

## 9 Applicativization in Amharic

**Abstract:** This chapter provides a detailed description of the applicative construction and of a related non-applicative construction involving the same verbal marking in Amharic (Ethiosemitic, Ethiopia). The applicative suffixes *-ll-* and *-bb-*—benefactive and malefactive, respectively—always co-occur with object agreement suffixes which cross-reference the applied phrase. These two suffixes can be used with virtually any verb irrespective of transitivity or the lexical semantics of the verb root, presumably because any event can be potentially cast as benefiting or harming some entity. The same suffixes can also occur in a non-applicative construction, where the oblique phrase is marked with a preposition but cross-referenced on the verb as if it were an object.

### 1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed description of the applicative construction and of a related but non-applicative construction involving the same verbal marking in Amharic (Ethiosemitic, Ethiopia). Amharic, self-name [amarɨɲa] (አማርኛ), belongs to the Transversal South Ethiosemitic language group (see Figure 1) with Harari, the East Gurage languages and Argobba (Hetzron 1972: 119; Faber 1997: 11–13; Rubin 2008: 80).<sup>1</sup> It is spoken by approximately 31.8 million people as mother tongue in Ethiopia, and by approximately 25.1 million people as a second language (Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig 2021).<sup>2</sup> It is the working language of the federal government of Ethiopia. There are five regional dialects of Modern Amharic, namely, that of Addis Ababa, Gonder, Gojjam, Menz, and Wello (Meyer 2011; see also Zelealem Leyew 2007).

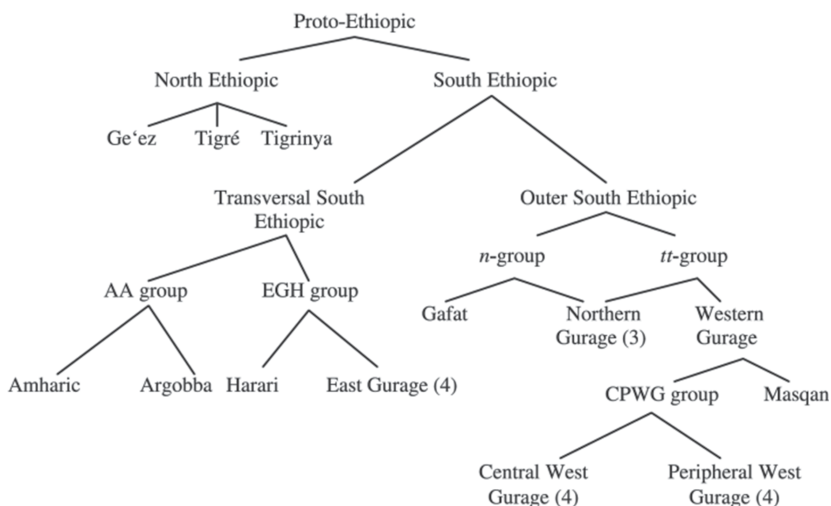
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<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 is identical to Figure 5 in Rubin (2008: 92), which is based on Hetzron (1972). The numbers in parenthesis indicate the number of languages within the subgroup. According to the traditional classification of Ethiosemitic, there are 23 languages. Ge'ez is no longer spoken and survives only as a liturgical language of the Orthodox Christian churches of Ethiopia and Eritrea (Weninger 2011b: 1125). Argobba is severely endangered (Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig 2021) and Gafat is believed to be extinct (Weninger 2011a: 1114).

<sup>2</sup> According to Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig (2021), 14.8 million speakers are monolingual.

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**Figure 1:** The Ethiosemitic language family.

The data used in this chapter is based on different sources including the author's native speaker knowledge, examples from published sources as well as corpora of naturally occurring discourse.

The chapter is organised as follows. In § 2 we provide a brief background on the morphosyntax of Amharic, followed by a discussion of the morphology (§ 3), syntax (§ 4), semantics (§ 5) of the applicative construction and of the non-applicative construction that involves the same verbal marking as the applicative construction. In § 6 we conclude with a summary of the main findings.

## 2 Basics of Amharic morphosyntax

### 2.1 Morphology

As a Semitic language, Amharic employs the word formation strategy known as *root-and-pattern* morphology particularly prevalent in the domain of verb morphology. The core semantic content of a word is signalled by the consonants, also known as 'root radicals', whereas grammatical meaning is encoded by the consonant-vowel (CV) template.

There are six major templates of the verb: perfective, imperfective, jussive, imperative, converb/gerund, and verbal noun. The most common type of roots has three consonants (triradicals). Traditionally, triradical verbs are classified into three conjugational classes known as Type A, Type B, and Type C. This classification is based on whether or not the penultimate radical of the root is geminated. In Type B verbs the radical is geminated in all templates. In Type A verbs, it is geminated in the perfec-

tive template only. In Type C verbs it is geminated in the perfective and imperfective templates. This can be seen in Table 1 for the perfective, imperfective, jussive, and converb/gerund templates using the verbs *sabbār-* ‘break’, *fəllag-* ‘search/want’ and *marrək-* ‘cause to surrender’.

**Table 1:** Verb templates.

Type	Perfective	Imperfective	Jussive	Converb
A	C <sub>1</sub> əCC <sub>2</sub> əC <sub>3</sub> <i>sabbār-</i>	C <sub>1</sub> əC <sub>2</sub> C <sub>3</sub> <i>-sabr-</i>	C <sub>1</sub> C <sub>2</sub> əC <sub>3</sub> <i>-sbār</i>	C <sub>1</sub> əC <sub>2</sub> C <sub>3</sub> ə <i>sabrə-</i>
B	C <sub>1</sub> əCC <sub>2</sub> əC <sub>3</sub> <i>fəllag-</i>	C <sub>1</sub> əCC <sub>2</sub> iC <sub>3</sub> <i>-fəllig</i>	C <sub>1</sub> əCC <sub>2</sub> iC <sub>3</sub> <i>-fəllig-</i>	C <sub>1</sub> əCC <sub>2</sub> iC <sub>3</sub> ə <i>fəlligə-</i>
C	C <sub>1</sub> aCC <sub>2</sub> əC <sub>3</sub> <i>marrək-</i>	C <sub>1</sub> aCC <sub>2</sub> iC <sub>3</sub> <i>-marrik-</i>	C <sub>1</sub> aC <sub>2</sub> C <sub>3</sub> <i>-mark</i>	C <sub>1</sub> aC <sub>2</sub> C <sub>3</sub> ə <i>markə-</i>

Nouns can be marked for definiteness, gender, number, and case. The definite is marked by the suffix *-u/-w* (masculine) *-wa* (feminine) but the indefinite is unmarked. The plural is marked by the suffix *-ottf*, but the singular/transnumeral is unmarked. There is differential object marking (DOM) whereby the accusative is marked (by the suffix *-n*) typically if the NP is definite/specific (see Amberber 2009). The nominative is unmarked.

Verbs are marked obligatorily for subject agreement but often optionally for object/indirect object agreement. In the perfective and converb conjugations, subject agreement consists of suffixes only, whereas in the imperfective and jussive a combination of prefixes and suffixes is used. Intransitive verbs take S NPs, transitive verbs take A and O NPs, and extended transitive verbs take A, O, and IO NPs. The basic temporal distinction is between past (perfect) and non-past (imperfect).

As the applicative construction requires object marking on the verb, it is important to be familiar with the full range of object marking (see also Haile 1970). Table 2 presents the object agreement markers in Amharic using the verb form *sabbārə* (perfective) *jisabr-* (imperfective), ‘break’, where the subject is the third person masculine singular, but the object expresses different persons, numbers and genders (e.g., *sabbārə-w* ‘he broke him/it’, *sabbārə-h* ‘he broke you’, etc.).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This is not the full set of object pronominal suffixes. Thus, when the verb takes the first person singular subject marker (*-hu*), the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine object suffix is *-t* (as in *sabbār-hu-t* ‘I broke it’).

**Table 2:** Object agreement markers (with a 3SG.M subject).

	Perfective	Imperfective
3SG.M	<i>səbbərə-w</i>	<i>jisabr-əw</i>
3SG.F	<i>səbbər(*ə)<sup>4</sup>-at</i>	<i>jisabr-at</i>
2SG.M	<i>səbbərə-h</i>	<i>jisabr-ih</i>
2SG.F	<i>səbbərə-f</i>	<i>jisabr-if</i>
1SG	<i>səbbərə-ŋŋ</i>	<i>jisabr-əŋŋ</i>
3PL	<i>səbbər(*ə)-attəw</i>	<i>jisabr-attəw</i>
2PL	<i>səbbər(*ə)-attəh<sup>w</sup></i>	<i>jisabr-attəuh</i>
1PL	<i>səbbərə-n</i>	<i>jisabr-ən</i>

In the above paradigm, the subject is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular which is realised by the suffix *-ə* in the perfective stem (*səbbər-ə*) and by the prefix *ji-* in the imperfective stem (*ji-sabr*).

## 2.2 Basic syntax

Amharic is a nominative-accusative language, that is to say that the subject of an intransitive clause and the subject of a transitive clause are in the nominative distinct from the object of a transitive clause which is in the accusative. As already pointed out, the nominative is not morphologically marked, whereas the accusative is marked by the suffix *-n* (*-in* after consonant final stems) typically only if the noun is definite or specific.<sup>5</sup> Consider the following examples:

- (1) a. *lidʒ-u wadə bet hed-ə*  
 boy-DEF.M<sup>6</sup> toward home go\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘The boy went home.’
- b. *aster lidʒ-u-n ajjə-tf-(iw)*  
 Aster boy-DEF.M-ACC see\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Aster saw the boy.’

