A sentence containing an Agent is like a play containing a hero. The hero pursues a goal using an appropriate instrument: a sword (Le Cid), verbal eloquence (Cyrano), or both (Othello). An agentive sentential subject likewise pursues a goal using an instrument: a hand shaped like a pincer in (1), verbal eloquence in (2).

(1) John pinched Mary on the cheek. (2) John convinced/persuaded [Mary to leave].

These ingredients of agentivity are obligatory. A sentence is not agentive if it lacks a syntactic subject ("There arrived three men") or if the subject is not [+human] ("The shoes pinched Mary"), or, if human, it lacks a Goal ("Repeated failures convinced John to give up his medical studies"), or it has a Goal but no Instrument for attaining the Goal ("Mary hoped to become a cheerleader").

The essential component of Agentivity is the Goal. Thus, a clause headed by the directional aspectual morpheme TO suffices to transform an unaccusative or unergative sentence into an agentive sentence, as in (3), where the Result Clause functions as Goal and the main sentence as Instrument; or (4), where the PP headed by TO licenses an Instrument/Means Phrase. With both Goal and Instrument present, the Agentive subject need not even be overt, as in (5), with a VP Goal and a hand or machine implied by the verb "wash" as Instrument.

(3) John left [to annoy Mary]. (4) John walked *(to Versailles) on foot. (5) This shirt washes easily.

I propose that the crucial difference between agentivity and causality lies in the nature of the temporal trajectory between the initial and final stages of an event. Like the hero of a play, an Agentive subject must be continually "on stage". The Agent is even more constrained: his trajectory may contain no temporal gaps. This aspectual constraint on Agentivity provides an account for two old but still unsolved paradigms involving obligatorily [+human] subjects. In (4a) below, the merger of directional TO to the right of a punctual change-of-state verb creates an uninterrupted temporal interval between an action and its Goal. In (5b), the merger of aspectual HAVE to the left of the change-of-state verb creates an uninterrupted temporal interval between the intention of the Agent and the VP Goal. Such intervals require a [+human] subject to maintain them. In the absence of such aspectual elements, a change-of-state verb leaves a temporal hiatus between the initial and final states of the event which places the sentence squarely in the domain of causality, in which a +human subject is not necessary.


(5) a. John made Mary fix the sink. b. John had Mary fix the sink. c. John's playing made Mary love Bach. d.*John's playing had Mary love Bach.

We will try to account for the fact that the merger of the two aspectual elements HAVE+TO in (6) derives a sentence with a Goal and a seamless temporal interval, yet lacking agentivity, by delving somewhat further into the nature of causal sentences.
(6) John has to leave soon.