

Nominalization-based constructions in Tibeto-Burman: Synchronic and diachronic perspectives¹

1. A typological divide: Languages with clausal nominalization and without

Clausal nominalization:

- (1) *k^hur⁵⁵ khə⁵⁵ dō³⁵³-sa ŋe¹³ t^hū³⁵³ sō*
[3.SG.ERG 3.SG.ABS hit-NZR]_O [1.SG.ERG]_A [see EGO]_{PRED}
'I saw him hit him/I saw his hitting of him.' (Dongwang Tibetan, data from Barteel (2007), cited in Genetti, Barteel et. al. (MS-2008))

With the exception of a predicate nominalizer, the clausal nominalization has main-clause-like structure. (Matisoff 1972; Noonan 1997; Bickel 1999; DeLancey 2002)

Action nominalization/action nominal construction:

- (2) *ai sɔ hiz hir-ŋ əv him.*
[1.SG.NOM]_A [see.PST]_{PRED} [3.SG.GEN hit-NZR of 3.SG.ACC]_O
'I saw his hitting of him.'

In addition to a predicate nominalizer, the action nominalization has noun-phrase-like structure. (Chomsky 1970; Comrie and Thompson 1985; Koptjevskaya-Tamm 1993)

Clausal nominalization in relative clause construction:

- (3) *dokhunɯŋ āmu cilā = n bi = e cij = pen*
[all [that goat=ERG Ø_i give=NZR]_{REL} thing=PL_i]_{NP}
'all the things (that) the goat gave' (Dolokha Newar, data from Genetti, Barteel et. al. (MS-2008))

Relative pronominal relative clause:

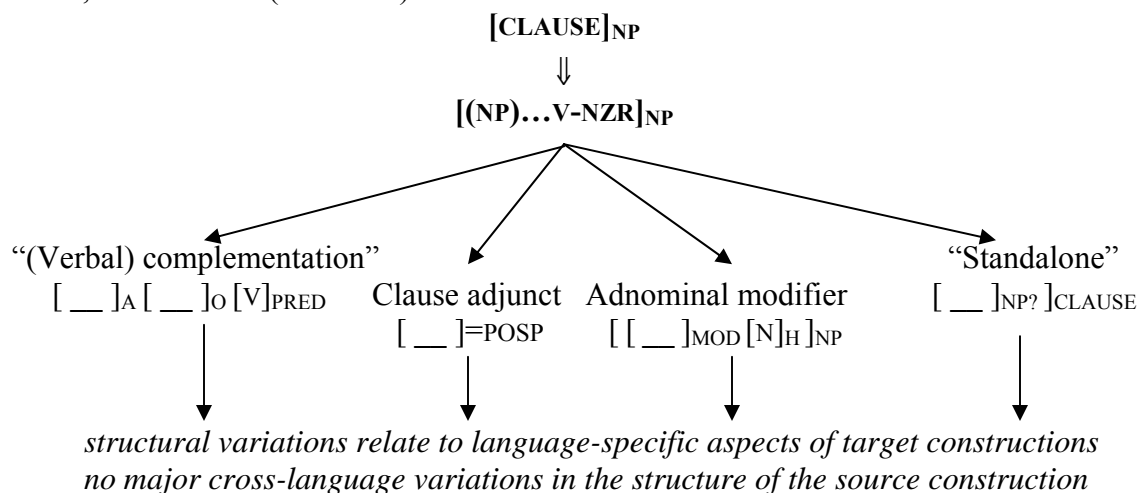
- (4) *ɔl ðə θŋ-z (ðæt) ðə got geiv*
[all DEF thing-PL_i [(REL) DEF goat.NOM give.PST Ø_i]_{REL}]_{NP}
'all the things (that) the goat gave' (? 'all the things (of) the goat's giving')

Other reported functions of clausal nominalization include "standalone" uses (like main clauses, but usually with a marked semantic/pragmatic value) and in various dependent clause (or "converbal") functions (Genetti, Barteel et al. MS-2008; Noonan to appear 2008; Watters to appear 2008).