<sup>4</sup> When a vowel-initial suffix attaches to a vowel-final stem, the vowel of the latter is deleted in accordance with the vowel hiatus resolution rule of Amharic.

<sup>5</sup> By the terms “definite” and “specific” we include personal pronouns, demonstratives, noun phrases with a possessive modifier, the possessive suffix, and quantifiers.

<sup>6</sup> The stem glossed as ‘boy’ here actually means ‘child’, and it is the definite suffix *-u* that leads to the meaning ‘the boy’ (i.e., a more accurate gloss would be: child-DEF.M).

In (1a), the subject NP ('the boy') is unmarked for the nominative. The object NP in (1b) is marked for the accusative case by the suffix *-n*. Notice also that in (1b) the verb can optionally take object agreement marking. If we replace the definite NP in (1b) with an indefinite one, not only will the accusative case marking be unacceptable, but the verb cannot be marked for object agreement, as shown in (2):

- (2) *aster (and) lidʒ(\*-in)      ajja-tf(\*-iw)*  
 Aster one boy-ACC      see\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster saw a/one boy.'

In addition to the direct object as shown in (2), Amharic also has what might be called "indirect" and/or "oblique" objects, typically marked by adpositions:

- (3) *aster la-lidʒ-u      mas'haf sat't'a-tf(-iw)*  
 Aster to-boy-DEF.M book give\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster gave a book to the boy.'

While the unmarked constituent order in Amharic is clearly [S/A O V], it is possible to depart from this through topicalization and focus. Furthermore, overt NPs are often omitted once introduced in discourse, and this is particularly true with the subject NP as the verb is obligatorily marked for subject agreement.

Amharic has adpositions which include both prepositions (which, in most cases are formally prefixes) and postpositions. The presence of prepositions is typologically unusual as the language is otherwise strictly head-final. The postpositions are often independent words which are historically derived from nominals. There are about 8 to 10 prepositions and about the same number of postpositions. As we will see shortly, the prepositions *bə-* and *lə-*<sup>7</sup> are particularly relevant to the discussion of the applicative construction. The main adpositional meanings encoded by these prefixes are listed below.<sup>8</sup>

The prefix *bə-* can be used to encode a range of different meanings including Instrumental, Locational, Time, and Malefactive:

- (4) a. Instrumental: *bə-billawa* 'by a knife'  
 b. Locational: *bə-gəbaya* 'at a market'  
 c. Time (starting/finishing point of an event): *bə-hulət səʔat* 'at 2 o'clock'

The prefix *lə-* encodes three core meanings: Beneficiary/Goal, Reason, and Time:

<sup>7</sup> With allomorphs *b-* and *l-* respectively before vowel-initial stems.

<sup>8</sup> The other common prepositions with multiple meanings are: *kə-* 'from, out of, at, in, on, to, by, with', *wədə-* 'toward, into, to, about', *iskə-* 'as far as, until, to', *silə-* 'about, because of' and *ində-* 'like, as'. Most of these prepositions are traditionally (Leslau 1995: 597–616) analysed as prefixes.

- (5) a. Beneficiary/Goal  
*lə-lidɜ-u                      sət'tə-hu-t*  
 to-boy-DEF.M              give\PFV-SBJ.1SG-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'I gave it to the boy.'
- b. Reason  
*wətadər-ottf-u              l-agər-attfəw*  
 soldier-PL-DEF              for-country-POSS.P  
*jɪ-mot-all-u*  
 SBJ.3P-die\IPFV-AUX.NPST-SBJ.3PL  
 'The soldiers (will) die for the sake of their country.'
- c. Time  
*lə-misa              asa              bəll-attf*  
 for-lunch    fish    eat\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 'She ate fish for lunch.'

In terms of clausal syntax more broadly, there are three types of subordinate clauses: complement, relative, and adverbial (see also Demeke 2003). Complement clauses are typically found with verbs of perception and attention (e.g., *ajjə* 'see', *səmma* 'hear'), cognition (*ammənə* 'believe', *awwək'ə* 'know'), desire (*fəllagə* 'want', *təməjənə* 'wish'), speaking (*nəggərə* 'tell', *t'əjjək'ə* 'ask'). Such clauses are marked by the complementizer *ind(ə)*- which is attached to the verb of the complement clause as shown below:

- (6) [aster [ləmma **ində**-mət't'a]                      *səmma-tt]*  
 Aster    Lemma    **comp**-arrive\PFV.SBJ.3SG.M    hear\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 'Aster heard that Lemma has arrived.'

Another productive complementizer is *bil*- (equivalent to the English complementizer 'that'), which is historically derived from the converb form of the verb 'to say' (*alə* in the perfective).<sup>9</sup> This complementizer is inflected for person, number, and gender and is often found with verbs of cognition (*assəbə* 'think') and speech (*nəggərə* 'tell'). It is commonly used to express direct and indirect speech/thought.<sup>10</sup>

- (7) a. [aster [PRO *wədə-bet    i-hed-allə-h<sup>w</sup>*                      **bil-a]**  
 Aster                      to-house    SBJ.1SG-go\IPFV-AUX.NPST-SBJ.1SG    **say**\CNV-SBJ.3SG.F  
*assəb-ətt]*  
 think\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 'Aster thought that she would go home.'  
 (Lit. 'Aster thought, saying: "I will go home."')

<sup>9</sup> The grammaticalization of a quotative verb 'to say' into a complementizer is cross-linguistically well known (see Kuteva et al. 2019: 357–358).

<sup>10</sup> Null arguments are marked as PRO here for expository purposes.

- b. [PRO [PRO *wadə-bet i-hed-alla-h<sup>w</sup>* *bil-a*]  
 to-house SBJ.1SG-go\IPFV-AUX.NPST-SBJ.1SG say\CNV-SBJ.3SG.F  
*assəb-əttf*  
 think\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 ‘She thought that she would go home.’  
 (Lit. ‘She thought, saying: “I will go home”.’)

Adverbial clauses can be formed by attaching various conjunctions to the verb: *silə* ‘because’, *si* ‘when’, *ində* ‘as soon as’. Here is one example:

- (8) [PRO [PRO *silə-səddəb-ə-jjɪ* *matta-hu-t*]  
 because-insult\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-OBJ.1SG hit\PFV-SBJ.1SG-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Because he insulted me, I hit him.’

The relative clause involves the use of the markers *jə-* in the perfective and *jəmm-* in the imperfective. The relative clause verb is marked for agreement with the head noun, which it precedes. Consider the following:

- (9) a. *lidz-u tilantinna mət’t’a*  
 boy-DEF.M yesterday come\PFV.SBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘The boy came yesterday.’  
 b. *lidz-u-n ajjə-hu-t*  
 boy-DEF.M-ACC see\PFV-SBJ.1SG-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘I saw the boy.’

Now consider (10), which is based on the combination of the above two clauses:

- (10) *tilantinna jə-mət’t’a-w-in lidz ajjə-hu-t*  
 yesterday REL-come\PFV.SBJ.3SG.M-DEF.M-ACC boy see\PFV-SBJ.1SG-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘I saw the boy who came yesterday.’

Notice that the relativised verb has nominal properties in that it is marked for definiteness and accusative case. The head noun modified by the relative clause must occur without definiteness and case marking. We will examine the interaction of the relative clause with the applicative construction in § 4.4.

## 2.3 Valency and voice operations

There are productive valency-decreasing and valency-increasing derivations. The valency-decreasing derivations include the passive, anticausative, reflexive and reciprocal. These involve the use of the prefix *tə-*, which attaches to the transitive verb. Due

to this multifunctionality, the term MEDIO-PASSIVE may be more appropriate (than terms such as “reflexive/passive”) to refer to the prefix *tə-* (see also Meyer 2011). Here are some examples:

- (11) a. *aster dabbo-w-in k'orrat'-atf*  
 Aster bread-DEF.M-ACC cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 ‘Aster cut the bread.’  
 b. *dabbo-w (bə-aster) tə-k'orrat'-ə*  
 bread-DEF.M by-Aster MP-cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘The bread was cut (by Aster).’

The term ANTICAUSATIVE refers here to an intransitive verb that is morphosyntactically distinct from the passive and reflexive. Thus, the anticausatives *tə-səbbərə* ‘break (INTR)’, *tə-kəffətə* ‘open (INTR)’, and *tə-bəttənə* ‘scatter (INTR)’ correspond to the transitive verbs *səbbərə* ‘break’, *kəffətə* ‘open’, and *bəttənə* ‘scatter’, respectively.

