

# Semantic and syntactic functions of western Indonesian applicative morphology

Christina L. Truong & Bradley McDonnell  
(University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa)

Keywords: <applicative, morphosyntax, Indonesia, Austronesian>

Many western Indonesian languages make use of a small number of verbal affixes which can introduce a non-A(gent) semantic argument into the clause, such as a location, instrument, beneficiary, goal, among others. Some constructions formed with these affixes exhibit features consistent with prototypical applicatives (Peterson 2007; Zúñiga & Kittilä 2019), such as the inclusion of the introduced non-A as a core argument, and the “demotion” of an A or P argument to oblique. However, the verbal affixes which form applicative constructions in these languages are consistently polyfunctional. They also form causatives and comparatives, derive verbs from non-verbal bases, change the scope, aspect, or intensity of action, increase affectedness of P arguments, and derive verbs with non-predictable, lexicalized meanings.

One widely-discussed example of this polyfunctionality is found in the Standard Indonesian suffix *-i*. It can act as a valency-increasing suffix, deriving transitive (or ditransitive) constructions that mark a goal or location, as in (1).

- (1) a. *Ia duduk di kursi itu.*  
3SG sit LOC chair that  
'S/he sat on the chair.'
- b. *Ia menduduk-i kursi itu.*  
3SG AV.sit-APPL chair that  
'S/he was sitting on the chair.' (Slightly modified from Arka et al. 2009)

It also derives transitive verbs from various bases as in *kulit* (n.) 'skin' → *kulit-i* 'peel', *basah* (adj.) 'wet' → *basah-i* 'dampen'. Finally, *-i* in some cases does not increase transitivity but has aspectual effects as in (2).

- (2) a. *Ia memukul saya.*  
3SG AV.hit 1SG  
'S/he hit me.'
- b. *Ia memukul-i saya.*  
3SG AV.hit-APPL 1SG  
'S/he was hitting me.' (Slightly modified from Arka et al. 2009)

In this paper, we survey the functions of applicative affixes in eleven western Indonesian languages. We pay close attention to the varied syntactic properties and semantic nuances of apparent applicative constructions. For example, some constructions in which a non-A argument is introduced exhibit unexpected syntactic behavior, such as failure to increase valency, lower access to syntactic operations for the introduced argument, and incompatibility with particular voice markers. We further demonstrate that use of apparent applicative affixes for non-prototypical functions is both prevalent in individual languages and broadly distributed across languages of the region. We closely examine these constructions with respect to properties of compatible bases, semantic relationships encoded, degree of productivity, and distribution of functions across the affix forms available. While there is considerable overlap between functions, forms, and morphosyntactic properties of these constructions across languages, variation among these present a puzzling and complex synchronic and diachronic picture.

Although a few affixes included in the survey have been discussed at length in the literature (e.g., Indonesian *-kan* and *-i* (Arka 1993, Arka et. al. 2009), and *Tukang Besi* applicative suffixes (Donohue 2001, Peterson 2007)), on the whole, the polyfunctional nature of these affixes is not widely discussed nor well-accounted for. Western Indonesian applicative constructions pose a number of challenges to a general theory of applicatives due to their non-prototypical functions and large variation in semantic and syntactic behavior.

## References

- Arka, I. Wayan. 1993. The *-kan* causative in Indonesian. Sydney: University of Sydney MPhil Thesis.
- Arka, I. Wayan., M. Dalrymple, M. Meladel, M. Suriel, A. Avery and J. Simpson. 2009. A linguistic and computational morphosyntactic analysis for the applicative *-i* in Indonesian. In *Proceedings of the LFG09 Conference*, ed. by Miriam Butt and Tracy Holloway King, 85-105. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.  
<http://web.stanford.edu/group/cslipublications/cslipublications/LFG/14/papers/lfg09arkae-tal.pdf>
- Donohue, Mark. 2001. Coding choices in argument structure: Austronesian applicatives in texts. *Studies in Language* 25 (2): 217-254.
- Peterson, David A. 2007. *Applicative constructions* (Oxford Studies in Typology and Linguistic Theory). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zúñiga, Fernando and Seppo Kittilä. 2019. *Grammatical voice* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.