The Unergative-Unaccusative Distinction and the Benefactive Applicative in Amharic
Author(s): Mengistu Amberber

Please see “How to cite” in the online sidebar for full citation information.

Please contact BLS regarding any further use of this work. BLS retains copyright for both print and screen forms of the publication. BLS may be contacted via http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/bls/.

The Annual Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society is published online via eLanguage, the Linguistic Society of America's digital publishing platform.
The unergative-unaccusative distinction and
the benefactive applicative in Amharic*

Mengistu Amberber
Australian National University

1. Introduction. In this paper, I discuss the interaction between monadic predicates and the benefactive applicative construction on the basis of data from Amharic (Ethio-Semitic). I will show that the benefactive applicative construction is available for both unergative and unaccusative predicates. However, I will show that important morphosyntactic and semantic asymmetries exist between the two types of monadic predicates. I propose a structural account for the asymmetries by appealing to independently motivated principles of grammar.

The paper is organized as follows. In §2, I present general background facts regarding transitivity alternation in Amharic. In §3, I discuss some of the theoretical issues regarding the applicative construction. In §4, I examine the interaction between monadic predicates and the benefactive applicative construction. In §5, I argue that a preposition incorporation account of applicatives, à la Baker (1988a) is not tenable for the Amharic facts. I show that the conceptual status of the benefactive argument differs according to the predicate: in the case of unergatives, the benefactive is a canonical Path, in the sense of Jackendoff (1990), whereas in the case of unaccusatives the benefactive is an ‘extra’ affected argument.

2. Split intransitivity in Amharic. There are two types of monadic verbs in Amharic which can be classified along familiar lines as unaccusative and unergative. The unaccusative verbs are further subdivided into two sub-classes mainly on the basis of morphological criteria. I call these two sub-classes Pattern I and Pattern II. Descriptively, the Pattern I unaccusatives can be regarded as ‘basic’ intransitives, whereas the Pattern II unaccusatives are ‘derived’ intransitives. Pattern II unaccusatives are ambiguous between an inchoative and a passive reading. Representative examples of monadic verbs are presented below:

(1) Unaccusative: Pattern I \textit{mat't아} ‘come (intr)'
    Pattern II \textit{te-sabbare} ‘break (intr)’ or ‘was broken’
(2) Unergative: \textit{čæfære} ‘dance’

There are a number of morphosyntactic tests for split intransitivity in Amharic. For the present purposes, I will mention only one important diagnostic test which is associated with the distribution of causative affixes.

Amharic has two productive causative affixes. The first of these is \textit{æ-}, which I call the \textit{l-syntax} causative (cf. Hale and Keyser 1993), for reasons that do not concern us here (but see Amberber 1996). This affix attaches to Pattern I unaccusatives like \textit{?=.*mt’} ‘come’ to derive a causative verb such as \textit{æ-mt’t’æ} ‘bring’. It does not attach to Pattern II unaccusatives nor to unergative verbs as the examples in (3) show.
(3) The distribution of the causative $a$:

Pattern I: $mat\text{"a}$ ‘come (intr)’ ($a-mat\text{"a}$ ‘bring’)
Pattern II: $ta-s\ddot{a}bb\ddot{a}ra$ ‘break (intr)’ ($a-ta-s\ddot{a}bb\ddot{a}ra$)
Unergative: $\ddot{c}\dot{a}ff\ddot{a}ra$ ‘dance’ ($a-\dot{c}\dot{a}ff\ddot{a}ra$)
Transitive: $s\ddot{a}bb\ddot{a}ra$ ‘break (tr)’ ($a-s\ddot{a}bb\ddot{a}ra$)

The second causative affix, which I refer to as the $s$-syntax causative, is $as$- . It has a wider distribution: with the exception of Pattern II unaccusatives, it occurs with both types of monadic verbs. A felicitous English translation of this causative affix is ‘make/cause’.

