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The locutor-referential pronoun in Zhoutun

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores a special pronoun, the locutor-referential pronoun *tha* in Zhoutun, a Tibetanized Chinese variant spoken in the Amdo Sprachbund. Two rules of the use of *tha* are found in this paper. Rule 1: If *tha* occurs in a complement clause of a speech verb, it refers to the internal locutor. Rule 2: If *tha* occurs in an environment other than a complement clause of a speech verb, it refers to the narrative locutor. If only rule 1 is followed, then *tha* can be considered a logophoric pronoun; however, *tha* is special in that it can also be used in the context to which rule 2 applies, a usage that does not fit the definition of a logophoric pronoun. The use of *tha* is not obligatory. An inherited form from Mandarin Chinese, the formation of the locutor-referential *tha* has to do with the contact with Amdo Tibetan and its probable evolving pathway is “third-person pronoun > logophoric pronoun > locutor-referential pronoun”.

KEYWORDS

locutor-referential pronoun, Zhoutun, logophoric pronoun, Amdo Sprachbund

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*The locutor-referential pronoun in Zhoutun**

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1 Introduction

This paper explores a special pronoun --tentatively termed as the “locutor-referential pronoun”--*tha*, in the Zhoutun vernacular (or 周屯话 *zhoutunhua* in Chinese), a Chinese variant spoken in the Amdo Sprachbund and strongly influenced by nearby Amdo Tibetan. *tha* is notable for two reasons. First, it seems to be used only in natural discourse, but in the data collected through elicitation during my fieldwork, no single instance was found. In other words, *tha* occurs in a limited context in Zhoutun. Second, such a “locutor-referential pronoun” is not reported in other Chinese dialects (including those which also located in the Amdo Sprachbund and deeply affected by Amdo Tibetan) or even in other languages¹. In literature, a similar notion is “logophoric pronoun”, but the definition of logophoric pronoun does not cover the use of *tha*.

Given these two points, I believe that documenting the locutor-referential form and its usage in Zhoutun is important before its possible disappearance in the future (see section 4). Thus, although it is difficult to thoroughly test the usage rules and boundaries of *tha* and although the collected data containing *tha* are limited, it is nonetheless worthy of study. Before exploring the usage of *tha*, I would like to provide some background on Zhoutun in section 2.

2 Zhoutun: An overview

2.1 *Sociolinguistic Context*

The Zhoutun “vernacular” is a Northwest Chinese spoken by 800-900 people in Zhoutun Village, Guide County (ཁྱིཀ་ *khri ka* in Tibetan), Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, P.R. China. Unlike other Northwest Chinese dialects, Zhoutun was deeply influenced by Amdo Tibetan, and its basic word order was changed to a rigid SOV. In harmony with the SOV order, Zhoutun has a set of postpositions and morphological case markers that rarely exist in Mandarin Chinese which has SVO order.

Although the syntactic profile of Zhoutun has a number of features that can be classified into Tibetan-type, Zhoutun is a Northwest Chinese, rather than Tibetan. This is because the basic

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¹ Although I did not find it in literature, it does be possible that such a pronoun exists or has been reported.

vocabulary and grammatical morphemes are derived from Chinese — they have clear cognates in Mandarin Chinese. But whether Zhoutun should be classified as a Chinese dialect, a distinct Sinitic language or a mixed language is still an open question, which largely depends on the criteria one would adopt to define a language or a dialect. In the study on Wutun, a similar vernacular to Zhoutun, also spoken in Qinghai Province and also under the huge influence of nearby non-Sinitic languages, Sandmann (2016: 2) argues that since it is unintelligible to the speakers who speak other Mandarin Chinese dialects, Wutun is defined by her as a “distinct Sinitic language” rather than a Chinese dialect. While it makes sense to consider “intelligibility”, the question is whether intelligibility is the sole factor. In Chinese literature, a number of “unintelligible” variants are defined as Chinese dialects instead of distinct languages, such as Wu, Min, and Cantonese. The same is true for “mixed language”; people differ in the criteria of a mixed language. Regardless of which specific linguistic identity Zhoutun is defined as, I believe that the objective description of the Zhoutun grammar will not be affected by the terminological issue. And in this paper, I would conveniently use “Zhoutun” or “Zhoutun vernacular” to indicate the language spoken in Zhoutun Village.

Zhoutun data used in this study were collected during four trips to Zhoutun Village in September to October 2014, November 2014 to January 2015, August to September 2015, and in October 2020, for a total of nearly five months. The data were collected from two sources: purposive interview and natural discourse, which in turn includes interviews on specific topics, storytelling and daily conversations. In total, nearly 1,400 sentences were collected through purposive interview. And 17 stories, interviews, and daily conversations were recorded and transcribed (not yet strictly in phonetic transcription). The data contains over 25,000 words.

For more information on Zhoutun, one can refer to my series of work, i.e., Zhou 2016, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2021. In this research, I discuss the third-person pronoun and reflexive pronoun in Zhoutun, which are related to the current topic of the locutor-referential pronoun *tha*.

