Causative and Benefactive Constructions in Thai*

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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 *hây* '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 *hây* Clause" order, while the benefactive has the "Clause *hây* NP" order. Consider (1) and (2).

(1) Causative: dɛɛŋ   hây   <u>nók súu nǎŋsǔu</u>
Daeng HAY Nok buy book
"Daeng made Nok buy a book."

(2) Benefactive: <u>nók súu ŋǎŋsǔu</u> hây dɛɛŋ
                     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.[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 *genesis* of some act, who constitutes ... the *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,[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.[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 CAUSE --> EFFECT, and a prototypical 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 P_a --> Action of P_a --> P_b

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 (P_a = the trigger)
       Volition of P_a --> Action of P_a --> Volition of P_b -->
       Action of P_b --> P_c

In the above, the volition-driven action of P_a affects P_b, who then produces an action volitionally, and this action in turn affects P_c.[4] 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 (P_a = the trigger)
       P_a -->   Volition of P_b--> Action of P_b --> P_c

Notice in (5) P_a is not accompanied by volition since the trigger for the benefactive situation is non-agentive, non-volitional, but it nevertheless induces volition in P_b.
    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)　　*dɛɛŋ hây <u>nók mii khwaamsùk</u>
　　　　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)　　*dɛɛŋ hây <u>fǒn tòk</u>
　　　　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)　*<u>nók mii khwaamsùk</u> hây　dɛɛŋ
　　　　Nok have happiness　HAY Daeng
　　　　"Nok is happy for Daeng."

(11)　*<u>fǒn tòk</u>　hây　dɛɛŋ
　　　　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 *hây* which connects the two constituents in the constructions under investigation. By examining the

motivation behind the use of this particular word, we will understand further the relationship between the causative and benefactive. We should first note that the word *hây* means 'to give,' based on sentences like (12) (from Dejthamrong 1970:40) and (13).

(12)   dèk hây sataŋ nɔ́ɔŋ
        child HAY money little brother
        "The child gave his little brother money."

(13)   hây phan bàat kɛ̀ɛ dɛɛŋ
        HAY 1,000 baht to Daeng
        "(I) gave Daeng 1,000 baht."

As mentioned at the outset, the verb 'give' appears in the benefactive construction in several unrelated languages. The use of 'give' in the benefactive constructions prompted Shibatani (1994) to propose that the construction is to be understood by the 'give' schema. That is, simply put, benefit is understood as something which is given to a recipient as an object can be given to a recipient. Although superficially this analysis seems to apply to the Thai benefactive, I would like to offer a different explanation.

    I will propose that the *hây* in both causative and benefactive constructions originates from the *hây* with a more general meaning of 'enabling' which is present in a sentence with two clauses combined by *hây*. When the verb in the second clause is ellipted, *hây* becomes reinterpreted as marking the trigger in the benefactive construction. In order to show this process we compare the benefactive sentence (2), which we discussed earlier, with sentence (14), which serializes two clauses. Example (2) is repeated here for convenience.

(2)   <u>nók sɯ́ɯ nǎŋsɯ̌ɯ</u> hây dɛɛŋ
       Nok buy book   HAY Daeng
       "Nok bought a book for Daeng."

(14)   <u>nók sɯ́ɯ nǎŋsɯ̌ɯ</u> hây dɛɛŋ ʔàan
        Nok buy book   HAY Daeng read
        "Nok bought a book for Daeng to read."

While (2) has only the benefactive reading, (14) is ambiguous between the benefactive and causative meanings. In order to explain this ambiguity we must first note that (14) describes

two events, "Nok bought a book" and "Daeng read it/ would read it." Further these two events are given a special relationship by *hây,* which connects the enabling event and the enabled event. This general meaning of (14) is then given a more specific interpretation depending on the wishes of Daeng. If Daeng does not want to read a/the book, it may be understood as having the causative meaning. That is, *hây* has the force of causation and the sentence is interpreted as "Nok bought a book and she *made* Daeng read it." In this case, the second clause is the effected event and the first clause delineates the basis on which the effected event can be realized. If Daeng (at least potentially) wants to read a/the book, on the other hand, (14) can be said to have the benefactive meaning. Note in this case the first clause is interpreted as the effected event. The second clause represents an event which the recipient of the benefit wishes to engage in, and we call the event this clause embodies the "target event." The "target event" works as a motivation which leads to the effected event just as the trigger in the canonical benefactive sentence does. In this interpretation (14) is understood as "Nok bought a book so that Daeng could read it."

To summarize, it is clear that the source of ambiguity in (14) is the existence of two clauses, either of which could be interpreted as coding an effected event. When the verb *ʔàan* 'read' is deleted by ellipsis from (14) and the sentence transforms to (2), ambiguity is eliminated. This is so because when there is only one constituent clause in the pre-*hây* position, this clause is interpreted as the effected event which is beneficial for the trigger according to the schema presented earlier as (7).[7] The verb *hây* used in causative and benefactive constructions has the general meaning of enabling and it manifests a specific meaning when relevant semantic context is given to a sentence.

Although a sentence such as (2) has gained clarity of benefactive meaning, it has lost clear indication of the "target event." It will become the language user's task to construe a possible goal event. This leads us to consider some pragmatic constraints imposed on the benefactive construction.

