

# Diagnosing Non-Promotional “Passives” in Aleut

Edwin Ko (eddersko@gmail.com) ★ 43rd Berkeley Linguistics Society ★ February 5, 2017

## 1 Background

### 1.1 The debate

(1) *Icelandic*<sup>1</sup>

- a. *Canonical passive* (Thráinsson 2007:10, Ex.1.22b):

**Skáurinn** var opnaður.

the.cupboard-M.SG.NOM was opened-M.SG.NOM

‘The cupboard was opened’

(*promotional passive*)

- b. *New Impersonal Construction* (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002:98, Ex.2a, henceforth M&S):

Það var lamið **stúlkuna** í klessa.

it[EXPL] was hit-NEUT.SG the.girl.F.SG.ACC in a.mess

‘People badly beat the girl’

(*non-promotional “passive”*)

- ◇ Underlying subject is demoted, but objects remain in-situ.

- There has been a debate surrounding the true nature of these non-promotional passive constructions; that is, are these constructions:

(a) **passives** with a thematically empty null subject? (e.g. Eythórsson 2008, Jónsson 2009)

(b) **actives** with a phonologically null, but syntactically active thematic *pro*? (M&S 2002, etc.)

- O’Connor and Maling (2014) and Maling and O’Connor (2015) point out that these discussions are found in other languages including Irish and Northern Pomo, a language of Northern California:

(2) a. *Irish autonomous construction* (McCloskey 2007:827, Ex.3a):

Cuirfear **é** sa reilg áitiúil.

bury.FUT.AUT him.ACC in.the graveyard local

‘He will be buried in the local graveyard’

- ◇ *passive*: (Stenson 1989, Noonan 1994)

- ◇ *active*: (McCloskey 2007)

- b. *Northern Pomo -ya construction* (O’Connor 1992:121, Ex.62, adapted):

**mo:wal** chaxa:-ya

him.ACC cut-IMP

‘(they) cut him’

- ◇ *passive*: (O’Connor 1992)

- ◇ *active*: (O’Connor and Maling 2014)

---

<sup>1</sup>The following abbreviations are used: 1: 1<sup>st</sup> person, 2: 2<sup>nd</sup> person, 3: 3<sup>rd</sup> person, ABL: ablative, ABS: absolutive, ACC: accusative, AN: anaphoric, AUT: autonomous, AUX: auxiliary, CAUS: causative, CESS: cessive, COLL: collective, CONJ: conjunctive, DAT: dative, ENCL: enclitic, F: feminine, FUT: future, GEN: genitive, HAB: habitual, ICHO: ichoative, IMP: impersonal, INTERR: interrogative, IND: indicative, INTEN: intentional, M: masculine, NEG: negation, NEUT: neuter, NOM: nominative, OBJ: object, OBL: oblique, OPT: optative, PART: participial, PASS: passive, POS: possessive, PL: plural, PST: past, REFL: reflexive, REL: relative; SG: singular, SUBJ: subject, TR: transitive.

- M&S (2002) employ four syntactic tests to distinguish between impersonal actives (or unspecified subject constructions) and non-promotional passives:

| Syntactic Property                   | Active | Passive |
|--------------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Agentive <i>by</i> -phrase           | ✗      | ✓       |
| Control of subject-oriented adjuncts | ✓      | ✗       |
| Binding of anaphors                  | ✓      | ✗       |
| Non-agentive ("unaccusative") verbs  | ✓      | ✗       |

- These diagnostics show that the Polish non-promotional construction is an active, whereas the cognate construction in Ukrainian is a passive.
- This talk contributes to the discussion by bringing data from an unrelated language, namely Aleut, a highly endangered language of Alaska.

**My empirical claim** is that there are syntactic and semantic evidence that non-promotional constructions in Aleut are in fact actives.