(4) The distribution of the causative $as$-:

Pattern I: $mat\text{"a}$ ‘come’ (intr) ($as-mat\text{"a}$ ‘cause x come’)
Transitive: $s\ddot{a}bb\ddot{a}ra$ ‘break (tr)’ ($as-s\ddot{a}bb\ddot{a}ra$ ‘cause x break y’)
Unergative: $\dot{c}\dot{a}ff\ddot{a}ra$ ‘dance’ ($as-\ddot{c}\dot{a}ff\ddot{a}ra$ ‘cause x dance’)
Pattern II: $*as-ta-s\ddot{a}bb\ddot{a}ra$

Thus, Amharic has a morphologically transparent diagnostic for unaccusativity which can be informally stated as in (5):

(5) $CAUS$-selection:

Intransitive verbs which can be causativized only by the $s$-syntax $CAUS$ affix are unergative.

The unergative/unaccusative distinction exhibits itself in various areas of the grammar. In this paper, I will focus on how split intransitivity interacts with one valency changing derivation, namely the applicative.

3. The Applicative. The basic facts about the applicative construction are by now familiar to many. Essentially, in the typical applicative construction an erstwhile oblique argument of a predicate (such as instrumental, beneficiary, locative) becomes the direct object. The verb of the applicative construction is morphologically more complex than its non-applicative variant. Consider, for instance, the examples in (6) from Chichewa, a Bantu language (from Baker 1988a:229):

(6) a. $Mbidzi$ $zi-na-perek-\text{-}\text{-a}$ $msampha$ $kwa$ $nkhandwe$ $zebras$ $SP$-$PAST$-$hand$-$ASP$ $trap$ $to$ $fox$
 the zebras handed the trap to the fox

b. $Mbidzi$ $zi-na-perek-er\text{-}\text{-a}$ $nkhandwe$ $msampha$ $zebras$ $SP$-$PAST$-$\text{hand-to}$-$ASP$ $fox$ $trap$
 the zebras handed the fox the trap

The goal argument in (6a), the beneficiary, occurs as a direct object in (6b), the applicative construction. The verb is complex, comprising the applicative affix -$er$.
Likewise, consider the Chamorro (Austronesian) example in (7), (from Baker 1988a:237, original due to Gibson 1980):

(7) a. Ha puunu' si Miguel i bæbei para guahu
    3sS-kill PN Miguel the pig for me
    Miguel killed the pig for me
b. Ha puunu'-l yu' si Miguel nu i bæbei
    3sS-kill-for me PN Miguel OBL the pig
    Miguel killed the pig for me

The beneficiary of the action denoted by the verb in (7a) occurs as the object of the preposition ‘for’, whereas in (7b), it occurs as the direct object of the sentence.

Amharic has a construction which exhibits similar formal properties to the applicative. This can be demonstrated by the instrumental applicative as shown in (8):

(8) a. aster ba-mat'ragiya-wi maskot
    A. with-broom-DEF window
    t'arraga-č-(*(bb-atj)
    clean.pf.-3fs-(with-3mo)
    Aster cleaned a window with the broom
b. aster mat'ragiya-*-(wi-in) maskot
    A. broom-(DEF-ACC) window
    t'arraga-č-*(bb-atj)
    clean.pf.-3fs-with-3mo
    Aster cleaned a window with the broom

In (8a) the instrumental NP ‘the broom’ occurs with the prepositional prefix ba-. The verb is optionally marked with the element -bb-at which consists of a form similar to the preposition ba- and a pronominal suffix which agrees with the instrumental NP. Notice that the -bb- form and the agreement affix occur as a unit, i.e., one cannot occur without the other. For ease of exposition, I will call this unit the B-complex. Now consider (8b): the instrument is no longer marked by the prepositional element. Rather it occurs with the accusative suffix -n. Notice also that the B-complex which was optional in (8a) is obligatory in (8b).

