The Function of the Suffix \(-na\) in Khalkha Mongolian

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This paper discusses the function of the Khalkha Mongolian suffix \(-na\). While it has been described as referring to future, present, and timeless situations, how it is used has not yet been specified. This paper is an attempt to shed some light on this, taking into account factors such as aspect oppositions, aktionsart-independent (i.e. generic) uses, text-specific uses, interaction with aktionsart, and age of speaker. Finally, \(-na\) is understood to be a bleached imperfective marker that has lost its ability to relate to a specific point in time and is, instead, in the process of acquiring modal connotations.

**Keywords**: Aspect, aktionsart, imperfective, bleaching, future, modality

1. The basic problem

Previous research on the function of the suffix \(-na\) in Khalkha Mongolian often differentiated between three functions\(^1\): a future time reference, a present time reference, and reference to more or less timeless situations. However, earlier attempts to link these diverse functions to either verb class or textual genre have been insufficient, and a proper understanding of the distribution of \(-na\) is still lacking.

\(^1\) Here, I would like to express my gratitude to my informants for their indispensable input and to Erdenimöngke, St. Georg, D. Güneckog, and J. Rentzsch for discussing different versions of the manuscript with me.
This paper is intended to contribute to clarifying this issue. It starts with a discussion of previous research (2.). This is followed by a short discussion of the probable diachronic situation and the notion of “focality” that should prove helpful (3.). Then, generic uses (4.), textually conditioned uses (5.), and the interaction of -na with aktionsart (6.) will be discussed, with the last part being introduced by a short discussion of aktionsart in Khalkha Mongolian in general. Finally, the discussion will be summed up (7.).

2. Previous research

Bjambasan and Sanžaa (1987: 161-163) state that -na can have a future or present time reference, but mention that it is subject to discussion whether these are two functions of one nonpast morpheme or whether these are two different morphemes. They further subdivide its present tense use into a present with reference to the time of speaking and a general present that reaches from past to future including the moment of speech. This general present is said to be replaceable by the Habitual suffix -dag in combination with the copula2). The general

2) This would be -dag bajna. Hashimoto (2004: 99) states for identity predications that the presence of bajna marks a temporary state, and Svantesson (1991: 194-195) identifies the form -san bajna which consists of the Perfect participle and the copula as a present perfect with considerable emphasis on the resultant state. If it is possible to extrapolate from this, or to be slightly more specific about Činggeltai’s (1959: 22-23) analysis of -dag bajna to the effect that this item is RESTRICTING a sequence of events to a temporary state, we would suppose that it is not compatible with eternal truths that are envisaged as such. (And even Bjambasan himself (1987: 102, my translation) says something to this effect: “As the participle -dag ... has no temporal meaning itself, the tense of complex forms is clarified by the tense suffixes on auxiliaries like baj- and bol.”)

But if so, the example from a poem provided by Bjambasan and Sanžaa (1987: 162) is a rather bad choice: Us šingen bolovč mös bolon hatuurna (= hatuurdag bajna). ‘Although water is liquid, it hardens by freezing to ice.’ The use of -dag bajna here might well be understood as taking notice of something that one was not aware of before (cp. the analysis of Umetani 2006 of bajna in several other environments). Therefore, it seems rather unlikely that -dag bajna and -na (rather than -dag and -na) are
present -na is more frequent in written than in spoken language.

Kim (1995: 88-105), taking a similar approach, but pointing to a similarity between -na and unmodified -dag, states additionally that the usual present tense is marked by -ž bajna / suuna / heutene (linking converb plus ‘to be’, ‘sit’ and ‘lie’), but that in the written and especially the literary language -na is used.

Street (1963: 120-121, 152) even goes a step further and does not mention a possible use of -na as an ongoing present at all. However, as he only attributes “durative or iterative” meanings to the form -ž baj-[na] that is usually referred to as the Progressive, there is no neutral aspect marker for ongoing actions in his analysis of Mongolian at all.

Song (1997: 151-160) claims that -na can be used for present, future, and timeless situations. When referring to the present, he reasons that -na can be used in imperfective contexts such as habitual and progressive ones, but it does not express such meanings itself. On the other hand, as it is incompatible with adverbials referring to the past, non-past reference must be inherent to it.

Svantesson (1991: 191) states about -na that “for action verbs, this form refers to events that take place after the moment of speech” and “with static verbs, such as med ‘to know’, it denotes a state that obtains at the time of speaking.”

So there seems to be wide agreement that -na can be used for statements that refer to the future, or for timeless / permanent situations. The actual present time reference of -na (when attached to non-auxiliaries) is understood to be a problem, but no detailed solution has been attempted. The differentiation between spoken and written language sometimes mentioned is only understood to be a strong tendency, but not an absolute dividing line. Song, who does reach a exchangeable.
conclusion, bases his opinion on problematic evidence:

(1) Za, odoo end buu-na daa. Ta nar-iin buu-x “Ulaanbaatar”
    well now here get-off-NA Emph you(Nom) Pl-Gen stay-Irs
    zochid_buudal ene dee, ta nar-t end öröö zaxial-chix-san bai-gaa.
    hotel this Emph you(Nom) Pl-Loc here room reserve-Int-Pfv be-Impfv
    ‘Well, [we] get out here now. This is Ulan Bator Hotel where you
    will stay. [I] have reserved a room here for you.’

(2) A: Tu yuu xii-j bai-na ve? B: (Bi) nom unshi-na.
    you(Nom) what do-Conn be-NA Q I(Nom) book read-NA
    ‘What are you doing? – (I) read a book.’

