The Gĩkũyũ Causative: Implications for the Minimalist Program

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Abstract: Gĩkũyũ, just like other Bantu languages, has a rich and complex morphology. The complexity is more evident in derivational morphology than inflectional morphology. The paper is a detailed description of the Gĩkũyũ causative, and analysis within the Minimalist Program. The theory has been revised extensively but it is the 1995 version that showed a higher degree of explanatory adequacy in analysing Gĩkũyũ causative verbal extensions. The data for the study was in form of four hundred verbs. The verbs were then classified according to their transitivity status.

The Causative Cross-Linguistically

Many languages have a morphological category called causative which conveys the meaning of causation and adds a new agent argument (the causer) to the valence pattern. According to Bybee (1985:29), the causative is the most common valence-changing category in her world-wide sample of 50 languages. The syntax and semantics of causatives has been studied extensively (cf. Xolodovic (ed.), 1969; Shibatani (ed.), 1976; Comrie, 1985; Baker, 1988; Song, 1996; Dixon, 2000 and Haspelmath & Müller-Bardey, 2001).

Payne (1997:176) defines causative or causative constructions as the linguistic instantiations of the conceptual notion of causation. It is a linguistic expression that contains in semantic or logical structure a predicate of cause, one argument of which is a predicate expressing an effect. The predicate of cause contains the notion of causation, while the predicate of effect expresses the effect of the causative situation.

Shibatani (1976:1-2) says a causative situation of two events only occurs if the following conditions hold:

(a) The relationship between the two events is such that the occurrence of one event, ‘the caused event’ has been realised T which is after the time of the ‘causing event’ T’.

(b) The relation between the ‘causing’ and the ‘caused event’ is wholly dependent on the occurrence of the ‘causing event’

The causative, just like the applicative, adds another argument or increases the valence of the verb. The core arguments in the causative construction are ‘the causee’ and the causer’. Payne (1997) defines the ‘causee’ as the agent of the caused event which is sometimes referred to as the coerced endpoint (Croft, 1990). ‘Causer’ is defined as the agent of the predicate of cause and is sometimes referred to as the ‘agent of cause’. The causative affix can be hosted by both intransitive and transitive verbs (Schadeberg, 2003). There are three types of causatives as outlined by Comrie (1981) and Payne (1997). These are: lexical, morphological and periphrastic.

(a) Lexical Causatives

Almost all languages have some lexical causatives. The notion of ‘cause’ is wrapped up in the lexical meaning of the verb itself; it is not expressed by an additional affix. Consider the (b) examples below from English and Gĩkũyũ:

1a. The pot broke
1b. Lewis broke the pot, (Lewis caused the pot to break)
2a. The player fell
2b. Amos felled the player. (Amos caused the player to fall)
3a. Nguo nĩyatarũka (the dress has become torn)
3b. Mwana nĩatarũra ngu (The child has caused the dress to tear)

(b) Morphological Causatives

Morphological causatives involve a productive change in the form of the verb, and most express causation and permission. A morphological causative is formed by attaching a causative affix to a bare verb or a base which yields a derived causative construction. This process of derivation is illustrated in detail in the discussion of the Gĩkũyũ causative in sub-section below.

(c) Periphrastic Causatives

Periphrastic causatives are also known as analytical as they involve a separate causative verb. In English most causatives are analytical:

5. He made her go to town
Causation is expressed by the use of two predicates: ‘made her’ and ‘go to town’. The causing event is contained in the first predicate while the effect or result of cause is in the second. In Gĩkũyũ, the periphrastic causative is marked by the verb ‘tũm-’ (cause) as illustrated in the second example below:

6a. Kaana nĩkagũre ibuku
    The child has bought a book
6b. Kuria nĩatũma kaana kagũre ibuku
    Kuria has caused the child to buy a book

In (6b), the causative there are two predicates. Kuria nĩatũma is the predicate with the causing event whereas the second predicate, kaana kagũre ibuku is the predicate of effect or result of the causation. Many languages, including English, have two or more causative constructions. Gĩkũyũ, the subject of this study, has the periphrastic and the morphological, with the morphological being the more productive.

A further distinction is made in the realisation of the morphological causatives, namely the long and the short causative (Hyman, 2002; Kula, 2000). This classification is based on the length of the causative affix. The long causative has in its structure a consonant and a vowel while the short causative affix is just a vowel. Good (2005) refers to the short causative as transitive and reconstructs it as the super high front vowel in Proto-Bantu /i/. Good calls it transitive for two reasons; one, it causes direct causativisation and, two it is hosted mostly by intransitive verbs thus making them transitive. It is important to note that both causatives add another agent.

