

Valency and saliency in Bantu applicatives: A diachronic reanalysis

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Abstract

This chapter examines apparent competing functions of applicatives, prepositions and locative-marked phrases in a number of Bantu languages, focussing on the interaction of these types of categories in various applicative constructions. We show that in a number of Bantu languages, prepositional constructions compete with applicatives. The interaction between the two construction types revolves around valency (the licensing of an additional object) and saliency (the encoding of pragmatic effects), two hallmarks of applicative constructions more widely. Evidence from this interaction, we propose, helps to better understand the diachronic development of applicatives. We further observe a diachronic reanalysis of the applicative marker from expressing both syntactic and pragmatic effects to a pure pragmatic marker of saliency, in the context of functionally and structurally ambiguous locative phrases.

1. Introduction

As stated in this volume's introduction (Pacchiarotti & Zúñiga), applicatives are typically defined as derivational processes which i) impact syntax; ii) introduce an object argument (in contrast with the non-derived stem); and iii) are associated with a wide range of semantic roles which are mapped onto an applied phrase. In many ways therefore, applicatives in Bantu are often regarded as typical examples of the construction. Bantu applicatives can introduce an applied phrase into the clause which would otherwise be more peripheral or not be licensed. These applied phrases can fulfil a wide range of semantic roles such as benefactive, location, instrument, substitutive and reason (see e.g. Ngonyani 1996, 1998; Marten 2011; Marten and Kula 2014). The different semantic roles are typically introduced by the same applicative morpheme, reconstructed to Proto-Bantu as **-id* (Meeussen 1967: 92), although there is some variation in the reflexes of **-id* and therefore the morphological form of the applicative found across Bantu languages. However, unlike the more typologically common pattern, applicative constructions in Bantu (and in Niger-Congo more broadly) are often obligatory (Creissels 2004, Creissels et al 2008).

Applicative construction in Bantu have attracted considerable attention in the linguistics literature. Early descriptive work, such as that found in grammatical descriptions of Bantu languages, typically provides overviews of different uses and often notes a functional parallel between applicative constructions and prepositional phrases in European languages. Ashton (1944), for example, discusses Swahili applicatives under the heading of 'the prepositional (or applied) form', although she notes that 'it is unwise to try to associate these verbs with any one English preposition' (1944: 217). Formal analyses of Bantu applicatives within theoretical linguistic frameworks have brought into focus constraints on the syntax of

applicatives and the cross-linguistic variation found within Bantu. These topics are explored, for example, in several papers in Mchombo’s (1993) landmark collection on comparative Bantu grammar, while Pykkänen (2008) develops a formal, cross-linguistic analysis of applicative constructions, taking Bantu applicatives (and English dative-shift) as a starting point. In the typological literature, Peterson (2007) is a comprehensive, cross-linguistic study, while Pacchiarotti (2020) provides a fine-grained, cross-Bantu typology of applicatives.

This previous work on Bantu applicative shows that these constructions often exhibit the core features associated with applicative constructions cross-linguistically, in particular in relation to valency-change. However, an increasing amount of scholarship has shown that traditional characterisations of applicatives in Bantu as just allowing for the addition of an argument have been too simplistic. In particular, in many cases, applicative verbs in Bantu languages do not alternate systematically with non-applicative verbs, nor do they change valency, but rather applicative verbs have a pragmatic effect of marking emphasis or focus (e.g. Trithart 1983, Marten 2003, Creissels 2004, Voisin 2006, Cann and Mabugu 2007, Marten and Mous 2014, Jerro 2016, Sibanda 2016, Marten and Mous 2017, Pacchiarotti 2017, 2020).

It is the development of pragmatic functions of the applicative that we are interested in in this paper. We argue that where there are alternative strategies in a language for an applicative construction next to a preposition-like construction there is room for pragmatic functions of the applicative to come to the foreground, especially where there is no associated valency change. We look at languages where applicatives and preposition-like construction compete, as well as their differences and co-occurrence patterns. We concentrate on the pragmatic effects, rather than delving into the syntactic properties of the applicatives in these languages. As such our approach is not within the formal syntactic line of research on applicatives, nor is it focused on the typological classification of applicatives into types.

Bantu languages may have prepositions which interact with applicatives in different ways. This includes some prepositions that have come to be used in constructions in which they compete with or reinforce the applicative extension, as in (1) below. The prepositions involved can be morphologically simple (and presumably old) prepositions such as *na* ‘with’ in Bemba (1), as well as innovative prepositions such as *ḡgírá* ‘for’ in Mbuun (2). We also see borrowed forms such as *for* from English in Sesotho (3) and *para* from Portuguese in Makuwa, as discussed further below.¹

- (1) Bemba
Mutálé a-lée-¹ípík(-íl)-a *na* *supuni*
 Mutale SM1-PROG-cook(-APPL)-FV with 9.spoon
 ‘Mutale is cooking with a spoon.’
 (Marten and Kula 2014: 21)
- (2) Mbuun
ó-á-mó-dzwillé ḡgírá n-dzim
 SM1-PRS-PROG-OM1-kill.APPL for 9-money
 ‘He kills her *for the money*.’
 (Bostoen and Mundeke 2011: 192)

¹ We use both prefixed and unprefixed versions of the language names (e.g. Sesotho, Bemba) in accordance with the original authors’ usage and the discourse surrounding language naming conventions in the area where the language is spoken.

