

Events in Inuktitut: Voice Alternations and Viewpoint Aspect

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I discuss the aspectual properties of the Antipassive (AP) construction in Inuit languages. The AP has been shown to have an atelic/imperfective interpretation (Benua 1995 for Alaskan Yup'ik, Bittner 1987, 1988 for West Greenlandic), a common phenomenon for ergative languages (Dixon 1994).

I propose that the AP yields a change of aspectual interpretation due to the AP morpheme on the verb. The AP construction has accusative case on the direct object, which corresponds to atelic aspect in an ergative language like Inuktitut. On the other hand, accusative case in a nominative-accusative language like Finnish corresponds to telic aspect. I propose that the difference is due to an *atelic* feature on the accusative case checking functional head in Inuktitut, while it is due to a *telic* feature in a nominative-accusative language (Kratzer 2004). I further suggest that changes in viewpoint aspect are a side effect of the changes in agreement configurations and case checking heads.

The paper also provides some new evidence from some dialects of Inuktitut that the ergative case is not a structural case. This observation conforms to the changes observed that some dialects of Inuktitut that allow the AP construction in wider distributions than generally assumed (Johns 2005).

2. The Ergative-Antipassive alternation in Inuktitut¹

The ergative construction in Inuktitut is characterized by having the external argument marked with ergative case and the internal argument marked with absolutive case. The verb's agreement morphology signals agreement in person and number with both arguments (double agreement).

- (1) *Ergative construction*²
- | | | |
|---------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| anguti-up | arnaq | kunik-taa |
| man-ERG | woman(abs) | kiss-part. 3sg/3sg |
| The man kissed the woman. | | |

¹ All data is taken from original fieldwork on the Baffin Island dialects of Canadian Inuktitut unless otherwise indicated. I am very grateful to Ida Awa (Mittimatalik, North Baffin), Saila Michael (South Baffin), and Sandra Uvilluk (Iglulik, North Baffin) for sharing their language.

² Glosses: Erg: ergative case; abs: absolutive case, *mik*-case, often taken as accusative case (Bok-Bennema 1991, Spreng 2001); AP: Antipassive morpheme; ind: indicative mood, part.: participial mood. Both moods are used as declarative moods. The reasons for their distribution in declarative sentences have no bearing on this paper. (cf. Johns 1987 for details).

In the intransitive construction, the sole argument is marked with absolutive case and the agreement morphology signals agreement in person and number with it.

- (2) *Intransitive construction*
 anguti niri-vuq
 man(ABS) eat-ind.3sg
 The man is eating.

In the literature on Inuit languages, the AP construction has previously been assumed to have overt and non-overt AP morphology (Bittner 1987, Woodbury and Sadock 1986, Bok-Bennema 1991, Schieberl Manga 1998, Jensen and Johns 1989, Beaudoin-Lietz 1982, and many others). I claim that there is no such alternation and that the overt AP morpheme *-si-* has functions that are not observable in the constructions without it (section 3.1).³ The agreement morphology on the verb refers in person and number to the absolutive argument and the internal argument is marked with the *mik*-case⁴, traditionally assumed to be an oblique case, a sign of “demotion” of this argument, as a mirror image of the passive in nominative-accusative languages (Marantz 1984).

- (3) a. *Antipassive construction with Antipassive morphology*
 anguti kunik-*si*-vuq arna-mik
 man(ABS) kiss-AP-ind.3sg woman-mik
 The man is kissing a woman
- b. *Antipassive construction without Antipassive morphology*
 anguti niri-juq niqi-mik
 man(ABS) eat-part.3sg niqi-mik
 The man is eating meat

2.1 Aspectual properties: Telicity

Previous approaches to telicity in Inuit languages (Benea 1995 for Yup’ik) have argued that there is a telicity contrast between the ergative and the AP construction. The AP construction is interpreted as atelic while the ergative construction is interpreted as telic. Across ergative languages, this is a fairly common contrast (Dixon 1994). The ergative construction in (4a) can be interpreted as having an endpoint, the implication is that there is an end to the waiting while in (4b) there is no such implication.

