

Verbal complementizers in Kalmyk

This paper deals with the complementizer(s) in Kalmyk (a Mongolic language spoken in the Republic of Kalmykia in Russia). According to the descriptive grammars (e.g., Sanžeev 1983) in Kalmyk the complementizer function is performed by one of the (participial) forms of the verb *gi-* ‘say’, a typologically common situation (see Dixon and Aikhenvald 2006). Those forms are mainly *giž*, illustrated in (1), but also *gihäd* and *gism*.

- (1) Eck-n’ Badm nand möng ög-txä **gi-ž** kel-v.
 father-P.3 B. I.DAT money give-JUSS say-CV.IPFV tell-PST
 ‘His father said that Badma should give me the money.’

Two questions that arise is (a) whether the complementizers *giž*, *gihäd*, and *gism* are (fully grammaticalized) instances of the category C, like complementizers in the better-known European languages, and (b) whether the verb *gi-* ‘say’ in its ‘verbal’ (unembedded) uses, such as (2), is an instance of the category V, just like other matrix verbs.

- (2) Eck-n’ Badm nand möng ög-txä **gi-v**.
 father-P.3 B. I.DAT money give-JUSS say-PST
 ‘His father said Badma should give me the money.’

The data obtained through field work suggest that answers to both questions should be negative. To anticipate the conclusion, I will show that the complementizers derived from *gi-* behave much like verbs while the verb *gi-* behaves much like a complementizer. That is, the verb-like and complementizer-like uses of *gi-* are very similar and, in fact, as I will propose, should receive a unified analysis.

As to the question (a), it can be shown that the complementizers have internal (morpho)syntactic structure. This is because the participial markers present on the complementizers appear to show the same syntactic properties that they display otherwise. Thus, *giž*, morphologically the adverbial participle (converb) of the verb *gi-* ‘say’, at least for some speakers, may not be embedded in a noun phrase, like adverbial modifiers in general (see Grimshaw 1990); instead the adjectival participial form *gism* is used, as shown in (3). The simplest way to accommodate those data is to say that the complementizers should be synchronically analyzed as participles, comprising (at least) of V and a participial morpheme (Ptcp).

- (3) [Cergč-nr xol tal jov-tn **gi-sn/*gi-ž** zakvr] av-v.
 soldier-PL river towards go-IMP.PL say-PC.PST/*say-CV.IPFV order receive-PST
 ‘Soldiers received the order to go towards the river.’

As to the question (b), it can be shown that the verb *gi-* ‘say’ in its verbal uses is a (semi)functional element, showing affinity to the traditional elements of the category C. Firstly, *gi-* ‘say’ is a unique verb that is able to embed a finite clause directly. All other matrix verbs require the support of the complementizer *giž* (*gihäd*), as shown in (4); cf. (2).

- (4) *Eck-n’ Badm nand möng ög-txä kel-v.
 father-P.3 B. I.DAT money give-JUSS tell-PST
 ‘His father said that Badma should give me the money.’

Secondly, it resists nominal complements, as shown in (5). Thirdly, it requires the embedded clause to immediately precede it, which is not the case for, e.g., the verb *kel-* ‘tell’. This is shown by the (dis)allowed positions of the subject in (6a)–(6b).

- (5) Ajsa ju kel-v/??? gi-v?
 A. what tell-PST/??? say-PST
 ‘What did Ajsa say?’

- (6) a. (**Eck-n'**) kövüid-t-än [mod xamxl-txa gi-ž] (**eck-n'**) kel-v.
 (father-P.3) sons-DAT-P.REFL wood cut-JUSS say-CV.IPFV (father-P.3) tell-PST
 'Father said that his sons should cut some wood.'
- b. (**Eck-n'**) kövüid-t-än [mod xamxl-txa] (* **eck-n'**) gi-v.
 (father-P.3) sons-DAT-P.REFL wood cut-JUSS (* father-P.3) say-PST
 'Father said that his sons should cut some wood.'

The conclusion that we can draw from these data is that *gi-* in both its complementizer-like and verb-like uses is a verb and a complementizer at the same time. The analysis that I would like to propose for that peculiar situation is that *gi-* spans across two adjacent heads (V and C) in a nanosyntactic fashion (see Starke 2009). That is, *gi-* is associated in the lexicon with a two-head C-V structure. This explains why *gi-* bears syntactically active verbal morphology while otherwise behaving like a complementizer in (obligatorily and uniquely) selecting a finite clause immediately adjacent to it.

There is one important question that this unified analysis of *gi-* raises. Namely, why *gi-* is apparently interpreted as 'say' in examples like (2), while lacking any lexical content when embedded (note that *gi-* also introduces complements of verbs like *san-* 'think', which don't refer to a speech act).

What I would like to suggest is that *gi-* lacks any encyclopedic content, like a functional element. The verbal meaning that we perceive in (2) arises as the result of a postsyntactic (presumably, pragmatic) rule of default semantic interpretation, assigning the meaning 'say' to the V whose complement is a CP (along the lines of Pustejovsky 1995). Perhaps, this is also what we find in a zero-verb construction in Russian shown in (7), which is interpreted as a speech act. This analysis might be supported by the fact that some speakers in certain contexts translate the unembedded *gi-* as 'want', which shows that its meaning is not fixed in the lexicon.

- (7) Ja ej: 'Id-i sjuda!
 I.NOM her.DAT go-IMP here
 'I tell her "Come here!"'

To conclude, the complementizers in Kalmyk have a double categorial nature, being both C and V elements. Viewed diachronically, they have lost the semantics but retained the morphology of their verbal source and acquired a new C syntax. These data can shed some light on the emergence of functional elements from lexical sources.

References

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