



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Benefactives in Kipsigis: A Feature-Checking Analysis

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Abstract:

Generative grammar has tremendously evolved since the ground breaking publication of Chomsky's book Syntactic Structures in 1957. This paper attempts to explore the Theory of Feature Checking which is a module in Minimalism; the latest approach in the Chomskyan tradition, while showing its implication on the benefactive analysis in Kipsigis. In the language, benefactive is expressed through an applicative construction. We examine the various forms of benefactive and how it conjugates with different verbal types: intransitive, transitive and ditransitive. The implication of benefactive incorporation to the entire argument structure is also highlighted. The paper also illustrates how features of the verbal morphology having benefactive are merged and moved to be checked in overt syntax.

Keywords: Minimalism, Feature, Checking, Benefactive, Applicative, Merge, Move

1. Introduction

Kipsigis is the most numerous group of the Kalenjin cluster of languages. The Kalenjin belong to the Southern Nilotic group of the Nilo-saharan language family inhabiting the Southern part of the Rift valley province in Kenya. The word Kipsigis which literally translates into 'the bearer, finder or producer' was coined way back during the migration of the community to their present homeland. In this study, Kipsigis refers to the language spoken by the Kipsigis community and the community itself.

The language exhibits a rich morphological realization in verbs with an extensive agglutination of both inflectional and derivational morphology. Most inflectional morphemes such as tense, person, negation and aspect are prefixed to the verb while several derivational morphemes like applicatives, causatives, reciprocals, reflexives and stative are all suffixed.

The present study is concerned with analyzing Kipsigis benefactives which falls under applicative, a topic in verbal extensions. Verbal extensions in southern Nilotic languages involve suffixation rather than prefixation. Applicative according to Shibatani (1996) is a grammatical element –verbal affix that increase valence. This means that an applicative has been understood as a valence increasing mechanism where intransitive roots become transitive, transitive become ditransitive and so on. Applicative licenses a semantic role not normally subcategorized for by the lexical verb when appearing outside a particular applicative (instruction), as a core syntactic argument. The semantic roles associated with applicatives may involve; locative, instrument, associative, purpose, reason, benefactive among others. According to Payne (1997:186), benefactive can be described as a valence increasing operation that brings a peripheral participant onto center stage by making it into a direct object. The 'new' direct object is sometimes referred to as the applied object. The study uses feature theory as proposed by Chomsky (1993, 1995) for its analysis. This paper thus addresses the following three main concerns:

- What is the compositionality of a benefactive construction in Kipsigis?
- What is the effect of a benefactive incorporation on the verbal complex and structure?
- How does feature checking theory of Minimalism accounts for the benefactive construction in the language?

2. The data

The data from Kipsigis, which the authors generated through introspection, shows benefactive constructions being represented by two morphemes, -w- and -chi- which are affixed after the verb root. When incorporated to the verb, the benefactive introduces an applied object to the structure. Consider the following set of data¹:

1. a. sir baruet
v-write letter-Acc
write a letter.
- b. sir-w-an baruet
write-BEN-1Sg/Acc letter-Acc
write for me a letter
- c. sir-chi John baruet
Write-BEN John letter-Acc
Write to John a letter
- 2.a. ki-sir Peter baruet
PST-write Peter-Nom letter-Acc
Peter wrote a letter.
- b. *ki-sir-w Peter baruet Mary
PST-write-BEN Peter-Nom letter-Acc Mary
*Peter wrote a letter Mary.
- c. ki-sir-chi Peter baruet Mary
PST-write-BEN Peter-Nom baruet-Acc Mary-Obl
Peter wrote a letter for Mary.

From the presented set of data, the two benefactive morphemes possess peculiar characteristics. One similarity though in the two morphemes is that there is an introduction of an applied object with the suffixation of either *-w-* or *-chi-* to the verb. In (1a), the verb *sir/* write is transitive and only selects one theme argument *baruet/* letter, as an NP object. Following the morphological derivation of the same verb form with a benefactive morpheme *-w-* in (1b) and *-chi-* (1c), it is evident that the resulting structure is a double constructions in which both the arguments *-an-* 'me' and *John* are realized as object NPs. The same interpretation occurs in (2.c). I have excluded (2.b) because of the ungrammaticality which I am going to discuss in the next paragraph. It is clear that there is totally no possibility of representing the beneficiary or benefactive role in Kipsigis verbal construction in a non-derived form without a benefactive morpheme *-w-* or *-chi-*. In essence, the benefactive affix changes the structure of the verb by increasing the number of arguments.

The second interesting observation is on the selection of arguments by each morpheme. From the data presented, benefactive morpheme *-w-* attaches to verbs which select pronominal as the applied object, see 1b. where the first person singular accusative *-an-* 'me' is 'attracted' by *-w-* morpheme as opposed to 2.b. in which *-w-* is 'repelled' by the composition of the verb type hence causing ungrammaticality. In this case, when the verbs select the benefactive morpheme *-chi-*, the implication is that the resultant argument structures are all full Nouns.