4. Pragmatic constraint on the benefactive construction

Since by definition the goal event is not specified in the canonical benefactive sentence, it must be pragmatically construed. I will show below that this pragmatic construal

plays a significant role in the acceptability of benefactive sentences.

Since *mii* 'have' is normally a non-volitional predicate, it cannot be used in the benefactive sentence.

(15) *<u>nók mii rót</u> hây dɛɛŋ
   Nok have car HAY Daeng
   "Nok has a car for Daeng."

However, if a trigger in (15) is replaced by a clause which specifies the goal event, the sentence becomes grammatical. Observe (16).

(16) <u>nók mii rót</u> hây <u>dɛɛŋ khàp</u>
   Nok have car HAY Daeng drive
   "Nok has a car for Daeng to drive."

This suggests that the speaker must understand at an abstract level a goal event in order to accept a benefactive sentence. The same point can be argued for by the acceptability of non-volitional verb in a benefactive sentence if the goal event can be imagined. That is, a verb, which is normally considered non-volitional, may appear in the effected event clause of a benefactive sentence if an applicable situation can be construed (Vichit-Vadakan 1976:468). Thus normally (17) below is unacceptable, but if a native speaker can imagine a situation in which Nok 'deliberately' laughed, for example, at Daeng's unsuccessful joke, it will be judged acceptable. Unlike (15), however, it is difficult to describe a goal event overtly in (17).

(17) <u>nók hǔarɔ́</u> hây dɛɛŋ
   Nok laugh HAY Daeng
   "Nok laughed for Daeng."

Such construal can be very cultural as the following two benefactive sentences demonstrate.

(18) *<u>chai tɛŋŋaan</u> hây mɛ̂ɛ
   Chai marry HAY Mom
   "Chai got married for Mom."

(19) <u>chai bùat</u>   hây mɛ̂ɛ
   Chai enter monkhood HAY Mom
   "Chai entered monkhood for Mom."

Both are structurally identical. However, native speakers judge (19) to be natural while (18) to be strange. To understand this discrepancy, one needs to know the culturally induced pragmatic knowledge: According to Buddhist teaching, the best thing a son can do for his mother is to enter monkhood for some time. If a son becomes a novice monk, the mother will definitely receive merit. Such a connection between marriage and the benefit the mother would receive is weak, if it exists at all, in Thai culture.

7. Conclusion

Matisoff notes, "The notion of benefaction and transitivization/causativization are more closely related than is generally realized (1976:430)." My conclusion that syntactic similarity of the causative and benefactive constructions are a reflection of the semantic affinity of the two supports this observation. Thus I hope to have provided a foundation to consider the two constructions as related phenomena and hope to extend this analysis to other languages.

Notes

1 Givón (1976:330), referring to (i) below, says: "The action of the subject of *cause* is REASON or MOTIVATION for the object's deliberate action."
    (i) He caused me to drop everything and go to the store.
My "trigger" is similar to his "REASON or MOTIVATION," but the trigger refers to a person rather than his action.

2 Two separate notions of agentivity and trigger can describe different types of causatives. Three sentences below are from English. The trigger is underlined and the agents italicized.
    (i)   *John* made *Bill* wash the car.
    (ii)   John let *Bill* wash the car.
    (iii)   *Bill* washed the car for John.
In (i) both John and Bill are agentive, while only John is the trigger. In (ii), Bill is both a trigger and agent, because he wanted to wash the car. John is a trigger but not agent, because he simply allowed Bill's action. In (iii), the trigger and the agent are completely separate.

3 Such a hint doesn't have to be an actual hint, but it may be imagined solely in the mind of the agent.

4 Sentence (i) below, for example, is not a prototypical causative and lacks volition on the part of P_b and does not involve P_c. The schematic representation can be specified as (ii), which is identical to the transitive event structure of (3).

> (i) John made Bill happy.
> (ii) Volition of P_a --> Action of P_a --> P_b

Under this analysis (i) above is understood as a special type of transitive sentence comparable to (iii) below.

> (iii) John washed the car clean.

5 These ungrammatical sentences, (8) and (9), will be grammatical if *tham hây* is used in place of *hây* (Vichit-Vadakan 1976). Another interesting point is the fact that the use of *hâi* becomes possible when the subject is not fully agentive as in (i) and (ii) below.

> (i) chán yàak hây fǒn tòk
>   I   want HAY rain fall
>   "I want it to rain."
> (ii) khɔ̌ɔ hây mii khwaam-sùk
>   ask for HAY exist happiness
>   "I wish you happiness."

The instigator of "making rain fall" and "making someone happy" is different from the person who wishes rain and happiness. The instigator may be construed as a supernatural power. This point needs further investigation.

6 This constraint goes beyond Thai. In many languages, a non-volitional *event cannot be an effected event. The following English* sentences are ungrammatical. These examples are from Givón (1984:128).

> (i)   *He understood the question/ was tall for his father.
> (ii)   *The storm killed him for his father.

7 (2) can be further reduced to a sentence without any noun phrase after *hây* as in (i) below.

> (i) nók sɯ́ɯ nǎŋsɯ̌ɯ hâi
>   (name) buy book HAY
>   "Nok will buy books for (you)."

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