DIRECT AND INDIRECT CAUSATION IN SINHALA: EXAMINING THE COMPLEXITY CONTINUUM

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1. INTRODUCTION. The causative, or the causative clause, is the linguistic expression of causation. Causation is a somewhat abstract concept in which the occurrence of one event results in the occurrence of a separate event. It is not always evident how one can ‘cause’ another; it is an intangible connection between events: a series of events alone does not necessarily connote a relationship of causation. A Causative can be defined as:

A linguistic expression that contains in semantic/logical structure a predicate of cause, one argument of which is a predicate expressing an effect (Payne 1997:176)

Because causation is not concrete, it is expected that there are different structures for causative expressions. Causative expressions come in several forms: lexical, morphological, and analytical, but each have common parts:

-Causer - agent of predicate of cause
-Causee - agent of caused event
-Caused event - resultative action, i.e. ‘the effect’

A lexical causative is an expression in which the caused event is part of the semantics of the verb, such as “kill” meaning “cause to die.” In these expressions, the causer and the causee will be the same entity. A morphological causative is an expression with a productive change in verb form, such as an inflection that changes ‘go’ to ‘send.’ This is a valence increasing operation so that an intransitive verb becomes transitive and a transitive verb becomes ditransitive. Thus an additional party, a causee or a causer, is added to the expression. An analytical causative is one in which there is a separate causative verb and which are not de facto valence increasing operations. Sinhala uses the latter two of these methods to express causation.

2. ICONICITY IN CAUSATIVES. Iconicity in causatives is namely concerned with the correspondence between linguistic distance and conceptual distance. Conceptual distance is directness or indirectness of a predicate of cause and a predicate of effect. Linguistic distance is the distance between two grammatical structures.

The linguistic distance between [two structures] is least when they are fused in [the same morpheme]; greater when they are distinct but bound morphemes; and still greater when they are separate words. The linguistic distance between them is greatest of all when they are separated by one or more other words. (Haiman 1983:782)

1 I offer my sincere thanks to Nissanka Wickremasinghe for all of his assistance, time and patience as well as Dr. Robert Englebretson for his guidance. Any errors in examples or analysis are mine alone.
2 Such as example (2)
Thus the connection between linguistic and conceptual distance is:

a. The linguistic distance between expressions corresponds to the conceptual distance between them
b. The linguistic separateness of an expression corresponds to the conceptual independence of the object or event which it represents.

(Haiman 1983:782-3)

Direct causation has a conceptual distance between cause and result that is lesser than indirect causation and should therefore have a causative expression with lesser linguistic distance than that of indirect causation.

Indirect causation has a conceptual distance between cause and result that is greater than direct causation and should therefore have a causative expression with greater linguistic distance than that of direct causation. Thus Haiman (1983) posits:

If two causatives contrast within a given language, such that they correspond to structures given..., and they contrast semantically with respect to the conceptual distance between cause and result, then the conceptual distance between cause and result will correspond to the formal distance between cause and result. (783)

This is indeed the case for Sinhala. I will argue that there is a continuum of directness which matches Haiman’s theory. The two types of causative expression, morphological and analytical, correspond to expressions of lesser and greater linguistic distance respectively.

3. Morphological Causative. In Sinhala, the morphological causative is a productive change in verb form. Because the causative form is distinguished by a bound morpheme, on Haiman’s continuum, it should represent more direct forms of causation.

3.1. Unmarked Morphological Causative. The simple morphological causative is the most direct type of causative conceptually and is the form with the least linguistic distance. That is to say, this is the most unmarked causative clause type. With the causative verb form, valency is increased by one, making intransitive clauses transitive and transitive clauses ditransitive. The form is a simple sentence: nominatives are unmarked and animate accusatives are marked with –wǝ.

Causative clause:

(1) mamǝ oyawǝ duwǝwǝnǝw

a

1SG 2SG-ACC run.NPST.CAUS

‘I make you run.’

In Sinhala, either participant in a caused event can be animate or inanimate. The only restriction is that inanimate causers must use the non-volitional verb in the past tense. There are no animacy restrictions for any of the causative clause types. This leads to clauses such as (2) where the morphological causative is used with an inanimate causer. This is a possible
exception to the tendency for the morphological causative to be used with very direct causation. Inanimate causers can provoke questions about indirectness behind the event, which would make the clause conceptually less direct. However, because inanimate agents are non-prototypical agents, some non-prototypicality is to be expected. This does not result in a complete dismissal of Haiman’s continuum in Sinhala causatives.

