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## Letting, Making, and the Dynamics of Causation

### A brief note

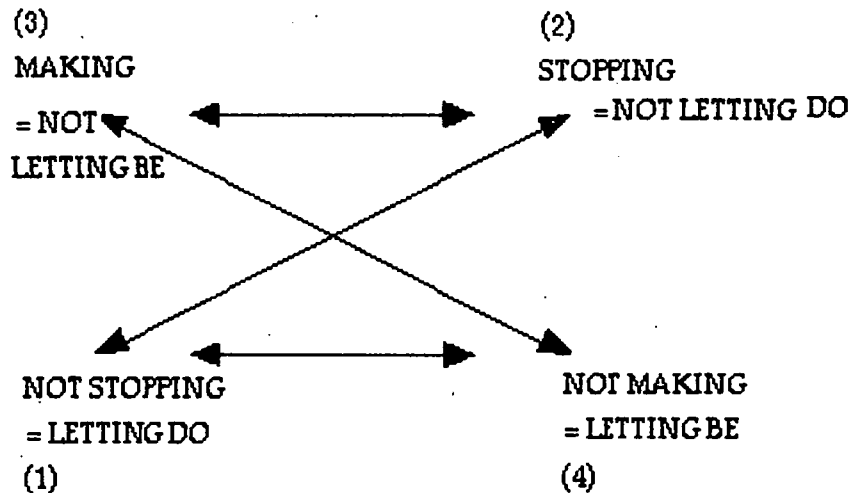
The force-and-barrier model offers a simple means of representing the relationship holding between a process or a project we refer to and a circumstance that its realization depends on. The circumstance is cognized (conceptualized) as a barrier that either does or does not let the process or project follow its course towards fulfilment. 'Letting' something happens means not stopping it, lower the barrier, open a gate in it; 'letting' and 'not letting' thus form an axis of modal meaning values, including the deontic set permission<->prohibition (of some act) and the epistemic set possibility<->impossibility (of some event). This is one of the semiotic dimensions of the dynamic square for causation.

'Making' (something happen) is an active, often agentive concept, and its dynamic representation is far from being clear. By contrast, 'not making' (something happen) is equivalent to letting it stay in its contingent state, and is thus a form of 'letting'. There seem to be a third conjuncture of the force-and-barrier schema, a positive 'making' conjuncture, and a negative, fourth form, if the choice of verb is to be explained. How does this semantic phenomenon work? The modal meaning values corresponding to the positive form of 'making' include the deontic set obligation<->facultativity and the epistemic set necessity<->contingency.

Let us summarize the four meaning values we are to represent within the framework of one and the same dynamic schema in order to account for their cognitive kinship, apparent in the fact that they share verbs of the 'letting' type (Fr. *laisser*, G. *lassen*, da. *lade*, Sp. *dejar*, Port. *deixar*, etc.) characterized by their transitive constructions with verb-phrasal objects, by the examples (1) – (4):

- (1) Yesterday the open cage let the birds escape.
- (2) My colleague never lets anybody criticize him.
- (3) Mary let her boyfriend down. She made him unhappy.
- (4) Please let me stay with you. Let things be as they are.

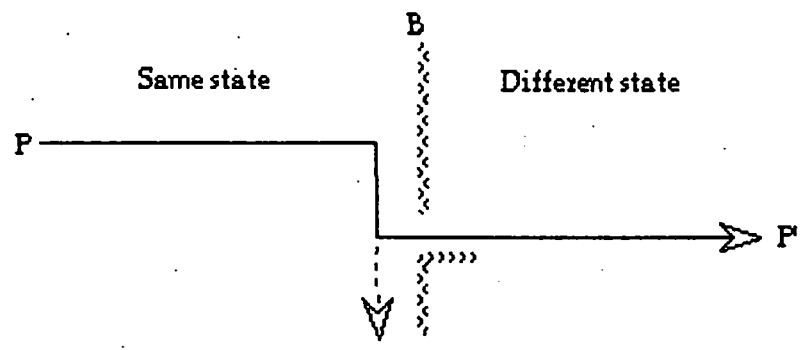
The semiotic square corresponding to these main forms is the following:



