

TIBETAN INITIAL CLUSTERS OF NASALS AND R

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Though none of the four possible sequences *nr*, *ny*, *nr* and *mr* occurs as such as initial cluster, two of them, *nr* and *mr* can be met with when preceded by an *s*-prefix: *snr*- and *smr*-. The former is limited to three words of rare occurrence,¹ otherwise we witness the elimination of the nasal: *smr*->*sr*-.² The initial cluster *smr*- occurs mainly in *smra*-*ba* "to speak, talk" and its cognates, but we observe both shift of the *r* to the end of the word (*smra*-*ba* > *smar*-*ba*) and its elimination in the doublet *smo*-*ba*.

In each of the four sequences we witness shift of the *r* to the beginning of the word, henceforth referred to as *r*-metathesis: **nr*->*rn*-, **nyr*->*ny*-, **nr*->*rn*- and **mr*->*rm*-. In the last case the *r*-metathesis can actually be demonstrated by the compound *rmo*-*snags* "wailing" occurring side by side with its doublet *smre*-*snags* (showing vowel alternation).³ The disappearance of the *r* in doublets of words with *r*-metathesis when prefixed by *s* (*sme*-*ba* "spot" by the side of *rme*-*ba*, etc., see p. 250) should also be noted. The initial cluster **nyr*- when occurring with *r*-metathesis as *ny*- must apparently be separated from a secondary **nyr*- resulting by iotization from an original *nr*-. In the latter case we observe elimination of the *r*: *nr*->*nyr*->*ny* (e.g. *rna* < **nra* "ear" and **nyran* > *nyan* "to hear").⁴

As will be seen, in addition to the *r*-metathesis listed under A, there are alternative developments listed under B. We observe either elimination of the nasal or its change to an homorganic plosive (prefixed or unprefixing) or both.

I. **nr*-

A. *r*-metathesis

**nra* > *rna* "drum", etc. (about twenty examples).

B. Alternative developments

The following cases – not counting members of the same word family – have been observed:

¹ They are *snrubs* and *snron*, the names of the eighteenth and the seventeenth lunar mansions, and the compound *smrel-gzi* "sloping, oblique".

² Cf. "Loss of *l* or *r* in Tibetan initial consonantal clusters", *BSOAS*, XXXVII, 1974, p. 445.

³ Cf. *ibid.*, n. 16.

⁴ Cf. "Ear, sharp and hearing, a Tibetan word family" in M. Boyce and I. Gerševitch (eds.), *W.B. Henning memorial volume*, London, 1970, p. 407.

- (1) **nra*ns "entire, complete, unimpaired"⁵
 - (a) Elimination of original initial nasal:
 - (α) *rans*-*pa* "entire, complete, unimpaired"
 - (β) *ran* "(completely, i.e. exclusively, one's own) own, self"
 - (γ) *ran*-*ba* "to be complete, unimpaired, perfect: (yi(d)) *ran*-*ba* "(with mind unimpaired=) to rejoice"
 - (b) Change of a *prefixed* nasal to plosive:
 - (i) Prefix *h*: (α) *hgran*-*ba*, Pf. *hgrans* "to satiate"
(β) *hgrans*-*pa* "satiated, replete, full"
 - (ii) Prefix *b*: *bgran*-*ba*, Pf. *bgrans* "(to make complete) to count, number, calculate"
 - (c) Change of an *unprefixed* nasal to plosive:
 - (α) *gran*-*ba* "to count, judge, consider"
 - (β) *gran* "(I consider, reckon=) perhaps"
 - (γ) *grans* "(total=) number"
 - (d) Elimination of nasal, *r* preceded by an *h*:
hran "(complete, self-sufficient=) alone"
- (2) **nril* "round, globular"
 - (a) Elimination of the original initial nasal:
 - (α) *ril*-*po* "round, globular"
 - (β) *ril*-*bu* "pill"
 - (b) Change to *prefixed* plosive:
 - (i) Prefix *h*: *hgril*-*ba* "to be turned, rounded, made circular, to be twisted or wrapped round"⁶
 - (ii) Prefix *s*: *sgril*-*ba* "to wind or wrap round, roll, wrap, or wind up"
 - (c) Change to *unprefixed* plosive:
gril "roll"
- (3) **nrū* "angle, corner, horn"⁷
 - (a) Elimination of the original initial nasal:
ru/*rva* "horn"
 - (b) Change to *unprefixed* plosive:
gru/*grva* "angle, corner"
- (4) **nren* "stiff, coagulated"⁸

⁵ Cf. "Cognates of Tibetan *rans*-*pa* ('entire, complete') with guttural stem initial" in *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taipei*, Vol. XXXIX, 1969, pp. 287-9, and "Tibetan *nyin*-*rans* and *t'o*-*rans*" in *Asia Major*, N.S. XII, 1966, pp. 179-84.

⁶ Cf. also the iotized and aspirated further derivative *hk'yil*-*ba* "to wind, twist".

⁷ See *Asia Major*, N.S. I, p. 14, n. 2, according to which *ru*/*rva* "horn" and *gru*/*grva* "angle, corner" must be regarded as doublets which were differentiated in meaning at a later stage. See also *Études Tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*, ed. by Professor A. Macdonald, Paris, 1971, p. 473 and n. 15.