## 2 Aleut constructions

### 2.1 Data

- The data are based on existing documentation collected by other fieldworkers resulting in around 184 occurrences of non-promotional constructions:
  - ◇ Atkan Aleut School Grammar (Bergsland and Dirks 1981)
  - ◇ Portions of the Aleut Dictionary (Bergsland 1994)
  - ◇ Aleut Grammar (Bergsland 1997)
  - ◇ Literature on Aleut (Berge 2010a, 2010b, 2011, to appear)
  - ◇ Handouts at CoLang 2016 Aleut practicum (Berge and Dirks 2016)

### 2.2 Overview

- Aleut (Eskimo-Aleut) is spoken across the Aleutian (and Pribilof) islands. There are three “main” dialects: Attuan, which is presumed to no longer have any fluent speakers, Atkan, and Eastern.<sup>2</sup>
- Aleut has SOV word order and a so-called anaphoric system claimed to have developed from an ergative system (Bergsland 1997, Berge 2013):

- (3) a. *Active construction* (Bergsland and Dirks 1981:9):

Asxinu-s hla-â kidu-ku-s  
 girl-ABS.PL boy-ABS.SG help-IND-3PL  
 ‘The girls are helping the boy.’

(Atkan)

<sup>2</sup>The Commander Island dialect, also known as Medny Aleut, is not discussed here.

b. *Anaphoric marking* (Bergsland and Dirks 1981:10):<sup>3</sup>

Asxinu-s kidu-ku-u  
 boy-REL.PL help-IND-AN.3SG

‘The girls are helping him.’

(*Atkan*)

- ◊ When arguments of the predicate are overt, they are ABS, and verbal agreement occurs with the subject in person and number.
- ◊ In transitive constructions, subjects are REL when the non-subject is unexpressed; number agreement is with the missing argument, and person agreement is with subject and object.

- Aleut has a set of passive morphemes that demote the subject (see Table 1); this talk focuses on the general passive marker *-lga-* / *-sxa-*.

| Removal of subject: Passives |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <i>-lga-</i> / <i>-sxa-</i>  | passive of all sorts of verbs, including intransitive ones |
| <i>-ĝa-</i>                  | passive of <i>-(x)ta-</i> ‘continuous state’, ‘to have as’ |
| <i>-ula-</i>                 | passive of <i>-usa-</i> ‘applicative’                      |
| <i>-(a)ĝi-</i>               | ‘to be V-ed, to be in state of having V-ed’                |
| <i>-naĝi-</i>                | ‘to be V-ed’ (have a V-er)                                 |
| <i>-qa-</i>                  | ‘anaphoric participial mood marker’                        |

Table 1. Passivizing suffixes (Berge and Dirks 2016, adapted).

- The passive morpheme *-lga-* exhibits behavior much like a promotional passive:

(4) *Promotional passives*a. 3PL *subject* (Berge and Dirks 2016):

Hla-s kidu-lga-qa-s  
 boy-ABS.PL help-PASS-PART-3PL

‘The boys were helped.’

(*Atkan*)

b. 1SG *subject* (Bergsland 1997:170):

kidu-lga-qa-q  
 help-PASS-PART-1SG

‘I was helped’

(*Atkan*)

- ◊ The agent is demoted; object promoted to subject position and agrees with the verb.

- **However, the passive morpheme does not necessarily result in object promotion** (Bergsland 1997, Berge 2013):

(5) *Non-promotional “passives”*a. 3PL *object* (Berge and Dirks 2016):

Hla-s kidu-lga-qa-ĥ  
 boy-ABS.PL help-PASS-PART-3SG

‘Someone helped the boys.’ / ‘We helped the boys.’

(*Atkan*)

<sup>3</sup>This phenomenon has been referred to as the *Aleut Effect* (e.g. Sadock 2000, Boyle 2000, Johns 2010, Merchant 2011).

- b. 1SG *object* (Bergsland 1997:170):

ting kidu-lga-qa- $\hat{x}$

1SG.OBJ help-PASS-PART-3SG

‘one helped me.’

