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SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC INFERENCES OF DECAUSATIVE VERBS

Causative verbs describe a situation in which some participant changes its state, and this change is caused by another participant (cf. I broke the cup). Decausative verbs are derived from causative ones (cf. The cup broke). According to a widespread opinion there is an "anticausative" component in the semantics of decausatives. It is argued in this paper that a decausative verb is perfectly compatible with the idea of causation and that a missing Background Causer gives rise to an inference 'Causer is irrelevant or nonexistent'. Our final goal is to demonstrate that semantic inferences form a separate communicative status of a component in the meaning definition of a verb.

Key Words: implicature, semantic inference, pragmatics, decausative verbs.

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1. Implicature and inference

In terms that are now widely accepted, the difference between implicatures and inferences consists in that implicatures are conveyed by the speaker who creates the message, while inferences are made by the addressee who interprets it (see, e.g., Brown 1983: 33). I shall take the part of the addressee and in this way avoid mentioning implicatures altogether. The fact is that the term implicature, being burdened by multifarious connotations and non-distinctive epithets, does not guarantee mutual comprehension.

As for inferences, they can be divided into two classes, provisionally called here semantic and pragmatic inferences.

Pragmatic inferences are those semantic components in the meaning representation of a text that owe their existence to general rules of interpretation of verbal discourse. Pragmatic inference produces meaning components that do not exist in a ready made form in the semantics of either a word or construction of the language in question.

Semantic inferences are semantic components included in the meaning definition of a word in the vocabulary or in the semantic explication of a construction; morphological, prosodic or any other linguistic entity: they are conventionally related to that entity. What it means for a component to be an inference (or: to be of inferential nature; to have an inferential status) will be clear later on. Semantic inferences are not rule generated - they are already present in this or that part of the description of language, i.e. either in the vocabulary or grammar.

Example below demonstrates the necessity of general rules of pragmatic inference:

> <A woman *W* asks her friend *M* not to tell anybody about some event.> *M*. A gentleman never tells. <Later on it turns out that he did tell. Responding to *W*'s reproach,> *M*. I never said I was a gentleman. (A.Lurie. "Love and friendship").

Here W makes a request. It should be reacted upon by either an agreement or a refusal of the interlocutor. The response of M, "A gentleman never tells", in its direct sense, is neither. So the maxim of relevance is violated, and, guided by that maxim, W makes a crucial inference: 'M is a gentleman'. After that W has, according to the rule of syllogism:

A gentleman never tells
M is a gentleman; CONSEQUENTLY,
M won't tell.

In this way *W* interprets the reaction of *M* as that of agreement to fulfill the request. Afterwards the crucial inference of *W* is declared by *M* to be "non-said"; so he is free of his promise - if only at the expense of the acknowledgement that his answer to the request of *W* was incoherent.

No doubt, general rules of pragmatic inference just exemplified, though playing an important role in interpretation of discourse, are best placed outside linguistic semantics sensu stricto. My topic in this paper is semantic inference.

Namely, I shall demonstrate that the notion of inference can be used to indicate the communicative status of a semantic component in the meaning definition of a word (or a word form or a word in its use).

A semantic component is a predicative unit of a meaning definition. Component's communicative status is what determines the behavior of this component in a wider context. For example, the status of presupposition predicts the component's immunity to negation, and this is what opposes presuppositions to assertions (though, presumably, presuppositions are not the only kind of non-assertive components). The behavior of a inferential components will be described below.

My final goal is to demonstrate the utility of "inference" as a separate communicative status of a component in the meaning definition of decausatives.

2. Decausatives

Decausatives have attracted much attention in the recent years, see, e.g., Haspelmath 1993, Levin & Rappaport Hovav, 1995. My analysis has been carried out for Russian. For brevity's sake I will sometimes use English translations of the Russian examples instead of the original.

In what follows "decausative" means 'derived from causative'. So I begin with what it means to be a causative verb. The definition may be given in semantic terms: a causative verb describes a situation in which some participant, say X, changes its state, and this change is c a u s e d by another participant, say Y. With a transitive causative verb the participant Y is denoted by its subject and the participant X reveals on the surface as the Object. From now on I deal only with transitive causative verbs.

The decausative, i.e. intransitive, use of (transitive) causative verbs, is a phenomenon widely spread in languages all over the world: decausativation is a productive model of semantic - or lexical - derivation. In examples (1), (2) verbs in (1b), (2b) are decausatives:

(1) a. John *opened* the window; b. The window *opened*;
(2) a. Vanja *broke* the window; b. The window *broke*.

