

Causative in Ossetian: a complex predicate analysis

Sergei Tatevosov
 Lomonosov Moscow State University
 tatevosov@gmail.com

1. Overview

The goal of this paper is to explore syntax of the causative construction in Ossetian (a.k.a. Ossetic). The construction is exemplified in (1)-(2):

- (1) **Causative of an intransitive verb**
 Alan Aslan-ı bad-ın kodta
 A.NOM A.-ACC sit-INF do.PST.TR.3SG
 ‘Alan was sitting Aslan down.’
- (2) **Causative of a transitive verb**
 Alan Zawır-ən Aslan-ı mar-ın kodta
 A.NOM Z.-DAT A.-ACC kill-INF do.PST.TR.3SG
 ‘Alan was making Zaur kill Aslan’

Properties of the construction:

- **causative verb** *kənn* ‘do make’ (pst 3sg *kodta*);
- **lexical verb** (*bad-ın* ‘sit’/*mar-ın* ‘kill’) that appears with what is traditionally labeled as the **infinitival inflection** (*-ın*);
- **Causer** in the Nominative case
- **Causee** in the dative case for transitives (cf. the external argument of ‘kill’ in (2)), in the accusative case for intransitives (cf. the only argument of ‘sit’ in (1));
- **direct object** in the accusative case.

(1)-(2) superficially look like an instance of the infinitival causative attested, e.g. in Romance languages:

- (3) Maria ha fatto riparare la macchina a Gianni.
 Maria has made repair the car to Gianni
 ‘Maria made Gianni repair the car.’ (Guasti 2005: 146)

The goal of this paper is to argue that Romance and Ossetian causatives have considerably different syntactic structures. Specifically, I will argue that the causative in Ossetian is essentially a **complex predicate** consisting of a nominal element and a light verb. (1)-(2) are thus structurally similar to complex predicates like the one in (4), where ‘do, make’ is a light verb and *p’a* ‘kiss’ is a non-verbal element (see Lyutikova, Tatevosov 2013).

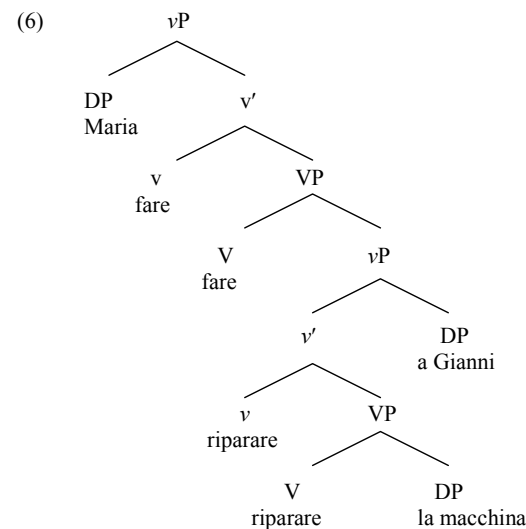
- (4) Alan Madinə-ju p’a kodta.
 A. M.-ACC kiss LV.PST.TR.3SG
 ‘Alan was kissing (lit. ‘kiss-making’) Madina.’

2. How Ossetian is not Italian

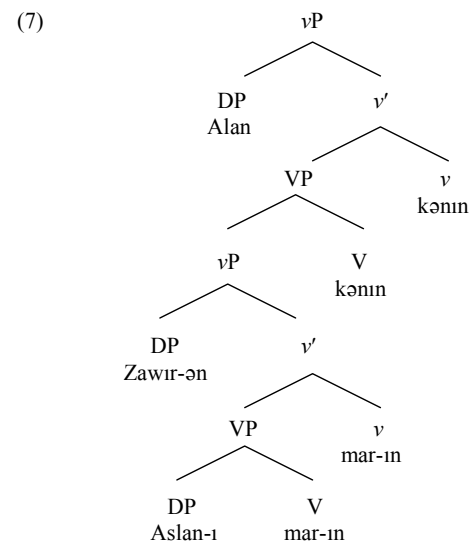
Infinitival causatives like *faire-inf* causatives in Romance languages are typologically not uncommon. While there is a fair amount of issues surrounding virtually any analysis of their structure and interpretation, there seems to be a general agreement that they involve two layers of verbal structure, one projected by the lexical verb, the other being introduced by the causative verb (e.g., Guasti 2005 and literature therein).

