

## The external cause of the causative alternation on evidence from Romance

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In this talk I seek to enhance our understanding of the external cause of the causative alternation (Haspelmath 1993, a.o.), and I propose an RRG account of three subtypes of this alternation. My point of departure is the variation in perfect auxiliary selection (HABERE ‘have’ vs. ESSE ‘be’) and SE marking in the intransitive member of the alternation (Zribi-Herzt 1987, Kailuweit 2011, a.o.).

- (1a) La branche **a** cassé (sous le poids de la neige). (French)  
the branch have.3SG break.PTCP under the weight of the snow  
‘The branch broke/split (under the weight of the snow).’
- (1b) La branche **s’ est** cassée.  
the branch.FSG REFL=be.3SG break.PTCP.FSG ‘The branch broke/split.’
- (2a) Le scuole **hanno** chiuso (a causa della pandemia). (Italian)  
the schools have.3PL close.PTCP at cause of.the pandemic  
‘The schools closed (because of the pandemic).’
- (2b) Le porte **si sono** chiuse.  
the door.FPL REFL=be.3PL close.PTCP.FPL ‘The doors closed.’

Corpus evidence suggest that with some verbs the HABERE intransitives are found both in French and in Italian (cf. 1a, 2a), whereas with other verbs (cf. 3) the HABERE intransitives are virtually absent in Italian.

- (3) Et mon bijou **a rouille** et s'est cassé au bout de quelques mois [...]  
and my jewel have.3SG rusted and REFL=is broken within some months  
‘And that piece of jewellery of mine became rusty and broke within a couple of months.’

Applying a number of tests for the detection of an effector (see Van Valin/Wilkins 1996 for the notion of effector, and Martin 2010, Cançado 1995, Centineo 1995 for the relevant tests), I draw a distinction between two classes of externally caused verbs. In the one class, which includes *break* and *close*, the causer is the effector of an activity (Centineo 1995, Van Valin/LaPolla 1997). I argue that, in the other class, which includes French *rouiller* ‘rust’, the causer is the argument of an unspecified causing event. I represent the meanings of the two classes with the logical structures in (4a-b): (4a) lexicalizes a specific type of cause, while (4b) only entails that a cause exists.

- (4a) [**do'** (x, [**pred'** (x)))] CAUSE [PROC **pred'** (y) & INGR **pred'** (y)] (e.g., *ouvrir, fermer*)  
(4b) [**pred α'** (x)] CAUSE [PROC **pred'** (y) & INGR **pred α'** (y)] (e.g., *rouiller* (tr.))

Both verb classes lend themselves to SE ANTICAUSATIVIZATION, which I define as the saturation of the causer position with a null argument value spelled out by the morpheme SE (Bentley 2006, drawing on Van Valin 1990). The class in (4a) also lends itself to an operation which I call LABILE ANTICAUSATIVIZATION (cf. 1a, 2a). This operation encodes an event of indirect causation (Cruse

1972, Wierzbicka 1975) with verbs that would normally describe direct causation by an effector. In this construction, an understood causer or causing event is optionally expressed as an adjunct.

(5) **ext.cause'** (pandemia, [**do'** (x, [**pred'** (x))]) CAUSE [PROC **pred'** (scuole) & ...]) (cf. 2a)

A constructional template requires that the causee should play the role of the causer in syntax, hence the selection of HABERE 'have' and the absence of SE.

Finally, the verbs in the class in (4b) (cf. 3) describe processes or gradual completion (Bertinetto/Squartini 1995, Hay/Kennedy/Levin 1999 and Bentley 2019), and they can participate in a morphosemantic operation of LABILE CAUSATIVE ALTERNATION.

(6a) PROC **rust'** (x) & INGR **pred  $\alpha'$**  (x) (cf. 3) >

(6b) > [**pred  $\alpha'$**  (x)] CAUSE [PROC **rust'** (y) & INGR **pred  $\alpha'$**  (y)]

The intransitive in (6a) is not as well attested in Italian as it is in French due to the strength of active-middle alignment in the former language (Bentley 2006).

In sum, the investigation of the variation in perfect auxiliary selection and SE marking in the intransitive member of the causative alternation in Italian and French leads me to argue that two types of external causation can be lexicalized. All verbs lexicalizing external causation participate in SE ANTICAUSATIVIZATION, but a difference between the two types emerges from analysis of the HABERE intransitives, which are the output of LABILE ANTICAUSATIVIZATION with the class in (4a) and the input of LABILE CAUSATIVIZATION with the one in (4b).

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