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The formal and functional-semantic features of the predicate-argument structure of the periphrastic causative verb allow in English

Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of formal and functional-semantic features of the predicate-argument structure of the periphrastic causative verb allow in English. The research is of primary importance due to the lack of the unified theory of causation in linguistics and the scanty range of studies devoted to causative verbs in terms of formal semantics. The scientific novelty is as follows: the predicate-argument analysis of the causative verb allow is carried out for the first time. The author examines the verb allow in two functional meanings – «to let someone do or have something» and «let something happen, allow something to do something». The analysis of the predicate-argument structure is based on the description of two parameters with the involvement of the minimal context. The first parameter includes the description of the set of obligatory arguments (participants) of the causative situation and the detection of the formal features of arguments – the corresponding formal semantic roles which correlate with the communicative relevance of the information in the semantics of the whole sentence. The second parameter is the detection of the taxonomic category which forms the functional-semantic type of the particular causative situation. The author reveals two obligatory arguments in all minimal contexts – causer and causee. The range of semantic roles varies for these arguments: causer can act as an agent, a force, an instrument or a source; causee can act as a patient or counteragent. The analysis showed that the functional-semantic potential of the verb is highly correlated with the taxonomic category. Acting as specific semantic roles in different extralinguistic situations causes the affiliation of the verb with several taxonomic categories: «action», «causative incident with the background causer», «causative incident with the party liable», «process».

Keywords: causative verb; causative situation; predicate-argument structure; taxonomic category; causer; causee; semantic role

The interrelation of language and thinking can be seen in numerous crossing philosophical and linguistic categories reflecting the universal phenomena of beings in the scientific worldview. The phenomenon of the cause-effect relationships, where one event (the cause) makes another event happen (the effect), belongs to this sort of universal linguistic-philosophical categories. The category

of the cause-effect relationships, as the basic form of the correlation between the real-world processes, has gone beyond philosophy and been of interest in a wide variety of disciplines, permeating all areas of science and technology. The cause-effect relation affects all aspects of our lives: it pervades our thinking and motivates our rational actions, knowledge of cause and effect provides the basis for rational decision-making and problem-solving [1, p. 51].

The comprehensive research on cause-effect relationships is currently important in different branches of science. Since the cause-effect relationships are expressed in all natural languages, causation has been a theme of linguistic investigation for last decades. In linguistic, causation is a lexical-grammatical category which represents the cause-effect relations between the subject and the object. Despite of the presence of some general definitions and directions, the integrated theory of causation has not been formed in linguistics yet. Certain select pieces of research only touch upon some aspects of causation without outlining the category as a system. In this context, the research on the semantics of causative verbs is currently important and opportune and can contribute to the comprehensive theory of causation in linguistics.

The object of this research is the causative verb *allow*, which is in common use in English. This verb has not been examined in the terms of formal semantics up to the present. The predicate-argument structure of verb *allow* has been analysed for the first time. This research is therefore quite a scientific novelty.

The aim of the research is to describe the formal and semantic features of the predicate-argument structure of the periphrastic causative verb *allow* in English. In accordance with the aim, we set the specific objectives of the research: to describe the set of obligatory arguments (participants) of the causative situation which form the predicate-argument structure of the verb; to detect the corresponding formal features of the arguments, i.e. their semantic roles; to define the possible taxonomic categories which represent the type of the extralinguistic situation and foreordain the semantic potential of the verb for the situational type.

In order to achieve these objectives, we applied the following methods and techniques of research: methods of observation and deduction for conducting objective study, the selection method for acquiring the material for research, the method of semantic description, structural-semantic analysis and contextual analysis based on synchronous observation, the continuous sampling method. The British newspapers "The Guardian" and "The Independent" were selected as the authentic language material.

Causality is a genetic connection of phenomena through which one thing (the cause) under certain conditions gives rise to, causes something else (the effect). Causative structures relate to specific cognitive models which represent integrated conceptual structures with specifiable properties [2, p. 117]. Different languages have their own linguistic ways to express the cause-effect relationships. Depending on these ways, there are two types of causative – the lexical causative and the grammatical causative. The lexical causative is a verb which includes a component "to cause" as a part of its semantic meaning. For example, the verb *break* is a lexical causative because we can interpret its meaning in the following way: *break = cause something + not to work properly anymore*.