¹ All data is sourced as cited. In most cases, authors' transcriptions have been preserved, although some small changes have been made here and there to improve consistency within this paper. Abbreviations have been similarly changed for consistency where possible. In preparing this I've benefited greatly from discussions with Jackson Sun, Randy LaPolla, Stephen Morey, Guy Deutscher and Seino van Breugel.

2. Tibeto-Burman clausal nominalizations: is there a “prototypical structure”?

Genetti, Bartee et. al. (MS-2008):



An example: adnominal modification with or without genitive marking

- a) genitive always present: Gurung (Tamangic; data from Glover (1974), cited in Noonan (to appear 2008))

(5) *cá pxra-bá-e mxí jaga*
[that [Ø]_i walk-NZR-GEN]_{RELC} person_i PL]_{NP}
‘those walking people (=sentries)’

- b) preposed relatives with genitive, postposed relatives without: Written Tibetan (Tibetic; data from Beyer (1992), cited in Noonan (to appear 2008))

(6) *blama-s btul-ba-i bgegs*
[[lama-ERG Ø_i tame-NZR-GEN]_{RELC} demon_i]_{NP}
‘the demon which the lama tamed’ (head-preposed relative clause)

(7) *bgegs blama-s btul-ba*
[demon_i [lama-ERG Ø_i tame-NZR]_{RELC}]_{NP}
‘the demon which the lama tamed’ (head-postposed relative clause)

- c) no genitive marking at all: Mongsen Ao (Ao group; data from Coupe (2007:255))

(8) *sənti-pà? nə hən-pà? kákət tʃu*
[NAME-MASC AGT Ø_i carry-NZR]_{RELC} book_i DST]_{NP}
‘the book that Senti carried’

RELC constructions differ, but structure of clausal nominalization is same...

...or is it?

3. Variations in the structure of [CLAUSE]_{NP}

3.1. Languages with a less-grammatically-integrated clausal nominalization

In Turung and Numphuk Singpho (Jingpho/Kachinic) – both highly isolating/analytical languages of the SW China/N Burma/NE India area – it is possible (though statistically rare) to find unmarked clauses functioning as arguments of a higher clause. Arguably, these would have the status of “zero-” clausal nominalizations.

[CLAUSE]_{NP} → [(NP)...V]_{NP} ⇒ [[(NP)...V]_{S/A/O} [V]_{PRED}]_{CLAUSE}

- (9) *məcan¹ məjan¹ bok¹ go¹ muŋ⁵kaŋ⁵ goi⁴ ŋaa⁵*
 [poor person all TOP]_{TOP} [world LOC stay]_S
gai⁴ yak¹ de¹
 [very difficult RLS]_{PRED}
 ‘For poor people, **living in the world** is very difficult.’ (Numphuk Singpho (Kachinic); data from Morey (under review))

- (10) *the²maa¹ n³-tem¹ daa² dii³ n³-ŋaa² də=go¹*
 [**this.much** NEG-write keep AUX]_S [NEG-have RLS=TOP]_{PRED}
ii¹ naa³ go¹
 [1.PL GEN TOP]_{TOP}
 ‘We didn’t have **writing and recording of these sorts of things**.’ (Turung Singpho (Kachinic); data from Morey (under review))

More often, Singpho clausal nominalizations are marked by noun phrase operators, most commonly waa¹ ‘DEF’ in Numphuk or go¹ ‘TOP’ in Turung. naa⁴ ‘SEQ’ – homophonous with naa⁴ ‘GEN’ – marks subordinated clauses in Numphuk, which also – arguably – have the status of clausal nominalizations.

