

**Workshop proposal for the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea
(Bucharest, Romania; August 26-29, 2020)**

Title:

“Neglected syntactic functions and non-syntactic functions of applicative morphology”

Convenors:

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Description

Applicatives appear to be very common cross-linguistically, especially in agglutinative languages with rich verbal morphology (see Peterson 1999, 2007 for a survey of 50 languages with applicative constructions and their features). Most definitions of applicative constructions (e.g. Alsina and Mchombo 1993; Bresnan and Moshi 1993; Payne 1997, 2002, Peterson 2007; Mithun 2002; Haspelmath and Müller-Bardey 2004; Kulikov 2011; Creissels 2016) coincide in claiming that there are at least four fundamental attributes of applicative morphemes: (i) they are verbal derivational processes with syntactic consequences; (ii) they introduce an internal argument (i.e. object argument) to the argument structure of the underived verb root/stem; and (iii) there are multiple typically “peripheral” semantic roles that can be mapped onto the morphosyntactic entity introduced by the applicative (e.g. Beneficiary, Instrument, Possessor, Location, etc.). Several definitions (Payne 1997; Dixon and Aikhenvald 2000; Peterson 2007) also assume that applicative morphemes are optional (i.e. verb roots/stems without an applicative can appear in a construction with an oblique/adjunct, but this peripheral participant can alternatively be expressed as a core argument if the verb root/stem combines with an applicative). These features have become well known and are often assumed to be “canonical” or “prototypical”. However, if one looks across language families, it is unsurprisingly unclear what should be the essential, defining criteria to include a given construction in the category “applicative”, and why.

For instance, in languages where applicative morphology is optional, it can co-occur with the oblique constituent which should have been promoted by applicative derivation (e.g. Taba, Austronesian, Bowden 2001; Indonesian, Austronesian, Chung 1976: 55, Musgrave 2001: 156; Australian Aboriginal languages, Austin 2005; Abaza, Northwest Caucasian, O’Herin 2001). The functions of these constructions are not well understood at the present time, but they could be discourse-related.

By contrast, in many Bantu and Niger-Congo languages (Creissels et al. 2008: 109; Creissels 2010: 30), as well as in many Northwest Caucasian languages (Peter Arkadiev, p.c.) and Iroquoian languages (Mithun 2002), applicative constructions are *obligatory*. They are the only way to express a given participant in a single clause — such as General Location, where the event described by the verb takes place.

Applicative derivation is not always a valence-increasing operation. For instance, Bantu applicative constructions where the initial direct object loses some object properties and the applied object gains all object properties after applicative derivation, are extremely problematic for any claims related to syntactic valence. Further problems with labeling applicative

derivation as a valence-increasing operation are found in Salish redirective applicatives, where the applicative combines with a transitive verb root and the resulting derived stem is still transitive (Kiyosawa and Gerds 2010).

In some languages and with certain types of verbs, applicative morphology might have purely semantic (e.g. aspectual-related) effects with no syntactic consequences whatsoever for the clause (Maa, Nilotic, Lamoureux 2004; preverbatation in Germanic, Slavic, Baltic, Indo-Aryan, Kulikov 2012, Kozhanov 2016; Taba, Austronesian, Bowden 2001; Bantu, Trithart 1983).

Even though applicative morphology is often characterized as introducing a “semantically peripheral” participant, i.e. a non-Theme (and non-Agent), the (obligatory) use of applicative morphology to bring in core (i.e. non-peripheral) semantic participants such as Themes appears to be common in Australian Aboriginal languages (Austin 2005), Papuan (Onishi 2000: 131), Austronesian (Bowden 2001), Eskimo-Aleut (Mithun 2000: 108), and Mayan (see Lehmann and Verhoeven 2006 who call this construction in Yucatec Maya “extraversion”).

Finally, applicative morphology has been reported to have a focalizing function in Otomí and Mesoamerican languages in general (Hernández-Green 2016), including Eastern Mayan and Mixean languages (Hernández-Green 2016: 357; Mora-Marín 2003), Mojeño Trinitario (Arawak, Rose forthcoming), Bantu (Kimenyi 1980; Trithart 1983) and Atlantic (Voisin-Nouguier 2002). This function is particularly noteworthy given that applicative constructions often function as topic-continuity/worthiness devices (Peterson 2007).

In this workshop, we do not take any feature of applicative morphology to be defining, canonical, or prototypical. Instead, our definition of APPLICATIVE morpheme is any derivational morphology occurring on a verb root/stem that has amongst its functions the introduction of a non-Actor semantic argument into a main clause. This non-Actor is usually mapped onto an APPLIED PHRASE. The latter term, coined by Denis Creissels, refers to any morphosyntactic entity introduced and/or semantically/pragmatically manipulated by the applicative without any specifications about its syntactic category and argumenthood status.

The goal of this workshop is to focus entirely on seldom-described functions of applicative morphology that appear to be nevertheless widespread in geographically distant and genealogically unrelated language families. These include:

Syntax-related:

- Applicative morphology is the only (or one of) the morphosyntactic means to introduce a General Location (e.g. ‘in the house’, ‘at the sea’, etc.) into a main clause (as in Northwest Caucasian and Bantu).
- Applicative morphology introduces an applied phrase that is syntactically an adjunct/oblique or “registers” the occurrence of the adjunct/oblique in the clause (as in Mayan, Oto-Manguean, Bantu, and Austronesian).
- Applicative morphology is valence-increasing with some verbs but valence-neutral or even valence-decreasing with others (as in Mapudungun and Tswana), i.e., applicative morphology has become fossilized and has lost its original functions.

Non-syntax-related:

- Applicative morphology can be used to narrow-focus a syntactic non-core argument like a Location, an Instrument, etc. (as in Bantu, Mayan, Otomanguean and Arawak).

- Applicative morphology does not introduce an applied phrase. Instead, it can add meaning nuances to the meaning of the verb root/stem, such as completeness, repetition, thoroughness, excess, “in vain”, etc. (as in Bantu, Austronesian, and some branches of Indo-European).
- Applicative morphology does not introduce an applied phrase. Instead, it can change the meaning of the whole event described by the construction in which applicative morphology appears (e.g. *The man will jump (over) the rock* vs. *The man will jump-APPL on top of the rock*, as in Maasai, Nilotic; see Lamoureaux 2004).

Other possible topics:

- the semantic and/or pragmatic features/usage contexts of optional applicative constructions (see above) vs. the counterpart construction in which a verb root without an applicative combines with an oblique
- the occurrence of applicative morphology on the verb in subordinate clauses (as in Bantu)
- the occurrence of applicative morphology on the verb in *wh*-questions (as in Bantu)
- the genesis and evolution of applicative morphology as a way to explain the (dis)appearance of their non-canonical functions

Some contributions within this workshop point to the fact that directionals and other spatial-related morphology can have applicative functions (see also Rose forthcoming, where applicative-like functions are carried out by classifiers). More generally, not only do the contributions below address these less described functions of applicative morphology, but they also point to several other non-described functions which have parallels in other language families.

Keywords:

Applicatives, Applicative-like morphology, Focalization, Registration, Semantics, Valence neutrality, Voice

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