While the anticausative, the passive, and the reflexive are distinct types of valency-changing alternation, they are marked by the same form. A verb so marked can be ambiguous between the anticausative, the passive, and the reflexive reading though one can force a passive reading by expressing the Agent in a *by*-phrase (Demoz 1964: 13–27; Amberber 2000, Amberber 2002: 14–25). When the prefix *tə-* is attached to the perfective verb *səkk'alə* ‘he hanged’, the reflexive form *tə-səkk'alə* ‘he hanged himself’ is derived, which can be ambiguous between the reflexive meaning ‘he hanged himself’ or the passive reading ‘he was hanged’. The reflexive reading is not universally available for all transitive verbs. Thus, the verb *k'orrat'ə* ‘he cut’ has the *tə*-stem *tə-k'orrat'ə* ‘it was cut’, but the reading is passive or anticausative rather than reflexive. On the other hand, while verbs that express activities related to parts of the body, so-called ‘self-grooming’ verbs, are typically reflexive, e.g., *tat't'əbə* (< \**tə-at't'əbə*) ‘he washed himself’, *tə-latf'ə* ‘he shaved himself’, it is also possible to interpret them as passive.

Reciprocity is also expressed by the prefix *tə-* but with a special reduplicative stem of the verb. For a triradical verb, the reduplicative stem is *tə-C<sub>1</sub>əC<sub>2</sub>aCC<sub>2</sub>əC<sub>3</sub>*, e.g., *nəkkəsə* ‘bite’ → *tə-nəkkəs-u* (MP-bite.RECP\PFV-3PL) ‘they bit each other’.

The valency-increasing derivations are the causative and applicative. The causative is formed by attaching the prefix *a-* (direct causative) or *as-* (indirect causative).

- (12) a. *k'ibe-w k'allət'-ə*  
 butter-DEF.M melt\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘The butter melted.’  
 b. *səwijjə-w k'ibe-w-in a-k'allət'-ə-w*  
 man-DEF.M butter-DEF.M-ACC CSD-melt\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘The man melted the butter.’



Some intransitive verbs such as *tʃəffərə* ‘dance’, *zəmmərə* ‘sing’, *təjyna* ‘sleep’, *azzənə* ‘be sad’, *fərra* ‘be afraid’, which can be characterized as unergative (as opposed to unaccusative), cannot take the prefix *a-*. Such intransitive verbs take the other causative prefix, namely *as-* marking the indirect causative, e.g., *tʃəffərə* ‘dance’ → *as-tʃəffərə* ‘make someone dance’ (not *\*a-tʃəffərə*).

The causative of transitive verbs is formed by attaching the prefix *as-* (indirect causative). Here is an example:

- (13) a. *almaz dabbo k’orrət’-əttf*  
 Almaz bread cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 ‘Almaz cut some bread.’  
 b. *aster almaz-in dabbo as-k’orrət’-əttf-at*  
 Aster Almaz-ACC bread CSI-cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.F  
 ‘Aster made Almaz cut some bread.’

Note that the causee argument in (13b), ‘Almaz’, is marked by the accusative case suffix and is cross-referenced by the object agreement marker. If the initial object is definite/specific (*dabbo-w* ‘the bread’), it will be marked by the accusative case suffix (*-n*). However, the object agreement marker still cross-references the causee—not the initial object, as can be seen below.<sup>11</sup>

- (14) *aster almaz-in dabbo-w-in as-k’orrət’-əttf-at (\*-iw)*  
 Aster Almaz-ACC bread-DEF.M-ACC CSI-cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.F OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Aster made Almaz cut the bread.’

The other valency changing derivation is the applicative, which is the focus of this chapter. It should be pointed out here that the term ‘applicative’ is not commonly used in the grammatical description of Amharic or other Ethiopian languages. As far as we are aware, the term was used for the first time in Amberber (1996). This chapter will show that based on the definition provided by Zúñiga and Creissels (this volume), it is possible to identify an applicative construction in Amharic (see also Amberber 2000, 2002: 55–60; Yabe 2007: 76–85). In the following sections of the chapter, the morphology, syntax, and semantics of the applicative will be discussed in detail.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted here that the occurrence of two objects both marked by the accusative suffix *-n* as the example shows is less preferred in actual discourse and there is a tendency for the initial object to appear as non-definite/non-specific which makes it ineligible for the accusative suffix *-n*.

### 3 Morphology

There are two applicative morphemes, *-ll-* and *-bb-*, which we refer to as **BENEFACTIVE** and **MALEFACTIVE** respectively. The following examples provide a minimal pair contrast between these two morphemes:

- (15) *daɲɲa-w səwijjə-w-in<sup>12</sup> fərrəd-u-ll-ət*  
 judge-DEF.M man-DEF.M-ACC judge\PFV-SBJ.3POL-**APPL**-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘The judge passed judgment in favour of the man.’ (i.e., the man was acquitted)

- (16) *daɲɲa-w səwijjə-w-in fərrəd-u-bb-ət*  
 judge-DEF.M man-DEF.M-ACC judge\PFV-SBJ.3POL-**APPL**-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘The judge passed judgment against the man.’ (i.e., the man was convicted)

The applicative suffixes always co-occur with object agreement suffixes which cross-reference the applied phrase. Thus, in the above examples, *-ll-* (benefactive) and *-bb-* (malefactive) are followed by the object agreement suffix which cross-references the applied phrase (‘the man’).

Notice that the applied phrase takes the accusative case marking *-n* consistent with the differential object marking phenomenon noted earlier (§ 2.1).

It is important to note here that the suffixes *-ll-* and *-bb-* can also occur in a non-applicative construction where the oblique phrase is marked with a preposition but cross-referenced as if it were an object. To distinguish this usage of the suffixes from their applicative function, we use the term “oblique cross-reference” (OCR)<sup>13</sup>. Thus, consider the following:

- (17) *daɲɲa-w lə-səwijjə-w(\*-in) fərrəd-u-ll-ət*  
 judge-DEF.M **for**-man-DEF.M-ACC judge\PFV-SBJ.3POL-**OCR**-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘The judge passed judgment in favour of the man.’ (= ‘the man was acquitted.’)

- (18) *daɲɲa-w bə-səwijjə-w(\*-in) fərrəd-u-bb-ət*  
 judge-DEF.M **on**-man-DEF.M-ACC judge\PFV-SBJ.3POL-**OCR**-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘The judge passed judgment against the man.’ (= ‘the man was convicted.’)

Notice the formal similarity between the prepositions *lə-* ‘for’ and *bə-* ‘on’, on the one hand and the applicative/oblique cross-reference markers *-ll-* and *-bb-* with identical consonants in each pair on the other. The proper analysis of this similarity is controver-

<sup>12</sup> The form *səwijjəw* consists of the “singulative” morpheme *-jjə*, which is used with some nouns such as ethnic names and the generic nouns referring to people, *səw* ‘man/person’, *set* ‘woman’ (Meyer 2011: 1192).

<sup>13</sup> I thank the editors of this volume for suggesting I use the term “oblique cross-reference” (OCR) here as distinct from “applicative” (APPL).

sial. As Kramer (2014) pointed out, there are several possible hypotheses, including: that these markers are part of a complex agreement morpheme (Mullen 1986; Amberber 1996), that they are incorporated prepositions (Yabe 2007), or that they are applicative heads (Demeke 2003). The arguments for or against these hypotheses are often theory-internal. For the present purposes, we analyse *-ll-* and *-bb-* as applicative markers when they occur in constructions such as (13) and (14), and will be largely agnostic as to the proper characterisation of their formal similarity with the prepositions *lā-* and *bā-*.

While the term “malefactive” is appropriate for the meaning in (16)/(18), the applicative suffix *-bb-* can also encode a range of other meanings, including locational and instrumental, similar to what is found in the Gumer language (Völlmin 2010).

There are no serial verbs in Amharic, but there are converbs which are used in clause chaining constructions, as already mentioned above. Converbs can take the applicative morphemes as well as the full range of derivational and inflectional suffixes except for tense/aspect inflection. Thus, consider the following example:

- (19) *indzāra lā-lidz-e gaggar-hu*  
 injera for-child-1.POSS bake\PFV-SBJ.1SG  
 ‘I baked injera for my child.’

In (19) the Beneficiary of the event (of baking) is expressed with the preposition *lā-* ‘for’. In (20) below, the event of ‘baking’ occurs as a sub-event in a clause chain that involves the use of the converb:

- (20) *indzāra lā-lidz-e gagirr-e i-hed-allā-hu*  
 injera for-child-1.POSS bake\CNV-SBJ.1SG SBJ.1SG-go\IPFV-AUX.NPST-SBJ.1SG  
 ‘Having baked injera for my child, I (will) leave.’

In (21) below, the converb occurs with the oblique cross-reference suffix cross-referencing the Beneficiary argument ‘my child’:

- (21) *indzāra lā-lidz-e gagirr-e-ll-ət*  
 injera for-child-1.POSS bake\CNV-SBJ.1SG-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
*i-hed-allā-hu*  
 SBJ.1SG-go\IPFV-AUX.NPST-SBJ.1SG  
 ‘Having baked injera for my child, I (will) leave.’

The converb is productively used to represent a series of events in a clause chain (see Meyer 2012; Amberber, in preparation). Here is another example:

- (22) *māsob kəft-o dabbo wəssəd-ə*  
 basket open\CNV-SBJ.3SG.M bread take\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Having uncovered the basket, he took bread.’

The converb *kəft-o* ‘having opened’ is used here as a subordinate clause. A characteristic property of the converb in Amharic is that it cannot be marked for tense/aspect and thus it is arguably not fully verbal. Now consider (23) where the converb takes the applicative suffix:

- (23) *məsob kəft-o-ll-ət* *dabbo wəssəd-ə*  
 basket open\CNV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M bread take\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Having uncovered the basket for him, he took bread.’

