

Causative in Korean - Case of Confusion for Romanian Learners

Diana Yuksel

(University of Bucharest)

Introduction

The notional universal category of causality exists in any natural language, but it is realized in a different way and with specific means in each language. There have been many attempts to specify the restrictions on the interpretation of causal constructions in Korean, but none of them captures such restrictions entirely. As a consequence, it is difficult to identify the correct interpretive restrictions present in the causal phrases. On the other hand, in Romanian linguistics, we cannot find exhaustive studies on the causal verbs and many of the general grammar studies give little consideration or avoid this grammatical category entirely¹.

The present study's main purpose is to show the difficulties in teaching Korean to Romanian students, focusing on the problem of expressing the causative in Korean, difficulties due, on one hand, to the grammatical and functional differences between the two languages and on the other hand to the lack of exhaustive studies on the causative constructions in both languages, which makes it difficult to find common ground for understanding the linguistic and extra-linguistic features that contribute to the realization of these grammatical categories.

¹ Although a series of Romanian linguists such as I. Iordan, Al. Graur, G. Pana-Dindelegan, Gh. Constantinescu-Dobridor, etc. did pay attention to the concept of causativity and its means of realization in Romanian, the causal verbs are still little investigated to the present day.

1. The general category of causative

Causal structures are among the lexical and semantic grammatical categories that generated controversial opinions among linguists around the world. The complexity of the problem resides mainly in the lack of an efficient method for semantic research as well as in the difficulty of setting a strict delimitation between the linguistic and extra-linguistic aspect.

Modern linguistics researches the language units not from an analytic perspective, but from a generative-synthetic perspective, which offers the possibility of disclosing the formation and functioning process of all the units which bear a role in communication. In modern linguistics the stress shifted from the systemic aspect of language to the functional and communicational aspect. Thus, referential, cognitive and pragmatic elements are now considered among the factors that contribute to convey the meaning of language units. Such function-oriented language research describes the functioning of semantic and grammar structures in communication. Therefore, the focus of modern research is on the active language, on the language in use, which is described in terms of semantics or functional semantics, the discourse shifting thus from function to form. Korean language is no exception, and causative phrases, as we shall see, are the best example for supporting the idea that only a function oriented interpretation can lead to the correct interpretation of this grammatical category.

Starting from the universal categories of semantics we can notice that both logical and linguistic categories of expression correspond to the

semantic ones. Thus, F. Brunot² replaces the classical study of grammar phenomena according to the grammatical phrase components with an analysis based on the ideas and the means of expressing the ideas, considering that language description supposes an analysis in which along with the classical categories of object, number, gender, action, agent, patient, etc. elements such as will, quantity, quality, comparison, temporal relationship and logical relationship (cause, purpose, condition, etc.) should also be taken into consideration.

Causal structures can be found in all natural languages, being thus an universal category, but the means of realization may differ substantially. Linguistic research proved that in the old Indo-European language there was a specific way of rendering causal constructions by adding the suffix -ejo/e to the transitive verbs. The same method was present in a few old Indo-European languages such as Sanskrit, Saxon language and Slavic languages, which developed a specific class of verbs with causative meaning. For example, in Sanskrit, from the verb "vid" (to know), the derived causative form appeared: "vedayami" (make know, make learn). During the process of language evolution, this morphologic class disappeared and in many Indo-European languages today causality is no longer a purely grammatical category, but a lexical one.

Things are very different with Ural-Altaic, Sino-Tibetan and Arabic languages, where we have even today specialized derivational morphemes that create the causal verbs, which constitute a morphological class of their own.

For example, in Korean we have the following phrases:

1. 철수는 죽었다. (Cheolsu died.)

² Ferdinand Brunot, *La pensée et la langue*, Paris, 1953

2. 경찰은 철수를 죽였습니다. (The police killed Cheolsu).

In the second example, the verb "to die " (죽다) receives the suffix 이 becoming the causative verb 죽이다 (make die, kill).

