self. However, when we further examine the various contexts in which these two stems occur, we can see that the semantic-pragmatic factors behind the alternation are not simply a matter of person, or marking the source of or access to information.

- (3) a. *ŋè ge.gẽ rèʔ*
 1SG teacher COP.NEGO
 ‘I am a teacher’ (One is assigned to be a teacher, or narrates that one is a teacher in a dream.)
- b. *tʂè.fʰi: ge.gẽ jǐ*
 Tashi teacher COP.EGO
 ‘Tashi is the teacher’ (In a play, the director assigned Tashi to play the role of a teacher.)
- c. *sʰɔ.dʒe nà fè.tʂǔ jǐ*
 Sangye person gentle COP.EGO
 ‘Sangye is a gentle man’ (The speaker knows Sangye well.)

A comparison of (2a) and (3a) above shows that again in the first person, different stems are chosen depending on whether or not the speaker is in control of the event in question. In both (2b) and (3b) the subjects are third person, but the choice of stem varies according to whether the speaker has control over the event. If we compare (2b) and (3c), the speaker does not have control in either situation, but there is a difference in the degree of familiarity the speaker wishes to express, which we can call ‘Authority’.

4.1.2 Evidentiality

In contrast with the expression of egophoricity through stem alternation, the copula in the default stem *jǐ*, needs to be followed by an evidential marker to express evidentiality. A direct evidential expresses that information is obtained directly through the five senses of perception, while

an indirect evidential shows that information is obtained through inference or deduced from some form of evidence.

- (4) a. *tè tʂə̃.fʰi: (jĩ) ˈde:*
 DEM tashi COP NEGO.DIR
 ‘That one is Tashi’ (Directly seen, heard, etc.)
- b. *tè tʂà.fʰi: jĩ ˈdzə*
 DEM tashi COP NEGO.INDIR
 ‘That one is Tashi’ (By inference.)

From the perspective of egophoricity, both direct and indirect evidential fall into the non-egophoric category. The following three examples are different responses to a situation in which a family member finds a broken glass in the kitchen and asks who broke it. In the presence of a direct evidential, the copula *jĩ* can be omitted, but its nasal feature will be retained on the direct marker.

- (5) a. *tè ɲè jĩ*
 DEM 1SG COP.EGO
 ‘That was me’
- b. *tè ɲè (jĩ) ˈde:*
 DEM 1SG COP NEGO.DIR
 ‘That was me’
- c. *tè ɲè jĩ ˈdzə*
 DEM 1SG COP NEGO.INDIR
 ‘That was me’

As per the context just described, example (5a) indicates that one intended to break the glass. Example (5b) expresses one’s apology or indicates that one has accidentally or unintentionally broken the glass. Example (5c) is used when one finds out after the fact that she or he has caused the event. The primary difference between the first example and the latter two is whether or not the speaker himself had control over the incident (egophoricity). The difference between the latter two is whether or not the speaker is aware of their action on the spot (evidentiality).

As can be seen from the examples above, egophoric opposition and evidential opposition do not belong to the same semantic-pragmatic level and exhibit different morphosyntactic processes. Egophoricity is a category defined in terms of binary opposition. Its key semantic-pragmatic oppositions are the ‘**controllability**’, and the ‘**authority**’, that the speaker wants to express. On the other hand, evidential contrast occurs only under non-egophoric conditions and functions to code information sources.

4.2 Existential verb clause

In Thebo Tibetan, the existential verb is also the primary possessive verb. Possessive clauses are thus structurally identical to existential clauses but with a more fixed order. The existential verb has two stems: *jèʔ* and *né*.

4.2.1 Egophoricity

Unlike a copula clause, the existential verb employs both a stem alternation and a marker to encode egophoricity.

