Thematic interpretation of optional CAUSEE in Teochew 'give'-causative

Background One central issue of argument structure studies is the LINKING question (Carter 1976): an argument occupies a syntactic position and binds a thematic relation related to the event structure, but how does the syntactic position align with the thematic one? Approaches like UTAH (Baker 1988) adopt a restrictive theory directly linking these two, but some other studies hold a more syntactically-oriented event structural view (Borer 2005; Ramchand 2008; Schäfer 2008; Alexiadou et al. 2015; Wood&Marantz 2017; Biggs&Embick 2022; Marantz 2022, a.o.). In this paper, I show how a certain kind of causative construction in Teochew (Southern Min, Sinitic), and specifically how the CAUSEE is interpreted in this construction, providing an interesting case supporting the latter position. This study is also in the spirit of Dowty (1991) in that it provides further evidence against discrete (unanalyzed) thematic roles and against linking such roles to syntactic projections.

Data In Teochew, the CAUSEE in the *kə*-causative is optional, and the original meaning of this causative light verb is 'give' (1a). Though one might suspect that the absent CAUSEE is a dropped (null) referential argument commonly seen in Sinitic language, this is not the case: it has a nonspecific reading not requiring contextual support ((1a); see the contrast with (1b)). The embedded predicates can be of any transitivity/telicity (examples omitted for space). Both CAUSER and CAUSEE can be [+/-human, +/-animate]: *Nangy* and *Mimi* in (1a) can refer to human or animal; *Nangy* in (1a) can be replaced by *niaotsia* 'catfood'; *Mimi* in (1a) can by replaced by *giu* 'ball'.

(1) a. No context providing the identity of CAUSEE: b. No context providing the subject:

    Nangy | *kə* | *(Mimi)* | *tsao.*   *kə | *Mimi* | *tsao.*

    Nangy give Mimi run   give Mimi run

    'Nangy causes Mimi/someone to run.'   Intended: 'Someone causes Mimi

    (Lit. 'Nangy gives the running event to Mimi/someone)   to run'

Analysis <u>Syntactically</u>, this causative contains two vPs: it is bi-eventive, diagnosed by independent manner adverbs (2), assuming the event is introduced by root verbalized by v. It is not bi-clausal, attested by the ungrammaticality of a left-clefted embedded object (3a) and of an embedded complementizer *da* (3b). It embeds an AspP: preverbal progressive marker *lo* can occur in the embedded structure (4). Following Lin (2006), I assume Sinitic languages do not have a TP layer. The implicit CAUSEE is syntactically projected, attested by its ability to license (i) reflexive anaphors, (ii) reciprocals and (iii) depictives (examples are omitted for space). Both explicit and implicit CAUSEE are introduced as an argument: they can (i) be passivized, (ii) be clefted, (iii) be raised by argument-targeting *dui* 'towards'-construction and (iv) block the passivization of the embedded object due to locality (examples are omitted for space). The CAUSEE is an applied argument rather than a core one: it is incompatible with another applied argument (Marantz, 1993; McGinnis 1998; Nie 2020) (examples are omitted for space).

(2) *Nangy* **meme** *kə (Mimi)* **manman** *tsao.*   (4) Nangy *kə (Mimi)* **lo** *tsao.*

    Nangy **quickly** give Mimi **slowly** run   Nangy give Mimi **PROG** run

    'N. quickly causes M./someone to slowly run.'   'N. causes M./someone to be running.'

(3) a. *Nangy *kə* **muegia** *Mimi* *tsia.*   b. *Nangy *kə* **da** *Mimi* *tsao.*

    Nangy give **stuff** Mimi eat   Nangy give **COMP** Mimi run

<u>Semantically</u>, the CAUSEE is interpreted as a 'prospective AGENT', rather than a real one. It fails all four traditional diagnostics targeting the AGENT role, i.e., instrumental phrase (5a), agent-oriented adverb (5b), agent-oriented comitative (5c) and purpose clause (5d) (these are valid tests in Teochew: passive with *by*-phrase passes them all; unaccusative behaves oppositely; examples omitted for space). The embedded predicate cannot be unaccusative (6a) or stative (6b), suggesting the CAUSEE cannot be THEME or EXPERIENCER. However, the embedded predicate can be a verb like 'run' whose external argument is traditionally thought to be AGENT (1a).

