

ANTIPASSIVE AND DISTRIBUTED MORPHOLOGY THE CASE OF OBJECT-*pro**

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0 Introduction – Antipassive in Inuktitut

This paper will explore the role that the theoretical framework of Distributed Morphology (DM) as introduced by Halle & Marantz (1993) can play in the analysis of antipassive in Inuktitut.

Many ergative languages employ an operation, which is widely called Antipassive (Marantz (1984), Johns (1987), Bittner (1987), Baker (1988), Bok-Bennema (1991), Austin & Lopez (1998) among many others). This process shows different case marking from the canonical ergative-absolutive case assignment in sentences with two arguments. In general, AP includes a change in argument structure of the verb, insofar that the agent argument receives absolutive case, the case that is normally associated with the ergative argument. Furthermore, the object receives a different case from the normally associated absolutive case in transitive sentences. In Antipassive sentences, the verb is marked with an antipassive morpheme that differs within and across the Inuit dialects.

1) Ergative-absolutive

Jaani-up natsiq kaapi-jaa
Jaani-erg seal(abs) stab-part.3sg/3sg
'John is stabbing/stabbed the seal.'

Johns 1987:15

The crucial fact in 1) is that the verb agrees in person and number both with the subject and the object of the sentence.

2) Intransitive

Jaani sinik-tuq
John(abs) sleep-part.3.sg
'John is sleeping'

Johns 1987: 15

In construction 2), the verb agrees only with the subject in person and number.

3) Antipassive (AP) with overt object

Anguti tuktu-mik taku-Ø-juq
man(abs) caribou-inst see-AP-ind.3sg
The man sees a caribou.

Manga 1996:49

As in the intransitive construction, the verb agrees only with the subject in 3). AP can also occur with a non-overt object that is usually interpreted as *someone* or *something*.

4) AP with non-overt object

Kii-si-juq

bite-AP-ind.3sg

'it is biting someone/something'

Manga 1996:55

Most analyses suggest that the instrumental (also referred to as modalis, accusative, object case, oblique case. cf. Bok-Bennema 1991, Bittner 1994, among others) is a structural case comparable to the accusative in nominative-accusative languages. Taking this assumption on face value and furthermore, presupposing that in examples like 4) there is a covert argument that receives instrumental case and patient theta-role, implies that the non-overt object is in fact small *pro*.

In general, the AP is examined in contrast to the ergative/absolute construction. The common motivation seems to be that we need an explanation for the fact that Inuktitut (and many other ergative languages) employs a second transitive construction.

More recent work has found that the object of the AP construction differs from the object of ergative sentences in regard to its semantics, e.g. specificity. Manga 1996 shows that the object of AP constructions is non-specific and therefore remains inside the VP to receive accusative/instrumental case. This contrasts with the absolute object in the ergative construction, where it is specific and moves to T. In other words, the AP object marked with instrumental case shows a feature [-specific] whereas the absolute object of the ergative-absolute construction has the feature [+specific]. This seems to be in accordance with the interpretation of object-*pro* as *someone* or *something*.

5) Specificity contrast

a. Tigu-guk

take-opt2E/3A

'(you) take it'

b. tigu-si-git

take-AP-opt2A

'(you) take something'

Manga 1996:57

The question, whether instrumental case is structural or not is of no particular concern for the topic of this paper. The question rather is, is there an element at all that receives instrumental case VP-inherently or structurally. It seems that there is an element that has to carry the feature [-specific] whether it is overt or not and this element receives instrumental case as any overt NP in any AP construction.

