Generic argument-structure head in the Wolof causative-benefactive syncretism

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Introduction. Wolof (Atlantic; Niger-Congo) has a morphological syncretism between causatives and benefactives, which both use the suffix *-al*. I argue that these distinct uses of *-al* are subsumed under a generalized causal relation. All instances of *-al* are then analyzable as spellouts of a single generic head — which receives its interpretation based on the syntactic context (*i.e.,* contextual allosemy; Marantz, 1997).

Distribution: Extern*al* arguments. Both causativization and applicativization involve the introduction of a non-core argument, differing only by whether it is external or internal (Pylkkänen, 2008). The argument introduced with *-al* to a clause *without* an external argument (*e.g.,* unaccusatives) receives a causer interpretation, in (1). The argument introduced with *-al* to a clause *with* an external argument (*e.g.,* transitives) receives a beneficiary interpretation, in (2).

(1) a. mango wadd-na=∅.
mango fall-C=3SG.S
'A mango fell.'

b. Omar wadd-(al)-na=∅ mango.
Omar fall-al_{CAUS}-C=3SG.S mango
'Omar made a mango fall.'

(2) a. Omar jënd-na=∅ teere.
Omar buy-C=3SG.S book
'Omar bought a book.'

b. Omar jënd-(al)-na=∅ Fanta teere.
Omar buy-al_{BEN}-C=3SG.S Fanta book
'Omar bought a book for Fanta.'

Two sources of caus*al*ity. I analyze both *-*al_{CAUS} and *-*al_{BEN} as encoding a causal relation between two events (Parsons, 1990; Pylkkänen, 2008). I argue that the external argument in *-al* causatives behaves like a canonical causer whilst in *-al* benefactive it behaves like an agent. Clauses with a transitivized verb using *-*al_{CAUS} contrast with those with a lexically transitive verb in that (i) the resulting event must occur in the former but not the latter and (ii) inanimate subjects are permitted in the former but not the latter; an 'intentionality' distinction. This mirrors the analysis of Martin and Schäfer (2012, 2013), who argue that the only difference between Causers and Agents in bi-eventive structures is the Modal Base (ρ) under which they are interpreted, in (3). I adopt the view that *-*al_{CAUS} and *-*al_{BEN} exactly parallel this distinction.

(3) $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda e_1 [\theta(e_1)(x) \wedge \Box_\rho \exists e_2 [\textsc{caus}(e_1)(e_2) \wedge P(e_2)]]$ where θ = AGENT or CAUSER

In the presence of a Causer, the Modal Base is *circumstantial*: the world of evaluation is not filtered out (*i.e.,* actuality-entailing). With an Agent, the Modal Base is *energetic*: the (intended) result need not occur in the actual world (*i.e.,* not actuality-entailing). Analogously, in *-al* causatives, the resulting event expressed by the verbal event must occur, as in (4a). In *-al* benefactives, I take the (potential) benefit as a predicate corresponding to the resulting subevent (Zúñiga, 2011), which need not occur or end up being beneficial, as in (4b).

(4) a. $\underbrace{\text{X}_{\text{CAUSER}} \text{ did something}}_{e_1}$ which $\overset{\Box_{crcm}}{\text{caused}}$ $\underbrace{\text{P to occur}}_{e_2}$ *Causative* (*-*al_{CAUS})

b. $\underbrace{\text{X}_{\text{AGENT}} \text{ did P}}_{e_1}$ with the $\overset{\Box_{nrg}}{\text{intent of causing}}$ $\underbrace{\text{Y}_{\text{Beneficiary}} \text{ to benefit}}_{e_2}$ *Benefactive* (*-*al_{BEN})

A structur*al* divide. The different interpretations of *-al* reflect the different heights at which it surfaces: *-*al_{CAUS} surfaces below the repetitive *-aati* whilst *-*al_{BEN} surfaces above it, in (5).

(5) a. Omar wadd-(al)-**aat(i)**-na=∅ mango bi.
Omar fall–al_{CAUS}-REP-C=3SG.S mango the
'Omar made the mango fall again.

b. Omar togg-**aat(i)**-(al)-na=∅ Fanta ceeb.
Omar cook-REP–al_{BEN}-C=3SG.S Fanta rice
'Omar cooked rice for Fanta again.

