

West Greenlandic antipassive*

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1. Introduction

Antipassive is a construction often found in ergative languages which is used to express transitive meaning where the object is defocussed or less definite than in its counterpart, the ergative transitive clause. The antipassive verb is often (but not always) complex compared to the transitive verb, and the object often has oblique case marking, while the transitive object has absolutive or nominative case, morphologically unmarked in West Greenlandic¹. The antipassive construction is often intransitive in terms of verbal agreement; in languages with both subject and object agreement in transitive clauses the antipassive verb only shows subject agreement, parallel to intransitive verbs^{2,3}.

- (1) a. *matu amma-r-paa*
door.NOM open-[+TR]-IND.3SG.3SG
'He/she opened the door.'
- b. *matu-mik amma-a-voq*
door-INST open-AP-IND.3SG
'He/she opened a/the door.'
- (2) a. *Jensi-p tuttu toqu-p-paa*
Jens-ERG reindeer.NOM die-[+TR]-IND.3SG.3SG
'Jens killed the reindeer.'

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¹ West Greenlandic is a polysynthetic language, Eskimo-Aleut language family, with morphological ergativity: the subject of transitive clauses has ergative case marking, the object and the subject of intransitive clauses has nominative case (zero marking).

² Where no source is given, the examples stem from my own field work. The morphological analysis is mine, also with examples from other sources.

³ The following abbreviations are used:

ALL=Allative, AP=Antipassive, ERG=Ergative, HAB=Habitual, IND=Indicative, INST=Instrumental, INTR=Intransitive, NIQ=(nominalizing affix), NOM=Nominative, PL=Plural, POSS=Possessive, SG=Singular, TR=Transitive.

- b. Jensi tutto-mik toqu-t-si-voq
Jens.NOM reindeer-INST die-[+TR]-AP-IND.3SG
 ‘Jens killed a/the reindeer.’

In the following I will deal with the antipassive in West Greenlandic. In traditional eskimological grammar it has been termed ‘half-transitive’⁴, reflecting its hybrid status between a transitive construction (it takes an object) and an intransitive construction (it only shows subject agreement, like the intransitive verb, and unlike the transitive verb that agrees with both subject and object).

The morphological complexity that is often found with antipassive verbs as well as the semantic effects on the interpretation of the object have led to the view that the antipassive is derived from the transitive verb. This view is explicitly held within Relational Grammar, where Antipassive is seen as a detransitivizing operation that demotes the direct object to the status of an oblique adjunct.

Baker (1988) gives an analysis of Antipassive as a grammatical function changing operation that he suggests is an instance of Noun Incorporation universally⁵. This analysis has been adopted by Bittner (1994), Bittner & Hale (1996a, b) as part of a general theory of structural case assignment.

Kalmár (1979) is an exception, since he takes neither construction to be derived from the other, but considers both the transitive and the antipassive construction to be basic in their own right. The different interpretation of the objects stems from the function in discourse of the two clause types: with a given (“old”) object referent the transitive, ergative clause is chosen, while the antipassive clause with the oblique object is chosen for the introduction of a new object referent.

The morphological case marking of the arguments in the antipassive construction shows the same pattern as transitive clauses in NOM-ACC languages, with nominative case on the subject and marked case, here instrumental, on the object. This gives support to the other analytical trend, namely that the antipassive construction is a transitive construction on NOM-ACC basis. Some of the proponents of this view are (for Inuit languages) Bok-Bennema (1991), who analyses the antipassive affix as an auxiliary affixal verb that takes a VP complement and is featurally

⁴ The term ‘half-transitive’ stems from Kleinschmidt (1851, p. 55) and has been used in much grammatical work on Greenlandic.

⁵ Baker (1996, p. 240) refers to his 1988-book “for a general analysis of antipassive that takes it to be a type of noun incorporation universally.”

specified for assigning accusative case to the object, and Johns (2001), who deals primarily with the discourse function and distribution of the antipassive in Inuktitut dialects.