³ I therefore gloss the construction without *-si-* as having no AP morpheme instead of a zero allomorph.

⁴ This case has many functions and even more names in the literature. Thus, I refer to it as the *mik*-case. Eastern varieties of Inuktitut are loosing the final [k], sometimes turning it into [t].

- b. Peter surak-*si*-juq anautar-mik [AP]
Peter(ABS) break-AP-part.3sg stick-mik
Peter is breaking the stick.
- c. Peta-up anautaq surak-taa [ergative]
Peter-ERG stick(ABS) break-part.3sg/3sg
Peter broke the stick.
- (10) a. Mittimatalik
anguti uqalimaq-tuq⁸ [intransitive/AP]
man(ABS) read-part.3sg
The man is reading (something).
- b. anguti uqalima-*si*-juq [intransitive/AP]
man(ABS) read-**incpt.**-part.3sg
The man starts to read (something).
- c. anguti-up uqalima-*si*-jaa [ergative]
man-ERG read-**incpt.**-part.3sg.
The man was just about to read it.
- d. *anguti-up uqalima**q**-*si*-jaa *[ergative/AP]
man-ERG read-**AP**-part.3sg.
The man just read it.

Whenever *-si-* appears with a verb that does not permit an AP morpheme (10b), the interpretation is inceptive.⁹ Furthermore, the AP *-si-* and the inceptive *-si-* differ in that only the inceptive *-si-* deletes preceding consonants (compare the verb roots in (10a) with (10b) on the one hand with (9a) and (9b) on the other). Furthermore, the inceptive *-si-* can occur in any construction while this is impossible for the AP *-si-* (10b,c, d).¹⁰

The implicit assumption that there is a zero alternant fails to explain the distribution that is clearly dependent on the argument structure of the verb. A zero alternant makes that clearly predictable distribution a matter of lexical accident, a view that is obviously undesirable.

⁸ Object-permitting verbs are what Levin 1993) terms object-deleting verbs. I assume that these are verbs that have a basic argument structure like unergative verbs although unlike them, allow optionally an internal argument. For further arguments along for this view from the aspectual literature, see Higginbotham 2004).

⁹ In the remainder of this paper, verbs that require *-si-* in the Antipassive construction are called [+AP] verbs and verbs that do not permit Antipassive morphology are called [-AP] verbs.

¹⁰ See Spreng 2001) for a detailed argument for the predictability of the Antipassive morpheme based on the verb's argument structure.

3.2 Aktionsart

The previous section has shown that the argument structure of the verb roots determines whether they allow an AP morpheme. A further prediction can be made on the aspectual level. Rothstein (2004) defines the verb classes defined by Vendler (1967) in terms of the binary features [\pm telic; \pm stages].

(11)	i)	states	-telic; -stages	[-AP] verbs
	ii)	activities	-telic; +stages	[-AP] verbs
	iii)	achievements	+telic; -stages	[+AP] verbs
	iv)	accomplishments	+telic; +stages	[-AP] verbs

Only achievement verbs belong to the class of [+AP] verbs (Spreng 2004). It is neither the feature [telic] on the root nor the feature [stages] that determines whether an AP morpheme is allowed. To capture the distribution of the AP morpheme and to show why verbs that have no stages but are telic require the AP morpheme while everything else, telic or not, disallows the AP morpheme, I suggest the feature [punctual] distinguishing achievements from the other classes¹¹.

Examples (12) and (13) show that only achievement verbs are [+AP] verbs. If the verb root is not an achievement verb (12), the causative morpheme turns the stative verb root into an achievement verb, and thus requiring the AP morpheme *-si-*.

(12)	Mittimatalik	
	a.	b.
	quviasuk-tuq	quviasuk-tit-si-juq
	happy-part.3sg	happy-caus-AP-part.3sg
	He is happy.	He makes someone happy.