But if the adverbial odoo ‘now’ is interpreted less strictly than Song
would expect, (1) might rather be interpreted as future instead of present.
The answer in (2), claimed by Song to be exchangeable with the
Progressive nom unšiž bajna, seems to be impossible, as my informants
state that it can only have future time reference and is thus inadequate
in the context given. The following example from Bjambasan and
Sanžaa, however, has been accepted by four of the nine informants as
referring to a present that coincides with the moment of speech:

(3) Ene uul-and mor’ jav-na
    this mountain-Dat horse go-NA
    ‘On this mountain a horse is walking’

3) Song uses the following glosses: Conn — connective, Emph — emphatic
particle, Gen — genitive, Impfv — imperfective, Int — intensive, Irs —
irrealis, Loc — dative-locative, Nom — nominative, Pfv — perfective, Pl —
plural, [Q — question particle]
4) The other five informants considered the sentence to be strange, and to
possibly have a future meaning in suitable contexts. Two of them raised
the additional objection that one cannot draw attention to the presence
of a horse that is near to oneself as implied by the proximal demon-
strative pronoun ene. One suggested a sentence in which a present time
reference of jav-na would be possible: Tend neg mor’ javna ‘Over there is
a horse, walking’. (While this interpretation still concedes that the horse
is moving, this is of no relevance. This then might imply a semantic
weakening of jav- or javna.)
However, this sentence cannot serve as a basis for further generalizations. In addition to baj- ‘to be’, bol- ‘to become’ and possibly some position verbs, jav- ‘to go’ is the only verb that can be combined with the so-called nomen imperfecti -aa in sentence-final position without a question, modal or negation particle following it. According to the small sample provided by Song (1997: 274) and some corpus research done by myself, sentence-final javaa is considerably more frequent than any other form apart from bajgaa. In an auxiliary function, its meaning is described as “progressive” by Činggeltei (1999: 313) for the Inner Mongolian standard variety. Thus, it clearly differs from similar movement verbs, and it is not entirely surprising that even its supposedly dynamic Aktionsart is not realized as expected. As we will see and as has been predicted by Svantesson, most activity verbs cannot get an interpretation referring to an action ongoing at present in the context given above. But if Svantesson’s statement was sufficient, we would expect that even generic statements formulated with -na could only be based on stative verbs, which is not the case as we will see. On the other hand, there is data that none of the above-mentioned sources explicitly mentions:

(4) MOTORT_DUGUJ NIS-DEG-GÜJ JUM! gež tereer hašgir-laa.
    motorcycle       fly-DAG=Neg   MP Compl he  scream-Evid
    Dadli, Pirs hajor šool-on  inee-ne. – Bi med-nee. Ene bol
    two ridicule-KV laugh-NA  I  know-NA this TOP

5) The nomen imperfecti seems to be used with baj- to refer to a temporary present state. An intuitive example is its use in combination with the Perfect participle: ühsen bajna ‘she has died and is dead’ vs. *ühsen bajgaa ‘she has died and is being dead right now’.

6) Using a corpus of Mongolian language articles which contains at least 700 newspaper articles and interviews, I searched for the following sentence-final sign sequences. For <нама.> ‘go’, there were 29 hits; in 19 of these cases it was used as an auxiliary to a verb. <бөхөө.> ‘become’ got 4 hits, <сүррээ.> ‘sit’ functioning as an auxiliary 2, <оргоо.> ‘stand’, <сагр аа.> ‘lie’, <сүррээ.> ‘sleep’, <бөхөө.> ‘think’ and <хүрээ.> ‘wish’ got none. Occurrences of the high-frequency sequence <байгаа.> ‘be’ were too numerous to count.

7) “үргэлжлүү байдал”. In contrast, “durative” would be “урту үргэлжлүү байдал”.

zügeer₁  züüd  baj-san  jum gež  Harij huldhan hel-lee.
simply=FC  dream  Cop-Pa  MP  Compl  fast  say-Evid
“He ... yelled at Harry ...: “MOTORCYCLES DON'T FLY!” Dudley and Piers sniggered. I know they don't,” said Harry. “It was only a dream.”

-na is used here with an imperfective function as a background to the laughing to prevent it from propelling the narrative. While this sentence is taken from a translation of Harry Potter, such sentences are not untypical for Mongolian narratives. Kalchofner (1999: 179-193, esp. 180-182) attests this use of -na for Nacagdorž’s “Lambaguajn nulims” where it contrasts with the two discourse-propelling items -laa and -v and marks imperfectivity⁸.

3. Diachrony and focality

Given the distribution of -na illustrated so far, a diachronic typological frame might help to guide and structure the research. It has been observed that progressives tend to become generalized to imperfectives or presents, cutting out some of the core functions of older, relatively unspecific and bleached imperfectives or presents in the course of the development. The ability to mark generic statements and the function as historic presents are retained the longest (Bybee et al. 1994: 147-148, 152)⁹. In the literature cited above, -na has been compared with two items, -dag and -ž bajna. -dag is usually called the Habitual (e.g. Svantesson 1991: 197), but it can be applied to anything from repeated actions to continuous actions to generic statements (most detailed in Hashimoto 1995, see also Song 1997: 288-292). -ž baj-[na]¹⁰,

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⁸) It also contrasts with another form that Kalchofner calls imperfective in meaning, namely -zee. This form is rather problematic as he mentions that it can also be used as a discourse-propelling device in fairy tales, then expressing an inferential meaning.

