

Covert generic causatives in Korean as dispositional ascriptions

SeYeon Park

Department of Linguistics, The University of Texas at Austin

seyeon.park@utexas.edu



1. Overview

- This paper introduces a rarely discussed type of causative in Korean, i.e., **covert generic causatives**.
 - The construction consists of:
 - a sole **causer** subject which is strictly **non-agentive** (*agentive subject, (1a))
 - a verb which is strictly **non-causative** (*causative verb, (1b))
- (1) a. {*chong*/holangi*}-{*n*}*un cwuk-e*. b. **chong-un cwuk-y-e*.
 gun/tiger-TOP die-DECL gun-TOP die-CAUS-DECL
 ‘Guns/Tigers kill e.g., people’ ‘Guns kill e.g., people.’
- These causatives describe a dispositional causative property of the subject that brings about a resultant state described by the verb.

Proposal

- The verb undergoes **covert causativization** (i.e., Ø-causativization, e.g., *The sun melts* vs. *The snow melts*), taking a non-agentive causer subject.
 - This causativizing strategy is unexpected in two ways:
 - (i) **Typologically** unexpected: covert causativization shows a restriction on one semantic domain, namely non-agentive causers.
 - (ii) **Locally** unexpected: Korean already has an overt causativizing strategy.
- Covert generic causatives fill in a paradigmatic gap for **non-agentive causers**, since overt causative requires agentive causer.
- Covert generic causatives are a type of **dispositional middles** (e.g., *This bread cuts easily*), extending the typology of middles.

2. Syntax

Alternative analysis

- Previous research analyzes the causer DP as topic, pragmatically interpreted as a causer (Ahn, Kim & Lee 1992).
- Possibility?: the construction consists of an overt topic, perhaps with a null patient subject.

Subjecthood of the causer/absence of a null patient

1. A *PRO* in a subject-control phrase, e.g., -*ttay* ‘when’-clause, can refer to the causer, but not to the patient.
 - (2) a. *ppang_i-un [PRO_i sinseha-l ttay] salccy-e.*
bread-TOP fresh-COMP when become.fat-DECL
‘Bread_i fattens when PRO_i fresh.’
 - b. **swul_i-un [PRO_j manhi masi-l ttay] ppalka-ycy-e.*
alcohol-TOP much drink-COM when red-become-DECL
‘Alcohol_i reddens (e.g., people_j) when PRO_j drinking a lot.’
2. Subject-oriented adverbs which can appear sentence-initially can ascribe a property to the causer, but not to the patient.
 - (3) a. *hwahakcekulo ppang-un salccy-e.*
chemically bread-TOP become.fat-DECL
‘Chemically, bread fattens people.’ [the adverb is oriented toward ‘bread’]
 - b. **kepwwukhakey ppang-un salccy-e.*
uncomfortably bread-TOP become.fat-DECL
‘Uncomfortably, bread fattens people.’ [the adverb is oriented toward ‘people’]
3. Honored subjects, even when *pro*-dropped, must show referent honorific agreement on a verb (i.e., -*si/-sy*). The unacceptability of *si-* marking in (4) shows that the patient is not the subject.
 - (4) *khal-un tachi(*-sy)-e.* c.f., (4*) **elusin-tul-un tachi(-sy)-e.*
knife-TOP get.hurt-HON-DECL elder.HON-PL-TOP get.hurt-HON.REF-DECL
‘Knives get people (HON) hurt.’ Intended: ‘Elders (HON) get people hurt.’

- All together, this suggests that **the sole DP is the subject**, and not a topic, and furthermore there is **no underlying null patient** in covert generic causatives.

3. Semantics & covert causativization

- Covert generic causatives show two main semantic properties:
 - They always give rise to **direct causation**.
 - They only take **non-agentive** causer subjects.

Starting point: “overt” causativization (later extended for covert generic causatives)

- I adopt previous analyses on causativization (Jo 2021, p. 147); it suggests that this conjoins a direct causer to the meaning of the base predicate.
- (5) $\llbracket \text{Caus} \rrbracket = \lambda P \lambda e \exists v [P(v) \ \& \ \text{cause}'(e, v)]$ (where v indicates e 'event' or s 'state')
- I argue that how *cause'* is interpreted depends on the thematic role already assigned by the underlying predicate.

