

## The Lexical Underspecification of Bantu Causatives and Applicatives

*Pylkkänen (2008) proposes two types of applicatives and three types of causatives that are distinguished with regard to their relative height in the clause. Based on new data from the Bantu language Shona, I argue that for an analysis of causatives and applicatives that are underspecified for complement selection (height).*

**Background.** In Pylkkänen's widely adopted (2008) typology of applicative constructions, she asserts that there are two kinds of applicative heads: 'high' and 'low'. High applicatives are functional heads that introduce and license a 'non-core' argument *above* V and below little v (Voice for Pylkkänen), relating the applied argument to an event. Often high applicative constructions convey the notion of a favor: 'fix something for someone'. 'Low' applicatives introduce and license a non-core argument *below* V and relate the applied argument to the verb's theme object. This usually results in possession: 'give someone something'. Less widely adopted is Pylkkänen's (2008) typological proposal for causatives, which distinguishes three types based on merge height as well. Pylkkänen's causatives may be either 'phase-selecting', 'verb-selecting', or 'root-selecting'.

On the surface, the semantics of verb-selecting causatives are nearly identical to those of phase-selecting causatives. The crucial difference is that, because verb-selecting causatives introduce causees below little v, there is only one agentive argument and it is the subject. Phase-selecting causatives on the other hand are merged above little v and introduce agents. Where precisely a causative is merged can be tested with agent-oriented modification of the causee. Using this diagnostic, I present original evidence that Shona causatives are verb-selecting:

- (1)      *Chipo*      *a-ka-yimb-is-a*      *Tendai*      *ne-kuda*      **Shona**  
1.Chipo   SM1-PST-sing-CAUS-FV   1.Tendai   with-love  
(i) 'Chipo intentionally made Tendai sing.'  
(ii) \*'Chipo made Tendai intentionally sing.'

This sentence and its possible interpretations show that the Shona causative does not merge above little v, and therefore does not introduce an additional agent into the clause (making it unlike Venda and Luganda, for example, which according to Pylkkänen have phase-selecting causatives).

Importantly, Pylkkänen proposes that the height (complement selection) of causative and applicative heads corresponds one-to-one with a semantic distinction. For Pylkkänen, this is because the lexical items themselves, i.e. the low and high causative and applicative heads, are all separate entities. These heads are available in a universal inventory from which any language may select its particular set of argument introducers.

**Challenge.** A task in comparative syntax, then, is to establish which applicative and causative heads are present in a given language, based on the semantics of the resulting multi-object clause and on the potential interaction of the various heads. However, this is not a straightforward task, for two reasons. The first is the methodological challenge of assessing the precise scopal interactions between the various (core and non-core) arguments. The second reason is that my results show applicative and causative interpretations that Pylkkänen's typology does not account for and others that flout some of her explicit predictions, indicating that the theory needs revision.

**Proposal.** I argue that, at least for Bantu languages, causative and applicative heads are underspecified for complement selection (height) in the lexicon. This analysis better accounts for the data and is theoretically more elegant. I make this argument in three parts.

First, Pylkkänen's account predicts that verb-selecting causatives should introduce exclusively non-agentive causee arguments. I show that in multiple Bantu languages with these causatives, these heads actually reliably introduce agentive causer arguments in unaccusative

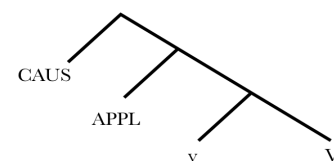
contexts. This indicates that at least some causative semantics are supplied by the merge environment and not the heads themselves.

Second, my research on Shona confirms evidence from Marten & Kula (2014) on Bemba that there is yet a third merge location for Bantu applicatives, a ‘super high’ position above little *v* with *substitutive* (as opposed to beneficiary) semantics:

- (2)      Ábá-icé      bá-lée-tólók-el-a=kó      bá-mayó      **Bemba**  
             2-children SM2-PROG-jump-APPL-FV=LC17      2-mother  
             ‘The children are jumping for/on behalf of the mother.’ (Marten & Kula 2014:22)

The distinction between substitutive and beneficiary semantics is non-obvious, but the ‘super high’ placement of a substitutive applicative can be empirically supported by exploring the semantic possibilities in constructions where applicative and causative heads co-occur. Concretely, because Shona causatives do not merge above little *v*, it should be impossible for a construction to have the ‘causativized substitutive applicative’ interpretation in (3).

- (3)      *Miriam made Jonah cook dinner instead of Elijah.*  
             (such that Elijah didn’t have to cook dinner)



The Shona sentence and its possible interpretations in (4) show that this prediction holds.

- (4)      *Tinotenda      a-tamb-is-ir-a      Tatenda      Chipo*      **Shona**  
             1.Tinotenda SM1-dance-CAUS-APPL-FV      1.Tatenda      1.Chipo  
             (i) ‘Tinotenda made Chipo dance for Tatenda.’  
             (such that Tatenda benefitted from Chipo’s dancing).’  
             (ii) ‘Tinotenda made Chipo dance for Tatenda.’  
             (such that Tatenda benefitted from Tinotenda’s coercive action)  
             (iii) ‘Tinotenda made Chipo dance instead of Tatenda.’  
             (such that Tatenda didn’t have to make Chipo dance)  
             (iv) \*‘Tinotenda made Chipo dance instead of Tatenda.’  
             (such that Tatenda didn’t have to dance)

This supports my proposal that substitutive applicatives merge higher than other applicatives.

Third, I provide data that shows that middle height applicatives (Pylkkänen’s high) behave like their ‘super high’ counterparts in unaccusative environments. This corresponds to how lower causatives in other Bantu languages behave as if they were higher and introduce causers in those same contexts. I ultimately argue that this data suggests an agent domain in the phrase structure, an idea that echoes some of Wiltschko’s recent work on the notion of a universal spine (2014), and which supplies a possible mechanism for how these underspecified heads may become specified in a semi-compositional manner.

In **summary**, I show how we can disentangle the different semantic interpretations and their interactions and how this can inform our theory of polytransitive predicates. Specifically, I argue in favor of underspecified functional heads (Appl and Caus) whose meaning is partly determined by the height at which they merge.

◆ Wiltschko, Martina, 2014. *The universal structure of categories: Towards a formal typology* (Vol. 142). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ◆ Pylkkänen, Liina, 2008. *Introducing Arguments*. Cambridge: MIT Press. ◆ Marten, Lutz, and Nancy C. Kula, 2014. Benefactive and substitutive applicatives in Bemba. *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics*, 35(1), pp.1-44.