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# Investigating Valency in Causative Verb Derivational Mechanisms: The Case of the Oromo Language

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines verb derivation in Oromo, focusing on how causative morphological suffixes such as *-s-*, *-sis-*, and *-sisiis-* alter verb valency and argument structure. The study investigates whether verbs derived through these causative morphemes behave differently from non-derived verbs, especially in subsequent valency-changing operations. It also explores the interaction of causative morphology with inchoative and ideophonic roots. A qualitative descriptive methodology was employed, combining primary data from native Oromo speakers with secondary sources such as grammars and linguistic corpora. Verbs were categorized by inherent valency and analyzed using a morphosyntactic framework grounded in valency theory and derivational morphology. Findings reveal that the suffix *-s-* in CS1 pattern marks direct causation and agentivization, and increases valency by introducing an agentive subject. The suffix *-si(i)s-* in CS2 pattern encodes indirect causation, adding intermediate agents and expanding argument roles. The suffix *-sisiis-* in CS3 pattern represents causative stacking, where the subject functions as an effector, producing multi-agent constructions. The study reinterprets geminated forms like *-ess-* as composites of inchoative and causative morphemes, shaped by morphophonemic processes such as palatalization and vowel harmony. The research proposes a valency code system ([1A] through [5E]) to map argument expansion across derivational layers. Comparative insights from other Cushitic languages highlight both shared phonological processes and divergent morphological strategies. This study contributes to morphosyntactic typology by clarifying the functional distinctions among causative suffixes, demonstrating how morphological stacking reshapes clause architecture, and offering a framework for analyzing valency manipulation in Afroasiatic languages.

*Keywords: Oromo morphology, causative derivation, valency change, derived verbs, verbalization, morphosyntactic typology*

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## INTRODUCTION

A linguistic valency refers to the number and type of arguments that a verb can take. It is a foundational concept in linguistic theory, shaping the syntactic and semantic architecture of clauses. In many languages, valency is manipulated through morphological processes such as causativization, passivization, anticausativization, inchoativization and applicativization.

Oromo, a Lowland East Cushitic language spoken widely in Ethiopia, exhibits a robust and typologically rich system of valency-changing mechanisms. These mechanisms are deeply embedded in its verbal morphology, allowing for intricate transformations of argument structure through suffixal derivation. Despite the descriptive work on the Oromo morphology, there remains a significant gap in our

understanding of how causative derivation specifically interacts with valency architecture. Previous studies have often treated causative suffixes as interchangeable or have overlooked the morphophonemic and syntactic nuances that distinguish direct, indirect, and stacked causation. Moreover, the role of non-verbal roots such as nominal, adjectival, and ideophonic forms in causative derivations has received limited analytical attention.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating how causative suffixes in Oromo, *-s-* (CS1), *-si(i)s-* (CS2) and *-sisiis-* (CS3), affect a verb's valency and its clause structure. Using a qualitative descriptive methodology, the research draws on data from Oromo native speakers, particularly the Arsi-Baale dialects and analyzes verb forms through a morphosyntactic framework grounded in valency theory. This study will explore CS2 and CS3 patterns, highlighting valency expansion and multi-agent constructions and offer a diachronic perspective across Cushitic languages.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate valency changes in causative verb derivational mechanisms within the Oromo language. The research focuses on analyzing morphosyntactic structures that influence argument patterns when causative morphemes are applied to base verbs. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was elicited through structured interviews and linguistic elicitation sessions with native Oromo speakers from various dialectal backgrounds, ensuring dialectal diversity and representativeness. Secondary data included existing grammars, linguistic corpora, and scholarly works on Oromo syntax and morphology.

The analysis employed a morphosyntactic framework, drawing on principles from valency theory and derivational morphology. Verbs were categorized based on their inherent valency (monovalent, divalent, trivalent), and the impact of causative derivation on their argument structure was systematically examined. Special attention was given to morphological markers such as *-s-*, *-si(i)s-* and *-sisiis-* causative affixes, assessing their productivity and syntactic implications.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Verbal Derivation and Valency in Oromo

Valency theory positions the verb as the nucleus of sentence structure, determining the number and roles of surrounding arguments.[1] While argument positions reflect syntactic grammar, they also embody semantic roles, suggesting valency is not merely a structural "slot-filling" system.[2] The theory, therefore, bridges lexical semantics and grammatical dependency, offering a fertile ground for morphosyntactic research. Allerton even anticipates valency-based grammar gaining prominence due to this dual capacity.[3]

French linguist Lucien Tesnière originally transferred the chemical concept of "valency" (the bonding power of elements) to linguistic structure. His model reimagined sentence construction through syntactic dependencies, where the verb anchors clause architecture.[4]

In Oromo, analyzing morphological devices that alter valency requires acknowledging the pivotal role of verb class (transitive or intransitive) and derivational typology. This study approaches verbal morphology by assuming that suffixes are conditioned by the syntactic-semantic environment, revealing a symbiotic relationship between lexis and grammar.

