Some notes on the meaning components of internally and externally caused verbs.

Comments on Rappaport Hovav “Lexical content and context. The causative alternation revisited”

Violeta Demonte and Isabel Pérez Jiménez
CCHS-CSIC

1. Introduction

“... it is possible to distinguish facets of meaning that are strictly contributed by the verb [the lexicalized meaning] from other facets of meaning that may be derived either from the choice of arguments or from prototypical uses of the verb in context [non-lexicalized meaning].”

- There are counterexamples to the possibility of a systematic and crosslinguistic (morpho)-syntactic relation between the two members of alternating pairs. Lack of alternation sometimes seems to depend on the theme argument the verb combines with.

(1) a. John broke the pencil.  
   b. The pencil broke.

(2) a. The waiter cleared the counter.  
   b. *The counter cleared.

(3) a. Rebecca broke her promise.  
   b. *Her promise broke.

- Internally caused COS verbs (wilt, bloom) may have causative counterparts if certain constraints regarding the meaning of their external arguments are satisfied.

(4) a. The gardenias bloomed.  
   b. *The gardener bloomed the gardenias.

(5) Early summer heat bloomed fruit trees across the valley. (LN 1119) ((28) RH)

- Certain verbs cannot be classified as verbs of internally or externally caused change since this condition appears to depend on the choice of arguments.

(6) a. {The days / Skirts} lengthen {in summer / in the eighties}.
   b. At his third lie, Pinocchio’s nose lengthened in such an extraordinary manner that he could not turn around. (The Adventures of Pinocchio, Carlo Collodi, Oxford World Classics) ((32b) RH)

- Lexical entailments determine verb/root meaning and, consequently, argumenthood.

(7) “The Direct Causation Condition”

For verbs allowing all types of causers as external arguments sometimes the possibility of participation in the CA depends on the choice of arguments.

Do we need to posit polysemy to account for cases like (8) and (9)?

(8) a. The waiter cleared the counter. 
   b. *The counter cleared. 
   c. The sky cleared.

(9) a. Rebecca broke her promise. 
   b. *Her promise broke.
   c. The pencil broke.

The semantics of alternating verbs:

(10) Reinhart’s (2002) and L&RH’s (1995) generalizations relative to the thematic/semantic composition of alternating verbs:

Agentive verbs do not have intransitive variants; verbs with unspecified causers do alternate; internally caused COS verbs do not have transitive variants (and when they do their subjects are mainly natural forces).
In (2) and (3) / (8) and (9) the combination of a supposedly alternating verb with specific internal arguments denotes a change of state that can only be caused by an agent (Brousseau and Ritter (1991), L&RH (1995), a.o).

Question: Is there a way to maintain the generalization in (10) and also account for the facts in (2)/(8) and (3)/(9)?

- Let us consider first (2)/(8): Polysemy
  Spanish: two different verbs in the contexts where English clear appears: limpiar and aclarar.

  A) Limpiar, as clear in English, is an agentive verb which does not have an intransitive anticausative variant.

    (11) a. {El camarero / *la servilleta / *el viento} {limpió/*aclaró} el mostrador.
      {The waiter / the napkin / the wind} cleaned / cleared the counter
    b. *El mostrador se limpió. (* in the anticausative reading)
    c. {*El día / *La montaña / el valle / el cielo} se limpió.
       {The day / the mountain / the valley / the sky} SEanticausative marker cleaned

  B) aclarar productively participates in the causative-inchoative alternation.

    (12) a. {El peluquero  /  la edad / la tintura} (le) aclaró el pelo a María.
       {The hairdresser / the age / the dye} (her dative.feminine) cleared the hair to María
       'The hairdresser made María's hair lighter.'
    b. Su pelo se aclaró {con la edad / con la tintura}.
       Her hair SEanticausative marker cleared {with the age / with the dye}
       'Her hair became lighter {with age /with the dye}.'

      o Cut / Cortar.

    (13) a. El panadero cortó el pan. – cortar: 'to separate parts of an object using a sharp instrument'
       The baker cut the bread
    b. *El pan se cortó por sí solo.
       The bread SE cut by itself

    (14) La comunicación se cortó. – cortar: 'to interrupt'
       The communication SE cut
       'The communication got interrupted.'

    o (3)/(9) *The promise broke:

    - The generalization underlying the facts in (3)/(9) is that when causative-inchoative verbs/roots do not have intransitive counterparts it is because they, descriptively speaking, move to the class of purely agentive verbs. This seems to be the case when we extend the basic lexical meaning of physical activities to abstract activities (see Piñón (2001) for a similar conclusion).

    - (2)/(8) Polysemy: Two different verbs in the contexts where English clear appears: limpiar and aclarar.

