

Mongolian Verbal Inflectional Suffixes

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1. Introduction

This paper describes verbal inflectional suffixes in Khalkha Mongolian and shows their syntactic-semantic functions. Mongolian inflectional suffixes can be divided as follows according to their syntactic/semantic functions.

- (1) Classification of Mongolian suffixes
 - A. Indicative (*cagaar tögsgöx nöxcöl*)
 - B. Imperative (*biyeer tögsgööx nöxcöl*)
 - C. Verbal noun (*üilt neriin nöxcöl*)
 - D. Connective (*nöxcöl düülen xolbox nöxcöl*)

A Mongolian verb can take maximum one inflectional suffix. Different inflectional suffixes cannot occur within the same lexical boundary of a verb.¹⁾

2. Indicative

Mongolian indicative suffixes express temporal meaning. They display the opposition of Non-past and Past tense.

- (2) Semantic functions of Mongolian indicative suffixes

Non-past: *-na*²⁾

- Past: *-laa* (direct knowledge)
-jee (indirect knowledge)
-v (neutral modal)

The indicative *-na* expresses non-past tense, whereas the other three indicatives (*-laa*, *-jee*, *-v*) show past tenses. The three Past indicatives are differentiated by their modal (evidential) meanings: *-laa* of the speaker's direct knowledge, *-jee* of the speaker's indirect knowledge, and *-v* of neutral modality (Jae-mog Song, 1997). A Mongolian indicative suffix ends a sentence, especially a declarative sentence.

- (3) *Dorj aīrag av-na.*
 Dorj kumiss take-Npast³⁾
 'Dorj buys kumiss.'
- (4) *Dorj aīrag av-laa.*
 Dorj kumiss take-DK Past
 'Dorj bought kumiss. (I witnessed it)'
- (5) *Dorj aīrag av-jee.*
 Dorj kumiss take-IDK Past
 'Dorj bought kumiss. (I haven't witnessed it)'
- (6) *Dorj aīrag av-av.*
 Dorj kumiss take-NM Past
 'Dorj bought kumiss.'

Mongolian indicative suffixes can be used not only in a statement but also in a question, as shown in examples (7-10). A question sentence needs an interrogative marker in Mongolian: *uu/üü/yyu/yüü* in a Yes-No question and *ve/be* in a WH-question. The main verb of a question sentence generally takes a verbal noun suffix in Mongolian, which will be discussed

in detail in section (4).

- (7) *End yuuni nom bai-na ve?*
 here what(Gen) book be-Npast Q
 'What kind of books are here?'
- (8) *End tamxi tat-aj bol-no uu?*
 here cigarette smoke-Conn become-Npast Q
 'May I smoke here?'
- (9) *Ulaanbaatar-t yav-ax-ad xamg-in toxiromjitoi unaa-g
 xel-j ög-nö üü ?*
 Ulaanbaatar-Loc go-Irs-Dat all-Gen proper transportation-Acc
 Tell-Conn give-Npast Q
 'Could you tell me the best transportation to Ulaanbaatar?'
- (10) *Ta or-no uu?*
 you(Nom) come:in-Npast Q
 'Will you come in, please?'

Mongolian indicative suffixes cannot be used in a negative sentence (example 11). Mongolian negative sentences need a verbal noun suffix instead of an indicative suffix.

- (11) A. *Ter öciqdör ir-[lee/jee/ev].*
 he(Nom) yesterday come-DK Past/-IDK Past/-NM Past
 'He came yesterday.'
- B. **Ter öciqdör ir-[lee/jee/ev]-güi.*
 he(Nom) yesterday come-[DK Past/-IDK Past/-NM Past]-Neg
 'He didn't come yesterday.'
- C. *Ter öciqdör ir-sen-güi.*
 he(Nom) yesterday come-Pfv-Neg

'He didn't come yesterday.'

Example (11B) using an indicative suffix is not acceptable in a negative, whereas example (11C) using a verbal noun suffix *-sen* is acceptable.

3. Imperative

Mongolian imperative suffixes complete a directive, an optative, or a volitive sentence. They indicate speaker-oriented modality.⁴¹

(12) Mongolian imperative

A. Directive: ϕ , *-gtun*, *-aač̄/-aat*, *-aaraĩ*, *-g*

B. Voluntative: *-ya*, *-sugaĩ*

C. Optative: *-aasaĩ*, *-tugaĩ*,

D. Admonitive: *-uuzai*

3. 1. Directive

Mongolian has several directive suffixes. Among directive suffixes, the most unmarked one is the zero-morph directive. It is semantically simple and morphologically the least complex. It has the same morphological shape as the verb stem. While other directive suffixes have an additional meaning such as politeness or temporal interval, the zero-morph directive only indicates a strict order.

(13) *Namaĩg itge- ϕ !*

I(acc) believe-Dir

'Believe me!'