Unlike in (22), in (23) the Agent that opens the basket is not the same as the Agent that takes the bread. Someone X opened the basket for the benefit of someone Y where the latter took the bread. To make the distinction clearer, we can use overt NPs as follows:

- (24) *ləmma məsob kəft-o* *dabbo wəssəd-ə*  
 Lemma basket open\CNV-SBJ.3SG.M bread take\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Lemma, having uncovered the basket, he took (some) bread.’

- (25) *ləmma məsob kəft-o-ll-ət* *ali dabbo*  
 Lemma basket open\CNV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M Ali bread  
*wəssəd-ə*  
 take\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Lemma having uncovered the basket for him, Ali took (some) bread.’

Interestingly, the applicative / oblique cross-reference suffix is also used to form modal constructions of necessity and obligation. In such cases, the composite of the verb *allə* ‘to exist’ and the suffix *-bb-* and object suffixes are used as shown below:

- (26) *mədan kə-fəlləg-ə* *hakim\_bet məhed*  
 cure\VN if-want\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M hospital go\VN  
*allə-bb-ət*  
 exist\PFV.SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘If he wants to be cured/be well, he must go to the hospital.’

This grammaticalized use of the APPL/OCR morphemes with the verb *allə* ‘to exist’ will not be examined further in this chapter (but see Meyer 2012; see also Ahland 2009 for the grammaticalization of the possessive construction).

We will now investigate the syntactic structure of the constructions involving the APPL/OCR markers in detail.

## 4 Syntax

### 4.1 The syntactic behaviour of applied phrases and cross-referenced obliques

Before examining the syntactic status of the applied phrase or cross-referenced oblique, let us first look at the base construction (BC). Consider the following example:

- (27) *aster bə-birtʃikʰkʰo wətat tʰatʰa-tʃ*  
 Aster with-glass milk drink\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 ‘Aster drank milk from a glass.’<sup>14</sup>

The verb *tʰatʰa* ‘to drink’ takes two arguments – the Agent (‘Aster’) and the Theme (‘milk’). The phrase ‘with a glass’ is clearly an adjunct as it is not required by the argument structure of the verb. Now, consider the applicative construction below:

- (28) *aster birtʃikʰkʰo-w-in wətat tʰatʰa-tʃ-ibb-at*  
 Aster glass-DEF.M-ACC milk drink\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Aster drank milk from the glass.’

Notice that the applied phrase is definite and is marked by the accusative case. The verb is marked by the applicative suffix and object agreement that agrees with the applied phrase. All these formal properties of the construction are obligatory. For example, if the applied phrase is indefinite the resulting construction will be ungrammatical, as shown below:

- (29) \**aster birtʃikʰkʰo wətat tʰatʰa-tʃ-ibb-at*  
 Aster glass milk drink\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M

The applicative marker and the object agreement suffix are both obligatory. If they are missing, the resulting construction will be ungrammatical:

- (30) \**aster birtʃikʰkʰo-w-in wətat tʰatʰa-tʃ*  
 Aster glass-DEF.M-ACC milk drink\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F

Thus, in Amharic the construction illustrated by example (28) satisfies the definition provided in Zúñiga and Creissels (this volume) regarding the AC and its relationship with the BC.

<sup>14</sup> While the Amharic preposition *bə-* means ‘with’, ‘by’, here it is translated into idiomatic English as ‘from’. The preposition *kə-* is equivalent to ‘from’ but cannot be used in this context.

- (31) (i) The predicates in both constructions are built upon the same root, but the one in the AC bears additional overt marking that distinguishes it from the one in the BC.  
 (ii) The participant encoded as S or A in the BC appears as S or A in the AC.  
 (iii) The AC includes a noun phrase in a role other than S or A, the applied phrase (AppP), which refers to a participant that either requires a non-core coding different from its coding in the AC or cannot be expressed at all in the BC.

The applicative so defined can be derived from virtually any verb irrespective of transitivity. In the following examples, we see the (benefactive) applicative derived from intransitive and transitive verbs:

- (32) a. *aster rot'-attf*  
 Aster run\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 'Aster ran.'  
 b. *aster rot'-attf-ill-ət*  
 Aster run\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster ran for him.'
- (33) a. *aster dabbo k'orrət'-attf*  
 Aster bread cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 'Aster cut some bread.'  
 b. *aster dabbo k'orrət'-attf-ill-ət*  
 Aster bread cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut some bread for him.'

Now consider the following example with the ditransitive verb 'to give':

- (34) a. *aster lə-lidz-u məs'haf sət'tə-tf(-iw)*  
 Aster to-boy-DEF.M book give\PFV-3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster gave a book to the boy.'  
 b. *aster lə-lidz-u məs'haf sət'tə-tf-ill-ət*  
 Aster to-boy-DEF.M book give\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster gave a book (to someone) for the benefit of the boy.'

The verb 'to give' takes three arguments, and in (34a) we see the relevant arguments occurring as subject (the Giver), indirect object (the Recipient), and direct object (the Gift). Optional object agreement in (34a) is with the Recipient. In (34b), on the other hand, where the verb takes the applicative suffix, the Recipient is implicit (someone

unspecified). The phrase ‘the boy’ is now a non-core argument (Beneficiary) and is cross-referenced by the APPL suffix and object agreement.<sup>15</sup>

It is very important to keep in mind that in Amharic natural discourse the use of overt NPs to express arguments is very limited. Most often the subject, but also other grammatical functions are left implicit. Sometimes this is because these implicit arguments are cross-referenced by agreement morphology on the verb. This can be seen in the following examples based on (15) and (16) but without the NP arguments:

- (35) *fərrəd-u-ll-ət*  
 judge\PFV-SBJ.3.POL-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘(They) passed judgment in favour of the him.’ (i.e., he was acquitted)

- (36) *fərrəd-u-bb-ət*  
 judge\PFV-SBJ.3.POL-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘(They) passed judgment against him.’ (i.e., he was convicted)

None of the arguments of the verb ‘to judge’ are expressed by overt NPs.

It is important to note that there can only be one applicative and/or oblique cross-reference marker in a verb (see also Kramer 2014). Consider the following example:

- (37) *aster lə-ləmma dabbo-w-in bə-billawa-w*  
 Aster for-Lemma bread-DEF.M-ACC with-knife-DEF.M  
*k’orrət’-əttf-ill-(\*ibb)-ət*  
 cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Aster cut the bread with the knife for Lemma.’

Thus, while there are two peripheral arguments which can potentially be encoded as a cross-referenced oblique or as an applied object, only one of them can do so at a time. Note also that when there are two peripheral arguments, the Beneficiary and the Instrument, the former should occur first (or higher) in the structure as the contrast in (38a) and (38b) shows:<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> I’m grateful to Denis Creissels for pointing out that the lack of ambiguity in (34b), that is, the fact that the verbal suffix *ill-* can only refer to the Beneficiary, has crucial implications in that the construction should be regarded as an instance of a D-applicative (“dative” applicative) distinct from a P-applicative’. See Zúñiga and Creissels (this volume) for discussion of these terms, which are based on Creissels (forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> See McGinnis (2008) for one formal account of the applicative construction, where the author argues for the structurally higher position of the benefactive applied phrase.

- (38) a. \**aster bə-billawa-w lə-ləmma dabbo-w-in*  
 Aster with-knife-DEF.M for-Lemma bread-DEF.M-ACC  
*k'orrət'-əttf-ill-ət*  
 cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M
- b. *aster lə-ləmma bə-billawa-w dabbo-w-in*  
 Aster for-Lemma with-knife-DEF.M bread-DEF.M-ACC  
*k'orrət'-əttf-ill-ət*  
 cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut the bread with the knife for Lemma.'

Now, if we replace the Beneficiary in (37) with the Instrument and use *-bb-* to refer to the instrumental phrase, the resulting construction is ungrammatical:

- (39) \**aster lə-ləmma dabbo-w-in bə-billawa-w*  
 Aster for-Lemma bread-DEF.M-ACC with-knife-DEF.M  
*k'orrət'-əttf-ibb-ət*  
 cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M

The instrumental phrase should precede the Beneficiary if the oblique cross-reference suffix *-bb-* refers to the resulting structure. Thus, (40) is better than (39):

- (40) ?*aster bə-billawa-w lə-ləmma dabbo-w-in*  
 Aster with-knife-DEF.M for-Lemma bread-DEF.M-ACC  
*k'orrət'-əttf-ibb-ət*  
 cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut the bread with the knife for Lemma.'  
 (Lit. 'Aster, with the knife, she cut the bread with it for Lemma.')

This sentence, while not ungrammatical, sounds awkward. In the more felicitous version of the sentence, the instrumental phrase occurs *without* the Beneficiary:

- (41) *aster bə-billawa-w dabbo-w-in k'orrət'-əttf-ibb-ət*  
 Aster with-knife-DEF.M bread-DEF.M-ACC cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut the bread with the knife.'  
 (Lit. 'Aster, with the knife, she cut the bread with it')

This seems to be due to information structure, where the APPL/OCR suffix is partially used to focus on a constituent and to achieve maximum prominence, the instrumental phrase is not only fronted but also, ideally, occurs without another peripheral phrase (see Zúñiga and Creissels, this volume, for discussion on fronted and focused constituents in Western Mayan languages). In fact, we can also find the cross-referenced oblique at a clause-initial position displacing the subject:



- (42) *bə-billawa-w aster dabbo-w-in k'orrət'-əttf-ibb-at*  
 with-knife-DEF.M Aster bread-DEF.M-ACC cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut the bread with the knife.'  
 (Lit. 'With the knife, Aster cut the bread with it.')

