

Passive as a causative: evidence from Karachay-Balkar

In this paper, we survey the PASSIVE CONSTRUCTION in Karachay-Balkar, a Turkic language spoken in the Caucasus. This construction is illustrated in (1a); its active counterpart is shown in (1b).

- (1) a. kölek (kerim-ni küc-ü ble) zirt-ıl-di.
 shirt K.-GEN force-3 with tear-PASS-PST.3SG
 ‘A/the shirt was torn by Kerim.’
- b. kerim kölek-ni zirt-ti.
 K. shirt-ACC tear-PST.3SG
 ‘Kerim tore a/the shirt.’

(1a) exhibits all the hallmarks of a prototypical passive construction: the direct object of (1b) is promoted to the subject position in (1a); the subject of (1b) is expressed in (1a) as an optional PP; passivization is morphologically marked by the *-l* morpheme.

The puzzle we would like to address is: There is a class of constructions in which the passive does not apparently affect core syntactic relations, but rather introduces the meaning of external causation. This happens if the passive morpheme attaches to intransitives (both unaccusatives, (2), and unergatives, (3)) and to verbal stems that are passive already (see (4), where *-n* is an allomorph of *-l*).

- (2) a. illew (*alim-ni kücü ble) sin-di.
 toy Alim-GEN force with break-PST.3SG
 ‘The toy broke (*by Alim).’
- b. illew alim-nikücü ble sin-ıl-di.
 toy Alim-GEN force with break-PASS-PST.3SG
 ‘The toy was broken by Alim.’
- (3) a. alim (*farida-ni kücü ble) bar-di.
 Alim Farida-GEN force with leave-PST
 ‘Alim left (*by Farida).’
- b. alim farida-ni kücü ble bar-ıl-di.
 Alim Farida-GEN force with leave-PASS-PST
 ‘Alim left (because something was done) by Farida.’
- (4) kölek (kerim-ni küc-ü ble) zirt-ıl-in-di.
 shirt K.-GEN power-3 with tear-PASS-PASS-PST.3SG
 1. ‘The shirt was torn by Kerim (on someone’s order).’
 2. ‘The shirt was torn (by someone) on Kerim’s order’

Neither (2a) nor (3a) accept PPs referring to the external causer. In contrast, in the (b) examples, which indicate that a situation occurs due to external causation, such PPs are readily available.

Similarly, a crucial difference between (1a) and (4) is that the latter is interpreted as externally caused (e.g. by someone's order). In (1a), the PP *kerim-ni küc-ü ble* unambiguously refers the Agent. In (4), it can either refer to the Agent, as in (4.1), or to the external causer, as in (4.2). There are two possible perspectives to address the 'causal passive' in (2b), (3b), and (4). First, we can treat the distribution of the *-l* morpheme as an instance of grammatical polysemy so that 'passive' and 'causal passive' are distinct meanings/uses of this morpheme. Secondly, we can attempt to provide a uniform analysis of the *-l* morpheme, whereby apparent differences is a product of interaction between a single general meaning of *-l* and its lexico-syntactic environment.

While not rejecting the first alternative on principled grounds, in this paper we opt for the second one. More specifically, we suggest that

- the *-l* morpheme always applies to a transitive predicate;
- the *-l* morpheme existentially binds the Agent/causer argument, as assumed in a number of semantic analyses of the passive (e.g., Kramer, Wunderlich 1999, Wunderlich 1997), and induces promotion of the Patient to the subject position.
- if a verb provides a suitable argument structure, which is the case with transitives like *zirt* 'tear', the *-l* morpheme produces a 'normal' passive, as in (1a).
- if for whatever reasons a predicate does not have a transitive argument structure (either because the verb is lexically intransitive, as in (2b)-(3b), or because the agent argument has already been bound by another instance of the passive morpheme, as in (4)), the verb undergoes coercion by means of covert causativization. Causativization introduces a new agent/causer argument, as usual, thus creating a transitive structure.

