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Aorist in Lhagang Tibetan

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1 Prolegomena

Aorist (< *gr.* ἀόριστος 'indefinite, vague' < ὁρος 'limit') is a Greek term, but it should not be Greek to us. Aorist in Greek, whether it is Classical or Modern, is a clearly defined category of the verb in both the morphological and semantic aspects. It is very likely that many dialects of Khams Tibetan have the Aorist category in their verb system; however, this term is not used frequently, maybe due to ambiguity as a term of descriptive linguistics.

It is clear and unambiguous that Aorist functions as one of the Tense-Aspect categories in Greek, neither simple Tense nor Aspect. In Modern Greek, Aorist is explained as "past perfective". In Tibetic languages, especially in Lhagang Tibetan, Aorist functions as a Tense-Aspect category which is very close to past perfective; however, it is different from Perfective widely used in the description of Slavonic languages, and hence we choose the term Aorist for Lhagang Tibetan. We basically follow the core meaning of Aorist in Greek (mainly Modern but to some extent Classical) and do not consider usages attested in other languages like Turkish; however, Aorist in languages such as Bulgarian and Croatian is similar to Greek. As far as we know, the use of Aorist in Lhagang Tibetan is partially similar to *adyatanī* (Aorist) of Sanskrit as well as *passé simple* in French, *passato remoto* in Italian, and *perfectum* in Latin.

Lhagang Tibetan (Minyag Rabgang Khams; according to the classification of Suzuki 2015:25) is one of the Tibetic languages spoken in the easternmost Tibetosphere, located in Tagong (lHa sgang) Village (henceforth Lhagang Village), Tagong Town, Kangding (Dar mdo) Municipality, Ganzi (dKar mdzes) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China. This language has been described as a sketch grammar by Suzuki & Sonam Wangmo (2016), and Suzuki & Sonam Wangmo (2018) discuss the evidential system of Lhagang Tibetan. Evidentiality, morphologically a part of the Tense-Aspect-Modality+Evidentiality&Epistemicity (TAM+E&E) system, is principally marked in various suffixes of a verb in Tibetic languages (Tournadre & Lapolla 2014, Vokurková 2008). Our "Aorist" seems to correspond to "Perfective" in Oisel (2017) and "Completed past" in Tournadre (p.c.).

Here we will discuss Aorist compared with Perfect in Lhagang Tibetan. Both Aorist and Perfect seem to describe a situation that an action has completed or accomplished. The suffix of Aorist /-zə/ can be used following a verb stem, either alone, with an egophoric evidential marker /-jiː/, or with a statement evidential marker /-reʔ/, whereas the forms of Perfect has already been incorporated into evidential categories: /-tʰeː/ (sensory evidential) and /-kʰeː/ (non-sensory or statement-inferential evidential). We will describe these three suffixes more in detail, and discuss what is an essential sense of Aorist, based on data taken from elicitations, natural conversations, and narrative stories. We use the following narratives: **(Origin)** *Origin of Lhagang*; **(Pig)** *King's Pig*; **(Lark)** *Prince's wife become a Lark*; **(S&W)** *Sheep and Wolf* ; **(mDzo)** *White mdzo mo*; **(H&T)** *Hare and Tiger*; **(3Birds)** *Three Birds*; **(L&P)** *Lark and Partridge*.

2 Usage of Aorist and Perfect: An overview

We cite four consecutive sentences (1.1)-(1.4) from the narrative (**Pig**) to demonstrate how Aorist is distinguished from Perfect.

(1.1)　´teː　　´tə　　⁻ʰtɔː ji ⁻ᵐbo loʔ　　`ⁿgo-la　　^ŋeː-neː　　ⁿduʔ-**zə ^ji:-kʰe**ː

　　　　then　　that　　place for cattle dung　　on-LOC　　sleep-CONJ　　sit-**AOR-PFT.NSEN**

　　　'Then, he slept and sat on that place for dung.'