Whereas English has lexical causatives, such as ‘send,’ the Sinhala language does not use this form of causative clause. Therefore when our consultant translated these words, a causative inflection of the verb is used.

Verbs that are transitive become ditransitive when the causative inflection is used.

Past tense causative forms have two different inflections, one for volitional and one for non-volitional forms. The former (5) connotes compliance or willfulness on the part of the causee. The latter (6) connotes resistance on the part of the causee, and some force, whether physical or verbal manipulation, on the part of the causer.

3.2. Morphological causatives with post-position lauwa ‘through’. In addition to clauses with a causative inflection of the verb, slightly less direct causation is accomplished with a causative inflection in addition to a post-position. In this type the causee is an oblique rather than the patient. This type of clause connotes that the causer uses the causee as an instrument to accomplish the caused event. The causation is direct because the causer is the agent, but less direct than the unmarked clause because some action must occur for the causee to be an instrument or channel for the caused event.

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3 This paper includes all combinations of causer-causee and animacy: animate-animate (1), inanimate-animate (2), animate-inanimate (14) and inanimate-inanimate (15).
3.3. Morphological causatives with the complementizer kiyala ‘say’. The causative inflection of the verb can also be used with the kiyala verb, which has grammaticized strongly into a complementizer. It is also possible to interpret this clause type as a verb with two events taking place: The causer is telling the causee something and a caused event happens. If this is the case, then the clause type is of greater linguistic distance as well as greater conceptual distance. If kiyala is to be interpreted as a verb, then the causation would be analytical rather than morphological. However, the other types of analytical causatives in Sinhala are not used with the causative inflection of the verb. Additionally, kiyala is used in several clause types as a complementizer in complements clauses, not simply in causative ones. Therefore, it is more likely that kiyala functions as a complementizer here, however both explanations are possible.

As with other clauses with verbs in Sinhala, the agent of the second action, here the caused event, can be unspecified. It is implied that the agent of the second event is the patient of the first event. In example (9) it is stated that ‘you’ is told something and it is implied that ‘you’ is made to wash the clothes. However, the agent of the caused event could be an additional unstated party, depending on context.

(9) mamǝ oyaṭǝ kiyǝla redi hodǝwǝnǝwa
1SG 2SG-DAT say.conv clothes wash, NPST.CAUS
‘I am making you wash the clothes.’ lit. ‘I cause that you wash the clothes.’

To specify the causee, it can be directly stated after the verb/complementizer:

(10) nuwan maṭǝ kiyǝla mawǝ prǝmadǝ kǝrǝwǝnǝwa
nuwan 1SG-DAT say.conv 1SG-ACC late do, NPST.CAUS
‘Nuwan is making me late.’ lit. ‘Nuwan causes that I am late.’

4. Analytical causative. Analytical causatives usually involve a separate causative verb and are not de facto valence increasing operations. In Sinhala, as in many other languages, the caused event verb is in the infinitive.

4.1. Analytical causatives with denǝwa ‘dive’ and ærinǝwa ‘open’. These verb forms imply indirect causation: the causer lets, or does not prevent, the causee from accomplishing the caused event.

denǝwa - According to the consultant, this expression is used when causer allows causee to accomplish the caused event
ærinǝwa - According to the consultant, in this expression the causer retains less agency (which would make the causation less direct). This would be used when the causee accomplishes caused event through “carelessness” of the causer.

The consultant translates both forms as ‘let’ in English. These are more like permissive clauses than causative clauses, but it is one of the main ways in Sinhala to express indirect causation. There is greater linguistic distance here because of the compound verb form.

(11) mamǝ oyaṱǝ sindu kiyanna denǝwa
    1SG 2SG-DAT sing say,INF give,NPST
    ‘I am letting you sing.’

(12) mamǝ kukulawǝ marannǝ ærinǝwa
    1SG chicken-ACC die,INF open,NPST
    ‘I am letting the chicken die.’