⁹) I am not sure whether the difference between historic presents and tenseless narrative imperfectives is included in Bybee et al.’s analysis. They do notice that past progressives often have a wider range of use than present progressives.
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usually called the Progressive, has already become compatible with stative verbs (e.g. Song 1997: 373-374). Following Johanson (2000: 38-39, 87-93), it would be possible to show that these forms can be differentiated by a notion called “focality”: while both -dag and -ž bajna conceptualize an action as ongoing and look at it from an internal perspective, -ž bajna narrows the view around a point within this action, while -dag makes the spectator look at its wider temporal surroundings. If the focality is further relaxed, it completely disappears and the action is not localized at the time axis anymore. Here, a timeless interpretation, but also several modal conceptions (to which the notion “future” is related) can arise. From this perspective, -na is a likely candidate for a non-focal imperfective. If this is the case, how is it realized? Since aktionsart, as the category with which aspeсtual items usually most directly interact, is only relevant after factors such as lexically fixed expressions and textual genre are taken into account (cp. Johanson 1971: chapter 2, also see Aikhenvald 2004: 331 for a similar statement on evidentiality), we shall first try to address these and then some aktionsart peculiarities.

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10) Činggeltei (1999: 292) notes that, for Inner Mongolian, -ž baj- can be merged into a single suffix [ʤæː] or [ʤɪː]. This holds for Khalkha as well. It is rarely written, so only very frequent verbs can be searched for in the internet. But the band Lumino provide their lyrics in a form closer to spoken language. Here is an (of course untranslatable) example from their song “Namajg dagaad cenge”:

_Duu duugaa bid büxen avalčžijnă_ We are breaking into cheers
_Dur xüsel bü[ü]r ajmaar ovolžžijnă_ My desire is growing incredibly
_Höörxän ohin ter dor šovolžžijnă_ A sweet girl is bobbing about over there
_Harin minijh endee bombolžžijnă_ But here mine [my dick] is shrinking and swelling

The video is readily available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dyE7dLHBZs; the lines in question are in the time intervals 1.16-1.21, 2.13-2.22, 3.09-3.26.

11) I am deliberately mixing terminology here. Johanson uses the term “intraterminal” as an all-encompassing term for imperfectivity, progressivity etc.
4. Generic use, complement use and citation form

There seem to be uses of -na that do not depend on aktionsart. This seems to hold true for generic statements and complement clauses complementized by the highly grammaticalized verb ge-. A third such use seems merely to lie in the use of a verb stem suffixed by -na as the citation form for the verb.

4.1 Generic statements and instructions

(5)

Aues-Kjurpjun nar-yn toglo-son ene bajrlal-d 1...\( \mathcal{d}d4! \) [ge-ed]\(^{12}\) cagaan

\[
\text{PI=} \text{Gen play-Pa this position-Dat Compl-KV White}
\]

\( \text{xoxi-gdo-no. Ene ac-yg xamgaal-aad}_c \text{ nemer-güj.} \)

\[
\text{win-Pass-NA this resulting_position=Acc defend-KV=FC help=Neg}
\]

2. \( \mathcal{f}f2 \mathcal{g}f3+ \) 3. \( \mathcal{f}f3 \mathcal{d}d5! \) geed \( \text{dahiad hojor bodon-d} \)

\[
\text{Compl-KV again two piece=Dat}
\]

\( \text{zereg dovtol-no.} \)

\( \text{simultaneously attack-NA} \)

In this position from the game Réti-Alekhine\(^{13}\), White is overcome by 1...\( \mathcal{d}d4! \). It’s no use defending against this fork. 2. \( \mathcal{f}f2 \mathcal{g}f3+ \) 3. \( \mathcal{g}f3 \mathcal{d}d5! \) and again two pieces are attacked at the same time.’

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12) This word is not in the original text, but is used in other similar instances in the same book and is accepted by native speakers.

13) I do not know how the names in the Mongolian text came about, but the position is from a game between Réti and Alekhine, Baden-Baden 1925.
This comment is not about the historic chess game, but about the specific position of the pieces, irrespective of how the board came to look like this. After a few moves that are inherent to the logic of the position, White would have less pieces and would, in due course, be check-mated. So the fact that White is lost is inherent to the position and therefore linguistically a prototypical generic statement that is realized as such by -na.

Instructions usually use -na. Here, the description of a regular process is intermingled with the prediction that something will come about. Repeated actions can also be marked with -na, but it appears likely that this is restricted to predictions so that this use is not a variety of generic or timeless uses, but of a future interpretation:

(6) Aaruul-taj guril: Nuntaglaž núd-sen aaruul-yg usan-d-aa 

dry_curd=Com noodle crush-Pa dry_curd=Acc water=Dat=RP

hij-z bucalg-aad elde-z hajr-san guril aa örgün hercí-ź čana-na. 

put-KV boil_up-KV roll-KV fry-Pa dough=Acc broad cut-KV cook-NA

Öröm, šar_tos, davs amtlagç-aaar amta-na. 

cotted_cream butter salt flavoring=Instr season_to_taste-NA

‘Noodles with dry curd: Put the crushed dry curd into water, boil it up, cut the noodle dough that has been rolled out and fried [on the bare hotplate] into broad stripes [, put it into the water] and cook it. Season it to taste with clotted cream, butter and salt as flavoring!’

(7) Avtobus n’ ödör bür oglören-ij 06:00 cag-aas orojn-y 

bus=P3 day every morning=Gen hour=Abl evening=Gen

19:30 minut härtel 15 minut tutam-d jau-dag. 

minute until minute every=Dat go=DAG

Ojroolcoo 1 cag jau-z niseh_buudal hür-ne. 

about hour go-KV air_port arrive-NA

‘Busses go every day every 15 minutes from 6 o’clock in the morning to 19:30 in the evening. After approximately one hour, one reaches the airport.’