- (3) Sesotho
- a. *Ke-rek-etse* *di-konopo* *se-lamba* *sa-ka*
 SM1SG-buy-APPL.PRF 10-button 7-jacket 7-POSS.1SG
 ‘I bought buttons for my jacket.’
- b. *Ke-rek-ile* *di-konopo* *for* *se-lamba* *sa-ka*
 SM1SG-buy-PRF 10-button for 7-jacket 7-POSS.1SG
 ‘I bought buttons for my jacket.’
 (Riedel and Gibson 2021)

In the Bemba example (1), the preposition is required whereas applicative marking is optional. When both are used together, emphasis is placed on the instrument (in this case *supuni* ‘spoon’). In Mbuun, applicative marking and the use of the preposition are alternative coding strategies but they can also be combined (Bostoen and Mundeke 2011: 192-193). Like in Bemba, when both are used together, emphasis is placed on the applied object (2). In Sesotho either the applicative (3a) or the preposition (3b) can be used, but not both, and (as far as we know), there is no difference in information structure associated with either structure. We will show in this paper that the interaction of applicative marking and the use of prepositions in Bantu is related to information structure on the one hand (e.g. in Bemba and Mbuun) and to providing alternative syntactic coding strategies on the other hand – as in Mbuun and Sesotho, but not in Bemba, where, with instruments at least, the use of the preposition is obligatory.

An interesting further effect has been noted in some languages for applicatives with locatives (Mabugu 2001, Marten and Mous 2014, 2017, Pacchiarotti 2020). In some languages, the applicative is optional with some semantic roles. For example, a goal applied phrase which can optionally be introduced by the applicative can appear as either an NP argument or can maintain its locative/prepositional meaning even in the applicative construction. Mabugu (2001: 119-120) notes that in Shona an applicative-marked goal, whether preposition marked (4c) or not (4b), is interpreted as having an endpoint while the adjunct PP goal (4a) is not. When the applicative is used with the locative marking (4) this focuses the goal and that this endpoint of the action has been reached. Note here that in (4), *Muchaneta* and *Vimbai* are human proper names.

- (4) Shona
- a. *Muchaneta* *a-ka-sund-a* *cheya* (*ku-na* *Vimbai*)
 1a.Muchaneta SM1-PST-push-FV 9.chair 17-ASSO 1a.Vimbai
 ‘Muchaneta pushed a chair (towards Vimbai).’
- b. *Muchaneta* *a-ka-sund-ir-a* *cheya* *Vimbai*
 1a.Muchaneta SM1-PST-kick-APPL-FV 9.chair 1a.Vimbai
 ‘Muchaneta pushed a chair to Vimbai.’
- c. *Muchaneta* *a-ka-sund-ir-a* *cheya* *ku-na* *Vimbai*
 1a.Muchaneta SM1-PST-kick-APPL-FV 9.chair 17-ASSO 1a.Vimbai
 ‘Muchaneta pushed a chair to Vimbai.’
 (Mabugu 2001:118)

The examples show that the use of applicative marking can determine the semantic interpretation of the expression. Marten (2002) uses the Relevance-theoretic notion of “concept strengthening” (cf. Carston 2002) to characterise the semantic and pragmatic effects of applicatives.

In light of this more detailed understanding of Bantu applicatives, this paper explores the interaction between applicatives and prepositions in Bantu. The aim of the chapter is to

understand how morphological applicative constructions and functionally related prepositional constructions interact and thereby to contribute to a better understanding of applicative constructions more generally. Based on evidence from different Bantu languages, we will develop an analysis of the relationship between applicatives and prepositions, as well as applicatives and locative phrases. Specifically, we are interested in how this interaction provided the context for a dissociation of syntactic valency change and the marking of pragmatic saliency, and a diachronic reanalysis of the applicative marker as saliency marker. Under this analysis, the original function of applicatives combined syntactic and pragmatic effects, and the purely pragmatic functions, without attendant change of valency, resulted from this dissociation. The development can be understood as an effect of subjectification, i.e. development of meaning towards what the speaker is talking about (Traugott 1989: 35), and more widely as one aspect of the grammaticalization of applicatives. This is the neglected function of the applicative in Bantu which the current study focuses on and which contributes to the broader aims of the volume as a whole.

The empirical discussion below will take the more familiar cases of locatives as a starting point, where the interaction of applicatives and functional prepositions is well-known. After summarising previous work, we will turn to instrument and benefactive applicatives and show that a similar interaction can be observed. This will then provide the basis for our discussion of applicatives and the relevance of the comparison with prepositional constructions for our understanding of applicatives.

Applicatives, as can be seen from the papers in this volume, have a range of different functions, and as we show here, also compete and interact with prepositional constructions in complex ways across Bantu. To help the reader differentiate between the different types of constructions, we define applicatives for Bantu languages as constructions with one or more morphological marker that is reconstructable to Proto-Bantu **-ɪd* (Meeussen 1967: 92), and that have at least one of the semantic/syntactic/pragmatic functions associated with the applicative in Bantu (Trithart 1983). This is illustrated by the examples from Swahili in (5) below where the erstwhile applicative marker *-e(l)* has become part of a verb stem through lexicalization (5a), while in (5b), the applicative marker alternates with the non-applied form and introduces an additional participant (the person being visited).

