

The Use of the Directionals *aku* and *mai* in Written Hawaiian Narratives: Exploring the Narrator-Narrative Relationship¹

Kanae Iwasaki

JSPS/Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of
Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

Abstract: This paper discusses the Hawaiian spatial function words (i.e., directionals) *aku* and *mai*—their most basic function is described as “away from the speaker” and “toward the speaker,” respectively. However, the situation in which the speaker does not participate in the scene has not been sufficiently described by scholars. Based on grammatical descriptions of other Polynesian languages, which use the counterparts of *aku* and *mai* to express the emotional distance between the narrator and their narrative, this study analyzed data from three Hawaiian narratives to determine whether there is a deviation in the use of *aku* and *mai*. The results did not show as large a deviation as, for example, the case of North Marquesan, a similar Polynesian language. This may be due to the nature of Hawaiian directionals, or the way Hawaiian individuals think about the distance between the narrator and their narrative. To clarify this, we must further analyze other elements in the relationship between narrators and their narratives.

Key words: Hawaiian grammar, spatial expression, directionals, narrative

1. Introduction

The Hawaiian language has a category of function words known as “directionals.” These elements are typically used after verbs or action nouns to show the direction in which a movement or action proceeds. Though this seems like a simple and clear function, some details are yet to be clarified in describing directionals in the Hawaiian language. In this paper, as a part of studies on Hawaiian spatial expression, the deictic directionals *aku* and *mai* are discussed. The main point is to establish “from who, what, or where we judge the direction of movement when third-person subject sentences are made,” especially in relation to the narrator/author of written Hawaiian folktales.

¹ This paper is written based on my oral presentation at the 40th meeting of Japanese Society for Oceanic Studies (March 2023). Some additional data and references are also added.

In this paper, Section 2 refers to previous studies on *aku* and *mai* in Hawaiian and some other Polynesian languages. In Section 3, data on the use of *aku* and *mai* in three folktales is presented. Then in Section 4, I discuss how we can interpret the data considering the (emotional) distance between narrators and their narratives. Through this process, this paper aims to examine the relationship between narrative/narrator and directionals' grammatical functions in written Hawaiian language.

2. Previous research on *aku* and *mai*

2.1 In Hawaiian descriptions

In Hawaiian, there are four words that serve as directionals: *aku*, *mai*, *a'e*, and *iho*. Compared to the vertical axis *a'e* (upwards) and *iho* (downwards), *aku* and *mai* are more deictic words. These words come after content words, but not necessarily. For example, *hele* (to move, come, or go) can be used with all four elements, and may also appear in a sentence by itself.

1)	<i>Hele</i>	<i>mai!</i>	“Come!”	<i>Hele</i>	<i>iho!</i>	“Go down” [sic]
	move	mai		move	downwards	
	<i>Hele</i>	<i>a'e!</i>	“Go up!”	<i>Hele</i>	<i>aku!</i>	“Go away!”
	move	upwards		move	<i>aku</i>	(Elbert and Pukui 1979: 91)
2)	<i>Hele</i>	<i>au.</i>	“I go.”			
	move	1sg				

As linguistically typical in the words of spatial expression, Hawaiian directionals have many uses besides their spatial purpose. They are explained by Elbert and Pukui (1979) in the most famous and comprehensive linguistic description of Hawaiian. Additionally, some scholars have described directionals in more detail, including Cook (1999), who discussed the temporal usage of directionals, and Shionoya (2007), who explained their use in comparative sentences.

Despite their breadth of usage, almost every previous description has denoted directionals' spatial usage, on which I concentrate in this paper, as their most basic function. Table 1 shows some examples.