(6) is a complete recipe. Texts consisting of instructions usually include -na and some imperative forms. In (7), the bus usually reaches
the airport after about an hour, but that is a prediction merely based on a bus schedule or on experience. As we know from the context, the event is repeated on several occasions, and -na introduces an element of uncertainty i.e. related to the possibility of traffic jams etc. The Habitual -dag could have been used here to convey greater certainty or regularity.

4.2 Complement sentences

(8) Medeež dörvön ödör duul-na ge-deg amar-güj bajh.

of course four day sing-NA Compl=DAG rest=Neg MP

‘Surely it isn’t easy to sing for four days?’

(9) Mongol hün dotr-oo juu bodo-ž baj-gaa-g _n’

Mongolian person inside=RP what think-KV Cop-NI=Acc=P3
gadn-aas _n’ har-aad taa-ha-d amarhan. Büh setgel-ijn

outside=Abl=P3 see-KV guess-KV:when easy every mind=Gen

hööölööö _n’ niüren deer-ee bičetej baj-dag.

movement=P3 face upon=RP inscribed Cop-DAG

Ööröör hel-bel mongol hün dotood jertönc-öö

other say-KV:if Mongolian person inside world=RP

busd-aas nuu-na ge-dg-ijg med-deg-güj.

other_people=Abl hide-NA Compl=DAG=Acc know-DAG=Neg

‘It’s easy to guess what a Mongolian thinks when you see him. All his emotions stand inscribed into his face. In other words, a Mongolian doesn’t know how to hide his inner world from others.’

These examples show -na in combination with the appropriate form of the complementizer verb ge- that is also used for direct citations. -na ge- is used to mark actions as such, without giving any temporal or aspectual qualification whatsoever. In the first example, not even a subject of ‘to sing for four days’ is specified or specifically assumed. In the examples, the complementizer verb takes the Habitual particle and the prototypical case for subjecthood and objecthood, namely nominative and accusative.

4.3 Citation form

In the following example, -na is suffixed to a verb to name this
verb in meta-language. While -h is used in dictionaries, most of my informants clearly preferred -na here. This usage is very similar to the use of -na in complement clauses, but notable nevertheless, as a complement clause might be built up according to a fixed, grammaticalized scheme, while such factors can be ruled out here14).

(10) Ter ih šüten bišir-deg sumo-gijn jertöncö-d_n’ haa baj-san that very worship-DAG Sumo=Gen world=Dat=P3 where Cop-Pa
tal-yn mongol-yn neg Dolgorsüren ge-deg hün-ij steppe=Gen Mongolia=Gen one Compl-DAG person=Gen
hüü oć-ood_l sumo barild-aad=l ... - Azargal-aad=l?
son go-KV2=FC Sumo wrestle-KV=FC rule_to_roost15)-KV=FC
- Azargala-h_n’č haašaa jum. - Jaagaad. Azargal-san š_dee?
 - Nf=P3=FC to_where MP why -Pa MP
 - Ügüj ee, azargal-na ge-deg čin’ muuhaj üg.
no -NA Compl-DAG=P2 bad word
'Into this much-admired Sumo world, there came from the Mongolian steppe — wherever that may be — the son of a certain Dolgorsüren and wrestled and ... — ... ruled the roost? — Why do you say so? — Why, you have ruled the roost! — “Rule the roost” is a bad word.'

5. Textually conditioned uses

Textually conditioned uses do not depend on characteristics of -na alone or in a certain syntactic environment, but on the type of text. That is, they may either invoke a certain kind of text or be understood in a certain way within it. However, on their own, the sentences in question would get a different interpretation. It is not clear whether or not textually conditioned uses interact with aktionsart. I did not try to elicit any restrictions, as speakers only have a very limited intuition about conventions within written texts so that only a very

14) Note that while (10) has the sequence -na ge- as well, the use of meta-language to state that “azargalna is a bad word” clarifies that it is not a complement sentence here, but a citation form.
15) The verb azargal- derives from the stem azraga ‘stallion’, i.e. it literally means ‘to do what stallions do’.
careful quantitative investigation might produce reliable data.

5.1 Historical present (used for a sequence of events)

(11) -Ta “Tonšuul” sonin-y erhlegč hij-ž baj-san biz_dee?
you newspaper=Gen editor do-KV Cop-Pa MP
-Za ter_čin’ joštoj hecüü jum bil ee. Socializm-yn üje-d
well that=TOP really difficult MP MP socialism=Gen time=Dat
Cop-Pa MP Central_Committee upon call-NA assemble-NA
Heden cag huralda-ž baj-gaa_č “Tonšuul”-yn tuhaj neg č úg
some hour assemble-KV Cop-Ni=FC =Gen about one=FC word
jari-h-güj. Bi ge-deg hün šal_demij tend suu-na.
talk-Nf=Neg I Compl-DAG person completely_idle there sit-NA
‘You have worked as an editor of the newspaper “Tonšuul”? -Well,
that was really difficult then. That was in the time of socialism. [We]
were summoned to the Central Committee. We held an assembly.
Although we were assembling for many hours, not one word was
spoken about the “Tonšuul”. I sat around there completely purposeless.’

Here, it seems that a past action is being retold in a lively fashion\(^{16}\). No imperfectivity seems to be implied, as the predicates ‘for them to
summon us’ and ‘for us to hold an assembly’ are in an obvious temporal
order. Both have dynamic actional phrases. For this to be understand-
able, the time frame was explicitly introduced by the speaker. On their
own, the two sentences in question would rather get an interpretation
like ‘Someone will summon some people to the Central Committee. They
will assemble’. This use of -na seems to be quite rare.