The grammatical causative constitutes the morphological causative and the syntactical or analytical causative. The morphological causative is possible in languages with morphological devices (i.e. inflections), which are able to change verbs into the causative forms. The morphological causative results in morphologically derived causative verbs. In the syntactical causative, the meaning of the causation is incorporated in the auxiliary verbs with the categorial meaning "stimulus that encourages a new activity or a new state". These auxiliary verbs are called periphrastic causative verbs. The syntactical causative is a two-verb structure that expresses a predicate of causation and a predicate of

effect. The predicate of causation is a periphrastic causative verb, the predicate of effect is the second, lexical verb in its base form or in the form of *to*-Infinitive.

In English, analytical causatives can be represented as the backbone of the functional-semantic field of causation. The English language possesses the variety of periphrastic causative verbs, each of which is specialized for the expression of particular kinds of causal dependence. Periphrastic causative verbs are *let, make, have, get, allow, cause, enable, force, help, keep, permit, prevent* and others. The semantics of these verbs is distinct because there is a difference between the lexical-syntactic constructions "hortative verb + Infinitive" and the analytical morphemes *have, make* or *get* which are fully nonsemantic.

The causative verb is used in two different meanings in linguistics: (1) the verb which contains the information about the action which causes another action or state, i.e. the denotative situation consists of two actions or states; (2) the verb which contains the information about the action which does not lie in the impact on the subject but lies in the impact on any other object [3, p. 354].

In our research, we follow the most universal interpretation of a causative verb, offered by M.V. Vsevolodova: "causative verbs are actional verbs with the meaning of intellectual, mental, physical, social action which is aimed at another person or object, resulting in taking an action, having a state or changing a quality" [4, p. 58].

In linguistics, the term "periphrastic" is interpreted as "consisting of two (or more) elements, compound, descriptive, complex" [5, p. 321]. Periphrastic constructions are the constructions which include an unchangeable part and a conjugated verb which is similar to an auxiliary verb. Analytical constructions (including analytical constructions with causative verbs) are considered periphrastic constructions.

The differential sign of a causative verb is transitivity. Intransitive verbs can't be causative verbs. On the other hand, not all the transitive verbs are causative. Transitive verbs are considered causative providing they have a seme "motivate an object to act or to change a state or a quality". The causative construction with the periphrastic causative verb denotes a complex situation consisting of two component events: the causing event, in which the causer does or initiates something; and the caused event, in which the causee carries out an action, or undergoes a change of condition or state as a result of the causer's action [6, p. 256].

As a result, the periphrastic causative verb is always followed by a non-causative verb in its base form or in the form of *to*-Infinitive. This non-causative verb indicates the action which the cause carries out or a change the cause undergoes. The link between these two verbs is not a simple one: the causal predicate is conceptually dependent on the effected predicate because causal predicate necessarily evokes another action or state.

The causative meaning of periphrastic causative verb *allow* combines with the permissive meaning. There is a notion "permissive causation" in linguistics. Permissive causation is a kind of causation where the causer is not the sole and most important agent of causation, as in factitive causation, but rather one that makes a contribution to the coming about the caused event by not impeding or permitting the caused situation that is nonetheless perceived to be more saliently related to some other, more immediate cause [7, p. 29]. Permissive causation does not denote any action but only the action which does not call for the big dynamic activity.

The verb *allow* is characterized with the high frequency of usage because it belongs to the corpus of top thousand spoken and written English words, according to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English[1]. There are four main definitions of the verb *allow* in the lexical entry of

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[1] Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 2009. 1950 p. – p. 38.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. All of them are marked with the note "transitive". But only two of them call for the combination with a non-causative verb, namely the first definition "to let someone do or have something" and the second definition "let something happen, allow something to do something".

In our research, we are going to analyse the predicate-argument structure of the periphrastic causative verb *allow* in two mentioned functional meanings. The analysis of the predicate-argument structure is based on two parameters: (1) the number of obligatory arguments and the inherent specifications of these arguments; (2) definite semantic roles of the arguments (the actual roles the participants play in some real or imagined situations, apart from the linguistic encoding of those situations). We intend to determine the taxonomic category of the verb and the variation of taxonomic category due to step changes of the predicate-argument structure. The taxonomic category coincides with the definite type of an extralinguistic situation and shows how the content of a situation is distributed over time. The taxonomic category is as important for the semantics of a word, as the part of speech for the grammar of a word [8, p. 34].

We are going to examine the formal and semantic features of the predicate-argument structure of the verb *allow* with the involvement of minimal context. Minimal context is the context of one single self-contained sentence which can be interpreted without a wider context.

Thus, the first functional meaning is implemented in the combination "allow somebody to do something". The core participants of the causative situation here are the causer and the causee. Let us consider different minimal contexts in order to study the semantic features of the causer and the causee.

1. *Nigella Lawson **allowed** her children to smoke marijuana, the television cook's former personal assistant told a court today* [9].

