The Oblique Causer Construction across Languages

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1. Introduction

The examples in (1a-c) illustrate the '*oblique causer construction*' in German, Italian and Greek, respectively. In this construction, a dative (or genitive) DP combines typically with an anticausative verb, i.e. with the intransitive version of a verb which undergoes the causative alternation. For German, the causative alternation is illustrated in (2). The dative/genitive DP in (1a-c) is interpreted as the unintentional/involuntary causer of the change-of-state event expressed by the anticausative verb (but see below).

(1) a. Dem Mann zerbrach die Vase
the.DAT man broke the.NOM vase
'The man unintentionally caused the vase to break'

b. A Francesca si ruppe il vaso
to Francesca REFL broke.3SG the vase
'Francesca unintentionally caused the vase to break'

c. Tu Ben tu kaike i supa
the.GEN Ben he.GEN burnt.NACT the soup.NOM
'Ben involuntarily caused the soup to burn'

(2) a. Der Mann zerbrach die Vase
the.NOM man broke the.ACC vase
'The man broke the vase'

b. Die Vase zerbrach
the.NOM vase broke
'The vase broke'

The 'oblique causer construction' can be found in many other Indo-European languages, for example in Albanian, Bulgarian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Romanian, Slovenian or Spanish (cf. Cuervo 2003, Rivero 2004, Kallulli 2006, Schäfer 2008). Note that in all these languages the string *oblique DP + anticausative* is ambiguous between two or even three readings. Besides the interpretation as a causer, the oblique DP can be

interpreted as affected by the change-of-state event and, in some languages, also as the possessor of the theme undergoing the change of state. Rivero (2004) gives the following glosses for the Greek example in (1c):

(i) 'Ben's soup burned' (*possessor reading*)
(ii) 'Ben was affected {pos./neg.} by the soup burning' (*affectedness reading*)
(iii) 'Ben involuntarily caused the soup to burn' (*oblique-causer reading*)

Here, I concentrate on the causer reading of the oblique DP which can be enforced by adding adverbs like '*unintentionally*' or '*by mistake*' to the examples in (1).[1/2]

2. Semantic properties of the 'oblique causer construction'

The 'oblique causer construction' differs in two semantic properties from canonical subjects of causative verbs.[3]
(i) The non-intentionality restriction: While nominative agents are compatible with adverbs stating intentionality, non-intentionality as well as purpose clauses, oblique causers are only compatible with adverbs stating non-intentionality (cf. 3).

(3) a. Der Mann zerbrach die Vase (absichtlich / aus Versehen / um die Versicherung zu kassieren)
the.NOM man broke the.ACC vase (on purpose / by mistake / in order to collect the insurance)
b. Dem Mann zerbrach die Vase (*absichtlich / aus Versehen / *um die Versicherung zu kassieren)
the.DAT man broke the.NOM vase (on purpose / by mistake / in order to collect the insurance)

[1] Cf. Cuervo (2003), Rivero (2004), Kallulli (2006), or Schäfer (2008) for discussion of the other readings.

[2] I assume that at least the difference between the 'affectedness reading' and the 'oblique causer reading' is a case of structural ambiguity, not just a case of vagueness. One argument comes from German anticausatives. As discussed in detail in Schäfer (2008), German (as many other languages) has morphologically unmarked and marked anticausatives and while the former allow both readings, the 'oblique causer reading' is blocked in the context of German marked anticausatives. This can be illustrated with an anticausative verb that comes optionally with or without morphological marking as in (i). As shown, the version with the reflexive marker is not compatible with the adverb '*versehentlich*' (unintentionally) which means that it does not allow the causer reading for the dative.

(i) a. Das Badewasser ist ihm (versehentlich) abgekühlt
b. Das Badewasser hat sich ihm (*versehentlich) abgekühlt
the bathwater is/has (REFL) him.DAT (by mistake) cooled down

In all other languages mentioned above both morphological classes of anticausatives allow both readings. This difference between German and all the other languages is related in Schäfer (2008) to the different phrase structural status of the anticausative markers (full pronoun in German vs. clitic/verbal head in all the other languages).

[3] These properties are illustrated with German examples, but they hold across languages (cf. Cuervo 2003, Rivero 2004, Kallulli 2006, Schäfer 2008).

(ii) The human restriction: The oblique DP, although interpreted as an unintentional causer, must be human. That is, non-human dative DPs are not allowed in this construction although such DPs cannot have intentions in the first place (cf. 4).

