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The binary semantics in the causative potential of the verb enable in English

Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of the causative potential of the verb enable in English. Research on causative as a semantic distinctive feature of a verb is important both for the whole semantic system of a language and for the verbal lexis as a microsystem in the particular language, therein lies the relevance of this research. The scientific novelty is as follows: the binary semantics of the causative verb enable in English is investigated for the first time from the perspective of the formal-semantic features of the verb. By the binary semantics is meant the semantic potential of the verb enable which allows to form two types of causative – lexical causative and syntactical causative. The formal-semantic features of the verb in each type of causative are conditioned by the specifics of the predicate-argument structure of the verb and the taxonomic category which are interrelated. The cause-effect relationships are interpreted in the lexical causative and in the syntactical causative differently. In the lexical causative, cause is the verb enable, effect is a one-piece causee. In the syntactical causative, cause is incorporated in the verb enable as well, but effect is implemented in the two-piece structure – the first piece is a causee, the second piece is an effected predicate (the Infinitive of the non-causative verb). There are some differences in the predicate-argument structure of the verb enable in two types of causatives. The semantic roles of a causer are an agent, an intermediary agent or a force in both types of causatives. The semantic role of a causee in the lexical causative is always a patient, whereas the semantic role of a causee in the syntactical causative construction is a patient or an agent (if the causee is animate). For defining the possible taxonomic categories, the most crucial are the parameters of the main arguments, most notably the parameters of a causer. Regardless on the type of causative, the possible taxonomic categories of the verb enable are “action with the focus on the result”, “causative incident” and “causative incident with the background causer”.

Keywords: cause-effect relationships; causative verb; lexical causative; syntactical causative; predicate-argument structure; taxonomic category; semantic role

The essence of the category of the cause-effect relationships is based on the intersection of two exploratory paradigms – logic-philosophic paradigm and linguistic paradigm. The issue of the cause-effect relationships is linked with the understanding the principles of building the material world and its cognition, what makes the category of the cause-effect relationships universal.

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; the concept of causation is complex and multifaceted [1, p. 51]. Therefore, different languages possess their own ways of expressing the cause-effect relationships.

Although the cause-effect relationships are interpreted variously, the causative as a peculiarity of verbal predicates has generated a great deal of linguistic interest for a long time. Verbs are uppermost in the amount of the usage of notional words in the majority of world languages. The causative as a semantic distinctive feature of a verb is important for the whole semantic system of a language, whose elements are regularly interconnected, in general, and for the verbal lexis as a microsystem in every language in particular.

In this context, the examination of the formal-semantic features of the verb *enable* is relevant to the body of scientific knowledge about the causative verbal lexis, and to the research into the formal semantics. The integrated theory of causation has not been formed in linguistics yet, therefore this study could contribute to the comprehensive theory of causation in linguistics. In the research, the binary semantics in the causative potential of the verb *enable* will be examined for the first time from the perspective of the formal-semantic features of the verb, which stipulates the scientific novelty of the study.

The aim of the research is to detect and to describe the formal-semantic features of the causative potential of the verb *enable* in English. This aim predetermined the specific objectives of the research: to detect the type of causative (lexical or grammatical) which the causative verb *enable* can denote in English; to describe the predicate-argument structure of the verb in the causative type detected; to define the possible taxonomic categories which are the most crucial key parameters of a verbal lexeme.

In order to achieve these objectives, we applied the following research methods and techniques: 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», «The Independent» and «The Telegraph» were selected as the authentic language material. We carried out the research by analysing the minimal context – one single self-contained sentence as a speech fragment which is essential and sufficient to determine the meaning of the word which is self-consistent in regard to the comprehensive meaning of the text based on language data.

The causative verb *enable* is a derived verb. Derived verbs refer to one of the productive and actively developing word-formative types. There are favourable conditions for the verbalization of the adjectives when it comes to the causative derived verbs. The most productive word formation type is the conversion which is implemented in the derivational model “adjective – causative verb”. In the process of conversion, the affix (prefix or suffix) is also added to the adjective. The derived verb *enable* is an example of the verbalization of the adjective in English, namely the conversion of the adjective with the meaning of an attribute.