Following a derivational model, there is an order mismatch between the *-al* suffixes and their respective arguments — $-al_{CAUS}$ merges closer to the verb than $-al_{BEN}$ but the causer argument surfaces farther from the verb than the beneficiary argument, as schematized in (6).

(6) [CAUSER [$_{...}$ BEN [$_{...}$ $-al_{BEN}$ [$_{...}$ $-al_{CAUS}$ ...]]]]

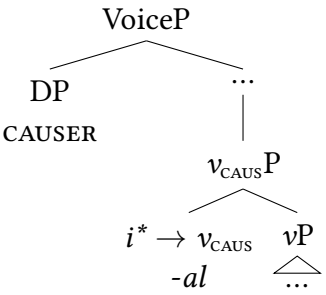
This ressembles Harley's (2013) puzzle in Hiaki, where the causative and applicative morpheme order does not reflect their respective argument's position — violating the Mirror Principle (Baker, 1985). I follow various proposals that treat the heads introducing causative semantics from those introducing arguments (Kratzer, 1996; Pylkkänen, 2008). More specifically, I argue that whilst *-al* introduces causative semantics, its argument can be either introduced in its specifier position — in benefactives — or later in the specifier of Voice — in causatives.

Contextu*al* *al*losemy in argument structure. Given that both $-al_{CAUS}$ and $-al_{BEN}$ (i) co-occur with the addition of an argument, (ii) contribute bi-eventive causative semantics, and (iii) are homophonous, I propose a unified analysis for treating *-al* as the spellout of a single generic argument-structure-manipulating head. This echoes Wood and Marantz's (2017) proposal that heads involved in argument structure — like *v*, Voice, Appl, and P — can be reduced to a single head: i^*; syntactic features are unneccesary when syntactic structure already reflects interpretative differences.

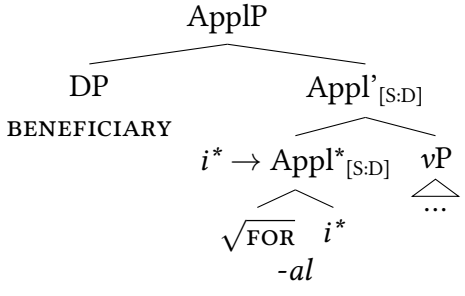
I propose that $-al_{CAUS}$ and $-al_{BEN}$ can be treated as the spellout of i^* in different syntactic contexts. In causative contructions, *-al* takes a change-of-state *v*P complement; it forms a v_{CAUS}P and the causer argument is introduced by Voice, as in (7a) and (8a). In benefactive constructions, before merging with a *v*P complement *-al* merges with a benefactive predicate (*i.e.,* $\sqrt{\text{FOR}}$) to create a complex head; it forms an Appl head and introduces the beneficiary argument in its specifier position, as in (7b) and (8b). This distinction is accounted for by the selectional feature [S:D] (*i.e.,* **S**elect for a **D**P) — hosted on Appl but not v_{CAUS}.

(7) a. $[\![i^*]\!] = \lambda P_{\langle s,t\rangle}\lambda e_1[\square_{crcm}\exists e_2[\text{CAUS}(e_1)(e_2) \wedge P(e_2)]]$
b. $[\![i^*_{\text{FOR}}]\!] = \lambda x\lambda e_1[\square_{nrg}\exists e_2[\text{CAUS}(e_1)(e_2) \wedge \text{Benefit}(e_2) \wedge \text{BEN}(e_2)(x)]]$

(8) a.



b.



Conclusion. I show that the verbal suffix *-al* incurs a causative interpretation to clauses without an external argument and a benefactive interpretation to clauses containing an external argument. I analyze both constructions as involving a causal relation between two events with $-al_{CAUS}$ surfacing structurally lower in the verbal spine than $-al_{BEN}$. I then argue for treating *-al* as the spellout of a single generic argument-structure-manipulating head in both causative and benefactive environments, which receives its interpretation via contextual allosemy.

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