

# Thewo Tibetan's /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/

## A narrative exploration of how temporal space and verbal semantics interact with evidentiality

Abe Powell

Lanzhou University

This paper has three aims. First, in its form, this paper uses a narrative style to overtly highlight the iterative process used to identify the meaning of the two suffixes in question. Second, this paper seeks to describe the intricate workings of two verbal suffixes in Thewo Tibetan. Finally, this paper makes a defense of why these two suffixes belong to the category of evidentiality. Thewo Tibetan is spoken in China on the Gansu-Sichuan border. The suffixes /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ appear either directly after action verbs, or directly after the progressive aspect marker. /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is used to express that the speaker has sensory information of their claim at the time of the speech act. The temporal nature of the evidence, whether it is sensory information of the act itself or of the results of the act, is determined in part by the semantics of the verb (telic vs non-telic). In contrast, /ta<sup>33</sup>/ is used to express that at the time of the speech act, the speaker no longer has sensory evidence (but formerly did) of the stated action. Based upon these observations, this paper argues that temporal space and verbal semantics are key to understanding the cognition which underlies interpreting /nə<sup>33</sup>/ and /ta<sup>33</sup>/. As such, this paper makes the following three contributions: (1) In its form it provides an anecdote of failures and success along the path to identifying the function and meaning of two evidential suffixes; (2) It introduces two suffixes of the hitherto un-described Thewo Tibetan evidential system; and (3) It gives an in-depth analysis of these suffixes and offers evidence to support the claim that they are evidential suffixes.

**Keywords:** Thewo Tibetan, evidentiality, telicity, verbal semantics, mirativity

## 1. Background

This paper is about the Thewo Tibetan suffixes /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/, in particular about how their evidential usage is related to verbal semantics and temporal space. Thewo Tibetan<sup>1</sup> is a small, Tibetic language spoken on the Gansu-Sichuan border in Northwestern China. Although spoken in a small geographic area, the rough terrain and historically limited transportation have likely helped create the remarkable linguistic diversity found in Thewo Tibetan (Powell 2022). The variety described here is spoken in: [In Thewo Tibetan] ɲa<sup>33</sup>wa<sup>55</sup> k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> ndzo<sup>33</sup>ge<sup>55</sup> ndzō<sup>33</sup> t<sup>h</sup>e<sup>33</sup>wo<sup>55</sup> ndō<sup>33</sup>ne<sup>55</sup> x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> de<sup>33</sup>kɔ<sup>55</sup> ru<sup>55</sup> de<sup>33</sup>ma<sup>55</sup> (*Rnga.ba Khul Mdzod.dge Rdzong The.bo Drong.rdal gdong.sne sde.ba.gong.ma Dang Sde.ba.gab.ma*) or [In Chinese] 阿壩藏族羌族自治州若爾蓋縣凍列鄉上供瑪村和下供瑪村 (*Aba Zangzu Qiangzu Zizhi Zhou Ruoergai Xian Donglie Xiang Shanggongma Cun he Xiangongma Cun*).<sup>2</sup> Although there is much similarity between the various Thewo dialects, my language teachers have all stressed that even twenty miles away /ta<sup>33</sup>/ is used quite differently.<sup>3</sup>

Evidentiality as a grammatical category is often defined as marking information source (Aikhenvald 2004); however, as of yet there is no consensus regarding its definition and scope. There are two debates in particular which are relevant to this paper. The first debate is whether or not mirative markers belong to the category of evidentiality or constitute their own individual category. DeLancey (1997) claimed that mirativity, the grammatical marking of new information, is a grammatical category in its own right and used many examples from Lhasa Tibetan to support his claim. Hill (2012) argues that these Lhasa Tibetan examples actually highlight particular sensorial usages of Lhasa Tibetan's evidential system and do not materially differ from evidential functions. After DeLancey's (2012) refutation, Hill (2013) clarified and expounded upon his original argument that mirativity does not exist. This debate is relevant to this paper because one of the suffixes in question, /nə<sup>33</sup>/, has both mirative-like and evidential functions (see §10.3).

---

1. Important studies on Thewo Tibetan include Renzeng Wangmu (2013), Lin (2014), and Sangsrgyas Tshering (2020).

2. The place name in Thewo Tibetan is written in International Phonetic Alphabet. Following it, in parentheses, is the romanized (Wylie) Written Tibetan. After this appears Chinese with Chinese romanization (pinyin) in parentheses.

3. Although Tournadre & Konchok (2001:87) include a list of Thewo Tibetan final auxiliary verbs, several of the forms they attest to are not found in this particular variety of Thewo Tibetan. Also, Renzeng Wangmu (2013) reporting on a Thewo variety spoken about 10 miles from the villages represented in this paper, cites several suffixes that are quite different (at least phonologically speaking) from the ones represented in this paper (§3).

The second debate is whether or not egophoric<sup>4</sup> markers can be considered evidentials. Egophoric markers are generally used in self statements where the action of the verb is volitionally done by the speaker. Some such as Sun (1993: 958), Aikhenvald (2018: 24), and DeLancey (2018: 9) assert that such “self” marking on verbs should not be considered evidential in nature given that there is a fundamental difference between knowledge one has of his or her own actions and knowledge one has of the actions of others; however, others, such as Tournadre & LaPolla (2014), argue that egophoricity constitutes a type of access to information and, this access to information is evidential in nature.

Tournadre & LaPolla's (2014: 2) definition states that evidentiality is: “the representation of source and access to information according to the speaker's perspective and strategy.” Tournadre & LaPolla use “source” to refer to information acquired second hand through another speaker, i.e. “I think Jane has arrived [because Mercedes said so].” Regarding access to information, Tournadre & LaPolla are referring to the many different ways we access information, namely the five senses, inner feelings (including physical and emotional feelings), and personal knowledge, i.e. “I think Jane has arrived [because I heard her car's loud engine just now].” This debate regarding egophoric markers relates to my claim (§ 3) that Thewo Tibetan's egophoric marker /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is an evidential marker. Thus, in this analysis I follow Tournadre & LaPolla's (2014) definition of evidentiality; however, I do not defend this analysis here given my goal is to introduce /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/.

Although this paper documents the first exploration of Thewo Tibetan's evidential system, there have been significant efforts to document, describe, and explore the evidential systems of other Tibetic languages.

Studies focusing on describing evidential systems of individual Tibetic varieties include (but are not limited to) the following: Mdzo-dge Tibetan (Sun 1993) Mabzhi Tibetan (Tsering Samdrup & Suzuki 2018) Lende Tibetan (Huber 2000), Rgyalthang Tibetan (Hongladarom 2007), Chengduo Tibetan (Caiji Wenmao 2020), Lamjung Yolmo (Gawne 2013), Lamo Tibetan (Suzuki et al. 2021), Lhasa Tibetan (DeLancey 1986; Garrett 2001; Kalsang et al. 2013; Oisel 2017; DeLancey 2018), Diaspora Tibetan (Hongladarom 1993; Caplow 2017), and Tabo Tibetan (Hein 2007).

In addition to studies on individual speech varieties, several studies have explored broader topics regarding evidentiality within Tibetan. For example, Tournadre (2017) presents a masterful typological overview of what he terms the Evidential/Epistemic (E/E) categories in the Tibetic languages. This overview

---

4. For more on the background of the term egophoric (and conjunct disjunct) please see Chapter 1 in Gawne & Hill (2017).

argues that all Tibetic languages have an E/E system which includes sensory, inferential, assumed, quotative, and epistemic categories which relate to tense, aspect, person, and volition. Zemp (2020) investigates perspective-indexing constructions in Tibetic and neighboring non-Tibetic languages, exploring in part whether Tibetan might have influenced the development of evidentiality in neighboring languages. In addition to these studies by Tournadre (2017) and Zemp (2020), Gawne & Hill (2017) provides a wonderful collection of chapters on evidentiality in Tibetic Languages. While these chapters do include descriptions of specific Tibetic varieties, they also include typological and theoretical work which synthesizes research on Tibetic evidential systems.

## 2. Overview of the Thewo Tibetan verbal system

Thewo Tibetan's verbs do preserve some of Old Tibetan's four inflectional categories.<sup>5</sup> For example the verb for 'buy' in old Tibetan happens to have only two forms for the four categories: *nyo* ལྟ (both past and future) and *nyos* ལྟས (both present and imperative). Thewo Tibetan preserves these two forms with [ŋe<sup>55</sup>] 'buy' as the imperative and [ŋɔ<sup>55</sup>] for everything else. But unlike Old Tibetan, Thewo Tibetan verbs must be suffixed with the exception of two categories: (1) sentences where the speaker is the subject and is expressing intention to do the action found in the verb; and (2) imperative sentences. The suffixes are used to communicate aspect, modality, and evidentiality.

These suffixes, often in combination with variation inherited from Old Tibetan's inflectional categories, create a fair degree of morphophonemic variation. Table 1 (see § 3 and the end of the paper for a list of abbreviations) illustrates this variation by showing a few of these suffixes and the morphophonemic variation which follows suffixation.

In addition, categories such as transitivity and volition, which are very important in Written Tibetan (Jin 1983), are also important in Thewo Tibetan. Some Thewo Tibetan intransitive verbs inherently signal non-volition. For example, in Table 1, the reason why the intransitive verb [x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup>] 'loosen' cannot be combined with the egophoric marker (labeled as EGOK1 /nɔ<sup>33</sup>/) is that /nɔ<sup>33</sup>/ can only be used when the speaker intentionally did the action expressed by the verb. Also, the reason why [x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup>] 'loosen' cannot be found in the "self-future" or "imperative" category is because both of these categories require volition, or put in semantic terms, this verb cannot take an agent.

---

5. These four stems marked tense-aspect (often referred to as past, present, and future despite their aspectual nature) and also the imperative.

In addition to some verbs inherently being non-volitional, certain evidential markers (/nə<sup>33</sup>/ and /ta<sup>33</sup>/) can also be used with first person agents and regular transitive and intransitive verbs to express non-volition. Examples (24)–(25), (27)–(28), and (30) below all highlight this phenomenon. Given that to date I have found few examples of non-volitional verbs, and that evidential markers can be used with regular transitive and intransitive verbs to express non-volitionality, I do not believe it is possible at this time to say definitively that volition and transitivity have a one-to-one correlation, i.e., if intransitive then non-volitional and vice versa. I believe it is more accurate to say there is a dynamic relationship between these two categories.

