Beyond the causative continuum

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Introduction

- We take the concept of causatives for granted
- Inspired by a problem in the analysis of Bunun
- Additional data from Dutch
- A new model of agency and causation
- Methodological consequences
Stating the problem

• In many languages, causatives seem to be a useful theoretical construct to explain certain grammatical phenomena
• We more or less know what they are doing: they express causation
• So what’s the problem?
Stating the problem

“... a causative construction involves the specification of an additional argument, a causer, onto a basic clause. A causer refers to someone or something (which can be an event or state) that initiates or controls the activity.”

Dixon (2000: 30)
Stating the problem

• Structural notion of causatives:
  1. Causatives are seen in the first place as morphosyntactic phenomena.
  2. Causatives require the introduction of an argument.
  3. Causatives are central to the description of valency-changing derivations.
Stating the problem

“Causatives are grammatical mechanisms that are used to express causation, i.e. they express that in addition to the main participants of the event, an additional participant, the Causer, is relevant, which is not the main Agent of the event, but somehow causes it.”
Stating the problem

“causative (CAUS). (Construction, verb, affix) used in saying who or what causes something to happen.”

Matthews (2005: 49)
Takivatan Bunun

- Austronesian, Taiwan
- Bunun: ± 50,000 ethnic members
- Takivatan dialect: <1700 speakers
- ± 3 hours of transcribed and interlinearised text + elicited data
Takivatan Bunun

• A number of verbal prefixes have two or three variants:
  – Neutral variant: typically $m$-
  – Causative variant: initial $p$-
  – Associative variant: $k$-
# Takivatan Bunun

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<tr>
<th>Type</th>
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<td>Allative (ALL)</td>
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<td>Resultative object (RES.OBJ)</td>
<td>sin-</td>
<td>(pin-)</td>
<td>—</td>
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Takivatan Bunun

• Neutral variant:

(1) ma-suað maduq
DYN-grow millet

‘[They] grew millet’ (TVN-012-002:7)
Takivatan Bunun

- **Causative variant**: some sort of external causation is implied

(2) pi-sihal-un pa-lunjku
CAUS.STAT-good-UF CAUS.DYN-sit

‘You have to be good to him and give him a seat’
(lit: ‘[He] has to be good-ed and made to sit down’
(adapted from TVN-013-001:15)
Takivatan Bunun

- **Associative variant**: the agent is not the only agentive force performing the event

(3)  **ka**-lumaq  naipa  
**ASSOC.DYN**-home  **DEM.S.DIST.NVIS**

‘He went home’ [lit: ‘That one went home to be together with his family’]
(adapted from TVN-012-001:119)
Problem 1: causatives do not always behave as they are supposed to.

- They almost never trigger explicit expression of a Causer.

(4) \{pu-saupa-ta\} \[muʔu\]
\text{CAUS.ALL}-direction-DEF.REF.DIST 2P.N

‘They sent you to that place’ [lit: ‘(sb) made you go in the direction (of that place)’] (TVN-012-002:48)
Problem 1: causatives do not always behave as they are supposed to.

– … actually, this is only possible when the verb does not have agent-cross-referencing

(5) na {pun-han-un} [őaku] [aipi]
    thus CAUS.ALL-go-UF 1S.N DEM.PROX
[Kuhku-ta] {pa-tas?i-un}
GeoName-DEF.REF.PROX CAUS.DYN-make-UF
‘… I will take it to Rui-Sui to have it fixed.’ (TVN-xx2-004)
Takivatan Bunun

- **Problem 1**: causatives do not always behave as they are supposed to.
  - It is not clear that they cause demotion of the original agent.
Takivatan Bunun

• Problem 2: there is a tripartite alternation in prefixes that is best analysed as a paradigmatic opposition.

  ma- / pa- / ka-
  neutral   causative   associative

But a paradigm of what?
Takivatan Bunun

• **Control:**
  - Neutral *m*-forms:
    
    Agent = Controller
  
  - Causative *p*-forms:
    
    Causer = Controller
  
  - Associative *k*-forms:
    
    Agent + X = Controller
Dutch

- Indo-European, West-Germanic
- 21.7 million native speakers
- Corpus of Spoken Dutch (CGN), ± 9,900,000 words
- Examples from Dutch spoken in Flanders, Belgium
- Extracted with directed search queries
Dutch