- (5) Swahili
- a. *ku-tembe-a*
INF-walk-FV
'to move' [non-applicative in present-day Swahili]
 - b. *ku-tembel-e-a*
INF-walk-APPL-FV
'to visit' [applicative of *-tembea*]²
(Our own knowledge)

This paper compares applicative constructions with their competing or functionally related syntactic constructions in a number of Bantu languages. We focus on a relatively small number of Bantu languages mostly spoken in East and Southern Africa, for which relevant data or published descriptions are available. Based on this comparative evidence, we propose 1) an extension to the cross-linguistic, functional-diachronic paths of development of applicatives as developed in Peterson (2007:142,152) to include a stage of “saliency marking” and 2) that the particular use of applicative morphemes as saliency markers without

² Note that although the appearance of the intervocalic /l/ in Swahili in these cases may make it appear as if there are two productive morphemes, this is not supported by the morphosyntax or semantics of these verbs.

a change in valency results diachronically from reanalysis of applicative markers from licensing arguments to encoding saliency in the context of applicative constructions with both applicative markers and prepositional complements. From this perspective it appears that the syntactic function of applicatives – the introduction of arguments – diachronically precedes their pragmatic function as marking focus or saliency, a hypothesis set forth by De Kind and Bostoen (2012). We hope that this will lay the foundation for a systematic survey, employing a representative sample, to test the hypotheses argued for here in future work.

We show that the interaction of applicative marking and the use of prepositions in Bantu is related to information structure on the one hand and to providing alternative syntactic coding strategies on the other hand. We will also see examples of borrowed prepositions which are the result of language contact where it seems that semantic role encoding plays a more important role than information structure

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 explores the interaction between prepositions and applicatives, focusing on the co-occurrence of prepositions with applicative marking (in §2.1), the interaction between locative marking and applicatives (§2.2), prepositions which introduce specific thematic roles (§2.3) drawing on data from across the Bantu languages. Section 3 examines wider processes of change and cycles of historical development. Section 4 constitutes a summary and makes a number of concluding comments, as well as highlighting directions for future research.

2. The interaction of prepositions and applicatives

2.1 Co-occurrence of prepositions and applicative marking

Bantu languages typically have comparatively small, often poorly described, preposition inventories. As noted above, these inventories include morphologically simple forms, the results of more recent grammaticalization (e.g. from prepositional or associative phrases), and borrowings. In this section we provide a short overview of how the various types of prepositions found in different Bantu languages interact with applicatives.

Meeussen (1967: 115) reconstructs two non-predicative “index forms” – non-concordial elements which can precede a nominal or pronominal. These are the associative **na(-)* ‘with, also, and’ and comparative **nga(-)* ‘like’. For example, Bemba (6) (repeated from (1) above) and Herero (7) retain reflexes of the simple preposition *na* ‘with’. Cognates of the Bemba and Herero *na* ‘and, with’ are widespread across Bantu. In Bemba, morphologically simple prepositions can co-occur with applicative marking in instrumental applicatives (6). In Herero, applicative marking is not required for an instrumental reading (7). Note that the construction in (7) is comprised of the preposition *na* plus the initial vowel *o-*, resulting in *no*.

- (6) Bemba
Mutálé a-léé-!ípík(-íl)-a na supuni
 Mutale SM1-PROG-cook(-APPL)-FV with 9.spoon
 ‘Mutale is cooking with a spoon.’
 (Marten and Kula 2014: 21)

- (7) Herero
Mbì-ryá òn-yámà n-òrútuwò
 SM1SG-eat 9-meat with-11.spoon
 ‘I usually eat meat with a spoon’
 (Marten field notes, 03-08-2005, 18, 6)

For Chichewa, Trithart (1977: 16) also describes the optionality of the applicative in (8) 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.”

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

Mbuun has the form *ǎngírǎ* which is derived from a prepositional phrase meaning ‘on the body of’ (Bostoen and Mundeke 2011: 187). The preposition *ǎngírǎ* and the morphological applicative are two possible ways of introducing certain semantic roles into a main clause in Mbuun. The *ǎngírǎ*-construction can be used where the applicative is not grammatical. But the two strategies can also be combined, resulting in a construction in which the *ǎngírǎ*-marked beneficiary or reason noun phrase is focussed, as shown in (9). Thus, while example (9a) sees the use of the preposition *ǎngírǎ* ‘for’, (9c) combines both the applicative derivation and the prepositional phrase and the double expression results in what Bostoen and Mundeke (2011: 192) describe as a “discursive function” which places focus on the oblique beneficiary/reason argument.

- (9) Mbuun
- a. *Mo-ib ó-ǎ-dzúú máám ǎngírǎ nke?* [preposition only]
 NP1- SM1-PRS.PROG-kill mother for what
 thief
 ‘Why does the thief kill mother?’
- b. *ó-ǎ-mó-dzwillé ǎngírǎ n-dzim* [APPL + preposition]
 SM1-PRS.PROG-OM1-kill.APPL for NP9-money
 ‘He kills her FOR THE MONEY’
- c. *Mo-ib ó-ǎ-dzwillé máám ǎngírǎ nke?* [APPL + preposition]
 NP1-thief SM1-PRS.PROG-kill.APPL mother for what
 ‘WHY does the thief kill mother?’
 (Bostoen and Mundeke 2011: 192)

Swahili has a number of grammaticalized prepositions: *katika* ‘in, at’ (< *kati*, *katikati* ‘middle, centre’), *kwa* ‘at’ (< locative class 17 *ku-* and connective *-a*), and *mpaka* ‘until, up to’ (< *mpaka* ‘boundary’); the latter is a preposition that is used with noun phrases and clausal complements. As a preposition, *mpaka* has spread to numerous languages in East Africa, including both Bantu and non-Bantu languages (Mous 2020). However, Swahili prepositions do not combine with applicatives. As we argue below, Swahili prepositions are rarely used alongside a productive applicative derivation (although see Section 2.3 for discussion of the use of *kwa* in Swahili applicatives alternations). There are other Bantu languages that avoid the combination of applicative derivation and the use of a preposition. The few examples that we found of *mpaka* in East-African Bantu languages in combination with an applicative contain lexicalised applicatives. In the following Rangi example, the verb *-sekera* ‘sift’ is a lexicalised applicative **Error! Reference source not found.**