### Morphological Structures of Oromo Verbs

Drawing on typological frameworks and descriptive grammars,[5] the study explores how morphological derivation drives valency changes. Verbal derivation in Oromo includes both lexical innovations and

[1] Robert M W Dixon, "A Typology of Causatives: Form, Syntax and Meaning," *Changing Valency*, 2000, 30–83; David John Allerton, *Valency and the English Verb*, (London: Academic Press, 1982).

[2] K. Götz-Votteler, " Describing Semantic Valency," in *Valency – Theoretical, Descriptive and Cognitive Issues*, ed. T. Herbst and K. Götz-Votteler (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 37–49.

[3] David J Allerton, "Valency Grammar," in *Concise History of the Language Sciences* (Elsevier, 1995), 280–89.

[4] L. Tesnière, *Elements de Syntaxe and Structurale* (Paris: Klinksieck, 1959).

[5] T. Payne, *Describing Morphosyntax: A Guide for Field Linguistics*, 2nd ed. ( Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Martin Haspelmath, "Arguments and Adjuncts as Language-Particular Syntactic Categories and as Comparative Concepts," *Linguistic Discovery* 12, no. 2 (2014): 3–11; Paul J Hopper and Sandra A Thompson, "Transitivity in Grammar and Discourse," *Language* 56, no. 2 (1980): 251–99.

morphological manipulations, often entwined with person, gender, number, and tense inflections. The root stem types are monosyllabic, with structures like:

- CVC (e.g. *ban-*'open')
- VCC (e.g. *idd-*'sting')
- CVCC (e.g. *kenn-*'give')
- VCaCb (e.g. *arg-*'see')

Verbal derivation involves pairing these base stems with suffixes that reflect morphological roles such as the Causatives: *-s-*, *-si(i)s-, -sisiis-*; the Middle: *-at-*; the Passive: *-am-* and the Inchoatives: *-a(a)t-, -a(a)h-, -o(o)m-*. Additionally, ideophones are formed via reduplication of root-final onset segments—e.g., *him-im-im*, *did-id-id*, and *bar-ar-ar*—reflecting dynamic root patterns in the language's morphology.

Derived verbal forms can include co-occurrence of multiple suffixes (e.g., *-s-at-, -si-siis-, -s-at-am-, -om-s-at-*). The co-occurrence signifies layered morphosyntactic operations such as causativization, transitivization, de-transitivization, anticausativization and valency shift.

Simple verb derivatives are formed when base verbal, nominal, adjectival, or ideophonic roots are affixed with a single morpheme. These typically yield stative or inchoative meanings before being transitivized. For example, the suffix *-s-* serves not only as a causative marker but also as an agentive verbalizer of non-verbal roots, converting adjectives, nouns, and ideophones into verbs.

**The CS1 Causative Pattern (-*s*-)**

The **-***s*- suffix in Oromo verbal morphology marks the ***CS1 causative pattern****,* a prototypical derivational strategy that increases valency by introducing a direct causer agent. This suffix applies broadly to verbal, nominal, adjectival, and ideophonic roots, functioning both as a causative marker and an agentive verbalizer.

***Morphophonemic Variation and Allomorphy***

The -s- suffix exhibits predictable allomorphic behavior based on the phonological environment of the stem:

- *-č-* when stem-final consonants include /l/ or /t/ followed by *-s-* suffix.
- *-f-* when *-s-* precedes a passive marker (*-am-*)—though this pattern isn't universally accepted, as seen in forms like *č'ab-s-am-uu* ('to be broken') which resist transformation to **č'ab-f-am-uu*.

In CS1 constructions, derivation applies to verbal base stems, nominal, adjectival and unclassified roots, and Ideophones. Here, *-s-* not only increases valency but functions as a morphological bridge linking stative concepts to agent-driven actions.

