

The tightness of resultatives: Implications for causation and agentivity
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Transitive resultatives such as "The puppy poked the baby awake" are often given a bieventive causative analysis in terms of a causing subevent (e.g., poking) and a caused subevent (e.g., becoming awake). Such resultatives, like lexical causatives (e.g., "The puppy poked the baby"), are said to require a relation of direct causation between their causing and caused subevents. However, determining precisely what constitutes direct causation continues to be debated. This talk contributes to this discussion through a close examination of transitive resultatives. Such resultatives provide an ideal domain for this investigation as their verb provides explicit information about the causing event, while lexical causatives are silent about this event.

Of particular interest is one of the two major types of transitive resultatives, so-called nonselected NP resultatives. Unlike selected NP resultatives, such resultatives often lack any obvious shared participants between the causing and caused subevents. Thus, examining the possible relations between the subevents in nonselected NP resultatives should illuminate the nature of direct causation. As I show through an examination of naturally occurring resultatives, the types of relations instantiated in these resultatives involve a range of both physical and abstract contiguity or "contact" relations, often involving unexpressed participants. These relations overall fall under prototypical understandings of direct causation found in the literature.

To conclude, I briefly discuss the implications of this study for the understanding of agentivity. There are many notions of agent in the literature, some broad and others narrow; however, prototypically an agent is taken to be a volitional entity that brings about a change of state in a second entity. Thus, human causers of resultatives qualify as prototypical agents, so that generalizations relating to the distribution of causer types across resultatives are relevant to the understanding of agentivity.