As a matter of fact, West Greenlandic can be taken as giving empirical support for both views, since a large number of verbs have a transitivizing morpheme inside the antipassive morpheme, indicating that in this case the antipassive verb is derived from the transitive verb, while another large number of verbs show complementary distribution of transitivizing and antipassive morphemes, suggesting that both constructions may be derived from the same root. In what follows I will try to show that

- in West Greenlandic the antipassive is a verbal, not a nominal affix, that is, Baker's (1988)-claim about the universality of antipassive as a type of Noun Incorporation should be modified,
- in West Greenlandic not all instances of antipassive are derived from transitive verbs; at least for a major part of verbs it seems to be the case that the transitive and the antipassive morphemes are in complementary distribution, suggesting that they are alternative ways of forming transitive verbs, one on the ERG-NOM, the other on the NOM-ACC pattern, and
- the different interpretation of the object of ergative transitive and antipassive verbs is related to the pronominal agreement on the verb more than to the particular type of case marking on the object.

2. Is Antipassive a nominal affix?

Baker (1988) argues for an analysis of antipassive as a nominal affix, because it seems to pattern with canonical noun incorporation. In West Greenlandic the antipassive verb can take an object with instrumental case, and the incorporated noun can be modified, also with a phrase in instrumental case, as e.g.

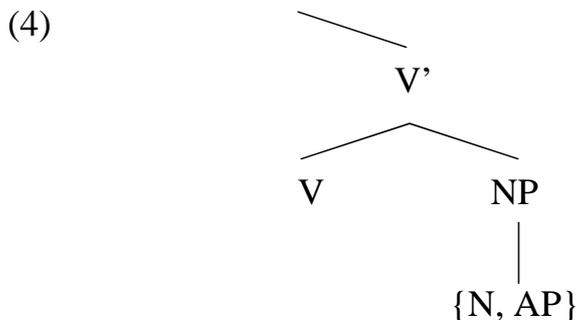
- (3) a. piili-mik tungujortu-mik pi-si-voq
car-INST blue-INST thing-buy-IND.3SG
 'He bought a blue car.'
- b. tungujortu-mik piili-si-voq
blue-INST car-buy-IND.3SG
 'He bought a blue car.'

Baker suggests that the antipassive morpheme in languages like West Greenlandic, where it occurs postverbally, is specified as a suffix, in contrast to incorporated nouns that are roots and incorporate preverbally.

There are, however, several arguments against seeing the antipassive as nominal in West Greenlandic:

- the antipassivized verb takes verbal inflection: the obligatory mood inflection and subject agreement;
- it can be nominalized with deverbal nominalizing affix;
- it can be negated: West Greenlandic negation is affixal and affixes only to verbs;
- it can be modified with ad-verbal affixes.

But possibly the most striking argument against applying Baker's theory to the West Greenlandic antipassive construction is structural. Both the (nominal) antipassive morpheme and the incorporated root/stem originate in the same position, as heads of the complement of the verb:



Thus they should not be able to cooccur, but in fact they can. As the following examples show, a transitive noun-incorporating affixal verb can be antipassivized, parallel to any other transitive verb in West Greenlandic.

- (5) a. *meeqqat tujuulu-ler-pai*
children sweater-provide.with-IND.3SG.3PL
 ‘She dressed the children in sweaters.’
- b. *meeqqa-nik tujuulu-li-i-voq*
child-INST.PL sweater-provide.with-AP-IND.3SG
 ‘She dressed the children in sweaters.’
- (6) a. *pi-g(i-v)aa*
thing-have.as-IND.3SG.3SG
 ‘He has it as his thing, i.e. he owns it.’
- b. *pi-gi-nnip-poq*
thing-have.as-AP-IND.3SG
 ‘He has something as his thing, i.e. he owns something.’

In Bittner (1994) the antipassive noun takes a complement, the object of the antipassivized verb. Structures like the ones shown in (5b, 6b) would have to incorporate the head of the object NP, i.e. the head of the complement-of-the-complement, in violation of the Head Movement Constraint (Travis 1984).

