

Third person arguments in Inuktitut

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Previous accounts of ergativity in Inuit languages have assumed that the ergative case is a structural case. This assumption was primarily based on the fact that agreement morphology that refers to the ergative marked argument is always overt and absent when there is no argument that is marked ergative. This paper provides evidence that the ergative case in Inuktitut is not a structural case in some variants of the language. It provides a preliminary account as to why the Antipassive/ergative alternation corresponds to aspectual splits in many ergative languages. Furthermore, it can be shown that the shift towards more nominative/accusative case systems in some variants of Canadian Inuktitut relates to person features on the arguments and Aktionsart properties of the verb roots.

1 Introduction

This paper offers an account for the conditions under which the ergative-Antipassive voice alternation is used in Inuktitut. I focus on two variants of Inuktitut, South Baffin and Iglulik, that show restrictions on the ergative construction that are based on person features of the external argument.

Inuktitut is traditionally described as exhibiting an Antipassive voice alternation. The conditions under which the Antipassive is used are described often with respect to the properties of the DP's involved. Usually, it is assumed that the object in the Antipassive is non-specific (Schieberl Manga 1998) or non-definite (Fortescue 1984). I present new evidence that person features on the arguments determine whether a construction with two arguments can be in the Antipassive. There is indication that in some dialects of Inuktitut, the ergative case loses its status as structural case despite the fact that agreement morphology on the verb seems to refer to it. These facts lend support to the observation that the more Eastern dialects of Canadian Inuktitut allow the Antipassive construction in more environments than the ergative construction, showing a shift towards a more nominative/accusative system (Johns 2001a, b).

1.2 The Ergative-Antipassive alternation

The ergative-antipassive alternation exhibits the following properties in more conservative variants of Inuit languages, as previously described in

numerous works on Inuit languages (Bittner 1994, Johns 1992, Bok-Bennema 1991, Johnson 1980, and many others.).

- 1 a. Ergative
anguti-up arnaq kunik-taa
man-ERG woman(ABS) kiss-part.3sg/3sg
The man kissed the woman.
- b. Intransitive
anguti niri-vuq
man(ABS) eat-ind.3sg
The man is eating.
- 2 a. Antipassive with overt Antipassive morphology
anguti kunik-si-vuq arna-mik
man(ABS) kiss -AP-ind.3sg woman-mik
The man is kissing a woman.
- b. “Antipassive” without Antipassive morphology
anguti niri-vuq niqi-mik
man(ABS) eat-ind.3sg meat-mik
The man is eating meat.

In the ergative construction (1), the agreement morphology on the verb refers to both the ergative and the absolutive argument. The agent is marked ergative, the theme is marked absolutive. In the Antipassive (2), agreement morphology refers only to the absolutive argument, which is now the agent. The internal argument is marked with the *mik*-case which is accusative when there is an overt Antipassive morpheme (Spreng 2001, Spreng 2005a). Previously, the Antipassive without Antipassive morphology is assumed to have a zero Antipassive allomorph (Bittner 1987, Marantz 1984). However, there is no evidence to support such a view (Spreng 2001). Only causativized and inherently transitive verbs take an Antipassive morpheme and show a voice alternation while the assumption of having a zero allomorph obstructs the fact that the distribution is determined by the argument structure and the Aktionsart of the verb (Spreng 2005b, Spreng forthcoming). I therefore only discuss the Antipassive with the Antipassive morpheme *-si-* (2a).

Previous approaches to ergativity in Inuktitut have generally assumed the ergative to be a structural case, it being a subject (Johnson 1980), equivalent to a possessor (Johns 1987) or similar to a direct object (Bittner and Hale 1996a, b, Bok-Bennema 1991). The following sections provide evidence that this assumption needs to be called into question.

2 Is the ergative case a structural case in Inuktitut?

The following subsections provide some initial evidence that cast doubt on the assumption that the ergative case is always a structural case in Inuktitut. Section 3 will then discuss in detail the conditions under which the ergative case is not permitted.

2.1 Passive

Beside the Antipassive, Inuktitut has a passive construction. Based on the traditional assumption that the ergative construction is the underlying construction and the ergative is the subject (3a), the passive can be described as follows. The verb shows agreement with the absolutive marked argument only and it requires a passive morpheme. The absolutive was absolutive also in the ergative construction although it could be taken as raised to subject position. The argument that would have been ergative in the ergative construction is ‘demoted’ in the passive to be marked with the ablative (3b).

- 3 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.

Assuming that a passive alternation is characterized by some kind of agreement loss with one of the arguments, we see that agreement morphology signals agreement only with the absolutive argument. This results in an inherent case on the agent and an obligatory passive morpheme on the verb.¹

In some dialects of Inuktitut (South Baffin and Iglulik), the ergative case marker is retained in the passive construction. The verb shows the same properties as in more conservative dialects with the passive morpheme and agreement with the absolutive argument (4)

- 4 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.

