Introduction

The aim of this research is to investigate two core uses of the Central Alaskan Yup'ik appositional mood: in narrative and in non-narrative genres. The challenge is to provide a framework to explain these two uses, which have certain features in common but diverge significantly in important respects. I argue that discourse coherence relations, as described by Kehler (2002), provide a useful toolkit for the investigation. The importance of the present analysis is that it provides a pragmatic perspective on a phenomenon that is typically described as syntactic and prosodic in nature. That pragmatic perspective ultimately sets the stage for a semantic description of the appositional mood in light of the syntactic and prosodic facts.

Data

In Yup'ik, mood is required on all verbs, and in this sense mood is the most basic inflectional category. The appositional mood, marked by -lu (or -na in negative clauses) is not only the most common mood in possibly all Yup'ik genres, but it is also the most versatile in its semantic and syntactic use. Unlike Yup'ik subordinate clauses, which can have their own subjects, the subject of an appositional mood clause in non-narrative genres must corefer with the subject (S or A) of the main clause. A Yup'ik example (from Miyaoka 2012: 1417) is given in (1).

(1) qaya-u-gu-q [nutara-u- lu-ni] kayak-be-IND-3SG_i [new.one-be-APP-3SG_i] “It is a new kayak”
   lit. “(It) is a kayak, being a new one”
   (where IND = indicative, APP = appositional)

The appositional mood clause in (1) provides information which is essentially predicative and thus non-backgrounded. The state it describes (being new) is understood to occur simultaneously with the state described by the main clause (being a kayak).

In narratives, however, the use of appositional mood diverges in two important ways from the non-narrative usage. First, a narrative appositional mood clause may stand alone in a sentence as an independent clause. Second, each clause may take a unique subject, regardless of whether that clause constitutes a standalone sentence. Example clauses (2a-c) (from Jacobson 1995: 241) provide an illustration of these features.

(2a) [Qimugtait ciulisteŋuyaramek elitnaurnavke-na-teng.] their.dogs leaders not.having.learned.the.way-NEG.APP-3PL
(2b) [Nutaan kass’at maani] only.when white.people here
(2c) [pingameng ciulisteňek elitnauri- lu-teng.] those leaders training-APP-3PL

“In their dogs hadn't learned the way of being leaders (= lead dogs). Only when the white people came, (the white people) trained lead dogs.”

In the example above, clauses (2a) and (2c) are appositional mood clauses, while clause (2b) is subordinate to (2c). The two appositional mood clauses have different subjects (their dogs and white people respectively).

Previous analyses of the appositional mood

On Miyaoka's account, the non-narrative function of the appositional mood is to yield a so-called “co-subordinate clause” which is semantically and syntactically dependent on the main clause, but is not embedded
within it (Miyaoka 2012: 1416). His analysis is motivated by several important insights about the relationship between the co-subordinate and head clauses, including the generally predicative nature of the mood. Importantly, the interpretation of temporal co-occurrence between clauses in examples like (1) is so prevalent that the appositional mood has at times been called the contemporative mood (Miyaoka 2012: 1417). In Jacobson (1995) and Woodbury (1983), the features of the narrative appositional mood are more fully investigated. Jacobson (1995: 240-241) provides a general description of appositional mood clauses which can stand alone as sentences in narratives, while Woodbury (1983) describes some important prosodic features in narratives which mark switch-reference, allowing the uniqueness of subjects between clauses as noted above.

4. Discourse coherence
Kehler (2002) offers a “theory that characterizes the possible ways in which successive utterances can be connected to form a coherent discourse” (Kehler 2002: 3). The connections between utterances are modeled by discourse coherence relations. These include ELABORATION, whereby two successive utterances describe the same entity from a different perspective (e.g., John juggled the balls with finesse. The dextrous performer showed no signs of stopping.), and OCCASION, whereby a chain of events is sequenced around a system of entities (e.g., Bill put down the book. He closed his eyes.). Another coherence type is CAUSE-EFFECT (e.g. I turned the lights off; the room darkened.), which entails a “path of implication” from one utterance to another (Kehler 2002: 20).

5. Ongoing field research: discourse properties of the appositional mood
Building on the insights of the abovementioned authors, I put forward that discourse coherence has something to offer an analysis of the Yup'ik appositional mood. On this view, the appositional mood clause in non-narrative contexts like (1) exemplifies an ELABORATION relation: the clause provides a different perspective (namely, mood) on the same entity (the kayak). But the appositional mood clauses in example (2) are coherent in a different way, since (2c) is understood to temporally follow (2a). Example (2) thus appears to be an instance of an OCCASION relation, where a temporal sequence is structured around a set of entities. The crux of my research is exemplified by the following question: to what extent does the dichotomy of usage of the Yup'ik appositional mood align with the divisions present in pre-existing theories of discourse coherence relations? That is, does the non-narrative usage clearly and consistently exemplify a pre-established discourse coherence relation (that of ELABORATION), while the narrative use clearly and consistently exemplifies some other relation (OCCASION)? This investigation of coherence relations will also lend insight into the semantics of the appositional mood. If the appositional mood is found to occur in only some coherence contexts but not in others, a unitary meaning for the mood might be formulated. One hypothesis is that the meaning of the appositional mood is highly general and thus accommodates all coherence relations except those of the CAUSE-EFFECT type, and that pragmatic factors – that is, whether the appositional mood clause occurs subordinately in non-narrative contexts or autonomously in narrative ones – is what selects between ELABORATION and OCCASION interpretations. What might allow speakers to generalize over ELABORATION and OCCASION are the relations’ similarities when compared to the CAUSE-EFFECT relation. For example, the former relations entail a change of perspective in either time (for OCCASION) or subject (for ELABORATION), but crucially do not entail a change of perspective in both time and subject, as CAUSE-EFFECT relations can. I am currently investigating these questions as I conduct fieldwork in Alaska. Accordingly most of the results are forthcoming, but will be presented in the talk as important cross-linguistic perspective on the nature of discourse coherence relations and the semantics of mood in an under-represented language.

7. References

