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AN ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMATIC RELATIVE CLAUSES IN THE YOUNG VARIETY OF OIRAT

(BASED ON KALMYK AND XINJIANG OIRAT)

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With respect to the range of permissible relative clauses, there are two varieties of Oirat: Young and Old.¹ There are certain types of relative clauses that are assessed as grammatical by the Old speakers of Oirat, while the Young speakers consider them marginally grammatical or ungrammatical. I conclude that this distinction between the two varieties of Oirat is caused by the two possible interpretations of constructions with two semantically equivalent NPs in the nominative case (henceforth double NomNP constructions). In Young Oirat, the double Nom constructions are interpreted as equatives, which in the case of relatives with the relativized in/direct object or oblique are garden–path structures² that forestall the intended interpretation. As a result, in Young Oirat (unlike the Old Oirat), a whole range of relatives with the relativized in/direct object or oblique are misinterpreted or considered to be ungrammatical. Since double NomNP constructions occur mostly in relatives with relativized indirect objects, this type of relative is the most problematic in Young Oirat. Considering that relativized obliques and genitives are much less problematic, it appears that Young Oirat violates the accessibility hierarchy for relativization proposed by Keenan and Comrie.³ However, my analysis concludes that Young Oirat is in compliance with the hierarchy as the factor that inhibits the relativization of some relatives is extraneous. I conclude that there are two main reasons for the equative interpretation of the double NomNP constructions in Young Oirat: (1) emergence of an equative copula, and (2) the loss of the extended property of the genitive case.

1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1 TWO VARIETIES OF OIRAT. The analysis provided in this paper is based on data from two dialects of Oirat: Kalmyk and Xinjiang Oirat (see the Appendix). It appears that, with respect to the range of permissible relative clauses, Oirat speakers can be divided into two age–based groups regardless of dialectal or other differences such as sub–dialect, gender, social status, etc. One variety is used by speakers 50 years of age and older, and the other by speakers younger than 50. I refer to these age groups as Young and Old speakers. The demarcation between the Young and the Old speakers seems to be slightly different in the two dialects: in Xinjiang Oirat, the dividing age seems to be in the late 40s and early 50s, whereas in Kalmyk it seems to be somewhere in the late 60s or even higher. I assume that the difference between Young and Old varieties in both dialects reflects a general trend in this language. It is important to point out that my “age–based” hypothesis is only tentative, as it is based on a limited number of consultants (a total about 20).

1.2 THE DATA. This paper is based on the following data: (a) consultations with native speakers of the Xinjiang Oirat dialect (about 10 speakers) and notes collected during two and a half months of linguistic fieldwork in Xinjiang province, China; (b) consultations with native speakers of the Kalmyk dialect via

¹ The definitions of Young and Old varieties of Oirat are given in §1.2

² The “garden–path” syntactic structures in my understanding are “dead–end” structures that forestall the intended interpretation. For instance, ‘I convinced her children are noisy.’ (Personal communication, William O’Grady)

³ The accessibility hierarchy for relativization proposed by Keenan and Comrie (1981) suggests the following: subject > direct object > indirect object > oblique > genitive > object of comparison, where ‘>’ means ‘is more accessible to relativization’.

telephone (about 10 speakers). In addition, I also rely on my own intuitions as a native speaker of Kalmyk.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF OIRAT RELATIVE CLAUSES.

2.1 DEFINITION OF THE RELATIVE CLAUSE. In this paper, I adopt the conventional definition: a relative clause is a clause that modifies a noun by providing information about its referents. In sentence (1), for instance, the relative clause provides information about the car; it restricts the set of potential referents of the noun *car* to the particular car that I bought yesterday (O’Grady 2004:158).

(1) The car [(that) I bought_yesterday]

In example (1), *car* is called the head noun of the relative clause; the relative clause itself is enclosed in square brackets. The gap /_/ points to the position that has been relativized (in other words, the position that in the corresponding basic sentence would normally be occupied by the now relativized NP). In (1) the gap immediately follows the verb. Since in basic English sentences this position is normally occupied by a direct object (I bought a car yesterday), we can say that in (1) it is the direct object that has been relativized or that the NP bearing the grammatical relation of direct object is modified by the relative clause.

2.2 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF RELATIVE CLAUSES IN OIRAT. Oirat is an agglutinating accusative language with an SOV word order. Relative clauses in Oirat are prenominal (a relative clause precedes its head noun), which is characteristic of an NP–V language. Based on my observation, it appears that both dialects permit only head–external relative clauses (the head noun is always outside of the relative clause). Oirat seems to employ a gap strategy: no resumptive pronouns can be used in relative clauses. Oirat has neither relative pronouns (like English *who* or *which*) nor complementizers (like English *that*).

2.2.1 NONFINALITY OF THE VERB. Relative clauses in both dialects allow only nonfinite verbal forms, as shown in (2).

Basic sentence (example from Kalmyk)

(2) a. bi ɵtskyl’dyr maʃi xuld–dʒe av–la–v
 I.Nom yesterday car.Acc⁴ trade–SG take–Ps2⁵–1pSg
 I bought a car yesterday

Corresponding relative clauses:

b. *[miniɵtskyl’dyr _ xuld–dʒe av–la–v] maʃi–m⁶
 I.Gen yesterday trade–SG⁷ take– Ps2–1pSg car.Acc–1pPoss
 The car [that I bought _ yesterday]

c. [mini ɵtskyl’dyr _ xuld–dʒe av–sɪn] maʃi–m
 I.Gen yesterday trade–SG take–Ps.P. car.Acc–1pPoss
 The car [that I bought _ yesterday]

Notice that in sentence (2b) the serial verb *xulddʒe avlav* is in a finite form (past tense 2), whereas in sentence (2c), the same verb is in a nonfinite form (past participle), which is straightforward evidence that in Oirat a verb in a relative clause is not allowed to be in a finite form.

⁴ The accusative case marker has two forms: /–g/ and a null. In this case, it has a null form.

⁵ Ps2 = past tense 2 (there are 3 types of past tense in Oirat).

⁶ The suffix /–m/ is optional in this sentence; it indicates that /maʃi/ ‘car’ belongs to the 1st person.

⁷ SG = subordinating gerund.

3. DOUBLE NOMNP CONSTRUCTION. The main goal of this paper is to provide an analysis of relative clauses that are problematic (i.e., marginally acceptable or unacceptable) for the Young Oirat speakers. As a result of this investigation it was found that one feature which is common to all of these problematic relative clauses, and which sets them apart from the nonproblematic relative clauses, is the presence of more than one NP in the nominative case that can potentially have the same referent or refer to the same entity. I conclude that the primary reason why these relative clauses are problematic is that the double NomNP constructions in Oirat have two potential interpretations, as shown in (3b).

Basic sentence

- (3) a. Ba:t̪ir kyn-də nom əg-væ
 Baatr person-Dat book.Acc give-Ps1⁸
 Baatr gave a book to a person

Corresponding relative clause

- b. Ba:t̪ir nom əg-s̪in ky:n
 Baatr.Nom book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom

Interpretation 1:

- Ba:t̪ir [nom əg-s̪in] ky:n
 Baatr (zero copula) book.Acc give-PsP⁹ person.Nom
 Baatr is the person who [gave a book]

Interpretation 2:

- [Ba:t̪ir _ nom əg-s̪in] ky:n
 Baatr.Nom book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom
 the person to whom [Baatr gave_ a book]

The Young speakers of Oirat typically prefer interpretation 1, in which the first NomNP *Ba:t̪ir* bears the grammatical relation of the subject of the matrix clause, while the second NomNP *ky:n* ‘person’, is the nominal predicate of the matrix clause that bears the grammatical relation of the subject of the relative clause and is assigned the thematic role of agent. In interpretation 1, the two NPs that are marked by nominative case refer to one entity. In other words, I believe that in Young Oirat, sentence (3) is usually interpreted as a [S [NP] COPULA [NP [RC] N]] construction, which is an equative construction in which the second NP is a relativized subject. It is important to point out that in my analysis of interpretation 1, the position of the zero copula violates the basic word order of Oirat, which is SOV. Later in this paper, I conclude that the misplaced zero copula in (3) represents a relatively new copula in Oirat, an equative copula (more detailed description of this copula is provided in § 5).

