Words denoting causative (He broke the window) and inchoative: change of state events (The window broke) are often morphologically simple words denoting the associated state predicates (The window is broken), though the relationship differs for different kinds of states.

For change of state events, there is no single direction of derivation from causative to inchoative (e.g. Italian scioglieri ‘melt trn. → sciogliere’ ‘melt intrans.’) or inchoative to causative (e.g. Turkish olda “melt dl.”). Typological approaches argue that the direction of derivation is sensitive to the lexical semantic nature of verbs, namely whether to which kind of event denoted by the verbs tends to occur spontaneously (e.g. freeze, melt) or is more likely to be instigated by a causer (e.g. break, close) (cf. Haepelemati 1993; Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995, Conrie 2006). In addition to how the change of state event is brought about, spontaneously or not, another factor that has been suggested to be responsible for such an asymmetry in the formal encoding of the causative-inchoative alternation is the nature of the state underlying the change of state (Koontz-Garboden 2005).

Dixon (1982) shows that there is a distinction between property concept states (PCS) and result states (RS). The latter entail some prior event giving rise to the state, whereas the former do not presuppose such an event.

Types of state predicates

Do languages show a preference for deriving state predicates from change of state events (i.e. for encoding states as RS) or the other way round (i.e. for encoding states as PCS)? And is it always the case that there is a direction of derivation?

All 5 languages exhibit a tendency for deriving state predicates from causative/inchoative verbs, though to different extents. Maltese and Turkish show a high propensity for RS. The same holds for German and Italian, though they tend to have a larger number of PCS (i.e. of verbs derived from states) in comparison to Maltese and Turkish. English shows a slight preference for RS (close ↔ closed). However, there is a remarkable amount of PCS (wid → wide).

For each language there are cases where the direction of derivation is unclear because:

- the same form is used (The door open-ed = The door is open)
- the items are equally complex (Turkish fıkır / fıkır thaw trn. ↔ fıkır thaw’d)
- the associated adjective is (synchronically) not related morphologically to the verbs (The prices rose = The prices are high; The beer cool-ed down = The beer is cool).

Correlation between states and verbs

Does the nature of the underlying state indeed have an impact on the direction of derivation among causative-inchoative verb pairs (as suggested by Koontz-Garboden 2006)?

English no direction of derivation is observed in causative and inchoative verbs both when associated to PCS (wide → widem → widen) and RS (broken → break = break). German when the state is PC there is equal chance that the inchoative is derived (OPEN offen → offen ich schaffen) or that there is no direction of derivation (o Herr tocken → tockern = tockern). For RS, the verbs are either non-directed (BROKEN zerbrochen → zerbrechen = zerbrechen) or the inchoative is derived (CLOSED geschlossen → schließen = schließen) Italian there is a distribution of how verbs are anticausative for both PCS (low basso → abbassare = abbassarsi) and RS (100% strappare = strappare = strapparsi). Maltese for both PCS and RS, causative, anticausative and non-directed alternations are all possible, with a slight preference for anticausatives when the state is resultative (CREASED kremen → kremen). Turkish PCS are always causative (o Her tokur → kurust = kurun) RS may be either anticausative (BENT düzeltl = düzeltl = düzeltl) or causative (ANGRY kyzan = kızdın = kızdın).

Conclusion

This preliminary investigation of change of state events and their associated state predicates suggests three main findings:

- all 5 languages tend to derive the state predicates from their associated change of state events;
- most of the state notions in question fall along a continuum with regard to the two types of state predicates, with some notions being typically encoded as property concept states and others as result states;
- the data suggest that there is no direct correlation between the type of state predicate, whether it is a property concept or a result state, and the direction of derivation in causative-inchoative verb pairs, neither within nor across these 5 languages.

In order to be able to draw generalizations about the relationship between state predicates and the causative-inchoative alternation, further research is to be carried out (i) on a wider range of change of state events and their associated state predicates (ii) among more languages from different families and geographical areas.

References


Dixon, Robert M.W. 1982. Do not presuppose such an event. Of the causative-inchoative alternation is the nature of the state underlying the change of state (Konstanz-Garboden 2005).


Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Franz-Ferdinand for the inspiration and helpful discussion. We are also grateful to Alexa Conrie, Drummer, Zdenka, Boaz Ledy, Chris Lucas, Tülin Yasu, Georg Nowak, Stefano Frangoli and all the native speaker informants for their help. The project is supported by the ZukunftsKolleg, University of Konstanz. The Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF) & Schenklin by the Research Institute for Computational Analysis of Linguistic Development (CALD), University of Konstanz.