**Table 1.** Thewo Tibetan morphophonemic variations<sup>6</sup>

Suffix	no <sup>33</sup> (EGOK1)	ja <sup>33</sup> (INK)	ta <sup>33</sup> (AAK)	Self-future	Imperative
ki <sup>51</sup> ‘apply ointment’	ki <sup>55</sup> no <sup>33</sup>	ki <sup>55</sup> ja <sup>33</sup>	kia <sup>55</sup> ta <sup>33</sup>	ku <sup>51</sup>	ki <sup>51</sup>
ŋa <sup>35</sup> ‘sleep’	ŋa <sup>55</sup> no <sup>33</sup>	ŋa <sup>55</sup> ja <sup>33</sup>	ŋa <sup>55</sup> ta <sup>33</sup>	ŋa <sup>343</sup>	ŋu <sup>55</sup>
zu <sup>343</sup> ‘drunk’	zu <sup>55</sup> no <sup>33</sup>	zu <sup>55</sup> ja <sup>33</sup>	zu <sup>55</sup> ta <sup>33</sup>	zu <sup>343</sup>	zu <sup>33</sup>
x <sup>h</sup> u <sup>55</sup> ‘die’	x <sup>h</sup> u <sup>55</sup> no <sup>33</sup>	x <sup>h</sup> u <sup>55</sup> ja <sup>33</sup>	x <sup>h</sup> u <sup>55</sup> ta <sup>33</sup>	x <sup>h</sup> u <sup>51</sup>	x <sup>h</sup> u <sup>55</sup>
xi <sup>51</sup> ‘release’ (transitive)	xi <sup>51</sup> no <sup>33</sup>	xi <sup>55</sup> ja <sup>33</sup>	xia <sup>55</sup> ta <sup>33</sup>	xu <sup>51</sup>	xi <sup>51</sup>
x <sup>h</sup> u <sup>55</sup> ‘loosen’ (intransitive)	non-existent	x <sup>h</sup> u <sup>55</sup> ja <sup>33</sup>	x <sup>h</sup> u <sup>55</sup> ta <sup>33</sup>	non-existent	non-existent
tə <sup>55</sup> ‘show’	tə <sup>55</sup> no <sup>33</sup>	tə <sup>55</sup> ja <sup>33</sup>	təa <sup>55</sup> ta <sup>33</sup>	tə <sup>51</sup>	tə <sup>55</sup>

Further exploring the topic of transitivity, Example (1) below illustrates an intransitive verb where gravity is the force behind the motion of the wheel, and Example (2) illustrates a transitive verb where *the women* is the agent and *the sick person* is the patient (both literally and grammatically). The topic of how evidential markers are used to signal volition and non-volition will be discussed more in §9.2 and §11.

- (1) po<sup>33</sup>lo<sup>55</sup> t<sup>h</sup>e<sup>55</sup>.əe<sup>33</sup> ŋdʒi<sup>55</sup>-ta<sup>33</sup>  
 wheel down roll-AAK  
 ‘The wheel rolled down.’

6. The example of [x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup>] ‘die’ being combined with the suffix /no<sup>33</sup>/ in the table is syntactically possible, but semantically improbable—it would be something like ‘I died (by suicide)’.

- (2)  $m\partial^{33} \iota e^{55} - x^h u^{33} n\epsilon^{33} b\partial^{55} m\epsilon^{33} k^h \gamma^{55} n\gamma^{33} t s^h i^{51} - n\partial^{33}$   
 women-ERG sick.person hospital in lead-CPK  
 ‘The women took the sick person to the hospital.’

### 3. Thewo Tibetan’s evidential suffixes

Excluding copulas,<sup>7</sup> Thewo Tibetan has seven evidential suffixes which are used in realis situations:

1.  $/\iota a^{33}/$ : the intimate knowledge evidential (INK)
2.  $/j\partial^{55} t s^h u^{33}/$ : the inferential knowledge evidential (INFRK)
3.  $/ta^{33}/$ : the already acquired knowledge evidential (AAK)
4.  $/n\partial^{33}/$ : the current perception knowledge evidential (CPK)
5.  $/n\gamma^{33}/$ : the egophoric knowledge evidential 1 (EGOK1)
6.  $/ji^{33}/$ : the egophoric knowledge evidential 2 (EGOK2)
7.  $/s^h u^{33} k i^{55}/$ : the reported knowledge evidential (RPTK)

The decision to use non-standard names for the evidential suffixes was not made lightly. As will be seen in the following description, the function of many of these suffixes does not correspond to commonly used terms like “direct” and “indirect”. Many of the Thewo Tibetan evidential suffixes also do not map very easily to Tournadre & Suzuki’s (2023) proposed categories because many of these three markers individually transcends several of Tournadre & Suzuki’s (2023) proposed categories.

My teacher Kalzang Legsha shared a story with me which illustrates the use and meaning of these suffixes. The story centers around a father and whether or not he had eaten. Different family members, including the father, speak to this question.

- (3)  $\gamma a^{33} d\partial a^{55} - x^h u^{33} s i \gamma^{55} - \iota a^{33}$   
 father-ERG ate-INK  
 ‘Father ate.’

---

7. Although Thewo Tibetan’s copulas each carry evidential meaning, they have been excluded from this study. The reason is they usually do not serve as suffixes or verbal auxiliaries and are usually only used in communicating equative and existential values. This characteristic seems to be somewhat unique to Thewo Tibetan (Gawne & Hill 2017: 23). However, Amdo Tibetan as described by Sun (1993) seems similar.

- (4) ʔa<sup>33</sup>dza<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> se<sup>33</sup>-jō<sup>55</sup>ts<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup>  
 father-ERG ate-INFRK  
 'Father ate.'
- (5) ʔa<sup>33</sup>dza<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> sia<sup>55</sup>-ta<sup>33</sup>  
 father-ERG ate-AAK  
 'Father ate.'
- (6) ʔa<sup>33</sup>dza<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> sia<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>  
 father-ERG ate-CPK  
 'Father ate.'
- (7) ηε<sup>55</sup> se<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>  
 1SG.ERG ate-EGOK1  
 'I ate.'
- (8) ηε<sup>55</sup> sea<sup>55</sup>-ji<sup>33</sup>  
 1SG.ERG ate-EGOK2  
 'I ate.'
- (9) ʔa<sup>33</sup>dza<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> se<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>-s<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup>ki<sup>55</sup>  
 father-ERG ate-EGOK1-RPTK  
 'Father [said he] ate.'

In Example (3), the mother had been out shopping and upon returning to the village, saw her youngest son playing with the other village children. She asked him if his father, her husband, had eaten. Example (3) is the boy's response. The boy replied using the intimate knowledge evidential, /ɿa<sup>33</sup>/. This was fitting given that the boy had eaten with his father. However, given that no specific details about how the father ate were given in this simple clause, the boy could have also chosen to substitute /ɿa<sup>33</sup>/ with /ta<sup>33</sup>/ (Example (5)). The primary difference here is that while /ta<sup>33</sup>/ emphasizes already acquired knowledge based on sensory evidence of the verb's action or the results of the verb's action, /ɿa<sup>33</sup>/ emphatically claims that the speaker has intimate knowledge of the event in question. Using /ta<sup>33</sup>/ in this sentence instead of /ɿa<sup>33</sup>/ would imply that the boy had not necessarily witnessed his father eat, but that he had witnessed something suggesting that his father had eaten.

In Example (4), the elder son is responding to his uncle's question regarding whether or not the boy's father had eaten. The elder son had come home and seen dirty dishes and assumed his father had eaten and thus answered using the sentence in Example (4). Here the /jō<sup>55</sup>ts<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup>/ is used to suggest that the speaker is making an inference about a past event based on evidence (dirty dishes). Alternatively, the elder son could have answered the uncle by using the sentence in Example (6). The /nə<sup>33</sup>/ in Example (6) also implies that the action described by the

verb is being inferred. But unlike /jõ<sup>55</sup>ts<sup>h</sup>ɰ<sup>33</sup>/, the suffix /nə<sup>33</sup>/ implies the speaker has current perception of either the action (in the case of non-telic verbs) or the results of the action (in the case of telic verbs) at the time of the speech event.

In Examples (7) and (8), the father has just received a telephone call from one of his brothers. This brother asks him if he has eaten. The father replies in the affirmative and uses /nɔ<sup>33</sup>/ or /ji<sup>33</sup>/ to indicate he had intentionally completed the action of the verb in question. There is a debate about whether or not egophoric suffixes, like /nɔ<sup>33</sup>/ and /ji<sup>33</sup>/, can be called evidential in nature. See Tournadre & LaPolla (2014) for more on this debate. For example, is not the use of the 1st person pronoun here sufficient for marking the source of information? Is /nɔ<sup>33</sup>/ not best thought of as an agreement marker? Although these questions are very important, the very fact that sentences with first person subjects can take other evidential markers (usually when the speaker is not aware or not volitionally involved in the action) implies that /nɔ<sup>33</sup>/ does indeed clarify that the source of knowledge is the speaker's awareness and intent of their action. I shall not attempt to further defend my hypothesis that /nɔ<sup>33</sup>/ is an evidential in this paper given that it is outside of this paper's research question; however, I do plan to revisit this question in a future paper and there hope to offer what might be said in defense of this analysis, and in addition the important counter arguments against this analysis. This paper assumes that /nɔ<sup>33</sup>/ and /ji<sup>33</sup>/ are best analyzed as evidentials.

In Example (9) the uncle had just hung up the phone after asking his brother if he (his brother) had eaten. The uncle's wife asks her husband if his brother had eaten. He responds by saying that he heard that his brother had already eaten /s<sup>h</sup>ɰ<sup>33</sup>ki<sup>55</sup>/.

The reader will note that the verb for 'eat' has several different phonological manifestations in Examples (3)–(9). These changes are phonologically conditioned by the suffixes.

Now that the basic system has been described, I shall turn to exploring /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ in greater depth. Further papers will explore the remaining five suffixes.

#### 4. First observation

In order to give the reader insight into how I conducted this study, §4–§9, I use a narrative style where I describe the process I went through exploring the meaning of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/.

This narrative style overtly expresses my methodology and therefore I shall not make further mention of methodology in this paper.



In autumn of 2018, I worked with my teacher Kalzang Legsha to learn Thewo Tibetan.<sup>8</sup> Kalzang Legsha used wordless picture books to tell me stories using his mother tongue of Thewo Tibetan. In almost every sentence without a copula, I saw the use of the suffix /nə<sup>33</sup>/ which appeared after either the verb, or after the progressive (PROG) aspect marker. See Examples (10)–(11) which illustrate two of these sentences.

- (10) *ŋa<sup>33</sup>ŋu<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> tɕa<sup>33</sup>zi<sup>55</sup> ŋi<sup>55</sup> k<sup>h</sup>e<sup>55</sup> ru<sup>33</sup>pa<sup>55</sup> je<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>*  
 child-ERG bucket two lift help do-CPK  
 ‘The child helped carry two buckets.’

- (11) *lɔ<sup>33</sup>su<sup>55</sup> pə<sup>33</sup>ŋə<sup>55</sup> du<sup>33</sup>-ku<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>*  
 teacher.ERG guitar play-PROG-CPK  
 ‘The teacher is playing the guitar.’ (Or ‘The teacher was playing the guitar.’)

Another teacher, Sanggyatsho, while using wordless books to tell stories also used the /nə<sup>33</sup>/ suffix in almost every sentence without a copula.

- (12) *ndzɔ<sup>33</sup>tsa<sup>55</sup> ne ts<sup>h</sup>ə<sup>33</sup>tɕu<sup>55</sup>-yu<sup>33</sup> nə<sup>33</sup>ŋgo<sup>55</sup>-yu<sup>33</sup> mbu<sup>55</sup>-ye<sup>55</sup> te<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>*  
 beside LOC dog-ERG above-GEN bug-RECIP see-CPK  
 ‘To the side, the dog saw a bug above (him).’