As for interpretation 2, in Young Oirat, it is marginally accepted or not accepted at all. In Old Oirat, on the other hand, the primary interpretation is the second one, in which the first NomNP *Ba:t̪ir* has the grammatical relation of the subject of the relative clause, while the second NomNP *ky:n* ‘person’ functions as the head noun of the relative clause. In this particular sentence, the second NomNP is assigned the theta role of goal. However, as can be seen in other examples, the role of the second NomNP may vary depending on the semantics of the verb (goal, source, etc.).

⁸ Ps1= past tense 1 (recent past).

⁹ PsP = past participle.

In general, the Young speakers are more inclined to interpret double NomNP constructions as equatives than the Old speakers. In Old Oirat, the equative interpretation is not the primary one: it is realized less frequently.

4. WHAT IN THE DOUBLE NOMNP CONSTRUCTIONS TRIGGERS THE EQUATIVES?

4.1 NOMINATIVE CASE. It seems that in order to trigger an equative construction, both NPs in the double NomNP construction have to be in the nominative case. Equative construction interpretations do not occur when the two NPs are in some other case, as shown in (4):

- (4) a. [Ba:tri-ge tan'-sɪn] ky:¹⁰-gə
 Baatr-Acc know-PsP person-Acc
 the person who [_knows Baatr] (person is in the accusative case)
- b. [Ba:tɪr-de nom umʃ-tʃ ɐg-sɪn] ky:n-de
 Baatr-Dat book read-SG give-PsP person-Dat
 to the person who [_read a book to Baatr]

All the Oirat speakers (including the Young speakers) consider both (4a) and (4b) grammatical and agree on the interpretation, which is the only interpretation. The fact that Young Oirats do not interpret (4a) or (4b) as equative constructions, similar to (3b), demonstrates that it is only the nominative case that can trigger an equative construction [_S [_{NP} COPULA [_{NP} [_{RC} N]]]] and that Young Oirat suppresses any other alternative interpretations. (4c) illustrates that an equative interpretation for (4a) is not acceptable:

- (4) c. [Ba:tri-ge tan'-sɪn] ky:-gə
 Baatr-Acc know-PsP person-Acc
 *Baatr is the person who [_knows] or
 *Baatr, the person who [_knows], where *Baatr* is in the accusative case

4.1.1 DEFAULT THEMATIC ROLE FOR AN NP IN THE NOMINATIVE CASE. I assume that the nominative case is usually (i.e., in basic sentences) associated with such thematic roles as theme, agent, or experiencer. Based on this assumption, I believe that an NP in the nominative case has a stronger potential than an NP in other cases to trigger the equative interpretation. In the construction [_S [_{NP} COPULA [_{NP} [_{RC} N]]]], the first NP fulfills the thematic role of theme, and the second NP carries the thematic role of agent, both of which (theme and agent) I consider to be default thematic roles for an NP in the nominative case.

Let us go back to example (3). Notice that in the second interpretation the second NP in the nominative case (*ky:n* 'person') is assigned the thematic role of a goal (a person to whom the book was given), which otherwise (not in a relative clause) requires the NP to be in the dative case: in basic sentences, an NP that carries out the role of a goal has to be in the dative case (see (3a)). In the first interpretation, on the other hand, the first NomNP (*Baatr*) is assigned the thematic role of a theme and the second NomNP *ky:n* 'person' is the agent of the relative clause. Assuming that in Oirat the default thematic role for an NP in the nominative case is that of a theme, an agent or an experiencer, the difference between the two interpretations of (3) is that in the first interpretation both NomNPs are assigned default thematic roles (a theme and an agent), whereas in the second interpretation the second NomNP *ky:n* 'person' is assigned the thematic role of goal, which is not a default role for an NP in the nominative case. Recall that Young Oirat primarily accepts interpretation 1. Thus, there seems to be a tendency in Young Oirat toward inability to assign an NP in the nominative case a thematic role other than the default (goal, source, etc.). With respect to the relative clauses, the way this inability is realized

¹⁰ <n> in *ky:n* 'person' is a fleeting sound; it disappears in certain environments, such as the accusative case.

is as follows: whenever there are two NPs in the nominative case, the first NP takes the thematic role of theme, while the second NP takes the role of agent of the relative clause.

4.2 SEMANTIC EQUIVALENCE. The most essential requirement for the two NPs in the nominative case to be interpreted as the constituents of an equative construction (that can potentially obstruct the intended interpretation) is their semantic equivalence. In other words, the two NPs have to be able to refer to the same entity or potentially to have the same referent. If this requirement is not met, then the two NPs in the nominative case fail to be interpreted as constituents of an equative construction, as shown in (5). (Note that *Bairta* is a typical Oirat female name.)

- (5) a. [Bairta _ usn əg–sn] kəvyn
 Bairta.Nom water give–PsP boy.Nom
 The boy whom [Bairta gave water to _]
- b. Bairta _ usn əg–sn ky:kn
 Bairta.Nom water give–PsP girl.Nom

Interpretation 1:

Bairta [_ usn əg–sn] ky:kn
 Bairta.Nom (zero copula) water give–PsP girl.Nom
 Bairta is the girl who [_gave water]

Interpretation 2:

[Bairta _ usn əg–sn] ky:kn
 Bairta.Nom water give–PsP girl.Nom
 The girl whom [Bairta gave water to _]

Both (5a) and (5b) have a pair of NPs in the nominative case. However, only (5b) has two potential interpretations. Notice that in (5a), the two NomNPs (*Bairta* and *kəvyn* ‘boy’) are not semantically equivalent: they cannot refer to the same entity, because *Bairta* is a typical female name. Thus, the requirement for the semantic equivalence in this sentence is not met. Consequently, the equative interpretation is not realized, and the sentence in (5a) has only one interpretation. In (5b), on the other hand, the two NPs in the nominative case (*Bairta* and *ky:kn* ‘girl’) can potentially have the same referent: *Bairta* can be the same person as the girl who gave water. The requirement for the semantic equivalence is satisfied. As result, sentence (5b) is ambiguous; it has two potential interpretations, which in Young Oirat leads to the garden–path interpretation.

5. WHAT MAKES YOUNG OIRAT MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE GARDEN–PATH INTERPRETATION? Now, the question is why the double NomNP constructions do not trigger equative construction interpretations in Old Oirat. What makes Young Oirat so special? To be precise, why, in Young Oirat, is the equative construction interpretation more dominant than it is in Old Oirat? My hypothesis regarding this issue can be divided into two main parts: the equative copula and the genitive case.

5.1 COPULA. In the previous section, I discussed the properties within the double NomNP construction that presumably instigate the equative construction. However, to be engaged into an equative construction, the two NPs have to be linked to each other via a copula, which is the essential element of the equative construction. Considering my assumptions regarding the default thematic roles for a NomNP, it seems reasonable to expect that the presence of two semantically equivalent NomNPs creates a strong potential for a copula that can saturate the syntactic structure of an equative. In other words, the presence of two semantically equivalent NomNPs is a relatively strong precondition for a copula. I

propose that the interpretation of the double NomNP constructions as equatives in Young Oirat is possible due to the presence of an equative copula located between the two NPs.

First, it is important to point out that I adopt one of the broadest definitions of copula, which simply states that a copula is an auxiliary verb whose most salient feature is that it is semantically empty (it makes no independent contribution to the meaning of the sentence), and that it enables a nonverbal predication (Hengeveld 1992:32). I assume that as long as a morpheme fulfills the above-mentioned function and is semantically empty, it is a copula, regardless of whether these properties are realized only in a restricted environment (in that environment, it is a copula). In this connection, I propose that in Young Oirat there are two types of copulas: copula *bæ:* ‘be’ and the equative copula.

Copula *bæ:*

Let us look at the example with copula *bæ:*, as shown in (6):

- (6) Ba:t̪r bak-ʃe bi-læ
 Baatr.Nom teacher.Nom be-Ps2
 Baatr was a teacher

Notice that in sentence (6), the position of copula *bilæ* (past tense of *bæ:* ‘be’) is in compliance with the basic word order of Oirat (SOV).