(1.2)　´tə　　　⁻ɦla ɦgɛ-tə　　⁻zaʔ ʰtɕiʔ tə　　⁻pʰaʔ ɦgɛ-gə　　⁻kʰo　　`pʰu gə la

　　　　then　　monk-that　　a whole night　　pig-ERG　　3　　absolutely

　　　´ŋeː　　　´ma-ʰtɕuʔ-**zə reʔ**

　　　sleep　　NEG-CAUS-**AOR**

　　　'Then, that monk was absolutely not allowed to sleep by the pig for a whole night.'

(1.3)　^ɦiã-tɑ　　　　´ɦiã　　⁻zeː　　⁻ʰtɔː ji ⁻ᵐbo loʔ　　^jaː-ʰko　　⁻ʰtɔː ji ⁻ᵐbo loʔ

　　　oink-COM　　oink　　say　　place for cattle dung　　DIR-dig　　place for cattle dung

　　　^jaː-ʰko-**zə reʔ**

　　　DIR-dig-**AOR**

　　　'(The pig) was oinking and oinking, and repeating to dig up the place for dung.'

(1.4)　´teː　　　´tə ri ⁿdə reʔ　　^jaː-ʰko-kʰa-te　　　⁻ɦla ɦgɛ　⁻tsʰiʔ kʰa ^za-**kʰe**ː

　　　　then　　be like that　　DIR-dig-just when-TOP　　monk　　get angry-**PFT.NSEN**

　　　⁻tsʰiʔ kʰa ´za

　　　get angry

　　　'Then, that is like that: just when it dug, the monk got so angry,' (**Pig**)

　　　Of the four sentences, we find three types of suffixes: Aorist+non-sensory Perfect (1.1), Aorist (1.2; 1.3), and non-sensory Perfect (1.4). We analyse that this difference reflects the essence of Aorist and Perfect following the context. Aorist+non-sensory Perfect type indicates the completed past of the actions occurring on the background of the story; Aorist denotes the completed past of the actions which play an important role in the plot; Perfect tells the situation of non-completed actions occurring on the background. The narrator makes a story-telling divided into a descriptive part and a main plot part by using other phonetic features such as intonation too.

　　　An abridged version of the tabular on the combination of Aorist and Perfect with three principle evidentials (egophoric, statement, sensory) is as follows:

TA\Evidential	Egophoric (E)	Statement	Sensory (SEN)
Aorist (AOR)	/-zə jiː/	/-zə reʔ/	---
Perfect (PFT)	---	/-kʰeː/	/-tʰeː/

　　　Aorist does not have a sensory form, and Perfect does not have an egophoric form. Other than the forms in the table above, Aorist has a form /-zə/ alone. We have not classified it yet; however, it is used regardless of egophoric or non-egophoric descriptions. See Suzuki & Sonam Wangmo (2018) for an enlarged version. Then, we need explore which functions in descriptive linguistics bring this difference between Aorist and Perfect.

3 Action-focus opposed to result-focus

Aorist describes an action itself rather than a result of an action. An example from the narrative **(mDzo)**:

(2)   ˊjɔ̃   ⁻pʰa ri   ⁻kʰɔ̃ ᵐba   ⁻ʰtɕa ⁻tso: tsoʔ   ⁻ⁿdzo mo

          again   opposite side   house   single tall upright   mdzo mo

          ⁻ʰka: bo   ˋʔə-ri:-**zə**   ⁻ze:-kʰe:

          white   Q-see-**AOR**   say-PFT.NSEN

      'Again, (the middle sister) said: "Did (you=the demon) see a white mdzo mo in the single tall upright house on the opposite side?" ' **(mDzo)**

      Aorist appears in a quoted sentence as an interrogative, and it is intended that the speaker (the middle sister) asks a question whether the addressee (the demon) *did see* a white mdzo mo or not.

      Another example is from **(S&W)**:

(3)   ˊte   ⁻luʔ   ˊma wɯ   ⁻ʱŋi: ɣa-gə

          then   sheep   mother and son   two-ERG

          ⁻ɕʰə ɣə   ⁻ʰtɕiʔ   ˋʰte:-ʱzɑ:-loʔ-**zə** ^ji:-kʰe:

          paper   one   give-put-pretend-**AOR**-PFT.NSEN

      'Then, the sheep mother and son pretended to give a paper.' **(S&W)**

      In this story, the action described in (3) plays a key role of the plot. Many parts are narrated in Perfect, but Aorist is used in this place.