3. Antipassive morphology in West Greenlandic

Some verbs alternate freely (i.e. without overt marking on the verb) between ergative and antipassive constructions:

- (7) a. Tumasi-p neqi neri-vaa
Tumasi-ERG meat eat-IND.3SG.3SG
 ‘Tumasi ate the meat.’
 b. Tumasi neqi-mik neri-voq
Tumasi meat-INST eat-IND.3SG
 ‘Tumasi ate the/some meat.’

Most verbs, however, form the antipassive by means of overt morphology, either affixing the antipassive morpheme to the transitive verb (=root + transitivity morpheme) or directly to the root itself.

The antipassive morphemes in West Greenlandic⁶ are the following, from Fortescue (1996), who also provides information of the context in which they are used.

3.1 Antipassive morphemes in West Greenlandic -*ller-*

This affix is not very frequent, and it is only used with certain verbs, which can be listed.

- (8) Meeqqat neqi-mik aa-ller-put
children meat-INST fetch-AP-IND.3PL
 ‘The children fetched the/some meat.’

⁶ Inuit/Inuktitut dialects vary with respect to the number of antipassive morphemes and the frequency in use of the antipassive construction (Johns 2001). In West Greenlandic it is commonly used. I will not deal with the discourse function of the ergative / antipassive constructions here. See below concerning the definiteness effect of the object in the two constructions.

-nnig-

Not a very frequent affix either, except in combination with the transitive affixal verb *-gi-/ri-* ‘have as’ and the large number of verb stems that include this affix in their internal morphology.

- (9) a. Tumasi asa-nnip-poq
Tumasi love-AP-IND.3SG
 ‘Tumasi is in love.’
 b. Tumasi oqaloqatigi-nnip-poq
Tumasi talk.to-AP-IND-3SG
 ‘Tumasi talked to somebody.’

-i-/si-

This is by far the most frequent affix, the two forms being considered allomorphs with the same historical origin.⁷ *-si-* is found mostly after t-final stems and vowel stems, while *-i-* is found mostly after r-final and g-final stems. On analogy with the *si-* form which affixes to the transitive verb, the *i-* form has traditionally been taken to truncate a stem-final consonant (Fortescue 1984, p. 85), thus not contradicting the view that the antipassive verb is derived from the transitive verb. Note the semantic distinction between (10b) and (10c). It has often been claimed that the oblique object in the antipassive construction is optional, however, this can only mean that both options, the antipassive construction with and without an overt object are grammatical, not that they are identical.

- (10) a. Kaali-p nanoq toqup-paa
Kaali-ERG bear kill-IND.3SG
 ‘Kaali killed the polar bear.’
 b. Kaali nannu-mik toqut-si-voq
K.NOM bear-INST kill-AP-IND.3SG
 ‘Kaali killed a polar bear.’
 c. Kaali toqut-si-voq
Kaali kill-AP-IND.3SG
 ‘Kaali is a killer/murderer.’
 (11) a. Aani-p erro-r-paa
Aani-ERG wash-TR-IND.3SG.3SG
 ‘Aani washed the dishes/the clothes.’

⁷ *-i-/si-* derives from Proto-Eskimo ^x*ði* (Fortescue 1996, Fortescue et al. 1994). *-si-* was earlier differentiated, after t-final stems being pronounced [si], after vowel stems [s&i]. This distinction was reflected in the old, but not in the new orthography, and it is probably not found in the speech of people today (Fortescue 1996).

- b. Aani erro-r-si-voq
Aani wash-TR-AP-IND.3SG
 ‘Aani washed the clothes (did the clothes-washing).’

While *-si-* does not truncate the transitive morpheme, the other allomorph *-i-* replaces the transitive morpheme.

- (12) a. Aani matu-mik amma-a-voq⁸ (=1b)
Aani door-INST open-AP-IND.3SG
 ‘Aani opened a/the door.’
 b. Aani erru-i-voq
Aani wash-AP-IND.3SG
 ‘Aani washed up.’