The equative copula

In some copular constructions in the present tense, copula *bæ:*, in all varieties of Oirat, is in zero form. As suggested by Alexander Vovin (personal communication, 2006), the absence of the overt copula in the present tense could be the result of the influence of the neighbor languages: Russian in Kalmyk and Uighur in Xinjiang Oirat. Note that in both Russian and Uighur, the copula in the present tense can be in a zero form, as shown in (7):

Example from Russian

- (7) Ya uchitel’
 I.Nom (zero copula) teacher.Nom
 I am a teacher

Compare (7) with the equivalent sentence in Kalmyk, shown in (8):

- (8) Bi bakʃe
 I.Nom teacher.Nom (zero copula)
 I am a teacher (Vovin’s interpretation)

In (8), under the influence of Russian, the copula has a zero form. Notice that in Vovin’s interpretation, the zero copula is in the clause-final position. I suggest that Vovin’s interpretation reflects Old Oirat. I propose that in Young Oirat interpretation, the zero copula in sentence (8) is located NOT at the end of the clause, as it is in Old Oirat, but right after NP *bi* ‘I’, as shown in (9):

- (9) Bi bakʃe
 I.Nom (zero copula) teacher.Nom
 I am a teacher (Young Oirat interpretation)

In Old Oirat, copula *bæ:*, in the double NomNP environment (in the present tense), simply takes zero form (as suggested by Vovin). In Young Oirat, on the other hand, the copula, in the double NomNP environment, not only takes zero form, but also takes a position between the two NPs. In other words, the difference between the Young and the Old varieties of Oirat is in the location of the copula in the double NomNP constructions. In the case of sentence (8), the difference between the two interpretations is not obvious: both in Old Oirat and in Young Oirat, the sentence delivers the same message: ‘I am a

teacher.’ However, the difference between the two varieties of Oirat regarding the location of the copula in double NomNP environment seems to be evident in cases where these constructions are part of a bigger structure (discussion in § 6). Thus, at this preliminary stage of my investigation, I propose that in Young Oirat, unlike in Old Oirat, there are two types of copulas: copula *bæ:* ‘be’ and the equative copula.

These two types of copulas, in Young Oirat, seem to be in complementary distribution. Equative copula tends to appear only in the present tense and only in double NomNP constructions, whereas copula *bæ:* seems to appear everywhere else, as shown in (10) and (11):

Appearance of copula *bæ:*

(10) a. Baatr Honolulu-də bæ:-næ
 Baatr.Nom Honolulu-Loc be-Pr/F
 Baatr is in Honolulu

b. Batïr mini bakʃe bilæ
 Baatr.Nom I.Gen teacher.Nom be.Ps2
 Baatr WAS my teacher

Now compare (10a) and (10b) with the similar sentences in (11):

(11) a. *Baatr Honolulu-də
 Baatr.Nom (zero equative copula) Honolulu-Loc
 Baatr is in Honolulu

b. *Batïr mini bakʃe
 Baatr.Nom (zero equative copula) I.Gen teacher.Nom
 Baatr WAS my teacher

Notice that both (11a) and (11b) are ungrammatical (both in Young and Old Oirat). I assume that (11a) is unacceptable because the equative copula cannot appear in this environment. This is not a double NomNP construction: the second NP *Honolulu-də* is not in the nominative case; therefore, it cannot be a constituent of an equative [_S [Nom_{NP}] COPULA [Nom_{NP}]]. (11b) is ungrammatical because the equative copula cannot be used in reference to events in the past. Copula *bæ:*, on the other hand, does not seem to appear in the domain of the equative copula, as shown in (12) and (13):

(12) *Batïr mini bakʃe bæ:-næ
 Baatr.Nom (zero copula) I.Gen teacher.Nom be-Pr/F
 Baatr is my teacher

Example from Kalmyk:

(13) *Bi Mongol ky:n bæ:-næ
 I.Nom (zero copula) Mongol person.Nom be-Pr/Fut
 I am a Mongolian person

I assume that (12) and (13) are ungrammatical because copula *bæ:* cannot appear in the double NomNP environment, since it is in complementary distribution with the equative copula. The equative copula in Oirat seems to replace copula *bæ:*, but only in the present tense and mostly between two NPs in the nominative case.

Table 1 on the next page summarizes the distribution of the two copulas in Young Oirat.

It is worthwhile to point out that in other Mongolian languages, such as Khalkha, sentences (12) and (13) are considered grammatical: it seems that Khalkha allows the presence of the overt copula *bæ:* in the present tense (personal communication, Vovin 2006). As mentioned earlier, the absence of the overt copula in the present tense, in Oirat, could be the result of the influence of the neighbor languages.

TABLE 1.

copula/tense	past	Present	future
<i>bæ:</i>	<i>bilæ</i>	<i>bænæ</i> – everywhere, except for the equative [_S [Nom _{NP}] COPULA [Nom _{NP}]] constructions	<i>bæ:x</i>
equative copula	—	in the equative [_S [Nom _{NP}] COPULA [Nom _{NP}]] constructions	—

I assume that the proposed equative copula is in a very marginal position in Oirat grammar. Besides its abnormal position, it has limited domain and, unlike the copula *bæ:*, it does not inflect.

5.1.1 THE ORIGIN OF THE MISPLACED COPULA IN OIRAT. First, the equative copula appears in two forms: in Kalmyk it appears only in its zero form, whereas in Xinjiang Oirat it appears both in zero as well as in overt form *bol*.

Recall that the proposed equative copula in Young Oirat violates the basic word order. The question is what could instigate such a violation. In this regard, one of my assumptions is that the equative copula has derived or is in the process of being derived from the overt topic marker *bol* in Xinjiang Oirat and *bolxla* in Kalmyk. The most important feature of this overt topic marker that supports my hypothesis is its location. In both dialects the topic marker *bol* or *bolxla/bolxna* is usually placed immediately after the first NP of the sentence. In regards to the double NomNP constructions, its position would coincide with the position of the proposed equative copula. Second, in both dialects the above-mentioned topic marker can be replaced by a pause (null form). However, the null form of the topic marker (in both dialects) is not as prominent as its overt counterpart: the overt form of the topic marker has a more dramatic impact on the sentence. From my perspective, this transformation (topic marker > copula) has a slightly different course in the two dialects. In Xinjiang Oirat both the null form (pause) and the overt form *bol* of the topic marker at some point was reanalyzed as the equative copula. Therefore, in present-day Xinjiang, the equative copula appears in two forms (zero and *bol*). It is important to emphasize that in Xinjiang Oirat (unlike in Kalmyk), the distinction between the topic marker and the copula in some sentences is quite transparent. Note that when there is a pause after the first NP in the double NomNP constructions it is usually analyzed as a copula rather than a topic marker (probably by virtue of the weak nature of the null form of the topic marker compared with the overt form), as shown in (14):

Xinjiang Oirat

- (14) a. *Bat̪r* *bol* *mini* *bakʃe*
 Baatr.Nom topic marker/copula I.Gen teacher.Nom
 1. As for Baatr, he is my teacher (strong topicalization)
 2. Baatr is my teacher
- b. *Bat̪r* *mini* *bakʃe*
 Baatr.Nom copula/topic marker I.Gen teacher.Nom
 1. Baatr is my teacher
 2. As for Baatr, he is my teacher (weak topicalization)

Notice that in (14a) the primary interpretation is the one with the topicalization, whereas in (14b), the primary interpretation is the one with the copula.

In Kalmyk, on the other hand, only the null form of the topic marker *bolxla/bolxna* is reanalyzed as a zero copula. Therefore, at present the equative copula appears only in zero form. Why is the overt form of the topical marker not reanalyzed as a copula in Kalmyk as in Xinjiang? It could be because of its

relatively complex morphological structure (*bol-xla* ‘become’+ Conditional suffix that in turn consists of the suffix /x/ future participle + suffix /la/ past tense 2 or /na/ present/future tense) and its relative phonological length. As a result, presently in Kalmyk, the distinction between the topic marker *bolxla/bolxna* and the zero equative copula is much clearer (not transparent as it is in Xinjiang), as shown in (15):

Kalmyk

- (15) a. Bat̃r bolxla mini bakʃe
 Baatr.Nom topic marker I.Gen teacher.Nom
 As for Baatr, he is my teacher (strong topicalization, the only interpretation)
- b. Bat̃r mini bakʃe
 Baatr.Nom zero copula I.Gen teacher.Nom
 1. Baatr is my teacher
 2. As for Baatr, he is my teacher (very weak topicalization)

Notice that (15a) has only one interpretation (topicalization). As for (15b), it is interpreted primarily as an equative construction with a copula; and only if there is a virtual pause could it be interpreted as a topicalization.

