

Overt positive degree morphology in Tibetic

Patrick Muñoz

University of Chicago

pjmuno@uchicago.edu

Donnerstag,
05.03.2020
13:45–14:15
ESA1 O 121

Recent literature on degree morphology and gradable adjectives has sometimes claimed (e.g. Bobaljik 2012: 32, fn. 5; Grano & Davis 2018: 133) that there is no well-described language in which a degree morpheme attending gradable adjectives in the positive form is uncontroversially and overtly realized. If this is true, then it is a problem for semantic theories of gradable adjectives which, following Cresswell (1976), posit a positive-form degree morpheme ('POS') in this position, since there is no descriptive, theory-independent reason to believe in the existence of such a morpheme.

The purpose of this talk is to fill a descriptive lacuna in the theoretical literature: certain varieties of Tibetic, including Ü-Tsang / 'Standard' Tibetan (UT), from which this talk takes its examples, but also Literary Tibetan (Goldstein et al. 1991: 249ff.) and Sherpa (Kelly 2004: 235–236), do overtly realize a distinct morpheme with positive-form gradable adjectives. The marking is robust, regular, and clear, making the case for such a morpheme in Tibetic far less controversial than previous similar claims made for Navajo (Bogal-Albritton 2008: 30), Mandarin (Grano 2012), and Arabic (Grano & Davis 2018).

UT has a distinct class of adjectives, which appear with obligatory degree morphology to the right of the stem, both in attributive and predicative position. This includes a morpheme, most often realized as *po*, which appears in the positive form. As illustrated with the stem *tsha* 'hot':

(1) *tsha po* ('hot') / *tsha ba* ('hotter') / *tsha shos* ('hottest')

This questions the generalization in Grano & Davis (2018: 133, ex. 8), according to which comparative and positive forms can't be overtly (i) equally complex and (ii) non-identical. The marker *po* is obligatory in the positive, it is in contrastive distribution with a wide variety of other degree markers, and it cannot stack with the others (e.g. **tsha po ba*). It further has its own morphophonological life, with the allomorph depending on the adjectival stem, and has a cross-categorical degree-related function, appearing also on gradable quantifiers (e.g. *mang po* 'much/many').

References: Bobaljik, J. D. (2012). Universals in Comparative Morphology: Suppletion, Superlatives, and the Structure of Words. MIT Press. Bogal-Albritton, E. (2008). Gradability and degree constructions in Navajo. B. A. thesis, Swarthmore College. Cresswell, H. J. (1976). The semantics of degree. In B. Partee (ed.), *Montague Grammar*, 261–292. Academic Press. Goldstein, M. C., G. Rimpoche & L. Phuntshog (1991). *Essentials of Modern Literary Tibetan: A Reading Course and Reference Grammar*. Munshiram Manoharlal. Grano, T. (2012). Mandarin *hen* and universal markedness in gradable adjectives. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 30, 513–565. Grano, T. & S. Davis (2018). Universal markedness in gradable adjectives revisited. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 36, 131–147. Kelly, B. (2004). A grammar of the Sherpa language. In C. Genetti (ed.), *Tibeto-Burman Languages of Nepal: Manage and Sherpa*. Pacific Linguistics, 191–324.