The transitive stem *error-* ‘wash’ has two antipassive forms: *error-si-* as in (11b) and *erru-i-* as in (12b) with different lexicalized meaning. This phenomenon is found with several verbs.

The derivation of the antipassive verbs in (12a, b) shows the condition described in the Truncation rule of Aronoff (1976, p. 88), where in the case of West Greenlandic antipassive X=transitive verb stem, Y=antipassive verb stem.

(13) Truncation rule

A truncation rule deletes a morpheme which is internal to an affix, in the following general manner:

$$[[\text{root} + \text{A}]_X + \text{B}]_Y \\ 1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad \rightarrow \quad 1 \quad \emptyset \quad 3$$

where X and Y are major lexical categories.

This behaviour is found only with the *-i-* allomorph of the antipassive affix, and seeing that it is (almost) always in complementary distribution with the transitive *-r-/-g-* and has the same function, namely creating a semantically transitive verb, the question arises whether they could have the same position in the derivation. This position is likely to be a light verb, transitivity *v* (Hale & Keyser 1993, Chomsky 1995), that is, both a transitivity and an antipassive affix can be realizations of *v*.

⁸ In many cases *-i-* assimilates to a preceding vowel: *amma-i-* → *amma-a-*.

In the Distributed Morphology-approach to derivational morphology (Marantz 1997), roots are category neutral, and their syntactic environment determine their word class and syntactic properties.

West Greenlandic morphology seems to present a very clear illustration of the syntactic approach to morphology, and the divide between morphology and syntax is by no means clear. Because of the agglutinating, only partly fusional character of word formation, the individual morphemes are often discrete, and they provide empirical evidence for syntactic categories as for instance the transitive v , as well as applicative heads. Morpheme order mirrors syntactic order in illustration of the Mirror Principle (Baker 1985), as evidenced by the different semantic effects when for instance aspectual or adverbial affixes take different positions in a morpheme string. The examples in (14) are adapted from Fortescue (1984, p. 286).

- (14) a. *nere-qqi-ler-sar-poq*
eat-again-begin-HAB-IND.3SG
 ‘He would begin to eat again (repeatedly).’
 b. *neri-sa-le-qqip-poq*
eat-HAB-begin-again-IND.3SG
 ‘He again began to eat (repeatedly).’

At the same time, derivation is recursive: the same category can enter the derivation several times, if the environment is suitable, as in the following example, where an antipassive verb, *aa-lle-* ‘fetch’, is transitivized with the applicative affix *-qqu-* ‘tell to’. The resulting transitive verb *aa-lle-qqu-* ‘tell to fetch’ is antipassivized (whereby the object is defocused).