Under this line of inquiry, the structure of (3), repeated as (5), can be analyzed along the lines of (6), which follows Folli and Harley 2007 and a few related proposals (all DPs are shown in their first-merge positions):

- (5) Maria ha fatto riparare la macchina a Gianni.
 Maria has made repair the car to Gianni
 ‘Maria made Gianni repair the car.’



Given the apparent parallelism between (5) and (2), it is tempting to analyze them along similar lines and to assign (2) the structure in (7):



(7), however, cannot be correct in view of (8), where the internal argument appears as a possessive (pro)clitic attached to the lexical verb.

(8) **Cliticized direct object in a causative construction**

Alan Zawır-ən jə=mar-in kodta
 A.NOM Z.-DAT POSS.3SG=kill-INF do.PST.TR.3SG
 'Alan was making Zaur kill him'

The clitic cannot appear in a verbal environment, as (9) with the finite verb indicates. Its distribution is restricted to the position at the left periphery of a noun phrase, (6a-c). (Nothing depends in what follows on what one assumes about the precise nature of this position.)

(9) **Cliticized direct object in a finite clause**

*Zawır jə=marɔta
 Z. POSS.3SG=kill.PST.TR.3SG
 'Zaur was killing him'

(10) **Cliticized possessor in a noun phrase**

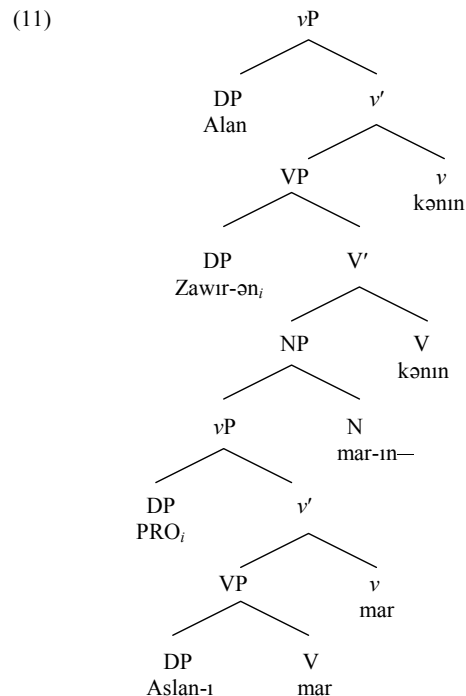
a. jə=ası duwə əmbalɔtɔ
 POSS.3SG=this two friend.PL.GEN
 'these two friends of him'
 b. *ası jə=duwə əmbalɔtɔ
 c. *ası duwə jə=mbalɔtɔ

(8)-(10) together suggest that the infinitive is in effect a nominal, which (7) does not capture, hence an alternative analysis is called for.

3. The proposal

I argue that the causative construction is to be analyzed as in (11), which involves two main ingredients:

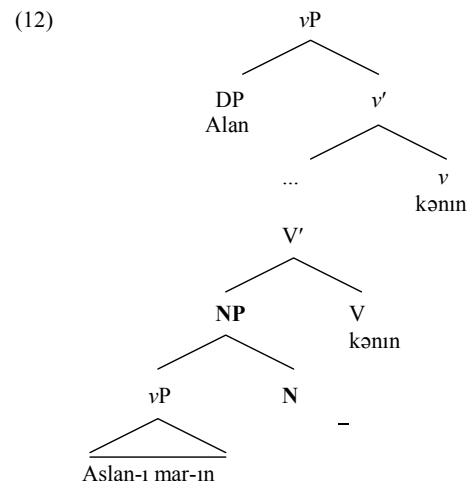
- ① The causative construction is a complex predicate
- ② The causative construction is a control structure



In what follows, both ingredients are laid out in more detail.

4. The causative construction as a complex predicate

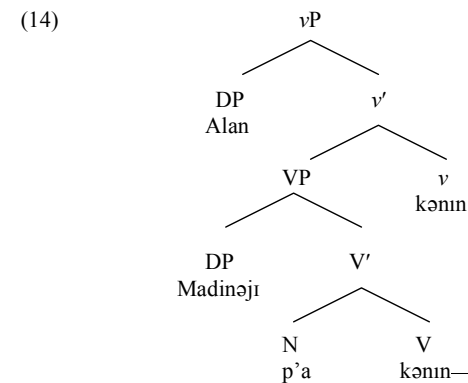
Evidence from clitic placement strongly suggests that there is a layer of nominal structure on top of the embedded verb phrase:



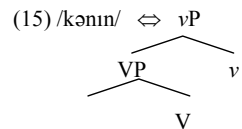
This makes the causative construction an instance of a **complex predicate**. (8) illustrates a canonical complex predicate consisting of a nominal and a light verb, represented in (9) (Lyutikova, Tatevosov 2013; for other Iranian languages see, among others, Folli *et al.* 2005, Karimi 1997, Karimi-Doostan 1997, 2001, Megerdoomian 2002, Mohammad, Karimi 1992, Pantcheva 2008)). Crucially, complex predicates in Ossetian use the same light verb *kənɪn* as occurs in the causative construction.

