Diachronic Degrammaticalization
Evidence from the Tibetan Case System

I. Introduction

Grammaticalization is the change of a lexical item to a grammatical one, and a grammatical item to a more abstract grammatical one, originally coined by Meillet in 1912 (Kuryłowicz 1965), accompanied by its phonological and semantic weakening (Heine & Reh 1984). Degrammaticalization is the opposite process – the process of language change by which a grammeme is augmented to a lexeme or some intermediate stage on the way to a lexeme, for example the graduation of a functional morpheme to a more lexical morpheme, characterized as a composite change involving gains in morphosyntactic autonomy or phonetic and/or semantic substance (Trousdale & Norde 2013). Regrammaticalization is a change in grammatical function, sometimes called functional renewal when the old function is no longer available (Ramat 1998).

In this paper, we put forth evidence of diachronic changes in the use of certain Tibetan cases such as the ablative -*las*, elative -*nas*, and associative -*dang*, that can be ambiguously categorized as examples of either degrammaticalization or regrammaticalization, though we allege the former after a careful overview of definitional properties and certain caveats. We draw from the modern spoken Lhasa dialect (compared with Classical/Literary Tibetan or earlier reconstructions wherever necessary) which shows that these case markers, which may have already historically undergone an instance of degrammaticalization from a suffix to a phrasal clitic, are undergoing further degrammaticalization given that they now also taken on the function of a subordinator[1].

II. Brief Literature Review

For much of the 20th century, it was assumed that grammaticalization was unidirectional and irreversible (Lehmann 1982, Heine et al. 1991, Hopper & Traugott 1993, Haspelmath 1999, Kuteva 2001, etc.). However, it was slowly realized that the apparent unidirectionality of grammaticalization was only a statistical tendency (though a very strong one) and not an absolute one, hence some researchers started to find evidence that it was reversible (Greenberg 1991, Campbell 1991, Ramat 1992, Traugott 2001, van der Auwera 2002, Haspelmath 2004, Norde 2009). Others, by contrast, have argued that most of the alleged cases of degrammaticalization in the literature can be redefined as instances of a different phenomenon, namely lexicalization (cf. Haspelmath 1999; Traugott 2001, and Brinton & Traugott 2005).

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1   Any of a lexical class of words that join clauses at a subordinate syntactic level, a subordinating conjunction.

There is thus a "cline of grammaticality" that goes as follows: content item (semantically and lexically strongest, most concrete) > grammatical word > clitic > inflectional affix (> Ø) (semantically and lexically weakest, most grammatical, most abstract); This cline of grammaticality can also be further broken down into different hierarchy scales, such as functional, semantic, and formal, all of which have been variously used by the literature (Kiparsky 2005:3–4). Degrammaticalization is the process in reverse, where a morpheme or grammeme is strengthened to become a content word (oftentimes without reaching it), or otherwise have more lexical content. Hence, degrammaticalization cases are those where some linguistic unit, usually a morpheme, goes up the cline of grammaticality. The most-cited example comes from the strengthening of the Old English genitive case marker -*es*, which eventually became a phrasal clitic -'s, as in *the man I live with's girlfriend* (Lowe 2016), parallel to Swedish *sjåføren av lastebilens* 'the driver of the truck's fault' (Emonds & Faarlund 2014, 118f). Such a construction would have only been possible in Old English through periphrasis or by stringing multiple nouns of the DP in the genitive case, as we see in Modern German and Icelandic. It is also useful to recall that these changes are gradual in the sense that there is an intermediary stage in which the older and newer form-function relationships coexist (Traugott 2004, Norde 2002: 63) for some time.

Type of degrammaticalization	Explanation and canonical examples
Degrammation	a function word comes to be reanalyzed as a lexical item, essentially a reversal of primary grammaticalization (Trousdale & Norde 2013), e.g. Middle Welsh preposition *yn ôl* 'after' into a full verb *nôl* 'to bring' (Willis, 2007).
Deinflectionalization	the reversal of secondary grammaticalization (i.e. the reversal of a shift from less grammatical to more grammatical), whereby the degrammaticalizing morpheme remains bound, e.g. the shift from the genitive singular suffix –*s* into a clitic possessive in English and Continental Scandinavian (Norde, 2006).
Debonding	a shift away from affixes to less grammatical forms, but debonding affixes and clitics generally become free morphemes; it is the most frequently attested type of degrammaticalization, e.g. the shift from the 1PL verbal suffix –*muid* into a free pronoun 'we' in Connemara Irish (Doyle, 2002) and the decliticization of the Norwegian infinitival marker *å* (Faarlund, 2007).

