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The problem of the classification of parts of speech in the Mongolian languages

Abstract

The question about the classification of parts of speech in the Mongolian Studies is far from new, but it is still open to discussion and a solution has not yet been found. The paper examines the evolution of classification offered by different authors starting from the 19th century. The author presents his own classification of parts of speech in the Mongolian languages based on the one determinant – the criterion of lexical meaning.

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The question about the classification of parts of speech in the Mongolian Studies is far from new, but it is still open to discussion and a solution has not yet been found. Its history may be rightfully started from the first foreign grammar of Mongolian, that of the Old-written Mongolian language written by I.J. Schmidt (1831, § 29, 156). Being guided by the experience of research into the Indo-European languages he distinguished and described nine general types of words in the Mongolian language – the parts of speech: 1) the substantive; 2) the adjective; 3) the pronoun; 4) the numeral; 5) the verb; 6) the post-position speech element; 7) the adverb; 8) the conjunction; 9) the interjection. Following I.Y. Schmidt the analogous structure was proposed in the grammar by O.M. Kovalevskij (1835, § 30).

The original classification of parts of speech of the Mongolian languages (Old-Mongolian and Oirat-Kalmyk) was suggested then by A.A. Bobrovnikov (1849, p. 52–55). He didn't assume as a basis the morpho-semantic criterion as did I.J. Schmidt and O.M. Kovalevskij following the European grammarians. He based himself on the formal criteria of the grammatical changeability of words. Three categories of the Mongolian

words were outlined by A.A. Bobrovnikov: 1) the declinable words – the nouns which include the object, qualitative and relative nouns, the numerals and the pronouns; 2) the conjugated words – the verbs; 3) the invariable words – the particles. As a matter of fact the same parts of speech classification as Bobrovnikov's was suggested in his early work by W.L. Kotvič (1902, p. 52–60). But later Kotvič rejected the principle suggested by A.A. Bobrovnikov (Kotvič, 1915, p. 33–35; 129) and distinguished the traditional (for the European grammars) parts of speech in the Kalmyk language: 1) the nouns (the substantives and the adjectives); 2) the numerals; 3) the pronouns; 4) the verbs; 5) the adverbs (including the postpositions and the conjunctions); 6) the interjections. It should be noted that it was A.O. Rudnev (1905, p. 29, 56–57, 60) who followed A.A. Bobrovnikov and the early V.L. Kotvič. He made corrections in their scheme and determined six parts of speech for the Mongolian language having divided them into three groups: 1) the verb; 2) the noun (the substantive, the adjective, the numeral, the pronoun); 3) the adverb, including the particles. In his early works N.N. Poppe accepted A.A. Bobrovnikov's scheme, the early V.L. Kotvič and A.D. Rudnev in general and distinguished three groups of words: the name, the verb, the invariable words (the interjections, the particles) (Poppe, 1929, p. 34; 1936, p. 14–17). In his further works (Poppe, 1937, p. 50–51; 1938, p. 72–77, 101, 106, 181, 188, 198, 262) he preserved this scheme in general and worked out some details in the group of nouns having divided them into the nouns with complete changeability and incomplete changeability. In the first group of words he distinguished the noun in the true sense (the object and the qualitative noun), and also the pronoun and the numeral.

In a specialized article about the parts of speech in the Mongolian language (1940, p. 147–173) N.N. Poppe gives a new scheme for the classification of parts of speech having introduced the adverb and having determined ten parts of speech having equal status:

- 1) the object noun
- 2) the qualitative noun;
- 3) the numerals;
- 4) the pronouns;
- 5) the verbs (including the participles and adverbial participles);
- 6) the adverbs (including the adverb- postposition as a transitional category);
- 7) the postpositions;
- 8) the conjunctions;
- 9) the particles, both prepositive and postpositive;
- 10) the interjections (including figurative and onomatopoeic words).