Table 1. *Aku* and *mai* in previous Hawaiian grammatical descriptions²

	<i>aku</i>	<i>mai</i>
Andrews 1854	<i>Aku</i> , implies motion from the speaker or agent (p.125)	<i>Mai</i> implies motion towards the speaker or agent (p.125)
Elbert and Pukui 1979	Far or away from the speaker: ‘away’, future (p.91)	Near or toward the speaker: ‘to me’, toward the speaker (p.91)
Pukui and Elbert 1986 (Dictionary)	Particle expressing direction away from the speaker.	Directional particle, towards the speaker, this way.
Schütz et al. 2005	‘away’: ...the direction is literally away from the speaker (p.16) ‘away from the speaker’ (p.52)	‘toward the speaker’ (p.52) ‘here’ (toward first person), ‘in this direction’, ‘in the direction toward the focus of narrative’ (p.118)

These descriptions are clear. However, we face some confusion about the rule of *aku* and *mai* use when we read stories. Although it is originally an oral tradition and often referred to as an endangered language, Hawaiian comprises a rich collection of written texts and some audio excerpts, some of which are available on the Internet. Written texts include a wide variety of contents: Bibles, newspapers, legal documents, indigenous cultural testimonies, etc. Among them are many narratives about Hawaiian gods and legendary figures; these stories are typically told from the third-person perspective. In their narratives, the narrators are not in the place where the story unfolds. This begs the question, how do narrators choose the focus or point of view of the narrative? Moreover, who, where, or what can become the point of view? Additionally, based on the use of *aku* and *mai* in such texts, it is common for the point of view to change throughout the course of the story. Therefore, when can such change occur? What effects are caused by these changes in the point of view? These questions have not been fully explained in the literature.³

Previously, I have tried to explain these points. For example, I took the first chapter of “*He mo‘olelo o Kawelo*” from Fornander’s collection as a data source and examined the point of view of the narrative when *aku* and *mai* are used, and how such a point of view changes as the story progresses (Iwasaki 2022). The entities that can become the center of the point of view include humans, gods, animals, things, and places (even where no one

² Although these descriptions also referred to temporal or other usages of directionals, in this paper I only cite spatial one.

³ Besides, the irregularity of *aku* and *mai* with verb of saying (say, tell, reply, etc.) is often referred to.

in the story seems to be in that place). However, it is unclear when changes to the point of view occur, or what the narrator aimed to do by making such changes.

In this paper, adopting a different approach, I focus on the relationship between the narrator and their narrative, as indicated by other Polynesian languages' previous descriptions, which are summed up in the next section. After all, the one who decides *aku* or *mai* is the narrator, so it is reasonable to consider this relationship. Additionally, comparing related languages is a key process in Hawaiian grammatical studies, as interviewing native speakers is often difficult.

Before continuing, it should be noted that *aku* and *mai* can be followed by the demonstrative (-) *la*. This leads to the words *akula* and *maila*, respectively.⁴ These *-la* forms can be frequently found in narratives, and some scholars insist that they work as temporal/aspectual elements, though the discussion has proven inconclusive so far. As shown in Tables 3–5, the author counts those with and without *-la* separately, but this time the difference between these two forms is not discussed.

2.2 In other Polynesian languages

Aku and *mai* are said to date back to Proto-Polynesian (and perhaps even further)⁵; thus, there is some reference of directionals in the grammatical description of those languages, though the form of *aku* tends to be *atu*. As for their typical usage, these elements have roughly the same or, at least, similar roles in Hawaiian.

Kieviet (2017: 347–362) shows the corresponding elements of *aku* and *mai* in Rapa Nui. Their basic function is described as: “The directionals *mai* and *atu* indicate direction with respect to a certain deictic centre or locus.” He also refers to the case of the third-person: “it is to a certain extent up to the narrator to choose the perspective from which the text world is regarded” (Kieviet 2017: 351). It can be inferred that the situation is the same in Hawaiian because, theoretically, only the narrator can decide which directionals to use.