3. Feature Checking Theory

Feature Checking theory is an important module provided in Minimalist framework. In Minimalism, verbs are assumed to be inflected for features in the lexicon and are inserted into derivations after the inflection rather than in their bare form. Chomsky (1993, 1995) stresses that the verb features are checked against their corresponding features encoded in the inflectional categories. The functional categories such as, AgrS, AgrO and T have their own features to which the features encoded in the verb of the lexicon must correspond to; the function of these V-features is to license the morphological properties of the verb taken from the lexicon. According to Chomsky (ibid), the morphological elements Agr and T have two functions: (a) to check features of the verb that move to them, and (b) to check properties of the DP that raise to their Spec. The functional elements AgrS, T and AgrO do not have only the function of licensing the V-features of V, but also the function of checking the NP-features of the DP that raise to their Spec position. The features, both interpretable and uninterpretable are checked at different levels before spell-out.

Consider the following structure:

3. ki-get-w-ok
PST-drive-BEN-2nd/Acc
drove for you (plural)

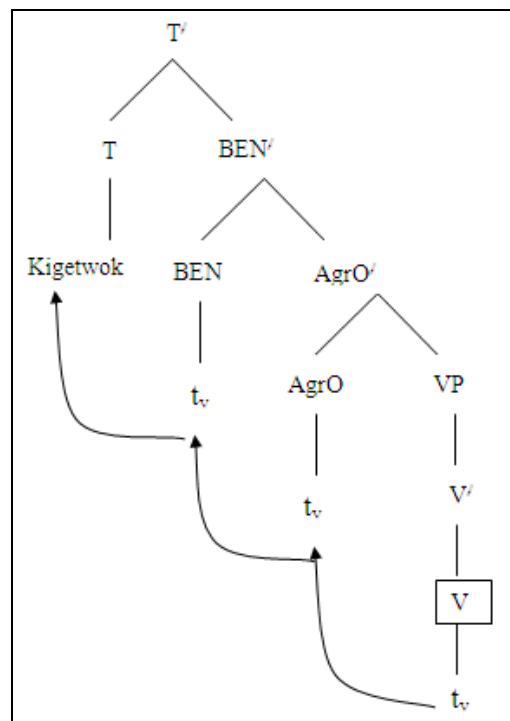


Figure 1

In figure 1, a fully inflected verb *kigetwok* 'drove for you' is base generated from the VP. It overtly moves to T via AgrO and BEN for checking of agreement object features and benefactive feature, landing in T for tense checking. It is to be noted that such movement is triggered by the agreement requirements followings the conditions under merge and move.

4. Discussion

4.1. Analysis of Benefactive Distribution: Verb Forms

As noted in the previous sections, a benefactive verb is a form that assigns a benefactive role on the argument functioning as an applied object. It licenses the incorporation of an extra argument which did not exist in a non-benefactive verb form. The presence of two benefactive morphemes in the language raises questions on the selection of verb lexeme. This question is explored in the preceding section.

4.1.1. -w-

Generally, verbs can be categorized as being intransitive, transitive and ditransitive. A verb selects the kinds of morphemes that can be attached to it. Several restrictions are placed on the kind of morphemes that attaches to these verbs. The restriction is based on the syntactic requirement of the lexical item in question.

Consider:

4. ki-rir-w.an
PST-cry-BEN-1Sg/Acc
Cried for me.
5. ki-tyar-w-an
PST-kick-BEN-1Sg/Acc
Kicked for me.
6. nde-w-an
put-BEN-1sg/Acc
Put for me.

From the selection of verbs presented, it follows that the morpheme -w- 'for' is a free form in terms of attaching to a given types of verbs. Sentence (4) has an intransitive verb, (5) transitive and (6) ditransitive. The semantics form of the applied object implies the activity was done 'on behalf of'. Further, the interpretation of applicative constructions crucially depends on the lexical meanings of the verb and of the object NP whose presence is licensed by the benefactive.

4.1.2. -chi-

Consider:

7. Ki-rir-chi-an
PST-cry-BEN-1Sg/Acc
Cried on me.
8. ki-tyar-chi-an
PST-kick-BEN-1Sg/Acc
kicked on me
9. ki-nde-chi-an
PST-put-BEN-1Sg/Acc
put on me.

The constructions (7), (8) and (9) consist of intransitive, transitive and ditransitive verbs respectively. From the sets, it implies that morpheme *-chi-* is selected by all forms of the verbs. The semantic interpretation of these structures implies the action was done 'towards' the incorporated object.

4.2. Analysis of benefactive distribution: Incorporated Object selection

In their canonical use, benefactive derivations license the presence of an NP in object role representing a participant fulfilling a semantic role that the same verb devoid of the applicative marker cannot assign to an object.

4.2.1. -w-

Consider:

10. ki-we-w-un
PST-go-BEN-2Sg/Acc
Went for you

In example (10), the applied object is a pronominal, the benefactive morpheme *-w-* thus select a pronominal to play the role of an incorporated object. A look at a verb with the same morpheme but with a full Noun and not pronoun incorporation yields an ungrammatical structure; such constructions are not permissible in the language.