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    - A structural account for the generalization underlying the contrasts in (8) and (9).
      - There can be agentivity both at the root level and at the VP level (v+Direct Object combination).
      - Verb meaning can be compositionally built: v head supplies a higher node introducing the external argument with a vP only compatible with an Agent external argument.
      - Let us assume that in languages which have morphologically marked (reflexive)-passives and anticausatives we need to postulate a structure with a VoiceP where external arguments are introduced (Kratzer 1996). The difference between Agent external arguments and other conceivable causers depends on the features of Voice.
      - From Alexiadou (2010): (17) would be the structure for John broke the pencil/table and (18) the one for the pencil/table broke.
and (18) distinguish three levels in the representation of causative events:
the level of idiosyncratic meaning (the core meaning), the event/change level and
the domain of the Causer external argument.

How can we account for the constraints on the interpretation of
John broke the contract
and therefore for the impossibility of an intransitive variant –*
The contract broke–
if we do not want to have doubly classified roots?

Towards an answer based on the existence of lexical-structural factors involved:
Roots of alternating verbs are by default stative since they denote a result state
and not how this result is reached. In cases like John broke the promise
vs. *
The promise broke
what is systematically involved is the component of how the result
is reached. In break the promise there is no real change of state, there is no real
undergoer. If we use a framework like DM we could think that alternating roots
can be inserted either at the root level or as modifiers of v at the vP level (see
Alexiadou 2010: 195) depending on the combination Theme-v. When the root
modifies v, a manner component is "added" and v' selects an external argument.

- Parallel contrast:

(19) a. John emptied the tub. / The tub emptied.  b. I emptied the trash bin./ *The trash bin emptied. (RH (23) in the handout)  c. The dust bin emptied (with a touch of a button and nothing got caught in the bin requiring manual removal. I just purchased this vacuum today so I can’t...).

3. The 'cause' component in internally (and externally) caused change of state verbs

- Internally caused COS verbs seem to have a cause component as part of their meaning
detectable in their intransitive use), as it is also the case with externally cause COS verbs.
- It seems that internal and external causation are notions relevant for argument realization.

3.1. Combination with causer PPs

- A causal component in intransitive COS verbs can be crosslinguistically detected by the
licensing of Causer-PPs (but not agent-PPs). Con can introduce instruments and causers:

(20) a. Juan abrió la puerta con la llave.

(17) a. La vaquilla se rompió con {el terremoto / tus golpes / *Juan / * el martillo}.

- Externally caused COS verbs.

(21) a. {Juan / el martillo} rompió la vaquilla.

- Internally caused COS verbs

(21) b. El árbol floreció con {el sol / la primavera / el fertilizante / *el jardinero / *la manguera}.

- There is an asymmetry between the possibility of expressing the Cause through an
external argument and through a causer PP.

Michel, however, could explain this difference if a structural
distinction between Agents and Causers is not assumed?

(21’) a. {Juan / el martillo} rompió la vaquilla.

- In the line of AAS (2006) we would like to claim that these PPs are licensed via
adjunction to vCause.

3.2. Dative causers

- Externally caused and internally caused intransitive COS verbs can combine with a

(22) a. A Juan se le rompieron las gafas.

- Schäfer (2008, 2009): this dative constituent occupies the specifier of an applicative
head above a causative node. Such causers are crosslinguistically only possible in
unaccusative change-of-state contexts; this suggests that these contexts themselves are
the source of the causative semantics.

b. La ropa se secó con el sol.
The clothes dried with the sun
'The clothes dried with the sun.'
3.3. Scope of negation

- Koontz-Garboden (2009: 102ff.): scope of negation facts show that only externally
caus COS verbs have a causal component. In (23a) it is not denied that any glass
entered into a state of brokenness. It is being denied that the glasses were the cause of
their own breaking. (23b) is interpreted as a contradiction, according to Koontz-
Garboden. In this case, "what is negated is that there was a change of state in the
patients".

(23) a. No se rompió ningún vaso; los rompió Andrés.
   No se broke any glass; them broke Andrés
   'Any glass didn't break; Andrés broke them.'
   b. # No empeoró ningún paciente. Los empeoró el tratamiento.
   no worsened any patient. Them worsened the treatment
   'Any patient didn’t worsen. The treatment worsened them'.

   [Koontz-Garboden 2009: (83), (84)]

   • However:

(24) ... en esta sociedad si no maduran te maduran a ostias, cuando vives solo
... in this society if not mature2.sg.pres youacc mature3.pl.pres
y por tu cuenta, tienes que limpiar el piso, prepararte la comida, tienes ganas de ...
   'In this society, if you do not mature (by yourself), they make you mature …'

   • Conclusion: both externally and internally caused COS verbs have a causal meaning
component in their intransitive variant.

