

## The crosslinguistic diversity of antipassives: function, meaning and structure

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The term *antipassive* refers to a derived *detransitivized* construction illustrated in (1):

(1) West Greenlandic (Eskimo, Eskimo-Aleut; Keenan & Dryer 2007: 359)

- a. *arna-p niqu-∅ niri-vaa*  
woman-ERG meat-ABS eat-IND.3SG.3SG  
'The woman ate the meat.'
- b. *arnaq-∅ niqu-mik niri-NNig-puq*  
woman-ABS meat-INS eat-ANTIP-IND.3SG  
'The woman ate meat.'

On the syntactic level, the antipassive (1b) is derived from the transitive predication (1a) by means of the antipassive suffix *-NNig*. The patient (*niqu-∅* 'meat-ABS') loses its properties of a core argument. The peripheral status of this argument in (1b) is indicated by the instrumental case *-mik* and the lack of indexing on the verb. Additionally, the antipassive alters the properties of the agent. Semantically, the antipassive is often regarded as being synonymous with the transitive predication (Foley 2007). The semantic affinity is conventionally reflected by identical or similar translation into English, as in (1a) and (1b).

The above example illustrates the three properties the antipassive is often characterized with (cf. Polinsky 2005):

- a) the patient-like argument (or P) of the transitive predicate loses some or all of its morphosyntactic properties of a core argument
- b) the agent-like argument (or A) acquires some morphosyntactic properties usually associated with S (or sole argument)
- c) the reassignment of semantic roles to syntactic functions is usually indicated on the verb (e.g. by an affix)

Up to now, the literature on detransitivizing operations primarily focused on the more familiar passive construction: while numerous studies have been published on the passive (Siewierska 1984; Shibatani 1988; Taranto 2004; Abraham & Leisiö 2006; Lyngfelt & Solstad 2006; Alexiadou & Schäfer 2013), not a single book-length on the antipassive has appeared. Given how much progress has been made recently in the study of linguistic diversity and the increasing accessibility of modern descriptive grammars, it is time to update our understanding of the antipassive constructions, its morphosyntactic properties, patterns of distribution across the world's languages and functional motivation. Below some aspects relevant to the proposed workshop will be briefly introduced.

Typological studies on antipassives started with Silverstein's (1976) work positing the existence of an implicational relation between language particular morphosyntactic alignment and individual detransitivizing operations. The passive is regarded as a characteristic of languages with primarily nominative-accusative case alignment, whereas the antipassive is considered to be a hallmark of languages with traits of ergative alignment. Even though there is nothing in Silverstein's (1976) study that would exclude the existence of the antipassive in well-behaved accusative languages, it has become textbook wisdom that this phenomenon is first and foremost associated with languages with ergative traits (e.g. Payne 1997: 219). Still, there is a growing agreement among linguists that antipassive also occurs in primarily accusative languages (e.g. Polinsky 2005, Say 2008, among others). French illustrates this point: unlike in the transitive construction (2a), in the antipassive (2b), the verb carries a verbal

marker *se* which demotes the patient (*nouveau chapitre* ‘new chapter’) to an oblique position. Its peripheral status is marked by the preposition *à*.

(2) French (Janic 2013: 185)

a. *Le doctorant attaque un nouveau chapitre.*  
the PhD.student start.3SG.PRS a new chapter  
‘The PhD student starts a new chapter.’

b. *Le doctorant s’ attaque à un nouveau chapitre.*  
the PhD.student SE start.3SG.PRS PREP a new chapter  
‘The PhD student starts a new chapter.’

The antipassive is usually associated with two functions. The semantic/pragmatic one indicates that the action expressed by the verb shows lower semantic transitivity. This can be related to the properties of object (e.g. identity or affectedness), in addition to properties of a predicate (e.g. aspects) (cf. Hopper & Thompson 1980; Bittner 1987; Cooreman 1994). The syntactic function consists in the promotion of the agent in order to act as pivot for various syntactic operations such as coordination, interrogation, negation etc. Unlike the semantic/pragmatic function, the syntactic one is identified in languages with syntactic ergativity alone. Occasionally the antipassive may also express lexical functions (cf. Grinevald-Craig 1979; England 1988; Tsunoda 1988).

Another line of research focused on the morphological marking of the antipassive. Polinsky (2005) focuses on the question of whether or not a language has a specialized antipassive verbal marker, i.e. a morpheme the function of which is limited to the antipassive alone. The question of dedicated antipassive marker in languages with nominative-accusative marking pattern has been recently discussed by Creissels (2012); Janic (2013) and Bostoen et al. (2015). Since such markers may be diachronically associated with other functions (e.g. aspect, middle/reflexivity, reciprocity, causativity, among others), there is also a great deal of variation in the polyfunctionality and polysemous patterns displayed by antipassive markers that have not been discussed yet in detail, apart from a few exceptions (see for instance Moysse-Faurie 2008; Jacques 2014).

A number of gaps in the research on the antipassive can be identified: the acknowledge that the antipassive is a topic worthy of study beyond the scope of ergativity; scarcity of detailed studies of antipassive marker (e.g. presence vs. absence of a verbal marker, distinction between specialized vs. polyfunctional antipassive marker, the diachronic development of the antipassive marker); the limitation of the study of antipassives to the formal feature made many linguists fail to acknowledge the existence of the implicational relationship between semantics of a construction and its syntactic realization and how they interact and function in discourse. Finally, the fact that in some languages the antipassive may be lexically restricted or present lexical difference in meaning between transitive and antipassive verbs has largely been ignored. Possible topics of the workshop will thus include, but are not limited to, the following:

- morphosyntactic properties of the arguments of the antipassive, i.e. the properties acquired by the A argument and the properties lost by the P arguments (see Bickel et al. 2007 for an extensive example);
- lexical and grammatical restrictions on antipassive formations;
- antipassive constructions in primarily non-ergative languages;
- functional motivation for the use of antipassive constructions;
- markedness of antipassive constructions;
- nature and sources of antipassive verbal markers.
- diachronic development of the antipassive construction.
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