In other modern languages, such as Latin, Slavic and Germanic languages, there are no specialized formal indices for causative constructions and the causative situation is rendered through a sum of separate methods which cannot be considered as parts of a unitary system. In Romanian language there is a specific class of verbs, the causal verbs, whose semantics contains two actions: the stimulating actions (or causal) and the effect action (or caused). For instance the verb "a aduce" (to bring) is considered to be a causal verb in the context in which it can be read as "cause someone to come". "A aduce pe cineva" literally means "to bring someone along" and can be interpreted as causal thinking that for the effect of this action someone "was made to come". Another example: "Mama a adormit copilul." (Mother made the child sleep.) At the same time, there are verbs which contain a simpler semantic component, being more obvious for the causal action. The caused action is thus expressed separately through one of the following verbs: a face (to do), a ruga (to ask), a porunci (to order), a obliga (to cause), a determina (to persuade), a pune (to set someone to...) etc. The verb "a face" (to make, to do) constitutes the core of the lexico-grammatical domain of causative verbs. For example: "Maria l-a facut pe Ion sa planga." (Mary made John cry).

We can identify so far one of the first problems for Romanian students in understanding the causative constructions in Korean: the different methods of expressing causality in the two languages, on two different levels: morphological in Korean and lexical in Romanian.

2. Morphological causative and passive in Korean

Passive and causative verbal forms in Korean can be derived by adding one of the passive/causative suffixes to the stem of a transitive verb. Suffixes: 이, 히, 리, 기 are attached in order to obtain the short passive, 아, 어지다, 여 for long passive, 이, 히, 리, 기, 우, 구, 추 for short causative and -에 하다 for long causative. Because both causative and passive suffixes have identical shapes, homonymous causative and passive verbal forms are frequently produced from the same base: 깎이 (cause to cut) and 깎이 (be cut) from the verb stem 깎 (cut), 앉히 (make seat) and 앉히 (be seated) from the verb stem 앉 (sit). In addition to lexical causatives and passives which are derived from the combination of verb stems with the causative or passive suffixes, Korean has periphrastic causatives and passives, or the long causatives and passives. The periphrastic causative is formed by the combination of verb base with the adverbial ending -게 followed by the verb 하다 (to do). For instance, 입게 하다 means "make (someone) dress". Some verbs take both lexical and periphrastic causatives, but some other verbs take only periphrastic causatives.

The incidence of homonymous causative and passive verbal forms in Korean is raising problems for a Romanian learner. In Romanian, not only passive and causative are formed in different ways, but while the causative is a category formed mainly through lexical procedures, as shown above, passive verbal forms pertain to the domain of morphology. Moreover, in Romanian, the transitive verbs can be conjugated in the passive voice. In Korean, passives are not so commonly used as in some other languages, such as English or Romanian. There are many transitive verbs which do not undergo passivisation; for instance, the verb 주다 (to give) does not

undergo either lexical or periphrastic passivisation. Thus, the number of transitive verbs which undergo passive formation with the passive suffix is limited to a certain group of verbs. There are two kinds of verbs which undergo periphrastic passivisation: one is a group of verbs which take an inchoative verb 지 and the other a group of verbs which take an inchoative verb 되다 in their passive formation. The passive of the first group is formed by adding the infinitive ending -어 to the verb stem followed by the inchoative verb 지: 부수어지다 (be broken). All the transitive verbs which take the inchoative verb 되다 in passive formation are derived from Chinese-originated loan verbs plus the verbaliser 하. In the passive formation of these verbs, the verbaliser 하 is changed to the inchoative verb 되. Thus, the passive of 생각하다 (to think) is 생각되다 (to be thought).

3. A few issues regarding the correct interpretation of causative structures

Ch. Bally³ defines causal relationships as having an objective and asymmetrical, unidirectional (the relationship goes from A to B, but not the other way round), transitive (the causal relationship between A - B and B - C presupposes the relationship between A and C as well). Such a causal relationship can be established between two or more verbal structures which, having a certain hierarchical succession, form a complex causative macrostructure (S1+cauz.2+cauz.3...) and represent the chain of causal relationships between A, B and C.

³ Ch. Bally, *Linguistique générale et linguistique française*, 4-ème éd. – Berne: éd. Francke, 1965

Therefore, the notions of "movement", "direction", "subject" or "object" become important and cannot be separated from the notions of "cause" and "caused". The causal situation arises thus from the action of the subject and the succession of this action with the state of the object⁴. According to G. Lakoff, the typical causal phrases with an agent and a patient are endowed with the following characteristics: 1) There is an agent that does something. 2) There is a patient that is transformed. 3) The transformation of the patient is due to the action of the agent. 4) The action of the agent is intentional. 5) The agent is directing its action with a specific target. 6) The agent is the source and the patient is the object (target) of the action. 8) The event is an entity (there is a special and time interference between the action of the agent and the transformation of the patient). All these *universalia* can be applied and can be found in the causal structures in Korean. The problem arises not as much in the formation of the causal structures (see section 2. of the paper), but in their correct interpretation since the passive and causative structures in Korean can be considered ambiguous structures.