In Russian a decausative is marked by the reflexive particle *-sja* (with the allomorph *-s'*). In English decausative use of a verb is morphologically unmarked. But as far as meanings of decausatives are concerned, these two languages are very much alike (though, of course, markedness always may be an important distinguishing factor).

The analysis has been limited to Russian verbs in the Perfective aspect, where decausatives are not homonymous with passives (in modern language) - a decausative in the Perfective aspect is marked with the reflexive particle *-sja*, while Passive is an analytic form based on the Past Participle:

(3) a. Dver *otkrylas* 'the door *opened*' [decausative of a Pfv erb];
b. Dver *byla* nakonec *otkryta* 'at last the door *was opened*' [passive form of a Pfv verb].

In the Imperfective aspect both decausatives and passives are marked with *-sja*, so the familiar warning of the Moscow metro, generally speaking, is ambiguous:

(4) Ostorozhno, dveri *zakryvajutsja*! = 'Be careful, the doors *are closing / are being closed*!'.

Strangely enough, Russian grammars, both theoretical and of a practical orientation (such as Wade 2000), never include decausatives in the list of possible interpretations of Russian *sja*-verbs. One reason for that may be that up to the middle of the XIX century *sja*-form in contexts like *Dver zakrylas* could be interpreted as passive, see Bulaxovskij 1954:315, and sporadically we are faced with this use even later, see examples from Janko-Trinitskaja 1962: 141-143 (where it isn't marked as ungrammatical, which is a mistake). Another reason for this myopia towards decausatives may be that traditional grammars tend to take into consideration only Imperfective verb forms, while the semantics of a

decausative, as we shall see, clearly manifests itself only in the Perfective.

Questions that I would like to answer in connection with Russian decausatives are as follows:

1. *Which causative verbs may have a derived decausative?* In fact, why the decausative use is possible for *zakryt'* 'close' in (5) and impossible for *zaperet' na zasov* 'to bolt' in (6) or for *prinesti* 'to bring' in (7)?

(5) a. John *zakryl* dver' 'John *closed* the door';
b. Dver *zakrylas* 'The door *closed*'.
(6) a. On *zaper* dver' *na zasov* 'He *bolted* the door';
b. *Dver' *zaperlas' na zasov* 'The door **bolted*'.
(7) a. On *prines* chashku 'he brought the cup'; b. *Chashka *prines las'* '*the cup brought'.

2. *How can the meaning of a decausative be derived from the meaning of the motivating causative verb?* An ambitious project of ours called "Lexicographer" (and partly described in Kustova, Paducheva 1994, Paducheva 1998a) aims at presenting verbal meaning by means of a semantic formula from which many relevant features of verb's behavior can be deduced - such as syntactic arguments and adjuncts, aspectual meaning paradigm, prosody, etc. As to their general shape, these meaning definitions are similar to "scenarios" introduced by A. Wierzbicka, see Wierzbicka 1996, Goddard 1998.

So, the question can be reformulated as follows: is there a rule building the semantic formula of a decausative on the basis of that of its motivating causative verb?

3. *What is the semantic difference between decausatives and passives?* In particular, what is the meaning difference between *otkrylas'* and *byla otkryta* in (3)?

Let us now compare causative *break* in (2a) with its corresponding decausative in (2b) and find minimal differences between the two uses of this verb:

(2) a. Vanja *broke* the window; b. The window *broke*.

A. Difference in the taxonomic category (Vendler-Dowty class) of the verb: sentence (2a) can be understood as a goal-oriented action (imagine that Vanja is a burgler), while (2b) is definitely a happening. In fact,

the most conspicuous feature of decausatives is that they are non-agentive. A prototypical causative verb (such as *to kill, to break, to open* etc.) is a verb of action. Meanwhile, a decausative denotes a happening - something that happened not because this was the goal of a goal-oriented Agent. In this respect decausatives differ both from passives and reflexives (all the three can be marked identically by particle *-sja* in Russian); for example, *umylsja* = 'I washed myself' means that I did it deliberately, that this was my intention. On the predominant agentivity of reflexives see Wierzbicka 1996: 415; agentivity of passives is beyond doubt in Russian.