(4) a. Das Erdbeben zerbrach die Vase
the.NOM earthquake broke the.ACC vase
b. *Dem Erdbeben zerbrach die Vase
the.DAT earthquake broke the.NOM vase

These restrictions pose at least the following two questions:
First, what is the correct syntactic and semantic relation between canonical external arguments (2a, 3a, 4a) and oblique causers (1a-c, 3b)? How similar is the oblique causer to a prototypical nominative agent/causer-subject in transitive nom-acc contexts?
Second, what is the relation between the intentionality restriction and the human restriction? If the 'oblique causer construction' does not license intentionality, why then are non-human causers which are not capable of intentions in the first place not licensed in this construction?

One possible view on the latter question suggests that 'non-intentionality' is a key defining feature of the 'oblique causer construction'. This would mean that the construction explicitly expresses or stresses that the oblique DP acts without intention. If this were the case, then the 'oblique causer construction' would presuppose the oblique DP's capacity for intentionality (i.e. +human); the human restriction would derive from the non-intentionality restriction as it does not make sense to stress that an entity not capable of intentions causes something without intention (cf. also 5).

(5) Der Sturm hat (#absichtlich / #versehentlich) das Segel zerrissen
the.NOM storm has intentionally / unintentionally the.ACC sail torn
'The storm tore the sail (#on purpose / #unintentionally)'

The latter view is in accordance with the claim originating from the typological literature that non-canonical subject-marking is a sign to mark the distance from a default, in this case, to highlight the low degree of agency of a highly agent-worthy entity.

3. Oblique causers as canonical external argument

If it is a central property of the 'oblique causer construction' to mark the reduced intentionality of the external argument, then both, nominative causers and oblique causers, origin in the same phrase-structural position. Such an account has been formalized recently by Kallulli (2006). For reasons of space, I cannot review her account here. The most important facet of Kallulli's analysis that is relevant here is that the oblique causer occupies the specifier of Voice/little v (cf. Kratzer 1996), exactly as canonical agents or causers. The two differ in that, in the case of canonical agents, Voice carries a [+ intentional] feature while, in the case of the oblique causer, this feature is deleted. (The deletion of this feature is related to the presence of anticausative morphology (cf. Kallulli (2006) for details). But a detailed analysis of the syntax and semantics of the 'oblique causer construction' in section 4 reveals that such an analysis

cannot be correct. An alternative analysis is given in section 5. There, I show that the non-intentionality restriction and the human restriction on the oblique causer can be derived from general properties of the head introducing the oblique DP, an applicative head. Therefore, there is no need for syntactic features such as [+/– intentional].

4. Against oblique causers as canonical external arguments

A number of observations argue against the view that oblique causers are simply canonical external arguments of reduced intentionality.[4]

(i) Instrument licensing: Canonical causatives can also involve an unintentionally acting human nominative subject. Importantly, even if the subject acts unintentionally, an instrumental phrase can still be licensed (cf. (6a)). This shows that intentionality is not a prerequisite for the licensing of an instrumental adjunct.[5] With oblique causers, however, instrumental phrases are strongly deviant (cf. (6b)).

(6) a Der Mann zerbrach die Vase versehentlich mit einem Hammer
the.NOM man broke the.ACC vase unintentionally with a hammer
'The man unintentionally acted with the hammer so that the vase broke'[6]

b. Dem Mann zerbrach die Vase versehentlich (*mit einem Hammer)
the.DAT man broke the.NOM vase unintentionally (with a hammer)
'The man unintentionally caused (with a hammer) the vase to break'

(ii) Non-alternating, unaccusative verbs: The oblique-causer construction is crosslinguistically possible not only with verbs undergoing the causative alternation but also with unaccusative verbs which have no transitive counterpart. But unaccusatives do not project a canonical subject position (vP/VoiceP, Kratzer 1996).[7] Below this is illustrated for German in (7) and Italian in (8).[8]

(7) a. Das Kartenhaus ist umgefallen (*anticausative/unaccusative*)
the house of cards is toppled down
'The house of cards has toppled down'

b. *Hans hat das Kartenhaus umgefallen (*transitive/causative*)
Hans has the house of cards toppled down
'John caused the house of cards to topple down'

c. Das Kartenhaus ist ihm versehentlich umgefallen (*oblique causer*)
the house of cards is him.DAT by mistake toppled down
'John unintentionally caused the house of cards to topple down'

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[4] Again, these observations are illustrated with German examples, but they hold across languages (cf. Schäfer 2008).

