

Applicative uses of spatial markers: Typological and diachronic perspectives

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Keywords: applicatives, spatial verb morphology, adpositions, typology, diachrony

Workshop description

This workshop will investigate how elements with spatial meaning develop applicative functions from a typological and diachronic perspective. Whereas applicatives have been described to originate in adpositions or adverbs with spatial meaning for a long time, for example in early Indo-European (Kuryłowicz 1964) and in Bemba (Atlantic-Congo, Bantu, Zambia; Givón 1975: 85, cited in Peterson (2007: 126)), spatial verb morphology has only recently been established as a source for applicatives (e.g. Payne (2021) on Nilotic languages). For instance, this new pathway of grammaticalization is proposed on the basis of present-day examples like (1) from Harakmbut (non-classified, Peru), featuring the spatial prefix *ok--k-*, which expresses ‘separation’.

(1) Harakmbut (An Van linden 2022: 131, 142)

(a) *Lup o-k-teŋ-me* *mbiʔig*
) *e* *ŋ*
Lupe 3SG.IND-SPAT:**separation**-cut-REC.PST fish
‘Lupe cut the fish into pieces.’

(b) *i-k-totok-me-y* *eʔ-pidn* *abueta-ta*
1SG-SPAT:**separation**-pull-REC.PST-1.IND NPF-thorn grandmother-ACC
‘I pulled a thorn out of grandmother(’s knee).’

In (1a), the spatial prefix specifies the internal spatial configuration of the O-participant resulting from the action denoted by the verb; the fish ended up being cut into separate pieces rather than showing cuts but still being in one piece. The prefix does not affect the valency of the verb, which remains transitive. In (1b), by contrast, it introduces a Source argument to the clause (viz. accusative-marked *abueta-ta* ‘grandmother’), and thus turns a transitive root into a ditransitive stem. In addition to general spatial markers like the spatial prefixes in Harakmbut, applicative uses have also been recently attested for directionals (e.g. in Nilotic languages, see Payne (2021)), associated motion markers (e.g. in Tungusic languages, see Pakendorf & Stoyanova (2021)), and incorporated spatial nouns (e.g. in Northwest Caucasian languages, see Arkadiev (2021), Arkadiev et al. (2024)). Well-known spatial sources of applicatives include adpositions and adverbs that developed into so-called preverbs in ancient Indo-European languages, but also in present-day Germanic, Slavic and Baltic languages, where they appear as prefixes or particles (see Zúñiga et al. 2024).

It is still unknown how widespread these ‘old’ and ‘new’ pathways from spatial element to applicative marker are, which stages can be distinguished, and what the main types of variation of the outcomes are.

Aims of the workshop

The workshop will bring together linguists working on these issues, either on the basis of historical corpus data for languages with written records or based on first-hand data collected in the field for those languages that do not have historical data. We invite language-specific contributions, as well as cross-linguistic or areal studies. More specifically, the questions to be addressed include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ⊖ What type of spatial markers can develop applicative functions? What are their morphological properties? And do these also still show non-applicative functions?
- ⊖ What are the thematic/semantic roles of the applied phrases introduced by applicatives of spatial origin? Are these roles encoded by the applicative construction or to be inferred from the context?
- ⊖ What is the syntactic status of the applied phrase introduced by such applicatives?
- ⊖ How do these applicative markers affect the valency of their host verb? Do they increase its valency with a core argument (direct applicatives) or a non-core argument (non-direct applicatives; cf. Zúñiga & Kittilä 2019: 58), or do they rearrange the semantic roles of their arguments without changing the valency of the verb (redirecting applicatives; cf. Zúñiga & Creissels 2024: 24)?
- ⊖ When or why do language users employ these applicatives? Does the use of applicatives consistently cause the same semantic shift across verbs or does this differ between verbs or between applied phrases (cf. Pijpops et al. 2021)?
- ⊖ What stages can be proposed for diachronic pathways from spatial element to applicative marker? Do these spatial elements retain their spatial semantics in their applicative use (cf. (1b)), or do they show semantic bleaching depending on the host verb? Specifically for the case of adpositional sources, what is the role of adposition stranding in the grammaticalization process (cp. Peterson 2007)?
- ⊖ Where do we find hotbeds of applicative markers of spatial origin? Are there any areal or genetic patterns?

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