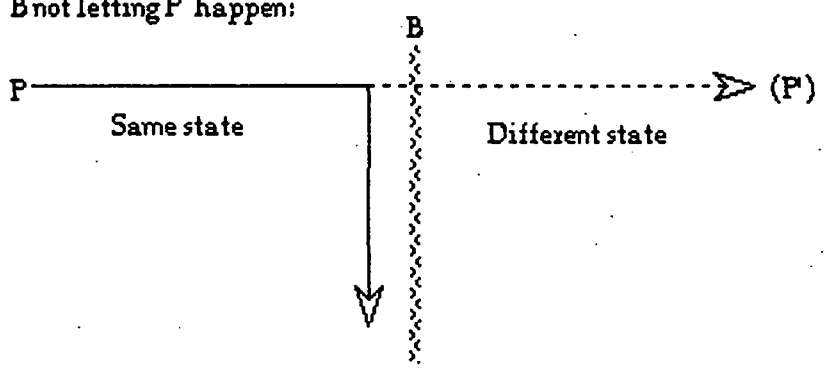
This Greimasean presentation of two intersecting 'contradictory' values (1) – (2) and (3) – (4), forming an axis of 'contraries' (3) – (2) that opposes the strong, efficient, positive values, whereas the 'subcontraries' only distinguishes the two weak, concessive, negative values (1) – (4), turns out to render the schematic structure of the involved dynamic concepts directly. This schematic structure comprises three necessary elements: a flexible path toward continuation (of process) or realization (of project), a barrier showing the circumstance affecting the path, and finally a division of the dynamic space in two strata and a critical line, dividing the content space of the path in two strata, one in which acts or events do not change the state of the reference entity following the path: thus a stratum of Same state, and one representing a Different state.

In ordinary 'letting' causation, like (1) and (2), the barrier coincides with the critical line, and the passage through this critical barrier leads from Same to Different state. The barrier B lets or does not let the process or project P happen:

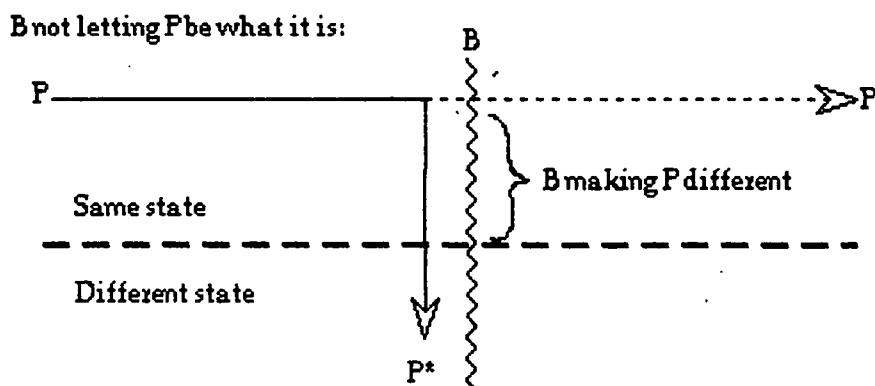
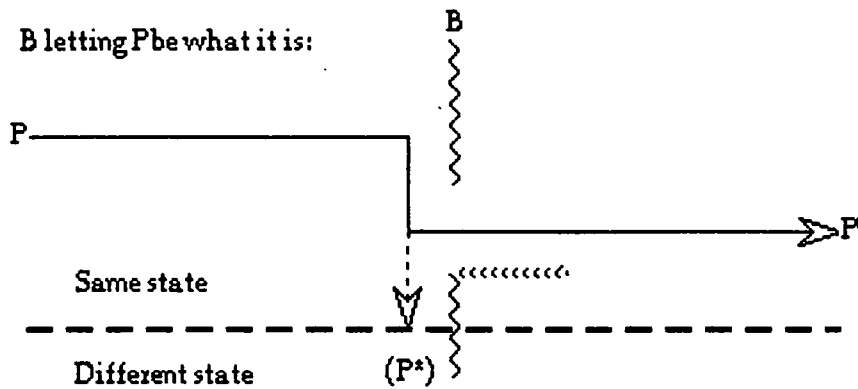
B letting P happen:



B not letting P happen:



If the critical line crosses the barrier instead of running in parallel to it, we will obtain a transition from P to P' within one and the same state  $P = P'$ , so an open barrier will let P stay the same; whereas a closed barrier will force P to go into a different state, so the impeding circumstance will be precisely the one changing or making P into a P\*, as in the following diagram:



The 'harassment' of P by the barrier corresponds to an active intervention that makes it go into a state determined by this dynamic circumstance.

It had formerly been stated that the 'making' schema includes an entity, a multiple input into this entity, and a critical boundary that the entity crosses before unfolding a result scenario that shows the change it undergoes. This result scenario – e. g. A morphological change such as: dividing, crushing, splitting, growing, shrinking, or the set of mereological changes: filling, emptying, ordering, disordering, etc. – would characterize P\* as a figurative evision.

There is no doubt that the 'letting' and the 'making' forms of causation are basic in human cognition. They should therefore be studied with particular care and accuracy. The present account contributes to the elucidation of two important aspects of their behavior that has intrigued semantic research: how come they can use the same verb and very similar constructions? And how can a barrier possibly 'make' anything at all?