

# **Epistemic Modality in Standard Spoken Tibetan:**

## **Epistemic Verbal Endings and Copulas**

**Zuzana Vokurková**

**Epistemic modality in standard spoken tibetan:  
Epistemic verbal endings and copulas**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ABL :	ablative
ABS :	absolutive
Ag :	agent
ASSOC :	associative
CAUS :	causative/causative particle
COMP:	comparative
CONTR :	controllable
EGO :	egophoric
ENDO :	endopathic
EPI :	epistemic
ERG :	ergative
FACT :	factual
FP :	final particle
GAR :	verbal suffix marking the complement of a verb of motion
GEN :	genitive
GNR :	generic
h :	humilific
H :	honorific
HAB :	habitual
IMM :	suffix marking the immediate
IMP :	imperative
impers :	impersonal
IMPF :	imperfective (past, present, future)
ImpP :	imperative particle
IND :	indicative
INF :	infinitive
INFR :	inferential
M :	masculine
NEG :	negative
NOM :	nominalizer
N-CONTR :	non-controllable
OBL :	oblique
Pa :	patient
PAS :	past
PFV :	perfective past
PERF :	perfect
pl :	plural
POLITE :	particle expressing politeness
PRS :	present

Q :	question particle/interrogative particle
QP :	quotation particle
REC :	receptive
RES :	resultative
RepS :	marker of the reported speech
RES :	resultative
SENS :	sensory
sg :	singular
SST :	standard spoken Tibetan
SUB :	subjunctive
TAM :	tense-aspect-modality
VBZ :	verbalizer



# INTRODUCTION

## Key terms

In this study, I revisit the notion of epistemic modalities in standard spoken Tibetan, the topic of my dissertation “Epistemic Modalities in Spoken Standard Tibetan” defended at Charles University (Prague, Czech republic) and the University of Saint-Denis (Paris 8, France) in 2008. This monograph deals with *standard spoken Tibetan* (SST, the Tibetan term: *spyi.skad*). This term corresponds more or less to the dialect of Lhasa (*lha.sa.skad*) and the surrounding areas. It is a variety of central Tibetan (*dbus.skad*) and is used as a *lingua franca* by Tibetans living in the Tibetan autonomous region (T.A.R.) and in the Tibetan diaspora in India, Nepal and other countries. Standard spoken Tibetan is spoken by about one and a half million people, 130,000 of whom live in the diaspora.

Another key term employed in this work is *epistemic modality* or *epistemicity* (see Boye 2006; Bybee, Fleischman 1995; de Haan 2005; Nuyts 2001a; Palmer 1986, 1990). This can be defined as the expression of the speaker’s evaluation of the probability of a state of affairs (Nuyts 2001). It shows “the status of the speaker’s understanding or knowledge” and “the degree of commitment by the speaker to the truth of what he says” (Palmer 1986: 51), or “the extent to which the speaker is committed to the truth of the proposition” (Bybee, Perkins, Pagliuca 1994: 179). In this monograph, epistemic modalities are defined in terms of the degree of the speaker’s certainty of the actuality of his utterance.

Epistemic modalities are closely connected with another important linguistic parameter — *evidentiality*. Evidentiality specifies the speaker’s commitment to what he says in terms of the kind of evidence he is basing his statement upon (Palmer 1986). It is often defined as a grammatical means of expressing a source of information (Aikhenvald 2004), or more broadly, as the expression of the speaker’s access to information, considering as well the subjective strategy or perspective of the speaker in representing a particular state of affairs (see Mélaç 2014; Tournadre, LaPolla 2014). Epistemic modality and evidentiality are at times regarded as two separate linguistic categories (see Aikhenvald 2004; de Haan 2005; Nuyts 2001), at times as parts of the same linguistic category, and in other cases the first one is considered as a sub-category of the latter (Papafragou 2000), or vice versa (Willet 1988). Having a large conception of modality, unlike van der Auwera, Plungian (1998), Aikhenvald (2004, 2011)<sup>1</sup> and Gosselin (2005),<sup>2</sup> and in

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<sup>1</sup> “That evidentials may have semantic extensions related to probability and speaker’s evaluation of the trustworthiness of information does not make evidentiality a kind of modality.” Aikhenvald (2004: 7–8).

accordance with Palmer (1986), Bhat (1999) and Tournadre (2004), I consider evidentials as a modal type. In this monograph, therefore, ‘evidential’ and ‘epistemic’ are treated as two parts of the same linguistic category.

