

# THE ROMANCE CAUSEE AS AN OBLIQUE SUBJECT

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**Abstract:** *The goal of this paper is to provide an analysis of the a-causee found in Romance periphrastic causatives (Rouveret and Vergnaud 1981; Kayne 1975; Burzio 1986; Guasti 1993; Folli and Harley 2007 a.o.). We propose that the a-causee should be seen as a quirky subject, which receives dative, i.e. oblique case, by means of an elementary predicate lexicalized by the preposition a (Manzini and Franco 2016). The crucial observation is that, independently of causatives, crosslinguistically oblique subjects show up in structurally reduced sentences crucially lacking the TP layer (e.g. perfective sentences in split ergative languages cf. Georgian discussed by Nash 2014 a.o.). The lacking of the TP layer makes nominative case unavailable and this is why in functionally impoverished syntactic environments subjects get oblique case i.e. they are realized as non-nominative quirky subjects.*

**Keywords:** *Romance causatives, datives, quirky subjects*

## 1. Introduction

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.). In this study, we focus our attention on the status of the causee argument (e.g. the constituent a Gianni “to Gianni” in (1) below).

- (1) Maria ha fatto riparare la macchina a Gianni.  
Maria AUX.3sg. made repair.INF the car to Gianni  
“Maria made Gianni repair the car”.

In particular we develop an account which aims to explain why the embedded subject within the causative complement precisely shows up as dative. A crucial question that any analysis of Romance causatives must address is of course why oblique/dativized subjects are possible and necessary in Romance causative sentences. Note that dativized subjects do not typically show up in main sentences in a language like Italian.

In section 2 we will briefly review some relevant existing proposals on the status of the a-causee. In section 3 we turn to illustrate our proposal on the formal status of the a-causee.

In section 4 we discuss some crosslinguistic data which potentially support our analysis. Section 5 concludes the paper.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Previous treatments of the *a*-causee

Kayne (2004) has developed a raising approach to the syntax of Romance *Faire-Infinitive* causatives, whereby 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.

Under this approach *a/à* is a functional head on the main sentential spine which is twinned with another functional head, Agr-IO. This Agr-IO projection attracts the *causee* in its specifier as schematized in (2) below:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (2) ...fait [ <sub>VP</sub> <b>Paul</b> [ <sub>VP</sub> manger une tarte]]   | base-generated structure                |
| ...[ <sub>AgrIO</sub> AgrIO..fait [ <sub>VP</sub> <b>Paul</b> [ <sub>VP</sub> manger une tarte]]]                                    | Agr-IO is merged                        |
| ...[ <sub>AgrIO</sub> <b>Paul</b> <sub>i</sub> AgrIO..fait [ <sub>VP</sub> <b>t</b> <sub>i</sub> [ <sub>VP</sub> manger une tarte]]] | AgrIO attracts the causee in SpecAgr-IO |

The derivation then proceeds as in (3) below: *à* is merged to the structure, then VP-Preposing is triggered. Namely, the causative VP is attracted in its specifier of the projection headed by *à*.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (3) ...[ <sub>àP</sub> <i>à</i> [ <sub>AgrIO</sub> <b>Paul</b> <sub>i</sub> AgrIO..fait [ <sub>VP</sub> <b>t</b> <sub>i</sub> [ <sub>VP</sub> manger une tarte]]]] <i>à</i> is merged               |  |
| ...[ <sub>àP</sub> [fait manger une tarte] <sub>j</sub> <i>à</i> [ <sub>AgrIO</sub> <b>Paul</b> AgrIO [fait [ <sub>VP</sub> <b>t</b> [ <sub>VP</sub> manger une tarte]- <b>t</b> <sub>j</sub> ]]]]] | <i>à</i> attracts the causative VP to its specifier (VP-Preposing) |