The reason why we believe that the coercion-based account for the 'causal passive' in Karachay-Balkar is superior to the polysemy-based account is that the former makes a correct prediction about the range of meanings of the 'causal passive'. Since 'causal passives' involve causativization, we can expect that they pattern with true causatives as to the range of interpretations they have. This prediction is borne out precisely.

The most important piece of evidence supporting causative coercion has to do with the distinction between direct and indirect causation (a.k.a. manipulative vs. directive (Shibatani 1976), contact vs. distant, immediate vs. mediated (Kulikov 2001), causer-controlled vs. causee-controlled (Wierzbicka 1988, Shibatani 2000)). True causatives of intransitive unaccusatives (see (5)) are direct, whereas those of transitives (see (6)) and unergatives (see (7)) are normally indirect. In Balkar, a reliable diagnostic for indirect causation is adverbial modification. Time-span adverbials like 'in two hours', measure adverbials like 'for two hours', rate adverbials like 'quickly', etc., yield ambiguity with indirect causatives, but not with direct causatives.

- (5) *murat eki minut-xa illew-nü sin-dir-di.*
 M. two minute-DAT toy-ACC break-CAUS-PST.3SG
 1. 'Murat broke a/the toy in two minutes.'
 2. *'What Murat did in 2 minutes was make a/the toy break.'
 3. *'What Murat did was make a/the toy break in 2 minutes.'

- (6) *alim kerim-ge kölek-ni zirt-tir-di.*
 A. K.-DAT shirt-ACC tear-CAUS-PST.3SG
 1. 'Murat made Kerim tear a/the shirt in two minutes. {The sum of causing and tearing events occurred in 2 minutes }.'
 2. 'What Murat did in 2 minutes was make Kerim tear a/the shirt.'
 3. 'What Murat did was make Kerim tear a/the shirt in 2 minutes.'

- (7) kerim alim-nibar-dir-di.
 Kerim Alim-ACC leave-CAUS-PST.3SG
 1. ‘Quickly, Kerim made Alim leave.’ {the sum of causing and leaving events occurred quickly }.
 2. ‘Kerim quickly made Alim leave.’
 3. ‘Kerim made Alim leave quickly.’

If ‘causal passives’ are built through covert causativization, they must exhibit the same distribution of direct and indirect interpretation as in (5) vs. (6)-(7). This indeed happens to causal passives in (8) vs. (9)-(10):

- (8) illew eki minut-xa sin-il-di. <direct causation>
 toy two minute-DAT break-PASS-PST.3SG
 1. ‘The toy was broken in two minutes.’
 2. ‘*Some event that took two minutes made a/the toy break (in a couple of seconds).’
 3. ‘*Some event (of indefinite duration) made a/the toy break in two minutes’
- (9) kölek eki minut-xa kerim-ni küc-ü ble zirt-il-in-di. <indirect causation>
 shirt two minute-DAT K.-GEN power-3 with tear-PASS-PASS-PST.3SG
 1. ‘The shirt was torn by Kerim on someone’s order in two minutes.’
 2. ‘The shirt was torn by Kerim because someone convinced him in two minutes to do so.’
 3. ‘The shirt was torn in two minutes by Kerim, because someone ordered him to do so’
- (10) alim farida-ni kücü ble bar-il-di. <indirect causation>
 Alim Farida-GEN force with leave-PASS-PST.3SG
 1. ‘Alim left on Farida’s order quickly {both subevents occurred quickly}’
 2. ‘Alim left quickly because Farida ordered him to do so.’
 3. ‘Alim left because Farida convinced him quickly to do so.’

Under the polysemy-based analysis, strict parallelism between causatives and ‘causal passives’ is a mysterious coincidence, since no connection between the causative and the passive is established. Under the coercion-based analysis, this parallelism falls out naturally, since a part of causal passive formation *is* causativization.

References

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