In various languages, epistemic modalities are expressed by different lexical and grammatical means, e.g. modal verbs and affixes. In Tibetan, however, epistemic modalities are not expressed by modal verbs, as is the case with many languages of the world but by other lexical and grammatical means. These lexical means include, in particular, epistemic adverbs. However, the chief means to be found in the spoken language are morpho-syntactic, consisting of a system of epistemic verbal endings and copulas, which will be discussed in detail in this monograph. As it is the case in many languages with a verb-final word order, in Tibetan, grammatical meanings, e.g. modality or tense, are marked at the end of the verbal domain by verbal suffixes, verbal markers or verbal endings depending on the adopted terminology. In this study, the term *verbal endings* is employed.

Verbal endings indicate the end of a sentence. Some verbal endings function primarily as markers of evidential meanings. These are termed *evidential verbal endings*. The use of these verbal endings is obligatory in spoken Tibetan but most of the time optional in the literary language. In addition to evidential verbal endings, there are also verbal endings which primarily express various degrees of the speaker’s certainty of the actuality of his utterance. These are called *epistemic verbal endings* in this monograph. They correspond to the epistemic use of English modal verbs, such as ‘may’ or ‘must’, and to epistemic adverbs, such as ‘surely’, ‘apparently’, ‘likely’, ‘probably’. Both types of verbal endings may be grouped under the term *TAM verbal endings*<sup>3</sup> because they all express, in addition to modality, various tense-aspects. They do not express the grammatical categories of gender, voice and number.

While all the attention of scholars has mainly been concentrated on evidentiality (evidential verbal endings and copulas) — which is particularly rich in Tibetic languages — very little has been written about epistemic modality (epistemic verbal endings and copulas) in Tibetic languages. However, as we will see, epistemic verbal endings constitute a very complex system in SST (and other languages of the family). In consequence, I have decided to focus my interest on this aspect of Tibetan grammar. In this work, my intention is to classify all types of epistemic verbal endings and copulas that are more or less frequently employed in SST and to analyze them from the formal, semantic, pragmatic and syntactic viewpoints.

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<sup>2</sup> “On se gardera par ailleurs de confondre l’instance de validation, qui fonde la modalité, avec la source de l’information, qui relève de la problématique de « l’évidentialité », quoique ces deux phénomènes entretiennent des liens étroits et qu’il soit parfois difficile de les distinguer...” (Gosselin 2005: 30–40).

<sup>3</sup> TAM stands for tense-aspect-modality.

## Fieldwork and corpus

Taking into account the fact that there are few written sources on epistemic modalities in SST (see chiefly Hu 1989, Tournadre, Sangda Dorje 2003, Wang 1994, Zhou, Xie [eds.] 2003), the main part of my research work has been comprised of fieldwork. In the course of my fieldwork, I have had to overcome several difficulties concerning the building of paradigms of the many epistemic verbal endings used in SST. One difficulty was found in the rarity of occurrences of some forms in the actual spoken language necessitating a method of elicitation. Other difficulties were the divergences among Tibetan consultants who, though they all speak standard Tibetan, hail from different locations and have their own idiolects and therefore use different epistemic verbal endings and copulas. And last but not least, I faced the problem of hypercorrection. As a matter of fact, some of my consultants, more or less unconsciously, relied on the written language.

Although I worked with Tibetan consultants in Tibet, India and Europe, focus is placed on the Lhasa variation of SST. My fieldwork began in Central Tibet (Lhasa) in 2002 when I began to collect material on Tibetan secondary verbs<sup>4</sup> and verbal endings for my D.E.A. thesis defended in October 2002 at the University of Paris 8, France. I continued my work in Northern India (Dharamsala) in 2003. At that time, I concentrated on the expression of epistemic modalities in the language spoken by the Tibetans living in the diaspora, *spyi.skad*, comparing it with Lhasa Tibetan, *lha.sa.skad*. Between 2004 and 2006, I spent over a year in Lhasa studying the epistemic modalities in SST and in some Tibetan dialects as well. During this time, I also worked with Tibetan consultants living in Europe (France, Poland, Czech republic). Between 2012 and 2015, I returned to Lhasa several times to verify the results of my previous fieldwork and to check the examples employed in this monograph.

My main Tibetan consultants are Dawa (born in Lhasa, professor at Tibet University), Tsheyang (born in Lhasa, professor at Tibet University), Tenpa Gyaltsen (born in Lhasa, former employee at the PICC insurance company), Soyag (born in Hor, resident in Lhasa for 20 years, professor at Tibet University) and Dondrub (born near Lhasa, studied in India, tourist guide). I also worked with Ngawang Dagpa (born in Lhasa, lived in India, resident since the 1960s in France, professor at Inalco, France), Tenzin Samphel (born in Nepal, resident since the 1990s in France, a former professor at Inalco, France), Pema Yonden (born in Lhasa, living in India from the age of three, teacher of Tibetan), Tashi (born near Lhasa, security guard), Sangda Dorje (born in Lhasa, associate professor at Tibet University), Tenzin Jigme (born in India, a former professor

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<sup>4</sup> For the term “secondary verbs”, see Section 3.1.

