

Voice and valency alternation in some inherited Tocharian verbs

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The topic of this paper is a group of eight verbs found in both languages of the Tocharian branch of Indo-European (Tocharian A and B), all characterised by what Haspelmath (1993: 90–91) calls inchoative/causative alternation. They follow a specific archaic-looking stem pattern which is exclusive to this group (Jasanoff 2003: 199–203; Malzahn 2010: 87–89, 323–331; Pinault 2012). The group is also remarkable in that each verb has a decent PIE etymology, something quite uncommon in the Tocharian verbal lexicon.

^B*kən-/^Akän-* ‘occur; fulfill’, ^B*kəs-/^Akäs-* ‘come to extinction; extinguish’, ^B*təm-/^Atäm-* ‘be born; create’, ^B*nək-/^Anäk-* ‘perish, disappear; destroy’, ^B*nəm-/^Anäm-* ‘bow (itr.); bend (tr.)’, ^B*pək-/^Apäk-* ‘ripen, cook (itr./tr.)’, ^B*ləwk-/^Aluk-* ‘light up (itr./tr.)’.

In the subjunctive of both languages, the valency alternation is expressed with stem alternation, the most common way in Tocharian. In the present and preterite of Tocharian B, however, it is expressed through voice: middle forms indicate the intransitive, while active forms indicate the transitive. This is a highly uncommon feature in the Tocharian verbal system (cf. Malzahn 2010: 87–89).

Tocharian B	prs.act.3sg. <i>nak-ṣä-m</i> ‘destroys’	prs.mid.3sg. <i>nak-ṣ-trä</i> ‘perishes’
Tocharian B	prt.act.3sg. <i>nek-sa-Ø</i> ‘destroyed’	prt.mid.3sg. <i>nek-sa-te</i> ‘disappeared’
Tocharian B	sbj.act.1sg. <i>nek-Ø-u</i> ‘will destroy’	sbj.mid.1sg. <i>nk-e-mar</i> ‘will perish’

There is general agreement among scholars that the voice alternation in the preterite is an innovation specific to Tocharian B (cf. Ringe 1990: 214; Jasanoff 2003: 180; Malzahn 2010: 112; Peyrot 2013: 591). The purpose of the present paper is to investigate whether that is also the case in the present. The fact that other more productive strategies for expressing valency alternation were available suggests that it is not. On the other hand, in these verbs Tocharian A does generally show a stem alternation in present, subjunctive and preterite alike.

Tocharian A	prs.act.3sg. <i>nk-äṣ-Ø</i> ‘destroys’	prs.mid.3sg. <i>näk-näṣ-tär</i> ‘perishes’
Tocharian A	prt.act.3sg. <i>ñak-äs-Ø</i> ‘destroyed’	prt.mid.3sg. <i>nak-Ø-ät</i> ‘disappeared’
Tocharian A	sbj.act.2sg. <i>nak-Ø-ät</i> ‘will destroy’	sbj.mid.3sg. <i>nk-a-tär</i> ‘will perish’

In this paper, I propose that the voice-valency alternation in the present stem in Tocharian goes back to a PIE stem alternation between a transitive stem with suffix **-e/o-* and an intransitive stem with suffix **-je/o-*. Due to subsequent replacement, neither stem can be recovered directly in either Tocharian language, but they can be inferred from comparative evidence (cf. Hollifield *apud* Jasanoff 1978: 37 fn. 23; 2003: 181 fn. 11; Hackstein 1995: 87, 89, 91). The apparent lack of inherited present stems with the suffix **-e/o-* has become an argument in favour of an early split of the Tocharian branch (cf. Ringe 2000). If they can be found in the foundation of an archaic layer of the verbal system, this argument would weaken significantly.

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