In sum, I suggest that in Young Oirat, a topic marker is reanalyzed as a copula, but only in the double NomNP environment. I believe that the presence of the two NPs in the nominative case prompted such a reanalysis: the double NomNP construction served as a precondition for an equative copula.

5.1.1.1 NOTE ON THE MORPHEME *BOL* IN OIRAT. I do not have space to discuss the vast literature on the issue of categorization of *bol*. Most works define *bol* as subject marker (Hangin 1968, Kara 1992:182, Kullmann 1996, cited in Apatoczky 2005:1). However, the opinions regarding the definition of this particle are not entirely homogeneous. John Street (1963, cited in Apatoczky 2005:1) analysed *bol* as possessive or nominal–terminus marker; *bol*’s role to make definiteness was emphasized by Kara (1992), while Kullmann declared *bol* to be a focus marker (Kullmann 1996:372, 345, cited in Apatoczky 2005:1). For the time being, I adopt Apatoczky’s analysis of the morpheme as a topic marker. I assume that the topic marker *bol* in Xinjiang Oirat and *bolxla/bolxna* in Kalmyk have the same origin, from the stem *bol* ‘become’.

5.1.2 ANOTHER HYPOTHESIS REGARDING THE ORIGIN OF THE COPULA. It could be that the misplaced zero copula, is just the result of language contact. Kalmyk, for instance, could have borrowed it from Russian. This is in accordance with Vovin’s suggestion: recall that Vovin suggested that omitting the overt copula in the present tense is the result of contact with the Russian language. However, I assume that Young Kalmyk borrowed not only the phenomenon of omitting the copula in the present tense, but also in its nonfinal positions. Notice that Russian has a zero copula in the present tense that can be placed between two NPs; recall (7) and (9):

- (7) Ya uchitel’
 I.Nom (zero copula) teacher.Nom
 I am a teacher
- (9) Bi bakʃe
 I.Nom (zero copula) teacher.Nom
 I am a teacher (Young Oirat interpretation)

Notice that the position of the zero copula in Russian (7) and in Young Kalmyk (9) is the same. As for Xinjiang Oirat, it could be that the equative copula acquired its position from the position of the Mandarin copula /shi/. It is worth mentioning that Slater (2003) reports that there is more than one case

where a Mongolian language located in the present territory of China borrowed the overt copula /shi/ from Mandarin Chinese.

Mangghuer optionally uses an additional equational copula *shi*, which it has borrowed from the Chinese equational copula *shi* [Chinese character for shi]. *Shi* appears medially, between the two NPs it links, as it would in Mandarin; this contrasts with the clause-final position of the Mongolic copulas. Further, in most cases *shi* does not appear as the sole copula, but rather, a Mongolic form also appears with it. Finally, we should note that *shi* is permissible only in equational clauses, and even in these clauses, it is optional [all instances of "shi" in italics].

Slater gives example 16:

bi (shi) laoshi bi
 1:SG COP teacher SUBJ:COP
 I am a teacher.

Slater also states that the same borrowing has been reported for Baonan (Li 1983:46–47, cited in Slater 2003) and Santa (Field 1997:355–57, cited in Slater 2003). Note that in the cases of Mangghuer, Baonan, and Santa, the Mongolian languages borrowed not only the position of the copula, as allegedly did Oirat, but the phonological form of the copula as well. In Oirat this loan equative copula cannot co-occur with the Mongolic copula *as*, according to Slater, in Mangghuer.

It could also be that both Kalmyk and Xinjiang borrowed the position of the equative copula from Mandarin Chinese (see the attachment on Oirat history). I have to point out that all of my assumptions regarding the origin of the equative copula are only tentative.

In sum, I propose that the difference between the Young and the Old varieties of Oirat is in the location of the copula in the double NomNP constructions. In § 6, I discuss how this difference is reflected in the interpretation of the double NomNP constructions.

5.2 THE GENITIVE CASE. Another feature that distinguishes Old Oirat from Young Oirat and that makes Young Oirat more susceptible to the garden-path interpretation of double NomNP constructions has to do with the property of the genitive case.

5.2.1 GENITIVIZATION OF THE TRANSITIVE SUBJECT OF THE RELATIVE CLAUSE. Both Kalmyk and Xinjiang Oirat allow agent subjects that are in relative clauses to be in the genitive case (henceforth, genitivization of the relative subject). Moreover, in some relative clauses, agent subjects are required or strongly preferred to be in the genitive case, as shown in (16).

- (16) a % [bi ɵtskyɫ'dyr _xuld-dʒe-av-sɿn] maʃi-m
 [I.Nom yesterday trade-SG-take-PsP]car-1pPoss
 The car [that I bought _ yesterday]
- b. [mini ɵtskyɫ'dyr _xuld-dʒe-av-sɿn] maʃi-m
 I.Gen yesterday trade-SG-take-PsP car-1pPoss
 The car [that I bought _ yesterday]

According to all informants, irrespective of the varieties, (16b) is more acceptable than (16a). Notice that the transitive subject *bi* 'I' in (16a) is in the nominative case, whereas in (16b) it is in the genitive case. However, not all cases with genitivized transitive subjects are uniformly accepted by all speakers of Oirat. The Young speakers tend to avoid genitivized subjects, whereas the Old speakers typically prefer to have the subjects in the relative clause be in the genitive case, as shown in (17).

Basic sentence:

- (17) a. Bi Tuya-də xot ke-væ
 I.Nom Tuya-Dat food.Acc give-Ps1
 I made food for Tuya (person's name)

Corresponding direct object relative clause, in general preferred by the Old speakers (especially by Xinjiang Oirats):

- b. [Mini Tuya-də _ ke-sɪn] xot
 I.Gen Tuya-Dat make-PsP food.Nom
 the food that [I made_ for Tuya]

Corresponding direct object relative clause, in general preferred by the Young speakers (especially by Kalmyks):

- c. [Bi Tuya-də _ ke-sɪn] xot
 I.Nom Tuya-Dat make-PsP food.Nom
 the food that [I made_ for Tuya]

(17b) is preferred by some Old speakers of Kalmyk and by the majority of the Old speakers of Xinjiang Oirat, whereas (17c) is typically preferred by the Young speakers of Kalmyk. In general, genitivization of the agent subject is less common in the Kalmyk dialect than it is in Xinjiang Oirat. But what is more important, it appears that the Old speakers of both dialects tend to genitivize agent subjects more often than the Young speakers. Thus, it could be that genitivization of the subjects is in the process of disappearing in both dialects.

The lack of genitivization in the Kalmyk dialect and its presence in Xinjiang Oirat could be accounted for by the geographic location of the two dialects. Kalmyks as a linguistic group have been culturally and geographically isolated from the rest of the Mongolian tribes for almost 400 years (Bläsing 2003:229). Xinjiang Oirat speakers, on the other hand, are geographically closer to other Mongolian languages that might still have a strong tendency towards genitivization. Whether the genitivization is robust enough in other Mongolian languages to influence Xinjiang Oirat is yet to be determined. I assume that genitivization is disappearing in both dialects. However, presumably due to the linguistic environment, in Xinjiang Oirat this process is at a less advanced stage than it is in Kalmyk.

5.2.1.1 THE LOSS OF GENITIVIZATION AS A LOSS OF THE STRATEGY FOR DISAMBIGUATION. Now, the question is how the lack of genitivization in Young Oirat (especially in Kalmyk) makes Young Oirat more susceptible to the garden-path interpretation. Let me start by reintroducing the sentence in (3), as shown in (18):

Basic sentence

- (18) a. Ba:tɪr kyn-də nom əg-væ
 Baatr person-Dat book.Acc give-Ps1
 Baatr gave a book to a person

Corresponding relative clause without genitivization:

- b. Ba:tɪr nom əg-sɪn ky:n
 Baatr.Nom book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom

Interpretation 1:

- Ba:tɪr [_ nom əg-sɪn] ky:n
 Baatr.Nom zero copula book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom
 Baatr is the person who [_ gave a book]

Interpretation 2:

[Ba:t̪ir _ nom əg-s̪in] ky:n
 Baatr.Nom book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom
 the person to whom [Baatr gave_ a book]

Corresponding relative clause with genitivization, strongly preferred by the Old speakers:

c. Ba:tr-in nom əg-s̪in ky:n

Interpretation 1:

[_Ba:tr-in nom əg-s̪in] ky:n
 Baatr.Gen book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom
 the person who [_gave Baatr's book]

Interpretation 2:

[Ba:tr-in _ nom əg-s̪in] ky:n
 Baatr.Gen book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom
 the person who [Baatr gave a book to_
 (This interpretation is usually accepted only by the Old speakers.)