1. Uniqueness of participants

- Morphological causatives are derived via overt causativization using *-i/hi/li/ki/wu/kwu/chwu*.
 - Previously, they have been observed to give rise either to direct or sociative causation.
 - **Direct** vs. indirect causation: direct causation is not compatible with intermediate cause (Bittner 1999).
 - **Sociative** vs. (in)direct causation: the causer is neither direct nor indirect, but plays a sociative role, e.g., supervising or helping an event.
- (6) *sensayngnim-i haksayngtul-ul yek-kkaci kel-ly-ess-ta.*
 teacher.HON-NOM students-ACC station-to walk-CAUS-PST-IND
 ‘The teacher walked (marched) the students to the station.’ (sociative causation)
- I argue that when causativized:
 - (i) **patient-subject verbs** (i.e., stative, inchoative) give rise to **direct causation**.
 - (ii) **Agent-subject verbs** (i.e., activity, causative) give rise to **sociative causation**.
 - This can be neatly explained by the property *uniqueness of participants* (Krifka 1998): a participant cannot be added when a participant of the same thematic role already exists in the meaning.
 - When there is no agent (i.e., patient-subject verbs), causativization adds a **direct causer**.
 - When an agent is already present (i.e., agent-subject verbs), it adds a **sociative causer**.

2. Agentivity constraint

- Overt causatives, either lexical or morphological, require their subject to be strictly agentive.
 - Compare: e.g., *John/The hammer/The wind broke the vase.* (English)
- (7) *sala-kal*¹mangchi-kal*²palam-i elum-ul el-ly-ess-ta.*
 Sarah-NOM/hammer-NOM/wind-NOM ice-ACC froze-CAUS-PST-DECL
 Intended: ‘Sarah/The hammer/The wind froze the ice.’
- Explanation for the properties of covert generic causatives*
- The **non-agentive** condition: It is a paradigmatic alternative causative form to overt causatives.
 - Otherwise, overt and covert causativizations are the same type of process.
 - The **direct causation** reading: The non-agentivity of an added causer directly contradicts with the property of sociative causers who are agentive in nature.
 - This further explains why the verbs of this construction is never an agent-subject verb.

General causativization paradigm in Korean that encompasses both morphological causatives and covert generic causatives.

		overt causativization (adds agentive causer)	covert causativization (adds non-agentive causer)
(8)	patient-subject verbs	direct causation	direct causation
	agent-subject verbs	sociative causation	∅

4. Typology of middles & dispositional ascription analysis of covert generic causatives

Covert generic causatives as a type of dispositional middles

- Crucially, despite the difference in what their dispositional description is about (i.e., patient vs. causer), covert generic causatives show **key properties** of dispositional middles:
 - (i) Are generic
 - (ii) Are intransitive
 - (iii) Involve causative semantics
 - (iv) Involve an unexpressed argument in their meaning

Proposal: dispositional ascription analysis (proposed for dispositional middles, Lekakou 2004)

- Dispositional ascriptions are argued to be restricted to be **subject-oriented**, following the accessibility relation proposed by Brennan (1993):
 - “dispositional (readings of) generic sentences are subject oriented”
 - e.g., *??Bread is disposed to turn into gold when touched by Midas.*
 - I suggest this property explains why covert generic causatives are **always generic**.
 - Dispositional ascription allows non-agentive causers to appear in a subject position.
- (9) *sala-ka yucin-ul **chong-ulo** cwuk-y-ess-e.*
 Sarah-NOM Eugene-ACC gun-with die-CAUS-PST-DECL
 ‘Sarah killed Eugene with a gun.’ [episodic, non-agentive causer as an adjunct]

Putting all the pieces together:

- Covert generic causatives are a type of causative that not only fit into a causativization paradigm, but also adds a non-agentive puzzle piece into the paradigm.
- This construction is also a type of middles formed through the process of dispositional ascription.
- Thus, this construction extends a typological understanding of both causatives and middles.

5. Theoretical implications

- Covert generic causatives represent two new constructions of typological interest:
 - (i) Causatives with non-agentive causers
 - (ii) Middles with causer subjects



Selected References

Ahn, Sung-Ho, Kwang-sup Kim & Chung-min Lee. 1992. Constraints on presupposition accommodation.; **Bittner**, Maria. 1999. Concealed causatives.; **Jackendoff**, Ray. 1972. Semantic interpretation in generative grammar.; **Jo**, Jinwoo. 2021. Selection and argument structure: the case of morphological causatives in Korean.; **Krifka**, Manfred. 1998. The origins of telicity.; **Lekakou**, Marika. 2004. Middles as dispositional ascriptions.; **Shibatani**, Masayoshi & Sung Yeo Chung. 2002. Japanese and Korean causatives revisited.