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\(^{16}\) Of the six informants, two did not get the impression of liveliness. One
suggested that, while the narrated event itself did only take place at
one occasion, it is presented as typical for that time. The other infor-
mant simply understood that the sentence is about several events: they
were summoned to the Central Committee several times, always talked
for hours, but never spoke a word about their journal. (One of the
other informants also noted that this interpretation would be possible.)
Both of these interpretations would have to be included in the past
imperfective use.
5.2 Past imperfective in narratives

(12) Jamar_neg hačirhaltaj zujl-ijn tuhaj jari-h üje-d
some strange issue=Gen about talk-Nf time=Dat
zuüd baj-san uu, hüühedelj-n kino baj-san uu ge-sen
dream Cop-Pa Q puppet=Gen movie Cop-Pa Q Compl-Pa
ši g o g t          h a j h r a -l güj  öngöröö-nö.
like completely pay_attention-KV:without pass_over-NA
‘When he [Potter] would talk about some amazing thing, no
matter if it was something like a dream or a cartoon, they would
let it pass without paying attention.’ 17)

In contrast to the former example, this sentence refers to the
habitual behavior of its subject. Enduring states are also attested.
While most of the 19 examples given in the first two chapters of the
Mongolian translation of Harry Potter and the philosopher’s stone are
atelic state or activity predications, two or three examples of accom-
plishments show that there is no obligatory restriction 18). This use
seems to be frequent in novels, but it is not restricted to them. The
next example was taken from a history book that recounts the French
revolution in a chronological, narrative fashion:

(13) Am’dral-yn nöhcöl_bajdal_n’ tun=č daruuhan bolohoor ün-iyn
life=Gen situation=P3 extremely=FC humble because price
ösölt, baraa bütėegdehüün hüünsnij_zujl-iyn hangamž-iyn
increase goods product food=Gen supply=Gen
taluarhi dogoldl-yg ted tun,č emzeg hüleeż_av-na.
concerning irregularity=Acc they extremely=FC vulnerable receive-NA
‘Because they [the sans-culottes] lived in very poor conditions, they

17) Original text: “If there was one thing the Dursleys hated even more
than his asking questions, it was his talking about anything acting in
a way it shouldn’t, no matter if it was in a dream or even a cartoon --
they seemed to think he might get dangerous ideas.”

18) The best example for a telic predication is Dürsgüj am’tad uhaangüj jum
ši g daukiad l! gež motor_dugujd güjegdeh bürtee üglene. “... roaring
along like maniacs, the young hoodlums,” he said, as a motorcycle
overtook them.”
observed rising prices and irregularities in the supply with food and other products with great concern.'

In a related sense, an imperfective -na can be used as a stylistic device to introduce the setting of a joke19):

(14) Sekš sudlal-yn hičel. Bagš leke unši-na. ... Ar-yn
sex study=Gen lesson teacher lecture read=NA back=Gen
šireen-ees erergej ajuutn-y duu xada-ž, bagš-ijn
table=Abl male student=Gen voice raise-KV teacher=Gen
jaria-g tasla-v: ... 
speech=Acc interrupt-Pa2 
‘Sex ed class. The teacher reads out a lecture ... [an excerpt from this lecture] From a table at the back of the class, a male voice was raised and cut off the teacher’s words: ... [words of the pupil]’

Thus, it seems possible to state that -na functions like a past imperfective in certain kinds of narrative texts. As most narrative texts in contemporary Mongolian society are written texts, this function may appear as literary to some observers. However, a past imperfective meaning does not seem to be inherent in -na, as it is not present when -na is used as a historical present. Rather, when -na contrasts with such markers as -v that propel the narrative, it is interpreted as imperfective because of this contrast.

6. Interaction with aktionsart in other uses

If the uses enumerated above are ignored, the relevance of aktionsart becomes more tangible. Before turning to this issue, it will be necessary to introduce the aktionsart classes present in Khalkha. There are a few analyses that have taken aktionsart into account, namely those by Činggeltei (1959: 9), Chuluu (1995), Song (1997), and

19) However, the most common means to introduce the background situation of a joke seems to be a combination of the Present Progressive with the quotative particle gene, e.g. Hojor nöhör uulzaž bajna gene ‘There were these two husbands, who met...’
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Matsuoka (2008). Činggeltei, Chuluu and Matsuoka discuss other dialects, and as this difference is crucial in Mongolian, we will not consider them here. Song postulates the aktionsart classes suggested by Smith (1991), namely the four Vendlerian classes states, activities, accomplishments and achievements (Vendler 1957) plus semelfactives, but he doesn’t devise a test to show that they are actually relevant in Khalkha. He then proceeds to demonstrate a sixth class (that was already discussed by Smith 1991: 225, but she does not consider it a class) that exhibits an ambiguous reading of the Progressive, i.e. Bi nuugdaž bajna ‘I’m hiding’, i.e. ‘1. I’m in the progress of going into hiding 2. I’m in hiding’. However, there is another class that can refer to the beginning and a subsequent stative course of action, e.g. Bi medsen ‘I’ve understood it’, but Bi meddeg ‘I know it’. On the other hand, I am not aware of how the class “semelfactives” could prove relevant. Therefore, Khalkha seems to have the following aktionsart classes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aktionsart type</th>
<th>temporal structure</th>
<th>examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>states</td>
<td>(X)…………………..</td>
<td>erscheinen, to seem, sanagd-spielien, to play, togl-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities</td>
<td>(X)-----------------</td>
<td>scire (Latin, ‘to understand and to know’), med-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inceptive states</td>
<td>X…………………..</td>
<td>sich verstecken, to hide, maqgd-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inchoative states</td>
<td>---X………………</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accomplishments</td>
<td>-------------------X</td>
<td>erzeugen, to generate, üüsg-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achievements</td>
<td>(--------)X</td>
<td>to find, ol-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, “X” stands for a lexical boundary, “-----” stands for a dynamic phase and “……” stands for a non-dynamic phase. Brackets mark parts of the temporal structure that can only be highlighted by some imperfective / perfective markers and that might (depending on the theoretical approach) be considered to be created by these devices. Currently, I am able to demonstrate five of these classes by using language-specific tests based on aspect markers20:
1. The initial boundary of inceptive and inchoative states can be highlighted by simple past markers, e.g. *Bi zogsloo ‘I stopped (~ stood still)’* and *Bi nuugdsan ‘I went into hiding’*. The Progressive -ž bajna can then mark a subsequent action: *Bi zogsož bajna ‘I’m standing’, Bi nuugdaž bajna ‘I’m in hiding’*. This is not possible with the other classes, e.g. *Bi togloson ‘I played’* and *Bi toglož bajna ‘I’m playing’*.