(13)	quqir-si-juq	nanur-mit ¹²
	shoot-AP-part.3sg	polar bear-mik
	He is shooting a polar bear.	

The Mittimatalik examples (14-16) show that accomplishments, activities, and perception verbs (statives) are [-AP] verbs. None of them are punctual.

(14)	iglu-mik	sana-juq
	house-mik	build-part.3sg
	He is building a house.	
	(it is not finished, the event takes place at speech time)	

¹¹ Achievement verbs also pattern together with respect to tense marking (Hayashi 2005, Hayashi and Spreng forthcoming).

¹² The *mik*-case suffix is *-mit* in more Southern variants of the Baffin dialects. I gloss it as *mik*-case in general.

(15) anguti uniar-tuq qamuti-mik
 man(ABS) pull-part.3sg sled-mik
 The man is pulling the sled (while we are watching).

(16) anguti taku-juq nanur-mik
 man(ABS) see-part.3sg polar bear-mik
 The man is watching/looking at a polar bear

The evidence shows that AP morphology is not only determined by the argument structure of the verb root but also by its Aktionsart. Furthermore, the change in aspectual interpretation between ergative and AP construction can be tied to the AP morpheme. Viewpoint aspect changes with the change in agreement configuration and the AP morpheme, properties that can be subsumed as voice alternation. The next section shows that this is a phenomenon that has similarities in other languages.

4. Aspect and agreement

4.1 German

Other than in Inuktitut, voice alternations between active and passive in German show no difference in event interpretation. Regardless of the configuration, both constructions are atelic and perfective (17).

- (17) a. Peter küßt Maria stundenlang [atelic, perfective] Active
 Peter is kissing Mary for hours.
- b. Maria wird stundenlang geküßt. [atelic, perfective] Passive
 Mary is being kissed for hours

Voice alternations seem not to have any impact on viewpoint aspect or telicity. English is a similar case in that respect. The passive and active examples have identical telicity and viewpoint interpretations.

- (18) a. #Peter ate an/the apple for an hour.
 Peter ate an/the apple in an hour.
- b. #An/the apple was eaten for an hour
 An/the apple was eaten in an hour.

However, in German, if the case on the direct object is changed to an inherent dative (19b) or case marking disappears in the progressive construction (20 a', b') the only feasible interpretation is imperfective¹³.

- (19) a. Sie hat tagelang Fausthandschuhe gestrickt.
 she has for-days mittens-ACC knit.
 She has knit mittens for days. [atelic, perfective]
- b. Sie hat tagelang an Fausthandschuhen gestrickt.
 she has for-days at mittens-DAT knit.
 She was knitting mittens for days. [atelic, imperfective]
 (Kratzer 2004:392)
- (20) a. sind's am Kochen? a.' sind's am Suppe-Kochen?
 are-you at/the cooking? are-you at/the soup-cooking
 Are you cooking? Are you cooking soup?
- b. di warn da am renovieren
 they were there at/the renovating
 They were renovating there.
- b'. Di warn da am Haus-renovieren
 They were there at/the house-renovating
 They were renovating the house there. (Krause 2002:23-25)

Changes in object case correspond to changes in viewpoint aspect in German while in Inuktitut, voice alternations have that effect. The absence of accusative case on the internal argument in German changes the viewpoint aspect while in Inuktitut, not only the absence of accusative case in the ergative construction but also which argument checks absolutive case has an impact on the event interpretation.

