

24.900: Fieldwork on the Mongolian language (Part 2)

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1 Task 1: Basic clause structure

I began the interview by asking Enky for the Mongolian equivalent of ‘John’ and ‘Mary.’ They are ‘Bat’ (pronounced /bʌt/) and ‘Dorma’ (pronounced as it looks) respectively. We will be meeting these characters frequently in this assignment. In presenting this section, I was torn between the logic of presenting the sentences in order of complexity, but was overcome by the wish to present a coherent story.

Here we also give trees for some of the simpler sentences in the collection. It should be generally clear that, at least for unembedded sentences, Mongolian is a head-last language as Korean and Japanese.

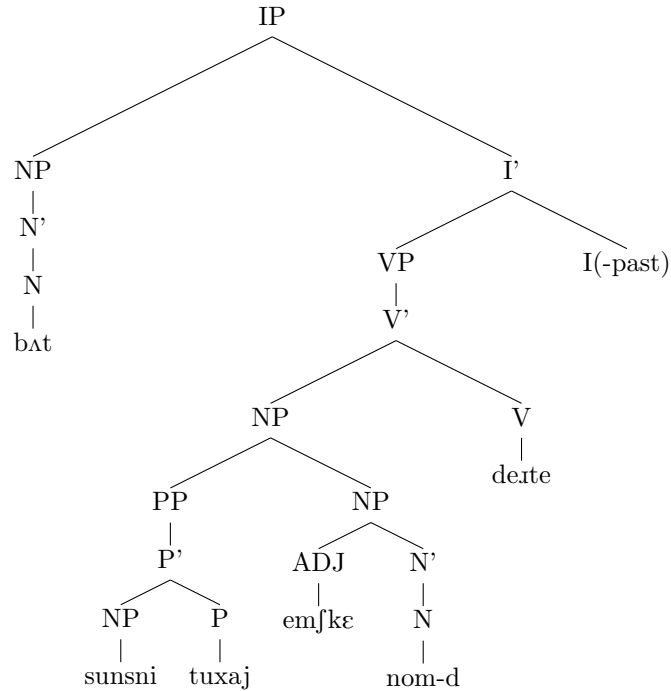
1. ‘Bat likes scary books’

| | | | |
|-----|-------|--------|-------|
| bʌt | emʃkɛ | nom-d | derte |
| Bat | scary | books* | likes |

* In the previous assignment we saw that the Mongolian word for ‘book’ is /nom/. The suffix ‘-d’ that follows in the above is not due to the plural form, but instead seems to be a marker for the object in the sentence. The actual marker evidently depends upon the verb of the sentence. When asked about a predictive rule, Enky was unable to formulate one.

2. ‘Bat likes scary books about ghosts.’

| | | | | | |
|-----|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| bʌt | sunsni | tuxaj | emʃkɛ | nom-d | derte |
| Bat | ghosts | about* | scary | books | likes |



* The preposition ‘about’ is treated differently in Mongolian from other prepositions such as ‘for’, ‘into’, ‘with’, etc. In particular, ‘about’ is special in that when formulating a prepositional phrase with the head ‘about’, the lexical item for ‘about’ does not attach to the object of the (c.f. Example 9 and 10, which are apparently more common forms for prepositional phrases). It seems to be a general rule that preposition morphemes are attached to the last word of the clause. ‘About’ is an exception to this rule.

3. **‘Dorma knows Bat likes scary books.’**

| | | | | | |
|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| dorma | bat-in | emfke | nom-d | derte | mitan |
| Dorma | Bat | scary | books | likes | knows |

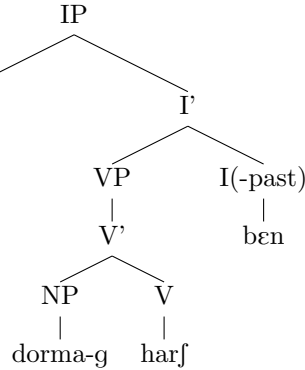
4. **‘Dorma hides under the bed.’**

| | | | | |
|-------|------|--------|---------|--------------|
| dorma | orni | dɿɿ | noktitʃ | bɛn |
| Dorma | bed | under* | hides | (I: present) |

* Another exception to the preposition rule.

5. **‘Bat sees Dorma.’**

| | | | |
|-----|---------|------|--------------|
| bat | dorma-g | harʃ | bɛn |
| Bat | Dorma | sees | (I: present) |



6. **‘Bat saw Dorma.’**

bʌt dorma-g harʃ-an
 Bat Dorma saw*

* The suffix ‘-an’ to the end of the verb is used to indicate past tense. I was informed that explicit tense morphemes (such as /ben/ ‘(I: present)’) are not necessary, and that they can be replaced by these tense suffixes *to verbs*. In the upcoming examples, we will see an example where an explicit future tense word is needed because the phrase does not terminate with a vowel.