Despite the fact that the agreement morphology only refers to the absolutive, the agent still has an ergative case marker. Generally, the ergative only occurs in constructions where agreement morphology overtly refers to that argument. This demonstrates that the ergative is losing its properties as structural case under certain circumstances.

2.2 Theta Roles

On a more general note, the ergative case in Inuktitut is closely tied to the agent proto-role (Dowty 1991), a characteristic that is more reminiscent of

¹ On whether Inuktitut DP's are actually DP's, see Compton 2004) for a discussion. I am not advocating any particular view here.

an inherent or lexical case than structural case. It marks, possessors (5), agents (3a), and causers (6b), but not, for example experiencers (6a).

- 5 a. arna-up nasa-a
 woman-rel.² hat-3s.poss
 The woman's hat. (Johns 1987:46)
- 6 a. quviasuk-tunga
 happy-part.3sg
 I(abs) am happy
 b. quvisaku-ti-taanga
 happy-caus.-part.3sg/1sg
 She(erg) made me happy

The fact that the ergative is generally tied to “high” theta roles indicates that it may not be a structural case. Furthermore, the fact that the passive construction has a DP marked with ergative but showing no agreement is further evidence that the ergative may not be assigned under agreement. The next section discusses further conditions under which the ergative is not allowed and provides further evidence that the ergative case needs to be treated differently than before in the literature on ergativity in Inuktitut.

3 Third person external arguments

New data illustrates that some variants of Inuktitut do not allow the ergative construction under the following conditions. If the verb is a verb that requires the Antipassive morpheme in the Antipassive construction and the external argument is third person, the Antipassive construction is the only permissible construction. The ergative construction is then ungrammatical.

- 7 Person combinations allowed with the ergative
 ERG/ABS
 1/2; 1/3
 2/1; 2/3
 *3/1; *3/2; *3/3 obligatory AP construction
- 8 South Baffin/Iglulik
- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. 1/2 | b. 1/3 |
| aqtuq-tagit | aqtuq-tara Piita |
| touch-part.1sg/2sg | touch-part.1sg/3sg Peter(abs) |
| (I-erg) touched you | (I-erg) touched her/Peter |
| c. 2/1 | d. 2/3 |
| aqtuq-tanga | aqtuq-tait Piita |
| touch-part.2sg/1sg | touch-part.2sg/3sg/Peter(abs) |
| (you-erg) touched me | (you-erg) touched her/Peter |

² Ergative case often is glossed as relative.

- e. 3/1³
 aqtuq-*si*-juq uvan-nit
 touch-AP-part.3sg me-mik
 (s/he-abs) is touching me
- f. 3/2
 aqtuq-*si*-juq illinnit
 touch-AP-part.3sg you-mik
 (s/he-abs) is touching you

Examples (8) show that if the external argument is third person, the ergative construction is not possible anymore. This entails the verbal agreement morphology for this person combination is not available anymore. Note that this applies only for verbs that require the Antipassive morpheme. These verbs are generally punctual verbs (Spreng 2004a) while verbs whose Aktionsart is atelic do not allow for the Antipassive morpheme *-si-*. The pattern for these latter verbs is more complicated to capture (Spreng forthcoming).

Furthermore, what is important to note in (8e) and (8f) is that the Antipassive renders the event interpretation imperfective/atelic when compared the ergative constructions in (8a-d). This aspectual difference between Antipassive and ergative construction has previously been noted for Yup'ik (Benua 1995), West Greenlandic (Bittner 1988) and also to a certain degree for Mittimatalik (Spreng 2002). This contrast seems a common occurrence for Antipassives in other ergative languages. Ergativity splits often follow along aspectual lines (Dixon 1994).

However, this distinction disappears in Iglulik completely for combinations with two third person arguments.

- 9 a. 3/3
 una aqtuq-*si*-juq u-mi-na
 this one(abs) touch-AP-part.3sg this one-mik
 this one touched that one
- b. 3/3 overt NP's
 Piita quqir-*si*-juq nanur-nit
 Peter(abs) shoot-AP-part.3sg polar bear-mik.pl
 Peter shot/is shooting the bears perfective
- c. 3/3 overt NP's
 Piita quqir-*saq*-tuq nanur-nit
 Peter shoot-AP-part.3sg polar bear-mik.pl
 Peter shot/ is shooting at bears imperfective

While the South Baffin examples in (8e) and (8f) are imperfective, we get a perfective reading in Iglulik.⁴ Furthermore, to get an imperfective reading in the Antipassive construction, Iglulik requires a different Antipassive

³ Note that this combination is grammatical when in the presence of a causative morpheme (6b).

