

Three ways to highlight a peripheral role: Dimensions of the western Austronesian applicative alternations

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Introduction

We examine the typology of a cline of applicative-like constructions in the western Austronesian languages of maritime Southeast Asia.

- **Three distinct types** are identified based on original and published data in a sample of 55 languages.

Three types of applicative-like constructions in western Austronesian

- A 'Topic-promoting' applicative:** highlights the information structure status (topic) of a peripheral phrase without increasing valency; attested in so-called Philippine-type languages.
- B Syntactic (canonical) applicative:** promotes a peripheral phrase to a core argument position in the clause, increasing valency; attested in West Nusantara languages (western Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei).
- C Semantic applicative:** highlights a peripheral phrase through verbal morphology without increasing valency; found in West Nusantara languages

Roadmap

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Framework, sampling, methodology
- 3 The core data
 - ▶ Type B Syntactic (canonical) applicatives
 - ▶ Type C Semantic applicative
 - ▶ Type A Topic-promoting applicatives
- 4 Implications
- 5 Conclusion

Framework and terminology

- ▶ **Applicative:** An applicative is a morphologically-marked clausal construction allowing the coding of a thematically peripheral role as a core argument (Peterson 2007; Foley 2007)
- ▶ **Peripheral roles:** Non-agent, non-patient roles, e.g., beneficiary, instrument, transported theme, reason/purpose, static location, goal, others.
- ▶ **Applied phrase (AppP):** Phrase that expresses the peripheral role targeted by the construction (see e.g. Pacchiarotti & Zuñiga 2022)
- ▶ **Companion phrase (CompP):** Phrase that expresses the same role as P in a corresponding base construction (McDonnell & Truong 2024)
- ▶ **Pivot:** In symmetrical voice languages, voice morphology marks the role of one phrase with unique access to relativization, and other interclausal relations.



Sample

Taiwan 12
 Philippines 18
 Borneo 8
 Java 3
 Sumatra 5
 Lesser Sundas 1
 Sulawesi 7
 other 1
55 Total

- 1 Atayal, Atayalic, TW
- 2 Seediq, Atayalic, TW
- 3 Bunun, Bunun, TW
- 4 Amis, E. Form., TW
- 5 Kavalan, E. Form., TW
- 6 Saisyat, E. Form., TW
- 7 Paiwan, NW Form., TW
- 8 Puyuma, Puyuma, TW
- 9 Saaroa, Tsouic, TW
- 10 Tsou, Tsouic, TW
- 11 Thou, W. Plains, TW
- 12 Yami, Batanic, TW
- 13 Itbayaten, Batanic, PH
- 14 Blaan, Bilic, PH
- 15 Botolan Sambal, C. Luzon, PH
- 16 Kapampangan, C. Luzon, PH
- 17 Aklanon, GCP, PH
- 18 Bantoanon, GCP, PH
- 19 Cuyonon, GCP, PH
- 20 Cebuano, GCP, PH
- 21 Hiligaynon, GCP, PH
- 22 Mamanwa, GCP, PH
- 23 Tagalog, GCP, PH
- 24 Waray, GCP, PH
- 25 W. Subanon, GCP, PH
- 26 Ilocano, N.Luzon, PH
- 27 Kalinga, N. Luzon, PH
- 28 N. Alta, N. Luzon, PH
- 29 Balantak, Celebic, SUL
- 30 Mori Bawah, Celebic, SUL
- 31 Muna, Celebic, SUL
- 32 Pendau, Celebic, SUL
- 33 Tukang Besi, Celebic, SUL
- 34 Makasar, SSUL, SUL
- 35 Totoli, TT, SUL
- 36 Central Sama, WIN, PH
- 37 Sama Bangingi', WIN, PH
- 38 W. Coast Bajau, WIN, BOR
- 39 Matéq, WIN, BOR
- 40 Mualang, WIN, BOR
- 41 Kendayan, WIN, BOR
- 42 Kelabit, WIN, BOR
- 43 Idaan, WIN, BOR
- 44 Kimarangang, WIN, BOR
- 45 Tatana, WIN, BOR
- 46 Javanese, WIN, JAV
- 47 Madurese, WIN, JAV
- 48 Sundanese, WIN, JAV
- 49 Besemah, WIN, SUM
- 50 Jambi, WIN, SUM
- 51 Balinese, WIN, SUN
- 52 Indonesian, WIN, Other
- 53 Toba Batak, Sumatran, SUM
- 54 Gayo, Sumatran, SUM
- 55 Nasal, Sumatran, SUM

Methodology

29	Does the construction allow a beneficiary AppP (e.g. cook for s.o., do an activity as a favor for s.o.)?
	- If yes, what is the maximum syntactic transitivity of the clause in a beneficiary-selecting construction?
	- If yes, can the beneficiary AppP be the pivot in PV/passive?
	- If yes, can the companion phrase (patient/theme) be the pivot in a beneficiary-selecting construction?
	-- Specify known conditions influencing mapping of the pivot, if any
	- If yes, can the beneficiary AppP be coded as a core argument?
	-- If yes, what is the status of the companion phrase with AppP is core?
	- If yes, can the beneficiary AppP be non-overt?
	-- Specify conditions
	- If yes, can the beneficiary AppP be oblique marked?
	- If yes, can the beneficiary AppP be coded as a possessor NP?
	- If yes, can the beneficiary AppP be indexed on the predicate as a pronominal clitic or affix?
	-- Specify known conditions influencing coding of the beneficiary AppP, if any

Data compilation

- ▶ Part of a larger project on morphosyntax of western Austronesian languages
- ▶ Informed by previous studies on West Nusantara languages (Truong 2025) & Philippine-type Austronesian languages (Chen 2017, 2025)
- ▶ Questionnaire organized by construction
- ▶ Coding properties: case & prepositional marking, indexing, non-overt realization
- ▶ Behavioral properties: relativization, passivization, quantifier float, binding, and more, subject to availability of data

Syntactic applicatives: The basics (1)

(1) Balinese, two-way voice system

a. *Buku beli tiang di toko ento.*

book PV.buy **1SG** at shop DIST

'I bought the book in that shop.'

