

## How many voices are there in Ainu really?

Tresi Nonno

independent scholar; Chiba, Japan; e-mail: [tresi\\_nonno@hotmail.com](mailto:tresi_nonno@hotmail.com)

### Abstract

Japanese linguists usually describe Ainu as a language with a passive voice. One example considered as passive is *hapo or wa a-en=koyki* – “I was scolded by mother”. Such sentences can’t be considered examples of passive since they contradict all conditions of the passive voice. Other items considered passive are personal markers *enci=* (1sg) and *unci=* (1pl) used in Ishikari/Asahikawa dialect. These markers show that the marked person is a patient/target/beneficiary of an action. When these markers are used, then other personal markers are absent. These markers could be considered as implementations of passive, but in Ainu there are no personal markers like *enci=* and *unci=* for other persons and numbers. A voice cannot carry out itself only for some persons and numbers, so this case also can’t be considered a true passive. And thus, Ainu should be considered a language without voices.

**Keywords:** Ainu language; passive voice; voices

### 1. Introduction to the problem

According to Tamura Suzuko there is a passive voice in the Ainu language. As an example of a passive sentence, she gives the following: *hapo oro wa a-en-koyki* – “I was scolded by mother” (Tamura 2000: 72). A more accurate representation of this sentence is the following:

(1) *hapo*(1) *or*(2) *wa*(3) *a-*(4)*en*=(5)*koyki*(6)  
 mother(1) place(2) from(3) indefinite agent(4) 1sg.patient(5) scold(6).

Tamura notes that the difference between passive sentences and sentences with an indefinite agent is not clear (Tamura 2000: 72).

Other items that can be considered as implementations of passive voice in Ainu are personal markers *enci=* and *unci=* that are used in Ishikari/Asahikawa dialect (Ōta 2005: 35, 234).

The marker of *enci=* correlates with the subject of the sentence, and it shows that the first person singular is a patient or a target, or a beneficiary of an action. When this marker is used in a verb, then any other personal markers are absent.

(2) *enci=emina* – I am laughed at (Ōta 2005: 35).  
 1sg.patient/target=laugh-at-something/somebody

The marker of *unci=* performs the same functions as *enci=*, but for the first person plural (Ōta 2005: 234), and there are no alike personal markers for other persons and numbers.

According to Tamura these markers *enci=* and *unci=* are markers that express agent and patient at once: the agent here is an indefinite person and the patient is first person singular and plural correspondingly (Tamura 2000: 59). I seriously doubt that patient and agent is expressed at once in these markers, I suppose that these markers express only patient/target of an action.

The question about the inner structure and possible origin of these markers can be a matter of future consideration, however, it is evident that the marker of *enci=* correlates with the patient marker of first person singular, namely *en=*, and the marker of *unci=* correlates with the patient marker of first person plural, namely *un=*.

In the current paper I want to consider whether it is possible to say that there is a passive voice in the Ainu language.

## 2. The case of *hapo or wa a-en=koyki*

According to Tamura the sentence *hapo or wa a-en=koyki* “I was scolded by mother” (see sentence 1) is an example of a passive sentence in Ainu, but at the same time, she notes that it is quite difficult to distinguish examples of the passive voice from sentences with an indefinite person.

In the Ainu language any grammatical meaning related to a verb should have its own unambiguous implementation within the verb phrase, i.e.: it is completely impossible that a grammatical meaning, related to a verb, would be expressed by a compound of a postposition, placed in the noun phrase, and a prefix, placed in the verb. Any grammatical meaning, related to the verb, should be expressed within the verb phrase only.

In the modern/historical Ainu language all parts of a sentence except a verb phrase are actually optional, and the sentence *hapo or wa a-en=koyki* normally can be reduced to *a-en=koyki*. The postposition *or wa* isn't a part of the verb phrase, and so the verb that is supposed to be passive is actually a form with an indefinite agent, i.e.: the meaning that is supposed to be passive voice hasn't its own implementation that would differ from the indefinite agent.

Of course, the phrase *hapo or wa a-en=koyki* can be translated in English as “I am scolded”, but the use of passive voice in this case is a fact of English, not a fact of Ainu.

Also, it should be noted that in languages that have a passive voice and an indefinite agent, their forms differ unambiguously, and do not tangle with each other.

For instance, in English the phrase *I am scolded* semantically is close to the phrase *they scold me*, but grammatically they are different, and the first phrase isn't a derivative of the second, i.e.: *am scolded (to be scolded)* isn't a derivative of *they scold*.