      Both the examples (2) and (3) can also be interpreted as descriptions of an event which has just happened. In other words, the narrator employs Aorist as a "near past" meaning compared with Perfect.

      The examples (4abc) from elicitation also demonstrate the difference of foci:

(4a)   ⁻kʰo   ˊʱziʔ ʱdɑʔ ^ʱdʑɑʔ-**zə reʔ**

       3SG   slip-**AOR**

      'He slipped.'

(4b)   ⁻kʰo   ˊʱziʔ ʱdɑʔ ^ʱdʑɑʔ-**tʰe:**

       3SG   slip-**PFT**

      '(I have seen) He slipped.'

(4c)   ⁻kʰo   ˊʱziʔ ʱdɑʔ ^ʱdʑɑʔ-**kʰe:**

       3SG   slip-**PFT.NSEN**

      '(I indirectly know that) He slipped.'

      The three examples can simply be translated as 'he slipped' in English. The meaning of (4a) is not related to Intentionality (see Section 4) 'he intentionally slipped' because the verb /ˊʱziʔ ʱdɑʔ ^ʱdʑɑʔ/ 'slip' is a non-controllable verb and it never expresses Intentionality. Therefore, the essential difference between (4a) and (4bc) is a focus, i.e., the action or the result; that between (4b) and (4c) is evidentiality, i.e., Sensory or Non-sensory (alternatively analysed as Statement). An interpretation of (4a) is "neutral in evidentiality" on the one side and "focus on the action" on the other side. The use of Aorist focuses on the action 'his slipping', while Perfect focuses on the result of the action with two kinds of access to information (sensory or non-sensory).

4 Intentionality of action

A combination of "verb root + Aorist" means intentionality of the action when the verb belongs to Controllable. If a non-controllable verb is used with Aorist, it denotes a focus on the action sa describried in Section 3.

A pair regarding intentionality appears in elicitations, as in:

(5a)　　´ŋa　　　　　　ˉza ma　　　　　　`za-**zə**

　　　　1SG　　　　　　food　　　　　　　eat-**AOR**

　　'I ate food.'

(5b)　　´ŋa　　　　　　ˉza ma　　　　　　`za-**kʰe**:

　　　　1SG　　　　　　food　　　　　　　eat-**PFT.NSEN**

　　'I carelessly ate food (that I should not eat).'

The verb 'eat' in the pair (5) is a controllable verb. Hence, the intentionality of the action generally exists. In this case, the use of Perfect non-sensory (PFT.NSEN) as (5b) is rather "marked".

Another example similar to (5b) is as follows:

(6)　　´ŋa　　　　　　ˉꜛgo　　　　　　　´ma-ꜛdʑɛʔ-**kʰe**:

　　　　1SG　　　　　　door　　　　　　　NEG-close-**PFT.NSEN**

　　'I should have closed the door.' (Situation: 'I forgot closing the door.')

The use of Perfect non-sensory implies that Aorist contains a meaning of intentionality. Since Aorist to some extent contains intentionality, endopathic (non-controllable) verbs, such as /ˉʰtoʔ/ 'be hungry' and /´na/ 'be sick', are rarely followed by Aorist.

5 Near Past or Aktionsart

Aorist sometimes emphasises specific Aktionsart, especially inchoative and accomplishment.

Aorist can express an accomplishment in some cases, e.g., from the narrative (**H&T**):

(7)　´ʈaʔ tʰoʔ　　　　^ʈaʔ ꜛzaʔ　　　`l̥ũ-nə　　　ˉʰtaʔ　　^tə la

　　top of cliff　　　bottom of cliff　　fall-CONJ　　tiger　　there

　　`ʰseʔ-tɕʰaʔ-**zə re?**

　　kill-can-**AOR**

　　'(The hare) made (the tiger) fall from the top to the bottom of the cliff and was able to kill the tiger there.'
(H&T)

This sentence emphasises an accomplishment of the action which led the tiger to be killed. The tiger was probably dead, but the narrator's intention is on the achievement of making the tiger fall down. This function is related to 'punctual' and 'momentary' features.