(14) *Conx-oo xaa-(g)-aač̄!*

window-Rfl close-Dir

'Close the window, please!'

(15) *Ta suu-gtun!*

you(Nom) sit-Dir

'Take a seat, please!'

(16) *Ter üüniig sain bod-og!*

he(nom) this(Acc) well think-Dir

'Let him ponder about this!'

(17) *Ene em-üg xool-nī ömön uu-(g)aaraī!*

this medicine-Acc meal-Gen before drink-Dir

'Take this medicine before meal!'

Mongolian can express different degrees of politeness/formality with different directive suffixes. The zero-morph directive is a non-polite informal order, the suffix *-aaċ* an informal request, and the suffix *-gtun* a polite formal request. The *-aaċ* form sounds more polite than the zero-morph directive and the *-gtun* form more polite than the *-aaċ* form. Mongolian uses a different directive suffix for a third person, as shown in (16). The agent of the predicate *bod-* 'to think' in (16) is not the hearer but a third person. The suffix *-aaraī* in (17) implies that there is a relatively long temporal gap between the speech moment and the hearer's action.

3. 2. Voluntative

Mongolian has two voluntative suffixes, though *-sugaī* is hardly used in the colloquial Mongolian these days. The Mongolian voluntative suffix *-ya* has a first person subject, either inclusively or exclusively. When the subject is exclusive, it indicates the speaker's volition or intention as in example (18). When the subject is inclusive, it expresses the speaker's proposal as in example (19). It can also be used to express promise as in example (20).

- (18) *Oroi bol-loo. Bi odoo yav-'ya!*
 evening become-Past I(Nom) now go-Vol
 'It is evening. I will leave now!'
- (19) *Gedes öls-ċ bai-na. Xari-j xool-oo id-'ye!*
 stomach hungry-Conn be-NPast return-Conn meal-Refl eat-Vol
 'I'm hungry. Let's go back and eat!'
- (20) *Margaas neg šiidvertei xariu ög-iye.*
 tomorrow one decisive answer give-Vol
 'I will give you a decisive answer tomorrow.'

The voluntative *-sugaī* is hardly used in the spoken language and seldom used in the written language such as a resolution or decree.

- (21) *Xödöö aj axui-g xurдан xogjuul-sugei!*
 countryside economy-Acc quickly develop-Vol
 'To quickly develop the agriculture.'

3. 3. Optative

Optative suffixes indicate the speaker's desire or wish. They mainly refer to a third person, and rarely a first person.

- (22) *Ted ajl-aa xurдан duus-g-aasaī!*
 they(Nom) work-Refl quickly finish-Caus-Opt
 'I hope they finish their work quickly.'
- (23) *Manai oron mand-tugaī!*
 we(Gen) country prosper-Opt
 'May our country prosper!'

3. 4. Admonitive

The admonitive suffix *-uuzai* expresses admonitions or warnings to the hearer. It refers to a second or third person.

- (24) *Ta xojigd-uuzai!*
 you(Nom) be:late-Adm
 'Make sure you are not late!'
- (25) *Ter arxi uu-(g)uuzai!*
 he(Nom) alcohol drink-Adm
 'Make sure he doesn't drink!'

4. Verbal noun

Mongolian verbal noun suffixes indicate aspectual and modal meanings (Jae-mog Song 1997).

- (26) Semantic functions of Mongolian verbal noun suffixes⁵³
- san*: Perfective
 - aa*: Imperfective
 - dag*: Habitual
 - x*: Irrealis

Mongolian verbal noun suffixes can form an attributive or a nominal clause.

- (27) [*Tani xel-deg*] *ünen*.
 you(Gen) speak-Hab true
 'What you say is true.'

- (28) *Davaa [šalgalt-aa saĩn ög-sön]-d-öö maš.*
 Davaa examination-Refl well give-Pfv-Dat-Refl very
ix bayartaĩ bai-na
 much pleased be-Npast
 'Davaa is very pleased at having done well in the examination.'
- (29) [*xot-in töv-d bai-dag*] *zočid buudal.*
 city-Gen center-Loc be-Hab hotel
 'a hotel situated in the center of the city.'
- (30) *Bat [öčigdüör av-san] nom-oo odoo unš-ij bai-na.*
 Bat yesterday buy-Pfv book-Refl now read-Conn be-Npast
 'Bat is now reading the book that he bought yesterday.'

Verbal noun suffixes end nominal clauses in examples (27-28). The verbal noun suffix *-deg* forms a subject clause in (27), and the verbal noun suffix *-sön* forms an oblique nominal clause of the dative-locative preposition *-d* in (28). Mongolian verbal noun suffixes can also form attributive clauses as shown in examples (29-30). Mongolian verbal noun can also finish a sentence like indicative suffixes, which is exemplified in (31-32).