(PV, with patient pivot)

b. *Tiang m-(b)eli buku di toko ento.*

1SG AV-buy **book** at shop DIST

'I bought the book in that shop.'

(Artawa 1998: 48) (AV, with agent pivot)

- ▶ Most western Austronesian languages have a symmetrical voice system.
- ▶ At least two transitive constructions, neither of which is derived from the other.
- ▶ Voice morphology signals which role (or set of possible roles) is selected as the **pivot**.
- ▶ Pivot has unique access to relativization, certain interclausal relations.
 - ▶ And in West Nusantara languages like Balinese, the pivot is also a core argument.
- ▶ For more, see e.g. Foley 2008; Riesberg 2014b; Chen & McDonnell 2019.

Syntactic applicatives: The basics (2)

(2) Balinese, two-way voice system

a. *Buku beli tiang di toko ento.*

book PV.buy 1SG at shop DIST

'I bought the book in that shop.'

(PV, with patient pivot)

b. *Tiang m-(b)eli buku di toko ento.*

1SG [AV]-buy book at shop DIST

'I bought the book in that shop.'

(Artawa 1998: 48) (AV, with agent pivot)

(3) Balinese, locative applicative

a. *Toko ento beli-in tiang buku.*

shop DIST PV.buy-LOC.APPL 1SG book

'I bought the book in that shop.'

(PV, with location pivot)

b. *Tiang m-(b)eli-in toko ento buku.*

1SG [AV]-buy-LOC.APPL shop DIST book

'I bought the book in that shop.'

(Artawa 1998: 55) (AV, with agent pivot)

Syntactic applicatives: The basics (3)

(4) Balinese, benefactive applicative

a. **Cai** *beli-ang* *tiang buku-ne ene.*

2SG PV.buy-BEN.APPL 1SG book-DEF PROX

'I bought you this book.'

(PV, with beneficiary pivot)

b. *Tiang m-(b)eli-ang* **cai** *buku-ne ene.*

1SG [AV]-buy-BEN.APPL **shop** book-DEF PROX

'I bought you this book.' (Artawa 1998: 55) (AV,
with agent pivot)

- ▶ Applicative marker *-in*:
location, goal, or recipient AppP
- ▶ Applicative marker *-ang*:
beneficiary, instrument, or transported
theme AppP
- ▶ AppP is coded as a bare NP, like other
core arguments, while obliques are
preposition-marked.
- ▶ AppP can be the **pivot**, or a non-pivot
core argument.

Changes in syntactic argument structure (1)

(5) Balinese, quantifier float

a. *I Nyoman ngrereh-ang anak-e punika somah sami*
 PN.M N. AV.search-BEN.APPL person-DEF that spouse all

'I Nyoman searched for wives for *all* of them.'

b. *Anggur-e dumang=a teken okan-okan-ne ibi makejang*
 grape-DEF PV.divide=3 to RDP-child-3.POSS yesterday all

(i) ?* 'She distributed the grapes to *all* her children yesterday.'

(ii) 'She distributed *all* the grapes to her children yesterday.'

(Arka 2003: 46–47)

- ▶ A floating quantifier can modify the AppP of an applicative construction.
- ▶ This behavioral property applies to core arguments in Balinese, but not obliques.

Changes in syntactic argument structure (2)

(6) Balinese, binding

a. *la*_{<i>} *ng-alih* *potrekan* *awakne*_{<i>}
3 AV-search picture self.3

'(S)he_{<i>} searched for the picture of himself/herself_{<i>}.'

b. *Tiang ng-alih-ang* *ia*_{<i>} *potrekan* *awakne*_{<i>}
1 AV-search-BEN.APPL 3 picture self.3

'I searched for the picture of himself_{<i>} for the benefit of him_{<i>}.'

c. * *Tiang ng-alih-ang* *awakne*_{<i>} *potrekan* *ia*_{<i>} *-ne*
1 AV-search--BEN.APPL self.3 picture 3-DEF

Intended: 'I searched for the picture of him for the benefit of himself.' (Arka 2003: 203)

- ▶ The beneficiary **AppP** can bind the **CompP** but not vice versa.
- ▶ Altogether, coding and behavioral evidence indicates that AppP is a core argument.
- ▶ Canonical applicative

Syntactic applicatives: Summary

- ▶ Symmetrical voice and applicatives are two separate paradigms in Balinese and most other West Nusantara languages.
- ▶ Typically, roles for AppP are divided across two forms of applicative marking:
 - 1 locations and goals
 - 2 beneficiaries, instruments, themes
- ▶ In a syntactic applicative:
 - ▶ The AppP is **coded like other core arguments** rather than obliques.
 - ▶ We can demonstrate that the AppP **behaves like a core argument** in many respects.
 - ▶ Like other core arguments, the status of the AppP (e.g. pivot, non-pivot) depends on the voice construction (e.g. AV, PV).
 - ▶ **An argument is added** to the syntactic argument structure of the clause.

Semantic applicatives: The basics (1)

(7) Sundanese, benefactive applicative

a. *Asep m-(b)awa sangu keur Lilis.*

A. AV-bring cooked.rice for L.

'Asep brought food for Lilis.'

(Base)

b. *Asep m-(p)ang-mawa-keun Lilis sangu.*

A. AV-BEN.APPL-bring-BEN.APPL L. cooked.rice

'Asep brought Lilis food.'

(Syn. Appl.)

c. *Asep m-(p)ang-mawa-keun sangu keur Lilis.*

A. AV-BEN.APPL-bring-BEN.APPL rice for L.

'Asep brought food for Lilis.'

(Sem. Appl.)

(Truong 2025: 1, 49)

- ▶ Sundanese voice and applicative system is similar to Balinese.
- ▶ But we observe an alternation in the coding of the AppP with benefactive applicative marking on the verb.
- ▶ We call constructions like (7c) 'semantic applicatives'.

Semantic applicatives: The basics (2)

(8) Sundanese, benefactive applicative

a. *Abi n-(t)ingali-an sapatu keur Dewi.*

1SG AV-look-PLUR shoe for D.