Traditionally, the prefixation in English does not modify the lexical-grammatical constituent of the derived word, i.e. the base word and the derived word are of the same part of speech. Yet, there are some so called transporting prefixes which transform the derived word into another part of speech. The prefix *en-* is a transporting prefix as well. The derivational model of the verb *enable* is typical for derived causative verbs: the prefix adds the meaning of the causative to the verb and actualizes the

potential of the meaning of the base *able* “to have the skill, strength, knowledge etc needed to do something”.

The verb *enable* belongs to the corpus of top thousand written words and the most common academic words in English. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, the verb has only one definition “to make it possible for someone to do something, or for something to happen”¹, which is marked with the note “transitive”. The verb is the matter of our special scientific interest because its semantics is multifaceted and expresses different types of causation.

First of all, we have to clarify the notion “causative”. The central criterion of causative is the meaning of effect: «the meaning of the effect which causes the changes in the objects and predetermines the emergence of new situations is called causative in linguistics» [2, p. 267]. 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” [3, p. 58].

Linguists distinguish between 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. The grammatical causative constitutes the morphological causative (morphologically derived causative verbs) and the syntactical or analytical causative (when 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”) [4].

Since the morphological causative does not exist in English, we have to ascertain which type of causative – the lexical causative or the syntactical causative – the verb *enable* can be related to.

We have examined the large number of contexts and concluded that the verb *enable* can be used as an autonomous semantical unit which incorporates the component “to cause” as a part of its meaning and does not require the second predicate. That means that the verb can denote the lexical causative. Let us consider some minimal contexts which demonstrate it.

- (1) *The technique **enabled** the selection of the family member who would be the closest match in an organ transplant, thus helping to minimise the risk of transplant rejection* [5].
- (2) *Nick Hillman, the director of Hepi, told the Telegraph that the effective use of technology can **enable** “more direct contact between academics and students* [6].
- (3) *When Moose’s only friend, paparazza Leah (Ana Golja) ill-advisedly shows Moose how to find out where Dunbar lives using a star-map phone app, she **enables** a serious bout of stalking that goes wrong* [7].
- (4) *Any business that **enables** the sharing of user-generated content – such as online comments or video uploads – is likely to be affected by the new rules on reducing online harms...* [8].
- (5) *He [Bryan Clark] **enabled** publication of undergraduate research and acknowledged his co-authors in an age when this was unusual* [9].
- (6) *Brussels sprouts are likely to be up to a third bigger than usual this winter after unseasonably warm autumn weather **enabled** a bumper crop* [10].

¹ Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 2009. 1950 p. – p. 513.

The lexical causative with *enable* can be represented as the following reductive combination: *subject + enable + object*. Using such terms as *subject* and *object* gives us scanty information about the formal-semantic features of the lexical causative with the verb *enable*. In order to describe its predicate-argument structure, we are going to reveal the obligatory arguments of the causative situation in this type of causative and to define their semantic roles. The core participants of any causative situation are a causer and a causee. A causer is an agent or an item, a phenomenon or an event that influences a causee (an object) by initiating something (a change of state of a causee).

In contexts (1)–(6), the causees are inanimate objects expressed by abstract nouns (*selection, contact, stalking, sharing, publication*) and a concrete noun (*crop*). The semantic roles of the causee is a patient because they denote a thing affected or an entity undergoing the change of state. Grammatically, the patient fills the role of the direct object in all these contexts in the Active Voice.

If the verb has the form of the Passive Voice, the patient moves to the position of the grammatical subject. The “syntactical” voice is the changes in the syntactical roles of the arguments of a verb and of their communicative status [11, p. 220]. The Passive voice is one of the argument-changing alternations, grammatical relations change but semantic roles remain the same. Grammatically, the causer may be shifted into the position of the object or may be abolished if there is no need to introduce it into the informative field of a sentence:

- (7) *Trump’s election was enabled by the policies that overlooked the plight of our most vulnerable citizens* [12].
- (8) *Facebook Places, a location-sharing feature within the world’s pre-eminent social networking service, was enabled in the UK yesterday about a month after its US launch* [13].