***Functional Scope of -s- Suffix***

In CS1 constructions, the suffix -s- serves multiple roles:

- **Valency increaser**: Converts intransitive or stative verbs into transitive forms.
- **Morphological bridge**: Links non-verbal roots (e.g., adjectives, ideophones) to agentive verbal meanings.
- **Semantic transformer**: Shifts from states or qualities to actions initiated by an external agent.

***The Myth of Geminated -ss- and the CS1 Derivational Patterns***

Several Oromo linguists, including Tolemariam, propose that the geminated *ss* sequence in the *-ess-* suffix represents a distinct causative morpheme.[6] They interpret it as a direct causative, often derived from denominative or de-adjectival sources. Tolemariam illustrates this theory with verbs like *diriir-s-uu* ('to spread') and *dab-s-uu* ('to bend'), suggesting that these may optionally adopt a doubled causative marker—*diriir-ss-uu* and *dab-ss-uu*—without semantic change.

As a counter argument to Tolemariam and many other scholars who studied Oromo, the phonological and morphological constraints are contested based on three key objections:

i. **Phonotactic Irregularity:** The presence of three consecutive consonants, such as *ss* following a consonant-final stem (e.g., *diriir-*, *dab-*), is highly unusual in Oromo phonology. Such forms are only plausible if an epenthetic vowel (e.g., *i*) is inserted to maintain syllabic integrity.

[6] Fufa Tolemariam, "A Typology of Verbal Derivation in Ethiopian Afro-Asiatic Languages [M]," *Utrecht: LOT*, 2009.

ii. **Lack of Spoken Evidence**: Field analysis, including data from the Maccaa Oromo dialect, reveals no phonological realization or pronunciation that supports a geminated *-s-* morpheme in these verb constructions.

iii. **Absence of Morphophonemic Justification**: There is no morphophonemic motivation for gemination in these cases—unlike when /l/ or /r/ precede the causative *-s-*, which may trigger allomorphic variation (e.g., *-č-*). Thus, the number of *s* morphemes aligns more with agentivity than with morphophonemic necessity.

***The Real Structure Behind -ess- Forms***

Traditionally labeled *-ess-*, this suffix is better analyzed as a combination of two separate morphemes: *-es-* (a modified inchoative) and *-s-* (the causative). These emerge from specific derivational patterns:

- **ATIS-CS1**: where *-at-* (inchoative) becomes *-es-* when followed by *-s-*
- **AHIS-CS1**: where *-ah-* (inchoative) similarly transforms into *-es-* before *-s-*

The following examples show their morphophonemic transformation:

(1) *diim-at-uu* ('to become red') → *diim-es-s-uu* ('to make red')
(2) *beel-ah-uu* ('to become hungry') → *beel-es-s-uu* ('to make hungry')

These transformations are explained by Dubinsky et.al., who describe how consonant clusters undergo palatalization and fricativization:[7]

- Stem-final /t/ plus causative /s/ yields [čč]
- /h/ or glides (/y/, /w/) are deleted when followed by /s/, prompting replacement with [s]
- Vowel harmony alters the preceding /a/ to /e/

For example: *d'eer-at-s-uu* → [d'eer-ečč-uu] (Tuulama dialect); *d'eer-at-s-uu* → [d'eer-es-s-uu] (Arsi-Baale & Oromo other dialects)

***Deconstructing the Myth of Geminated ss in Oromo Causatives***

A morphophonemic evidence of the Oromo inchoatives of ATIS, AHIS and OMIS patterns derived for the causative CS1 pattern should be discussed. The discussion hence offers further support against viewing *-ess-* as a simple geminated variant or allomorph of the causative morpheme *-s-*. Two core observations reinforce this claim:

i. **Semantic Parity**: Verbs formed with *-ess-* express direct causation, just as those derived with the single *-s-* suffix. This undermines the argument that *-ess-* represents a stronger or geminated form of causative.

ii. **Uniform CS1 Extension**: Inchoative verb stems formed with the *-o(o)m-* pattern (e.g., *k'ar-oom-uu* 'to be wise') also follow the CS1 causative pattern when extended with *-s-*, resulting in forms like *k'ar-oom-s-uu* ('to make wise'). Similarly, *-a(a)t-* and *-a(a)h-* patterned inchoatives combine with *-s-* to form causatives, producing constructions such as *diim-es-s-uu* and *beel-es-s-uu*.