Despite its ubiquitous presence in this wordless-book genre of texts, I found very few examples of /nə<sup>33</sup>/ in several other texts I recorded in 2016 in the Thewo Tibetan language area (specifically in Sde.ba.gab.ma or Xiagongma village). These texts included an hour-long conversation by a group of ladies knitting under a winter sun, descriptions of how highland barley is planted, and local wedding traditions as described by a middle-aged woman, etc. The hour-long conversation was mostly focused on the ladies’ plans to go to a monastery and mostly involved irrealis. The other texts mostly described customs or hopes for the future with very few examples of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/. It seemed to me that /nə<sup>33</sup>/ was used with progressive and completed aspect but I needed more data to confirm this. Also, not being entirely ignorant of Tibetic languages, I knew there would likely be some kind of evidential value in this suffix.

In 2019, as Kalzang Legsha and I prepared to create a dictionary of Thewo Tibetan, we used a frame with the verb ‘work’ to see what suffixes might appear after it.<sup>9</sup> We wanted to be aware of these suffixes prior to starting the dictionary. At

8. Kalzang Legsha provided extensive support as I wrote this paper. Any mistakes found here are the result of my own actions: either misunderstanding what I was taught, or not asking enough questions to fully elucidate a particular phenomenon.

9. This dictionary should be available in App form in 2025. It includes definitions, example sentences, and recordings for both. There are also some cultural notes included with some

this time Kalzang Legsha introduced the suffix /ta<sup>33</sup>/ (see Example (13)). Example (13) can be used with either /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/, i.e., they occupy the same syntactic slot. Please note that they cannot appear together after a verb.

- (13) [kɛ<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup>] le<sup>33</sup>kə<sup>55</sup> lea-ta<sup>33</sup>/nə<sup>33</sup>  
3SG-ERG work work-CPK/AAK  
‘[He] worked.’  
(Note: Thewo Tibetan’s transitive verb /le<sup>33</sup>/ ‘work’ requires the argument /le<sup>33</sup>kə<sup>55</sup>/ ‘work’.)

After seeing that the frame with both /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ had the same gloss, ‘(work) worked’, I discussed with Kalzang Legsha their differences. In our initial discussion, Kalzang Legsha mentioned that /ta<sup>33</sup>/ is often used with things that you saw happen. I then asked if /nə<sup>33</sup>/ appeared with things that you didn’t directly see happen. He confirmed this as well. This seemed to confirm my suspicion that both of these suffixes likely had evidential-like functions. It was time to explore these suffixes in greater depth.

5. First hypothesis

My first hypothesis was:

1. /ta<sup>33</sup>/ is the direct evidential marker. By *direct* I assumed that /ta<sup>33</sup>/ would mark that the speaker saw the action they mentioned, or in the event that the action was more directly perceived through smell or touch, etc., that the speaker had directly felt or smelled the action, etc.
2. /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is the indirect evidential marker. By *indirect* I assumed that /nə<sup>33</sup>/ would mark that the speaker saw some result of the action they mention, or perhaps they smelled or felt a result of the action mentioned, etc.

My next step was to test this hypothesis.

6. First test

Patching together several different observations and experiences that I had in the villages while doing fieldwork on Thewo Tibetan, I created several different sto-

---

entries. The database is currently slightly over 9,000 words and phrases and it represents a concerted effort by community members to document this language.

ries. I told these stories to Kalzang Legsha and asked him how different parts of the story would be communicated in his mother tongue. Although there were many stories in total, I believe sharing only two of them is necessary for this section. Both stories will validate Kalzang Legsha's answer to my questions, namely that /ta<sup>33</sup>/ can be used when the speaker saw something happen and /na<sup>33</sup>/ can be used when the speaker infers that something happened. But both stories will also show that my questions were insufficient and that much more complexity lay beneath the surface than a simple binary *direct* vs. *indirect* opposition. This disproved my first hypothesis and forced me to rethink the issue.

## 6.1 Story 1

Story 1 is about a man named Dorje who brought some alcohol home. He put it where the alcohol is usually put in the house and then went back out to take care of another matter. When he got home, he saw his uncle leaving the home with what appeared to be the alcohol that he had just bought. When he sees this happening, he says in surprise the sentence in Example (14).

- (14) ɬa<sup>33</sup>k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> te<sup>33</sup> kɛ<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup>-na<sup>33</sup>  
 alcohol that 3SG-ERG carry-CPK  
 'He is carrying that alcohol.'

After saying Example (14), Dorje gets a phone call from his grandfather who asks what his son (Dorje's uncle) is doing. Dorje is still watching his uncle when the phone rings and when he answers. Dorje responds with the sentence in Example (15)<sup>10</sup>—still watching his uncle leaving with what appears to be the alcohol he had just bought.

- (15) ɬa<sup>33</sup>k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> te<sup>33</sup> kɛ<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup>-ku<sup>55</sup>-na<sup>33</sup>  
 alcohol that 3SG-ERG carry-PROG-CPK  
 'He is carrying that alcohol.'

The fact that Examples (14) and (15) mean the same thing was slightly confusing to me. As best as I could understand from Kalzang Legsha, it had something to do with the semantic nature of the verb (telic vs. non-telic). Since carry can refer to an ongoing action (as opposed to 'hit' which might refer to a single, relatively

---

10. In Examples (15) and (16) the verb 'to carry' has two different representations, one with the vowel [u] and one with the vowel [ɯ]. First, the data in all of the example sentences is written phonetically. Second, differences such as the one between Examples (15) and (16) can be observed throughout the paper. The differences mostly relate to phonological processes which take place once the affix is added.

quick action), it could be used in one of two ways: (1) without the progressive aspect marker; (2) with the progressive aspect marker. But in both of these examples, /nə<sup>33</sup>/ indicates that the speaker is currently witnessing this event and that the event is ongoing.

I asked Kalzang Legsha what would it mean if I changed the /nə<sup>33</sup>/ in the above examples to /ta<sup>33</sup>/ (see Examples (16–17)). He told me that changing /nə<sup>33</sup>/ to /ta<sup>33</sup>/ before the verb (Example (16)) would mean that Dorje saw it happen but Dorje isn't observing it at the moment he says this sentence. Likewise, he said that putting /ta<sup>33</sup>/ after the progressive aspect marker (Example (17)) would mean that Dorje saw it happening, and believes it is still happening (i.e., that the uncle is still carrying the alcohol), but Dorje isn't actually observing it at the moment he says this sentence.

- (16) ɬa<sup>33</sup>k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> te<sup>55</sup> kɛ<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup>-ta<sup>33</sup>  
 alcohol that 3SG-ERG carry-AAK  
 'He carried [away] that alcohol.'
- (17) ɬa<sup>33</sup>k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> te<sup>33</sup> kɛ<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup>-ku<sup>55</sup>-ta<sup>33</sup>  
 alcohol that 3SG-ERG carry-PROG-AAK  
 'He is/was carrying that alcohol.'

It seems that /ta<sup>33</sup>/ refers to an event that the speaker is no longer viewing. In Example (16) this is a finished event and in Example (17) it is likely ongoing.

What seems unmistakably important in these examples, is that when /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is used the speaker is directly witnessing the event, but when /ta<sup>33</sup>/ is used, the speaker is no longer witnessing the event. I interpret these results as disproving my hypothesis. But since I had no new hypothesis to guide the testing, I continued to elicit examples in the hopes of having a eureka moment.

## 6.2 Story 2

In the second story Trashi goes to buy a mobile phone. His friend Dorje goes with him. While Trashi is buying the phone, Dorje was watching. Just after the phone was bought and while Trashi was changing the SIM card, a third friend calls Dorje and asks why Trashi isn't answering his phone. Dorje explains in part by saying the sentence in Example (18).

- (18) kɛ<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> ʃou<sup>33</sup>tɕi<sup>55</sup> ŋa<sup>55</sup>-ta<sup>33</sup>  
 3SG-ERG phone bought-AAK  
 'He bought a phone.'

I followed up by asking my teacher about what would be said if some things were changed. For example, if Dorje had taken an important phone call just when

they reached the store and did not actually observe Trashi buying the phone, then what would Dorje say when Trashi came out of the store changing the SIM card for the new phone and the friend called asking why Trashi wouldn't answer his phone? Kalzang Legsha explained that in this case Dorje would answer with Example (19).

- (19) *ke<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> ʃou<sup>33</sup>tɕi<sup>55</sup> ŋa<sup>55</sup>-na<sup>33</sup>*  
 3SG-ERG phone bought-CPK  
 'He bought a mobile phone.'

Although these correspond to my original hypothesis, Kalzang Legsha then followed up with another example. He said if Dorje had not gone with Trashi, but rather had run into him the next day on the street and had seen the new phone, then he might tell another friend the sentence found in Example (18).

While the initial explanation of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ being used to mark the accompanier directly seeing the phone being bought does not disprove my original hypothesis, the fact that this same sentence can be used by someone who met Trashi in the street, saw the new phone, and wanted to share this event with another person suggests there might be a problem with this hypothesis. When we compare this with how Dorje uses the /na<sup>33</sup>/ in Example (19) when he isn't present at the time of purchase, the problematic nature of the first hypothesis becomes clear. Why does Dorje, who didn't see the action in Example (19) use /na<sup>33</sup>/ while the friend who meets Trashi in the street, sees the phone, and then tells another friend about Trashi's new phone use /ta<sup>33</sup>/?

## 7. Second observation

I next read extensively about evidentials in other Tibetic languages; however, in reality my second hypothesis was formed, not by reflection, but through further discussion and manipulation of the narrative in the second story.

I changed the second story as follows. Trashi and Dorje go to the store. When they got to the store, only Trashi went in. Dorje received an important phone call and waited outside the store. As Trashi came out of the store with the new phone, Dorje was asked by his friend on the telephone what Trashi had done. With the new phone right before his eyes, Dorje says the sentence in Example (20). Alternatively, if Dorje had been smoking a cigarette outside waiting, he could have said Example (20) to his friend Trashi (changing the pronoun to second person) as he saw his friend hold up his new phone.

- (20)  $ke^{55}-x^h u^{33} \int ou^{33} t\epsilon i^{55} \eta a^{55}-n\partial^{33}$   
 3SG-ERG phone bought-CPK  
 ‘He bought a phone.’ (Or if  $ke^{33}x^h u^{55}$  is changed to  $ts^h e^{55}x^h u^{33}$  then: ‘You bought a phone.’)

Both Trashi and Dorje continue walking down the street. Several minutes later another friend calls Dorje and asks what Trashi has been doing. In this instance, Dorje cannot use the sentence in Example (20) to answer. Instead, he would say the sentence in Example (21).

- (21)  $ke^{55}-x^h u^{33} \int ou^{33} t\epsilon i^{55} \eta a^{55}-ta^{33}$   
 3SG-ERG phone bought-AAK  
 ‘He bought a phone.’