B. Difference in d i a t h e s i s (voice, not necessarily marked in the verb form), see Melchuk, Xolodovich 1970. I treat decausatives as generated from causative verbs by means of a diathetic shift - decausativation. This shift consists in that participants with the defined semantic roles change their syntactic positions and, consequently, communicative ranks. Three ranks must be distinguished: Center (corresponding to the syntactic positions of Subject or Object); Periphery (Instrumental and Prepositional Phrase) and Off Screen; this last rank is ascribed to a participant which is not projected to the surface argument structure of the sentence, see Paducheva 1998b.

In fact, compare (a) and (b) in (8):

(8) a. The reorganization of the company *diminished* travel expenses;
b. With the reorganization of the company travel expenses *diminished*;
c. Travel expenses *diminished.*

In (8a) the Causer occupies the position of a grammatical subject and belongs to the communicative Center; in (8b) it is demoted from its position in the Center and moved to the Periphery - in fact, it surfaces as a Prepositional Phrase (e.g., *ot* + Genitive). Meanwhile, the former Object is promoted to the position of the Subject.

Cf. also (9a) and (9b):

(9) a. Vnezapnyj poryv vetra *zakryl* dver' 'A sudden gust of wind *closed* the door';
b. Dver' *zakrylas'* ot vnezapnogo poryva vetra 'The door closed because of a sudden gust of wind'.

With the communicative ranks taken into consideration diathetic shift can be looked upon as a shift in the focus of attention, a kind of metonymy shift. Thus, what is called "causativity alternation" in Levin, Rappoport 1995 is presented here as a unidirectional meaning shift. As any other meaning shift, it has its own semantic derivation model, see Paducheva 1998b.

Note that decausativation opens a new slot in the surface case frame of a decausative, namely, that of the so called Background, or Peripheral, Causer (in the same way as passivization opens Instrumental slot, in Russian terminology - "agentivnoe dopolnenie"), see *with the reorganization of the company* in (8b) or *ot vnezapnogo poryva vetra* in (9b).

In fact, PP "*ot* + Genitive" cannot denote an external (background) Causer in the context of an actional verb, so (10a) is possible, while (10b) is not:

(10) a. Strana *razorilas'* ot postojannyx vojn 'the country *got ruined* of perpetual wars';
b. *Korol' *razoril* stranu ot postojannyx vojn 'the king *ruined* the country of perpetual wars'.

C. And the last feature that differentiates a decausative from its motivating causative verb concerns optional vs. obligatory status of the participant Causer in the concept of the situation provided by the verb. Let us return to example (8). In (8a), with a causative verb, the Causer is obligatory; meanwhile in (8b), with a decausative, it becomes optional. In fact, in (8c) the Causer doesn't show on the surface.

We'll discuss optionality of the Causer in section 4, and now let us return to the taxonomic category of decausatives.

Being a diathetic shift, decausativation is not expected to change the verb's taxonomic category. So it is reasonable to suppose that decausatives, happenings themselves, are formed from those uses of causative verbs that already denote happenings.

Ñonsequently, a separate meaning shift is postulated - deagentivation, with a separate semantic derivation model. In other words, such verbs as *wake up, open, close, diminish* etc. when used with a non-agentive Subject are treated as having a shifted lexical meaning (i.e. as being separate lexemes).

The effect of deagentivation can be demonstrated with the help of example (11):

(11) à. Ivan [Y] *razbudil* menja [X] grubym pinkom 'John [Y] *woke* me [X] with a rude kick'
á. Menja [X] *razbudil* zvonok v dver' [Y] 'the doorbell [Y] *woke* me [X]'.

Below meaning representations for *razbudit'* in (11a) and (11b) are given - by means of the semantic formulas in the "Lexicographer" style.

(11à) Y *woke* Õ [action] =
I. *Arguments*:

rank	*role*	*taxonomic class*
Y - Subject	Agent	PERSON
X - Object	Patient	LIVING BEING
(Z) - Periphery	Manner	ACTION

II. *Taxonomic category of the verb*: action
III. *Semantic decomposition*:
Background Exposition: Õ was sleeping <presupposition>
Center *Causer: Y acted on purpose* <presupposition>
(Manner: applying Z)
this caused <assertion>
New state: Õ does not sleep <implication>
Inferences

(11á) Y *woke* Õ [happening] =
I. *Arguments*:

Y - Subject	Causer	EVENT
X - Object	Patient	LIVING BEING

II. *Taxonomic category*: happening
III. *Semantic decomposition*:
Background Exposition: Õ was sleeping <presupposition>
Center *Causer: Y took place* <presupposition>
Manner:
this caused <assertion>
New state: Õ does not sleep <implication>
Inferences

Thus, deagentivation is a categorial shift (cognate to metaphor - in fact, metaphor is, from a logical point of view, a categorial mistake).

