Beyond the causative continuum

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In the study of valency-increasing devices, causatives – alongside applicatives – have traditionally taken the center stage. In this talk, I will focus on causatives and demonstrate how their perceived importance often obscures the fact that in some languages there is a wider spectrum of morphological or syntactic mechanisms that are structurally and functionally very similar to causatives, but are mostly ignored in descriptive and typological studies.

In this talk, I will discuss causative and related constructions in Bunun and Dutch. Based on this data and on Shibatani & Pardeshi (2002)'s concept of the causative continuum, I will suggest that causation is part of a larger functional domain, which could be subsumed under control and which closely interact with agency.

1. Stating the problem: what is wrong with our conception of causation?

In this talk, I will try to explain what is wrong with our (i.e. the traditional, the commonly accepted) notion of what causatives are and do.

There is nothing inherently wrong with causatives. It is clear that causation and causatives are useful concepts in the description of the grammar of many languages. However, it might be useful to change the way we think about them (and about valency-changing derivation and valency in general).

How do people think about causatives? Let's have a look at some definitions.

> "… 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)

There are other definitions, that talk about two events (a causal event and a caused/effected event) being expressed and are therefore more functionally oriented, but these still have results 2 and 3. An example:

> The causative verb (here *laten* or *doen*) expresses what we will call a 'causal predicate', i.e. some type of cause; we will be more specific about the nature of the causal semantics of these verbs in the course of this paper. The infinitive in the construction expresses what we will call the 'effected predicate': the process or state brought about by the causal predicate.
>
> Verhagen & Kemmer (1997:62)

The problem, especially as a consequence of result 3, is that we think it is unproblematic that we assume causation to be an established concept that is grammatically delineated (i.e. has unambiguous, established and clear grammatical boundaries). In doing that, we create an artificial conceptual perimeter (cf. knowledge horizon), which restricts which phenomena we are looking for and are interested in.

I hope to demonstrate in this talk that there are phenomena out there that are structurally and functionally related to causatives, and that are relevant and interesting from a linguistic viewpoint, but that are at the moment either excluded from accounts of valency-changing derivation and causation, or treated as 'atypical' causatives.

For the purpose of this talk, we will assume 'causative' to be a functional notion:

> 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.

Or, according to Matthews (2005), more simply:

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

2. Takivatan Bunun

A subset of verbal prefixes has two or three variant forms. There is a neutral variant, typically with an initial morph *m-*.

(1) ma-suað maduq
DYN-grow millet

'[They] grew millet' (TVN-012-002:7)

A causative variant with initial *p-* expresses that some sort of external causation is implied

(2) pi-sihal-un **pa**-luŋku
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)

An associative variant with initial *k-* expresses that the agent is not the only agentive force performing the event (cf. sociative causation in Shibatani & Pardeshi (2002))

(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)

There are two main problems with this tripartition.

2.1. Problem 1: Atypical causative behaviour

The first is that the causative prefixes (with *p-*), although they have clear causative semantics (a causative function), has a number of syntactic behaviours that are problematic:
They almost never trigger explicit expression of the Causer:

(4) {**pu**-saupa-ta} [muʔu]
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)

It is grammatically possible to express a Causer, but only when UF *-un* or LF *-an* are present.

(5) na {**pun**-han-**un**} [**ðaku**] [aipi]
thus **CAUS.ALL**-go-**UF** **1S.N** DEM.PROX
[Kuhku-ta] {pa-tasʔi-un}
GeoName-DEF.REF.PROX CAUS.DYN-make-UF

'… I will take it to Rui-Sui to have it fixed.' (TVN-xx2-004)

This is relatively common with stative verbs. Another problem is that causatives do not cause clear syntactic demotion of the original agent, something that both Comrie (1976) and Dixon (2000) consider to be a characteristic of causative constructions.