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The corpus on which my research is based has been obtained from several sources: the most important one being an inquiry of Tibetan native speakers, followed by spontaneous conversations and recordings of a test on epistemic modality (see below), as well as other sources, including Tibetan television shows, and texts composed in spoken Tibetan.

Since no extensive study of epistemic modality in spoken Tibetan had been completed to the state, my first task was to identify all the different types of epistemic verbal endings and to construct their paradigms. I therefore began by asking Tibetan consultants about the existence of different verbal endings and the influence of various parameters on their use. I collected a corpus of examples illustrating the various paradigms. Since certain verbal endings are very rare in the spoken language, it would be virtually impossible to obtain all existing forms of the various types of epistemic verbal endings by merely hoping for an occurrence in conversation. A certain section of my examples, therefore, are not directly drawn from conversations but are elicited.

My next step was to verify the data acquired during my work with my consultants. For this purpose, I prepared a series of spoken tasks in which my consultants would be prompted to use various epistemic verbal endings. I attempted to find such situations in which native speakers would naturally use epistemic verbal endings. Since the Tibetan language encodes the cognitive process differently according to the type of access to information (whether it is visual, stemming from memory, or through sense perception), the spoken task I proposed to my consultants consisted of three parts. The first part was based on visual experience, the second on memory and the third one on physical sensation, or touch.

In the first part, I asked my consultants to talk about three photographs that I showed them. The photographs represented an unknown man, an unknown woman and a non-specified landscape with a lake. I asked my consultants to guess who the people were and where the lake was. In the second part, the consultants spoke about their or their family's past and future: what they remembered from their past and what they thought their future would be like. And in the third part, I prepared several objects and hid them under a cover. The consultants had to judge what the hidden things were. First, they only could observe the general shape of the things. Then, they could touch them from outside the cover, and finally from inside the cover.

To summarize the results of the test broadly, the first outcome was that in all parts of the test, the consultants tended to use epistemic verbal endings. The following outcome was that in the third part, all the consultants but one used one or another type of epistemic verbal ending when they judged the objects by mere sight. But when they could touch them, they used evidential verbal endings, not epistemic verbal endings. The test also demonstrated a certain degree of idiolect employed by each consultant in the use of epistemic verbal endings. The most interesting case was the total absence of any epistemic verbal ending in the utterances of one consultant (a man from Lhasa, 26 years old) who preferred the use of epistemic adverbs combined with evidential verbal endings instead. The test further demonstrated that epistemic adverbs are a very frequent means of expressing epistemic modalities in spoken Tibetan and that they are often employed with epistemic verbal endings.

## **Structure of the monograph and of the Tibetan examples**

The monograph consists of three chapters. The first chapter introduces the various lexical and grammatical means of expressing epistemic modalities in standard spoken Tibetan. It concentrates on the system of epistemic verbal endings and copulas (1.2), analyzing them from different points of view: formal (1.2.1), functional (1.2.2) and syntactic (1.2.3). The final part of the chapter discusses the co-occurrence of a lexical and grammatical means of expressing epistemic modalities, i.e. epistemic adverbs and epistemic verbal endings (1.3).

The second chapter is a classification and a detailed analysis of the epistemic verbal endings and copulas that are employed in spoken Tibetan. They are classified into eleven types. Each type is described from a morphological, semantic, pragmatic and syntactic point of view, and illustrated by examples.

The last chapter focuses on the compatibility of secondary verbs with epistemic verbal endings. The first part describes secondary verbs (3.1) and the second part deals with the combinations of epistemic verbal endings (or epistemic auxiliaries) with seventeen secondary verbs which are most frequently used in standard spoken Tibetan (3.2).

The examples from spoken Tibetan are given in the Tibetan orthography using Wylie transliteration (Wylie 1959). Although current pronunciation differs a great deal from the written language, it is nonetheless possible to convert transliterated sentences into the actual pronunciation by means of several phonological rules. Each example consists of four lines: the first one is written in Tibetan script, the second one is registered in Wylie transliteration, the third

one is the English interlinear gloss,<sup>5</sup> and the fourth one is the English translation and the context of the utterance or a commentary in brackets (see below). Tibetan words with more than one syllable are written with a dot between the syllables.<sup>6</sup> Grammatical morphemes are attached by a dash. Various meanings of one morpheme are joined by the mark “+”. The morphemes in the process of grammaticalization are connected by the mark “:”.