- (10) Rangì
Hapana tɔ-sɛkɛr-a mpaka vaa-fum-irɛ ha-ra
 NEG take-sift.APPL-FV until 2:PRF-leave-PRF 16-DISTAL.DEM
 ‘Don’t go sift until they’re out of there.’
 (Dunham 2005:181)

2.2 Locative marking and applicatives

In many Bantu languages, the applicative can co-occur with an applied object with locative marking (cf. i.a. Damman 1961, Guthrie 1962, Kähler-Meyer 1966, De Kind and Bostoen 2012, Marten and Kula 2014). Here we treat locative markers, such as the class 18 marker *mu-* in (11a, b), as a morphological category rather than as a (possibly proclitic) preposition, following how these morphemes are treated in the sources we used. This is not to imply that there are consistent systematic differences between prepositions and all morphemes labelled as locative markers in different Bantu languages. In fact, locative-marked nouns function as prepositional phrases in some Bantu languages and noun phrases in others (cf. Riedel and Marten 2012, Zeller 2017). For our cross-linguistic sample the relevant information is not always available and the difference is not central to the paper, so we follow the descriptive labels employed in our sources.

The interaction between applicatives and locative marking has been described in a number of previous studies. Here we summarise some of the findings on the combined expression of a morphological applicative and locative marking with a preposition-like function. One such case is Bemba where the use of the applicative-marked verb form in (11b) results in an emphatic reading which focuses the locative complement (see also Gunnink and Pacchiarotti, this volume, for parallel data in Fwe).

- (11) Bemba
- a. *N-de-ly-a mu-mu-putule*
 SM1SG-PRS-eat-FV 18-3-room
 ‘I am eating in the room’ [without term focus; as answer to: What are you doing?]
- b. *N-de-li-il-a mu-mu-putule*
 SM1SG-PRS-eat-APPL-FV 18-3-room
 ‘I am eating in the room’ [Emphatic; as answer to: Where are you eating?]
 (Marten 2003: 217)

In Bemba, the locative marker is required while the applicative marking is optional. When both are used together, emphasis is placed on the instrument (cf. (1)) or locative (cf. (11b), i.e. the applied object or applied phrase).

One other common function of locative applicatives across Bantu is as directionals where the applicative changes the verbal semantics in terms of movement towards/away from the applied object and does not add an argument; Guthrie (1967-71, Vol 1: 89) reconstructs directive as part of the meaning of applicative **-rd*. In Sesotho, the locative form *motseng* ‘at/in/to/from the village’ can appear either with a non-applicative marked verb as in (12a) or with an applicativised verb as in (12b) and the applicative verb means ‘return to’ rather than ‘return from’ (12a). This kind of meaning change is commonly associated with applicatives of directionals in Bantu.³

³ Note, the applicative morpheme in Sesotho is obligatory here insofar as a directional meaning cannot obtain with a preposition in this context. See however Creissels (2004) and others for alternative analyses of these construction types.

- (12) Sesotho
- a. *Ngwana o-tla-khutl-a mo-tseng*
 1child SM1-FUT-return-FV 3-village.LOC
 ‘The child will come back from the village.’
- b. *O-tla-khutl-el-a mo-tseng*
 SM1-FUT-return-APPL-FV 3-village.LOC
 ‘S/he will go back to the village.’
 (Doke and Mofokeng 1957: 323)

Another difference in interpretation between the non-applicativised and the applicative form in Setswana results in a difference between location (running ‘on the road’) (13a) and direction (running ‘to the road’) (13b), the later with the applicativised verb form. In constructions of this type therefore the use of the applicative adds the Goal argument (13b). Expressing direction requires the applicative in these cases.

- (13) Setswana
- a. *Ke-tlaa-tabog-a ko tseleng*
 SM1S-FUT-run-FV PREP 9.road.LOC
 ‘I will run on the road.’
- b. *Ke-tlaa-tabog-el-a ko tseleng*
 SM1S-FUT-run-APPL-FV PREP 9.road.LOC
 ‘I will run to the road.’
 (Creissels 2004:11)

Again, we see differences in interpretation related to marking only the locative (here with *ko* and the locative suffix on the noun) in (13a) and the double marking of both the verb with the applicative and the locative phrase (13b).

Such double expression with applicative functions is not always possible. For example, Swahili does not allow prepositions or locative marking with applicatives in directional constructions. Rather, these are obligatorily marked with the applicative morpheme and appear with non-locative marked complements **Error! Reference source not found.**⁴

- (14) Swahili
- a. *Wa-li-po-pand-i-a ile mi-buyu*
 SM2-PST-REL16-climb-APPL-FV DEM.4 4-baobab
 ‘When they climbed up the baobab trees...’
 (Swahili, Ashton 1944: 219)
- b. *M-toto a-li-m-kimbil-i-a mama wake*
 1-child SM1-PST-OM1-run-APPL-FV 1.mother 1POSS.3S
 ‘The child ran off to his mother.’
 (Swahili, Ashton 1944: 219)

⁴ Although the form *chini* ends in *ni*, it does not synchronically contain the Swahili locative suffix *-ni*.