***Reanalyzing -ess- as Composite***

Rather than a standalone geminated causative, *-ess-* should be understood as a sequential compound morpheme:

- The initial *-es-* (or *-eč-*) is an allomorphic transformation of the *-at-* or *-ah-* inchoative morphemes
- The final *-s-* is the actual causative suffix

This allomorphy is driven by phonological processes:

- Vowel harmony alters short /a/ to [e]
- The interaction between /t/, /h/, glides, and /s/ leads to phonetic changes like palatalization or fricativization
-

***Grammatical and Valency Shifts***

The base stem (BS) verbal pattern of Oromo stative and some non-stative intransitives morphologically derives for the causative CS1 pattern with the *-s-* suffix, as a transitivising mechanism. The valency increase and structure code between an intransitive verbal BS pattern and a causative CS1 pattern. The

[7] Stanley Dubinsky, Maria-Rosa Lloret, and Paul Newman, "Lexical and Syntactic Causatives in Oromo," *Language*, 1988, 485–500.

added or introduced argument is the agentive subject of the causative construction. The subject of the intransitive is the direct object in the causative construction. The following sentences in examples *a* are the underlying intransitive clauses, while examples in *b* are the derived corresponding transitive or simple causative clauses in which agentive subject arguments are introduced through direct causation.

(3) a. *muk-ni* *č'ab-e*
wood-NOM break-3SG:M:PFV
'The wood broke down'
b. *Roobaa-n* *muka* *č'ab -s-e*
Roobaa-NOM wood:ABS break-CS1-3SG:M:PFV
'Roobaa broke the wood'

(4) a. *ani* *mana* *bul-e*
I house: ABS spend night-1SG:PFV
'I spend the night at home.'
b. *inni* *mana* *na* *bul-č-e*
he house:ABS me:ABS spend night-CS1-3SG:M: PFV
'He made me spend the night at home'

(5) a. *ani* *sire-rra* *bul-e*
I bed- LOC spent night-1SG: PFV
'I spend the night in the bed.'
b. *inni* *sire-rra* *na* *bul-č-e*
he bed- LOC me: ABS spent night-CS1-3SG:M: PFV
'He caused me to spend the night in the bed.'

In (3) and (4), the same base intransitive verb *bul-uu* 'to spend night' involves different valency structures of positional arguments *mana* 'house' in the absolute case in (3) and *siree* 'bed' in postpositional locative in (4), but both positional entities as semantically the same as location. The underlying intransitive clauses in (3a) and (4a) have same bivalent intransitive verb involving intransitive subject and but different positional objects: in (3a) an absolute object is entailed in the NP forming [2B] valency structure, and (4a) a locative adposition is involved to make [2B]. The derived CS1 causative *bul-č-uu* 'to cause to spend night' in transitive clauses in (3b) and (4b) involve three arguments, including an introduced agentive subject and a patientive direct absolute object and a positional absolute in (3) and postpositional object in (4) in the [3C] and [3B] valency structures, respectively. In general, when a causer is introduced as a subject of the CS1 verb, the subject of the underlying clause becomes an absolute object (or takes a direct object slot), and the valency structure increases by one.

Furthermore, the *-s-* suffix is verbalizer in idiophone verbs. According to my hypothesis, it is rather agentivizer than transitivizer. Both transitive and intransitive idiophone stems are verbalized with *-s-*. Very few idiophone verbs are found to be transitive; for example, verbs such as *k'irk'ir-s-uu* 'to tickle' and *firfir-s-uu* 'to intensely move apart' are transitive idiophone verbs formed through the causative *-s-* suffix as a transitivising de-idiophonic verbalizer. They are derived from stems of idiophones of visual concepts *k'irk'ir-* 'act of tickling somebody' and *firfir-* 'intensive act of moving apart something'.

As shown in example (4), the de-idiophonic verb *k'irk'ir-s-uu* is an intensive causative is a bivalent transitivised. In fact, all de-ideophonic intensive causatives are agentive verbs since the *-s-* suffix occurs in them. The transitivising CS1 de-idiophonic verb is valency-increasing, as it involves an agentive subject and a patient. The following example of transitive sentence involves a de-ideophonic transitivised verb in the pattern.