2.2. Problem 2: Tripartite paradigm

The three prefixal variants (*m/p/k-*) are mutually exclusive and they appear to be functionally related.

ma-	/	pa-	/	ka-
neutral		causative		associative
←*more*		*frequent*		*less*→

They are therefore best analysed as being in paradigmatic opposition, but what kind of paradigm?
You could say that they all have something to do with who controls the event, and we will see in 4 how this helps us to formulate a possible solution to our causative problem. A short foreshadowing:

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

3. Dutch

Dutch has a number of periphrastic causative constructions. The electronic version of the ANS (Coppen et al. (2007)) mentions two, *doen* 'do' and *laten* 'let'. Verhagen & Kemmer (1997) argue that the difference between the two is that between direct and indirect causation.

(6) de stralen-de zon **doe-t** de temperatuur oplop-en
the shine-ADJR sun do.PRES-3S the temperature rise-INF
'The bright sun **makes** the temperature rise.' (V&K)

(7) de sergeant **liet** ons door de modder kruip-en
the sergeant let.PST.S us.ACC through the mud crawl-INF
'The sergeant **had/made** us crawl through the mud.' (V&K)

There are two problems with this general picture.

3.1. Other causative verbs

There are at least four verbs in Dutch that can be used in periphrastic causative constructions. In order of frequency in the corpus extracts:

(a) *Laten* 'let'

(b) *Doen* 'do'
(c) *Maken* 'make'
(d) *Geven* 'give'

3.1.1. Maken 'make'

Constructions with *maken* 'make' can express causation, but only combine with words expressing a state (typically adjectives).

CSR causes CSE to be in a certain STATE
$[CSR]_{NP\text{-}Nom}$ + maken + $[CSE]_{NP\text{-}Acc}$ + $[STATE]_{AdjP}$

(8) hij maakte me nerveus
3S.NOM make-PST.S 1S.ACC nervous
'He made me nervous' (fv800876)

Sometimes, causative *make* also combines with other word classes that express a state. In (9), *aan het lachen* is a prepositional phrase with an infinitive used as a noun; in (10), *deelgenoot* is a noun phrase.

(9) ... ze maakte me ook aan het lachen
3S.F.NOM make-PST.S 1S.ACC also at the.N laugh-INF
'[Lulu was teasing me, but] she also made me laugh.' (fv800706)

(10) maak mij deelgenoot.
make 1S.ACC partaker
'let me partake [in this religious knowledge].' (fv801435)

3.1.2. Geven 'give'

Geven occurs in three structurally different causative patterns. The first is unambiguously causative and has been attested in the CGN.

CSR give AG ACT onto PAT
$[CSR]_{NP\text{-}Nom}$ + geven + $[AG]_{NP\text{-}Acc}$ + $[PAT]_{NP\text{-}Acc}$ + te + $[ACT]_{VP\text{-}trans}$

(11) Ø geef me gras te eten.
give 1S.NOM grass PRT eat-INF
CSR CAUSE AG PAT ACT
'… make me eat grass.' (fv800618)

A second is formally similar to purposive constructions (see 12), but has causative

undertones, as in (13).

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

(12) dat geef-t mij meer moed om te werk-en.
that give-3S 1S.ACC more courage in.order.to PRT work-INF
'That gives me more courage to work.' (fv700184)

(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)

A third construction has only been attested on Dutch from the Netherlands. It appears to be only used in religious texts, involves an all-powerful being bestowing a certain event on an Agent, and often can be interpreted as a permissive causative.

CSR (typically God) give AG the gift to ACT (on PAT)
$[CSR]_{NP\text{-}Nom}$ + geven + $[PAT/it]_{NP\text{-}Acc}$ + $[AG]_{NP\text{-}Acc}$ + te + $[ACT]_{VP\text{-}trans}$

(14) … geef het ons te kennen...
give 3S.N 1P.ACC PRT know-INF
'[If You have special wishes,] let us know it ...' (internet)

Even if this event is intransitive, a dummy object *het* 'it' is present.