[5] Cf. Schäfer (2008) for further discussion.

[6] The sentence is ambiguous with respect to the scope of the adverb '*unintentionally*' but this is the relevant reading for the argument made here.

[7] Or, at least, do not project a specifier in this projection.

[8] For corresponding data in Spanish, Romanian, Bulgarian or Greek see Cuervo (2003), Rivero (2004) or the overview in Schäfer (2008).

(8) A Franco sono appassite tutte le piante in giardino (per errore)
to Franco are.3.PL wilted.PL all the plants in.the garden (by mistake)
'Franco accidentally caused all the plants in the garden to wilt'

German allows the 'oblique causer' even in the context of the eventive copula '*werden*' (become) in combination with an adjective expressing the resultant state.[9]

(9) Dem Chemiker ist (versehentlich) die Säure heiß geworden
the.DAT chemist is inadvertently the.NOM acid hot become
'The chemist inadvertently caused the acid to become hot'

(iii) Auxiliary selection: In languages with '*have-be*' opposition in the perfect tense, the 'oblique causer construction' selects '*be*' (cf. for example German and Italian above). This suggests that the underlying predicate is unaccusative which, in turn, is not compatible with the projection of SpecVoice (the canonical subject position).
(iv) The interpretative vagueness of the oblique causer: Crosslinguistically, oblique causers show interpretative underspecification which is never found with causers projected in the canonical subject position (SpecVoice). As observed by Ganenkov, Maisak & Merdanova (2008) in their discussion of the counterpart of the 'oblique causer construction' in the Caucasian language Agul (cf. section 5), the oblique causer is not necessarily interpreted as *unintentional* causer. The construction is actually compatible with three readings/contexts: The first involves an *unintentional causer*, the second an *involuntary facilitator*, the third an *unexpected, but highly intentionally acting causer*. Below the readings are illustrated with a concrete German example.[10]

(10) als dem Mädchen die Tür (dann doch noch) aufging
when the.DAT girl the.NOM door (then after all) open-went
Reading A: The girl accidentally opened the door (because she pushed it with her elbow while playing with her toys on the floor)
Reading B: (The mother told the girl to hold the door so that the wind could not open it, but her efforts were not enough). The girl accidentally opened the door / let the door open.
Reading C: (All children tried but no one could open the tightly closed door, however it happened so that.) The girl managed to open the door.

The data above leads to two conclusions: First, the polysemy of the unintentional causer strongly argues against the idea that the oblique marking of the causer reflects necessarily

[9] This phenomenon is more restricted in other languages. This, however, is not a restriction on the 'oblique causer construction' in these languages, but a restriction on the use '*eventive copula + adjective*', which is blocked in many languages if a corresponding unaccusative verb exist. If no such verb exists, the use becomes o.k. and the addition of an oblique causer becomes o.k., too.

[10] In addition, I checked the Greek and Italian counterparts of the construction. The existence of the three readings was attested for both languages (p.c. Artemis Alexiadou for Greek, Giuseppina Rota for Italian). See Schäfer (2008) for illustration.

reduced intentionality (cf. reading C).[11] Furthermore, the polysemy of the unintentional causer strongly argues against the proposal that the oblique causer DP occupies the canonical subject position, i.e. SpecVoice/little v. The reason is that canonical nominative subjects can express reading A but not readings B and C, as is illustrated with the example in (11) below.

(11) Das Mädchen hat (versehentlich) die Tür aufgemacht
the.NOM girl has unintentionally the.ACC door opened
Reading A: The girl accidentally opened the door (because she pushed it with her elbow while playing with her toys on the floor)
**Reading B*: (The mother told the girl to hold the door so that the wind could not open it, but her efforts were not enough) The girl (accidentally) opened the door/let the door open
**Reading C*: (All the children tried but no one could open the tightly closed door, however it happened so that). The girl managed to open the door.

The same holds for canonical transitive causatives with non-human causer subjects. The example below can only mean that the rain was so strong that it destroyed the crop (direct causer). It cannot mean some counterpart of reading B above, that is, an interpretation where the external argument fails to prevent a change of state. A conceivable situation would be that the crop dries up due to the holding off of the rain.

