

Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies

ISSN 1710-8268

<https://thecjbs.org/>

Number 18, 2023

A Tibetan Verb Lexicon Second Edition, Updated and Expanded

Reviewed by Gerjan Altenburg

Dalhousie University

Copyright Notice: Digital copies of this work may be made and distributed provided no change is made and no alteration is made to the content. Reproduction in any other format, with the exception of a single copy for private study, requires the written permission of the author. All enquiries to: gerjan.altenburg@dal.ca.

PAUL G. HACKETT, *A Tibetan Verb Lexicon* (Second Edition, Updated and Expanded). Boulder: Snow Lion Publications, 2019. Xii, 507 pp. US \$49.95 (pb). ISBN 9781559394833

2019 saw the publication of the long-awaited second edition of Paul Hackett's *A Tibetan Verb Lexicon*, now updated and expanded. This second edition greatly improves upon the first.

Like the first edition, this edition assumes familiarity with Joe Wilson's *Translating Buddhism from Tibetan*.¹ Many of the examples come from Hackett's new *Learning Classical Tibetan*, which might be seen as a respectful successor to Wilson's book.² *A Tibetan Verb Lexicon* is useful on its own as a dictionary or grammar book. No doubt it will be popular as such amongst professional researchers and translators. For students of classical Tibetan language, it is perhaps best enjoyed as a compliment to either *Translating Buddhism from Tibetan* or *Learning Classical Tibetan*. This seems to be what Hackett himself has in mind.³

Calling this edition updated and expanded perhaps understates the matter. In the first edition, released in 2003, Hackett writes:

...this edition of *A Tibetan Verb Lexicon* is consciously thought of as a "First Edition" in that much work remains in additional

¹ Joe Wilson, *Translating Buddhism from Tibetan* (Boulder: Snow Lion Publications, 1992 and 1998).

² Paul Hackett, *Learning Classical Tibetan: A Reader for Translating Buddhist Texts with Grammatical Annotations and Translations* (Boulder: Snow Lion Publications, 2019).

³ He writes: "... I do not consider the presentation of aspects of Tibetan grammar in this book to contradict or supersede Joe Wilson's text. Indeed, I envision it as complimentary. However, during the course of teaching Wilson's presentation of Tibetan grammar in the classroom and implementing it in a computational environment, certain formulaic additions and supplementary distinctions were perceived to be advantageous" (4).

documentation of the range of variation in Tibetan syntactical structures, in refining Tibetan-Sanskrit alignments, etc. Nonetheless, following repeated requests from students, the utility of such a book as this was deemed sufficient enough to warrant publication. Although I have attempted to correct any errors I discovered while preparing this manuscript for publication, it is likely that some remain, and I beg the reader's indulgence for them. Thus, while a second edition with greater detail and additional examples will require several more years of work, it is hoped that any inadequacies of this first edition will be outweighed by its usefulness.⁴

Here, I will raise two points about this statement. First, the first edition is the valuable work of an early career researcher, who had not yet completed a doctorate. On the other hand, the second edition is very much the product of a senior scholar with a strong record of research and teaching in classical Tibetan. Released 16 years after the original, Hackett fulfills his promise of "a second edition with greater detail and additional examples." In fact, this second edition more than doubles the size of the first. It could eat the first edition for breakfast and still have room for lunch and supper.

Second, although Hackett clearly established the first edition as a work in progress, the field did not unanimously heed his request for "indulgence" in the "errors" and "inadequacies" in 2003. Hackett uses his updated *Preface*, in part, to respond to criticisms of the first edition, and rightfully so. Publishing academic takedowns, especially of tentative work by early career researchers, helps no one. I expect this second edition will

⁴ Paul Hackett, *A Tibetan Verb Lexicon: Verbs, Classes, and Syntactic Frames* (Boston: Snow Lion, 2003), xii.

satisfy Hackett's early critics. But perhaps Hackett's response to his critics here will reopen old feuds.

