

Aspect, tense and evidentiality in Khalkha and Khorchin

1. Introduction

The official classification of Mongolian in China from 1978 assumes three groups, Mongolian proper, Oirat and Buriat, also a common approach in Russia. For the international level, some Mongolian scholars (e.g. Batzayaa) and the official Chinese line favour a four-level classification into Russian Oirat, Russian Buriat, Mongolian in China and Mongolian in Mongolia, deliberately misclassifying Xinjiang Oirat and Kalmyk Oirat or Shiliin gol and Northern Khalkha into separate groups. Classifications primarily guided by recent linguistic data such as the early Chinese classification by Chinggeltei almost invariably recognize at least four major groups: Buriat, Oirat, Khalkha-Chakhar and Khorchin. Table 1 indicates that the tense-aspect-evidentiality (TAE) system of Khorchin has acquired a different structure, while Oirat and Khalkha basically retained the system of Middle Mongolian (MM). In this paper, I will elaborate on the differences between the Khalkha and Khorchin verbal systems.

Table 1. Simple past tenses in MM, Oirat, Khalkha and Khorchin¹

| | Middle Mongol | Oirat | Khalkha | Khorchin |
|--------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| *-ba | neutral | firsthand | – | – |
| *-jugu | secondhand | secondhand | secondhand | neutral |
| *-luga | firsthand | completed firsthand | firsthand-near (past/future) | near (past/future) |
| *-san | ?present perfect | – | completed | ?present perfect |

2. Forms

The forms of maximal predicates show that Khalkha is not a MM by other means, while Khorchin isn't either, for completely different reasons:

¹ Oirat is based on [Orulamjab 2013]. The analysis of MM heavily draws from [Street 2009].

Table 2. Complex TAE forms in MM

| stem | converb+copula | participle+copula | finite suffix |
|------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| V- | -n/-jU a- | -QU bü- | -IUGA |
| | -n a- | -GsAn a- | -jUgU |

Table 3. Some attested complex TAE form patterns in Khalkha

| stem | CVB/PTCP+COP | PTCP/CVB+COP | PTCP+COP | finite suffix |
|------|--------------|--------------|-----------|---------------|
| V- | -aad bai- | -j bai- | -san bai- | -na / -dag |
| | -j/-san bai- | -dag bai- | -san bai- | -na |
| | -j bai- | -san bai- | -dag bai- | -na |

Table 4. Complex TAE forms in Khorchin

| stem | converb+copula | non-finite unit | finite suffix |
|------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| V- | -ad bEE- | -zE- | -z(E) |
| | -tqeg- | -ad bEE- | -sen |

Table 2 indicates that MM only allows for few complex markers with two copulas, and all attested forms are past. Table 3, on the other hand, indicates that Khalkha is able to express very complex present forms (in *-na / -dag*) with up to three instances of the copula *bai-*. Both past and present forms are possible if the copula is used twice. That is, Khalkha can use two more copulas for present forms than MM. Conversely, table 4 shows the only attested kind of more complex predication possible in Khorchin. As *-zE- < -z bEE-* is not an instance of the copula synchronously, one might right away argue that two copulas never occur in Khorchin. But if one accepts the form, it is similar to MM in that only past forms can be complex. While it is not directly obvious from the table, Khorchin doesn't allow particle + copula combinations in any position, thus greatly reducing the number of possible predications. The number of possible finite non-mood suffixes in positive declarative sentences differs greatly between Khalkha and Khorchin:

Table 5. Finite non-mood suffixes in Khalkha and Khorchin: finite verbal suffixes and converbs

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| Khalkha (2010) | -n, -n=aa | -l=aa | -j, -j=ee | -aad / -aad=l | |
| Khorchin (1950) | -n, -n=a | -la | -z, -z=E | -ad / -ad=a | -sar / -sar=a |
| Khorchin (2010) | -n, -n=a | -la | -z, -z=E | -ad / -ad=a | |

Table 6. Finite non-mood suffixes in Khalkha and Khorchin: participles

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Khalkha (2010) | -san / -s=iin -saan / -s=iim=aa | -dag / -d=iin -dg=aa / -d=iim=aa | -h=iin -h=iim=aa | (-aa / -aa=n) (/ -aa=m=aa) |
| Khorchin (1950) ² | (-sen) | (-deg) | (-x=in) | |
| Khorchin (2010) | (-sen) | | | |

As can be seen from table 5, the forms of finite verbal suffixes are morphologically identical. The forms of converbs differ slightly in that Khorchin integrated them into the paradigm of the long final vowel, while Khalkha can add =l. The loss of =saar is common to both Khalkha and Khorchin. An actual difference can be found for participles where Khalkha uses the modal clitic =iin (< yum) to great extent, while Khorchin forms such as -sen yim don't seem to have been contracted. Moreover, those forms that existed seem to have been phased out of use.