'I looked around at shoes for Dewi.'

(Base)

b. *Abi m-(p)ang-ningali-an-keun sapatu keur Dewi.*

1SG AV-BEN.APPL-look-PLUR-BEN.APPL shoe for D.

'I looked around at shoes for Dewi (in lieu of her).'

(Sem. Appl.)

- ▶ Beneficiary coded as a PP = same as base construction.
- ▶ (8b) has substitutive semantics ('in lieu of').
- ▶ (8a) and (8b) have different truth conditions.
- ▶ (8b) entails (8a) but not vice versa.

Semantic applicatives change semantic argument structure (1)

If we adopt the so-called inference test described by Riesberg (2014a) for testing argumenthood of various phrases following Zifonun, Hoffmann & Strecker (1997):

For the base: *Abi ningalian sepatu keur Dewi.*
'I looked around at shoes for Dewi.'

From reduced clause: *Abi ningalian sepatu.*

Not possible to infer: *Abi ningalian sepatu keur hiji jalma.*
'I looked around at shoes for someone.'

For the applicative: *Abi mangningaliankeun sepatu keur Dewi.*
'I looked around at shoes for Dewi (in lieu of her).'

From reduced clause: *Abi mangningaliankeun sepatu.*

It is inferred: *Abi mangningaliankeun sepatu keur hiji jalma.*
'I looked around at shoes for someone.'

Semantic applicatives change semantic argument structure (2)

(9) Sundanese

- a. *Udi tos ny-(s)urung mobil ka imah.*
 U. CMPL AV-push car to house
 'Udi pushed the car to/towards the house.' (Base)
- b. *Udi tos ny-(s)urung-keun mobil ka imah.*
 U. CMPL AV-push-THM.APPL car to house
 'Udi pushed the car to the house.' (Sem. Appl.)
 (Truong 2025: 40)

- ▶ **No change in the coding of roles** is observed in (9).
- ▶ Different truth conditions
 - ▶ (9a) → act of applying force to car is no longer occurring
 - ▶ (9b) → movement of the car to the house is complete, i.e. the car has reached the house
- ▶ (9b) entails (9a) but not vice versa.
- ▶ Only the reduced form of (9b) gives rise to the inference: 'Udi pushed the car to somewhere.'

Semantic applicatives: Summary

- ▶ In our sample, semantic applicatives:
 - ▶ are found in a subset of languages that have syntactic applicatives, and
 - ▶ are marked with the same forms of applicative markers.
- ▶ Like syntactic applicatives:
 - ▶ they belong to a paradigm separate from symmetrical voice, and
 - ▶ typically are divided across two forms of applicative marking.
- ▶ In a semantic applicative:
 - ▶ The AppP **shows non-core coding**.
 - ▶ The AppP is most commonly a beneficiary role (freely productive) or other dative role (less productive).
 - ▶ The applicative marker signals the **promotion of a peripheral role in semantic argument structure**.
 - ▶ Generally, there is no indication that the AppP is promoted to a syntactic core argument.

‘Topic-promoting’ applicatives: the basics (1)

- ▶ Philippine-type Austronesian languages feature a four-way symmetrical voice system, consisting of **Actor Voice**, **Patient Voice**, **Locative Voice (LV)**, and **Circumstantial Voice (CV)**.

'Topic-promoting' applicatives: the basics (1)

(10) Tagalog

a. *b*⟨**um**⟩*ili si Nina ng sinigang mula kay Tala para kay Rica.*
 buy⟨**AV**⟩ PN.PIVOT Nina INDF.CM sour.soup P PN.CM Tala P PN.CM Rica

'Nina bought sour soup from Tala for Rica.'

(Actor Voice)

b. *bi-bilih*⟨**in**⟩ *ni Nina ang sinigang mula kay Tala para kay Rica.*
 CONT-buy-⟨**PV**⟩ PN.CM Nina DEF.PIVOT sour.soup P PN.CM Tala P PN.CM Rica

'Nina will buy sour soup from Tala for Rica.'

(Patient Voice)

c. *bi-bilih*⟨**an**⟩ *ni Nina ng sinigang si Tala para kay Rica.*
 CONT-buy-⟨**LV**⟩ PN.CM Nina INDF.CM sour.soup PN.PIVOT Tala P PN.CM Rica

'Nina will buy sour soup from Tala for Rica.'

(Locative Voice)

d. *i-bi-bili ni Nina ng sinigang mula kay Tala si Rica.*
 ⟨**CV**⟩-CONT-buy PN.CM Nina INDF.CM sour.soup P PN.CM Tala PN.PIVOT Rica

'Nina will buy sour soup from Tala for Rica.'

(Circumstantial Voice)

'Topic-promoting' applicatives: the basics (2)

- ▶ LV and CV have traditionally been analysed as (syntactic) applicative constructions (Payne 1982; Mithun 1994; Aldridge 2004 et seq.), since they promote a peripheral role (e.g. a locative, instrument, or beneficiary) to pivot status.

(11) Tagalog

a. *bi-bilih-an* *ni* *Nina* *ng* *sinigang* *si* *Tala* *para kay* *Rica*.
 CONT-buy-**LV** PN.CM Nina INDF.CM sour.soup PN.PIVOT Tala P PN.CM Rica
 'Nina will buy sour soup from *Tala* for Rica.' (Locative Voice)

b. *i-bi-bili* *ni* *Nina* *ng* *sinigang* *mula kay* *Tala* *si* *Rica*.
CV-CONT-buy PN.CM Nina INDF.CM sour.soup P PN.CM Tala PN.PIVOT Rica
 'Nina will buy sour soup from Tala for *Rica*.' (Circumstantial Voice)

What can constitute a pivot in an LV/CV construction?

- ▶ However, it is inaccurate to generalise these constructions as invariably promoting a non-core, adjunct-like argument.
- ▶ LV/CV morphology can mark a core argument across a wide range of three-place constructions.

What can constitute a pivot in an LV/CV construction?