Table 1 – Types of degrammaticalization in the literature

The diachronic development of Slavic languages have provided valuable insight, given the relative abundance of degrammaticalization phenomena (though the ratio of grammaticalization to degrammaticalization phenomena will always be skewed toward the former). In the past fifteen years, much has been written about the development of the Bulgarian definite article, where the 'short-form' or 'oblique' masculine -a /ə/, was reanalysed and recycled from an earlier genitive-accusative case ending (Mladenova 2009), though note that there are multiple accounts as to how this may have happened, many of which predate the modern understanding of degrammaticalization (Columbus (1977), Galton (1967), Georgiev (1955), Mayer (1988), Stölting (1970)). South Slavic languages have also experienced the creation of an independent noun meaning 'thing' (Willis 2007), *нещо*, from the OCS indefinite pronoun 'something' *нѣчьто*, pre-Modern Russian *нѣчто*. Spoken colloquial Czech is also undergoing degrammaticalization of the negative form of *muse-t* (formerly strictly a modal 'must'), which has come to mean 'to dislike', as in *Já vlastně podobn-é seriál-y celkově ne-musí-m* 'these TV series, I actually don't like them at all' (Hansen 2016:268).

Another well-studied instance of degrammaticalization is the unstressed 'weak' pronouns in Old Russian which became stressed full pronouns (Zaliznjak 2004) as the erstwhile well-established pronominal clitic system in Old East Slavic was beginning to disappear. Modern diachronic syntacticians have posited that Old Russian underwent a loss of TP (Migdalski 2018), on account of second-position clitics (so-called "2P clitics", as opposed to verb-adjacent clitics like in Old Church Slavonic). Due to this, pronominal clitics could not raise and adjoin to T0 as heads but remained as phrases in argument positions (Migdalski & Jung 2015), hence they turned themselves into weak pronouns (thus going from a very deficient clitic with no morphology and no free distribution to gaining some limited movement). These clitics in Old Russian became increasingly unstable and they gradually disappeared entirely from written materials by the 15th century (Jung & Migdalski 2021). This loss of TP simultaneously caused a shift in how the grammar treated auxiliaries – hence the shift of the pronominal auxiliary from a verbal head to a subject pronoun. As an example, we can see in Pskov's Judicial Charter, an Old Russian legal code written some time between 1397 and 1467, that the 1st person auxiliary form behaves like a nominative subject pronoun, *а того ж* **есми** *не* **знаю***, у кого купилъ* 'and I do not know from whom I bought' (Anonymous, 1984). Further syntactic investigation is required to know to what extent the loss of TP was a factor that caused a reanalysis and subsequent degrammaticalization of the conditional element. A similar phenomenon occurred in 14th – 15th century Old Polish (Jung & Migdalski 2021) and is perhaps occurring anew in Modern Macedonian (Bošković 2001: 254–264), in which the weak pronouns are gaining new scrambling possibilities (thus they are losing their clitic status). Another way of describing it would be to say that material from an

obsolescent[2] subsystem survived and was reinterpreted (Willis 2010), adapting to fit the properties of other members of the category to which it was reassigned.

Outside of Slavonic languages, we have other examples of debonding, a subtype of degrammaticalization, wherein a shift in status from bound to free morpheme occurs, hence a counterdirectional shift on the cline of grammaticality (Willis 2017), such as the English and Mainland Scandinavian infinitive markers, which are no longer necessarily proclitic to the verb (Fitzmaurice 2000) as *to intelligently but concisely articulate* and *att djärvt gå* ('to boldly go', Swedish); the Estonian question particle *es* and emphatic particle *ep* both going from bound morpheme to free morpheme (Campbell 1991); and the Saami abessive case suffix *-taga*, which later became a clitic *-taga*, and finally a free postposition *taga* meaning 'without' (Kiparsky 2012). In Japanese, some bound grammatical markers became free discourse markers (e.g. clause-final *-ga* concessive subordinate detached and developed into a clause-initial weakly adversative conjunction (Matsumoto 1988)). In Ilokano (Malayo-Polynesian), we have *to/nto* which went from an inflectional future to a separate lexical particle (Rubino 1994).