As a rule, decausatives are formed from causative verbs that can take non-agentive subjects. Cf. (5a) and (9a). The verb *close* in (9a) doesn't exclude a non-agentive subject, whence a decausative use possible for *close* in (9b). While in (6) the semantics of *to bolt* implies the use of an

instrument (the bolt), which, in its turn, presupposes an Agent manipulating with it; thus, for *bolt* deagentivation is blocked, and so is decausativation.

As for deagentivation, I follow Levin, Rappoport 1995 in distinguishing change of state verbs (such as *close, break*, which specify only the resulting state) and verbs of manner (such as *lock, cut, sweep*). Verbs of manner of action specify the activity leading to the resulting state, its goals, instruments, etc.; no wonder that they avoid non-agentive subjects and, consequently, do not decausativize, cf. the analysis of *cut* in Levin, Rappoport 1995: 103. The same with *bolt* in (6) and with *bring* in (7).

Or take the Russian verb *udalit'* 'remove' - it doesn't decausativize because of its evaluative component (absent in English, which, according to Levin, Rappoport 1995: 103, also doesn't decausativize, though for *remove* explanation is unclear): one can say *udalit'* only about something excessive, non necessary; something not needed or harmful: a tumor, a bad tooth etc.; and this evaluation needs a subject of consciousness present in the concept of situation; in the last two cases the activity denoted by *udalit'* is specified as including an operation, which can be performed solely by an Agent, and this is additional evidence of its agentivity.

In general, if the meaning definition of a causative verb ascribes the subject participant a role that can only be fulfilled by a volitional being then a non-agentive Causer is an impossible candidate for the subject of this verb (but for an essential meaning shift), see Haspelmath 1993. A prediction can be made that for such a verb decausativation is impossible. More precisely, if decausativized, the verb will change its meaning, dropping the components that rely upon the agentive subject. Take, for example, a verb *zatjanut'* from *tjanut'* 'to pull'; its decausative *zatjanut'sja* [e.g., about a meeting] has the meaning 'to be longer than was expected': manner of action component disappears and what remains is only change of state component.

On the contrary, such verbs as *decline, begin, diminish,* which are non-agentive in their primary meanings, decausativize eagerly, see example (8).

The relationship between a causative verb and its decausative can be demonstrated by example (8). See below lexical meaning representations for the verb *diminish* of example (8) in its causative, (8a), and decausative, (8b), use:

(8a) *Y diminished X* =
Background there was some quantity of X <presupposition >

Center	*Causer: the event Y took place* <presupposition > *this caused* <assertion> *New state: the quantity of X is less than before* <implication>
Inference	
(8b) *X diminished <because of Y>* =	
Background	there was some quantity of X <presupposition > (the event Y took place this caused)
Center	*New state: the quantity of X is less than before* <assertion>
Inference	Causer is irrelevant <inference by default>

Obviously, semantic definitions of a causative verb and its decausative consist of the same components. What changes is their communicative status. The causal component belongs to the Center in the meaning decomposition of a causative verb (in our formulae central components are marked by bold letters), and the decausativation moves it to the background. The last line in (8b) - Inference - will be discussed in section 3.

Thus, the answer to the first question is: those verbs have derived decausatives which allow a non-agentive subject. Formulae (11a) and (11b) are meant as an answer to the second one: they give an idea of how a general rule looks like that derives the meaning of a decausative from the meaning of a transitive causative verb in a non-agentive use. Now about the third question. The difference between decausatives and passives is accounted for in the following way. Let us compare again (3a) and (3b):

(3) a. Dver *otkrylas* 'the door *opened*' [decausative of a Pfv verb];
b. Dver *byla* nakonec *otkryta* 'at last the door *was opened*' [passive form of a Pfv verb].

Neither (3a) nor (3b) mention the Agent, but the absence of an Agent in the surface structure is interpreted in (3a) and (3b) differently. Sentence (3b) still presupposes the Agent - somebody has opened the door; while (3a) does not. In fact, not only it is the case that decausatives are formed from those verbs that CAN be used with non-agentive subject, as was demonstrated by example (9); more than that: the speaker chooses a decausative for his conceptualization of the situation if (s)he wants to present the situation as having no Agent. For example, in the context of

(12) Vanja, most probably, was the one who opened the door; but the speaker, using a decausative, wants to dwell on the moment when it was not yet clear for an imaginary Observer:

(12) The door opened and Vanja came in.