Tibetan has an archaic system of verbal stems used in different tenses (see Bailey, Walker 2004; Beyer 1992; Wang Zhijing 1994; Zeisler 2004). However, the system of verbal inflection has been considerably reduced in the spoken language and tense and aspect are most of the time conveyed by verbal endings. The verbal stems do not, in general, have an influence on the interpretation of the verbal endings. Unlike literary Tibetan, most of the verbs have lost their inflectional diversity in the spoken language and have one generalized stem for all tenses. As a result, I will use, when appropriate, the invariable stem for all tenses in the examples and will not mark the original tense of the stem as in classical or literary Tibetan. In some cases, two (or exceptionally three) stems are still used in SST: the past and the present-future (and exceptionally the imperative). These will be marked in brackets after the lexical meaning of the verb, i.e. (PAS), (PRS), (IMP).

Line 1: ཕལ་ཆེར་མི་གཅིག་སྐྱབས་པ་འདྲ།

Line 2: *phal.cher mi cig slebs - pa.'dra*

Line 3: probably person a come - PFV+EPI 2 +SENS

Line 4: It looks like someone has come. (The speaker can hear knocking on the door or the dog barking.)

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<sup>5</sup> I.e. morpheme by morpheme translation; lexical morphemes are, however, not analyzed.

<sup>6</sup> The negative counterparts of affirmative verbal endings are also written with dots between syllables, e.g. *yod.kyi.red* (affirmative) and *yod.kyi.ma.red* (negative). They are not further analyzed in negative and TAM morphemes. Although such analysis would be possible with most evidential verbal endings, it would be rather complicated and often impossible with the majority of epistemic verbal endings. For more details, refer to Vokurková (2008: 58).

# I. THE EXPRESSION OF EPISTEMIC MODALITY IN STANDARD SPOKEN TIBETAN

In various languages, epistemic modalities may be conveyed via different lexical and grammatical means. Regarding lexical expression, aside from modal verbs (e.g. may, could, must), epistemic meanings may be encoded in the lexicon by means of epistemic verbs (verbs of cognition, such as: believe, guess, seem, be sure, doubt, think, say), by epistemic adverbs (e.g. probably, likely, maybe, possibly) (Givón 1984: 318), and by other lexical means (e.g. adjectives, nouns). The world's languages also use various grammatical means for conveying modality, whether morphological and syntactical, such as modal particles, verbal affixes, or word order (see Brown 2006; Bybee 1985, Haspelmath 2005).

In standard spoken Tibetan, possibility and probability are not conveyed by modal verbs<sup>7</sup> but through other lexical and grammatical means. The main means in the spoken language are epistemic adverbs for the lexical expression (1.1), and a system of verbal affixes which I designate as *verbal endings* for the grammatical expression (1.2). In SST, there are two groups of verbal endings that are clearly distinguished in employing the criterion of epistemicity:

1) Evidential verbal endings that principally express an evidential meaning and certain information i.e. the speaker presents his utterance as certain (for evidentiality in Tibetan see: Section 1.2.2.3; Garrett 2001; Mélac 2014; Oisel 2013; Tournadre, Sangda Dorje 2003, Vokurková 2008; for evidentiality see: Aikhenvald 2004, 2011; Aikhenvald, Dixon [eds.] 2003; Barnes 1984; Chafe, Nichols [eds.] 1986; Guentcheva [ed.] 1996; Guentcheva, Landaburu [eds.] 2007; Johanson, Utas 2000; Tournadre, LaPolla 2014, ex. 1).

(1) མོ་རང་ལྷ་སར་འགྲོ་གི་རེད།

<i>mo.rang</i>	<i>lha.sa</i>	- <i>r</i>	<i>'gro</i>	- <i>gi.red</i>
she	Lhasa	- OBL	go (PRS)	- FUT+FACT

She will go to Lhasa.

2) Epistemic verbal endings that principally convey an epistemic meaning. By using these endings, the speaker expresses different degrees of certainty of the actuality of his utterance (for

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<sup>7</sup> The verb *srid* „be possible“ is an exception because its lexical meaning is epistemic. However, unlike modal verbs in European languages which have both, modal and epistemic, meanings, *srid* only has an epistemic meaning. For more details on *srid*, see Section 3.2.6.

epistemicity in Tibetan see: Tournadre, Sangda Dorje 2003; Tournadre, Shao [to be published], Vokurková 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Zhou, Xie 2003; for epistemic modality, see: Boye 2006; Choi 1995; Nuyts 2001a, 2001b, ex. 2). This morpho-syntactic system will be discussed in detail in Section 1.2.

