

Some preliminary notes on etymology of some Ainu suppletive verbs

Tresi Nonno

independent scholar; Chiba, Japan; e-mail: tresi_nonno@hotmail.com

Abstract

In modern Ainu language there are verbs expressing grammatical numbers irregularly: *a – rok* “to sit”, *an – oka* “to be present”, *arpa/oman – paye* “to go”, *as – roski* “to stand”, *ek – arki* “to come”, *mi – utomciwre* “to wear”, *rayke – ronnu* “to kill”, *uk – uyna* “to take”, *unu – uyruke* “to place”. *A – rok* and *as – roski* have been made according to the same model: plural form is made of singular by adding *r* --- *k/ki* circumfix; initially *r* was *ar* “very” and *k/ki* was *ki* “to act”. *Arpa* and *paye* both are derivatives of *pa* “to step”. *Oman* is compound of *om* “thigh” and *an* “to be present”. *Arki* is compound of *ar* “very” and distorted singular from *ek*. *Rayke – ronnu* have been made of root *ray* “to die” and different causatives. *Mi – utomciwre* are derivatives of different roots. Structures of rest pairs are yet unclear; they will be matter of further consideration.

Key words: Ainu language; suppletive verbs; Ainu language history

1. Introduction: general notes on grammatical category of number in Ainu

In Ainu language verbs express category of grammatical number.

Singular and plural forms express not just number of subject/agent that is rather usual, but also sometimes frequency of events and/or intensiveness of described process.

In the case of transitive verbs number expressed in the stem of verb usually correlates with number of patient.

Category of grammatical numbers can be expressed by the following means:

There are verbs that use the same stem for singular and plural forms, for example:

*kik*¹

3agsg 3ptsg beat

He/she/it beats him/her/it.

Depending on context this phrase can be translated as:

3agpl 3ptsg beat

They beat him/her/it.

kik

3agsg 3ptpl beat

He/she/it beats them.

Depending on context this phrase can be translated as:

3agpl 3ptpl beat

¹ All examples of Ainu language are given in practical Ainu orthography.

He/she/it beat them.

In Ainu language also there are some verbs that demonstrate different singular and plural forms.

Some verbs form plural form by adding *-pa* suffix, for instance:

hetuk

3sbsg grow

He/she/it grows.

hetukpa

3sbpl grow

They grow.

Some verbs express singular form by adding *-n* ending and plural forms by adding *-p* ending, for example:

san

3sbsg go toward sea shore

He/she/it goes to seashore from mountain area.

sap

3sbpl go toward the sea shore

They go to seashore from mountain area.

And there is a small group of verbs that make plural forms completely irregularly:

“to sit”

a

3sbsg sit

He/she/it sits.

rok

3sbpl sit

They sit.

“to be present”

an

3sbsg be present

He/she/it is present.

oka

3sbpl be present

They are present.

“to go”

arpa (can be *oman* in some dialects)

3sgsb go
He/she/it goes.

paye
3plsb go
They go.

“to stand”

as
3sgsb stand
He/she/it stands

roski
3sbpl stand
They stand.

“to come”

ek
3sbsg come
He/she/it comes.

arki
3sbpl come
They come.

“to wear”

mi
3agsg 3ptsg wear
He/she wears it
Also depending on context can be translated as:
3agpl 3ptsg wear
They wear it.

utomciwre
3agsg 3ptpl wear
He/she wears them (these clothes).
Also depending on context can be translated as:
3agpl 3ptpl wear
They wear them (these clothes).

“to kill”

rayke
3agsg 3ptsg kill
He/she/it kills him/her/it.
Also depending on context can be translated as:
3agpl 3ptsg kill

They kill him/her/it.

ronnu

3agsg 3ptpl kill

He/she/it kills them.

Also depending on context can be translated as:

3agpl 3ptpl kill

They kill them.

“to take”

uk

3agsg 3ptsg take

He/she/it takes he/she/it.

Also can be translated as:

3agpl 3ptsg take

They take he/she/it.

uyna

3agsg 3ptpl take

He/she/it takes them.

3agpl 3ptpl take

They take them.

“to place”

unu

3agsg 3ptsg place

He/she/it places him/her/it.