⁴ With respect to telicity, the contrast is not so clear but see Spreng 2005b, Spreng forthcoming) for a detailed discussion and analysis.

morpheme in (9c) (Spreng 2004a). The aspectual difference disappears together with the option of an ergative construction. What we see here is that the ergative construction is ungrammatical even for a perfective reading. The ungrammaticality of the ergative construction is thus tied not only to aspect but also to the person feature on the arguments, notably third person.

We can conclude from the data in this section that overt DP's cannot be marked ergative. Agreement with two arguments is only marked if the external argument is not third person, or in other words, if it is not overt. If the internal argument is first or second person in the Antipassive construction, the pronoun is required; a fact that seems somewhat surprising in a language that is supposed to be *pro*-drop. The aspectual difference between ergative and Antipassive disappears when there is no ergative alternative available. In other words, the Antipassive fulfills the functions of the ergative construction. If we want to express imperfective aspect like with the other person combinations, it is done by morphological means, i.e. a different Antipassive morpheme *-saq-*. In addition, we can say that nominal DP's cannot be marked ergative in general, i.e. in both Iglulik and South Baffin.

In Iglulik, if both arguments are third person, there is no aspect-driven ergativity split while in Mittimatalik and other more conservative dialects⁵, the split is completely intact. Furthermore, the split in South Baffin is only intact when the external argument is not third person.

4 Antipassive and Ergative Construction: Towards an analysis

What I would like to capture with the analysis are the facts discussed in the two previous sections. In particular an account is needed for the fact that the ergative case may not be a structural case in South Baffin and Iglulik, especially, when it comes to third person arguments.

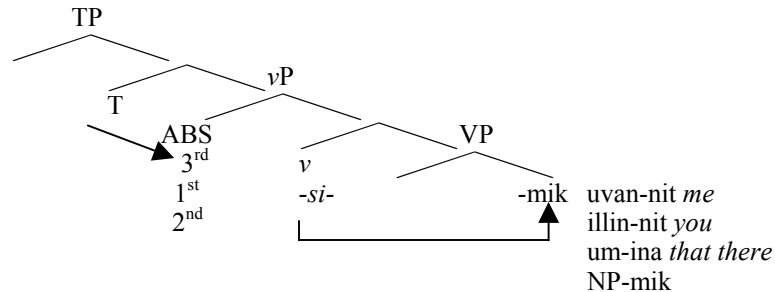
4.1 Antipassive

I propose that agreement morphology in Inuktitut is in one functional head T. Evidence comes from the fact that even double agreement cannot conceivably be separated. I have argued elsewhere that the object case in the Antipassive is equivalent to the accusative in accusative languages when there is an Antipassive morpheme (Spreng 2005a), a view that has been proposed for all 'Antipassive' constructions in Bok-Bennema (1991). My proposal accounts for the fact that once there is an Antipassive morpheme, there is a pronoun that is marked with that case marker, an occurrence that is surprising in a *pro*-drop language. It indicates strongly that the Antipassive marker's purpose is introducing an accusative case feature into the derivation, something that is normally not present in an ergative language like Inuktitut.

So, in essence, the Antipassive can be analyzed as a simple nominative-accusative derivation like in any nominative accusative language. Accusative case is checked in v , which is where the case feature bearing Antipassive morpheme is located.

⁵ Inupiaq, spoken in Alaska, would be such a dialect (Nagai 1998).

10 Antipassive with *-si-*: nominative-accusative



The analysis in (10) illustrates that any person feature on T can probe and agree with the first available goal in the specifier of vP. Furthermore, *-si-* can probe to any kind of internal argument, regardless of person features. I am assuming that *-si-* is underspecified for person since there are no restrictions on the internal argument with respect to whether an Antipassive construction is required or inadmissible. Even for the combination of two third person arguments that require the Antipassive construction in Iglulik, it seems more economical to assume that it is the higher argument that determines that there has to be an Antipassive construction.

4.2 Ergative construction

We have to account for the fact that the ergative construction is impossible with external third person arguments⁶ and that the ergative case is not checked as structural case. I am adopting (Woolford 2004) in analyzing ergative case as inherent case. In her system, there are two types of non-structural cases.