The applicative is quite productive in Amharic. The preposition ba- and the associated B-complex do not occur only with instrumentals. The prepositional prefix ba- has a range of spatial and temporal meanings which include ‘on, at, by, with, in’, among others. It paradigmatically contrasts with another prepositional element, lə-. The classic minimal pair that shows the distribution of these two forms, ba- and lə-, is presented in (9) and (10) respectively:

(9) a. daññaw ba-aster tarrada-(bb-at)
    judge-DEF on-A. judge.pf.3ms-(on-3fo)
    the judge judged against Aster (=he sentenced her)
b. daññew a-ster-in farrada-bb-at
   judge-DEF A.-ACC. judge.pf.3ms-on-3fo
   the judge judged against Aster (=he sentenced her)

(10) a. dañña-w la-aster farrada-(ll-at)
   judge-DEF for-A judge.pf.3ms-(for-3fo)
   the judge judged in favor of Aster (=he acquitted her)

b. dañña-w a-ster-in farrada-ll-at
   judge-DEF A.-ACC judge.pf.3ms-for-3fo
   the judge judged in favor of Aster (=he acquitted her)

In general, when a verb is marked by -bb-, as in (9), the construction has a malefactive interpretation. (9a) is the non-applicative version, whereas (9b) is the applicative counterpart. On the other hand, when a verb is marked by -ll-, as in (10), the construction has a benefactive meaning. Again the (b) example is the applicative version. For the sake of brevity, I will use the term Benefactive as a superordinate term to refer to both the malefactive and the benefactive constructions.

Let us now turn to the central issue: how the applicative interacts with split intransitivity.

4. The applicative and split intransitivity. It has been noted in the literature that in a number of languages the Benefactive applicative of intransitive predicates is ungrammatical. Thus, compare (11) and (12) from Bahasa Indonesian (cf. Baker 1988a:252, original due to Chung 1976):

(11) a. Mereka mem-bawa daging itu kepada dia
do they  TRANS-bring meat the to him
   they brought the meat to him

b. Mereka mem-bawa-kan dia daging itu
   they  TRANS-bring-to him meat the
   they brought him the meat

(12) a. Ajah saja menj-umbang kepada rumah sakit
   father my TRANS-donate to   house sick
   my father donated to the hospital

b. *Ajah saja menj-umbang-kan rumah sakit
   father my TRANS-donate-to house sick
   my father donated to the hospital

The verbs meaning ‘bring’ and ‘donate’ differ in transitivity: the latter cannot take a direct object. Thus, the NP ‘hospital’ in (12) cannot occur as a direct object of the complex verb, as shown in (12b).

Similar facts pertain in Chichewa as well, as presented in Baker (1988a:255). Consider (13) and (14):

(13) a. Menje a-na-gon-a
   hunter SP-PAST-sleep-ASP
   the hunter slept
b. *Mlenje a-na-gon-er-a kalulu
   hunter SP-PAST-sleep-for-ASP hare
   the hunter slept for the hare
(14) a. Mkango u-ku-yenda-a
   lion SP-PRES-walk-ASP
   the lion walked
b. *Mkango u-ku-yenda-er-a anayani
   lion SP-PRES-walk-for-ASP baboons
   the lion walked for the baboons

Again, the verbs meaning ‘sleep’ and ‘walk’ which are typical intransitive predicates do not permit the applicative as the ungrammatical sentences in (13b) and (14b) show.¹

Interestingly, certain predicates in Chichewa can permit the applicative despite their intransitive valency. A case in point is the verb meaning ‘dance’ in (15), (cf. Baker 1988a: 258).

(15) a. Atsikana a-na-vin-a
   girls SP-PAST-dance-ASP
   the girls danced
b. Atsikana a-na-vin-ir-a mfumu
   girls SP-PAST-dance-for-ASP chief
   the girls danced for the chief

Baker (1988a) offered a Case theoretic account for the interaction of intransitivity with the Benefactive applicative. The basic idea is as follows. First it is assumed that the applied object needs structural Case from the verb. If the simple verb does not have structural Case to assign, either because it is lexically a non-Case assigner, as in a basic intransitive verb or is derivationally deprived of its Case assigning properties, as in the passive and antipassive, the complex verb cannot assign structural Case. In order to accommodate data such as (15), Baker suggests that unergative verbs such as ‘dance’ take cognate objects and thus are different from other intransitive verbs. Such unergative verbs behave as transitive predicates and are capable of Case assignment. Thus, for Baker (1988a) the reason why transitive verbs and unergative verbs which take cognate objects allow the Benefactive applicative follows from Case theory.

