

The Romance Causee as an oblique subject

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The argument structure of Romance causatives, e.g. (1) is a long-standing issue in generative linguistics. Competing proposals have been advanced in the literature (Kayne 1975, Zubizarreta 1985, Burzio 1986, Guasti 1993, 1996, Folli and Harley 2007, 2013 a.o); we concentrate on the apparent realignment of cases from nominative(?)–accusative to dative – accusative in the embedded sentence.

- (1) L'insegnante ha fatto leggere questo libro agli studenti
the teacher AUX.3SG made read-INF this book to the students

According to Kayne (2004) *a* is a functional head on the main sentential spine. Kayne argues that some prepositions, including French *à* “to” and its Italian counterpart *a*, are probes in the sense of Chomsky (2000, 2001, 2004), responsible for the checking of dative case. Therefore, the causee is attracted to the head of a functional projection outside the causative vP where it checks dative case, as in (2). The causer moves to the Spec of TP in order to satisfy the EPP. However while *à* is in the matrix sentence, the DP following actually is the subject of the infinitival at some point in the derivation. In our view Kayne’s raising analysis is unwarranted in that it is not obvious that *à* heads a functional projection taking the causative predicate as its complement. This therefore might turn out to be a stipulative part of the analysis.

- (2) [[_{PP} causee [_P [_P *à*]_{causeP} causer _V_{cause} [_{VP} causee [_{VP} [_V DP_{object}]]]]]]

Other treatments of *a*-causees are available, notably in the Applicative Literature. These approaches take the dativized arguments to be licensed in the specifier of a functional ApplP taking the theme in its object position (Pylkkaenen 2002, 2008, Cuervo 2003, Boneh and Nash 2011 a.o). Specifically, in terms of Appl structures, causees are high applicatives, introducing a relation between a DP and a predicate/event. However it is not clear why we would want to treat the preposition *a* as a difunctional Appl head—in fact this is not how it is treated in Cuervo (2003). If so, however Appl lacks any overt morphological counterpart in Romance.

Our key observation is that independently of causative environments, dative/oblique subjects are strongly attested crosslinguistically. Instances often quoted in the formal literature are the ‘quirky’ subjects of Icelandic, e.g. (3). We may add oblique subjects in ergativity splits, e.g. Kurmanji Kurdish (4) from Baker and Atlamaz (2013); in Latin as well, in necessity constructions with the gerund, the subject (external argument of transitive and internal argument of unaccusatives) is turned into a dative e.g. (5):

- (3) Henni leiddust strákar
her(dat) bored boys.the(nom) Icelandic (from Svenonius 2002)

She found the boys boring.

- (4) Te ez di-m. Kurmanji
You.OBL I.DIR see.PAST-1SG
You(sg) saw me.

- (5) hominibus moriendum est enim omnibus Latin
men(dat) to.die is indeed all(dat)

All men must indeed die

Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes* 1.9.15

We argue that the Romance causee is nothing but an oblique “quirky” subject as in (6). The difference between (6) and the quirky subjects of the Icelandic type is that analyses of the latter identify quirky subjects with the [Spec, TP] position – we propose that the causee is in its base-generated [Spec, vP] position. In other words, the oblique/dative case assigned to it is better compared to the oblique assigned to the Kurmanji Kurdish external argument in the ergative alignment in (4); that the ergative case is inherent case, assigned by the verb, is a conclusion widely attested in the literature (Johns 1992, Woolford 2006, Legate 2012 a.o.).

(6) [_{VP} QUIRKY SUBJECT [_v VP]]

Various questions arise at this point, which will form the focus of this paper. One crucial question is of course why oblique subjects are possible and necessary in Romance causative sentences – as opposed, say to any main sentence in the language (recall that the examples in (3)-(5) are main sentences). The crucial fact is that restructuring predicates (which subsume *Faire-Infinitive* causatives) embed structurally deficient complements (Wurmbrand 2001 and references therein).

The degree of structural deficiency of the latter is a debated issue. In the literature various analyses have been advanced which all try to formally capture the “clause-union” or “restructuring effect” typically found with causative structures. A first set of approaches (Kayne 1975, Burzio 1986, Rouveret and Vergnaud 1980) appeals to VP-Preposing whereby a chunk of VP including at least the infinitival and its internal argument moves to the Spec of a higher functional head leaving the embedded subject stranded in the lower VP. Couched in more recent Minimalist terms, VP-Preposing is a way to empty the phase. According to another set of approaches, causativization crucially involves some process of incorporation; for instance for Baker (1988) it is the embedded lexical verb that incorporates into the matrix predicate. The incorporation approach to complex predicate formation has recently been revived by Wurmbrand (2013). Relying on evidence coming from German and various Austronesian languages, Wurmbrand proposes that restructuring complements feature an additional (default) Voice head. It is the latter that undergoes incorporation into the matrix restructuring verb.

Whatever the implementation we side with the consequence of an incorporation analysis à la Wurmbrand that the complement selected by *fare* is effectively a predicate, possibly vP, or VoiceP, but with Voice incorporated to the matrix. In the absence of a T layer, is clear that subject of the embedded verb cannot be assigned Nominative Case; this is exactly why the causee shows up as a “quirky” dative subject. In order to formally characterize the “quirky subject” status of the *a*-causee we adopt Manzini and Savoia’s (2011), Manzini and Franco’s (forthcoming) analysis of Oblique case which reduces the descriptive dative to a more elementary predicate introducing a part-whole relation (notated as $Q \subseteq$), ultimately a possession relation, saying that the event is “included by” the argument. Under this approach, the preposition *a* lexicalizes the $Q \subseteq$ elementary predicate.

In short, we treat the dativized subject of causative predicates as an oblique subject. The parallel is with oblique subjects in the so-called ergative alignment (of Indoeuropean languages), which, according to a number of treatments, reflect a reduced structure of perfects (e.g. Nash 2014 on Georgian), parallel to the impoverished structure of the embedded complement of the causative verb.

Selected References

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