- (6) a. *ŋè zi:=né jèʔ=v⁹*
 1SG home=LOC EXST.EGO=EGO
 ‘I am at home’
- b. *sùʔ gə.gi rə.ⁿgo=nè né=(ⁿgi)*
 cow all hill=LOC EXST.NEGO=NEGO
 ‘All cows are on the hill’
- (7) a. *ŋè: go.mò jèʔ=v*
 1SG.LOC money EXST.EGO=EGO
 ‘I have money’
- b. *v.kè=lè go.mò né=(ⁿgi)*
 aka=DAT money EXST.NEGO=NEGO
 ‘Aka has money’

Of the examples above, the first pair (6a, 6b) has an existential meaning, while the second pair (7a,7b) has a possessive meaning. Examples (6a) and (7a) refer to the speaker’s situation, while (6b) and (7b) refer to that of a third person. In addition to having an alternation (*jèʔ/né*), the existential verb may also be followed by the egophoricity markers *=v* or *=ⁿgi*. Note that the non-egophoric marker *=ⁿgi* can often be omitted.

As discussed in 3, egophoricity is not a contrast between person and information source but relates to more complex semantic-pragmatic factors. The same situation is presented in the following examples of existential verb clauses.

- (8) a. *ŋè: go.mò né=(ⁿgi)*
 1SG.LOC money EXST.NEGO=NEGO
 ‘I have money’ (The speaker did not realize he had money before.)
- b. *ŋó jó.tʃiʔ=lè pé.tʃʰe jèʔ=v*
 1PL.GEN yangkyi=DAT book EXST.EGO=EGO
 ‘My Yangkyi has books’ (The speaker is Yangkyi’s mother.)

⁹ There is a phonetic realization *jə* for *jèʔ=v*.

We can see in example (8a) that although the subject is in the first person, the non-egophoric marker is chosen when the event in question is not expected by the speaker. In contrast, in example (8b) the subject is in the third person, but the egophoric marker is chosen because the speaker has full mastery or explanatory power over the event in question. The author believes that the distinction between the two is also relevant to the authority previously mentioned. The case of example (8a) can also be considered as a mirative, but basically, it is still an expression of egophoricity.

4.2.2 Evidentiality

As with a copula clause, an existential verb needs to be followed by an evidential marker for evidential expression, though the existential verb itself will remain in the default stem *jèʔ*.

- (9) a. *v.ké=lè* *go.mò jèʔ* *rè*
 aka=LOC money EXST NEG.DIR
 ‘Aka has money’ (See directly, etc.)
- b. *v.ké=lè* *go.mò jèʔ* *zə*
 aka=LOC money EXST NEG.INDIR
 ‘Aka has money’ (Known by inference)

4.3 Prospective

4.3.1 Egophoricity

The situation of verbs in the prospective aspect is similar to that shown for the existential verb clause above. The marker *jèʔ/né* in *=lè.kʰv.jèʔ/né* (from the existential verb) has a stem alternation and is also followed by the egophoric markers *=v* or *=ⁿgi*. Note that the non-egophoric marker *=ⁿgi* can often be omitted.

- (10) a. *ŋè* *ⁿdzo=lè.kʰv.jèʔ=v*
 1SG go/NPAST=PROS.EGO=EGO
 ‘I’m about to go’
- b. *v.ké* *ⁿdzo=lè.kʰv.né=(ⁿgi)*
 aka go/NPAST=PROS.NEGO=NEGO
 ‘Aka is about to go’

If someone wants to indicate that an event in question is not under his or her control, the first person is also followed by a non-egophoric marker. Conversely, if an event is not under a speaker’s control but concerns a relative or close contact, the egophoric marker may be chosen to indicate that she or he has the authority to interpret the event in question.

- (11) a. *tè* *ɣè* *zə=lè.kʰe.né*
 now 1SG drunk/NPAST=PROS.NEGO
 ‘I’m about to get drunk’
- b. *ɣó* *e.kə* *pí.né* *jè=lè.kʰe.jè?=e*
 1PL.GEN aka graduate do/NPAST=PROS.EGO=EGO
 ‘My Aka is about to graduate’ (Aka’s grandmother talking to the parents of other students)

4.3.2 Evidentiality

As with the existential verb clause described above, to further express evidentiality the *jè?/né* component of the prospective marker selects its default stem and is then followed by a corresponding evidential marker.

