Some valency-neutral applicatives in the Americas

Fernando Zúñiga, University of Bern

The literature on voice has occasionally noted the existence of applicatives that appear not only to add new objects to the syntactic core but also to add non-objects (or at least non-canonically marked objects) and even, most strikingly, to clearly reduce the valency of the predicate. The following examples illustrate these three cases with the Yup'ik applicatives *-(g)i* and *-(u)te*:

(1)   Central Alaskan Yup'ik (Eskimo-Aleutian; Mithun 2000: 96f, 109f)

    a. *Ui-ka*   *tuqu-i-gaqa.*
       husband-1SG.PSR   die-APPL-IND.3SG→1SG
       'I have lost my husband.' (lit. 'My husband died on me.')

    b. *Elag-i-uq*   *avelngar-nek.*
       dig-APPL-IND.3SG   mouse-ABL.PL
       'He dug to the disadvantage of the mice.'

    c. bivalent *ikayur-* 'help (sbdy.)' vs. monovalent *ikayur-ute-* 'help out'
       bivalent *ulligte-* 'cut (fish) for drying' vs. monovalent *ulligte-i-* 'cut fish for drying'

Similar phenomena have also been found in South American languages that are arguably areally related (Wise 2002). The Chayahuita morpheme *-të*, for instance, is used to perform quite different valency-related operations (3rd person singular objects are zero-marked):

(2)   Chayahuita (Cahuapanan; Wise 2002: 330)

    a. *Ama-r-in.*   vs.   *Ama-të-r-in.*
       bathe-IND-3SG.SBJ   bathe-X-IND-3SG.SBJ
       'S/he bathes.'   'S/he bathes him/her.'

    b. *Tashi-r-in.*   vs.   *Tashi-të-r-in.*
       become.night-IND-3SG.SBJ   become.night-X-IND-3SG.SBJ
       'It becomes night.'   'It becomes night in the place where s/he is.'

    c. *Nati-r-in.*   vs.   *Nati-të-r-in.*
       obey-IND-3SG.SBJ   obey-X-IND-3SG.SBJ
       'S/he obeys him/her.'   'S/he obeys.'

    d. *A'pa-r-in.*   vs.   *A'pa-të-r-in.*
       send-IND-3SG.SBJ   send-X-IND-3SG.SBJ
       'S/he sends it.'   'S/he sends it to someone.'

Perhaps also somewhat surprisingly, some such operators can have no discernible valency-related effect with specific verbs, like the applicatives *-ye* and *-tu* in Mapudungun:

(3)   Mapudungun (unclassified; Zúñiga 2009)

    a. *kuñül-* 'look after, pity (tr.)' vs. *kuñül-ye-* 'look after as if they were family (tr.)'
       pe- 'see, find (tr.)' vs. *pe-ye-* 'picture, imagine (tr.)'

    b. *chali-* 'greet, report (tr.)' vs. *chali-tu-* 'greet, report (tr.)'
       kansha- 'get tired (itr.)' vs. *kansha-tu-* 'rest (itr.)'

The present paper explores possible synchronic and diachronic rationales behind such multifunctional operators in several languages of North and South America.

References

Mithun, Marianne. 2000. *The Languages of Native North America*. Cambridge: CUP.

Wise, Mary Ruth. 2002. Applicative affixes in Peruvian Amazonian languages. In *Current Studies on South American Languages*, M. Crevels et al. (eds.), 329-344. Leiden: CNWS.

Zúñiga, Fernando. 2009. The applicatives of Mapudungun. Paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas, San Francisco, January 8-11, 2009.