First, when asked to relativized the indirect object of the basic sentence in (18a), the Old speakers in general strongly prefer the genitivized version of the relative clause, as in (18c), whereas the Young speakers usually prefer the nongenitivized version or are unable to produce such a relative clause altogether. It is important to point out that for the sentence in (18c) the Old speakers primarily give the second interpretation, whereas the Young speakers can only interpret it as a relative with the relativized subject (interpretation 1). In other words, the Young Oirat speakers do not employ genitivization in the relatives with the relativized indirect objects, as the Old speakers do. Now notice that one of the difference between the nongenitivized relative in (18b) and the genitivized relative in (18c) is the presence or absence of the double NomNP construction. The key point is that there cannot be any double NomNP constructions in the genitivized version because the subject in the relative clause (the first NP) in sentences is never in the nominative case. In other words, genitivization could potentially prevent the ambiguity caused by the dual interpretation of the double NomNP constructions by simply destroying such constructions. It does this by changing the nominative case of one of the NPs that can potentially be a constituent of the double NomNP construction to the genitive case. Provided that the Young Oirat speakers employ the genitivization strategy, as do the Old speakers, there simply would not be any relatives that involve two semantically equivalent NomNPs to cause the ambiguity: double NomNPs interpreted as equatives. As a result, genitivization could potentially be used as a disambiguation tool. However, this is not the case. In reality, the Young speakers of Oirat in general do not employ genitivization in the relative clauses, especially in relatives with the relativized indirect objects.

As I mentioned earlier, it appears that genitivization of the relative subjects is disappearing in both dialects. I assume that, at some point of the history of the Oirat language, genitivization of the relative subject was much more common than it is now. At that stage, the problem with the double NomNP constructions could not occur. So, what could make the speakers of Oirat stop using such a useful disambiguation tool? I cannot give a definite answer to this question at this point. But I can offer a hypothesis on how this process might evolve.

5.2.1.2 THE LOSS OF THE EXTENDED PROPERTY OF THE GENITIVE CASE. Let us take a closer look at the sentence with the genitivized relative subject in (18c):

Interpretation 1:

[_Ba:tr-in nom əg-sɪn] ky:n
 Baatr.Gen book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom
 the person who [_gave Baatr's book]

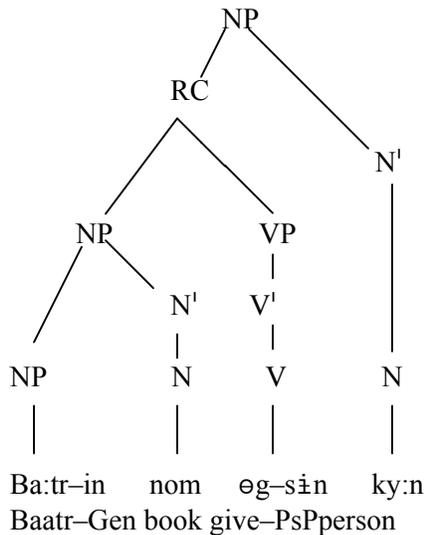
Interpretation 2:

[Ba:tr-in _ nom əg-sɪn] ky:n
 Baatr.Gen book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom
 the person who [Baatr gave a book to_]
 (this interpretation is usually accepted only by the Old speakers)

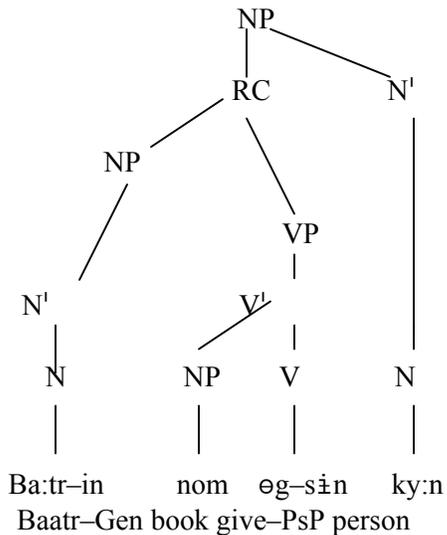
If we try to analyze what the NP in the genitive case (*Ba:tr-in*) modifies in interpretation 1 and in interpretation 2, we can notice a significant difference. The difference between the two applications of the genitive case is in the extent of their scope. To be specific, the scope of the genitive case in the second interpretation (accepted only by the Old speakers), is larger than that in the first interpretation (in general, accepted by the Young speakers), as shown in structure 1:

STRUCTURE 1

Interpretation 1:



Interpretation 2:



In the Young Oirat interpretation, *Baatr-in* modifies only the immediately following noun *nom* 'book': 'Baatr's book'. However, in the Old Oirat interpretation, *Baatr-in* modifies the whole phrase *nom əgsɪn* 'book gave': the literal translation would be something like 'Baatr's giving the book'. Recall that the Old speakers accept both interpretations, whereas the Young speakers in general accept only the first interpretation. This means that in Old Oirat the genitive case has two versions: short range, and long range or extended. Note again that for the Old speakers the second interpretation is primary, meaning that in the relative clause, the genitive case utilizes its extended version. The extended version of the genitive case sometimes appears in the Young Xinjiang variety. For instance, in Young Xinjiang Oirat, the extended version of the genitive case can be triggered by inserting a word between the genitivized NP and the immediately following NP, as shown in (19):

- (19) [Baatr-in_ ɔtskyl'dyr nom ɔg-sɪn] ky:n
 Baatr-Gen yesterday book give-PsP person/Nom
 The person who yesterday [Baatr gave a book to_]

The Young Xinjiang speakers who prefer interpretation 1 in (18c) interpret (19) as the relativized indirect object. My interpretation of this phenomenon is the following: the insertion of a word between *Baatr-in* and *nom* 'book' triggers the extended version of the genitive case. It seems that the inserted word *ɔtskyl'dyr* serves as a tie breaker. By breaking the tie between *Baatr-in* 'Baatr-Gen' and the noun *nom* 'book', it disrupts the short-range version of genitive case that in its turn activates the extended version of the genitive case.

Moreover, it seems that Old Xinjiang speakers use prosody to differentiate the two different versions of the genitive case. For instance, to make the relativized indirect object interpretation in (18c) more obvious, the Old speakers use a prominent pause after *Baatr-in* to signal that genitive case is going to cover a larger structure than just the immediately following noun. Note that the Old speakers accept the second interpretation of (18c) only if there is no prominent pause between *Baatr-in* and *nom*. When the Old speakers want to convey the first interpretation of (18c), they simply do not pause between *Baatr-in* and *nom*. "No pause" seems to signify that the genitive case is going to utilize its short range version and modify only the immediately following noun. Both of these strategies (the insertion of a word between *Baatr-in* and *nom* 'book' and using a pause between them) seem to be based on the same principle.

The strategy of using prosodic cues to employ two versions of the genitive case is also employed by some Young Xinjiang speakers; it does not seem to appear in Young Kalmyk variety. However, the extended version of the genitive case is not completely abandoned in Young Kalmyk. Recall that the Young Kalmyk speakers accept the sentences in (16b). Notice that in (16b), NP *mini* (I.Gen) is not immediately followed by an NP in the nominative case that it could modify, as happens in sentence (18c), where *Baatr-in* modifies *nom* 'book'. In (16b) NP *mini* (I.Gen) modifies NP *ma sim* 'my car', which involves the extended version of the genitive case. I assume that for (16b), the extended version of the genitive case is prompted by the lack of any other NP in the nominative case, besides *ma sim* 'my car', that could potentially be modified.

It could be concluded that in Young Kalmyk, the extended version of the genitive case, in principle, can be triggered by disrupting its short-range version (inserting word(s) between the NP-Gen and the immediately following NP in the nominative case). But, for some reason, the extended version of the genitive case in Young Kalmyk cannot occur in relatives with relativized indirect objects. It could be because in Oirat, relatives with relativized indirect objects, unlike relatives with relativized direct objects, usually involve more than one NP that potentially can be modified by the NP-Gen, thus causing an ambiguity or confusion (compare (16b) with (18)). This is just a preliminary guess.