Based upon this observation, and upon some of the reading I did, I formed my second hypothesis.

## 8. Second hypothesis

My second hypothesis was:

1.  $/ta^{33}/$  communicates that the speaker *had* direct sensory awareness of either the action expressed by the verb, or direct sensory awareness of the results of the action expressed by the verb. When  $/ta^{33}/$  is used with the progressive aspect marker  $/ku^{55}/$ , the speaker almost certainly has witnessed the action in question and believes the action to be ongoing. The action will not have been done by the speaker unless it refers to an unintentional action.
2.  $/n\partial^{33}/$  communicates that the speaker *has* sensory awareness of either the action expressed by the verb, or direct sensory awareness of the results of the action expressed by the verb. When  $/n\partial^{33}/$  is used with the progressive aspect marker  $/ku^{55}/$ , the speaker is currently witnessing the ongoing action of the verb. The action will not have been done by the speaker unless it refers to an unintentional action.

## 9. Second test

Here I shall first re-evaluate stories 1–2 to see if this hypothesis can explain the patterns found there. Then I add additional scenarios to test this hypothesis more

broadly, including the important concepts of person and volition (Jin 1983).<sup>11</sup> It will be structured as follows:

1. Story 1–2 revisited
2. Volition and non-volition with the first person
3. Volition and non-volition with the second person
4. Non-volition with the third person<sup>12</sup>
5. Weather examples

### 9.1 Stories 1–2 revisited

In the first story, when Dorje sees his uncle carrying the alcohol, he can say the sentence in Example (14) because he has, at the moment of speech, access to the information—namely he can see his uncle carrying the alcohol. And, just as Kalzang Legsha explained, when the progressive aspect marker is added, this access to the information is still ongoing and therefore he can answer his grandfather's question about what his uncle is doing in Example (15).

Then, when /ta<sup>33</sup>/ is substituted for /nə<sup>33</sup>/, this corresponds with Dorje no longer being able to see his uncle (Example (16)). It also explains why Dorje assumes the action of carrying is ongoing in Example (17), despite not being able to see his uncle. Thus, the second hypothesis is able to account for what is happening in Examples (14)–(17).

In the second story, /ta<sup>33</sup>/ is communicating that the speaker (Dorje again) knew that Trashi had bought a phone. Although it assumes that Dorje had sensory awareness of the event – either through seeing Trashi buy the phone or seeing the results (the new phone in Trashi's hand) – what is emphasized is that Dorje's access to the information is not new.

Likewise, when /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is used in the second story, it means that Dorje has current sensory access to the information. The sensory input might be only of the results (like in Example (19)), but when the /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is combined with the progressive aspect marker (like in Example (22) below), it indicates that Dorje is watching it happen as he speaks. Likewise, when /ta<sup>33</sup>/ is used in Examples (18) and (21), it indicates that this Dorje already knew of the phone being bought and is

---

11. Although many studies of Tibetan discuss the importance of volition, Daojie Ben et. al. (2020) argue that *volition* itself is not actually important, but rather it is the valence of the verb, or put another way, the degree to which a verb is transitive, which is very important in Tibetan.

12. Given that stories 1–2 examine volitional actions with third person agents, I do not revisit this question in this section.

not learning of it for the first time. In this way the second hypothesis is also able to account for what is happening in the second story.

- (22)  $k\varepsilon^{55}\text{-}x^h u^{33} fou^{33} t\varepsilon i^{55} n_0^{33}\text{-}\gamma u^{55}\text{-}n\partial^{33}$   
 3SG-ERG phone buy-PROG-CPK  
 ‘He is buying a phone.’

## 9.2 Volition and non-volition with the first person

When exploring volition with the first person, it became immediately apparent that /no<sup>33</sup>/ is the dominate marker used. /no<sup>33</sup>/ is used with a first person agent who intentionally did the action communicated in the verb. Example (23) illustrates this with a man communicating to his family that he had eaten.

- (23)  $\eta\epsilon^{55}$   $se^{55}-n\alpha^{33}$   
 1SG.ERG ate-EGOK1  
 'I ate.'

However, another example involving several individuals hauling buckets of water to help irrigate crops yielded examples with a first person agent, volitional verb, and the presence of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/. In this example a boy carrying a bucket of water accidentally spilled some of the water. When he accidentally spilled the water, he uses /nə<sup>33</sup>/, as seen in Example (24). This fits the second hypothesis given that his temporal access to the information is present at the time of speech. The /nə<sup>33</sup>/ used here might be used to communicate surprise, but this is not a necessary prerequisite for using /nə<sup>33</sup>/ in this situation. In addition to communicating when the speaker had access to information in relation to the time of speech, this sentence also highlights the fact that the action was unintentional.

When the boy arrives at his destination he uses /ta<sup>33</sup>/ to express that he accidentally spilled some water along the way (see Example (25)). Here again, the action has already happened and the boy was already aware of it. This tells the listener that the boy already knew and that the boy didn't mean to spill the water.

- (24)  $\eta\epsilon^{55}\text{-}x^h u^{33} t\epsilon^h u^{55} dzoa^{51}\text{-}n\alpha^{33}$   
 1SG-ERG water spill-CPK  
 ‘I spilled the water.’
- (25)  $\eta\epsilon^{55}\text{-}x^h u^{33} t\epsilon^h u^{55} dzoa^{51}\text{-}ta^{33}$   
 1SG-ERG water spill-AAK  
 ‘I spilled the water.’

In order to confirm the “accidental” nature of combining /ta<sup>33</sup>/ or /nə<sup>33</sup>/ with a first person agent and a volitional verb, I asked my teacher what would be said if



the water had been spilled intentionally. He responded and said /nɔ<sup>33</sup>/ would be used (see Example (26)).

- (26) *ɲɛ<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> tɛ<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> dzo<sup>51</sup>-nɔ<sup>33</sup>*  
 1SG-ERG water spill-EGOK1  
 'I spilled the water.'

'Spill' in the above examples is a volitional verb. Although the /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ are used in Examples (24)–(25) to communicate the action was not done intentionally, what happens when they are paired with a true non-volitional verb?

In Examples (27)–(28) the unmarked, absolutive (ABS) form of the first person pronoun (/ɲa<sup>55</sup>/) is used with the non-volitional verb /pe<sup>55</sup>/ 'to sweat'. To further demonstrate that the verb is non-volitional, Example (29) is included which shows that the suffix /nɔ<sup>33</sup>/ cannot be used with this particular verb.

- (27) *ɲa<sup>55</sup> ɲu<sup>33</sup>tɛ<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> pi<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>*  
 1SG.ABS sweat sweat-CPK  
 'I sweat.'
- (28) *ɲa<sup>55</sup> ɲu<sup>33</sup>tɛ<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> piɛ<sup>55</sup>-ta<sup>33</sup>*  
 1SG.ABS sweat sweat-AAK  
 'I sweat.'
- (29) *\*ɲɛ<sup>55</sup> ɲu<sup>33</sup>tɛ<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> pi<sup>55</sup>-nɔ<sup>33</sup>*  
 1SG.ERG sweat sweat-EGOK1  
 'I sweat.'

The sentence in Example (27) is used when a person realized they had sweat, for example they notice their clothes are wet with sweat, etc. If, however, the progressive aspect marker is added to Example (27), as seen in Example (30), it means the speaker is sweating as they speak and thus directly aware of it in the moment it was happening. Both of these examples can be explained by the second hypothesis. /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is used when there is access to the information (the action of the verb) at the moment of speech.

- (30) *ɲa<sup>55</sup> ɲu<sup>33</sup>tɛ<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> mbu<sup>33</sup>-ku<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>*  
 1SG.ABS sweat sweat-PROG-CPK  
 'I am sweating.'

The sentence in Example (28) communicates that the speaker had sweat earlier and was aware of it. It indicates that there is no longer any evidence of sweating at the time when this sentence was spoken—such as sweat on the clothing, etc. When I asked about whether or not I could add the progressive aspect marker to Example (28), my teacher said this would be an ungrammatical sentence. See

Example (31). The second hypothesis indicates that this kind of sentence would likely not be said. Namely, the combination of a first person subject with the progressive aspect marker and /ta<sup>33</sup>/ suggests the speaker had sensory access to an action which he or she believes to be ongoing but now has no sensory access to is highly unlikely when he or she is the one doing (or experiencing) the action. This is indeed how Kalzang Legsha analyzed this example.

- (31) \**ŋa*<sup>55</sup>     *ŋu*<sup>33</sup>*tɛ*<sup>h</sup>*u*<sup>55</sup> *mbu*<sup>33</sup>-*ku*<sup>55</sup>-*ta*<sup>33</sup>  
           1SG.ABS sweat            sweat-PROG-AAK  
           ‘I am sweating.’

The basic principle reflected in these examples is that the switch between /nɔ<sup>33</sup>/ (for volitional, first person actions) and /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ (for first person actions which are non-volitional, or actions done by a second or third person) reflect two types of knowledge. The first type is knowledge of an action which exists before the action begins (/nɔ<sup>33</sup>/). The second type is knowledge of an action which comes through observing the action or the results of the action (/ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/). Examples (23)–(31) do not disprove the hypothesis nor do they add content which suggests the hypothesis needs to be altered.<sup>13</sup>

### 9.3 Volition and non-volition with the second person

Our first examples in this section come from a story. This story will highlight the use of a second person agent with a volitional verb. The story starts with Dorje and Dawa at KTV. Dorje has been drinking heavily. As they leave KTV, and begin walking down the street, they bump into Lobzang who when looking at Dorje and sniffing, says to him the sentence in Example (32).

- (32) *ts*<sup>h</sup>*e*<sup>55</sup>-*x*<sup>h</sup>*u*<sup>33</sup> *ɬə*<sup>33</sup>*k*<sup>h</sup>*u*<sup>55</sup> *tʰo*<sup>55</sup>-*nə*<sup>33</sup>  
           2SG-ERG    alcohol    drink-CPK  
           ‘You’ve been drinking alcohol.’

The following morning Dorje wakes up with a massive headache. Complaining of his headache, Dawa looks at him and says the sentence in Example (33).

- (33) *ts*<sup>h</sup>*e*<sup>55</sup>-*x*<sup>h</sup>*u*<sup>33</sup> *ɬə*<sup>33</sup>*k*<sup>h</sup>*u*<sup>55</sup> *tʰo*<sup>55</sup>-*ta*<sup>33</sup>  
           2SG-ERG    alcohol    drink-AAK  
           ‘You drank alcohol.’

---

13. Despite Example (44) referring to an action which was ongoing in the past, Example (31) cannot be used in this way.

In Example (32), Lobzang uses /nə<sup>33</sup>/ because his access to the information is current at the time he speaks. In Example (33), Dawa, uses /ta<sup>33</sup>/ to tell him he had been drinking because he has already known this for a while. These two examples support the second hypothesis as it is written.

I asked my teacher if we could change the narrative above to accommodate the progressive aspect marker being added to Examples (32)–(33). He said yes that the progressive aspect marker could be added to Examples (32)–(33). From his explanation emerged Examples (34)–(35).