Consequently, the cause-effect relationships expressed by the lexical causative can be interpreted as: cause is the verb *enable*, effect is a one-piece causee.

The causers in contexts (1)–(6) are of different nature because of different degree of activity. In contexts (3) and (5), the causer has the semantic role of an agent because the causer is an active animate doer who acts consciously and volitionally.

In other contexts, the causer is inanimate. It is expressed by the abstract nouns *technique, technology, business, weather*. In contexts (1), (4) and (6) the causer is a subject in the sentence. But not only can the grammatical subject have the role of the causer, the uncoordinated attribute with the function of object has it as well. The uncoordinated attribute belongs to the word combination which constitutes the autonomous predicative unit due to the eventive semantics of the main component. Such word combinations of the uncoordinated attribute and the determinate word form the integrated naming unit. Therefore, the causer in the word combination *the effective use of technology* is the prepositional object *technology* in context (2).

In spite of the fact that the causers in contexts (1), (2), (4) and (6) belong to the class of abstract nouns, not all of them have the same semantic role. The semantic role of the causer in contexts (1), (2), (4) cannot be an agent because the causers (*technique, technology, business,*) do not act themselves but serve as the intermediary link in the activity of people who created them. As we wrote before, the canonical agent is an active animate doer that is characterized by the high degree of animacy and the high degree of the control of the own activity, who acts consciously and volitionally. But some scientists note that the agent can be an inanimate or indefinite participant of the situation that is often personified [14, p. 70]. To express the essence of this type of inanimate causer, we are going to introduce the subcategory of an agent which we would name an intermediary agent. This semantic role implies the entity which does not act but serves as an intermediary link in person’s actions, being a product of a person’s activity, and motivates a causee to act or to change its state. Thus, the semantic role of the causer in contexts (1), (2), (4) is an intermediary agent.

In context (6), the semantic role of the causer cannot be an intermediary agent because *weather* does not participate in a person's activity but serves as a background causer which instigates the changes of the causee. The semantic role of the causer is a force or a natural cause, what means it embodies a spontaneous natural entity performing the action mindlessly.

By defining the taxonomic category of the verb in each context, we keep to the classification of the verbal taxonomic categories developed by E.V. Paducheva who considers the taxonomic category not merely as one of the parameters of the lexical meaning but the parameter that defines the whole structure of the interpretation of the verb [15].

In contexts (3) and (5) the taxonomic category of the verb is "action". Action stipulates the activity of an animate agent which consists in motivating an object to act or to change a state and in achieving the result matching the goal. The subcategory of action is "action with the focus on the result". Moreover, the result is meant regardless of the tense used (it is Present Simple in one context, and Past Simple in another one).

In contexts (1), (2), (4), the taxonomic category of the verb is "incident", namely "causative incident". This category means that changes happen not as a result of a purposeful activity of an animate agent but due to other reasons which caused these changes. The main difference between the category "action" and the category "incident" is that the main topics of the sentences are essentially different. The sentence with the category "action" contains the answer to the question "what has the causer done?", while the sentence with the category "incident" contains the answer to the question "what has happened with a causee?". Incident presumes the changes in the state of a causee, consequently the obligatory constituent elements are the initial state and the final state. As opposed to the category "action", there is not an animate agent but an intermediary agent. In the Passive sentences in contexts (7) and (8), the taxonomic category of the verb *enable* is "causative incident" as well.

In context (6), with the force or natural cause as a background causer, the taxonomic category of the verb *enable* is "causative incident with the background causer".

