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Shortened Words *Skung Yig* in Tibetan U med (*dbu med*) Writing

Abstract

In Tibetan writing there are no special signs separating individual words. Instead the Tibetans use dots in U chen (*dbu chen*) and vertical short lines in U med (*dbu med*) writing styles to separate syllables in a word. However, polysyllabic words, having two or more syllables separated by several separating signs mentioned above, can be compressed in one contraction and marked by a separating dot or a vertical short line. These contractions are called “Shortened Words” – *skung yig* in Tibetan. We can find a few different names for the script used in Shortened Words. In the Monlam software program they are called *Dpe yig*, Tshe tan zhab s drung calls them *Gzab yig*, Rin chen rgya mtsho names them *Bar bris* and the letter writing competition organized by Tibet House in Delhi at the end of the 1980s, called them *Khams yig*. Shortened Words served as a very unique style of copying Tibetan Buddhist prayers and rituals. It was practiced in order to minimize time consumed by scribing and to save materials which were difficult to obtain in Tibet in the past. The present paper discusses the examples of Tibetan Shortened Words found in the Pander Collection kept at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow.

The present paper is about Tibetan U med *Dpe yig* writing material found in the Pander Collection¹ kept at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. During the project funded by the Polish Ministry of Science we² were able to work on a part of Tibetan materials, that were available till now. These were mainly religious prayers, ritual texts

¹ Eugen Pander was a 19th century German scholar who collected Tibetan and Chinese materials from Beijing at the end of the 19th century and sent them back to Europe.

² At present Prof. Marek Mejor, Dr. Thupten Kunga Chashab and Dr. Agnieszka Helman-Ważny are studying the collection of Tibetan manuscripts kept at the Jagiellonian University under the name of Pander Collection.

and to a smaller extent works on Tibetan history, biographies, grammars and texts on other arts. Pander collected those Tibetan books while living in China, (1881–1889) working as a teacher. Most books in his collection are in the form of xylographs but some are manuscripts. Those manuscripts, except for a few of them, were written in U med (*dBu med*) script³, precisely *Dpe yig* or in *Khyug yig*. In Tibet, tradition of wooden block printing was introduced at the beginning of the 17th century⁴ and modern technological methods of printing were unknown to general Tibetan population before 1959. Therefore, scribing texts was an essential and common practice for Tibetans to produce religious texts and other materials.

While studying the Pander Tibetan Collection I was attracted by “Shortened Words” found in manuscripts written in a unique form of old *Dpe yig* script, to be found neither in xylograph printings nor in later Tibetan writings. This particular writing method is called in Tibetan *Khyug yig*, “Shortened Words or Letters”. It is worth mentioning here that in the present day U med *Skung yig* writing Tibetans also write some words in a shortened form, for example, *Thams cad*, *Sangs rgays*, *Dpal ldan*, *Lhan rgyas*, but not on such scale as in the Pander manuscript collection. Shortened words not only attracted my attention but it also took much time for me to understand their full version. The method of shortening words was practiced primarily in order to copy religious texts and the obvious reason for shortening words was to shorten the time consumed by scribing and to reduce work burden of scribes. A similar opinion regarding creation of shortened words is also given by Shes rab, the author of the Shortened Words Dictionary. As he explains, “Shortened Words were used in the Land of Snow to eliminate the burden of writing and to save the paper”⁵. The dictionary is prepared according to the Tibetan alphabetical order and clarifies Shortened Words by presenting them in their full versions.

Perhaps due to unpopularity of writing Shortened Words nowadays, except for the dictionary mentioned above I have never come across any materials which dealt with formation of Shortened Words. Going through numerous Shortened Words in the manuscript I asked myself, was there any method that scribes had to shorten the words or not? Moreover, were there any commonly accepted uniform rules for shortening words in those days? Keeping the above mentioned questions in mind, and with a hope of finding some answers to those questions, I prepared a table (presented below) for analysis to show how a given word is written in its original U med script, its equivalent in U chen, what it should be in its full form in U chen and which letters are missing in that particular form. To carry on this analysis I chose a manuscript called *Mchod sprin rin po che nam mkha’i sprin kyi phung po* being a part of *Bde gshegs yongs ’dus*⁶ (Pander A. 249

³ There are two different scripts in Tibetan writing system, U chen (or U can) and U med. In general U chen script is used for printing materials and U med for private purposes. U med can be expressed in six different ways of writing. These are: *Tshugs chen*, *Tshugs chung*, *Tshugs ma khyug*, *Kyug*, *’Bru rtsa*, *Dpe yig*.

⁴ Tashi Tsering 1983, fol. 2b, l. 7-3a.

⁵ Shes rab 2003, p. 695, l. 13.

⁶ It is mentioned in the colophon that it is a “Treasure text of Padma Sambhava later revealed by the 19th century teacher Mdo sngags gling pa”.

acc. 585) from the Pander Collection, and I extracted Shortened Words from there. I also included here a few Shortened Words selected from other texts of the Pander Collection (Pander A. 134, 161, 174, 179, 220) and presented them in the latter part of the table. Except for the book I mentioned above (She s r a b) we do not have any guidelines or rules which explain Shortened Words. Therefore, one has to understand those words by their first syllable and by following vowels and letters. If that is not sufficient to understand, then one has to depend on preceding and following words or the context of the whole sentence.