This paper examines the question of whether there is in fact a small *pro* in object position of the AP in Inuktitut. So far, it has been an assumption in order to analyze the instrumental as structural case. It further investigates the implication of object *pro* and other empty categories in a framework that proposes late insertion

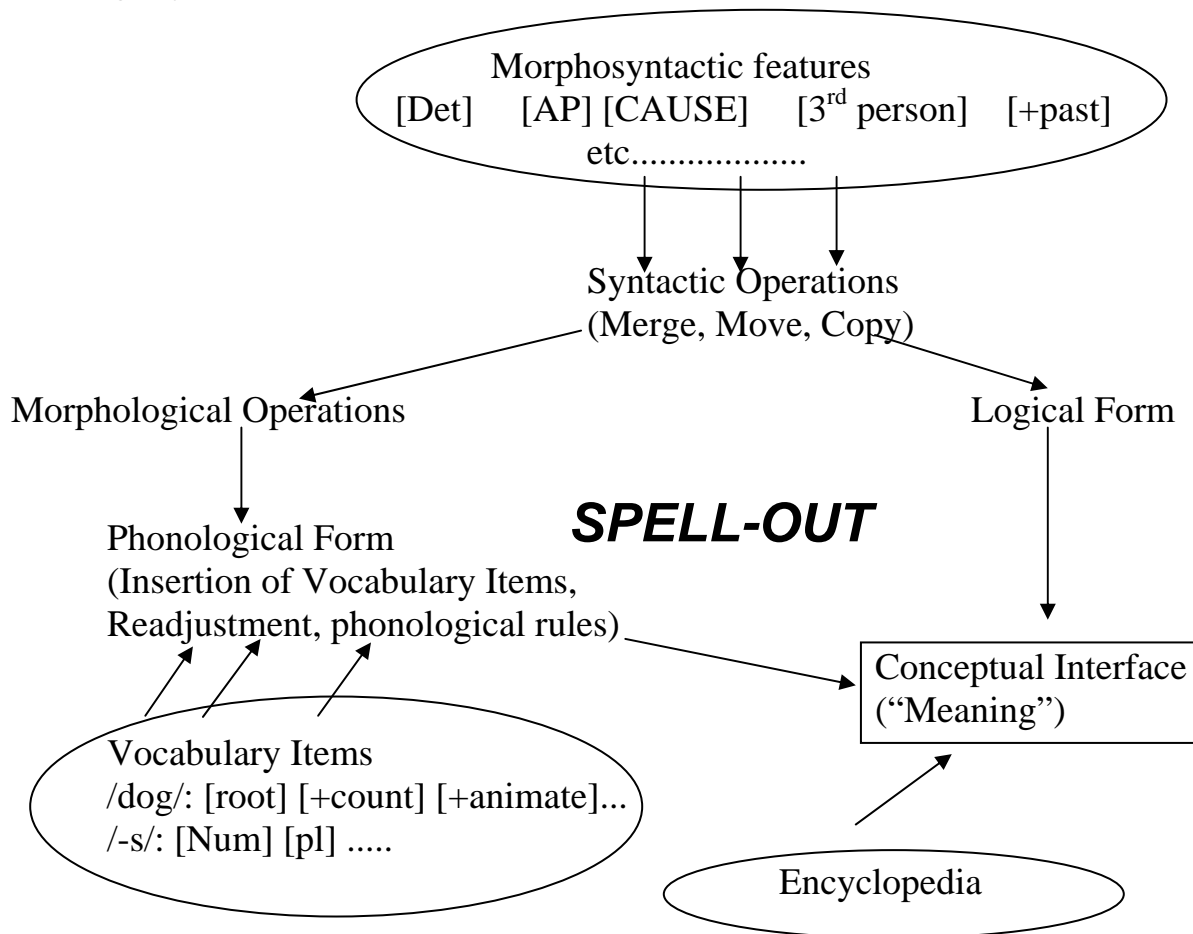
of vocabulary items as in Distributed Morphology, originally proposed by Halle & Marantz (1993) and subsequent work.

Section 1 outlines the crucial characteristics of DM for this discussion. Section 2 discusses the various arguments for licensing small object-*pro* and explores the applicability to Inuktitut. Section 3 provides a suggestion for the problem of licensing small object-*pro* within a framework of DM and a short outlook on further research in DM (cyclic, vs. non-cyclic insertion, computation on abstract feature bundles, terminal nodes, relevance of phonological features, etc.).

1 Distributed Morphology

The following illustration shows the model of grammar as described in DM.