(2) མོ་རང་ལྷ་སར་འགོ་གི་ཡོད་གྱི་རེད།

<i>mo.rang</i>	<i>lha.sa</i>	- <i>r</i>	<i>'gro</i>	- <i>gi.yod.kyi.red</i>
she	Lhasa	- OBL	go (PRS)	- IMPF+EPI 2+FACT

In all likelihood, she will go to Lhasa.

# 1.1 THE LEXICAL EXPRESSION OF EPISTEMIC MODALITY

## 1.1.1 EPISTEMIC ADVERBS

Epistemic adverbs are the most important lexical means of expressing epistemic modalities in SST. They may be employed in the same sentence either with an evidential or an epistemic verbal ending. The co-occurrence of epistemic adverbs with evidential endings as in example (3a) with both the epistemic adverb *phal.cher* and the evidential verbal ending *gi.red* is a common way of expressing epistemic modality in SST. Nonetheless, Tibetans often prefer sentences with an epistemic verbal ending either combined with an epistemic adverb, as in example (3b) with both the epistemic adverb *phal.cher* and the epistemic ending *gi.yod.kyi.red*, or without it as in example (3c) with the epistemic verbal ending *gi.yod.kyi.red*.

(3) ཁོང་ཕལ་ཆེར་ཡོང་གི་རེད།

- a) *khong phal.cher yong - gi.red*  
s/he+H probably come - FUT+FACT

She will probably come. (A reply to the question as to whether she will come. For some reason, the speaker tends to think that she will.)

ཁོང་ཕལ་ཆེར་ཡོང་གི་ཡོད་ཀྱི་རེད།

- b) *khong phal.cher yong - gi.yod.kyi.red*  
s/he+H probably come - IMPF+EPI 2+FACT

She will probably come. (A reply to the question as to whether she will come. She said she would come so the speaker thinks she will.)

ཁོང་ཡོང་གི་ཡོད་ཀྱི་རེད།

- c) *khong yong - gi.yod.kyi.red*  
s/he+H come - IMPF+EPI 2+FACT

She will probably come. (A reply to the question as to whether she will come. She said she would come so the speaker thinks she will.)

Regarding the degree of probability: in example (3a), my consultants suggest that the degree of the speaker's certainty is higher than in examples (3b) and (3c). This is due to the fact that (3a) contains an evidential ending, which generally conveys the speaker's certainty (100%); the epistemic meaning is only expressed by the epistemic adverb *phal.cher* 'probably'. In contrast, examples (3b) or (3c) contain an epistemic ending which conveys a

degree of certainty lower than 100%, and thus the degree of certainty is perceived as slightly lower than in the case of sentences containing an evidential ending, as in example (3a).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that Tibetans when speaking in an epistemic context often prefer uttering a sentence that includes an epistemic adverb in order to stress the uncertainty of the statement they are making, as in examples (3a) and (3b). They tend to use epistemic adverbs, regardless of whether the verbal ending is evidential<sup>8</sup> or epistemic. In sentences containing both an epistemic adverb and an epistemic verbal ending, as in example (3b), it is often the adverb that is stressed in the utterance and that emphasizes the degree of probability. The final epistemic meaning, however, arises from an interaction of both the lexical and the grammatical epistemic means, in addition to being influenced by the pragmatic circumstances of the utterance.

Epistemic adverbs differ in the degree of certainty they convey and they can be divided into at least three groups according to these degrees of certainty: adverbs expressing possibility (close to 50%), adverbs expressing probability (close to 75%) and adverbs expressing near-absolute certainty (close to 100%).

### 1.1.1.1 Epistemic adverbs expressing possibility

In the epistemic adverb *gcig.byas.na*, the degree of certainty expressed is approximately 50% or more. From a syntactic viewpoint, *gcig.byas.na* is generally employed at the beginning of a sentence. It is usually translated in English by the adverbs ‘perhaps’, ‘maybe’ or ‘possibly’ (bKrahis Tsering, Liu 1991) and ‘perhaps’, ‘maybe’ (Goldstein 2001). It is very common in SST. Below is an example of the use of this adverb in a sentence:

<sup>8</sup> They are, however, not used with sensory evidentials (direct evidentials in Garrett’s terminology, see Garrett 2001: 87):

ཁྱེད་རང་གི་དེབ་གཤམ་ཡོད་ཅིང་། ཉེ་འདྲུག

*khyed.rang - gi deb ga.par yod.red/’dug*  
 you+H - GEN book where exist (FACT/SENS)  
 Where is your book?

