

## Two types of external causation and the causative alternation in Romance

In the Romance languages causative verbs are known to divide into three groups defined by the distribution of the morpheme SE in the intransitive member of the causative alternation: +SE, ±SE and -SE (see Zribi-Hertz 1987 for French). Several accounts have been proposed of this distribution. Some have pointed to a meaning difference between the intransitive structures with and without the reflexive morpheme, whether in terms of external-vs.-internal causation (Rothemberg 1974; Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995) or of the process-vs.-result interpretive effects of the alternation (Zribi-Hertz 1987; Cennamo 2015; etc.). Assuming that event decomposition is located in syntax, others have proposed that any relevant interpretive effects are read directly off syntax (Folli and Harley 2005; Alexiadou et alii 2006; Labelle and Doron 2010, etc.). In this talk I explore the constituency of the three groups in Italian and French, taking the view that syntactic argument structure is projected from semantic content (Dowty 1979; Jackendoff 1983; Foley and Van Valin 1984; Kiparsky 1997; Van Valin and LaPolla 1997, etc.). I argue that Italian and French exhibit two types of ANTICAUSATIVIZATION and a LABILE CAUSATIVE ALTERNATION, and I analyse the subtle differences in the distribution of verbs in the two languages drawing a distinction between two classes of verbs of external causation.

My point of departure is the observation that in both languages causative psych verbs require the reflexive morpheme when intransitive, thus proving to belong to the +SE class.

- (1a) Marie **s'est** / \*a irritée/\*é (de tout ce bruit). (French)  
 Mary REFL=be.3SG have.3SG annoy.PTCP of all that noise
- (1b) Maria **s'è** / \*ha irritata/\*o (per tutto quel rumore). (Italian)  
 Mary REFL=be.3SG/ have.3SG annoy.PTCP for all that noise  
 'Mary got annoyed because of all that noise.'

As for ±SE alternation, a subtle contrast emerges from the results of corpus searches (using the itTenTen16 and frTenTen17 corpora of SketchEngine). With some verbs, the +SE pattern is clearly predominant in Italian, but not in French. To give but one example, I only found one token of intransitive *arrugginire* 'rust' with HABERE in Italian, while the French structure in (2) was well exemplified in the searches.

- (2) Et mon bijou **a rouillé** et s'est cassé au bout de quelques mois.  
 and my jewel have.3SG rusted and REFL=is broken within some months  
 'And my jewel rusted and broke within a couple of months.'
- (frTenTen17)

This finding contrasts with the results of searches with other verbs, for example *open* and *close*, where the ±SE alternation is well documented in both languages, and, crucially, the -SE intransitive takes HABERE not only in French, but also in Italian.

- (3a) I ristoranti **hanno** chiuso (a causa della pandemia). (Italian)
- (3a') Les restaurants **ont** fermé à cause de la pandémie. (French)  
 the restaurants have.3PL close.PTCP at cause of.the pandemic  
 'The restaurants closed (because of the pandemic).'
- (3b) La porta **s'è** chiusa (da sola). (Italian)
- (3b') La porte **s'est** fermée (toute seule). (French)  
 the door REFL=be.3SG close.PTCP.FSG by/all alone  
 'The door closed (by itself).'

The members of the -SE group are more difficult to identify in Italian and French. Zribi-Hertz (1987) includes in this class the verbs whose +SE variant is properly reflexive, and hence not anticausative, or “ergative” in her terminology (e.g., *rouler* ‘roll’), and the verbs which have causative paraphrases that do not mean the same as the intransitive (e.g., Fr. *vieillir* ‘become old’).

Applying a number of tests for the detection of an effector (see Van Valin/Wilkins 1996 for the notion of effector, and Martin 2010, Cañado 1995, Centineo 1995 for the relevant tests), I draw a distinction between two classes of verbs of external causation. In the one class, which includes *open* and *close*, the causer is the effector of an activity (Centineo 1995). I argue that, in the other class, which includes the majority of causative psych verbs (but also other verbs, e.g., *rust* (cf. 2), etc.), the causer is the argument of an unspecified causing event. I represent the meanings of the two classes with the logical structures in (4a) and, respectively, (4b), where **do'** (x, [...]) is the operator of non-agentive activities and x is an effector: (4a) lexicalizes a specific type of cause, an activity with an effector, whereas (4b) only lexicalizes an unspecified cause.

- (4a) [**do'** (x, [**pred'** (x)])] CAUSE [PROC **pred'** (y) and INGR **pred'** (y)] (e.g., *close*, cf. 3)  
(4b) [**pred' α'** (x)] CAUSE [PROC **pred'** (y) and INGR **pred'** (y)] (e.g., *rust* (2), etc.)

Both verb classes lend themselves to SE ANTICAUSATIVIZATION, which I define as a monotonic operation of saturation of the causer position with a null argument value (Bentley 2006), spelled out by the morpheme SE. The lexico-aspectual properties of SE ANTICAUSATIVIZATION and the selection of ESSE follow from this analysis with no further stipulation.

I claim that the -SE intransitives of the ±SE alternation are LABILE ANTICAUSATIVES, whereby the highest position in logical structure is left unspecified and the subject projects from the next available position (PROC **pred'** (y) in 4a-b). The pattern with HABERE can be a strategy to encode an event of indirect causation (Cruse 1972, Wierzbicka 1975, etc.) with verbs which would by default describe direct causation by an effector (cf. 3a,a'). This construction, which is only available for class (4a) and does not have any aspectual interpretive effect, is well attested both in Italian and in French. Elsewhere, LABILE ANTICAUSATIVIZATION admits both types of external causation and is not as well attested in Italian as in French (cf. 2), arguably because of the strength of active-middle alignment in the former language (La Fauci 1988; Bentley 2006, 2016; Ledgeway 2012, etc.). While the selection of *avoir* is predicted in French (Smith 2016; Bentley 2020), the selection of *avere* in Italian challenges the accounts of perfect auxiliary selection proposed in the framework adopted here (though see Bentley 2006:50). To return to causative psych verbs (cf. 1a-b), not only do the majority of such verbs lack a lexicalized causer and, arguably, a PROC **pred'** component in their logical structure, but those that do have these properties (e.g., *tranquillizzare* ‘calm down’) are ruled out from LABILE ANTICAUSATIVIZATION because of a unique feature of their semantic make-up (Bossong 1998): the lower argument (the causee) is [+animate], which gives rise to agentive inferences in the absence of SE.

Finally, the -SE class includes verbs of internal causation (manner of motion verbs, *blossom*, etc.) and pure unaccusatives (*go/come up, down*, etc.) (Schäfer 2009), which do not lexicalise any kind of cause and, therefore, are not expected to alternate. However, they may enter into LABILE CAUSATIVE ALTERNATIONS (Haspelmath 1993) - i.e., they may transitivise - in a language specific fashion, which in turn results in the possibility of SE ANTICAUSATIVIZATION (see the case of *invecchiare* ‘become old’ in some varieties of Italian).

The broader theoretical point made in this talk is that allowing a rich lexicon to be a module in the architecture of grammar we can make predictions on which verbs can appear in which

morphosyntactic constructions and capture patterns of similarity and variation between cognate languages.

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