(12) Der Regen hat die Ernte vernichtet
the rain has the crop destroyed
'The rain destroyed the crop'

To conclude, the relation between the oblique causer and the event is *semantically much less constrained* and *syntactically much less direct* than the relation between canonical causers or canonical agents and the event. It follows that oblique causers cannot be introduced in the same way as canonical causers; oblique causers are not introduced by Voice/little v.

5. An alternative analysis: Oblique causers are projected by applicative heads

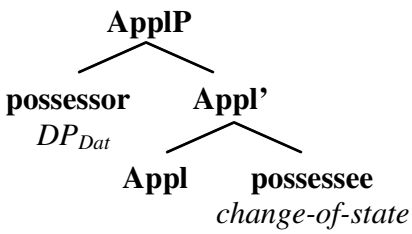
As an alternative, I propose to derive the properties of the 'oblique causer construction' from the assumption that the oblique DP is applied to a change-of-state event via an *applicative head* as in (13). The underlying predicate is unaccusative; the oblique causer is not an argument of the verb (cf. Cuervo 2003 or Rivero 2004 for such a proposal). The applicative head assigns inherent case to the DP in its specifier (Anagnostopoulou 2003, McFadden 2004, McIntyre 2006 among many). I follow the proposal in Harley (1998,

[11] A nice example triggering reading C was provided by Torgrim Solstad (p.c.). '*anspringen*' (start up) is a non-alternating, unaccusative verb. Note that the dative DP clearly wants/intends to start the car.

(i) Mir springt der Wagen nie an, aber meiner Frau springt er immer an
me.DAT starts the car.NOM never up, but my wife.DAT starts it.NOM always up

2002), Cuervo (2003) or McIntyre (2006) that an applicative head itself has very reduced semantics but just establishes an abstract, possessive *have*-relation between its specifier and its complement (here, the change-of-state event). The construction literally expresses that the oblique causer "has" the change-of-state event.

(13)



5.1 Deriving the semantic properties

(i) The Human restriction: While it is sometimes claimed that there is a general human restriction on applied arguments,[12] McIntyre (2006) shows that this general claim is not correct. Non-human entities can show up as datives in the double object construction (cf. 14a) and as so-called affected datives (cf. 14b).

(14) a. Sie gaben dem Haus {einen Namen / eine neue Fassade}
they gave the.DAT house {a name / a new façade}
'They gave the house a name/a new façade'
b. Dem Stuhl brachen zwei Beine ab
the.DAT chair broke two legs off
'Two legs of the table broke'

However, as McIntyre notes, non-human entities can be applied arguments only if they stay in a relation of *inalienable possession* (a part-whole relation) either with the possessed entity or with the entity undergoing the change of state. (*The house HAS a name / a new façade; The table HAS two broken legs*). This is not a necessary condition for human possessors which can also be alienable possessors. Turning to oblique causers, it is hard to imagine that a non-human entity (e.g. a natural force) is in an inalienable relation to an entity undergoing a change-of-state and, at the same time, can cause this entity to undergo the change of state. This would mean that the entity could cause the change of its subpart. If the oblique causer is human, there is no such restriction on the possessive relation. It follows from this line of argumentation that the human restriction is not explicitly written into the unintentional causer construction but derives from one of the building blocks of the construction, namely the possessive relation.

(ii) The non-intentionality restriction and the no-instrument restriction: The reason why adverbs expressing intentionality are never licensed is once again located in the nature of the possessive relation, especially in the fact that possessive relations are *stative*. It is a well known fact that stative predicates across languages do not license agentive adverbs of any kind (cf. (15a-c); note that the c-example involves a causative '*have*'), nor do stative predicates license instruments (cf. (16)).

[12] For example in the discussion about the double object construction.

(15) a. *John knew the answer intentionally/voluntarily/on purpose
b. *John had the car intentionally/voluntarily/on purpose
c. *John had Mary clean the floor intentionally/voluntarily/on purpose

(16) He knew the answer (*with the calculator)

This poses, of course, the question, why then *adverbs expressing non-intentionality* are allowed? I propose that these adverbs (in this context) are not agentive adverbs in the strict sense, i.e. they are not structurally licensed but they are evaluated by pragmatic considerations. They are motivated as follows: Oblique causers are necessarily human. Humans causing something can act intentionally or unintentionally by world knowledge; by default they are typically assumed to act intentionally. The oblique causer construction cannot convey this default assumption. It cannot assert intention; i.e. it cannot assert that the default holds. Therefore, the first assumption on encountering an oblique causer is that the default does not hold. Otherwise, the speaker would have used a different construction. That is, we tend to assume that the human causer acts without intention (reading A) or that it renders possible the change-of-state event without wanting to (reading B). But as we saw with the reading C above, the construction itself is not confined to non-intentionality. The non-intentionality of the dative construction, therefore, is just a pragmatic implication of the fact that the construction cannot actively assert intentionality. And, since this implication is pragmatic, it is not obligatory.