Cablitz (2006) conducted a detailed study on the expression of space in North Marquesan, one of the languages most similar to Hawaiian. (North) Marquesan has similar elements to Hawaiian directionals. Cablitz (2006) referred to the “usage of *mai* and *atu* in narratives and reported events” in detail (439). There are some differences in the two directionals. In narratives Hawaiian directionals and North Marquesan directionals behave

⁴ In some texts they are separated: *aku la*, *mai la*.

⁵ See, for example, Greenhill and Clark (2011). Other two directionals, *a'e* and *iho*, are also used in some Polynesian languages, but obsolete in others today.

differently. According to Cablitz, in North Marquesan narratives, “both *mai* and *atu* can express directional movement towards a location or person.” The difference between *mai* and *atu* is that:

When *mai* is used, the narrator takes some kind of quasi-perspective and it seems that he or she is somehow more involved in the narrative than when *atu* is used. Consistent use of *atu* in a narrative for directional movement towards and away from the protagonist in fact expresses a more neutral or distant perspective of the narrator... (Cablitz 2006: 442)

This claim is followed by an example that compares the frequency of *mai* and *atu* in one narrative, highlighting a considerable difference: six instances of *mai* versus 50 of *atu*. Cablitz (2006: 443) concludes that this discrepancy shows that the narrator adopted a less involved perspective. In other words, North Marquesan narrators can use *atu* and *mai* to emphasize their mental distance from their narrative.

This kind of mental distance is also referred to in Maori grammar. Bauer (1993: 92) describes the correspondents of *aku* and *mai* as “adverbial particles,” and says that their use may lead “to identify the participant of the story who is the chief point of focus in episodes where there are several participants” (Bauer: 473). Furthermore, Bauer’s study reports that many native speakers refer to the particles’ “affective use.” According to Bauer (1993: 474), “*mai* is used with participants with whom there is emotional rapport, while *atu* marks emotional distance.”

These descriptions indicate that *aku* and *mai* are seen as a means of representing a more abstract kind of distance between narrators and their narratives—i.e., mental distance. In Hawaiian, sometimes it is said that emotional proximity can be coded by the words of physical nearness, especially in relation to the use of *mai*. However, at least in grammatical descriptions, there seem to be no such references to the relationship between the narrator and their narrative.

3. Data

3.1 Goals

As noted in Section 2.1, this paper aims to determine whether some aspects of the usage of *aku* and *mai* can be explained in connection with how the narrators recognize the relationship between the narrator and their narrative.

Specifically, regarding the assumption that the narrator-narrative relationship plays a role in the use of *aku* and *mai* in Hawaiian, the frequency of *aku* and *mai* in the narratives is

compared. If one is more frequent than the other (as is the case in North Marquesan, noted above), there is a possibility that Hawaiian narrators use these directionals to express their involvedness in their narrative, similarly to their North Marquesan counterparts. Besides, numerical data has been mostly absent from Hawaiian grammatical studies; therefore, examining such data could provide valuable insights.

3.2 Data sources

Three narratives are shown in Table 2. All of them were publicly printed⁶ between 1834 and 1906 in the form of books or serial stories in newspapers, when Hawaiian was actively used as an everyday language.⁷

“*Ke ka‘ao o Lā‘ieikawai*” is a story about the dramatic life of a famous female figure, Lā‘ieikawai. “*He mo‘olelo o Kawelo*” is a story detailing a man’s life from his youth to his struggle to become the king of the island. “*Ka mo‘olelo o Hi‘iakaikapoliopele*” is a story about the journey of a well-known goddess, Hi‘iakaikapoliopele, who sought to fetch a man for her renowned sister, the goddess of the volcano, Pele.

As stated above, all stories are about the person mentioned in title, all of whom are well-known legendary figures in Hawaii. Therefore, these stories are not about events that occurred at the time they were written; they are considered to have occurred in the past in Hawaii. In a sense, the authors are distanced from their stories.