(13) **Complex predicate based on a noun**

Alan Madinə-ʃɪ p'a kodta.
 A. M.-ACC kiss LV.PST.TR.3SG
 'Alan was kissing (lit. 'kiss-making') Madina.'



(14) instantiates a constructionalist approach to complex predicate formation in the spirit of Ramchand 2008, whereby the argument structure and lexical aspectual properties of a predicate are determined by the configuration itself, and the role of lexical items like *kən* and *p'a* is restricted to spelling out different pieces of the structure. Following the nanosyntactic approach to spell-out, Lyutikova and Tatevosov 2013 propose the lexical entry for *kənɪn* in (15):

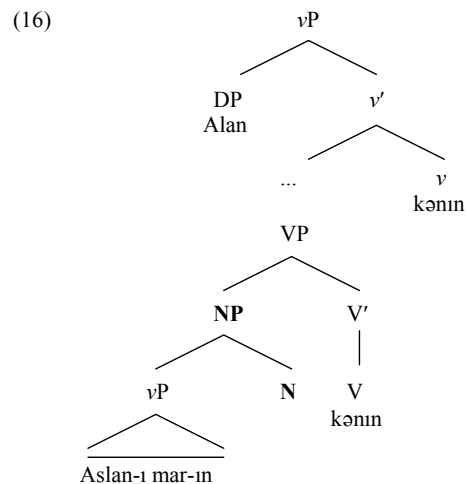


(15) says that the lexical item *kənɪn* is a light verb that spells out, or lexicalizes, a subtree containing vP and VP or any of its subtrees, subject to general principles that constrain possible spell out patterns (Superset principle, Cyclic override principle, Elsewhere principle). On this view, as is common among constructionalist approaches to grammar, the role of lexical items is restricted to giving phonological content to the structures independently built in the syntax.

In (13), *p'a* 'a kiss' is not in the argument position and is not thematically related to events denoted by V. Rather, 'a kiss' supplies a modifier to a predicate introduced by V yielding, semantically, a description of processes in which a kiss is given. Arguments of this process are agent and theme, sitting in Spec, vP and Spec, VP, respectively.

The structure in (11)-(12) is the same except that an articulated vP is encapsulated below the nominal layer. The NP semantically modifies the verb in the same way the noun *p'a* in (13) does. According to (14), the higher V denotes some processes and these are processes in which Aslan is killed by Zawır.

A possible alternative: the NP is an internal argument of *kənɪn* and is sitting in the Spec, VP position:



From the semantic point of view, (14) and (16) are hardly distinguishable. However, there is crucial morphosyntactic evidence showing that (16) cannot be correct: **prefixation facts**.

Perfectivizing prefixes are associated with different attachment options depending on the status of the nominal. If a nominal is an argument of *kənɪn*, the prefix appears on the verb:

- (17) **Prefixation; lexical verb**
 Alan çəzar ş-kodta.
 A. house PRF-make.PST.TR.3SG
 'Alan built a house.'

If, the other way around, a nominal is a non-verbal component of a complex predicate, the prefix is merged on top of the non-verbal component:

- (18) **Prefixation; complex predicate**
 Alan Madinə-ji a-p'a kodta.
 A. M.-ACC PRF-kiss make.PST.TR.3SG
 'Alan kissed (lit. 'kiss-made') Madina.'

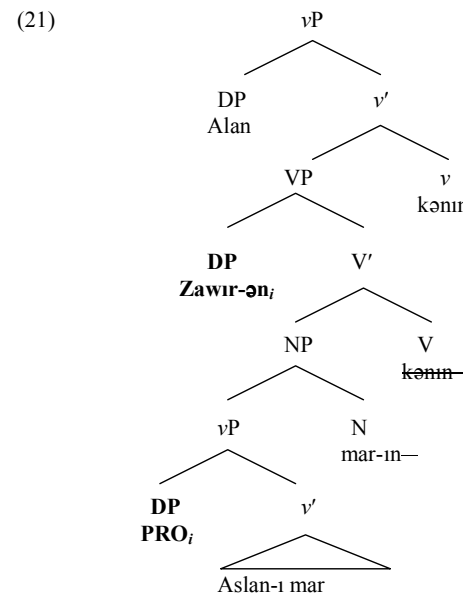
Prefixation in the causative construction patterns with (18), not with (17):