- c. *Waziri* *a-li-anguk-i-a* *chini*
 1.minister SM1-PST-fall-APPL-FV 9.down
 ‘The minister fell down’
 (Abdulaziz (1996: 32) cited in Marten & Mous 2017: 9)

Nyambo exhibits a more complex interplay between prepositions and applicatives for locatives (see also Gunnink & Pacchiarotti this volume and Pacchiarotti (2020: 124) for a discussion of this strategy more broadly). The language requires applicative marking for locative complements with certain verbs. Generally, these are verbs with no inherent locative meaning (‘speak’ in (15a/b) versus ‘store’ in (15c/d)). In (15d) the applicative broadens the scope of the locative to include the subject and hence ‘while in the house’. There are other verbs which do not allow an applicative to express location (‘find’ in (15e/f)).

- (15) Nyambo
- a. *gamb-ir-á* *omu-nju*
 speak-APPL-FV LOC-house
 ‘to speak in the house’
- b. **gamb-a* *omu-nju*
 speak-FV LOC-house
- c. *biik-á* *omu-nju*
 store-FV LOC-house
 ‘store (something) in the house’
- d. *biic-ir-á* *omu-nju*
 store-APPL-FV LOC-house
 ‘store (something) while in the house’
- e. *a-ka-mu-sang-á* *omu-nju*
 SM1-PST-OM1-find-FV LOC-house
 ‘he found her in the house’
- f. * *a-ka-mu-sanj-ir-á* *omu-nju*
 SM1-PST-OM1-find-APPL-FV LOC-house
 (Rugemalira 1993: 71-72)

In a final category of Nyambo verbs, the locative and applicative alternate 0.

- (16) Nyambo
- a. *A-ka-sitamá* *aha-ntébe* [locative]
 SM1-PST3-sit LOC16-9.chair
 ‘He sat on a chair.’
- b. *A-ka-sitam-ir-á* *e-ntébe* [applicative]
 SM1-PST3-sit-APPL-FV AUG-9.chair
 ‘He sat on a chair.’
 (Rugemalira 2005: 95)

In (16a), there is no applicative marking on the verb, while the noun expressing the location (the chair) is locative marked. In (16b), the verb is marked for the applicative, but the location is expressed by a bare (class 9) noun phrase and is not locative marked. There is no difference in meaning between the two sentences indicated in the source, although more contextualised examples might reveal a (semantic or pragmatic) difference in interpretation.

To summarize, there is variation among Bantu languages with respect to the co-occurrence of applicative marking and locative marked or prepositional phrases. While in some languages the two patterns are in complementary distribution, e.g. in Swahili **Error! Reference source not found.** and Nyambo 0, in other languages applicative marked verbs and locative-marked phrases can or must be used together, e.g. in Sesotho (12b) and Setswana (13b). Different marking patterns are often associated with differences in interpretation, which also depend on the lexical meaning of the verb. In particular, the use of applicatives often integrates the locative more closely semantically in the verb meaning (e.g. the action is directed towards the location) or adds a pragmatic meaning of focus or emphasis. As we will show in the next section, these comparatively well-described effects of applicatives in locative contexts are replicated across a wide range of applicatives in on-locative contexts.

2.3 Prepositions introducing specific thematic roles

A number of Bantu languages have constructions where a preposition introduces a beneficiary, reason or other thematic role, similarly to the applicative construction. Speakers of Sesotho (cf. 3) and isiXhosa use a construction based on the borrowed English preposition *for* (17a), as well as the regular applicative verbal extension found across the Bantu languages (17b) with equivalent meanings.

- (17) isiXhosa
- a. *Ndi-zo-phek-a* *u-ku-tya* *for* *a-ba-ntwana*
 SM1S-FUT-cook-FV AUG-15-food for AUG-2-child
 ‘I will cook food for the children’
- b. *Ndi-zo-phek-el-a* *a-ba-ntwana* *u-ku-tya*
 SM1S-FUT-cook-APPL-FV AUG-2-child AUG-15-food
 ‘I will cook food for the children’
 (Simango 2019: 324, glossing added)

As Riedel and Gibson (2021) show, the Sesotho construction with a borrowed preposition can be used with a wide range of verbs and different types of thematic roles but has not grammaticalized to the point where the *for*-marked noun phrase is treated as a grammatical object. In Sesotho, unlike in Mbuun or the applicative-locative combinations in Sesotho, Bemba and other languages, either the applicative (3a) or the preposition *for* (3b) can be used, but not both for the same verb/applied noun phrase **Error! Reference source not found.**

- (18) Sesotho
- **Ke-rek-etse* *for* *se-lamba* *sa-ka* *di-konopo*
 SM1S-buy-APPL.PERF for 7-jacket 7-POSS.1S 10-button
 Int: ‘I bought buttons for my jacket’
 (Riedel & Gibson 2021)

According to Machobane (1989), in Sesotho, certain intransitives do not allow benefactive applied objects (19a) but only locative applied objects (19b), as well as locative adjuncts

which are not applicative marked. However, the *for*-construction can be used in such cases as the example in (19c) shows.

- (19) Sesotho
- a. * *Baeti* *ba-fihl-etse* *mo-rena*
 2-visitor SM2-arrive-APPL.PERF 1-chief
 ‘The visitors have arrived for the chief’
 (Machobane 1989:60)
- b. *Ba-eti* *ba-fihl-etse* *mo-reneng*
 2-visitor SM2-arrive-APPL.PERF 1-chief.LOC
 ‘The visitors have arrived at the chief’s place’
 (Machobane 1989:60)
- c. *Mo-eti* *o-fihl-ile* *for* *wena*
 1-visitor SM1-arrive-PERF for PRON.2S
 ‘A visitor has arrived for you.’
 (Riedel & Gibson 2021)

This restriction on Sesotho beneficiaries looks similar to the restrictions on morphological applicatives with some verbs in Mbuun which also do not allow benefactive applicative constructions (20a).

