

Relative Clauses in Kalmyk

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Jang, Youngjun. 2009. Relative Clauses in Kalmyk. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*. 17(3). 25-37. This paper introduces the Kalmyk language and examines the relative clauses of this language. As an SOV language, Kalmyk relative clauses exhibit common characteristics with those of Korean, but in some contexts they have similarities to those of English. For example, Kalmyk does not allow Internally-Headed Relative Clauses (IHRCs), which is a common characteristics of Korean, Japanese, and some other American Indian languages like Quechua. Once we decide the overall properties of Kalmyk relative clauses, we may be able to shed a new light on the general characteristics of relative clauses in natural languages. In particular, Kalmyk may provide a very good research resource for relative clause constructions because it belongs to Altaic languages while it also shows characteristics of SVO European languages like English.

Key Words: Kalmyk, relative clause, head-final, head-initial, Altaic, IHRC, EHRC, Mongolian

1. A Brief Introduction of Kalmyk¹⁾

In this section, let us briefly introduce the Kalmyk people, most of whom are residing in the autonomous republic of Kalmykia of Russia, and their language, one of the endangered languages of the world spoken by around 170 thousand

1) An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 18th International Congress of Linguists (CIL18), held at Korea University, Seoul, July 21 - 27, 2008. Comments and question from the audience were very helpful for improving the contents of this paper. Special thanks go to Aisha Bitkeeva and her father for their warm remarks and comments on my paper. All errors are, however, my own.

population.

In Section 1.1, we introduce the Kalmyk people, tracing their history back to the 11th century when they first appeared in the non-Mongolian European territory. In Section 1.2, we are concerned with the Kalmyk language, mostly from a linguistic point of view, focusing on its typological and genealogical characteristics.

1.2 The Kalmyk People

Kalmyk is a name given to western Mongolian people, who migrated from Central Asia in the 17th century. The majority of the Kalmyk people are now living in the autonomous Republic of Kalmykia on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, as we see in the map.

(1) Republic of Kalmykia²⁾



One of the 21 republics of the Russian Federation, Kalmykia has around

2) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalmyks>

320,000 population in its territory, most of whom are Buddhist believers. Outside this Republic, there are Kalmyks in Mongolia and the north-western part of China, too.

Ethnically, the Kalmyks are the European branch of the Oirat Mongolians. Their ancient lands are now located in Kazakhstan, Russia, Mongolia and the north-western part of China. After the fall of the Yuan Dynasty of the Mongols in 1368, which was the successor empire of Ghengis Khan, the Kalmyk people emerged as a powerful foe against the Eastern Mongols, the Ming Chinese and their successor, the Manchu, in a nearly 400 year military struggle for domination and control over Mongolia. The struggle ended in 1757 with the extermination of the Oirat Mongols in Dzungaria, the last of the Mongolian groups, by China.³⁾

The ancestors of the Kalmyks, often called the Oirats, migrated from the steppes of southern Siberia on the banks of the Irtysh River to the Lower Volga region. Various reasons have been given for their movement toward the West, but the generally accepted answer is that they sought abundant pastures for their herds.

The Kalmyks settled in the wide open steppes from Saratov in the north to Astrakhan on the Volga delta in the south and to the Terek River in the southwest. They also encamped on both sides of the Volga River, from the Don River in the west to the Ural River in the east. This area under Kalmyk control would eventually be called the Kalmyk Khanate.⁴⁾

The name "Kalmyk" is a word of Turkic origin that means "remnant" or "to remain."⁵⁾ This name appears as early as the thirteenth century in Turkish records. It also appears as early as in the 16th century in Russian written sources.

Within a quarter century after movement, the Kalmyks became subjects of the Russian Tsar. In exchange for protecting Russia's southern border, the Kalmyks were promised an annual allowance and access to the markets of

3) Grousset, 1970: 502-541.

4) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalmyk_language

5) According to some records, the Kalmyk people were not aware that the Mongolians were returning to Mongolia and thus remained in the current Kalmyk area. That's why they began to be called such.

