

TAM domain in Mongolian: *-lee* suffix

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1. Introduction. The focus of this research is the *-lee* (*-laa*, *-loo*, and *-löö*) morpheme in Mongolian, which received various types of accounts: past tense marker (Tserenchunt & Luethy, 2000), present perfect marker (Wu, 1995), and evidential marker (Binnick, 2012). In this study, I argue that *-lee* is an aspectual operator that carries an evidential presupposition.

2. The puzzle. The tense analysis cannot capture the nature of *-lee* since it can describe past events, in (1), but also future events, in (2). We also see that *-lee* is incompatible with present interpretation, since (2) cannot have present interpretation even with the temporal adverb ‘now’. These observations provide evidence against classifying *-lee* as tense.

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| (1) Bat döngöj say ir-lee. | (2) Odoo boroo or-loo. |
| Bat just now come-lee | now rain enter-lee |
| ‘Bat came just now.’ | ‘It is about to rain.’ |

The compatibility with different temporal interpretations supports the aspectual analysis of *-lee*; however, this analysis does not explain why *-lee* is incompatible with tense morphology: **unsh-san-laa* (read-PST-lee). Lastly, *-lee* has an evidential component since *-lee* can only be used in the context where the speaker has direct evidence. Sentence (2) is felicitous only in the context where the speaker has direct evidence (e.g., seeing the dark clouds), but infelicitous when the speaker is agnostic about the event (e.g., in the basement and unsure about the weather) or has indirect evidence (e.g., heard from a friend that it is about to rain). The aim of this study is to give a semantic analysis of *-lee* that accounts for all the properties listed above.

3. Proposal. I argue that *-lee* is an aspectual operator carrying an evidential presupposition, following the work of Izvorski, (1997). Starting with the aspectual operator analysis of *-lee*, I argue that *-lee* marks the boundary of an event in relation to the UT. For instance, in (1), *-lee* marks the right boundary of an event without including the UT, i.e., the event of *Bat coming* started in the past and ended before the UT. In (2), *-lee* marks the left boundary of the event without including the UT, i.e., the event *raining* starts from the UT and continues to the future. To account for the problem in which *-lee* is incompatible with tense markers, I argue that, unlike English aspect where the tense locates the event time, *-lee* is obligatorily anchored to the UT; hence, the event time cannot be shifted by tense. In addition to the aspectual component, *-lee* has a direct evidential component, which is consistent with the behavior of presuppositions due to its projection, following Heim (1992). In (3), we see that the evidential requirement is not cancelable, showing that the evidential component is not at issue and is consistent with a presupposition. In addition, sentence (4) presupposes that Tuyaa has evidence in her belief world, thus giving further support to analyzing *-lee* as a presupposition due to its projection.

- (3) End us baih-gui bai-laa.
Here water be-NEG be-lee
= ‘[I have evidence that] there is no water.’
≠ ‘I don’t have evidence that there is no water.’

- (4) *Context: Tuyaa is in the basement and hallucinating about the weather.*
Tuyaa boroo or-loo gedegt itel-tei bai-na.
Tuyaa rain enter-lee that belief-with be-PRES
‘Tuyaa believes that it is going to rain.’

4. Conclusion. I argue that *-lee* cannot be tense but has both aspectual and evidential components. The at-issue component is that *-lee* marks the boundary of an event in relation to the UT, while presupposing that there is direct evidence.

References

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