In Japhug, another Sino-Tibetan language, we three documented instances of degrammaticalization – the locative suffix *zɯ* becoming becoming a clitic, free-standing pronouns are built by combining possessive prefixes with the root *-ʑo* 'oneself' (Jacques 2016b), and a relator noun used postpositionally meaning 'on' (with or without motion) to a common noun meaning 'ground' (Jacques 2016a). In Tamang, a genetically (but not geographically) distantly related Sino-Tibetan language, case markers are all toneless suffixes; they include: *-se* 'ergative', 'instrumental', 'ablative', *-la* 'genitive', *-ta* 'accusative', 'dative', *-ri* 'locative' (used for time, space, purpose), *-tʰen* 'sociative (Mazaudon 2005). In some Kiranti languages (such as Hayu below, which is Sino-Tibetan), case markers also function as subordinators (Michaelovski 2003):

(1)   nikai wonoŋ-boŋ buubu-ha cuŋ-**noŋ** suuk-o-m lxtse bilṭ-ha.
      much high.place-until carry:REDUP-CONV mount-**LOC** scratch:PT-3P-ASS tiger-ERG
      'When she had carried him up high, tiger scratched her.' (Michailovsky 1988:205)

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2   Willis (2016) argues that obsolescence of a form may prohibit its acquisition, which in turn may lead to degrammaticalization (as in the (counterdirectional) change from the pronoun 'something' to the noun 'thing' in South Slavic and Goidelic Celtic), or to exaptation (as in varieties of English where was - were has been reinterpreted as a distinction of polarity instead of as a distinction of number, van de Velde & Norde 2016). Willis thus clearly shows that although obsolescence may be a common trigger in exaptation, it does not always result in exaptation (but also in degrammaticalization, which is not a functional leap, but a gradual change whereby the old and the new form and/or semantics are clearly related).

The reason degrammaticalization is so cross-linguistically rare[3] seems to be because circumstances that permit this phenomenon are peculiar – a language needs an accidental convergence of factors, in one word, a conspiracy. Newmeyer (2000) mentions that complete reversals of grammaticalization (going up the cline of grammaticality, meaning seeing a decrease in degree of grammatical content morphosyntactically) are extremely rare[4], perhaps nonexistent. This should hardly be a cause of surprise (as noted by Janda, 1995, 1998), given the predominant arbitrariness of the sound/meaning association in linguistic signs and the phonological deformations that accompany downgrading, it would be "nothing less than a miracle if some aspect of the precise earlier stage of a language were recreated in degrammaticalization" (Newmeyer, *ibid.*). Furthermore, Norde (2003) concludes that degrammaticalization is not an autonomous process but the result of other changes, usually of the kind that Plank (1995) had identified as 'Systemstörung' (system failure). Crucially, degrammaticalization always involves a single shift from right-to-left on the cline of grammaticality, in other words, there are no known cases in which a grammatical item gradually moves all the way up the cline, passing though the same intermediate stages a grammaticalizing item passes through, in the reverse order (Fischer et al. 2004).

III. Definitional properties

When we speak of the cline of grammaticality (sometimes also referred to as a staircase) – what are the properties that are changing? A simple way of conceiving what is changing is to think of going up or down the cline as changing one morphosyntactic position or trait at a time. Let us take, for example, the syntactic slot occupied by the case marker, which generally end up in one of three systems, simplified to their essentials:

(2) [Mod-K Head-K]$_{DP}$ Indo-European-like case system
                                    (e.g. Latin bonae feminae, good-ACC woman-ACC)
     [Mod [Head-K]]$_{DP}$ Armenian-like case system
                                    (e.g. lav gnot∫, good-∅ woman-DAT)
     [Mod Head]$_{DP}$-K   clitic case system
                                    (Tib. zla.ba gsum=gyi, month-∅ three-GEN, F.14.1.9)

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3 Within syntactic theory, the reasons for this one-way universal tendency are threefold: firstly, languages have a head preference principle (change of XP to X0) in that they rather merge externally than internally (van Gelderen 2004); secondly, there is a strong tendency for upwards reanalysis, meaning that grammaticalization is a change "up the tree" (Roberts & Roussou 2003); and thirdly, there is an economy principle at play, dubbed Late Merge – Merge costs less than Move since Move implies Merge, and if one does Merge, better to do it as late and high in the structure as possible (van Gelderen 2008). These theoretical motivations are empirically backed by data from a large range of languages.