- (12) a. *tè* *jü=né.kʰe.jè?* *rè*
 3SG come/NPAST=PROS NEG.DIR
 ‘He’s coming soon’ (The speaker saw him preparing to come)
- b. *tè* *jü=né.kʰe.jè?* *tsə*
 3SG come/NPAST=PROS NEG.IDIR
 ‘He was about to come’ (The speaker inferred afterward)

In the prospective, we can see that *jè?/né* as a marker behaves similarly to *jè?/né* as an existential verb. This is precisely because the prospective construction has developed from the existential verb clause. We will discuss the grammaticalization of the existential verb in 7. Synchronically, however, *jè?/né* as an existential verb and *jè?/né* as part of the prospective marker need to be discussed separately.¹⁰

5 Fixed stem class

For the ‘fixed stem class’, we see that egophoric contrast relates to complex semantic-pragmatic factors, and is realized by stem alternation. In contrast, in the ‘fixed stem class’, the main verb itself has no stem alternation and needs to be followed by a specific marker to express egophoricity.

¹⁰ The reason for not regarding *jè?/né* as simply an egophoricity marker in its own right is that *=lè.kʰe* cannot collocate with modal or evidential markers on its own.

5.1 Egophoricity

We have seen that two main factors affect the stem alternations of copulas and existential verbs, controllability and authority. Here we further clarify these two concepts and propose a framework for their analysis.

Controllability in this context does not refer to objective controllability (volitional verb), but rather to a level of ‘controllability’ the speaker wishes to express; that is, whether or not the speaker has control over the event in question. The scope of controllability is limited to events in which the speaker has been or will be, or is, involved and over which he/she has control. An event in which the speaker is not involved is not controllable for the speaker, even if the action itself is volitional. An event is also not controllable if the speaker is involved but the event itself is not objectively controllable (non-volitional verb) or if the speaker is in a semantic role of patient or oblique.

Authority is an attitude that the speaker wishes to express, whether he or she has in-depth knowledge of the event in question and whether he or she has the right to interpret it. Both factors have a strong pragmatic motivation behind them, and emphasize the extent to which one is responsible for or in control of an event.

The binary contrast between egophoric and non-egophoric is a combination of these two factors of controllability and authority. First, if the speaker considers the event in question to be controllable, the egophoric marker is selected. If the speaker considers the event in question to be uncontrollable, the non-egophoric marker is selected. When the event is objectively uncontrollable for the speaker, but he or she still wants to emphasize his or her degree of familiarity or closeness, authority plays a key role. Uncontrollable situations are non-egophoric by default but may take the egophoric marker to express authority. This is a pragmatic mechanism, and authority only matters in an uncontrollable context. Now, we will return to ‘fixed stem’ verbs and the two types of markers expressing egophoricity with which they occur.

5.1.1 Primary-existential (type A)

Within type A, a division can be made between primary markers, the existential verb marker, and the combination marker, all of which are in complementary distribution.

5.1.1.1 Primary markers

The primary markers are =*v* and =*i*, where =*v* is an egophoric marker and =*i* is a non-egophoric marker. The term ‘primary’ is used to refer to markers whose origin is not visible from a diachronic perspective. Such markers can only occur with verbs in the habitual and prospective. The habitual often has a future tense implication. In the prospective, as mentioned in 4.3, stem alternation within the prospective marker *jè?*/*né* is also a means of expressing egophoricity.

- (13) a. *ŋè:* *lè.fé* *tʂi:* ⁿ*dʒu=v*
 1SG.ERG homework write/PAST PRF/NPAST=EGO
 ‘I will finish my homework’

- b. *tì* *lè.fě* *tʂi:* *ˈdʒu=kì*
 3SG.ERG homework write/PAST PRF/NPAST=NEGO
 ‘She/he always completes homework’ (weekly homework)
- (14) a. *ŋè:* *tè* *tʂóʔ=ɐ*
 1SG.ERG DEM break/NPAST=EGO
 ‘I’m going to break it’ (the glass bottle)
- b. *ŋè:* *tè* *tʂóʔ=kì*
 1SG.ERG DEM break/NPAST=NEGO
 ‘I will break it’ (the glass bottle)

It is worth noting that though both examples in (14) are about an event in which the speaker is involved, (14a) expresses that the speaker is in control and has intent. In contrast, (14b) expresses that the speaker does not intend to break the bottle, but presumes it may happen unintentionally.