4.2.2. -chi-

Consider:

11. ki-me-chi-ok Cheiso
PST-die-BEN-2Pl/Acc. Jesus-Nom
Jesus died for you.
12. ki-me-chi Cheiso Piich
PST-die-BEN Jesus-Nom people-Acc
Jesus died for the people.

A look at the *-chi-* morpheme, the resultative applied object can either be a pronominal or a full NP.

4.3. Multiple Benefactives

The benefactive morpheme can co-occur with another benefactive morpheme in the verbal morphology. The verb structure therefore has two similar affixes, *-chi-* and *-chi-* or *-chi-* and *-w-* co-occurring together in that order and not in a different order. This co-occurrence has the meaning of someone doing something for somebody else on behalf of another person. The co-occurrence increases the number of arguments as the two benefactive objects become part of the core arguments. These arguments are required for semantic interpretation so all of them are overt. The benefactive morphemes are separated by the aspect *{-nèè-}*.

Consider the following:

- 13.a. ki-sir-chi lakwet kwanda baruet
PST-write-BEN Child-Nom father-Obl letter-Acc
The child wrote a letter for his father.
- b. ki-sir-chi-nee-chi ng'oriet lakwet kwandabaruet
PST-write-BEN1-ASP-BEN2 cloth-Obl1 child-Nom father-Obl letter-Acc

The child wrote the letter on his cloth for his father.

- 14 sal-chi-nee-w-an
 paint-BEN-ASP-BEN2-2Sg
 brush for him on my behalf.

The verbal morphology in (13.b) has the following features; tense *-ki-*, benefactive 1 *-chi-*, Aspect *-nee-* and benefactive 2 *-chi-*. The implication of such derivation on the feature theory is that there is creation of heads to check these features, further, for checking to occur, the base generated verbal complex moves up the tree diagram for checking purposes.

In (14), the verb form has also several affixes attached to the root *sal-* 'paint', these are benefactive 1 *-chi-*, aspect *-nee-*, benefactive 2 *-w-* and second person singular *-an-*. Different form of benefactive co-occurrence such as *-w-* and *-w-* or *-w-* and *-chi-* is not possible in the language.

The structure for 14 is thus diagrammatically represented as:

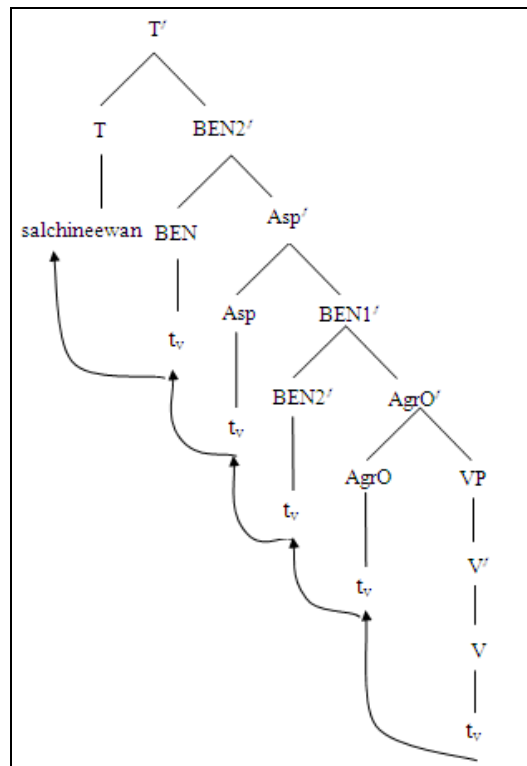


Figure 2

In the structure, the verb with its appendages moves through AgrO/, BEN1/, Asp', BEN2' to check for agreement, benefactive, aspect benefactive features, to land at T.

The co-occurrence of benefactive and benefactive in the language does not dictate the order of arguments that is relative to the affixes in the verb. The arguments in the structure can be used interchangeably in any post-verbal construction.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have briefly examined various aspects of the benefactive in Kipsigis. The paper has shown which verb forms select the benefactive since they are of two kinds, *-chi-* and *-w-*, and the kind of applied objects that are selected by these benefactives. Further, an indication of the categorical features carried by the verb is highlighted and how the same features are interpreted using Feature Checking analysis under minimalism. It is illustrated that fully inflected verbs are base generated and they move up the tree diagram to be checked. The implication of this is that nodes are created in order to check the features carried by the verb before full interpretation.

ⁱAbbreviations used in the glosses include: Acc- Accusative; Agr(O)- Agreement (Object); AgrS- Agreement (Subject); BEN- Benefactive; Nom- Nominative; NP(s)- Noun Phrase(s); Obl- Oblique; PST- Past Tense; T- Tense; v- verb; VP- Verb Phrase; 1Sg- First Person Singular; 2Sg- Second Person Singular; 2Pl- Second person plural;

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