Regarding the authors, many of their details are unknown, but some are clarified in the publications. “Ho‘oulumāhiehie” is speculated to be Poepoe, while “Haleole,” in the excerpt from Elbert (1959) and the author of *Lā‘ieikawai* are the same person, who spent many years collecting folktales. Thus, there is a possibility that both “Lā‘ie” and “Kawelo” were written by the same author. However, even if the narrator is the same, this does not mean that the relationship between the narrator and the narrative is also the same. Therefore, based on the appropriateness of the content and quantity, this time “Lā‘ie” and “Kawelo” are used.

⁶ Hence, hereafter I use the term “author,” though it also means “narrator” in this paper.

⁷ There is a gap of 70 years, so it should be noted that there can be some differences due to diachronic changes. This should be explored in further research.

Table 2. The three Hawaiian stories analyzed in this paper

Title	Lā'ie (Hale'ole 1997)	Kawelo (Elbert 1959: 32-47)	Hi'iaka (Ho'oulumāhiechie 2003: 1-151)
Published in	1834	1918 (Collected in 1860-70s)	1905-6
Author	S. N. Hale'ole	Unkown "The collectors included S. N. Kamakau, S. Haleole, Kepelino Keauokalani..." (According to Elbert 1959: 1)	Ho'oulumāhiechie = Moku'ōhai Poepoe? (According to Ho'oulumāhiechie 2003: 462)

3.3 Results

Tables 3-5 show the instances of *aku* and *mai* that appear across the three stories. In all texts, *aku* and *mai* were detected uniformly and then homonymies were manually removed.

Note that the *aku* and *mai* groups in the tables comprise "*aku* and *akula*" and "*mai* and *maila*," respectively. It should also be noted that the instances of *aku* and *mai* include directionals used for other than their spatial purpose, mainly a temporal one. As can be seen in Table 3, there are many *-la* forms, and as noted in Section 2.1, some studies posit that the *-la* form can have a temporal/aspectual use in the narrative. Typically, previous studies do not explore this matter in depth; however, Kamanā and Wilson (1991; 2012) see these narrative *-la* forms as those that occur when the demonstrative *ala* follows directionals. Therefore, it is assumed that the difference in tense-aspect does not determine whether *aku* or *mai* are used. Thus, this time, they are grouped together.

Table 3 presents the simple numbers and the volume of the token varies in each story. It should be noted that the ratio of the use of the *-la* and zero forms varies across authors. This difference is not the main point of this paper, but it may suggest the authors' different characteristics.

Table 4 shows how often *aku* and *mai* appear in each story. Although there is some difference among the authors in terms of which one is used more often, overall, the percentage indicates that they are used approximately the same amount (around 4%).

Table 5 shows the ratio of the occurrence of *aku* and *mai* in each story; it shows differences among narrators, stories, or both in selecting *aku* or *mai*. While in Lā'ie the ratio was roughly 6:4, in the other two it was nearly 5:5. Moreover, in Hi'iaka, the *mai* group is used more frequently than the *aku* group, which indicates a reverse trend, compared with the

others.

Table 3. The total number of occurrence of *aku* and *mai* in each text

	Lā'ie	Kawelo	Hi'iaka
Token	67335	15592	92219
<i>aku</i>	867	121	1109
<i>akula</i>	826	186	572
<i>aku</i> group	1693	307	1681
<i>mai</i>	752	177	1300
<i>maila</i>	310	113	615
<i>mai</i> group	1062	290	1915
Total	2755	597	3596

Table 4. The ratio of the occurrence of *aku* and *mai* to token in each text

	Lā'ie	Kawelo	Hi'iaka
<i>aku</i> group	1693	307	1681
	0.0251	0.0197	0.0182
<i>mai</i> group	1062	290	1915
	0.0158	0.0186	0.0208
Total	2755	597	3596
	0.0409	0.0383	0.0390

Table 5. Ratio of *aku* vs *mai* in each texts

	Lā'ie	Kawelo	Hi'iaka
<i>aku</i> group	1693	307	1681
	0.6145	0.5142	0.4675
<i>mai</i> group	1062	290	1915
	0.3855	0.4858	0.5325
Total	2755	597	3596

In Table 5, the publication years progress from older to newer from the left to the right. Chronologically, the *aku:mai* ratio seems to have changed from a less frequent use of *mai* to the contrary; however, our deduction does not end here.

