Einladung
zu einem Gastvortrag
von

Herrn
Prof. Dr. Nathan Hill
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über das Thema

Understanding Ablaut in the Tibetan Verb

Although Tibetan verbs with the root vowel -a- display considerable ablaut patterns in their stem variation, the traditional analysis holds that stem alternations are of relatively recent providence and thus of no value for reconstructing the behavior of the trans-Himalayan verbal system (Coblin 1976). To briefly state the synchronic situation—all verbs with roots in -a- have an imperative with -o- (√bya 'do', imp. *byos*, √sad 'kill', imp. *sod*), some verbs have a present marked with -e- (e.g., √bya 'do', pres. *byed*), and others have a present marked with -o- (e.g., √sad 'kill', pres. *gsod*). The traditional analysis credits the present -e- to the suffix -d (*byad > *byed*) and the present -o- to the prefix g- (*gsad > *gsod*). On its own terms, there are already two problems with this analysis. First, it gives no account of why some verbs form their present with a prefix g- and others with a suffix -d. Second, it leaves a small number of verbs unaccounted for, in particular √za 'eat" (pres. *za*, past *zos*, fut. *za*, imp. *zos*).

This paper examines Tibetan -a- root verbs and their ablaut patterns. It questions the traditional analysis that views these patterns as recent and of little value for reconstructing the Sino-Tibetan verbal system. It categorizes Tibetan verbs into a-a, e-a, o-a, and a-o patters, relying on recent research into the etymologies of certain verbs. It further examines potential connections to ablaut patterns in Kiranti and Gyalrong.

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