[CLAUSE]_{NP} → [[(NP)...V]_{ART}]_{NP} ⇒ [(NP)...V]_{S/A/O} [V]_{PRED}
 [CLAUSE]_{NP} → [[(NP)...V]_{POSP}]_{NP} ⇒ [(NP)...V]_{OBL} [A O V]_{CORE}

- (11) *məreeŋ⁴ tee¹ naa⁴ go¹ aŋ⁴goi⁴ ŋaa⁵ re¹*
 [village **found** SEQ TOP]_{TOP} [here stay RLS]_{PRED}
 ‘After setting up the village, (he) stayed here.’ (Numphuk Singpho, data from Morey (under review))

Unlike in most Tibeto-Burman languages, adnominal relative clause modification in Singpho is not based on a synchronic nominalization. Rather, there is an obligatory clause marker $de^1/də/re^1/rə$ ‘REL’, which is cognate with Realis predicate marker $de^1/də/re^1/rə$ ‘RLS’ and ultimately derives from a verb or verbal auxiliary rai/re ‘do/be/stay’ (Stephen Morey, personal communication). Thus, in principle the Singpho relative clause construction would seem to have an origin in zero-relativization. The relative clause in this case may or may not have been analysable as “zero-nominalized”.

*[CLAUSE]_{NP} → *[[NP]...V AUX]_{NP}
 ↓
 *[[[NP]...V AUX]_{RELC}][N]_{HEAD}]_{NP} → [[[[NP]...V REL]_{RELC}][N]_{HEAD}]_{NP}

- (12) $iŋ^3 \quad səjoo^1 \quad ŋaa^1 \quad de^1 \quad koŋ^2 \quad muu^1$
 [1.PL Ø_i make FUT REL]_{RELC} pagoda_i]_{NP}
 ‘the pagoda that we will make’ (Turung Singpho, data from Stephen Morey, in personal communication: Text Ref: SDM07-20050707-013 (5))

In Rawang, a more synthetic language of N Burma/SW China possibly of the same branch, clauses in argument functions are – seemingly, obligatorily – marked by a noun phrase operator of some kind. The most common is Distal demonstrative $wē$ ‘that’, which in some if not all nominalizing uses appears to be morphologically bound.

[CLAUSE]_{NP} → [[(NP)...V]ART]_{NP} → [[(NP)...V](-NZR)]_{NP} ⇒ [(NP)...V]_{S/A/O} [V]_{PRED}

- (13) $wē \quad əfùm \quad nī \quad hu? \quad bòy \quad lúm̄rā-rì-səŋ$
that three day until festival festival.goers-PL-LOC
 $àŋkàŋ \quad rəp-í \quad əm-ləm \quad a?-ləm \quad fəŋbē \quad dó \quad yàŋ-à.$
 lord/host family-AGT eat-PURP drink-PURP all feed/host RPST-TR.PST
 ‘The ones who came to participate in the celebration were served by the hosts with food and drinks.’ (Rawang (Kachinic?); data from LaPolla (under review))
- (14) $nəmbùŋ \quad wà \quad rá-ì \quad wē-í \quad fúŋgùŋ \quad ŋa? \quad rá-à.$
 [wind do DIR-3.INT.PST NZR-AGT]_A [tree]_O [knock.over DIR-TR.PST]_{PRED}
 ‘The blowing of the wind knocked the tree over.’ (Rawang; data from LaPolla (under review))
- (15) $zùŋ-ka? \quad dī-wē \quad də-í-ē \quad nū...$
 [school-LOC go-NZR]_S [CNTR-be-NPST]_{PRED} TOP
 ‘He’s going to school (not anywhere else)...’ (Rawang; data from LaPolla (under review))

Relative clauses in Rawang may or may not be marked by wē ‘that; NZR’. Although no semantic difference between the marked and unmarked forms is reported, the marked forms may be headless while the unmarked forms may not. La Polla (2007) considers the marked form to be “nominalized”, while the unmarked form is not. In principle, however, both types would derive from a Singpho-like “zero-” relativization and/or nominalization.