The contexts we examined showed that the verb *enable* can be used not only as an autonomous semantical unit (i.e. lexical causative), but also as a part of a two-verb structure, or causative construction for denoting syntactical causative. Like other auxiliary causative verbs (or periphrastic causative verbs) in English, the verb *enable* has the categorial meaning "stimulus that encourages a new activity or a new state". Causative constructions typify the cause-effect relationships by representing the predicate of causation in a periphrastic causative verb and the predicate of effect in the second non-causative verb in its base form or in the form of *to*-Infinitive. Consequently, causative constructions imply the obligatory actualisation in the verbal-infinitival construction. The syntactical causative construction with the verb *enable* can be represented as following: *subject + enable + object + to + the Infinitive of a non-causative verb*.

In order to analyse the predicate-argument structure of the verb *enable* in the syntactical causative construction, let us turn to the contexts of use. We have selected the contexts which demonstrate the variety of arguments with different semantic roles.

- (9) *She **enabled** me to look at my situation and see my own part in it, how I'd contributed to making it more difficult* [16].
- (10) *Dr Simon Eccles, deputy CEO at NHSX, the thanked "amazing team who worked all night", **enabled** the website to reopen on Saturday* [17].
- (11) *He developed a cellular test to facilitate the first successful bone marrow transplants, which subsequently **enabled** hundreds of thousands [people] worldwide to live normal healthy lives* [18].

- (12) *Science and medicine **have enabled** us to intervene, to diagnose, and improve health so that humans can live longer [19].*
- (13) *It is not necessary to take the kind of extreme measures proposed here which would undermine the autonomy and diversity of UK higher education which **have enabled** our universities to remain world-leading [20].*
- (14) *German explorers claimed yesterday that global warming and freak winds **had enabled** them to become the first navigators to sail unaided in a yacht through the usually icebound North-east Passage, along Russia's Arctic coast [21].*

In contexts (9)–(10), the causer is a human, an animate doer who acts consciously and intentionally. It plays the semantic role of an agent.

The causer in other contexts is inanimate. In contexts (11)–(13), the causer is expressed by the concrete noun *transplants* and the abstract nouns *science*, *medicine*, *UK higher education* (uncoordinated attribute with the function of object in the phrase *the autonomy and diversity of UK higher education*). The semantic role of the causer in all the contexts is an instrument because the causers (*transplants*, *science*, *medicine*, *UK higher education*) act as mediators which were created by people.

In contexts (14) we see another type of a causer. The causers *warming* and *winds* are considered as a background causer which does not act as an agent but instigates the changes of the causee without volition. The semantic role of the background causer here is a force or a natural cause, what means it embodies a spontaneous natural entity performing the action mindlessly.

Let us consider the second core participant of the causative situations in contexts (9)–(14), the causee. The causee is inanimate only in contexts (10) and (13). It is expressed by the abstract nouns *website* and *universities*. This kind of nouns is typical for the causative construction with the verb *enable*. We have not detected the contexts with the inanimate causees expressed by concrete nouns. The semantic role of the causee in both cases is a patient – the entity undergoing a change.

In contexts (9), (11), (12), (14), the causee is animate, a human. If we analyse the cause-effect relationships in these sentences, we can transform every sentence into two autonomous sentences where the first situation is the action of one entity (the cause) and the second situation is the action of another entity affected by the first entity (the effect). It accords fully with the definition of causative situation given by V.P. Nedyalkov and G.G. Silnitsky: «the constituents of every causative situation are at least two microsituations which are interrelated with the relations of causation» [22, p. 6]. The following transformations will serve us to illustrate this division:

*She **enabled** me to look at my situation = (1) she made it possible, (2) I looked at my situation.*

*Transplants **enabled** hundreds of thousands [people] to live = (1) Transplants made it possible, (2) hundreds of thousands [people] lived.*

*Science and medicine **have enabled** us to intervene, to diagnose, and improve health = (1) Science and medicine made it possible, (2) We intervened, diagnosed, and improved health.*

*Global warming and freak winds **had enabled** them [explorers] to become the first navigators = (1) Global warming and freak winds made it possible, (2) explorers became the first navigators.*

The transformations undergone demonstrate that the semantic role of the causee is an agent in all these contexts, because the doers act as a result of the causer's impact, they are volitional. In context (9), there are two active doers, and therefore both clauses have their own agents. The sentence in context (9) is the only one which has two agents in the semantic structure.