Now, the Amharic examples above show that the Benefactive applicative is possible with both types of intransitive predicates. Consider for instance the unergative verb ‘laugh’ in (16a). This verb is unergative as evidenced by the unaccusativity diagnostic of CAUS-selection: it cannot take the affix a- as shown in (16b). However, notice that this verb can appear in the Benefactive applicative as in (16c). An otherwise oblique argument occurs as a direct object marked by the accusative Case.

(16) a. aster sak’a-ć
   A. laugh.pf.-3mS
   Aster laughed
b. * lamma aster-in a-sak’-at
   L. A.-ACC CAUS-laugh.pf.3mS-3fO

c. aster lamma-n sak’a-č-*(+bb-at)
   A. L.-ACC laugh.pf.-3fS-(on-3mO)
   Aster laughed at Lemma

The Benefactive applicative of unergative verbs is fairly productive. The only obvious non-lexical exception involves definiteness: an indefinite argument cannot occur as the applied object, nor can it co-occur with the B-complex, as shown in (17a) and (17b). The only acceptable construction involves the absence of the B-complex as shown in (17c).

(17) a. *aster ba-saw sak’a-č-+bb-at
    A. at-someone laugh.pf.-3fS-on-3mO

b. *aster saw+i-n sak’a-č-+bb-at
    A. someone-ACC laugh.pf.-3fS-on-3mO

c. aster ba-saw sak’a-č
    A. at-someone laugh.pf.-3fS
    Aster laughed at someone

What about the Benefactive applicative of unaccusatives? Consider the Pattern I unaccusative verb ‘come’ in (18).

(18) a. *ing+da mat’t’a
guest come.pf.3mS
    a guest came (arrived)

b. *ing+da ba-aaster mat’t’a-(bb-at)
guest on-A. come.pf.3mS-(on-3fO)

c. aster-(in) *ing+da mat’t’a-*(bb-at)
    A.-<ACC> guest come.pf.3mS-(on-3fO)
    lit. Aster a guest arrived on her

Notice that an important asymmetry emerges between the Benefactive applicative of unergatives and that of unaccusatives. Unlike the Benefactive of unergative verbs, a Benefactive argument of unaccusatives cannot occur with the positional element ba-, as shown in (18b). However, the applicative construction is possible as shown in (18c). The same is true for Pattern II unaccusatives as in (19).

(19) a. t’armus-u ta-sabbara
    bottle-DEF INCH-break.pf.3mS
    the glass broke

b. *t’armus-u ba-aaster ta-sabbara-(bb-at)
bottle-DEF by-A. INCH-break.pf.3mS-(on-3fO)

c. aster-(in) t’armus-u ta-sabbara-*(bb-at)
    A.-<ACC> bottle-DEF INCH-break.pf.3mS-(on-3fO)
    lit. Aster the glass broke on her (she is adversely affected)
There is another non-trivial difference between the unergative and unaccusative predicates: the Benefactive argument must occur clause initially. If it does not, as in (20), the construction becomes ungrammatical.

(20) *t’armus-u aster-(i+n) ta-sabbare-bb-at
    bottle-DEF A-(ACC) INCH-break.pf.3mS-on-3fO

The Benefactive applicative of unaccusative verbs is also productive. In fact, it occurs with verbs which do not normally take an oblique argument. Consider the verb mašša ‘become night’. In isolation, the event encoded by this verb is neutral with respect to affectedness. However, the event can be conceived of as adversely or favorably affecting someone when it is cast in the applicative construction as in (21a) and (21b) respectively:

(21) a. aster-(i+n) mašša-bb-at
    A.- (ACC) night.pf.3mS-on-3fO
    lit. Aster it became night on her

b. aster-(i+n) mašša-Il-at
    A.- (ACC) night.pf.3mS-for-3fO
    lit. Aster it became night for her

Predicates which express time, weather, physical and mental states can be involved in the applicative construction. However, there are some constraints which can be explained on semantic and/or pragmatic grounds. Consider the examples in (22).