Russian border settlements. The Kalmyk Khanate reached its peak of military and political power during the last half of the 17th century to the middle of 18th century. The Kalmyks enjoyed economic prosperity from free trade with Russian border towns, China, Tibet and with their Muslim neighbors. Towards the end of 17th century, however, the Russian government gradually chipped away at the autonomy of the Kalmyk Khanate. By the mid-17th century, Kalmyks were increasingly disillusioned with Russian encroachment and interference in its internal affairs.

It is important to note this: Ubashi Khan, the last Kalmyk Khan, decided to return his people to their ancestral homeland, Dzungaria. Under his leadership, approximately 200,000 Kalmyks migrated directly across the Central Asian desert. Along the way, many Kalmyks were killed in ambushes or captured and enslaved by their Kazakh and Kyrgyz enemies. Many also died of starvation or thirst. After several grueling months of travel, only 96,000 Kalmyks reached the Manchu Empire's western area called Xinjiang near the Balkhash Lake.

Catherine the Great of Russia abolished the Kalmyk Khanate, transferring all governmental powers to the Governor of Astrakhan. The Kalmyks who remained in Russian territory continued to fight in Russian wars, and gradually created fixed settlements with houses and (Buddhist) temples. In 1865, the city of Elista, the future capital of the Kalmyk Republic was built.

After the Communist October Revolution in 1917, many Kalmyks were executed by the Soviet authorities. Half of all Kalmyk speakers died during the Russian Civil War. Stalin's ethnic cleansings also significantly reduced the population of the Kalmyk people.

Until recently, the Kalmyk population in Russia was at lower levels than it had been in 1913. Particularly, Stalin ordered the collectivization, closed the Buddhist monasteries, and burned the Kalmyks' religious texts. He deported all monks and all herdsmen owning more than 500 sheep to Siberia. About 60,000 Kalmyks died during the great famine of 1932 to 1933. After dissolution of the USSR, Kalmykia kept the status of an autonomous republic within the newly formed Russian Federation.

1.2 The Kalmyk Language

The Kalmyk language belongs to Oirat-Kalmyk-Darkhat, which in turn belongs to the eastern Mongolian of the Mongolian group, a member of Altaic language family. Some linguists, such as Nicholas Poppe (1970), have classified the Kalmyk-Oirat language group as belonging to the western branch of the Mongolian language division, since the language group developed separately and is distinct.

Although the literary tradition of Kalmyk goes back to 11th century, the official Kalmyk alphabet was created in the 17th century by a Kalmyk Buddhist monk. In 1924 this script was replaced by a Cyrillic script, which was abandoned in 1930 in favor of a Latin script.

Russian was made the primary official language of Kalmykia, and in 1963 the last Kalmyk language classes were closed and Russian became the language of education for Kalmyk children. As a result of these policies, many Kalmyks do not speak their ethnic language. Kalmyk linguists, in collaboration with the Kalmyk government, are now working to improve this situation.

Earlier, the Kalmyks spoke and published primarily in Russian. Consequently, the younger generation of Kalmyks primarily speak Russian and not their own native language. Around 170,000 to 510,000 people are estimated to speak Kalmyk. In recent years, attempts have been made by the Kalmyk government to revive the Kalmyk language. Beginning in 1993, school education in the Kalmyk language was restored.

2. Relative Clauses in Kalmyk

2.1 General Picture of Kalmyk Relative Clauses

As a member of the Mongolian language family, Kalmyk is an agglutinative language with SOV word order, like Korean and many other Altaic languages. Just like in Korean, it employs the Externally-Head Relative Clauses (EHRCs). It also allows pre-nominal, but not post-nominal relative clause. This is shown in (2):⁶⁾

6) Unless noted otherwise, the examples of Kalmyk are cited from Indjieva (2004).

- (2) [*Ter kyyn bits-sn degtr*
 that person write-P.P. book
 'the book that that person write'

In (2), the P.P is a past participle, a non-finite form of a verb. Kalmyk has no relative pronoun, unlike many European languages like English.