The evolution of G.D. Sanžeev's views on the parts of speech classification is no less interesting. He adopted the term "the object noun" and "the qualitative noun", having used them in his early work on syntax. (Sanžeev, 1934, p. 40–41). In his grammars of the Kalmyk (Sanžeev, 1940, p. 26–38) and the Buryat (Sanžeev, 1941, p. 22–41) languages he uses these terms and he gives a scheme for the classification of the parts of speech. In general it is similar to that worked out by N.N. Poppe in his aforementioned article. The only difference is that G.D. Sanžeev determines nine parts of speech (except

the conjunctions). Later on G.D. Sanžeev developed slightly different views on the classification of parts of speech in the Mongolian and generally in the Altaic languages (Sanžeev, 1952, p. 84–102; 1953, p. 124–126). He suggested distinguishing twelve parts of speech in the Mongolian and the Turkic languages:

- 1) the substantive;
- 2) the object noun;
- 3) the adjective;
- 4) the qualitative noun;
- 5) the numeral;
- 6) the adverb;
- 7) the pronoun;
- 8) the verb;
- 9) the postposition;
- 10) the conjunctions;
- 11) the particles;
- 12) the interjections.

As one can see G.D. Sanžeev supported in general distinguishing of the object and the qualitative nouns, as suggested by A.A. Bobrovnikov at one time, but at the same time he introduced the terms “the substantive” and “the adjective”. He explained that the difference between them and the object and the qualitative nouns consists in that the substantives can only get attributes, whereas the object nouns, by getting attributes can play the role of attributes themselves, and the adjectives can only be attributes, but can not be substantivized, whereas the qualitative nouns can play the role of attributes and be substantivized.

So, in the Buryat language the words like *uhaan* ‘mind’, *gazar* ‘ground’, *gar* ‘hand’, *ger* ‘house’, *zam* ‘road, way’ are the substantives because in the form of their stem they can not be attributes for another word, and the lexemes like *uhan* ‘water’, *tumer* ‘iron’, *modon* ‘tree’ are the object names, so the object names not only take an attribute, but they play its role themselves, for example: *gunzegy uhan* ‘deep water’ – *uhan teerme* ‘water mill’, *hatuu tumer* ‘hard / solid / firm / strong iron’ – *tumer zam* ‘iron road i.e. railway’, *under modon* ‘tall tree’ – *modon ger* ‘wooden house’. The adjectives are the words which can only be attributes (*uhaantai* ‘intelligent’, *zorigtoi* ‘brave’, *zantagar* ‘big-headed’ and so on), and the object nouns can both be attributes and name the properties, qualities and features. Let’s compare, for example, in the Buryat language: *hatuu tumer* ‘hard / solid / firm / strong iron’ – *tumereĭ hatuu* ‘hardness / solidness / firmness / strength of iron’, *hain Dorzhyn hainiin* ‘kind Dorzhi’s kindness’.

Both the Soviet specialists in the Mongolian Studies D.A. Alexeev (1955), T.A. Bertagayev (1968, p. 240–243), B.H. Todayev (1951) and others: Sh. Luvsanvandan (1968), Ts. Onorbayan (1998, p. 23–36) suggested their own classification of parts of speech for the Mongolian languages. The aim of this article is not to review all points of view on this problem because such a review is sufficiently big as to require special attention and it has already been studied in detail in the literature.

That's why we consider it is appropriate to direct the reader to the relevant research works. For example, different points of view on the classification of parts of speech in the Mongolian Studies are expounded in the work of N.N. Poppe (1940, p. 147–173), which is devoted to the parts of speech in the Mongolian language. Quite a good review of word classification in the Russian and the Soviet Mongolian studies and also in the linguistics of the Mongolian People's Republic is given by V.M. Nadelyayev (1988, p. 76–88). There is also a review of word classifications in the work of E.A. Kuz'menkov (1991, p. 48–63).

In the Mongolian Studies a common approach to the classification of parts of speech is not yet agreed, nor is, the exact criterion for their classification determined for elucidated their quantity. In this connection we would like to give here our own view on this problem. We also would like to share our own interpretation of word classification criteria in the Mongolian languages. We came to it as a result of nearly 50-years observation and studying on the living Mongolian language, both practically and theoretically.

