TRACTATA ALTAICA

DENIS SINOR

sexagenario
optime de rebus altaicis merito
dedicata

OTTO HARRASSOWITZ · WIESBADEN

B 27979

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redigerunt

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1976

OTTO HARRASSOWITZ · WIESBADEN

SZEGED

B 87949

SZTE Egyetemi Könyvtár

J000188692

CIP-Kurztitelaufnahme der Deutschen Bibliothek

Tractata altaica : Denis Sinor, sexagenario optime de rebus altaicis merito dedicata / red. Walther Heissig ... – Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 1976.

ISBN 3-447-01798-8

NE: Heissig , Walther [Hrsg.]; Sinor , Denis : Festschrift

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Gesamtherstellung: Buchdruckerei Hubert & Co., Göttingen
Printed in Germany

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Lajos Bese (Budapest)

SOME INVESTIGATIONS ON THE HISTORY OF THE VERBAL INFLECTION IN MONGOLIAN

Outstanding scholars such as Ramstedt, Poppe, and Sanzheev have added successfully to our knowledge of the history of verbal inflection in Mongolian. However, some of their conclusions seem controversial and may provoke criticism as well. In the following paragraphs, I will examine three forms of verbal inflection, with a special view to the pertinent conclusions so far achieved.

1. A very interesting lesson may be drawn from the problem of Buriat -hŪ (that is -hū/-hū) 'first person hortative' particle.

Historically, Rudnev (1913: p. 140), Poppe (1930: p. 120), and Sanzheev (1963: p. 107-108) hardly give attention to this particle. They tend to content themselves with a summary identification, namely, that Buriat -hŪ goes back to Mo. -su/-sü = -suγai/-sügei. One underlying principle of this identification is that Buriat h goes back to the earlier Mo. s, and consequently, -hŪ to an earlier *-sŪ. The agreement thus would seem obvious. This is further reinforced by a striking semantic agreement between Mo. -su/-sü, -suγai/-sügei and Bur. -hŪ.

All the more problematic is the long vowel of Buriat -hŪ, since -- at least to the best of our knowledge of the history of Mongolian phonology -- a long vowel from -hŪ would not have evolved from a -su/-sü or -suγai/-sügei.

The following explanation may be plausible: The presence of Middle Mongolian -sU (-su/-sü) 'first person optative' should be reckoned with as regards Buriat -hŪ 'first person hortative.' This was the first component in any case. The second component, in my opinion, might have been the specialized variant of MMo. -kU (-ku/-kü) 'future potential.'[1]

The meanings are not inconsistent with such an interpretation. MMo. -sU 'first person optative' is in fact, a mood marker, while the potential component of -kU 'future potential' might have been modified, in a sense, the optative meaning of -sU. Thus it was possible that the mood and the temporal marker became associated. Moreover, it

is precisely this *.gU that forms the second component of MMo. -ǰU.gU 'preterit imperfect.'

Buriat -hŪ may thus be considered as the aggregate of original MMo. -sU 'first person optative' and -kU 'future potential.' The development may have been: *-sU.gU > *-sU'U > -sŪ > -hŪ.

To be sure, *-sU.gU, which may correspond to Buriat -hŪ, is not seen in either Middle Mongolian or Common Mongolian. In this respect, the geographical distribution of this form may be very interesting. It occurs namely in the Buriat dialects as -hŪ, -'Ū and -Ū, in the Tsongol and Khamnigan as -sŪ, and in the Dörböt of the Oirat-group as -sŪ. This does not preclude the possibility that it might have arisen in the Middle Mongolian (or possibly earlier) as a form of Old-Buriat (-Oirat) dialect.

2. In his "Introduction to Mongolian Comparative Studies," Professor Poppe has theorized a derivation of the modern dialectal forms -sā, -sǟ, and -hǟ from the Mo. -suɣai/-sügei. I quote the pertinent passages from his argument below.

"In Monguor is a special imperative form in -sā ... which has developed from a form with the suffix -*suɣai, that is, with the secondary element -*ɣai." (§198)

"Only few Mongolian languages have the optative form with the ancient suffix -*su augmented by the secondary element -*ɣai.

This augmented suffix is -sā < -*suɣai in Kalmuck. In Buriat this suffix is -hǟ with personal pronouns added enclitically:... " (§199)

This theorem is repeated by Professor Poppe in another place of his work as follows:

"The augmented optative suffix is -*suɣai. This has been generalized in Written Mongolian and is the only optative suffix in classical Written Mongolian. The suffix -*suɣai occurs in Mong. /-sā/, Bur. /-hǟ/+ personal endings/, and in Kalmuck /-sǟ/ ..." (§203)

I have quoted Professor Poppe's interpretation at some length in order to make this concept -- originated by Ramstedt (1903: pp. 70-71), -- clear. Accepted by Sanzheev (1963: pp. 105-107) as well, it concludes that the contemporary dialectical forms -sā, -sǟ, -hǟ must be derived from Mo. -suɣai/-sügei.