- ▶ However, it is inaccurate to generalise these constructions as invariably promoting a non-core, adjunct-like phrase.
- ▶ LV/CV morphology can mark a core argument across a wide range of three-place constructions.
 - ▶ Possible pivots in LV constructions
 - ▶ locative
 - ▶ temporal
 - ▶ source
 - ▶ goal
 - ▶ **recipient in ditransitives**
 - ▶ Possible pivots in CV constructions
 - ▶ instrument
 - ▶ benefactive
 - ▶ reason
 - ▶ purpose
 - ▶ degree
 - ▶ **theme in ditransitives**
 - ▶ **theme in productive causatives**
 - ▶ **(theme in control constructions)**

What can constitute a pivot in an LV/CV construction?

- ▶ CV-marked productive causatives feature a **pivot-marked theme argument (13c)**.

(12) Productive causatives

a. **Nag-pa-ligo=ako** kay Maria ng pusa.

AV-CAUS-bathe=1S.PIVOT PN.CM Maria CM cat

'I had Maria bathe a/the cat.'

(Actor Voice)

b. P<in>a-pa-ligo=ko si **Maria** ng pusa.

CAUS-**PV**-RED-bathe=1S.CM **PN.PIVOT Maria** CM cat

'I am making *Maria* bathe a/the cat.'

(Patient Voice)

c. i-p<in>a-pa-linis=ko kay Maria **ang pusa**.

CV-CAUS-PRF-RED-clean=1S.CM PN.CM Maria **PIVOT cat**

'I am having Maria clean *the cat*.'

(Circumstantial Voice)

⇒ Also, **CV morphology does not co-occur with a separate voice affix**

What can constitute a pivot in an LV/CV construction?

- ▶ This differs from Type B and Type C applicatives, which consistently co-occur with a separate voice affix, as shown earlier in (9).

(9) Sundanese

a. *Udi tos ny-(s)urung mobil ka imah.*

U. CMPL AV-push car to house

'Udi pushed the car to/towards the house.' (Base)

b. *Udi tos ny-(s)urung-keun mobil ka imah.*

U. CMPL AV-push-THM.APPL car to house

'Udi pushed the car to the house.' (Sem. Appl.)

(Truong 2025: 40)

What can constitute a pivot in an LV/CV construction?

- ▶ CV-marked ditransitives also feature a **pivot-marked theme argument (14c)**.

(13) Ditransitives

a. **Nag-bigay** *si aya kay tina ng pera.*
 [AV].PRF-give PN.PIVOT Aya PN.CM Tina INDF.CM money
 'Aya gave Tina money.'

(Actor Voice)

b. *B(in)igay-an ni aya si tina ng pera.*
 give-PRF-[LV] PN.CM Aya PN.PIVOT Tina INDF.CM money
 'Aya gave Tina money.'

(Locative Voice)

c. *i-b(in)igay ni aya ang pera kay tina.*
 [CV]-give-PRF PN.CM Aya DEF.PIVOT money PN.CM Tina
 'Aya gave Tina the money.'

(Circumstantial Voice)

⇒ Likewise, CV morphology does *not* co-occur with a separate voice affix (unlike Types B and C applicatives)

What can constitute a pivot in an LV/CV construction?

- Similarly, CV-marked control constructions feature a **pivot-marked theme argument (15b)**.

(14) Object control constructions (common in Philippine-type languages spoken in Taiwan)

a. *Ku=paisel-ay i Senten pa-trekel dra eraw.*

1SG.CM=force-LV **PN.PIVOT Senten** DEFV.CAUS-drink INDF.CM alcohol

'I forced Senten to drink the alcohol.'

(Locative Voice)

b. *Ku=paisel-anay kan Senten pa-trekel na eraw.*

1SG.CM=force-CV PN.CM Senten DEFV.CAUS-drink **DEF.PIVOT alcohol**

'I forced Senten to drink alcohol.'

(Circumstantial Voice)

⇒ Again, CV morphology does *not* co-occur with a separate voice affix (unlike Types B and C applicatives)

The competing hypotheses

► Hypothesis A

LV/CV morphology realizes an **Applicative head** that introduces an **applied object above the theme** (Aldridge 2004 et seq.)

⇒ LV/CV morphology entails the presence of a valency-increasing operation in the clause.

► Hypothesis B

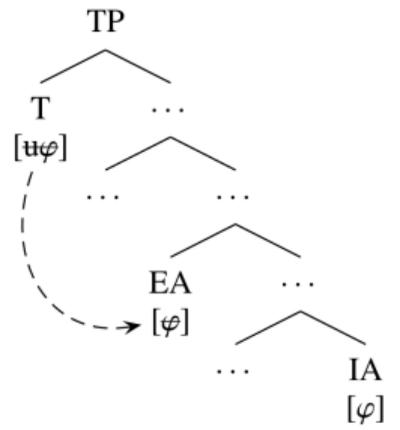
LV/CV morphology functions as topic-agreement morphology, indexing the grammatical role of the clause-level topic (Chen 2017, 2025; see also Chung 1994; Shibatani 1998; Pearson 2005 for a similar view).

⇒ LV/CV morphology does *not* entail the presence of a valency-increasing operation in the clause.