6) Harley & Noyer (1998)
(Slightly modified)



Syntactic operations create terminal nodes (morphemes) that are specified for morphosyntactic and semantic features. They are filled with Vocabulary items at Spell-Out. Crucial is that computation in narrow syntax operates solely on abstract features as opposed to lexical items, which are inserted at the end of the computational process.

The Insertion of Vocabulary Items (VIs) follows two different regulations.

Competition at f-nodes: inflectional items with similar feature specification compete for insertion at an f-node morpheme slot. The VI that is more highly specified is inserted. A feature hierarchy as proposed by Harley 1994 might also determine insertion into f-nodes.

Morphosyntactic environment at l-nodes: a VI is inserted if it meets certain conditions on morphosyntactic environment; for instance, an accusative suffix is inserted at an l-node that is governed by D.

Within this framework, one has to ask if the conditions to insert a particular vocabulary item (VI) are distinct enough to allow for a specific trigger for this VI. In other words, AP insertion has to be for a reason. The conditions for insertion have to be specified in the syntax through feature specification of the morpheme slots in which the VI is inserted.

The problem in the case of the AP is to determine what distinguishes the syntactic environment of the AP with non-overt object from the intransitive construction.

Seemingly, the AP construction employs a small *pro* that receives instrumental case in place of the normally overt object. This should be sufficient distinction from a canonical intransitive construction, where there should be no small *pro*.

As we can see, the presence or absence of small *pro* is crucial for conditioning the insertion of the AP VI. Therefore, I will review the arguments for object-*pro* and subsequently apply them to Inuktitut.

2 Criteria for object-*pro*

Rizzi 1986 discusses several tests to identify object-*pro* in Italian. In the following section, I try to apply those tests to Inuktitut antipassive constructions.

2.1 Recoverability through agreement

Inuktitut employs what is generally termed *pro*-drop. Therefore, transitive and intransitive sentences do not need an overt argument.

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------|
| 7) a. taku-vara | b. taku-vuq | |
| see-ind.3sg/1sg | see-ind.3s | |
| s/he sees me. | He sees. | Harper 1974:33 |

As can be seen in examples 1), 2), and 7), the agreement marker shows pronominal agreement with both arguments in transitive sentences and agreement with the absolutive argument in intransitive sentences. In AP constructions with overt object, the verb agrees only with the absolutive argument. Object-*pro* therefore is not recoverable through pronominal agreement on the verb as illustrated in example 8).

- 8) Angut iglu-mik amiar-i-vuq

Man(abs) house-instr. paint-AP-ind.3sg
'The man is painting the house'

However, if we take a sentence where the implicit object is modified, case marking on the modifier shows instrumental case. This indicates that the object-*pro* is present since modifiers usually agree in case with the modified element in Inuktitut.

9) Tungujurtu-mik ii-si-vunga
it is green-instr. swallow-AP-ind.1sg
I swallowed something green.

For Inuktitut, object-*pro* in AP sentences is not recoverable through agreement with the verb at all, unless one wants to suggest that object-*pro* is recoverable though the AP morpheme that is somehow specified for a [-specific] feature for the object. Note that if we assume AP to be some instance of agreement, we would need a node – *pro* or not – that is also specified for [-specific]. However, we can assume that it can be recovered through case agreement on an overt modifier unless the modifier actually functions as the argument.

2.2 Passivization

It is possible to passivize an active AP sentence with non-overt object. The AP morpheme is omitted in the passive. If the AP object receives structural case and behaves like a direct object in nominative-accusative languages, we would expect that passivization moves the object-*pro* to subject position and yields an overt subject or pronominal agreement with the subject in the passive sentence.

10) a. Amiar-i-junga b. kisukiaq amiar-tau-nnir-tuq
 paint-AP-part.1sg something paint-pass-apparently-part.3sg
 I am painting something Something has apparently been painted

Example 10) shows that there is indeed an overt pronominal in subject position after passivization. However, this can be taken as some instance of backward reference (see section 2.3) within discourse (my informant suggested that in her response), i.e. the pronominal reference has already been interpreted by other means and surfaces overtly for that reason. On the other hand, since Inuktitut has extensive pro-drop, it seems indicative that *kisukiaq* is obligatorily overt here.