(6) *gurbaa-n* *muč'aa* *k'irk'ir-s-a*
boy-NOM baby:ABS tickle-CS-3SG:M:IMFV
'The boy tickles the baby'

In (6), the subject argument is realized as a direct agent of the intensive action in a transitivising notion. A transitive verb *k'irk'ir-s-uu* 'to tickle' involves two arguments, a transitive subject (*gurbaa* 'boy') in the nominative and an affected direct object (*muč'aa* 'baby') in the absolute. While the subject

does the intensive action of tickling, the direct object undergoes that action made of a visually-idiophone.

Finally, the inchoative suffixes (*-at-*, *-ah-*, and *-om-*) in the ATIS, AHIS and OMIS verb derivational patterns typically form stative, intransitive verbs—effectively detransitivizing them. However, when combined with the CS1 causative *-s-*, these verbs become transitive through the introduction of an Agent, thereby increasing valency by one.

(7) a. *rifeens-i diim-at-e*
hair-NOM red-ATIS-3SG:M:PFV
'The hair became red'
b. *isii-n rifeensa diim-es-s-t-e*
her-NOM hair:ABS red-ATIS-CS1-3SG:F-PFV
'She reddened the hair (or, she made the hair become red)'.

(8) a. *muč'aa-n beel-ah-e*
child-NOM hunger-AHIS-3SG:M:PFV
'The child became hungry.'
b. *hintaloo-n muč'aa beel-es-s-t-e*
woman-NOM child:ABS hunger-AHIS-CS1-3SG:F-PFV
'The woman made the child hungry.'

(9) a. *namičč-i dull-oom-e*
man-NOM old-OMIS-3SG:M:PFV
'The man became old.'
b. *d'ibdee-n namičča dull-oom-s-i-t-e*
misery-NOM man:ABS old-OMIS-CS1-3SG:F-PFV
'The misery made the man get old.'

***Comparative Examples of Valency Shift in CS1 Causatives of Inchoatives***

| Pattern | Inchoative Verb (1A) | Causative Verb (2B) | Valency Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| ATIS | *diim-at-uu* ('become red') | *diim-es-s-uu* ('make red') | Intransitive → Transitive |
| AHIS | *beel-ah-uu* ('become hungry') | *beel-es-s-uu* ('make hungry') | Intransitive → Transitive |
| OMIS | *dull-oom-uu* ('become old') | *dull-oom-s-uu* ('make old') | Intransitive → Transitive |

These examples illustrate the transformational power of CS1 causativization, revealing that the *-ess-* form is not a morphologically geminated morpheme but a composite sequence driven by morphophonemic and valency principles. In conclusion, what traditionally interpreted as *-ess-* is a composite structure reflecting phonological adaptations and morphological derivation rather than a geminated causative morpheme. Verbs bearing *-es-s-* should be classified under the CS1 pattern, which employs a single causative *-s-* morpheme shaped by preceding inchoative forms.

**The CS2 Causative Pattern (*-sis-*)**

The role of the CS2 *-sis-* suffix is the indirect causation and valency expansion in Oromo.

This section explores the morphological and semantic nature of the suffix *-sis-*, presenting it as a hallmark of CS2 (Second Causative) derivation—a construction that encodes indirect but intentional causation. Linguist Kulikov characterizes second causatives as distinct derivational strategies applied even to verbs that already exhibit causative forms.[8] The *-sis-* suffix aligns with his fifth typological option: a morphologically independent causative that doesn't share structural features with the primary causative.

***Structure and Function of -sis-***

Morphologically, *-sis-* reflects a doubled causative, often parsed as two *s* segments bridged by an epenthetic *i*, ensuring distinct phonological identity. Semantically, it denotes an indirect causer—an agent who initiates the action but doesn't perform it themselves. As a valency impact, CS2 forms typically introduce a third argument or a second object, reflecting a higher degree of event complexity than CS1 causatives.

[8] L. I. Kulikov, "Causatives," in *Language Typology and Universals*, ed. Martin, et. al. Haspelmath (Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 886–98.