$[[[(NP)\dots V](\underline{ART})]_{\text{RELC}}] [N]_{\text{HEAD}}]_{\text{NP}}$

- (16) *əpəŋ pūŋ-í səŋwut dətú yàŋ-à məsúíl*
 [[NAME NAME-AGT Ø_i **teach guide RPST-TR.PST**]_{RELC} story_i]_{NP}
 ‘the story taught by Apang Pung’ (Rawang; data from LaPolla (2007))

- (17) *dəmŋâ-rì-í rīm-at-à wē məsúíl*
 [[shaman-PL-AGT Ø_i **keep-DIR-TR.PST NZR**]_{RELC} story_i]_{NP}
 ‘a story being kept by the shamans’ (Rawang; data from LaPolla (2007))

The possibility of zero-relativization in Rawang in turn provides a productive channel for grammaticalization of noun phrase constituents as clausal nominalizers (LaPolla 2007):

$*[[[(NP)\dots V]_{\text{RELC}}] [N]_{\text{HEAD}}]_{\text{NP}} \rightarrow [[[(NP)\dots V](-)\underline{NZR}]_{\text{NP}}]$

- (18) *nəmlat gú ta? rəm-ŋî nəŋ-ŋî da?-ì gú*
 [the.first CLF LOC add-REFL accompany-REFL DIR-INT.PST **CLF:HUM/NZR**]_{NP}
 ‘one added to the first-born as company’ (Rawang; data from LaPolla (under review))

Evidence of similar developments is found even in highly synthetic Himalayish languages such as Belhare and Athpare, both spoken in the Eastern Nepali Kirant:

- (19) *khan-na asen a-in-u-na meruba*
 [[2.SG-ERG yesterday Ø_i 2-buy-3.UND-ART/NZR]_{RELC} goat_i]_o
pu-metta-ŋ!
 [look-CAUS-1.SG]_{PRED}
 ‘Show me the goat that you bought yesterday!’ (Athpare (Eastern Kiranti); data from Bickel (1999))

Development of noun phrase operators as clause markers and, eventually, bound predicate operators is not restricted to core argument or noun phrase-internal functions. In Atong, a variety of subordinated clauses are formed via direct suffixation of noun phrase relational markers (or their cognates) to a bound (?) predicate root. In principle, such constructions would have arisen through application of a noun phrase postposition to an unmarked (“zero-nominalized”) clause:

*[[(NP)...V]POSP]_{OBL} [A O V]_{CORE} → [[(NP)...V-SBRD]_{OBL} [A O V]_{CORE}

- (20) *soŋ dam-sa-ci alsia raja məŋʔ-sa ganaŋ-cəm.*
 [village CLF-one-LOC]_{OBL} [lazy king CLF-one]_S [be-EXIS]_{PRED}
 ‘In a village lived a lazy king.’ (Atong (Bodo-Garo); data from van Breugel (in press))

- (21) *tura-saŋ reʔeŋ-ci-do aŋ-na topi raʔ-bo-ne.*
 [PLACE-MOB go.away-LOC-TOP]_{SBRD} [1.SG-DAT]_E [hat]_O [get-IPTV-TAG]_{PRED}
 ‘If you go to Tura, buy me a hat.’ (Atong data from van Breugel (in press))

*Strikingly, languages whose clausal nominalizations already *have* a bound predicate nominalizer at the time of the construction’s inception *also* go through the same sort of development; in this case, the -NZR=POSP *sequence* may fuse and undergo reanalysis as a single predicate subordinator. This sort of development is clearly sketched out by Genetti, Bartee, et. al. (MS-2008), based partly on data and analysis from Coupe (2007):*

*[[(NP)...V-NZR]POSP]_{OBL} [A O V]_{CORE} → [[(NP)...V-SBRD]_{OBL} [A O V]_{CORE}

- (22) **pa tə-ləm ku tsə-pàʔ-nə tə-ləm tʃu apak-tʃuk*
 [3.SG RPFX-head LOC peck-NZR-INST]_{OBL} [RPFX-head DST flat-PFV.PST]_{CORE}
 * ≙ ‘**By way of** (the other birds’) pecking on her head, (her) head became flat.’
 (Not-Ao-Mongsen; data based on discussion in Coupe (2007))

- (23) *pa tə-ləm ku tsə-pànə tə-ləm tʃu apak-tʃuk*
 [3.SG RPFX-head LOC peck-CAUSAL]_{SBRD} [RPFX-head DST flat-PFV.PST]
 ‘**Because** (the other birds) pecked on her head, (her) head became flat.’ (Ao Mongsen; data from Coupe (2007))