2.2 *Third-person Pronouns*

Zhoutun has two third-person pronouns, namely, *kuɣ* and *atei*. Of the two, *kuɣ* is also a demonstrative meaning ‘that’, e.g., *kuɣ .ɿ̃* that people ‘that person’, *kuɣ i p̃ɿ fu* that one CL book ‘that book’. The following are examples in which *kuɣ* is used as a third-person pronoun.

- (1) a. *kuɣ tshuɣ le lo.*
 3 yesterday come PFV
 ‘S/he went here yesterday.’
- b. *ni kua ta.*
 2 3:ACC beat
 ‘Beat him/her!’

kuɣ is a subject with zero marking in (1a), while in (1b), it occurs in the object position and marked by the accusative marker *xa/a* (*kuɣ+a* → *kua*). *kuɣ* can also occupy the genitive position, the recipient position in ditransitive constructions, etc. To put it simply, *kuɣ* has no limitation on the grammatical slot it can occupy. *atei* is another common third-person pronoun, but unlike *kuɣ*, it cannot occur in the object position. Thus, the substitution of *atei* for *kuɣ* in (1b) never happens. While

in other positions, e.g., genitive, recipient, subject, *atei* is free to occur. Another distinction between the two is that *kur* tends to (but not necessarily) refer to the object that appears on the spot, while *atei* can refer to the object that is not on the spot.

Of the two third-person pronouns, I hold that *kur* came from the demonstrative pronoun *kur*, which likely has to do with the demonstrative pronoun *kr* in old Chinese as well as some modern Chinese dialects, given that Mandarin *r* corresponds to *ur* in Zhoutun. For example, (Mandarin-Zhoutun) *r-ur* ‘hungry’; *xr-xur* ‘river’/ ‘drink’; *kr-kur* ‘cut’/ ‘brother’/ ‘song’. As for *atei*, the origin is unclear. I currently speculate that it might come from *teia*, the third person pronoun used in Qiaohua, a local variant of the Xining dialect spoken in Guide County and nearby villages, with the final *a* being dropped and the productive prefix *a-* in Zhoutun. However, further study is needed.

Notably, when asked whether the Mandarin Chinese third-person pronoun *ta* is used in Zhoutun or not, all my linguistic consultants gave a negative answer. Some of them further pointed out that *ta* is a Mandarin Chinese word but not a native Zhoutun word, and they never use it in their daily conversation. Interestingly, it was in the daily conversation with some of those consultants (who promised that they never use *ta*) that I observed the use of *tha*. The native speakers of Zhoutun appear to use the Mandarin Chinese element unwittingly while denying its existence in their language system. A more reasonable deduction is that *tha* in natural discourse is fundamentally different from *ta* as a Mandarin Chinese third-person pronoun. The former, though obviously originating from the latter, has already developed into a “locutor-referential pronoun” and therefore differentiates itself with the latter except that they are formally identical.

2.3 Reflexive Pronoun

In Zhoutun, the reflexive pronoun is *kurteia*, which can be used as an argument (in (2)) or as an emphatic adverbial following the argument (in (3)).

- (2) *kur* *teĩtsi* *li* *tha* *kurteia* *teiã* *xr* *l.*
 3 mirror LOC ABL self see COMP PFV
 ‘S/he saw her/himself in the mirror.’
- (3) *liãteỹ* *kurteia* *eyr* *li* *tchi* *li.*
 Lianjun self school LOC go PART
 ‘Lianjun is going to the school by herself.’

kurteia is a common reflexive pronoun in Northwest Chinese (Cao 2008).

3 The Usage of *tha*

3.1 Rules for the Use of *tha*

Let us begin the discussion of the usage of *tha* by listing two examples in which *tha* might be recognized at first glance as an ordinary third-person pronoun or a logophoric pronoun.

- (4) *tʂaɛi* *le* *lɔ* *na* *xã* *tɛikã* *tɛiu* *tsu* *lɔ*,
 Zhaxi come PFV take COMP hurry at.once walk PFV
*tha*_i *tɛhi* *li* *ʂur*.
 tha go PART say
 ‘Zhaxi_i came. (He_i) took (something) and hurried to go. (He_i) said that he_i is leaving.’

- (5) *ãuʂtũ*_i *the* *ka* *xr* *lɔ*, *atei*_j *tɛiɔ* *tʂɻ*
 An Wendong too young COMP PFV 3 teach PROG
tr *tɛiu* *tʂhutʂũ*, *ɛiɔɛɻ*. *tɛhũtɛhũ*_k
 NOMZ only junior.middle.school elementary.school Qingqing:PL
tɛia *fã* *xr* *ʂi*, *tha*_j *tɛiɔ* *li* *ʂur*.
 holiday begin COMP when tha teach PART say

‘An Wendong_i is too young. He_j [i.e., a third person] only teaches the students in junior middle school and elementary school. When the students in the age of Qingqing_k began their (winter) vacation, (he_j) said that he_j would teach them.’ (Context: the speaker tells the addressee that another person, i.e., *atei* ‘he’, volunteered to teach kids in the village during winter vacation.)

In (4) *tha* refers to *tʂaɛi* (Zhaxi in pinyin), the producer of the utterance “*tɛhi li*”. (5) involves three participants: *ãuʂtũ* (An Wendong in pinyin), *atei* ‘he’ and *tɛhũtɛhũ* (Qingqing in pinyin). In this more complicated context, the pronoun *tha* refers to the same participant as *atei*, i.e., the utterer of the words “*tɛiɔ li*”.

