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 both promitional and non-promotional passives:
  1. Promotional passive (Berge & Dirks 2016):
     - Hla-ê kidu-lga-qa-s.
     - The boys were helped.
  2. Non-promotional passive (Berge & Dirks 2016):
     - Someone/We helped the boys.

Hypotheses

- Non-promotional “passives” in Unangam Tunuu are: (3)
  1. Passives with thematically empty null subjects:
     - boy-ABS,SG help-PASS-PART-3SG
     - ‘Somebody/We helped the boy.’
  2. Passives with phonologically null but syntactically active thematic pros:
     - pro Hla-ê kidu-lga-qa-s.
     - ‘Someone/We helped the boy.’

Proposition

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 (Berge & 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)

Unaccusative Test

- Canonical unaccusative verbs are found in the passive:
  1. [...] akiq lga-qa-qan die-PASS-PART-INTEN.3SG
     - ‘people had died’ (Bergsland 1997:295, adapted)
  2. [...] qan akiq lga-qa-ja-nul inside active-PASS-able-to-PART-3SG=NEG
     - ‘one could not get to’ (Bergsland 1997:168, adapted)

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactic Property</th>
<th>Active Unangam Tunuu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In agitative by-phrase possible?</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can subject-oriented adjuncts be controlled?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can unaccussative verbs undergo passivization?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can anaphors be bound?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By-Phrase Test

- In promotional passives, the agent may be re-introduced via liakan (Eastern) or hadagaan (Atkan) (Bergsland 1997).
- The by-phrase test is inconcusive: 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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data: (Bergsland 1997:241)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| [ngaan human DAT.3SG 1PL.REFL kana(1)-1,sm-aqan-aan bow-PASS-INTEN.3SG=ENCL woang-lga-ku-s come-PASS-IND-3SG]
| ‘we came to worship (lit. bow ourselves to) Him’ |
| [aniqdu-ê epiduq-lga-aqan-aan child-ABS,SG cut-PASS-INTEN.3SG=ENCL woang-lga-qa-s come-PASS-PART-3SG ‘one came to circumcise the child’] |

Binding Test

- In an impersonal reading of the non-promotional construction, reflexive pronouns are lost (Bergsland 1997:173):
  9. a. tride haajγen-kw-s 3PL.REFL stop-PASS-IND-3SG they stopped
     - Active
  b. [...] haajγen-lga-ku-s stop-PASS-IND-3SG ‘they stopped’
     - Impersonal reading

- We reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data: (Bergsland 1997:173)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ngaan human DAT.3SG 1PL.REFL ipqagi-ti-ku-u paddle-CASU-IND-3SG ‘paddles to it’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. ngaan human DAT.3SG 1PL.REFL ipqagi-ti-ku-u paddie-PASS-CONJ.3SG ‘we paddle to it’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

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

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<tr>
<td>Agentive by-phrase</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject-oriented adjuncts</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaccussative verbs</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binding of anaphors</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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):
     - ‘the boy was helped.’
     - ‘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. Píyí-ta mida kw-u, Peter-REL,SG help-IND-AN.3SG ‘Peter is helping him (or her).’

Selected References


Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Anna Berge, Moses Dirks, Joan Maling, Cathy O’Connor, Michelle Yuan, Nico Baier, Tyler Lau, Erin Donnelly, and participants at CoLang 2016 and BLS 43 for helpful comments. This project is based in part on work supported in part by the National Science Foundation (NSF) under Grant No. #1500841. 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 NSF. All errors are my own.