- (31) *Egč min` xödöö yav-san.*
 elder:sister 1P countryside go-Pfv
 'My elder sister went to the country.'
- (32) *Bat ödör бүр сургуул`-d yav-dag.*
 Bat day all school-Dat go-Hab
 'Bat goes to school every day.'

In the above examples (31-32), Mongolian verbal noun suffixes finish sentences without being helped by other grammatical forms.

As mentioned in section (2), Mongolian employs not an indicative suffix

but a verbal noun suffix in a negative sentence. Indicative suffixes cannot be used in a negative sentence in Mongolian.

- (33) *Ter öcīgdör ir-sen-güi.*
 he(Nom) yesterday come-Pfv-Neg
 'He didn't come yesterday.'
- (34) *Manai ax xödöö yav-aa-güi.*
 we(Gen) elder:brother countryside go-Impfv-Neg
 'My elder brother didn't/hasn't go to the country.'
- (35) *Bi ert bos-dog-güi.*
 I(Nom) early get:up-Hab-Neg
 'I don't get up early.'

It is mentioned in section (2) that Mongolian indicative suffixes can be used in a question sentence. Mongolian main verbs, however, normally take verbal noun suffixes in interrogative sentences.

- (36) *Ax cīn` ir-sen üü ?*
 elder:brother 2Poss come-Pfv Q
 'Has your elder brother come?'
- (37) *End nom bai-(g)aa yuu ?*
 here book be-Impfv Q
 'Is there a book here?'
- (38) *Či margaaš yaa-x ve ?*
 you(Nom) tomorrow do:what-Irs Q
 'What are you going to do tomorrow?'

Indicative suffixes are only allowed in question sentences with a certain group of specific verbs such as *bai-* 'to be' or *bol-* 'to become', which is

exemplified in (7-8), or when it conveys the meaning of invitation rather than question, as shown in examples (9-10).

5. Connective

Mongolian has a dozen of connective suffixes. Connective suffixes link a preceding verbal clause and a following verbal clause. They express various kinds of relationships between clauses, though their semantic functions are quite often difficult to pin down. Connective suffixes can be subdivided into coordinate and subordinate.

(39) Mongolian connective suffixes⁶⁾

A. Coordinate

-j, -aad, -n

B. Subordinate

-val, -vč, -saar, -tal, -mage, -xlaar, -xaar, -ngaa, -nguud

Some examples of Mongolian connectives are given below in (40-43). The suffix *-j* mainly expresses simultaneous or continuous actions, whereas the suffix *-aad* indicates the completion of one action before another. The connective suffix *-n* is used to express simultaneous actions. The suffix *-val* expresses the condition under which the action of the following verb happens.

(40) *Bat öglöö ert ir-j анги-a ceverle-jee.*

Bat morning early come-Conn classroom-Refl clean-IDK Past
'Bat came early in the morning and cleaned his classroom.'

(41) *Nansalmaa gadagš-aa gar-aad umar züü rüü*

Nansalmaa outward-Refl run-Conn north direction toward

xar-av.

look-NM Past

'Nansalmaa ran outside and looked to the north.'

- (42)
- Bi c̄üüdeṅ-ee untraa-n xevt-lee.*

I(Nom) light-Rfl turn:off-Conn lie:down-DK Past

'I turned off the light and lay down.'

- (43)
- Širuun boroo or-vol üyer bol-dog.*

heavy rain come-Conn flood become-Hab

'When it rains cats and dogs, there are floods.'

Mongolian has more than a dozen auxiliary verbs. Connective suffixes link a main verb and an auxiliary verb to form an auxiliary verb construction.⁷⁾ Auxiliary verb constructions mainly indicate aspectual or modal meanings.

- (44)
- Egč min` nom unš-ij bai-na.*

elder:sister IPoss book read-Conn be-Npast

'My elder sister is reading a book.'

- (45)
- Ta yav-j bol-no.*

you(Nom) go-Conn become-Npast

'You may go.'

- (46)
- Ter čamd miniü tuxai yar`-j med-ne.*

he(Nom) you(Dat) I(Gen) about tell-Conn know-Npast

'He may tell you about me.'

- (47)
- Bat Tuyaa-d angli-in tuxai yar`-j ög-sön.*

Bat Tuyaa-Dat England-Gen about talk-Conn give-Pfv

'Bat told Tuyaa about England.'

In the above examples (44-47), the *-j bai-* form indicates progressive, the

-j bol- form possibility, the *-j med-* form probability, and the *-j ög-* form benefactive. Each auxiliary verb construction allows a particular connective suffix. Among many connective suffixes, only a few of them, *-j*, *-aad*, *-n*, *-saar*, are allowed in auxiliary verb constructions and the suffix *-j* is most frequently used.