One may wonder whether *tha* in both examples can be treated as an ordinary third-person pronoun used in the indirect speech context. This is plausible if one considers the context of Mandarin Chinese, in which the formally identical *ta* is used in indirect speech while *wo* ‘I’ is used in direct speech.

- (6) a. *Zhaxi shuo ta lai le*.
 Zhaxi say 3 come PFV
 ‘Zhaxi said that he came.’
- b. *Zhaxi shuo wo lai le*.
 Zhaxi say 1 come PFV
 ‘Zhaxi said “I came”.’

In the complement clause of the verbs of speech, thought, perception, etc., it is cross-linguistically very common to employ third-person pronouns in indirect reports. I argue, however, that *tha* in (4-5) is no ordinary third-person pronoun. First, Mandarin *ta* in indirect speech can refer to the speaker, but it can also refer to someone else. That is, the referent of Mandarin *ta* is based on pragmatics rather than syntax. That is, for the *ta* in (6a), it can refer to another person rather than Zhaxi. In contrast, it is a grammatical rule that *tha* in (4-5) refers only to *Zhaxi* and *atei*, respectively, not to someone else. Second, as discussed below, there are certain contexts in which *tha* cannot be translated as s/he but still refers to the producer of speech, thought, etc.

Now, we turn to an intriguing example in which *tha* can literally be translated as “I”.

- (7) *the* *εiɔ* *si,* *tha* *ʂɔtʂhe* *ʂi* *tɕhi* *ʂi,*
 very young when tha firewood pick go when
tha *tɕi* *pu* *ku,* *pi* *pu* *thũ* *pi.*
 tha strength NEG enough back NEG COMP PART
 ‘When I was very young, every time I went out to pick up firewood, I did not have enough physical strength to shoulder it.’

(7) is part of a narration in which the speaker recalls her childhood experience. Here, *tha* refers to the linguistically covert speaker.

In examples (8-9) below, the speakers “I” are overt.

- (8) *ŋx_i* *tʂɿmɿ* *tʂuã* *xã* *lɔ* *tʂɿ,* *kurle.* *ytɕhĩ* *iathu*
 1 this turn COMP PFV PROG come Yuqing girl
tha_i *xa* *tɕiã* *xɿ* *lɔ* *tʂɿ,* *tɕikã* *kur* *tʂuã*
 tha ACC see COMP PFV PROG hurry that.way turn
kur *lɔ.*
 COMP PFV

‘I_i turned this way and went. Yuqing saw me, and (she) hurried to turn that way.’

In (8), there are two participants, i.e., *ŋx* and *ytɕhĩ*. Of the two, *tha* refers to *ŋx*, the utterer of the narrative speech. Note that (8) shows that *tha* can occupy an object slot, marked by the accusative marker *xa*. In (9) below, *tha* also refers to “I”.

- (9) *ŋx_i* *xifã* *tʂhi* *xã* *lɔ,* *mi* *kãthuu,*
 1 supper eat COMP PFV not.have something.to.do
tɿ *tʂhutɕhi* *lɔ,* *kur* *tʂã* *lɔ.*
 DM go.out PFV there stand PFV
tɿ *tha_i* *tʂã* *lɔ* *tʂɿ,* *mi* *kãthuu* *tʂɿ.*
 DM tha stand PFV PROG not.have something.to.do PROG
 ‘I_i finished the supper and found nothing to do. Then I_i went out and stood there, having nothing to do.’

Thus far, I have surveyed two types of contexts in which *tha* refers to “s/he” (as in (4-5)) and “I” (as in (7-9)). Arguably, *tha* is neither a third-person pronoun nor a first-person pronoun and fundamentally differs from the ordinary third-person pronoun *ta* in Mandarin Chinese.

With closer observation of the two types of contexts represented by examples (4-5) and (7-9), one can distinguish two kinds of speakers, or “locutors” adopted in this paper: the locutor who says something concrete represented as a complement clause of a speech verb (e.g., in *John said that he came here yesterday*, the locutor of *he came here yesterday* is *John*); and the locutor of a narration (e.g., in a narration such as *I came here yesterday and met John. I walked along with him. Then I...*, the locutor is *I*). For convenience and clarity, I henceforth call the first kind of locutor the “internal locutor” (IL), and the second kind of locutor the “narrative locutor” (NL). The IL and NL can be the same person, but they do not necessarily need to be. In, for example, *I met John yesterday and he said*

to me that he bought a fantastic book, the IL of *he bought a fantastic book* is “John” while the NL of the whole narration is “I”.

From (4-5) and (7-9), respectively, we can conclude two rules regarding the use of *tha*, as indicated in (10).

(10) Rules for the use of *tha*:

Rule 1: If *tha* occurs in a complement clause of a speech verb, it refers to the IL.

Rule 2: If *tha* occurs in an environment other than a complement clause of a speech verb, it refers to the NL.