(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)

3.2. Structural and functional variation

The examples with *geven* 'give' already foreshadow a second problem with a simple classification of verbs into two neat causative types (direct vs. indirect causation): all causative verbs can occur in a number of constructions, which often appear to be functionally and/or structurally related, but do not all neatly fit in the 'causative' category. We will illustrate this below with *laten*.

3.2.1. Laten 'let'

The prototypical use for this verb is as an indirect coercive causative.

CSR cause CSE ACT (onto PAT)
$[CSR]_{NP\text{-}Nom}$ + laten + $[CSE]_{NP\text{-}Acc}$ (+ $[PAT]_{NP\text{-}Acc}$) + $[ACT]_{VP}$

(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' (fv400152)

Laten can be used to express a permissive causative:

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

(17)	in 's hemelsnaam	waarom	laten	ze	die
	for.God's.sake	why	let-PL	3P.NOM	those.P

geestelijk-en	niet	huw-en?
clergyman-PL	not	marry-INF

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

The implication of causation is very weak in (9) and one might wonder if it is correct to classify these constructions as causatives at all.

The previous two patterns are both described by Verhagen & Kemmer (1997); the next two are not.

Laten can also express that a participant, below called the Allower, does not stop a state from continuing to exist. Unlike the constructions above, this type of construction does not express permission and it can only occur with intransitive verbs expressing a state (or transitive verbs of perception).

ALLOWER cause PAT to remain STATE
$[ALLOWER]_{NP\text{-}Nom}$ + laten + $[PAT]_{NP\text{-}Acc}$ + $[STATE]_{VP\text{-}intrans}$

(18)	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)

Finally, *let* constructions that are identical to the coercive and permissive causative constructions can have a hortative meaning. In these cases, the slots that are normally taken by the Allower/Causer and by the Causee/Agent must be filled with first person

personal pronouns.

let us ACT
[1st pers]$_{NP\text{-}Nom}$ + laten + [1st pers]$_{NP\text{-}Acc}$ +[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)

4. A possible solution

4.1. Modularity

Modularity (in my interpretation) is an analytical principle whereby overly complex systems are considered to be consisting of a number of interacting subsystems. Generally, the main reason for a modular analysis is complexity reduction and transparency. There are two possible interpretations (implementations?) of modularity in linguistics:

- Methodological: If a complex linguistic phenomena is too complex to analyse in its entirety, take it apart into meaningful subsystems, which are less complex, and analyse these individually. (Optional: Then analyse the interactions between the subsystems and see if you can reintegrate them in a coherent fashion.)
- Theoretical: Some complex grammatical concepts are epiphenomenal. They actually consist of a number of subsystems that interact in a suboptimal manner but nevertheless produce a result that we (linguists? speakers?) perceive as systematic.

Whichever interpretation of the modular principle you use, it will allow you to view linguistic phenomena in a new way without necessarily giving up on your beloved linguistic terminology.

4.2. Agency and 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)

As the excerpt above illustrated, Control is seen a property of participants and a high degree of Control is associated with Agents and/or Subjects.

Suppose this is not entirely correct. What is Control were a syntactic property on par with Agency, rather than a property of Agency? In other words, Agency would become a complex phenomenon resulting from the interaction from two subsystems:

Agentivity = Agency + Control

Suppose then that you could classify Controllers along some sort of continuum, in a way that is not unsimilar to how you classify Agents. (Taking into account both Bunun and Dutch data, this appears to work only when you assume at least two classificatory dimensions for Control.)