- (34) *ts<sup>h</sup>e<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> .a<sup>33</sup>k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> t<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup>-ŋgu<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>*  
 2SG-ERG alcohol drink-PROG-CPK  
 'You are drinking.'
- (35) *ts<sup>h</sup>e<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> .a<sup>33</sup>k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> t<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup>-ŋgu<sup>55</sup>-ta<sup>33</sup>*  
 2SG-ERG alcohol drink-PROG-AAK  
 'You were drinking alcohol.'

In Example (34), Lobzang is currently watching Dorje drink and therefore, because his access to the information is immediate at the moment of speaking, he uses /nə<sup>33</sup>/. However, in Example (35), this event refers to something in the non-immediate past, i.e., one day ago, etc. It means that '[at that time] you were drinking.' The second hypothesis fails to account for Example (35). Here the speaker does not believe this event (drinking) is ongoing. Rather the speaker is talking about an event which was ongoing in the past. This would suggest that there are two ways to interpret the progressive aspect marker combined with /ta<sup>33</sup>/. The first is that the action had just been observed and the speaker believes it is still ongoing. Second, it could be interpreted as talking about a past action which was ongoing in the past. Given that I have not yet observed morphological differences which could create such a distinction, my current hypothesis is that listeners know from context which it is.

The next story has a second person subject with a non-volitional verb which expresses something akin to the English phrase, 'happened to see something.' The context of Examples (36)–(37) is two friends walking down the street. A theft occurs right in front of them. The first friend did not see the theft because she was looking at the second friend. The second friend's expression indicated that he witnessed the event. However, when asked by the first speaker about what happened, he denied seeing the theft. The first friend, trying to get the second friend to speak about it says the sentence in Example (36). Incidentally, the second friend did not want to share what happened because they knew the person who stole the item. After being questioned by the police about what happened (with the second

friend still not acknowledging the fact that he saw the theft), the first friend says the sentence in Example (37).

- (36) *ts<sup>h</sup>e<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> ku<sup>33</sup>mə<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> ku<sup>55</sup> tɛ<sup>33</sup>le<sup>55</sup> ŋi<sup>51</sup> t<sup>h</sup>o<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>*  
 2SG-ERG thief-ERG steal do eyes see-CPK  
 ‘You saw the thief steal.’

- (37) *ts<sup>h</sup>e<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> ku<sup>33</sup>mə<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> ku<sup>55</sup> tɛ<sup>33</sup>le<sup>55</sup> ŋi<sup>51</sup> t<sup>h</sup>o<sup>55</sup>-ta<sup>33</sup>*  
 2SG-ERG thief-ERG steal do eyes see-AAK  
 ‘You saw the thief steal.’

In Examples (36)–(37), the speaker had observed her friend’s expression as he saw the thief steal something. When /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is used, it is used right at the moment this awareness was gained, and when /ta<sup>33</sup>/ is used, it is used after the speaker had already known of this event. Neither example refutes the second hypothesis.

#### 9.4 Non-volition with the third person

In this story, Nyima (the speaker of both sentences) tells Drolkar that Drolma has heard about Drolkar’s situation. When the sentence in Example (38) is spoken, it means that Nyima has known (at least for a little while) that Drolma heard about Drolkar’s situation. When the sentence in Example (39) is spoken, it means that Nyima has just learned that Drolma heard about Drolkar’s situation. The verb /na<sup>33</sup>ko<sup>55</sup>/ is non-volitional and indicates that something was heard accidentally, or unintentionally.

- (38) *ts<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> tō<sup>33</sup>nda<sup>55</sup> tɛ<sup>33</sup> kɛ<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> na<sup>33</sup>ko<sup>55</sup>-ta<sup>33</sup>*  
 2SG.GEN matter that 3SG-ERG heard-AAK  
 ‘She heard about your situation/matter.’

- (39) *ts<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup> tō<sup>33</sup>nda<sup>55</sup> tɛ<sup>33</sup> kɛ<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> na<sup>33</sup>ko<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>*  
 2SG.GEN matter that 3SG-ERG heard-CPK  
 ‘She heard about your situation/matter.’

Here again the distinction between /ta<sup>33</sup>/ or /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is dependent upon when the access to the information occurred in relation to the speech event. /ta<sup>33</sup>/ indicates that this access already happened while /nə<sup>33</sup>/ means this access just happened. These examples do not refute the second hypothesis.

#### 9.5 A weather example

Example (40) is a common phrase used in the semi-agrarian, semi-pastoral Thewo Tibetan community. The sun’s position is very important information for

work there. In Example (40) the speaker has sensory access to the sun's rise at the time of the speech event. This does not refute the second hypothesis.

- (40)  $\eta\mathfrak{c}^{35} x^h a^{55} - n\mathfrak{a}^{33}$   
 sun rise-CPK  
 'The sun is up.'

I was not able to find any example sentences in the dictionary project combining a verb which described a weather event which used /ta/. As a result, I asked my teacher what would happen if we took Example (40) and changed the /nə<sup>33</sup>/ to /ta<sup>33</sup>/. My teacher thought this was very strange. He said that when the sun has risen one would know about it—no matter if he or she is inside or outside. No matter if his or her eyes are shut or open. And one cannot just leave the sun behind—there is always current perception of it! But on further reflection, he said, yes, it would be possible, but it would likely mean that the speaker was on the other side of the world and did not have any personnel awareness of the sun rising except that he saw it was light when Zooming with a friend on the other side of the world. It should be noted that this was exactly the context of our conversation. We were using Zoom at the time we discussed this and we were indeed on opposite sides of the world from each other. Example (41) emerged from this conversation.

- (41)  $\eta\mathfrak{c}^{35} x^h a^{55} - ta^{33}$   
 sun rise-AAK  
 'The sun rose.'

Examples (40)–(41) can be explained using the second hypothesis. When the sun is up, you would use /nə<sup>33</sup>/ because no matter where you go and what you do, you have sensory access to the fact that the sun is up when you make this statement. Likewise, one's inability to use Example (41) unless on the other side of the world—i.e., you can see the sun over Zoom and then "leave" it behind when you close your computer fits with the hypothesis that /ta<sup>33</sup>/ is used when there had been sensory awareness of a certain action.

Another illustration of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ used with a weather example is found below.

- (42)  $n\mathfrak{c}^{55} p\mathfrak{o}^{55} - n\mathfrak{a}^{33}$   
 rain fall-CPK  
 'It rained.'
- (43)  $n\mathfrak{c}^{55} p\mathfrak{o}^{55} - ta^{33}$   
 rain fall-AAK  
 'It rained.'

In Example (42), the use of /nə<sup>33</sup>/ without the progressive aspect marker suggests that the speaker is currently viewing the results of the rain—wet concrete in the case of this example. If the progressive aspect marker was added it would mean the speaker is viewing the rain fall at the moment of the speech event. In Example (43), the use of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ suggests that the rain has ceased falling and that the speaker no longer has current perception of the results of the rain falling—in this case the speaker was relating to a friend that it had rained earlier in the day.

## 10. Updated hypothesis and second analysis of data

The second hypothesis is able to explain all of the examples with /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ except for Example (35) where the use of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ combined with context indicate that this event was ongoing in the past. The updated hypothesis is as follows:

1. /ta<sup>33</sup>/ communicates that the speaker *had* direct sensory awareness of either the action expressed by the verb, or direct sensory awareness of the results of the action expressed by the verb. When /ta<sup>33</sup>/ is used with the progressive aspect marker /kuw<sup>55</sup>/, it can mean one of two things: (1) the speaker almost certainly has witnessed the action in question and believes the action to be ongoing, or (2) the speaker is talking about an action which was ongoing in the past but which has since finished. When combined with a verb which has a first person agent, /ta<sup>33</sup>/ also indicates that the action in question was accidental in nature and not done intentionally. When used with a first person agent, the progressive aspect marker cannot be used.
2. /nə<sup>33</sup>/ communicates that the speaker *has* sensory awareness of either the action expressed by the verb, or direct sensory awareness of the results of the action expressed by the verb. When /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is used with the progressive aspect marker /kuw<sup>55</sup>/, the speaker is currently witnessing the ongoing action of the verb. When combined with a verb which has a first person agent, /nə<sup>33</sup>/ also indicates that the action in question was accidental in nature and not done intentionally.

Given that this updated hypothesis is able to explain all of the hundreds of examples of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ that I have looked at, my next step is to explore whether or not /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ are evidentials. For this discussion, I would like to explore three questions:

1. Are /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ best analyzed as evidential markers or tense markers?
2. What role do verbal semantics play in Thewo's evidential system?
3. Should /nə<sup>33</sup>/ be analyzed as a mirative marker?

### 10.1 Are /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ evidentials?

We have already seen that these two suffixes indicate the speaker either had sensory awareness of the action in question or of the results of the action. I believe both types of access fit the definition by Tournadre & LaPolla (2014) given at the beginning of this paper. In addition, the temporal space difference, or tense<sup>14</sup> difference, between /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ can also be thought of as having evidential value; i.e., events which one has just witnessed, along with all the accompanying details, are fresh in the mind. However, after time passes, the degree to which one remembers an event might change. Tournadre & LaPolla (2014: 8) also discuss a similar issue. In standard Tibetan, when speaking about a mutual acquaintance *med-pas*, *yod-pa*, and *'dug-pa* can be used to indicate when the speaker last saw the person in question, with *med-pas* being more likely to be used with those one has not seen for quite some time.

However, there are other definitions of evidentiality. Do /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ shed any light on the value of these different definitions for describing Thewo Tibetan?<sup>15</sup> Aikhenvald (2018: 4), a leading authority on evidentiality, states that evidentiality, “is a closed system of grammatical forms whose primary meaning is information source, which cover a recurrent and limited set of semantic parameters.” Do /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ mark information source? Is this their primary function? Neither question has a simple answer. Although /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ inherently indicate that the information in question was obtained first hand (either by witnessing the action of the verb or by witnessing the results of the action), they also indicate the speaker's temporal distance from the action in question. Indeed, this temporal distance seems to be their most salient difference. This would seem to indicate that they don't meet the criteria of being primarily about information source. However, how is “primary” determined?

For suffixes, or morphology that mark grammatical information belonging to several different categories, how do you determine which one is primary? For example, we have already seen that /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is used with first person agents when talking about realis situations. It can be said that /nə<sup>33</sup>/ marks both person and aspect (if not access to information too). What criteria do we use for determining which is the primary feature of /nə<sup>33</sup>/? Is it the perspective of the speaker? Is it the

---

14. According to the examples seen so far, I believe this could be seen as a type of absolute tense. However, this too is a hypothesis and needs further testing.

15. This is an important question because definitions, if misused, can become prescriptive rather than descriptive, i.e., we (sometimes unknowingly) force a particular phenomenon into a definition, rather than let that phenomenon generate the definition. I believe this was part of my mistake in my earlier, problematic hypotheses for /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/: I hadn't yet learned Thewo Tibetan's definition for their meaning and usage.

perspective of the listener? Is it a more broadly extrapolated concept? If the latter, then how does the extrapolation avoid subjectivity?