4.2 Accusative and partitive case: Finnish

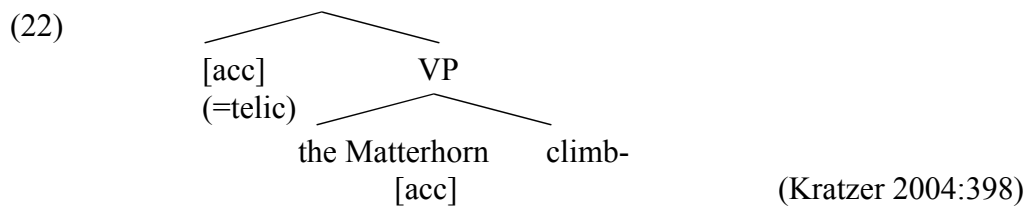
In Finnish, the changes in telicity are encoded in the accusative/partitive alternation. Roughly summarizing the facts, if the object case is accusative, the sentence is telic/bounded (21a) while when the object case is partitive, the event is atelic/unbounded (21b)¹⁴ (Kratzer 2004, Kiparsky 1998, 2001, Pylkkänen 2000).

¹³ Despite the claim of most descriptive grammars that German has no progressive form, the construction is completely productive (Krause 2002).

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that Finnish has no passive alternation (Kiparsky p.c.). For the purpose of this paper, Finnish serves as example that case/agreement alternations correspond predictably to different event interpretations crosslinguistically.

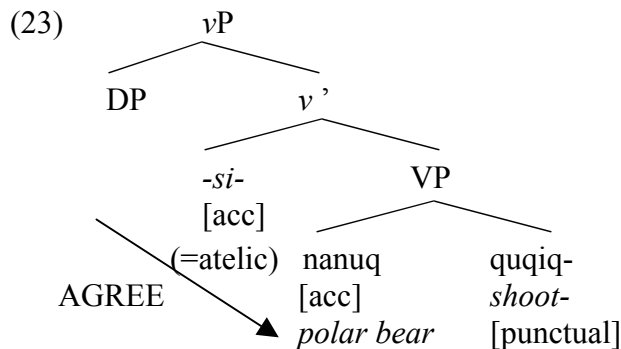
- (21) a. Jussi tapasi Saara-n [telic]
 Jussi met Saara-ACC
 ‘Jussi met Saara.’
- b. Jussi haile-e Saara-a [atelic]
 admire-3SG Saara-PAR
 ‘Jussi admires Saara.’ (Pylkkänen 1998:1)

Kratzer (2004) proposes an analysis that accounts for the aspectual alternations in Finnish. The telic interpretation corresponding to accusative case on the internal argument is due to an accusative feature on a functional head merged with the VP. It equals a telic feature. Checking accusative case thus renders the event telic.



4.3 Accusative case in Inuktitut

I adopt a similar analysis for Inuktitut modifying it to accommodate the Inuktitut facts. I have argued in Spreng (2001) that the AP morpheme *-si-* has an accusative feature thus rendering *mik*-case equal to structural accusative case. A similar proposal has been made in Bok-Bennema (1991). Aspectually, accusative case corresponds to atelicity while its absence corresponds to telic aspect.



The difference between Inuktitut and Finnish then is pinpointed in the [atelic] feature on *v*, thus capturing the fact that accusative corresponds to atelic aspect in Inuktitut. It captures that only with punctual verbs, the AP morpheme is possible, and that these are verbs that obligatorily have an internal argument in their argument structure. Thus, the only part that distinguishes the AP from a, for

example German active construction, is the aspectual interpretation, which is captured in the difference in features on *v*.

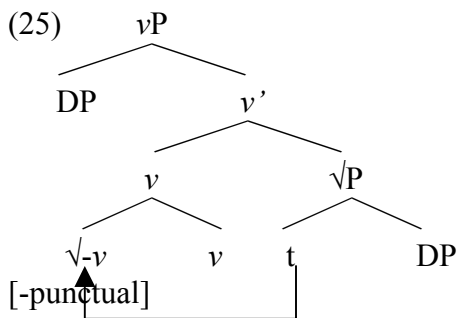
4.4 Non-punctual verbs in Inuktitut

I have argued in the previous section that for [+AP] verbs, it is the AP morpheme with *is* responsible for the change in aspect. [-AP] verbs (accomplishment verbs, activities) are basically atelic. Intransitive and transitive constructions show no difference in telicity (2 and 3 repeated here as 24a, b).