4 Grammaticalization yields roughly 75,000 results in Google Scholar, whereas degrammaticalization yields 2,210 results and regrammaticalization yields a mere 319 results.

When conjoining more than one DP, we finally see the difference between a true head-case-marking system like Armenian and a system in which cases are phrasal clitics like in Tibetan:

(3)   [Mod-K Head-K]$_{DP}$ -and-[Mod-K Head-K]$_{DP}$ IE-like
       [Mod [Head-K]]$_{DP}$ -and-[Mod [Head-K]]$_{DP}$ Armenian-like
       [Mod Head]$_{DP}$-and-[Mod Head]$_{DP}$-K   Tibetan phrasal clitic

Though the (de-/poly-/re-/etc.-)grammaticalization literature has become rather large in recent decades, the issue of definitional properties has only been dealt with in the literature a few times, as the semantic and phonological changes as described in Table 2 are implicitly taken to be the realizations of something fundamental changing in the grammar. The table below summarizes the kinds of semantic and phonological changes behind (de-)grammatialization typically described in the literature:

Change	Grammaticalization	Degrammaticalization
Semantics	Semantic "bleaching"[5] or loss, desemanticization, fading, semantic attrition, semantic decay, semantic depletion, semantic impoverishment, weakening, generalization of semantic content, and abstraction) (Traugott & Heine 1991).	Semantic strengthening, lexicalization, specialization of semantic content, concretization (Traugott 1986), semantic extension (Genetti 1986).
Phonology	Phonological reduction (phonological attrition, phonological weakening, phonetic erosion, phonetic loss, Abnutzung (Campbell 2000).	Fortition? Emphasis? Unaddressed by the literature.

5   DeLancey (2011) notes that in some Tibetan dialects, the agentive nominalizer -*mkhan* has displaced the other nominalizers and now marks all relative clauses, thus illustrating semantic bleaching and functional broadening, and the categorial development to a relative clause marker. Interestingly, -*mkhan* itself is the product of grammaticalization, as it originally was a noun which meant 'skilled or educated person'.

Morphosyntax	Greater morphologization of syntactic elements (Joseph & Janda 1988).	Demorphologization into the syntax (Joseph & Janda 1988).

Table 2 – Comparing grammaticalization and degrammaticalization

Campbell (2000), written almost as a polemic against the then-fledgling discussion on grammaticalization, argues that grammaticalization (and its corollary) has no independent status of its own, and that the mechanisms behind grammaticalization can be better explained in the domains of semantic change, reanalysis, and grammatical structure in general. She believes it necessary to study the "constraints" on what lexical sources grammaticalize and what grammatical meanings/functions can be the outcomes of particular lexical sources – she proposes that such an investigation would require recourse to semantic change and grammar in general, and will not be explained by looking merely inside grammaticalization theory alone. So even if we conclude that such constraints have weak predictive power, grammaticalization would remain derivative in that the explanation behind these facts would still lie outside grammaticalization itself (for a usage-based theory, see Boyd & Harder 2012).

Haspelmath (1999), who holds that grammaticalization is not reversible, arrived at the same view as that of detractors of grammaticalization such as Campbell (*ibid.*) – namely, that semantic change is not a crucial part of the definition of grammaticalization, since it operates freely also outside of grammaticalization and can have effect even when no grammaticalization is involved at all (Hopper & Traugott 2003). Moreover, sometimes semantic changes precede morphosyntactic changes, sometimes they accompany them, and sometimes they follow them. Given this independence, semantic loss alone is not diagnostic for grammaticalization.

What about phonological reduction? Campbell (*ibid.*) again holds that this cannot be considered as a diagnostic of grammaticalization, since as seen in the multitude of Tibetan case marker allomorphs (although affected by "dramatic phonological erosion" (Jacques & Michaud 2011) due to changes in the syllable structure overall since the Classical era, specific allomorphs of different case markers remain distinct), we see that it is neither necessary (given grammaticalizations and degrammaticalizations where no phonological reduction or fortition, respectively, has taken place) nor sufficient. Regular sound changes, such as coda deletion or cluster simplification, contribute much to phonological reduction anyway, without necessarily leading to grammaticalization, such as Spanish f > h > Ø as in filo > hilo > [ilo] 'thread', aw > av > as in aw$\widehat{ts^h}$ > av$\widehat{ts^h}$ > o$\widehat{ts^h}$ 'snake' in Armenian (from Proto-Armenian *awǵʰi < *anʷgi, IE *h₂éngʷʰis), dz > z in Tibetan (Pre-Tibetan dza > za, 'eat', Hill 2019).

