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Valency and expectation in Bantu applicatives

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Abstract: Bantu applicatives are standardly analysed syntactically, as encoding a change in valency. However, in many cases applicatives do not change valency, but are rather related to a change in interpretation. In particular pragmatic functions of applicatives related to focus and emphasis are often noted in the description of individual languages, but are very rarely reflected in typological or theoretical work. To address this problem, this paper develops a pragmatic analysis of applicatives, in which applicatives signal that the action denoted by the base verb is being carried out in some way remarkably, and so differently from normal expectations about the action. Pragmatic effects are found with all uses of applicatives, and may lead to a change in valency, or not. Absence of a change in valency is found in particular with locative and instrument applicatives, while benefactive applicatives almost always entail a change in valency. This is related to the thematic hierarchy: Beneficiaries occupy a high position in the thematic hierarchy and have a strong effect on the expectedness of the action expressed. The advantage of our analysis is that it addresses both interpretational and structural aspects of applicative constructions and provides a unified explanation for them.

Keywords: applicative constructions; valency; context-dependence; syntax-pragmatics interface; expectation.

1 Introduction

Applicatives are typically analysed syntactically, in terms of their valency changing potential, in particular as resulting in the addition of an argument, or the promotion of a non-argument, with respect to a corresponding non-applicative construction (see e.g. Peterson 2007). In addition, in many languages, including Bantu languages, applicatives are marked morphologically, for example, through a derivational suffix of the verb. However, these two properties do not always co-occur, and a morphology-syntax mismatch arises when morphologically marked applicative verb forms do not change valency. In such cases the same applicative morphology is related to syntactic valency changing only sometimes, but not consistently, making a syntactic analysis problematic. Furthermore, pragmatic functions of applicatives related to focus and emphasis are often noted in the description of individual languages, but are very rarely reflected in typological or theoretical work (exceptions include e.g. Marten 2003; Creissels 2004; Voisin 2006). The challenge addressed in this paper is to show how a range of uses of applicative constructions defy an analysis in purely syntactic terms, and to outline an alternative analysis of Bantu applicatives which explains the morphological marking and associated semantic, syntactic and pragmatic qualities. In particular, we propose that applicative morphology indicates that the action or event described by the predicate is unusual or unexpected and in some sense ‘stronger’ than the corresponding non-applied verb form. From this perspective, the underlying valency of lexical verbs encodes culturally expected, ‘normal’ events, while applicative morphology signals that the particular event is somehow remarkable, often through emphasising or focusing a specific aspect of the action or event. While we will not develop a fully worked-out definition of ‘remarkableness’, we will assume that pragmatic effects like remarkableness or unexpectedness, rather than syntactic effects, are at the heart of applicative constructions. We

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will develop this idea and take a semantic-pragmatic characterisation of applicatives as a starting point, and show that well-known syntactic effects, which have been taken as central in previous research, follow from it.

The paper is organised as follows. In Section 2, we provide a background on Bantu applicatives, and in Section 3 a brief survey of previous syntactic analyses. Section 4 introduces motion predicates and lexical applicatives and shows their specific behaviour in terms of meaning and valency. Section 5 describes pragmatic effects associated with applicatives, and shows that these are independent of valency change. In Section 6 we discuss so-called augmentative verbs, which morphologically employ a double applicative suffix, and show how these forms provide further evidence for a pragmatic view of applicatives. In Section 7 we bring the evidence of the preceding sections together and develop a comprehensive, pragmatic analysis of applicatives. Finally, Section 8 presents a summary and conclusion of our findings.