Furthermore, I was told that there are no past participles forms; e.g. there is no “Bat has seen Dorma” in Mongolian.

7. **‘Bat loves Dorma.’**

bʌt dorma-d herte
 Bat Dorma* loves

* In examples 5, 6, 7 we see clearly that the marker for the object of a sentence depends on the verb of the phrase (e.g. ‘-d’ or ‘-g’). Enky was unable to give me a predictive rule.

8. **‘Bat wants to give Dorma a gift.’**

bʌt dorma-d bilɣ otʃrɣ hustʃ bɛn
 Bat Dorma gift give wants (I: present)

9. **‘Bat will marry Dorma if he can impress her.’**

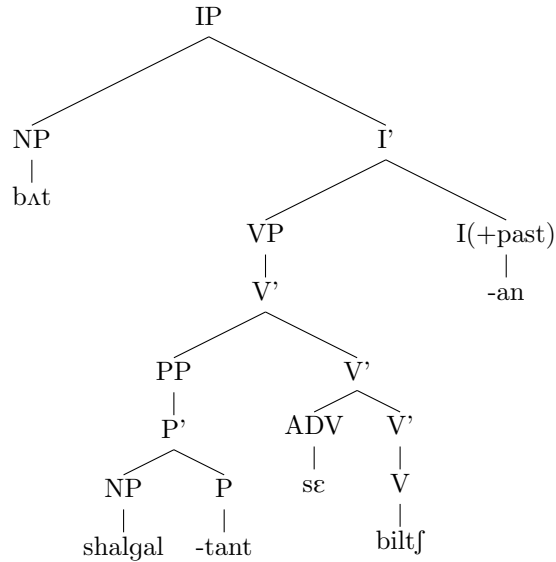
hirbe bʌt dorma-d talagd-val tante gilʃ-in
 if Bat Dorma impress-if* her marry-(I: future)**

* In Mongolian, the ‘if’ construction involves two morphemes which wrap the subordinate clause. I was unable to obtain any other construction that showed such splitting. I was similarly unable to obtain a sentence where the /hirbe/ and /-val/ occurs as a single unit. Hence, it is not clear if the process observed here is similar to that found in German verb splittings.

** Note that, again, the tense of the sentence is marked with a suffix that attaches to the verb.

10. **‘Bat studied hard for a test.’**

bʌt shalgal-tant sɛ biltʃ-an
 Bat test-for hard studied-(I: past)



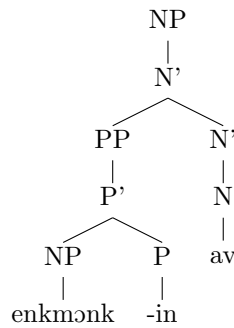
11. ‘Bat married Dorma.’

bat dorma-tai gilʃ-an
 Bat Dorma-with married-(I: past)

2 Task 2: Structure of complex NPs

1. Enkhmunkh’s father*

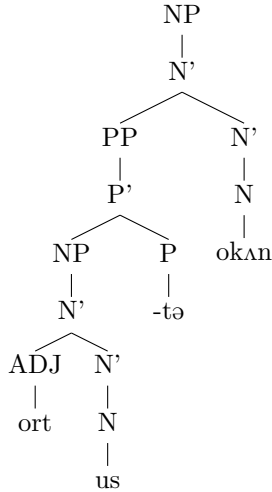
enkmɔnk-in av
 Enky-of father



* During the interview, I actually requested “father of Enky”, not “Enky’s father.” I was informed, however, that both phrases would be mapped to the above Mongolian phrase.