Parallel developments with and without bound predicate nominalizers:

*[[(NP)...V]POSP] → [[(NP)...V-SBRD]
 *[[(NP)...V-NZR]POSP] → [[(NP)...V-SBRD]

3.2.1. Interim summary

Some if not all Tani languages have developed Genitive-marking of subjects in some types of nominalization-based construction, as well as in some types of subordinated or dependent clause. In a sense, then, Tani languages such as Galo have come to resemble languages without clausal nominalizations in exhibiting a more noun-phrase-like nominalized clause syntax. However, in terms of the overall arrangement of nominalization-based constructions and their functions, Galo in fact straightforwardly resembles a very large number of (probably most) other Tibeto-Burman languages.

How did this come about?

3.2.2. Some proposed etymologies:

Galo *-kə̀/gə̀* ‘GEN’ < PT **ka* ‘GEN’ < PTB **ka* ‘ABL’ and/or ‘GEN’ (DeLancey 1984)

Galo *-nà* ‘NZR:SUB’ < PT **na* ‘(ART/?)NZR’, possibly \approx Proto-E. Kiranti **na?* ‘ART/NZR’

Galo *-nam* ‘NZR:(NSUB:)RLS’ < PT **na = m* ‘NZR=ACC’

Galo *-kò* ‘NZR:LOC/OBL’ \approx PT **ko* ‘place; ground; earth’ ?

Galo *-há* ‘NZR:(NSUB:)IRR’ \approx PBod **sa* ‘earth; soil’ (Noonan to appear), cf. Lhasa *-sa*
‘NZR:LOC/DAT’ ??

**if* these etymologies are at all accurate, they lead one to suspect that:*

a) the Tani Genitive is not secondary, but is rather an old Genitive form. Therefore, Genitive subject-marking probably evolved in response to, and possibly eventually as a marker of, the nominalized status of the predicate (as opposed to having arisen via reanalysis of some other, non-Genitive form in the same construction).

...however, it is not yet possible to state at what point precisely Genitive subject marking would have arisen, and what the predicate shape would have been at that stage!

b) while at least one or two bound predicate nominalizers may have been present at the Proto-Tani stage, there was presumably a stage when proto-bare-verbs were either apposed directly to head nouns (giving rise to nominalizers, as in Rawang) or marked by an article (again giving rise to nominalizers, as in Rawang, Singpho and Himalayish)

3.2.3. A possible explanation

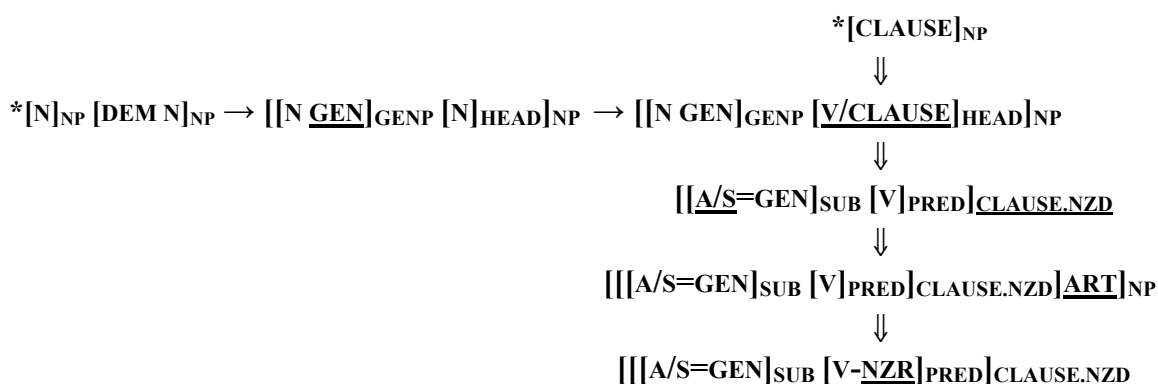
In Old Chinese, Genitive 之 (Mandarin zhī) developed the ability to mark association between a notionally non-finite – but morphologically unmarked – predicate, and its argument(s). Although originally a noun phrase operator, Genitive 之 effectively took on the function of marking a clausal nominalization.

