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Applicative and Causative Syncretism in Sinitic Languages: A Crosslinguistic Perspective

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This analysis considers the relation between identical applicative and causative enclitics found in many Northern Sinitic languages of both the Mandarin and Jin dialect groups, cognate with Standard Mandarin [=kei°< 'give']. The broad definition of applicativization proposed by Creissels (forthc.) is adopted whereby a referent in a given syntactic context, the "applied noun", is either promoted or added as an argument of the clause.

In Standard Chinese, the use of the Verb=*kei* construction is mainly restricted to verbs of transfer as well as to certain verb classes that can be construed as expressing a transfer in the direction of a recipient or beneficiary, once they are used in this construction, including *mài* 賣 'sell', *rēng* 扔 'toss', *xiě* 寫 'write'. In contradistinction to this, in Northwestern China, many Lan-Yin and Central Plains subgroups, as well as some of the Jin dialects, show a remarkable extension of Verb=GEI to a much larger group of volitional verbs that do not inherently involve any kind of transfer in their meaning, including 'sing', 'sweep', 'engrave' and so on. Below is one such example of a benefactive applicative from the Lanzhou dialect, Gansu:

(1)   Lanzhou Mandarin, Gansu (蘭州話 , 甘肅)

lɔ⁴⁴   ʂʅ⁵³fu   **kɯ¹³**   vɤ⁴⁴   kʻɤ¹³=**kɯ**   kɤ¹³   tʂɔŋ⁵³tsʅ. 老師傅給我刻給個章子。

old   master   TO‹GIVE›   1SG   engrave-APP‹GIVE›   CLF   seal

'The master craftsman engraved a seal for me.' (Jia 2016: 164)

This phenomenon has been reasonably well-described in Chinese linguistics for some of the Northern dialects. What is less well-researched for Sinitic languages is the fact that the *same* applicative marker plays a further important role in forming causative constructions with both unaccusative and labile transitive verbs in certain of these languages, such as in Gangou (Zhao 2021, forthc.). The syncretism uncannily resembles a similar pairing of syntactic functions, independently reported for Austronesian (Hemmings 2017) and South American languages (Guillaume & Rose 2004, Chappell, 2024). Furthermore, the verb class dichotomy is echoed in the use of transitivizing affixes in Australian languages which increase valency to produce either causative or applicative constructions (Austin 1997, McGregor 1998).

The main part of my talk will thus investigate the question of diachronic relationship between the causative and applicative morphology, given the debate as to the direction of change:

causative > applicative or applicative > causative.

Date: February 22, 2024 (Thursday)
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Venue: 2/F, Conference Room, Art Museum East Wing, Institute of Chinese Studies,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Hilary Chappell is a specialist in the typology of Sinitic (Chinese) languages, currently holding the Research Chair in Linguistic Typology of East Asian Languages at one of France's *grands établissements* – the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) – a graduate school in Paris. She took up this appointment in 2005 after teaching in the Linguistics Department at La Trobe University in Melbourne for 18 years. She is currently working in the Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2023-2024 as Vice-Chancellor Visiting Professor. Over the past 30 years, she has directed several projects funded at the national level in both France and Australia, all of which have had the overall goal of questioning and thoroughly rethinking the typological profile of Sinitic languages in terms of their variation and diversity. Her European Research Council project on the "Hybrid Syntactic Typology of Sinitic languages" (2009-2013) led to the creation of a new series with De Gruyter Mouton in Berlin: *Sinitic languages of China: Typological descriptions*, for which four comprehensive grammars have already been published. Her publications include four books and 80 journal articles and chapters, notably *Chinese grammar* (2004) and *Diversity of Sinitic languages* (2015), both published by Oxford University Press. During her career, she has presented over 180 conference papers on linguistic typology and Chinese languages, of which 70 were plenary or invited speeches, and has served as a Visiting Professor at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Australian National University, Shanghai Jiaotong University and Tsing Hua University. During her stay in Hong Kong, her project is to write up a large part of the grammar of Waxiang, based on fieldwork of 12 months in Xiangxi, Hunan.

All are welcome