Aikhenvald's (2018) point is well taken. It is important to note what the most salient feature of a particular grammatical unit is. However, it is also important to note that the answer to this question might be highly dependent on the situation—and we cannot assume that one element is going to be more important than another. It could be that multiple items are viewed as being equally important/primary. For example, if a Thewo Tibetan speaker wants to emphasize that she is *seeing* her roommate wash clothes, she could say the sentence in Example (44). But it is also true that if she wanted to emphasize that this action was happening *now*, as long as she was observing it at the moment of speech, she would use the same sentence. These two elements are inseparable from each other.

- (44)  $ke^{55}-x^h u^{33} ki^{33} ze^{55} dzə^{33}-kə^{55}-nə^{33}$   
 3SG-ERG clothes wash-PROG-CPK  
 'She is washing clothes.'

But what if we analyze the temporal distance represented in the distinction between /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ as evidential in and of itself? Regarding Tournadre & LaPolla's (2014) definition, it would seem that as far as Thewo Tibetan is concerned, temporal distance could be analyzed as part of a speaker's access to information. I am currently thinking about whether or not this is a helpful analysis. And I am also thinking about whether or not it is possible to view Aikhenvald's definition of evidentiality as including temporal distance between the action of the verb and the speech event.

Regardless of the answer to these questions, it is important to remember that the concept of evidentiality emerges from patterns found in language and does not exist separately from these patterns. I interpret Tournadre & LaPolla's definition as better reflecting the reality found within Thewo Tibetan. But this might reflect a misunderstanding of what Aikhenvald is trying to express with her definition.

## 10.2 What role do verbal semantics play in Thewo's evidential system?

In Example (14) we saw that when /nə<sup>33</sup>/ was added directly onto the verb for 'carry' it indicated that the speaker was currently observing the action of the verb. This is made especially clear when we compare Example (14) with Example (15) (which contains the progressive aspect marker) and we see that these examples both have the same meaning. Both indicate that the uncle is carrying the alcohol at the time of the speech event. There are likely two interrelated reasons for these sentences meaning the same thing.



The first reason is simply the nature of /nə<sup>33</sup>/. It indicates the speaker has access to sensory information of the action or the result of the action at the time of the speech act. The second reason is related to the semantic meaning of the verb. Verbs naturally include temporal connotations. Telic verbs are verbs whose actions have a natural end point. For example, the verb 'wink' naturally indicates a very short action. Closing an eye slowly and re-opening it slowly in continuous action would not really be a wink. Non-telic verbs do not express a natural end point. For example, the action of the heart muscle as it contracts is relatively quick; however, it seldom contracts only once. It (hopefully) repeats this action millions of times in unceasing action. Eyes usually don't constantly wink. Looking again at the verb /k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>454</sup>/ 'carry, pick up', we see that it can refer both to the action of picking something up (telic) and also the action of carrying (non-telic). The translation in Example (14) could be written as 'he is carrying that alcohol' or 'he has picked up that alcohol.' If we consider the temporal implications of actions like 'carry', it seems reasonable to think that they generally imply a duration longer than 'wink' or 'hit'. Thus [k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>55</sup>nə<sup>33</sup>] refers to an ongoing action despite the fact that the progressive aspect marker is not added to it.

Example (40) is similar. The sun appears to be constantly moving (i.e., the rotation of the earth means that the angle we view the sun is constantly changing). So, when the speaker says the sun has "risen" it doesn't mean the sun has stopped moving. Likewise, if the progressive aspect marker is added, it still means the sun has "risen" but it highlights the fact that it is still moving.

Another example can be found in the verb for sleep as found below in Examples (45)–(46). Notice here that the use of the progressive aspect marker indicates that the speaker is getting sleepy, not sleeping at the moment of speech. I suspect that this is related to the fact that this is a compound word made up of /ŋi<sup>55</sup>/ 'eye' and /lo<sup>51</sup>/ 'change'. The 'eyes change' or someone sleeps.

- (45) kɛ<sup>55</sup> ŋi<sup>51</sup>lo<sup>33</sup>-ku<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>  
 3SG sleep-PROG-CPK  
 'He is sleepy.'

- (46) kɛ<sup>55</sup> ŋi<sup>51</sup>lo<sup>33</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>  
 3SG sleep-CPK  
 'He is sleeping.'

Significantly, when the /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is used in combination with sleep in Example (44), it necessarily means that the speaker is watching this person sleep at the moment they say this sentence. Thus, /nə<sup>33</sup>/ indicates a completed action, falling asleep, and also a continuing state, namely sleeping.

These observations suggest that the evidential value of the suffix /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is partly determined by the semantics of the verb. Sometimes /nə<sup>33</sup>/ by itself will

mean the action of the verb has already happened, but sometimes it means it is happening while the speaker speaks. Thus, the interpretation of the suffix /nə<sup>33</sup>/ cannot be separated from the semantics of the verb it follows. This by extension means that the evidential value of /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is impacted by the semantic meaning of the verb.

I believe this is an important observation because it suggests that the meaning of an evidential marker is not independent from the situation in which it is used. Indeed, the interpretive dimensions of using evidentials in ambiguous situations have been noted before (Hongladarom 1993; Gawne 2013:214; Tournadre & LaPolla 2014: 18). But what this paper adds is that even the grammatical context (i.e., the meaning of the verb) can alter the type of information an evidential encodes, at least in Thewo Tibetan. Much of the literature about evidentials assumes that evidential markers are static, i.e., marker A is always direct or it is always indirect, etc. While this is likely true for some languages, we have seen that for Thewo Tibetan the evidential value of these two suffixes, namely the way in which they communicate access to information, can change based on the pragmatic and semantic context. Especially for languages which remain poorly understood by researchers, we need to analyze evidentials in a plethora of situations. Hill (2013) demonstrates this by citing several examples of supposedly ungrammatical sentences in Lhasa Tibetan, which are actually perfectly normal sentences in certain unique contexts.

### 10.3 Is /nə<sup>33</sup>/ a mirative marker?

Another possible analysis of /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is to say it marks surprise or new information, i.e., mirativity. After all, the difference between /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ can be thought of (at least in part) as “old” and “new” information. Examples (14) and (15) reflect this “new” information usage. To explore whether or not /nə<sup>33</sup>/ marks mirativity, let’s first look at what mirativity is. DeLancey (1997:35–36) defines mirativity as follows:

The operational definition of the category is that it marks both statements based on inference and statements based on direct experience for which the speaker had no psychological preparation, and in some languages hearsay data as well. What these apparently disparate data sources have in common, as against general or culturally sanctioned knowledge and knowledge based on experience – be it inference from well-known facts or repeated direct experience – is that the proposition is one which is new to the speaker, not yet integrated into his overall picture of the world.

Although it was stated by my teacher that /nə<sup>33</sup>/ marked new information, we also see /nə<sup>33</sup>/ in situations where it likely is not indicating new information. Consider the sun rising in Example (40). There is every reason to assume that the rising of the sun constitutes a type of common knowledge and therefore does not refer to the type of knowledge that we would classify as “new”.

Example (47) also suggests the /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is not restricted to use with “new” knowledge.

- (47) *ke<sup>55</sup>-x<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup> ki<sup>33</sup>ze<sup>55</sup> dzeə<sup>55</sup>-nə<sup>33</sup>*  
 3SG-ERG clothes wash-CPK  
 ‘He washed his clothes.’

The context of this sentence is two friends speaking about a third friend who washed his clothes. The speaker is the roommate of the friend who washed his clothes. This roommate happens to wash his clothes every Saturday morning. When asked by his friend what his roommate did on a particular Saturday, he responds with Example (47). His choice of /nə<sup>33</sup>/ reflects that he is looking at the clean clothes hanging on the balcony. This statement does not infer that washing the clothes was a regular action, or that it was the first time it happened. These would be communicated by using adverbs and possibly another verbal suffix. But given that this roommate always washed his clothes this day, it also doesn’t mean that this event needed to be integrated into how the speaker saw the world.

Example (47) is merely communicating when the action happened (in relation to the speaker sharing the information) and communicating that the speaker’s access to information was such that he or she saw the results of the action in question; i.e., this is not hearsay or a guess (with no sensorial basis).

The reason that /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is also used to indicate new information is simply because /nə<sup>33</sup>/ communicates that the speaker *has* (at the time of the speech act) sensory awareness of either the action expressed by the verb, or direct sensory awareness of the results of the action expressed by the verb. So, when you want to express something new or express surprise in Thewo Tibetan, there is a good chance you will use /nə<sup>33</sup>. But you will use it at many other times, too.

DeLancey (2012: 540), however, also makes the comment that:

The correct significance of the fact that mirative constructions can occur in both direct and indirect evidential contexts is precisely that it proves that they are not evidentials—direct vs. indirect evidence is the fundamental evidential distinction, so a construction which simply ignores that distinction is not an evidential.

We see that /nə<sup>33</sup>/ can also appear in what DeLancey describes as direct and indirect evidential contexts. In Example (47) it is “indirect” but in Example (48) it is “direct”.

- (48)  $ke^{55}-x^h u^{33} ki^{33} ze^{55} tsu^{33}-ku^{55}-nə^{33}$   
 3SG-ERG clothes wash-PROG-CPK  
 ‘He is washing clothes.’

But for Thewo Tibetan, the fundamental distinction between /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is not “direct” or “indirect” but rather the speaker’s access to the information. In Thewo Tibetan, the access to information is considered to have different characteristics—in the case of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/, one of the most important characteristics is the temporal distance between the speech act and the act which the speech act describes. It would seem that /nə<sup>33</sup>/’s usage is too broad to fit the category as defined by DeLancey; however, it seems clear that when indicating surprise in Thewo Tibetan it is quite possible that /nə<sup>33</sup>/ will be used.

Hengeveld & Olbertz (2012:488) offer another definition of mirativity: “In our view, then, mirativity could simply be defined as a linguistic category that characterizes a proposition as newsworthy, unexpected, or surprising.” As we have already seen, /nə<sup>33</sup>/ can indeed mark the “unexpected” and “surprising” but it is not limited to either of these. Can the remaining Thewo examples be analyzed as belonging to the category “newsworthy”?

If we return to Example (48), is it possible that /nə<sup>33</sup>/ marks “newsworthy” here? I think this is a completely fair analysis. Why else would the speaker share it? Although I believe this is a fair analysis, I want to see evidence of a distinction between newsworthy and non-newsworthy before I analyze /nə<sup>33</sup>/ as mirative based on Hengeveld & Olbertz’s definition. Often, though perhaps not always, we share information because we believe it is newsworthy. Do languages distinguish between “newsworthy” and “non-newsworthy”? If Thewo Tibetan does have such a distinction then I believe /nə<sup>33</sup>/ could be analyzed as a mirative marker; however, Hengeveld & Olbertz do not give any examples of a contrast between newsworthy and non-newsworthy in their paper. Their examples all use the mirative marker in question and they do not explain what would happen if this marker were omitted or replaced. In Thewo Tibetan, /nə<sup>33</sup>/ occupies a position which cannot be left blank for statements relating to ongoing or completed actions. Also, it seems clear that /ta<sup>33</sup>/ does not mark “non-newsworthy”.