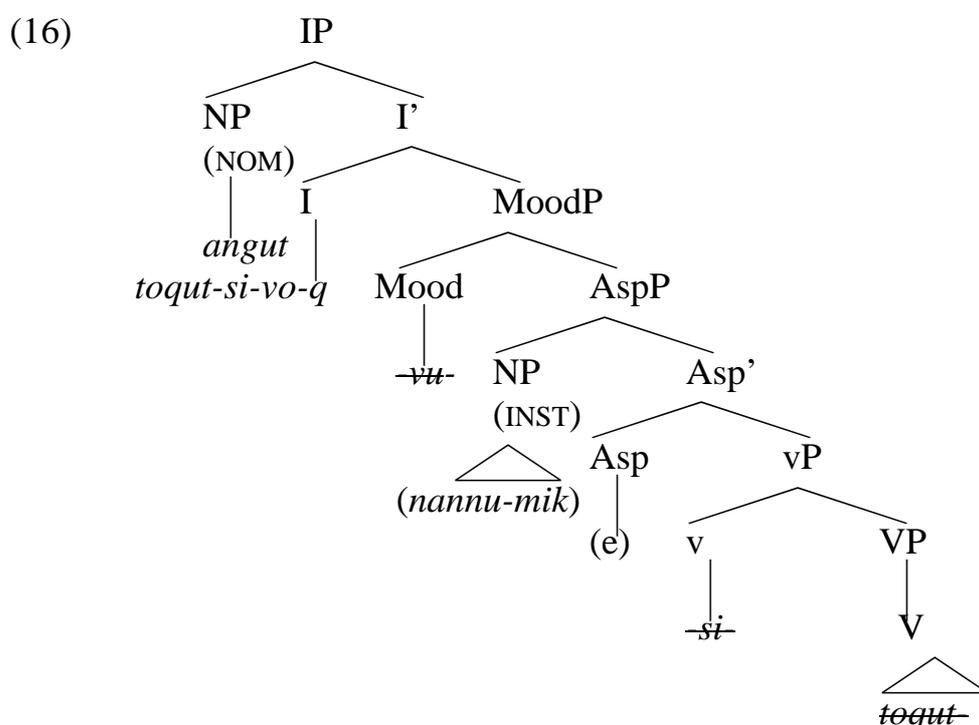
- (15) *meeqqa-mut neqi-mik aa-lle-qqu-si-voq*
child-ALL meat-INST fetch-AP-tell.to-AP-IND.3SG
 ‘She told the child to fetch (some) meat.’ (Fortescue 1984, p.270)

To sum up, my suggestion is that transitive and antipassive affixes are both realizations of v , and they have the same function: they derive a transitive verb which may follow one of the two major patterns in West Greenlandic, the transitive with ergative case on the subject and nominative case on the object, or the antipassive with nominative case on the subject and instrumental case on the object - equivalent to the pattern in transitive constructions in NOM-ACC languages with marked case on the object.

4. Antipassive clause structure

The question is now whether the antipassive clause in West Greenlandic has the same structure as transitive clauses in NOM-ACC languages.

It has been argued, also in relation to West Greenlandic and other Inuit languages, that the nominative argument is licensed in SpecIP, regardless of function (Bok-Bennema 1991, Johns 1992, Bittner 1994). On the assumption that the instrumental object of the antipassive clause is equivalent to the accusative object structurally, the clause structure should include an aspectual object licensing phrase (cf. Grimshaw 1990, Alexiadou 1999, Borer 2000), giving the following general clause structure⁹:



5. Nominalization

Nominalization structures in Greenlandic support the idea that the type of clause structure shown in (16) can indeed be the structure of the antipassive verb.

All verbs can be nominalized with *-neq* (underlying NIQ) that affixes to the verb stem, forming an abstract deverbal noun. However, ergative and antipassive verbs have different argument structure under nominalization.

⁹ West Greenlandic verbs are obligatorily inflected for Mood, here indicative, while Tense is not an obligatory category. The example shown here implies recursive derivation, as the verb stem *toqut-* ‘kill’ is derived from the root *toqu-* ‘die’ + *t* (=transitivizing morpheme).

It has been shown for NOM-ACC languages that event (process) nominals have the same structure with respect to internal arguments and adverbial modification as the corresponding verbs, cf. Grimshaw (1990), Alexiadou (1999), Borer (2000). West Greenlandic antipassives also retain their internal argument structure when nominalized, and the subject/agent can become a possessor of the nominalized verb with the same interpretation, parallel to nominals in NOM-ACC languages. Case marking of the internal argument(s) is the same in both the antipassive clause and the nominal.

- (17) a. angut nannu-mik toqut-si-voq
 man *bear-INST* *kill-AP-IND.3SG*
 ‘The man killed a (polar) bear.’
 b. angut-ip nannu-mik toqut-si-ner-a
 man-ERG *bear-INST* *kill-AP-NIQ-POSS.3SG/3SG*
 ‘The man’s killing of a/the polar bear.’
 c. nannu-mik toqut-si-neq inerteqquta-a-voq
 bear-INST *kill-AP-NIQ* *forbidden-be-IND.3SG*
 ‘Polar bear killing is forbidden.’