2. Girl with long hair

ort us-tə* okan
 long hair-with girl

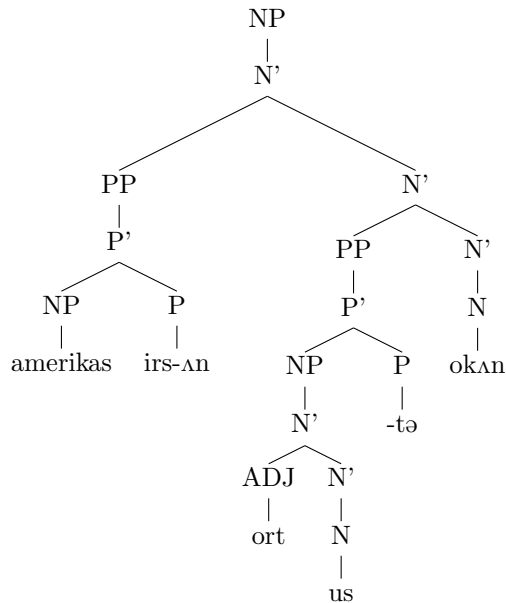


* Refer to Sentence (11) of the previous section. During the interview, I observed that the morpheme for the preposition “with” assumes different forms in different sentences. Enky explained to me (or attempted, at the least!) that the forms of words are affected by the presence of “masculine” and “feminine” vowels. In particular, he claimed that the vowel ‘a’ in (11) is an example of a masculine vowel, and hence the morpheme for “with” becomes /-tai/. On the other hand, he reported that ‘u’ is a feminine vowel in this example, and therefore brings out the /-tə/ form.

In this example and the previous, spoken Mongolian seems to suggest the possibility that the head of a prepositional phrase is “attaching” onto the noun object. However, I have drawn the structures here assuming that the underlying workings of Mongolian is identical to that of English.

3. Girl with long hair who comes from America.

amerikas irs-λn ort us-tə okλn
 America come-from long hair-with girl



To simplify the structure, I may have misrepresented /irs-λn/ ‘come-from’ by putting it as a single preposition. I do not feel equipped to tackle the potential complexity otherwise! As a matter of fact,

I had originally asked for “Girl with long hair from America” rather than “Girl with long hair *who comes* from America.” For some reason, Enky had trouble in translating the first form.

I am also unsure which additions are modifiers or complements to the head.

A bonus entry!

4. **Bat loves the girl with long hair *and* Dorma.**

| | | | | | | |
|-----|------|-----------|------|-----|-------|-------|
| bʌt | ort | us-tə | okʌn | ba | dorma | herte |
| Bat | long | hair-with | girl | and | Dorma | loves |

3 Task 3: Embedded declarative CPs

One example of a sentence with an embedded clause (using the ‘if’ complementizer) has been given as Sentence (10) of Section 1. We repeat it here and present another ‘if’-statement.

1. **Bat will marry Dorma if he can impress her.**

| | | | | | |
|-------|-----|---------|------------|-------|-------------------|
| hirbe | bʌt | dorma-d | talagd-val | tante | gilʃ-in |
| if | Bat | Dorma | impress-if | her | marry-(I: future) |

I find it difficult to draw a structure for this sentence because it seems like the main clause (“Bat will marry Dorma”) doesn’t seem to have a subject!

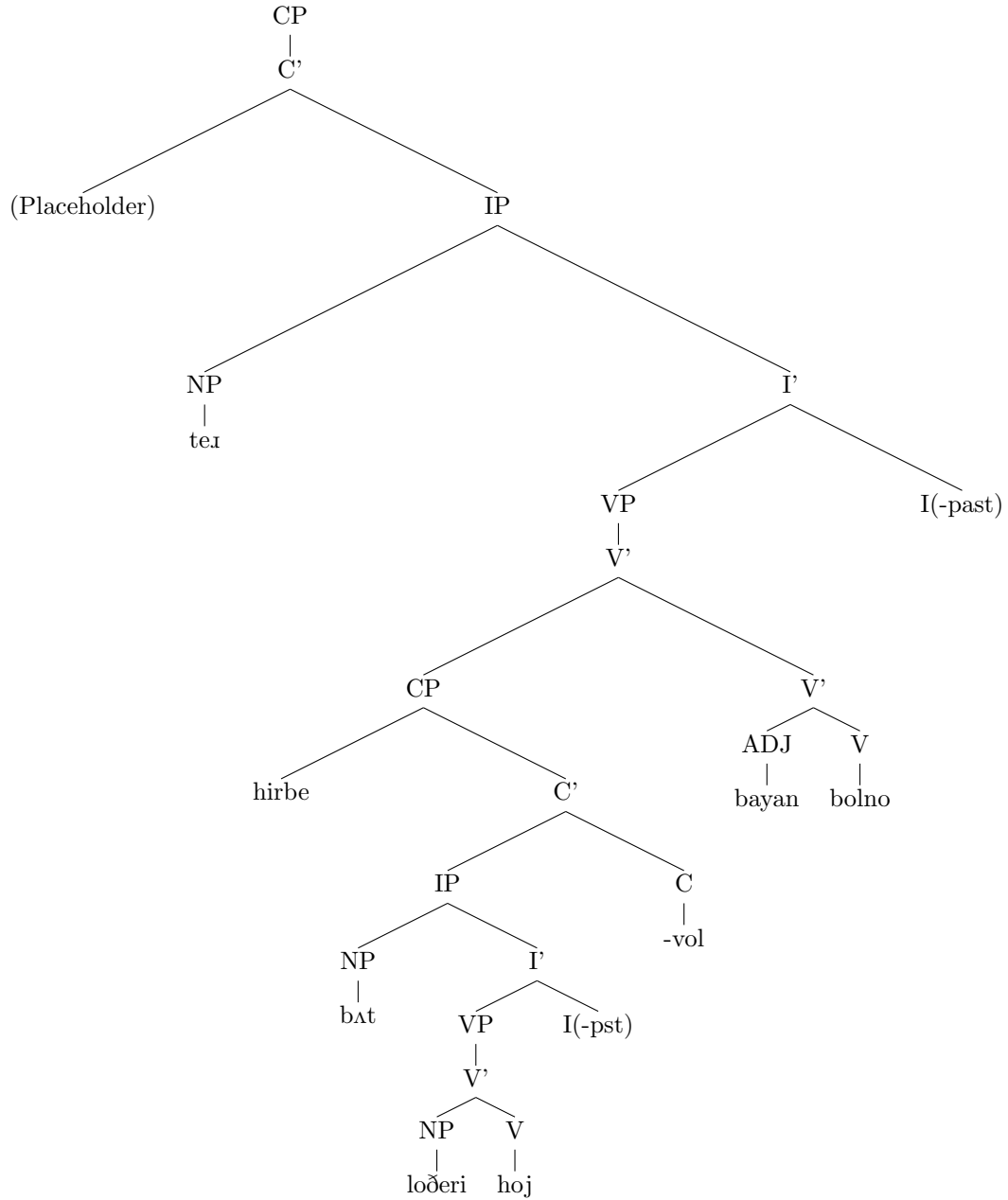
2. **Bat will be rich if he wins the lottery.**