2 Bantu applicatives

Bantu applicatives are well described and a number of analyses of different aspects of the construction have been proposed from a variety of analytical perspectives. Typical examples of applicative constructions found in the literature involve a change in valency, where the applicative verb appears to license the introduction of a new object, the applied object, such as *anyani* ‘baboons’ in (1b):

- (1) a. A-lenje a-ku-phík-á zí-túmbúwa [Chichewa]
 2-hunters SM2-PRES-cook-FV 8-pancakes
 ‘The hunters are cooking pancakes’ (Mchombo and Firmino 1999: 217)
- b. A-lenje a-ku-phík-ír-a a-nyaní zí-túmbúwa
 2-hunters SM2-PRES-cook-APPL-FV 2-baboons 8-pancakes
 ‘The hunters are cooking (for) the baboons some pancakes’ (Mchombo and Firmino 1999: 217)

Bantu applicative constructions have a number of distinct morphosyntactic characteristics which can be summarised as follows:

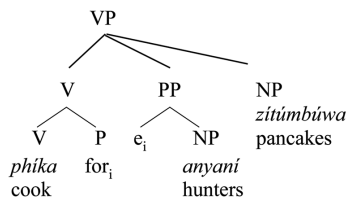
- Applicative verbs are formally marked by a verbal suffix (also called ‘verbal extension’) reconstructed as **-il-*, appearing after the verbal root and before the final vowel. Sometimes vowel and nasal harmony occur (which is also found with causatives, statives, passives, etc., as well as with perfects).
- When applicatives license the introduction or promotion of an additional argument, this argument can have different thematic roles such as beneficiary, location, instrument, motive, etc.
- Schadeberg (2003: 74) proposes a concise set of three basic semantic/thematic roles of Bantu applied objects: “(i) beneficiary, (ii) place and – by extension – time, cause and reason, and (iii) instrument”.
- De Kind and Bostoen (2012) propose, based on evidence from CiLuba, that the basic meaning of applicatives is locative (following earlier proposals by e.g. Dammann 1961 and Kähler-Meyer 1966). A similar view underlies the analysis of Bemba substitutive applicatives in Marten and Kula (2014).
- The applicative can be combined with other extensions, and usually follows causative suffixes, but precedes passives and reciprocals (Hyman 2003).
- Reduplication of (what looks like) applicative suffixes give sometimes rise to intensive readings.
- In contrast to other (non-Bantu) languages with applicatives (cf. Peterson 2007), the form of the suffix in Bantu does not vary according to different syntactic or thematic functions of the applicative.
- A historically post-verbal locative clitic (such as *-ho* in Kinyarwanda) is sometimes analysed as locative applicative marker (see Zeller and Ngoboka 2006).

3 Previous syntactic analyses

Syntactically, applicatives are typically analysed as instances of double object constructions, and a considerable amount of work has focused on the status of the two objects (e.g. symmetric vs. asymmetric languages/constructions) (Baker 1988; Bresnan and Moshi 1990; Marantz 1993; Kimenyi 1995; Moshi 1998; Ngonyani 1998; Ndayiragije 1999; McGinnis 2001; Ngonyani and Githinji 2006; Zeller and Ngoboka 2006; Pylkkänen 2008; Georgala 2012; Murrell 2012, among many others).

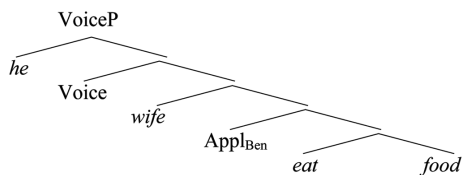
Irrespective of the theoretical approach taken, the starting point for formal analyses of applicatives is their valency-changing quality, often illustrated with benefactive applicatives. The central position of valency change can in fact be traced to older, comparative work. Guthrie (1962), for example, divides Bantu extensions into three groups: 1) valency reducing (passive, stative), 2) valency increasing (applicative, causative), and 3) valency neutral (reversive). Early generative analyses, such as Baker's (1988) incorporation analysis, assume that applicatives are double object constructions with a prepositional head incorporated into the verb (2):

(2) Applicatives as preposition incorporation (cf. Baker 1988: 278)

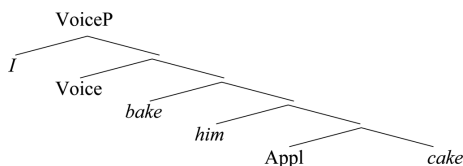


Similarly, more recent approaches which postulate an applicative head (e.g. Marantz 1993 and subsequent work) assume that applicatives license the introduction of an additional argument. In work distinguishing between 'high' and 'low' applicatives (e.g. Jeong 2006; Pylkkänen 2008; Georgala 2012), two different applicative constructions are postulated, distinguished by the relation of the applied object with either the direct object (low applicatives) or the event denoted by verb (high applicatives). However, both cases presuppose that an extra applied object is introduced by an applicative head as shown in (3) (Pylkkänen 2008: 14):

