

RESEARCH

Causal necessity, causal sufficiency, and the implications of causative verbs

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Against past analyses, we propose that natural language causatives do not universally encode a single, unanalyzable bringing about meaning like Dowty's (1979) *cause*, but instead draw on an inventory of contrasting causal dependency relations. To illustrate this claim, we focus on the English causative verbs *make* and *cause*. We point out a number of differences in their inferential profiles, and argue that these follow from the fact that *cause* asserts a relation of causal necessity between a cause and its stated effect, while *make* asserts causal sufficiency. We distinguish these notions from their alethic counterparts: while causal necessity is similar to the notion of counterfactual necessity (Lewis 1973), causal sufficiency has not figured in previous analyses of causal language. We show that analyzing *make* as a sufficiency causative not only accounts for the similarities and differences between its distribution and that of *cause*, but also enables us to explain previously puzzling inferences associated with the use of *make* as opposed to other periphrastic causatives.

Keywords: causative; *cause*; *make*; sufficiency; necessity; causal models

1 Introduction

At the outset of his influential paper on causation, Lewis (1973: 556) reminds us that:

Hume defined causation twice over. He wrote “we may define a cause to be an object followed by another, and where all the objects, similar to the first, are followed by objects similar to the second. Or, in other words, where, if the first object had not been, the second never had existed.”

What is particularly puzzling about this passage from Hume is the phrase that appears between the two definitions: *in other words*. This suggests that the second definition is meant simply as a restatement of the first, but the two definitions do not seem to describe the same thing at all. Lewis, who favours the second definition, focuses on the idea that the first definition is about an actual (observed) regularity, while the second deals with counterfactual possibility.

There is another difference between the two definitions, however, which is perhaps more glaring. Hume's second definition takes a cause to be something that is (counterfactually) *necessary* for its effect: that is, something without which there was no possibility of the effect being realized. His first definition, however, does not involve necessity at all. Instead, it describes a relation which seems closer to one of sufficiency, a connection made explicit in Lewis's summation of theories in the spirit of the first definition:

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