In the theoretical analysis, the Gĩkũyũ causative is considered as licensing an extra argument like the applicative. However, the one introduced by the causative cannot be plugged in. The argument introduced by the causative cannot check its features in a causative local configuration; therefore, the argument introduced has to be subcategorized for by the verb. The Gĩkũyũ causative is represented as a full projection, with the causative affix being the head of the causative phrase. The structure building process and the Principle of Full Interpretation (F1) build a causative head and a specifier for the causative head where the accusative case-checking takes place. The causative licenses an extra argument in a full causative projection (7)

7. The Causative Projection

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CAUS P
SPEC
CAUS
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The Gĩkũyũ Causative

The Gĩkũyũ causative is marked by two morphemes -i- and -ithi-. The -i- is the short causative or the transitive while -ithi- is the long causative. -ithi- is highly productive both in distribution and in meaning; it is associated with many verb types and has the meaning of coercion. -i- on the other hand is less productive, only occurring with intransitive verbs and a few transitive verbs. -i- is associated with the non coercive meaning (Mwangi, 2001). We will now apply the causative morpheme to different verb types to see how the valence of each verb is increased.

Argumentless verbs

8a. Nĩkwara
    Nĩ-kũ-a-ar-a
    Foc-expl-tns-shine -fv
    It has shone

When the causative affix is attached, an obligatory argument is introduced as the subject and the cognate object is recovered:

8b. Ngai nĩarĩa riũa
    Ngai nĩ-a-a-ar-i-a riũa
    God foc-sm-tns-shine-caus-fv sun
    God has caused the sun to shine

The act of the sun shining is achieved directly, that is, the causer (God) has directly caused the sun to do anything. This explains the ill-formedness of (8 c)

8 c. *Ngai nĩarĩitha (riũa)
    Ngai nĩ-a-a-ar-ithi-a (riũa)
    Ngai foc-sm-tns-shine-caus-fv (sun)
    God has caused the sun to shine
9b. Structural Configuration of a Gĩkũyũ Argumentless Structure with the Causative

The causative object riũa moves from moves from its place in the VP to [SPEC/CAUSP] to check its causative features and becomes the primary object of the verb. The underived verb moves from its place in the VP to [CAUS/CAUS'] to pick up the causative affix and check for causative features. The now derived verb moves to [TNS/TNS'] to check its tense features. The verb then moves to [AGRS/AGRS'] to check subject agreement features; and lastly moves to [FOC/FOC'] to pick the focus marker, and finally, spell out. The argument Ngai introduced by the causative, also referred to as the causer becomes the subject of the sentence; it moves from [SPEC/VP] to [SPEC/AGRsP] to check its agreement features. Lastly, it moves to [SPEC/FOCP] to spell out.

Intransitive verbs

10 a. Mwana nĩanyota
Mwana nĩ-a-a-nyot-a
Child foc-sm-tns-get thirsty-fv
The child has grown thirsty

10 b. Njambi nĩanyotia mwana
Njambi nĩ-a-a-nyot-i-a mwana
Njambi foc-sm-tns-get-thirsty-caus-fv child
Njambi has caused the child to be thirsty

11. Enyothithia ngũuo aheo soda
e-nyot-ithi-a ngũuo aheo soda
Refl-get thirsty-caus-fv so that given soda
He has caused himself to be thirsty so that he can be given a soda
(He is pretending so that he can be given a soda)

Intransitive verbs II

12 a. Mwana nĩahũma
Mwana nĩ-a-a-hũm-a
Child foc-sm-tns-grow weary-fv
The child has grown weary

13 b. Mambo nĩahũmithia mwana
Mambo nĩ-a-a-hũm-ithi-a mwana
Mambo foc-sm-tns-grow weary-fv child
Mambo has made the child grow weary

Sentence (13 b) shows the long causative –θi- hosted by an intransitive stem. This goes on to show how the long causative is productive because it can be hosted by both intransitive and transitive stems.

14a. Structural Configuration of a Gĩkũyũ Underived Intransitive Structure

14b. Structural Configuration of a Gĩkũyũ Intransitive Structure with the Causative
In diagram (14b), what was the subject in the underived structure *mwana* becomes the causative object, also the primary object of the verb. As the primary object, it is subcategorised for by the verb; therefore it moves from its place as a complement of the verb in the VP to [SPEC/CAUSP] to check for causative features. The verb moves from its place in the VP to [CAUS/CAUS'] to pick up the causative affix, check for causative features and check for object agreement features. The verb moves on to check for tense, subject agreement features then spells out after picking up the focus marker. Since the causative transitivises the intransitive structure making it a derived monotransitive structure, the causer *Njambi* becomes the subject of the derived structure. The causer moves from [SPEC/VP] to [SPEC/AGRsP] to check its agreement features. Lastly, it moves to [SPEC/FOCP] to spell out.

