

Article

Syntactic Function Exploration of Tibetan Interrogative Pronouns

Zeja Xian ^{1,*} and Zhouji Yang ²

¹ China Academy of Ethnic Minority Information Technology, Northwest Minzu University, Lanzhou, Gansu, China

² China Golmud No. 2 People's Hospital

* Correspondence: Zeja Xian, China Academy of Ethnic Minority Information Technology, Northwest Minzu University, Lanzhou, Gansu, China

Abstract: This study focuses on Tibetan interrogative pronouns. Firstly, it traces their records in Tibetan grammar, revealing their dual functions and compound forms. Then, according to the focus of inquiry, Tibetan interrogative pronouns are subdivided into ten semantic categories, including asking about people, things and places, time, etc. Subsequently, it deeply discusses the syntactic functions of interrogative pronouns in various semantic categories when they act as subjects, objects, attributives, adverbials, etc., demonstrating their richness and complexity in expressing interrogative semantics in Tibetan. This is of crucial significance for in-depth exploration of Tibetan grammatical structure and language usage. It also provides solid theoretical support for Tibetan language teaching, translation practice and cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Tibetan; interrogative pronouns; syntactic function; semantic category

1. Introduction

Interrogative pronouns occupy a central position in language structure and expression. As key elements in constructing interrogative sentences, they undertake the important mission of eliciting unknown information and promoting communication and interaction. In the Tibetan language system, interrogative pronouns also show unique and rich connotations and functions, with diverse forms and detailed rules and manifestations in semantic coverage and syntactic usage.

In-depth research on Tibetan interrogative pronouns helps uncover the deep mysteries of Tibetan grammatical structure and provides a key entry point for a comprehensive understanding of the Tibetan language mechanism. By systematically analyzing the classification methods of Tibetan interrogative pronouns and the syntactic functions they undertake in different contexts, we can more accurately grasp the expression rules and semantic logic of Tibetan, and then provide strong theoretical support and practical guidance for many fields such as Tibetan language teaching, translation practice and cross-cultural communication.

This study fully draws on the research results of predecessors on Tibetan interrogative pronouns, comprehensively uses various research methods such as literature research method and case analysis method, and conducts in-depth and detailed analysis of Tibetan interrogative pronouns, aiming to reveal their unique value and role in the Tibetan language system and contribute to the further development of Tibetan linguistics research.

2. Classification of Tibetan Interrogative Pronouns

In the fundamental "Thirty Odes" of traditional Tibetan grammar, it is recorded that "for any thematic description, first, the syllable composed of the first letter and the second

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letter of the postposition pervades all language statements as a generalization [1]." Here, only the interrogative pronoun "གང" is mentioned. Later, the scholar Panchen Midhi Zhenbei Yixi Zaba pointed out in "The Door of Language" that "གང is not only a generalization but also an interrogative pronoun. The same is true for ཅི, etc., but the usage needs to be flexibly changed in different contexts [2]." This shows that Tibetan interrogative pronouns have dual functions of generalization and interrogation. Karma Situ Chokyi Jungne pointed out that "the derived interrogative pronouns གང་ཞིག, གང་དག, and གང་ཕྱིན of གང play a generalizing role in sentences. The situation is generally the same for interrogative pronouns such as ཅི་ཅི་སྟེ [3]." Thus, in addition to simple forms, Tibetan interrogative pronouns also have compound forms. According to different classification bases, interrogative pronouns can be classified into diverse categories.

From the perspective of semantic types, Professor Duoshi pointed out in "Exploring and Clarifying the Meanings of Tibetan Grammar" that "the interrogative pronoun ལྷ is specially used to represent people. ཅི can represent properties, reasons, purposes and things. ཇི can act as an interrogative pronoun representing metaphor and degree. ཏུ is used to represent quantity. ཉམས represents time. As for གང, it can refer to everything [4]." Moreover, this work also mentions that simple interrogative pronouns in Tibetan have two basic grammatical functions of "representing reference" and "representing doubt".

In Tibetan, different interrogative pronouns have different referential scopes. As elaborated in "Four Clear Structures of Tibetan Grammar", "ལྷ is used to refer to people; ཏུ is specifically for numbers; ཉམས mainly represents time; ཅི is used to refer to things; ཇི represents degree; and གང is relatively broad and can refer to everything [5]."