Or take example (13). Of (13a) and (13b) only in (13b) there is an Agent in the event of cup-breaking. In (13a) John is the Agent of the situation described by the verb *threw*, but not *broke*; in fact, in (13a) John could throw the cup on the flour in order to check whether it is unbreakable as it was claimed to be, so his intention was not to break, which is necessary in order to be the Agent of *broke* in (13a):

(13) a. John threw the cup on the flour and it *broke*; b. John *broke* the cup.

In the example (14) (suggested by Barbara Partee, personal communication) the Agent is present in the context of the decausative *opened*, but not in the concept of the situation created by the decausative itself:

(14) After all of our pushing and shoving on it, when the door finally *opened*, it turned out there was nothing at all inside.

Here, as in (13), "we" is the Agent of pushing and shoving, but not of the opening of the door. Thus, the concept provided for a situation by a decausative contains no participant with the semantic role of Agent, irrespective of whether the Agent was present in a wider context or not. Now I want to return to deagentivation and say few words in its defense.

An observation made in Haspelmath 1993 (see also Levin, Rappaport 1995) consists in that strictly agentive causative verbs do not decausativize. Still what we need is a positive condition under which decausativation is possible; it can be formulated as follows: a causative verb gives rise to a derived decausative on the condition that it allows a non-agentive subject. Thus, decausativation of a "normal", primarily agentive causative verb, such as *close*, goes through two steps: deagentivation and then decausativation itself.

Presenting deagentivation as a separate meaning extension model gives rise to many useful generalizations.

1. The lexical limits of decausativation are rigorously formulated; namely, those verbs engender derived decausatives that have non-agentive

use - either a primary or a derivative one. In this way lexical limits of decausativation are reduced to those of deagentivation.

2. Non-agentivity of decausatives is explicated: it can be accounted for by the fact that decausatives are formed from non-agentive verbs or non-agentive uses of verbs.

3. Deagentivation makes it possible to present the relationship between an agentive causative verb and its decausative as a purely diathetic shift: in fact, both non-agentive causative verb and its decausative denote happenings, and the difference between them is purely syntactic and communicative, it doesn't concern the word's lexical meaning. Meanwhile deagentivation yields a separate lexeme.

4. There are independent reasons for presenting a verb like *wake* in the context of a non-agentive subject as a separate lexeme. In fact, in many respects causative verbs behave differently when used with agentive and non-agentive subjects: Instrumental action, such as *by pushing heavily* in the context of example (11) is only possible in the context of a verb with the agentive subject; on-going process interpretation for the Imperfective is also a prerogative of an agentive verb. Thus, deagentivation is a shift in the word's lexical meaning which bears upon its grammatical behavior.

5. In Levin 1993 causative alternation is said to affect change of state verbs. At the same time, the class of change of state verbs is defined through their participation in causative alternation. So there is a kind of vicious circle. My definition of change of state verbs directly addresses their semantic formula: Manner of activity specification denies a verb its change of state membership. In other words, what differentiates change of state verbs, such as *smestit'*, *porvat'*, from those that do not, such as *prinesti, porezat'*, is the fact that the semantic formula of the latter includes Manner specification, while change of state verbs specify only the final state. But Manner specification requires an Agent acting in such and such way, so limitation of Manner is more natural as a condition on deagentivation than on decausativation. In fact, for decausativation its dependency on Manner specification is more indirect.

3. Decausatives and their semantic relatives

Let's see what happens when *-sja* is added to an unambiguously actional verb, as in (15), (16). Under certain conditions *sja*-form may get a coercive interpretation. But it is not a coerced decausative.

(15) Plan *sostavilsja* sam soboj [Instrumental] 'the plan drew itself', lit. 'the plan drew by itself';

(16) *Vorota *zaperlis* v 12 chasov 'the gate locked at 12'.

Sentence (16) is ungrammatical in Modern Russian; in fact, passive interpretation of reflexive verbs is impossible in the Perfective aspect, while decausative interpretation is excluded in the context of a strictly agentive verb. Meanwhile, (15) is acceptable. The fact is that the verb in (15) is not a decausative; (15) = 'the new state (with the existing plan) was achieved with the minimal effort on the part of the Agent', i.e. '*as if* by itself'. The meaning of the verb is such that the Agent is necessarily present in the speaker's conceptualization of the situation; in fact, it is the Agent who takes the b e n e f i t of the change of state that took place.