The *causer* matrix subject moves to the Spec of TP in order to satisfy the EPP. Importantly, while *à* is in the matrix sentence, the following DP is actually the subject of the infinitival at some point in the derivation. In our view, this analysis has some important advantages over competing proposals, for instance it draws a parallel with formally similar structures i.e. double object constructions (Collins and Thráinsson 1993 postulate a higher Agr-IO which licenses the indirect object in double object constructions). However, we believe that Kayne’s raising analysis is unwarranted, in that it is not obvious that *à* heads a

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. I am also grateful to Rita Manzini for fruitful discussions on the issues addressed here. All remaining errors are my own.

functional projection taking the whole causative predicate as its complement. The need to place the preposition above the causative verb is a direct consequence of the authors' theoretical assumptions about Accusative and Dative Case checking.

Kayne assumes that the establishment of an Agree relation and consequent movement to the specifier of the relevant Case marking head can be considered the mechanism involved in structural case assignment, including Accusative Case.

Under this approach, VP-Preposing is a necessary step in the derivation. Proponents of VP-Preposing accounts (see also Belletti and Rizzi 2012; Belletti 2015) assume that linear order is a matter of syntax, hence the need to appeal to a mechanism such as VP-Preposing which derives the correct word order.

However, other proposals in current minimalist theorizing assume that linear order is not part of core syntax but rather an externalization procedure (Chomsky 2001, 2013, Abels and Neeleman 2012). In this paper, we offer an alternative view on the licensing of dativized arguments which is compatible with VP-Preposing, although it does not crucially hinge on raising (movement) of the preposition and of the *a-causee*.

Other treatments of *causees* are available, notably in the Applicative literature. According to Applicative approaches (Cuervo 2003; Pylkkänen 2008; Boneh and Nash 2011, a.o.), dativized arguments are licensed in the specifier of a functional ApplP taking the theme in its object position as in (4):

- (4) ...[VoiceP DP<sub>Subj</sub> Voice [<sub>VDO</sub> fare [ ApplP **DP<sub>Dat</sub>** Appl [<sub>VBE</sub> DPObj <sub>Vbe</sub> [Root]]]]]

(from Cuervo 2003)

*Causees* in particular are hosted in High Applicative phrases, introducing a relation between a theme and a predicate/event.

Applicative projections are avoided here in that they do not seem to fit with the actual morphosyntactic organization of languages like Italian. In Romance languages the applicative content is introduced by a preposition (or by a nominal inflection in languages featuring overt-case marking on nominals) and not by verbal morphology like in the Bantu languages studied by Pylkkänen (2008). Therefore it is not clear what the counterpart of the Applicative morphemes of the Bantu languages would be in Romance. In this respect we depart from Cuervo (2003)'s analysis of *a* as the Spell-out of an Applicative Head (see also footnote 7 on this point).

### 3. A proposal: the causee is an oblique subject

Our key observation is that independently of causative environments, dative/oblique subjects are widely attested crosslinguistically.

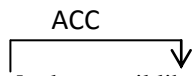
Well-known examples in the formal literature are the “quirky” subjects of Icelandic (5). We may add oblique subjects in ergativity splits, e.g. Kurmanji Kurdish (6) from Baker and Atlamaz (2013); oblique subjects are also found in familiar languages like Latin. In necessity contexts with the gerund the subject (the external argument of transitives and the internal argument of unaccusatives) is turned into a dative (7):

- (5) Henni leiddust strákarnir  
 Her (dat) bored boys.the (nom)  
 ‘She found the boys boring’  
 Icelandic  
 (Sigurðsson 1996: 1)
- (6) Te ez di-m.  
 You (dat) I (dir) see.PAST.1sg.  
 ‘You (sg) saw me’  
 Kurmanji Kurdish  
 (Baker and Atlamaz 2013: 2)
- (7) *hominibus moriendum est enim omnibus*  
 men (dat) to die is indeed all (dat)  
 ‘All men must indeed die’  
 Latin  
 (Cicero, Tuscolanae Disputationes 1.9.15)