The fact that the existing word classifications of languages are not logical has been noticed by scientists for some time. However, the most exact and distinct account was given by Y.S. Maslov (1975, p. 200–219) who devoted himself to this problem for a long time. Later on he grounded it more convincingly having proposed his own variant of word classification in different world languages (Maslov, 1997, p. 155–167). Earlier V.V. Vinogradov (1947, p. 38–44) had proposed his own classification of Russian words having divided them into four classes: 1) the categorematic words; 2) the syncategorematic words; 3) the modal words; 4) the interjections. This classification was supported by A.N. Gvozdev (1961, p. 145) and Y.S. Maslov (1975, p. 205). V.M. Nadelyayev tried to apply this scheme to the Mongolian language as early as in the 1950-s in his lectures on the theoretical grammar of the Mongolian language given at the Department of the Mongolian philology at the Oriental faculty of Leningrad State University. We had a chance to listen to them. Later on he completed and published this scheme (Nadelyayev, 1987, p. 20–48; 1988, p. 88–109).

We made an attempt to apply this type of classification to the Tofa language (Rassadin, 1978, p. 14–15). We also tried to consider and classify the pronouns of the Mongolian languages from this point of view (Rassadin, 1991, p. 94–97).

The scheme for word classification of languages by Vinogradov – Maslov – Nadelyayev is advanced enough and it takes in consideration quite well the specific character of different languages. Nevertheless V.M. Nadelyayev didn't think through the logics of the parts of speech organization in the Mongolian languages. He divided all the words of the Mongolian language into three groups:

I. The material words (parts of speech);

- 1) the word-names – the substantives, the adjectives, the verbs, the adverbs, the numerals;
- 2) the word-indications – the pronouns;

II. The formal words (particles):

- 1) the form-building particles;
- 2) the stem-building particles;

- 3) the conjunctive particles;
 - 4) the article-getting up particles.
- III. The expressive words (interjections):
- 1) the emotionally-expressive words;
 - 2) the volitively expressive words;
 - 3) the imitatively expressive words.

As one can see, even in this detailed classification, the special group of modal and figurative words are not distinguished. The first words are included in the group of the speech particles (group II), the second ones are in the group of interjections (group III).

Such a variety of views in traditional classifications and the ones based on new principles is due to the fact that the criterion of classification is not thought out and maintained rigorously. The morpho-sema-syntactical criterion applied in the Indo-European linguistics is not applicable for the Mongolian languages because their non-derivative parts of speech and word classes are not distinguished formally. What is more many derived words are formally similar. So, for example, the word-forms taken out of the context like *tom* 'large' – *tom* 'turn a rope', *tav* 'put' – *tav* 'fifty', *hatan* 'the khan's / the prince's wife' – *hatan* 'drying out' (fused adverbial participle of the verb *hat* – 'dry out').

This list of examples is endless for the principal criterion of word classification in the Mongolian language is semantics, and not simply lexical meaning of a word, but a type of this meaning. Besides, it is necessary to distinguish the levels of language and speech as F. de Saussure and his followers taught. The fact is that on the language level each word or lexeme fulfils its own, clearly definite function and has its own strictly limited meaning. As for the speech level, that is, one of usage, these functions are absolutely different, though the meaning, stipulated by its type is the same. The word classifications of every language may be carried out both on the language level and at the speech level. And the success depends on, so to say, "the purity of the experiment". On the language level the words are classes or parts of speech, on the speech level they are parts of the sentence. Moreover, when used in speech every categorematic part of speech fulfils its main function and all secondary ones. It is necessary to take into consideration another condition: only a word that is one of the categorematic part of speech may be a part of the sentence. All existing classifications usually begin with one criterion and end with another. And logic says for every classification only one criterion for division should be maintained from the beginning to the end. The simultaneous application of two and more criteria for division doesn't give a positive result.