The meaning of the Perfective *-sja* form in (16) can be called p a s s i v e - p o t e n t i a l. It seems to constitute an intermediate stage in the semantics of "the book sells well"-construction, which can be exemplified by such Russian examples as

(17) Mashina xorosho/ploxo zavoditsja 'the car starts easily/with difficulty';

(18) Pjatna ot chaja xorosho/ploxo otstiryvajutsja 'stains of tea wash away easily/with difficulty'.

In fact, according to the analysis presented in Spencer 1998, the semantics of this construction includes two ideas - modality and generalization. In the Russian Perfective forms, such as

(17) mashina *zavelas'* = 'somebody managed to start the car';

(18) pjatno *otstiralos'* = 'somebody managed to wash out the stain', modality is already present, while universal quantification is achieved only in the course of imperfectivation. Thus,

(17) = 'the car is such that it is easy/difficult to start';

(18) = 'stains of tea are difficult to wash away'.

Thus, (17), (18), as well as (15), are not decausatives. Note that neither (19) is an example of a decausative use; rather it is a reflexive one:

(19) a. He *suggested* the solution; b. *The solution *suggested*; c. The solution *suggested* itself.

Verbs of movement very unwillingly decausativize, and this explains example (7).

Now the only example still in wait for explanation is (8c), with the

missing background Causer. The relationship between (8b) and (8c) is considered in the next section.

4. Is there an "anticausative" component in the semantics of decausatives?_

In Haspelmath 1993 and many other works decausatives are called "anticausatives". This term is misleading (see Mel'chuk 1998: 392). In fact, decausatives do not exclude cause specification, they differ from causatives only in that the participant Causer is demoted into a peripheral position.

For those contexts where the Background Causer is present in the surface structure of a decausative the proposed diathetic interpretation of the relationship between causative verbs and their derived decausatives is irreproachable. The problem now is, how to account for the semantics of a decausative in the context of the Background Causer missing. My suggestion is that this syntactic context is a secondary one for a decausative.

In Comrie 1985 and Plungjan 2000: 209 decausativation is treated as "valence decreasing derivation"; in fact, when (8c), for example, is related directly to (8a), it seems to be the case that the decausative has one valence less than the motivating causative verb:

(8) a. The reorganization of the company *diminished* travel expenses;
b. With the reorganization of the company travel expenses *diminished*;
c. Travel expenses *diminished.*

I introduce the structure (8b) as an intermediate stage; in this way (8c) can be presented as derived from (8b) by what is called in Plungjan 2000: 214 interpretive valence decreasing derivation.

Interpretive valence decreasing derivations can be exemplified by Unspecified Object deletion:

(20) He ate an apple - He ate <something eatable>.

Russian also has Unspecified Subject deletion (see Plungjan 2000: 200):

(21) a. Voland [Nom] *prochel* [Sg] vash roman [Acc] = 'Voland has read your novel';
b. Vash roman [Acc] *prochli* [Pl] = 'indefinite person has read your novel'.

The derivation of (8c) from (8b) can be presented as Unspecified Adjunct deletion: the participant Causer is demoted Off screen, which means that

the cause of the change is unspecified: either it is unknown or irrelevant or unimportant or trivial (as is, e.g., Natural Force in *mjach ukatilsja* - 'the ball rolled away') - or non-existent (as in *U nego probudilsja interes k muzyke* = lit. 'interest to music woke up in him'). Which exactly of the listed reasons is responsible for demotion of the Background Causer is sometimes difficult to say; see example from Levin, Rappaport 1995, p. 105:

(22) The day lengthened 'the day became longer as the earth progressed through a certain part of its orbit'.

In fact, it is highly improbable that the speaker has this Cause in mind.

In other words, the missing Background Causer gives rise to an inference 'Causer is irrelevant / nonexistent' (= there is no cause the speaker has in mind); anticausative inference 'there is no external cause' = 'it happened by itself', contrary to what is generally assumed, is one of many other possibilities, not even the most common one.

The component 'Causer is irrelevant / nonexistent' can be ascribed a special communicative status - that of an inference. In fact, this inference can be made on the grounds that no Causers are mentioned in the utterance or the context. In other words, the inference that works in the context of examples (1b), (2b) can be blocked - both in a syntactic and in a wider textual context. For example, in (9b) the inference is blocked in the context of the Background Causer:

(9) b. Dver' zakrylas' *ot vnezapnogo poryva vetra*
'The door closed *because of a sudden gust of wind*'.