- (15) a. *tì:* *tʂʰə.tʂə* *ˈdʒɛ:* *kó=kì*
 DEM.ERG car barely drive=NEGO
 ‘He can drive just fine’
- b. *tì:* *tʂʰə.tʂə* *ˈdʒɛ:* *kó=ɐ*
 DEM.ERG car barely drive=EGO
 ‘He can drive just fine’

Both of the examples in (14) relate to other people’s situations, or rather, events that are beyond the speaker’s control. In example (15b), the egophoric marker is used because the speaker wants to express his or her familiarity with the event in question. In contrast, in example (15a), the speaker is merely reporting an event, with no emphasis, and so the non-egophoric marker is used. The prospective aspect has already been discussed in 4.3.

5.1.1.2 Existential verb markers

The existential verb markers are *jèʔ* and *né*. The existential verb markers occur with the perfective aspect. These act as egophoric and non-egophoric markers, respectively. In the simple-perfective, the existential verb markers can only occur in sentences with an exclamatory mood.

- (16) a. *ŋè:* *jə.ye* *tʂi:* *jèʔ*
 1SG.ERG letters write/PAST EGO
 ‘I wrote letters’(did my homework)
- b. *tì:* *jə.ye* *jə.rè* *tʂi:* *né* *jè*
 DEM:ERG letters good write/PAST NEG PART
 ‘He wrote so well’ (Compliment, also used ironically)

- (17) a. $\eta\grave{e}:$ $j\grave{a}.ye$ $t\grave{s}i:$ $y\grave{v}$ $j\grave{e}?$
 1SG.ERG alphabet write/PAST PRF/PAST EGO
 ‘I have written alphabets’ (have done my homework)
- b. $t\grave{i}:$ $j\grave{a}.ye$ $t\grave{s}i:$ $y\grave{v}$ $n\acute{e}$
 DEM.ERG word write/PAST PRF/PAST NEGO
 ‘He has written alphabets’ (has done his homework)

5.1.1.3 Combination markers

Combination markers are the existential verb markers combined with the primary markers, occur in the progressive aspect.¹¹

- (18) a. $\eta\grave{v}$ ${}^ndzo=i.de$ $j\grave{e}?\grave{v}$
 1SG go/NPAST=PROG EGO
 ‘I’m walking’
- b. $t\grave{e}$ ${}^ndzo=i.de$ $n\acute{e}=({}^ngi)$
 DEM go/NPAST=PROG NEGO
 ‘S/he is walking’

In all of the examples above, we see the existential markers $j\grave{e}?$ and $n\acute{e}$ alternating to express an egophoric opposition. The following example is a case where the speaker speaks about himself, but because of a lack of controllability, the non-egophoric marker is used.

- (19) a. $\eta\grave{v}$ $t\acute{o}?\grave{v}=ki.de$ $n\acute{e}$
 1SG hungry/NPAST=PROG NEGO
 ‘I’m hungry’
- b. $t\grave{e}$ $\eta\grave{v}$ ${}^ngo.t\grave{v}?$ $l\grave{e}:=i.de$ $n\acute{e}$
 now 1SG.ERG error do/NPAST=PROG NEGO
 ‘Now, I’m doing something wrong’

5.1.1.4 Non-egophoric marker $n\acute{e}$

The non-egophoric marker $n\acute{e}$ is from the Old Tibetan verb *<snang>* ‘appear, see’, and therefore has a semantic tendency towards ‘to witness’. It can also be used in inferential cases, though it does not have a parallel evidential value, as do $r\acute{e}$ or $z\acute{a}$. See the following examples.