In natural discourse, however, the IL and NL frequently co-occur in the same context. Thus, both Rule 1 and Rule 2 can be activated, leading to a situation where *tha* in the same context refers to different locutors. For example:

- (11) *tshur* *tʂasi_i* *mi* *tɕhi*. *tha_j* *ʂur* *lɔ*, *ni_i* *pu*
 yesterday Zhaxi NEG go tha say PFV 2 NEG
tɕhi *mɿ?* *tha_i* *pu* *tɕhi*.
 go PART tha NEG go
 ‘Zhaxi_i did not go (to some place) yesterday. I_j asked, “Didn’t you_i go?” (He_i answered) He_i did not go.’

In (11), there are two kinds of locutors: the NL “I”, which does not overtly appear but is the narrator of the narration, and the IL “Zhaxi”, who is the speaker of the concrete content *pu tɕhi* ‘not go’. In this situation, the first *tha*, following Rule 2, refers to the covert NL “I”, while the second *tha*, following Rule 1, refers to the internal locutor “Zhaxi”.

3.2 *tha* as a *Locutor-referential Pronoun*

In the section above, I described the use of *tha* and identified two rules for using it. But how do we define such a pronoun? Or straightforwardly, how do we term it? The most competitive candidate is “logophoric pronoun”. Logophoric pronouns are “pronouns used to refer to the person whose words, thoughts, or emotions are being represented” (Culy 1997: 845). (12) illustrates the use of logophoric pronoun in Donno Sɔ (Culy 1994; cited from Huang 2007: 267):

- (12) a. *Oumar Anta inyemeñ* *waa* *be* *gi*.
 Oumar Anta LOG-ACC seen AUX said
 ‘Oumar₁ said that Anta₂ had seen him₁.’
- b. *Oumar Anta woñ* *waa* *be* *gi*.
 Oumar Anta 3SG-ACC seen AUX said
 ‘Oumar₁ said that Anta₂ had seen him₃.’

In (12a), the logophoric pronoun *inyemeñ* refers to Oumar, the locutor of the words, while the third-person pronoun *woñ* in (12b) refers to someone other than Oumar. In contrast, for languages that do

not have logophoric pronouns, the distinction between (12a) and (12b) may not be successfully represented. See (13) from Mandarin Chinese.

- (13) *Zhangsan_i shuo ta_{i/j} lai le.*
 Zhangsan say 3 come PFV
 ‘Zhangsan_i said that he_{i/j} came.’

In (13), *ta* may refer to Zhangsan or someone else, depending on the particular context.

Comparatively, *tha* in Zhoutun is paralleling with the logophoric pronoun in (12) rather than the third-person pronoun in (13). See (14).

- (14) *ɲɣ tr anε_i tha_i mɤmɤ iɔ tɕhi lɔ*
 1 GEN grandmother tha steamed.bun beg go PFV
u li.
 say PART
 ‘My grandmother_i said that she_i went to beg for steamed buns.’

In (14), *tha* refers to *ɲɣ tr anε* ‘grandmother’ but not someone else.

Logophoric pronouns were first found in African languages and thus introduced then to linguistic research; they also appear in some European languages, such as the Finnish and High Latvian dialects (Clements 1975; Culy 1997; Huang 2000; Nau 2006). More recently, scholars began to find them in Asian languages: in the Southern Hokkaido dialects of Ainu in Japan (Bugaeva 2008), in Amdo Tibetan (Ebihara 2014), in Khams Tibetan (Sun 2019) and in Nuosu Yi (Liu & Li 2016). The very fact that the logophoric pronouns are found in Amdo Tibetan, the donor language that deeply influenced Zhoutun, provides a possibility that *tha* in Zhoutun is also a logophoric pronoun and may, in one way or another, relate to the logophoric pronouns in Amdo Tibetan. However, a closer examination would reveal that the use of *tha*, i.e., the use disciplined by Rule 2 in (10), is not covered by the definition of the logophoric pronoun.

In the cross-linguistic studies on logophoric pronouns, Culy (1997: 848) points out that “logophoric pronouns occur only in the complements of certain predicates, and which predicates license logophoric pronouns varies from language to language.” He (Culy 1994) shows that there is “a cross-linguistic implicational hierarchy of predicates that license logophoric pronouns”, as shown in (15).

- (15) A hierarchy of logophoric licensing predicates (Culy 1994: 1062; cited from Culy 1997: 848)
 speech > thought > knowledge > direct perception

That is, for example, a language that allows “knowledge” predicates as logophoric licensors will also have “thought” and “speech” predicates as logophoric licensors, but not vice versa. No matter what predicates a language may have as logophoric licensors, a logophoric pronoun should “occur in the complements of certain predicates”, as claimed by Culy. But, as shown in Rule 2 and exemplified by (7)-(9), *tha* may appear as arguments of independent clauses. It is therefore problematic to term *tha* as a “logophoric pronoun”.

Then, what about the term “reflexive pronoun”? As mentioned in 2.2, the properties that both *kurteia*, the reflexive pronoun, and *tha* can serve as an argument and that they both have some kind

of “self-referentiality” meaning provide a possibility that *tha* is also a reflexive pronoun. However, a key difference makes this possibility unlikely, i.e., a reflexive pronoun calls for an antecedent, usually in the same clause, for example:

- (16) *tʂaɛi_i ʂur tʂɿ kɿ, ylǐ_j kurteia_j xa ta*
 Zhaxi_i say PROG PART Yulin self ACC beat
xɿ lɔ.
 COMP PFV
 ‘Zhaxi_i says that Yulin_j beat himself_j.’