- (20) Mbuun
- a. * *maam* *o-á-témmé* *m-bwá* *ó-ηgán*
 mother SM1-PRS.PROG-call.APPL 9-dog 1-doctor
 ‘Mother calls the doctor for the dog.’
- b. *maam* *o-á-tém* *ó-ηgán* *óηgirá* *m-bwa*
 mother SM1-PRS.PROG-call 1-doctor for 9-dog
 ‘Mother calls the doctor for the dog.’
- c. *maam* *o-á-léηgéné* *m-bwá* *ó-ηgán*
 mother SM1-PRS.PROG-seeK.APPL 9-dog 1-doctor
 ‘Mother seeks a doctor for (the benefit of) the dog’
 (Bostoén & Mundeke 2011:192)

As in Sesotho, the ungrammaticality in Mbuun does not apply to the prepositional construction (20b). Example (20c) shows that the ungrammaticality of (20a) is not related to the human versus non-human status of the beneficiary, but rather to the verb root with which the applicative combines.

In some Mozambican Bantu languages, prepositions borrowed from Portuguese are found with applicative-like functions. In Cuwabo, the preposition *para* ‘for’ introduces a reason *wh*-word without the verb being marked with an applicative **Error! Reference source not found.**, seemingly similar to the Sesotho and isiXhosa borrowed prepositions. In Makhuwa the preposition is used with the applicative but is required for the sentence to be grammatical (22), which is similar to the Mbuun pattern and the locative/preposition applicative combinations.

- (21) Cuwabo
o-ní-já *weeká* *pára=ni*
 SM2SG-PRS.CJ-eat 2SG.alone for=what
 ‘Why do you eat on your own?’
 (Guérois 2015: 223)
- (22) Makuwa
Saára *onthumenlé* *ekolár'* *ile* * (*para*) *páni?*
 Sara o-n-thum-el-ale ekolar ile para pani
 1.Sara SM1-OM1-buy-APPL-PFV.CJ 9.necklace 9.DEM.DIST for 1.who
 ‘Who did Sara buy the necklace for?’
 (Jenneke van der Wal, p.c.)

The Cuwabo example in **Error! Reference source not found.** mirrors a construction with a non-borrowed preposition found in Sambia, as shown in (23). Here the preposition *kwa* together with the question word meaning ‘what’ is used to form a why-question.⁵

- (23) Sambia
Kwa *mbwai* *a-ku-et-e-a* *ma-tagi?*
 PREP what SM1-OM2S-bring-APPL-FV 6-egg
 ‘Why did s/he bring you eggs?’
 (Riedel, field notes, 2006, example 00844)

Sambia also has an applicative plus ‘what’ construction for forming a why-question that arguably competes with the prepositional construction in (23). This kind of construction, where the applicative together with a *wh*-word or a *wh*-clitic meaning ‘what’ is interpreted as a why-question, has been described for a number of Bantu languages (cf. the list of languages with this construction in Trithart 1983:148) illustrated with the example from Sambia in 0 and Zulu data in (25).

- (24) Sambia
A-chi-kund-iy-a-i?
 SM1-OM7-like-APPL-FV-what
 ‘Why does s/he want it?’
 (Riedel, field notes 2006)
- (25) Zulu
U-cul-el-a-ni?
 SM2S-sing-APPL-FV-what
 ‘Why are you singing? What are you singing for?’
 (Buell 2011:805)

Across Bantu, this adds another example of functional overlap between morphological applicatives and prepositional constructions.

A final pattern to consider are prepositions which introduce goal arguments, and so provide a structural alternative to applicative constructions. This is the case in Swahili, where the preposition *kwa* can be used in this way, but only in lexically restricted cases. Verbs such

⁵ Note that while the verb in (23) also contains an applicative, this applicative introduces the second person singular beneficiary here, not the reason *wh*-phrase.

as *-andika* ‘write’ allow for a goal to be added with the preposition *kwa*. This can be seen in (26a) where *kwa* is used to introduce the Goal *mwenyekiti* ‘chairperson’. However, it is not acceptable for the morphological applicative *-i-* in such a verb and the preposition *kwa* to co-occur. This is illustrated by the ungrammaticality of both examples (26b) and (26c). Moreover, this use of the preposition *kwa* does not extend to other verbs that can take a Beneficiary but not a Goal such as *-pika* ‘cook’, meaning that constructions such as those in (26d) are ill-formed with an intended meaning of ‘I cooked for the children’.

- (26) Swahili
- a. *Ni-li-andika barua kwa mw-enyekiti.*
 SM1S-PST-write 9.letter PREP 1-chairperson
 ‘I wrote a letter to the chairperson.’
- b. *Ni-li-andik-(*i)-a barua kwa mw-enyekiti.*
 SM1S-PST-write-APPL-FV 9.letter PREP 1-chairperson
 ‘I wrote a letter to the chairperson.’
- c. *Ni-li-mw-andik-i-a barua (*kwa) mw-enyekiti.*
 SM1S-PST-OM1-write-APPL-FV 9.letter PREP 1-chairperson
 ‘I wrote a letter to the chairperson.’⁶
- d. # *Ni-li-pika kwa wa-toto.*
 SM1S-PST-cook PREP 2-children
 * ‘I cooked for the children’
 ‘I cooked at the children’s place’
 (Swahili, Riedel 2019)

In isiXhosa, an applied noun phrase such as the beneficiary *abantwana* ‘children’ in 0 can appear with locative marking as in 0. Du Plessis and Visser (1992) describe this type of construction as having a focus-related meaning.