11 a. Non-Structural Cases

- (i) Lexical Case: Idiosyncratic, lexically selected case
- (ii) Inherent Case: Case inherently associated with θ -role licensing

b. Arguments

- (i) Idiosyncratic Lexical Case is limited to T arguments
- (ii) The more regular Inherent Case is limited to A and G arguments⁷

c. Licensers

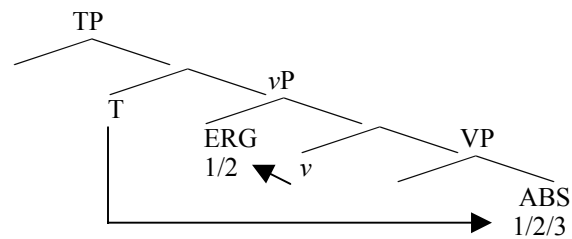
- (i) Only lexical heads (e.g. V, P) may license idiosyncratic lexical case.
- (ii) Only little/light v heads may license inherent case.

⁶ Note that this analysis also only applies to constructions with verbs that would require an Antipassive morpheme. Other verbs can have all person combinations in the ergative as far as I know at this point.

⁷ A argument: Agent; T Argument: Theme; G Argument: Goal.

Ergative case in Inuktitut matches all the properties of inherent case. It is licensed by v and is closely tied to the agent proto-role since it also marks possessor DP's (Dowty 1991). Furthermore, experiencer verbs like “be happy” or “fear” require a transitivity morpheme to be in an ergative construction. Assuming this morpheme to be in little v , the ergative, which bears the agent role, is again licensed by it instead of the verb. I therefore propose the following analysis.

12 Ergative



Ergative case is licensed by v as inherent case and therefore the argument is not visible for the probe from T. Thus, the internal argument functions as a goal for agreement (Chomsky 2000, 2001).

It is noteworthy that, other than in the Antipassive, pronouns are not required and when present only function for emphasis.

It is possible that the agreement morphology that signals double agreement in Inuktitut may be a pronominal clitic. For example, usually, double agreement suffixes have the vowel [a] while intransitive agreement has the vowel [u]. It may be that this vowel is underspecified for person and probes to the lower argument while the rest of the inflectional suffix is specified for person. A closer look at the agreement morphology with this issue in mind should prove insightful for further research.

4.3 Summary

The proposed analysis for the Antipassive and the ergative construction accounts for the fact that the ergative construction is not available with a certain type of verbs and with third person external arguments. It takes advantage of the fact that accusative case is a special occurrence in an ergative language, dependent on a morpheme that is in general responsible for changes in case and agreement and also to an extent for an aspect-driven ergativity split. It provides the beginnings of an account for the variation across the Inuit languages and dialects with respect to the conditions under which the Antipassive is required, possible, or disallowed. It accounts for the phenomenon that the ergative case seems to lose its properties as structural case in certain dialects and ties this phenomenon to the fact that the Antipassive has a much wider distribution in dialects that show this phenomenon (Johns 2001b, a).

5 Outlook: A shift towards a nominative/accusative system?

Ergative languages often have splits that happen along the lines of certain aspectual properties. Interesting in this context is that to my knowledge, it is the Antipassive construction that has the atelic/imperfective interpretation crosslinguistically and not vice versa (Dixon 1994). In Inuktitut, the crucial factor are the Aktionsart properties of the verb since it is not only the argument structure but also the Aktionsart of the verb that is responsible for the contrast between the ergative and the Antipassive construction. The Antipassive morpheme seems to provide an aspectual interpretation that contrasts with the aspectual characteristic of the verb root that requires that Antipassive morpheme. This change in aspect also corresponds to a change in agreement. Thus a voice alternation corresponds to a change in aspectual interpretation. Whether the phenomenon can be accounted for crosslinguistically in the same manner needs to be investigated. Interestingly, in German a ‘demotion’ of the internal argument in progressive constructions shows similar properties. In progressive constructions, the internal argument does not get structural case anymore and is ‘incorporated’ obligatorily. In German, it is not the voice alternation but a change in case assignment to the internal argument that renders an event imperfective (Spreng 2004b). Thus, the phenomenon in Inuktitut and German may merit an identical analysis.

It seems that a possible shift to a nominative accusative system starts to happen where there is the least resistance, i.e. agreement that is based on properties that are underspecified such as third person (Harley and Ritter 2002).

There is some indication that the Antipassive construction might become the less marked and less conditioned construction in some dialects of Inuktitut. The Antipassive is not only used with imperfective aspect but is even required with certain person combinations. Furthermore, there is no more split with certain person combinations (Iglulik). Another indicator is the ‘new’ passive construction that, if one takes the Antipassive construction as the ‘underlying’ active construction, looks almost exactly like the familiar passive of nominative/accusative languages.

What can be stated with certainty is that the dialects that have previously been described as having a clear voice alternation between ergative and Antipassive allow the Antipassive construction in a wider distribution than is generally assumed for Inuit languages. Whether this is a sign of a synchronic ergativity split or the beginnings of a change remains to be investigated.

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