Why the extended version of the genitive case has almost disappeared from Kalmyk, and seems to be in the process of disappearing in Xinjiang Oirat, is a question to which I have no answers at this point. Recall that a pause, as a prosodic tool, seems to be the only cue that is used to distinguish between the two versions of the genitive case. It could be that the pause, at some point, lost its ability to differentiate the two versions of the genitive case (as in Young Kalmyk). However, it seems counter-intuitive to lose as prominent a prosodic cue as a pause, which fulfills such an important task, for no substantial reason. To the extent of my knowledge, throughout the languages of the world prosodic cues such as pauses tend to be very stable and unlikely to be lost easily (personal communication, Victoria Anderson 2006).

In sum, I believe that one of the main reasons for the Young speakers (especially Kalmyk) not to be able to interpret (18c) as the relativized indirect object is because of the change in the property of the genitive case. In other words, there is an important difference between Old and Young varieties of Oirat, which is based on the realization of different properties of the genitive case. I claim that the disappearance of genitivization plays a crucial role in the strong inclination of Young Oirat to interpret

double NomNP constructions as the equative constructions that makes the Young speakers more susceptible to the garden–path interpretation. I assume that the loss of genitivation is one of the main reasons that Young Oirat is unable to produce or interpret some of the syntactic structures with the relativized indirect object or oblique.

Finally, at this point, it seems to be impossible to untangle the cause–and–affect knot among the three interrelated phenomena: (1) emergence of the equative copula, (2) the loss of the extended version of the genitive case, and (3) loss of the genitivation of the relative subject. However, assuming that the double NomNP constructions prompted the emergence of the copula, I tentatively propose the following: the loss of the extended version of the genitive case took place first; it caused the loss of the genitivation of the relative subject that instigated the occurrence of the double NomNP constructions, which in turn served as precondition for the emergence of the equative copula.

5.3 TYPES OF RELATIVE CLAUSES IN OIRAT. In terms of what is being relativized, relative clauses can be arranged into several groups: subject, direct object, indirect object, oblique, genitive, and object of comparison (Comrie 1981:142). With the exception of the object of comparison, it seems that Oirat is able to relativize all of the above–mentioned positions. Since double NomNP constructions occur mostly in relatives with relativized indirect objects, this type of relative is the most problematic in Young Oirat. Due to the garden–path interpretation of the double NomNP constructions, in Young Oirat, relatives with relativized indirect objects tend to be either interpreted as relatives with the relativized subject or rejected as unacceptable. Considering that relativized obliques and genitives are much less problematic, it appears that Young Oirat violates the accessibility hierarchy for relativization proposed by Keenan and Comrie.¹¹ However, my analysis concludes that Young Oirat is in compliance with the hierarchy, since the factor that inhibits the relativization of some relatives is extraneous: it is not based on the ranking of the relative clauses in the hierarchy.

5.3.1 WHY ARE RELATIVES WITH THE RELATIVIZED INDIRECT OBJECTS THE MOST PROBLEMATIC? Since problematic relatives (i.e., marginally acceptable or unacceptable) for the Young Oirat speakers are those that have double NomNP constructions, in principle, any type of relative clause can be problematic. However, due to the syntactic properties of Oirat, the problem with misinterpreting the double NomNPs affects only the following three types of relative clauses: (1) relatives with relativized direct objects, (2) relatives with relativized indirect objects, and (3) relatives with relativized obliques. This is because double NomNP constructions can only occur and cause ambiguity in these three types of relatives. However, as I mentioned earlier, compared to relative clauses with relativized obliques or direct objects, relatives with relativized indirect objects seem to be more susceptible to misinterpretation or rejection in Young Oirat. Why?

Let us start by comparing the relatives with relativized direct objects with the relatives with indirect objects. Here is an example of the relatives with a relativized direct object:

Basic sentence

- (20) a. Ba:t̪ir ky:–gə yz–væ
 Baatr person–Acc see–Ps1
 Baatr saw a person

¹¹ The accessibility hierarchy for relativization proposed by Keenan and Comrie (1981) suggests the following: subject > direct object > indirect object > oblique > genitive > object of comparison, where ‘>’ means ‘is more accessible to relativization’.

Corresponding relative clause

b. Ba:tîr [_ yz-sî:n] ky:n

Interpretation 1:

Ba:tîr [_ yz-sî:n] ky:n
 Baatr (zero copula) see-PsP person.Nom
 Baatr is the person who [_ saw]

Interpretation 2:

[Ba:tîr _ yz- sî:n] ky:n
 Baatr.Nom see-PsP person.Nom
 the person who [Baatr saw _]

Notice that (20b) is a relative with a relativized direct object that contains a double NomNP construction. Consequently, this sentence is ambiguous, with two interpretations. In Young Oirat the first interpretation is the primary one, which seems to forestall the second interpretation. However, it is important to point out that the first interpretation is not as dominant as it is with the relativized indirect object in (3). The reason for such a difference is that relatives with indirect objects involve transitive verbs that already have an argument. In example (3), for instance, the verb *give* has an argument *book*; consequently it does not require another NP to become a complete VP: the verb's argument structure is saturated and complete within the relative clause. As a result, when the NP *person* follows the argument *book*, it is not unequivocally interpreted as the second argument (goal). To my knowledge, in Oirat, there is no ditransitive verb that obligatorily requires two internal arguments. In relatives with direct objects, on the other hand, the argument structure of the transitive verbs is not complete within the relative clause. In example (20b), for instance, the NP *person* has to be interpreted as an argument of the verb *yz* 'see', because there is no other NP to fulfill this role. In example (20b), the verb *yz* 'see' can be both transitive and intransitive. Only because of this dual feature is it possible to interpret this sentence as an equative construction in Young Oirat (interpretation 1), which to a certain degree forestalls the second interpretation (relativized direct object). Thus, relatives with the relativized direct object can cause the ambiguity (have two potential interpretations) in Young Oirat, but only if they involve verbs that can be both transitive and intransitive. As the number of this kind of verb in Oirat is relatively limited, the number of problematic relatives with relativized direct objects in Young Oirat is much smaller than the number of problematic relatives with relativized indirect objects.

Now, let us compare relatives with relativized indirect objects, as in (3), with relatives with relativized obliques, as shown in (21):

Basic sentence:

(21) a. Ba:tîr ger-t usn u:-va
 Baatr.Nom house-Loc water.Acc drink-Ps1
 Baatr drank water in the house

b. Ba:tîr _ usn u:-sî:n] ger
 Baatr.Nom water.Acc drink-PsP house.Nom
 The house which [Baatr drank water in_] (only one interpretation)

Notice that in (21b) there are two NPs in the nominative case: *Baatr* and *ger* 'house'. But unlike most relatives with relativized indirect objects, for instance in (3), these two NomNPs are not semantically equivalent. Consequently, the equative interpretation is not realized: sentence (21) in Young Oirat has only one interpretation: there is no alternative interpretation (equative) to interfere with the intended relativized oblique interpretation. Recall that in (3b), on the other hand, the two NomNPs (*Baatr*

1. *Multiple Be Analysis* (MBA)

There are two kinds of copular structures:

- a) Predicative structure NP'(NP1)
- b) Equative Structures EQUALS'(NP1,NP2)

In the predicative construction, one noun phrase (NP2 in 1a) serves as the predicate for NP1, which functions as an argument. In (1b), both NPs function as arguments of an abstract copular predicate.

The other theory holds that all copular constructions involve the predication of NP, even in equative environments.

2. *Unified Be Analysis* (UBA)

NP2(NP1)

This model, adopted in my analysis, claims that both predicatives and equatives show asymmetries between the two NPs in copular constructions. These asymmetries are assumed to follow from an underlying subject/predicate distinction (Carnie 2005:1–2)

Before continuing this section, let me forestall any potential confusion by emphasizing that in this paper, I am not trying to support any of the existing theories regarding the equative constructions, nor do I intend to propose a theory of my own on this issue. Rather, my paper is more of a descriptive nature. It is simply convenient for explanatory and descriptive reasons to use the UBA model.

6.1 YOUNG OIRAT VS. OLD OIRAT. As I stated earlier, a garden–path structure is simply a dead–end structure that forestalls the intended interpretation. In the case of Young Oirat, a garden–path structure is the equative construction that leads to the dead–end interpretation, which subsequently limits the range of permissible relative clauses in Young Oirat.