What about the assumptions of unidirectionality? Nothing is deterministic about (de-)grammaticalization and unidirectionality – as Hopper and Traugott (2003:131) state, elements do not have to move all the way to complete in either direction of the cline – languages often do have numerous grammaticalization processes that have been frozen at various stages, resulting in a "ragged and incomplete subsystem that is not evidently moving in some identifiable direction". We have already given plenty of cross-linguistic evidence against this assumption in our brief overview of degrammaticalization, and as stated by Campbell (2000), no independent status for grammaticalization can be underpinned by assumptions of unidirectionality. The fact that degrammaticalizations are at least roughly ten times rarer than grammaticalizations (Newmeyer 2000; Dryer 1997 mentions a proportion of 1:99!) has been plausibly explained by the least-effort principle - less effort (whether defined anatomically or acoustically) is required on the part of the speaker to produce an affix than a full form; and we if add the element of frequency-caused predictability to the high amount of built-in redundancy in grammatical codings[6], and it is not difficult to see why the quick-and-easy option of affixation is frequently chosen (as opposed to upgrading the element in question and using it with less grammatical function). All other things being equal, a child confronted with the option of reanalyzing a case marker as a phrasal clitic or reanalyzing a case marker as a subordinator will choose the former, yet the contrary occurred in Tibetan, which is an interesting fact in and of itself.

Grammaticalizations and their opposite therefore necessarily involve some reanalysis, but reanalysis is a much more powerful mechanism of grammatical change and is not limited to nor co-extensive with grammaticalization. Similarly, sound change and semantic change apply to many things in addition to grammaticalizations (Detges & Waltereit 2002). These "explain" instances of grammaticalization, but grammaticalization itself explains nothing without first calling upon these kinds of changes and the explanations they afford (Campbell 2000).

Perhaps one saving grace to the (de-)grammaticalization labels is that of the Joseph & Janda (1988)'s focus on diachronic changes involving the morphologization of syntactic elements, which are far more common than those of demorphologization into the syntax. The Tibetan phrasal clitic case system indeed developed greater demorphologization over time as we will see below. This is likely our best tool when speaking about degrammaticalization. When a morphologization change is not clear as to whether and upward or downward change has occurred in the cline of grammaticality, we can say that regrammaticalization has occurred, though this concept remains marginal at best (Greenberg 1991).

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6   This is based on the assumption that functional categories require less coding material — and hence less production
     effort — than lexical categories (Newmeyer 2000).

Nonetheless, Campbell (*ibid.*) ultimately rejects grammaticalization as an independent process, yet she concedes that work in grammaticalization has given us a very rich assembly of examples we would be unaware of had it not been done. These results inform us significantly about various natural typological arrangements cross-linguistically and about certain kinds of recurrent changes, which is all valuable information. A more nuanced view presented by Hancil and König (2014:4) is that although grammaticalization and its opposite "may ultimately have the status of an *explanandum* rather than an *explanans*, [they do have] some explanatory value at a lower level, namely in providing answers to the question whether an example of language change meets the definition and can therefore be subsumed under the cover term grammaticalization [or degrammaticalization]".

IV. Analysis of phrasal clitics as subordinators in Tibetan

The case markers of Literary Tibetan are neither noun suffixes like the classical cases of Lithuanian, Ukrainian or Old Norse nor adpositions like those found in French or English (to, of, à, avec, etc.). They are clitics and attach at the end of an NP and can never occur independently (Tournadre 2005, 2010). Another quirk directly related to their clitic nature is that Tibetan cases occur only once for each NP (Tournadre and Dorje 2003), unlike typical Indo-European or Northeast Caucasian case systems, where a case, for example dative, is marked on each constituent of the NP whether nouns, adjectives, demonstratives, quantifiers or pronouns.