(17a) shows the antipassive clause corresponding to the nominalized clause in (17b) with the subject as a possessor of the nominal. In (17c) the nominal is used as the subject of an impersonal clause.

Compare these examples to the examples in (18), which show nominalization of a transitive verb. It is not possible to have an object in this case. The nominal can have a possessor argument, but semantically this is the object of the verb, while the possessor of the nominalized antipassive verb is equivalent to the subject. The argument with nominative case becomes the possessor argument in both cases, and only the antipassive deverbal noun can retain an object.

- (18) a. angut-ip nanoq toqup-paa
 man-ERG *bear* *kill-IND.3SG.3SG*
 ‘The man killed the polar bear.’
 b. angut-ip toqun-ner-a
 man-ERG *kill-NIQ-POSS.3SG/3SG*
 ‘The killing of the man.’
 (i.e. ‘the man’ is the object of ‘kill’)

Assuming that the nominative argument is in SpecIP, this indicates that only the antipassive verb has structure related to arguments below IP, and

that only this part of the structure is maintained in deverbal nominals, i.e. only antipassives have an aspectual object licensing phrase, corresponding to transitive clause structure in NOM-ACC languages. The ergative clause has no corresponding projection for object licensing, the nominative object is licensed in IP.

6. Interpretation of the object

In NOM-ACC languages the interpretation of the object in transitive clauses has been related to the existence of the object licensing AspP (or AgrP). However, the instrumental object of West Greenlandic antipassives often gets a defocussed, indefinite or less definite interpretation, contrary to expectations, if the structure is the same.

A possible explanation for this could be that the definite interpretation of the object with marked case does not necessarily stem from the case marking pattern alone and the specific structure associated with it, but is determined also by other factors. In West Greenlandic the agreement on the verb is pronominal, and the argument NP corresponding to the verbal agreement is omissible. It is possible that definiteness of the arguments is determined through the presence vs. absence of the pronominal agreement as much as through case marking of arguments. Compare the following examples:

- (19) a. Toqup-paa
 kill-IND.3SG.3SG
 ‘He killed it.’
 b. Toqut-si-voq
 kill-AP-IND.3SG
 ‘He killed (something) / He is a murderer.’

(19a) with subject-object agreement on the verb has a definite interpretation of the object, while (19b) with only subject agreement may refer to an indefinite, unspecified object or even be interpreted as having no object reference at all. Bittner (1987) has investigated the interpretation of the object in the antipassive construction in relation to definiteness/specificity and operators of negation, quantification, aspect etc. in detail. She shows that the indefinite interpretation associated often associated with the antipassive is not absolute, but does not discuss the relation to the interpretation of the verbal agreement. However, I will leave this issue for future work.

7. The ergative subject

If my suggestions about the structure of West Greenlandic antipassive and deverbal nominals are valid, there are some implications from this to the position of the ergative subject, which has been the topic of many linguistic studies. For West Greenlandic alone there are several suggestions.

Bok-Bennema (1991) suggests that IP in transitive clauses has a dual case feature, that takes care of both nominative and ergative¹⁰ case assignment to object and subject.

Johns (1992) builds her analysis of ergativity in Inuktitut on the parallelism between the inflectional paradigms of the transitive and the possessive constructions and derives the ergative transitive clause from a possessed participle, with the ergative subject as an outer specifier to AgrvP (=IP).