In general, the inference 'Causer is irrelevant / nonexistent' is blocked by any possible kind of causal context:

(23) a. You intentionally arranged it that my cup *broke*;
b. The cup *broke* because you put it on the very edge of the table;
c. He threw the cup on the floor, so it *broke*, etc.

In (24) the causal connection between the behavior of the mouse and the fate of the egg is also realized, so the component "Causer irrelevant" in the meaning representation of the verb would have led to a contradictory meaning representation of the text as a whole:

(24) a. A mouse was running by, it waved her little tail, the egg fell down and *broke*. (Russian tale).

Thus, we see that the inference "Causer irrelevant", unproblematic in (1b), (2b), is blocked in any contradicting context, and it is in this sense that this component can be said to have inferential status - the status of a cancelable inference.

The suggested account of the causal aspects of decausatives provides a solution to an important problem posed in Wierzbicka 1980: 173. The problem is connected with semantics of medium verbs, such as *decay, melt, dry*.

The semantic formula of a medium verb is the same as that of a decausative. If the anticausative component were inherent in the semantics of a medium verb, that is, if, e.g., *X dried* had always meant 'X dried by itself', without any external cause, the semantics of a medium verb couldn't have been taken as constituting a part in the meaning definition of the corresponding causative verb: for *Y dried X* we would have got a formulation 'Y caused X dry by itself', which is self-contradictory. If we acknowledge the inferential nature of "anticausative" component in the semantics of decausative and medium verbs the problem extinguishes: the inference 'Causer irrelevant / nonexistent' simply won't be made because the Causer is mentioned in the context.

So, the causal component, central in the meaning of a transitive causative verb, is not excluded from the scenario of a decausative verb. The difference between a decausative and its motivating causative verb concerns the communicative status of the causative component: in the semantics of a causative verb the causative component belongs to the Center; in the semantics of a decausative it goes to the Background or Off screen. In the semantic formulas I use the optionality of the causal component in the semantics of decausatives is indicated by brackets.

As for medium verbs, their semantics is to be conceived along the same lines as that of decausatives: medium verbs are, so to say, non-derived decausatives.

In Levin, Rappaport 1995: 108 it is suggested that quantification can give an account of the absent participant Causer in (1b), (2b): "Suppose that the intransitive form of externally caused verbs arises from binding the external cause within the lexical semantic representation, where this binding is interpreted as existential quantification." It follows from what is said above that in b-sentences of examples (1), (2), with missing

Background Causer, the situation is conceptualized as non-committal about the participant Causer; while existential quantification over Causers assumes that a Causer inevitably exists.

This would have been the case if the cause were a parameter of a situation, in the same sense as, e.g., time or place (for some types of situations), i.e. if our conceptualization of reality obeyed the Axiom of causality: Any change has some reason.

But syntactic behavior and semantic interpretation of decausatives demonstrates that there is no such axiom: the speaker can conceptualize a situation having no cause in mind. The same option is provided by medium verbs, such as *melt, decay, die* discussed above.

Thus, to recapitulate, our treatment of decausatives presupposes three separate meaning shifts: 1) deagentivation, a categorial shift; 2) decausativation proper - a shift of the communicative ranks of the participants, i.e. focus of attention; and 3) Unspecified Adjunct deletion - interpreting valence decreasing derivation. Each of the shifts has an independent motivation and a wide sphere of application.

5. 'I am not to blame'

There is another riddle connected with the semantics of decausatives. It can be demonstrated with the help of examples (25) and (26):

(25) a. Vanja broke the cup <accidentally>;
b. The cup broke <by itself>.

(26) - It *broke* <about a cup>! - It didn't just *break*, you *broke* it.

Anna Wierzbicka (1980: 172), discussing the dialogue here numbered as (26), describes the reaction *you broke it* as made "with an emphasis which rejects the sentence *it broke* as a false rather than incomplete report".

Let us look upon these two alternatives more closely. I shall call the first participant of the dialogue (26) C(hild) and the second A(dult) (Wierzbicka qualifies the second speaker in (26) as an "angry adult").

For *It broke* to be false it is necessary that its meaning contradicts the "true" meaning of *You broke it.* In order to be an "incomplete report" the meaning of *It broke* must only constitute the part of *You broke it.*

The first alternative is correct if we acknowledge the component 'I am not to blame' as a potential part of the meaning decomposition of (25b). In fact, the essence of the opposition in (26) can then be schematically presented as having the form

(26') C. I am not to blame! A. You ARE to blame!

