

Causatives as a window to the semantic denotations and morphology of passives

This talk focuses on the syntax of the periphrastic 'make'-causatives in Sason Arabic (SA) and the affixal causatives in Turkish, and their implications for two properties of passives: (i) The verbal morphology associated with passives is often considered to be an essential part of the construction (e.g., Haspelmath 1990; Kiparsky 2013). (ii) Passive Voice has two associated semantic denotations. The first, which does not combine with a 'by'-phrase, existentially closes the initiator θ -role via an existential quantifier merging at Voice. The second semantic denotation leaves the initiator position open to be accessed and saturated by the 'by'-phrase (e.g., Bach 1980; Keenan 1985; Bruening 2013, Legate et al 2020). Although the availability of two denotations is the predominant pattern cross-linguistically, it raises the question of whether all passive constructions necessarily have both denotations.

After establishing both causative constructions involve a thematic Voice projection, I demonstrate that they manifest an active-passive alternation despite the absence of any morphological reflex. The examination reveals that the absence of passive morphology is due to distinct reasons in SA and Turkish. With respect to the semantic denotations, I argue that SA and Icelandic caused-experiencer constructions have passive syntax with only the denotation that involves the 'by'-phrase. On the other hand, passives in Turkish causatives and Hiaki allow only the denotation with the existential closure of the Initiator θ -role.

This study concludes that neither morphology nor 'by'-phrases are reliable indicators of the presence or absence of a passive syntax, and highlights the importance of independent diagnostics to determine the passive syntax.