I am very much inclined to believe that in this instance my predecessors have not paid attention to the evidence of the Mongolian hortative particle -tuɣai/-tügei. I have pointed out elsewhere that the Middle Mongolian -tU.gAi, 'third person optative,' may be segmented pretty much the same way as -sUgAi, 'first person optative.' Although the first -tU. segment of -tU.gAi does not occur by itself, still its being an independent morpheme is well proven by the analogy of -sU. in MMo. -sU.gAi and of contemporary Mongol -tu., as well as by Dagur -ta/-te/-to. In turn, the second segment of -tU.gAi (and -sU.gAi -- termed by Professor Poppe as a "secondary element") -- is identical with the .gAi segment of -sU.gAi. In this way, MMo. -sU.gAi, 'first person optative' and -tU.gAi, 'third person optative' are parallel forms (par excellence co-variants) as regards their structure (Bese 1970: 3).

Now, it is very interesting to note that in contemporary Mongolian dialects no *-tā or *-tǟ of any kind can be seen as a derivation of MMo. -tU.gAi. These would be the expected reflexes if allowance is made for the above cited interpretation of Mo. -sU.gAi > -sā, -sǟ, -hǟ. On the contrary, the contemporary dialectal counterparts of MMo. -tU.gAi are these: Kalmuck -tχā/-tχɛ̄, Ordos -tugǟ/-tugī, Dagur -tχai/-tχei/-tχoi. It means that the "regular" contemporary forms of the MMo. -sU.gAi, per analogiam, might be some kind of *-sgā, *-sgǟ, *-sχai, *-sugī, etc. This example indicates that it is difficult to conceive a -CVV development of -sā, -sǟ, -hǟ in the contemporary dialects from a MMo. -CVCVi final morpheme sequence in -sU.gAi.

Thus, I prefer to state that the contemporary forms -sā, -sǟ, -hǟ of Mongolian dialects may only be traced back to an earlier -sAi < *-sUi (that is MMo. -sU 'first person optative' and -i 'present durative' or 'present emphaticum'). The proposed *-sU.i may be analogous to the example of the MMo. -kUi (that is -kU 'future potential' and -i 'present adjective or durative') > Monguor, Dagur, Paoan -guī. This diphthongized optative particle -sAi appears first as a "vulgar" form in classical Written Mongolian and in Literary Oirat. -sAi < *-sU.i there are no antecedent in Middle Mongolian written records. Thus, since we are without evidence to the contrary, I also have come to think that MMo. -sU.gAi 'first person optative' did not survive into contemporary Mongolian, and the classical Written Mongolian -suɣai/-sügei may be only a pure orthographical borrowing from written Middle Mongolian.

3. I have dealt earlier with the problems of segmentation of MMo. -ǰU.gU/.i/ 'present imperfect' and -ǰU 'imperfect converb' (Bese 1970: 6, 9.3), and will now deal with the historical aspects of the question.

3.1 In Middle Mongolian, the form of the 'imperfect converb' is

-ǰu/-ǰü. This is the written form. However, it is not possible to derive -ǰ, -ži in the modern dialects from this. The antecedent of the modern forms could only have been *-ǰi, as Ramstedt (1903: p. 83) has hypothesized.

This *-ǰi antecedent occurred in MMo. -ǰi.gAi, which is a variant of the MMo. -ǰU.gUi in the text of the Secret History. We have, therefore, no reason to doubt the authenticity of *-ǰi.

At the same time the pronunciation of MMo. -ǰU (that is -ǰu/-ǰü) must have been authentic, otherwise it would have been written as -ǰi, as in -ǰi.gAi.

We must deal with the antecedents of the modern Mongolian dialects already at the beginning of the 17th century, the time of the formation of Classical Mongolian. The forms of the 'imperfect converb' in modern dialects, however, go back to the *-ǰi, MMo. -ǰi. antecedent. These forms are not directly connected to the MMo. -ǰU. In this manner, it may be presumed that the -ǰu/-ǰü in classical Written Mongolian was, strictly speaking, already only an othographical borrowing from written Middle Mongolian. And it is of course possible to say the same of the classical Written Mongolian -ǰuɣui/-ǰügüi, 'present imperfect,' as well.

3.2 According to Ramstedt (1903: p. 83), *-ǰi was originally a verbal noun. Here it is necessary for us to consider other circumstances.

The MMo. -ǰU, and the Modern Mongolian -ǰ, -ži, are converbial particles. This means that their syntactical role with regard to finite verbal particles is subsidiary. From this, in turn, it follows that the converbs are historically also subsidiary: subsidiary in function, and subsidiary also in relation to participating elements. That is, another element could take precedence over them.