2. *Yet governments and universities **have allowed** the big academic publishers to deny these rights* [10].

3. *Genghis Khan owes his place in history to a sudden shift in the Asiatic climate from the cold, arid period that immediately preceded his ascent as leader of the Mongol empire, to the warmer, wetter weather that **allowed** his horsemen to expand out from Central Asia* [11].

4. *Until now, the app [WhatsApp] has **allowed** people to take back messages they sent by accident or that they later regretted* [12].

5. *North Carolina is planning controversial new laws that aim to ease gun restrictions in schools and **allow** teachers to carry weapons while on school grounds* [13].

6. *Oxford follows in the footsteps of Cambridge University, which, for the first time this summer, is participating in the UCAS system of adjustment which **allows** students who have achieved higher grades than expected on results day, to be reconsidered by other institutions* [14].

The first obligatory argument in the causative situation is a causee. It is obviously that the causee is a grammatical direct object (animate object) in all the contexts above. A direct object is a grammatical relation that exhibits a combination of certain independent syntactic properties, and mainly the usual grammatical characteristics of the patient of typically transitive verbs. The patient is the entity predicated with a state or location, the entity undergoing a change of state or location, the entity which is possessed, acquired, or exchanged. The patient is an undergoer, but in these structures we reveal another type of argument.

The causee is an active participant of the situations in contexts (1)–(6). The participant who has a free hand to act and may act or may not. This argument is called counteragent, according to

Shmeleva T.V. [15, p. 43]. With relation to the result of an action and its effect, a counteragent is similar to a patient, but it has one feature which is not typical for a patient – volition. The semantic role of the causee here is a counteragent with the freedom of will.

The second obligatory argument is a causer. The causer is an agent or an item, a phenomenon or an event that influences the causee by initiating something (a change of state of a causee). The causer is always the grammatical subject in an active sentence.

In contexts (1) and (2), the causer is an agent because it has the semantic role of a person who is the doer of the event. In context (1) the agent is a proper noun (*Nigella Lawson*), in context (2) the agent is a collective noun (*governments and universities*). Both bear in mind the animate agents that are conscious and act volitionally (on purpose) or intentionally.

There is another type of a causer in context (3). *Weather* cannot be an agent because it is inanimate and not volitional. It is a background causer which is not an agent but a cause of an event. The semantic role of the background causer in context (3) is an inanimate force or a natural cause. Force embodies an entity (usually spontaneous natural forces which are able to activate under certain circumstances and to perform the action mindlessly) that instigates an action, but not consciously or voluntarily.

In contexts (4)–(6), the causers (*application*, *laws, system*) are neither agents nor force. The semantic role of the causer is an instrument here. Instrument is the semantic role of an inanimate thing that an agent uses to implement an event. It is the stimulus or immediate physical cause of an event. We define this semantic role as an instrument because *application*, *laws, system* are the means by which the actions denoted by the predicate are carried out.

Now we are going to define the taxonomic category of the verb *allow* in each context. The taxonomic category directly correlates with the obligatory arguments of the causative situation, foremost with the type of a causer. In contexts (1) and (2), the agent as a causer assumes only two taxonomic categories "action" or "activity". The both categories call for the agent – the doer of an event that is conscious and acts with volition. But the category "activity" denotes the non-limiting situation, what excludes the obligatory existence of the object. The goal to change the state of an object is possible only for the taxonomic category "action" because the result of every action is to have a new state. In that way, the taxonomic category of the verb *allow* in contexts (1) and (2) is "action".

In context (3) we reveal the taxonomic category "causative incident" which means that the causation is a main structural component here, the causer as a cause of a change belongs to the communicative centre and plays a role of a syntactical subject. The subcategory is "causative incident with the background causer" because the changes happen not as a result of a purposeful activity but as a consequence of spontaneous natural forces.

The causative situation in contexts (4)–(6) expresses another kind of causation. The grammatical subject is an instrument here. But the factual causers are concrete people who created the application, the system or made laws with a definite intention. Therefore, application, laws, system are the mediators in these situations, although they are formal causers in the syntactical structure of the sentences in these contexts. The type of taxonomic category is "causative incident with the party liable".

Then, we are moving on to the second definition "let something happen". It fulfils its semantic potential in the combination "allow something to do something". The following sentences will serve us to illustrate the context of the usage:

1. *The cause is vital to humanity and I feel personal shame that my generation **has allowed** this crisis to happen on our watch* [16].

2.   *This vague wording **has allowed** schools to become testbeds for the latest surveillance technologies, Taylor says, and is habituating young people to accept a heightened level of scrutiny for increasingly mundane activities, such as borrowing a book from the school library* [17].

