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Edited by Lars Johanson

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Yakup: An Old Uyghur appeal • Abish & Jumabay: The Kazakh complementizer {-U ʔw} • Dybo & alii: Beltir personal markers • Da deviren Kırmızı & Kırkıcı: Turkish locative verbs • Karakoç & Herkenrath: Unwitnessed events in bilingual Turkish • Brendemoen: In memoriam Even Hovdhaugen • Reviewsevidentiality • Report • Review

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The book under review is written by Robert I. Binnick [RB], professor of linguistics at the University of Toronto, a renowned expert in Mongolian and the theory of tense, and former vice president of the Mongolia Society, who has published extensively on both Mongolian and tense/aspect. In this book the author revisits and to some extent reconsiders his earlier (1979, 1990) research on Mongolian past tenses.

Mongolian is a language with a notoriously complicated system of past tenses that has puzzled several generations of linguists and remains the topic of lively discussions till now. While the number of past tenses (four) is not unheard of, it is the character of relations between them that makes the Mongolian system typologically interesting and descriptively challenging for linguists, and of special interest not only for scholars of Mongolian, but for all linguists who study structurally and/or genetically related languages, including in particular Turcologists and, more generally, scholars of the Central Asian linguistic area.

The book opens with a short preface (pp. xi–xiii), which outlines the general context of the issues to be discussed. This is followed by Chapter I, “The Problem of the Mongolian Past Tenses” (pp. 1–59), which offers a more detailed overview of the problem. In the introductory section, “The Mongolian Past Tenses”, the reader finds a convenient anticipatory summary of the main claims and conclusions of RB (pp. 12–14). The complex system of functional distinctions between the four past-tense markers is described in terms of the following categories (which, in turn, are quite intricately related with and not entirely independent of each other): evidentiality (evidential/inferential), “recency or immediacy” (proximal/distal past), deictic/anaphoric (= “relating the occurrence recounted in their clause to a contextual time”, p. 13) past; spoken/written language. RB’s summary of the main functions of the four past-tense morphemes, *-jee*, *-lee*, *-sen*, and *-v* (in RB’s notation) is also conveniently reproduced in simplified form in his three-dimensional scheme on p. 109. With minor changes and a few clarifications and corrections adopted from Brosig’s (2013) very detailed and useful review of RB’s book, this scheme can be presented in a condensed tabular form as follows (RB’s labels are in some cases followed by more standard and/or more self-explanatory terms):

	evidential = firsthand		inferential = indirective
	in spoken language	in written language	
proximal = recent past (+ present, near future)	<i>-lee</i> (deictic; topic-switch in discourse)		—
(neutral (?))	<i>-sen</i>	<i>-v</i>	
distal = distant past			<i>-jee</i> (deictic; conclusive in discourse)

Note that the somewhat confusing label “inferential” is employed in the same sense as “indirective”,¹ – a term more widely adopted in Turkic scholarship after Johanson (2000).

The next two sections provide a detailed overview of approaches to the analysis of the system of past tenses, subdivided by the author into two groups, semantic and pragmatic theories. RB demonstrates the inadequacy of the purely semantic approaches, arguing for the advantages of the pragmatic theories. These operate, in particular, with such notions as evidentiality, which, according to RB, are indispensable for understanding of the Mongolian system of tenses.

The following three chapters offer a more detailed discussion of the functions of the past tense markers under study. Chapter II, “Use and Interpretation of the Past Tenses in the Spoken Language” (pp. 61–111), consists of three sections that outline the three functional dimensions that serve as a basis for a pragmatically oriented analysis of the past tenses: evidential/inferential (evidentiality), distal/proximal, and deictic/anaphoric. The last division appears somewhat controversial in the theoretical conception of the author, especially in so far as the applicability of the latter member of this opposition is concerned. In particular, while RB’s definition of the anaphoric tenses as those “which relate the time of the eventuality only *indirectly* to the time of utterance, their relationship to this deictic centre being mediated by a *reference time*” (p. 102) largely corresponds to the standard, widely-accepted understanding of the notion of “anaphoric tense” (see, e.g., Higginbotham 2009: 102–115), it is somewhat unclear why it should apply, according to RB, to the usage of the *-sen* past that is described in a Mongolian textbook as the past tense that “is used to talk about an action that has taken place at a set time in the past (e.g., I walked

1 RB only briefly mentions the equivalence of “inferential” and “indirect” on p. 41, fn. 62.

home yesterday)” (p. 106). Likewise, Brosig (2013: 239) qualifies the use of the term “anaphoric past” with regard to both *-v* and *-san* (*-sen*) forms as “somewhat puzzling”.

Chapter III, “Use and Interpretation of the Past Tenses in the Written Language” (pp. 113–146), discusses in detail the differences between the spoken and written varieties of Mongolian and focuses on the peculiarities of the uses of past tenses in the latter.