- (27) isiXhosa
- a. *Ndi-nik-el-a abantwana iiswiti* [non-locative marked beneficiary]
 SM1S-give-APPL-FV 2.child 10.sweet
 ‘I hand over sweets to the children.’
- b. *Ndi-nik-el-a iiswiti e-bantwaneni* [locative-marked beneficiary]
 SM1S-give-APPL-FV 10.sweet LOC-2child.LOC
 ‘I hand over sweets to the children.’
 (Du Plessis and Visser 1992: 59, cited in Riedel 2019)

This isiXhosa construction has the same word order and also the same object-marking restrictions⁷ as the Sesotho *for* and the Mbuun *nygirá* constructions, discussed above. This behaviour is thus not limited to innovated prepositions. This means there is evidence for an entire category of prepositions introducing semantic roles but not (yet) showing the

⁶ This sentence would be grammatical with the reading of ‘I wrote him/her_{i/*i} a letter at the chair person’s place’.

⁷ The acceptability or not of object marking with these constructions is not mentioned in Du Plessis and Visser (1992). We thank Hlumela Mkabile for providing additional judgements.

morphosyntactic properties of morphological applicatives in Bantu. The fact that these locative marked phrases **Error! Reference source not found.** are not full arguments in isiXhosa is also noted in Andrason (2018), and in part reflects the restructuring of the locative system in Southern Bantu, where locatives no longer behave as noun phrases (Marten 2010, Creissels 2011).

In this section we have reviewed the role of applicative verb forms and prepositionally marked complements. We have taken the interaction of applicatives and locatives as a starting point, where variation with respect to both co-occurrence restrictions and interpretive effects have been well documented. We then showed that similar variation occurs with other thematic roles such as instrument, benefactive and theme objects. While in the case of locatives, the coding of the locative phrase is typically achieved through noun class morphology, the coding of non-locative phrases relies on the use of prepositions, and so results in complex interaction between the two construction types. In the following section, we will explore this interaction in terms of its typological and diachronic implications.

3. Valency and saliency: A reanalysis account

Considerable work has been produced over the years on the diachrony of the applicative suffix **-id* in Bantu (see Pacchiarotti 2020 for a recent overview) as well as cross-linguistically (Peterson 2007). We will provide a brief review of this work here, and then develop a novel account of the development of applicatives based on a reanalysis of applicatives as markers of saliency.

3.1. Previous accounts

Pacchiarotti (2020) discusses two fairly widely agreed hypotheses about the original function of Bantu applicative **-id*. First, applicatives, like other Bantu extensions, are likely to have a verbal origin, probably as main or auxiliary verbs following non-finite verbal complements in a head-final structure (Givón 1971, Voeltz 1977, Hyman 2007a, 2007b). Cross-linguistically, Peterson (2007) proposes that the most common etymological sources for applicative in general are adpositions (mostly postpositions) and verbs. However, due to the paucity of adpositions in Bantu, a verbal origin seems the more likely scenario. With respect to the function of **-id*, two main proposals have been made, namely that the original function was the introduction of a benefactive argument (e.g. Trithart 1983), or that the original function of was related to introducing locatives, which is the analysis we will follow here (see Pacchiarotti 2020: 272-278 for arguments in favour of an original Location-related function of PB **-id*). Under this view, **-id* originally functioned to bring a locative phrase closer into the predication expressed by the verb, to direct the action expressed by the verb to a particular endpoint (e.g. Schadeberg 2003: 74), or to provide an abstract notion of space which could be filled by different expressions denoting location and, subsequently, by non-locations (Marten and Kula 2014).

However, while the relationship between valency changing and semantic and pragmatic effects brought about by applicatives discussed earlier in this paper has been noted frequently, no fully developed analysis about the diachronic relation between these different functions has been proposed. Pacchiarotti (2020) presents evidence from lexicalised reconstructed Proto-Bantu verb forms which might support an analysis set forth by Schadeberg (n.d.) in which pragmatic functions precede the syntactic functions of applicatives – e.g. first the pragmatic saliency of a locative phrase is highlighted, and this function then grammaticalizes into the syntactic introduction of an additional argument (see also Creissels 2004). This scenario is consistent with grammar ontogenesis, whereby

discourse-related structures often develop into syntax (see, e.g., Givón 1979). However, the lexical evidence is somewhat inconclusive and the link between pragmatics and syntax is a widespread, but not a necessary effect.

An alternative analysis is developed by De Kind and Bostoen (2012), who, as noted above, propose that applicatives originally introduced locative arguments, and this meant that locatives could be brought into post-verbal focus position, from which then pragmatic effects resulted.

3.2 A new account

Based on the interaction of applicatives and prepositions discussed in this paper, we will here propose a novel analysis of the developments of applicatives, which centrally involves a reanalysis of applicatives in the context of (ambiguous) double marking of the applied argument. Like De Kind and Bostoen (2012) we assume that applicatives originally licensed an additional (locative) argument. This licensing was likely to be linked to semantic effects (e.g. directing the action of the verb towards a location), and probably also to pragmatic effects (by highlighting the saliency of the location for the predication). However, at this stage we do not assume that applicatives could be used solely as a marker of saliency, without underlying syntactic operation.