3.   *Coalition's climate policy **has allowed** heavy industry to increase emissions by nearly a third* [18].

4.   *The bill closes a loophole which **allowed** products of forced and child labour to enter the US* [19].

5.   *Taken together, the results suggest that sleep **allows** the brain to calm its activity so memories can be written down* [20].

In contexts (7)–(11), the causee is an inanimate object. The semantic role of the causee is the role of being acted upon by an agent here. It is expressed by concrete nouns (*brain, schools, products, industry*) and abstract nouns (*crisis*). The causee is a thing affected by an event or thing that undergoes a process, so in these cases it is a patient.

The second obligatory argument is a causer, the referent which instigates an event or process rather than actually doing it. The causer in context (7) is an agent because it has the semantic role of a person who is an animate doer that is conscious and acts volitionally or intentionally. In contexts (8)–(10), the semantic role of a causer is an instrument because the causers (*wording, policy, loophole*) are the mediators, the means by which the actions denoted by the predicate are carried out (the factual causers are concrete people who created *wording, policy, loophole* intentionally). The causers are inanimate concrete nouns.

In context (11), the causer (*sleep*) is a source. Source is the semantic role of many types of referents, such as the place where the action originated or the original owner in a transfer, the entity from which a physical sensation emanates. The last-mentioned referent is the case.

The taxonomic category of the verb *allow* in context (7) is "action", which denotes the obligatory main referent – the causer – who is a conscious agent acting with volition. Since the causers in contexts (8)–(10) are only the mediators of the actions denoted by the predicates, the type of taxonomic category is "causative incident with the party liable". The distinguishing feature of this type of "incident" is that the result of the action may be undesirable, exactly what we reveal in contexts (8)–(10). The taxonomic category of the verb *allow* in context (11) is "process" because there is a synchronous change of the quality or the state of an object in the causative situation.

Conclusion. This paper proposed the analysis of the formal and functional-semantic features of the predicate-argument structure of the verb *allow* in English. The functional causative meaning of the verb is implemented in two combinations – *allow somebody to do something* and *allow something to do something*. In the process of analysing the predicate-argument structure of the verb, we determined the obligatory arguments of the causative situation and the semantic roles of the arguments for all kinds of causative situation. The semantic roles of a causee vary from counteragent to patient, the semantic roles of a causer vary from agent to instrument, source or force. Semantic roles of each argument are labels for certain predicate-argument relations which stipulate for the definite taxonomic category of the verb. According to the way how the semantic roles are realized within one predicate-argument structure in different extralinguistic situations, the verb *allow* can be used in several taxonomic categories: "action", "causative incident with the background causer", "causative incident with the party liable", "process".

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Формальные и функционально-семантические особенности предикатно-аргументной структуры перифрастического каузативного глагола allow в английском языке

Аннотация. Данная статья посвящена исследованию формальных и функционально-семантических особенностей предикатно-аргументной структуры перифрастического каузативного глагола allow в английском языке. Актуальность исследования обусловлена отсутствием единой теории каузатива в языкознании и недостаточным объемом работ, посвященных изучению каузативных глаголов в фокусе формальной семантики. Научная новизна данного исследования заключается в том, что каузативный глагол allow впервые подвергается предикатно-аргументному анализу. Автор рассматривает глагол allow в двух функциональных значениях – «to let someone do or have something» и «let something happen, allow something to do something». Анализ предикатно-аргументной структуры основан на описании двух параметрических показателей с привлечением минимального контекста. Первый параметр включает описание набора обязательных аргументов (участников) каузативной ситуации и выявление соответствующих данным аргументам формальных признаков – семантических ролей, которые в свою очередь коррелируют с коммуникативной значимостью информации в семантике всего предложения. Второй параметр – определение таксономической категории, которая формирует функционально-семантический характер конкретной каузативной ситуации. Автор выявляет два обязательных аргумента во всех минимальных контекстах – это каузатор и каузат. Диапазон семантических ролей для этих аргументов варьируется: каузатор может выступать в роли агенса, неодушевленной силы, инструмента или источника каузации; каузат может быть пациенсом или контрагентом. В результате исследования выявлено, что функционально-семантический потенциал глагола allow находится в отношении прямой зависимости с таксономической категорией. Реализация определенных семантических ролей в различных экстралингвистических ситуациях обуславливает употребление глагола allow в нескольких таксономических категориях: «действие», «каузативное происшествие с фоновым каузатором», «каузативное происшествие с субъектом ответственности», «процесс».

Ключевые слова: каузативный глагол; каузативная ситуация; предикатно-аргументная структура; таксономическая категория; каузатор; каузат; семантическая роль

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