• Accepted picture: two causative verbs
  – *doen* ‘do’: direct causation
  – *laten* ‘let’: indirect causation
  [Coppen et al. (2007), Verhagen & Kemmer (1997)]

• Fits into the traditional dichotomy: direct vs. indirect causation
Dutch

• Direct causation with *doen* ‘do’

(6) de stralen-de zon *doe-t* de temperatuur oplopp-en
the shine-ADJR sun do.PRES-3S the temperature rise-INF

‘The bright sun *makes* the temperature rise.’ (V&K)

– Causer has a tendency to be inanimate
(58%)
• Indirect causation with *laten* ‘let’

(7) de sergeant liet ons door de modder kruip-en
the sergeant let.PST us.ACC through the mud crawl-INF

‘The sergeant had/made us crawl through the mud.’ (V&K)

– Causer is typically animate (99%)
Problem 1: There are at least four causative verbs in Dutch:

- Laten ‘let’
- Doen ‘do’
- Maken ‘make’
- Geven ‘give’

Verhagen & Kemmer (1997) seem to focus on doen and laten because they allow for constructions with bare infinitives.
Dutch

- *Maken* ‘make’

1. CSR causes CSE to be in a certain STATE

\[
[\text{CSR}]_{\text{NP-Nom}} + \text{maken} + [\text{CSE}]_{\text{NP-Acc}} + [\text{STATE}]_{\text{AdjP}}
\]

(8) *hij maakte me nerveus*  
3S.NOM make-PST.S 1S.ACC nervous

‘He made me nervous’ (fv800876)
• *Geven* ‘give’

1. CSR give PAT to AG to cause AG to ACT onto PAT

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[CSR]}_{\text{NP-Nom}} + \text{geven} + \text{[AG]}_{\text{NP-Acc}} + \text{[PAT]}_{\text{NP-Acc}} \\
+ \text{te} + \text{[ACT]}_{\text{VP-trans}}
\end{align*}
\]

(11) Ø geef me gras te eten.

*give* 1S.NOM *grass* PRT *eat*-INF

CSR CAUSE AG PAT ACT

‘… make me eat grass.’ (fv800618)
Dutch

•  *Geven* ‘give’

2. AG give PAT to BEN in order to ACT

\[
[AG]_{NP-Nom} \ + \ \text{geven} \ + \ [BEN]_{NP-Acc} \ + \ [PAT]_{NP-Acc} \\
\ + \ \text{om te} \ + \ [ACT]_{\text{Predicate}}
\]

(13) geef me nog 'ns teksten om te lezen

give 1S.ACC yet PRT text-PL in.order.to PRT read-INF

‘… give me some other texts to read.’ (fv400243)
• *Geven* ‘give’

2. CSR give AG the gift to ACT (on PAT)

\[
[\text{CSR}]_{\text{NP-Nom}} + \text{geven} + [\text{het}]_{\text{NP-Acc}} + [\text{AG}]_{\text{NP-Acc}}
+ \text{te} + [\text{ACT}]_{\text{VP-trans}}
\]

(15) ..., *geef het ons te wandelen in Uw Geest*

  give 3S.N 1P.ACC PRT walk-INF in 2S.POSS spirit

  ‘[...] let us walk in Your Spirit.’ (internet)
Problem 2: in particular *laten* ‘let’ en *doen* ‘do’ have a variety of functions

- Some of these can be classified as causatives; others cannot.
- There are areas of ambiguity, where one usage cannot be clearly distinguished from another.
• **Laten**(1): indirect causation

CSR cause CSE ACT (onto PAT)

\[
[\text{CSR}]_{\text{NP-Nom}} + \text{laten} + [\text{CSE}]_{\text{NP-Acc}}
\]

\[
(+ [\text{PAT}]_{\text{NP-Acc}}) + [\text{ACT}]_{\text{Pred}}
\]

(16) ik laat hen iets voorbereid-en

1S.NOM let 3S.ACC something prepare-INF

CSR CAUSE CSE PAT ACT

‘I ask/demand them to them prepare something’ (fv4 00 1 52)
Dutch

- **Laten**(2): Permissive causation

  ALLOWER permit AG to ACT (onto PAT)
  \[\text{ALLOWER}_{\text{NP-Nom}} + \text{laten} + \text{[AG]}_{\text{NP-Acc}}\]
  \[+ [\text{PAT}]_{\text{NP-Acc}} + [\text{ACT}]_{\text{VP-trans}}\]