In (16) *kurteia* refers to “Yulin”, the antecedent in the same clause, but not “Zhaxi”, the one outside the clause. In contrast, *tha* can refer to a unit that belongs to another clause or another sentence, see (17).

- (17)=(8) *ŋɿ_i tʂɿmɿ tʂuã xã lɔ tʂɿ, kurle. ytehi_j*
 1 this turn COMP PFV PROG come Yuqing
iathu tha_i xa teiã xɿ lɔ tʂɿ,
 girl tha ACC see COMP PFV PROG
teikã kur tʂuã kur lɔ.
 hurry that.way turn COMP PFV
 ‘I_i turned this way and went. Yuqing saw me_i, and (she) hurried to turn that way.’

In (17), if *tha* were a reflexive pronoun, it should refer to “Yuqing” in the same clause rather than “I” in another sentence.

Given that neither “logophoric” nor “reflexive” pronoun is appropriate, I would propose the term “locutor-referential pronoun” in this paper to identify *tha*. Locutor-referential pronouns would be defined as “pronouns used to refer to the internal locutor (IL) of a clause and/or the narrative locutor (NL) of a narration.” As for which type of locutor a locutor-referential pronoun refers to, it depends on where the pronoun occurs: If it occurs in a complement clause of a speech verb, it refers to the IL; otherwise, it refers to the NL. Of course, the rules that determine the referents of a locutor-referential pronoun might vary from language to language (if there are other languages that have such a pronoun). Compared to “logophoric pronouns”, “locutor-referential pronouns” cover a broader range of function in that the latter can refer to both IL and NL, while logophoric pronouns only refer to IL.

3.3 *The Nonobligatory Use of tha*

Using *tha*, with the two rules for its use, however, is not obligatory. That is, when a context meets the condition in which *tha* is expected to be used, *tha* does not necessarily occur. See the examples below.

- (18) 1- *xuthu* *mã* *atei_i* *sã* *phîphiε* *na* *xã* *lε*
 thereafter PART 3 three bottle take COMP come
lɔ, *ɲɣ_j* *i* *kɣ* *ɟĩ* *mã,* *sã* *phîphiε*
 PFV 1 one CL person PART three bottle
xur *xã* *li* *mɣ.*
 drink COMP PART PART
- 2- *ɲɣ_j* *i* *tεĩ* *tshu* *xa,* *ni_i* *ɲa_j* *i* *thiã* *i*
 1 one jin take COMP 2 1:DAT one day one
tεĩ *na* *xã* *lε.*
 jin take COMP come
- 3- *atei_i* *pusãpusi* *ɬɣ* *ɲa_j* *ma* *tʂɣ.*
 3 dirty.words ADV M 1:DAT curse PROG
[an interval with other contents]
- 4- *sã* *tεĩ* *na* *xã* *lε* *lɔ,* *tha_j* *i* *kɣ*
 three jin take COMP come PFV LRP one CL
ɟĩ *sã* *tεĩ* *xur* *pu* *xã* *a.*
 person three jin drink NEG COMP PART
- 5- *tha_j* *i* *tεĩ* *tshu,* *ni_i* *tha_j* *i* *thiã* *i* *tεĩ*
 LRP one jin take 2 LRP one day one jin
na *xã* *lε.*
 take COMP come
- 6- *atei_i* *tha_j* *xa* *tsui* *li* *pusãpusi* *tʂɣmɣ*
 3 LRP DAT mouh LOC dirty.words this.way
ɬɣ *ma* *tʂɣ.*
 ADV M curse PROG

‘[Line 1-3] Thereafter he_i took three bottles of wine here. I_j am just one person, and (I_j) cannot drink up three bottles of wine. (I_j said) “I_j will only take one jin, and you_i take one jin a day to me_j.” He_i cursed me_j with dirty words... [Line 4-6] (He_i took) three jin (of wine) here. I_j cannot drink up three jin (of wine) alone. (I_j said) “I_j will only take one jin, and you_i take one jin a day to me_j.” He_i cursed me_j with dirty words.’

(18) is an excerpt extracted from a narration. Interestingly, the locutor repeated the same content of what he said after an interval. The contents in Lines 1-3 and 4-6 are basically the same; Lines 1 and 4, Lines 2 and 5 and Lines 3 and 6 are three pairs with similar meanings. One can easily find that the NL *ɲɣ* in Line 1, the IL *ɲɣ* in Line 2 and the NL *ɲɣ* in Line 3 become *tha* in Lines 4-6, respectively, showing that the use of *tha* is optional and that ordinary personal pronouns can be used in the same context.

The following (19) is another example of the non-obligatory use of *tha*.