Regarding the determination of the interpretation of the ambiguous short form passive and causative, Shibatani⁵ formulates the following rule: the passive reading is available in Korean only when there is a physical relation between the subject/agent and the patient.

For instance, in the following example, the relationship between a person and the shoes.

⁴ Such a definition was given, among others, by A. Potebnea and G. Lakoff.

⁵ M. Shibatani, 1994. *An Integrational Approach to Possessor Raising, Ethical Datives, and Adversative Passives*. Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society

의사는 환자에게 신발을 밟혔다.

(The patient was stepped on the shoe by the doctor.)

Since there is no larger context to clarify the meaning, the same phrase can also be interpreted as a causative construction: "The doctor caused the patient's shoes to be stepped on". In the same way, in the following example the phrase can be read as both causal and passive, but a causative reading is grammatical (Cheolsu cut Yeongyi's hair.) and is not affected by the kind of relation that holds between the matrix subject ("Cheolsu") and the noun in accusative ("hair").

철수는 영이에게 머리를 깎였다.

(Cheolsu cut Yeongyi's hair.)

(Yeongyi's hair was cut by Cheolsu.)

On the other hand, Washio⁶ differentiates between the two possible interpretations by identifying another condition for a phrase to be read as passive. In his opinion, the subject should be included in the event by possessing the object in accusative or by having a pragmatic relation with the possessor. Otherwise, the construction can only be interpreted as causative. For example, Washio argues that the following example can be interpreted as passive if Yeongjeori and Kyeonghui are, say, friends but ungrammatical if they don't have a relation of any kind:

영저리는 순자에게 경희의 일기를 읽혔다.

(Yeongjeori had Sunja read Kyeonghui's diary.)

⁶ R. Washio, 1993. *When Causatives Mean Passive: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective*. Journal of East Asian Linguistics 2

(Yeongjeori was read Kyeonghui's diary by Sunja.)

(* Kyeonghui's diary was read by Sunja.)

However, Kim Soo-Hee in a research study from 2002 notes that all the nine subjects, who are native speakers of Korean, said that the above example is ungrammatical as the passive no matter whether the subject Yeongjeori and the possessor of the object in accusative, Kyeonghui, are friends or not. Thus, a pragmatic relation is not a licensing factor of the Korean passive and cannot differentiate it from causative.

Analyzing the precise restrictions on the passive reading, Hee-Soo Kim and Acrisio Pires⁷ propose new criteria for determining the correct interpretation of passive and causative phrases. They state that what constrains the passive reading is the requirement for a possession relation between the subject (noun in nominative) and the noun in accusative. Such a relation of possession can be "inalienable or body-part, extended body part, or alienable, real or hypothetical, permanent or temporary."⁸ For example:

존이 매리에게 마음을 읽혔다. (John's mind was read by Mary.)

They also read as passive the following phrase, following their argument that the verb 찢다 (tear) can be passivized for extended body parts.

존이 매리에게 톱의 옷을 찢겼다.

⁷ In their study *Ambiguity in the Korean Morphological Causative/ Passive*, available

at www.ling.lsa.umich.edu/grp/wp/kim-pires.pdf

⁸ Kim and Pires, p.5

(John was torn Tom's clothes by Mary.)

However, by observing the logical relationship between the agent and the patient, we can also read the phrase in a causative note. "John had Mary tear Tom's clothes." This brings us back to the problem of differentiating between passive and causative phrases. In order to set some clear restrictions which can limit the interpretation of one phrase to either passive or causative, Kim and Pires apply the criterion of the obligatory "A-movement" of the possessor. This A-movement is only involved in the passive but not in the causative. The following two examples are eloquent.

존이 매리에게 머리를 깎였다. (John's hair was cut by Mary.)

This example is clearly a passive construction while the following one can only be read as a causative.

존이 매리에게 수의 머리를 깎였다. (John had Mary cut Sue's hair.)