***Valency Shifts across CS2 Patterns***

Here's how the *-sis-* suffix expands valency in key derivational configurations:

**BS-CS2 Pattern (Basic Stem → CS2)**

| | **Base Verb Form** | **CS2 Form** | **Valency** |
|---|---|---|---|
| (10) | *deem-uu* ('to go') | *deem-sis-uu* ('to cause someone to go') | 1A → 3C |
| (11) | *ban-uu* ('to open') | *ban-siis-uu* ('to cause someone to open') | 2B → 3C |
| (12) | *nak'-uu* ('to add') | *nak'-siis-uu* ('to cause someone to add') | 3B → 4C |

The following sentences also show the grammatical and valency structure entailed because of the CS2 causative pattern derived from base verbs through –sis- suffix:

(14) a. *muč'aa-n* *deem-e*
child-NOM walk-3SG:M:PFV
'The child walked'

b. *ani* *muč'aa* *deem-sis-e*
I child: ABS walk-CS2-1SG:PFV
'I caused the child to walk'

(15) a. *gurbaa-n* *gabayaa* *deem-e*
boy-NOM market: ABS go-3SG:M:PFV
'The boy went to the market'

b. *ani* *gurbaa* *gabayaa* *deem-sis-e*
I:NOM boy: ABS market: ABS go-CS2-1SG:PFV
'I caused the boy to go to the market'

(16) a. *gurbaa-n* *mana* *ban-e*
boy-NOM house: ABS open-3SG:M:PFV
'The boy opened the house'

b. *ani* *gurbaa* *mana* *ban-siis-e*
I:NOM boy:ABS house: ABS open-CS2-1SG:PFV
'I caused the boy to open the door'

(17) a. *haa-ti* *muč'aa* *d'ad'aa* *dib-d-e*
mother-NOM child: ABS butter: ABS anoint-3SG:F-PFV
'Mother anointed the son butter'

b. *abbaa-n* *haad'a* *muč'aa* *d'ad'aa* *dib-siis-e*
father-NOM mother: ABS child: ABS butter: ABS anoint-CS2-3SG:M:PFV
'Father caused mother to anoint the son butter'

(18) a. *haa-ti* *muč'a-tti* *d'ad'aa* *dib-d-e*
mother-NOM child-LOC butter: ABS anoint-3SG:F-PFV
'Mother anointed butter into the son'

b. *abbaa-n* *haad'a* *muč'a-tti* *d'ad'aa* *dib-siis-e*
father-NOM mother: ABS child-LOC butter: ABS anoint-CS2-3SG:M:PFV
'Father caused mother to anoint butter into the son'

***CS1-MS-CS2 Syncretism (Causative–Middle–Causative)***

| | Middle Form | CS2 Form | Valency |
|---|---|---|---|
| (19) | *čab-s-at-uu* ('to break for oneself') | *čab-s-ač-čiis-uu* ('to cause someone to break for themselves') | 2B → 2C |

***CS2-MS-CS2 Syncretism (Double Causative–Middle–Causative)***

| | MS Middle Form | CS2 Causative Form | Valency |
|---|---|---|---|
| (20) | *seen-sif-at-uu* ('to cause to enter for oneself') | *seen-sif-ač-čiis-uu* ('to cause someone to cause entry') | 3C → 4D |

***Inchoative–Causative Syncretism in CS2 (ATIS, AHIS, OMIS)***

Though it's debatable whether CS2 verbs stem directly from inchoatives or from their CS1 forms, we treat them as direct double causatives here:

| Pattern | Inchoative | CS2 Causative | Valency |
|---|---|---|---|
| (21) ATIS | *diim-at-uu* ('to become red') | *diim-ač-čiis-uu* ('to make red') | 1A → 2B |
| (22) AHIS | *beel-ah-uu* ('to become hungry') | *beel-oy-siis-uu* ('to make hungry') | 1A → 2B |
| (23) OMIS | *dull-oom-uu* ('to become old') | *dull-oom-sis-uu* ('to make old') | 1A → 2B |

***Animacy and Agency in Indirect Causation***

Example (24) illuminates how the CS2 causative morphologically transforms an intransitive clause into a transitive one involving indirect agentivity:

- (24a) *diim-at-te*: Subject is a spontaneously affected patient.
- (24b) *diim-ač-čiis-e*: Indirect causer (*k'illens-i*, 'weather') triggers the event.
- (24c) **č'aalaa-n* as causer feels incomplete without an intermediate agent—highlighting a constraint in human agent involvement in CS2.

The CS2 causative forms like *-ač-čiis-uu*, *-oy-siis-uu*, and *-sis-uu* typically introduce an inanimate indirect causer, especially in ATIS, AHIS, and OMIS patterns. The event valency increases due to this added level of causative abstraction.