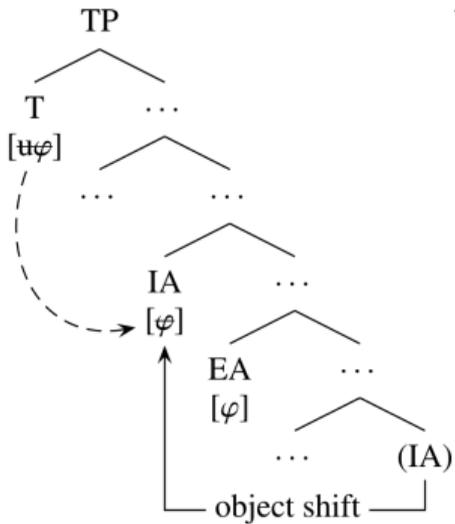
The competing hypotheses: Hypothesis A

Alleged argument structure alternations among non-AV clauses

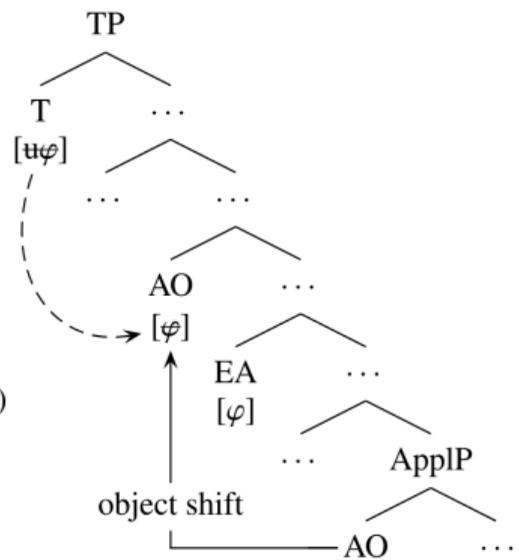
a. Actor Voice



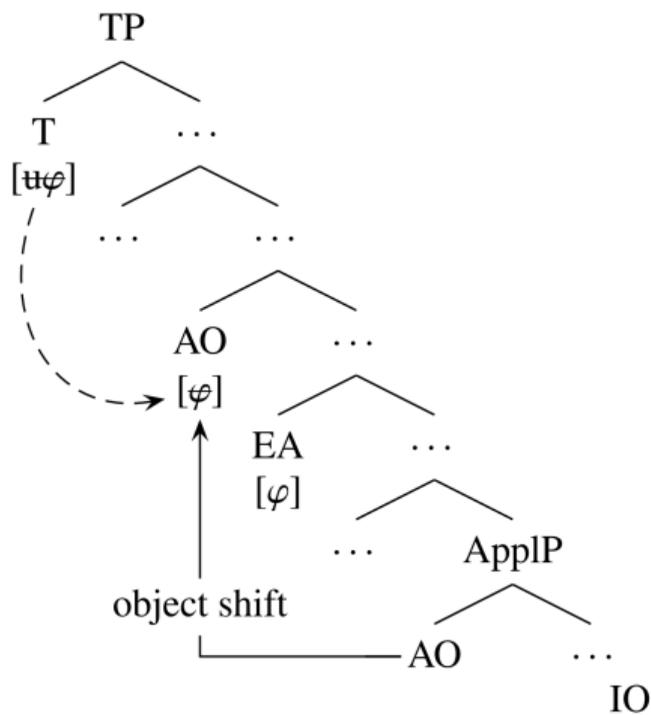
b. Patient Voice



c. Locative/Circumstantial Voice



The competing hypotheses: Hypothesis A



Diagnostics: LV/CV are topic-promoting, not subject-promoting (1)

- ▶ **Why is Hypothesis B optimal?** There is independent evidence that the pivot in LV/CV constructions does not function as a new subject/absolute/nominative argument (i.e. applied object promoted to a derived A-position), but rather as the topic (\bar{A} -element) (e.g. Richards 2000; Pearson 2005; Chen 2017).
- ▶ This is in line with the view that **Philippine-type voice licenses symmetrical voice alternation that does not rearrange the valency of a given clause** (Himmelman 2008; Riesberg 2014b; Chen & McDonnell 2019).
- ▶ Key diagnostics:
 - ▶ **Binding tests:** whether the LV/CV pivot behaves like an applied object (AppP) subsequently promoted to absolute.
 - ▶ **Pivot diagnostics:** whether the LV/CV pivot exhibits topic-like or subject-like behaviors (\bar{A} - vs. A-element).

Diagnostics: LV/CV are topic-promoting, not subject-promoting (2)

- Binding diagnostics indicate that pivot promotion does not alter binding relations (⇒ unexpected if the pivot were an AppP promoted to a derived A-position).

(15) Productive causatives

a. **Nag**-pa-ligo=*ako* kay *Maria ng sarili niya*.

AV-CAUS-bathe=1S.PIVOT PN.CM Maria CM REFL 3S

'I had *Maria* bathe *herself*.'

(Actor Voice)

b. *P*(in)a-pa-ligo=*ko* si *Maria ng sarili niya*.

CAUS-PV-bathe=1S.CM PN.PIVOT Maria CM REFL 3S

'I am having *Maria* bathe *herself*.'

(Patient Voice)

c. *i*-p(in)a-pa-linis=*ko* kay *Maria ang sarili niya*.

CV-CAUS<PRF>-RED-clean=1S.CM PN.CM Maria **PIVOT REFL 3S**

'I am having *Maria* clean *herself*.'

(Circumstantial Voice)

Diagnostics: LV/CV are topic-promoting, not subject-promoting (3)

- ▶ Binding diagnostics indicate that pivot promotion does not alter binding relations (⇒ unexpected if the pivot were an applied object promoted to a derived A-position).

(16) Ditransitives

a. *Nag-bigay si Joy kay Lia ng sarili niyang larawan.*

AV.PRF-give PN.PIVOT Joy PN.CM Lia INDF.CM self 3s.POSS picture

'Joy<j> gave Lia<k> a picture of herself<j/k>.' (Actor Voice)

b. *B(in)igy-an ni Joy si Lia ng sarili niyang larawan.*

give-PRF-**LV** PN.CM Joy PN.PIVOT Lia INDF.CM self 3s.POSS picture

'Joy<j> gave Lia<k> a picture of herself<j/k>.' (Locative Voice)

c. *i-b(in)igy ni Joy kay Lia ang sarili niyang larawan.*

CV-give-PRF PN.CM Joy PN.CM Lia PIVOT self 3s.POSS picture

'Joy<j> gave Lia<k> a picture of herself<j/k>.' (Circumstantial Voice)

Diagnostics: LV/CV are topic-promoting, not subject-promoting (4)

- ▶ This differs from Type B (canonical/syntactic) applicatives, where **the applied object is capable of binding the companion phrase**, as shown earlier in (6).