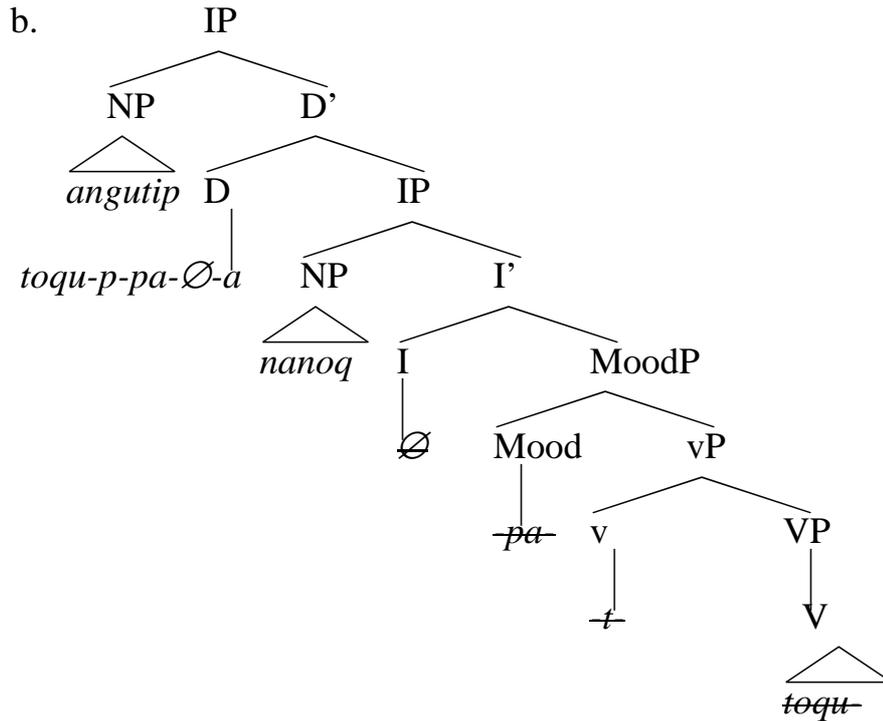
Fortescue (1995) shows the historical evolution of ergativity in Inuit languages, also relating the transitive and the possessive constructions, and describes the internal structure of the agreement morpheme, which also casts light on the possible clause structure of the transitive clause.

Bittner (1994) and Bittner & Hale (1996a, b) have been very influential in their case theory, comprising West Greenlandic, in which they suggest that the ergative subject originates as a VP-adjunct, case marked in its base generated position. However, considering the nominalization facts presented here, one would expect the ergative subject of the transitive clause to be present with the deverbal nominal, which, as we have seen, it is not. This indicates that the ergative subject is structurally in a higher position. My suggestion is that the ergative subject in West Greenlandic¹¹ is structurally equivalent to a possessor argument in a possessed nominal, as shown in (20).

- (20) a. angut-ip nanoq toqu-p-paa
man-ERG bear.NOM die-[+TR]-IND.3SG.3SG
 ‘The man killed the polar bear.’

¹⁰ Bok-Bennema suggests using GENITIVE for both possessor and transitive subject, since the morphological case is the same, and moreover, the transitive and the possessive inflectional paradigms are near identical. Here I have used ERGATIVE for both. The important thing to note is that they have identical case marking and inflection.

¹¹ This structure does not necessarily carry over to other ergative languages. More studies based on these ideas are necessary in order to establish whether all ergative languages have the same structure. However, see Alexiadou (1999, p. 13) who suggests a similar generalization, based on communication with Mark Baker.



There are some structural and terminological differences between (20) and the clause structures suggested by Bok-Bennema and Johns, but I believe that in essence they have some degree of equivalence. Bok-Bennema's dual case feature is suggested to reside in two separate heads. The structure that Johns suggests has two specifiers, corresponding to SpecDP and SpecIP in (20).

8. Conclusion

I have tried to show that the antipassive affix in West Greenlandic is verbal, not nominal, and that it is a realization of v° , that is, there are two types of transitive constructions in the language, one is the transitive verb on the ERG-NOM pattern, the other an antipassive verb on the NOM-ACC pattern. There are two antipassive derivations; one derives antipassive from a transitive verb, the other is derived directly from the root, in complementary distribution with the transitive (ERG-NOM) derivation. The NOM-ACC pattern of the antipassive verb is confirmed by the structure of the deverbal nominal, that retains aspectual structure of the verb under nominalization. The ergative subject is licensed in a position higher than the nominative argument, evidenced by the fact that a nominalized transitive verb on the ERGATIVE-NOMINATIVE pattern can have no internal arguments.

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