**The CS3 Causative Pattern (*-sisiis-*)**

This pattern is the most complex causativisation with unpacking the CS3 *–sisiis–* suffix, and the valency architecture alongside might be explained. The *-sisiis-* suffix represents the highest degree of morphological causative stacking in Oromo verbal derivation. Though it superficially resembles Kulikov's "doubling with alternation" type ($Y = X_1 + X_2$), it diverges in key ways:

- Only *-s-* acts as the first causative morpheme.
- *-sisiis-* combines *-s-* and *-siis-*, with *-siis-* itself functioning as a causative, thereby encoding a causative-of-a-causative structure.
-

***Semantic Profile of CS3 Causatives***

Unlike CS1 (direct causation) and CS2 (indirect causation), the CS3 causative marks the least agentive subject, which better fits the role of an effector rather than a true causer. This aligns with Kulikov's iconicity principle: compact morphological forms convey direct causation, while more complex constructions signal decreased directness.[9]

***BS-CS1-CS3 Pathway: Morphological Stacking and Valency Expansion***

The CS3 structure may emerge either from CS2 forms or as a direct extension of CS1. Its valency codes reflect the most significant expansion in clause complexity.

Example (25) illustrates this hierarchy:

| Step | Verb Form | Meaning | Valency Code |
|---|---|---|---|
| 25 (a) | *č'ab-uu* | 'to break(INTR)' | [1A] |
| (b) | *č'ab-s-uu* | 'break(TR)' | [2B] |
| (c) | *č'ab-siis-uu* | 'cause someone to break' | [3C] |

[9] Kulikov, "Causatives."

| Step | Verb Form | Meaning | Valency Code |
|---|---|---|---|
| (d) | *č'ab-sisiis-uu* | 'cause someone to cause breaking' | [3C] / [4D] |

Here, CS3 may bypass CS2 formally, but maintains a consistent numeric expansion from 1A → 2B → 3C/4D. The three *s*'s in *sisiis* symbolically represent three agentive roles.
Syntactic illustrations in (26):
(26) a. *Tolaa-n č'ab-s-e* → direct causation [CS1]
b. *Tolaa-n gurbaa muka č'ab-sisiis-e* → multi-agent causation [CS3]

***Nested Causative Examples across Patterns***

| Example | CS2 Verb | CS3 Verb | Valency Jump |
|---|---|---|---|
| (27) | *ban-siis-uu* ('cause to open') | *ban-sisiis-uu* ('cause someone to cause opening') | [3C] → [4D] |
| (28) | *nay-siis-uu* ('cause to add') | *nay-sisiis-uu* ('cause to cause adding') | [4C] → [5D] |

**Valency Mapping**
***Valency Codes across BS–CS1–CS2–CS3 Derivations***
Table 1 below maps the valency pathways, highlighting the architectural growth of argument structure in increasingly complex causative verbs.

**Table 1: Complex causatives and Architectural growth of argument structure**

| Base Verb | CS1/CS2 | Valency [CS1–CS2] | CS3 Verb | Valency [CS3] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *barr-* | *barr-i-s-uu / barr-i-siis-uu* | [1A/2B] | *barr-i-si-siis-uu* | [3C] |
| *č'ab-* | *č'ab-s-uu / č'ab-siis-uu* | [2B/3C] | *č'ab-si-siis-uu* | [3C/4D] |
| *deem-* | *deem-sis-uu* | [2B/3B/3C] | *deem-si-siis-uu* | [4C/4D] |
| *ban-* | *ban-siis-uu* | [3C] | *ban-si-siis-uu* | [4D] |
| *nak'-* | *nak'-siis-uu* | [3C/4C] | *nak'-si-siis-uu* | [5D] |
| *dib-* | *dib-siis-uu* | [4D] | *dib-si-siis-uu* | [5E] |

***Mapping CS1, CS2 and CS3 onto Valency Structure***
As a visual model, a structured table 2 below captures the morphological progression of causative derivation in Oromo and its valency impact:

**Table 2: Morphological Progression of Causative Derivation**

| Pattern | Suffix | Causation Type | Agentivity | Valency Change | Example Verb | Valency Code |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BS (Base Stem) | — | None | Root Agent | — | *č'ab-uu* 'to break' | [1A] |
| CS1 (Single Causative) | *-s- / -č-* | Direct | Strong Agent | +1 Argument | *č'ab-s-uu* 'to break (s.th.)' | [2B] |
| CS2 (Double Causative) | *-sis-, -ačč iis-* | Indirect | Intermediate Agent | +1–2 Arguments | *č'ab-sis-uu* 'cause (s.o.) to break (s.th.)' | [3C]/[4D] |
| CS3 (Triple Causative) | *-sisiis-* | Effector (Least Agentivity) | Minimal or Indirect | +2–3 Arguments | *č'ab-sisiis-uu* 'cause someone to cause breaking' | [4D]/[5D] |

**Note:** As causative complexity increases, the agent becomes more removed from the core action and the verb accommodates more syntactic arguments, transforming sentence architecture dramatically.

