Causative and Benefactive Constructions in Thai*

Shoichi Iwasaki  
University of California, Los Angeles

1. Introduction

The causative and benefactive constructions are not commonly treated in the literature as related phenomena. Indeed, in English, the causative sentence contains an embedded clause and thus is syntactically different from the benefactive sentence which does not. However, observation of the constructions in several other languages encourages us to investigate their relationship more carefully. For example, in Japanese and Korean both constructions are valency increasing sentences with a complex predicate and the same morpheme ("give") is employed in the two constructions in Lahu (Matisoff 1976:430), Mandarin, Russian, and Finnish (Newman 1993).

In this paper, I examine these two constructions in Thai which exhibit particularly clear and interesting patterns. I will show that both the causative and benefactive constructions employ a morpheme meaning 'give' like some of the languages mentioned above. Furthermore I will demonstrate that they consist of a noun phrase which refers to the person who triggers an event with different degrees of agentivity and a clause which describes the effected event. Although different in nature, this use of the two constructions is reminiscent of voice alternation between active and passive constructions. I will also examine the use of the verb 'give' in order to further delineate the relationship between the two constructions.

2. Agentive-trigger and non-agentive-trigger

Simple causative and benefactive sentences in Thai both contain an NP and a clause, and both employ the same verb háy 'give' to connect these constituents. With respect to the ordering of the NP and the clause, the two constructions are mirror images of each other, that is, the causative has the "NP háy Clause" order, while the benefactive has the "Clause háy NP" order. Consider (1) and (2).

(1) Causative:  
*deen háy nok súu nánsúu*  
Daeng HAY Nok buy book  
"Daeng made Nok buy a book."
(2) Benefactive:  \textit{\textit{nók sú}

\textit{sú} nánsúu hay déej}
Nok buy book  HAY Daeng
"Nok bought a book for Daeng."

In the two sentences above, the event depicted in the constituent clause, which I call the "effected event," is brought about by what I call the "trigger of the event", or simply the "trigger." Thus in both (1) and (2), the trigger is Daeng and the effected event is Nok's buying a book. The "trigger" is always a person and is the ultimate incentive for the effected event. If not for the "trigger" (Daeng) the instigator of the effected event (Nok) would not or could not have performed the action (buying a book). In the causative, what is normally known as the causer is the trigger.\textsuperscript{1} In the benefactive construction, the "trigger" is what is coded as the beneficiary, which, according to Newman, refers to a "person who plays a crucial part in the \textit{genesis} of some act, who constitutes ... the \textit{motivation} for some act (1993:465)" (emphasis added).

A person's participation as the "trigger" could range from being strongly agentive to non-agentive. The agentive-trigger exercises various degrees of control over the instigator of the effected event. For instance, the trigger may physically coerce, verbally order, or give permissions to the instigator of the effected event. A non-agentive-trigger, on the other hand, exerts no active control over the instigator of the event,\textsuperscript{2} but the instigator of the effected event voluntarily anticipates or interprets the trigger's wishes. For example, in (2), the non-agentive trigger, Daeng, may have simply hinted her desire of obtaining a book to Nok, who subsequently sensed it and acted on her own accord.\textsuperscript{3}

The difference and the similarity between the causative and benefactive may be understood by relating them to the transitivity prototype proposed by DeLancey (1981, 1985). According to DeLancey, a prototypical transitive event has the schemata of \textit{CAUSE} --> \textit{EFFECT}, and a prototypical \textit{CAUSE} involves agent's "volition." Thus, the "prototypical transitive entails a two-stage chain of causation, in which a decision on the part of the agent to perform an act causes the performance of the act, which in turn causes an event external to the agent (1985:5)." Schematically this process may be represented as followed. (This schema is a modification from DeLancey. P refers to 'participant.')
(3) Transitive event structure
Volition of Pa --> Action of Pa --> Pb

By extending the transitive event structure, a prototypical causative event (such as "John made Bill wash the car") may be schematically represented as follows.

(4) Causative event structure (Pa = the trigger)
Volition of Pa --> Action of Pa --> Volition of Pb -->
Action of Pb --> Pc

In the above, the volition-driven action of Pa affects Pb, who then produces an action volitionally, and this action in turn affects Pc. The prototypical benefactive event structure is a mixture of (3) and (4). It has a simpler structure like (3) and contains the trigger like (4).

(5) Benefactive event structure (Pa = the trigger)
Pa --> Volition of Pb--> Action of Pb --> Pc

Notice in (5) Pa is not accompanied by volition since the trigger for the benefactive situation is non-agentive, non-volitional, but it nevertheless induces volition in Pb.

Distinction in agentivity of "trigger" exhibited in (4) and (5) influences the order of constituents in a sentence. Because normally the Agent is placed at the beginning of a sentence (DeLancey 1981:633), an agentive-trigger occupies the position before the caused event, resulting in the causative sentence structure. When the trigger is non-agentive, the initial position is occupied by the agent of the effected event, resulting the benefactive construction. Thus it is possible to represent the clause structure of the two constructions as follows. In the representation below, the linear order represents the constituent order and the arrow represents the direction of the cause to the effect.

(6) Causative: Agentive-trigger ---> Effected Event
(7) Benefactive Effected Event<--- Non-Agentive-trigger

To summarize so far, both causative and benefactive constructions contain the trigger (agentive or non-agentive) and the effected event. Depending on the balance of agentivity between the trigger and the instigator of the effected event, the appropriate structure between the two will be employed. This
suggests that causative and benefactive are semantic as well as structural mirror images of each other, or that the benefactive is characterized as a reversed causative.

This treatment of these constructions explains a constraint imposed on both constructions: it is ungrammatical if the effected event in a causative or benefactive sentence is non-volitional/ non-controllable. Let's consider the following causative construction (8) as an example.

(8) *dẹẹŋ hạ́y ńok mǐi khwaamsùk
     Daeng HAY Nok have happiness
     "Daeng made Nok happy."

Example (8) is ungrammatical since the state of being happy is non-volitional/ non-controllable. In other words, a human trigger cannot change other human's internal state (Vichit-Vadakan 1976:470-473). A human trigger also cannot change a state involving a non-human actor as shown in (9).5

(9) *dẹẹŋ hạ́y fọ̀n tòk
     Daeng HAY rain fall
     "Daeng made rain fall."

It is significant that the benefactive also rejects a non-volitional/ non-controllable event as its effected event. Observe (10) and (11) below.

(10) *ńok mǐi khwaamsùk hạ́y dẹẹŋ
     Nok have happiness HAY Daeng
     "Nok is happy for Daeng."

(11) *fọ̀n tòk hạ́y dẹẹŋ
     rain fall HAY Daeng
     "Rain fell for Daeng."

The ungrammaticality of (10) and (11) offers support for the position that the benefactive and causative are related phenomena.6

3. A further relationship of causative and benefactive

   In the previous section we examined the relationship between the trigger and the effected event. Now we shift our attention to the word hạ́y which connects the two constituents in the constructions under investigation. By examining the