4.2. Analytical Causatives with kriya kǝrǝnǝwa ‘act in such a way that’. This is used for the most indirect causation in Sinhala. The linguistic distance here is greater because it is a three word verb compound, the caused event verb, and kriya kǝrǝnǝwa. The conceptual distance for these clauses is also fairly great because it involves two caused events, one implied (action A) the other expressed (action B). Action A occurs, which leads to action B being caused. Action B is the caused event that is expressed, action A is unstated. However, there must be an unexpressed action A for this clause type to be chosen by the speaker over one of the morphological causative clause types.

(13) mamǝ kukulawǝ marann kriya kǝrǝnǝwa
    1SG chicken-ACC die,INF act do,NPST
    ‘I am causing the chicken to die.’ or ‘I am acting is such a way that the chicken is dying.’

(14) ohu gaha perǝlennǝ kriya kǝrǝwǝnǝ
    3SG tree topple,INF act do,PST
    ‘He is causing the tree to topple’ or ‘He is acting in such a way that the tree is toppling.’

(15) hulaŋgǝ ge wæṭenn kriya kǝrǝnǝwa
    wind house fall,INF act do,NPST
    ‘The wind is causing the tree to fall.’

5. Case Study with kata kǝrǝnǝwa ‘talk’. This section shows the same verb, tense and participants in each causative expression, as well as a context that would have caused a particular expression to be used, rather than one of the others.

Clause Type: unmarked morphological causative
(16) mamǝ oyawǝ kata kǝrǝwanǝwa
    1SG 2SG-ACC talk do,NPST,CAUS
'I make you talk.'

Possible context: This, being the most basic causative, could be used in almost any context, as long as it wasn't indirect, or the speaker does not want to highlight the indirectness. For example, I poke you with a stick so you say 'ow'.

Clause Type: morphological causative with lauwa ‘through’
(17) mamǝ oya lauwa kata kǝrǝwanǝwa
    1SG  2SG through talk do,NPST,CAUS
    ‘I am using you to talk.’
Possible context: I have a mouthpiece (you) and I tell you to address the public on my behalf.

Clause Type: morphological causative with kiyǝla ‘say’
(18) mamǝ oyaṭǝ kiyǝla kata kǝrǝwanǝwa
    1SG  2SG-DAT say,CONV talk do,NPST,CAUS
    ‘I cause that you talk.’
Possible context: I order you to talk and so you are doing it.

Clause Type: analytical causative with denǝwa ‘give’
(19) mamǝ oyaṭǝ kata kǝrannǝ denǝwa
    1SG  2SG-DAT talk do,INF give,NPST
    ‘I am letting you talk.’
Possible context: I give you permission and because of that permission, you are talking.

Clause Type: analytical causative with ærinǝwa ‘open’
(20) mamǝ oyaṭǝ kata kǝrannǝ ærinǝwa
    1SG  2SG-DAT talk do,INF open,NPST
    ‘I am letting you talk.’
Possible context: Although you would not normally talk, I am not paying attention to you, so you go ahead and talk.

Clause Type: analytical causative with kriya kǝrǝnǝwa ‘act in such a way’
(21) mamǝ oyaṭǝ kata kǝrannǝ kriya kǝrǝnǝwa
    1SG  2SG-DAT talk do,INF act do,NPST
    ‘I act in such a way that you talk.’
Possible context: I behave very rudely at a dinner so that eventually you have to say something to make me stop my poor behavior.

6. SUMMARY. In Sinhala, Haiman’s iconic motivation fits with the continuum of direct-indirect causation. The most conceptually direct causation is accomplished with the least linguistically distant clause types. The least conceptually direct causation is accomplished with the most linguistically distant clause types.

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<th>Most Direct</th>
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<td>-wa- lauwa</td>
<td>kiyǝla</td>
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<td>denǝwa ærinǝwa</td>
<td>kriya kǝrǝnǝwa</td>
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Causative clauses in Sinhala are a confirmation of Haiman’s theory of iconic motivation, and support the idea of motivated language. The distribution of causative constructions is not random or by chance. Specific conceptual events influence which form will be used over others. This leads to further research questions such as what other construction types in Sinhala are a product of iconic and economic motivation? Additionally, how many and what other languages demonstrate iconic or economic motivation in causative constructions?

REFERENCES


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