Transitivity asymmetries in Cherkess causatives¹

Causatives in polysynthetic languages. In Baker 1997 it was proposed that polysynthetic languages can derive morphological causatives only from intransitive verb stems. This was supported by Baker's theory of polysynthesis (Baker 1996). In this paper we focus on causative constructions in a polysynthetic language which does not demonstrate all the properties Baker expects from such a language, and show grammatical mechanisms that allow the formation of causatives from all types of verbs.

Cherkess as a polysynthetic language. Cherkess is an ergative language of the North-West Caucasian language family. It is often said to be a dialect of Kabardian (Colarusso 1992 etc.). Cherkessian verbs are very rich in agreement morphology, in fact, every argument in the clause has a corresponding morpheme in the verb. That is why Cherkess is considered here a polysynthetic language.

Cherkess Data. There are several transitivity verb classes in Cherkess: 1) transitive verbs, which take subject in Ergative, direct object in Absolutive and (if they have one) indirect object in Ergative (verbs of type 'give'); 2) intransitive verbs, which take subject in Absolutive. Traditionally (Bagov et al. 1970), within the latter class a subclass of 2-place intransitives is distinguished. These verbs take subject in Absolutive and indirect object in Ergative. Causative counterparts can be derived from all verb types. However, their syntactic and semantic properties differ.

When a causative is formed out of an intransitive verb (whether 1- or 2-place), all agreement morphology in their proper slots and cases of NPs (Causee in Absolutive and initial Patient in Ergative) are preserved. The new agent stays in Ergative and has a corresponding agreement slot, which was not present in the original verb:

(1) ade-m jeǯaḳwe-r maSine-m Ø-ji-ri-ʁe-ĉ-a-ŝ father-ERG pupil-ABS car-ERG 3.Causee-3SG.IO-3SG.A-CAUS-wait-PF-IND Father made his pupil wait for the car.

On the other hand, when a causative is formed from a transitive verb, Causee changes its agreement slot from that for subjects to that of indirect objects, and the new subject takes subject agreement:

(2) we se abə txəλ-ər Ø-je-zə-b-κe-t-a-I you me he.ERG book-ABS 3.DO-3SG.IO-1SG.IO(Causee)-2SG.A-CAUS-give-PF-IND You made me give him the book.

There are some other distinctive properties.

In Cherkess there is a special "inversive" morpheme -qa-, which occurs in a verb when an indirect object is higher than a subject (transitive or intransitive) on the person hierarchy (1 > 2 > 3):

(3) sjə de λx_w -əm se txə λ *(q'e)-z-jə-t-a-ŝ. my brother-ERG I book INV-1SG.IO-3SG.S-give-PF-IND My brother gave me a book. (4) we se wə-*(q'e)-z-o-2e. you I 2SG.ABS-INV-1SG.IO-DYN-wait You are waiting for me.

With causativized 2-place intransitives an inversive morpheme occurs only when both the new subject and the Causee are lower than the indirect object on the person hierarchy:

- (5) abə w-*(q'ə)-z-jə-ʁe-2-a-ŝ
 he.ERG 2SG.DO(causee)-INV-1SG.IO-3SG.A-CAUS-wait-PF-IND
 He made you wait for me.
- (6) abə sə-w-jə-ʁe-2-a-\$
 he.ERG 1SG.DO(causee)-2SG.IO-3SG.A-CAUS-wait-PF-IND

 He made me wait for you.
- (7) abə wə-z-ʁe-2-a-\$
 he.ERG 2SG.IO-1SG.A-CAUS-wait-PF-IND
 I made him wait for you.

When a 2-place transitive verb is causativized, there is no need for an inversive morpheme when the Causer is lower than the Causee on the person hierarchy:

(8) se asλen sə-b-o-κe-λeκ_w

I Aslan 1SG.IO-2SG.A-DYN-CAUS-see

You showed me (lit.: made me see) Aslan.

When a 3-place transitive verb is causativized, an inversive can only occur when the Causee (but not the Causer) is lower than the original indirect object:

- (9) se txəλ-ər *(q'ə-)w-e-z-ʁe-t-a-ŝ I book-ABS INV-2SG.IO-3SG.IO-1SG.A-CAUS-give-PF-IND I made him give you the book.
- (10) asλen se txəλ-ər w-z-rjə-ʁe-t-a-ŝ
 Aslan I book-ABS 2SG.IO-1SG.IO-3SG.A-CAUS-give-PF-IND
 Aslan made me give you the book.

Analysis. The different properties of causativized verbs with respect to their transitivity may be explained by different mechanisms of causativization. In the case of intransitives the external agent (the Causer) does not affect the existing argument structure (the Causee and the initial object preserve their case marking and agreement slots). Causative constructions of this type show monoclausal properties: the inversive is sensitive both to the Causer and the Causee. In the case of transitives the Causer suppresses the initial agent ($S \rightarrow IO$) and appears to be external to the whole causativized clause. The inversive is thus insensitive to the Causer.

Conclusion. The transitivity asymmetries in polysynthetic languages may differ from language to language. These asymmetries may consist not only of the fact that morphological causatives can be derived only from intransitive verb stems, but also in different syntactic properties of causativized transitive and intransitive clauses.

Notes:

1. This study is the result of the fieldwork in the Karachay-Cherkessian Republic of Russia in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

References

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