

Book Review

Bantu Applicative Constructions. By Sara Pacchiarotti. CSLI Publications, Stanford California, 2020. Pp 349. ISBN 978168400059-3. \$49.

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In the large library of linguistic works discussing Bantu morphology, probably no element has received as much attention at the applicative morpheme, and for good reason. It is virtually omnipresent in the hundreds of Bantu languages spoken across Africa, and though its form is remarkably consistent (with some exceptions), the syntactic and semantic functions of the Bantu applicative are known (at least since Trithart 1983) to vary a great deal more than the other so-called ‘verbal extensions.’ That variation gets overshadowed by the fact that the valence-increasing function that the applicative performs in many Bantu languages has featured prominently in the development of both functionalist and generative syntactic theories.

In *Bantu Applicative Constructions*, Sara Pacchiarotti gives us a corrective to this myopic view of the morpheme, bringing together an impressive breadth of Bantu data, organized to illustrate that applicative morphemes in Bantu do not only serve to affect argument structure, but have a variety of functions from signifying emphatic, repetitive or completed action (as in reduplicated applicatives, p 160-161) to putting narrow focus on locative constituents (p 144-157). Pacchiarotti discusses this variation in the context of a 5-way typology she has developed based on these various functions:

(1) Pacchiarotti’s Typology of Bantu Applicatives

Type A: Appl introduces an obligatory applied phrase expressing a semantic role which could not be expressed by the root without the applied morpheme.

Type B: Appl introduces an obligatory applied phrase expressing a semantic role which could be expressed by the root without the applied morpheme using another structure (such as by a prepositional phrase)

Type C: Appl introduces an obligatory applied phrase expressing a semantic role which could be expressed by the root without the applied morpheme using the same structure.

Type D: Appl does not introduce an applied phase but indicates action of the verb is performed to completion or continuously with intensity, persistence, excess, or repetition.

Type E: Pseudo-applicatives. Verbs with apparent applicative morphology, but which do not have the synchronic function of an applicative.

The typology above is both root- and language-particular, so the same language may have all or any of these types. It also isn’t claimed to follow from any particular theoretical presuppositions, but the distinction between Types A-C is largely syntactic, pivoting around whether or not some language or verb root has alternative ways to introduce an applied phrase without an applicative morpheme. Because locative phrases are often able to combine with predicates without an applicative or other oblique structures, Type C applicatives are largely limited to locatives. In the 2017 dissertation this book is developed from, Types A and B are collapsed.

Chapters 1-3 of the book provide some necessary background information on the Bantu language family and assumptions adopted. In addition to functional description, Pacchiarotti also has diachronic explanation in mind, so here and throughout the book she provides thorough discussions of historical linguistic issues, including early contributions. Pacchiarotti also defines her scope: there will be no attempt to extend her typology or account of Bantu applicatives to what have been called applicatives in other languages. Her definition of an applicative is morphologically defined: any construction that employs the reflex of the Proto-Bantu *id. Chapter 3 also provides a useful discussion of the slippery distinctions in Bantu between arguments and adjuncts, especially when it comes to locative phrases.

Chapter 4 of the book defines and illustrates Pacchiarotti's 5-way typology of applicatives while Chapter 5 explores the first four of these in finer detail, examining the semantic function of the applicative in each of the types. Perhaps most interesting here is the discussion of the Type C applicatives in which the presence of the applied morpheme doesn't change the valency of the root, but instead signals a variety of semantic effects including changing the orientation of a locative from object-oriented to subject-oriented, putting (emphatic?) focus on a location, or putting the action described by the predicate into habitual aspect. Given the variation in applicative function, these chapters had me wondering about the potential interaction of the typology employed here and the arguments provided by Jerro (2016) that Bantu applicative semantics are heavily dependent on the semantics and event structure of the verb root they attach to.

Chapter 6 is an in-depth discussion of Type E (Pseudoapplicatives) in Tswana, based on original fieldwork by Denis Creissels. The focus here is on discovering common lexicalization paths by which the PB *id has become lexicalized in certain verbs. For each verb, Pacchiarotti examines the valence of the root, the valence of the pseudoapplicative, and the historical information available regarding the PB root, its modern cognates and their distributions.

Finally, Chapter 7 reviews hypotheses regarding the historical development of the applicative morpheme and its functions across Bantu, offering some additional arguments in favor of Schadeberg's (2003)'s theory that the Bantu applicative's original function was to tie nonpatient complements (such as spatial arguments) closer to the verb. This challenges the dominant view that the PB applicative primarily had a valence-increasing function.

References

- Jerro, K.J., 2016. *The syntax and semantics of applicative morphology in Bantu* (Doctoral dissertation).
 Schadeberg, T.C., 2003. Derivation. *The Bantu languages*, 71, p.89.
 Trithart, M.L., 1983. *The applied affix and transitivity: a historical study in Bantu* (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles).

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