Applicatives and secondary predicates

This paper examines instrumental applicative constructions in Niuean (VSO, ergative, Polynesian), which exhibit unusual behavior. I provide an analysis to account for their behavior, which extends the range of applicative constructions beyond the familiar high and low applicatives, and raises questions about their relation to complex predicate constructions (cf. Ball 2005, Carrier 2014, Cuervo 2003, Georgala 2012, Roberge and Troberg 2010).

(1a) shows a Niuean prepositional (aki) instrument, while (1b) shows that aki can appear within the predicate, and when it does, the instrument, like the theme, is licensed as an absolutive object, yielding a ditransitive sentence (Seiter 1980, Sperlich 1997). (P=proper, C=common)

(1)

a. Kua hele tuai e ia e falaoa aki e titipi
   Perf cut Perf Erg.P 3Sg Abs.C bread with Abs.C knife
   ‘He has cut the bread with the knife.’ (FN)

b. Kua hele aki tuai e ia e titipi e falaoa
   Perf cut with Perf Erg.P 3Sg Abs.C knife Abs.C bread
   ‘He has cut the bread with the knife.’ (FN)

Applicatives are commonly argued to have the following characteristics (e.g. Marantz 1993, Pylkkänen 2008, McGinnis 2008, Cuervo 2003, Kim 2011).

(2)

An applicative morpheme is in an Appl head that:
• introduces an argument in its specifier position.
• grammatically licenses it as an additional core internal argument.
• thematically licences it in some way.
• is high, relating its argument to the event, or low, relating it to the internal argument.

Niuean applicatives do not clearly exhibit these characteristics. They do not always grammatically license an additional argument. (3) shows a case where, because the agent has absolutive case, it is clear there is no grammatical absolutive object (i.e. a trace in this relative clause) licensed by aki. (If there is an absolutive object, an agent will have ergative case).

(3)

e kave toua [ne fa e hopo aki a ia]
AbsP cord rope [Nfut Prog jump with AbsP 3Sg]
‘the rope that she is jumping with.’

In addition, aki arguably does not introduce an argument in its specifier position (I will not outline the complex argumentation for this here, due to space), and it does not always assign an instrumental (or any) thematic role. In (4) all the arguments are thematically licensed independently of aki.

(4) Kua faka-epo aki he matua e asekulimi e muke.
   Perf cause-taste with Erg.C mother Abs.C ice-cream Abs.C baby
   ‘The mother let the baby taste the ice cream.’

Finally, aki has properties of both a high and a low applicative. Like a low applicative it can relate two internal arguments (4,6), but it also requires voice, and is arguably high in the structure, outside the core VP and above a range of secondary predicates (but below others). (5) shows its position in the predicate, above VP and two other secondary predicates denoting manner and direction (and below the universal quantifier and locative predicates).

(5) [vP Adv [vP Loc [vP UnivQ [vP aki [vP Dir [vP Man [VERB (NP)]]]]]]]

As seen above, Niuean aki appears in standard instrumental clauses (1b), and in causatives, allowing three arguments (causer, original agent, and original theme) to be expressed (4). It also appears in unaccusative double object constructions, with two absolutive arguments, where there is a CAUS (but no causer), a non-agentive subject, and a theme, as shown below.
Ne faka-kofu aki e vaka e tau laukou
Pst cause-cover with Abs.C canoe Abs.C Pl leaves
‘The canoe is covered with leaves.’

I provide a unified analysis for aki which accounts for the characteristics outlined above. I propose that aki is a light verb secondary predicate (cf. Ball 2008) that fronts along with the verb to yield VSO word order. It selects a ‘semi transitive’ small clause with a non-volitional subject (NVS) and a theme. In conjunction with agentive voice, the NVS is an instrument, in conjunction with causative voice, NVS is a causee, and in conjunction with CAUS voice (where there is no causer), the NVS is a non-agentive subject.

(7) Semi-transitive VP small clause – Non-volitional subject (NVS) and theme:

Vc
{AG ... vP
CAUS
}

aki
VP
NVS
V
Theme

knife cut bread (under trans Vc)
rope jump Null Cognate (a jump) (under unerg Vc)
child taste ice cream (under causative/Vc)
leaves cover canoe (under causative)

I will show that like all predicates in Niuean, aki can take a null non-case marked NP-pro argument within the predicate, accounting for (3). (Overt arguments appear outside the predicate). A final fact about Niuean applicatives is that the two absolutive arguments can appear in either order. I argue that this is due to the fact that aki allows whichever argument is focused to be the argument that it licenses, with the other argument being licensed as the non-applied object. (cf. Georgala 2012, Carrier 2014). (8) shows the alternative order for a sentence like (1b).

(8) Ne haha aki e Sione e kuli e akau.
Pst hit with Erg.P Sione Abs.C dog Abs.C stick
‘John hit the dog with a stick’.

The applicative marker aki is one of many light verb secondary predicates within the Niuean vP, and I compare it with others such as resultatives, and ai (a locative/temporal particle). I argue that the proposed analysis accounts for several mysterious properties of aki, such as its interaction with noun incorporation (Seiter 1980), and transitivity (Massam 1998), and its behavior in causatives and relative clauses. The analysis suggests that applicative markers share more properties with secondary predicates than is usually allowed for in traditional analyses.