

# French Null Instantiation and the Causative Construction

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The French causative verb *faire* assigns differential case to its ‘causee’ argument: given an intransitive infinitive as complement, it assigns accusative case; given a transitive infinitive, it assigns dative case (i.e. the causee is an *à*-marked PP):

- (1) a. Le prof fait lire l’élève  
the teacher makes to-read the student-ACC  
‘The teacher makes the student read’
- b. Le prof fait lire Proust à l’élève  
the teacher makes to-read Proust the student-DAT  
‘The teacher makes ‘to’ the student read Proust’

This is true whether the causee is realised as a full NP/PP argument (1), or as an affix on *faire* (2):

- (2) a. Le prof le.fait lire  
the teacher him-ACC.makes to-read  
‘The teacher makes him read’
- b. Le prof lui.fait lire Proust  
the teacher him-DAT.makes to-read Proust  
‘The teacher makes ‘to’ him read Proust’

Previous work has argued for a ‘flat’ analysis of the causative VP, in which *faire* ‘inherits’ the arguments of its verbal complement (e.g. Abeillé and Godard 2002). Given this, we can state a generalisation that captures the varying case marking: the causee argument appears after any inherited arguments; the resulting first object is accusative, and any other arguments dative. The causee can only be the first object when no objects are inherited from the downstairs verb because it is intransitive.

Most current analyses of French complex predicates (Miller and Sag 1997; Abeillé et al. 1998) fail to express this generalisation. Instead, they posit two (or more) lexical entries for causative *faire*: one selecting a transitive infinitive, and another selecting an intransitive. Attempts to account for the case marking with a single lexical entry (e.g. Bratt 1990) have problems with the following data:

- (3) a. Le prof lui/\*le.fait voir  
the teacher him-DAT/\*ACC.makes to-see  
The teacher makes \*(‘to’) him see
- b. Son chef lui/\*le.fait en.vouloir à tout le monde  
her boss her-DAT/\*ACC.makes EN.to-get-angry everyone-DAT  
Her boss makes \*(‘to’) her angry at everyone
- c. Il.fait se.les.laver aux enfants  
he.makes SE.them-ACC.wash the children-DAT  
He makes ‘to’ the children wash them (*their hands*)

It is simply a fact about the verb *voir* – whether its object is realised or not – that when it is embedded in a *faire* causative structure, the causee is a dative object (3a). Likewise, *en vouloir à* (a so-called ‘intrinsic clitic verb’) requires a dative causee, even though its only complement is already dative. Again, the resulting valence requirements of *faire* include no direct object at all. What’s more, although affixal objects of downstairs verbs generally climb onto the upstairs causative, verbs with an intrinsic or reflexive affixal argument like *se laver* in (3c) always realise their affixal arguments locally instead (‘clitic trapping’). Even so, the corresponding reduction in the downstairs verb’s valence requirements does not influence the case marking of the causee as one might expect.

To account for this, I give an analysis where verbs like those in (3) actually do propagate an argument up to *faire*, but this argument is marked with a novel feature NULL which prohibits those arguments from being overtly realised. The presence of [NULL +] arguments on the valence list ensures the appropriate case marking by the generalisation mentioned above. I present a method of instantiating clitics which departs minimally from Miller and Sag’s 1997 analysis by marking cliticised arguments [NULL +] instead of removing them from a valence list entirely.

Independent support for a feature like NULL is given by the phenomenon of “null instantiation” (Lambrecht and Lemoine 2005, Larjavaara 1997). This is an anaphoric/referential device which exists in English but is far more common in French: the dropping of the object of a transitive verb (for example, in situations where it could also have been expressed as a pronoun or pronominal affix (4a)). Evidence that the unrealised complement is still present at some level of syntactic representation is given by (4b), due to Koenig (1993).

- (4) a. La correspondante, elle.(les).admirait aussi  
 the correspondant, she.(them).admired also  
 ‘The correspondant liked them also’
- b. Je.lui.ai fait manger chaudes  
 I.him.have made eat hot-FEM.PL  
 ‘I made him eat (them) hot’

The adjective *chaudes* above agrees audibly with the missing object. I propose to analyse these constructions using the same feature NULL, which ensures that sufficient information is available in the syntactic representation to account for agreement in (4b), and avoids the need to redundantly duplicate many transitive lexical entries by providing entries for their seemingly intransitive counterparts.

## References

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