Also can be translated as:

3agpl 3ptsg place

They place him/her/it.

uyruke

3agsg 3ptpl place

He/she/it place them

Also can be translated as:

3agpl 3ptpl place

They place them

Verbs which express different meanings by using completely different stems are usually called suppletive verbs.

Issues of suppletion can also be seen in other languages, for instance, English forms: *am – is – are*; French forms: *je vais* “I go” – *j'allais* “I was going to” – *j'irai* “I will go”.

It seems that suppletion is result of decay of some previous system/systems.

In current paper I try to restore initial structures of some suppletive verbs of Ainu language.

2. Thoughts on structures of some suppletive verbs of Ainu

At first sight formation of the following pairs has no logic:

a – *rok* – “to sit”
an – *oka* – “to be present”
as – *roski* – “to stand”
arpa – *paye/oman* – *paye* “to go”
ek – *arki* – “to come”
mi – *utomciwre* – “to wear”
rayke – *ronnu* – “to kill”
uk – *uyna* – “to take”
unu – *uyruke* – “to place”.

However, if we take a more accurate view we can see some inner structures.

A – rok and *as – roski*

Pair *a – rok* seems to have the same structure as *as – roski*: plural forms of both pairs are formed by circumfix: *r---k/r---ki*, that seems to be circumfix made of components *ar* “very” and *ki*: “to act”, “to do”, “to perform”.

I suppose that the following processes took place there:

*'ar 'a ki² → *ar o ki → *rok*

*'ar 'as ki → *ar os ki → *roski*.

It seems that vowel dropped in *ar* when collocations converted into compounds. *Ki* seems to convert into *k* after vowel and remains *ki* after consonant. And *a* seems to convert into *o*.

Arpa –paye /oman – paye

Looking at *arpa – paye* we can see that there is component *pa* in both forms. Plural form *paye* obviously has the same verbal ending as, for example, such verbs like: *nuye*, *reye*, *teye* and so on so it is possible to single out its main component, i.e.: *pa*. Also the same *pa* can be seen in *arpa*. *Ar* means “many”/“completely” (initially this *ar* is just another form of numeral “three” – *re*). *Pa* means “to step”. (The same root also can be seen in verb *pas* “to run”).

Form *oman* evidently consists of the following component *om* “thigh”/“leg” and component *an* that means “to be”, “to be present” so it can be interpreted as “to be on legs” “to legs”.

Ek – arki

This pair has the following structure: *ek* – means just “to come”; while *arki* evidently consists of the following component: *ar* – completely, and *ki* that seems to be transformed form of *ek* like, for instance: “three” normally is *re*, but in compounds it can become *ar*: *ar-wan-pe* – “ten

² This is hypothetical form supposedly existed in late Jōmon Ainu.

[without] three” “seven”, i.e.: CV structure can become VC structure and VC can become CV if it helps to form an easier pronounced phonotactic structure.

Mi – u-tom-ciw-re

Form *mi* means just “to dress”, “to wear”.

Form *utomciwre* can be represented as the following:

u-tom-ciw-re

RCPR – direction – fit – CAUS

make [things] fit each other

Rayke – ronnu

Rayke evidently consists of the following components: *ray* that means “to die” and causative suffix *-ke*.

Form *ronnu* also seems to consist of root that means “to die” and causative suffix *-u/*-nu*³.

Form **ray-nu* became **rannu/ronnu* due to the following assimilation that takes place on morphemic borders: $C_1C_2 \rightarrow C_2C_2$, in current case: $yn \rightarrow nn$.

Pairs with unclear structure

An – oka, *uk – uyna*, *unu – uyruke* are pairs which structures are yet unclear and will be matter of further research.

However, right now it is possible to state the following:

Form *unu* consists of the following components: *un* – “to be in some place”/ “to dwell in a place” and *-u* – causative suffix.

Form *uyruke* has causative suffix *-ke*.

Both *uyna* and *uyruke* have reciprocal prefix *u-*.

3. Some intermediate conclusions

In Ainu language there are ten suppletive pairs. Having considered seven of them I have found that in five cases of seven plural forms have been made of the same roots as singular.

Almost all of considered plural forms have been made with use of intensifying affixes and/or causatives. Some singular forms also have been constructed with use of intensifying affix/causative.

It’s not possible to say something definite about history of formation of suppletive pairs of Ainu language in current moment so researches will be continued.

³ Form **-nu* seems to be a variant of causative suffix *-u*.