- (19) **Prefixation; causative construction**
 Alan Zawır-ən Aslanı a-mar-ın kodta
 A.NOM Z.-DAT A.-ACC PRF-kill-INF do.PST.TR.3SG
 'Alan made Zaur kill Aslan'
- (20) **Prefixation; causative construction**
 *Alan Zawır-ən Aslanı mar-ın ş-kodta
 A.NOM Z.-DAT A.-ACC PRF-kill-INF PRF-do.PST.TR.3SG
 'Alan made Zaur kill Aslan'

Therefore, (16) is unlikely to be a correct analysis of the internal structure of the causative.

5. The causative construction as a control structure

(11) is essentially a **control structure**: the causee is an argument of V, as in Alsina 1992, that controls into the lower vP where PRO occupies the external argument position.



The argument for the control analysis consists of two parts.

- ① We need to see that the surface position of the causee is outside of the NP;
- ② We have to exclude a raising analysis whereby the base-generated and surface positions of the causee are related by movement.

Evidence supporting the first part of the argument comes again from possessive clitic placement facts. As we have already seen, the possessive clitic must be located at the left periphery of a nominal constituent:

(22) **Cliticized possessor in a noun phrase**

- a. jə=ası duwə əmbalttı
 POSS.3SG=this two friend.PL.GEN
 ‘these two friends of him’
 b. *ası jə=duwə əmbalttı
 c. *ası duwə jə=mbalttı

The causee must appear outside the clitic, cf. (23) and (24).

(23) **Cliticized direct object; Causee is outside the domain of cliticization**

- Alan Zawır-ən jə=mar-ın kodta
 A.NOM Z.-DAT POSS.3SG=kill-INF do.PST.TR.3SG
 ‘Alan was making Zaur kill him’

(24) **Cliticized direct object; Causee is inside the domain of cliticization**

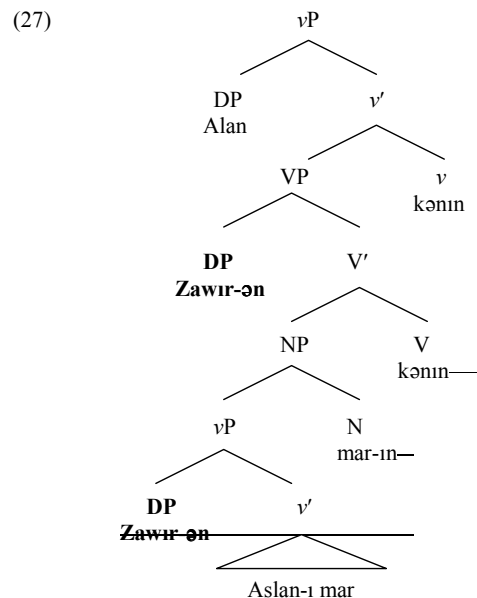
- Alan jə=Zawır-ən mar-ın kodta
 A.NOM POSS.3SG=Z.-DAT kill-INF do.PST.TR.3SG
 1. #‘Alan was making his Zaur kill.’
 2. *‘Alan was making Zaur kill him.’

In (24), the clitic forms a constituent with *Zawır-ən*, yielding ‘his Zaur’, but crucially not with [Zawır-ən mar-ın], which would have resulted in ‘killing of him by Zaur’. The two options are schematized in (25)-(26):

- (25) Alan [jə=[_{NP} Zawır-ən']] mar-ın kodta
 (26) *Alan [jə=[_{NP} Zawır-ən mar-ın]] kodta

Given the ungrammaticality of (26), I conclude that the surface position of the causee *Zawır-ən* is outside the NP, hence the Causee must be part of the higher verb phrase.

The second part of the argument aims at figuring out if the surface position of the Causee is related to its base-generated position by movement, (27), or we are dealing with a control structure, as proposed in (11).



The crucial fact telling the control analysis and the raising analysis apart comes in (28)-(29):

- (28) Alan škola-jən jə= škola-jən səwın kodta.
 A. school-DAT POSS.3SG= school-DAT go.INF make.PST.TR.3SG
 ‘Alan was making him go to school.’
 (29) ??Alan škola-jən jə= škola-jən səwın kodta.
 A. school-DAT POSS.3SG= school-DAT go.INF make.PST.TR.3SG
 ‘Alan was making him go to school.’