Tournadre (2010) also notes that another consequence of the clitic nature of the cases is that the various constituents of the NP[7] never undergo any morphological variation. The only morphological variation is related to the clitic morpheme itself[8], which may undergo a variation depending on the final consonant or vowel of the preceding word. When the case markers are unstressed, they carry no tone and are unaspirated, thus these case markers are pronounced in a phonologically reduced manner: *-ki'*, *-ki*, *-la*, *-tu*, *-na*, *-nä'*, *-lä'*, and *-tang* (Tournadre & Dorje 2003:411, FN117)

What constitutes a case in Tibetan and how various authors have categorized them differ wildly, so much so that Hill (2012) feels the need to present a comparative chart of case

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7   For a full analysis of the matter at hand, one would need to paint a coherent picture of the relevant subpart of the Tibetan syntax. We will trust Tournadre's work on what is nominal and what is not, though tests to figure out what is nominal are important; Tallermann (2019) suggests many tests, not all of which are accessible to all languages, such as the sentence fragment test, cleft test, coordination test, ellipsis test, and p-movement test.

8   Some case markers are clearly allomorphs and represent formal variations of a single morpheme in a certain environment. The variation is linked to an old morphophonological rule and does not reflect any difference in terms of grammatical semantics. This is for example the case for *gi*, *kyi*, *gyi*, *'i* and *yi*, which are allomorphs of the same genitive case as well as *gis*, *kyis*, *gyis*, *'is* and *yis*, which are allomorphs of the same ergative case, which can also be called agentive case (Genetti 1993, Tournadre 2010) or ergative/instrumental by DeLancey 2003.

analyses among prominent Tibetan specialists (Schiefner 1865, Cordier 1907, DeLancy 2003, Hill 2004, and Tournadre 2010). For example, *-tu* and allomorphs are considered terminative by DeLancey and Hill, but purposive by Tournadre and illative by Schiefner and Cordier. The whole issue is also further confused by the native Tibetan grammatical tradition that is modeled on Sanskrit.

Tournadre (2010) remarks that the Tibetan case system is highly transcategorial, whereby most of the case markers may be used not only with nouns, adjectives, pronouns, quantifiers, adverbs but also with verbs and verbal auxiliaries, though he also remarks that most case systems do have some level of transcategoriality, such as the Latin accusative which indicates both the direct object and the direction of the predicate (subsuming what we call the allative case), duration, attribute of the object, among a few other rarer uses.

A similar development occurred in Newari, a Himalayish language part of the Tibeto-Burman subfamily, whereby postpostional clitic suffixes in Classical Newari were morphologically reanalyzed in Kathmandu Newari as belonging to verbal morphology but "appeared to happen at different times for different subordinators, implying independent development of the subordinators, as opposed to a single unitary process" (Genetti 1991:242). Genetti maintains that the reanalysis of originally nominal morphology as verbal morphology, via the reanalysis of unmarked nominal clauses as clauses with erstwhile finite verbs is the main mechanism of change, though we also see phonological reduction for many of the subordinators (yä-ta > ta; sä-M > sä).

Though Tibetan has other strategies for subordination (Tournadre & Dorje 2003:194, 276, 467), let us mention these particular cases below which have diachronically developed into additional subordinators (DeLancey 2003:266):

(4)   ablative   *nas/las*   temporal succession, then
          elative   *na*   if/when
          instrumental *gyis*   cause, or logical inference ("agentive" by Tournadre)
          associative *dang*   commitative[9] with/against or a coordinating conj.

Let us take the instrumental – *gyis* and related forms, which in Classical Tibetan was limited to five functions (descriptions from Nagano 1995) – a formal agent in the active mood (5), the actual agent in the passive mood (6), methods or means/instrumentality (7), cause or reason (8), and an adverbializer (9), which must have been an innovation.

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9   "Rappelons, en outre, qu'en Amdo la marque habituelle correspondent a la conjonction de coordination *-daṅ* en tibetain standard est *-la*, qui est aussi une marque casuelle (Tournadre & Dorje, 2003:368 note 13, quoted in original by Hill 2012)." The particle *-dang/-tang* is usually unstressed, and attached to the preceding word. However, on certain occasions it is stressed, in which case it is pronounced *-thaṅg* (Tournadre & Dorje 2003)

(5)   bcom ldan 'das **kyis** bka'stsal pa.
        'The Bhagavan replied.'   (Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā 13, Inaba 1986: 185)

(6)   bdag **gis** bstan.
        '(It) is explained by me.'   (Dās et al. 1915:18)