This study, based on the achievements of predecessors and actual investigation results, and referring to the classification system framework of Tibetan interrogative pronouns by Mr. Duoshi and Professor Sangjie, subdivides Tibetan interrogative pronouns into ten semantic categories such as asking about people, things and places, and time according to the differences in inquiry focuses, and then deeply discusses their syntactic functions one by one. The specific semantic categories and the details of corresponding interrogative pronouns are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Semantic Categories of Tibetan Pronouns.

semantic class	interrogative pronoun
People	ལྷ ལྷ་ཞིག ལྷ་དག ལྷ་ཚོ ལྷ་རྣམས། ལྷ་ཚང་། ལྷ་སྟེ ལྷ་འདྲ། ལྷ་ལྷན། ལྷ་ལྷན་ལྷན།
Place	གང་། གང་ཞིག གང་དག གང་རྣམས།
Thing	ཅི ཅི་ཞིག གང་། གང་ཞིག གང་དག གང་རྣམས།
Time	ཉམས ཉམས་ཞིག ཉམས་ཚང་། ཉམས་ཚོ། ཉམས་ལྷན། ཉམས་ལྷན་ལྷན།
Quantity	ཏུ་ཅས། ཏུ་ཚོ། ཏུ་ཅུ།
Degree	ཇི་ཅས། ཇི་འདྲ། ཇི་འདྲ། ཇི་ཚོ། ཇི་འདྲ། ཇི་ཅས།
Reason	ཅི་ཅི་ཞིག ཅི་སྟེ། ཅི་ལྷན། ཅི་ལྷན་ལྷན།
Process	ཅི་འདྲ། ཅི་ལྷན། ཅི་འདྲ། ཅི་ལྷན།
Condition	ཅི་འདྲ། ཅི་ལྷན། ཅི་འདྲ། ཅི་ལྷན།
Method	ཅི་འདྲ། ཅི་ལྷན། ཅི་འདྲ། ཅི་ལྷན།

3. Syntactic Functions of Tibetan Interrogative Pronouns

3.1. Asking About People

The interrogative pronouns used in Tibetan to ask about people are "ལྷ", "ལྷ་ཞིག", "ལྷ་ཚང་།", "ལྷ་དག", "ལྷ་ཚོ", "ལྷ་རྣམས།", "ལྷ་སྟེ", etc. When asking about people, the compound interrogative pronouns formed with the basic morpheme "ལྷ" are mainly used. "ལྷ" and "ལྷ་ཞིག", "ལྷ་ཚང་།" represent the singular, while ལྷ་དག", "ལྷ་ཚོ", "ལྷ་རྣམས།", "ལྷ་སྟེ" and other interrogative pronouns are used to represent the plural. They can act as subjects, objects and attributives in sentences. For example:

- (a) "དེ་ཅི་ཚེ་འདི་སུ་ཞིག་གིས་བརྒྱུ་བ་ལ" (Who wrote this book?)
- (b) "ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་སུ་འཚོམ་བཞིན་ཡོད།" (Who are you looking for?)
- (c) "འདི་ནི་སུ་ཚོང་གི་ཚོག་ལུག་རེད།" (Whose livestock is this?)

In example (a), the interrogative pronoun "སུ་ཞིག" (who) acts as the subject of the sentence, referring to the person who performs the action. The predicate verb "བརྒྱུ་བ" (write) clearly shows the specific action. In example (b), the interrogative pronoun "སུ" acts as the object and is before the verb "འཚོམ" (look for), receiving the action expressed by the verb. In example (c), the interrogative pronoun "སུ་ཚོང" (whose) acts as an attributive, modifying and restricting the following noun "ཚོག་ལུག" (livestock), clarifying the ownership relationship between the modified noun and people.

3.2. Asking About Place

The interrogative pronouns used in Tibetan to ask about places are "གང", "གང་ཞིག", "གང་དག", etc. The interrogative pronoun "གང" in specific interrogative sentences represents the source, place of existence, and direction of things. It can act as an adverbial in a sentence.

- (a) "ཁྱེད་རང་གང་དུ་འགྲོ།" (Where are you going?)
- (b) "གང་དུ་ཚོང་ལུག་ཡོད།" (Where are there cattle and sheep?)
- (c) "མ་ཡུལ་གང་ནས་ཡིན།" (Where is one's hometown?)