We also assume that locatives even at the Proto-Bantu stage were ambiguous in terms of their syntactic function, and could function as either argument or adjunct (see Riedel and Marten 2012). Furthermore, locative marking – that is, at this stage, noun class morphology – could be interpreted as more nominal-like or preposition-like. This assumption is based on the change of locatives from nominal to prepositional syntax, as noted above. This process has been observed across the Bantu-speaking area, for example in the comparative work by Grégoire (1975), by Kuperus and Mpunga wa Ilunga (1990) in Luba, by Marten (2010) and Creissels (2011) for Southern Bantu, and by Beermann and Asiimwe (forthcoming) for Runyankore-Rukiga. It is therefore likely that the process was already apparent in Proto-Bantu. As discussed above, the ambiguity of locative complements can still be seen today, and leads to differences in the coding of locative phrases in applicative constructions.

What we propose, then, is that originally applicatives licensed a locative object, and gave rise to pragmatic effects. However, locatives were in themselves ambiguous between arguments and adjuncts, and so in some contexts would not have needed syntactic licensing for use as objects. In these contexts, locatives were effectively doubly licensed, by the applicative and by the locative morphology. This had two potential effects: 1) the double licensing might have had pragmatic effects, as it was unnecessary from a syntactic point of view (akin to reduplication, e.g. intensity, emphasis, saliency) and 2) applicatives could be associated solely with pragmatic effects, as there was no need for syntactic licensing. Once applicatives were reanalysed in this way, they could be used as pure saliency markers, without any attendant change in valency. The steps in the process are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Stages of development from syntactic to pragmatic functions

Stage 1	<p>Applicative constructions may be used to license locative complements, which are not subcategorised by the verb, directing the action towards a location</p> <p>Locatives are ambiguous between argument and adjunct</p> <p>Then a (locative) applicative with a locative marked complement is an instance of double licensing, leading to heightened pragmatic effects</p>
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Stage 2	Applicative morphology is reanalysed as marking pragmatic effects, while the locative verbal complement is licensed by the locative morphology only
Stage 3	Innovative speakers can use applicative markers without change in valency – purely as a saliency marker.

The scenario developed here, tying the grammaticalization of applicatives to the ambiguity of locatives as arguments or adjuncts, explains why pragmatic focus and saliency effects are most well described for locatives. With other thematic roles, this ambiguity is less well-documented. As we have shown, this is because of the relative paucity of prepositions in Bantu languages. However, on closer investigation, similar effects can be seen once relevant prepositions are available to mark functional alternatives to applicative constructions. These prepositions include a small set of prepositions already available in Proto-Bantu, as well as more recently grammaticalized and borrowed prepositions. Since instruments and benefactive arguments marked by prepositions are not ambiguous in the way locative marked phrases are, the interaction between the two functionally equivalent construction types can actually be seen more clearly in these cases, as we have shown.

The reanalysis proposed here will have occurred once applicatives could be used without change in valency, and the change would be transmitted through the different speech communities, and possibly through diffusion – thus underlying (some of) the variation observed in Bantu languages. Of course, speakers would still be able to use applicatives in the older function, to license a change in valency. The rise of the new function does not entail the demise of the old, and either, or both, functions may disappear over time. However, according to our analysis, the use of applicatives purely as a marker of pragmatic saliency, without a syntactic change, would have required the reanalysis outlined above.

The analysis proposed here can be seen as an instance of grammaticalization. Although it does not involve a change in word category and entails reanalysis that remains within syntax, it shows a development in time to a more pragmatic function. There is a well-known tendency in language change, and in particular in semantic-pragmatic change, and that is the tendency of subjectification, first developed in Traugott (1989). According to Traugott, semantic change, especially semantic change underlying processes of grammaticalization, proceeds from more objective depictions of state of affairs, to more internal, subjective representations or valuation of the external. From this perspective, the semantic development of applicatives underlying our proposed analysis can be seen as a development from expressing external spatial relations (the directing of the action to a location) to the expression of a subjective judgement of the saliency of the location with respect to preceding discourse or context – possibly via the more metaphorical use of locations discussed in Marten and Kula (2014) – to the expression of saliency of the action as such. Viewed from this perspective, the analysis is compatible with both established mechanisms of syntactic change and of semantic processes underlying grammaticalization.

4. Summary and concluding remarks

In this paper we have shown that the interaction of applicative marking and prepositions provides a novel perspective on the variation displayed by applicative constructions in Bantu.

This perspective highlights (and reinforces) the importance of two dimensions of applicatives – argument structure/transitivity/valency on the one hand and information structure/discourse/focus/saliency on the other.

The interaction between applicative marking and prepositions in Bantu provides valuable insights into a number of features of the syntax and semantics of Bantu languages. Eastern Bantu languages typically have a small inventory of prepositions – where a range of different sources/origins can be identified – and often with comparatively little lexical semantic content. Borrowed prepositions (such as those seen in Sesotho, Makhuwa and Cuwabo) can co-occur with applicatives – the former enabling the addition of arguments (changes in valency) and the latter performing a more focus/saliency-related function. Semantic relations rather than information structure are encoded by borrowed preposition.

In the case of borrowed prepositions however, it seems that syntactic coding, rather than information structure, plays a defining role in the recruitment and integration of these elements into the target language.

More generally, we have shown that the interaction of applicatives and functionally equivalent prepositionally marked constructions helps to better understand the diachronic development of applicatives. Following an established position in the literature, we have proposed that the original function of applicatives was related to location, and involved the licensing of an additional (locative) object in the clause. However, due to the ambiguity of locative phrases as arguments and adjuncts, locative applied objects could be interpreted in some contexts as doubly licensed. This in turn, provided the context for a reanalysis of the applicative marker as a saliency marker, which could encode pragmatic effects without attendant changes in valency. We have also suggested that this analysis not only involves reanalysis, but is also compatible with Traugott's (1989) notion of subjectification in semantic change.

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