The optionality property of Kiswahili applicatives

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This paper reports the optionality properties of Kiswahili applicatives observed in fieldwork. Adjunct thematic roles can be introduced in prepositional phrases (PP) or realized as applicatives in Kiswahili (Ngonyani, 1998; Port, 1981). Ngonyani (1998) observes that in a clause containing both a direct object (DO) and an instrumental in post-verbal positions, the instrumental cannot be realized as applicative. Ngonyani attributes this to the existence of the post-verbal DO and generalizes this with the restriction on the post-verbal realization of both DO and applied instrumental. Based on our fieldwork, we argue that whether or not an instrumental can be realized as applicative is not affected by the existence/absence of the post-verbal DO, but is related to its position in the clause, pre-verbal or post-verbal. Our argument is evidenced by the following data.

First, in some intransitives, the instrumental still cannot be realized as applicative in a post-verbal position. In (1) the instrumental kisu ‘knife’ is obligatorily introduced in a PP, though this clause contains no DO.

(1) [m.tau huju'a- li- k^h^at^h^ (*-i) -a *(kua) kisu]
man this 3sg. Past chop Appl FV by knife

The man chopped with a knife.

Second, for some clauses when the DO is fronted to a pre-verbal position, the instrumental cannot be realized as an applicative in a post-verbal position notwithstanding (2).

(2) [hi' ni ji a ma ambajo m.'juhuju a- li- k^h^at^h^ (*-i) -a *(kua) kisu]
this is meet that man 3sg. Past cut Appl FV with knife

This is the meat that the man chopped with a knife.

Third, when appearing in a pre-verbal position, instrumental can, or even must, be realized as an applicative (3).

(3) [hika ni k^h^isu ambajoo m't'u huju a- li- k^h^at^h^*(-i) -a anijama]
this is knife which man this 3sg. Past cut Appl FV meat

This is the knife with which the man chopped the meat.

This pre-verbal tendency of applicatives also holds for other thematic roles including goals and locatives. Goals in Kiswahili, for example, when appearing in a post-verbal position, can be realized in either applicatives or PPs. However, only the applicative form is grammatical when the goal is extracted to a pre-verbal position (4).

(4) [huju ndio mbwa (*kwa) ambajoo paka a- li- m- kimbi *(li) -a]
this be dog with which cat 3sg. past OM run Appl FV

This is the dog toward which the cat ran.

In summary this study finds that in Kiswahili the applicative construction is preferred or even obligatory when an adjunct thematic role appears in a pre-verbal position. To account for these word order facts in Kiswahili within the current minimalist framework can be an interesting topic in future studies.
References