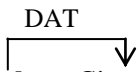
In this paper, we argue that the Romance *causee* is nothing but an oblique “quirky” subject. In (8 a-d) below we illustrate the main steps of our analysis of the Romance causative complement:

(8) a. Maria fa leggere il libro a Gianni<sup>2</sup>

b. [<sub>VP</sub> leggere il libro]

c.   
 [<sub>VP</sub> v [<sub>VP</sub> leggere il libro]]

d. ...fare [<sub>VoiceP</sub> Gianni Voice [<sub>VP</sub> v [<sub>VP</sub> leggere il libro]]]

e. fare [<sub>Q≡P</sub> a [<sub>VoiceP</sub> Gianni Voice [<sub>VP</sub> v [<sub>VP</sub> leggere il libro]]]]  


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<sup>2</sup> To simplify the illustration in (8) above we abstract away from processes which are not directly relevant for the present discussion, that is (Voice) incorporation to the matrix causative verb, valuation of Tense features on the main verb, assignment of Nominative to the matrix subject etc.

First, the lexical verb and its internal argument are merged (as in (8b.)). Then  $v$  enters the derivation (8c).

We assume with Chomsky (1995) that the  $v$  category assigns Accusative Case to the embedded object: it takes VP as its complement, and combines with V by some operation such as head movement to yield the transitive verbs we actually hear in languages like Italian. The accusative case we see on the embedded object (8c) will therefore depend on the presence of  $v$  in the embedded complement.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore we assume with Kratzer (1996) that the category Voice is simultaneously responsible for the introduction of the external argument in the derivation for the assignment of the agent theta-role to the external argument (8d).

Wurmbrand (2015) provides convincing evidence from Austronesian Voice Matching and German showing that restructuring complements (cf. Rizzi 1982, which subsume Faire-Infinitive causatives) feature a (default) VoiceP projection which undergoes incorporation into the matrix verb. We adopt Wurmbrand's (2015) recent views on restructuring predicates hence we assume that the causative verb *fare* in Italian embeds a functionally impoverished complement consisting of a VoiceP, a  $v$ P and a VP.

In order to formally characterize the “quirky subject” status of the a-causee we adopt Manzini and Savoia's (2011), Manzini and Franco's (2016) analysis of Oblique case. The authors endorse the traditional idea that cases are relations i.e. elementary predicates equivalent to Ps (Fillmore 1968). Under this approach, what is descriptively known as “dative” is reduced to a more elementary predicate introducing a part-whole/inclusion relation, not to be intended mathematically but rather as a broad notion of zonal inclusion (on this point see Belvin and den Dikken 1997), ultimately a possession relation, saying that the event is “included by” the argument. The inclusion relation is notated as ( $\subseteq$ ) and since the relational content is carried out by Q in DPs (as in generalized quantifier theory), dative is notated as ( $Q\subseteq$ ) in (8e).

Various strands of literature have connected dative to possession since the work of Kayne (1984). If we examine the dativized argument of a ditransitive sentence, the link between datives and possession becomes apparent: the sentence “I give the book to John” has been reanalyzed as “I give [John HAS a book]” in the literature (Pesetsky 1996, a.o.).

Therefore, interpretively, what the  $Q\subseteq$  says is that the argument to which dative morphology (or its prepositional counterpart) attaches has in its domain of inclusion either another DP as in *Ho dato il libro a Gianni* ‘I gave Gianni the book’ or the lower VP sub-event as in *Ho fatto leggere il libro a Gianni* ‘I made Gianni read the book’. Under this approach, “inclusion” (part-whole) is the primitive content of the preposition *a*, which in