In historical narratives, Aorist often appears together with a hearsay evidential marker; however, sometimes Aorist seems to function as an inchoative.

(8)　´tɕo wo-gə　　　　`kʰa ʈaʔ-zə-reʔ-sə reʔ

　　JOWO-ERG　　　　speak-**AOR**-HS

　　'The Jowo began to speak.' **(Origin)**

In the case of (8), it is also possible to interpret the function of Aorist as intentionality of the action

because the Jowo (statue of the Bodhisattva) can have intention to do although the people travelling with the Jowo did not think that he could utter something.

6 Strategy of Aorist in narratives

We look back to the description of Section 2. Aorist functions as an element making a plot of the story in contrast with Perfect making its background. The next consecutive example (9) from **(Pig)** demonstrates another function of Aorist:

(9.1) ´te: ⁻pʰaʔ ʱgɛ `ⁿgo-tə  ^kʰə-nə tə  `kʰo-rɔ̃
       then pig head-DEF carry-CONJ 3-self

       ⁻ʰtɕə wa `tʰã tɕeʔ-la  `ʔə ⁿɖa `ʱzu-nə ⁻ʰtsuʔ-nə
       cattle dung all-DAT like that do-CONJ point-CONJ

       ⁻ⁿdə `ʔə-reʔ  ⁻ⁿdə  `ʔə-reʔ ⁻ⁿdə
       this Q-CPV this Q-CPV this

       `ʔə-reʔ  ^ze:-nə  `kʰə lo: loʔ-**zə**
       Q-CPV say-CONJ pretend-**AOR**

'Then carrying the pig head, he did like this, by pointing every cattle dung, saying: 'Is this?, Is this?, Is this?', pretending (he did not know).'

(9.2) ´te: `kʰo-rɔ̃-gə ⁻ʰta: ⁻ʱʐɑ:-zə-gə ⁻ʱjɯ
       then 3-self-ERG sign put-NML-GEN turquoise

       ^reʔ-mo ´te: ⁻ⁿdə ´reʔ ⁻ze:-nɛ:
       CPV-PART then this CPV say-CONJ

       ⁻ʱjɯ ⁻tsʰə la ´lɛ̃-ʱʐɑʔ-**kʰe:**
       turquoise hither take-put-**PFT.NSEN**

'Then, the turquoise was already with a sign by him, wasn't it? Then, he said: 'This is the one', and took out the turquoise.' **(Pig)**

Both (9.1) and (9.2) should be put on the plot; however, the main verb in (9.1) is Aorist, and that of (9.2) is Perfect. In this case, we can consider which action is more important or interesting in the whole story. As described in Section 3, Aorist has an action-focus function. For the narrator (or a story-telling in general), the action 'taking out a turquoise', which has already been suggested in the earlier part of the story, does not form an important scenery. Rather, the action 'pretending not knowing the fact' is more attractive for audiences.

We frequently find a combination of "Aorist + statement Perfect" in a narrative mode, which describes a background description in completed past in a story-telling.

(10) ´te ´ʱdʑa: po-gə ⁻ʱjo: mo ´ma rə `ʱdʑuʔ-ɦo:-**zə-kʰe:**
      then king-GEN maid downwards run-come-**AOR-PFT.NSEN**

'Then, a maid of the king came down running.' **(Pig)**

The example (10) is a beginning sentence after a change of the background scene. Belonging to the background, the story still focuses on the action (running down) of the maid.

If the difference of a description from its background matters, the combination of "Aorist + statement

Perfect" appears in general conversations.