The interrogative pronoun "གང" is used to inquire about place information, aiming to explore the location, orientation or location environment of things. In a sentence, it represents the place where an action occurs or a thing exists, and acts as an adverbial modifying the predicate verb.

3.3. Asking About Things

The interrogative pronouns used in Tibetan to ask about things are "ཅི", "ཅི་ཞིག", "གང", "གང་ཞིག", "གང་དག", etc. Among them, "ཅི", "ཅི་ཞིག", "གང", "གང་ཞིག" are four that represent the singular, and the interrogative pronoun "གང་དག" represents the plural. In a sentence, it can act as an object, attributive, adverbial and other syntactic elements.

- (a) "ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་ཅི་བྱེད་བཞིན་ཡོད།" (What are you doing?)
- (b) "འདི་ཅི་ཞིག་གི་ཚུ་ལག་རེད།" (What's the part of this?)
- (c) "ཤིང་མཁན་གྱིས་ཅི་ཞིག་གིས་ཤིང་གཅོད།" (What does a carpenter use to cut down a tree?)

In example (a), the interrogative pronoun "ཅི" acts as the object of the verb "བྱེད" (do). In example (b), the genitive particle གི is used after the interrogative pronoun ཅི་ཞིག to form a genitive particle structure. This structure is placed before the noun ཚུ་ལག as an attributive. In example (c), the ergative particle གིས is used after the interrogative pronoun ཅི་ཞིག to form an ergative particle structure and acts as an agent adverbial modifying the predicate verb གཅོད.

3.4. Asking About Time

The interrogative pronouns used in Tibetan to ask about time are "ནམ", "ནམ་ཚོད", "ནམ་ལོ", "ནམ་ཞིག" etc. Most of the interrogative pronouns used to ask about time are compound interrogative pronouns formed with the basic morpheme ནམ. And they mainly act as adverbials in sentences.

- (a) "ཁྱེད་རང་ནམ་འགོ་རྒྱུ་ཡིན།" (When will you set off?)
- (b) "ཚོགས་འདུ་ནམ་ཚོད་གོ་མ་བཤམ།" (When did the meeting end?)

In example sentence (a), "ཁྱེད་རང" (you) is the subject, indicating the doer of the action. "ནམ" is an interrogative pronoun and functions as an adverbial, which is used to ask about the time when the action of "འགོ" (set off) occurs. "འགོ" (set off) is the predicate and is the core action of the sentence. In example sentence (b), "ཚོགས་འདུ" (meeting) is the subject and is the object described by the sentence. "ནམ་ཚོད" (when) is an interrogative pronoun and in this

sentence, it functions as an adverbial to modify "ཕྱི་ལོ་" (end), used to ask about the time when the meeting ended. "ཕྱི་ལོ་" (end) is the predicate verb.

3.5. Asking About Quantity

In Tibetan language, the interrogative pronouns used for asking about quantity include "དུ", "ཅི་ཙམ་", "གཞི་དུ", "གཞི་ཙམ་" and so on. Except for the interrogative pronoun "དུ", the others are compound interrogative pronouns. Generally speaking, classifiers in Tibetan are not essential. However, when expressing time, quantity and degree in Tibetan interrogative sentences, the complete meaning can be seen when there are classifiers in the sentences. They mainly function as postpositive attributives in sentences.

(a) "ཐུང་ལ་དཔེ་ཆ་དུ་ཡོད།" (How many books do you have?)

(b) "འཛོན་གྲྭ་འདི་ལ་ཐུན་བསྐྱམས་སློབ་མ་གཞི་དུ་འདུག།" (How many students are there in this class in total?)

(c) "ཐོང་མགོར་ལེལ་རྟོག་ཅི་ཙམ་ཐོགས་འདུག།" (How many fruits are growing on the tree?)

