1. INTRODUCTION
This squib shows that the nominal marker $ta$ in Lutuv exhibits exactly the kind of behavior that LaPolla (2004) predicts of agentive markers in Tibeto-Burman languages. Thus, one function of $ta$ in Lutuv seems to be that of an agent (or more properly, actor) marker. The sisters of the actor marker $ta$, such as the instrumental marker $ta$ (which can be also used to mark adverbs) and the ablative marker $taa$, as well as their relation to the actor marker $ta$ are also discussed.

2. BACKGROUND
It is well-known that semantic markers of agenthood are not uncommon in Tibeto-Burman languages. After examining 170 Tibeto-Burman languages, LaPolla (2004) found that 125 of them have an agentive marker. Contra Du Bois (1985, 1987), who claims that the ergative markers mark “old” information, LaPolla argues that ergative marking in Tibeto-Burman languages acts as a simple disambiguation device.¹

LaPolla argues that in Tibeto-Burman languages with the unmarked word order Agent-(Recipient)-Patient-Verb, where the agent is the topic, no role marking is necessary if there is only an agent and a patient. The marker is needed only if the agent is in the immediate preverbal position, or if there is some third animate human referent, such as a recipient. “[I]t is non-canonical word order that necessitates the marking, and the non-canonical word order is the result of non-canonical information structure” (LaPolla, 2004: 49). It is particularly important that when the agent is “new” information (i.e., when it takes the preverbal position, and not the sentence-initial topic position) that it be marked with an agentive/ergative marker, contra to the predictions of Du Bois. Further, LaPolla gives some additional evidence that it is disambiguation, and not some other factor, that is involved in agentive marking in Tibeto-Burman languages; see LaPolla (2004: 50) for details.

3. ILLUSTRATION OF ACTOR MARKING IN LUTUV
The nominal marker $ta$ in Lutuv behaves exactly the way that LaPolla describes agentive markers in Tibeto-Burman languages. First, let us observe that $ta$ indeed marks agent-like arguments and never marks patient-like arguments. Thus, in (1) $ta$ marks the agent of a transitive verb, in (2) it marks the agent of the intransitive verb, but (3) is ungrammatical because the undergoer cannot be marked with $ta$. Later we will see that $ta$ cannot mark the undergoer of a transitive verb either; see (6).

(1) Bawi=ta sabuti a=chang.
Bawi=a sabuti 3SG=cook
“Bawi cooks sabuti.”

¹ LaPolla (2004) seems to be using the terms agentive marker and ergative marker interchangeably.
Second, note that the unmarked word order in Lutuv is Agent-(Recipient)-Patient-Verb, so the premise of LaPolla’s claim holds. Indeed, the unmarked way to say “Bawi hit Zai” if the agent doesn’t need to be emphasized is (4). In such cases, the sentence-initial NP is by default an agent and a pragmatic topic and the preverbal NP in transitive sentences is always the patient. The agent marker is not necessary in (4) (but it’s not forbidden either) because by default the pragmatic topic is the agent.

(4) Bawi=ca Zai a=cabe.
    Bawi=TOP Zai 3SG=hit
    “Bawi hit Zai.”

That the NP in the sentence-initial position must be interpreted as an agent is also supported by the fact that (5) is semantically unacceptable.

(5) #Cabya=ca Bawi a=hruv.
    table=TOP Bawi 3SG=wipe
    “The table wiped Bawi.”

It is possible to synthetically make the preverbal argument into an agent by using the ta marker, as in (5). In this sentence, cabya “table” is the established topic, and if we want to make Bawi (which is “new” information) an agent, we must mark it with ta.

(6) Cabya=ca Bawi=ta a=hruv.
    table=TOP Bawi= 3SG=wipe
    “Bawi wiped the table.”

We have seen that ta cannot mark undergoers of intransitive verbs, and (5) shows that it cannot mark undergoers of transitive verbs either: whatever is marked with ta must be interpreted as an actor, even if such an NP occurs in the preverbal position, which is the patient position by default, as discussed above. The reason why we use the term “actor” here instead of “agent” is that usually agents are assumed to be volitional, but there is evidence that volitionally is not relevant in determining whether ta can mark an NP or not. This can be seen in (7), where myi “fire” is not a volitional agent.

(7) Myi=ta ing a=pa=ra.
    fire=A house 3SG=CAUS=be.broken
    “The fire destroyed the house.”

2 Space does not permit us to discuss the recipient argument in this squib.
4. OTHER FLAVORS OF TA

The discussion of the marker ta wouldn’t be complete without the mention of its sisters – the instrumental marker ta and the ablative marker taa. The sentences (8) and (9) illustrate two different uses of the instrumental marker ta.

(8) Taw=ta ingchiy i=pahaw.
    key=INSTR door 1SG=open
    “I opened the door with a key.”

(9) Anuo=sa=pa=ta=na i=pa=thu=sa.
    be.happy=INT=REL=INSTR=FOC 1SG=CAUS=wake.up=CAUS
    “I made you wake up happily.” (Lit. “I made you wake up with happiness.”)

The sentence (10) illustrates the use of the ablative marker taa.

(10) Zai=ca caauv=kha cabya cung taa=na a=la.
    Zai=TOP book=NMLZ table top ABL=FOC 3SG=take
    “Zai took a book from the table.”

5. CONCLUSION

It is not surprising that the instrumental and actor markers in Lutuv have the same form, and that the ablative marker seems to be closely related to them. In fact, LaPolla (1995: 1171) mentions that out of 145 examined Tibeto-Burman languages, 52 of them have the same agentive and instrumental marker, 23 languages have the same agentive and ablative marker, and 45 languages have the same ablative and instrumental markers. So the three markers are closely connected in many Tibeto-Burman languages. Lutuv seems to fall into what LaPolla (1995: 1172) calls “agentive-instrumental-ablative type”, and he notes that languages of that type shows “frequent isomorphy with (manner) adverbial markers as well as anterior and causal clause subordinators”. It seems that this isomorphy with manner adverbial markers is what we see in sentences like (9), where adverbials are also marked with what we glossed as instrumental marker. Let us finish with a quote from LaPolla (2023), which insightfully describes the development of agentive markers in the Tibeto-Burman languages he examined:

In many of the languages I’ve looked at (the Tibeto-Burman languages; LaPolla 1995, 2004), there is a clear development of agentive marking through the extension of ablative or instrumental marking to constrain the inference of which participant is the agent. This begins only in contexts where there could be confusion, such as when there are two human referents mentioned in an utterance, and it is optional at that stage. The first speaker to do this would have had the desire to constrain the interpretation of the semantic roles, and in order to do so used a form already in the language (e.g. ablative marking; it is easier to use material already in the language than to create totally new material). Over time this marking can become obligatory and can also be extended to other sorts of agent-like referents.
6. REFERENCES
LaPolla, Randy J. (2023) “Grammatical Relations,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Role and Reference Grammar*, edited by Bentley, Delia; Mairal-Usón, Ricard; Nakamura, Wataru; Robert D. Van Valin, Jr., Cambridge Handbooks in Language and Linguistics (Cambridge University Press)