The only possible interpretation is "John had Mary cut Sue's hair.". A passive reading "John was cut Sue's hair by Mary." would make no sense. In the passive, the structure of nominative and dative has to be interpreted as the antecedent of the possessor of the accusative. But in the last example, where an overt noun which is not co-referential with the subject is the possessor, only the causative reading is possible.

The above mentioned study explains the interpretive restrictions on the passive reading in a precise and unified way by deriving the passive from obligatory A-movement of the possessor; it explains why similar restrictions do not extend to the causative phrases. This is all at the level of

short passive or causative verbal forms. In regard to the difference between the long and short forms of the passive or causative constructions the *Korean Grammar for International Learners*⁹ although warning that it is difficult to discern certain regularities in the use of the short and long forms, it points out that there is a slight difference in meaning. The general rule says that the short form causative verbs convey the speaker's direct involvement in the stated action, while the long form convey the speaker's indirect involvement. For example:

1. 어머니가 아이에게 밥을 먹이셨어요.

Mother fed the child. (She put the food in his mouth.)

2. 어머니가 아이에게 밥을 먹게 하셨어요.

Mother let the child eat.

According to the rule the first phrase has a coercive meaning. The child had to eat because the mother fed him (made him eat). The second example, however, does not necessarily have a coercive meaning. The child was allowed to eat, but he didn't have to.

The problems arise when the same short form causative can be direct and also indirect. In the following three examples¹⁰ the verb 입다 acquires three different meanings, all of them falling under the incidence of causative.

1. 엄마가 영이에게 옷을 입힌다. Mother dresses Yeongyi.

(Mother puts Yeongyi's clothes on her.) - short form, direct causative

⁹임호빈, 홍경표, 장숙인. 외국인들을 위한 한국어 문법

¹⁰ Examples taken from *The Korean Language* by Iksop Lee and S. Robert Ramsey, p.214

2. 영이엄마는 영이에게 언제나 비싼 옷만입힌다. (Yeongyi's mother always lets her wear expensive clothes.) - short form, indirect
3. 엄마가 영이에게 옷을 입게 한다. (Yeongyi's mother lets her put (her own) clothes on.) - long form, indirect

Conclusions

So far, the above examples and the study of the previous researches lead clearly to one conclusion: although being a morphological category, Korean passives and causative are more often distinguished by their idiomatic semantic content than derived out of purely syntactic motivations. However this does not simplify the grammatical analysis. In Romanian, the notional category of causality is embedded into the semantic structure of the causal verbs. Thus any causal verb will attract a direct or indirect object which will show that subject makes someone or something act or modify itself. As such, the causative verbs in Romanian constitute a grammatical and lexical category *sui generis* and their meaning depends quite largely on their lexico-semantic context, determining the lexical, but also the syntactic value of the verbs. Although we can find common functional features for the causative phrases in Korean and Romanian, the difference is their grammatical features lead the Romanian learners to confusion. Another difficulty in understanding the causative phrases in Korean for Romanian learners identified in this paper resides in the ambiguity and the intersecting meanings of the causative and passive constructions in Korean. As we have seen before, there is a number of verbs in Korean with identical causative and passive

forms. For instance, 보다 (to see), by receiving the passive or causative suffix -이 becomes 보인다 which means "is seen" or "causes to be seen".

서락산은 보입니다. (Mount Seorak becomes visible.)

선생님은 학생에게 책을 보인다.

(The teacher is showing the book to the student.)

As we have seen, in such cases, the correct meaning of the phrase can only be determined by the careful analysis of the context. We have seen that in Korean a phrase such as 영저리는 순자에게 경희의 일기를 읽혔다. can be interpreted either as a causative structure (Yeongjeori had Sunja read Kyeonghui's diary.) or as a passive one (Kyeonghui's diary was read by Sunja.). In Romanian there's a big morphological difference between "Yeongjeori a pus-o pe Sunja sa citeasca jurnalul lui Kyeonghui" and "Jurnalul lui Kyunghui i-a fost citit lui Yeongjeori de catre Sunja." even if functionally the phrases are similar. In this case, the correct interpretation does not depend only to the correct application of the morphological and lexical restrictions pertaining to the category of causatives or passives in Korean, but in the end it resorts to understanding a different way of thinking reflected in the usage of language.

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