Constructions with Causative/Instrumental Suffixes

P’orhépecha has three suffixes, -ra, -ta, and -tara, which introduce a participant with the role of causer or instrument. When functioning as causative markers, these suffixes generate a syntactic valence increase of both intransitive and monotransitive verbs. Inversely, when these morphemes introduce an instrument, they usually do not induce an increase in the syntactic valence. In fact, as will be shown below, there are certain conditions that limit the generation of constructions with an instrumental object.

This chapter is organized as follows: In 5.1, the way in which the argument structure of morphological causatives is understood in this work is described. This section also deals with the distribution of the causative morphemes -ra, -ta, and -tara, as well as with the use of double causative marking when introducing a single causative event. In 5.2, ditransitive constructions resulting from the causativization process are analyzed, while section 5.3 focuses on causative clauses in which the syntactic expression of the causee is affected by the presence of the middle/reflexive suffix -kurhi. Finally, section 5.4 covers constructions in which causative suffixes have an instrumental value.

5.1 Morphological Causatives

The use of verbal affixes in expressing causative situations is very common in P’orhépecha. Causation can be characterized, following Shibatani (1976b) and Comrie (1981:161, 1985:330, 1989:165–166), as a complex situation in which two events are involved: a CAUSE or causing event (E1), and the EFFECT/RESULT event or caused event (E2). Causative affixes can therefore be defined as derivative mechanisms involving the notion of CAUSE (E1), whereby a causer (agent) is introduced that triggers the event denoted by the base predicate (E2). What would otherwise be the subject of E2 in a non-causativized predicate (agent or patient/theme) becomes the causee of the causative construction.

In P’orhépecha, causative suffixes can combine with intransitive and monotransitive base verbs, resulting in the syntactic valence increase of the
derived stem. The causer is encoded as the syntactic subject, while the original subject of the base predicate (causee) is demoted to object function. In (1b) and (2b) sentences with intransitive verbs denoting a change of state are presented.

(1) a. *purhú* niní-s-∅-ti
   squash ripen-PRF-PRS-3IND
   ‘The squash ripened.’

   b. *María* niní-ra-∅-s-ti *purhú*-ni
   Maria ripen-CAUS-PRF-PRS-3IND squash-OBJT
   ‘Maria cooked the squash (lit. Maria caused the squash to ripen).’

(2) a. *wíchu* kwaká-s-∅-ti
   dog get.wet-PRF-PRS-3IND
   ‘The dog got wet.’

   b. *Pédru* kwaká-ra-s-∅-ti *wíchu*-ni
   Pedro get.wet-CAUS-PRF-PRS-3IND dog-OBJT
   ‘Pedro got the dog wet (lit. wet the dog).’

In (3b) the causativization of an agentive intransitive verb is shown, and in (4b) that of a monotransitive verb:

(3) a. *sapí* piré-s-∅-ti
    child sing-PRF-PRS-3IND
    ‘The child sang.’

    b. *María* piré-ra-s-∅-ti *sapí*-ni
    Maria sing-CAUS-PRF-PRS-3IND child-OBJT
    ‘Maria made the child sing.’

(4) a. *Xwánu* xwá-s-∅-ti *tsíri*
    Juan bring-PRF-PRS-3IND corn
    ‘Juan brought some corn.’

    b. *María* xwá-ra-s-∅-ti *Xwánu*-ni *tsíri*
    Maria bring-CAUS-PRF-PRS-3IND Juan-OBJT corn
    ‘Maria made Juan bring some corn.’