

## Reconsidering defeasible causative verbs

[for Workshop 2: *Agent control over non-culminating events*]

Martin and Schäfer (2012) present an intriguing preliminary analysis of a class of verbs that they argue may take an external argument which is either Agent or Causer, noting that if Agent is selected, no result is entailed to hold, but if Causer is chosen, a result is entailed to obtain, as illustrated by the contrasts in (1) and (2) (my examples). They call such verbs *defeasible causative verbs*.

- (1) a. They offered me a position at their bank, but I turned it down. [Agent]  
b. Living in a large city offered Rebecca a number of advantages, #but she refused them. [Causer]
- (2) a. My parents encouraged me to go back to school, but I didn't listen to them. [Agent]  
b. The new regulation's coming into effect encouraged the people to save, #but nobody saved. [Causer]

Martin and Schäfer treat (p. 251) the semantics of these verbs (their paradigmatic example is *offer*) as having a free parameter for a modal base with the condition that an energetic modal base is chosen if the verb selects Agent, and that a circumstantial or stereotypical modal base is chosen if the verb selects Causer. Since an energetic modal base is not necessarily realistic, a result is not entailed to hold, whereas with a circumstantial modal base, which is realistic, a result is implied to hold. (A stereotypical modal base is chosen in certain exceptional cases.)

Although Martin and Schäfer suggest (p. 256) that their analysis does not postulate that defeasible causative verbs are lexically ambiguous, it actually does because the choice of Agent or Causer is mutually exclusive (and the choice of modal base depends on this choice). Moreover, since it is not clear how to relate Agent and Causer, it is also not clear how to relate the two senses of defeasible causative verbs.

The view that I propose is that defeasible causative verbs do indeed have two senses but that these two senses can be related. First, I claim that the two senses are distinguished aspectually. Specifically, defeasible causative verbs with Agent are activities or accomplishments, whereas with Causer they are states (or achievements if construed inchoatively). Observe that if the tense in (1) and (2) were changed to simple present, only (1b) and (2b) could be understood non-habitually (e.g. #*They offer me . . .* versus *Living in a large city offers Rebecca . . .*).

Second, a defeasible causative verb with Agent is an accomplishment just in case it entails that a result state holds, so it is an activity just in case no result state is entailed to hold. Accordingly, the use of *encourage* in (2a) is an activity, which seems correct (e.g. *My parents encouraged me for a long time to . . .*). *Offer* in (1a) may appear to contradict this because it seems to be an accomplishment without an entailed result state. However, I argue that the result state of *offer* with Agent is always simply a *possibility* that the agent puts at the disposal of the recipient – whether the recipient actually makes use of the possibility offered is immaterial as far as the result state characterized in this way is concerned. From this perspective, then, *offer* in (1a) is an accomplishment and entails a result state, namely, the possibility for the recipient to have a position at the bank.

Finally, given that a defeasible causative verb with Causer is a state (see above – barring an inchoative reading), the question is how to account for the “result state implication.” I write “result state implication” because, strictly speaking, this is a misnomer: since there is no event, there is also no result state. Since a defeasible causative verb with Causer denotes a state, the proper question to ask is how to relate this state to the accomplishment denoted by the corresponding verb with Agent. I suggest that the state denoted by a defeasible causative verb with Causer is simply a state that could be the result state of the corresponding defeasible causative accomplishment verb with Agent. For example, in (2b), the people are in an encouragement-state (i.e. they are statively encouraged) to save because of the new regulation. This state could be the result state of an event in which the lawmakers encouraged the people (with a new regulation) – construed as an accomplishment – to save.

## References

Martin, Fabienne and Florian Schäfer. 2012. The modality of *offer* and other defeasible causative verbs. In *Proceedings of the 30th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*, ed. Nathan Arnett and Ryan Bennett, 248–258. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. [www.lingref.com](http://www.lingref.com), document #2822.