¹¹ There is a phonetic realization $di\acute{o}$ for $de=j\grave{e}?\grave{v}$ in example (19a), a multi-phase syllable merger is presumed: first $j\grave{e}?\grave{v}=j\grave{o}$ and then $de=j\grave{o}>di\acute{o}$.

- (20) a. *tì:* *tò:* *tʰẽ=ⁿgi.dɛ* *rè*
 DEM.ERG cigarette smoke/NPAST=PROG NEGO.DIR
 ‘S/he is smoking’ (Direct)
- b. *tì:* *tò:* *tʰẽ=ⁿgi.dɛ* *zə*
 DEM.ERG cigarette smoke/NPAST=PROG NEGO.NDIR
 ‘S/he is smoking’ (Indirect)
- c. *tì:* *tò:* *tʰẽ=ⁿgi.dɛ* *nè*
 DEM.ERG cigarette smoke/NPAST=PROG NEGO
 ‘S/he is smoking’ (either direct or indirect)

The difference between (21a) and (21b) above has to do with whether or not information is obtained directly. (21c), on the other hand, can be used in both direct and indirect cases. In other words, there is a distinction between something that one personally sees and something that one can infer via available evidence. We may therefore consider (21c) to be an evidentially neutral case.

5.1.2 Copula markers (type B)

The copula markers are =*nə* and =*nè.rè?*,¹² which are egophoric and non-egophoric, respectively. From a diachronic perspective, *nè* is a nominalization marker, which can be considered to have emerged from an extended copula clause. Such markers can be paired with all aspect categories, except for the egophoric habitual and the prospective.

- (21) a. *ŋè* *ge.gẽ* *jè=ɲə*
 1SG teacher do/PAST=EGO
 ‘I worked as a teacher’
- b. *tsʰe.rè* *gegẽ* *jè=lè.rè?*
 tsering teacher do/PAST=NEGO
 ‘Tsering worked as a teacher’
- (22) a. *ŋè* *ⁿdzo=i.dɛ=ɲə*
 1SG go=PROG=EGO
 ‘I’m going’
- b. *tsʰe.rè* *ⁿdzo=i.dɛ=lè.rè?*
 tsering go=PROG=NEGO
 ‘Tsering is going’

¹² =*nè.rè?* has an allomorph =*le.rè?*.

The examples (22) and (23) above demonstrate the simple-perfective and the simple-progressive, respectively. However, in the habitual and the prospective, only a non-egophoric context can use a type B marker.

- (23) a. **ŋè:* *tò:* *tʰẽ=jà*
 1SG.ERG cigarette smoke/NPAST=EGO
 ‘I smoke’
- b. *tsʰe.rẽ=yə* *tò:* *tʰẽ=nè.rè?*
 tsering=ERG cigarette smoke/NPAST=NEGO
 ‘Tsering smokes’ (usual)
- (24) a. **ŋè:* *jũ=né.kʰv.jè?=jà*
 1SG come/NPAST=PROS=EGO
 ‘I’m about to come’
- b. *tè* *jũ= né.kʰv.jè?=lè.rè?*
 3SG come/NPAST=PROS=NEGO
 ‘He is coming soon’

In the previous two sections, we have discussed examples of primary-existential markers (type A) and copula markers (type B). In non-egophoric contexts, the copula marker functions to express assertion. In egophoric contexts, there is no such distinction.

- (25) a. *tsʰe.rẽ=yə* *tò:* *tʰẽ=nè.rè?*
 tsering=ERG cigarette smoke/NPAST=NEGO
 ‘Tsering smokes’ (usual)
- b. *tsʰe.rẽ=yə* *tò:* *tʰẽ=ngi*
 tsering=ERG cigarette smoke/NPAST=NEGO
 ‘Tsering smokes’ (usual)

Both of these examples are egophoric simple-habitual, but example (25a) tends more towards an assertion, while (25b) has no such a function.

5.2 Evidentiality

While egophoricity is obligatory in a finite clause, a further evidential contrast is optional. An evidential contrast can occur in almost any aspect except the perfect-habitual. The direct marker is *rè* and the indirect marker is *zə*. In the perfect-habitual, only direct evidentials can occur.