⁸ See *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1964 (1965), pp. 104-05.

- (a) Elimination of the original initial nasal:
 (α) *ren* "stiff, coagulated"
 (β) *ro* "(a stiff=) body, corpse"⁹
- (b) Change to *prefixed* plosive:
 (i) Prefix *h*: (α) *hgren-ba* "to stand"
 (β) *hgroñ-ba* "to die"
 (ii) Prefix *s*: *sgren-ba* "to raise"¹⁰
- (c) Change of *unprefixed* original nasal to plosive:¹¹
 (α) *gren* (Pf. of *hgren* "to stand")
 (β) *groñ* (Pf. of *hgroñ* "to die")

II. *nyr-

A. *r*-metathesis

**nyran* > *rnyañ-ba* "to rinse", etc. (about ten examples).

B. Alternative developments

- (a) Elimination of *r* if **nyr*- results from an iotized **nr*-
 (α) *nyan-pa* (*snyan-pa*) "(resp.) to hear; ear"
 (cp. *rna-ba* "ear"; *rno-ba*, *rnon-pa* "sharp"¹²)
 (β) *nyog-pa* (but also *rnyog-pa*) "soiled, dirtied, made unclean" (cp. *rnag* "matter, pus")
 (γ) *mnyam-pa* "like, alike, equal, same" (cp. *rnām-pa* "piece, part, section, class, species, etc." *rnams* "(piece by piece=) sign of plural")
 (δ) *nyal-ba* "to lie down, sleep", *snyol-ba* "to lay down, to bed"
mnyel-ba (resp.) to get tired" (cp. *rnal (-ma)* "rest")
- (b) Elimination of *r* after *s*-prefix: *snyi* (< **srni*) "snare, trap" by the side] of *rnyi* "id."

III. *nr-

A. *r*-metathesis

**nra* > *rna* "ear", etc. (about half a dozen examples).

B. Alternative developments

The most remarkable of the alternative developments is the elimination of the nasal in the case of an *s*-prefix, alongside which we observe change to a plosive in cognate words. In one case the assumption of an original nasal

⁹ Note the vowel alternation *e~o* (see *Asia Major*, XIX, 1974, p. 97 (VI E, 1) and cp. p. 95 VI A, 4 *hgren-ba* "to stand" ~ *hgroñ-ba* "(to be stiff=) to die; to be killed").

¹⁰ Note also the synonymous palatalized derivative *bžen-ba*.

¹¹ The absence of the prefix *h*, which as such marks the perfect-form, may be a secondary development.

¹² *mnye-ma* "ear of corn" is a further member of the word family (see the article quoted in n. 4).

can be supported by a Chinese cognate word (熱), in another (忍) the assumption may be based on it.

- (a) *r- | sr- | dr- (h̄dr-)* – Elimination of the nasal when initial (α), or after an *s*-prefix (β) with change to a plosive to be observed in cognate words (γ)
 (α) **nrin* > *rin* "long, distant"
 (β) **snrin* > *srin(-ba)* "to extend, stretch"
 **snran* > *sran* "street, pair of scales";
sron(-ba) "to straighten" and *bsran(-ba)* "straight, upright" also belong here
 (γ) **nran* > *dran-po* "straight", *dran(s)* Perf. *dran* Fut. and *dronis* Imper. of *hdren* (< *h̄dren?*) "to draw, pull out", furthermore **nrin* > *h̄drin* "distant" (in *glo-ba h̄drin* "disloyal"¹³)
- (b) *r- | h̄dr- (dr-) | hr-* – Elimination of the nasal when initial (α), with (in cognate words) change to a (prefixed or unprefixed) plosive (β) or to the initial cluster *hr-* (γ) to be observed
 (α) **nral* > *rall(-ba)* "torn, lacerated, slashed"
 **nrul* > *rull(-ba)* "to become putrid, to rot"
 (β) *h̄dral (-ba)* (Perf. *dral*)¹⁴ "to tear to pieces"
h̄drul (-ba) (Perf. *drul*)¹⁴ "to become putrid, to rot"
 (γ) *hral (-ba)* = *h̄dral (-ba)*¹⁵
hrul (-ba) = *h̄drul (-ba)*¹⁵
- (c) *dr- (h̄dr-)/sr-* – Change to a (prefixed or unprefixed) plosive (α) or elimination after an *s*-prefix of the initial nasal (**snr-* > *sr-*) (β)
 (α) **nra* > *h̄dra* "similar, equal"
 **nre* > *h̄dre* "to be mixed with"; *dre (-po or -mo)* "mule"
 **nrod* > *drod* "warmth, heat"¹⁶, *dro (-ba)* "to be warm"
 (β) **snras* > *sras* "(the image [of his father]=) (resp.) son"¹⁷
 **snre* > *sre(-ba)*, Perf. *bsres* "to mix, mingle"
 **snro* > *sro(-ba)*, Perf. (*b*)*sros* "to warm"
- (d) *sr-* < **snr-*
 For the example in question
 **snran* > *sran(-pa)* "to suffer, bear, endure"
 no cognates with the initial clusters *dr-* or *h̄dr-* can be suggested, but

¹³ See p. 88, n. 2 of the article quoted in n. 9.

