Roots, voice and anti-causativity within the word

The new constructionist approaches to syntax assume that roots are generated without any argument structure, and that a part of the semantic interpretation is formed at the syntactic component (Cf. Borer (2013), De Belder & Craenenbrock; (2015)). If we adhere to this point of view, roots will play no role in determining causative alternation.

In the present paper, we argue that anti-causative morphology is generated within the roots. The most recent analysis of anti-causative verbs proposes the idea that anti-causative morphology is located in the Voice category (Cf. Alexiadou (2013)). Standard Arabic (SA) provides data which are not compatible with this proposal. In SA anti-causative morphology is different from voice morphology. Anti-causative verbs in SA are formed by the realization of the anti-causative morphology on the verb as examples 1 and 2 illustrate.

   break.perf.3.sg.m zayd-nom det-window-acc
   (Zayd broke the window.)

2. a. ta-kassarat-i n-nafidat-u
   anticaus-break-3.sg.f det-window-nom
   (The window broke.)

2. b. in-kasarat-i n-nafidat-u.
   anticaus-break.perf.3.sg.f det-window-nom
   (The window broke.)

The anti-causative morphology is carried out on the verb by the consonant /t/ as a prefix in (2a), and by the consonantal element /n/ in (2b).

While anti-causative morphology is implemented on the verb by consonantal elements, voice morphology, on the contrary, takes the form of a vocalic melody, as shown by the verbal passive in (3b) below:

   break.perf.act.3.sg.m zyd-nom det-glass-acc
   (Zayd broke the glass.)

3 b. kusira l-ka ?s-u.
   break.pass.perf.3.sg.m det-glass-nom
   (The vase broke.)

Unlike in Modern Greek, Latin and in Albanian (Kalluli, 2006) where anti-causative morphology and voice morphology are realized by the same morphology, what Alexiadou called “non active morphology” as in (4) from Alexiadou (2010). The data in (3a-b) show that anti-causative and voice morphology are pulled out by different kinds of morphology in SA.

4 to hirografo katastrafike
   the manuscript-nom destroyed-Nact
   i. “The manuscript destroyed.
   ii. “The manuscript was destroyed.

We will show that this difference in the achievement of anti-causative and voice morphology between SA and these Indo-European languages is not accidental, but reflects, rather, a deep difference in the categories holding these two types of morphemes.
Based on these facts, we will develop an analysis that distinguishes between voice and Anti-causativity. Clearly, if the anti-causative morphology is not an integral part of the root, we propose that it is an independent functional category closer to root than to voice category. This category is projected as caus(ation)P in syntax directly below the categorizing head little v°. Hence, in this analysis, roots are not merged directly as complements, or adjunct in Marantz (2013), of v°. Rather, they are inserted as the complements of the head caus°. The hypothesis that this head contains a lexically realized morphology in SA, but it is nul in Modern Greek, Latin and Albania, accounts for the homonymy of the non-active morphology in the latter languages.

More strikingly, the behavior of event nominals strongly supports our proposal. The derivation of event nominals, or argumental nominals, from the consonantal roots elements preserves the anti-causative morphology, but not passive morphology, as shown by the following examples:

   anticaus.break-nom det- glass-geni frighten.perf.3.sg.m- me
   (The glass’s breaking frightened me.)
5b. in-kisar-u 1-ka?s-i  axafa-ni.
   anticaus.break-nom det-glass-geni frighten.perf.3sg.m- me
   (The glass’s breaking frightened me.)

5c. (* kusir-u) 1-ka?s-i  axafani.
   break.pass-nom det-glass-geni frighten.perf.3.sg.m- me
   (*The glass’s breaking frightened me.)

Our analysis has some important theoretical and empirical consequences. We state here only the main ones:

- Voice and anti-causativity are distinct phenomena.
- It seems that there is no strict structural locality between the roots and their categorizers. Roots are close to the caus° head than to v°.
- If we consider that roots are nul elements, in the sense that they are not the locus of the lexical semantic interpretation, we must nevertheless conclude that they maintain a privileged relation to the head of causP rather than to the head of vP.¹

Selected references:


¹ This result is compatible with the proposals of Borer (2013) and Lohndal (2014) who propose that roots don’t take complements. If our analysis is on the right track, the internal argument will be directly merged in spec CausP.