

ON THE CATEGORY OF CAUSATIVE VERBS IN TIBETO-BURMAN LANGUAGES*

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

The category of causation exists in the majority of Tibeto-Burman (TB) languages, but its importance is not the same in each language. In some languages, the causative category occupies an important position in its grammatical system, with its causative verb-forms still active in usage and in function. In other languages, although the causative forms may still exist, they have a low functional load. In still other languages there only survive the incomplete traces of causative verb forms, or none at all.

There are many differences in the morphological realization of causative verbs in the various languages, including agglutinative prefixes, inflectional suffixes, inflexion of the verb roots, or auxiliary words before or after a main verb. In the languages which have inflexion of verb roots, the causative category may be expressed by initial voicing alternations, by different vowels, or by inflexion of the tones. Some languages have several different morphophonemic alternations, with some being more important than others.

There are many papers which discuss the category of causation, but most of them only concern the causative forms of a specific language. Only a few (e.g., Matisoff 1976) take an overall view of the causative category in general. This paper will reveal the historical connections which exist among the phonetic shapes of causative verbs. We will demonstrate that the various recent forms all come from the same ancient forms through a long historical evolution, and that they developed independently in each language after they split off from each other.

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2.0. SOME REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CATEGORY OF CAUSATION

2.1. Agglutinative forms

Languages which typically indicate the causative meaning with agglutinative forms include rGyalrong, Jingpho, Dulong, Written Tibetan, and Darang, all of which employ prefixes.

2.1.1. rGyalrong

Taking the rGyalrong dialect of Wangjaba of Zhuokeji District of Maerkang County in the Aba Tibetan Autonomous region of Sichuan Province, we find the prefix **sə-** used before verb roots to express a causative meaning. As each rGyalrong verb in this dialect already has a prefixal syllable before the root, the causative prefix is inserted between this prefix and the verb root. This causative prefix can be used either with transitive or intransitive verbs.

<i>before v.t.</i>		<i>before v.i., with change of v.i. to v.t.</i>	
SIMPLEX	CAUSATIVE	SIMPLEX	CAUSATIVE
kaza	'eat' kasəza	nawawo	'cry' kasəwawo
katsəs	'speak' kasətsəs	kapka	'succeed' kasəpka
kaslap	'learn' kasəslap	kanja	'lose' kasənja
kajok	'hang up' kasəjok	tambəm	'overflow' kaəmbəm
kasakha	'dislike' kasəsakha	tapho	'escape' kasəpho
kawat	'wear' kasəwat	kasto	'be straight' kasəsto

Table 1. rGyalrong (Wangjaba) causatives

As the examples show, most verbs take the prefix **ka-**, while a few others take **ta-** (e.g., 'escape') or **na-** (e.g., 'cry'). However, any prefix will be changed to **ka-** if the causative morpheme is inserted. Apart from adding prefixes, rGyalrong has other methods to represent causation as well, as we shall see below.

2.1.2. Dulong

As in rGyalrong, Dulong uses causative prefixes before verbs, although the language has more of them. There is obviously a cognate relationship between the prefix **su**³¹- of Dulong and the prefix **sə-** of rGyalrong:

<i>before v.t.</i>		<i>before v.i., with change of v.i. to v.t.</i>	
<i>SIMPLEX</i>	<i>CAUSATIVE</i>	<i>SIMPLEX</i>	<i>CAUSATIVE</i>
gui ⁵⁵ 'wear'	su ³¹ gui ⁵⁵	ɲu ⁵³ 'cry'	su ³¹ ɲu ⁵³
kai ⁵⁵ 'eat'	su ³¹ kai ⁵⁵	bət ⁵⁵ 'small'	su ³¹ bət ⁵⁵
ɹi ⁵⁵ 'bear'	su ³¹ ɹi ⁵⁵	bjw ⁵⁵ 'melt'	su ³¹ bjw ⁵⁵
tɔp ⁵⁵ 'gain'	su ³¹ tɔp ⁵⁵	mūk ⁵⁵ 'craze'	su ³¹ mūk ⁵⁵
jaŋ ⁵³ 'watch'	su ³¹ jaŋ ⁵³	dam ⁵³ 'be full'	su ³¹ dam ⁵³

Table 2. Dulong causatives

As well as **su**³¹, there are other forms to indicate causation in Dulong, as described in Sun 1982:101-3.