There is another possibility. What if /nə<sup>33</sup>/ marks more than one grammatical category? What if it marks both mirativity and evidentiality? While I greatly appreciate Hengeveld & Olbertz’s (2012:498) insight that some languages might use the same marker for mirative and evidential purposes, the question is whether or not Thewo Tibetan signals that there are two grammatical categories present. If Thewo Tibetan does have two different grammatical categories present, I would expect there to be situations when /nə<sup>33</sup>/ only marks “surprise” etc., and does not mark anything about the speaker’s access to information. If, however, /nə<sup>33</sup>/ can-

not be separated from its evidential usage, then the fact that some examples of /nə<sup>33</sup>/ communicate “surprise” etc. would only indicate that the “mirative” usage is a sub-category of a larger category. As far as I understand now, there are no instances where /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is used when it does not serve evidential functions. Therefore, I do not believe a mirative analysis of /nə<sup>33</sup>/ makes sense. It is better to consider /nə<sup>33</sup>/ as an evidential marker which, because of the type of access to information it indicates, often is used in statements where there is “surprise” present, etc.

## 11. Comparison of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ with evidentials in other Tibetic varieties

After having determined the usage and meaning of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/, I wanted to explore whether or not other Tibetic varieties, especially those geographically close to the Thewo region, shared similar characteristics. In particular I was interested in seeing whether or not other varieties had the following three characteristic found in Thewo Tibetan's /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/:

1. A binary-like contrast between “current perception knowledge” and “already acquired knowledge”;
2. A “current perception knowledge” evidential whose evidential value (either current sensory awareness of an ongoing act or sensory awareness of the results of a previously completed act) is determined by the telicity of the verb;
3. Non-egophoric markers being used to mark non-volitional first person actions.

It is important to note that my search was not to find cognates or to explore historical questions regarding the evolution of evidential markers in Thewo Tibetan or other Tibetic varieties. These are important questions, but questions which remain outside of the scope of this study. Thus, my goal was to see if any other Tibetic languages have evidentials which have the same or similar functions as Thewo Tibetans /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/. I shall deal with each of these three characteristics in turn.

Regarding characteristic (1), a binary contrast between “immediate” knowledge and “already acquired” knowledge, studies in several geographic areas report a similar function of the evidential system. Speaking of Sherpa, Woodbury (1986) describes *nok* as expressing a kind of current evidence which can refer to either evidence of the action itself, or evidence from the results of the act. This usage seems very similar to Thewo Tibetan's /nə<sup>33</sup>/. Similarly, van Driem (1998: 127) speaks of two evidential values in Dzongkha saying there is an, “old, ingrained

background knowledge which is or has become a firmly integrated part of one's conception of reality" and a "knowledge which has been newly acquired".

Other central varieties of Tibetan appear to include a "time" distinction in their evidential system. Let us look at the suffix *ḥdug* as found in Ladakhi (Zeisler 2018:94–95) and Standard Tibetan (Tournadre & LaPolla 2014:8). Zeisler (2018:95) says of *ḥdug*: "*ḥdug* is typically used for newly perceived situations relating to OTHER." This sounds similar to the usage of Thewo Tibetan's /nə<sup>33</sup>/. Zeisler describes a situation where several people went trekking and put their bags in a room. After the bags were put there, they were referenced several times by the hostel owner: (1) Soon after the trekkers left (*ḥdug*); and (2) ten days later (*jot*). Zeisler notes that the time difference seems to be significant (Zeisler 2018:94). The Examples (49) and (50) below are taken from Zeisler (2018:93–94) with no content edits).

- (49) *khon trekiŋ-a son-ste-jot [...]* *khon-e dzola bor-te-duk*  
 they trekking-LOC go.PA-CP-S1e=PRF they-ERG/GEN bag put-CP-S2v=PRF  
 'They have gone/went trekking [...] They have left/left their bags [in the room over there.]'  
 (Leh, 2014 conversation, from Zeisler 2018: 93, (6))
- (50) *kh-e dzola bor-te-jot.*  
 s/he.GEN/ERG bag put-CP-S1e=PRF  
 'S/he has left/left his/her bag(s) [in the room over there].'  
 (Leh, 2014, conversation, from Zeisler 2018: 94, (7))

For Thewo Tibetan, there are four ways to say the sentence in Example (49). Each choice involves a different suffix. If the speaker could see the bags when she made this statement (i.e., the door was open and the bags were visible) and wanted to emphasize that she just learned about the bags being placed in this room, she would use the suffix /nə<sup>33</sup>/. If the speaker could not see the bags at the time of the speech event but knew they had been put into the room, then she could say /ta<sup>33</sup>/. If the speaker was the owner of the hostel, and had instructed the guests to put their luggage in this room, then the speaker could use /ji<sup>33</sup>/. The last choice would be to use /ɿa<sup>33</sup>/ which would emphasize that she saw the guests place the luggage in the room. But after ten days, when saying Example (50), the option of /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is not possible even if the speaker can see the bags when they say the sentence in Example (50). /ta<sup>33</sup>/, /ji<sup>33</sup>/, and /ɿa<sup>33</sup>/ all remain possible suffixes to use in this situation and carry the same meaning as was described for their use in Example (49).

Heading north to the Amdo region, in his paper on Amdo's<sup>16</sup> evidential system, Sun (1993) describes how the immediate evidential <sup>h</sup>kə is used to talk about non-self, ongoing actions which the speaker has direct sensory awareness of at the time of the speech event. This is very similar to /nə<sup>33</sup>/s usage when it is combined with either the progressive aspect marker, or a non-telic verb. In addition, when the speaker, at the time of the speech event, has current, or immediate, sensory awareness of a past action made by another person, the speaker will add [s<sup>h</sup>ə] (Sun 1993:979) before the immediate evidential. This appears to be identical in function to /nə<sup>33</sup>/ appearing without the progressive aspect marker and without a non-telic verb. Speaking of already acquired knowledge, Sun says that the direct evidential is used to communicate that the knowledge was acquired in the past. Likewise, when the direct evidential <sup>t</sup>hə is combined with the progressive aspect marker <sup>h</sup>khod, it can communicate that the speaker just witnessed the action of the verb but can no longer see it at the time of the speech event (Sun 1993:978). This is very similar to the meaning of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ when combined with the progressive aspect marker. The main difference is that Thewo Tibetan does not use the equivalent of Amdo Tibetan's direct evidential <sup>t</sup>hə, the intimate knowledge evidential /ɬa<sup>33</sup>/, in this situation.

Looking at Kham Tibetan varieties, as described in Hongladarom (2007), Caiji Wenmao (2020), Suzuki et al. (2021), etc., the only example I saw which seemed to be talking about something close to a time distinction in the evidential system was in Caiji Wenmao's (2020) paper on the Changduo variety of Khams from Qinghai. Here Caiji Wenmao says the existential verb wo<sup>24</sup> has been grammaticalized and expresses egophoric completion, but notes that the action in question was just completed or was continued to the moment of the speech event. While this points to possible similarities in how the evidential system interrelates with the concept of time, there was insufficient data in Caiji Wenmao's paper to do a complete comparison with Thewo Tibetan's /nə<sup>33</sup>/ and /ta<sup>33</sup>/.

Regarding characteristic (2), again the closest example I can find to how Thewo Tibetan's /nə<sup>33</sup>/ is affected by telicity is in Sun's (1993) paper. Sun describes how the progressive aspect marker cannot appear with stative or punctual verb stems (Sun 1993:974). What is similar here is merely that in both speech varieties the verb type has an impact on meaning. In Thewo Tibetan the difference of meaning is generated by the telicity of the verb. In the variety of Amdo which Sun (1993) describes, the difference of meaning is created by the verb type restricting or allowing the appearance of the progressive aspect marker.

---

16. The Amdo variety that Sun describes is spoken in the same county as the Thewo Tibetan variety described in this paper and is used by nomads. My language teachers have often commented on the huge diversity of Tibetan varieties within this county.

Regarding characteristic (3), in many Tibetic varieties non-egophoric markers are used to mark non-volitional, first person actions. DeLancey (1990) wrote one of the first descriptions of this phenomenon borrowing language (conjunct-disjunct) from Hale (1980). Given the amount of literature related to this shared phenomenon, I shall restrict my discussion here to a comparison with Amdo Tibetan, specifically the variety spoken in the nomadic areas of Mdzod.dge or Ruoergai County.

Amdo Tibetan (Sun 1993) is one of these varieties and uses non-egophoric suffixes (the indirect evidential to be precise) to indicate actions the speaker did while not knowing or not being conscious of the action. Sun (1993:965) explains this by saying: “when narrating unconscious non-volitional acts that occurred to him in the past, the speaker has to use the indirect evidential to indicate that he was not a knowing, conscious being during the act itself, but found out about the act only afterwards from indirect sources.” The basic principle in both Amdo Tibetan (Sun 1993) and in Thewo Tibetan is the same. A clear distinction must be made between actions one knows because of volitionally participating in them and actions which are known from observation—whether it be observing others or oneself (in the context of noticing the results, etc. of an action which one did unintentionally). The source of the knowledge is key—knowledge which originates in the self, i.e., knowledge of actions which are volitionally done, and knowledge one gains from observing actions (whether of others or self-actions that one did not intentionally do) are inherently different. For the first, the knowledge of the action is known even before the action happens. For the second, the knowledge of the action is acquired either as the action unfolds or after it happens.

## 12. This journey’s end and other journeys’ beginning

Through this journey I have described how my understanding of /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ developed over time. I first considered that they might be “direct” and “indirect” evidential markers.<sup>17</sup> But as my investigative journey continued, I realized they marked the speakers’ temporal and qualitative access to information. By temporal I am referring to the distinction between /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/, namely that /ta<sup>33</sup>/ communicates that the action of the verb was already known about and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ communicates that the action of the verb was just learned about (or is being currently observed). By qualitative access, I am referring to both suffixes indicating

---

17. Terms that I appreciate from a stylistic standpoint, but which I have come to see as being misleading and overly simplistic—though I do not have any better suggestions!



that the action of the verb was learned about first hand—either through observing it or through observing the results.<sup>18</sup>

Moving beyond the description of how these two suffixes function, I have explored four other topics:

1. Whether or not /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ are evidentials: Because both suffixes always imply the speaker had first hand access to the information in question, I analyze them as meeting Tournadre & LaPolla's (2014) definition. However, when looking at Aikhenvald's (2004; 2018) definition it seems less clear. A key factor here is Aikhenvald's (2018: 4) statement that evidential markers must primarily mark evidentiality. It is hard for me to understand how "primary" should be determined and thus I prefer the broader definition by Tournadre & LaPolla (2014).
2. How the verb's meaning interacts with /nə<sup>33</sup>/ to communicate what type of access the speaker had to the event in question: When verbs whose meaning indicates an action with comparatively longer duration (such as carry or sleep) are combined with /nə<sup>33</sup>/, despite the absence of the progressive aspect marker, they often indicate that the action is ongoing at the time of the speech event.
3. Whether or not /nə<sup>33</sup>/ should be thought of as a mirative marker: While Thewo Tibetan uses /nə<sup>33</sup>/ to communicate ideas like "surprise", "unexpected information", "newsworthy items" etc., it does not seem to provide evidence that *mirative* is a separate category within Thewo Tibetan. It seems most reasonable to analyze these mirative-like functions as being part of the broader evidential system. This does not mean this is the case in other languages, but it does indicate that we must let languages "make up their own minds" about whether or not they have the category *mirative*.
4. What characteristics do /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ share with the evidential systems of other Tibetic varieties: Thewo Tibetan is not unique in having a way to distinguishing between what information has been newly acquired and what information is "old" knowledge. Other Tibetic varieties also include this distinction. But regarding how the telicity of the verb affects the evidential meaning of Thewo Tibetan's /nə<sup>33</sup>/, the only similar example I could find to this characteristic was in Amdo Tibetan as described by Sun (1993), and it was not entirely the same. Outside of this example, I found no mention of such interaction between verbs and evidential values in other Amdo varieties (Haller 2009; Ebihara 2013; Shao 2015) or Kham Tibetan (Hongladarom

---

18. I am using "observing" somewhat loosely here because it is stylistically more pleasant than saying, "had direct sensory awareness of an action."