5.2 The source of the causative semantics

The final question which needs to be answered is why is the possessor of the change-of state event interpreted as responsible for the coming about of the change-of-state event? What is the source of the causative semantics?

5.2.1 The syntax and semantics of (anti-)causatives

Alexiadou et al. (2006) argue that all change-of-state verbs are inherently causative. They are built up by a [Root + Theme] complex expressing a resultant state and a verbal head v_{CAUS} taking the resultant state as its complement. V_{CAUS} introduces *a causal relation* between a causing event (the implicit argument of v_{CAUS}) and the resultant state denoted by the [Root + Theme] complex. Causatives and inchoatives/anticausatives differ only in the presence vs. absence of a Voice-projection which introduces the external argument.

(17) a. inchoatives/anticausatives: [v_{CAUS}(e) [Root + Theme]]
b. causatives: [Voice [v_{CAUS}(e) [Root + Theme]]]

The existence of v_{CAUS} in inchoatives/anticausatives can be detected by the crosslinguistic licensing of Causer-PPs (but not agent-PPs) as illustrated below for English and German (cf. Alexiadou et al. 2006 and references there).

(18) a. The vase broke from the earthquake / *from Peter / *by Peter
b. The flowers wilted from the heat / *from Peter / *by Peter

(19) a. Die Vase zerbrach durch den Erdstoss / *durch Peter / *von Peter
the vase broke through the earthquake / through Peter / by Peter
b. Die Blumen verblühten durch die Hitze / *durch Peter / *von Peter
the flowers wilted through the heat / through Peter / by Peter

5.2.2 The aspectual licensing of causers

I want to argue that the causative semantics in the 'oblique causer construction' has the same source as the causative semantics in transitive causatives and inchoatives. It depends on the presence of v_{CAUS}. (In this sense the oblique DP is a causer and not an agent). This is suggested by the fact that all three causers necessarily need a telic syntax in order to be licensed (cf. Alexiadou & Schäfer 2006, Schäfer 2008), i.e. v_{CAUS} selects for a resultant state.[13] To see this, look at the German verb '*rollen*' (to roll) which undergoes the causative alternation.

(20) a. Hans rollte den Ball
John.NOM rolled the.ACC ball
b. Der Ball rollte
the.NOM ball rolled

The verb is basically atelic as shown by the standard PP-modification test in (21a). We can, however, add a telic PP as in (21b). Crucially, nominative causers (22), causer-PPs (23) as well as the 'oblique causer' (24) are only possible if the predicate is telic.[14]

(21) a. Hans rollte den Ball (*in fünf Minuten / fünf Minuten lang)
Hans rolled the ball (in five minutes / five minutes for)
b. Hans rollte den Ball (in fünf Sekunden / *fünf Sekunden lang)
Hans rolled the ball (in five seconds / five seconds long)
über die Torlinie
across the goal-line

(22) a. *Der Wind rollte den Ball
the.NOM wind rolled the.ACC ball
b. Der Wind rollte den Ball über die Torlinie
the.NOM wind rolled the.ACC ball across the goal-line

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[13] Alternatively, the combination of an unbounded event with a resultant state leads to causative semantics (cf. Marantz 2006, Schäfer 2008). This is suggested by data as in (9) as well as by the fact that Causer PPs are licensed in the context of '*eventive copula+adjective*' combinations as in (i).

(i) Die Suppe wurde durch den Wind kalt
the soup became through the wind cold

[14] A similar restriction can be found in English, too. Folli & Harley (2008) give the pair below.