<sup>3</sup> We are aware of the importance of assuming that a functional head external to the verb phrase that is responsible for the assignment of accusative structural case. We believe that Chomsky (1995) proposal concerning the existence of the  $v$  category is very insightful in that it straightforwardly accounts for the assignment of accusative case to the internal argument selected by the lexical verb. However the mechanisms of structural case assignment are debated in the literature. For instance Kayne (1989) provides argument in favor of the existence of the AgrO head- lower than T but crucially higher than VP to which (French) direct object raise -for example during cliticization, passivization or wh-movement- which triggers object agreement. More recently Kayne has argued in favor of the existence of the Agr DO head which is able to attract the object in its specifier (Kayne 2004). Here we will adopt Chomsky (1995) formalization of accusative case assignment. We will not commit ourselves to the idea that Agree and subsequent movement to the specifier of a higher functional head in the main sentential spine are the essential mechanisms involved in structural case assignment.

turn is the lexicalization of the  $Q \subseteq$  elementary predicate. We propose that the causee receives dative case via the  $Q \subseteq$  elementary predicate.<sup>4</sup>

The difference between (8e) and the quirky subjects of the Icelandic-type<sup>5</sup> is that analysis of the latter (Taraldsen 1995, Anagnostopoulou 2003, Baker 2008 a.o.) identify quirky subjects with the [Spec,TP] position, while we propose that the a-causee is base-generated in [Spec, VoiceP].<sup>6</sup>

In the next section we will review some evidence suggesting that the oblique/dative case assigned to the causee argument is better compared to the oblique assigned to the Kurmanji Kurdish external argument in the ergative alignment.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. *Oblique subjects appear in functionally- deficient structures*

Various questions arise at this point, which will be addressed in this section. One crucial question we need to answer is of course why dativized subjects are possible and

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<sup>4</sup> One anonymous reviewer asks whether our analysis of the a-causee carries over the case of the da-causee (Guasti 1997 a.o.). A discussion of the status of the da-causee is beyond the scope of the present paper. We are aware of the issues but we must leave them for future work.

<sup>5</sup> Sigurðsson (1989) shows that quirky subjects in Icelandic pass all the classical subjecthood tests (binding of reflexives, binding of PRO etc.); the same behavior is displayed, trivially, by nominative external arguments in Icelandic. Interestingly, the Romance causee passes two reliable subjecthood tests. The Italian reflexive pronoun *SI* can't be embedded in the complement of the causative, however in appropriate contexts, it can be shown that the causee can bind the anaphora "se stessa" "herself" as in (i) below:

(i) Ho fatto riascoltare se stessa<sub>i</sub> a Paola<sub>i</sub> (nella registrazione)  
I made rehear herself to Paola in the recording.  
"I made Paola rehear herself in the recording"

Moreover the causee can also act as a subject controller for PRO (see (ii) below):

(ii) Ho fatto promettere a Paola<sub>i</sub> di PRO<sub>i</sub> andarsene.  
I made promise.INF to Paola to leave.INF

We are indebted to Rita Manzini for providing the relevant examples in (ii).

Note that ergative subjects pattern alike in this respect (Manzini, Savoia, Franco (2015) on Punjabi, Bhatt (2003) on Hindi a.o.). This fact could be taken as an indication that a unifying analysis of causees and ergative subjects could be feasible. For a discussion of the binding properties of (dativized) NPs in Italian see also Giorgi and Longobardi (1991).

It is worth mentioning that Sigurðsson (2004) argues that only the quirky subjects of the Icelandic type qualify as proper non-nominative subjects since they pass all the subjecthood tests. Conversely, languages like German (and Italian) which only pass a subset of subjecthood tests only have subject-like non-nominatives.

See Poole (2015) for a recent implementation of the idea that quirky subjects differ crosslinguistically in whether they display the full range of properties exhibited by canonical nominative subjects.

<sup>6</sup> Alternatively one can assume that the a-causee is base-generated in the [Spec, vP], nothing hinges on this point.

<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, one could assume that the preposition *a* is hosted in a High Applicative Projection (Pylkkänen 2008 a.o.). Boneh and Nash (2011) propose a solution along these lines for coreferential dative and benefactive datives in French. We believe that the properties of Romance benefactive datives can be undoubtedly accounted for by resorting to a High Appl treatment, however we don't see how this kind of analysis could be extended to the case of the a-causee which is notably an affected argument (Guasti 1997; Folli and Harley 2007).

necessary in the complement of Faire-à causative sentences. In our view the crucial fact is that restructuring predicates embed structurally deficient complements.

