COCOA Eventstravaganza
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Was I speaking before I spoke?

Stefan Kaufmann (UConn)

Some English expressions let us characterize states of affairs in terms of subsequent courses of events, even if the latter do not come to pass. Well-known examples of this are "counterfactual" *before*-clauses ('The police defused the bomb before it exploded') and progressives ('Mary was drawing a circle when she ran out of ink'). Numerous proposals have been made to capture the modal component of each of these constructions, such as Beaver and Condoravdi (2003) for *before* and Landman (1992) for the progressive. Both refer to possible worlds and processes or events, but ultimately rely on notions that are less well understood (reasonably probable worlds; continuation branches of events). The connection to conditionals ('If the police hadn't defused the bomb, it would have exploded'; 'If she hadn't run out of ink, she would have drawn a circle') looms large but is not explored in detail.

Assuming that causal models are a useful tool for modeling (the relevant kind of) counterfactual reasoning, what might they tell us about the relationship between *before*-clauses, progressives and counterfactual conditionals? Are events crucially involved, and if so, how should they be represented in the causal model? A close look at all three constructions reveals striking similarities, but also stark differences. The similarities suggest to me that pretty much the same kind of causal reasoning is involved in *before*-clauses and progressives. The differences suggest that the notion of "event" that figures in the analysis of the progressive is not as useful in *before*-clauses. It turns out that the causal structure is useful precisely for abstracting away from other particulars of the events.

Causal models are (not) about events

Elitzur Bar-Asher Siegal (Hebrew Univ. of Jerusalem)
Prerna Nadathur (Ohio State University)

While the relata of (structural equation) causal models are often referred to as "events", we argue that they do not correspond to events (or eventualities) in the traditional linguistic sense. We propose instead that a linguistic eventuality predicate corresponds to a causal model which represents nomological relations between properties and features that characterize the relevant predicate. In this approach, descriptions of singular (token) events are true or false *in virtue* of the relationship between actual (described) facts and nomological relations in the appropriate (type-level) model. In this talk we will discuss the development of the current linguistic conceptualization of event(ualities) and relate these ideas to the formal tool of causal models. We also examine how the distinction between token- vs type-causal relations is relevant for the truth conditions of causal claims, and look at what this tells us about the broader ontology of causation.

From "e_1 CAUSE e_2" to "A → B"

Bridget Copley, SFL (CNRS/Paris 8/UPL)

Causal models allow us to easily model entrainment, non-entailed results, and interaction between causal conditions, none of which are easily modeled with neo-Davidsonian causal relations between atomic events. But how do we distinguish between eventive and stative predicates using causal models? We could just use existence predicates of events, but maybe there is a better way? Taking inspiration from the idea that the value of a node can be something other than a truth value, I hypothesize that causal models corresponding to eventive verbs have a node that makes reference to a temporal difference argument. The perspective offered here has a couple of surprising and interesting implications: for verbal taxonomy (six basic predication types) and for syntax ('become' meanings are expressible without a BECOME head and without a lexical BECOME operator).