Note that if the speaker wants to focus on any of the non-subject arguments, they can omit the subject and place the focussed argument in clause-initial position as can be seen below:

- (43) *bə-billawa-w dabbo-w-in k'orrət'-əttf-ibb-at*  
 with-knife-DEF.M bread-DEF.M-ACC cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'She cut the bread with the knife.'  
 (Lit. 'With the knife, she cut the bread with it.')

The motivation for focus is also implicated in the interaction between the relative clause and the applicative construction, as we will see in § 4.4.

## 4.2 On the stacking/combination of voice operations in the applicative construction

Applicativisation is allowed in the context of valency-encoding derivations including passivisation, anticausativisation, causativisation, and reflexives/reciprocals. For the sake of space, we discuss two such derivations: passivisation and causativisation.

### 4.2.1 Passivisation

In the following examples, (44a) shows the simple passive whereas (44b) and (44c) show the applicativised passive with the malefactive and benefactive suffixes respectively:

- (44) a. *dabbo-w (bə-aster) tə-k'orrət'-ə*  
 bread-DEF.M by-Aster MP-cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 'The bread was cut (by Aster).'  
 b. *dabbo-w tə-k'orrət'-ə-bb-at*  
 bread-DEF.M MP-cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.F  
 'The bread was cut to her detriment (by someone).'  
 (or 'it was cut accidentally by her')  
 c. *dabbo-w tə-k'orrət'-ə-ll-at*  
 bread-DEF.M MP-cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.F  
 'The bread was cut for her benefit (by someone).'  
 (or 'it was possible for her to cut it')

In (44b) the malefactive applicative can have a reading whereby the bread was cut by accident and as such it is not necessarily the case that a different Agent is involved. Thus, Aster didn't mean to cut the bread, but she did so accidentally. Likewise, the benefactive use doesn't necessarily implicate the involvement of a different Agent who cut the bread for the benefit of someone. It could be the case that the thing to be cut ('the bread' in the example) was particularly hard or difficult and the Agent eventually managed to cut it.

#### 4.2.2 Causativisation

In (45a) we see the simple causative and in (45b) and (45c) we show the applicativised causatives:

- (45) a. *aster dabbo-w-in as-k'orrət'-ətf*  
 Aster bread-DEF.M-ACC CSI-cut\OCR-SBJ.3SG.F  
 'Aster made the bread cut (by someone).'
- b. *aster dabbo-w-in as-k'orrət'-ətf-ill-ət*  
 Aster bread-DEF.M-ACC CSI-cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster made the bread cut for him (by someone).'
- c. *aster dabbo-w-in as-k'orrət'-ətf-ibb-ət*  
 Aster bread-DEF.M-ACC CSI-cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster made the bread cut against him (by someone).'

Notice that neither the causee nor the Beneficiary/Maleficiary are expressed by overt NPs. In (45a), the verb is more appropriately understood as the causative of the passive: 'the bread was made cut'. The original agent ('causee') can be expressed by a prepositional phrase: *bə-səw* 'by someone'. In (45b) and (45c) the grammatical features of the Beneficiary/Maleficiary (person, number, gender) are indicated by the agreement morphology on the verb. These arguments can be overtly expressed as can be seen in (45')

- (45') *aster dabbo-w-in lə-lidz-u as-k'orrət'-ətf-ill-ət*  
 Aster bread-DEF.M-ACC for-child-DEF.M CSI-cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster made the bread cut for the boy (by someone).'

### 4.3 On case and agreement in the applicative construction

We have seen that the applicative derivation advances an oblique argument into the core, placing it as the direct object of the clause. It thus appears that, in their applicative use, the APPL/OCR markers enable a non-core terms to bear the accusative case marker *-n*. Consider the following examples, adapted from Hetzron (1970: 309).<sup>17</sup>

- (46) a. *səw-ottf-u bə-gzijabher j-amn-all-u*  
 men-PL-DEF in-God SBJ.3PL-believe\IPFV-AUX-SBJ.3PL  
 ‘The people believe in God.’
- b. *səw-ottf-u bə-gzijabher j-amn-u-bb-ət-all*  
 men-PL-DEF in-God SBJ.3PL-believe\IPFV-SBJ.3PL-OCR-OBJ.3M-AUX  
 ‘The people believe in God.’
- c. *səw-ottf-u igzijabher-in j-amn-u-bb-ət-all*  
 men-PL-DEF God-ACC SBJ.3PL-believe\IPFV-SBJ.3PL-APPL-OBJ.3M-AUX  
 ‘The people believe in God.’

We assume that the verb ‘to believe’ takes two arguments: the believer (Experiencer) and the entity believed in (Theme). The Theme occurs as a prepositional phrase, ‘in God’, in both (46a) and (46b). The only difference between the two is that in the latter the verb is marked by the oblique cross-reference suffix, *-bb-* and object agreement *-ət*. In (46c), on the other hand, the Theme is marked by the accusative case *-n* like any other direct object and *-bb-* here functions as an applicative marker.

Interestingly, Hetzron (1970: 309) suggests that the construction in (46c) has “a clearly stylistic euphonic function.” The idea is that (46c) is preferred to (46b) to avoid too many [b] sounds, “the abundance of [b]’s in *bə-* and later in *-bb-* is thus avoided by replacing the first one with *-n*” (p. 309). Hetzron (1970: 309–310) further argues that the construction in (46c) is possible only with certain types of ‘complements’; “the complement must be an organic, not only incidental, part of the content of the verb” (Hetzron 1970: 309). Thus, consider the following example:

- (47) *bə-məkina-w mət’t’a-ttf-ibb-ət*  
 with-car-DEF.M come\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘She came with the car.’

According to Hetzron (1970: 309), *məkinaw* ‘the car’ in the prepositional phrase cannot be marked by the accusative suffix *-n* because “the presence of an instrument does not

<sup>17</sup> The interlinear glosses have been added and the transcription is also modified here to be consistent with the IPA.

necessarily follow from the content of the verb ‘come’.” Thus, according to Hetzron (1970), (48) below, which is the applicative version of (45), would be ungrammatical:

- (48) *məkina-w-in mət't'a-tt(-ibb-ət)*  
 car-DEF.M-ACC come\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘She came with the car.’

While it is true that not all types of non-core terms can be advanced by the applicative derivation in all contexts, I have found no evidence that (48) is ungrammatical. Perhaps there is more tolerance for constructions such as (48) than was possible at the time of Hetzron’s (1970), a topic for a detailed diachronic investigation.

So far in our examination of the constructions involving an APPL/OCR marker, we have shown the conditions under which the suffixes, *-ll-*, *-bb-* and the following agreement suffixes, are obligatory on the verb. Thus, consider the following:

- (49) *aster bə-billawa-w dabbo k'orrət'-əttf(-ibb-ət)*  
 Aster with-knife-DEF.M bread cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Aster cut some bread with the knife.’

- (50) *aster billawa-w-in dabbo k'orrət'-əttf\*(-ibb-ət)*  
 Aster knife-DEF.M-ACC bread cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Aster cut some bread with the knife.’

In (49) we observe that when the Instrument occurs in a prepositional phrase headed by *bə-* ‘with’, the oblique cross-reference marker is optional. On the other hand, in (50) we see that when the Instrument is marked by the accusative case and occurs without the preposition *bə-*, the applicative suffix is required.

#### 4.4 The constructions involving an APPL/OCR marker in the context of relativisation

Another area of the grammar where the applicative suffix is obligatory is relativisation. Consider once again (50) above. Any of the arguments can be modified by a relative clause. The interaction between the relative clause and the applicative shows that relativisation is used to focus on an argument (cf. Schachter 1973). In (51) below we see that the Theme argument ‘bread’ is modified by the relative clause, whereas in (52) the Instrument argument ‘the knife’ is modified by the relative clause:

- (51) *aster bə-billawa*<sup>18</sup> *jə-k'orrət'-əttf\*(-iw)* *dabbo*  
 Aster with-knife REL-cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M bread  
 'The bread which Aster cut with a knife.'
- (52) *aster dabbo jə-k'orrət'-əttf\*(-ibb-ət)* *billawa*  
 Aster bread REL-cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M knife  
 'The knife with which Aster cut some bread.'

The crucial observation is that with the relative clause, the applicative suffix and the associated object agreement are obligatory. Interestingly, the applicative suffix will be required even when the associated phrase does not have the preposition *bə* 'with'. Thus, in (53a) the goal/destination of the going event occurs as the prepositional phrase with the preposition *wədə* 'to', 'towards'. Likewise, in (54a) the source/location of the event occurs as a prepositional phrase with *kə* 'from'. In both (53b) and (54b) the verb is relativised to modify the noun *kətəma* 'town':

- (53) a. *lidz-u wədə-kətəma hed-ə*  
 boy-DEF.M to-town go\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 'The boy went to town.'  
 b. *lidz-u jə-hed-ə-bb-ət kətəma*  
 boy-DEF.M REL-go\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M town  
 'The town where the boy went to.'
- (54) a. *lidz-u kə-kətəma mət't'-a*  
 boy-DEF.M from-town come\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 'The boy came from (the) town.'  
 b. *lidz-u jə-mət't'-a-bb-ət kətəma*  
 boy-DEF.M REL-come\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M town  
 'The town from which the boy came.'