(22) a. *aster-(i+n) igr-va te-sabbare-bb-at
    A.- (ACC) leg-her INCH-break.pf.-on-3fO

b. aster igr-va te-sabbare
    A. leg-her INCH-break.pf.3mS
    lit. Aster her leg broke

Recall that in (19c) the unaccusative verb meaning ‘break’ can occur in the Benefactive applicative. However, for certain choices of arguments, the construction is not available, as can be seen in (22a). When the event is conceived of as obviously malefactive, such as ‘the breaking of one’s body part’, the applicative is not possible. Instead, a simple predicative relationship between the body part and the unaccusative verb suffices, as in (22b).

Hence, although both unergatives and unaccusatives allow the Benefactive applicative, they exhibit two important differences:

(23) a. Benefactive can occur in a PP    Unergative    Unaccusative
    yes       no       yes

b. Benefactive is clause-initial

The interaction between split intransitivity and the applicative construction reveals an interesting partitioning of monadic verbs in a number of other languages. For instance, in several Australian languages only unergative verbs can be involved in the applicative. In Arabana-Wangkangurru, as presented in Austin (1995,
original due to Hercus 1990), there are two causative affixes: mə- and lə-. The former is described as encoding 'mediated causation', which, for the present purposes, I consider to be the formal equivalent of the Amharic s-syntax causative əs- or the English independent verb 'make'. This affix can attach to both unergative and unaccusative types of verbs.

On the other hand, the affix -lə- exhibits a split in intransitivity: when it attaches to unaccusative verbs it derives a causative construction, whereas when it attaches to unergative verbs it derives an applicative. These are shown in (24) and (25) respectively (from Austin 1995):

(24) *Causative* -lə-: kəjī- 'to turn' kəjī-lə- 'to turn (it) over'
(25) *Applicative* -lə-: wīya- 'to laugh' wīya-lə- 'to mock, laugh at'

Thus, to summarize the facts so far, in Amharic the Benefactive applicative construction is available in both unergative and unaccusative predicates. Nevertheless, important differences are shown to pertain between the two classes.

In the remainder of this paper, I will attempt to account for the observed asymmetry between unergative and unaccusative predicates with respect to the Benefactive applicative in Amharic. I will motivate a structural analysis that best accounts for the Amharic facts.

5. Structural account. Let us begin with the incorporation analysis of applicatives as outlined in Baker (1988a). Consider (6) repeated below as (26):

(26) a. *Mbodzi zi-na-perek-a msampha kwa nkhandwe*
  zebras SP-PAST-hand-ASP trap to fox
  the zebras handed the trap to the fox

b. *Mbodzi zi-na-perek-er-a nkhandwe msampha*
  zebras SP-PAST-hand-ASP fox trap
  the zebras handed the fox the trap

For Baker, both (26a) and (26b) have an identical D-structure thematic configuration. He argued that the applicative in (26b) is derived when the preposition, or applied affix, incorporates into the verb as in (27).

(27) S
    NP  VP
      zebras
    V   PP NP
      trap
    P   P NP
      hand -lə
      t₁  t₁  fox
The major problem in applying the preposition incorporation (PI) account to the Amharic facts emerges from the co-occurrence of the positional element $ba$- (or $lə$-) with the B-complex. Thus, consider the relevant example repeated in (28):

(28) aster $ba$-lama sak'ə-č-(bb-at)
A. at-L. laugh.pf.-3fS-(on-3mO)
Aster laughed at Lemma

If the source of -bb- in the verb is the incorporation of the positional $ba$-, then we would not expect the two to co-occur. In other words, the $ba$- on the Benefactive NP and the -bb- on the verb should have been in complementary distribution, contrary to fact. Thus, the occurrence of -bb- in the verb could not have been as a result of PI.

