Semantic characteristics of the Tibetan honorific forms

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The following research deals with a group of words of the Tibetan language possessing honorific elements, the original meanings of which are names of parts of the body. Honorific forms serve to mark social relations within the act of communucation. The choice of a neutral or honorific form is determined "not only by belonging to a certain social system class or group, but also ... by the situation of communication" (Nikolsky & Shveitser 1978:13). In the first case we deal with stratificational variation, in the second case with situational variation.

Existence of honorific forms in the Tibetan language was noted by the famous Hungarian tibetologist Csoma de Koros. He distinguished the so-called "respectful language" (*zhe sa'i skad*) and "common or vulgar idiom" (*mnyam gtam*), (Csoma de Koros 1984:32-36). George Roerich marked out two levels of honorific forms: "generally accepted respectful expressions and especially respectful expressions" (Roerich 1961:123-131).

Parfionovich analyzed some general rules of formation of honorific words of the Tibetan language based on their structure and their parts of speech (Parfionovich 1970:44-46). Kitamura Hajime suggested his own classification of the Tibetan honorific forms (Hajime 1977:13-14).

The main structural semantic models of Tibetan honorific forms are as follows:

1. An honorific prefix is added to the nominal stem (word). We should mention the fact that the honorific prefix also possesses the features of a component of a complex word.

A. An honorific prefix is added to a monosyllabic stem (word).

Dngul "money" > *phyaq dngul* "money" (h.), *phyag* is an honorific prefix with the primary meaning "hand".

B. An honorific prefix is added to a nominal stem, and the suffix is left out: e.g. *zhwa mo* "hat" *dbu zhwa* "hat"(h.), *dbu* is an honorific prefix with the primary meaning "head" (h.).

C. An honorific prefix is added to one of the categorical components of the word, and the other categorical component is left out; e.g., *dka' yol* "cup" > *zhal dka'* (h.), *zhal* is an honorifc prefix with a primary meaning "mouth" (h.).

Models A and B are most active.

2. One of the components of the bisyllabic words is substituted by a synonymous component which is honorific; e.g., *kha lag* "food" > *zhal lag* "food" (h.), the component *kha* "mouth" is substituted by the component *zhal* "mouth" (h.).

3. Unlike the above-stated models typical for the nominal parts of speech, this model is characteristic for verbs. Not only an honorific prefix is added to a verbal stem but also an auxiliary verb: *klog* "to read" > *ljags klog gnang* "to read" (h.), *ljags* is an honorific prefix with the primary meaning "tongue" (h.), *gnang* is an auxiliary verb with the primary meaning "to do, to give" (h.).

Besides this many Tibetan words have honorific equivalents of different roots: *'gro* "to go" > *phebs* "to go" (h.), *sha* "meat" > *gsol krum* "meat" (h.). Thus honorific Tibetan words, one of the components of which is a name of a part of the body, can be divided into two groups: words in which this component is an honorific prefix, and compounds in which this component is meaningful and directly takes part in the formation of the meanings of the words.

The lexical-semantic structure of the words in which the components denoting parts of the body are honorific prefixes is as follows:

1. The primary meaning of the prefix *sku* is "body" (h.). The stems taking this prefix have the following meanings: body, parts of the body, health, natural processes (sickness, recovery, birth, death, weariness, freezing etc.), relationships between people (relatives and enemies etc.), location, image, picture, clothing, ornament, property, business and trade.

sku rked "waist" (h.), *sku snyung* "to be sick" (h.), *sku tshong* "trade" (h.).

2. The primary meaning of the prefix *ljags* is "tongue" (h.). The meaning of the stems taking this component is as follows: food, prize, number, counting, talk, reading, order, breath.

ljags lung "order, instruction" (h.), *ljags tshwa* "salt", *ljags grangs* "number" (h.).

3. The prefix *dbu* has the primary meaning "head" (h.). The meanings of the stems taking this component are as follows: objects connected with the head in some way (hat, pillow, helmet etc.); dwelling (castle, tent); rank and position.

Dbu zhwa "head" (h.), *dbu gur* "tent", "residence" (h.), *dbu mna'* "vow" (h.).

4. The prefix *zhal* has the primary meaning "mouth" (h.). The stems taking this prefix have the following meanings: talk, response, reading, meeting, visit, lie, smile, lips, competition.

zhal mchu "lips" (h.) *zhal mjal* "meeting" (h.), *zhal lan* "response" (h.).

5. The prefix *phyag* with the primary meaning "hand" (h.) is taken by the stems with the following meanings: objects related to the hand (stick, key, book etc.), meeting, talk.

phyag sor "finger" (h.), *phyag dngul* "money" (h.), *phyag mjal* "meeting" (h.).

6. The prefix *zhabs* has the primary meaning "leg". It is taken by the stems with the following meanings: parts of the leg, walking, travelling, footwear, location around an object, stimulation of actions.

Zhabs rting "heel" (h.), *zhabs bskul* "to stimulate" (h.), *zhabs thegs* "to walk" (h.).

The least active prefixes are *mgul* and *spyan.*

7. The prefix *mgul* has the primary meaning "throat" (h.). The meanings of the stems taking this prefix are song, cold, cough.

mgul glu "song" (h.), *mgul cham* "cold" (h.).

8. The primary meaning of the prefix *spyan* is "eye" (h.). It is combined for example, with the stem meaning "to invite, (invitation)".

We have analysed a group of Tibetan words having an honorific prefix with a primary meaning "name of a part of the body". We have come to the general conclusion that the meaning of the stem is connected with the meaning of honorific prefixes, though in some cases it is not easy to trace these connections. This problem requires further research.

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Received: 17 October 1996

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