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The Tocharian subjunctive

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1 INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the Tocharian subjunctive. It aims at describing the formation of this category and at assessing its use, meaning and syntax. On the basis of this synchronic analysis, the origins of the Tocharian subjunctive in the Indo-European proto-language will be investigated.

1.1 TOCHARIAN

“Tocharian” is the conventional name of two languages, usually labelled “Tocharian A” and “Tocharian B”. Less frequently, we also find the names “East Tocharian”, “Turfanian” or “Agnean” for Tocharian A and “West Tocharian” or “Kuchean” for Tocharian B. Both Tocharian A and B have long become extinct and they are only known to us through manuscripts found in the North-West of China, in the Uygur autonomous region Xinjiāng (Uy. Šinjan), at the northern edge of the Tāklimakān desert. Tocharian A was found at the central site Šorčuq near Qarašāhār and in the eastern region Turpan, whereas Tocharian B was found in Šorčuq, Turpan, and the western region Kuča, the total stretch from Kuča to Turpan being about 600 kms. Most Tocharian B and all Tocharian A manuscripts are of Buddhist content, written on paper in the “slanted” northern variant of the Indic Brāhmī alphabet. It is difficult to date the manuscripts precisely, but the oldest Tocharian B material may be as old as the 5th century CE, while the youngest manuscripts are probably from after the 10th. Tocharian A is attested over a shorter period, approximately from the late 7th until the 10th century (Pinault 1989: 7-12).

Tocharian is not a particularly difficult language, nor is the script difficult to decipher. Yet Tocharology, the study of Tocharian, has to cope with considerable problems of interpretation: there are important lacunae in our knowledge of both languages concerning the meaning, inflexion and formation of many individual words as well as in several points of grammar. This is principally due to the fragmentary state of the corpus. Although with about 9,000 fragments in Tocharian B and 2,000 in Tocharian A the corpus is not extremely limited in quantity, the majority of the fragments are so small that they hardly yield more than word forms. The number of more or less complete leaves does not exceed 50 for Tocharian A and 200 for Tocharian B, texts of more than one leaf being even rarer. In most cases, fruitful use of a text is only possible with a parallel in another language such as Sanskrit, but such parallels are often difficult to trace or they may be lacking altogether; either because that parallel text is not preserved, or because the Tocharian text is an original composition that happens not to be translated into another language. In spite of all these difficulties, however, we are on firm ground as far as the essence of Tocharian grammar is concerned, and a large part of the words occurring

in the texts is well known: although the pitfalls need to be stressed, the study of Tocharian is by no means a hopeless undertaking.

Not only were the two languages in close contact historically, they are also genetically related. I assume that speakers of the two languages were able to communicate with some difficulty without special training, but that in reality they were at some point so accustomed to each other that a certain degree of convergence took place; apparently, it was especially Tocharian A that was influenced by Tocharian B (Peyrot *forth.c*). Despite the similarities between the two languages, they must have gone through a considerable period of separate development before the time of attestation, as for instance differences in the basic Buddhist vocabulary show that their speakers adopted Buddhism independently (Lane 1966). Their common ancestor, called “Proto-Tocharian”, is not directly attested, but reconstructed by means of the comparison of Tocharian A and B. It is usually dated at least before the beginning of the common era, but historical records lacking, the precise date of the break up of Proto-Tocharian into the predecessors of Tocharian A and B is unknown. Apparent Tocharian elements in the 3rd and 4th century CE Indic Prākṛit of Niyā in the South-East of the Tāklimakān (Burrow 1935) are only of value for the study of the prehistoric migrations of the Tocharians and contribute little to the reconstruction of Proto-Tocharian.

Although Tocharian differs typologically slightly from better-known Indo-European languages, its Indo-European character is obvious: it is genetically related to English, Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, and so on. It stands out typologically because it has only one series of obstruents (written as voiceless stops) whereas other languages have at least two, mostly three (as in Proto-Indo-European); on top of the four primary nominal cases nominative, oblique (accusative), genitive and vocative it has additional agglutinative case suffixes, which is rare in Indo-European (although it is not unique); the verb is characterised by a basic distinction between present and subjunctive, not found elsewhere; and, last but not least, the lexicon contains numerous loanwords from Sanskrit, Prākṛit, Iranian, Altaic and Chinese. Nevertheless, Indo-European traits can hardly be overlooked: both languages allow for relatively complex syllable structures; morphology makes extensive use of vowel gradation (“Ablaut”, partly transformed into palatalisation) and suffixation, with only a limited role for reduplication and one nasal infix; nouns with the four primary cases just mentioned inflect for singular, dual and plural number, and adjectives agree in case and number; the verb has several different stems, expressing tense, aspect and mood, as well as active and middle personal endings; the basic word order is SOV, but variation to different degrees is common.

