

The psych causative alternation

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Abstract

In this paper, we argue that Greek and Romanian exhibit a psych causative alternation. Evidence for this comes from the following empirical domains: first, object experiencer verbs alternate with subject experiencer forms and the morphology is the same as in the causative alternation. Second, these languages use special prepositions to mark causers in change of state readings, which allows us to disambiguate between verb pairs that instantiate a causative alternation and those that do not. We show that this distinction is tied up with the aspectual value of the particular interpretations. Furthermore, we will show that the few alternating psych verbs in English do not exhibit a causative alternation. Our results thus lead to a better understanding of causation in psych verbs. In Greek and Romanian causers may be realized both with object experiencer and subject experiencer verbs, but in English they only appear with the former, as Pesetsky (1995) argues. As English has the causative alternation in the non-psych domain, our discussion raises the question of the crosslinguistic availability of the psych causative alternation. We speculate that English lacks the causative alternation as a result of diachronic changes that relate to labiality and its Voice system.

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1. Introduction

Psych verbs have given rise to a long debate in the literature for at least two reasons. First, they pose a problem to linking, given that they may realize the experiencer argument either as a subject or as an object (Belletti and Rizzi, 1988, Grimshaw, 1990, Pesetsky, 1995, Arad, 1998, 2002; Anagnostopoulou, 1999, Pykkänen, 2000, Reinhart, 2001, Verhoeven, 2008, Landau, 2010, among others); see (1) and (2), taken from Pesetsky (1995:18).

- (1) a. The television set worried *John*.
b. *John* worried about the television set.
- (2) a. The court decision grieved *Sue*.
b. *Sue* grieved over/at the court decision.

Second, they have stirred great interest in the literature on aspect, as they are often ambiguous between states and events, and presumably exhibit subtle aspectual distinctions that have not been observed with non-psych verbs (see, for

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instance, Grimshaw, 1990; van Voorst, 1992; Tenny, 1994; Martin, 2006; Rozwadowska, 2007, 2012; Marín and McNally, 2011). In addition, psych predication is expressed in different and unsystematic ways across languages, making a precise theoretical description difficult to achieve. As a consequence, psych verbs have often been assessed to form a special grammatical class with particular characteristics that are not found with other verb classes (see Grafmiller, 2013 for a recent approach). A moderate view is formulated in Landau (2010), which distinguishes core psych properties from non-core ones, i.e., properties that psych verbs share with other verbs.

This paper belongs to the line of thinking that considers psych verbs to be essentially similar to other well-known verb classes (see Pesetsky, 1995; Arad, 1998); their special property is that they are usually ambiguous between several regular patterns. We propose that one such regular pattern in their behavior is what we will call a *psych causative alternation*. We develop our discussion on the basis of Greek and Romanian object experiencer (OE) verbs and their subject experiencer (SE) cognates, which form a more frequent alternation than in English, where (1) and (2) are isolated exceptions.¹ We argue that in their change of state eventive reading, such psych pairs instantiate a causative alternation, as described in, e.g., Dowty (1979), Parsons (1990), Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995). By comparison, we show that English lacks this alternation with psych verbs. Pairs as in (1) and (2) qualify as idiosyncratic alternations that are available in Greek and Romanian as well, but they do not describe causation with a change of state as in the causative alternation.

From this perspective and in agreement with Arad (1998), we argue that what is special about psych verbs lies in their aspectual ambiguity, rather than in their experiencer argument.² This ambiguity is illustrated by the Greek and Romanian examples in (3) and (4): (3a)/(4a) exemplify the agentive reading, (3b)/(4b) the non-agentive eventive reading, and (3c)/(4c) the stative reading of the OE verb *annoy*.³ (3d)/(4d) present the SE form of this verb, which alternates in both languages.

- (3) a. O Janis enohlise ti Maria *epitides/me ena bastuni*.
the John annoyed the Maria intentionally/with a stick
John annoyed Mary intentionally/with a stick.
- b. O *Janis/to pehnidi* enohlise ti Maria se deka lepta.
the John/the game annoyed the Maria in ten minutes
John/the game annoyed Mary in ten minutes.
- c. I *Maria/to kurema tis Marias ton* enohlise to Jani ja mia ora.
the Maria/the haircut the Mary.Gen him annoyed the John.Acc for an hour
Maria/Maria's haircut annoyed John for an hour.
- d. O Janis *enohlithike* (**epitides/*me ena bastuni*) *me to pehnidi*.
the John annoyed.NAct intentionally/with a stick with the game
John got annoyed with the game.
- (4) a. Ion a enervat-o pe Maria *dinadins/cu un băț*.
John has annoyed-her Acc Mary intentionally/with a stick
John annoyed Mary intentionally/with a stick.
- b. *Ion/jocul* a enervat-o pe Maria în cinci minute.
John/game.the has annoyed-her Acc Mary in five minutes
John/The game annoyed Mary in five minutes.
- c. *Ion/Freza lui Ion* a enervat-o pe Maria timp de o oră.
John/haircut the.Gen John has annoyed-her Acc Mary time of an hour
John/John's haircut annoyed Mary for an hour.
- d. Maria *s-a enervat* (pe Ion) *de la joc* (**dinadins/*cu un băț*)
Mary Rf-has annoyed (at John) of at game (intentionally/with a stick)
Mary got annoyed (at John) from the game.

¹ We use the following abbreviations: Acc 'accusative', Caus 'causative morphology', COS 'change of state', Gen 'genitive', Mid 'middle voice', NAct 'non-active voice', OE 'object experiencer', Past 'past tense', Pres 'present tense', Rf 'reflexive', RS 'result state', SE 'subject experiencer', SEv 'single eventuality', Sg 'singular', Smpl 'simple template/active voice'.

² Arad states that the special psych properties of OE verbs identified by Belletti and Rizzi (1988) occur in their stative reading; in their eventive reading they behave like typical transitive verbs. Our study of the psych causative alternation offers a better understanding of this regularity in the syntax of both OE and SE verbs.

³ This classification follows the general intuition that agentive readings are eventive, while stative readings are non-agentive, as is shown later in section 2. For speakers who find *in*-adverbials rather marked in (3b)/(4b), see the discussion in fn. 12. For a clarification of the clitic doubling facts in (3c) vs. (3b), see the discussion on (16) and (17) in section 2.

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