- (19) 1- *kr netsi pu eiã li, pu iɔ ia,*
 this milk NEG taste.sweet PART NEG want PART
ane *kr netsi a pu iɔ,*
 grandmother this milk ACC NEG want
 2- *tx ka liɔ xr lɔ.*
 DM this:ACC put.down COMP PFV
 3- *tha_i xa nɛ pu nɛ a, tʂæci ni tsa xã.*
 LRP DAT milk NEG like PART Zhaxi 2 suck COMP
 4- *atei_i ka tsa kuã lɔ tʂr, pu iɔ li.*
 3 this:ACC suck habituate PFV PROG NEG want PART
 5- *kheʂui tiɛ tshã ki ʂi, ki tiɔ ʂi,*
 water little mix give when give COMP when
 6- *ɲr_i pu tsa, nɛnɛ eiã tʂr mi li.*
 1 NEG suck milk taste.sweet PROG NEG PART
 “The milk does not taste good; (I_i) do not want it. (I_i) do not want the milk.”
 And (she_i) put the milk down. (She_i said) She_i does not like the milk. Zhaxi_j,
 you_j drink it. She_i is used to drinking the (pure) milk and does not want the
 one with water. Even if only a little water is mixed into the milk and given
 (to her_i), (she_i would say) “I_i will not drink it, the milk does not taste good.”

The locutor of (19) is a grandmother, who is talking (to her friend) about her granddaughter: her little granddaughter does not drink the milk mixed with water. In Line 3, *tha*, according to Rule 1, is used to refer to the granddaughter, the IL, with the speech and thought verb being omitted. However, in Line 6, though the IL, the granddaughter, based on Rule 1, could be referred to by *tha*, the first-person pronoun *ɲr* is used instead.

From the description above, it can be concluded that *tha* is not prominent in Zhoutun, as indicated in two aspects. First, *tha* is used only in a particular context, i.e., in some natural discourse. It never occurs in the data collected through elicitation (at least for those collected in my fieldwork), which shows that native speakers do not consider *tha* to be a commonly used pronoun in the grammar system and that they perceive *tha* as having no importance because in those contexts of natural discourse where *tha* occurs, they use ordinary personal pronouns instead in elicitation queries. Second, even in natural discourse, the usage of *tha* is not mandatory. Ordinary personal pronouns can be used in the position where *tha* could be used.

A question then arises, that if *tha* is used non-obligatorily, what is the difference between *tha* and ordinary personal pronouns? In other words, what is the function of *tha*? Regrettably, I have not come to a definitive answer but only a guess. I guess that *tha* has a pragmatic function that enables the locutor to abstract from the scene and provide a third-party perspective to the narration. I guess *tha* has this function because *tha* corresponds to the third-person pronoun in Mandarin Chinese, which means that the original meaning of *tha* should have to do with the third-person pronoun. A third person refers to a third party who is not on the spot. Using a form of (or that at least highly related to) a third-person pronoun to refer to the locutor him/herself puts the otherwise involved locutor to the status of not being present. By doing so, the locutor can distance him/herself from the text and step back into a third-party perspective, making the utterance/narration appear more objective or less emotional. For example,

- (20)=(7) *the* *εiɔ* *ɣi* *tha* *ɣɔtʂhe* *ɣi* *tɕhi* *ɣi*,
 very young when *tha* firewood pick go when
tha *tɕi* *pu* *ku*, *pi* *pu* *thū* *pi*.
tha strength NEG enough back NEG COMP PART
 ‘When I was very young, every time I went out to pick up firewood, I did not
 have enough physical strength to shoulder it.’

In this example, the locutor is describing a rather bitter experience from her childhood. By using *tha*, as opposed to the first-person pronoun *ɣr* ‘I’, the locutor seems to distance herself from this bitter experience and the narration is thus less emotional. However, since the speculated function of *tha* is on a subtle pragmatic level, it is difficult to find solid evidence (also due to the inadequacy of data containing *tha* and the lack of awareness of the use of *tha* by native speakers) and further studies are needed.

4 The Development of *tha*

4.1 Where Did *tha* Come from?

Since locutor-referential pronouns are not seen in Mandarin Chinese and other Chinese dialects, whereas Amdo Tibetan is reported to have a similar pronoun, namely, the logophoric pronouns (see below), I temporarily deduce that the formation of the locutor-referential *tha* has to do with the contact with Amdo Tibetan. Note that this deduction does not imply that *tha* is directly borrowed from Amdo Tibetan. Now, let us turn to the logophoric pronoun in Amdo Tibetan.

According to Ebihara (2014), Amdo Tibetan has three logophoric pronouns, i.e., *kho* (masculine), *mo* (feminine), and *khoy* (familial plural). An example is as follows (Ebihara 2014: 6):

- (21) *ta* [*mo* *εira* *jə=a* *mə-ndzo.* *ndi=ki*
 then LOG back house=DAT NEG-go:IPFV DEM=ERG
khoy=ki *gepo* *bawa* *mən.* *tə=ki* *gonmo=ta*
 LOG=GEN husband frog COP:NEG DEM=ERG night=PP
bawa=ki *kondzə* *hət=taŋ=na* *ta* *ŋə=zək*
 frog=GEN clothes take.off=AUX=CONJ then human=INDF
jən] *tə=ki* *ze=nəre=ja.*
 COP DEM=ERG say=AUX=SFP

“Then ‘She will not return home. Her husband (=the husband in her family) is not a frog. [He] is a man at night after taking off the clothes’ [the princess] said like that.”