In example sentence (a), "ཐུང་" (you) is the subject, which is the doer of the action. "ཡོད་" (have) is the predicate verb, indicating the possessive relationship. The interrogative pronoun "དུ" (how many) modifies "དཔེ་ཆ" (book). "དཔེ་ཆ" (book) is the object, and "དུ" (how many) is the attributive of "དཔེ་ཆ" (book), used to ask about the quantity of books. In example sentence (b), "འཛོན་གྲྭ་འདི" (this class) is the subject, indicating the scope. "ཐུན་བསྐྱམས་" (in total) is an adverb and functions as an adverbial for emphasis. "འདུག" (there are) is the predicate verb. The interrogative pronoun "གཞི་དུ" (how many) is a phrase functioning as an attributive to modify "སློབ་མ" (student), and "སློབ་མ" (student) is the object. This sentence is mainly used to ask about the number of students. In example sentence (c), "ཐོང་མགོ" (on the tree) is the subject, indicating the position. "ཐོགས" (are growing) is the predicate verb, describing the action. The interrogative pronoun "ཅི་ཙམ་" (how many) functions as an attributive to modify "ལེལ་རྟོག" (fruit), and "ལེལ་རྟོག" (fruit) is the object. This sentence is used to ask about the quantity of apples.

3.6. Asking About Reasons

In Tibetan language, the interrogative pronouns expressing reasons include "ཅི་ལྟར།", "ཅི་སྐད།", "ཅི།", "ཅི་ཞིག།", "གང།", "གང་ཞིག།" and so on. The interrogative pronouns expressing reasons are used to convey the meaning of asking. There are two different usages. One is to use only the interrogative pronoun to ask about the reason, and the other is that the interrogative pronoun is used in combination with words expressing distinction. The meaning of the sentence is expressed through the combination of the distinction word and the interrogative pronoun. "ཅི་ལྟར།" and "ཅི་སྐད།" are the special interrogative pronouns for asking about reasons. "ཅི།", "ཅི་ཞིག།", "གང།", "གང་ཞིག།" and so on must be used in combination with distinction words. Without distinction words, the complete meaning of the sentence cannot be expressed. The above interrogative pronouns can function as adverbials in sentences. For example:

(a) "ཚོགས་འདུ་ཅི་ལྟར་ཕྱིར་ཕྱིར་འགྲུངས་བྱས་པ་རེད།" (Why was the meeting postponed?)

(b) "ཁོང་གི་ལྟོ་བའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཅི།" (Why is he angry?)

In example sentence (a), "ཚོགས་འདུ" (meeting) is the subject, indicating that the object being asked about is related to the thing of "meeting". "ཅི་ལྟར" (why) is an interrogative adverb and functions as an adverbial in the sentence, used to introduce the inquiry about the reason. "ཕྱིར་ཕྱིར་" (postpone) is the predicate part. In example sentence (b), it is the combination of the distinction word and the interrogative pronoun to ask about the reason. Among them, "ཁོང" (he) is the subject, representing the subject whose reason is being asked. "ཅི" (why) is an interrogative adverb and functions as an adverbial. "རྒྱ་མཚན" (reason) is the distinction word, guiding the question about the reason.

3.7. Asking About Degree

In Tibetan language, the interrogative pronouns expressing degree include "ཅི་ཅི།", "ཅི་འདྲ།" and so on. The interrogative pronouns expressing degree are used to express the degree of the development of things and the degree of properties. They can function as adverbials in sentences. For example:

- (a) "ལྟོད་ཀྱིས་དོན་དེ་ལ་གོ་བ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ཅི་འདྲ་རེད།" (To what extent do you understand that matter?)
- (b) "རི་མོ་དེ་ལ་སློབ་ཅི་འདྲ་གང་ལ།" (How much interest do you have in that painting?)

In example sentence (a), the interrogative pronoun "ཅི་འདྲ" asks about the degree of understanding of the matter and functions as an adverbial in the sentence. In example sentence (b), the interrogative pronoun "ཅི་འདྲ" also functions as an adverbial, asking about the degree of "interest".

3.8. Asking About Process

In Tibetan language, the interrogative pronouns expressing process include "ཅི་འདྲ།", "ཇི་ལྟར།", "གང་འདྲ།", "གང་ལྟར།" and so on. When asking about the process, only the compound interrogative pronouns composed of simple interrogative pronouns and metaphorical auxiliary words can be used to ask questions. The way of asking is how a certain result of something came about or how to do it. The above interrogative pronouns can function as adverbials and objects in sentences.

