Issues on Mongolian historical syntax: verbal paradigms, causative constructions and relative clauses

(Abstract)

Su-ying Hsiao
Institute of Linguistics
Academia Sinica
suying@sinica.edu.tw

This talk summarizes my recent investigations on Mongolian verbal paradigms, causative constructions and relative clauses from a historical perspective. Data are drawn from important historical documents such as the Secret History of the Mongols, Altan Tobči, Erdeni Tobčiya, Mongolian Laoqida, Modern Mongolian Corpus, published field reports, reference grammars, data in previous studies, and our own field records.

We find that there are at least two lines of changes in the verbal paradigms related to temporal system from Middle Mongolian to Modern Mongolian. One is the development of perfective suffixes -san/-sen/-son/-sön (BE) as past temporal markers and imperfective suffixes -qu/-kü (BE) as non-past markers. The other line is the emergence of –na/-ne/-no/-nö as non-past tense markers.

As for causative constructions, we propose that ‘-γa/-ge’ and ‘-γul’ were two competing causative suffixes in Middle Mongolian, where ‘-γul’ was a newer and more productive form. There are also two causative suffixes, namely ‘-lγa/-lge’ and ‘-u:l/-ü:l’, in Modern Khalkha Mongolian. However, these two suffixes are complimentary distributed, not competing.

Mongolian relative clauses behave more like Japanese relatives than English or Mandarin Chinese relative clauses. AGENT in Japanese relative clauses might be Nominative or Genitive, a phenomenon called Ga/No Conversion in the literature. We found one relative clause with a Nominative subject in the Secret History of the Mongols, but failed to elicit any from our language consultants.