In Young Oirat, whenever there is a double NomNP construction, irrespective of the type of relative clause, the two NPs are primarily analyzed as an equative construction [s [NP] COPULA [NP [RC] N]], as was shown (3).

- (3) b. Ba:t̪ɪr nom ɐg-s̪ɪn ky:n
 Baatr.Nom book.Acc give–PsP person.Nom

Interpretation 1:

Ba:t̪ɪr [nom ɐg-s̪ɪn] ky:n
 Baatr (zero copula) book.Acc give–PsP¹³ person.Nom
 Baatr is the person who [gave a book]

Interpretation 2:

[Ba:t̪ɪr _ nom ɐg-s̪ɪn] ky:n
 Baatr.Nom book.Acc give–PsP person.Nom
 the person to whom [Baatr gave_ a book]

Now, let us add another NP to the sentence above, for instance, by transforming the basic sentence, shown in (23), into the relative with indirect object, as shown in (24):

¹³ PsP = past participle.

Basic sentence

- (23) Ba:t̡ir Tuya-də nom əg-væ
 Ba:t̡ir.Nom Tuya-Dat book.Acc give-PsI
 Baatr gave a book to Tuya

Corresponding relative clause in Young Xinjiang Oirat

- (24)a.%[Ba:t̡ir _ nom əg-s̡in] ky:n (bol) Tuya
 Ba:t̡ir.Nom book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom (be) Tuya.Nom
 The person who [Ba:t̡ir gave a book to] is Tuya

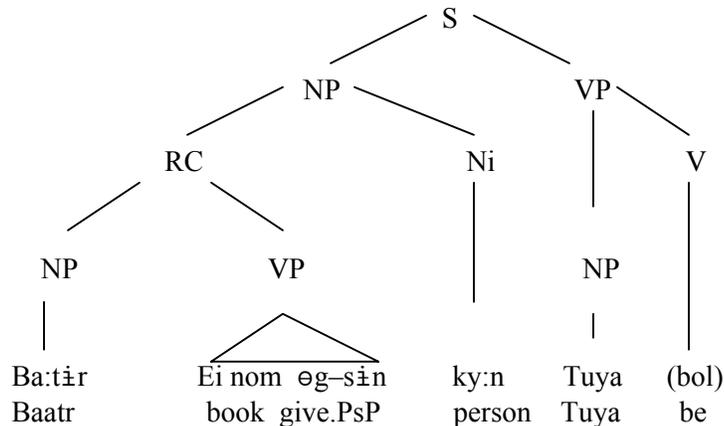
Corresponding relative clause in Young Kalmyk

- b.*[Ba:t̡ir _ degtr əg-s̡in] ky:n Tuya
 Ba:t̡ir.Nom book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom (zero copula) Tuya.Nom
 The person who [Ba:t̡ir gave a book to] is Tuya

Most of the Young speakers of Kalmyk consider (24b) ungrammatical, while for some Young speakers of Xinjiang Oirat, (24a) is only marginally acceptable. Note that according to the Old speakers of both dialects, (24a) and (24b) are grammatically correct. I claim that the reason why the Young speakers of Oirat, unlike the Old speakers, have trouble accepting the sentences in (24) is that they prioritize the equative interpretation of the double NomNP constructions. In other words, I claim that the equative interpretation forestalls the second interpretation in which NP *ky:n* ‘person’ is analyzed as an indirect object of the relative clause.

Lets us examine the two interpretations of (3). If we were to add the NP *Tuya* to the second interpretation (as in (24), it would not create any conflict with the existing syntactic structure. The new NP would be compatible with the existing syntactic structure, which is analyzed as an NP: the new NP *Tuya* simply takes the place of a nominative predicate in an equative construction. The merging of the two structures can be schematically demonstrated as in structure 2:

Structure 2: (suggested by William O’Grady, personal communication)



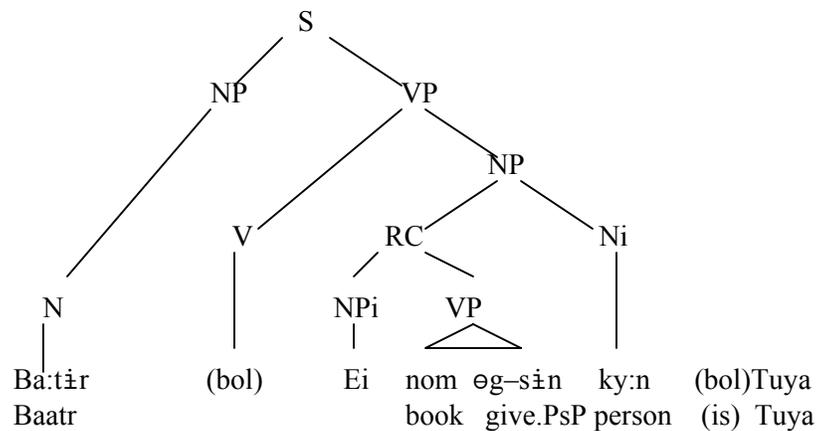
Interpretation 2: Ba:t̡ir Ei nom əg-s̡in ky:n + Tuya = S

Now if we add NP *Tuya* to the first interpretation, there is a conflict with the existing syntactic structure. The syntactic structure of an equative sentence is a closed structure. It is complete, and there is

no position available for a new NP to take. Structure 3, on the next page, schematically demonstrates the incompatibility of the two structures.

As you can see, the first interpretation is a closed structure: an equative construction [S [NP] COPULA [NP [RC] N]]. As a result, it is not structurally possible to add another constituent to it. Interpretation 2, on the other hand, is not a closed structure; it is basically an NP that is modified by the relative clause. The structure suggested by interpretation 2, which is an NP, allows practically any constituent to be added. So when another NP (*Tuya*) is added to this NP, it can be interpreted as an equative construction. From the standpoint of the first interpretation, adding a new NP to the sentence in (3) has no comprehensible outcome. Thus, when the Young speakers of Oirat hear the sentence in (24b), in order to make sense of it they first have to recover from the first interpretation (equative) and reanalyze it as a relative with a relativized indirect object (the second interpretation). That is why the Young speakers find the sentence in (24b) problematic: some do not accept it as grammatical; others consider it marginally grammatical.

Structure 3:(suggested by O'Grady)



Interpretation 1: Ba:t̥ir Ei nom ɛg-s̥ɪn ky:n + (bol) Tuya = nonsense

What is interesting is that the level of acceptability differs depending on what is being added to the double NomNP construction. For instance, when we add a new verb to the sentence in (3), as shown in (25), the Young speakers seem to have much less problem with the interpretation of a new sentence.

Relative clause in Young Xinjiang Oirat

- (25) a. [Ba:t̥ir _ nom ɛg-s̥ɪn] ky:n un-dʒe
 Ba:t̥ir.Nom book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom fall-SG
 The person who [Ba:t̥ir gave a book to _] fell

Corresponding relative clause in Young Kalmyk

- b. %[Ba:t̥ir _ nom ɛg-s̥ɪn] ky:n un-dʒe
 Ba:t̥ir.Nom book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom fall-SG
 The person who [Ba:t̥ir gave a book to _] fell

Notice that Young Xinjiang Oirats accept the sentence in (25a) and consider it grammatical, whereas Young Kalmyk speakers find it problematic. However, the level of unacceptability is much lower than that of the sentence in (24b). In other words, it seems to be harder for the Young Oirat speakers to

recover from the first interpretation (garden–path interpretation) in the cases where a single NP is added to such a structure than it is in the cases where a single verb is added, as shown in diagram 1:

DIAGRAM 1

Case 1: [S[NP]_{COPULA}[NP[RC] N]] + [NP] >> [S[NP[RC][NP][VP]]_N]_{COPULA}[NP]] –harder

Case 2: [S[NP]_{COPULA}[NP[RC] N]] + [NP] >> [S[NP[RC][NP][VP]]_N]_{VP}] –easier

(/ >> / means ‘transforms into’.)