Chapter IV, “The Discourse Functions of the Tenses” (pp. 147–213), deals with the peculiar uses of these tense markers in narration. They encompass a range of functions that are peculiar to a plethora of languages of the Central Asian region and in fact require a separate descriptive dimension to capture the peculiarities of their use, including such discourse functions as the use of *-lee* to signal change of theme (topic switch).

The short concluding section, “Remarks in Lieu of a Conclusion” (pp. 215–220), emphasizes innovative aspects of the monograph, which include the use of two additional categories, distal/proximal² and, especially, the anaphoric/deictic distinction.

The book concludes with a lists of references and subject index.

While the overall contribution of RB’s book to a better understanding of the verbal system of Mongolian is beyond any doubt, a number of critical remarks of more formal character are in place here.

A serious drawback of the book is its rather meagre theoretical introduction, which leaves the most important theoretical concepts without detailed explanation. Although we find few brief definitions on pp. 12–14, intermingled with RB’s short summary of his description of the uses of the past tense markers, this hardly suffices for such intricate notions as evidentiality or anaphoric tense. A number of important theoretical issues such as the question of whether the category of evidentiality should be considered as belonging to the domain of modality (which is taken for granted by RB;³ for a general discussion of this issue, see Narrog 2010) are, unfortunately, left without any proper discussion. Instead of at least minimal references to the most important theoretical studies on this and other categories (such as, first of all, Johanson & Utas 2000, Aikhenvald & Dixon 2003 and Aikhenvald 2004),⁴ we find an astonishing reference to the Wikipedia article on evidentiality (p. 41, fn. 62), which is certainly out of place in a serious academic work. Likewise, I am not sure it

2 This is of course not entirely a novelty; for instance, the *-jee* tense is described as distant past as early as Ševernina 1958: 83 (“davnoprošedšee vremja”), as noticed by RB himself (p. 15).

3 For instance, on p. 62 we read: “it is a starting point to recognize that the Mongolian past tenses principally differ not in tense or aspect, but rather in modality (and specifically, in evidentiality)”.

4 Only Aikhenvald & Dixon 2003 appears in the “List of works cited” (p. 223).

is appropriate to directly appeal to the opinion of a native speaker in support of the author's terminological preferences, as RB does in fn. 1 on p. 61, where we read:

Tserenchunt, a native speaker, writes, "I completely agree with your conclusion about the inferential and evidential past tenses in Mongolian as in Turkic languages" (personal communication, June 1, 2007).

No doubt, terminological issues are of particular importance for this complex domain of verbal categories, and require more attention and accuracy, especially more accurate references to the relevant literature. Thus, although RB mentions the equivalence of the terms "inferential" and "indirect" (or, more precisely, "indirective"; see Table above) on p. 41, fn. 62, no reference is given to the seminal paper by Johanson (2000) or earlier works by Johanson from the 1990s, where this term is introduced and properly explained.

Another, albeit minor yet quite annoying, shortcoming pertains to the transliteration. Brosig (2013: 239) has mentioned the presence of some faults in transcriptions of Mongolian forms. Unfortunately, RB is also inconsistent and inaccurate in the Romanization of Cyrillic (Russian), in particular, in bibliographical references. Largely following the British standard transliteration, rather than the much more widely-used by Slavicists and recommendable scientific transliteration, also known as the International Scholarly System (but nevertheless rendering *u* and *y* as *š* and *č*, respectively, in accordance with the latter convention!), he fails to be consistent within this hybrid system. Thus, Cyrillic *ь* [*mjagkij znak*] is sometimes omitted, as in *glagol'*nyi and *Mongol'*skom (reference to Dugarova 1991, p. 224), but not in *Kas'yanenko* and *mongol'skii* (same page); Cyrillic *я* is rendered both as *ya* and *ia* (*Kas'yanenko* and *iazyk* in the same reference on p. 224), Cyrillic *и* both as *y* and *i* (*iazyk* and *Sovremenii* in the very same reference), let alone obvious mistakenly spellings such as *Sovremenii* (instead of the correct *Sovremennii* with double *nn*; the recommended scientific transliteration is *Sovremennyj*).

The above-listed shortcomings and drawbacks do not of course diminish the importance and value of the book under review. Altogether, it offers a major contribution to Mongolian linguistics as well as to the typology of tense and evidentiality. Mongolian and Altaic scholars, as well as those interested in the study of verbal categories, will certainly benefit from reading it.

The book under review opens a new linguistic series at Brill, *Empirical Approaches to Linguistic Theory* (with Brian Joseph as Managing Editor), which transparently echoes the well-known series *Empirical Approaches to Language Typology* at de Gruyter. This obviously marks a new round of competition between these two prestigious publishers of linguistic literature, which, we may hope, will serve the interests of the readers, contributing to an overall increase in the quality of the publications.

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