

Unexpected non-anaphoric marking in Aleut

The Aleut reference-tracking system is well-known for its typologically unusual features. Some of these features include the marking of non-subject anaphoric constituent heads (e.g. non-overt direct object, possessor, etc., see Bergsland 1997, Fortescue 1985); In this famous example (Fortescue, 1985:108), the verbal inflection marks the possessor of the object, not the object itself:

- (1) *ada-ngis* *kidu-ku-ngis*
 father-3PL.ANAPH help-IND-3PL.ANAPH
 'He is helping **their** father'

Other unusual features of this system include non-canonical number marking (e.g. mismatches in number marking between argument and verb, see Bergsland 1997, Leer 1991, Sadock 2000); and the use of case marking for tracking anaphora rather than arguments on the verb. These three systems overlap in ways that makes their functions difficult to distinguish (Sadock 2000), not least because of the use of a limited set of morphemes for all of these functions.

The focus of work on the Aleut reference-tracking system has been on where anaphora is used; on the link between anaphora and the absence of an independent way of expressing pronominal 3rd person; and on the independence of number marking and anaphoric marking. Other important aspects of the system have escaped attention, including common instances of what Bergsland calls 'zero-anaphora.' 'Zero-anaphora' turns out to be as common as expected anaphoric marking. In the following examples (Bergsland 1997:174), anaphoric marking would be expected in (2) because of the missing head of the postposition *ngaan*; in (3), the object of the second clause, *taangaŋ* 'water', is anaphoric:

- (2) *taanga-ŋ* *ngaan* *sakaaga-ala-agiim*
 water-ABS 3SG.DAT come.down-PASS.INST-ANT.4SG
 'when the water was brought down to him,'

aman *taanga-ŋ* *yu-qada-agiim* *tunu-ku-ŋ* *awa*
 that.one.invisible.ABS.SG water-ABS pour.out-finish-ANT.4SG speak-IND-3SG that.one.ABS.SG
 'he poured the water out and said'

- (3) *taanga-m* *anŋaŋi-i* *igiim* *u-ula-angan*
 water-REL person-3SG.POSS 4SG.DAT go.to-PASS.INST-ANT.3SG
 'when the water was brought to him,'

igiim *ŋula-asa-qali-ku-ŋ* *awa*
 4SG.DAT wash-INST-begin-IND-3SG that.one.ABS.SG
 'he began to wash himself with it'

It has been noted that Aleut may mark topics rather than subjects between clauses (Bergsland 1997, Fortescue 1985); in examples (2) and (3), Bergsland notes that the number reference tracks the topic, and not the clausal subject. In fact, the reference system should be understood with respect to much larger entities than the sentence. There is little difference between these two examples to explain the lack of anaphoric marking or the different uses of third and fourth persons, without examining the greater context.

In this paper, I will present evidence from oral texts for the role of discourse in reference tracking in Aleut. Thus, the different number marking and lack of anaphora in sentences such as (2) and (3) may be related to the relative topical salience of the arguments; non-topics are less likely to be tracked with anaphoric marking. This holds true not just for anaphoric marking, but for other aspects of the reference tracking system as well, including switch-reference marking between clauses (which is also not always consistent with the linguistic literature). The reference system is not tied to verbal argument structure, and the reference morphology is somewhat independent of the head to which it attaches. The importance of marking person or subject is thus highly diminished. As such, reference-tracking has to be seen in the greater context, as a discourse-level feature, and ultimately, understanding how it functions will require an understanding of larger linguistic units.

The discussion of Aleut reference has wider implications. Aleut differs greatly in its reference system from the only other language group to which it is related, Eskimo. Although some features may be explained through areal diffusion (Leer 1991), the importance of topic tracking is shared with Eskimo and may be characteristic of other clause-chaining languages and/or ergative languages. Aleut may, therefore, merely reflect one end of a continuum of topic-tracking capabilities.