ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an analysis of the syntactic and semantic differences between the ergative, transitive construction and the intransitive, antipassive construction in Inuit that also explains the use of the antipassive marker as a marker of inchoative aspect. The analysis relies on the notion of a scale or path that provides a measure for the change that an event participant undergoes, as well as the notion familiar from Distributed Morphology that an acategorial root combines with a verbalizing head. The antipassive suffix $-si$ is analyzed as the head of a light verb that provides an event, and the complement to this light verb is a scale or path that provides the measure of change. In the antipassive, the oblique NP provides a scale, with the verbal root adjoined to $-si$ as a manner component. In the inchoative, an intransitive VP provides the scale, with no manner element adjoined to the light verb. The transitive/antipassive alternation is seen as an alternation between a result/manner interpretation of the verbal root. Thus, the transitive/antipassive alternation is not simply a matter of changing the valency of the verb but involves changes of
the scalar structure of the clause and the interpretation of the verbal root. The analysis of the polyfunctionality of the \(-si\) morpheme given here, which appeals to the scalar structure of the clause, suggests a new line of research for further explorations into the nature of middle marking in general.

*Keywords:* Antipassive, Inuit, scalar structure, manner/result verbs, aspect, polyfunctionality

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In several languages, there is an intransitive construction termed the antipassive in which the object of the corresponding transitive sentence appears in an oblique rather than a structural case. The following Inuit (South Baffin) example is from Macdonald and Spreng (2006), cited in Clarke (2009).

(1) a. Anguti-up nanuq quqir-jaa
    man-\(\text{ERG} \quad \text{polar.bear.ABS} \quad \text{shoot-PART.3SG/3SG}\)
    The man shot the polar bear.

    b. Anguti quqir-\(\text{si}\)-juq nanu-mik
    man.\(\text{ABS} \quad \text{shoot-AP-PART.3SG} \quad \text{polar.bear-OBL}\)
    The man is shooting/shot at a polar bear.\(^1\)

Example (1a) shows the transitive variant. The subject is in the ergative case and the object is in the absolutive case. The verb also shows agreement with both the subject and the object. In (1b), we see the antipassive variant. The verb is suffixed with the antipassive morpheme \(-si\). The subject is in the absolutive case and the object is in an oblique case. The verb shows agreement with the subject only. Thus, with the antipassive the clause is semantically transitive, in that there are two arguments present, but syntactically intransitive, in that agreement and case morphology reflect an intransitive structure.

In addition, as can be seen from the translations, there is also an aspectual difference between the transitive and antipassive sentence. This aspectual difference has been characterized in many different ways: the antipassive is seen as irresutlative (Siegel, 1999), atelic and imperfective (Spreng, 2006), or durative (Clarke, 2009).

Another interesting feature of the antipassive morpheme in Inuit is its “polyfunctionality.” Not only does the \(-si\) suffix attach to a transitive verb to create an intransitive, antipassive structure, it can also attach to an unaccusative