

The Causative-Anticausative Alternation Revisited

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1. Introduction While there is a consensus that a causative-anticausative alternation is attested across languages, the derivation of this verbal alternation has been subject to on-going controversy. Under one major type of approach the alternation is derived by an *anticausativization* operation applying to the causative/transitive form, and under another, by a *causativization* operation adding an argument to the base. On the causativization approach (e.g., Pesetsky 1995, Harley 2008, Pylkkänen 2008), the anticausative verb has no Cause operator/role present either in its syntactic or semantic representation. In contrast, popular versions of the anticausativization approach, as the one put forward by Chierchia (2004), and elaborated by Koontz-Garboden (2009), assume that the anticausative (e.g. Spanish *romperse* 'break (intrans)') retains a Cause operator present in the lexical semantic representation of the causative/transitive alternate (*romper* 'break (trans)'). We first argue against the presence of Cause in the anticausative alternate. We then compare the causativization and decausativization (total reduction) approaches, and argue that the latter is responsible for the transitive-unaccusative (and subject Experiencer) alternation.

2. Cause in anticausatives? Empirical phenomena commonly cited as evidence for the presence of Cause in anticausatives are (i) a modifier like *por sí solo* 'by itself' (Koontz-Garboden 2009), taken to require syntactic binding by a Cause subject, is licensed (1a), (ii) the Cause operator can be negated and therefore exists, as in (1b); (iii) a Cause-like adjunct can be added to the anticausative alternate (1c), (Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou and Schäfer 2006 a.o.), which is taken as evidence that Cause is present in the representation.

- (1) a. El barco se hundió por sí solo. (Spanish)
the boat SE sank by SELF only ('The boat sank by itself')
b. Son: El vaso se rompió 'The glass broke'
Father: No se rompió sino que tú lo rompiste! 'The glass didn't break, you broke it!'
c. The window cracked/broke from the pressure/from the explosion.

Arguments (i)-(iii) turn out on closer examination to be invalid. (i) For the subject (the binder) to be a Cause is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the licensing of the modifier 'by itself' (see also Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995). The modifier is impossible in sentences such as (2a), although the subject is a Cause, and in sentences such as (2b), although these are non-agentive (Theme) unergatives, which involve no Cause at all.

- (2) a. Ha-šemeš yibša et ha-šlulit (*me-acma). (Hebrew)
the-sun dried ACC the-puddle (from-itself)
b. Ha-ramkol hidhed me-acmo.
the-loudspeaker echoed from-itself

Examining the Hebrew counterparts of 'by itself' (*be-acmo* 'in-himself' and *me-acmo* 'from-himself'), we will clarify its licensing conditions.

(ii) We demonstrate that in (1b) it is not the Cause that is negated; rather, the negation is metalinguistic (i.e., has a non-truth functional use; it is a comment about the utterance rather than being part of an utterance), and therefore does not evince the presence of a Cause. Two independent arguments lead us to this conclusion. First, Hungarian, which distinguishes between metalinguistic negation (3a) and logical (non-metalinguistic) negation (3b-c) by the pre-verbal vs. post-verbal position of its verbal particles respectively, shows that negation in the relevant examples is metalinguistic as only the particle-verb order is possible (4).

- (3) a. Mari nem ki-javított néhány hibát, ő ki-javított minden hibát. (Hungarian)
Mari NEG PRT-corrected several error- ACC she PRT -corrected every error- ACC
'Mari didn't correct several errors, she corrected all errors.'
b. Mari nem javított ki néhány hibát. 'Mari didn't correct several errors.'
Mari NEG corrected PRT several error-ACC
c. *Mari nem ki-javított néhány hibát.
(4) Son: El-tört a pohár. 'The glass broke.' (Hungarian)
a. Father: #A pohár nem tört el, hanem te törted el!
the glass NEG broke PRT rather you broke-it PRT
b. Father: A pohár nem el-tört, hanem te el-törted!
the glass NEG PRT-broke, rather you PRT-broke-it

'The glass didn't break, rather you broke it.'

Second, metalinguistic negation does not license negative polarity items (NPI) (Horn 1985:135). Indeed, (5) is anomalous, unlike its reflexive counterpart, whose subject indeed is both Agent and Theme, and therefore its Agenthood can be negated; as that is logical negation, NPI is licensed (6).

- (5) #Af ke'ara lo nišbera, Dan šavar et kol ha-ke'arot. (Hebrew)
 no bowl NEG broke, Dan broke ACC all the-bowls
 (6) Af talmid lo niršam la-toranut, ha-mora rašma et ha-talmidim.
 no pupil NEG registered.REFL to-duty, the-teacher registered ACC the-pupils
 'No pupil signed up for duty, the teacher signed the pupils up.'

(iii) Addition of a Cause-like adjunct to anticausatives (1c) does not mean that their lexical-semantic representation bears information about such an entity. The addition of such adjuncts is allowed also by verbs that do not participate in any parallel alternation (7) and even by adjectives (8). There is also direct evidence for the absence of Cause in anticausatives. A Cause role assigned to a human-denoting argument is interpretable as Agent, which licenses Instruments (e.g., in the passive (9)) (and also Agent control into rationale clauses and Agent oriented adverbs). Yet the anticausative fails to do so (10) in contrast to (9).

- (7) a. He screamed from the pain. b. She cried from relief.
 c. Hu hit'ateš me-ha-pilpel (Hebrew) d. Hi rakda mi-simxa. (Hebrew)
 he sneezed from-the-pepper she danced from-happiness
 (8) a. The sheet was moist from the humid air. b. His skin is red from an inflammation.
 (9) a. The patient was healed (with Chinese herbs). b. Hu kurar be-kerax. (Hebrew)
 he cooled+down.PASS with-ice
 (10) a. The patient healed (*with Chinese herbs). b. Hu hitkarer (*be-kerax) (Hebrew)
 he cooled+down (with-ice)

3. Decausativization We first argue that total reduction of a role is possible in the lexicon although it is illegitimate in the syntax. We then distinguish the transitive-unaccusative and transitive-subject-Experiencer alternation from the causative-transitive and causative-unergative alternation based on (i) their morphology across languages (e.g., Haspelmath (1993) notes that crosslinguistically, the latter does not show any morphological indeterminacy, unlike the former), and (ii) the type of external role (added/reduced): only the former alternation is always associated with a Cause external role; the latter may be associated with an Agent (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995, Reinhart 2002, a.o.). Under the decausativization approach to the transitive-unaccusative/subject-Experiencer alternation, the set of unaccusative verbs can be naturally defined: Intransitives with a Theme role are unaccusatives only if they are derived by Cause reduction (we will discuss cases where the transitive alternate is missing altogether). Moreover, the decausativization approach allows explaining why reduction is constrained this way. We propose that a cognitive principle underlies the ban against reduction of roles involving a mental state [+m]. Conceptualization of eventualities triggered by a Cause is possible even in the absence of the Cause. Thus, humans can conceptualize the eventuality *open* abstracting away from the Cause of the opening event (although clearly every opening event is caused by something). In contrast, in conceptualization of eventualities brought about by Agents, humans are unable to disregard the causing entity; they perceive it as an inherent part of the eventuality. Thus, humans' cognition is unable to envision the eventuality *write* without a writing entity. This cognitive principle is manifested also in the fact that animate noun-phrases, in contrast to inanimates, preserve their animacy in metaphorical transfers (Nunberg, Sag and Wasow 1994). This in turn explains why [+m] arguments are largely unattested in idioms, as idioms describe abstract situations, which animates being concrete entities can hardly refer to.

References

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