Thus we propose to reject both the morphological and syntactic criteria for the classification of words in the Mongolian languages. This is the semantic criterion that should be taken as the general principle. V.M. Nadelyayev (1988, p. 83) pointed to stability in all classification schemes when taking into consideration only the type of the lexical meaning. First of all there is such a type as the material meaning. It is proper to the words which name objects, phenomena, features, qualities, properties, quantities, circumstances and actions/states. These are so called nominal words with nominative language function. On the language level their function is nominal. On the speech level it is absolutely

different, namely: it is to express the subject and the object of the action, the adverbial adjunct and the predicate. In spite of this, in the Mongolian languages in their modern state the material meaning of such words is constant. They form a separate lexico-grammatical group of substantives if they name the objects in the broad sense (mo. *hün* 'man', *us* 'water', *mod* 'tree', *ger* 'house'). Their categorical meaning is objectiveness or substantiveness. The words naming features, qualities, properties and so on (mo. *sain* 'good', *ih* 'big', *har* 'black', *bayan* 'rich, wealthy') form a lexico-grammatical group of adjectives, the categorical meaning of which is adjectiveness or indicativeness. The words naming numbers, quantities and all that is connected with them (mo. *hoyor* 'two', *gurvuu* 'three [together]', *tavdugaar* 'fifth', *arvaad* 'ten pieces for one/each, about ten pieces'), form a lexico-grammatical group of numerals, the categorical meaning of which is quantitiveness or numerativeness. The words naming actions/states (mo. *avah* 'to take', *yavah* 'to go', *suuh* 'to sit', *baih* 'to be') constitute a lexico-grammatical group of verbs, the categorical meaning of which is actionness or verbalness. The words naming different circumstances (*naaš* 'here', *odoo* 'now', *dahiad* 'again', *maš* 'very') under which the actions/states are performed form a lexico-grammatical group of adverbs. Their categorical meaning is circumstanceness or adverbialness. Thus, these five lexico-grammatical groups of words, having constant meaning at the present synchronic period, form a system of nominative words.

Besides naming words in the Mongolian languages, there is another system of categorematic words elaborated on the basis of their process of their historical evolution. It doesn't name but rather indicates objects, features, quantities, circumstances and actions/states. This special group of demonstrative words also possess material meaning, but it is not constant, but irregular. These words get the meaning of those objects, features, quantities, circumstances and actions/states which they indicate at the moment of speech. If such words indicate objects or persons (mo. *ene* 'this', *ter* 'that; he, she', *ed* 'these', *ted* 'those') these are substantive demonstrative words or pronominal substantives. If they indicate features (mo. *iim*, *iimerhüü* 'such, like this', *tüm*, *tüimerhüü* 'such, like that') they are adjective demonstrative words or pronominal adjectives. If they indicate quantity (mo. *hed* 'how much', *ödi*, *tödi* 'so much') they are numeratively-demonstrative words or pronominal numerals. If they indicate actions/states (mo. *yaah* 'what to do', *herheh* 'how to do', *ingeh* 'one should do this way') they are verbal-demonstrative words or pronominal verbs. If they indicate circumstances (mo. *haa*, *haana* 'where', *end* 'here', *tend* 'there'), they are adverbially-demonstrative words or pronominal adverbs. In speech the function of these words is to substitute nominative words and play the role of that part of the sentence which was intended for the nominative word in the given speech act (mo. *Šireen deer nom baina. Bi tüüniig avav.* 'There is a book on the table. I've taken it'). This system of demonstrative words correlates with the system of nominative words. The nominative and demonstrative words form together an independent class of categorematic words having material meaning.

In the Mongolian languages there are words which don't name and don't indicate anything. They have grammatical meaning and in speech they fulfill the function of lexical grammatical correlation between categorematic words being in this case purely formal

syncategorematic words. As far as they have another type of lexical meaning different from material one, they can't be given the same status as the categorematic words because they do not possess equal rights with them and fulfill only syncategorematic function. They can't be sentence parts. Inside their group they are divided into postpositions (mo. *hamt*, bur. *hamta*, kalm. *hamdan* 'together'; mo., bur. *tuhai*, kalm. *tuskar* 'about'), conjunctions (mo., bur. *ba*, *bolon*, kalm. *boln* 'and'; mo. *herev*, bur. *herbe*, kalm. *kemr* 'if'), predicative copulas (mo. *yum*, *mön* 'is', *bilee*, *san*, *yumsan* 'was'; bur. *yum*, *mün* 'is', *belei*, *hen* 'was'; kalm. *yumn*, *mön* 'is', *bilä* 'was'), subject indices (mo. *bol*, *bolbol*, *min*, *čin*, *n*'; bur. *bolbol*, *hadaa*, *šni*), words-substantivators (mo. *min*, *čin*, *n*', *gedeg čin*, *gedeg n*', *gegč n*', *gesen čin*'; bur. *šni*, *mni*, *n*', *geeše*, *geešešni*), auxiliary verbs (mo. *baih*, bur. *baiha*, kalm. *bääh* 'to be' etc.). These words form an independent class of syncategorematic words on the basis of the grammatical meaning of the same type.

