

The position of English causative verbs in the object-control vs. raising-to-object dichotomy

Generative linguistics, since Rosenbaum 1967, has posited two distinct analyses for sequences of the type *V NP (to) VP* as in (1) and (2), in which classical versions of these analyses are sketched:

- (1) Mary expected John_i [_{t_i} to leave] (= Subject to Object Raising[SOR], Exceptional Case Marking, ECM)
- (2) Mary persuaded John_i [PRO_i to leave](= Equi-NP-Deletion, Object Control [OC])

The central intuition underlying the distinction is that SOR verbs are basically bivalent and that they do not assign a semantic role to their surface NP object ('John' in (1)), but only to the complement clause ('John to leave' in (1)) as a whole, whereas OC verbs are basically trivalent and assign a semantic role both to their surface NP object ('John' in (2)) and to the complement clause ('John to leave' in (2)). Thus John has only one semantic role in (1), that assigned to the subject of the lower clause by the lower verb, whereas John has two semantic roles in (2), that assigned by the main verb to its object and that assigned by the lower verb to its subject (hence the appearance of a coreferential empty pronominal in the lower clause in (2), receiving an independent semantic role). This analytical intuition has gained widespread currency, to the extent that the labels 'control' and 'raising' are often adopted to refer to the phenomena even in frameworks that reject the original analyses (e.g. Pollard and Sag 1994, who assume neither movement of the subject in (1) nor an empty pronominal in the syntax in (2)). It leads to a series of classical criteria for distinguishing SOR and OC verbs.

Criterion 1. SOR verbs are basically bivalent whereas OC verbs are basically trivalent.

This contrast appears clearly if the VP is replaced either by an NP or an S argument:

- (3) Mary expected {John / a departure / that John will leave}
- (4) Mary persuaded John {of the truth of her statement / that Peter was going to leave}

Criterion 2. Deletion of the infinitival VP and entailments.

As a consequence of the proposed patterns of semantic role assignment, with OC verbs, a sentence like (2) entails (6) whereas with SOR verbs, a sentence of type (1) does not systematically entail (5).

- (5) Mary expected John. [is not entailed by (1)].
- (6) Mary persuaded John. [is entailed by (2)].

Criterion 3. Impersonal *it* and *there* and idiom chunks

As a further consequence of the patterns of semantic role assignment, SOR verbs can have impersonal *it* and *there*, as well as idiom chunks, as their surface NP object if the following VP allows such an item as its subject, as illustrated in (7), (8), (9). This is never the case with OC verbs, as they always assign a semantic role to their object, as appears from the ungrammaticality of (10), (11), (12).

- (7) Mary expected it to rain.
- (8) Mary expected there to be many people.
- (9) Mary expected the shit to hit the fan.
- (10) *Mary persuaded it to rain.
- (11) *Mary persuaded there to be many people.

(12) *Mary persuaded the shit to hit the fan.

Criterion 4. Passivization of the lower clause

Again, as a consequence of the patterns of semantic role assignment involved, passivizing the lower clause with SOR verbs leads to a truth-conditionally equivalent sentence ((13) \equiv (14)), whereas this is not the case for OC verbs ((15) \neq (16)).

(13) Mary expected the doctor_i [_{t_i} to examine John]

(14) Mary expected John_i [_{t_i} to be examined by the doctor]

(15) Mary persuaded the doctor_i [PRO_i to examine John]

(16) Mary persuaded John_i [PRO_i to be examined by the doctor]

This impressive set of systematic correlated contrasts between the two classes has made raising and control central theoretical topics in generative grammar (cf. e.g. Davies and Dubinsky 2004 for an overview of the discussion). However, it has long been known that certain classes of verbs, especially perception (see e.g. Miller and Lowrey 2003), permission (see e.g. Schmerling 1978), and causative verbs, raise a problem with respect to the dichotomy, because they exhibit an apparently mixed behavior with respect to the classical criteria distinguishing the two classes.

The central topic of this talk will be a detailed examination of the actual behavior of the English causative verbs *make*, *cause*, *force*, *have* and *get*¹ with respect to the SOR vs. OC distinction (cf. e.g. Cottier 1991, Cotte 1996, 1999, Lowrey 2002, Wierzbicka 1998 all of which are relevant to this topic even if they are not framed in an SOR vs. OC paradigm). With respect to the central semantic question of whether the surface object of the verb is a semantic argument of the causative verb (i.e. receives a semantic role from it), some examples a priori strongly suggest that it is (e.g. in (17) one has a strong intuition that Mary acted on John which suggests that John is a ‘causee’ in the same sense that one might say that John is a ‘persuadee’ in (2)), while for others cases the opposite is true (e.g. in (18) one does not feel that the error is acting on the datagram, but rather that the error simply triggers the whole event ‘the datagram be discarded’ as such, i.e. that there is no real causee).

(17) Mary **made** John eat his spinach.

(18) This message is only sent if the error **caused** the datagram to be discarded.

In this respect, a superficial look at the data suggests that *make* and *force* are OC verbs, whereas *cause*, *have*, and *get* seem more like SOR verbs.