(7)   mãn ti̱tso tsāmän-**ki**' sö̱'-pare'
        'These medicines are made with medicinal herbs.' (Tournadre & Dorje 2003:145)

(8)   khō̱ mãn-**ki'** thra̱'-song
        'He got better thanks to the medicine.'   (*ibid.*)

(9)   khos dga'-spro tshad-med • **kyis** ngang khong • la dga'-bsu zhus • pa red
        [kʰø̂: ɡàḍō tsʰɛ́ɱɛ̂:-ɡi: kʰóɴ-la ɡèsū ɕŷ:-bə rê̂:]¹⁰
        he.ERG joy boundless-**ERG** manner him-OBL welcome LV-PP AUX
        'He welcomed him with boundless joy.'   (Goldstein 1991, 6.5.2)

Given the highly diglossic nature of Tibetan, the modern formal literary language still allows the use of the instrumental/agentive/ergative as an adverbializer as in (9). In the colloquial language, it would appear that such usage is more restricted, with the connective (subordinating) function being the primary one.

The ablative *nas* follows a similar trajectory. Genetti (1986:389-390) states that the development of postpositions to subordinators is a productive process across time – among a few examples, she gives Classical ablative *nas*, which has both the reflexes "nEE" (presumably [e:] or [e̱:]) retaining its postpositional function, and "nE", as a non-final clause marker in Lhasa Tibetan. Denwood (1999:221) indicates that "*nas* is largely interchangeable with [the] serial verb *byas* for most speakers to indicate that the event of the subordinate clause preceded that of the following clause", which leads credence to the idea that subordinators perhaps being synchronically reanalyzed as belonging to verbal morphology. Tournadre's grammar mentions that it is always placed directly after the verb, and may not be preceded by an auxiliary (Tournadre & Dorje 2003:207), as in *kha-lag **bzas-nas** yong-gi yin* 'I'll come after I've eaten'.

Regarding the elative *na*, also called the locative by certain authors, has a temporal dimension¹¹ of 'when' in the high written register (*kya̱tso thō̱nga-**na**... 'it is said that, when...'

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10 Transcription and gloss by Rolf Noyer, May 2020.
11 This is reminiscent of pseudotemporals, which are really just conditionals that have historical *wh*-like forms, such as the interaction between the minimal pair *wenn/wann* in German, both of which derive from Proto-Germanic *hwannē* (*wenn* thus lost its temporality and became a mere conditional).

ibid.:415) and introduces a conditional clause (as in 'if') in spoken Tibetan (*ibid.*) as seen in (10). Heine (1993:53) suggests that the cline of grammaticality has both a diachronic and a synchronic dimension – diachronic in that it is the result of language change, and synchronic in that it consists of a range of synchronically defined uses, which we do see, especially given the diglossic sociolinguistic situation of Tibetan.

(10) o-log brgyab • **na** mi mang-po shi • gi red
[ŋòlô: gʲěp̀-na mǐ mèŋgū ɕí-gi reî:]
rebellion do.P-**if** people many die-PM AUX
'If they rebel, many people will die.'   (Goldstein 1991, 6.1a)

(11) elative case (?) > elative phrasal clitic 'out of' > when > if

We do not conclusively know if this case, or any of the cases mentioned in this section, ever were limited to being just case suffixes, hence the question mark in (11), though at least we can demonstrate that we have a historical progression that shows degrammaticalization of the older, literary attested state of grammar versus today's further-degrammaticalized state. The results of Lapolla (2004)'s reconstructive survey indicate that although all Tibeto-Burman languages have developed some sort of relation marking, none of the markers can be reconstructed to the oldest stage of the family, although based on cross-linguistic circumstantial evidence like Armenian, Swedish, English, and Turkish, we would expect phrasal case clitics to have developed from case suffixes (that is, if one were to see degrammaticalization in the first place, which need not occur as any step of the cline of grammaticality may remain stable for a very long time (Hopper and Traugott 2003).

