Polysemy in Labrador Inuttitut Causatives

In this talk we examine causative morphology in Labrador Inuttitut, a polysynthetic language with both null and overt morphological causatives (1)-(2). We argue that the distribution of polysemy between direct and indirect causative interpretations supports a view of thematic roles that speaks against a one-to-one mapping between thematic roles and syntactic positions and instead supports a view where the semantic roles implied by an event can integrate with either of two specifiers of argument introducing heads (cf. Wood & Marantz 2017).

(1) **null**

    a. Kajottak siKumi-kKau-juk
       cup   break-recent.pst-3s.part
      "The cup broke"

    b. siKumi-kKau-jaga
      break-rec.pst-1s/3s.part
      "I broke it"

(2) **overt**

    a. ani-juk
      went.out-3s.part
      "He/she went out"

    b. ani-1**ti**-niat-taga
      went.out-caus-near.fut.-1s/3s.part
      "I will make him/her go out"

Causative morphology introduces an agentive causer argument (1b,2b) that can be understood to be coercing a causee to participate in the (caused) event (Nie 2020 on affixal causatives; Jensen and Johns 1989 on Inuttitut overt causatives).

Whereas the overt causative can be used with most verbs, null causatives (1b) are restricted to a subset of verbs, e.g. change of state verbs, verbs of grooming, some verbs of motion, verbs of putting, verbs of emission and verbs of appearance (Allen 1998:640).

Certain verbs allow either the null or overt causative (3):

(3)   a. kata-juk   'It dropped'
           drop-3s.part

      b. kata-kKau-jaga   'I dropped it.'   null causative
           drop-r.past-part.1s/3s

      c. kata-**ti**-kKau-jaga   'I dropped it (on purpose)'   overt causative
           drop-cause-r.past-part.1s/3s

However, if the causee is animate, then only the overt causative is possible (4):

(4)   a. kata-kKau-juk   'He dropped (from the tree)'
          drop-r.past-3s.part

      b. kata-tti-Kau-jaga   'I made him drop (from the tree).'
           drop-caus-r.past-1s/3s.part

      c. *kata-kKau-jaga   'I made him drop (from the tree).'
           drop-r.past-1s/3s.part

Similarly, the null causative is unavailable to unergatives, which have agentive external arguments that are most naturally satisfied by animates.

We conclude that the null causative is incompatible with an animate causee, while overt *ti* supports an animate causee. This dovetails with another property of causatives in this language which is that overt *ti* is polysemous between 'make' and 'let' interpretations, i.e. **direct** vs **indirect** causative interpretations (5) (see Kuroda 1993 for Japanese). While the (direct) causative is normally associated with an agent as described above, the indirect causatives, with the same morphology, introduces an argument which grants permission (permissive) (6a) or unintentionally coerces the causee's actions (accidental) (6b).

(5)   ani-**ti**-niat-taga
      go.out-caus-near.fut-1s/3s.part
      a. I will make/force him/her to go out   *direct interpretation*
      b. I will let him/her leave   *indirect interpretation*
(6) a. sini-**tti**-Kau-jaga   *permissive*
      sleep-caus-r.past-1s/3s.part
      'I let her sleep in'
   b. ino-gunnai-**ti**-jaga   pigutsiak   *accidental*
      be.alive-no.more-caus-1s/3s.part plant
      'I let the plant die'

It is important that this polysemy is unavailable to the null causatives. This is unsurprising on the hypothesis that the null causative is restricted to inanimate causees, given that in the indirect interpretation the causee must have some control over the caused event.

An apparent exception is examples such as (3c), repeated below, where we see the overt causative occurring with an inanimate causee.

(7)   kata-**ti**-kKau-jaga   'I dropped it (on purpose)'   overt causative
      drop-cause-r.past-1s/3s.part

However, it is striking that in these cases the the interpretation of the external argument of the causing event is emphatically agentive (compare to 3b). In the absence of the indirect interpretation due to the inanimate causee, the volitionality of the causer has heightened salience and is perhaps even contrastive.

There are some speakers who do not interpret sentences such as (8) as extra purposeful, but instead interpret them as infelicitous because sentience is implied for the causee (8).

(8)   titigutik kata-**ti**-kKau-jaga   'I dropped the pen' ("implies the pen has a brain")
          pen   drop-cause-r.past-part.1s/3s

We take these patterns to be derivable from differences in the integration of the causer and causee external arguments with the semantic properties of the underlying structure (see Wood and Marantz 2017 for adversity causatives in Japanese). In the direct interpretation, it is the higher EA (the causer) that integrates with the agentive interpretation implied by the event. In the indirect interpretation, it is the lower EA (the causee) that does so. With the null causative, only the former is possible, because the lower EA (the causee) is inanimate and therefore not a possible agent. With the overt causative, both are possible with an animate causee, resulting in generalized polysemy. If the causee is inanimate, a special interpretation is coerced or it fails.

References
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