Causality and modality: plural causal instantiations in Teochew
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COCOA 13 September 2023

Many linguistic works have adopted the CAUSE operator to analyze causal relations. However, more recent studies have gradually converged on the idea that a denotation like CAUSE(e, e') is not sophisticated enough to capture complex causalities encoded in linguistic structures, echoing long-time discussions on causation in the field of philosophy. This study supports this view by working on the plural instantiations of causation encoded in five periphrastic causative constructions in Teochew, an understudied Southern Min language. Using data collected from 30 Teochew speakers, I demonstrated causality notions encoded in Teochew causatives differ in four dimensions: (i) (in)directness (temporality, space and acceptability of mediation), (ii) (non-)actuality entailment of the caused event, (iii) (not) bearing speaker attitude and (iv) (not) encoding social relations between event participants. I provide a sublexical modal analysis paired with event semantics to capture all these complexities, with an aim to replace the monolithic CAUSE event linker and to show most of the causal complexities result from different flavors of sublexical modality encoded in the causative verbs.