3.4. Transitive variants of internally caused COS verbs.

- Internally caused COS verbs have transitive variants, (McKoon & Macfarland 2000;

(25) a. la jefa de la delegación […] pudo zafar del fuego de las llamas que ardió los muebles
y la puerta de acceso a su oficina [http://www.lacapital.com.ar/contenido/2008/12/10/noticia_0071.html]
   → El fuego ardió los muebles: the fire burnt the furniture
   b. A la tercera poda de cada madre te aseguras otros 16 esquejes de cada hembra que puedes poner a enraizar mientras florece las madres
   (hembras que te salieron de semillas) [http://www.lamarihuana.com/foros/cultivo-exterior-f3/novato-t33200.html]
   → [tú] florece las madres: you blossom the mother plants
   c. El invernadero sometido al estímulo musical había germinado el maíz con mayor rapidez. [Benezezv, R. O. Manual de musicoterapia; CREAT] 
   → El invernadero había germinado el maíz: the greenhouse had germinated the corn
   → El sol aclaró el día: the sun cleared the day
   e. El joven Miguel Ángel […]. En 1995 fermentó las primeras uvas para hacer un vino propio
   → Él fermentó las uvas: he fermented the grapes

(25) More examples…

  a. …cuando el médico empeora el cuadro del paciente [www.scribd.com/doc/…/Temas-de-Seminarios-de-SICO]
     → El médico empeora el cuadro: the doctor worsened the patient’s symptoms
  b. Lambro los labios empeora el cuadro clínico [http://pekebebe.com/2146-labios-queratosos-y-resequedad-en-tu-
     cuerpo.html] 
     → Lambres los labios empeora el cuadro clínico: licking your lips worsens the symptoms
     → El sol maduró las frutas del huerto: the sun ripened the fruits
  d. …Hansón hizo una advertencia que palideció a los asistentes “el mundo solo tiene 10 años para
     frenar el calentamiento global” [www.elcorreo.net/…/Montevideo_y_Verdeles:secure_Bush_y_la_geopolitica_energetica]
     → La advertencia palideció a los asistentes: his warning paled the attendees

- These examples describe internally caused events which are triggered or facilitated by
natural forces, environmental phenomena or ambient conditions, events, or by the
intervention of some instrument (invernadero) or even agents when the process
described by the verb can be controlled by an external animate entity trough specific
means. → We agree with RH that this only happens with a restricted set of subjects.

- But it seems that the syntactic status of the causative use of these verbs is different from
that of externally caused COS verbs. For example, internally caused COS verbs cannot
be the basis for the formation of deverbal adjectives with the suffix -able/-ible (unless in
the structure <V todo lo V>, see Oltra 2009).

(26) a. hundible, rompible, oxidable, etc.
sinkable, breakable, rustable
b. *muebles ardidles (burnable furniture), *día aclarable (clearable day), *planta florecible (bloomable plant), *frutas maduras (ripeable fruit), *asistentes palidecibles (palable attendees), etc.

- An appropriate verbal base for -ble derivation must have an internal theme
argument, and an agentive external argument (Rainer 1999: 70.2.2.2).

- Internally caused COS verbs in Korean: The word phi- ‘blossom’ is only used as an
intransitive, (27a). To be used as a transitive, it should combine with the causative
morpheme -wu- (Oltra 2009).

   Rose-Nom blossom-Past-Decl
   "The rose blossomed."
   Rose-tree-Nom red rose-Acc blossom-Caus-Past-Decl
   ‘(lit.) A rose tree blossomed red roses.’
   Hot weather-Nom red rose-Acc blossom-Caus-Past-Decl
   ‘(lit.) The hot weather blossomed red roses’
A main question coming out from the transitivization facts is how the Direct Causation Condition can explain the following two facts:

a) The transitive variants of internally caused COS verbs do not only have a restricted set of subjects, but their external arguments also appear to have different syntactic behaviours with respect to certain grammatical processes.

b) There are crosslinguistic differences in the sense that in some languages transitivization is possible (Korean), even if the subjects of the internally caused COS satisfy the DCC, (27c).

c) What could the DCC say about SE? What could SE be in this approach?

4. Conclusions

In this presentation we have examined RH’s proposal that lexicalized meaning should contain a core meaning and lexical entailments if we want to account for certain recalcitrant facts which pose problems both to derivational and non-derivational approaches to the causative alternation. We find RH’s proposal new and illuminating. In our brief comments, we have tried to elaborate the hint that, apart from its intrinsic interest for theories of lexical meaning, it could help to refine the theory of roots in non-derivational approaches to the CA. It could perhaps be necessary to implement a mechanism of root modification. We have also discussed some aspects of languages which mark either transitivization or der transitivization morphologically. In order to implement RH’s approach cross linguistically such a type of fact should be taken into account.

5. References


Violeta Demonte: violeta.demonte@cchs.csic.es / Isabel Pérez Jiménez: isabel.perez@cchs.csic.es