(Atkan)

- ◊ Lack of agreement between overt argument and the verb; 3SG verbal ending observed.
- ◊ The unexpressed agent may refer to an impersonal third person or first person plural.

- **Inherent structural ambiguity #1:** Aleut promotional passives and non-promotional constructions become ambiguous with 3SG verbal ending and overt argument marked with ABS.SG:

- (6) (*Non-*)*promotional construction* (Berge and Dirks 2016):

Hla- $\hat{x}$  kidu-lga-qa- $\hat{x}$

boy-ABS.PL help-PASS-PART-3SG

‘The boy was helped’ / ‘Someone helped the boy.’ / ‘We helped the boy.’

(Atkan)

- ◊ *Promotional passive*: object promoted to subject position and agrees with verb.
- ◊ *Non-promotional construction*: object remains in-situ; no agreement between overt argument and verb.

- **Inherent structural ambiguity #2:** Aleut non-promotional constructions are ambiguous between a passive and active analysis:

- (7) a. *Non-promotional passive*:

∅ Hla- $\hat{x}$  kidu-lga-qa- $\hat{x}$

boy-ABS.PL help-PASS-PART-3SG

‘Someone helped the boy.’ / ‘We helped the boy.’

- b. *Unspecified subject construction (active)*:

*pro*<sub>arb</sub> Hla- $\hat{x}$  kidu-lga-qa- $\hat{x}$

boy-ABS.PL help-PASS-PART-3SG

‘Someone helped the boy.’ / ‘We helped the boy.’

### 3 Syntactic tests

#### 3.1 *by*-phrase test

- In Aleut, the agent may be re-introduced into promotional passive constructions via *ilaan* in Eastern Aleut or *hadagaan* in Atkan (Bergsland 1997:167):

- (8) a. Amaligan Amaya [...] *quga-m* *ilaan* ungaya-lga-qa- $\hat{x}$

there He devil-REL.SG by tempt-PASS-PART-3SG

‘There He was tempted *by* the devil [...]’

(Eastern 1870)

- **The *by*-phrase test is inconclusive:** no occurrences of *by*-phrases found in non-promotional constructions.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Because the current study is based almost entirely on existing documentation and positive evidence alone, a large sample size and broader genre of data (e.g. narratives, conversations) are required for better reliability.

## 3.2 Control test

### 3.2.1 Subject-oriented adjuncts

- Intentional clauses are clauses of intent or purpose formed with an intentional mood marker, and may appear as adverbials (Berge, to appear).
- The subject of the intentional clause is coreferential with the subject of the main clause (Bergsland 1997):

- (9) a. i. *imyaġ-iiġan ayuxta-na-ġ*  
 fish-INTEN.3SG go.out-PART-3SG  
 ‘he went out (in his boat) in order to fish’ (Atkan 1977; Bergsland 1997:238)
- ii. [**PRO** *imyaġ-iiġan*] *ayuxta-na-ġ*
- b. i. *angsuti-ingan anqa-l angali-q*  
 pick.berries-INTEN.1SG depart-CONJ do.same.day-1SG  
 ‘I went out to pick berries’ (Atkan; Berge and Dirks 2016)
- ii. [**PRO** *angsuti-ingan*] *anqa-l angali-q*

- ◊ **Proposal:** The intentional clause houses an obligatory PRO that is controlled by the subject in the matrix clause.

### 3.2.2 Hypotheses and results

- **Hypothesis #1: it’s a passive!**

Control is not possible; there is no subject in the non-promotional matrix clause because it is a true passive.

*passive:* \* [ ∅ [PRO V-INTEN.3SG ] NP V-PASS-3SG ]

- **Hypothesis #2 it’s an active!**

Control is possible; the non-promotional matrix clause can control into the subject-oriented adjunct because it has a *pro*.