A question arises, whether the component 'I am not to blame' is really present in the meaning of *It broke* - at least in the context of (26). And if so, then where does it come from? In other words, what inference can give an account for it.

The component 'Y is not to blame' is not present in the meaning of (25b), so it only can arise on the background of the opposition between (25b) and (25a) manifested in (26) by way of contrast with 'Y is to blame' in the meaning of the causative *break*. So we must look for the origin of the component 'Y is to blame' in the meaning of the causative *break*.

There are two possible sources for the origin of the component 'Y is to blame' in the meaning of *break* - 1) lexical semantics of the verb, and 2) categorial semantics of agency.

1) A sentence of the form *Y broke X* literally means 'Y destroyed the integrity of X'; but, as all verbs of destruction, *broke* invites the inference 'Y caused damage' (Kustova 1996); at least verbs of destruction have such an inference in their meaning extension potential. This inference is not valid for every verb in any context. For example, you can break a nutshell in order to get the core (*Razbej mne orex*!). But in a certain pragmatic context the potential "damage" component of destruction verbs may become essential for the speaker, so the idea of damage will be actualized. In fact, the "angry adult" of (26) is prone to emphasize the damage.

2) On the other hand, there is a special semantics of agency. A scenario of a verb of action includes three components explicating the role of Agent in the semantics of an action verb (on connection between roles of participants and semantic components of the definition see, e.g., Jackendoff 1990, Goddard 1998, Paducheva 1998b). For a participant Y to be assigned the role of the Agent it is necessary for Y to take part in the following components of the definition:

a. 'Y is the source of physical influence';
b. 'Y is the subject of intention';
c. 'Y is responsible for the new state coming into existence'[1].

In the context of an involuntary action, as in (25b), the second compo-

[1] "Primary responsibility" is included among the features of the prototypical Agent in Lakoff 1977.

nent, "intention", is lost. But the third component, "responsibility", is not. Moreover, in the context of actualized damage, as in (26), it is intensified to 'Y is to blame for the damage'.

Now we are ready to discuss the relationship between (25b) and (26). Sentence (25b), with a decausative *broke*, invites the inference of there being no external cause deserving being mentioned, see the component 'Causer is irrelevant' in the meaning of (4b). In the context of damage in (26) this component is extended to 'nobody is responsible for the damage' - due to the opposition with 'Y is to blame for the damage'. Then the opposition in (26) can be schematically presented as having the form (26'). And under this analysis the account of the situation given by C is considered by A to be false.

But there is another way to account for the opposition in (26), which does not require the component 'Y is not to blame' to be present in the meaning of (25b). In fact, the component 'Causer is irrelevant', which we argued for in section 4, cannot be qualified as included in what is said by the speaker; it is an inference made by the addressee on the ground that no causes are mentioned in the text or, as we now must add, present in the context. Then we can accept a weaker variant (26") for the opposition in (26):

> (26") It is not *only* the case that the cup broke; something you were doing was the (physical) cause of it; and as the broken cup is a damage you are to blame for it.

So it seems more probable that the utterance *It broke* gives an incomplete report of the situation. In fact, the inserted *just* of example (26) (It didn't *just* break) is an argument towards incompleteness rather than falsity of *It broke*. Under this analysis 'Y is to blame' is present in the meaning of (25a), on the rights of a potential inference actualized by the context of damage, while 'Y is not to blame' is not present in the meaning of (25b) at all.

6. Contrast

To conclude, I'd like to emphasize that in the analysis of example (26) it turned important to pay attention to the role of contrast, which non-accidentally finds its place exactly on the boundary between linguistic semantics and the pragmatics that is beyond linguistic semantics.

Example (27) (from Fillmore 1976) is often used to demonstrate the maxim of quantity. The inference (27b) from the utterance (27a) is made by the Hearer on the assumption that the Speaker could have made a stronger statement with less linguistic effort had (s)he made the statement about both eyes; the fact that (s)he did not do it makes us believe that the stronger statement is not true:

(27) a. She can see fine with her left eye;
b. Something is wrong with her right eye.

The same holds for example (28) (from Leech 1983); the reaction of B invites the inference 'we won't miss aunt Agate', which is not spoken out for the sake of politeness:

(28) a. We'll all miss Bill and aunt Agate, won't we?
b. Well, we'll all miss BILL.

But the same inferences may be looked upon as constituting the direct meaning of contrast. Then contrastive constructions fall within the scope of linguistic semantics, so the inferences connected with them are a challenge for linguistic semantics of the future.

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