- (31) 知 吾 卒 之 可 以 击
zhī wú zú zhī kě yǐ jī
 know [[1 soldiers GEN/NZR]_O [be.able use attack]_{PRED}]_{CLAUSE.NZD}
 ‘If (we) just know that our soldiers are ready to attack,’ [lit., ≅ ‘If we just know of our soldiers’ being able to be used to attack’ – MWP]

- (32) 而 不 知 敌 之 不 可 击
ér bù zhī dí zhī bù kě jī
 but NEG know [[enemy GEN/NZR]_{S/A} [NEG be.able attack]_{PRED}]_{CLAUSE.NZD}
 ‘But don’t know that the enemies cannot be attacked,’

- (33) 胜 之 半 也
shèng zhī bàn yě。
 [[victory GEN]_{GENP} [half]_N]_{NP} DECL
 ‘This is (only) a fifty-percent (chance of) victory.’
 (孫子 Sūn Zǐ (6th century BC) 兵法 Bīng Fǎ ‘The Art of War’ (Vol. 2, Chapter on Terrains, Para. 76); data supplied by Jackson Sun, PRC-ified by the author)

So, potentially, the Old Chinese construction could have been precisely the sort of construction inherited by (Pre-)Proto-Tani. Genitive argument-marking – whether of subjects exclusively or of other argument types also – would have been inherited by the clausal nominalization construction, while morphological predicate nominalizers would have developed later out of articles, or perhaps other forms:



...and “hey presto”: Proto-Tani clausal nominalization!