Again, the suffix *-bb-* and the associated object agreement are obligatory on the relativised verbs. Notice, however, that the suffix *-bb-* has no formal affinity with the prepositional elements *wədə* 'to', *kə* – 'from'.

<sup>18</sup> There is a slight preference for the noun in the instrumental phrase to occur as indefinite/non-specific ('a knife' rather than 'the knife').

## 5 Semantics

### 5.1 The lexical semantics of the verb root

It is important to note that virtually any verb can take the benefactive/malefactive applicative morphemes. From a broad semantic and pragmatic perspective this is not surprising, because any event can be cast as either benefiting someone/something or harming someone/something. Consider for example the event depicted by the verb *zənnəbə* ‘to rain’ in (55):

- (55) *zənnəb-ə*  
rain\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
‘It rained.’

The event encoded by the verb *zənnəbə* ‘to rain’ can be cast not as a neutral event but rather as an event with either positive or negative consequences for someone. While these consequences can be left unmarked and inferred contextually, it is also possible to encode them explicitly through the applicative construction as follows:

- (56) a. *zənnəb-ə-ll-ət*  
rain\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
‘It rained for him.’ (i.e., to his benefit)  
b. *zənnəb-ə-bb-ət*  
rain\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
‘It rained on him.’ (i.e., to his detriment)

There is some evidence to support this semantic motivation for the applicative. As we saw, the applicative construction normally involves the presence of one of the two applicative suffixes *-bb-* or *-ll-* plus the object suffixes. However, interestingly, in some cases the verb may occur without the applicative suffix. Consider the following examples with the verb *motə* ‘to die’:

- (57) a. *zəməd      mot-ə*  
relative      die\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
‘A relative died.’  
b. *aster-(in) zəməd      mot-ə-bb-at*  
Aster-ACC relative die\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.F  
Lit. ‘A relative (of hers) died on Aster.’  
c. *aster-(in) zəməd      mot-at*  
Aster-ACC relative die\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-OBJ.3SG.F  
Lit. ‘A relative (of hers) died on Aster.’

In (57a) the verb is used in a typical intransitive frame with one argument. However, a peripheral argument can be introduced as in (57b) with the applicative suffix *-bb-* and object agreement that cross-references the peripheral argument. Interestingly, the applicative suffix *-bb-* can be omitted without affecting the meaning as can be seen in (57c). This is curious because, as we have seen so far, a phrase that expresses a peripheral semantic role is cross-referenced by the applicative suffix and the associated object agreement marker. In (57c) we see that it is possible to use the object agreement suffix only to derive the same meaning as the applicative marked verb. What might be the reason for this? One possibility is that when the event in question is construed as *obviously* adversative, such as the death of a relative, the requirement that the *-bb-* suffix should be present is relaxed. Thus, (55c) may be regarded as a syntactic lookalike of the applicative (Zúñiga & Creissels, this volume).

Many other verbs behave in a similar way. Consider for example the verb *t'əffa* 'be lost, disappear' in (58):

- (58) a. *gənzəb t'əffa*  
           money disappear\PFV.SBJ.3SG.M  
           'Money is lost.'
- b. *aster-(in) gənzəb t'əffa-bb-at*  
           Aster-(ACC) money disappear\PFV.SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.F  
           'Aster lost some money.' (Lit. 'Some money disappeared against Aster.')
- c. *aster-(in) gənzəb t'əffa-t*  
           Aster-ACC money disappear\PFV.SBJ.3SG.M-OBJ.3SG.F  
           'Aster lost some money.' (Lit. 'Some money disappeared Aster.')

Again in (58c) the construction does not have the applicative suffix, presumably because the loss of property is construed as obviously adversative and thus obviating the need to mark the verb with the applicative affix *-bb-* which would otherwise be required to mark the malefactive applicative. This semantic motivation can be seen clearly when we compare the verb *sərrək'ə* 'to steal' with the verb *wəssədə* 'to take' (examples from Hetzron 1970: 315):

- (59) *and leba gənzəb sərrək'-ə-w*  
       one/a thief money steal\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-OBJ.3SG.M  
       'One/a thief stole money from him.'
- (60) *and leba gənzəb wəssəd-ə-bb-at*  
       one/a thief money take\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
       'One/a thief took money from him.'

Again, the intuition is that with the verb *sərrək'ə* 'to steal' the verb is not marked by the malefactive applicative since being a victim of a theft is clearly not a good thing. On the

other hand, the verb *wəssədə* ‘to take’ is neutral as to intent, thus is explicitly marked for the malefactive. In fact, if we replace the applicative with the simple object agreement in (60), the result is an ungrammatical sentence:

- (61) \**and leba gənzəb wəssəd-ə-w*  
 one/a thief money take\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-OBJ.3SG.M

The sentence improves in grammaticality if we also omit the object marker, but then the resulting structure simply means ‘the thief took money’ without any reference to the source of the money:

- (62) *and leba gənzəb wəssəd-ə*  
 one/a thief money take\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘One/a thief took money.’

As Hetzron (1970: 315) insightfully observed, the sentence with the verb ‘to take’ while pragmatically implying an act of theft, this is not necessarily the case as “[t]he thief might have taken the money quite ‘unprofessionally’, as a legitimate act by a man who also happens to be a thief.”

Note that the meaning of the applicative suffix (whether it is clearly benefactive or malefactive) may depend on real world knowledge. It is not hard to imagine that even an obviously adversative event such as dying can, in certain contexts, be cast as a positive act. Thus, we find many examples in religious as well as secular texts where the verb *motə* ‘to die’ takes the benefactive applicative. Here is one example (from the HaBiT database).<sup>19</sup>

- (63) ክርስቶስ ቤተክርስቲያንን ስለወደዳት  
*kiristos betəkristijan-in silə-wəddəd-at*  
 Christ church-ACC because-love\PFV.SBJ.3SG.M-OBJ.3SG.F  
 ሞተላት።  
*mot-ə-ll-at*  
 die\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.F  
 ‘Because Christ loved the church, he died for her [the church].’

The event of dying here is cast as a positive event and makes sense in the context of a specific doctrine. Similarly, the benefactive interpretation of a soldier dying in the act of defending their country derives its meaning from a particular patriotic discourse.

<sup>19</sup> The Amharic corpus in the HaBiT database is made up of text collected from the internet and has approximately 26 million words. For details, see Rychlý and Suchomel (2016). Here and elsewhere the original data is in Amharic orthography (Fidel) and is reproduced here for authenticity. I have provided the IPA transcription, the interlinear glosses, and the English translation.



## 5.2 Semantic roles that can be expressed by applied phrases or cross-referenced obliques

For the present purposes, following Zúñiga and Creissels (this volume) we distinguish between three types of semantic roles: central or maximally involved (Agents, Forces, Themes, Patients), peripheral (Comitative, Instruments, Beneficiaries), and intermediate (Sources, Goals, Recipients, Experiencers). As Zúñiga and Creissels point out, there is a cross-linguistic tendency for maximally involved or central roles to be expressed as core arguments in the syntax, whereas peripheral roles are often expressed as obliques or adjuncts. Interestingly, there is also “a cross-linguistic tendency for ACs to work on peripheral roles; Comitatives, Instruments, and Beneficiaries are indeed the most common roles with applicatives worldwide” (Zúñiga and Creissels, this volume). With this background, let us examine closely the range of semantic roles involved in the applicative construction in Amharic. Consider a typical transitive verb *k’orrətə* ‘to cut’:

- (64) *aster dabbo-w-in k’orrət’-əttf(-iw)*  
 Aster bread-DEF.M-ACC cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Aster cut the bread.’

In (64) all the required arguments of the verb ‘to cut’ are realised in the syntax: the Agent as the subject and the Theme as the direct object. As the object is definite it is marked by the accusative case morpheme *-n*. Neither of these core arguments can be applicativised consistent with the cross-linguistic profile of the AC mentioned above (but see the discussion on passives in § 4.2.1).

Now, a peripheral argument such as the instrument used to carry out the event of cutting, can be introduced as an adjunct phrase as in (65):

- (65) *aster dabbo-w-in bə-billawa k’orrət’-əttf(-iw)*  
 Aster bread-DEF.M-ACC with-knife cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Aster cut the bread with a knife.’

While the Theme object typically precedes the adjunct, the order is flexible, as can be seen below:

- (66) *aster bə-billawa dabbo-w-in k’orrət’-əttf(-iw)*  
 Aster with-knife bread-DEF.M-ACC cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M  
 ‘Aster cut the bread with a knife.’  
 (Lit. ‘Aster, with a knife, cut the bread.’)

Now consider the same sentence, but with the verb taking the APPL/OCR suffix and the object agreement cross-referencing the Instrument:

- (67) *aster bə-billawa-w dabbo-w-in k'orrət'-əttf-ibb-ət*  
 Aster with-knife-DEF.M bread-DEF.M-ACC cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut the bread with the knife.'  
 (Lit. 'Aster, with the knife, she cut the bread with it.')