(i) a. John ate the apple
b. John ate up the apple.
(ii) a. *The sea ate the beach
b. The sea ate away the beach

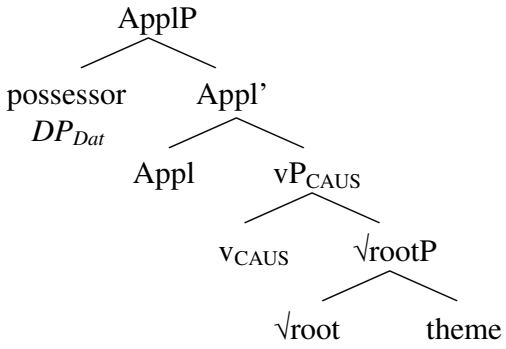
Folli & Harley (2008) discuss similar data for Italian. Travis (2005) gives a detailed argumentation that a telicity restriction on the licensing of Causers holds in Malagasy.

(23) a. *Der Ball rollte durch den Wind
the.NOM ball rolled through the wind
b. Der Ball rollte durch den Wind über die Torlinie
the.NOM ball rolled through the wind across the goal-line

(24) a. *Dem Torwart rollte der Ball
the.DAT goalkeeper rolled the.NOM ball
b. Dem Torwart rollte der Ball (versehntlich) über die Torlinie
the.DAT goalkeeper rolled the.NOM ball inadvertently across the goal-line

The above data suggests that all types of causers depend on a telic predicate, i.e. the source of the causative semantics is located in the eventive/aspectual make up of the predicate.[15] The updated structure of the 'oblique causer construction' is given below. The oblique DP "*has/possesses* the causative event which leads to the vase being broken". This abstract possessive relation is compatible with all three scenarios in (10).

(25)



6. Further motivation and explication: Caucasian languages

In this final section, I turn to the Caucasian language Agul (spoken in southern Daghestan) which gives strong morphological support for my claim that oblique causers are not located in the canonical subject position but, instead, are introduced by an applicative head expressing some possessive '*have*'-relation.[16]

In Agul, possession is expressed with the help of one of the two locative cases, either the *ad-essive* case (originally referring to location near a landmark, to be at a place) or the *post-essive* case (referring to location behind a landmark, to be behind a place). These two cases are used to express actual and permanent possession respectively. Notice that the locative cases are doubled by a prefix on the verb.

(26) a. za-w nis=na guni fa-a
I.ADE cheese.ABS=and bread.ABS ADE.be-PRS
'I have cheese and bread with me. (So, we can take a snack now.)'

[15] Periphrastic causatives are arguably different and do not obey this generalization. The same must hold for English causative '*have*', as it can embed atelic activity predicates (cf. *Asterix had Obelix carry a Menhir*).

[16] All data in this section is taken from Ganenkov et al. (2008).

b. za-q ʔu ruš=na sa gada qa-a
I.POST two daughter.ABS=and one son.ABS POST.be-PRS
'I have two daughters and one son'

Ad-elative case is used to express a 'motion from location near a landmark'. Literally, it expresses '*from the possession*' or '*from being at a place*', i.e. a kind of source.

(27) cil.i-f-as hat-u čuwal!
wall-AD.ELAT take-away-IMP sack.ABS
'Take away the sack from the wall!'

In (28) we find a canonical causative construction with an ergative/absolutive case-marking. In (28), we find the corresponding 'oblique causer construction' with the causer argument in the ad-elative case.[17]

(28) a. baw.a neƙ aƫuzu-ne
mother.ERG milk.ABS pour-out-PERF
'The mother poured out the milk'
b. baw.a-f-as neƙ aƫuzu-ne
mother.AD.ELAT milk.ABS pour-out-PERF
'The mother accidentally spilled the milk'

Note that (i) the oblique causer in Agul shows the human restriction, (ii) it is possible with exactly the same class of verbs (verbs of change of state that either have an intransitive version or that are purely unaccusative), (iii) it shows the instrument restriction and (iv) it allows exactly the same interpretations discussed in (10) above (cf. Ganenkov et al. (2008)). The construction in Agul shows therefore the same properties and restrictions as the 'oblique causer construction' in the Indo-European languages. Its case marking is, however, much more explicit. The construction literally expresses that 'the change-of-state event comes out of the possession of the oblique argument'. The oblique argument is the *"source"* of the change-of-state event.

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[17] Ganenkov et al. (2008) claim that virtually all East Caucasian languages have the 'oblique causer construction'. Comrie (2000) discusses a further Caucasian language, Tsez, which marks its oblique causer with possessive case. That is, this language, too, shows clear morphological reflex of the applicative head.

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