¹⁴ See above n. 11.

¹⁵ See "Tibetan *lh-* and *hr-* in alternation with other initial consonantal clusters, or with simple initial *l-* and *r-*", *Asia Major*, XVII, 1972, pp. 220–1.

¹⁶ The initial cluster can be supported by a reference to Chinese 熱, archaic *njat* "warm, hot", *GSR* 330j [*GSR*=B. Karlgren, "Grammata Serica Recensa, *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, no. 29, 1957, pp. 1–332.] See also VI C11 and n. 48 of the article quoted in n. 9.

¹⁷ An apparently identical semantic link between "to resemble" and the word for "son" (in Tibetan *sras* is a term of respect) may be observed in the case of Chinese 肖 "to resemble". See *GSR* 1149g "resemble (as a son his father)".

the obviously related *sra* (< **snra*) "hard" would seem to belong with *rno(n)-po* (< **nro(n)*) "sharp, pointed". Two Chinese cognates with archaic initial *nj*¹⁸ can be cited in support: for *sran* cp. Chinese *rèn* 忍 "to endure", arch. *njən* GSR 456 c, and for *rnon*, cp. Chinese *rín* 刃 "edge of a blade", arch. *njən* GSR 456a.

IV. *mr-

A. r-metathesis

**mra* > *rma* "wound", etc. (over twenty examples).

As additions to the example *rme-ba/sme-ba* "spot, speck", included in the preliminary remarks, the following doublets may be adduced: *rmañ-hts'er/smañ-hts'er* "pincers", *rmas*, Perf. of *rma-ba* "to wound" alternating with *smas* and *dmas*¹⁹, *smug-pa* noted by I. J. Schmidt (Wörterbuch, p. 432) for *rmug-pa* "dense fog", *rmed/smed* "to ask", and *rmel/smel* "to pluck".

B. Alternative developments

- (1) **mri* "to draw, paint, write"²⁰
 - (a) Elimination of nasal: *ri(-mo)* "drawing, painting, picture, figure"
 - (b) Change of *prefixed* nasal to plosive: *hbri(-ba)* "to draw, etc." (Perf. *bris*)
 - (c) Change of *unprefixed* nasal to plosive: *bris* in *bris-sku* (or *sku-bris*) "picture of a saint" and *bris-ma* "written book"
- (2) **mrin* "series, succession"
 - (a) Elimination of nasal:
 - (α) *rim* "series, succession"
 - (β) *rims* (succession [spreading] of diseases =) "contagious disease epidemics"
 - (b) Change of *prefixed* nasal to plosive: *hbrim(-pa)* "(to deal with a succession of recipients =) to distribute"
- (3) **mrum* "womb"
 - (a) Elimination of nasal: *rum* "id."
 - (b) Change of *prefixed* nasal to plosive: *sbrum* "pregnant"²¹
- (4) **mrul* "snake"²²
 - (a) Change of *prefixed* nasal to plosive: *sbrul* "id."

¹⁸ The Chinese archaic cluster *nj-* may have to be reconstructed as *snj* (> *nj-*). See BSOAS, IX, 1938, pp. 286, etc.

¹⁹ See BSOAS, XXXVII, 1974, p. 445, n. 17.

²⁰ Cf. Kachin (O. Hanson, *Dictionary*, p. 431) *māri* "to mark, line, rule". See Benedict, *Sino-Tibetan*, p. 103, no. 429, who gives the Kachin word as *mari*² and suggests a Tibeto-Burman root *riy*.

²¹ Cp. Chinese *rèn* 忍 "id.", GSR 667 i *njəm* (dissimilated from *mjəm*?).

²² Cf. Benedict, *Sino-Tibetan*, p. 111, no. 447, where **mrul* has been reconstructed for Burmese *mrue* "id." (spelt *mrui*), see *Tibetisch-chinesische Wortgleichungen*, No. 322, (*Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen* XXXII, 1929, Abt. I).

- (5) **mro* "taste, flavour"

The original initial nasal has been assumed in accordance with Chinese *wèi* 味 "id.", GSR 531 g *mjwəd*. Modern Tibetan dialects have *brod* for *bro*, see Jäschke, *Dictionary*, p. 382 b.

 - (a) Elimination of nasal: *ro* "id."
 - (b) Change of *unprefixed* nasal to plosive: *bro(-ba)* "to taste; taste"
- (6) **mro* "dance"

The original initial nasal has been assumed in accordance with Chinese *wǔ* 舞 "id.", GSR 103 g *mjwo*.

 - (a) Change of *unprefixed* nasal to plosive: *bro* "id."
- (7) **mrog* "solitude, wilderness, uncultivated land, esp. summer pasture"

The original initial nasal has been assumed in accordance with Chinese *mù* 牧 "to herd, pasture grounds", GSR 1037 a-c *mjδk*.

 - (a) Change of *prefixed* nasal to plosive: *hbrog* "id."