## DIACHRONIC EVOLUTION OF CAUSATIVES IN CUSHITIC LANGUAGES

### Proto-Cushitic Foundations

Words and roots of Cushitic languages are not directly attested in any written works, but have been reconstructed through the comparative method, which finds regular similarities between the languages and extrapolates ancient forms from these similarities. The study now moves from Oromo and analyses the linguistic landscape of other Cushitic languages.

The causative system in proto-Cushitic, though not directly attested in written records, has been reconstructed through comparative linguistic methods that trace regular patterns across Cushitic languages.[10] Evidence suggests that Proto-Cushitic employed a general causative suffix, likely *-s-* or *-is-*, to transitivize stative or inchoative roots. These early causative constructions maintained a direct causation model with minimal shifts in valency, preserving a morphosyntactic structure centered on the root. This foundational system laid the groundwork for the diverse causative strategies seen in modern Cushitic languages.

### *Divergence and Expansion*

As Cushitic languages evolved, they developed distinct strategies for expressing causation. Oromo, for instance, exhibits a rich system of causative stacking (*-s-*, *-sis-*, *-sisiis-*), reflecting intricate morphophonemic transformations and expanded argument structures. This complexity extends to ideophonic and non-verbal stems, which underwent causativization, challenging traditional notions of agentivity and syntactic roles.[11] In contrast, languages like Sidamo, Gedeo, and Somali retain simpler causative forms (*-s-* or *-is-*), with Somali showing limited double causatives and often relying on syntactic or auxiliary mechanisms for indirect causation. Afar presents a more restrained morphological system, primarily using *-se-* attached to verbal bases, with little evidence of stacking.[12]

### *Shared Tendencies and Innovations*

Despite their divergence, Cushitic languages share several phonological processes that influence causative morphology. Glide deletion, vowel harmony, and palatalization are widespread, shaping the allomorphic variations of causative markers. Moreover, the degree of valency increase through morphological causatives varies across the family, with highland languages like Oromo demonstrating more robust expansions compared to their coastal or eastern counterparts. These shared innovations highlight both the unity and diversity within the Cushitic linguistic landscape, reflecting a dynamic interplay between inherited structures and localized developments.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate how causative verb derivation in the Oromo language reshapes valency structure through morphological suffixes *-s-* of CS1, *-sis-* of CS2, and *-sisiis-* of CS3. The central objective was to determine whether these causative forms behave differently from non-derived verbs in terms of argument structure, agentivity, and morphosyntactic complexity. By analyzing data from native speakers and existing linguistic sources, the study has shown that causative derivation in Oromo is not a uniform process but a layered system with distinct semantic and structural implications.

The findings challenge the traditional view that suffixes like *-ess-* represent geminated causatives. Instead, the evidence supports a composite analysis in which inchoative and causative morphemes interact to produce derived forms. CS1 causatives introduce direct agents and increase valency by one; CS2 forms encode indirect causation with intermediate agents and expanded argument roles; and CS3 constructions reflect stacked causation, where the subject functions as an effector in multi-agent clause structures.

These derivational patterns are not only morphologically rich but also typologically significant. They reveal how Oromo distinguishes degrees of causation, control, and agentivity through precise morphological cues. The proposed valency code system ([1A] through [5E]) offers a structured way to map these transformations and contributes to broader discussions in morphosyntactic typology.

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[10] Bernard Comrie, "The Syntax of Causative Constructions: Cross-Language Similarities and Divergences," *The Grammar of Causative Constructions*, 1976, 259–312.
[11] Kulikov, "Causatives."
[12] Comrie, "The Syntax of Causative Constructions: Cross-Language Similarities and Divergences."

In conclusion, this study affirms that causative morphology in Oromo is a dynamic and rule-governed system. It provides a deeper understanding of how valency is manipulated across derivational layers and positions Oromo as a key language for exploring the interface between morphology, syntax, and semantics in Afroasiatic linguistics.

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