2.3 Backward reference

11) a. ii-si-vunga b. Kisu-mik?
 swallow-AP-ind.1sg what-instr
 'I just swallowed something.' What is it?

2.4.2 Instrumental as postposition

Manga 1996 proposes that instrumental case is inserted as a postposition, when the object noun is selected as non-specific. Therefore, the noun has no feature to be checked at T and remains in situ. In this way, she accounts for the fact that instrumental case patterns also with the inherent cases ablative, locative, etc. Their case markers are also defined as postpositions.

This analysis is problematic with regard to the notion of a “dummy” postposition that is inserted whether there is an overt NP or an object-*pro*. Every other ‘postposition’ is inserted to an overt NP. The trigger for insertion is, if we take a DM viewpoint, the structural and thematic position of the NP that receives the respective case. The question then is: How do we specify that, when we have an abstract *pro* that we do not insert *-mik*?

Recall that computation operates only on abstract items that are specified for morpho-syntactic and computationally relevant semantic features. Since the nodes that provide the slots for vocabulary insertion are all abstract, the difference between an abstract *pro* and an abstract morpheme that is filled with an N is not apparent.

Within a DM framework, we have to ask whether the Vocabulary provides also abstract elements for insertion. However, this seems rather redundant. The main question then rather is: ***DOES IT MATTER???***

2.5 Summary

The following tests to identify object-*pro* have been tried and yield the following results for Inuktitut.

15) Results for identifying object-*pro*

	Is there object- <i>pro</i> in AP?
Recoverability through agreement	Agreement with modifier
Passivization	Yes
Backward reference	Yes
Object control	Not applicable for Inuktitut
Case conflict	Yes
Instrumental as postposition	Not applicable in DM

3 Does it matter in DM?

The question of *pro* is only relevant in a lexicalist model in order to account for phenomena that are caused by non-overt elements. Within a DM framework, we should rather ask how the terminal nodes are specified into which the AP VI and the object are inserted.

In this context, the question, what distinguishes the intransitive sentence from the AP with non-overt object becomes increasingly important.

Insertion of Vocabulary Insertion is determined by syntactic environment, and mapping of morpho-/semantico-syntactic features. Terminal nodes (termed morphemes) are specified for features that have to be mapped by Vocabulary items inserted at Spell-Out. Morphemes are created in narrow syntax through Merge, Move, and Copy.

Dissociated Morphemes, which do not take part in the narrow computation, are inserted at the end of the computation but before Spell-Out, thus further providing slots for insertion. I suggest that the AP morpheme is inserted as a Dissociated Morpheme in the sense of Embick 1998 since it does not change the argument structure compared to an intransitive sentence.

Crucial for computation before Spell-Out is that phonological features are neither responsible for nor taking part in the computation. Insertion is solely dependent on morphological, semantic, and/or syntactic features of the morphemes.

The AP construction is, as discussed at length, possible with overt or non-overt object. I suggest that the terminal node for insertion (or non-insertion) of the object NP has to be specified for [-specific] in the sense of Manga 1996. However, whether insertion of the object takes place or not is still an open question. Do we have to specify for insertion of VIs in DM? What triggers or prevents insertion into a slot?

An answer could be that the slot for a non-specific object, which might also be the trigger for the insertion of the AP Vocabulary Item, is deleted. Since the diagnostics for object-*pro* are not decisive, we could assume that there is actually no morpheme slot at the point of Spell-Out.

Distributed Morphology presents a model of grammar that locates morphological processes across different modules of grammar. It proposes that computation in narrow syntax does not operate on lexical items, taken from the lexicon but on abstract morphosyntactic features. Since many of the technicalities still have to be worked out, many open questions remain. For the AP construction with non-overt object, the question, whether we have object-*pro* is converted into the question of whether or not it is feasible to assume that morpheme slots are not only created but also deleted during computation in narrow syntax.

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