- (26) a. *rà.tʰẽ=yə* *jà.ye* *tʰi:* *rè/zə*
 renchen=ERG alphabet write/PAST NEG.DIR/INDIR
 ‘Renchen (person name) wrote the words’

- b. *rà.tʰẽ=yə* *jà.ye* *ⁿdzə=i.de* *rè/zə*
 renchen=ERG alphabet write/NPAST=PROG NEGO.DIR/INDIR
 ‘Renchen is writing’
- c. *tè* *jù=né.kʰv.jèʔ* *rè/zə*
 DEM come/NPAST=PROS NEGO.DIR
 ‘S/he is coming soon’ (The speaker saw her or him preparing to come)
- d. *rà.tʰẽ=yə* *jà.ye* *ⁿdzə* *rè/zə*
 renchen=ERG alphabet write/NPAST NEGO.DIR/INDIR
 ‘Renchen can write’

6 Anticipation rule

In the discussion above, we defined egophoricity as the mechanism by which a speaker expresses controllability and authority. In interrogatives, the speaker’s choice of egophoric or non-egophoric marker depends on the maker s/he expects the addressee will use in their answer. This mechanism has been called the anticipation rule by previous scholars (Tournadre & LaPolla 2014). In quoted sentences, whether direct or indirect, egophoricity is thus preserved. Consider the following examples.

- (27) a. *ŋè* *tʰv.rè* *ⁿdzo=v*
 1SG tomorrow go=EGO
 ‘I’m going tomorrow’
- b. *tʂè./ʰi:* *tʰv.rè* *ⁿdzo=i*
 tashi tomorrow go=NEGO
 ‘Tashi will go tomorrow’
- c. *tʂʰeʔ* *tʰv.rè* *ⁿdzo=v* *né*
 2SG tomorrow go=EGO Q
 ‘Are you going tomorrow?’
- d. *ké:zɔ̄=yə* *kʰo* *ⁿdzo=v* *sì:=i*
 kalsang=ERG 3SG go=EGO say/NPAST=NEGO
 ‘Kalsang said he was going’
- e. *ké:zɔ̄=yə* *tʂè./ʰi:* *ⁿdzo=i* *sì:=i*
 kalsang=ERG tashi go=NEGO say/NPAST=NEGO
 ‘Kalsang said “Tashi will go”’

- f. *ké:zṣ=γə* *ŋḗ* *ⁿdzo=v* *sì:=i*
 kalsang=ERG 1SG go=EGO say/NPAST=NEGO
 ‘Kalsang said ‘I will go’

We can see that in (28a, 28b) the speaker chooses a marker of egophoricity based on controllability and authority, whereas in the interrogative in (28c), the speaker chooses the egophoricity marker that s/he expects the addressee will use in their answer. When the speaker quotes someone, the whole sentence is non-egophoric, and the egophoricity of what is quoted remains unchanged whether it is an indirect (28d) or a direct (28e, 28f) quote.

7 Diachronic changes of egophoricity markers

As we have seen above, egophoricity markers in Thebo can be divided into the primary-existential marker (type A) and the copula marker (type B), where the primary marker and existential marker within type A are in complementary distribution. Some preliminary assumptions can be made about the origin of these markers and their grammaticalization pathways.

7.1 Copula marker (type B)

The copula marker is clearly derived from a combination of the nominalization particle *nè* and the copula. We saw in 4 that in the simple habitual, the copula undergoes stem alternation to express egophoric opposition when it is the main verb. The copula marker here is isomorphic with the copula as it appears in the simple habitual, and its structure is copular in origin. In the process of grammaticalization, the nominalizer and the copula have combined and been reanalyzed as egophoricity markers.

$$(S+V+nè) + jṣ/rè? > (S+V) + nè.jṣ/nè.rè? > (S+V) + jṣ/nè.rè?$$

As mentioned above, copula markers (type B) have an assertive function in non-egophoric contexts but are functionally indistinguishable from primary-existential markers (type A) in egophoric contexts. This may be the reason for the gradual disappearance of copula markers in egophoric contexts.