(6) Balinese, binding

- a. *la*_{<i>} *ng-alih* *potrekan* *awakne*_{<i>}
3 AV-search picture self.3

'(S)he_{<i>} searched for the picture of himself/herself_{<i>}.'

- b. *Tiang ng-alih-ang* *ia*_{<i>} *potrekan* *awakne*_{<i>}
1 AV-search-BEN.APPL 3 picture self.3

'I searched for the picture of himself_{<i>} for the benefit of him_{<i>}.'

- c. * *Tiang ng-alih-ang* *awakne*_{<i>} *potrekan* *ia*_{<i>} *-ne*
1 AV-search--BEN.APPL self.3 picture 3-DEF

Intended: 'I searched for the picture of him for the benefit of himself.' (Arka 2003: 203)

- ▶ The beneficiary AppP can bind the CompP but not vice versa.
- ▶ Altogether, coding and behavioral evidence indicates that AppP is a core argument.
- ▶ Canonical applicative

The competing hypotheses revisited

► Hypothesis A

LV/CV morphology realizes an **Applicative head** that introduces an **applied object above the theme** (Aldridge 2004 et seq.)

⇒ LV/CV morphology entails the presence of a valency-increasing operation in the clause.

► Hypothesis B

LV/CV morphology functions as topic-agreement morphology, indexing the grammatical role of the clause-level topic (Chen 2017, 2025; see also Chung 1994; Shibatani 1998; Pearson 2005 for a similar view).

⇒ LV/CV morphology does *not* entail the presence of a valency-increasing operation in the clause.

Diagnostics: LV/CV are topic-promoting, not subject-promoting

- Pivot continuity: Elicited dialogues show a close link between pivothood and topichood

(17) a. *Nasaan ang kutsara ni Maria?*

where CN.PIVOT spoon PN.POSS Maria

'Where is *Maria's spoon*?' Discourse topic: *Maria's spoon*

b. *Gamit ni Lia ang kutsara.*

use.PV PN.CM Lia CN.PIVOT spoon

'Lia is using *it/the spoon*.'

(Patient Voice; spoon placed as the pivot)

c. *I-p<in>ang-ka-kain ni Lia ang kutsara.*

CV-PANG-PFV-RED-eat PN.CM Lia CN.PIVOT spoon

'Lia is eating with *it/the spoon*.'

(Circumstantial Voice; spoon placed as the pivot)

d. *Na-kita=ko=[ng k<in>uha ni Lia ang kutsara].*

PFV.PV-see=1SG.CM=LK steal-PFV.PV PN.CM Lia CN.PIVOT spoon

'I saw that Lia stole *it/the spoon*.'

(embedded Patient Voice; spoon placed as the pivot)

Summary: ‘Topic-promoting’ applicatives do not increase valency

▶ **Interim conclusion**

Philippine-type LV and CV constructions are not canonical applicatives — in the sense that they do not promote a new core argument or license valency-increasing operations.

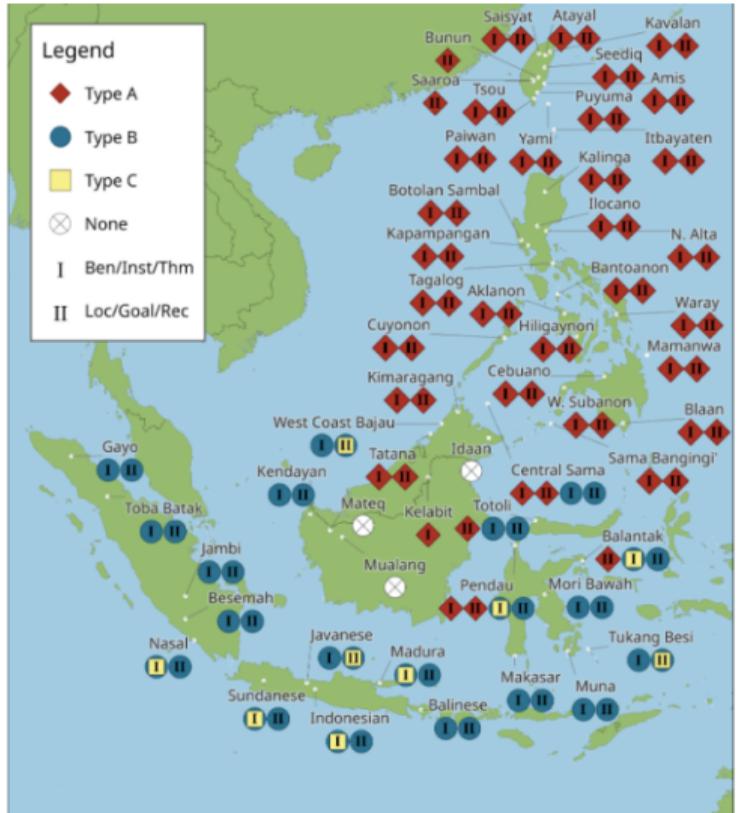
- ▶ This follows consistently from the fact that LV and CV morphology can highlight an already core argument (e.g. the theme in causatives and ditransitives) as the pivot.

▶ **LV and CV form part of the Philippine-type symmetrical voice system that indexes a phrase as the pivot (\bar{A} -topic).**

- ▶ We refer to these constructions as *topic-promoting applicatives*, which should not be confused with syntactic applicatives.

- ▶ For further discussion of the topic status of pivot phrases, see Chen (2025) and Pearson (2005).