2. Only inchoative states is ambiguous in the Progressive, see *Bi nuugdaž bajna 1. I’m in the progress of going into hiding 2. I’m in hiding’. On the other hand, *Bi zogsož bajna* cannot mean ‘I’m in the course of stopping’.

3. The resultative -aad bajna envisages a phase that is subsequent to a boundary. In case of the absence of a lexical boundary, it highlights the non-lexical initial boundary. As a consequence, -aad bajna and the Progressive -ž bajna must highlight different phases with accomplishments and achievements, but may highlight the same phase with the other classes. I.e. *Ter üheed bajna ‘It has died / it is dead’, Ter ühež bajna ‘It is dying’, Bi nomoo bičeed bajna ‘I have written my book’, Bi nomoo bičiž bajna ‘I’m writing my book’* denote distinct phases, but *Bi toglood bajna ‘I’m playing and playing’* and *Bi toglož bajna as well as Bi zogsood bajna ‘I’ve just stopped (and am still standing still)’* and *Bi zogsož bajna* denote overlapping phases.

4. Achievements cannot be combined with the marker -saar bajna ‘to be doing something (for an extended period of time)’ (cp. Matsuoka 2008: 45-46), but all other classes can, i.e. *Bi nomoo bičseer bajna ‘I’m still writing my book’, but *Ter ühseer bajna*.

Of course, *Ted ühseer bajna ‘They (e.g. the sheep) are dying’* is acceptable, but this only shows that aktionsart is not strictly a property.

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20) I did not use any adverbial-based tests, because time adverbials in Mongolian are not well understood so far. E.g., the precise difference between 2 minut, 2 minutaar, 2 minutad, 2 minutyn turš, 2 minutyn üjeer and its interaction with aspect has not been demonstrated yet, and given this, it would be quite risky to devise tests based on any of these.

21) As simple past markers seem to be aspectually unmarked, they may also denote the whole event, i.e. *Bi nuugdsan ‘I hid (then)’. The crucial thing is that an inceptive interpretation is possible here, while it is not with predications like *Bi togloson*. 

of verbs, but of actional phrases that do not contain aspectual markers; *Ted üh-* is an accomplishment\(^{22}\). By these criteria, it seems possible to differentiate between all classes except between states and activities. If there were classes like inceptive or inchoative activities, these could not be recognized either. As this distinction (as we shall see below) seems to be relevant here nevertheless, we shall provisionally adapt a purely semantic definition as given by Breu who writes that activities “have an obligatory (at every point in time probable) and not only a possible limit in time” (Breu 1996: 41, my translation). While such a definition does not work very well for position verbs like zogs- ‘to stop + stand still’, it seems to provide a feasible means to differentiate true states like *sanagd-* ‘to seem’ from activities like *togl-* ‘to play’\(^{23}\).

In the discussion about *-na*, it is this distinction between different degrees of dynamicity that shall be of interest. In non-narrative written language, stative predicates often appear with *-na*:

\[\begin{align*}
(15) & \text{Žinhene bjasalgal (1) beltgel, (2) bjasalgal, (3) tögsgöl ge-sen} \\
& \text{real meditation preparation meditation termination Compl-Pa} \\
& \text{gurvan hesg-ees bürde-ne.} \\
& \text{three part=Abl consist_of-NA} \\
& \text{‘True meditation consists of, first a beginning, second a meditation phase, and third its termination.’}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
(16) & \text{Surgaal_nomloł-yn čiglel-eer_n’ 1. buddyn, 2. hristijn,} \\
& \text{teaching=Gen direction=Instr=P3 Buddhist Christian} \\
& \text{3. islamyn, 4. busad bujuu „šine šašin-y” čig_barimžaa-taj süm} \\
& \text{Islamic other and new religion=Gen alignment=Com temple} \\
& \text{hijd-uüd ge-ž angil-ž bolo-h sanagda-na.} \\
& \text{monastery-Pl Compl-KV classify-KV may/can-Nf seem-NA}
\end{align*}\]

\(^{22}\) According to Johanson (2000: 66-74), the domain of aktionsart is the actional phrase which includes the verb with all its participants and spatial limitations, but without time or manner adverbials and aspect markers. We cannot go further into this here, though.

\(^{23}\) Again, it is actional phrases and not verbs that are classified. Eg, *Bi ene tuhaj bod-* I this about think ‘for me to think about something’ is to be classified as an activity, while *X gež bi bod-* X Compl I think ‘for me to think that X’ is a state.
'It seems that from the perspective of their teachings, [Mongolian] temples and monasteries can be classified as 1. Buddhist 2. Christian 3. Islamic and 4. others and those belonging to the “New Religions”.'