In French the phrase “I am scolded” is *je suis grondé* and the phrase “they scold me” or “someone scolds me” is *on me gronde*, and, as well as in English, in the current case the form of passive voice isn't a derivative of the form with the indefinite agent. The example of French is especially interesting, since in French exists a well-developed indefinite agent that doesn't intermix with any other forms and with the passive voice in particular.

Also it is interesting that similar consideration of these sentences with *or wa* and the indefinite agent has been also made by Tom Dougherty.

Dougherty points out that any attempt to represent a sentence like *hapo or wa a-en=koyki* as passive harshly contradicts the definition of passive provided by Dixon and Aikhenvald (see

Dougherty 2010). According to the definition: passives form a derived intransitive clause from a transitive clause, the former object is promoted to a subject, the underlying agent is demoted to some form of a peripheral argument, up to an including optional deletion, and also passives have explicit formal marking (Dixon, Aikhenvald 2000: 7).

Dougherty says that Ainu sentences like *hapo or wa a-en=koyki* can't be considered examples of passive since it doesn't fit all the four conditions shown in the definition.

Indeed, if we turn the sentence *hapo or wa a-en=koyki* into standard view without indefinite agent marker:

(3) *hapo*(1)  $\emptyset$ (2)=*en*(3)=*koyki*(4)  
 Mom(1) 3sg.agent(2)=1sg.patient(3)=scold(4)

we don't see any principal changes in the verb if we compare it with (1).

Also an important moment is that Dougherty points out that all reports of the existence of the passive voice in Ainu are made mainly by Japanese linguists such as Masayoshi Shibatani, Katsunobu Izutsu, and so on.

Here I am to note, that the sentence *hapo or wa a-en=koyki* looks like an artificially created construction. I suppose that constructions like *hapo or wa a-en=koyki* appeared in Ainu under the influence of Japanese. In Japanese the passive voice is used much more frequently than in other languages, and it is therefore quite logical that the passive in Ainu is the result of the influence of Japanese.

Thus, the sentences like *hapo or wa a-en=koyki*, considered as passive by Tamura, actually can't be considered as passive.

### 3. The case of *enci=* and *unci=*

Examples with the personal markers of *enci=* and *unci=* look more like implementations of the passive voice.

If we convert sentence (2) into a standard sentence with an agent and a patient, we receive the following:

(4)  $\emptyset$ (1)=*en*(2)=*emina*(3)  
 3pl.agent(1)=1sg.patient(2)=to laugh at somebody/something(3).

The case of *enci=* fits well the above-shown criteria of passive given by Dixon and Aikhenvald. If we compare sentences 2 and 4 we can see that the form that is supposed to be passive makes an intransitive sentence from a transitive, the former patient is promoted to a subject, the agent is deleted, and also in the current case the passive has explicit formal marking.

The markers of *enci=* and *unci=* could be considered as an implementation of the passive voice in Ainu, but there is one serious obstacle: in Ainu there are no personal markers like *enci=* and *unci=* for other persons and numbers. Such a grammatical category as a voice cannot implement itself only for some persons and numbers, any voice should have implementations

for all persons and numbers. However, in the case of *enci=* and *unci=* we don't see alike markers for other persons and numbers, and also such markers exist in one dialect only, namely Ishikari/Asahikawa, and thus the case also can't be considered as a true passive.

#### 4. Conclusion

Summarizing all the above-said, it is possible to say that the construction with an indefinite agent and the postposition of *or wa* definitely should not be considered as a passive voice. Constructions with personal markers *enci=* and *unci=* potentially could have developed into a full-fledged passive voice, if there would be the same markers for other persons and numbers, but such markers for other persons except the first haven't been developed. And thus, Ainu should be considered a language without voices.

Dougherty notes that in Ainu there are some voice-like constructions: causative and the so-called applicatives, that haven't developed into full-fledged voices. I seriously doubt, however, that it is correct to consider causative and applicatives as voice-like constructions. And I can say that these discrepancies show that in linguistics actually there is still no well-established understanding of what a voice is.

Dougherty also notes that Ainu looks like a language of mixed type: Ainu isn't a purely active-stative language, but a split active language, and it has also some ergative features. And also he notes that actually the questions of Ainu morphosyntactic alignment have been described insufficiently yet and there is much matter for future research.

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