4. Discussion

4.1 Ratio of *aku* vs *mai*

As shown in Table 5, although there were some differences in the frequency of the directionals for each text, the ratio of the occurrence of *aku* and *mai* was similar in all stories. It is very different from the example in North Marquesan. In fact, from my observation regarding directionals in similar third-person authors' Hawaiian folktales, such bias, if there is any, is usually a rare occurrence. Table 5 supports this via numerical data.

In addition, it is notable that the author of Hi'iaka uses *mai* more frequently than the others. It is because in Hi'iaka sometimes the author "speaks" to the readers using expressions such as "*ka makamaka heluhelu*" (i.e., "dear reader") or "*ka mea kākau*" (i.e., "the writer") when commenting on a variation of a storyline or the chants that appear in the story. Making metafictional comments with these expressions indicates the author's decreased level of involvement in the narrative. This seems contrary to what is said about directionals' use and mental distance in North Marquesan and Maori—summed up in Section 2.2.

4.2 Possible explanations for Table 5

There are several possible interpretations for these findings. The first explanation is that unlike in other related languages (e.g., North Marquesan), in Hawaiian, *aku* and *mai* are not used to indicate the mental distance between the narrator and the narrative.

The second explanation is that in the three stories analyzed in this study, the mental distance between the narrators and their narratives happened to be similar, whereas in other texts the *aku* vs. *mai* ratio may favor one of these directionals. To consider this possibility, further data are needed. Indeed, such expansion of the corpora is desirable to engage in a more detailed discussion. It is undeniable that there are narratives that show frequent use of *aku* or *mai*. Nevertheless, finding such texts cannot explain how the authors think about their mental distance from their narratives when they do not show bias, as in Table 5. Thus, in any case, this needs a separate discussion.

Additionally, it should be noted that the stories used in this paper are written narratives, not oral ones. Although they are both narratives, they each have different characteristics.

5. Further questions

This paper examined whether the relationship between the narrators and narratives is a key factor in determining the usage of *aku* and *mai*. This topic involves several factors; thus, there is a wide range of elements to study in the future.

First, to clarify the relationship between the narrators and the narratives, more data should be acquired. More narratives by more narrators have to be taken into account.

Besides, what kind of relationship exists between the narrative and the narrator in Hawaiian language needs to be examined from both a linguistic and cultural perspective. This includes both oral and written narratives. Although the former are more difficult to study because of Hawaiian's current linguistic situation, the archives of sound recordings can offer valuable insights. For example, there are many kupunas' narratives on the website *Kani 'āina*, "Voices of the Land."^{8 9}

Furthermore, other grammatical elements and spatial expressions can be discussed in relation to the narrators. For instance, spatial expressions such as demonstratives and locational nouns may also be discussed. If other elements can be explained in relation to the narrators or their distance with their narratives, it would be beneficial to the discussion of *aku* and *mai*.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Numbers JP19K13156, JP21J01161, JP23K12156.

