

Voice alternations and prominence relations in complex causative structures

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This talk tackles the issue of argument realisation in the realization of **causative structures**, concentrating on the case of **complex causative constructions (CC) in Italian**. CC encode a bi-eventive structure, expressing an indirect causal relation: in (1), the Causer of the inflected light-*v*, does not directly control the event of opening the door, which is performed by an intervening initiator (so-called Causee). In Italian, CC are realized by a monoclausal construction (Rizzi1976, Guasti1996): the Causee in (2) and (3) is not case-marked as subject by the infinitive, and has to be introduced by a prepositional phrase, which may be headed by two distinct prepositions. The existence of two constructions for Italian CC has been explained either as the surface realization of two underlying syntactic structures (cf. Kayne 1975), or as depending on selectional restrictions for the inflected verb (Folli&Harley2007). We present empirical evidence against the hypothesis that *fare* realises two light-verbs with distinct selectional properties, and we suggest that the structure (2) results from **passivisation**, where P(assive)Voice binds existentially the external argument of the infinitival clause (Bruening2013).

Next, we show that this analysis can be implemented by considering the realisation of Th-roles in a causative structure in terms of **prominence relations**. Assuming that semantic and thematic information constrain the realisation of argument structure, the valency change realized by PVoice is interpreted as the demotion of the external argument of the infinitive clause. There is an observed tendency for PVoice to bind existentially the prototypical agentive argument, i.e. the argument that, in the active sentence, is ranked higher in a hierarchy based on semantic roles (see e.g. Kiparsky 2013). Indeed, in Italian the implicit Causer in a passive construction is by default interpreted as prototypically agentive (4a), although this interpretation may be eventually overruled (5b).

A detailed inquiry on the semantic roles subcategorized by both verbal predicates in CC reveals an asymmetry in terms of agentivity. Taking agentivity at its strong value (i.e. as implying volition), an agentivity constraint is imposed on the Causee in *a*-causatives, and on the Causer in *da*-causatives (cf. Table 1). We therefore suggest that Voice alternation is justified in order to obtain a coherent mapping between semantic interpretation and argument realisation in the process of forming a complex predicate. Given that CC in Italian are reanalysed as monoclausal constructions, where two Causers are presented as responsible of the realisation of one complex event, passivisation applies when the first Causer is agentive, and the demotion of an agentive Causee follows the necessity to avoid a structure where two participants are equally ranked in terms of agentivity, i.e. are equally plausible as Causers. As for passivization in general, however, the rule is not strict. It may happen that the demoted Causee is characterized explicitly as non-agentive (6b), or that both Causee and Causer are agentive (5b), and yet passivisation doesn't apply. Nevertheless, this hypothesis yields a correct descriptive result: according to the generalisation in Table 1, *da*-causatives are the passive version of *a*-causatives, where the Causer is necessarily agentive.

Examples and tables

- (1) John made the janitor open the door.
- (2) Mario ha fatto aprire la porta *al* custode
 Mario make.PF open.INF the door *to*-the janitor
 “Mario made the janitor open the door”
- (3) Mario ha fatto aprire la porta *dal* custode
 Mario make.PF open.INF the door *by*-the janitor
 “Mario had the janitor open the door”
- (4) a. Il manifestante è stato ucciso.
 “The protester has been killed (by somebody/#by something)”
 b. Il manifestante è stato ucciso da una pallottola vagante.
 “The protester has been killed by a stray bullet”

Table 1 – Agentivity constraints on causer and causee

	Causer	Causee	
<i>a</i> -causatives	+/-Agent	+Agent	(5a,b,c)
<i>da</i> -causatives	+Agent	+/-Agent	(6a,b,c)

- (5) a. La siccità ha fatto arare la terra ai contadini. [-Agent, +Agent]
 drought make.PF plough the earth to-the farmers
 b. Il padrone ha fatto arare la terra ai contadini. [+Agent, + Agent]
 the landlord make.PF plough the earth to-the farmers
 c. *Il padrone ha fatto arare la terra al trattore. [+ Agent, -Agent]
 the landlor make.PF plough the earth to-the tractor
 “The landlor/the drough made the farmer plough the earth”
- (6) a. Il padrone ha fatto arare la terra dai contadini. [+Agent, + Agent]
 the landlor make.PF plough the earth by-the farmers
 b. Il padrone ha fatto arare la terra dal trattore. [+Agent, - Agent]
 the landlord make.PF plough the earth to-the tractor
 b. *La siccità ha fatto arare la terra dal trattore. [-Agent, - Agent]
 the drough make.PF plough the earth to-the farmers
 “The landlor/the drough made the farmer plough the earth”

References

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