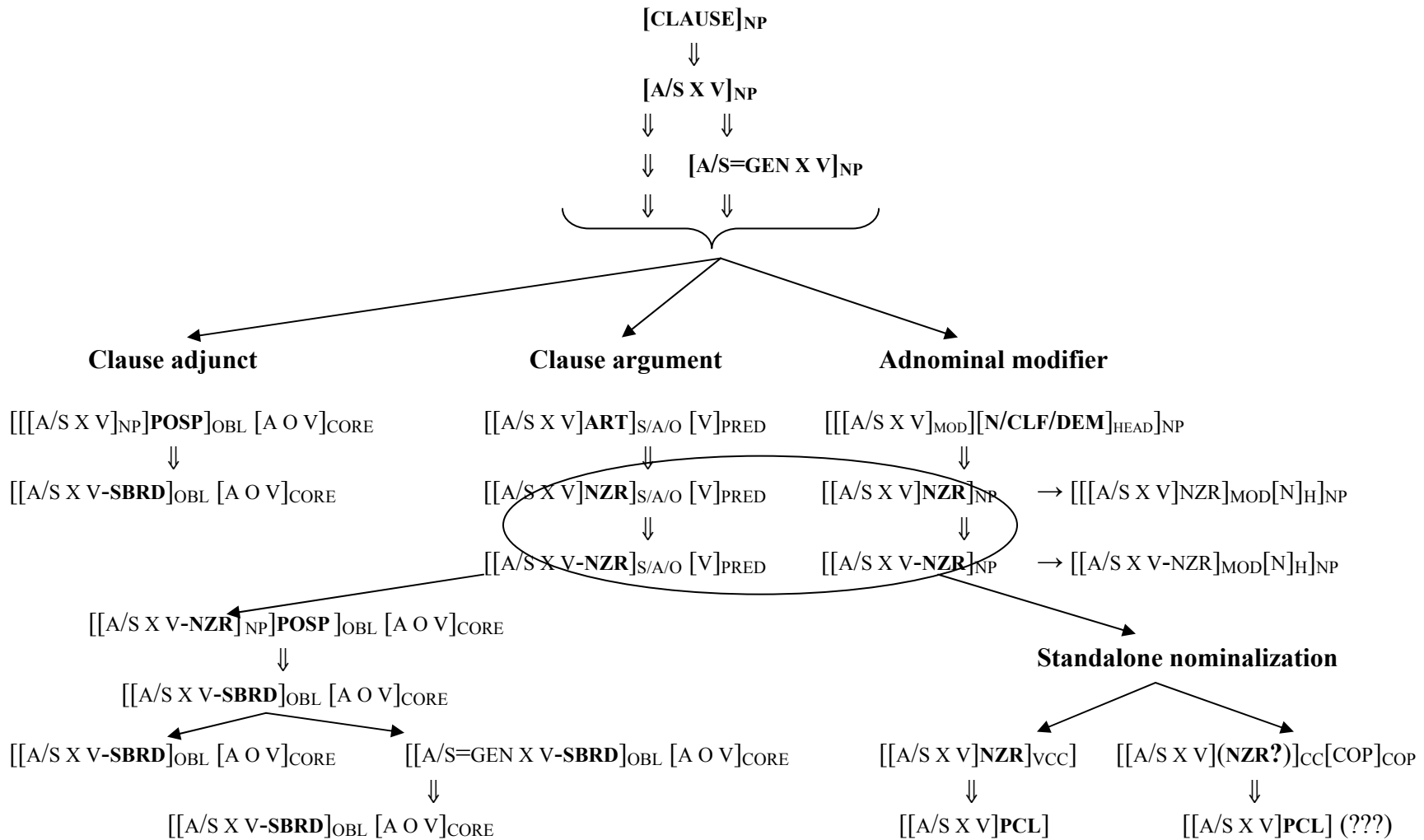


Figure 1 – Provisional schematic for the development of nominalization-based constructions in Tibeto-Burman (note that while Genitive subject-marking is not represented in the lower schematics, it should be understood to be present in those languages which developed it early on – however, not every construction is necessarily attested in all languages which also have Genitive subjects in non-main clauses, so further elaboration of the diagram will eventually be required)

An example: the parallel development of subordinating suffixes from postpositional marking of “non-nominalized” and morphologically nominalized clauses in Atong and Mongsen Ao (respectively):

- (35) *soŋ dam-sa-ci alsia raja məŋʔ-sa ganaŋ-cəm.*
 [village CLF-one-LOC]_{OBL} [lazy king CLF-one]_S [be-EXIS]_{PRED}
 ‘In a village lived a lazy king.’ (Atong data from van Breugel (in press))
- (36) *tura-saŋ reʔeŋ-ci-do aŋ-na topi raʔ-bo-ne.*
 [PLACE-MOB go.away-LOC-TOP]_{SBRD} [1.SG-DAT]_E [hat]_O [get-IPTV-TAG]_{PRED}
 ‘If you go to Tura, buy me a hat.’ (Atong data from van Breugel (in press))
- (37) **pa tə-ləm ku tsə-pàʔ-nə tə-ləm tʃu apak-tʃuk*
 [3.SG RPFX-head LOC peck-NZR-INST]_{OBL} [RPFX-head DST flat-PFV.PST]_{CORE}
 * ≙ ‘**By way of** (the other birds’) pecking on her head, (her) head became flat.’
 (Not-Ao-Mongsen data based on discussion in Coupe (2007))
- (38) *pa tə-ləm ku tsə-pànə tə-ləm tʃu apak-tʃuk*
 [3.SG RPFX-head LOC peck-CAUSAL]_{SBRD} [RPFX-head DST flat-PFV.PST]
 ‘**Because** (the other birds) pecked on her head, (her) head became flat.’ (Ao Mongsen data from Coupe (2007))

And an even later stage of the Mongsen Ao-type development in Lare Galo:

- (39) *əgə, doobəə booló...alə haé bəré?*
 əgə dóo-bəə-boolo alə-há=ee bəree
 ANAP.IND LOC.EXIS.INAN-DUR-COND good-NZR:IRR=COP.PFV CJEC
 ‘If it had remained...do you reckon it would have been (a) good (thing)?’
 (< *bV(V?) ‘NZR?’ + lo ‘LOC’) (Lare Galo data from Post (2007:253))

[A O V]=POSP]_{OBL} [CLAUSE] → [A O V-SBRD]_{SBRD} [CLAUSE]

[A O V-NZR]=POSP]_{OBL} [CLAUSE] → [A O V-SBRD]_{SBRD} [CLAUSE]

Same output, “different” inputs – but how “different” are the inputs really?

