

Functions of Western Indonesian “Applicative” Affixes

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Abstract

In this paper, I investigate the extent to which western Indonesian verbal suffixes involved in applicative constructions also perform non-applicative and non-valency increasing functions. To do so, I survey forms and functions of applicative morphology in a small sample of western Indonesian languages of different types of voice systems, including Karo Batak, Sundanese, Pendau, Balantak, and Tukang Besi. The study aims to establish a fuller picture of the behavior of the “applicative” affixes in such languages, which in turn can inform new lines of inquiry about the synchrony and diachrony of applicative constructions, and the relationship of applicatives to analyses of Austronesian voice.

A number of observations emerge from the study. First, the properties of a given base, such as stativity, transitivity or unaccusativity, do not appear to be sufficient to predict which affix will combine with the base, nor what the resultant meaning will be. Thus the meaning of such constructions is not purely compositional. Second, if the function of these affixes is equated with bringing a participant from the periphery of a clause into the core, much of the observed behavior is unaccounted for. In some applicative constructions, the applied object may not even be a participant in the event per se, as in the case of purpose applied objects. In other cases, no applied object with a peripheral role is present, as in the non-valency-increasing functions. Furthermore, for verbs derived from nominal bases, there is no base clause to speak of, and thus no peripheral roles can be identified. A satisfactory analysis of the so-called “applicative affixes” must take into account their non-applicative functions. One possible unifying characteristic of all the functions is that the choice and/or presence of affixes signals information about the semantic relationship between the verb and its object (applied or otherwise).