- (3) a. *the book that/which that person wrote* (English)
 b. [*Ter kyyn bits-sn degtr*] (Kalmyk)
 that person write-P.P. book
 'the book that that person write'
 c. [*nay-ka ecey manna-n salam*] (Korean)
 I-Nom yesterday meet-RC person
 'the person whom I met yesterday'

As shown in (3), the P.P. is a verbal ending that marks that the complement is a relative clause. Korean *-(n)un* has the same function and sometimes called relative clause marker by Korean grammarians. Since all modifying clauses end with this morpheme, no matter whether the clauses are made up of verbs or adjectives, it is not clear whether *-(n)un* is a pre-nominal suffix. However, the Kalmyk P.P. and the Korean *-(n)un* can be classified as the same grammatical morpheme with the same function.

2.2 Genitive Subject of Kalmyk Relative Clauses

Another characteristics of Kalmyk relative clauses is that tense of the verb is non-finite. First of all, consider the basic sentence.

- (4) [*Ətskyldyr bi masi xuld-dg av-la-v*
 yesterday I-Nom car buy-Part Pst-1p
 'I bought a car yesterday.'

The sentence in (4) shows that the past tense is marked by the verbal ending in this language. Compare the sentence with the following relative clause, with the emphasis on the verbal morphology.

- (5) a. [*Ətskyldyr mini ___ xuld-dg av-sn*] *masi-m*
 yesterday I-Gen buy-Part P.P. car-1p
 'The car that I bought ___ yesterday.'
- b. * [*Ətskyldyr mini ___ xuld-dg av-la-v*] *masi-m*
 yesterday I-Gen buy-Part P.P. car-1p
 'The car that I bought ___ yesterday.'

Only the past participle *av-sn* is allowed, while that with tense morpheme *av-la-v* is not.

Another characteristics of Kalmyk relative clause is that the subject of the relative clause is genitive case-marked. This is reminiscent of Japanese *ga/no*-conversion or the relative clause in Middle Korean. Compare the following sentences:

- (6) a. *Ətskyldyr bi masi xuld-dg av-la-v*
 yesterday I-Nom car buy-Part Pst-1p
 'I bought a car yesterday.'
- b. [*Ətskyldyr mini ___ xuld-dg av-sn*] *masi-m*
 yesterday I-Gen buy-Part P.P. car-1p
 'The car that I bought ___ yesterday.'
- c. * [*Ətskyldyr bi ___ xuld-dg av-la-v*] *masi-m*
 yesterday I-Gen buy-Part P.P. car-1p
 'The car that I bought ___ yesterday.'

As shown in (6), the nominative form of the first person singular is *bi*, while its genitive form is *mini*. Note that (6c) in which the nominative *bi* is used is unacceptable, while (6b) in which the genitive *mini* is used is acceptable. More examples of genitive subjects are provided in (7) below:

- (7) a. [*mini kitʃəl' ke-dʒ-ɿ*]əɾə
 I-Gen lesson do-Prt.P.P. room
 'the room [which I do homework in_]'
- b. [*Mini_belg-lyl-sn*] *kyyk-m*
 I-Gen present-Caus-P.P. girl-1p

- 'the girl who received a present from me.'
- c. [*Mini_tuul' kel'-dʒ əg-sn*] *kəvyn*
 I-Gen fairy tale tell-Part.-P.P. son
 'the boy who told my fairy tales'

All the examples in (7) suggest that the subject of a relative clause has genitive case.

2.3 Relativization of Major Constituents in Kalmyk

Keenan & Comrie (1977) proposes that unmarked constituents can be relativized more easily than marked ones. Thus their noun phrase accessibility hierarchy (NPAH) predicts that the relativization takes place with the following hierarchy:

- (8) Keenan & Comrie's NPAH
 Subject > Direct object > Indirect object > Oblique > Genitive >
 Object of comparison (OCOMP), where '>' means 'is more
 accessible than.'