Case 1 corresponds to the sentence in (24), whereas case 2 corresponds to the sentence in (25). First, let us look at case 1. I claim that it is relatively harder to recover from the garden–path interpretation in case 1 because, in this case, the copular structure of the existing equative construction (on the left) has to compete with the similar copular structure of the new structure (on the right). These two copular structures are syntactically equal, which makes it harder for the new structure to get realized. In this particular case, what could make it easier for the Young Oirat speakers to recover from the garden–path interpretation is a stronger signal for a new equative construction. In Young Xinjiang Oirat, the copula in the new equative construction is usually in its overt form *bol*, which seems to be a stronger indicator than a zero copula of a new equative copular structure. Recall that in Kalmyk, the equative copula has only a zero form, which could explain why the Young Kalmyk speakers tend to have more problems with such sentences as (24) than Xinjiang speakers: zero copula is not a very strong signifier of an equative construction.

Now let us examine case 2. I claim that it is relatively easier to recover from the garden–path interpretation in case 2 because, in this case, the added verb *undze* ‘fell’ is a much stronger signifier of the new syntactic structure than an equative copula. The verb *undze* ‘fell’, unlike an equative copula, unequivocally signals a VP, which subsequently makes it easier for the Young Oirat speakers to recover from the garden–path interpretation. It is important to point out that the above analysis implies that in Oirat the equative copula has a much weaker status than a regular verb.

In addition, Young Oirat (both Xinjiang and Oirat) seem to have absolutely no problems recovering from the garden–path interpretation in cases where a new structure is signified by more than one word, as shown in (26):

- (26) [Ba:t̪r _ nom əg-s̪ɪn] ky:n Honolulu-de job-ba
 Ba:t̪r.Nom book.Acc give-PsP person.Nom Honolulu-Loc go-Ps1
 The person who [Ba:t̪r gave a book to _] went to Honolulu

Notice that in (26) the double NomNP construction is followed by a VP, which consists of more than one word. This seems to be a strong signifier of a new VP, which consequently makes it very easy for Young Oirats to recover from the garden–path interpretation. Note that the Young speakers find (26) grammatical and seem to have no difficulty with its interpretation.

Recall that the first interpretation of (3) is not completely banned from Old Oirat grammar. This means that the zero copula seems to be present in both Young and Old Oirat. Thus, the mere presence of the zero copula does not answer the question that I posed at the beginning of this section, namely, why in Young Oirat, is the equative construction interpretation more dominant than it is in Old Oirat? However, as I mentioned earlier, one of the differences between the two varieties of Oirat is the location of the copula in a double NomNP environment (the copula in Old Oirat is located clause–finally, whereas in Young Oirat it is placed between the two NPs). I assume that this difference can be accounted for by the fact that the interpretation of double NomNP constructions as equatives is more dominant in Young Oirat than it is in Old Oirat. However, this assumption needs thorough investigation.

In sum, with respect to the relatives with the relativized in/direct objects and genitives, in Young Oirat, the equative constructions are the garden–path structures, which subsequently limit the range of permissible relative clauses in Young Oirat.

7 CONCLUSION. The purpose of this study was to find out why Old speakers of Oirat access certain types of relative clauses in Oirat as grammatical, while the Young speakers consider them marginally grammatical or ungrammatical. It was found that this distinction between the two varieties of Oirat seems to be caused by the two possible interpretations of constructions with two semantically equivalent NPs in the nominative case (so–called double NomNP constructions).

In Young Oirat, the double NomNP construction is interpreted as an equative copular construction, which, in the case of relatives with a relativized indirect object or oblique, is a garden–path structure that forestalls the intended interpretation. As a result, in Young Oirat (unlike Old Oirat), a whole range of relatives with relativized indirect objects or obliques are misinterpreted or considered to be ungrammatical.

This conclusion leads to the new question: what features of Young Oirat make it more susceptible to the garden–path interpretation than Old Oirat? Or why, in Young Oirat, is the equative construction interpretation more dominant than it is in Old Oirat?

I propose that there are two main factors that seem to trigger the equative construction interpretation in Young Oirat: (1) emergence of an equative copula and (2) the disappearance of the so–called genitivization strategy (marking the subject in the relative clause with the genitive case).

The crucial difference between the two varieties of Oirat is that in the double NomNP environment (in the present tense), in Old Oirat a copula is located clause–finally, whereas in Young Oirat it is the equative copula, which is placed between the two NPs. At this point of my investigation, I am not sure whether this difference is directly responsible for the fact that equatives are more dominant in Young Oirat than they are in Old Oirat or for forestalling the non–copula interpretations of the double NomNP constructions in Young Oirat. I believe that the equative copula in Oirat is a fairly new morpheme that probably has derived from a topic marker or was borrowed from other languages.

I demonstrated that genitivization (marking the subject in the relative clause with the genitive case) can be used as a disambiguation tool against the dual interpretation of the double NomNP constructions. So its absence in Young Oirat seems to contribute to the problem of the garden–path. I believe that the loss of the genitivization could have been caused by the loss of the extended property of the genitive case, which allows the NP in the genitive case to modify a structure with a higher node.

I tentatively propose the following sequence of events: the loss of the extended version of the genitive case, caused the loss of the genitivization of the relative subject, which instigated the occurrence of the double NomNP constructions, which in turn served as precondition for the emergence of the equative copula.

Due to the structure of the double NomNP constructions, it is mostly relativized indirect objects that are problematic for the Young speakers of Oirat, which could lead to the erroneous conclusion that the Young variety violates the accessibility hierarchy for relativization proposed by Keenan and Comrie. However, my analysis concludes that Oirat is in compliance with the hierarchy: the factor that inhibits the relativization of some relatives is extraneous (it is not based on the ranking of the relative clauses in the hierarchy).

APPENDIX

Oirat is a Mongolian language that is spoken mainly in the Kalmyk Republic (Russia), Xinjiang province (China), and Mongolia. Kalmyk is the dialect spoken in the Kalmyk Republic, whereas Xinjiang Oirat is the dialect spoken in Xinjiang province of China. In the Kalmyk Republic the

percentage of those who use Kalmyk as their first language is critically low (mostly people in their 60s or older). The use of Oirat in Xinjiang province is relatively stable, especially in rural areas.

Who are the Oirats and who are the Kalmyks?

The ethnonym Oirat [ørd] is used to cover several groups of Western Mongols, who originally belonged to the tribal confederation of the *Hoi-yin Irgen* ‘Forest People’. Until the thirteenth century, they lived south and southwest of Lake Baikal. After Chinggis Khan’s eldest son Jochi attacked the Forest People (1206–7), they moved to the steppes of the Altai region and adopted a fully nomadic way of life. 200 years later, in the fifteenth century their descendants emerged as a growing political power known as the Oirat Confederation. Over a period of 40 years (1416–55) the Oirats expanded their territory from Altai to Ili (a region near the present day border between China and Kazakhstan) where they established the so-called Jungharia. The Oirats reached the height of their power at the end of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries (1670–1745). However, in the middle of the eighteenth century, like all Eastern and Southern Mongols, the Oirats were subjugated by the Manchu. As a consequence of their complex political history, the present day Oirats are dispersed over various regions, including not only Jungharia (Xinjiang province) but also Manchuria, Western Mongolia, Qinghai province (China) and Russia (Birtalan, 2003:210). The present day Oirats comprise four main tribes: Torghut, Dørbet, øelet, and Khoshut.

Kalmyks [xal’miŋg] are descendants of the Oirat tribes (mostly Torgud and Dørbet) who, due to internal political pressure, in 1616 were forced to emigrate from their original homeland (Jungharia). They migrated westwards and settled along the Lower Volga and the Caspian Sea, submitting to Russian suzerainty. However, about 150 years later, their relations with the Russians worsened; consequently, in 1771, part of the Kalmyk population returned to Jungharia, where they rejoined the rest of the Oirats.

Major events of the Oirat history

Before the thirteenth century – Oirats (Forest People) lived south of lake Baikal.

1207: moved to the steppes of Altai region and adopted a fully nomadic way of life.

1416: expanded their territory from Altai to Ili and established the so-called Jungharia.

1616: part of the Oirats (Kalmyks) migrated and settled along the Lower Volga and the Caspian Sea.

1750s: Oirats are subjugated by the Manchu.

1771: part of the Kalmyk population returned to Jungharia, where they re-joined the rest of the Oirats.

Kalmyks as a linguistic community have been isolated from the rest of the Oirats (and other Mongolian tribes) for almost 400 years (1616–2005).

Part of the Kalmyks rejoined the Oirats about 230 years ago (1771–2005).

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