གཅིག་ལྗང་མཇུག་ལྗང་གི་སྒོ་ཡོད་ཅིང་། ཉེ་འདྲུག \*འདྲུག

*gcig.byas.na nyal.khri sgang - la yod/yod.red/\* ’dug*  
 maybe bed top - OBL exist (EGO/FACT/SENS)  
*gcig.byas.na sa sgang - la yod/yod.red/\* ’dug*  
 maybe floor top - OBL exist (EGO/FACT/SENS)  
 Maybe it’s on the bed, maybe it’s on the floor.

(4) གཅིག་བྱས་ན་ཕུར་བུ་ཡོང་གི་རེད།

*gcig.byas.na phur.bu yong - gi.red*  
perhaps Phurbu come - FUT+FACT

Maybe Phurbu will come. (A reply to the question as to who will come. The speaker doesn't know any details.)

In the epistemic adverb *ha.lam*, the degree of certainty expressed is low, perhaps even lower than that of the previous adverb. It is less frequently used than the previous epistemic adverb. It is translated in English as ‘nearly’, ‘more or less’, ‘approximately’, ‘roughly’ (Goldstein 2001). In negative sentences, *ha.lam* does not convey an epistemic meaning: it corresponds to ‘hardly’, ‘scarcely’ or ‘barely’.<sup>9</sup>

(5) ཁོང་ཉེ་ལམ་ཡོང་གི་རེད།

a) *khong ha.lam yong - gi.red*  
s/he+H more or less come - FUT+FACT

She will perhaps come. (The speaker doesn't know any details. It is just his mere supposition.)

ཉི་མ་ལ་དགོངས་པ་ཉེ་ལམ་རྒྱུ་མེད་པ་མ་རེད།

b) *nyi.ma - la dgongs.pa ha.lam rag - yod.sa.ma.red*  
Nyima - OBL leave of absence more or get - IMPF+EPI 2+SENS+NEG  
less

It seems Nyima didn't get a leave of absence. (Nyima doesn't look happy.)

The adverb *yang.na* is more often employed in its non-epistemic meaning of ‘either or’ and ‘otherwise’ in the spoken language. The degree of certainty expressed by this adverb is approximately 50%. From a syntactic viewpoint, *yang.na* generally follows the agent. It can be translated in English by the adverb ‘maybe’.

(6) བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡང་ན་སོག་ཡུལ་ལ་འགྲོ་གི་ཡོད་ཀྱི་རེད།

*bstan.pa yang.na sog.yul - la 'gro - gi.yod.kyi.red*  
Tenpa maybe Mongolia - OBL go (PRS) - IMPF+EPI 2+FACT

Maybe Tenpa will go to Mongolia. (The speaker knows that Tenpa is interested in Mongolia.)

<sup>9</sup> For example:

ཁོང་གིས་ཉེ་ལམ་བཟས་མ་སོང།

*khong - gis ha.lam bzas - ma.song*  
s/he+H - ERG hardly eat (PAS) - PERF+SENS+NEG  
He hardly ate.

### 1.1.1.2 Epistemic adverbs expressing probability

As suggested by my consultants, the degree of certainty expressed by the epistemic adverb *phal.cher* is higher than that of the previous group (more or less 75%). Syntactically, *phal.cher* may precede or follow the agent of an event though the latter is far more common. It is translated in English as ‘possibly’, ‘maybe’ or ‘perhaps’ (bKrahis Tsering, Liu 1991), or ‘most probably’, ‘most likely’ (Goldstein 2001). As a result of my research, I suggest using the English adverb ‘probably’ as the most suitable translation. This adverb is frequently employed in SST.

- (7) ཁོང་ཕལ་ཆེར་ཡོང་གི་རེད།  
*khong phal.cher yong - kyi.red*  
 s/he+H probably come - FUT+FACT  
 She will probably come. (See example 3a.)

The degree of certainty expressed by the epistemic adverb *spyir.btang* is quite high (about 75%). From a syntactic point of view, *spyir.btang* may precede or follow the agent of an event. It is usually translated in English by the adverbs ‘in principle’, ‘usually’ or ‘generally’ (Goldstein 2001). It is very frequent in the spoken language.

- (8) ཁོང་སློབས་དུས་ང་སླིར་བཏང་ཡི་གོ་འབྲི་མཁན་བསྐྱད་ཡོད།
- a) *khong slebs - dus nga spyir.btang yi.ge 'bri*  
 s/he+H arrive - when I generally letters write (PRS)  
 - *mkhan bsdad - yod*  
 - NOM stay - PERF (EGO)  
 When she came in, I was in principle writing letters. (A reply to the question as to what the speaker was doing. The speaker is trying to recall.)
- ཁོ་རང་སླིར་བཏང་ཕྱིན་པ་ཡོད།
- b) *kho.rang spyir.btang phyin - pa.yod*  
 he generally go (PAS) - PFV+EPI 3+EGO  
 In principle, he went [there]. (The speaker talked to him.)