Lee (2008) notes that NPAH is not strictly observed in the acquisition of English as a second language among the Korean learners of English. Indjieva (2004) also note that Kalmyk relative clauses do not follow NPAH. Consider the following examples:

- (9) [*ətskyldyr ədrin dyysn unt-sn*] *kəvyn* (Subject)
 yesterday the whole day sleep-P.P. boy
 'the boy that slept all day long yesterday'
- (10) [*Ter kyyn_ bit-f-sn*] *degr* (Direct object)
 that person write-P.P. book
 'the book that that person wrote]
- (11) a. *[*Bi_ degr umf-t/a-sn*] *kəvyn* (Indirect object)
 I-Nom book read-Prt.-P.P. boy
 'The boy I read a book to'

- b. %[Mini_ *degtr-ən umf-t/ä-ög-sn*] *kəvyn* (Indirect object)
 I-Gen book read-Prt.-P.P. boy
 'The boy I read a book to'
- (12) [*madn_ bææ-sn*] *ger* (Oblique)
 we-excell. hole dig-P.P. spade
 'The spade we dug the hole with'
- (13) [*noxa-n dldr-sn*] *zalu* (Genitive)
 dog-3p get loose-P.P. man
 'the man whose dog got loose'
- (14) *[*Baatr_ endr*] *kyyn* (Object of comparison)
 Baatr high person
 'the man who Baatr is taller than _']

As the examples in (9) through (14), Keenan & Comrie's NPAH does not seem to be strictly observed in Kalmyk. For example, we cannot relativize an indirect object (example (11)), while we can relativize genitive marked elements (see example (13)). There are two logically possible explanations. One is that Kalmyk does not observe Keenan & Comrie's NPAH. The other is that there is some potential problem with their NPAH. We are not going into this discussion in this paper, but one thing that we want to note is that at least Kalmyk exhibits different properties of relative clauses from what Keenan & Comrie argue for English.

3. Comparing Relative Clauses in Kalmyk, Korean, Japanese, and Turkish

As discussed in Section 2, Kalmyk allows genitive subjects in relative clauses. This is somewhat similar to the behavior of subjects of relative clauses in Middle Korean (see Jang 1995):

- (15) a. [*taman ttong-i* *talmye ssum*]-ul *matpolkesila*
 only excrements-Nom sweet sour-Acc tastes-DC

so-called *ga/no* conversion in Japanese is one of the most conspicuous characteristics of Modern Japanese.

(19) Japanese

[*John-no* ___ *kashita*] *hon*
 -Gen lent book
 'the book that John lent'

As shown in (19), the subject of the relative clause is genitive case-marked. Recall that the subject of main clause is nominative case-marked. That is, the subject of matrix clause is always *ga*-marked, while the subject of relative clause is *no*-marked.

(20) Turkish

Ben- [Ali-nin cam-I kir-dig-i zaman]i biliyordum
 I-Nom -Gen glass-Acc break-agr time-Acc know-ProPt1sg
 'I knew the time when Ali broke the glass'

One might point out that the sentence given in (16) is not a relative clause in its strict sense. It doesn't make any difference, though, even though it is an adverbial clause that modifies the head noun. Still the subject of the embedded or modifying clause, namely *Ali-nin*, is genitive.

The discussion so far is summarized as follows:

(21)

| | rel. pronoun | position of rel. clause | genitive subject |
|----------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Kalmyk | * | pre-nominal | ok |
| Korean | * | pre-nominal | * |
| Japanese | * | pre-nominal | ok |
| Turkish | * | post-nominal | ok |

The table in (21) implies that Kalmyk, Japanese, and Turkish behave in the same way in allowing genitive subjects, while Korean does not. It also implies

that Kalmyk, Korean, and Japanese allow pre-nominal relative clauses, while Turkish does not.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we introduced the Kalmyk language, one of the Mongolian group of Altaic family. As an SOV language, Kalmyk exhibits some of the expected patterns with regard to the relative clause formation. In Section 2, we have seen that Kalmyk has pre-nominal relative clauses just like many other Altaic languages like Korean and Japanese. Section 2 also discusses the characteristic genitive subjects in relative clauses of Kalmyk. In Section 3, we compared the relative clauses in Kalmyk with those in Korean (Middle Korean and Modern Korean), Japanese, and Turkish. We have seen that Kalmyk behaves like Korean in some respect, while it behaves like Japanese and Turkish in that it allows genitive subjects in relative clauses.

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