On Null Causativization

The Problem: Much recent literature (Pesetsky 1995, Harley 1995, Pylkkänen 2002, Alexiadou et al. 2006) argues that examples such as (1), often described as ‘zero-derived causatives’, contain a null causative head which is equivalent to overt causative morphemes like Finnish -tti illustrated in (2). However, null causative elements differ from overt causative heads in ways that are not predicted by a theory which assumes simple variation in (non-)pronunciation of functional heads.

The Facts: Bittner (1999) observes that null causatives such as zero-derived causative verbs and resultative secondary predicates are limited to direct causation; an indirect causation interpretation, where intermediate causes intervene between the causing and final caused event, is not possible in the absence of an overt causative morpheme (3)-(4). Another apparent restriction on null causatives is that they never causativize transitive verbs. According to Haspelmath (1993), while there are languages such as Finnish which share causative morphology between causative-transitives and causative-inchoatives, no language has causative/transitive pairs related by null morphology, even those languages with apparent null causative morphology in causative-inchoatives. Informally, one might say that null causatives are restricted to combining with ‘smaller’ constituents than overt causatives. If null causative elements were equivalent to overt causative heads modulo their pronunciation, this would predict that the equivalent of (5) should be possible with the same null morpheme. However, Haspelmath’s data suggest this prediction is not borne out, as illustrated with English in (6). Pylkkänen (2002) accounts for the contrast between Finnish and English by proposing that causatives in English are ‘root-selecting’ while those in Finnish are ‘verb-selecting’. However, on this account, the causative morphemes are semantically equivalent (7) and the nullness of the causative in English plays no role. A unified semantic analysis of all causatives does not capture the fact that null causatives do not allow indirect causation readings. Such an account also does not capture the fact that in no language does a zero-derived causative as in (6) appear to exist. There also appears to be a parallel phenomenon in the domain of resultative secondary predication. Adjectival resultatives are usually not marked by overt causative morphology in languages like English. There are some cases, such as Korean, where the resultative is arguably marked with overt causative morphology (8). However, Shim and den Dikken (2007) argue independently that the resultative phrase in Korean is in fact a larger tensed phrase, in contrast with English-like resultatives. This contrast is another instance where causativization of a ‘larger’ predicate is signalled by overt morphology, whereas causativization of a smaller predicate is null.

The Proposal: My proposal is that the causative semantics in zero-derived causative verbs and in the resultative construction has a different source than, and a different semantics from, overt causative morphemes. First, I propose that the distinction between ‘large’ and ‘small’ predicates is correlated with a semantic contrast between predicates of events and predicates of states. I further argue that null causativization involves a type shifter, CAUSE∅, which is triggered by contact between a predicate of events and a predicate of states, and contributes the ‘causative shift’ proposed by Kratzer (2005) as in (9). Kratzer discards this type shifter in her analysis of resultatives in favor for an equivalent syntactic element. However, the evidence presented here suggests that this element is indeed purely semantic in nature, and also introduces the causative semantics in zero-derived causatives. CAUSE∅ is semantically distinct from the causative morpheme of Pylkkänen (2002) as in (7) which can combine with verbs and give rise to bi-eventive semantics, in that it combines only with predicates of states. The restriction on direct causation in null causatives falls out if we assume that indirect causation requires two independent events, versus a causing event and a state.

Conclusion: The proposal here accounts for the fact that null causatives are cross-linguistically restricted both to causativizing adjectival predicates and to direct causation readings, uniting causative-inchoatives and the resultative construction. This analysis shares with Bittner (1999) a semantic approach to null causatives. However, the current proposal accounts for a broader range of data and derives the restriction on direct causation from an independently motivated restriction on null causatives, rather than stipulating the restriction in the denotation of the type shifting operator. From the perspective of this analysis, the question is not why null causatives are semantically restricted, but why causative heads with the semantics in (7) cannot be null.
(1) Jussi broke the window.

(2) a. Ikkuna hajo-si.
    window.NOM break-PAST
    ‘The window broke.’

   b. Jussi hajo-tt-i ikkuna-n.
      Jussi.NOM break-CAUSE-PAST window-ACC
      ‘Jussi broke the window.’

(3) Direct Causation Context: Jussi knocked the vase off of the table.
   a. Jussi caused the vase to break.
   b. Jussi broke the vase.

(4) Indirect Causation Context: Jussi left the window open such that the wind could get in. The wind
    knocked the vase off of the table.
   a. Jussi caused the vase to break.
   b. # Jussi broke the vase.

(5) Taro ope-tt-i Jussi-lle japoni-a.
    Taro.NOM learn-CAUSE-PAST Jussi-ABL Japanese-PART
    ‘Taro made Jussi learn Japanese.’


(7) Pylkkänen’s (2002) CAUSE:
    \[ \lambda P_{<s,t>} \lambda e_s \exists e’ \left[ P(e’) & \text{CAUSE}(e,e’) \right] \]

(8) Example containing both resultative and causative -key (Shim and den Dikken 2007:ex.36):
    Susana-ka Jim-eykey tung-i siwuenha-key annaha-tuli-key ha-ess-ta
    Susana-NOM Jim-DAT back-NOM fresh-KEY massage-OBHON-KEY do-PAST-DECL
    ‘Susana made Jim massage (some unspecified patient) his back fresh.’

(9) CAUSE\(_0\) (Kratzer’s (2005) Causative Shift):
    \[ P_{<s,t>} \Rightarrow \lambda e_s \exists s_s \left[ \text{state}(s) \& \text{event}(e) \& P(s) \& \text{CAUSE}(s)(e) \right] \]

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