In the Mongolian languages there are such words which have only modal meaning and express only the speaker's attitude towards the subject of the statement (mo. *magad*, *magadgüi*, *baidž magadgüi*, bur. *magad*, kalm. *magad*, *magad uga* 'very likely, probably'). They are relevant to all of the sentence and can't be its parts: not main, nor secondary. This group of words consists of different modal particles, words and word-combinations, sometimes of whole expressions. We distinguish them as an independent class of modal words. In the Mongolian languages there are also such words which have affective meaning and express different emotions, feelings and will (mo. *aa!*, *ee!*, *yoh!*, *uhai!*, *urai!*). These are so called interjections or affective words. They can't be sentence parts either. We distinguish them as an independent class of affective words.

Lastly, in the Mongolian languages there are quite a lot of words which don't name and indicate anything, don't fulfill auxiliary functions, don't express attitudes towards a statement and don't express any feelings or emotions. These words convey different images which a man gets from outside. Different substantives, adjectives, verbs, adverbs are formed from a lot of these words by means of special word-building models. But these figurative words are not parts of speech by themselves. The figurative words are subdivided into: 1) the words of acoustic perception (onomatopoeic: mo. *pur pur hiih* 'to bubble', bur. *har har gehe* 'to grit', kalm. *bur bur gih* 'to mumble'); 2) the words of visual perception (image-bearing: mo. *tügdegneh* 'to go-about a stooping or humpbacked person', bur. *barbaiha* 'to be shaggy', kalm. *musg-musg gih* 'to smile with curved lips'); 3) the words of sensible perception (mo. *barzaih*, bur. *barzaiha*, kalm. *barzah* 'to be rough to the touch'); 4) the words of figurative perception of an action (mo. *coo cohih*, bur. *soo sohiho*, *sooro sohiho*, kalm. *coo cokh* 'to hit in such a way that a hole is made'). Such words are also united into an independent class of figurative words. Within every class there is an inner classification, but with its own specific criteria. The language is quite a flexible system constantly renewable and developing. That's why the process of replenishing these words is also constant including the transference of lexemes from one class to another using different morphological processes in which affixation and lexicalization of different word-forms play a great role.

We propose our own classification of the Mongolian languages words. It may be presented in the following generalized scheme.

I. The categorematic words:

1. The naming words:

- 1) the substantives;
- 2) the adjectives;
- 3) the numerals;
- 4) the verbs;
- 5) the adverbs;

2. The demonstrative words:

- 1) the object-demonstrative words;
- 2) the qualitatively demonstrative words;
- 3) the quantitatively demonstrative words;
- 4) the actionally demonstrative words;
- 5) the circumstancetively demonstrative words.

II. The syncategorematic words:

1. The prepositions.
2. The conjunctions.
3. The predicative copulas.
4. The indices of the subject.
5. The words-substantivators.
6. The auxiliary verbs.

III. The modal words:

1. The modal particles.
2. The modal words.
3. The modal word combinations and expressions.

IV. The affective words:

1. The emotionally perceptible words.
2. The stimulatively willing words.

V. The figurative words:

1. The words of acoustic perception (onomatopoeic).
2. The words of visual perception (image-bearing).
3. The words of sensible perception.
4. The words of image-bearing action.

Of course, this scheme doesn't pretend to be the final word, it can be made more specific and restructured. But by following one determinant criterion, in our case that of the type of the lexical meaning, and to stay on the language level, the classification turns out like this. It is however a classification that emerges if as in our case, one determinant criterion thus of lexical meaning is used and one examines the language used and one examines the living language.

Abbreviations

mo. – Mongolian
bur. – Buryat
kalm. – Kalmyk

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