- (a) "གྲུབ་འབྲས་འདི་འདྲ་ཞིག་གི་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ཅི་འདྲ་རེད།" (How was such a good result achieved?)
- (b) "ལས་གཞི་འདི་རྒྱུ་བ་པའི་བརྒྱུད་རིམ་ཅི་འདྲ་རེད།" (What is the progress process of this project like?)

In example sentence (a), the interrogative pronoun functions as an adverbial, modifying the predicate verb "རྒྱུ་བ" (achieve); "རྒྱུ་བ" (achieve) is the predicate. In example sentence (b), "བརྒྱུད་རིམ" (process) is the subject of the sentence, indicating the object being talked about, which is a noun. "ཅི་འདྲ" (is) functions as the predicate verb. The interrogative pronoun "ཅི་འདྲ" (what... like) functions as the object in the sentence, used to ask about the specific situation, way, state, etc. of the "process".

3.9. Asking About Situation

In Tibetan language, the interrogative pronouns asking about situation include "ཅི་ཅི།", "ཅི་ཅི།", "གང་འདྲ།", "གི་འདྲ།" and so on. The interrogative pronouns expressing situation can ask about the situation of people or things in interrogative sentences. They can function as attributives in sentences. For example:

- (a) "གནས་འདིའི་འགྲིམ་འགྲུལ་གནས་བབ་ཅི་འདྲ་རེད།" (What is the traffic situation in this place like?)
- (b) "ཁོའི་ནད་གཞི་ཅི་འདྲ་རེད།" (How is his illness?)

In example sentence (a), the interrogative pronoun "ཅི་འདྲ" (what... like) functions as an attributive, modifying "གནས་བབ" (situation), asking for information about the specific circumstances, trends or degrees of things. In example sentence (b), the interrogative pronoun "ཅི་འདྲ" (what... like) functions as an attributive, modifying "ནད་གཞི" (illness), asking for information about the specific circumstances, trends or degrees of things.

3.10. Asking About Method

In Tibetan language, the interrogative pronouns asking about situation include "ཇི་ལྟར།", "གང་འདྲ།", "གི་འདྲ།" and so on. The interrogative pronouns expressing method can be used to express the methods and means of accomplishing something in interrogative sentences. They can function as attributives and adverbials in sentences. For example:

- (a) "ཐབས་ལམ་གཤམ་སྤྱད་ན་གྲུབ།" (By what method can it be completed?)
- (b) "མཉེན་ཆས་འདི་ཇི་ལྟར་སྤྱོད་དགོ།" (How to use this software?)

In example sentence (a), "ཐབས་ལམ་གཤམ་སྤྱད་ན་གྲུབ" (use... to complete). "ཐབས་ལམ་གཤམ་སྤྱད་ན" (use) is a verb, and here it forms a verb-object relationship with the preceding "ཐབས་ལམ་གཤམ་སྤྱད་ན" (by what method). "ཐབས་ལམ་གཤམ་སྤྱད་ན" is a noun phrase, in which the interrogative pronoun "གི་འདྲ" functions

as the attributive of རྒྱལ་ལམ་ (method). In example sentence (b), "ཇི་ལྟར་" (how) is an interrogative adverb and functions as an adverbial in the sentence, used to ask about the way or method and modify the following verb "བློ་" (use).

4. Summary

This research conducts a comprehensive and in-depth exploration around Tibetan interrogative pronouns. Firstly, it sorts out the relevant contents of Tibetan interrogative pronouns recorded in traditional grammar, points out that they have the dual functions of expressing generalization and interrogation and there are compound forms and other characteristics. On this basis, referring to the previous classification systems, Tibetan interrogative pronouns are divided into 10 different semantic categories according to the focus of inquiry. It focuses on analyzing in detail the syntactic functions of interrogative pronouns in each semantic category. For example, the interrogative pronouns asking about people can function as subjects, objects and attributives in sentences; those asking about places can function as adverbials; those asking about things can function as objects, attributives and adverbials, etc. The interrogative pronouns in different semantic categories play different roles and have different functions in sentences, which fully reflects the diversity and complexity of the syntactic application of Tibetan interrogative pronouns, helps to further deepen the understanding and grasping of the Tibetan grammar system and language expression rules, and also provides valuable reference bases for the subsequent Tibetan-related language learning, research and teaching.

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