### 1.1.1.3 Epistemic adverbs expressing high probability or near-absolute certainty

The adverbs conveying the meaning of near-absolute certainty are most often associated with evidential verbal endings, as seen in examples (9)–(13). Nevertheless, they are sometimes employed with epistemic verbal endings, as in example (14) below.

The epistemic adverb *yin.cig.min.cig* expresses a high degree of certainty (about 100%). It is generally employed with evidential verbal endings. It may only be used in future contexts, not in the past or the present. It is translated in English as ‘must’, ‘in any case’, ‘without fail’ (Goldstein 2001).

(9) ཁོང་ཡིན་ཅིག་མིན་ཅིག་ཡོང་གི་རེད།

*khong yin.cig.min.cig yong - gi.red*  
s/he+H in any case come - FUT+FACT

In any case, she will come.

Just as the previous adverb, the epistemic adverb *gtan.gtan* (also spelt as *brtan.brtan*) expresses a high degree of certainty (about 100%). It is frequently used in SST. It is translated in English as ‘certainly’ or ‘surely’ (Goldstein 2001). It is usually used with evidential verbal endings, and quite rarely with epistemic verbal endings. Its use is illustrated in the example below:

(10) ཁོང་གཏན་གཏན་ཡོང་གི་རེད།

*khong gtan.gtan yong - gi.red*  
s/he+H certainly come - FUT+FACT

She will certainly come.

There is another epistemic expression with the verb *gtan.'khel* which is semantically similar to the previous adverb. The verb *gtan.'khel* (used with the verbalizer *byed*) conveys the meaning of ‘determine’, ‘decide’ or ‘fix (a date)’. When used after a nominalized verb it may be translated in English by ‘decidedly’. Just as the adverb *gtan.gtan*, it is often employed in the spoken language.

(11) ཁོང་ཡོང་ཡག་གཏན་འབེལ་རེད།

*khong yong - yag gtan.'khel red*  
s/he+H come - NOM decide be (FACT)

Decidedly, she will come.

The adverb *brgya.cha brgya* is another epistemic adverb expressing a high degree of certainty. Its literary translation is ‘a hundred percent’ (Goldstein 2001) and it can be translated in English as ‘definitely’. It is preferably used with evidential verbal endings, not with epistemic verbal endings. This epistemic adverb is very frequent in Lhasa.

(12) ཁོང་བརྟུ་ཆ་བརྟུ་ཡོང་གི་རེད།

*khong brgya.cha brgya yong - gi.red*  
s/he+H definitely come - FUT+FACT

She will definitely come.

#### 1.1.1.4 Differences in the use of epistemic adverbs

As stated above, the two means of expressing epistemic modalities in SST — lexical and grammatical — are often combined. The use of the epistemic adverbs listed above depends on the type of epistemic verbal ending employed and more importantly, on the speaker's degree of certainty. It is true that the epistemic adverb is often the primary means for determining the degree of probability of an utterance, but epistemic meaning as a whole is also influenced by other linguistic and pragmatic indicators (for example, intonation or the speaker's idiolect).

Compare the following examples:

(13) གཅིག་བྱས་ན་ཁོང་ལྷ་སར་ཡོང་གི་ཡོད་གྱི་རེད།

a) *gcig.byas.na khong lha.sa - r yong - gi.yod.kyi.red*  
perhaps s/he+H Lhasa - OBL come - IMPF+EPI 2+FACT

She will perhaps come to Lhasa. (The speaker knows that she wants to look for a new job. He is making a guess.)

ཁོང་ཕལ་ཆེར་ལྷ་སར་ཡོང་གི་ཡོད་གྱི་རེད།

b) *khong phal.cher lha.sa - r yong - gi.yod.kyi.red*  
s/he+H probably Lhasa - OBL come - IMPF+EPI 2+FACT

She will probably come to Lhasa. (The speaker knows that she wants to look for a new job. He is slightly more sure of himself.)

ཁོང་གཏན་གཏན་ལྷ་སར་ཡོང་གི་ཡོད་གྱི་རེད།

c) *khong gtan.gtan lha.sa - r yong - gi.yod.kyi.red*  
s/he+H surely Lhasa - OBL come - IMPF+EPI 2+FACT

She will surely come to Lhasa. Or: She must come to Lhasa. (The speaker knows that she wants to look for a new job. He is quite sure of himself.)