(3) a. High applicative (e.g. Chaga)



b. Low applicative (e.g. English) (Pylkkänen 2008: 14)



Although differing in detail, the same valency-changing assumption underlies the applicative analysis in LFG. Work such as Bresnan and Moshi (1990) and Murrell (2012) analyses applicatives as a morpholexical

A similar example is provided from Bemba in (6), where the transitive use of *-toloka* ‘jump’ means ‘jumping over’ the object (6b), while the applicative form means ‘jumping onto’ (6c).

- (6) a. Mutálé a-léé-^ltólók-á [Bemba]
 Mutale SM1-PROG-jump-FV
 ‘Mutale is jumping’
- b. Ábá-icé bá-lée-tólók-a bá-mayó
 2-children SM2-PROG-jump-FV 2-mother
 ‘The children are jumping over the mother’
- c. Ábá-icé bá-lée-tólók-el-a bá-mayó
 2-children SM2-PROG-jump-APPL-FV 2-mother
 ‘The children are jumping onto the mother’

In these examples as well, we see that there is no direct change in valency related to the applicative, but that the difference between the base verb and the applicative verb is one of interpretation: The applicative directs the action of the verb towards an endpoint or goal. The saliency of this interpretation is further confirmed by the Bemba examples in (7), which is very similar to the Swahili examples in (5).

- (7) Mutálé a-léé-mu-bútúk-íl-á [Bemba]
 Mutale SM1-PROG-OM1-run-APPL-FV
 ‘Mutale is running towards him/her’
 ?‘Mutale is running for him/her’

The example shows that with the applicative verb *-butukila* ‘run (APPL)’, only the directional interpretation is possible, and not the benefactive one, at least out of context. The interpretation of applicative verbs is thus directly related to the semantics of the base verb, and the resulting interpretation dependent on it.

Next to motion applicatives, lexicalised applicatives interact directly with the lexical meaning of the base verb, without encoding a change in valency. In (8) a non-applicative verb is used to express ‘to warm oneself at the fire’ (8a), but the applicative form is used in the expression ‘warm oneself in the sun’ (8b):

- (8) a. uk-ont-a umu-lilo [Bemba]
 15-warm-FV 3-fire
 ‘to warm oneself at the fire’
- b. uk-ont-el-a aká-suba
 15-warm-APPL-FV 13-sun
 ‘to warm oneself in the sun’ (van Sambeek 1955: 86)

In (9), the use of the applicative distinguishes between ‘smell bad’ and ‘smell good’.

- (9) a. -nuka ‘smell, smell bad, stink’ [Swahili]
 b. -nuk-i-a ‘smell good, have a sweet smell’

Forms cognate to *-nuka/-nukia* with a similar meaning are found in several Bantu languages and thus appear to be quite old. While lexicalised applicative verbs may have a directional dimension (e.g. turning towards a sweet smell), they do not in any clear sense involve a change in valency.

5 Pragmatic factors

Since it is often assumed that the core function of applicatives is syntactic – encoding a change in valency – only a few studies have addressed semantic or pragmatic aspects of applicatives, mainly highlighting the

relevance of (lexical) semantics for the analysis of applicatives (e.g. Cann and Mabugu 2007; De Kind and Bostoen 2012; Jerro 2016; Sibanda 2016), or noticing the role of information structure, in particular the association of applicatives with focus (e.g. Marten 2003; Creissels 2004; Voisin 2006). However, we believe that the wider pragmatic functions of applicatives are a key aspect for their understanding. We will first show pragmatic effects of valency-changing applicatives, and then turn to non-valency changing applicatives. In the next section, we will build on this evidence to develop a pragmatic analysis of applicatives.