*active:* [ *pro*<sub>i</sub> [PRO<sub>i</sub> V-INTEN.3SG ] NP V-IMP-3SG ]

- Non-promotional constructions in the main clause found with non-promotional construction in intentional clauses:

- (10) a. *ngaan tuman kanaġ(t)-sxa-aġan-aan waaġa-lga-ku-ġ*  
 DAT.3SG 1PL bow-PASS-INTEN-3SG=ENCL come-PASS-IND-3SG  
 ‘we came to worship (lit. bow ourselves to) Him’ (Eastern 1870; Bergsland 1997:241)
- b. *pro<sub>i</sub> [PRO<sub>i</sub> ngaan tuman kanaġ(t)sxaaġanaan] waaġalgakuġ*
- (11) a. *aniqdu-ġ iqidgu-lga-aġan-aan waaġa-lga-qa-ġ*  
 child-ABS.SG cut-PASS-INTEN.3SG=ENCL come-PASS-PART-3SG  
 ‘one came to circumcise the child’ (Eastern 1870; Bergsland 1997:241)
- b. *pro<sub>i</sub> [PRO<sub>i</sub> aniqduġ iqidgulgaġanaan] waaġalgaqaġ*

- Active construction in the main clause found with non-promotional construction in intentional clause:

- (12) *isuġi-m ulu-u qa-lga-aġan isuġnaaġ-iiġtan*  
 seal-REL.SG meat-POS.3SG eat-PASS-INTEN.3SG go.sealing-OPT.1PL  
 ‘let us go sealing in order to eat seal meat’ (Eastern 1910; Bergsland 1997:240)  
 ◇ Person and number mismatch between main predicate and predicate in the intentional clause.<sup>5</sup>

- Non-promotional construction in matrix clause with active intentional clause was not found.
- **The control test passes:** Non-promotional constructions in the main clause with subject-oriented adjuncts (i.e. intentional clauses) permissible.

### 3.3 Binding test

- Aleut has a large set of reflexive verbs:

- (13) a. *txin aygaxti-* ‘to walk off’ (Bergsland 1997:101):  
**txin** aygaxti-ku-ġ  
 REFL.3SG walk.off-IND-3SG  
 ‘he forced me to do it’
- b. *txin uqlaġ-* ‘to wash, bathe’ (Bergsland 1994:449):  
 aaliisi-m ilaan **ting** uqlaġ-na-qing  
 harbor-REL.SG ABL.3SG REFL.1SG wash-PART-1SG  
 ‘I washed myself in the harbor’ (Eastern 1983)

- Importantly, there are no non-reflexive third person pronouns in the language (Leer 1991, Bergsland 1997). The following example can only have a reflexive meaning:

- (14) *achixa-* ‘to teach’ (Bergsland 1997:139):  
**txin** achixa-ku-ġ  
 REFL.3SG teach-IND-3SG  
 ‘he/she is teaching himself/herself’ (Atkan)

- To indicate a non-reflexive third person, anaphoric marking is used.
- Cross-linguistically, reflexive verbs do not passivize (Schäfer 2012), and reflexive verbs behave syntactically like intransitive verbs; “[a] reflexive verb [in Aleut] behaves much like an intransitive one” (Bergsland 1997:156).
- In Aleut, non-promotional constructions with reflexive verbs display variation in terms of their syntactic behaviors:
  - ◇ In an impersonal reading, reflexive pronouns are lost.
  - ◇ In a ‘we’ reading, reflexive pronouns are retained.

<sup>5</sup>See also example (16b).

- **Impersonal reading:**

(15) *Naturally reflexive verb – txin haaĝani- ‘to stop’:*

a. *Active construction* (Bergsland 1997:173):

**txidix** haaĝani-ku-s

REFL.3PL stop-IND-3PL

‘they stopped’

(Atkan 1952)

b. *Non-promotional construction* (Bergsland 1997:173):

il(-an) chugi-lga-lakan haaĝani-lga-ku-ĥ

inside(-LOC.3SG) not.silent-PASS-CONJ.NEG stop-PASS-IND-3SG

‘when they were (lit. one was) silent in there and stopped’

