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Sommario/riassunto	Fusing insights from cognitive grammar, systemic-functional grammar and Government & Binding, the present work elaborates and refines Davidse's view that the English grammar of lexical causatives is governed by the transitive and ergative paradigms, two distinct models of causation (Davidse 1991, 1992). However, on the basis of extensive synchronic and diachronic data on verbs of killing (e.g. kill, execute, choke or drown), it is shown that 'transitivity' and 'ergativity' are not absolute but prototypical characteristics of verbs which may be overruled by the semantics of the co