  (17) in 's hemelsnaam waarom laten ze die
gestelijk-en niet huw-en?
clergyman-PL not marry-INF

  ‘For God’s sake, why don’t they allow these clergymen
to marry?’ (fv400458)
Dutch

• **Laten**\(^{(3)}\): Do not hinder the continuation of an existing state

ALLOWER cause PAT to remain STATE

\[\text{[ALLOWER]}_{\text{NP-Nom}} + \text{laten} + \text{[PAT]}_{\text{NP-Acc}}\]

\[+ \text{[STATE]}_{\text{VP-intrans}}\]

\[(18) \quad \text{ze lat-en die daar zitt-en precies hé.}\]

3P.NOM let-INF that.one there sit-INF just INTER

‘Apparently, they just leave that one over there.’

[lit: ‘… just let that one sit there.’ (fv700078)\]
Dutch

- **Laten**: Hortative

let us ACT

\[ [1st \ pers]_{NP-Nom} \ + \ laten \ + \ [1st \ pers]_{NP-Acc} \ + \ [ACT]_{Pred} \]

(19) lat-en we ons tot de zaak bepal-en

let-PL 1P.NOM 1P.ACC till the case fix

‘Let’s focus on the case at hand.’ (fv800562)
Intermediate conclusion

• Causatives are more complex phenomena than we first thought
• Bunun morphological causatives are part of a ternary opposition that has paradigmatic properties
• Dutch periphrastic causatives have various functions and forms, and are connected to phenomena that are functionally and formally related but should probably not be classified as causatives.
A tentative solution

• Modularity
  – Methodological tool: 
    If a complex system is too difficult to analyse in its entirety, take it apart into meaningful subsystems
  – Theoretical principle: 
    Some/many complex grammatical concepts are epiphenomenal: they consist of a number of interacting subsystems
A tentative solution

• Control

“A causer refers to someone or something (which can be an event or state) that initiates or controls the activity. This is the defining property of the syntactic–semantic function A (transitive subject).”

(Dixon 2000: 30)
A tentative solution

• Control
  – What is Control were a functional category on par with Agency, rather than a property of Agency?
  – Agentivity = Agency + Control
A tentative solution
A tentative solution

• Control
  – Control would determine:
    • the conflation or separation of Agent and Controller
    • the degree of involvement the Controller has in the controlled event
  – Causation would be one possible manifestation of Control, i.e. situation where the Controller:
    • is maximally distinct from the Agent
    • exerts a high level of control
A tentative solution

• Control
  – The traditional concept of Agency (which I here have called Agentivity) would become epiphenomenal: it would be the artefact of an interaction of (at least) two subsystems.
A tentative solution

• Control
  – In Bunun, the locus of control is of main importance

Neutral \(m\)-forms: internal control
  \[\text{Agent} = \text{Controller}\]

Causative \(p\)-forms: external control
  \[\text{Causer} = \text{Controller}\]

Associative \(k\)-forms: joint control
  \[\text{Agent} + X = \text{Controller}\]
A tentative solution

• Control

Neutral

Causative

Associative
A tentative solution

• Control
  – For Dutch causative constructions, locus and involvement of Control are both relevant parameters
A tentative solution
A tentative solution

• The causative continuum
  direct — sociative — indirect
  (Shibatani & Pardeshi 2002)
  – Causation is not just a direct-indirect contrast
  – There is a link between verb classes and causation
A tentative solution
A tentative solution

• The extended continuum
  – The model here presented extends/unfolds the CC in more dimensions
  – At the moment, it lacks a clear link between function and form
  – Next step: interaction between modules
Conclusion

• Causatives are complicated
  – Structural and functional variation
  – Interrelations with similar phenomena

• Any narrow view on causatives blocks out many of these phenomena

• Modularity is a way to integrate these complexities in our linguistic description
Conclusion

- Agentivity might be epiphenomenal
- Control as a full-fledged functional category rather than a property of Agency
- Causation can then be explained as a manifestation of Control where:
  - Agent and Controller are maximally distinct
  - The involvement of the Controller is high


De Busser, Rik. 2009. *Towards a Grammar of Takivatan: Selected Topics*. PhD dissertation at the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.


Uninang miqumisang!

Dank u voor uw aandacht!