2007; Caiji Wenmao 2020). I also suspect, based on records of historical interchanges between the Thewo region and mBrugchu region (Zhou Ta 1996) that mBrugchu Tibetan might have similar suffixes, but as of yet too little data is available to evaluate this possibility. Regarding use of non-egophoric suffixes with first person, non-volitional actions, this is widely attested across languages on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau and neighboring regions.

As this journey concludes, I am looking forward to a new journey beginning. This paper only discusses a small portion of Thewo Tibetan's evidential system and it is important to document the whole system. Additionally, this paper did not explore (1) whether or not these two suffixes can be used in questions, and how they are used; (2) whether or not they can be used in irrealis statements, and if so, how; and (3) how are they used in combination with negative markers, if that is possible. Analyzing these three areas is an important step in broadening our understanding of these suffixes.

It is my hope that this description of Thewo Tibetan's /ta<sup>33</sup>/ and /nə<sup>33</sup>/ will help (in a small way) to fill in that evidential "mural" which forms the basis of our typological understanding of this unique grammatical category. I also hope it will highlight the unique culture and worldview of Thewo Tibetan speakers.



## List of abbreviations



1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
AAK	already acquired knowledge evidential
ABS	absolutive
CPK	current perception knowledge evidential
E/E	Evidential/Epistemic
EGOK1	egophoric knowledge evidential 1
EGOK2	egophoric knowledge evidential 2
ERG	ergative
GEN	genitive
INFRK	inferential knowledge evidential
INK	intimate knowledge evidential
LOC	locative
NEG	negative
OBL	oblique
PRF	(present) perfect
PROG	progressive aspect
RECIP	recipient
RPTK	reported knowledge evidential

S1e	Set 1 marker: existential linking verb <i>yod</i>
S2v	Set 2 marker for visual perception: <i>ḥdug</i>
sg	singular

## References

-  Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2004. *Evidentiality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
-  Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. (ed.). 2018. *The Oxford handbook of evidentiality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Caiji Wenmao. 2020. The evidential category in Chengduo variety of Khams Tibetan. *Minzu Yuwen* 2020(1). 27–37.
-  Caplow, Nancy J. 2017. Inference and deferred evidence in Tibetan. In Gawne, Lauren & Hill, Nathan W. (eds.), *Evidential systems of Tibetan languages*, 225–257. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Daojie Ben & Sangta & Dawa Pengcuo. 2020. The grammatical categories of the classical Tibetan verbs. In Roumbal, Iana & Zhang, Yong & Huo, Mingming & Volodina, Tatiana (eds.), *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Education, Language, Art and Inter-cultural Communication (ICELAIC 2020)*, 164–174. Dordrecht: Atlantis Press.
- DeLancey, Scott. 1986. Evidentiality and volitionality in Tibetan. In Chafe, Wallace L. & Johanna, Nichols (eds.), *Evidentiality: The linguistic coding of epistemology*, 203–213. Norwood: Ablex.
-  DeLancey, Scott. 1990. Ergativity and the cognitive model of event structure in Lhasa Tibetan. *Cognitive Linguistics* 1(3). 289–322.
-  DeLancey, Scott. 1997. Mirativity: The grammatical marking of unexpected information. *Linguistic Typology* 1(1). 33–52.
-  DeLancey, Scott. 2012. Still mirative after all these years. *Linguistic Typology* 16(3). 529–564.
-  DeLancey, Scott. 2018. Evidentiality in Tibetic. In Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of evidentiality*, 580–594. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ebihara, Shiho. 2013. Preliminary field report on dPa'ris dialect of Amdo Tibetan. *Journal of Research Institute* 49. 149–161. (<http://id.nii.ac.jp/1085/00001409/>) (Accessed 2022-12-05.)
- Garrett, Edward John. 2001. *Evidentiality and assertion in Tibetan*. Los Angeles: University of California at Los Angeles. (Doctoral dissertation.)
- Gawne, Lauren. 2013. *Lamjung Yolmo copulas in use: Evidentiality, reported speech and questions*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne. (Doctoral dissertation.)
-  Gawne, Lauren & Hill, Nathan W. (eds.). 2017. *Evidential systems of Tibetan languages*. Leiden: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Hale, Austin. 1980. Person markers: Finite conjunct and disjunct verb forms in Newari. In Trail, Ronald L. & Rathod, Harisingh T. & Chand, Geeta & Roy, Chaudhary & Shrestha, Indira & Tuladhar, Nirmal Man (eds.), *Papers in South-East Asian linguistics*, vol. 7, 95–106. Canberra: Australian National University.
- Haller, Felix. 2009. Switch reference in Tibetan. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 32(2). 45–70.

- Hein, Veronika. 2007. The mirative and its interplay with evidentiality in the Tibetan dialect of Tabo (Spiti). *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 30(2). 195–214.
-  Hengeveld, Kees & Olbertz, Hella. 2012. Didn't you know? Mirativity does exist!. *Linguistic Typology* 16(3). 487–503.
-  Hill, Nathan W. 2012. "Mirativity" does not exist: *hdug* in "Lhasa" Tibetan and other suspects. *Linguistic Typology* 16(3). 389–433.
- Hill, Nathan W. 2013. Contextual semantics of 'Lhasa' Tibetan evidentials. *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics* 10(3). 47–54.
- Hongladarom, Krisadawan. 1993. *Evidentials in Tibetan: A dialogic study of the interplay between form and meaning*. Bloomington: Indiana University. (Doctoral dissertation).
- Hongladarom, Krisadawan. 2007. Evidentiality in Rgyalthang Tibetan. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 30(2). 17–44.
- Huber, Brigitte. 2000. Preliminary report on evidential categories in Lende Tibetan (Kyirong). *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 23(2). 155–174.
- Jin, Peng (ed.). 1983. *Zangyu jianzhi*. Beijing: The Ethnic Publishing House.
-  Kalsang & Garfield, Jay & Speas, Margaret & de Villiers, Jill. 2013. Direct evidentials, case, tense and aspect in Tibetan: Evidence for a general theory of the semantics of evidential. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 31(2). 517–561.
- Lin, You-Jing. 2014. Thebo. In Sun, Jackson T.-S. (ed.), *Phonological profiles of little-studied Tibetic varieties*, 215–267. Taipei: Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica.
- Oisel, Guillaume. 2017. Re-evaluation of the evidential system of Lhasa Tibetan and its atypical functions. *Himalayan Linguistics* 16(2). 90–128.
- Powell, Abe. 2022. Mapping the spatial relationship between sub-basins and language variation in Thewo Tibetan. *Himalayan Linguistics* 21(1). 40–63.
- Renzeng Wangmu. 2013. *Diebu Zangyu yanjiu*. Beijing: Minzu University of China Press.
-  Sangsrgyas Tshering 2020. The voicing of unvoiced obstruents in Thebo Tibetan. *Cahiers de Linguistique Asie Orientale* 49(1). 1–20.
- Shao, Mingyuan. 2015. The direct and inferential evidentiality in Amdo Tibetan. In Editorial Committee of *Historical Linguistics Research*, Institute of Linguistics CASS (ed.), *Lishi yuyanxue yanjiu*, vol. 9, 156–182. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Sun, Jackson T.-S. 1993. Evidentials in Amdo Tibetan. *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology* 63(4). 945–1001.
- Suzuki, Hiroyuki & Sonam Wangmo & Tsering Samdrup. 2021. A contrastive approach to the evidential system in Tibetic languages: Examining five varieties from Khams and Amdo. *Gengo Kenkyu* 159. 69–101.
-  Tournadre, Nicolas. 2017. A typological sketch of evidential/epistemic categories in the Tibetic languages. In Gawne, Lauren & Hill, Nathan W. (eds.), *Evidential systems of Tibetan languages*, 95–129. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Tournadre, Nicholas & Konchok Jiatso. 2001. Final auxiliary verbs in literary Tibetan and in the dialects. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 24(1). 49–111.
-  Tournadre, Nicolas & LaPolla, Randy J. 2014. Towards a new approach to evidentiality: Issues and directions for research. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 37(2). 240–263.
- Tournadre, Nicolas & Suzuki, Hiroyuki. 2023. *The Tibetic languages: An introduction to the family of languages derived from Old Tibetan*. Paris: Lacito Publications.

- Tsering Samdrup & Suzuki, Hiroyuki. 2018. Evidential system in Mabzhi Tibetan of Amdo. In The Organizing Committee of the 51st International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics (ed.), *Proceedings of the 51st International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics*, 913–925. Kyoto: Kyoto University.
- van Driem, George. 1998. *Dzongkha*. Leiden: Research School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies (CNWS), Leiden University.
- Woodbury, Anthony C. 1986. Interactions of tense and evidentiality: A study of Sherpa and English. In Chafe, Wallace L. & Nichols, Johanna (eds.), *Evidentiality: The linguistic coding of epistemology*, 188–202. Norwood: Ablex.
-  Zeisler, Bettina. 2018. Don't believe in a paradigm that you haven't manipulated yourself!—Evidentiality, speaker attitude, and admirativity in Ladakhi. *Himalayan Linguistics* 17(1). 67–130.
-  Zemp, Marius. 2020. Evidentials and their pivot in Tibetic and neighboring Himalayan languages. *Functions of Language* 27(1). 29–54.
- Zhou Ta. 1996. *Gansu Zangzu buluo de shehui yu lishi yanjiu*. Lanzhou: Gansu Nationalities Publishing House.

## Address for correspondence

Abe Powell  
 Lanzhou University  
 222 South Tianshui Road  
 Lanzhou 730000, Gansu Province  
 China  
 abe.w.powell@gmail.com

## Publication history

Date received: 22 March 2022  
 Date accepted: 3 November 2022  
 Published online: 15 August 2024