**Monotransitive verbs**

**15a.** Karanja *n'atega huko*  
Karanja *n'ata-ega-a huko*  
Karanja foc-sm-tns-trap-fv mole  
Karanja has trapped a mole

**15b.** Mũngirigaca *n'ageithia* Karanja huko  
Mũngirigaca *n'ata-egi-thi-a* Karanja huko  
Agricultural officer foc-sm-tns-trap-caus-fv Karanja mole  
An agricultural officer has made//forced Karanja to trap a mole

16a. Structural Configuration of a Gĩkũyũ Underived Monotransitive Structure

The movements of the verb and the two arguments are the same as explained for the monotransitive structure in the analysis of the applicative. When the causative is attached the following changes occur.

16b. Structural Configuration of a Gĩkũyũ Monotransitive Structure with the Causative

The second object of the sentence also known as the secondary object *huko* moves from [NP/VP] to [SPEC/AGRoP] to check its object features. The causer *Karanja* which was the subject in the undervived sentence becomes the primary object or the causative object. It moves from its place in the VP to [SPEC/CAUSP] to check its causative/object features. The undervived verb moves from its place in the VP to [AGRo/AGRo'] to check secondary object features and then moves [CAUS/CAUS'] to pick up the causative affix and check for accusative agreement features. The now derived verb moves to
[TNS/TNS’] to check its tense features. The verb then moves to [AGRS/AGRS’] to check agreement features. Lastly, moves to [FOC/FOC’] to pick up the focus marker, and finally, spell out. The causative argument introduced by the causative, the causer mungirigaca becomes the subject of the sentence; it moves from [SPEC/VP] to [SPEC/AGRsP] to check its subject agreement features. Lastly, it moves to [SPEC/FOCP] to spell out.

**Ditransitive verbs**

17a. Mürangiri níaika andũ mbeca
Mürangiri ní-a-a-iy-a andũ mbeca
Guard foc-sm-tns-steal-fv people
A guard has stolen money from the people

17b. Müici níaiyithia mürangiri andũ mbeca
Müici ní-a-a-iyithi-a mürangiri
Thief foc-sm-tns-steal-caus-fv guard money
The thief has forced the guard to steal money from the people

The diagram (18) below shows the analysis of causative derivations on a ditransitive verb.

18a. Structural Configuration of a Gikuyu Underived Ditransitive Structure

The verb iya has four arguments: a subject and three objects. There is one primary object and two secondary objects. The subject of the underived ditransitive structure mürangiri becomes the new primary object as the former primary object andũ is demoted to the first secondary object. The verb subcategorises for the three objects. The three objects will move from their positions as complements of the verb to their respective specifier positions. The verb will move to the head positions of each object projection to check for object features. However, the verb checks for accusative object features with primary object or causee andũ at [CAUS/CAUS’] as it picks up the causative affix. In addition, the verb will check for tense features, accusative agreement features and eventually spell out after picking up the focus marker.

The Gikuyu causative affix is a transitivity agent. It adds an extra participant to the argument structure of the verbs. The added argument, the causer, is introduced in the subject position as the former subject moves to the position after the verb. Thus, intransitive verbs change to transitive verbs, see (8b), monotransitive verbs to ditransitive verbs as in (8b); and ditransitive ones to tritransitive verbs.

Having considered the two causative affixes, the long and the short, it is imperative to consider the factors that determine the choice of affix. The parameter that distinguishes the two is the one on directness. The causer of a short causative construction acts directly, thus direct causation but the causer of a long causative construction may or may not act directly. In other words, in direct causation there is only one entity which causes the causation.
The long causative is highly productive. Semantically, the long causative expresses the coercive meaning whereas the short causative expresses the non-coercive meaning otherwise referred to as direct causation (Good, 2005). The last determinant of which causative to use is the shape of the verb root. If a verb root ends in a vowel then the long causative will always be used e.g. the verb gāu (fall) will be ǧithiia (cause to fall). If the verb root ends in a consonant then, it can host the short causative. Once again the theory adequately explains the Gĩkũyũ causative.

Conclusion

The Gĩkũyũ causative is productive in distribution and meaning. There are two causative affixes, namely the short -i- and long causative -ithi-. The short causative is hosted by a few intransitive verbs while the long causative is more productive. It can be hosted by both intransitive and transitive verbs. One major distinguishing feature between the two is in their semantics. The short causative is associated with direct causation and non-coercive meaning while the long causative is associated with the coercive and indirect meaning. Both introduce a causer which pushes the subject of the sentence to become an object referred to as the causative object or the causee.

The Minimalist analysis explains the causative as a full projection licensed by Gĩkũyũ. The causer introduced by the causative becomes the new subject of the derived sentence thus checking its features under the specifier of subject agreement. The former subject becomes the causee and checks its object features under the specifier of the causative phrase.

References


