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Expressing volition, imposition and valency through causatives

ABSTRACT

The present study analyzes the different ways in which causative structures in these languages express the ideas of causation, volition vs imposition, and temporal sequencing of actions. The examples have been gathered from media discourse (written and spoken examples of news reports, articles or discussions from electronic media), and informal conversations with the native speakers of the languages during interviews and discussions.

The forms of expressing the concepts of *desire*, *wish*, *will* on the one hand, and the forms of *expressing imposition*, *request*, *incentive*, *order* or *involuntary action*, on the other, differ across languages from purely syntactic structures to morphological, or lexical-semantic means.

Key words: *causative, causation, volition, imposition, latency*

Introduction

Aims and research questions

The present research investigates the concept of causation and its expression in Indo European and non-Indo-European languages on the examples of Georgian (non Indo European), English, German and Russian (Indo-European) languages.

Causation is expressed through morphological affixation in the Georgian language and is constructed through syntax in most Indo-European languages, for instance, in German and English.

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Theoretical framework

Expressing causation across languages presents manifold interests from morphological, syntactic and typological standpoints. In grammar, the concept that is expressed through morphological derivation in one language (Georgian), can be expressed through syntactic structure in others (English). From semantic-pragmatic perspective, the interplay of precise semantic meaning of causation and pragmatic shades of meaning of imposition, request, incentive, voluntary or involuntary actions presents yet further points of interest.

Methodology

The main methodology used in the research is cross linguistic and typological analysis. Constructing and conveying the ideas of causation and causatives in different languages are the research issues that yield noteworthy findings in language typology, linguistic psychology, and cognitive processes involved in language acquisition. Hence, causatives present an interesting psycholinguistic and typological topic to be researched.

Georgian language, for instance, offers complex verbal forms and affixation for expressing the concept of causation, while English has a specific syntactic structure for stating the same idea, and German and Russian offer further specific syntactic constructions for expressing the same concept.

Hence, causation bears one more testimony to the typological difference between analytic and agglutinative languages.

Data

The present study analyzes the different ways in which causative structures in these languages express the ideas of causation, volition vs imposition, and temporal sequencing of actions. The examples have been gathered from media discourse (written and spoken examples of news reports, articles or discussions from electronic media), and informal conversations with the native speakers of the languages during interviews and discussions.

Empirical study and findings

It is well-known that causation entails in itself the primary meaning of imposition, responsibility, agency, and volition.

Examples:

- a) *I had the car repaired.*
- b) *She had the letter published.*

However, there are cases when involuntary causation occurs. This latter form is mainly expressed morphologically in synthetic and agglutinative languages (e.g. Georgian) and is transferred syntactically in analytical languages (e.g. English, German).

Example:

- c) *ნამცხვარი შემოძღვადა.*

[Namcxvari šemomech'ama].

[I ate the entire cake without realizing it].

It literally means: *the cake was so delicious it made me eat it up without realizing*

the fact (or, I only realized it upon the completion of the eating process).

One interesting case of causation is the verb *methinks* (Georgian *mepikreba*), which is no longer or rarely used in modern English. It expresses the involuntary mental or cognitive activity that makes an experiencer feel or think in a certain way.

However, in Georgian such verbs that express involuntary mental or cognitive activity are in abundance, e.g.:

- d) *მეეჭვება* [*meech'veba*] [*I doubt it*; literal meaning: *it makes me doubt*];
- e) *მეადვილებს* [*meadvileba*] [*it is easy for me*; literal meaning: *it makes me feel that it is easy*];
- f) *მეწერინება* [*mec'erineba*] [*I write it*, literal meaning: *either inspiration or circumstances or my condition make me write something, say, a poem or a story*];
- g) *მეჩვენება* [*mechveneba*] [*it seems to me*, literal meaning: *I might be seeing or feeling things*].

The complex affixation system of the Georgian language makes it possible to express the involuntary causation in one single word. The preverb *me-* in such verbs presents a particular interest for morpho-semantic analysis, in which the first-person singular is expressed. Other points of interest are the suffixes *-in* and *-eb* express the meaning of involuntary causation.

The same idea in Russian and German are expressed through dative cases:

- h) Mn'e dumaets'a
- i) Mn'e nravitsa
- j) Mir gefällt.

Another interesting feature of the Georgian language is the presence of ergative constructions. The ergative case (or literally, the Narrative case, as it is referred to in Georgian) presents a particularly interesting instance for cross linguistic comparative and typological analysis.

For instance, an interesting case of ergative construct triggering causation meaning is demonstrated in the following causative structure, where the additional meanings volition/involition are intertwined:

- k) *შიშმა გადამაწყვეტინა* [*šišma gadamac'q'vet'ina*], [*fear has made me make this decision*].

Conclusion

The present research makes a conjecture that not only do the ergative constructions denote the agent of the action but semantically they add extra shades of meaning of responsibility, intentionality, intentionality and in certain cases, causality to the entire statement.

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