Abbreviations

Hi'iaka	<i>Ka mo'olelo o Hi'iakaikapoliopole</i> (Ho'oumāhie 2006)
Kawelo	<i>He mo'olelo o Kawelo</i> (Elbert 1959) [originally In: Fornander, Abraham. (1918) <i>The Fornander collection of Hawaiian Antiquities and Folk-lore</i> , volume V. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press.]
Lā'ie	<i>Ke ka'ao o Lā'ieikawai</i> (Hale'ole 1997)
1	first person
sg	singular

⁸ <https://ulukau.org/kaniaina/> (Retrieved on date 2023-04-18)

⁹ Though not so thoroughly, regarding the ratio of *aku* vs *mai*, I have made two attempts at analyzing oral records. One data source is Shionoya (2005), which presents a recorded conversation between two speakers. Another comprises the records of the radio program, *Ka Leo Hawai'i* on September 23, 1974 (Kimura 1974). Both exhibit a ratio of approximately 5:5, in line with the findings of this paper studying written narratives. Even though more careful analysis should be conducted with the oral data, the bias may be minimal.

References

- Andrews, Lorrin. (1854) *Grammar of the Hawaiian Language*. Honolulu: Mission Press.
- Cablitz, Gabriele H. (2006) *Marquesan: A Grammar of Space*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Elbert, Samuel H. (1959) *Selections from Fornander's Hawaiian Antiquities and Folk-lore*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Elbert, Samuel H, and Mary Kawena Pukui. (1979) *Hawaiian Grammar*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Greenhill S.J. and Clark R. 2011. POLLEX-Online: The Polynesian Lexicon Project Online. *Oceanic Linguistics*, 50(2), 551-559.
- Hale'ol'e, S. N. (1997 [1863]) *Ke ka 'ao o Lā 'ieikawai*. Hilo: Hale Kuamo'o, Ka Haka 'Ula o Ke'eliokōlani.
- Ho'oulumāhiehie. (2006) *Ka mo'olelo o Hi 'iakaikapoliopole*. Honolulu: Awaiaulu Press.
- Iwasaki, Kanae. (2022) "The selection of "the focus of a narrative" in Hawaiian directionals". Handbook on the 164th Meeting of the Linguistic Society of Japan. 286–292. [in Japanese]
- Kamanā, Kauanoë and William H. Wilson. (1991) *Nā Kai 'Ewalu Papa Makahiki 'Elua (Revised edition)*. Hilo: Halekuamo'o.
- Kamanā, Kauanoë and William H. Wilson. (2012) *Nā Kai 'Ewalu: Beginning Hawaiian Lessons Book I*. Hilo: Halekuamo'o.
- Kimura, Larry Lindsey Kauanoë (producer) (1974). Kani'āina, ulukau.org Digital Repository of Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, University of Hawai'i at Hilo, *Ka Leo Hawai'i*, 1973-09-23, HV24.037, Larry Lindsey Kauanoë Kimura (presenter); Edith Kekipi DeMatta (guest); Ida Kapu'ihilani Feary-Milton Nāone (guest); Kamokila Campbell (guest); Keoni Dupont (guest); Joseph Iokepa Pu'ipu'i Wenuke/Wainuke Maka'ai (telephone guest); Loke Ka'ilihīwa Po'ahā (telephone guest); Charles Kale Pāwai Kawewehi (telephone guest); Ku'ulei Ching (telephone guest); Haunani Theresa Bernardino (telephone guest); Ku'uleimomi Bernardino (telephone guest), Retrieved from: ulukau.org/kaniaina on date 2023-04-18.
- Pukui, Mary Kawena and Samuel H. Elbert. (1986) *Hawaiian Dictionary: Revised and Enlarged Edition*. Honolulu : University of Hawaii Press.
- Shionoya, Toru. (2001) "Hawaiian language material (I)". In: Shibata, Norio and Toru Shionoya (eds.). *Languages of the South Pacific Rim Volume 1*. ELPR publication series; A1-001.
- Shionoya, Toru. (2007) "Directionals in Polynesian Comparative Expressions". *Memoirs of*

the Muroran Institute of Technology Vol. 57, pp.17–24. [In Japanese]

Schütz, Albert J., Gary N. Kahāho‘omalū Kanada and Kenneth William Cook. (2005)
Pocket Hawaiian Grammar: A Reference Grammar in Dictionary Form. Waipahu:
Island Heritage Publishing.