The first set of evidence comes from valency-changing applicatives which provide a structural alternative to non-applicative, oblique constructions. These are typically cases of locative or instrument applicatives, rather than benefactive applicatives. In these cases, there are two formally distinct ways of expressing the same proposition: The use of a non-applicative verb form and an oblique argument marked by a preposition or a locative affix, or the use of an applicative verb form plus an unmarked object NP. Although semantically identical, the applicative version often carries a specific pragmatic meaning: The event is emphasized or focused, it is portrayed as being ‘stronger’ than ‘normal’:

- (10) a. Salma a-li-ka-a ki-ti-ni [Swahili]
 Salma SM1-PST-sit-FV 7-chair-LOC
 ‘Salma was sitting on a chair’
- b. #Salma a-li-kal-i-a ki-ti
 Salma SM1-PST-sit-APPL-FV 7-chair
 ‘Salma was sitting on a chair’
- c. Salma a-li-kal-i-a ki-ti ch-a uvivu
 Salma SM1-PST-sit-APPL-FV 7-chair 7-of laziness
 ‘Salma was *sitting/slouching* in a comfortable chair’ (Marten 2003: 214)

In these examples, the neutral way to express the relevant event is to use a non-applicative verb plus oblique as in (10a). Without some contextual support to indicate that the event is in some way remarkable or unexpected, the use of an applicative verb plus unmarked object is infelicitous as shown by (10b). However, if the event in some sense extends normal expectations, the applicative construction is appropriate. In (10c) this reading involves slouching, rather than just sitting, which is reinforced by the change of object from a ‘normal’ *kiti* ‘chair’ to *kiti cha uvivu* ‘comfortable or lazy chair’. However, the change of object just provides further contextual clues. The point is that the event portrayed by the applicative construction in (10c) is construed as stronger and more remarkable than the corresponding event encoded by the non-applied verb.

A similar effect is demonstrated in the examples in (11):

- (11) a. Juma a-li-va-a kanzu [Swahili]
 Juma SM1-PST-wear-FV kanzu
 ‘Juma was wearing a Kanzu’
- b. #Juma a-li-val-i-a kanzu
 Juma SM1-PST-wear-APPL-FV kanzu
 ‘Juma was wearing a Kanzu’
- c. Juma a-li-val-i-a nguo rasmi
 Juma SM1-PST-wear-APPL-FV 10.clothes official
 ‘Juma was *dressed up* in official/formal clothes’ (Marten 2003: 215)
- d. – kijana wa Kihindi, ka-val-i-a vizuri ...
 youth of Indian SM1.PERF-wear-APPL-FV well ...
 ‘– an Indian youth, dressed (up) well ...’
 (Muhammad Said Abdulla, *Mwana wa Yungi Hulewa*, 1976: 52)

The non-applicative construction in (11a) shows the pragmatically neutral portrayal of the situation expressed by the verb. The object *kanzu* is an everyday garment which does not, on its own, easily trigger an interpretation that there was something special about the clothes or the way Juma was dressed. Consequently, in the absence of other contextual clues, the applicative verb form is infelicitous (11b). In contrast the applicative is used in (11c), where the *nguo rasmi* ‘official clothes’ facilitates an interpretation of dressing for a special event – we have translated this in (11c) as ‘dress up’. The final example (11d), from a novel by the Zanzibari author Muhammad Said Abdulla, shows the same construction, but now the applicative verb form is even used without an overt object. Rather than increasing valency, (11d) seems to demonstrate a decrease in valency. However, the pragmatic effects explain the use – the agent is portrayed as being dressed up well, and this is reinforced by the use of the adverb *vizuri* ‘well’. Examples like these show that applicatives carry pragmatic meaning, placing emphasis on the event, which is construed as being done to a more excessive, remarkable, and slightly unexpected degree.

