

Siberian Yupik Influence on Sirenikski Verbal Inflection

Anna Berge, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Language contact is pervasive in the history of all Eskaleut languages of the Pacific Rim, and the languages show contact effect regardless of typological similarity or degree of relatedness. Moreover, the degree of contact has allowed for the borrowing of features that are generally thought of as relatively impervious to borrowing, including verb inflection (cf. the pervasive Russian inflections in the well-known mixed language, Copper Island Aleut). One aspect of Eskaleut morphosyntax that has generated a great deal of interest is the parallelism between possessive inflection on nouns and person inflection on verbs, and attempts to reconstruct the systems include Hammerich 1936, Bergsland 1951, 1964, 1989, Vakhtin 1979, 1986, Fortescue 1984, 1995, 1998, etc. Most of these studies, despite acknowledging language contact, explain the modern reflexes of verbal person inflection in the respective languages via the traditional comparative method. The many irregularities require much speculation, however, and the motivations for the proposed developments are not always evident. For example, there are two variants of 2sgO verbal inflection, -tən and -kən, presumed to have come from an originally independent pronominal stem *təkə-. 1sgS/2sgO forms almost universally involve the variant -kən, while almost all others use -tən. Why this should be so is still unclear. Many aspects of Eskaleut inflection remain obscure, despite the excellent studies listed above.

In this paper, I revisit the verbal inflection of the Eskaleut language Sirenikski, examining its systems of nominal and verbal person inflections within the context of the verbal mood system. Sirenikski has been in close contact with Central Siberian Yupik (CSY) (as well as with non-Eskaleut Chukchi), and contact effects have been well described, including effects on its phonology, prosodic system, lexicon, and to a lesser extent on its derivational morphology. Much less work has been devoted to teasing out morphosyntactic effects, and indeed, this is complicated by the similarities between Sirenikski and CSY and the pervasive bilingualism of Sirenikski speakers at the time the language was being recorded and documented (Vakhtin 1991). Nevertheless, I find compelling evidence that some elements of the inflectional paradigm have been borrowed from CSY.

Sirenikski, like other Eskaleut languages, shows a close connection between its nominal and verbal person inflection. For example, the Sirenikski forms listed below are identical for relative possessed nouns and, e.g. intransitive verbs in dependent moods, or subject person inflection on transitive verbs, likewise in dependent moods:

1sg.possessor (sg & pl possessum)	=	1sg.subject -m(a)
1pl.possessum	=	1pl.subject -mta/-mtə-
2sg.possessor/sg.possessum	=	2sg.subject -pi/-pə-
2pl.possessum	=	2pl.subject -pəsi

A number of object endings (e.g. -ken in Sir 1sgS/2sgO -mkən, or -kut in Sir 2sgS/1plO -pəkut) however, are wholly foreign to the attested Sirenikski nominal system. They are, however, common across Yupik (and Inuit) languages, including CSY. Further, there appears to be different levels of borrowing between the independent and dependent verb moods. To both explain and argue for the attribution of language contact in this case, I contrast Sirenikski verbal inflection in both independent and dependent moods with the other Eskaleut languages. This paper contributes in a small but important way to our further understanding of Eskaleut inflection and the prehistoric relations between the Eskaleut languages of the Pacific Rim.

References

Bergsland, Knut. 1951. Kleinschmidt Centennial IV: Aleut demonstratives and the Aleut-Eskimo relationship. *IJAL* 17:167-179.

Bergsland, Knut. 1964. Morphological analysis and syntactic reconstruction in Eskimo-Aleut. *Proceedings of the IVth Congress of Linguists*. The Hague: Mouton, 1009-15.

Bergsland, Knut. 1989. Comparative aspects of Aleut syntax. *Aikakauskirja / Journal de la Société Finno-ougrienne*, 82:7-80.

Fortescue, Michael. 1984. Some problems around the correlation of Eskimo and Aleut mood markers. *Copenhagen: Institut for Eskimologi*, mss.

Fortescue, Michael. 1995. The historical source and typological position of ergativity in Eskimo languages. *Études/Inuit/Studies* 19:2:61-75.

Fortescue, Michael. 1998. *Language Relations Across Bering Strait: Reappraising the Archaeological and Linguistic Evidence*. London: Cassell.

Hammerich, Louis L. 1936. Personalendungen und Verbalsystem in Eskimoischen. *Meddelelser om Grønland* 23.2. Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Videnskabernes Selskab, hist.-filol.

Vakhtin, Nikolai B. 1979. Nominal and verbal ergativity, Asiatic Eskimo splits in the person and mood paradigms. *Ergativity*, ed. By Frans Plank. London & New York: Academic Press: 279-289

Vakhtin, Nikolai B. 1986. Morfologicheskaya ergativnost' v eskimoskom yazyke. *Paleoaziatskie Yazyki*, ed. By P. J. Skorik. Leningrad: Nauka: 133-157.

Vakhtin, Nikolai B. 1991. Sirinek Eskimo: The available data and possible approaches. *Language Sciences* 13:1:99-106.