

Kudrnáčová, Naděžda

The specific semantico-syntactic status of secondary agent constructions

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2 The Specific Semantico-Syntactic Status of Secondary Agent Constructions

Caused motion situations expressed in sentences like *John walked Harry to the door*, *They swam the cattle to the shore*, *The trainer ran the athletes around the track*, *John danced (/waltzed) Mary to the other end of the ballroom*, *John jumped the horse over the fence*, *John pranced (/cantered/ trotted, etc.) the horse* have a specific character. The syntactic configuration 'NP - VP - NP (- PP)' is the pattern used for lexical causatives, which present situations involving the merging of the causing event and the caused event. The common way of expressing this situation is to say that the cause and the result merge (owing to the absence of a mediating event between the two subevents, the causation has been traditionally described as direct, cf. Fodor 1970, McCawley 1978, Shibatani 1976 and many others). Since lexical causatives require a single clause, they denote a single event only, which is in accordance with the general principles of iconicity in syntax (Haiman 1985). In the types of constructions under consideration, the causing event and the caused event also merge to form a single unit. Here, however, the causee's movement is not solely a result of the energy that is transmitted from the causer to the causee. The causee represents a second energy source that underlies the motion (cf. Davidse and Geyskens 1998). That is, in spite of playing a patientive role, the causee displays features characteristic of agents. More specifically, he is the executor of a volitional impulse instigating the motion and the executor of conscious control over its course. The sentence *John walked Harry to the door* thus entails *Harry walked to the door*. In other words, these constructions express situations in which both the causer and the causee actively participate in the action but each of them displays a different hierarchical position in the causal structuration of the situation: the causer assumes a dominant, controlling position and the causee assumes a subordinate, controlled position.

We may thus say that the causee plays the role of a 'secondary agent' (Lyons 1969:365 uses the term the "agentive object"). The construction expressing the caused motion situations in question will thus be termed a 'secondary agent construction' ('SA construction' henceforth).¹ Although the term 'secondary agent' is a simplified one and cannot grasp

1 Langacker (1991: 412-413) uses the term 'secondary agent' to designate a causee that is "secondary in the sense of being downstream from the original energy source, yet agentive in the sense of having some initiative role".

all the relevant aspects of the situation, its application to the causee in SA constructions captures the Janus-headed position of this participant. In concrete terms, the causee is both a controlled participant, causally affected by the causer (the causee is the recipient of energy transmitted to him by the causer, who is a 'primary agent' in the sense of bearing primary responsibility for the action), and an agent, volitionally and consciously carrying out a given movement. The term 'secondary agent' is explicit enough to differentiate between constructions involving 'multiple agency' (on 'multiple agents' see Parsons 1994: 83) and periphrastic causative constructions, which involve what may, for the purpose of the present discussion, be termed 'double agency'. The former type of construction is exemplified by

- (2.1) a) John and Harry walked to the door.
 b) John walked to the door with Harry.

and the latter type of construction is exemplified by

- (2.2) a) John made (/had) Harry walk to the door.
 b) John forced (/got) Harry to walk to the door.

In the constructions in examples (2.1a) and (2.1b), 'multiple agents' have the same semantic status in that they both execute the motion denoted by the verb and, at the same time, their movements are not causally related. Certainly, the syntactic configurations in (2.1a) and in (2.1b) differ. The configuration in (2.1b) expresses what Parsons (1994: 83) terms 'displaced conjunction'; the movement of the agent in the subject position thus has a comitative flavour.

In the analytic causative constructions in the examples in (2.2), two agents are on the scene but, importantly, their actions are causally related. The operation of the causer is external because the causer remains outside the caused event, so to say. The causing event (John's action) and the caused event (Harry's movement) do not merge but represent two self-contained units (hence the provisional term 'double agency'). From this it follows that the causing event need not be contemporaneous with the caused event (John may merely initiate Harry's movement) and, also, that the causer need not execute control over the caused movement. These facts are iconically mirrored in syntax (cf. Haiman 1985): the periphrastic construction, effecting the split between the two events, renders the relationship between them as involving conceptual distance.

A secondary agent construction shares one feature with the analytic, ‘double agent’ type of construction, namely, the external operation of the causer. The causer’s activity stays, as it were, outside the causee’s movement because the caused motion is of a type that necessarily involves internal causation in the sense of the physical genesis of the movement (put in plain words, the movement can only be executed by the causee). At the same time, however, the SA construction effects the merging of the causing event and the caused event (or, rather, the causing event is superimposed on the caused event). That is, in spite of the external position of the causer, the SA construction presents the causer as operating “inside” the caused event. In other words, it presents the causer’s activity as forming an intrinsic part of the caused motion – note that the syntactic configuration ‘NP-VP-NP(-PP)’, encoding this very specific causative configuration, employs one verb. That is, it encodes, at a surface level, one action. The causer, functioning as the bearer of primary responsibility for the action encoded in the verb, represents “the starting point of the situation” (cf. Langacker 1990).² Accordingly, he occupies the subject position, i.e. the position prototypically reserved for dominant, controlling participants. The causee occupies the direct object position, prototypically taken up by subordinate, controlled participants. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the causee has a Janus-headed semantic status: being subordinate to the causer’s activity, he is the patient, and, being the actual executor of the motion, he is the agent.

The syntactic configuration ‘NP-VP-NP(-PP)’, encoding this very specific causative structure, must therefore employ verbs whose semantic structure makes it possible to accommodate both the causer and the causee. The analysis presented in this study will show that what plays a role are the principled connections between verb meanings and the type of causative structuration in question. The analysis will show, too, that the factors that license the formation of SA constructions are also the prototypicality of the caused motion situation and certain systemic relations holding between syntactic constructions expressing caused motion.

By way of concluding this short discussion, a remark concerning the status of SA constructions in relation to analytic causative constructions will be in order. SA constructions (*John walked Harry to the station*) cannot be viewed as variants of analytic causative constructions (*John had (/made) Harry walk to the station*) in spite of the fact that both types of construction involve ‘caused agency’ or ‘inducive causation’. Kemmer

2 The term the ‘bearer of primary responsibility’ is borrowed from DeLancey (1985).

and Verhagen (1994: 119–220) apply the term ‘inductive causation’ to analytic causative constructions of the type *She made (/had) him type the letter*. Talmy (2000: 474) uses the terms ‘caused agency’ and ‘inductive causation’ to refer to situations in which an animate agent induces another animate agent to act; he exemplifies this type of causation by a sentence like *I sent him downstairs*. (For a very informative analysis of formal and semantic aspects of *have* constructions see Martinková 2012.) Owing to the merging of the causing event and the caused event in SA constructions (which also includes a spatio-temporal overlap of the two sub-events), the causer is presented as exercising control over the entire movement, including the possibility of co-moving with the causee: cf. the difference between *John walked Harry to the station* and *John had (/made) Harry walk to the station*.³ The difference between SA constructions and analytic causative constructions is apparent even in situations which exclude the causer’s co-movement – cf. the difference between *The lion-tamer jumped the lion through the hoop* and *The lion-tamer had (/made) the lion jump through the hoop*. The former sentence renders the causer as initiating the movement and as controlling its entire course, whereas the latter sentence presents the causer as a mere initiator of the movement. In actual fact, the presence of control over the entire caused movement is one of the factors licensing the formation of SA constructions of the type *John swam the baby to the shore* (here *the baby* is a patientive, not an agentive participant).

3 Goldberg (1995: 162) adduces the sentence *Sam walked him to the car* as a caused motion situation “involving ongoing assistance to move in a certain direction”.