The second set of evidence concerns examples in which no change in valency takes place, and where the use of the applicative construction fulfils a purely pragmatic function, independent of any syntactic role. As in the previous examples, this effect is most commonly found with non-benefactive applicatives, such as locative or instrument applicatives. The examples in (12) show the pragmatic function of an instrument applicative construction (Marten and Kula 2014: 21):

- (12) a. Mutálé a-léé-’ípík-a na supuni [Bemba]
 Mutale SM1-PROG-cook-FV with 9.spoon
 ‘Mutale is cooking with a spoon’
- b. Mutálé a-léé-’ípík-íl-a na supuni
 Mutale SM1-PROG-cook-APPL-FV with 9.spoon
 ‘Mutale is cooking *with a spoon*’, ‘Mutale is using the spoon to cook with’

In both (12a) and (12b), the instrument is encoded as a prepositional phrase headed by the preposition *na* ‘with’. Yet the verb form is a base verb in (12a), and an applicative verb in (12b). Under a syntactic analysis, (12b) is puzzling, as it would constitute a morphology-syntax mismatch and the instrument NP *supuni* would be doubly licensed – by the applicative and by the preposition. However, the difference in pragmatic interpretation corresponds to the pragmatic effects described for the previous examples. In (12b) the action denoted by the verb – cooking with a spoon – is strengthened and portrayed as remarkable, and the fact that the cooking involved the spoon is highlighted. There is focus on the instrument although syntactically it remains coded as a prepositional phrase. The unifying effect of valency-changing examples in (10) and (11) above, and the non-valency changing examples in (12) is thus their pragmatic function, while syntactically, it is hard to provide a unified analysis.

A similar example is provided by Trithart (1977) from Chichewa, where the author notes the optional presence of an applicative marker, without any corresponding change in complementation.

- (13) Jóni a-ná-lí-lemb(-er)-a dzi’ná láké ndí péni [Chichewa]
 John SM1-PST-OM5-write-APPL-FV name his with pen
 ‘John wrote his name with a pen.’ (Trithart 1977: 16)

Trithart (1977: 16) comments on the optionality of the applicative in the example and notes that the applicative verb form “directs more attention to the fact that an instrumental appears in the sentence but it does not alter the behaviour of the sentence.” This means that the applicative contributes to a difference in interpretation, but does not result in a change in syntactic structure.

In addition to instrument applicatives, as seen in (12) and (13), pragmatic uses can also be found with locative applicatives:

- (14) a. N-de-ly-a mu-mu-putule [Bemba]
 SM1SG-PRES-eat-FV 18-3-room
 ‘I am eating in the room’
 (neutral; as answer to: What are you doing?)
- b. N-de-li-il-a mu-mu-putule
 SM1SG-PRES-eat-APPL-FV 18-3-room
 ‘I am eating in the room’
 (emphatic; as answer to: Where are you eating?) (Marten 2003: 217)
- (15) a. \hat{W} a-ku-cap-a vya-kuwvara vya \hat{w} -aana [Tumbuka]
 SM2-PRES-wash-FV 8-clothes 8.POSS 2-child
 ku-máaji yáayi
 17-6.water NEG
 ‘She is not washing the children’s clothes in the river’
- b. \hat{W} a-ku-cap-ir-a ku-nyúumba
 SM2-PRES-wash-APPL-FV 17-9.house
 ‘She is washing (them) *at home*.’ (Downing 2012: 127)

Like in the examples in (12) and (13), there is no change in valency in (14) from Bemba and (15) from Tumbuka. The locative argument is coded as a locative phrase in both (14a) and (14b). However, there is a pragmatic difference: (14a) is pragmatically more neutral, and could be used as a wide-focus answer to a question such as ‘What are you doing?’. In contrast, (14b) places more narrow focus on the location, answering a question such as ‘Where are you eating?’. As in the previous examples, the assertion expressed by the applicative construction in (14b) is more emphatic than the non-applicative assertion in (14a). Similarly, in (15a), the locations are expressed identically in the two sentences, as (class 17) locative nouns, yet (15a) has a base, non-applicative verb form, while (15b) has an applicative verb form. The difference between the two sentences lies in their information structure: (15b) places more focus on the location than (15a).