We are going to determine the taxonomic categories of the verb *enable* in each context now. The taxonomic category of the verb in contexts (9) and (10) is “action with the focus on the result”, because the causative impact emanates from the conscious agent acting with volition.

The semantic role of the causer in contexts (11)–(13) is an intermediary agent, the entity which does not act but serves as a mediator and motivates a causee to act or to change its state. Consequently, the taxonomic category of the verb is “causative incident”. The taxonomic category of the verb *enable* in context (14), where the force or natural cause acts as a background causer, is “causative incident with the background causer”.

Concluding the research, we can state that the causative verb *enable* is characterized by the binary semantics by virtue of being able to build two types of causatives – the lexical causative and the syntactical causative. Although the seme of causation is incorporated in the semantics of the verb both in the lexical causative and in the syntactical causative, these are two different types of causatives. The cause-effect relationships are interpreted in the lexical causative and in the syntactical causative differently. In the lexical causative, cause is the verb *enable*, effect is a one-piece causee. In the syntactical causative, cause is incorporated in the verb *enable* as well, but effect is implemented in the two-piece structure: the first piece is a causee, the second piece is an effected predicate (the Infinitive of the non-causative verb).

There are some differences in the predicate-argument structure of the verb *enable* in two types of causatives. The semantic roles of a causer are an agent, an intermediary agent or a force in both types of causatives. The semantic role of a causee in the lexical causative is always a patient, whereas the semantic role of a causee in the lexical causative construction is a patient or an agent (if the causee is animate). By defining the possible taxonomic categories, the most crucial are the parameters of the main arguments, most notably the parameters of a causer. The taxonomic categories are “action with the focus on the result”, “causative incident” and “causative incident with the background causer”.

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Бинарность в семантике каузативного потенциала глагола enable в английском языке

Аннотация. Статья посвящена исследованию каузативного потенциала глагола enable в английском языке. Исследование каузатива как семантического различительного признака глагола важно как для изучения всей семантической системы языка в целом, так и для изучения глагольной лексики как микросистемы в отдельно взятом языке, что обуславливает актуальность данного исследования. Научная новизна заключается в том, что бинарная семантика каузативного глагола enable в английском языке впервые подвергается анализу с точки зрения формально-семантических особенностей глагола. Под бинарной семантикой автор понимает семантический потенциал глагола enable, который позволяет образовывать два типа каузатива – лексический каузатив и синтаксический каузатив. Формально-семантические особенности глагола в каждом типе каузатива обусловлены спецификой предикатно-аргументной структуры глагола и таксономической категорией, которые взаимосвязаны. Причинно-следственные отношения по-разному интерпретируются в лексическом и синтаксическом каузативах. В лексическом каузативе причина – это каузативный глагол, а следствие выражается в семантике однокомпонентного каузата. В синтаксическом каузативе причина также инкорпорирована в каузативный глагол, но следствие реализуется в двухкомпонентной структуре: первый компонент – каузат, второй компонент – предикат следствия (инфинитив некаузативного глагола). Выявлены отличия в предикатно-аргументной структуре глагола enable в двух типах каузатива. Семантическая роль каузатора – агент, посредник или естественная сила. Семантическая роль каузата в лексическом каузативе – всегда пациент, а в синтаксическом каузативе – пациент или агент (если каузат одушевленное лицо). Решающим в определении таксономической категории глагола являются параметры основных аргументов, и в первую очередь каузатора. Независимо от типа каузатива, возможно употребление глагола enable в категориях «действие с акцентом на результате», «каузативное происшествие», «каузативное происшествие с фоновым каузатором».

Ключевые слова: причинно-следственные отношения; каузативный глагол; лексический каузатив; синтаксический каузатив; предикатно-аргументная структура; таксономическая категория; семантическая роль