

Is *-ta* really passive? Distributional Considerations of Passive Marking in Inuktitut

This talk investigates passive constructions in the Cape Dorset dialect of Inuktitut (CDI)¹, a split-ergative language. It has been demonstrated that both antipassive (1) and passive (2) constructions are allowed in Inuktitut (Spreng 2006). However, considering that antipassive constructions are normally found in ergative languages and passive constructions in nominative languages, we should expect to see passive markers only in sentences not marked for ergative case in CDI.

- 1) Oleekie-Ø pirosiaq-nik nuch-i-zu-vini-q
 Oleekie-_{ABS} plant-_{SEC} move-_{ANTIPASS-PAST-REALIS-3SG}
 Agent Patient
 “Oleekie moved the plant”
- 2) Pirosiaq-Ø (Oleekie-mut) nut-ta-vini-q
 Plant-_{ABS} (Oleekie-by) move-_{PASSIVE-REALIS-3SG}
 Patient (Agent)
 “The plant was moved by Oleekie”

The distributional facts elicited with our consultant led to interesting observations. Passive marking in CDI may appear in two distinct positions in relation to the other suffixal morphemes. When in the Voice1 position (3), the *-ta* marker is obligatorily immediately followed by *-u* (‘be’ following Beach 2003) to produce *-tau*. When the passive marker appears in the Voice 2 position (3) it takes the *-ta* form. Only the Voice2 position, *-ta*, is compatible with ergative case marking. In (4) the passive marker *-za*² appears with the agent *qimmi-up* which is marked with ergative case (*-up*). The dative case (*-mut*) instead of ergative (*-up*) on *qimmiq* leads to ungrammaticality. The opposite is true for the sentence in (5), which exhibits the passive marker *-zau*. When the passive is in Voice1 position, ergative case (*-up*) is grammatical on the agent, but dative case (*-mut*) leads to ungrammaticality.

- 3) V – CAUS-VOICE1(-tau) - MODALITY - TENSE - NEG - VOICE2(-ta)- REALIS - PRONOMINAL INFLECTION
- 4) kii-za-vini-nga qimmi-up(*-mut)
 bite-_{PASS-REALIS-GEN.1SG} dog-_{ERG}
 “I got bitten by a dog” (just now)
- 5) kii-zau-qqau-zunga qimmir-mut(*-up)
 bite-_{PASS-PAST-1SG} dog-_{DAT}
 “I got bitten by a dog” (earlier today)

Ergative languages privilege the object position (contra Nom/Acc languages which privilege the subject position) the antipassive construction is a natural option in an ergative language, but not the passive which would be a redundant operation. Given these considerations, are we right in considering the valency decreasing morpheme (*-ta*) as a true passive marker, even when it appears with ergative case marked arguments?

Regardless of whether or not one believes that passive constructions can occur in ergative languages, we still need to explain the fact that when the passive marker appears in Voice1 position with the ‘be’ marker (*-u*) in CDI, it is no longer compatible with ergative case marking. This talk addresses this issue drawing primarily from data elicited with our consultant and also considers previous descriptive and theoretical research on Inuktitut.

- BEACH, Matthew. 2003. “Asymmetries between Passivization and Antipassivization in the *Tarramiutut* Subdialect of Inuktitut”, in M. Butt and T. Holloway King (eds.) *Proceedings of the LFG03 Conference*, CSLI Publications.
- SPRENG, Bettina. 2006. “Antipassive Morphology and Case Assignment in Inuktitut” in A. Johns, D. Massam and J. Ndayiragije (eds.) *Ergativity: Emerging Issues*, Springer, pp. 247-270.

¹ Thank you to our consultant Oleekie Etungat, and to Alana Johns for encouraging our work on Inuktitut and for her advice.

² [z] and [t] are allophones.