Causatives

# Basic data

## Many languages indicate causation by adding an element which adds a causative meaning to an action and a causer argument

### this can be a bound morpheme appearing on the verb

#### Japanese

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Ziroo* | *ga* | *ik-u* |
| Ziro | nom | go-pres |
| ‘Ziro goes.’ | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Kanako* | *ga* | *Ziroo* | *o* | *ik-****ase****-ta* |
| Kanako | nom | Ziro | acc | go-caus-pst |
| ‘Kanako made Ziro go.’ | | | | |

### or it can be a separate verb – the periphrastic

#### he made Peter leave

### It is also possible to find something between these where the causative verb is a compound made up of a basic verb and a cause verb

#### Kobon (Papua New Guinea)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| a. | *mab* | *dudu.g-öp* |  | |
|  | tree | be.bent-perf.3sg |  | |
|  | ‘The tree is bent.’ | | | |
| b. | *yad* | *mab* | *dudu.gɨ* | ***yu****-bin* |
|  | 1sg | tree | be.bent | throw-perf.1sg |
|  | ‘I bent the tree.’ | | | |

#### The causative is considered a compound here as only one marking for aspect and tense is present

#### There are some languages where, although the two verbs are adjacent, they are not considered compounds as they both carry their own morphology:

#### Tamil (southern India)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *naan* | *avane* | *veekamaa* | *ooʈ-a* | *vacceen* |
| I | he.acc | quickly | run-purp | cause.pst.1sg |
| ‘I made him run quickly.’ | | | | |

#### note that the basic verb carries a marker of purpose and so is considered to be a non-finite complement of the causative verb

#### the two verbs are adjacent because of the V final requirement of the language (SSVV)

### this is potentially problematic as clearly not all languages which use the periphrastic causative have independent morphology on the embedded verb (e.g. English). If such a language were head final, it would be difficult to tell if it had periphrastic or compound causatives:

#### I him leave made

## Besides morphological and periphrastic causatives, many languages have lexical causatives, where a different lexical item expresses the causative version of certain basic verbs

### eat feed

### rise raise

### fall fell

### die kill

### learn teach

### lie lay

## Besides all this there are also cases of verbs which appear to have both causative and non-causative alternates

### the tree grew he grew the tree in the garden

### the ice melted they melted the ice

### the door opened she opened the door

# Causatives and meaning

## languages which have more than one kind of causative tend not to interpret them in identical ways

### he opened the door he made the door open

## these differ in terms of the directness of the involvement of the causer in the event concerning the theme

### he opened the door = he did something directly to the door which caused it to open

### he made the door open = he did something which caused the door to open

#### him opening the window made the door open

#### ?? him opening the window opened the door

# Theoretical Issues

## One of the first attempts to treat causatives within a theoretical framework was Lakoff 1965

## he noted the relationship between

### the soup is cool

### the soup cooled

### she cooled the soup

## he claimed that these are related in the same way that the following are related

### the soup is hot

### the soup became hot

### she made the soup become hot

## the difference is that in the first set the root becomes associated with abstract versions of ‘become’ and ‘make’ and hence both sets derive from the same underlying structures

S

NP VP

the soup V AP

BE cool

S

NP VP

S V

NP VP BECOME

the soup V AP

BE cool

S

NP VP

she V S

MAKE NP VP

S V

NP VP BECOME

the soup V AP

BE cool

## Transformations would then bring about the right surface form. McCawly 1968proposed that the relevant transformation was ‘predicate raising’ which shifted the root element from one abstract predicate to another, picking them up as it goes – this is remarkably like verb movement in more modern theories.

## McCawly 1968 also noted the similarity of Lakoff’s observation ot the following

#### John is dead

#### John died

#### Bill killed John

### he proposed that the same sort of analysis as Lakoff suggested should also be applied here. Though the problem is that the form of the verb changes at each step (unlike *cool*)

### To accommodate this, he claimed that lexical items are inserted into the structure only after the transformations apply.

### Thus, to start with, structures are totally constructed from abstract elements which become realised by lexical items at a later point in the derivation

## Evidence in favour of the transformational approach to causatives

### John almost closed the door

#### John almost caused the door to close

##### the door didn’t close at all!

#### John caused the door to almost close

##### the door did close a bit

### John closed the door again

#### John caused the door to close twice

#### John caused the door to close once

##### the door was previously closed

## Moreover

### John almost killed Bill

#### he almost caused Bill to die

##### nothing necessarily happens to Bill

#### he caused Bill to almost die

##### Bill becomes very sick

### John killed Bill again

#### John caused Bill to die twice

#### John caused Bill to die once

##### Bill was previously dead

# Later theoretical developments

## observations concerning morphological causatives, particularly the compound type, caused linguists to reinvent this story

### verb movement was already accepted from observations of finite verbs

### compound causatives seemed to indicate that verbs move to causative verbs in a similar way

### morphological causatives could be treated similarly, the difference being that they had no ‘free’ version

### the inchoative-causative alternates could also be accounted for similarly under the assumption of abstract causative morphemes (= CAUSE!!)

### Linguists were reluctant, however, to reinvent McCawly’s analysis of dead-die-kill because that seemed just too way out

### However, not all languages have the same lexical causatives. The following shows that in Turkish there is no verb ‘kill’ but a morphological causative based on the verb ‘die’

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