Shilluk applicatives

In this presentation, I will provide a description of applicative constructions in Shilluk, a West Nilotic language of South Sudan. Applicative constructions are a morphosyntactic phenomenon relating to voice and valency. In an applicative construction, the verb is morphologically marked relative to the base construction, and this marking conveys information re. a semantic role that is either coded differently in the base construction, or that cannot be conveyed in the base construction at all (Zúñiga & Creissels 2024).

The phenomenon is illustrated by the Shilluk example in (1). In the base construction in (1a), the Instrument is encoded through a prepositional phrase, i.e., as a peripheral argument. The corresponding Instrumental Applicative (1b) has the same propositional meaning, but here the Instrument is encoded instead as core argument. This difference is signposted on verb through morphological marking, in this case expressed through increased vowel length and tone (Remijsen & Ayoker 2018-).

(1)   a.   kwʌ̄n   á-cấm   kɪ́   pâal
          porridge PAST-eat:PASS PREP spoon
          'The porridge was eaten with a spoon.'

      b.   pâal   á-cāaam   kwʌ̄n
          spoon PAST-eat:PASS:APPLIC porridge
          'The porridge was eaten with a spoon.'

Shilluk is a head-marking language, both at the level of the noun phrase and at the level of the clause, and as such applicatives play a central role in how relations between the verb heading the predicate and its dependent arguments is structured. There are four different morphological applicatives, and some of these are additive. And because the Shilluk applicatives are valency-increasing operations, a verb can appear with up to four core arguments. In this presentation, we will consider the Shilluk applicatives with respect to syntactic properties; morphophonological exponence; semantics; and the structure of the morphological paradigm.

Zúñiga, Fernando & Denis Creissels (2024). Applicative constructions: an introductory overview. In Fernando Zúñiga & Denis Creissels (eds.) Applicative constructions in the world's languages. De Gruyter Brill, 3-56.

Remijsen, Bert & Otto G. Ayoker (2018-). A descriptive grammar of Shilluk. *Language Documentation & Conservation, Special Publication 14.* [https://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/sp14-a-descriptive-grammar-of-shilluk/]