Table of analyses

No.	Original text	U chen equivalent	Complete version	Missing vowel	Missing prefix	Missing root letter	Missing suffix	Missing second suffix
1	ཐོད་གཤམ།	བདོ་གས་	བདོ་བར་གཤེགས་པ་		ག	བ ག		པ་ ending
2	ནིའལ།	ནིའལ་	ནམ་མཁའ་		མ		/མ	
3	ལུའལ།	ལུའལ་	ལུག་འཆ་ལ་ལོ་		འ	ཆ	ག ལ	
4	འགྲུ།	བཀྲུ་	བཀྲུ་འབཀྲུ་		བ	ཀ	འ	
5	འགྲུ།	དགྲུ་	དགྲུ་ལ་འཁོར་		འ	ཁ	ལ	
6	ཆོན།	ཆོན་	ཆོན་པོ་			པ		
7	ཡོན།	ཡོན་	ཡོན་ཏན་				ན	
8	འགྲུ།	དགྲུ་	དགྲུ་བཤེགས་		བ	ག		
9	འགྲུ།	ལུའལ་	ལུ་མཆོ་		མ	/ཆ		
10	ལུའལ།	ལུའལ་	ལུ་ལུམ་			ལ	/མ	
11	འགྲུ།	ནིང་ནི་	ནིང་ང་འཛིན་		འ	ང /འ		
12	ལུའལ།	ལུའལ་	ལུ་ལུམ་			ལ	ན	
13	ལུའལ།	བདུད་ལི་	བདུད་ཅིའི་			/ཅ		
14	འགྲུ།	དགྲུ་	དགྲུ་འཛིན་		འ	/འ		

No.	Original text	U chen equivalent	Complete version	Missing vowel	Missing prefix	Missing root letter	Missing suffix	Missing second suffix
15	ཀྲུ།	རྩེབ་	དངོས་རྩུབ།			ག	ས	
16	གཞིག།	གཞིག་	གནས་ལྷགས་		/མ	ལ		ས
17	གཞི།	བདེན་	བདེན་དོན་			ད	ན	
18	ཐྱུ།	ཉིའི་	ཉི་ཐྱུའི་			ཟ		
19	རྩེའུ།	རྩེའུ་ག་	རྩེའུ་རྩེའུ་ག་			ད ར	ལ	
20	ཀྲུའོ།	ཕྱིན་མོ་	ཕྱིན་ཕྱིན་མོ་མས་			ག མ	ས	ས
21	ཐྱུའོའུ།	ཐྱུའོའུ་མེད་	ཐུང་ཐུང་མེམས་དཔའ་		/ད	ཆ བ	/མ	ས
22	ཁྱེ།	དམྱེན་	དག་པམྱེན་		' བ	ས		
23	ཀྲུའོའུ།	འདྲེན་མོ་	འདྲེན་མོ་མས་			ཟ མ		
24	ཀྲུ།	དམྱུ་ག་	དབང་མྱུ་ག་			ས	ད	
25	ལཱ།	མཱ་ན་	མཚན་			/ཙ		
26	ལྷ།	མ་	མ་མ་			བ		
27	ལྷ།	མོ་	མཁའ་འཕྱོ་		འ	ཁ ག	འ	
28	ལྷ།	མེད་	འགྱུར་མེད་		འ	ག མ	ད	
29	ལྷ།	མོ་ལ་	ལྷག་མོ་ལ་			མ ར	ག	
30	ཀྲུའོའུ།	འཕྲེན་	འཕྲེན་པཅས་		བ	ཁ ཅ		
31	ལྷ།	མེད་	འགྱུར་མེད་		འ	ཁ	ལ	

Findings of the analyses

As far as I am aware there is no written regulation that explains how one can shorten a word, but it becomes clear from the above table that there were common basic unwritten rules in the scribes' minds as to how words should be shortened. That is, all

the vowels in the original words were kept intact in the Shortened Words. I did not find any single case in which a vowel from the original word was omitted in its shortened form. Retaining every vowel of the original word in the Shortened Word is an essential element to understand, predict or guess what could be the full form of that very Shortened Word. If not the vowels then which letters were omitted in Shortened Words? We can see that the prefix and root letters of the second and third (if it occurs) syllables were regularly omitted. Also, we can find omissions of the suffix letter of the first syllable, but irregularly. In general, it seems to me that, the methodology of shortening words is: omission of the suffix letter of the first syllable and the prefix and root letters of the second and third (if it occurs) syllable. Knowing these rules makes it easier to understand Shortened Words, but this knowledge is still not sufficient to understand the complete form of a word. Thus, there are more than one prefixes and suffixes.

On a very rare occasion, in some other manuscripts (Pander A. 134, 161, 174, 179, 220), I also found omissions of the root letter of the first syllable of a word. For example, in the series no: 26–31 in the above table we see the absence of the root letter of the first syllable. In this case our task of finding complete version is rather difficult. The only possibility of understanding the full version of a word is through its context meaning or through preceding and following sentences.

Symbol meaning

-  This sign denotes here *Tsa*, *Tsha* or *Dza*. Sometimes also denotes *rTsa*.
-  This sign denotes here *Nga*.
-  This sign denotes here *Ma*.
-  Numbers are given in numeral signs for example: *Zhal 1 phyag 2, Dkon mchog 3* etc.

Bibliography

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