7.2 Existential markers

The existential marker is more complex than the copula marker, as it can occur both in the main verb position and in the prospective as a component of the prospective marker. When it is an egophoricity marker, it complements the primary marker. If we observe its distribution, we can find clues to its grammaticalization.

Aspect type	Main verb		Aspect marker		Egophoricity marker	
	EGO	NEGO	EGO	NEGO	EGO	NEGO
Perfective	–	–	–	–	<i>jèʔ</i>	<i>né</i>
Progressive	–	–	–	–	<i>jèʔ-(ɐ)</i>	<i>né-(ⁿgi)</i>
Prospective	–	–	<i>-jèʔ</i>	<i>-né</i>	<i>ɐ</i>	<i>(ⁿgi)</i>
Habitual	<i>jèʔ</i>	<i>né</i>	–	–	<i>ɐ</i>	<i>(ⁿgi)</i>

Table 7. The distribution of existential verbs

We can assume four stages from the table above.

- Stage 1 (The main verb):** In the habitual, the existential verb acts as the main verb, and its stem alternates to express egophoricity. It is also followed by the primary marker, which is obligatory in an egophoric context.
- Stage 2 (Aspect marker):** In the prospective, the existential verb becomes part of the aspect marker, relying on a stem alternation to express egophoricity. However, it is still followed by the primary marker and is obligatory in an egophoric context.
- Stage 3 (Incomplete egophoricity marker):** In the progressive, the existential verb is no longer the main verb or part of an aspect marker, and becomes the main part of the egophoricity marker. The subsequent primary marker becomes optional.
- Stage 4 (Complete egophoricity marker):** In the perfective, the existential verb completely becomes an egophoricity marker. It can fully realize egophoricity through stem alternation, and the primary marker disappears.

Here we can see the different stages of the gradual grammaticalization of existential verbs into aspect markers and then into egophoricity markers. It is also possible to see the process of how the existential marker has gradually replaced the primary marker.

7.3 Primary markers

Thus far no etymological candidate has been identified for the primary marker =*ɐ* and =*i* in Old Tibetan. However, beyond Thebo Tibetan, similar markers are in use in Amdo Tibetan with similar functions. The following is an example from the Rmachu dialect.¹³

- (28) a. *ta* *ŋa* *ndzo=a*
 now 1SG go=EGO
 ‘I’m going now’

¹³ This example was provided by Sangsrgyas skyabs, from Northwest Minzu University.

- b. *ta* *kʰər:ka* *ndzo=yə*
 now 3SG go=NEGO
 ‘He’s going now’

Since the vowel *ə* in Amdo Tibetan is a reflex of both Old Tibetan *i* and *u*, it can be assumed that the non-egophoric marker =*yə* in Amdo Tibetan shares a common origin with the non-egophoric marker =*i* in Thebo. =*yə* is still commonly used in Amdo Tibetan, probably because the existential verb itself has not developed stem alternations. Although the possible Old Tibetan correlates of the primary markers remain unclear, we can infer that they may represent an earlier egophoricity marker and are being replaced by existential markers.

7.4 Hypothesis: development and reorganization

From a diachronic perspective, the copula *rèʔ* (<red) arose later than the copula *jì* (<yin) in Tibetan (Shao 2016), and thus the use of stem alternation to express egophoricity can be assumed to have occurred later as well. In addition, the existential verb *né* is derived from the Old Tibetan verb *snang* ‘to appear, to see’. Thus, like the copula, the alternation of the existential verb stem can be assumed to have occurred later. We use these clues to assume the past development and possible future reorganization of the language’s egophoricity system in the following ways.