It is instructive to note that in a later study, Baker (1992:29) has modified the PI account for some constructions in Chichewa, arguing that certain locative Benefactives are possible without the preposition incorporating into the verb, as in (29b).

(29) a. Alenje a-ku-luk-1r-a pa-mchenge mikeke
hunters SP-pres-weave-appl-ind on-sand mats
the hunters are weaving mats on the beach
b. Alenje a-ku-luk-1r-a mikeke pa-mchenge
hunters SP-pres-weave-appl-ind mats on-sand
the hunters are weaving mats on the beach

For the Amharic facts, I would like to propose that the B-complex has a different structural status depending on the lexical semantics of the predicate. I would like to argue that the Benefactive is a canonical Path argument in the Lexical Conceptual Structure (LCS) of unergative verbs. I assume that unergative verbs encode an Activity Event-type. I suggest that the Benefactive argument makes the Activity event more complete. To see what I mean by making the event complete, consider the event denoted by verbs such as ‘laugh’ or ‘cry’. When someone laughs or cries, there is often a stimulus for the event. I suggest that the Benefactive argument partially spells out that stimulus.

For unaccusative verbs, I argue that the Benefactive does not make the Achievement Event-type complete. The Benefactive is rather an ‘extra’ affected argument.

The difference between the Benefactive of the two predicates can be informally highlighted by wh-questions. Since the Benefactive elaborates an Activity Event-type it is quite natural to ask, for instance ‘who is Mary laughing at?’ On the other hand, as the Benefactive is an extra argument of the Achievement Event-type, it is rather odd, at least in neutral contexts, to ask ‘who is affected by the breaking of the glass’.

Once the conceptual status of the Benefactive with respect to the predicate is clearly established, the syntactic difference between the two classes of monadic verbs can be accounted for by independently motivated principles of grammar. I suggest that, appealing to a Jackendovian type Conceptual Semantics (cf. Jackendoff 1990), a canonical Path argument is mapped onto a PP. Thus, the
Benefactive argument of unergative verbs occurs in a PP. On the other hand, the Benefactive argument of unaccusatives is a marked Path and is mapped onto an NP.

Suppose that with the unergative predicates, the PP may be generated either with a lexically filled head or an empty head. When P is lexically filled it can assign Case to its argument. Then the B-complex on the verb can be regarded as an optional oblique agreement.

On the other hand, P may be generated as an empty head. I assume that empty heads do not assign Case, nor can they preclude a governing verb from assigning Case (see also Baker 1992). Assuming that in Amharic the unergative verb can assign structural Case, the Benefactive argument gets Case. I assume that the B-complex is generated in AgrO and the Benefactive argument must move to Spec AgrO to get morphological Case. The applicative of unergatives can be represented as in (30), ignoring irrelevant details. (Note that \( t_j \) is the trace of the subject):

\[
\begin{array}{c}
(30) \\
\text{AgrOP} \\
\text{AgrOP'} \\
\text{NP} \\
\text{Lemma}_k \\
\text{EP} \\
\text{AgrO} \\
\text{sak}^{j}\text{-bb-at 'laugh-on-him'} \\
\text{VP} \\
\text{E} \\
\text{tj} \\
\text{NP} \\
\text{V'} \\
\text{AspP} \\
\text{V} \\
\text{CAUS} \\
\text{NP} \\
\text{Asp'} \\
\text{tj} \\
\text{t}_k \\
\text{VP} \\
\text{Asp} \\
\text{BE} \\
\text{NP} \\
\text{V'} \\
\text{tj} \\
\text{PP} \\
\text{V} \\
\text{tj} \\
\text{NP} \\
\text{P} \\
\text{t}_k \\
\phi
\end{array}
\]

