

## A person restriction on nominal predication in Inuktitut

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Non-canonical agreement in binominal copular clauses has attracted substantial interest, especially vis-à-vis specificational clauses that show agreement with the copular complement instead of the subject (Moro 1997; Mikkelsen 2005; Heycock 2012; Béjar & Kahnemuyipour 2017; Hartmann & Heycock 2020). Which nominal controls agreement, and which features are visible, varies cross-linguistically in syntactically revealing ways. At another end of this landscape lies a phenomenon that has drawn less attention, but which likewise raises questions about what  $\phi$ -features are licensed in a binominal structure: a restriction to third person arguments in nominal predication clauses (Stassen 1997, cf. Baker 2008). This talk investigates the third person restriction through a study of nominal predication in Inuit languages, in particular the Eastern Canadian varieties Labrador Inuttitut (Nunatsiavut, north coast of Labrador) and Tarramiutut (Nunavik, northern Quebec), referred to collectively here as Inuktitut. I argue that the 3rd person restriction in Inuktitut emerges from a general condition holding of nominal environments: the first merged argument in a nominal environment must be third person and the mechanism enforcing this must be early in the derivation.

Inuktitut employs multiple strategies for nominal predication, including: bare nominal constructions (1a), predicational nominal participles (PNPs) (2), and copular constructions in which an incorporated nominal is verbalized by *-u-* 'be' (1b,c). A notable property of PNPs is that they can be string-ambiguous with referring expressions and verbal predicates, e.g. (2a,c: i-iii). We see the 3rd person restriction in both bare nominal constructions (1a, 1d) and PNPs. A well-established property of the restriction emerges in PNPs: it follows an ergative-like pattern, i.e. the restriction holds of the subject of an intransitive PNP (2a,b) and the object of a transitive PNP (2c,d) (Smith 1977, Johns 1995). The third person restriction does not arise in copular structures like (1c) because these are verbalized and so the subject is not the first argument of a nominal.

- (1)
- |    |                      |                        |          |                                                 |                          |
|----|----------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. | Jani                 | ilinniatitsijik        | b.       | Jani                                            | iliniatitsij-u-lau-ttuk  |
|    | Johnny               | teacher                |          | Johnny                                          | teacher-BE-PST-PART.3.SG |
|    |                      | 'Johnny is a teacher.' |          |                                                 | 'Johnny was a teacher.'  |
| c. | iliniatitsij-u-vutit | d.                     | ?? ivvit | iliniatitsijik                                  |                          |
|    | teacher-BE-IND.2.SG  |                        | you      | teacher                                         |                          |
|    | 'You are a teacher.' |                        |          | 'You are a teacher.' (Lab. Inuttitut, elicited) |                          |

(2) Labrador Inuttitut, participial mood (forms from Johns 1995: 134; translations after Johns 1992: 62, 1995: 138–139; cf. Beach 2011: 2.3.3–2.3.4)

- a. nigi-juk  
eat-PART.3SG  
i. 'he/she is eating' ii. 'he/she is an eating one' iii. 'the one that is eating'
- b. \* nigi-junga [cf. verbal: nigi-vunga]  
eat-PART.1SG eat-IND.1SG  
Intended: i. 'I am eating' ii. 'I am an eating one'
- c. takunna-jaga  
look.at-PART.1SG.3SG  
i. 'I am looking at him/her' ii. 'he/she is my looked-at one' iii. 'the one I am looking at'
- d. \* takunna-jânga [cf. verbal: takunna-vânga]  
look.at-PART.3SG.1SG look.at-IND.3SG.1SG  
Intended: i. 'he/she is looking at me' ii. 'I am his looked-at one'

Most prior work has focused on the third person restriction for PNPs in Inuktitut. Johns (1993, 1995, 2000) locates the restriction in the participial's failure to raise to the position where local person is licensed. Johns and Kučerová (2017) recast it as a PCC effect diagnostic of clitic

doubling. Compton (2019) posits instead a defective person probe on participial C. The person restriction on bare nominal predicates has received far less attention, but Beach (2011) describes it for Tarramiutut (Nunavik), and Johns (1993, 1995) explicitly ties the availability of third person in participials to their nominal status.

My analysis aims to unify the pattern in PNPs and bare nominal constructions (and in the talk I will argue that it extends to referring nominals as well). A key claim is that the 3rd person restriction applies early in a derivation, restricting the person features of the first merged argument in a nominal. This stands in contrast to past accounts, where the restriction is operationalized by a later derivational mechanism (e.g. inability to reach a higher position or defectivity of a high probe). Restriction of the first merged argument automatically derives the ergative-like distribution of the pattern. In a transitive environment, the first merged argument is the object; in an intransitive environment it is the subject.

The analysis fits additional facts (not shown here). First, number on the absolutive is unrestricted; this is expected if number is ordinary nominal inflection and not regulated by first merge like person. Second, unlike the person restriction, number agreement follows an accusative pattern, with transitive and intransitive plural subjects blocking object number agreement, except when the subject is 3rd person. The exception, I will argue, follows from independently needed mechanisms for encoding the morphological form of the predicate word, including a split between agreement morphology and D-cliticization (cf. Yuan 2018).

Additionally, I will show that the distribution of the restriction tracks the argument structure of the nominal predicate: passive participles can license a first or second person ergative argument because their argument structure makes a higher argument position available, while active participles cannot (unless it is a possessor).

The patterns under discussion raise many questions about the nature of nominal predication and how it differs from verbal predication. Why are nominal arguments restricted in ways verbal arguments are not? What is special about the first merged argument? Some questions may be fruitfully addressed by examining interdialectal variation (Johns 1992, Beach 2011, Compton 2019). Also salient in this material are questions about 1st and 2nd person indexicals and how they are licensed, especially in equative, identificational and specificational structures. Time permitting, I will share preliminary data that show how these fit and inform my analysis.

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