

The role of the clitic SE and the verbs *hacer/faire/fer* in the acquisition of the Spanish, French and Catalan (anti)causative alternation

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There have been two main approaches in the literature in order to explain the causative alternation. On the one hand, there are those theories that postulate a reduction/addition of verbal arguments. On the other, we find models that defend a neutral categorial root under which both sides of the alternation are derived. The theory of transitivity (Levin&Rappaport Hovav 1995) claims that a bivalent causative verb results in its anticausative version by using a (Romance) clitic pronoun SE. The causativization approach, however, supports that the causative counterpart is derived from the anticausative version by adding an external argument (Pesetsky 1995). Both views present some problems. For instance, they cannot explain why some anticausative verbs come without SE and which verbs are part from the alternating causation and which not. Following Labelle (1992), the approach of Alexiadou and her colleagues considers three main classes of verbs entering this alternation: marked anticausatives (mAC), unmarked anticausatives (uAC) and (un)marked anticausatives (examples (1)-(3) adapted from Labelle 1992:375). Both participants of the variation are the faces of an alternating, category neutral verb. This moves towards a (causative) verbal phrase to derive uAC (2). For mAC (1), the causative phrase will be selected by an expletive Voice. Finally, the verbs in (3) represent an unspecified root that can alternate with and without SE. In this paper, we will focus on the first two groups. Heidinger (2012) also applies the concept of markedness to the causative version of the alternation. He claims that mAC have an unmarked causative uC correspondent (4), whereas uAC prefer a marked version of the causative partner using *hacer/faire/fer+V* (5).

French, Spanish and Catalan have all three classes of (anti)causatives. In the present study, we examined the longitudinal spontaneous data (1;6 – 5;0) of 9 monolingual children (3 Spanish, 3 French, 3 Catalan) from CHILDES (MacWhinney 2000). The aim was to find evidence in favour or against the two main theoretical approaches concerning the causative alternation exposed above. For this reason, three hypotheses were formulated: The detransitivization approach would predict a more frequent use of causatives, whereas the causativization theory would expect the opposite (H1), since any transformation could be considered more costly/complex than the other. If the Voice layer plays an important role not only for causatives but also for transitive verbs and passives, children should produce more mAC and uC (H2). However, following Heidinger (2012), if markedness is crucial in child language, we predict a more frequent use of either the nonmarked alternates (uC and uAC) or the marked ones (mAC and mC), the latter due to its salience (H3).

The results show that Spanish, French and Catalan monolingual children acquire the (anti)causative alternation differently. While the first produce mainly uC and mAC, the second group prefers the unmarked versions of the alternation and their Catalan monolingual peers do not seem to have a preference for a marked or unmarked version of the anticausative (cf. Figure 1). These findings reveal not only that H1 did not apply but also that H2 and H3 are partially borne out. In fact, these results might be accounted for by taking also into consideration those anticausatives that do not enter the alternation, namely unaccusative verbs. Figure 2 presents the productions of the Romance unaccusatives and clearly shows that the children also behave differently. Spanish children produce unaccusatives both with/without SE, whereas their French counterparts produce mainly unmarked unaccusatives (aprox. 88%) and their Catalan monolingual peers tend to prefer unmarked unaccusatives. In conclusion, this study shows that the interlinguistic variation observed in the causative alternation is also observable in the production of unaccusatives (i.e. nonalternating anticausatives). This seems to go in favour of the idea that speakers treat the first and the latter in a similar fashion (Friedmann et al 2008). Since this is a recent ongoing research, our next step is to compare these results with longitudinal data from bilinguals of these Romance languages. If language dominance plays a role for crosslinguistic influence (Schmeißer et al. 2015), we expect the bilinguals to perform as their Spanish, French and Catalan monolingual peers.

Examples

- (1) **marked anticausatives (mAC):** L'image *(s')agrandit
The image *(SE) enlarges
- (2) **unmarked anticausatives (uAC):** Le poulet (*se) cuit
The chicken (*SE) cooks
- (3) **(un)marked anticausatives:** Le vase (se) casse
The vase (SE) breaks
- (4) Juana abre la puerta
Juana opens the door
- (5) Juan hace disminuir la temperatura
Juan makes decrease the temperature

Figure 1

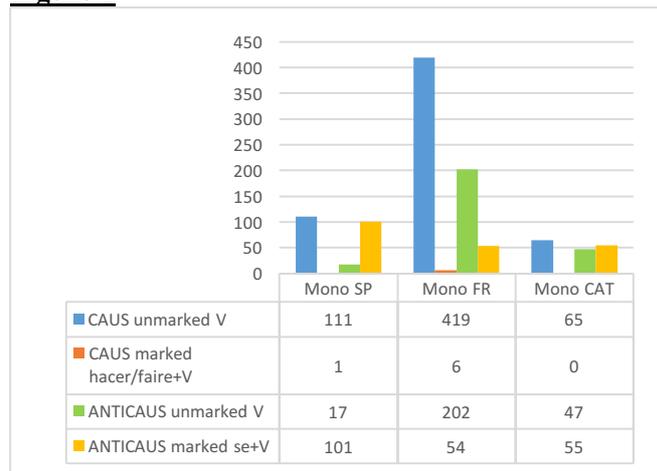
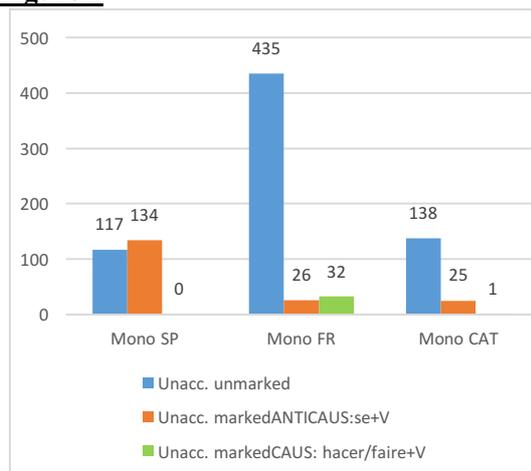


Figure 2



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