(Atkan 1909)

- **‘We’ reading:**

(16) a. *Active constructions:*

i. *Inherently reflexive verb* (Bergsland 1997:173):

ngaan **txin** iq(y)aĝiti-ku-u

DAT.3SG REFL.3SG paddle-IND-AN.3SG

‘he paddles to it’

(Eastern 1910)

ii. *Naturally reflexive verb* (Bergsland 1997:173):

ilaan **txin** ukudigati-ku-u

ABL.3SG REFL.3SG become.safe-IND-AN.3SG

‘he gets safe(ly away) from it’

(Eastern 1910)

b. *Non-promotional constructions* (Bergsland 1997:173):

ngaan **tuman** iqaĝi-sxa-lix ... ilaan **tuman** ukudiga-sxa-da-ĥ

DAT.3SG REFL.1PL paddle-PASS-CONJ ABL.3SG REFL.1PL become.safe-PASS-HAB-3SG

‘we paddle to it ... get safely from it’

(Eastern 1910)

- **Proposal:** Like in Irish, Aleut reflexive pronouns require an antecedent with matching person and number features.

- ◊ Impersonal reading: lacks necessary number and/or person features to bind onto reflexives.
- ◊ Personal ‘we’ reading: has necessary number and person features to bind onto reflexives.

- **The binding test passes:** binding of anaphors is possible; variation in syntactic behavior between the impersonal/personal readings explained by the availability of features on the null subject.

### 3.4 Unaccusative test

- In general, unaccusative verbs do not passivize (Perlmutter 1978).
- According to Bergsland, passives may appear on “all sorts of verbs including intransitive ones”.
- Citing Golovko (2007), Kiparsky (2013) says, “Aleut reportedly allows both impersonal or personal passives of all intransitives and transitives.”

- Canonical unaccusative verbs (e.g. ‘die’, ‘arrive’) are found with passive morphemes in Aleut:

(17) Unaccusative verbs with the passive marker:

a. *asxa-* ‘to die’ (Bergsland 1997:295, adapted):

[...] *asxa-lga-qa-gan*

die-PASS-PART-INTEN.3SG

‘...people had (previously) died ’

(*Eastern 1909*)

b. *ağa-* ‘to arrive’ (Bergsland 1997:168, adapted):

[...] *ilan ağa-lga-aka-qa-ġ-ulux*

inside arrive-PASS-ABLE.TO-PART-3SG=NEG

‘...one could not get [to]’

(*Eastern 1909*)

- **The unaccusative test passes:** unaccusative verbs may undergo passivization.

#### Results of the syntactic tests:

| Syntactic Property                   | Active | Passive | Aleut |
|--------------------------------------|--------|---------|-------|
| Agentive <i>by</i> -phrase           | ✗      | ✓       | ?     |
| Control of subject-oriented adjuncts | ✓      | ✗       | ✓     |
| Binding of anaphors                  | ✓      | ✗       | ✓     |
| Non-agentive ("unaccusative") verbs  | ✓      | ✗       | ✓     |

## 4 Conclusion

- I argued that the Aleut non-promotional construction is an active construction and not a passive as has been traditionally described.
  - ◊ Subjects in non-promotional constructions in Aleut may control into intentional clauses which I analyze as subject-oriented adjuncts.
  - ◊ Reflexive pronouns in Aleut require an antecedent with matching person and number features, explaining variation in syntactic behavior between the indefinite and definite reading of non-promotional constructions with reflexive verbs.
  - ◊ Morphology is an unreliable indicator of voice (Maling and O’Connor 2014).
- Preliminary research on the language based on existing documentation reveals areas of the grammar that require more attention to help guide future documentation efforts.

### Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Anna Berge, Moses Dirks, Joan Maling, Cathy O’Connor and participants of the Unangam Tunuu practicum at CoLang 2016 for helpful comments at various stages of this project. The current project is supported in part by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. #1500841 (CoLang 2016). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. All errors are my own.