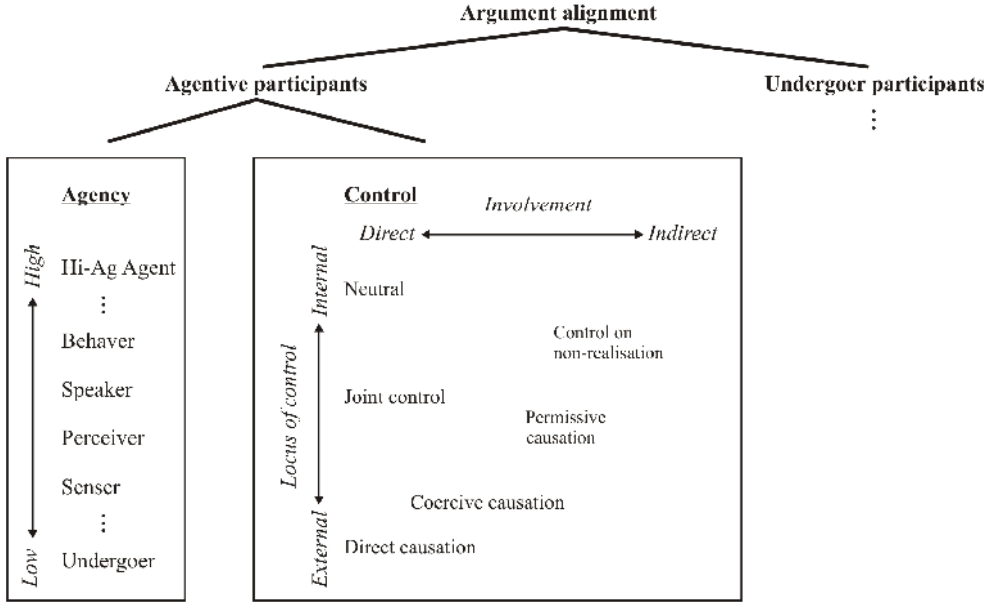

Figure 1. Agentivity

In such an analysis, Control would be determined by two parameters:

- The conflation or separation of Controller and Agent
- The degree of involvement of the Controller in the controlled event

The result is that causation is not just a phenomenon by itself anymore, but is part of a larger group of phenomena that revolve about the status of Agent and Controler in the event. Direct causation would be a manifestation of Control were:

- Agent and Controller are maximally distinct, i.e. the Agent performs the action but does not control it.
- The Controller exerts a high level of Control, i.e. has a direct (typically physical) influence on bringing about the event.

This analysis would give us an elegant solution for the Bunun tripartition, and it would enable us to fit the variation in Dutch in one functional category.

4.3. Why 'The causative continuum and beyond'?

Rather than assuming a binary distinction between direct and indirect causation, Shibatani & Pardeshi (2002) argued that there existed a continuum that had the two as extremes. They postulated for the existence of a mediating type of sociative causation that expressed something very similar to joint action and provided a functional and formal pathway from direct to indirect causation.

direct —— sociative —— indirect

The analysis set forth in this talk is based on their assumption of gradual transition between subtypes of causation, but that causation is part of a much larger n-dimensional functional field that also includes other phenomena and interacts with Agency.

6. Conclusion

- Causatives are more complicated than we thought. In many languages, there is much more functional and formal variation than is often assumed.
- Often, this variation goes unnoticed.
- A modular approach to grammatical analysis is a possible solution for narrow-sightedness and might provide us with a good method to tackle complex grammatical phenomena.
- One possible result of such an approach is the conclusion that Agentivity is a conflation of two functional categories: Agency and Control.
- Causation can then be explained as a manifestation of Control in which (a) Agent and Controller are maximally distinct and (b) the degree of involvement of the Controller is high.

7. Abbreviations

1P: 1st person plural	CAUS: causative	NOM: nominative
1S: 1st person singular	CSE: cause	PAT: patient
1S: 1st person singular	CSR: causer	PL: plural
2P: 2nd person plural	DEF: definiteness marker	POSS: possessive

2S: 2nd person singular	DEM: demonstrative	PRES: present tense
3S: 3rd person singular	DYN: dynamic verb	PROX: proximal
ACC: accusative	F: feminine	PRT: particle
ACT: action	INF: infinitive	PST: past
ADJR: adjectivizer	INTER: interjection	REF: referential
AG: agent	N: neuter gender (Dutch)	S: singular
ALL: allative	N: neutral form (Bunun)	UF: undergoer focus
BEN: beneficiary		

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