Mongolian, an SOV language, encodes complementation by forming a clause ending with verbal noun (VN) immediately before a case marker, e.g. the accusative -iig (1). This paper probes into a possible semantic foundation of complementation in Mongolian by contrasting it with its neighboring East Asian languages of similar morphological typological profile.

Functional and typological studies on the semantics of complementation have revealed that languages can have different types of semantic distinction coded in their complements (e.g. Givón 1990 [1]), among which are: (A) “realis” vs. “irrealis” (Dixon 1995 [2]), and (B) “directly perceived event (directness)” vs. “proposition (indirectness)” (Kuno 1973 [3]). These two types of semantic distinctions, though conceptually related (e.g. ‘directly perceived event’ belongs to the realm of ‘realis’), are independent of each other.

It seems that the distinction (A) is well represented in the complementation of languages of Europe in general by means of indicative/subjunctive mood, or by means of differential nominalizers (um (realis) and ki (irrealis) in languages like Korean (2). The distinction (B), though less well known, is overtly coded in the complementation of languages like Japanese (Kuno1973) by means of differential nominalizers no or tokoro (‘directly perceived event’) and koto (proposition) (3). It should be noted that Korean nominalizers um and ki, which encode the distinction (A), do not directly map on to the distinction (B). Conversely, Japanese nominalizers noltokoro and koto, which encode the distinction (B), do not directly map on to the distinction (A). It is an interesting question which of the two sets of distinctions viz. (A) or (B) is prioritized in a language like Mongolian, which has structural similarity to both Korean and Japanese in terms of agglutinative morphology.

Mongolian encodes the distinction (B) between ‘directly perceived event’ and ‘proposition’ as in (4). ‘Directly perceived event’ is encoded by a complement clause ending in VN (4a), while ‘proposition’ is encoded by the presence of the quotative marker (QM) -gedeg (‘say’) after a complement clause ending in VN (4b). Addition of -gedeg after the complement in (4a) results in ungrammaticality, as in (5a). On the other hand, omission of -gedeg from (4b) doesn’t result in ungrammaticality, as in (5b). There is a semantic difference, however, between (4b) and (5b). (4b) indicates that the speaker didn’t see Dorj and heard, indirectly, that he had come (proposition). In contrast, (5b) entails that the speaker saw Dorj in a room (a directly perceived event), and realized that he had indeed come.

In contrast, the distinction (B) between ‘realis’ and ‘irrealis’ is not directly encoded in Mongolian complementation in a manner parallel to the distinction (A). Both ‘realis’ and ‘irrealis’ complements can be encoded by clauses ending in VN (6a, 6b). It is interesting to note that -gedeg can occur in (6a) but not in (6b), independently of the realsis/irrealis status of the complement clause. When -gedeg is present in (6a), it indicates that the speaker didn’t see him go, but remembered having heard from someone that he had gone. When it is absent, the implication is that the speaker saw him go and later remembered the event. Gedeg cannot occur in (6b) because it is the speaker’s own intention, not someone else’s, to become a doctor, which makes the complement incompatible with the ‘indirectness’ marker -gedeg.

Mongolian complementation thus appears to prioritize the distinction (B) over the
Data (K: Korean, J: Japanese, other examples are Mongolian)

(1) *Chamai-g ir-eh-ii-i med-sen-gui
you-ACC come-VN.PRES ACC learn-VN.PAST NEG
‘I didn’t know that you would come’.

(2) K (a) *Ku phikoin-i kyelpaykha-m-i cungmyentoy-ess-ta.
that defendant-NOM innocent-NML-NOM be proved-PAST-DECL
‘It has been proved that the defendant is innocent’. (realis)

(3) J (a) Marii-ga kuru no/tokoro o mi-ta.
Mary-NOM come:PRES NML -ACC see-PAST
‘I saw Mary come’. (directly perceived event)

Abbreviations: ACC = accusative, CV = converb, DECL = declarative, FUT = future, GEN = genitive, IMPF = imperfective, NEG = negative, NML = nominalizer, NOM = nominative, PERF = perfective, PRES = present, QM = quotative marker, VN = verbal noun.
REFERENCES