Submitting English causative verbs to the criteria discussed above seems to reinforce the dilemma.

Criterion 1. Causatives appear to be basically bivalent (though the impossibility of a finite complement makes the results less clear and the cases of *have* and *get* require specific discussion).

(19) Mary made/caused/forced a mistake.

Criterion 2. The behavior of causatives with respect to the criterion 2 entailments is unclear as shown in the following examples. Note furthermore that (6) above follows from (2) even without any implication of an implicit anaphorical VP argument; to the extent that the entailments in (20) to (23) are marginally valid, this is only the case with such an anaphoric effect.

(20) Mary made John leave \rightarrow ? Mary made John.

(21) Mary made the bottle fall over \rightarrow ? Mary made the bottle.

¹ Obviously, one does not want to say that *have* and *get* are causative verbs *per se*, the intended reference is to the causative uses of these verbs.

- (22) Mary caused John to leave →?? Mary caused John.
(23) Mary caused the bottle to fall over →?? Mary caused the bottle.

Criterion 3. Impersonal *it*, *there* and idiom chunks. Though many examples of the types (7) to (12) above sound unnatural when the higher verb is a causative, one can easily find numerous attested examples, with all causative verbs, even *force*, that do sound natural, such as the following:

- (24) Tell me how you **got it** to rain about 30 minutes after I posted how I love the rain.
(25) Yes, this is a time consuming process, but to be fair to our long-time customers we **made there** be a requirement in order to purchase these books, namely...
(26) He was originally slated to have a match against HBK at Summerslam, but a Triple-H injury **forced there** to be a new main event, the Elimination Chamber.
(27) Lucas **had there** be a fledgeling romance between Luke and Leia because when he wrote and filmed that they weren't brother and sister.
(28) My little freak-out **made the shit** hit the fan and I haven't been back since.

Criterion 4. Passivization of the lower clause. Classical text book examples like (29) and (30) seem to suggest that *make* and *force* are clear OC verbs as these do not at all seem to be paraphrases.

- (29) Mary made/forced the doctor_i [PRO_i (to) examine John]
(30) Mary made/forced John_i [PRO_i (to) be examined by the doctor]

Cause and *have* on the other hand, seem to be clear SOR verbs with respect to this criterion.

These difficulties have often been ignored. When they are faced, two main options present themselves: either (i) one accepts the idea that these verbs enter both constructions, i.e. a form of lexical ambiguity, or (ii) one attempts to show that the ambiguity is only apparent and that all cases can be reduced to one construction, typically raising (e.g. Schmerling 1978 for verbs of permission, Miller and Lowrey 2003 for perception verbs). In this paper, I will defend the latter approach for causative verbs, arguing that the apparent control-like semantic effects are in fact not part of the strict semantics of the verbs, but arise as non logical inferences from the interaction between their SOR semantics and world knowledge, more precisely they result from conversational or conventional implicature.

Specifically, I will argue that the manipulative semantics of causative *make* (i.e. the idea that the surface object of *make* is a semantic argument of *make*, cf. e.g. Cottier 1991, Lowrey 2002) is not part of its lexical meaning, which is neutral causative, but is implicated from the most likely target for manipulation/coercion by the causer, given the nature of the caused state of affairs and the goal of bringing it about. Consider the following examples

- (31) Mary made John open the door.
(32) Mary actually managed to make John like spinach.
(33) Mary made the door open.

In the case of (31), as John is an agent and is consequently the main controller of the unfolding of the caused event, the most efficient way to bring about the latter event is to act on him, hence the naturalness of a manipulative implicature. In (32), on the other hand, John is an experiencer and not in control of the caused state, therefore a more likely interpretation is that no coercion/manipulation is involved but rather that, for instance, Mary prepared the spinach in a special way. Similarly, in (33), the door being an inanimate theme, the example can easily be interpreted as direct manipulation of the door, or as indirect causation, depending on the context. The data in (24) to (28) similarly strongly argue in favour of a raising analysis.

As for the passivization criterion, corpus research shows that (if they are in fact used at all) the passive versions of the textbook examples in (29) and (30) are very hard to find. When searching through corpora, what one does find are cases of the following type (those with *force* are very frequent, those with *make* are rarer and often archaic):

- (34) During his training, a medical problem cropped up that **forced** his trip to be postponed, but to his relief he later got the go-ahead.
- (35) Two new books [...] now turn a brighter light on his life and his role, explaining how his homosexuality **forced** his contribution to be obscured.
- (36) As safekeeper of Catholic doctrine, Pope Benedict was focused and responsible in a way that "**made** him be perceived by many as a hardliner," Sister Mary said

Remarkably, in such cases, the corresponding sentences with the active variant in the lower clause *are* in a paraphrase relation with the originals, again arguing strongly in favor of a raising analysis.

By contrast, following the analysis of Taranto (2002) for *get*, I will argue that other semantic control-type effects, e.g. for *force*, are due to specific lexical conventional implicature (cf. also Potts 2004).

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