6. Conclusion

This study described Mongolian verbal inflectional suffixes. They consist of four subcategories: indicative, imperative, verbal noun and connective suffixes.

Indicative suffixes end a sentence, mainly declarative sentences and express temporal meanings. Mongolian indicative suffixes are not used in a negative sentence. In a negative sentence they are replaced by verbal noun suffixes. Mongolian indicative suffixes are rarely used in an interrogative sentence.

Verbal noun suffixes form an attributive or a nominal clause. They can also end a sentence. It is a verbal noun suffix that Mongolian uses to finish a negative sentence. Mongolian normally uses verbal noun suffixes in an interrogative sentence too.

Imperative suffixes end a directive, voluntative, optative, or admonitive sentence. They indicate speaker-oriented modality. Mongolian can express different degrees of politeness or formality with different directive suffixes.

Connective suffixes link verbal clauses and express semantic relationship between them. Connective suffixes also form an auxiliary verb constructions affixed to a main verb. Auxiliary verb constructions mainly express aspectual or modal meanings in Mongolian.

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Notes

- 1) A Mongolian verb may have more than two derivational suffixes. If one takes the Mongolian negative marker *-gui* as inflectional, he can say a Mongolian verb may have two suffixes within its morphological boundary. But there are controversies concerned with whether or not the negative marker should be treated as inflectional (Jae-mog Song 1997: 138-140).
- 2) The Mongolian Cyrillic letters are transliterated as /a b v g d ye yo j z i i k l m n o ö p r s t u ü f x c č š šč ' i ` e yu ya/, respectively. Most of Mongolian

inflectional suffixes have allomorphs showing vowel harmony with the stem: *-na/-ne/-no/-nō*, *-laa/-lee/-loo/-löö*, etc.

- 3) Abbreviations in this paper are as follows: Acc (Accusative), Adm (Admonitive), Conn (Connective), Dat (Dative), Decl (Declarative), Dir (Directive), DK Past (Direct Knowledge Past), Gen (Genitive), Hab (Habitual), Hon (Honorific), IDK Past (Indirect Knowledge Past), Impfv (Imperfective), Irs (Irrealis), Loc (Locative), Neg (Negative), NM Past (Neutral Modality Past), Nom (Nominative), Npast (Non-past), Opt (Optative), Past (Past), Pfv (Perfective), 1P (the First Person Possessive), 2P (the Second Person Possessive), Q (Interrogative), Refl (Reflexive-possessive), Top (Topic), Vol (Voluntative).
- 4) Mongolian scholars traditionally divide Mongolian imperative suffixes depending on their subject: 1st person imperative, 2nd person imperative, and 3rd person imperative (Mishig 1978: 133-140, Nadmid 1984: 154-163, Onorbayan 1994: 203-208, Kullmann 1996: 175-183). This paper classifies imperative suffixes into directive, voluntative, optative and admonitive depending on their modal meanings.
- 5) The inventory of Mongolian verbal noun suffixes slightly differs from scholar to scholar. It is generally agreed that *-san*, *-aa*, *-dag* and *-x* should be taken as verbal noun suffixes. Some people, however, include *-gĕ*, *-maar* and *-xuic* as well within verbal noun suffixes.
- (a) *-san*, *-aa*, *-dag*, *-x*, *-gĕ*: Kassatkin (1963), Ozawa (1963: 92-96), Bosson (1964), Poppe (1970: 132-135), Byambasan (1979: 165), Nadmid (1984: 191), Sanzheyev (1988: 113, 116)
- (b) *-san*, *-aa*, *-dag*, *-x*, *-maar*: Street (1963: 205-208)
- (c) *-san*, *-aa*, *-dag*, *-x*, *-maar*, *-xuic*: Onorbayan (1994: 185-189)
- (d) *-san*, *-aa*, *-dag*, *-x*, *-gĕ*, *-maar*, *-xuic*: Mishig (1978: 165-198)
- The suffixes *-gĕ*, *-maar* and *-xuic* are less productive and their syntactic functions are more limited than *-san*, *-aa*, *-dag* and *-x*.
- 6) The inventory of connective suffixes also slightly differs from scholar to scholar. Those given in (38) are generally accepted as connective suffixes. Some people, however, include other forms as well: *-maajin* in Kullmann (1996), *-lgüi* in Onorbayan (1994), *-xaa* in Sanzheyev (1973), *-xaa*, *-maaj/-maajin/-maan* in Luvsanvandan (1968), and *-xaa*, *-snaar*, *-ruun*, *-xuic* in Ozawa (1963). The suffixes *-j*, *-aad* and *-n* are usually considered as coordinate suffixes. Onorbayan (1994), however, takes the suffix *-saar* as coordinate as well.
- 7) See Jae-mog Song (1998) for auxiliary verb constructions in Mongolian.