3. Meanings

With an overall smaller form inventory, Khorchin can make fewer explicit distinctions than Khalkha. In the expression of non-past future-genericity-habituality-progressivity, Khorchin is limited to two forms, while Khalkha has eight:

² The data are drawn from [Bayançoytu 2002]. Note that the extent to which -sen, -deg and -xin could be used in Khorchin during the 1950s is not quite obvious, and that I am bracketing them here in a mere attempt to be conservative.

Table 7. Imperfective markers in Khalkha and Khorchin

| | progressivity | habituality | genericity | future |
|----------|-------------------|-------------|------------|--------|
| Khalkha | -jiin, -jiihiin | -dag, -diin | -n, -hiin | |
| | -jaigaa, -jaigaan | | | |
| Khorchin | -zEna | -na | | |

In Khorchin, the difference between the two forms seems straightforward: events somehow perceived as being in progress are marked by *-zE-na*, while habitual, generic and future events only take *-na*. Whether a given real event is perceived as being in progress (possibly with breaks in-between) for a rather long time or as habitually repeating / permanent state is partly at the discretion of the speaker, so in a few cases the same state of affairs in the real world could be coded in two ways. But the system itself is very simple.

For Khalkha, the exact difference between the eight forms is still subject to ongoing research. Ignoring modal particles that can alter the range of aspectual applicability of forms (sometimes due to combinatory restrictions), evidence so far suggests that:

1. *-jiin* is used for events ongoing at the time of speaking. Breaks in-between are tolerated somewhat, but e.g. an *activity* carried out for a lifetime up to now (*nasaaraa tuslah hii-* 'to work as assistant during all of one's life') is unacceptable with this form on its own. For telic events especially with less salient duration phase (such as *ir-* 'to come'), *-jiin* can refer to approaching the telos.

2. *-jaigaa*, in contrast, is still used to mark events perceived as ongoing, but to some extent can include the past and future. *nasaaraa tuslah hiijaigaa* is perfectly acceptable, while *ineejaigaa* 'it is smiling' said about a baby just observed by a visitor is infelicitous. Events thus marked do not appear to be conceived of as consisting of distinct subevents, and there seems to be an implication that the speaker didn't witness the entire event. E.g. saying *medjaigaa* 'knows' will indicate a non first-person subject known to have this knowledge (while, in contrast, *medjiin* would refer to the speaker herself or indicate knowledge based on recent observation of somebody acting like she knows). *-jaigaa* can also be used as part of a presentational style that presents activities as atelic temporary states to a wider audience. This usage cancels the secondhand implication, i.e., speaking about one's own activities in this way becomes possible.

3. *-dag* on its own is used for events that happen repeatedly or permanently. *-dag* might not be as widely used with states as previously thought, i.e., it is not yet clear whether it can actually be designated as unrestricted non-progressive imperfectivity (as implied by [Hashimoto 1995]). Combined with other markers (e.g. with the progressive in *-jii-dag*), it can also pertain to events happening (in this case, being in progress) regularly under certain conditions. In some contexts apparently connected with surprise, regret or raising the interest of the listener, *-dag* can be used for singular activities and accomplishments. (*Bi öchigdör mashin-d yav-jai-san=chin shees hür-eed bai-dag. Teg-sen=chin mashin zogso-h bol-oo=güi bai-san* 'When I was going by car yesterday, I suddenly needed to urinate. But the car hadn't arrived at its destination yet'.)

4. *-n* appears to be compatible with future readings in all non-contradictory contexts, and the use of *-n* for future meaning is further emphasized by the unambiguous future marker *-h bolon* being used only twice in an 6-hour corpus of spoken language. When discussing potential events or when explaining in a kind, engaging way, *-n* can also be used habitually or generically.

5. While the meaning of the forms in *-iin* in declaratives is still somewhat unclear, in questions, they appear to signal interest (under certain circumstances aggression) on the part of the asker, thus becoming a communicative requirement that has almost displaced the question clitic *=ve* still used in the great majority of content questions in the written language.

The discussion above didn't include the suffix *-chig-* with its allomorphs. It never combines with the progressive marker, the copula or other ways of expressing an ongoing situation. In Khorchin, it is used to express dissatisfaction or partial completion of the event or a helpful stance towards the addressee. Partial completion is a mere implicature and a helpful stance is mostly assumed when the addressee is not performing well, thus the *Gesamtbedeutung* might be dissatisfaction. Research on the Khalkha marker is still very much ongoing, but dissatisfaction is also a meaning recurrently associated with *-chih-*. Volition on the part of the subject also seems to be related.

While understanding the exact development of TAME markers in Khorchin and Khalkha would require further research, the overall areal implications are easy to see. Sizable TAME systems as

in Khalkha and the overall more conservative Oirat exhibit a structural complexity similar to that found e.g. in Chechen, and a linkage between these must exist via Turkic. On the other hand, the systems of languages neighboring Khorchin such as Manchu and north-eastern Mandarin don't integrate evidentiality marking into the core system, express tense in a simple system or not grammatically at all, and use only small inventories of aspect markers.

References

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