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.

(1) Bat döngöj say ūr-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) Endus 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