Distribution of the three types of constructions

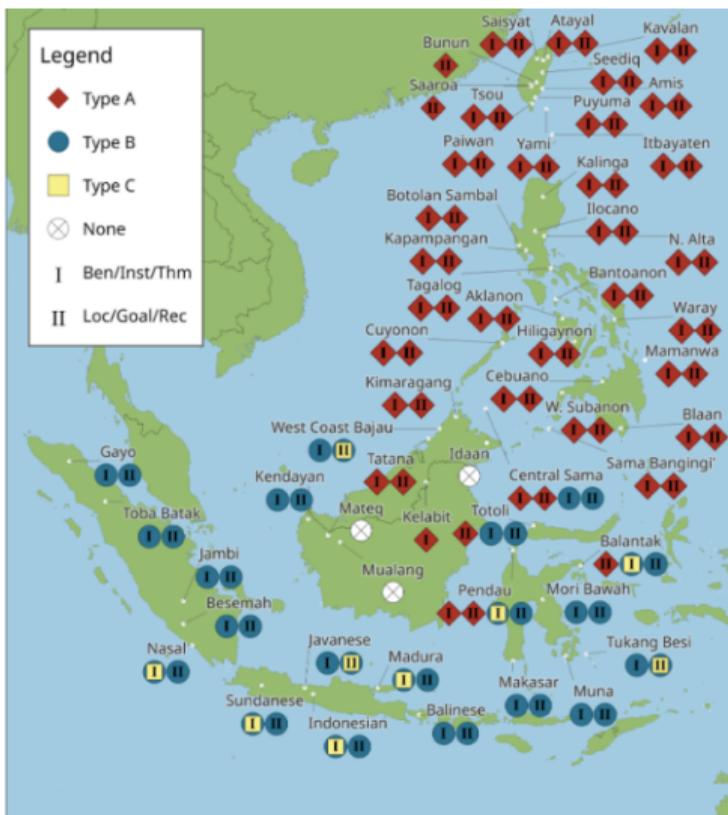


- ▶ Type A ('topic promoting') constructions are distributed mainly in Taiwan and the Philippines (Philippine-type Austronesian languages).
- ▶ Types B (syntactic) and C (semantic) are commonly found in West Nusantara.
- ▶ Type C is relatively uncommon.

Summary

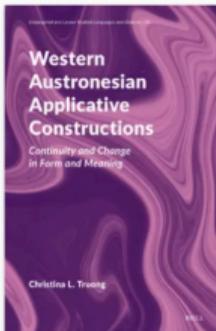
Type	Characteristics	Ex. Languages
A 'Topic-promoting' applicative	Verbal morphology signals promotion of a peripheral phrase in information structure (topic status), without increasing valency. The corresponding phrase is accessible to certain focus operations and interclausal relations, but may lack behavioral properties of other non-A core arguments.	Puyuma, Tagalog, Hiligaynon
B Syntactic (canonical) applicative	Verbal morphology signals promotion of a peripheral phrase in syntactic argument structure (core argument status). The AppP shows coding and behavioral properties shared by other non-A core arguments. This construction represents a canonical applicative because it adds a new syntactic core argument.	Balinese, Mori Bawah, Sundanese, Nasal
C Semantic applicative	Verbal morphology signals the promotion of a peripheral role in semantic argument structure , as evident from tests for semantic entailment and pragmatic inference. However, the phrase shows non-core coding. This construction is distinguished from Type B in that syntactic argument structure is unchanged.	Sundanese, Nasal

Implications (2)



- ▶ The three types are thus **not separate phenomena** and the canonical applicatives are only one slice of the larger picture.
- ▶ Cross-family comparison (e.g. Salishan, Otomongean, Abkhaz-Adyge) → canonical applicatives **commonly observed alongside** functionally similar constructions with divergent syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties.

Implications (3)



Western Austronesian Applicative Constructions

Continuity and Change in Form and Meaning

Series: [Endangered and Lesser-Studied Languages and Dialects](#), Volume: 4

Author: [Christina L. Truong](#)

Applicative constructions are a distinctive grammatical feature of the Austronesian languages of western Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. Applicatives in these languages show varied syntactic and semantic properties, and are...

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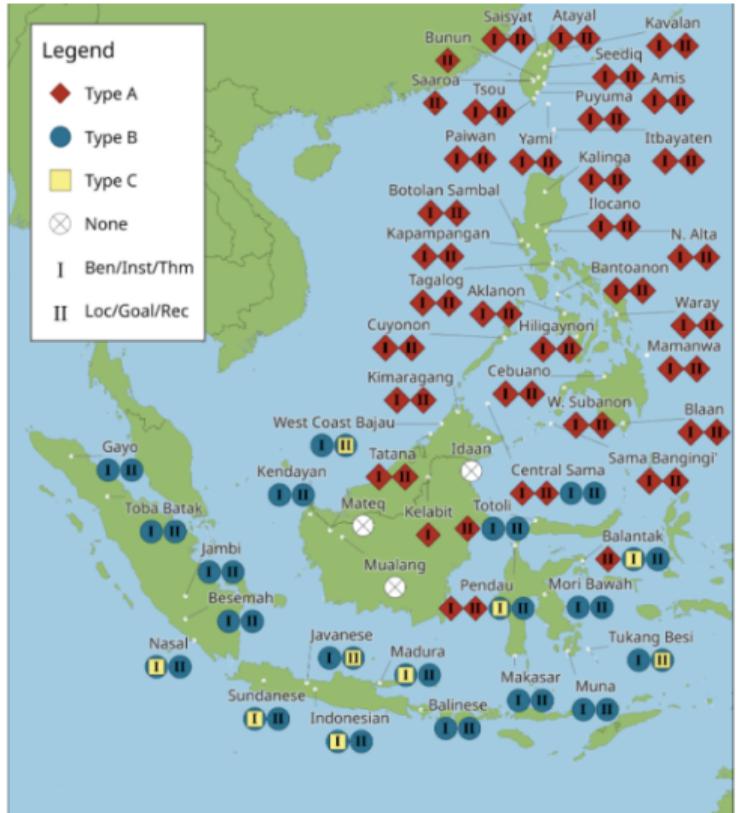
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Conclusion: Diachrony