The position of Tocharian in the Indo-European language family is difficult to establish (see Lane 1970, Ringe 1991): it is an independent branch like, for instance, Greek. Although it is often argued that Tocharian is archaic – that is, it branched off early – compared to central branches as Indo-Iranian or Balto-Slavic, this is hard to prove (see Winter 1997 for mainly lexical arguments). In any case, its relative archaicity can in no way be compared to that of Anatolian, which was definitely the

first split-off from Proto-Indo-European (or, for that matter, Proto-Indo-Hittite; see most recently Kloekhorst 2008b: 7–11). For the moment, it is best to keep in mind that Tocharian has a potential for the preservation of archaisms, but in view of its vitality in all kinds of morphological restructurings, caution is due so as not to jump to conclusions.

1.2 THE TOCHARIAN SUBJUNCTIVE

Although Lévi and Meillet have labelled a Tocharian B subjunctive “subjonctif” in their pioneering 1914 article, the principles of their analysis have proved wrong.¹ As it is in general use now, the term “subjunctive”, or, in German, “Konjunktiv”, was introduced by Sieg, Siegling and Schulze, who stated: “Neben den drei Indikativen [present, preterite and imperfect] gibt es noch einen Konjunktiv, der zugleich das Futurum vertreten muß, einen Optativ und einen Imperativ” (1931: 324).

In view of the future function of the subjunctive, Couvreur has argued for a different label, namely “futurum-conjunctief” (1947: 73). However, since the term “subjunctive” is rather vague, being used for various categories in languages of the world, it cannot be called a misnomer. The only point is that the term “subjunctive” must not be taken as a *description* of the function of the Tocharian subjunctive: as a label, it is an empty term, and it always needs to be explained what it stands for. Throughout this study, I will use the term “subjunctive”, but it will never be used to refer to the function of any form – it is the name of a category, no more.

In formal² terms, the Tocharian subjunctive is a second present, as noted by Sieg, Siegling and Schulze: “Eine einheitlich charakterisierte Konjunktivbildung gibt es nicht. Die Konjunktivstämme [...] sehen den einfachsten Präsensformen [...] oft zum Verwechseln ähnlich” (1931: 341; see also Lane 1959: 158). The present and the subjunctive have the same endings and are only distinguished by a difference in stem. Since the two categories make use of largely the same stem inventory, many presents can only be identified in contrast with the respective subjunctive and vice versa. In addition, there is a large number of verbs where present and subjunctive are identical, especially in Tocharian B (Lane l.c.). Although the subjunctive is a “second present”, its stem is generally shorter than that of the present if they are different. This often gives the impression that the present is derived from the subjunctive, e.g.

¹ They give *wārpatar* IT246a3 as a subjunctive (p 16). Indeed, this form has traditionally been analysed as a 3sg.sbj. ‘(s)he will receive’, on the assumption that it is a mistake for *warpatār* (e.g. Couvreur 1954a: 48 with footnote 30; I now choose to read *wārpanar*, a mistake for the 3sg.prs. *wārpanatār*, see Peyrot 2007a: №246). In any case, their subjunctives *yamātrā* and *aiśātrā* (p 17) were misreadings for the 3sg. optatives *yamitrā* IT247b5 ‘would make’ and *aiśitrā* M500.12b2 ‘would know’.

² Throughout this work, I will use the term “formal” only in the phonetic, phonological or morphological sense; I am not concerned with formal semantics.

Tocharian B 1sg.prs. *yamaskau* ‘I am doing’ vs 1sg.sbj. *yāmu*: compared to the subjunctive, the present has an additional element <aska>, morphologically {-ske-}.

Functionally, the subjunctive is clearly distinct from the present. The present covers “traditional” present meanings, to be rendered into English as a simple present or a present continuous, e.g. ‘I do; I am doing’. The subjunctive, on the other hand, expresses future tense and has a wide range of functions in subordinate clauses, such as conditionality, concessivity, or indefiniteness; in English, ‘I will do’, ‘if I do’, ‘even though I do’, or ‘whatever I may do’, respectively. The Tocharian subjunctive is not typically used to express wishes of the type Fr. *que je fasse* ‘may I do’.