(11) ´na nĩ lo   ´ʱgũ kʰa   ⁻ʰʈɑʔ mo tɕiʔ   ˋ ̃ʱtɕʰɑʔ-**zə ji**:-**kʰe**:

      last year   winter   very   be cold-**AOR-PFT.NSEN**

'In the last year's winter, it was very cold.'

This utterance will convey a meaning that the situation of the temperature functions as a part of the key events of a story although it is a part of a background.

However, there is another "Aorist + hearsay" formulation: /-zə reʔ-zə reʔ/ or /-zə reʔ-sə reʔ/ (AOR-HS) 'it is said that someone did something'. E.g.:

(12) ´ʔə ⁿdə   ^ɦoː-tə   ^zeː-**zə reʔ**-zə reʔ

      this   come-NML   say-**AOR**-HS

'(One bird) said: "that (person) is coming".' **(3Birds)**

This formulation is often attested in historical narratives, such as **(Origin)** mentioned above:

(13) ´tɕo wo-gə   ˋkʰa ʈaʔ-**zə reʔ**-sə reʔ

      Jowo-ERG   speak-**AOR**-HS

'The Jowo began to speak.' **(Origin)**

This type of enunciations just describes an action which has been done based on the speaker's indirect source of information, i.e., hearsay. The formulation /-zə reʔ-zə reʔ/ (AOR-HS) emphasises the source of information being what others said. However, in telling historical narratives, a story-teller tends to use a statement (or neutral) evidential for verb predicates to narrate what they believe as a historical fact, while the hearsay structure is used to narrate what is unclear enough to assume it as a historical fact (See Suzuki et al. 2015 for details). In any cases, the hearsay formulation tends to depend on a speaker's preference, and the frequency of its use also varies, and it is also used in everyday conversations when one wants to emphasise "hearsay" as source of information, which is a typical feature of reported evidential (cf. Tournadre & LaPolla 2014, Aikhenvald 2015:139-140).

7 Typological notes

Based on observations regarding Aorist compared with Perfect in a story-telling, we can note the similarity of *passé simple* in French. The construction of a story which describes a past event evidently distinguishes *passé simple* from *imparfait* that is quite in parallel with Aorist and Perfect in Lhagang Tibetan. However, compared to *passé simple*, Aorist is also frequently used in everyday conversations in Lhagang Tibetan as described in Sections 3, 4, and 5. This implies that the principal function of Aorist in Lhagang Tibetan is different from *passé simple*; it might be better if we contrast Aorist of Lhagang Tibetan with *passato remoto* in Italian, which still appears in conversations.

In several languages possessing the Aorist category, such as Croatian (Magner 2000[7]:279-280) and Sanskrit (Renou 1996:436-439), Aorist is principally used in folk literature or story-telling. However, Modern Greek and Bulgarian (Vrinat-Nikolov et al. 2001:199-200) frequently use Aorist in any types of utterances; hence, a contrastive study of Lhagang Tibetan with the latter languages might clarify specific features of Lhagang Tibetan or Tibetic languages having the Aorist category.

8 Conclusion: What Aorist conveys in Lhagang Tibetan

This article described aspects of Aorist in Lhagang Tibetan. The principal function of Aorist is more or less "past perfective", which can be expressed just with a suffix /-zə/. However, according to the speaker's access to information, one can choose egophoric /-zə jiː/ or statement evidential /-zə reʔ/. Aorist's *side* function emerges in certain utterances, especially in a narrative. Aorist, opposed to Perfect, describes a speaker's focus on the action, which emphasises principal dynamic actions in a story-telling.

We find a peculiar combination of "Aorist + statement Perfect" (/-zə jiː-kʰeː/) in the narrative mode. This issue should be discussed more in detail.

Abbreviations

1: First person; 2: Second person; 3: Third person; AOR: Aorist; CAUS: Causative; CONJ: Conjunction marker; CPV: Copulative verb; DAT: Dative; DIR: Directional marker; E: Egophoric; ERG: Ergative; GEN: Genitive; HS: Hearsay; LOC: Locative; NEG: Negative; NML: Nominaliser; NSEN: Non-sensory; PFT: Perfect; Q: Question marker; SEN: Sensory

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