

On stative/active intransitive split within tripartite alignment: A case of Kuril Ainu

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Ainu, the only non-Japonic language of Japan, was gradually pushed from Honshū to the north so that “northern Hokkaidō was occupied by ethnic Ainu by c. 1000 CE, southern Sakhalin by c. 1300 CE, and the Kurile Islands... as late as c. 1500–1600 CE.” (Janhunen 2022: 63)

This paper focuses on the least documented Kuril variety of Ainu, which disappeared in the early 20th century without any substantial texts left. Using both published and archival Kuril Ainu materials, we attempt to reconstruct its system of organizing grammatical relations.

Just like Hokkaidō Ainu, Kuril Ainu shows mixed alignment in verbal indexing being nominative-accusative in 1SG, neutral in 2nd and 3rd SG/PL, and tripartite in 1PL exclusive and inclusive. We assume that like in Hokkaidō Ainu, 1PL inclusive in Kuril Ainu is marked on the verb by *an-* for the transitive subject (A), *-an* for the intransitive subject (S), and *i-* for the object (O), which presumably also have a number of other functions conventionally gathered under the ‘4th person’ label, for example, the impersonal (‘(some)one, people’), 2nd person honorific, and logophoric functions. However, unlike any other Ainu variety, Kuril Ainu demonstrates an additional stative/active intransitive split within the 4th person by marking the subject of stative predicates (So) with *i-*, which is the object marker, and the subject of agentive predicates (Sa) with the regular intransitive subject marker *-an*.

- (1) *i-okay hi* {4.O-exist.PL Q} ‘Is someone alive?’ (KS #312)
i-omke wa {4.O-cough FIN} ‘Someone coughed.’ (KS #426, #462)
i-mokor-ci wa {4.O-sleep-PL FIN} ‘People slept.’ (KS #1097, #1099)
i-merayke {4.O-be.cold} ‘Someone felt cold.’ (Krasheninnikov 1755-II: 187)
i-mos wa {4.O-wake FIN} ‘Someone woke up.’ (Dykowski 1891: 29)
i-ru wa {4.O-melt FIN} ‘Something melted.’ (Dykowski 1891: 29)
i-wor-osma {4.O-water-enter} ‘Something sank.’ (Dykowski 1891: 33)
tanto i-pirka {today 4.O-be.good} ‘Today (the weather) is good.’ (Torii 1903: 131)
- (2) *sattek ek-an* {be.thin come.SG-4.S} ‘Someone came on foot.’ (KS #295)
ironno-an {catch.prey-4.S} ‘Someone caught prey.’ (KS #525)
kunne-ipe-an {be.dark-have.meal-4.S} ‘Someone had dinner.’ (KS #709)
hekirpa-an {turn.around-4.S} ‘Someone turned around.’ (KS #743)
ma-an {swim-4.S} ‘Someone swam.’ (KS #890)
as-an {stand.SG-4.S} ‘Someone stood.’ (KS #1118)
terke-an {jump-4.S} ‘Someone jumped.’ (KS #1125)

Semantics-driven intransitive splits are not unusual (cf. Old Japanese in Yanagida & Whitman 2009), but, to our knowledge, they have hardly ever been reported for a language with tripartite alignment, which is heavy enough by overdistinguishing grammatical relations. Unsurprisingly, the stative/active distinction has eventually been lost in most Ainu dialects.

References

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