

Why ABS objects are exceptional in Inuktitut: Clitic doubling and cross-dialectal variation

It is often noted that ABS subjects and ABS objects in the Inuit languages pattern together in many ways beyond morphology, to the exclusion of antipassive (‘MOD’) objects. This talk presents a second distinct pattern: in the eastern Nunavut varieties—henceforth Inuktitut—ABS objects display contrasts with *all other arguments*, including ABS subjects. Crucially, the properties in question parallel similar phenomena in languages with *pronominal object clitics*, supporting a clitic doubling analysis for Inuktitut object agreement referencing ABS objects. The co-existence of these two patterns across Inuit suggests that whether object agreement is true ϕ -agreement (Compton 2014) or object clitic doubling (Johns t.a.) is subject to cross-dialectal variation, bridging together these competing approaches; I speculate that this variation is related to the gradual decline of ergativity in the easternmost dialects (e.g. Johns 1999).

INTERPRETATIONAL PROPERTIES: While the Inuit literature often characterizes both ABS subjects and objects as obligatorily specific/wide scope, and antipassive (‘modalis’) objects as narrow scope/non-specific (e.g. Bittner 1994, Wharram 2003), novel data from Inuktitut display a markedly different pattern. The morpheme *-luunniit* ‘or’ is interpreted as a minimizer NPI under negation. As (1) shows, *-luunniit* may not modify a wh-indefinite in ABS object position, though it is licensed everywhere else. Moreover, the ill-formedness of (1a) is demonstrably due to the indefinite/non-specific nature of the ABS object, rather than ABS objects outscoping negation; *-luunniit* may modify a definite/specific ABS object, e.g. a proper name, (2).

- (1) a. *taku-lau-nngit-tara **kina-luunniit**
 see-PST-NEG-TR.1S/3S who.ABS-or
 Intended: ‘I didn’t see even one person.’ (ABS object)
- b. **kina-luunniit** ani-lau-nngit-tuq
 who.ABS-or leave-PST-NEG-INTR.3S
 ‘Not even one person left.’ (ABS subject)
- c. **kia-luunniit** taku-lau-nngit-taanga
 who.ERG-or see-PST-NEG-TR.3S/1S
 ‘Not even one person saw me.’ (ERG subject)
- d. taku-lau-nngit-tuq **kisu-mi-luunniit**
 see-PST-NEG-INTR.3S what-MOD-or
 ‘She didn’t see a single thing.’ (MOD object)
- (2) **Tigumiar-luunniit** taku-qqau-nngit-tara
 Tigumiaq.ABS-or see-REC.PST-NEG-TR.1S/3S
 ‘I didn’t even see Tigumiaq.’ (ABS object)

Similarly, quantificational expressions (including wh-words) are obligatorily interpreted as contextually restricted in ABS object position, though this is not required for other positions (omitted). In (3), typically non-D-linked wh-words are translated as strongly D-linked in ABS object position. Thus: (*only*) *Inuktitut* ABS objects must be interpreted as referential/specific.

- (3) a. **kisu** pi-juma-viuk b. **qatsi** sana-vigit
 what.ABS get-want-TR.2S/3S how.many.ABS make-TR.2S/3P
 ‘Which one do you want?’ ‘How many of these did you make?’

PRONOUNS: Another asymmetry concerns the distribution of independent pronouns. While ERG and ABS subject pronouns may co-occur with subject agreement, ABS object pronouns are generally prohibited from appearing with object agreement, (4). Note, however, that ABS object pronouns *may* appear overtly in select contexts, e.g. when modified or coordinated, (5).

- (4) a. (**?uvanga**) taku-jara surusiq
(1S) see-TR.1S/3S child.ABS
'I saw the child.' (ERG subject)
- b. (**?uvanga**) taku-junga surusim-mit
(1S) see-INTR.1S child-MOD
'I saw the child.' (ABS subject)
- c. surusi-up taku-jaanga (***uvanga**)
child-ERG see-TR.3S/1S (*1S)
'The child saw me.' (ABS object)
- (5) a. Taitviti-up **igvi-kuluk** taku-qqau-jaatit
David-ERG 2S-dear see-REC.PST-TR.3S/2S
'David saw dear you.' (modification)
- b. Jaani-up **Miali=lu ilitsi** taku-qqau-jaatsi
John-ERG Mary=CONJ 2P see-REC.PST-TR.3S/2P
'John saw you and Mary.' (coordination)

OBJECT CLITIC DOUBLING: I argue that these contrasts provide evidence for a *pronominal clitic doubling analysis* of Inuktitut object agreement (which, as seen above, appears as portmanteaux with subject agreement), building on Johns (t.a.). Doubled clitics are assumed here to be pronominal D⁰s, associated with a full nominal by movement (e.g. Nevins 2011, Harizanov 2014). Crucially, the phenomena seen in Inuktitut parallel cross-linguistic properties of object clitics. (i) Non-specific/non-referential quantificational elements (e.g. negative quantifiers) resist clitic doubling, while clitic doubling is required of specific/referential elements (Dobrovie-Sorin 1990, Gutierrez-Rexach 2000, Leonetti 2008). (ii) Pronominal objects are often realized as verb-adjoined clitics, though they must surface as independent pronouns in so-called *strong pronoun* contexts, e.g. when modified or coordinated (Cardinaletti & Starke 1999). The present analysis moreover captures why only ABS objects display these properties: only they undergo object clitic doubling (subject agreement encoding ERG and ABS subjects is true ϕ -agreement).

CROSS-DIALECTAL VARIATION: The Inuktitut data are at odds with the previous literature, which take ABS subjects and objects to behave uniformly. I propose that this contrast reflects *two distinct syntactic processes* underlying object agreement. In Inuktitut it is clitic doubling, but in other Inuit varieties (e.g. Western Inuit/West Greenlandic) it is genuine ϕ -agreement. That these processes co-exist unifies previously competing analyses (Compton 2014, Johns t.a.). I suggest that this dialectal split is rooted in language change: object agreement has *shifted* to clitic doubling in Inuktitut. This may be linked to another change led by the eastern Inuit dialects, the gradual loss of the ERG-ABS pattern (Johns 1999, et seq.). In the most innovative dialects, e.g. Labrador Inuttut, object agreement (surfacing within portmanteaux and co-occurring with ERG subjects) is only possible when *encoding a pronominal object*. The antipassive is otherwise used with full nominal objects, meaning ABS objects are absent in Labrador Inuttut (Johns t.a.). Combining these facts with the other Inuit facts discussed above, we find an inverse relationship between the decline of ergativity—indicated by the changing behaviour of ABS objects—and the pronominalization of object agreement, summarized below.

	Western Inuit/Greenlandic	Inuktitut	Labrador Inuttut
Ergativity	Strongly ergative	Ergative	Weakly ergative
ABS objects	Subj/obj uniformity	ABS obj asymmetries	No ABS objs
Obj. morphology	Agreement	Clitic doubling	Pronominal clitic only (no doubling)