

The Cases in the Bji Language

1. Introduction

The Bji /b'dʒi/ language is an unclassified language in Tibeto-Bermese languages which is used to be mentioned as the northern dialect of Tujia language to distinguish from the southern dialect Mdzi /m'dži/. But the two dialects are so different in phonology, morphology and sharing a low percentage of 45% for the cognate words in 1500 common used words (Tian, He ect. 1986:118), that the speakers of the two dialects are basically unintelligible to each others. So there is a necessary to distinguish the two languages in linguistic descriptions, and this paper will only focus on the Bji language.

2. Sole/ Agent/ Object Cases and Alignment

In the Bji language, cases are usually marked by postpositions. Like many other Tibeto-Bermese languages, the case markers in the Bji language shows a strong unaccusative alignment trend.

(1) ɳa ɳnaNg-'ra.	(2) 'no(s)[na-go(s)] gi se fu-'va ʈsʰad a?
1SG fell sick.1SG-CONT	2SG.A[2SG-A] Art medicine drink-IRLS want.2SG Q
"I am uncomfortable."	"Do you want to drink the medicine?"

But if an intransitive verb is fully controllable to the sole, it could take the same case marker as agent, while if the whole sentence is organized under the AOV order, the agent marker could be dropped.

(3) 'tʂəei(=go(s)) gi 'poznaN=bo ŋej't-a-fra.
PSN(=A) ART PLN=ALL go.FUT -IRLS-POT
"Krashi is going to Poznań."

3. The Origin of Morphosyntactic Alignment Cases

Besides of Sole/ Agent/ Object, there are still Causer/ Performer/ Donor/ Recipient/ Theme cases in the morphosyntactic alignment cases of the Bji language. But all these cases are marked by the postpositions with other functions like instrumental case /gos/, causal case /do/, ablative case /re/, allative case /bo/, comitative case /da(ha)/.

4. Other Cases

Besides of these cases, there are still many case in the Bji language. Especially, the Bji language has a great variety of locative cases and vocative case postpositions.

For examples, there are two main locative cases, the inessive case /ɿu/ and the adressive case /kʰu/. They are used clearly distinguished to divide whether the surface or the inside that the things exist or take place. But there is also an inflection form for the two cases of nouns when there is no necessary to distinguish the two cases in the speech.

Furthermore, there are superessive case /(ka)tʰɔ/, superlative case /ga(ha)/, subessive case /dʒi(da/tʰa)/ and sublative /pa(di/tʰi)/ case to describe whether the existence or the occurring is on or below the place, and whether it is just on the place or still has some distance from the place. Curiously, the differences in the verbal direction are distinguished so detailly, but there is no case postpositions for front or back, or left or right in the Bji language.

Abbreviations: 1SG - first-person single; 2SG - second-person single; Q - question marker; ART - article; FUT - future tense; PLN - place name; POT - potential mood; PSN - person name; CONT - continuous aspect; IRLS - irrealis suffix.

References: TIAN Desheng, HE Tianzhen ect. (1986) "土家语简志". Peking: Publishing House of Minority Nationalities.