At the same time MMo. -ǰU.gU/.i/, -ǰA.gA.i/ and -ǰi.gA/.i/, 'present imperfect,' begin with the morpheme segments -ǰU, -ǰA. and -ǰi. This proves that, at one time, these segments were able to function as independent tense-markers by themselves; yet the formation of these tense-marker clusters was also secondary in proportion to the simple tense-markers.

We may state additionally, then, that the Ancient Mongolian *-ǰi originally was a tense-marker with the meaning 'imperfect.' This primary 'imperfect' meaning and tense-marker function of the AM *-ǰi is a recent fact in the Ordos-dialect. It has several traces in other contemporary Mongolian dialects and even in some historical records,

too. In time, this tense-marker became ambivalent, having a dual function as both tense-marker and converbial particle. When the *-ǰi 'imperfect' later became strengthened in its function as converbial particle, that is, when the category of converb definitively formed, other elements (.gU. and .gA.i) coordinated with the -ǰU, -ǰA and -ǰi variants which remained in the role of tense-marker. By this process, the disturbing circumstance of the syntactical ambivalence is eliminated.

It is indeed interesting that we can hypothesize from Middle Mongolian three present tense-markers (-i, -yU, -mU), two imperfect tense-markers (-gA, -ǰU./ -ǰA./ -ǰi.), and for Ancient Mongolian two perfect tense-markers (-bA, -lU./ -lA.). There were others, but they are of secondary importance here. From this, it follows that tense-markers were relatively numerous in Ancient Mongolian.

Considering that ambivalence of suffixes (suffixes taken in the widest sense) is still the rule in Middle Mongolian (Bese 1970: 10.2) as well, it is to be presumed that many tense-markers could also have been ambivalent in the earlier state of the Mongolian language. Later, as a consequence of the better determination of their sure functions, certain morphemes became "specialized." This could also have been the case with the *-ǰi 'imperfect' tense-marker.

It is of secondary importance here, but if we consider only Middle Mongolian, we can establish the fact that contemporary Mongolian languages are a good deal poorer in tense-markers. In my opinion, the reason for this must be sought in the formation of the converbial system. The system of the converbial or analytical constructions formed by means of converbs offers a new possibility for giving expression to temporal and modal relations. In this manner, it is very probable that the impoverishment of tense-markers in Mongolian and the development of the system of analytic structure are historically reciprocal.

3.3 Various combinations of mood-marker + mood-marker, tense-marker + mood-marker and tense-marker + tense-marker occur in the Middle Mongolian verb conjugation (Bese 1970: 10.3). However, this verb-conjugation is characterized by a strong agglutinative affix. The antecedent of this is the Middle Mongolian -ǰU.gU/.i/, -ǰA.gA/.i/ and ǰi.gA/.i/, 'present-imperfect,' tense-marker cluster. And in connection with this, attention may be given to another interesting phenomenon. I believe that it is not by chance that .gUi (that is -kU, 'future potential,' and -i, 'present durative') occurred after -ǰU. in -ǰU.gU/.i/ and -ǰA. and -ǰi. in -ǰA.gA./.i/ and -ǰi.gA/.i/ respectively, and not elsewhere. This appears to reinforce my conclusion that in

Ancient Mongolian some form of vowel harmony was obligatory in the suffixes (Bese 1970: 9).

Consequently, -ǰU., -ǰA. and -ǰi. are co-variants, co-variants, that is, in the differing of their vowels. Differences in meaning also were realized.

3.4 Finally, let us pose the question as to how contemporary Mongolian -ǰä, -ǰɛ could derive from Middle Mongolian -ǰU.gU/.i/, -ǰA.gA/.i/ and -ǰi.gA/.i/, 'present imperfect.'

If we hypothesize that intervocalic -g- regularly dropped out here, a long vowel developing in place of two syllables, and that dz, z came from ǰ, then contemporary Mongolian *-dzU^{i} must come from MMo. -ǰU.gu.i. Yet this possibility is eliminated since such a form does not exist.

As well, the possibility of contemporary Mongolian -ǰä deriving from MMo. -ǰA.gA.i is eliminated because ǰ > dz, and z.

There remains MMo. -ǰi.gA.i, and the development here of -ǰigAi > *-ǰi'Ai > *-ǰiAi > *-ǰiĀ > -ǰä is conceivable; indeed it appears indisputable. Only the contemporary Mongolian alteration -tχä, etc. < MMo. -tUgAi could refute it.

NOTE 1. On the distribution of MMo. -kU 'future potential' see Bese 1970: 6.21. It was this -gU. augmented by the emphatic particles ǰe, ǰe.i 'surely' which also developed into MMo. -gU.ǰA.i 'dubitative.'

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