2.1.3. *Jingpho*

Very similarly, Jingpho uses two causative prefixes: **tfa**³¹ before verbs with initial aspirated stops or the fricatives *s* or *ʃ*, and **fa**³¹ before verbs with other initial consonants.

<i>before aspirates and fricatives</i>		<i>before other consonants</i>	
<i>SIMPLEX</i>	<i>CAUSATIVE</i>	<i>SIMPLEX</i>	<i>CAUSATIVE</i>
khɹit ³¹ 'be afraid'	tfa ³¹ khɹit ³¹	pai ³³ 'raise'	fa ³¹ pai ³³
si ³³ 'die'	tfa ³¹ si ³³	tʃon ³¹ 'ride'	fa ³¹ tʃon ³¹
su ³³ 'wake up'	tfa ³¹ su ³³	kap 'paste'	fa ³¹ kap ⁵⁵
khɹiŋ ³¹ 'stop'	tfa ³¹ khɹiŋ ³¹	jo ⁵⁵ 'feed'	fa ³¹ jo ⁵⁵
		tu ³¹ 'arrive'	fa ³¹ tu ³¹
		tsom ³¹ 'be pretty'	fa ³¹ tsom ³¹

Table 3. Jingpho causatives

The sibilant causative prefixes of rGyalrong, Dulong, and Jingpho can all be traced back to the same origin.

2.1.4. *Written Tibetan*

There are several causative prefixes in Written Tibetan, which are similar to Dulong in phonological shape. Written Tibetan prefixes can represent causation, or other grammatical meanings such as transitivity or autonomy. Although the Tibetan grammatical forms are very complex, from the following we can see that the prefix *s-* is the main grammatical marker of causative verbs:

<i>before v.t.</i>		<i>before v.i., with change of v.i. to v.t.</i>			
SIMPLEX		CAUSATIVE	SIMPLEX	CAUSATIVE	
baŋs	'soak'	fibaŋs	riŋ	'be long'	sriŋ
bjaŋ	'practice'	sbjaŋs	fipar	'burn'	spar
figos	'infect'	bsgos	nar	'lengthen'	bsnar
fibrel	'link'	sbrel	figjur	'change'	bsgjur

Table 4. Written Tibetan causatives

Note that transitive verbs are not marked prefixally with the same regularity as in some other languages.

2.1.5. *Darang*

Darang also has several causative devices. One common type is the prefixation of **xa-** before intransitive verbs to make them transitive or causative. The prefix **xa-** seems to be quite different from the sibilant prefixes of the above languages, but we infer that it has evolved from the same source as in Jingpho. See Table 5:

SIMPLEX		CAUSATIVE	
diu ³⁵	'be broken'	xa ³¹ diu	'break something'
ga ³⁵	'be broken'	xa ³¹ ga ³⁵	'break something'
n ⁵³	'sleep'	xa ³¹ n ⁵³	'put to sleep'
bo ⁵⁵	'explode'	xa ³¹ bo ⁵⁵	'cause to explode'

Table 5. *Darang* causatives

Besides the prefixes, Darang has other forms to indicate causation, as we shall see below.

Similar causative prefixes are found in other languages as well (e.g., Anong, Ergong). On the other hand, some languages have agglutinative suffixes that carry causative meaning. The following two languages are cases in point.

2.1.6. *Limbu*¹

Limbu is one of the TB languages of Nepal. There are several ways in Limbu to show causation, but one common way is to add the suffix **-s** directly after the verb root. See Table 6:

¹ These data are from van Driem 1987.