(15) is from a modern translation of the Lamrim, a major Tibetan Buddhist scripture, and states a universal or system-immanent truth about a property of true meditation in unequivocal terms. Conceptualized in such a frame, the actional phrase has no dynamicity at all\textsuperscript{24}. A future interpretation would be nonsensical, and as the state is not temporary, a Progressive would not do either\textsuperscript{25}. In (16), the author considers a possible classification as an inherent property of the socio-religious situation of contemporary Mongolia, so again there is no dynamicity. On the other hand, the spoken language does not seem to use -\textit{na} with stative verbs like \textit{sanagd-} and \textit{čad-} in this function, but uses -\textit{dag} instead\textsuperscript{26}:

(17) \textit{Ovsgootoj, sergelen zang-aas ilii\ü uhaan-aar-aa hün}

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{bürd-} itself allows for interpretations relating to two phases, namely \textit{----X....: ‘to become complete(d) + consist of’}. But in spite of the obvious temporal sequence thus encoded, it seems difficult to conceive of an actional phrase in which both phases can be selected by the Progressive, as the subject argument changes from parts to a single whole (with the parts in an ablative-marked phrase).

\textsuperscript{25} It would, however, become appropriate if the sentence were changed a bit, shifted to spoken language and put to use to explain something: \textit{Benjamin, ene bjasalgal gurvan hesgees bürdez bajna}. ‘Benjamin, this meditation consists of three parts.’ The Progressive here seems to highlight the momentary relevance of the state in question and to point to its internal diversity. It would be possible to use the Habitual in the original example. One explanation that should not be disregarded is that the sense of literary beauty entertained by the Mongolians shuns the repetition of suffixes. Presumably for this reason, a nearly identical sentence further subdividing the preparation phase has \textit{bürddeg}. Of course, another reason might be that the Habitual is extending its range of application.

\textsuperscript{26} This assessment is based on the analysis of several interviews with the rapper Quiza, the girl band 3Ohin and the sumo ringer Dagvadorž, all younger than 30 years of age. A detailed analysis of these interviews has been done in my unpublished master thesis (Brosig 2009).
clued-up clever character=Abl more reason=Instr=RP person
am’dral-yg iliüü zal-ž jav-dag ge-ž bodo-ž baj-na.
life=Acc more steer-KV go-DAG Compl think-KV Cop-NA
Hamgijn zöv, onovčtoj šijdver-iig či garga-ž čad-dag.
most correct precise decision=Acc=FC issue-KV can-DAG
Het sergelen baj-h hereg-gii jánum šig sanagd-dag.
too clever Cop-NF need-Neg MP as_if seem-DAG
‘I think that more than through a clued-up and clever character,
one can better lead one’s living by common sense. In this fashion,
one can make even the most accurate and precise decisions. Is seems
that you needn’t be too clever.’

In contrast, most stative verbs in spoken language will get a future interpretation:

(18) *Minij am’dral, aldaa onoo ter ğigeere tüüh bolon üld-ne.*
my life mistake hit completely history as remain-NA
‘My life, my mistakes and achievements will all become history.’

On the other hands, there are a few instances where stative verbs are used with -na in a non-future interpretation:

(19) *Bi ijm züjl-iig bol üzen jad-na.*
I such matter=Acc TOP hate-NA
‘I hate such deeds.’

This statement emphasizes the moral contempt that the speaker
holds for the person who has committed such deeds. He hates such
deeds now and will always hate them. By contrast, üzen jaddag would
emphasize that the speaker hated and still hates such deeds. So, even
here, there is a future meaning, though it does not exclude the present.
A somewhat similar use can be demonstrated for the inceptive-stative
predication med- ‘to come to know + know’: the form medne would
be an appropriate neutral answer to the question whether I know something.
It emphasizes the fact without situating it in time. The Habitual meddeg
is less to the point as it includes the additional information that the
state of knowing is not delimited, but might be used to indicate that the person in question is someone who usually knows about such issues and might be able to help now as well. The Present Progressive, medež bajna, would highlight that I am aware of the information at present. This might implicate that the speaker emphasizes her still knowing this fact, or that she wants an annoying interrogator to shut up. It is entirely possible to express the future with medne, but an appropriate context would be necessary. Moreover, such a future is particular in that it skips the attainment of the state\(^{27}\).

With accomplishments, achievements and activities, a present reference is impossible:

(20) Ama önöödör Mijabijama-taj barilda-na.
Today =Com wrestle-NA
‘Ama will wrestle with Miyabiama today.’

(21) Hjatad-uud-yn talaar gomdol baj-val biden-d hand,
Chinese-PI=Gen concerning complaint Cop-KV:if we=Dat turn
bid oč-ood al-aad őg-nö.
we go_there-KV kill-KV give-NA
‘If there should be any complaints regarding the Chinese, just turn to us, we will go there and kill them for you.’

Inchoative and also some inceptive predications are more problematic. For example, a single informant rejected (14), but accepted a similar joke with the inchoative predicate suu- ‘to sit down + sit’\(^{28}\). The point

\(^{27}\) E.g. Bi margaaš medne ‘I will know tomorrow’ vs. Bi margaaš medeh bolno (nomen futuri + ‘become’ + -na ‘I will come to know tomorrow’ and Bi margaaš medčihne ‘I will find out tomorrow’. In the third example, the so-called “intensive” suffix forces an interpretation that includes the attainment of the limit (cp. Ebert 1999: 333, 338 on Oirat). medne would express a great degree of certainty, medeh bolno seems to be least committed.