- (24) a. *Intransitive construction*
 anguti niri-vuq
 man(ABS) eat-ind.3sg
 The man is eating.
- b. *Antipassive construction without Antipassive morphology*
 anguti niri-juq niqi-mik
 man(ABS) eat-AP-part.3sg niqi-mik
 The man is eating meat.
- c. *Ergative construction*
 anguti-up niqi niri-jaa
 man-ERG meat(ABS) eat-part.3sg/3sg
 The man ate meat.

The change in aspect is between the above constructions and the ergative construction. However, none allows the AP morpheme that derives the aspectual change. The analysis needs to prevent the AP morpheme from insertion while still accounting for the difference between ergative and the above constructions.

I am adopting an analysis for those verbs that modifies a proposal by Harley (2001) for English. The verbs have an obligatory functional *v* that, in a sense, derives the syntactic category verb. Below, we have a root whose argument incorporates into the functional head, thus occupying this head and therefore preventing the AP morpheme from insertion.



The [-punctual] feature on the verb is interpretable since it does not originate on a functional projection. Thus, there is no agreement with an optionally occurring lower argument. Atelic interpretation is thus due to the [-punctual] feature of the verb root and is therefore independent from the agreement configuration of either construction. This accounts for the problematic cases in Mittimatalik where telicity is independent from agreement for these verbs.

- (26) a. anguti niri-juq palaugaar-mik ikaralimaa-mut
 man(ABS) eat-part.3sg bread-mik. 'for an hour'-abl
 The man is eating bread for an hour.
- b. anguti-up palaugaaq niri-jaa ikaralimaa-mut
 man-ERG bread(ABS) eat-part.3sg/3sg 'for an hour'-abl.
 The man ate the bread for an hour (and then stopped).

Both the construction with single agreement (26a) and the ergative construction with double agreement (26b) is compatible with 'for an hour', further indication that the contrasts are not restricted to telicity contrasts.¹⁵

4.5 Ergative case in Inuktitut

The analysis for the ergative construction needs to account for the fact that in South Baffin and Iglulik, the construction is ungrammatical with [+AP] verbs when the external argument is third person.

I am adopting Woolford 2004) and analyze the ergative case as inherent case. She assumes that there are two kinds of non-structural cases. Inherent case being closely tied to certain theta roles and being licensed by *v*. One indication that the ergative is losing its status as structural case comes from passive constructions. In more conservative dialects such as Mittimatalik, and assuming that the ergative construction was the "active" underlying structure (27a), the formerly ergative marked argument receives an 'inherent' ablative case (27b) in the passive. Generally, single agreement morphology prevents the ergative case.

- (27) a. Anguti-up arnaq kunik-taa
 man-ERG woman(ABS) kiss-part.3sg/3sg
 The man kissed the woman.
- b. Arnaq kunik-tau-juq anguti-mut
 woman(ABS) kiss-PASS-part.3sg man-ABL
 The woman was kissed by the man.

¹⁵ Note, however, that viewpoint aspect is perfective in the ergative. It is not entirely clear whether this is true for the first construction. Dialectal differences may be obscuring the contrast for viewpoint aspect.

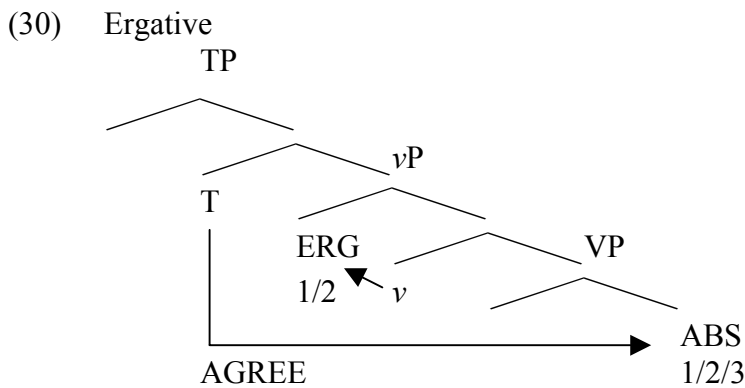
However, South Baffin and Iglulik retain the ergative case marking in passive constructions despite the fact that the verb's agreement morphology does not refer to it (28).