| | | | | | | |
|-------|-----|---------|----------|-----|-------|--------|
| hirbe | bʌt | loðeri | hoj-vol | teɪ | bayan | bolno |
| if | Bat | lottery | wins-if* | he | rich | will** |

* A close examination with the previous example reveals that the morpheme for ‘if’ is actually different in the two cases! (e.g. /-val/ vs. /-vol/.) This was explained by Enky as owing to vowel assimilation-like process.

** It was noted by Enky that in this example, the explicit morpheme for the future tense is needed because the last word in the sentence otherwise (/bayan/ ‘rich’) is an adjective and hence does not admit a suffix tense marker.

I find it difficult to formulate the structure because it does not seem to follow the general head-last pattern. It is perhaps possible that the deep structure is as the following:



with a subsequent move operation on the CP clause to the outermost C' placeholder. However, I feel that it is difficult to postulate this explanation with only two examples.

4 Task 4: Yes/No questions

1. Does Bat see Dorma?

bʌt dorma-g harʃ-an ow?
 Bat Dorma see-past does?

2. Does Bat like scary books?

bat emfke nom-d derte yu?
Bat scary books like does?

3. **Does the girl have long hair?**

tir okan ort us-tə yu?
the girl long hair-with does/is?

A more direct translation of this question may be “Is the girl *with* long hair?”

Evidently, it seems to be a fairly simple business in Mongolian to construct “yes/no” questions. In the first two examples (for which I presented the declarative forms in Section 1) we see that we simply need to add a special complementizer at the end to construct the question form.

5 Task 5: *wh*-questions

1. **What did Bat study for?**

jund bat biltjun be?
What* Bat study (a marker for a question)

* In this sentence, it is permissible to exchange the order of the first two words. The sentence “bat jund biltjun be?” is valid; and is in fact the first form that Enky produced. At this point, Enky remarked that in Mongolian one can “get away with all sorts of rearrangements”! However, I have presented this *wh*-first scenario to be more consistent with the other examples.

2. **Who does Bat love?**

hind bat herte ve?*Who Bat love (a marker for a question)

* Note the $b \rightarrow v$ swap. Enky was unable to explain the rule.

3. **Why does Bat want to marry Dorma?**

jagat bat dorma-te gilfitig huf ben ve?
Why Bat Dorma marry want (I: present) (marker for question)

Similarly to the “yes/no” questions, the *wh*-questions also require the use of a special complementizer which occurs at the end of the sentence. However, the *wh* questions require an additional morpheme near the beginning of the sentence. While in these examples I have taken the *wh*-words to be *at* the beginning of the question for consistency, I was informed that the relative order of the first two words can be swapped.