The instrumental phrase in (67) has two key properties: (a) it must be definite and (b) it must precede the theme argument. If either of these requirements is not met, the construction becomes ill-formed, namely when the instrumental phrase is indefinite (68):

- (68) \**aster bə-billawa dabbo-w-in k'orrət'-əttf-ibb-ət*  
 Aster with-knife bread-DEF.M-ACC cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M

and when the Theme precedes the instrumental phrase (69):

- (69) \**aster dabbo-w-in bə-billawa-w k'orrət'-əttf-ibb-ət*  
 Aster bread-DEF.M-ACC with-knife-DEF.M cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M

Now consider the following construction with the instrument coded as an applied phrase:

- (70) ?*aster billawa-w-in dabbo-w-in k'orrət'-əttf-ibb-ət*  
 Aster knife-DEF.M-ACC bread-DEF.M-ACC cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut the bread with the knife.'  
 (Lit. 'Aster, with the knife, she cut the bread with it.')

While (70) is not ungrammatical, it sounds awkward, presumably because both the applied phrase ('the knife') and the Theme argument ('the bread') are marked by the accusative case. This awkwardness disappears when the Theme argument is expressed as an indefinite noun phrase thus making it ineligible for the accusative case:

- (71) *aster billawa-w-in dabbo k'orrət'-əttf-ibb-ət*  
 Aster knife-DEF.M-ACC bread cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut a bread with the knife.'  
 (Lit. 'Aster, the knife, she cut a bread with it.')

Note, crucially, that it is only the Theme argument that can occur as an indefinite noun phrase. The applied phrase cannot be indefinite, as the ungrammatical structure in (72) shows:

- (72) \**aster billawa dabbo-w-in k'orrət'-əttf-ibb-ət*  
 Aster knife bread-DEF.M-ACC cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M

One question is how to account for the contrast between the awkward (70), where both the applied phrase and the Theme argument are marked as accusative, and (71), where only the applied phrase is marked accusative. This may be due to information structure, in that the applied phrase is the main topic of conversation and thus it displaces the object in terms of definiteness and specificity. This may also account for the fact that the verb can only be marked either for object agreement (agreeing with the theme argument of the verb), (73a) or oblique agreement (agreeing with the Beneficiary/Maleficiary phrase), (73b), but never for both object and oblique agreement, (73c):

- (73) a. *k'orrät'-ättf-iw*  
 cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'She cut it.'
- b. *k'orrät'-ättf-ill-ət*  
 cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'She cut [it] for him.'
- c. *\*k'orrät'-ättf-iw-ill-ət*  
 cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 (Intended: 'She cut it for him.')

In discussing the semantics of the applicative morphemes in Gumer, Völlmin (2010: 321) points out that "[t]he semantics of a verb may restrict the use of some of these [applicative] suffixes to very specific contexts or meanings, but it does not necessarily preclude them from appearing." Völlmin (2010) shows how the verb meaning 'to taste' in Gumer can be used in a number of different contexts. As the facts are nearly identical in Amharic, we demonstrate this using the equivalent verb *t'affät'ə* 'to be tasty':

- (74) a. *migb-u*      *t'affät'-ə*  
 food-DEF.M    become\_tasty\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M  
 'The food became tasty.'
- b. *ləmma-(n)*    *migb-u*      *t'affät'-ə-w*  
 Lemma-ACC    food-DEF.M    become\_tasty\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Lemma found the food tasty.'
- c. *ləmma-(n)*    *migb-u*      *t'affät'-ə-ll-ət*  
 Lemma-ACC    food-DEF.M    become\_tasty\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'The food became tasty for Lemma.'  
 (He cooked it well.)
- d. *ləmma-(n)*    *migb-u*      *t'affät'-ə-bb-ätt*  
 Lemma-ACC    food-DEF.M    become\_tasty\PFV-SBJ.3SG.M-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'The food became tasty to Lemma's detriment.' (i.e., the food became too sweet)

In (74a) the verb *t'affät'ə* 'become tasty' is used with its single obligatory argument – the thing that undergoes the change of state, i.e., 'the food'. In (74b), the Experiencer argu-

ment ('Lemma') is explicitly expressed, but notice that this argument is cross-referenced by the object agreement suffix on the verb. In (74c) and (74d) the verb is marked by the applicative suffix and there is object agreement with the applied phrase ('Lemma') with the Experiencer role. Interestingly, the applied phrase in both (74c) and (74d) is not necessarily an Experiencer. Lemma may not have actually tasted the food himself, but rather someone may have tasted it and determined that the food is tasty with either a favourable (=benefactive) or a not favourable (=malefactive) judgment about Lemma's culinary skills.

As already mentioned above (see Examples [34a] and [34b]), with inherently ditransitive verbs such as 'to give' the benefactive applicative marks an argument that benefits from the event but is not a Recipient. Thus consider (34a) repeated below as (75):

- (75) *aster lə-lidʒ-u məs'haf sət'tə-tf(-iw)*  
 Aster to-boy-DEF.M book give\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster gave a book to the boy.'

In (75) the Agent argument occurs as a subject ('Aster'), the Recipient occurs as an indirect object ('to the boy'), and the Theme argument is realised as the direct object ('a book'). If we keep the same three noun phrases as they appear in (75) but mark the verb for the benefactive applicative, we get (34b), repeated below as (76):

- (76) *aster lə-lidʒ-u məs'haf sət'tə-tf-ill-ət*  
 Aster to-boy-DEF.M book give\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster gave a book (to someone) for the benefit of the boy.'

Notice that, while in both (75) and (76) the phrase 'the boy' is formally identical,<sup>20</sup> the meanings are subtly different: in (76) the Recipient of the book is not and cannot be 'the boy', but rather someone not specified explicitly in the sentence. This is similar to the so-called deputative applicative (see Van Valin and LaPolla 1997: 384), where the applicative is depicting an act carried out on behalf of someone (expressed in the applied phrase).

When we examine other ditransitive verbs such as 'to send' we get a different picture. Consider the following:

<sup>20</sup> It is due to this ambiguity of the phrase headed by the preposition *lə-* between the Recipient and Beneficiary senses that some Amharic speakers of English as a second language usually confuse the two meanings encoded by the English prepositions 'to' and 'for', saying *I gave the book for him*, instead of *I gave the book to him*.

- (77) *aster lə-lidʒ-u məs'haf lak-ətf-ill-ət*  
 Aster to-boy-DEF.M book send\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster sent a book to the boy.'  
 Also: 'Aster sent a book to someone for the boy's benefit.'

Interestingly, (77) is ambiguous between the Recipient interpretation (the boy is the Recipient of the book) or the Beneficiary interpretation (the boy is the Beneficiary of the book being sent to someone unspecified). Also note that unlike the case with the verb *sət'tə* 'to give' in (75), without the applicative marker the construction in (77) with the verb *lakkə* 'to send' becomes ungrammatical:

- (78) \**aster lə-lidʒ-u məs'haf lakə-tf-iw*  
 Aster to-boy-DEF.M book send\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M

However, if the Theme argument is individuated and fronted, the structure becomes grammatical without the applicative suffix:

- (79) *aster məs'haf-u-n lə-lidʒ-u lakə-tf-iw*  
 Aster book-DEF.M-ACC to-boy-DEF.M send\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster sent the book to the boy.'

Notice that the object suffix now agrees with the Theme argument ('the book') and not the Recipient ('the boy'). How do other ditransitive verbs behave with respect to the applicative construction? Let us look at the verb *fət'tə* 'to sell':

- (80) *aster lə-lidʒ-u məs'haf fət'tə-tf-ill-ət*  
 Aster to-boy-DEF.M book sell\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster sold a book to the boy.'  
 'Aster sold a book to someone (unspecified) for the benefit/on behalf of the boy.'

Again, like the verb 'to give', the applicative of the verb *fət'tə* 'to sell' is ambiguous between the recipient reading and the benefactive reading. But like with the verb 'to send', and unlike with the verb 'to give', removing the applicative suffix from (80) renders the structure ungrammatical as the object pronominal suffix does not cross-reference the Recipient argument:

- (81) \**aster lə-lidʒ-u məs'haf fət'tə-tf-iw*  
 Aster to-boy-DEF.M book sell\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OBJ.3SG.M

Now turning to the meaning of the malefactive benefactive, as already mentioned, it is important to note that while it is typically employed to derive the meaning 'something

is negative/bad for someone', it is also used to mark the locative and instrumental.<sup>21</sup> To see this, let's start with a sentence that has instrumental and locational adjuncts:

- (82) *aster bə-t'ərap'p'eza-w laj bə-billawa siga k'orrət'-ətf*  
 Aster on-table-DEF.M on with-knife meat cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 'Aster cut some meat with a knife on the table.'

The first adjunct expresses the location, that is, where the event of cutting took place. It is marked by the preposition *bə-* 'on' and the adposition *laj* 'on'. The second adjunct expresses the instrument by which the event was carried out, and it is also marked by the prepositional prefix *bə-* 'with'. Now, either adjunct can in principle be cross-referenced or become an applied phrase. Consider (83) where the verb is cross-referencing the locational adjunct:

- (83) *?aster bə-t'ərap'p'eza-w laj bə-billawa siga*  
 Aster on-table-DEF.M on with-knife meat  
*k'orrət'-ətf-bb-ət*  
 cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut some meat on the table with a knife.'  
 ('Aster, on the table, she cut some bread on it with a knife.')