\(^{28}\) The sentence under discussion was Emegtej heree modon deer suuna.
Dooguur n’ eregtej üneg javč bajsan. Heree: … ‘A female crow was sitting on a tree. Below, a male fox was walking around.’ The crow says: …’ [I retold the joke by heart. Its original version has modny möčirdeer ‘on a
The Function of the Suffix -\textit{na} in Khalkha Mongolian is that position verbs are usually more stable in time than other activities, but tend to be more dynamic than most states or than inceptive states like \textit{med-} or \textit{tan'-} to recognize + be acquainted with'. Anyway, an inchoative predication like

(22) \textit{Bi odo\v{s} sandal deer suu-na.} \\
\hspace{1cm} I now chair upon sit-\textit{NA} \\
\hspace{1cm} ‘I'll sit down now.’

will get a future interpretation, and the same holds true of the inceptive predication

(23) \textit{Tjehnikijn saatl-yn ulmaas \textit{ujldverlel zogso-no.}} \\
\hspace{1cm} technical hindrance=Gen because of production stop+stand-\textit{NA} \\
\hspace{1cm} ‘Because of a technical problem, the production will stop.’\textsuperscript{29}

However, as even states like \textit{üldene} ‘remains' or \textit{čadna} ‘can' tend to get a future interpretation, this is clearly still insufficient evidence to identify \textit{zogs-} or \textit{suu-} as dynamic activity predications. Yet, it may be noted that the inceptive predications \textit{med-}, \textit{tan'-} and maybe \textit{šat-} ‘burn’ (native speakers are not equivocal about this) tend to interact in a different way with -\textit{na} than the inceptive \textit{zogs-} and all checked inchoative predications.

Finally, age seems to be a relevant factor which also significantly contributes to the complexity of the whole picture:

(24) \textit{Hüühed\_n' gjerman-aar\_I jari-na.} \\
\hspace{1cm} child=P3 German=Instr=FC speak-\textit{NA} \\
\hspace{1cm} ‘Her children can only speak German.’

This sentence was uttered by a woman of 63 who left Mongolia over branch of a tree' and Present Progressive instead of Past Progressive.\textsuperscript{29]}

\textsuperscript{29} Cp. \textit{Tjehnikijn saadlyn ulmaas \textit{ujldverlel zogsož bajna.} ‘Because of a technical problem, the production is standing still.’ The most likely reading of the text sentence would refer to a non-specific fact.
thirty years ago and has since had little contact with other Mongolians. While it was perfectly clear from the context that this utterance is intended as a categorical judgement on the ability of “her children”\(^{30}\), it is not acceptable in this interpretation for my other informants (who are 20 to 40 years of age). For them, it would mean ‘Her children will address you only in German (but when talking to their mother, they can use Mongolian all right)’.

### 7. Summary

To sum up, the function of -\(na\) can be described as follows:

1. While it can function like a time-independent imperfective unit when used in a narrative text where it contrasts with simple past items, it can be used to mark consecutive actions if a context is sufficiently specified (as in (6), (11)).

2. It cannot specify the time when an action is taking place. In a few select contexts that all exhibit great temporal stability such as medne ‘I know’, it is only interpreted as referring to the present moment because the expected information is usually only relevant to the conversation if it does. In general, though, it is rather more compatible with future and generic situations, situations not related to a concrete reality at all (i.e. complement sentences) and (textually conditioned) even past situations.

\(^{30}\) I also confirmed this by means of elicited sentences. For example, while the (constructed) sentence Ter minij najz bajsan gež ta meddeg ‘You know that she was my friend’ was accepted by my other informants, she rejected it. The evidence from this woman is collaborated by two other kinds of evidence: 1. One of my informants, when asked about the difference of -\(dag\) and -\(na\) in sentences like (24) did not immediately draw a link to future and non-future, but linked it to the age of speakers. A third informant confirmed this observation when asked directly, while the other informants were not aware of such a difference. 2. In older narrative literature, -\(na\) seems to be used more extensively than today. (While this second observation seems very suggestive to me, it does not prove anything, of course.)
3. The generic use is immediately linked to a prospective interpretation which is especially common with actions of low temporal stability. Thus, -na on the one hand tends to express an aspectual meaning that is correlated to the dynamicity of the actional phrase it is combined with, but on the other hand, it is more prone to express prospective than temporally unspecific meanings, as the suffix -dag is extending its use to stative and generic statements.

I would suggest that this is (cp. Johanson 2000: 87-88, 99-101) a rather prototypical case of an old imperfective form that is usually able to retain this imperfectivity on the past level to some degree, but due to its lack of focality cannot establish a link to a specific present situation anymore so that it leaves the time of the event unspecified and is, due to the existence of imperfective markers with higher focality, usually relegated to non-present functions, thus more and more acquiring modal connotations.

Abbreviations:

X-Y — 1. indicates a morpheme boundary between X and Y in the example sentences if this boundary is also included in the interlinear analysis 2. Y is a suffix to X; X=Y — Y is a clitic to X; X_Y — X and Y are treated as one unit for the sake of presentation, Abl — ablative, Acc — accusative, Com — comitative, Compl — complementizer, Cop — copula, Dat — dative, DAG — Nomen usus, Evid — evidential past, FC — focus (l: delimiting, ‘only’; ch: additive, ‘also, even’), Gen — genitive, Instr — instrumental, KV — one of the linking converbs, KV:X — other verb, meaning indicated by X, MP — modal particle, Neg — negation, Nf — Nomen futuri, Ni — Nomen imperfecti, P3 — personal-possessive 3rd person, Pa — simple past (“Nomen perfecti”), Pa2 — old simple past, Pass — Passive, Pl — plural, Q — question particle, RP — reflexive-possessive, TOP — topic
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(22)-(23) constructed sentences, (24) overheard utterance

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