For the associative, in the colloquial language, this marker functions almost exclusively as a coordinating conjunction (barring classicizing archaisms), whereas in Classical Tibetan, it held many more functions, the most relevant of which is indicated in (11), along with its modern use:

(12) [Head and Head]-K   Classical Tibetan associative case
[Mod Head]$_{TP/CP}$-K   subordinating conjunction in modern speech
(instantiation of syntactic category T or C)

Tibetan lacks simple relativization – instead, there is a process of "nominalization" resulting in a verb form with a nominalizer ending (these nominalizations lack the auxiliaries of finite verbal complexes, Erlewine 2019). This process continued to expand and likely these verbal categories may have started to cannibalize previously nominal case morphology

(DeLancey 2011), eventually leading to a situation as covered by Tournadre & Dorje (2003:467)'s chart of the multitude of connective functions for the Tibetan case system, which admittedly represents much more than what typical cases can cover in a language. This same process may have contributed to the relative abundance of suppletive forms (usually listed as "allomorphs" of various particles or functional words) we see today in Tibetan.

Are subordinating conjunctions ontological primitives? Can they be broken down into smaller definitional chunks? The literature does not seem to think that such a thing is possible, as Sgall (1997) explained, "it should be recalled that most of the kinds of complementations are underlying counterparts of prepositions, subordinating conjunctions or similar morphemes, which most theories understand as primitives". A further breakdown of this concept is beyond our scope.

Looking back at (3) and (12) – if one were to decrease grammatical function in the syntactic structure, what would it look like? "K" (case) is already a phrase clitic for the entire chain of DPs – the only way to further degrammaticalize (morphosyntactically) this element would be to make it enclitic to a constituent higher up in the derivation, such as a TP or CP. In concert with this change, another degrammaticalization path seems to emerge through the adverbial use of these morphemes (13), which increasingly migrate from nominal morphology to verbal morphology, akin to what we see in the development of Newari subordinators.

(13)   phrasal case-marking clitic > adverbializer > subordinator
        (nominal (NP) suffix <--------------------> verbal (VP) suffix)

We thus see a change of status of what were already, for the most part, function words. These new syntactic possibilities or positions can be regarded as evidence of instantiation of new syntactic categories – or at least, novel ways of producing existing syntactic categories. Do they have less grammatical or functional content, as we covered these terms in section III? In other words, is this degrammaticalization? According to Russi (2014), the currently best-received definition is from Norde (2009:120), "a composite change whereby a gram in a specific context gains in autonomy or substance on more than one linguistic level (semantics, morphology, syntax, or phonology)". Defined this way, the shift from phrasal clitic to subordinator indeed would fit the definition given that it meets several of the criteria seen in the Table 2, and at least the morphosyntactic changes represent a real change that must necessarily be co-extensive with degrammaticalization (as opposed to mere phonological or semantic change, which need not entail degrammaticalization).

V. Conclusion

As far as the distant pre-Tibetan past is concerned, it is difficult to tell if forms of many of the noun cases underwent a shift from an inflectional affix to a clitic/phrasal affix. If one day we are able to safely reconstruct it as such, then this evolution can thus be said to be counterdirectional in our aforementioned cline of grammaticality in the sense that it results in the assignment of an inflectional case suffix to a less grammatical category where it is assigned greater morphosyntactic freedom. It is later attested that this upward direction on the cline of grammaticality then continued, whereby these phrasal clitics, through numerous channels (nominalization, temporality, adverbialization, etc.), eventually became clausal subordinators.

As is to be expected when dealing with diachronic evidence of a diglossic nature, the changes occurred slowly, likely with numerous though sometimes short-lived variants along the way, and it took at least a few centuries for the newer colloquial forms to creep into the written language, and even today many overlapping functions remain for the various Tibetan cases. Further empirical studies and especially new analyses of classic degrammaticalization and regrammaticalization cases are also necessary to sharpen our theoretical notions, especially in highly diglossic situations. Quantitative historical research is not yet easily achievable for Tibetan, but there will soon be a publicly available[12] version of the *PArsed Corpus of Tibetan* (PACTib) that contains 166 million words, covering Tibetan texts of a variety of genres from the 9th to 21st centuries.

We have seen that certain authors outright reject the utility of speaking about (de-)grammaticalization and just focus on the by-products of general properties of linguistic change without requiring a special appeal to degrammaticalization. We assert that, at least as far as the morphosyntactic changes are concerned, such changes affect the very definitional properties of what is being derived in the speaker's grammar, therefore we maintain that degrammaticalization remains a useful cross-linguistic (and not just typological) concept.

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12 https://github.com/lothelanor/actib, for proof of concept, see Meelen et al. (2020) and Meelen & Roux (2021).

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