The contrast between the present stem and the subjunctive stem does not only distinguish the present from the subjunctive: it is an essential contrast in the lay-out of the Tocharian verb. Both stems are the basis of derived stems: the present stem is the basis of the “imperfect” past tense, while a modal category called “optative” is formed from the subjunctive stem. In addition, there is a strong affiliation between the subjunctive stem and the “preterite” past tense and the imperative. Thus, the difference between present and subjunctive is of crucial importance for the analysis of the whole Tocharian verb.

In the brief outline above, the term “indicative” has not been used. For other languages, “indicative” may be used to denote non-modal finite verb forms, i.e. presents, pasts or futures that are not subjunctive, optative, imperative or infinite. For the Tocharian verbal system the term “indicative” is not of great use since none of the distinctions in indicative forms, namely present, imperfect and preterite, is found with the subjunctive, optative or imperative. Thus, all presents, imperfects and preterites are indicative, whereas the subjunctive is an independent formation without, for instance, tense distinctions as in Fr. prs. *je fasse*, ipf. *je fisse*, pf. *j’ai fait*, etc.

1.3 INDO-EUROPEAN SOURCES

The essential problem of the historical explanation of the Tocharian subjunctive is that there is no obvious candidate for a comparison, not in Proto-Indo-European, nor in any of the Indo-European languages. At first sight, one of the obvious options is the Proto-Indo-European subjunctive, but this comparison is difficult for two reasons: the reconstruction of the Proto-Indo-European subjunctive is full of problems, and as far as it can be reconstructed, it shows no evident similarity to the Tocharian subjunctive.

Although subjunctives are found in a number of branches of Indo-European, many of these are independent creations or continuations of different Proto-Indo-European categories, such as the optative. The only formation that qualifies for the status of the “Proto-Indo-European” subjunctive is formed with the **e/o-*suffix. In Greek and Sanskrit, this suffix can be added to several tense-aspect stems, such as the present, the aorist, and the perfect, to yield the present subjunctive, the aorist subjunctive and the perfect subjunctive. If the basic tense-aspect stem is athematic, i.e.,

ending in a consonant, the $*e/o$ -suffix is added to that consonant, but the suffix can also be added to present stems that already have a present suffix $*-e/o-$, yielding a long vowel subjunctive in $*-ē/ō-$.

The problems of the reconstruction of the $*e/o$ -subjunctive are the shape of the suffix itself, the distribution over the tense-aspect stems, and the meaning, which is notoriously difficult to grasp. The suffix is strange because it seems to be the same as the $*e/o$ -present suffix, which suggests that the $*e/o$ -present and the $*e/o$ -subjunctive somehow reflect a single formation. There is evidence from Vedic and Latin that the $*e/o$ -subjunctive was in origin *not* an extra suffix to any tense-aspect stem, but rather an independent formation to the root; especially the combination of the two $*e/o$ -suffixes into one $*ē/ō$ -suffix must be secondary. As the etymology of its name suggests, the subjunctive was often used as a subordinating form: Lat. *subiunctivus* being a calque on Gk. ὑποτακτική ‘subordinating’. Indeed, in Latin, Greek and Vedic it is frequently found in subclauses. Its function in main clauses is difficult to establish; in Vedic, for instance, vague notions such as “expectancy” and other nuances of uncertainty and futurity are found. The future meaning is also suggested by split-off forms in Greek and Latin that have become reanalysed as futures. Although the formal resemblance with the $*e/o$ -present is commonly recognised, the few proposals that have been made to unify their meanings have not found general acceptance (Renou 1932; Kortlandt 1983a).

Even though the Proto-Indo-European subjunctive and the Tocharian subjunctive are semantically not completely identical they are rather close. Formally, however, the categories could hardly be more different. Since the formal characteristic of the Proto-Indo-European subjunctive is the (thematic) $*e/o$ -suffix, the fact that Tocharian has a subjunctive characterised precisely by the lack of that suffix has drawn special attention. As Schmidt has put it,

“Unter den verschiedenen Konjunktivbildungen des Tocharischen darf man sicherlich den athematischen Konjunktiv, d.h. einen themavokallosten Bildungstypus, als die größte Überraschung ansehen, ist es doch gerade der Themavokal, der im Griechischen und Indisch-Iranischen das unterscheidende Merkmal des Konjunktivs gegenüber dem Indikativ darstellt.” (1992: 108; 1994a: 230)

Another obvious difference is that Tocharian does not have a subjunctive suffix at all: it is not formed with a suffix from a basic stem, but it is itself a basic stem – the *present* is derived with a suffix. Further, the Tocharian subjunctive cannot be formed to tense-aspect stems, but is independently formed from the root; however, as noted above, this may in fact have been the more original situation in Proto-Indo-European as well.