In (21), the two logophoric pronouns *mo* and *khoy*, located in the complement clause (in the “[]”) of the verb *ze* ‘say’, refer to the IL, the covert “princess”. This example fits Rule 1 for the use of *tha* in Zhoutun. Whether Rule 2 for the use of *tha* also works in Amdo Tibetan remains unclear: Ebihara (2014) points out that in Amdo Tibetan, the logophoric pronouns “appear in reported speech and show co-reference with the third person original speaker of the reported speech”; i.e.,

they appear only in the complement clause of speech verbs, as shown in all the examples listed in that paper. This fundamentally distinguishes the logophoric pronouns from locutor-referential *tha* in Zhoutun, because *tha*, in addition to refer to the IL when it occurs in the complement clause of speech verbs, can refer to the NL, a function that is not shared by the logophoric pronouns in Amdo Tibetan (at least based on the description in Ebihara). Nevertheless, the formation of the logophoric pronouns in Amdo Tibetan does shed light on the formation of locutor-referential *tha*.

First, Amdo Tibetan has deep influence on Zhoutun. For example, Zhoutun has two sets of copulas. i.e., *ʃi/puʃi* from Chinese and *.ʃi/ma .ʃi* borrowed from Amdo Tibetan. And not to mention the great influence of the Amdo Tibetan on the syntax of Zhoutun (see 2.1).

Second, logophoric pronouns are actually not uncommon in Tibeto-Burman languages, although they are less commonly reported. Ebihara (2014), for example, claims that “as far as I know, logophoric pronouns have not been described in other Tibetan languages [than Amdo Tibetan] so far”. However, this may be because that scholars have not noticed the phenomenon, rather than that the phenomenon does not exist: Investigating logophoric pronouns is relatively difficult, especially due to the fact that they are context-sensitive and often non-obligatory. In fact, as far as I know, the logophoric pronoun *kho* is found in Yulshul, a variant of Khams Tibetan (Sun 2019). This kind of pronoun is also found in other Tibeto-Burman languages, such as nDrapa (a Qiangic language; Shirai 2007) and Nuosu Yi (Liu & Li 2016).

Third, although the functions of the logophoric pronouns in Amdo Tibetan and the locutor-referential *tha* are not identical, part of *tha*'s function, i.e., the function specified in Rule 1, is the same as the logophoric pronouns in Amdo Tibetan. This indicates that they are functionally related.

Fourth, the logophoric pronouns and *tha* share the same etymology. Ebihara points out that the origin of the three logophoric pronouns in Amdo Tibetan may be “the non-logophoric personal pronouns in written Tibetan: *kho* for ‘he,’ *mo* for ‘she,’ and *khonj* for ‘he’ (honorific).” See the following example (Ebihara 2014: 7):

- (22) a. *sonam_i=ki* [*kho_i* *ta* *joŋ=dzi*] =*zi* *ɕet=tsək*.
 Sonam=ERG LOG now come=AUX:EGO COMP speak=AUX
 ‘Sonam said that he (=Sonam) will come now.’
- b. *sonam_i=ki* [*ŋa_i* *ta* *joŋ=dzi*] =*zi* *ɕet=tsək*.
 Sonam=ERG 1 now come= AUX:EGO COMP speak= AUX
 ‘Sonam said, “I (=Sonam) will come now.”’
- c. *sonam_i=ki* [*khəga_i* *ta* *joŋ=dzi*] =*zi* *ɕet=tsək*.
 Sonam= ERG 3 now come=AUX:EGO COMP speak=AUX
 ‘Sonam said, “he (=Sonam) will come now.”’

“Coincidentally”, *tha* is formally identical with the third-person pronoun *ta* in Mandarin Chinese. Another paralleling performance between logophoric pronouns in Amdo Tibetan and *tha* in Zhoutun is that they are all used non-obligatorily. As shown in (22) and discussed in 3.3, respectively.

So far, I can reasonably infer that (1) the locutor-referential *tha* was formed under the influence of Amdo Tibetan; and (2) a possible pathway for the formation of the locutor-referential *tha* is “third-person pronoun > logophoric pronoun > locutor-referential pronoun”. Unfortunately,

however, there is not enough material to examine in detail how *tha* developed from the logophoric use to the locutor-referential use. An assumption is that since both logophoric pronouns and locutor-referential pronouns have some kind of “self-referentiality” meanings— they refer to the locutor-self of the sentence and the locutor-self of the narration, respectively— *tha* may extend from the logophoric usage to the locutor-referential pronoun.

4.2 *Staying Non-prominent*

As discussed in section 3.2, *tha* is not a prominent pronoun in Zhoutun. A possible reason is its non-obligatory use, showing its low prominence. If *tha* were used obligatorily, i.e., if it must appear in the appropriate context as governed by Rules 1 and 2, it would be hard for native speakers to deny its existence in the grammar system.