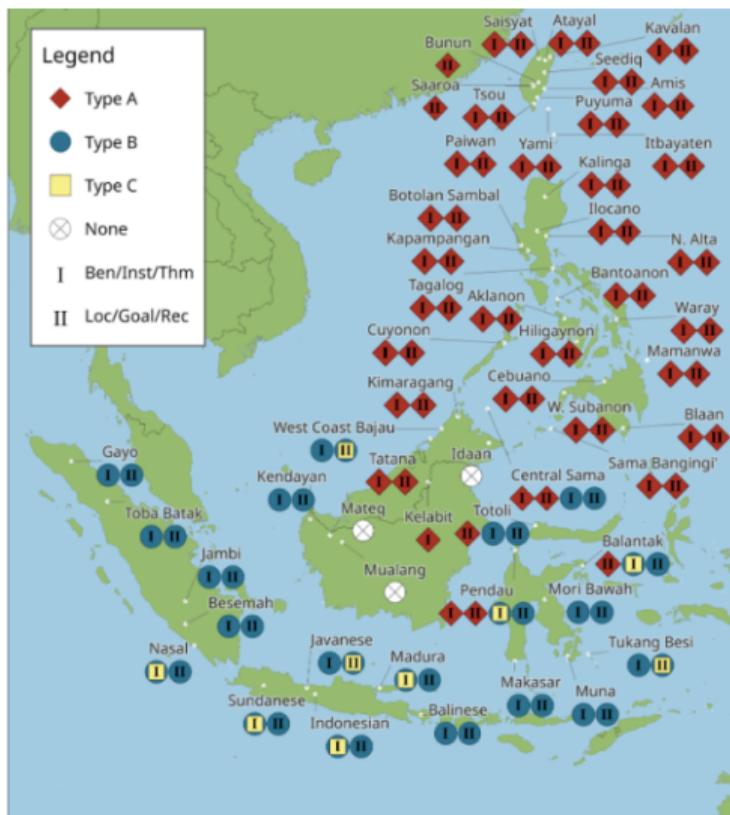


- ▶ The three types of applicatives in this case study are all diachronically related.
 - ▶ Type A = conservative
 - ▶ Type B = innovative
 - ▶ Type C = subconstruction/variant of Type B

- 1 Thus, canonical applicatives can derive from and evolve into non-canonical constructions.

- 2 Alternations in the properties of applicatives constructions are the expected result of diachronic change.

Conclusion: Typology



- 1 Western Austronesia emerges as a hotspot for applicative and applicative-like constructions with rich and largely understudied variation.
- 2 Canonical applicatives are just one subset of a larger set of strategies used by speakers to highlight peripheral roles.
- 3 In this case study, we cannot apply a 'one size fits all' definition of applicative, but all should be considered 'under the same umbrella'.

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'Topic-promoting' applicatives: the basics

(18) *Philippine-type voice alternation in Puyuma*

a. *S*⟨**em**⟩*elap na walak kana ramaraman i dalran dra saselap.*
 sweep⟨**AV**⟩ DEF.PIV child DEF.ACC rubbish LOC road INDF.OBL broom

'The child swept up the rubbish on the road with a broom.' (Actor Voice)

b. *Tu=selap-aw kana walak na ramaraman i dalran dra saselap.*
 3.NOM=sweep-PV DEF.NOM child DEF.PIV rubbish LOC road INDF.OBL broom

'The child swept up *the rubbish* on the road with a broom.' (Patient Voice)

c. *Tu=selap-ay kana walak na dalran kana ramaraman dra saselap.*
 3.NOM=sweep-LV DEF.GEN child DEF.PIV road DEF.ACC rubbish INDF.OBL broom

'The child swept up the rubbish on *the road* with a broom.' (Locative Voice)

d. *Tu=selap-anay kana walak na saselap kana ramaraman i dalran.*
 3.GEN=sweep-CV DEF.GEN child DEF.PIV broom DEF.ACC rubbish LOC road

'The child swept up the rubbish on the road w. *the broom*.' (Circumstantial Voice)

'Topic-promoting' applicatives

- ▶ Under symmetrical voice morphology (AV, LV, CV), all three arguments of a ditransitive are eligible to function as the pivot (indicated by argument-marking).
- ▶ The nonpivot agent remains a core argument, as evidenced by its realization as a bound pronominal clitic.

(19) \emptyset -beray=ku kan Isaw dra paysu.
 AV-give=1SG.PIVOT pn.ACC Isaw INDF.ACC money
 'I gave Isaw money.'

Puyuma

(Actor Voice)

(20) Ku=beray-ay i Isaw dra paysu.
 1SG.GEN=give-LV pn.PIVOT Isaw INDF.ACC money
 'I gave Isaw money.'

(Locative Voice)

(21) Ku=beray-anay kan Isaw na paysu.
 1SG.GEN=give-CV pn.ACC Isaw DEF.PIVOT money
 'I gave Isaw the money.'

(Circumstantial Voice)

Syntactic applicatives

(22) Sundanese, locative applicative

a. *Asep m-(p)elak tangkal cau **di** **kebun**.*

A. AV-plant tree banana **LOC field**

'Asep planted banana trees in a field.'

(Base)

b. *Asep m-(p)elak-**an** **kebun kosong** ku tangkal cau.*

A. AV-plant-**APPL** **field empty** by tree banana

'Asep planted an empty field with banana trees.'

(Truong & McDonnell 2022: 415)

(Syn. appl.)

Semantic applicatives

(23) Nasal, benefactive applicative

a. *Azma ny-(s)anik buwak gin anak=nyo.*

A. AV-make snack for child=3SG

'Azma made snacks for her children.' (Base)

b. *Azma ny-(s)anik-kun anak=nyo buwak.*

A. AV-make-BEN.APPL child=3SG snack

'Azma made her children snacks.' (Syn. Appl.)

c. *Azma ny-(s)anik-kun buwak gin anak=nyo.*

A. AV-make-BEN.APPL snack for child=3SG

'Azma made snacks for her children.' (Sem. Appl.)

(McDonnell & Truong 2024: 980, 983)

Semantic applicatives

(24) West Coast Bajau, 'vacuous' *-an* with transfer verbs

a. *Ai enna'(-an)=ni gula' diam kupi'*
 PERF PV.place-APPL=3SG.I sugar inside coffee

'(S)he put sugar in the coffee.' (Base / Sem. Appl.)

b. *Ai enna'-an=ni kupi' e gula'*
 PERF PV.place-APPL=3SG.I coffee DEM sugar

'(S)he put sugar in the coffee.' (Syn. Appl.)
 (Miller 2007: 285)