(5) a. *Nangy *kə (Mimi)* **eng sakou** *tsia* *muegia.*

    Nangy give Mimi **use cloth** cover stuff

    b. *Nangy *kə (Mimi)* **uyiseʔ** *tsao.*

    Nangy give Mimi **intentionally** run

	c.	*Nangy	ka̱	(Mimi)	**do**	**Xingy**	**gai**	**siohu**	**e**	**kəng**	**muegia.**
		Nangy	give	Mimi	**LOC**	**Xingy**	**POSS**	**help**	**under**	hide	stuff
	d.	*Nangy	ka̱	(Mimi)	**kəng**	**muegia**	**ka̱**	**səng**.			
		Nangy	give	Mimi	hide	stuff	**to**	**play**			

(6) a. *Nangy ka̱ (Mimi) **bualoʔ.**   b. *Nangy ka̱ (Mimi) **gia** Xingy.

     Nangy give Mimi **fall.over**   Nangy give Mimi **fear** Xingy

So if we are going to call the CAUSEE a 'prospective AGENT', not AGENT simpliciter, what is that? This 'prospectiveness' interpretation of the CAUSEE, in spirit, is similar to the 'HAVE-GOAL' distinction and the 'Prospective Possession' discussions of English double-object/dative construction (Richards 2001; Harley 2002; Krifa 2004; Gropen et al. 1989; Beavers&Koontz-Garboden 2020), especially because the causative light verb in this causative is 'give'. The reason for this 'prospective' reading is that this construction does not entail that the caused event occurs, similar to Nadathur's (2019) necessary vs. sufficient causation in terms of actuality entailment. Nine diagnostics support this; due to space, only five, which can be subsumed into two groups, are listed here. First, (i) negating the caused event is felicitous. Second, when the happening of the caused event/result is unknown, items originally with scope differences targeting different subevents in an event chain are unambiguous and can only target the causing event. These items include (ii) preverbal negative morpheme *bo* (7a), (iii) clause-final perfective marker *o* (7b), (iv) *gihu* 'almost' in the spirit of McCawley (1971) and (v) *you* 'again' in the spirit of McCawley (1968), Dowty (1968), von Stechow (1995) and Pylkkänen (2008) (neither 'repetitive' nor 'restitutive' reading can be retrieved).

(7) Context: whether Mimi finally runs or not is unknown:

    a. *Nangy* **bo** ka̱ (Mimi) *tsao.*   b. *Nangy* ka̱ (Mimi) *tsao* **o**.

      Nangy **NEG** give Mimi run   Nangy give Mimi run **PFV**

      'Nangy does not do the causing-Mimi/   'Nangy has done the causing-Mimi/

        someone-to-run thing.'   Someone-to-run thing.'

      NOT 'Nangy fails to cause Mimi/   NOT 'Nangy caused Mimi/someone to run

        someone to run.'   and the latter has run.'

I argue that the causative light verb *ka̱* 'give' encodes an existential opportunity modality (Portner 2009), following Davis et al.'s (2009) discussion on St'at'imcets *ka-...-a* circumfix and Rivero et al.'s (2010) discussion on Polish involuntary-state construction in terms of no actuality entailment. This syntactically-higher opportunity modality has a circumstantial modal base B and a stereotypical ordering source (left out for simplicity) (8). Together with the syntactically-lower embedded predicate, it influences the thematic interpretation of the intermediate CAUSEE: the embedded predicate requires the CAUSEE to be an AGENT; however, due to the 'prospectiveness' property encoded in the lexical semantics of *ka̱*, the CAUSEE cannot be easily labeled by traditional discrete thematic role. Therefore, the intermediate CAUSEE is interpreted as a 'prospective AGENT' rather than a real one.

(8) $[[ka̱]] = \lambda P_{<v,st>}.\lambda e_2.\lambda w.\exists e_1.\exists w'[w' \in B(w) \wedge \text{Result}(e_2)(w) \wedge P(e_1)(w')]$

This 'prospectiveness' property can help explain the CAUSEE optionality, in contrast to the CAUSEE obligatoriness in another Teochew periphrastic causative, the *mue* 'make'-causative. The 'give' one, unlike the deterministic 'make' one, is a probabilistic causative not entailing the result; therefore, a 'responsible party (RP)' (Biggs&Embick 2022) of the caused event is not required. When the CAUSEE is explicit, the 'probabilistic/prospective' reading decreases. **Implications** This case study (i) shows the inherent problem of traditional discrete (and unanalyzed) thematic roles, supporting Dowty (1991) by providing new evidence from the CAUSEE interpretation in Teochew probabilistic 'give' causative; (ii) proves the argument (CAUSEE) interpretation is derived from syntactically-oriented event structural interpretation, against a restrictive UTAH-like approach directly linking (unanalyzed) thematic relation and syntactic position. **Selected references** Alexiadou, A., et al. (2015). *External Arguments in Transitivity Alternations: A Layering Approach*. Oxford University Press. Baker, M. (1988). *Incorporation: A Theory of Grammatical Function Changing*. The University of Chicago Press. Dowty, D. (1991). Thematic Proto-roles and Argument Selection. *Language*, 67(3), 547-619.