Apart from the Proto-Indo-European subjunctive, there is no obvious candidate to compare the Tocharian subjunctive with as far as semantics is concerned. The Proto-Indo-European optative, for instance, has a different meaning; moreover, it is certainly continued directly in the Tocharian optative, so that it cannot be used to explain the subjunctive. The semantics of the “tenseless” semi-modal category

“injunctive” is too vague to allow for a direct comparison: a connection between the Proto-Indo-European injunctive and the Tocharian subjunctive must be based principally on formal considerations. Likewise, the Tocharian subjunctive might be compared with the Proto-Indo-European perfect and the aorist, but purely on formal grounds.

Some Tocharian subjunctive formations display paradigmatic gradation in the root, which goes back to Tocharian *e* and *ə* vocalism. This in turn is commonly projected back as Proto-Indo-European **o* : **Ø* gradation, found in the perfect. Thus, the comparison with the perfect is mainly based on the alternations in the root (on reduplication see 4.1.5, p 334). Alternatively, Kortlandt has proposed to explain the same gradation pattern rather from the **ē* : **e* gradation of the Proto-Indo-European *s*-aorist (1994). As a third possibility, Jasanoff derives the grading subjunctive from a perfect-like, but different and not commonly accepted Proto-Indo-European verbal type heavily based on the Hittite *hi*-inflexion (e.g. 2003: 161-165). All three explanations face serious challenges: the derivation from the perfect or Jasanoff’s *hi*-inflexion type does not account for the meaning nor for the stem pattern of the Tocharian subjunctive, while Kortlandt’s derivation from the *s*-aorist requires an explanation of the absence of both the *s*-suffix and the expected initial palatalisation.

In sum, although the Proto-Indo-European subjunctive could be a candidate for comparison as far as the semantics is concerned, formal problems abound. Conversely, when focusing on the form the perfect is deemed an attractive source, but an explanation of the semantics is difficult. The most important question, however, is how to account for the peculiar make-up of the Tocharian verbal system with a basic subjunctive stem and a derived present.

1.4 AIM

The aim of this study is threefold. It aims at

- describing the formation of the subjunctive;
- describing the use and meaning of the subjunctive;
- finding the origins of the subjunctive.

As mentioned in section 1.2 (p 15) above, the subjunctive can be seen as a second present with a strong affiliation with the preterite stem. The problem of the formation of the subjunctive is whether the present and the subjunctive really make use of the same stem inventory, or if some formations are rather specific for presents and others for subjunctives. Further, the question is to what extent the subjunctive and the preterite can actually be called *the same stem*, and, if not, how they differ. From the wide range of morphological markers, we need to know which distinguish the present from the subjunctive, and which the preterite from the subjunctive stem.

In my description of the use and meaning of the subjunctive I will investigate its use in order to assess the basic meaning. The principal problem is whether the subjunctive is modal or temporal or both, and whether the different uses in for instance

main and subclauses can be unified. Besides, it needs to be clarified how it differs from neighbouring categories such as the present and the optative.

In the search for the origins of the subjunctive, the relationships between the different verbal stems will receive special attention. The strong affiliation between the preterite and the subjunctive needs to be explained, as well as the fact that the present seems to be derived from the subjunctive and the peculiar phenomenon that they can be identical. Further, the question needs to be answered whether the vowel gradation in the root of some subjunctives is to be derived from the perfect, the *s*-aorist, or a third source.

1.5 STRUCTURE

Little needs to be said about the organisation of this book: the main body consists of three relatively independent chapters on the three main problems. Chapter 2 treats the formation of the subjunctive, chapter 3 its use and meaning, and chapter 4 its origins. As each of the three chapters requires a specific justification of the method applied and the structure that is followed, such matters are discussed in the introductions to the respective chapters. A fifth chapter recapitulates the findings and outlines old problems not yet solved and new ones that have been encountered. The book is concluded with a list of references, and indices of translated passages.