The pragmatic use of locative applicatives such as illustrated by the examples from Bemba and Tumbuka has been noted in the descriptive literature of other Bantu languages. For example, for locative applicatives in Lunda, Kawasha (2003 : 262) observes: “Applicative extensions may be used optionally in combination with a locative noun phrase without changing the semantic role of the locative. ... The applicativized verb places an emphasis on the location/setting of the event or state”. The mention of both optionality and emphasis in Kawasha’s comment accords well with our observations about the structure and interpretation of locative applicatives.

In addition to locative applicatives in which the location of an event is highlighted, pragmatic emphasis can also fall on the direction implied in the event, as (16) shows:

- (16) a. Posa! [Bemba]
 throw_away-FV
 ‘Throw (it) away!’
- b. Pos-oko! (<posa uko)
 throw_away-Dem17
 ‘Throw (it) there!’
- c. Pos-el-oko! (< posela uko)
 throw_away-APPL-Dem17
 ‘Throw (it) there far away!’

In (16), both the base form (16b) and the applicative form (16c) of *-posa* ‘throw’ can be used with a locative demonstrative clitic indicating the direction of throwing. The difference between the two constructions is that (16c) is more emphatic than (16b), adding an implication of throwing something further away. However, both (16b) and (16c) encode the endpoint of the throwing, and so there is no difference in valency.

Similar examples, in which applicatives result in an interpretative difference without a corresponding syntactic difference, can be found in Swahili. In (17), Abdulaziz (1996) notes a difference in pragmatic emphasis:

- (17) a. Waziri a-li-anguk-a chini [Swahili]
 minister SM1-PAST-fall-FV down
 ‘The minister fell down’
- b. Waziri a-li-anguk-i-a chini
 minister SM1-PAST-fall-APPL-FV down
 ‘The minister fell down’ (Abdulaziz 1996: 32)

Both (17a) and (17b) describe the same event. However, the applicative construction in (17b) draws attention to the movement itself, adding a ‘meaning of movement and directionality’ (Abdulaziz 1996: 32), and so (17b) depicts a more remarkable downwards falling than in (17a).

A final set of examples comes from intransitive uses of applicatives:

- (18) a. Tu-ka-ly-a [Bemba]
 SM1PL-FUT-eat-FV
 ‘We will eat’
- b. Tu-ka-li-il-a
 SM1PL-FUT-eat-APPL-FV
 ‘We will feast’ (idiom.: ‘enjoy’) (Marten 2003: 218)
- (19) Krismasi u-ta-ku-l-i-a wapi? [Swahili]
 Christmas SM2SG-FUT-SM-eat-APPL-FV where
 ‘Where will you celebrate Christmas?’ (Poeta 2011: 49)

In both (18) and (19), the applicative form of *-lya/-la* ‘eat’ is used to express ‘enjoy/celebrate’. While this usage is probably at least in part idiomatic, the underlying effect of the applicative is in line with the effects described so far: The applicative adds emphasis to the predicate and a sense that the action was remarkable, and performed to a higher degree than expected.

6 Augmentative verbs

A final observation about the pragmatic function of applicatives comes from so-called ‘augmentative verbs’ found in many Bantu languages. These verb forms typically include a derivational extension which looks morphologically like a double applicative, but which does not have an effect on syntax: Rather augmentative verb change the interpretation of the base verb by adding emphasis or a sense of excess or completion to the base verb. The link between applicatives and augmentatives, which is clearly seen in their morphological similarity, is obscure from a syntactic point of view, but becomes clear from a pragmatic perspective. For example, in Luganda, the use of augmentative verb forms encodes ‘completeness’ or ‘excessiveness’ as a result of performing the action denoted by the verb to a high degree or amount, or as reaching a final endpoint (cf. Ashton et al. 1954: 332).¹

¹ Unfortunately no glosses are provided in the original source. However, we are mainly concerned here with the interpretation indicated in the English translations, which in all examples includes an element of excessiveness. We are grateful to Saudah Namyalo for discussion of these data.