Development:

- A Egophoricity marker =*v*/*i* occurred throughout the system.
- B The copula *rèʔ* is developed and stem alternations in the main verb replace the primary markers.
- C The existential verb *né* was developed, and though the stem alternations of the main verb express egophoricity, they did not fully replace the primary markers.
- D Combination of nominalization and copula clause: (S+V+*né*)+*jì*/*rèʔ*.
- E Existential verbs became part of the prospective marker (=lè.kʰv.jèʔ/*né*), and the progressive marker.
- F The sequence of nominalize and copular verb above underwent reanalysis, with the nominalizer and the copula combining to become egophoricity markers with an assertive function. The progressive marker (*i.de-jèʔ*/*né*), and perfective marker (V2-*jèʔ*/*né*), use stem alternation to express egophoricity but do not completely replace the primary marker.
- G Existential verbs undergo reanalysis in the progressive (*i.de-jèʔ*/*né*); perfective (V2-*jèʔ*/*né*) becomes part of the egophoricity marker, used with the primary markers.
- H Copula markers (type B) are functionally identical to the primary-existential marker (type A) in terms of egophoricity, and therefore tend to disappear. Existential verbs act fully as egophoricity markers in place of primary markers in the perfective. In the progressive, they become the major part of the egophoricity marker and the primary marker becomes optional.

Potential future reorganization:

We can infer a potential future reorganization of the current system as follows.

- I The copula marker (type B) disappears completely in egophoric contexts.
- J Reanalysis occurs in the prospective and the existential verb becomes a fully egophoricity marker.

The path in which these hypothesized diachronic developments and possible future reorganization occur is:

$$A > B/C > D/E > F > G/H > I > (J/K)$$

A hypothetical future egophoricity and evidential system may thus be as follows.

Aspect type	Egophoricity and evidential markers				
	EGO	NEGO	NEGO (Assertion)	Direct	Indirect
Perfective					
Progressive	<i>jèʔ</i>	<i>né</i>	<i>=lè.rèʔ</i>	<i>rè</i>	<i>zə</i>
Prospective					
Habitual	<i>=e</i>	<i>=i</i>			

Table 8. A hypothetical future egophoricity and evidential system

The egophoricity and evidential system of Thebo may eventually lead to functional reorganization, in particular, a change in the function of the non-egophoric markers *né* and *=i*, and finally the development of a homogeneous (non-layered) egophoricity and evidential system. This would be consistent with previously proposed frameworks (Tournadre & LaPolla 2014, Tournadre 2017, Hill & Gawne 2017) which place egophoricity in the category of evidentiality. However, at present, such a framework cannot be proposed for Thebo Tibetan.

8 Summary

Through analysis of egophoricity and evidentiality in Thebo Tibetan, we have examined in some detail the semantic-pragmatic factors behind formal oppositions between these categories in terms of morphosyntax, including markers and stem alternations. Our conclusions support the existence of egophoricity as a self-contained system in Thebo Tibetan, which demonstrates an egophoric-nonegophoric contrast. Non-egophoric contexts may or may not be specified for evidentiality. The most basic evidential opposition is direct versus indirect and occurs only in non-egophoric contexts.

In Thebo Tibetan, markers of egophoricity can be divided into two categories, primary-existential markers (type A) and copula markers (type B). The latter has an assertive function in non-

egophoric contexts. From a diachronic perspective, the grammaticalization pathways of the existential markers and the copula markers are clear, but the origin of the primary markers remains unknown. At the same time, we can also see that Thebo’s whole egophoricity and evidential system may be in the process of reorganization; a finding with implications for the development of these categories in other Tibetan dialects.

ABBREVIATIONS

1	first person	LOC	locative
2	second person	NEG	negation
3	third person	NEGO	non-egophoric
ABL	ablative	NPST	non-past
ALL	allative	NMLZ	nominalizer
COJ	conjunctive	PRF	perfect
COP	copula	PROG	progressive
COM	comitative	PROS	prospective
CVB	converb	PRS	present
DAT	dative	PL	plural
DEM	demonstrative	Q	question
DIR	direct	SFP	sentence final particle
EXST	existential verb	SG	singular
ERG	ergative	TERM	terminative
EGO	egophoric	=	clitic
FUT	future	-	morphem boundary
GEN	genitive	/	stem type
IMP	imperative	.	syllable boundary;
INDIR	indirect		multiple grammatical categories

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