In terms of structure, Hackett's work is divided into two main sections: an "Introduction" and the actual "Verb Lexicon." Hackett also includes a "Verb Tense Index," which is helpful for quick reference of verbal tenses, and a "List of Sanskrit and Tibetan Citations," which he provides ahead of his bibliography. Although each of these elements were found in the first edition, Hackett greatly expands on each in this updated edition.

The new "Introduction" reorganizes much of the content from the first edition. One area in which Hackett significantly reworks the "Introduction" is his treatment of auxiliary constructions. Hackett writes:

One of the least understood grammatical constructions in Tibetan is the set of auxiliary constructions. The primary reason for this would appear to be the contextual nature of their specific implications that, to my knowledge, have yet to be fully and formally described. What is presented below is a first attempt at categorizing and describing the specific contexts and uses of the different auxiliary verb constructions. It should be taken as an attempt at a taxonomy of auxiliary constructions (19).

His "taxonomy of auxiliary constructions" runs about five pages and is arguably the most useful part of the whole "Introduction." It will prove instructive for serious students of classical Tibetan. Hopefully Hackett's willingness to publish a first go at something will not earn him the same kind of criticism he received for the less polished aspects of the first edition. I wish more scholars were willing to share their initial attempts at useful resources for classical Tibetan.

The updated and expanded "Introduction" is not perfect. One stylistic choice I cannot find a clear explanation for is why the author uses

Turrell Wylie's transliteration system in some figures or tables, but for the most part leaves Tibetan un-transliterated. My guess is that if a table or figure draws upon Wilson's book for source material or shows some equivalency between Tibetan and Sanskrit, then Hackett uses Wylie's transliteration system. This would make sense, as tables presented in Latin letters would be more useful to new students or to scholars working with Sanskrit materials. The first edition includes a technical note on transliteration.⁵ I cannot find a similar statement in the second edition. I would have liked a clear explanation of the choice here, as it does not seem consistent with the main body of the text.

On the subject of tables and figures, the main update to Table 1 "Correspondence Between Wilson Verb Classes and Indigenous Categories" in the first edition, now presented as Figure 1 in the second, is that Hackett appears to have abandoned his renaming of Wilson's "verbs of absence" as "verbs of containment" (5).⁶ Otherwise, the "Subject/Object Relation" column contains an annoying and obvious formatting error, which is likely the fault of the publisher and not the author. Normally, I would not bother to nitpick a typo. It is actually quite unkind to do so. But I point one out here only to question whether the editors at Shambhala Publications are still doing right by Snow Lion Publications, many years after Snow Lion's acquisition by the larger publisher.

Obviously, the most important part of this book is the "Verb Lexicon" and not the "Introduction." Hackett tells us that this new edition of the "Verb Lexicon" covers:

⁵ Paul Hackett, *A Tibetan Verb Lexicon: Verbs, Classes, and Syntactic Frames* (Boston: Snow Lion, 2003), xi.

⁶ Table found on page 5 in both editions. The discursive footnote explaining the choice in the first edition is obviously not included nor needed in the second. I do wonder why he changed his mind.

...nearly all verbs attested in other lexical resources. It also covers all of the verbs in the texts included in the author's recently published Tibetan language reader... as well as some newly identified verbs not found in other dictionaries (ix).

This fact alone makes this new edition worth purchasing. This new lexicon is more than 400 pages long. The original was less than 150. If you compare the lists of Sanskrit and Tibetan citations in the first and second editions, you will find the resources drawn upon in this updated and revised edition equally impressive. If you still use the first edition, I strongly encourage you to upgrade to the second.

Notes on the Contributor

Gerjan Altenburg is a Frisian-Canadian scholar of Indian Buddhist monasticism working with primary sources available in Sanskrit and classical Tibetan.

Correspondence to: Gerjan Altenburg. Email:
gerjan.altenburg@dal.ca.