In (31), the addition of the applicative marker in (31b) does not result in a change in valency, but in a change in interpretation. In our analysis, the lexical entailment of the predicate is that an object is thrown in the direction of or ‘at’ something or someone. However, if the endpoint is human, the throwing can also be construed as being directed towards that person. In this case, the action is remarkable vis-à-vis the lexical meaning, and so is marked by applicative morphology.³

From our perspective, then, all uses of applicatives are pragmatically licensed, as portraying the event as being remarkable and to some extent unexpected. In some instances this is lexicalised, and a specific interpretation of unexpectedness (e.g. running towards, smelling good) results from the interaction with lexicalisation pattern of the predicate. In other cases, the action denoted by the verb is unexpected in involving the applied object. The pragmatic meaning may go together with a change in valency, depending on the nature of the added constituent and on the language concerned. With benefactive uses, there is almost always a change in valency. But this is not evidence for a syntactic requirement as such, but rather reflects the high topicality and topicworthiness of animate, beneficiary arguments, whose involvement in the action almost always entails an element of counter-expectation or remarkableness.

8 Conclusions

In this paper we have questioned the common assumption that applicatives encode a syntactic operation and that their basic function is syntactic. In contrast, after looking at a range of applicative examples without change in valency, we proposed that applicatives are really about pragmatic meaning, and about expressing that the action of the verb is performed in an unexpected, remarkable way. From this perspective, non-valency changing applicatives are expected, and the change of valency is in need of explanation. We have provided this explanation in particular with reference to benefactive applicatives, which almost always include a change in valency, by reference to the thematic hierarchy and the fact that beneficiary arguments are very high on the thematic hierarchy. This means that the involvement of a beneficiary argument will typically entail that the event is remarkable and different from normal expectation, and so the use of applicative morphology is expected. The empirical advantage of our analysis is that it addresses different uses of applicative constructions – including valency-changing and non-valency-changing cases – and that it provides a unified explanation for these uses.

We believe that the study of applicatives is instructive, for several reasons. Firstly, applicatives are good data for examining the interaction between structure, meaning and context – especially in language groups like Bantu, where applicatives are morphologically marked. It was because of the morphological marking that we could observe the apparent syntax-morphology mismatch of non-valency changing applicatives to begin with. In our analysis this apparent mismatch is resolved because what at first sight looked like (and in much of the current literature are taken to be) instances of structural, syntactic aspects of natural language turned on closer analysis in fact out to be centrally related to interpretation. Secondly, methodologically our study has shown that it is rewarding to study language in use, and to ‘listen to’ data which at first sight seem difficult to analyse – such as the pragmatic, non-valency changing uses of applicatives. While the link between applicatives and emphasis, and the partial relation to valency-changing has been noted frequently in the descriptive literature, it has hardly been addressed in the typological or theoretical literature. Yet, in our analysis, it is these examples which are central to a full understanding of applicatives. Thirdly, the notion of expectation we have evoked in our analysis has received considerable attention in the literature, in particular in relation to mirativity, where it is often argued that many languages employ formal means to express the speaker’s assessment of the hearer’s expectation with respect to a particular fact or event. While these are different cases to the ones addressed in our analysis, it is noteworthy that notions of expectations appear to play a role in both phenomena.

³ We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this example to us.

While the present analysis provides an alternative to most other, syntactic analyses of applicatives, there are a number of outstanding issues and questions for further research. First, it would be good to have more examples from other Bantu (and non-Bantu) languages, to see whether the range of applicative uses is similar to Bemba and Swahili, from which most of our examples are taken, or whether there is cross-linguistic variation. Second, our notions of unexpectedness and remarkableness were largely intuitive, and future work needs to provide a more detailed and explicit characterisation of these terms. Third, we have focussed here on pragmatic aspects of applicatives, and have mentioned semantic aspects only in passing. However, more fine-grained study of the semantics of applicatives (for example in terms of direction and directing of an action, or the effects of different lexical classes of predicates) will certainly increase our understanding of the construction. Fourth, it would be interesting to look at the pragmatic functions of other so-called valency-changing operations – causatives, statives, or passives – and see to what extent their syntactic behaviour can also be subsumed under a more comprehensive, interpretation-based analysis along the lines we have proposed for applicatives in this paper.

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