(28)-(29) show that if the clitic is there, an XP cannot be moved out of NP. However, if the raising analysis is correct, this is exactly what should have happened in (8), repeated as (30):

- (30) Alan Zawır-ən jə= [-Zawır-ən mar-ın] kodta
 A.NOM Z.-DAT POSS.3SG= kill-INF do.PST.TR.3SG
 ‘Alan was making Zaur kill him’

From (28)-(30), it follows that the surface position of the causee does not result from movement, which is correctly predicted by the control analysis in (11)/(21), but not by the movement analysis in (27).

6. Summary and conclusions

There exists a family of theories where the causative is thought of as a spellout of some or other piece of structure independently required in the syntax (Baker 1988, Harley 1995, 2008, Travis 2000, 2010 Folli, Ramchand 2003, Lidz 2004, Ramchand 2008, Miyagawa 2012). Lidz (2004), Harley (2008 and elsewhere), and Ramchand (2008) while offering quite distinct analyses of the causative configuration all agree (up to notational details) that the causative morpheme is essentially a realization of the *v* head. Continuing this line of inquiry, in the paper I have examined the analytical causative in Ossetian, which looks superficially similar to faire-inf causatives in Romance. I have argued, however, that what looks like an infinitive is to be re-analyzed as a nominalization. A welcome outcome of this move is that syntax of the causative construction in Ossetian has been reduced to a well-understood phenomenon of complex predication. Finally, I presented evidence that the Causee argument originates within the higher verb phrase and controls into the embedded nominalization. On this account, the otherwise puzzling properties of the possessive proclitic fall out naturally.

References

Amberber M., Baker, B., Harvey M. (Eds.), 2010. *Complex Predicates: Cross-linguistic Perspectives on Event Structure*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
 Folli, R., Harley H. 2007. Causation, obligation and argument structure: on the nature of little *v*. *Linguistic Inquiry* 38.2: 197-238.
 Folli, R., Harley, H., Karimi S., 2005. Determinants of event type in Persian complex predicates. *Lingua* 115, 1365-1401.
 Guasti, M.T. 2005. Analytic Causatives. In M. Everaert, H. van Riemsdijk (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax*. Vol. 1, 142-172.
 Harley, Heidi (2008). On the causative construction. In Shigeru Miyagawa and Mamoru Saito (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Japanese Linguistics*. Oxford University Press, 20-53.
 Karimi, S., 1997. Persian complex verbs: idiomatic or compositional. *Lexicology* 3, 273-318.
 Karimi-Doostan, Gh., 1997. *Light Verb Constructions in Persian*. Ph.D. thesis, Essex University.
 Karimi-Doostan, Gh., 2001. N + V complex predicates in Persian. In: Dehe, N., Wanner, A., (Eds.), *Structural Aspects of Semantically Complex Verbs*. Peter Lang, Frankfurt, pp. 277-292.
 Lidz, Jeffrey (2004). Causation and Reflexivity in Kannada. In V. Dayal and A. Mahajan (eds.) *Clause Structure in South Asian Languages*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 93-130.
 Lyutikova, E., Tatevosov, S. 2013. Complex predicates, eventivity, and causative-inchoative alternation. *Lingua*.
 Megerdooonian, K., 2001. Event structure and complex predicates in Persian. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 46, 97-125.
 Miyagawa, Shigeru (2012). Blocking and causatives: Unexpected competition across derivations. *Case, Argument Structure, and Word Order*, Chapter 8. Routledge, 202-223.
 Mohammad, J., Karimi, S., 1992. Light verbs are taking over: complex verbs in Persian. *Proceedings of WECOL*, 195-212.
 Pantcheva, M., 2008. Noun preverbs in Persian Complex Predicates. *Nordlyd* 35. Svenonius, P., Tolskaya, I., (Eds.), Special issue on Complex Predication, pp. 19-45.
 Ramchand, G. 2008. *Verb Meaning and the Lexicon: A First Phase Syntax*. CUP.
 Travis, Lisa DeMena (2000). Event structure in syntax. Carol Tenny and James Pustejovsky (eds.). *Events as grammatical objects: The converging perspectives of lexical semantics and syntax*. Stanford: CSLI Publications, 145-185.
 Travis, Lisa DeMena (2010). *Inner aspect: The Articulation of VP*. Dordrecht: Springer.