

On the Passivisability of *Cause* Causatives in English

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The passive of periphrastic causative sentences with the verb *cause* (henceforth “*cause*-causative passives”) is alleged to be ungrammatical (Mittwoch (1990), Mair (1990)). This is shown in (1). The examples are from Mittwoch (1990:119).

- (1) a. The inflation caused prices to rise.
 b. * Prices were caused to rise (by the inflation).

However, there are certain contexts in which *cause*-causative passives are used:

- (2) The Negro came to the United States of America in 1619. [...] Before the Mayflower, [...] *hundreds of Negroes* [...] *were caused to perish in the middle of the sea*, simply because the mean and cruel task master, the white man, would walk down the aisle and stumble over Negroes chained to the ship and say, “We have too many on board. Dump them over into the sea.”

Mittwoch (1990) and Mair (1990) merely point out the fact shown in (1) and do not provide any explanation. Furthermore, very few serious attempts have been made to account for the passivisability of *cause*-causatives. The purpose of this study is to clarify the nature of *cause*-causative passives, and to propose the condition for the use of *cause*-causative passives.

Observation on the data in (2) tells us that the subject of the *cause*-causative passive, (*hundreds of*) *Negroes*, appears in the preceding context as the first line shows. The *cause*-causative passive describes what happened to that subject. This accords with the notion of the topic defined by Chafe (1987) and Lambrecht (1994). We can then assume that the subject of a *cause*-causative passive functions as the topic of the sentence. Moreover, the reason why Negroes were caused to perish in the sea is described in the context following the *cause*-causative passive. These two points are characteristics common among *cause*-causative passives to be used in contexts. Based on this observation, we propose the following descriptive generalisation as a condition for the use of *cause*-causative passives:

- (3) In order for a *cause*-causative passive to be acceptable, the subject must function as the topic of the sentence, and the cause of the event expressed by the sentence must be described in the context.

The following examinations illustrate the validity of our condition. First, the subject of a *cause*-causative passive must function as the topic of the sentence; this is confirmed by the examples in (4):

- (4) When a patient has a headache, the doctor should prescribe aspirin. While aspirin relieves the patient's headache,
- a. * his body temperature is also caused to drop.
 - b. it also causes his body temperature to drop.

In the preceding context given in (4), there is no expression which corresponds to the subject of the *cause-causative* passive. As we have seen, when *cause-causative* passives are acceptable, the passive subject or related words appear in the preceding context, and the construction is a sentence that describes what happens/happened to the subject. In (4), however, the subject is not introduced into the discourse, and the passive construction cannot be used in such a case, as seen in (4a), while the active counterpart can be used, as in (4b). In this way, we can illustrate the plausibility of the first part of our condition.

Next, let us turn to the second point: the cause of the event expressed by a *cause-causative* passive must be described in the context. Consider the following:

- (5) * Concerning his body temperature, it is also caused to drop.

Even though the sentence in (5) is arranged to make the subject the topic of the sentence, it is unacceptable. This is because there is no context in which the cause is described. Here it is confirmed that the cause must be described in the context.

Consequently, we predict the following:

- (6) Although *cause-causative* passives are not accepted on their own, if they satisfy condition (3), they will be acceptable.

Let us examine whether this prediction is born out. The following instance is judged to be unacceptable by previous studies:

- (7) * Prices are caused to rise (by the inflation). (= (1b))

As we have predicted, the sentence can be licensed under the well arranged context where the subject of a *cause-causative* passive serves as the topic of the sentence, and the cause is explicitly described. This is shown in (8):

- (8) The oil crisis caused a serious inflation in the 70's in Japan. Inflation lead to a general increase in prices and a fall in the purchasing value of money.
Needless to say, *prices were caused to rise* in this country.

In (8), the *cause-causative* passive can be used. Here the subject is introduced in the preceding discourse, and the sentence in question describes what happened to that subject. Thus, the subject serves as the topic of the sentence. As for the condition for the cause, the context points to *inflation* as the cause of the event; thus the *cause-causative* passive is accepted. Even the *cause-causative* passives assumed to be unacceptable at the sentence level can be licensed in contexts which satisfy the condition in (3). This fact adds further credence to our proposal in (3).