Another possible factor affecting the use of *tha* may concern the influence of Mandarin Chinese. As mentioned, the locutor-referential pronoun *tha* was initially a third-person pronoun inherited from Mandarin Chinese. With the other two third-person pronouns (i.e., *kur* and *atei*) having formed, *tha* lost its original function and became a locutor-referential pronoun. Undoubtedly, the Chinese varieties and Altaic languages in the Amdo Sprachbund were deeply influenced by Amdo Tibetan (see, e.g., Dwyer 2013; Xu 2014; Sandman & Simon 2016; Zhou 2019a, b). As Sandman & Simon (2016) argued, in the Amdo Sprachbund, Amdo Tibetan is the “model language”, whose many morphosyntactic features have been transferred into the Chinese and Altaic languages in the area. However, over time, recent decades saw an increasing influence from Mandarin Chinese.

In Zhoutun, my younger consultants around the age of 30 told me that when they were very young (i.e., more than 20 years ago), they could hear some “incomprehensible” words or sentences spoken by elderly people over 60. That, I assume, may reflect the more “Tibetanized” period of the Zhoutun dialect. In 2014, when I first went to Zhoutun, the native speakers rarely spoke Mandarin Chinese (thus, I could not understand them), but they could understand some of my words, showing that they had obtained basic knowledge of Mandarin Chinese. During the later investigation and the personal communication between my consultant and me after my fieldwork in recent years, I have noticed that their level of Mandarin Chinese has been increasing. As observed by Zhou (2020a), the penetration of Mandarin Chinese occurs mainly through TV programs. Moreover, mounting communication with Chinese people outside the village and compulsory education also partly contribute to the spreading of Mandarin Chinese.

The increasing influence of Mandarin Chinese is found not only in Zhoutun. In Tangwang (a Chinese variant spoken in Tangwang Town, Dongxiang Autonomous County, Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province), which has been deeply affected by Amdo Tibetan and Santa, Xu (2014) noticed some phenomena showing the influence of Mandarin Chinese. For example, the younger generation tends to use the prepositional *ba* from Mandarin Chinese instead of the postpositional accusative *xa* to mark an object. Moreover, nearly two decades ago, Slater (2003: 8) had already pointed out the following:

In the last few generations, Han Chinese influence has grown tremendously in the region, and the population of Sinitic speakers has swelled massively, through successive waves of settlement from eastern China. As Sinitic speakers have spread out from their earlier small settlements in the river valleys and gained more pervasive social influence, entire populations of neighboring groups have become highly bilingual in

Chinese, which is by now the language not only of government and trade, but also of increasingly available education and mass media.

Now we return to Zhoutun. Accompanying the increasing influence of Mandarin Chinese is the decreasing level of Amdo Tibetan (see Zhou (2020a)). It could be expected that, on the one hand, there is a growing awareness among native Zhoutun speakers that Mandarin Chinese has the third-person pronoun *ta*. Since it is formally identical to the locutor-referential pronoun *tha*, native speakers may take a somewhat excessive strategy to keep Zhoutun pure from “Chinese” elements by consciously avoiding the use of *tha*. This can be illustrated by the statement in 2.1, in which native speakers assured that *tha* is a Chinese form but not an indigenous one. On the other hand, the decaying influence of Amdo Tibetan may have made the Zhoutun villagers gradually unfamiliar with the use of *tha*, especially under the condition of its nonobligatory use. The natural discourse in which *tha* is used all occurred among middle-aged people, while such usage has not been observed yet among the younger generation.

5 Discussion

This paper describes the locutor-referential pronoun *tha* in Zhoutun. When *tha* occurs in a complement clause of a speech verb, it refers to the IL; when *tha* occurs in an environment other than a complement clause of a speech verb, it refers to the NL. The use of *tha* is not obligatory. Inherited from Mandarin Chinese, *tha* was first used as a third-person pronoun and then developed into a locutor-referential pronoun under the influence of the nearby Amdo Tibetan.

Because of its rare use, it is possible that I misinterpreted the data or missed some undetected uses of *tha*. What we are very sure of is that *tha* is different from third person, first person, reflexive pronouns in Zhoutun and its usage cannot be covered by logophoric pronouns. We need to collect more data to better examine the behavior of *tha*. On the other hand, it is reasonable to hold that *tha* may keep declining in use. That is, even if more natural discourse is collected, it is uncertain whether we can observe enough cases of *tha*. With the increasing influence of Mandarin Chinese, a pessimistic estimation is that *tha* may gradually disappear from Zhoutun. This makes the current research more meaningful.

Another significance of this research is that I hope to use it to evoke the study on such a pronoun in nearby languages (i.e., Tibetan and, more broadly, Tibeto-Burman languages). Since the functions of locutor-referential pronouns, especially the function to refer to the NL, requires in-depth investigation, it is possible that such pronouns do exist in Tibetan or Tibeto-Burman languages (or in other languages around the world) but have not yet been documented. The *tha* in Zhoutun may not be an isolated case.

ABBREVIATIONS

1	first person	ERG	ergative
2	second person	GEN	genitive
3	third person	INDF	indefinite marker
ACC	accusative marker	LRP	locutor-referential pronoun

ADVM	adverbial marker	IPFV	imperfective
AUX	auxiliary verb	LOG	logophoric
CL	classifier	NEG	negative
COMP	complement verb	PART	particle
CONJ	conjunction	PFV	perfective
COP	copular	PL	plural
DAT	dative marker	PP	pragmatic particle
DEM	demonstrative	PROG	progressive
DM	discourse marker	REL	relativizer
EGO	egophoric	SFP	sentence-final particle

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