

Causative Alternation in Mandarin Resultatives: A Macro-event Perspective

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The study aims at analyzing semantic characteristics of the causative alternation and exploring the underpinning motivation and cognitive mechanisms from a perspective of Macro-event. We tentatively construct a causative alternation macro-event model in which the causative alternation in Mandarin resultatives is regarded as an alternative construal of the same situation representing macro-event. 3770 “V pò” in People’s Daily in BCC (BLCU Corpus Center) are selected for the analysis. The results indicate that (1) the overall constructional distribution of the causative alternation is uneven with different specific predicate verbs in “V pò” resultatives and the constructional preference has some impact on the causative alternation strength but can only partly predict the causative alternation. (2) The semantic characteristics of the causative alternation in “V pò” resultatives are exhibited in the semantic properties pertaining to force dynamic patterns, conceptual integration degree, semantic orientation, and the semantic properties of event participants. “V pò” resultatives show causative and anticausative force dynamic patterns involving the external and reflexive force. The causers of “V pò” resultatives cover concrete forces referring to agent, instrument and natural force and abstract forces including event and metaphorical force. The more various the causers are, the stronger the causative alternation strengths are; however, it is a matter of degree. (3) Both internal and external motivations are found to contribute to the causative alternation. The joint conceptual semantics of the resultatives can be construed as undergoing the cognitive process of sequential scanning or summary scanning in windowing of attention and a shift of profile in information focus on representing causative or anticausative variants. Theoretically, the present study has built a causative alternation macro-event model for the causative alternation in Mandarin Chinese resultatives, focusing on the role of constructional preference, event participants, and the exploration of the motivation and cognitive mechanisms. The present study posits that causative alternation is motivated, which extends and enriches the scope of macro-event. The corpus-based investigation has proved the critical role of event participants and that causative alternation is a matter of degree. Moreover, the study demonstrates the possibility and applicability of the corpus-based study on the causative alternation in Mandarin resultatives, which might shed new light on the methodology of the studies on causative alternation.

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