

Causality in Cognition and Language in Taiwanese Southern Min

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This study presents preliminary data on the representation of causality in cognition and language in Taiwanese Southern Min (TSM). Existing literature on TSM causative constructions only focuses on the syntactic typology of causatives (Cheng et al., 1999; Cheng, 1974; Lin 2006). As the first attempt to explore the causality in TSM from the perspective of semantic typology, two basic causative constructions are identified in the elicitations, including lexicalization (serial verb construction) as in (1) and periphrastic light verb construction as in (2). In (1), the sentence can be interpreted either volitionally or accidentally. In (2), a morpheme *hoo* can appear optionally between the serial verbs to denote intentionality: when *hoo* appears, the causer *tsa-poo-lâng* 'man' can only be interpreted deliberately performing the action and causing the breaking event to happen by hitting.

Type I Lexicalization: serial verb construction

(1)

Hit	ê	tsa-poo-lâng	phah-phuà	tsia-ê	n̄ng
this	CL	man	hit-break	these	egg

This man broke these eggs.

Type II Periphrastic light verb construction

(2)

Hit	ê	tsa-poo-lâng	ka	tsia-ê	n̄ng	phah-(hoo)-phuà
this	CL	man	KA	these	egg	hit-(CAUSE)-break

This man (deliberately) broke these eggs.

To explore speakers' preference for the conceptualization of causal chains, the research design comprises a relative responsibility assignment and a discourse task using a series of video clips. In the relative responsibility assignment task, the participants are trained to assign the responsibility to causer, causee or neither in the video clips to explore the pattern of the assignment. In the discourse task, they are required to provide descriptions of each clip. The empirical observations show that TSM speakers pay more attention to intentionality while those with more frequent L2-Mandarin use attribute certain extent of responsibility to unintentional causee or external factors such as environment and context. The results show the preferences for the responsibility assignment in causal chains and advance the understanding of the way language interfaces with nonlinguistic cognition in the representation of causality. In addition, this study contributes itself to a large-scale crosslinguistic comparison of semantic typology of causative constructions.

References

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