The use of various epistemic adverbs expressing different degrees of the speaker's certainty, as seen in the above example, shows that the semantic range of some epistemic verbal endings is quite large. In general, it is possible to combine the majority of epistemic verbal endings with the epistemic adverbs of the first and second degree (1.1.1.1 and 1.1.1.2), for example *gcig.byas.na* 'perhaps' and *phal.cher* 'probably'. The use of the epistemic adverbs of the third degree (1.1.1.3),

for example *gtan.gtan* ‘certainly’ or *yin.cig.min.cig* ‘necessarily, absolutely’, with epistemic verbal endings is more restricted as they are semantically less compatible with the general meaning of probability which epistemic endings convey. Look at the following sentences: while examples (14) and (15) are grammatical, example (16) sounds strange to many native speakers and should be considered as exceptional or even ungrammatical. Similarly, other examples with the adverb *gtan.gtan* and the epistemic verbal ending *a.yod*, as in (17), or that with the adverb *yin.cig.min.cig* and the epistemic verbal ending *gi.yod.pa.’dra*, as in (18), are problematic or even perceived as unacceptable by native speakers:

(14) གཅིག་བྱས་ན་ཁོང་གིས་བྱས་པ་འདྲ།

*gcig.byas.na khong - gis byas - pa.’dra*  
perhaps s/he+H - ERG VBZ (PAS) - PFV+EPI 2+SENS

It seems he might have done it. (It is similar to his way of doing things. The speaker is less certain.)

(15) ཕལ་ཆེར་ཁོང་གིས་བྱས་པ་འདྲ།

*phal.cher khong - gis byas - pa.’dra*  
probably s/he+H - ERG VBZ (PAS) - PFV+EPI 2+SENS

It seems he probably did it. (It is similar to his way of doing things. The speaker is more certain.)

(16) ? ཁོང་གིས་གཏན་གཏན་བྱས་པ་འདྲ།

? *khong - gis gtan.gtan byas - pa.’dra*  
s/he+H - ERG certainly VBZ (PAS) - PFV+EPI 2+SENS

It seems he must have done it. (It is similar to his way of doing things. The speaker is almost certain.)

(17) ? ཁོང་ལ་ངའི་ལྗེ་མིག་གཏན་གཏན་བརྟེན་ཨ་ཡོད།

? *khong - la nga - ’i lde.mig gtan.gtan brnyed*  
s/he+H - OBL I - GEN key certainly find

- *a.yod*  
- PERF+EPI 3+EGO+NEG

She can’t have found my key. (She was not at the place where the speaker thinks he lost it.)

(18) \* མོ་ཡིན་ཅིག་མིན་ཅིག་བོད་ལ་འགྲོ་གི་ཡོད་པ་འདྲ།

\* *mo yin.cig.min.cig bod - la ’gro - gi.yod.pa.’dra*  
she necessarily Tibet - OBL go (PRS) - IMPF+EPI 2+SENS

Intended statement: It seems she will certainly go to Tibet.

Nonetheless, epistemic adverbs of the third degree are sometimes employed with epistemic verbal endings, for example *gtan.gtan* is used with the ending *pa.yod*, as in the example below:

(19) ཁོང་གཏན་གཏན་ཕྱིན་པ་ཡོད།

*khong* *gtan.gtan* *phyin* - *pa.yod*  
 s/he+H certainly go (PAS) - PFV+EPI 3+EGO

He must have left. (A reply to the question as to whether he has gone [somewhere]. The speaker lives with the person in question in the same house.)

### 1.1.2 OTHER LEXICAL MEANS

In standard spoken Tibetan, there are various other lexical means in addition to epistemic adverbs that convey epistemic meanings. These include verbs of cognition or judgement, nominal constructions with a noun or an adjective, and so forth. For example, the epistemic verbs (e.g. *bsam* ‘think’) are quite frequently used as epistemic markers. Look at the following examples (20) and (21) with the verb *bsam* ‘think’:

(20) རུབ་བཏུག་འདི་ངས་སྐྱེར་ཡོང་པ་ཡིན་བསམ་གྱི་འདུག།

*rkub.bkyag* 'di nga - s khyer yong - *pa.yin*  
 chair this I - ERG bring come - PFV (EGO)  
*bsam* - *gyi.* 'dug  
 think - PRS+SENS

I think it was me who brought this chair. (A reply to the question as to who brought the chair.)

(21) ངས་སྟོན་པ་ལ་སྐྱུག་པ་ཡོད་བསམས་བྱུང་།

*nga* - s *stod.phad* - la *blugs* - *yod* *bsams*  
 I - ERG bag - OBL put - PERF+EGO think  
 - *byung*  
 - PFV+EGO

I thought I put it in the bag. (A reply to the question as to where the knife is. The speaker believes that the knife is in the bag but is not sure. The knife may be in the bag, but it is equally possible that the knife is not in the bag.)