- (28) a. surak-tau-juq titirauti Piita-**up**
break-PASS-part.3sg pencil(ABS) Peter-**ERG**
The pencil was broken by Peter.
- b. qimmiq quqir-tau-juq Piita-**up**
dog(ABS) shoot-PASS-part.3sg Peter-**ERG**
The dog was shot by Peter.

A last indication that the ergative is losing its status as a structural case is that it is disallowed with third person arguments with [+AP] verbs.

- (29) [+AP] verbs: person combinations allowed with the ergative construction
ERG/ABS
1/2; 1/3
2/1; 2/3
*3/1; *3/2; *3/3 obligatory AP construction

Thus, the external argument cannot be an intervener for agreement with the lower argument because it has become invisible to the probe from T due to being licensed by *v* (Chomsky 2000, 2001). I further follow previous accounts (Bok-Bennema 1991, Bittner 1994, Wharram 1996, Marantz 1984) that the absolutive contrasts to the ergative and is thus always the subject. I suggest that there is no phi agreement of *v* with the lower DP when there is no AP morpheme. Absolutive case is due to agreement of T with the lower DP.



5. Viewpoint aspect

In the previous sections I have claimed that the difference between ergative and AP is not exactly a contrast of telicity but of viewpoint aspect. This can be illustrated more clearly when it corresponds to a different verb in English.

- (31) South Baffin
- a. kapi-*si*-juq
stab-AP-pat.3sg
He is poking someone.

 - b. kapi-jara
stab-part.1sg/3sg
I stabbed him

The AP construction in (31a) is atelic due to the iterative interpretation, which in turn is due to the AP morpheme. Furthermore, it is imperfective. An interpretation of (31a) as ‘*stabbing repeatedly*’ is impossible. The ergative construction in (31b) on the other hand can only be interpreted as a stabbing with potentially fatal results. This is not an isolated occurrence (32).

- (32) a. aqtuq-*si*-juq
touch-AP-part.3sg
He is stroking someone.
- b. aqtuq-tanga
touch-part.2sg/1sg
You touched me.

The verb *aqtuq*- ‘*touch*’ is interpreted as a quick touch in the ergative and a stroking motion in the AP that is barely noticeable, not a repeated touch.¹⁶ I suggest that the change in viewpoint aspect is a side effect of the changes in agreement. Due to agreement of T with the internal argument in the ergative construction, the internal structure of the event becomes inaccessible, resulting in a perfective reading. For languages where perfective readings correspond to accusative case such as German, viewpoint aspect may be encoded in the lower part of the functional domain, thus “perfecting” the event after accusative case checking while in Inuktitut, this can only be done if case is checked in the highest functional projection.

¹⁶ An interpretation of repeated touching requires a different Antipassive morpheme *-saq-* (cf. (Spreng 2004)).

6. Conclusion

AP morphology in Inuktitut is aspectual morphology to derive atelic aspect for [punctual] verb roots. It is not morphology that encodes any special kind of aspectual interpretations such as inceptive as Bittner (1987) suggests for West Greenlandic. The [atelic] feature on the AP morpheme allows for an iteration of the [punctual] verb that results in an atelic interpretation.

This paper provides new evidence for aspectually and person feature-driven ergativity splits. It explains the fact that the AP renders an event not only atelic due to its AP morpheme but also imperfective due to the changes in agreement.

A preliminary suggestion for cross-linguistic variation of event interpretations can be made based on changes of object case and voice alternations, offering an initial approach to the crosslinguistic observation that “demoted” object case often corresponds to an “opening” (atelic/imperfective) of the event.

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