Might they not both have the same basic cognitive, and even grammatical, statuses – namely, as nominalizations? Might the first type of structure not simply represent the only strategy available to a language with a universal functional need (to reify an event and subject it to various characteristically nominal construals and discourse uses), but without well-grammaticalized nominalizing morphology with which to code it?⁴

⁴ For a fairly radical (but entirely plausible) partial account of the shaping and re-shaping of Tibeto-Burman language typologies due to partial creolization following use as regional lingua francas, see Burling (in press).

5. Conclusion

I have attempted to show that the “basic” schematic [CLAUSE]_{NP} can “unpack” into not one, but rather a variety of language-specific structures in Tibeto-Burman. Among the attested structures are [A/S X V]_{NP} – in which there is no formal indication of nominalized status, but where the clause can function in at least some ways like a nominal – [A/S=GEN X V]_{NP} – in which genitive subject marking signals the nominalized status of a clause, despite no morphological predicate nominalization – [[A/S X V](-)NZR]_{NP} – in which a phrasal clitic or predicate affix signals nominal status, but in which other clause constituents retain canonical marking – and [A/S=GEN X V-NZR]_{NP} – in which both a morphological nominalizer and subject genitive marking signal the nominal status of a clause.

I have attempted to characterize these structures in terms of an overall *set of diachronic progressions*, with the first, “zero-nominalized” structure viewed as in some sense “basic” or “original” – and largely characteristic of more isolating/analytical languages of the N Burma/SW China area – and the remaining structures viewed as secondary, and progressively more characteristic of synthetic/agglutinating languages of the Himalayas.

Following Deutscher (2008), I have also suggested that the root of all of these developments consists in a cognitively marked operation in which speakers license an event-oriented construction for treatment as an entity-oriented construction; while retaining clause-like syntax, it is then deployed in the same way a nominal would be in at least some discourse functions. Nonetheless, there would exist a functional pressure also to *morphologically* mark this operation (to distinguish the relevant structures from true finite clauses), wherewith ordinary noun phrase operators are recruited in supporting functions, and eventually grammaticalize as bound predicate nominalizers.

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Abbreviations

1	First person	FUT	Future	PL	Plural
2	Second person	GEN	Genitive	POSP	Postposition
3	Third person	H	Head	PRED	Predicate
A	Transitive subject	HAB	Habitual	PROS	Prospective
ABS	Absolutive	HDST	Hyper-distal	PST	Past
ACC	Accusative	HUM	Human	PT	Proto-Tani
ACNC	Additive concessive	IND	Individuator	PTB	Proto-Tibeto-Burman
ADV	Adverb(ial)	INT	Intransitive	PURP	Purpose
AGT	Agentive	IPFV	Imperfective	QN	Qualifying noun
APPL	Applicative	IPTV	Imperative	REFL	Reflexive
ART	Article	IRR	Irrealis	REL	Relativizer
ASP	Aspect	LOC	Locative	RELC	Relative clause
ATTN	Attainment	LQ	Leading question	RLS	Realis
AUX	Auxiliary	MASC	Masculine	RPST	Remote past
CAUS	Causative	MOB	Mobilitative	S	Intransitive subject
CLF	Classifier	MOD	Modifier	SBRD	Subordinat(or)
COMT	Comitative	NEG	Negative	SEQ	Sequential
CNTR	Contrastive	NOM	Nominative	SG	Singular
DAT	Dative	NP	Noun phrase	SLEV	Same-level
DEF	Definite	NPST	Non-past	SUB	Subject
DEM	Demonstrative	NSUB	Non-subject core	TAG	Tag
DIR	Directional	NZD	Nominalized	TOP	Topic
DST	Distal	NZR	Nominalizer	TR	Transitive
E	Extension to core	O	Transitive object	UND	Undergoer
ERG	Ergative	OBL	Oblique	V	Verb
EXIS	Existential	PCL	Particle	WOND	Wonder(ment)
FOC	Focus	PF	Perfect		

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