Structural differences between poetic and prosaic genres of Ainu
— In favour of the corpus-based approach to linguistic typology —

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For many years, language documentation has merely been regarded as a primary ‘invisible’ stage of grammar writing; the results of language documentation itself, i.e. transcribed and annotated texts, often remained unpublished.

In the last decade, the importance of language documentation as such has been finally recognized by the international community of linguists. As a result, not only the quantity of documented languages has considerably increased but the quality of the presentation of texts as well.

Here, I am going to argue in favour of the corpus-based approach to linguistic typology, since there are many languages for which the texts of a ‘new generation’, i.e. fully glossed and annotated texts with translations and attached audio files, are already available, and even more will appear in the nearest future (see http://www.hrelp.org/grants/projects/). On the other hand, grammars and dictionaries of the majority of the so-called endangered languages, if there are any, are still very far from being complete.

Let us consider, for instance, Ainu, a moribund language spoken only by a couple of persons on the Island of Hokkaido in Northern Japan. More than a century has passed since linguistic research of Ainu was begun, and this research has produced a quantity of recorded texts, five comprehensive dictionaries and at least seven grammars of various dialects. Yet, none of these grammars is complete, as we are still at a rather early stage of Ainu research. Early descriptions of the Ainu language were based upon the study of poetry (yukar ‘heroic epic songs’ and kamuy yukar ‘devine epic songs’; often referred to as Classical Ainu) written in elegant style and organized in the lines of 4-5 syllables. Prosaic genres of Ainu folklore told in the colloquial language for a long time were not taken into consideration.

However, it is obvious that there are basic differences in the structure and degree of complexity between poetic genres of Ainu folklore vs. prosaic genres (=colloquial Ainu). The differences are:

(1) the degree of polysynthesis: high in poetic Ainu vs. moderate in prosaic Ainu;
(2) person marking: the use of the first person inclusive and exclusive with reference to the person of protagonist in poetic Ainu vs. the use of the first person inclusive only with reference to the person of the protagonist in prosaic Ainu;
(3) the frequency of the use of applicative constructions: very high in poetic Ainu vs. moderate in prosaic Ainu;
(4) the function of applicative constructions: primarily syntactic function in poetic Ainu vs. syntactic and discourse functions in prosaic Ainu.

Henceforth, I shall discuss the latter two issues.

Applicatives in Ainu (in all genres) are derived by means of the prefixes e-, ko-, and o-. The syntactic role of these prefixes is valency-increasing by itself, and the concrete meaning may vary depending on the lexical meaning of the base verb. To my current state of knowledge, the important semantic roles added by the Ainu
applicative prefixes in prosaic Ainu (South Hokkaido dialects of Chitose and Saru) are as follows (the order of listing reflects the diminishing frequency):


**o-** 1. Goal(-Place), 2. Location(-Place); Occasionally: Source(-Place).

As we can see, the **meanings** of the applicative prefixes in prosaic Ainu partially overlap, but very insignificantly. In poetic Ainu, the degree of overlap in the meanings of the three prefixes is much greater; **e-** and **ko-** are often interchangeable on the same verbal stems. In few cases, these prefixes do not add any meaning and do not affect the valency either.

In prosaic Ainu, the three prefixes in applicative constructions encode the information that the entity the construction refers to is of greater **discourse salience**. Applicative objects in prosaic Ainu exhibit the properties of highly topical entities, i.e. they either tend to be expressed by nominal forms with a definite referent or are subject to zero-anaphora and left-dislocation. Applicative objects in poetic Ainu do not necessarily exhibit properties of highly topical entities.

The only available detailed descriptions of applicative prefixes (Kindaichi 1993 (1931): 264-276; Chiri 1974 (1936): 89-95), mainly of their meanings, are all based on poetic Ainu, therefore the common viewpoint which has persisted among ainologists was that it is near to impossible to draw a borderline between the meanings of these prefixes, which proved to be wrong (Bugaeva (to appear)).

The applicative constructions in poetic Ainu have lost their discourse function which is associated with prototypical applicatives. The productive use of applicative-like verbal (head marking) morphology in poetic Ainu may be simply interpreted as the way of marking case relations that fits rhythm and melody of songs better than the use of postpositional particles (dependent marking) with the same meanings.

In prosaic Ainu, applicative constructions are not used so frequently. They are genuine pragmatically marked applicative constructions which are of great interest for the descriptive and typological studies of applicative constructions.

The above mentioned information is not to be found in any of the existent Ainu grammars but it can be inferred from texts when carefully examined by an attentive typologist.

References