Now, consider the Benefactive applicative of the unaccusative predicate, repeated in (31):

\[
\begin{array}{c}
(31) \\
\text{aster-}(\text{+in}) \\
t'\text{armus-u} \\
ta\text{-sabb}e\text{ra}-*(\text{bb-ot}) \\
\text{A.-ACC} \\
bottle\text{-DEF} \\
\text{INCH-break.pf.3mS-(on-3fO)} \\
lit. Aster the glass broke on her (she is adversely affected)
\end{array}
\]
The Benefactive argument is generated as an NP complement of the verb root. It cannot get Case from the verb, because, by hypothesis, unaccusatives do not assign structural Case. However, I assume that the Benefactive can be assigned inherent Case. It is often assumed (cf. Chomsky 1986) that inherent Case is an optional Case that is assigned only when it is required. I assume that the B-complex is generated as the head of AgrS and the Benefactive argument moves to Spec AgrS to check morphological Case. The derivation is partly schematized in (32):

(32) \[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{AgrSP} \\
\text{NP} \quad \text{AgrS}' \\
\text{Asterj} \\
\ldots \\
\text{AgrS} \\
\text{t-sbbrj-bb-at 'break-on-her'} \\
\text{AgrOP} \\
\text{NP} \quad \text{AgrOP}' \\
\text{the bottle}_k \\
\text{EP} \\
\text{AgrO} \\
\text{Asp}' \\
\text{E} \\
\text{tj} \\
\text{NP} \\
\text{Asp} \\
\text{t}_k \\
\text{VP} \\
\text{INCH} \\
\text{NP}_1 \\
\text{R'} \\
\text{tj} \\
\text{t}_k \\
\text{NP}_2 \\
\text{R} \\
\text{tj} \\
\end{array}
\]

Therefore, the distinction between the two predicates is attributed to the structural status of the Benefactive argument which itself follows from the lexical semantics of the verbs.

Incidentally, one may also argue for a 'lexicalist' account where the applicative marker, the -bb- suffix, is lexically inserted into the verb. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address in detail the issue of determining whether a syntactic or a lexicalist account better handles the applicative construction in Amharic. However, I note here that to make a lexical analysis operational one has to assume that the agreement suffix is also lexically inserted. Since for independent reasons I assume that the agreement suffixes are syntactically inserted, the simplest assumption would be to generate the B-complex in the relevant Agr projection.3
6. Conclusion. To conclude, the interaction between split intransitivity and the Benefactive applicative construction in Amharic can be accounted for if we assume that the Benefactive argument has a different lexical conceptual status depending on the lexical semantics of the predicate. With unergative verbs it is an argument that makes the event more complete, whereas with unaccusative verbs it is an affected argument.

Notes

* I thank Lisa Travis for comments and suggestions on ideas presented in this paper. I also thank Hilda Koopman for useful questions at the venue of BLS 23rd. Of course, any shortcomings that might be reflected here are entirely mine. The following abbreviations are used in the interlinear gloss of Amharic sentences: ACC ‘accusative’, m ‘masculine’, f ‘feminine’, S ‘subject’, O ‘object’, DEF ‘definite’, CAUS ‘causative’, INCH ‘inchoative’, PASS ‘passive’, pf ‘perfect’. Also, the abbreviations EP and AspP refer to ‘event phrase’ and ‘aspect phrase’ respectively. For interlinear glosses of examples from other languages, the reader is referred to the original sources.

1. As noted in Baker (1988a), these sentences can be grammatical with a reading that is different from the typical applicative. For instance, (13b) would be grammatical with the reading: ‘the hunter lay on the hare’. Note also that Alsina and Mchombo (1990) argue against the claim that beneficiary applicatives cannot be formed from intransitives. However, they implicitly admit that there is an asymmetry between the benefactive applicative of transitics and that of intransitives. They claim: “it is true that beneficiary applicatives based on certain intransitive verbs do not have the full range of interpretations they get when based on transitive verbs” (Alsina and Mchombo 1990:502).

2. See also Baker (1996) for a different analysis of applicative constructions which does not appeal to the standard incorporation account.

3. See Mullen (1986) for a study of Amharic agreement affixes within the framework of Lexical Phonology.

References


Austin, P. 1995. ‘Causatives and Applicatives in Australian Aboriginal Languages’, ms., La Trobe University.