This sentence sounds awkward when the cross-referenced locational adjunct occurs with the instrumental adjunct. When only the cross-referenced locational adjunct is present without the instrumental adjunct, the sentence becomes perfectly acceptable:

- (84) *aster bə-t'ərap'p'eza-w laj siga k'orrət'-ətf-bb-ət*  
 Aster on-table-DEF.M on meat cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut some bread on the table.'  
 (= 'Aster, on the table, she cut some bread on it.')

Likewise, the instrumental adjunct can be cross-referenced as shown in (85a), but it is more felicitous if it occurs without the locational adjunct as in (85b):

- (85) a. *?aster bə-billawa-w bə-t'ərap'p'eza-w laj siga*  
 Aster with-knife-DEF.M on-table-DEF.M on meat  
*k'orrət'-ətf-bb-ət*  
 cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut some meat with the knife on the table.'  
 (= 'Aster, with the knife, on the table, she cut some meat with it.')

<sup>21</sup> This section has benefited from consulting Völlmin (2010: 322ff), who discusses the same phenomenon in Gumer. See also Völlmin (2017).

- b. *aster bə-billawa-w siga k'orrət'-ətf-bb-ət*  
 Aster with-knife-DEF.M meat cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-OCR-OBJ.3SG.M  
 'Aster cut some meat with the knife.'  
 (= 'Aster, with the knife, she cut some meat with it.')

This state of affairs, i.e., why a single cross-referenced adjunct is more felicitous is likely to be due to information structure. The speaker chooses one of the multiple adjuncts and foregrounds it in the conversation by the use of the APPL/OCR marker.

When we talk about the locational applicative, it is important to keep in mind that typically it corresponds to the meaning 'at' or 'on'. It cannot correspond to the goal location ('towards a place') nor to the source location ('from a place'). Thus, consider the following:

- (86) *aster wadə kətəma-w hed-ətf*  
 Aster to city-DEF.M go\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 'Aster went to the city.'

The goal location ('to the city') cannot be cross-referenced in main clauses (but see the discussion above, § 4.4, on relative clauses):

- (87) \**aster wadə kətəma-w hed-ətf-ibb-ət*  
 Aster to city-DEF.M go\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M

Similarly, a source location ('from a place') cannot be cross-referenced as the contrast in the pair of examples in (88)–(89) shows:

- (88) *aster kə-kətəma-w wət't'a-tf*  
 Aster from-city-DEF.M leave\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 'Aster left from the city.'

- (89) \**aster kə-kətəma-w wət't'a-ətf-ibb-ət*  
 Aster from-city-DEF.M leave\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M

It is obvious by now, but it is worth mentioning again, that with the appropriate context, the applicativised verb can also be used to mark the malefactive if the event is cast as negative for someone. Thus, when the verb is used in isolation, i.e., without the overt NP arguments, which as we noted is possible in Amharic, it can be ambiguous between three possible interpretations, namely, instrumental, locational, and malefactive:

(90) *k'orrät'-ətf-bb-ət*

cut\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M

(i) 'She cut [it] with it.' = Instrumental

(ii) 'She cut [it] on it.' = Locational

(iii) 'She cut [it] to his detriment.' = Malefactive

Note that the object agreement suffix on the verb agrees with the applied phrase rather than with the original object. Thus, when the verb is used in isolation, the grammatical features of person, number and gender of the original object are not known. In the above example where the verb *k'orrät'* 'to cut' is used by itself, the English translation presents the original object (Theme argument) as 'it', but this is not necessarily the case in Amharic as the object could be 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular feminine, 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular masculine, or 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural.

We mentioned earlier that only certain arguments and peripheral roles can occur as an applied phrase / cross-referenced oblique. Thus, we saw that while the locational role depicted in English by the prepositions 'on', 'at' can be cross-referenced or become an applied phrase, source or goal locations cannot. Likewise, the comitative cannot be cross-referenced or become an applied phrase. First consider the comitative in the BC:

(91) *aster kə-lidʒ-u gar hed-ətf*

Aster with-boy-DEF.M together go\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F

'Aster went with the boy.'

The comitative role cannot become an applied phrase, whether in its adpositional form, (92), or as an accusative marked phrase, (93):

(92) \**aster kə-lidʒ-u gar hed-ətf-ibb-ət*

Aster with-boy-DEF.M together go\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M

(93) \**aster lidʒ-u-n gar hed-ətf-ibb-ət*

Aster boy-DEF.M-ACC together go\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F-APPL-OBJ.3SG.M

Before concluding this section, we briefly look at one productive benefactive construction which involves the verb *bil-* 'having said' which is the converb form of the verb *alə* 'to say'. Following Völlmin's (2010: 327) description of a similar phenomenon in Gumer, we can see below that the verb 'to say' can be used to form a benefactive construction in Amharic. Thus, consider the following example:

(94) *aster lə-lidʒ-u bil-a məs'haf gəzza-tf*

Aster for-boy-DEF.M say\CNV-3SG.F book buy\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F

'Aster bought a book for the boy.'

(Lit. 'Aster, having said for the boy, she bought a book.')



Notice that in (94) with the verb ‘to say’, the Agent of the buying event (‘Aster’) has thought of the Beneficiary when carrying out the event and this is consistent with other grammaticalized uses of the verb *alə* ‘to say’ (for example, as a complementizer with verbs of cognition and speaking). Interestingly, this construction is available only for a Beneficiary in a peripheral role rather than the Recipient argument of a ditransitive verb such as *sət’t’ə* ‘give’, as can be seen in (95).

- (95) \**aster lə-lidz-u bil-a məs’haf sət’t’ə-tf*  
 Aster for-boy-DEF.M say\CNV-3SG.F book give\PFV-SBJ.3SG.F  
 (Intended: ‘Aster gave a book to the boy.’)

Thus, if the intended meaning is ‘Aster gave a book to the boy’, where ‘the boy’ is the Recipient argument, the sentence is unacceptable. If the intended meaning is that ‘the boy’ is a Beneficiary of the giving event whose Recipient is not specified, the construction is perfectly grammatical.

## 6 Conclusion

In this chapter we examined the applicative construction in Amharic, as well as a related construction that does not meet the definition of an applicative construction provided by Zúñiga and Creissels (this volume) but involves the same verbal marking.

We identified two distinct (although quite obviously related) constructions involving the suffixes *-ll-*/*-bb-*: a construction that fully meets the definition provided by Zúñiga and Creissels (this volume), and a construction in which an adjunct expressed as a prepositional phrase is cross-referenced as if it were an object.

We established that the Amharic applicative construction overall satisfies the definition provided by Zúñiga & Creissels (this volume) and is consistent with a more inclusive characterisation of the applicative whereby a non-Agent element is given a more prominent morpho-syntactic and/or semantic-pragmatic prominence relative to its status in the basic construction.

A key morphosyntactic feature of the applicative in Amharic is the use of the two verbal suffixes *-ll-* and *-bb-*, which co-occur with object agreement suffixes on the verb. While subject agreement is obligatory in the language, agreement with the object and/or other (peripheral) arguments is governed by factors such as definiteness/specificity or topicality/focus. The suffix *-ll-* is used when the applied phrase is a Beneficiary of the event encoded by the verb, whereas the suffix *-bb-* is used when the applied phrase is malefactive, locative, or instrumental. We showed that these two suffixes can be used with virtually any verb irrespective of transitivity or the lexical semantics of the verb root because any event can be potentially cast as benefiting or harming some entity. We identified a syntactic lookalike to the applicative whereby a potential peripheral argu-

ment can be cross-referenced by an object agreement suffix alone, without the need for the applicative suffixes *-ll-/-bb-*. This syntactic lookalike appears to be restricted to certain verbs which can be independently construed as implicating a malefactive interpretation, for example with verbs such as *motə* ‘to die’, *sərrək’ə* ‘to steal’.

We discussed the formal similarity between the suffixes *-ll-/-bb-* with the prepositions *la-/bə-* respectively. We observed that when the phrase cross-referenced by the agreement suffix that follows *-ll-/-bb-* occurs with one of these prepositions, the suffixes *-ll-/-bb-* may be optional. On the other hand, when the phrase cross-referenced by the agreement suffix that follows *-ll-/-bb-* occurs without one of these prepositions (i.e., in the applicative construction), it must be marked for the accusative case and the suffixes *-ll-/-bb-* become obligatory.

It is plausible that the preposition marked applied phrase may be an intermediate construction before the emergence of the accusative marked applicative. To what extent this may be true diachronically is a topic we leave for future work.

## Abbreviations

ACC	accusative
APPL	applicative
AUX	auxiliary
CNV	converb
COMP	complementizer
CSD	direct causative
CSI	indirect causative
DEF	definite
F	feminine
IMP	imperative
INTR	intransitive
IPFV	imperfective
JUS	jussive
M	masculine
MP	medio-passive
NEG	negation
NPST	non-past
OBJ	object
OCR	oblique cross-reference
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POL	polite
POSS	possessive
RECP	reciprocal
REL	relative
S	singular
SBJ	subject
VN	verbal noun

## References

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