

Syntactic Ambiguity: Non-Promotional “Passives” in Unangam Tunuu (Aleut)

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Introduction

- Non-promotional passives are constructions in which the underlying subjects become suppressed or demoted whereas objects remain in-situ.
- Unangam Tunuu (or Aleut), a language of Alaska, has promotional and non-promotional passives:
 - (1) Promotional passive (Berge & Dirks 2016):
Hla-s kidu-lga-qa-s.
boys-ABS.PL help-PASS-PART-3PL
'The boys were helped.'
 - (2) Non-promotional passive (Berge & Dirks 2016):
Hla-s kidu-lga-qa-â.
boy-ABS.PL help-PASS-PART-3SG
'Someone/We helped the boys.'

Hypotheses

- Non-promotional “passives” in Unangam Tunuu are:
 - (3) Passives with thematically empty null subjects:
∅ Hla-â kidu-lga-qa-â.
boy-ABS.SG help-PASS-PART-3SG
'Someone/We helped the boy.'
 - (4) Actives with phonologically null but syntactically active thematic *pro*:
pro Hla-â kidu-lga-qa-â.
boy-ABS.SG help-PASS-PART-3SG
'Someone/We helped the boy.'

Proposal

This analysis suggests that non-promotional “passives” in Unangam Tunuu are in fact actives. Promotional passives in the language, suggested to have developed from non-promotional “passives” via analogy (Bergsland 1997), thus developed from active morphology.

Data: Existing Documentation

- Based on existing documentation resulting in around 184 occurrences of non-promotional constructions:
 - ◊ Atkan Aleut School Grammar (Bergsland & Dirks 1981)
 - ◊ Portions of the Aleut Dictionary (Bergsland 1994)
 - ◊ Aleut Grammar (Bergsland 1997)
 - ◊ Current literature (Berge 2010a, 2010b, 2011, to appear)
 - ◊ Handouts from CoLang 2016 (Berge & Dirks 2016)

Diagnosing Non-Promotional “Passives”: Passives or Actives?

- To distinguish between a passive and active analysis, Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) employ four syntactic tests on Polish and Ukrainian, two closely related languages, with diametrically opposite results:

Syntactic Property	Active	Passive	Polish	Ukrainian
Is agentive <i>by</i> -phrase possible?	✗	✓	✗	✓
Can subject-oriented adjuncts be controlled?	✓	✗	✓	✗
Can unaccusative verbs undergo passivization?	✓	✗	✓	✗
Can anaphors be bound?	✓	✗	✓	✗

By-Phrase Test

- In promotional passives, the agent may be re-introduced via *ilaan* (Eastern) or *hadagaan* (Atkan) (Bergsland 1997).
- The *by*-phrase test is inconclusive: no occurrences of *by*-phrases found in non-promotional constructions.

Control Test

- Intentional clauses that function as clauses of purpose in Unangam Tunuu are subject-oriented adjuncts.
 - ◊ As a subordinate clause, the intentional clause may function as an adverbial (Berge, to appear).
 - ◊ The subject of the intentional clause is coreferential with the subject of the main clause (Bergsland 1997).
- Non-promotional constructions with intentional clauses are found in the data (Bergsland 1997:241):
 - (5) [*ngaan tuman*
DAT.3SG 1PL.REFL
kanaâ(t)-sxa-aâgan-aan]
bow-PASS-INTEN.3SG=ENCL
waâga-lga-ku-â
come-PASS-IND-3SG
'we came to worship (lit. bow ourselves to) Him'
 - (6) [*aniqdu-â iqidgu-lga-aâgan-aan*]
child-ABS.SG cut-PASS-INTEN.3SG=ENCL
waâga-lga-qa-â
come-PASS-PART-3SG
'one came to circumcise the child'

Unaccusative Test

- Canonical unaccusative verbs are found in the passive:
 - (7) [...] *asâxa-lga-qa-gan*
die-PASS-PART-INTEN.3SG
'...people had died' (Bergsland 1997:295, adapted)
 - (8) [...] *ilan aâga-lga-aka-qa-â-ulux*
inside arrive-PASS-able.to-PART-3SG=NEG
'...one could not get [to]' (Bergsland 1997:168, adapted)

Binding Test

- In an impersonal reading of the non-promotional construction, reflexive pronouns are lost (Bergsland 1997:173):
 - (9) a. *txidix haaâgani-ku-s*
3PL.REFL stop-IND-3PL
'they stopped'
 - b. [...] *haaâgani-lga-ku-â*
stop-PASS-IND-3SG
'when they [...] stopped'

Active Impersonal reading
- In a ‘we’ reading of the non-promotional construction, reflexive pronouns are retained (Bergsland 1997:173, adapted):
 - (10) a. *ngaan txin*
DAT.3SG 3SG.REFL
iqaâgi-ti-ku-u
paddle-CAUS-IND-AN.3SG
'he paddles to it'
 - b. *ngaan tuman*
DAT.3SG 1PL.REFL
iqaâgi-sxa-lix
paddle-PASS-CONJ.3SG
'we paddle to it'

Active 'We' reading
- Like Irish, Unangam Tunuu reflexive pronouns require an antecedent with matching person and number features:
 - ◊ The subject in the impersonal reading lacks the necessary number and/or person features to bind onto reflexives.
 - ◊ The subject in the ‘we’ reading contains the necessary number and person features to bind onto reflexives.

Results

Non-promotional constructions in Unangam Tunuu pattern syntactically like an active:

Syntactic Property	Active	Unangam Tunuu
Agentive <i>by</i> -phrase	✗	?
Subject-oriented adjuncts	✓	✓
Unaccusative verbs	✓	✓
Binding of anaphors	✓	✓

Discussion: Syntactic Change

- According to Maling & O'Connor (2015), structural ambiguity can lead to syntactic change (i.e. via reanalysis).
- Promotional passives may be completely ambiguous with non-promotional constructions (Berge & Dirks 2016):
 - (11) *Hla-â kidu-lga-qa-â.*
boy-ABS.SG help-PASS-PART-3SG
'The boy was helped.' or 'Someone/We helped the boy.'
- Bergsland (1997:170, emphasis mine): “the personal passive seems to have developed in Eastern Aleut from the non-promotional use by **analogy** of the anaphoric type and have spread from there to later Atkan”:
 - (12) Anaphoric marking (Bergsland & Dirks 1981:10):
Piitra-m kidu-ku-â.
Peter-REL.SG help-IND-AN.3SG
'Peter is helping him (or her)'.
- ◊ Person restriction: agreement cannot occur with unexpressed 1st/2nd person objects (Merchant 2011).
- Preference in the Atkan dialect to use non-promotional constructions w/ 1st/2nd person objects over promotional passives w/ 1st/2nd person subjects (Bergsland 1997).
- ◊ Extension of person restriction of the anaphoric marking as a factor in the development of promotional passives.
- Directionality of change in function of voice morphology:
 - ◊ Active from passive: Icelandic, Polish, Irish (via reanalysis, Maling & O'Connor 2015).
 - ◊ Passive from active: Kaqchikel (via reanalysis, Broadwell & Duncan 2002), Unangam Tunuu (via analogy).

Selected References

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