In what follows we will show that there are reasons to assume that seemingly dissimilar structures such as Italian-type causative complements and perfective sentences featuring ergative subjects in languages like Kurmanji Kurdish or Georgian have actually much in common. In particular, both syntactic environments are characterized by some degree of structural reduction (possibly the same degree of structural reduction)<sup>8</sup> i.e. they are VoiceP/vPs hosting oblique subjects in their specifiers.

In the formal literature it has been noted that perfective sentences in languages displaying tense/aspect-based ergativity splits like Kurmanji follow the ergative alignment. Crucially, these structures are functionally impoverished (Baker and Atlamaz 2013, Manzini, Savoia and Franco 2015) unlike imperfective sentences (which, in turn, follow the nominative alignment as shown in the paradigm in (9) below for Kurmanji):

- (9) a. Ez Eşxan-ê di- vun-im- e  
 I.DIR Eşxan-**OBL** IMPF-see.PRES-1sg. PRES.COP  
 “I am seeing Eşxan”
- b. Eşxan-ê ez di- m  
 Eşxan-**OBL** I.DIR saw.PAST 1sg.  
 “Eşxan saw me”

Different implementations of the idea that perfective sentences are structurally reduced structures can be found in the literature. For instance, Baker and Atlamaz (2013) have recently defended that the past V stem in Kurmanji is defective in that it is not phasal, whereas the present V stem is a strong phase head. The technical details are not relevant here. The main point is that the formal properties of perfective sentences in Kurmanji do not seem to differ from those of Romance causative complements in important respects: in both syntactic environments we see that as a consequence of structural reduction external arguments receive oblique (inherent)<sup>9</sup> case.

Léa Nash’s (2014) work on Georgian provides further support for the idea that sentences in the ergative alignment are structurally-impoorished (on a par with the Romance causative complement). The author argues that the transitive subject can be theta-

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> The status of ergative case is debated in the literature, however we follow Johns (1992) Woolford (2006) and Legate (2012) which defend the idea that ergative case is inherent case assigned locally by the verb. We have attempted to show that in languages like Kurmanji in perfective sentences the subject can’t get nominative. Similarly, the merger of the elementary predicate projection ( $\subseteq$ ) can be seen as a way to prevent the derivation from crashing. The elementary predicate ultimately ensures that the causee gets inherent case.

licensed and by consequence case-licensed, in a position outside vP only in sentences which follow the nominative-accusative alignment. In turn, this leads the author to assume that ergative case on subjects is licensed vP-internally as exemplified in (10 a-b) below:

- (10) a. [TP T <CASE> [EventP DP CASE Event <CASE> [vP v [...DPCASE]]]]  
 nominative alignment
- b. [TP T <CASE> [vP DPERG v [...DPCASE]]]]  
 ergative alignment

Georgian is an interesting language to investigate because it allows us to figure out the formal properties of non-ergative and ergative sentences respectively.

As Nash (2014) discusses, sentences in the ergative alignment are aspectually deficient in Georgian, neither perfective nor imperfective. The author claims that the deficient perfectivity of sentences in Georgian aorist... “is rather a result of the absence of any Aspect category in the clausal functional structure”. In the perfect “the event is just named without referring to the specifics of its internal temporal organisation as if it were “nominalised” in some sorts”. This leads the author to propose that the category Event, equivalent to Kratzer’s (1996) Voice, is absent in those sentences which follow the ergative alignment (10 b).

Conversely, the nominative alignment is characterized by a more complex functional structure. Nash (2014) proposes that in the nominative alignment the Event aspectual head is present, and it is lexicalized by the suffix “-av” (10a). It seems that Georgian can provide overt morphological evidence in support of the claim that structures which feature nominative preverbal subjects are more complex (10a), than those hosting oblique (ergative) preverbal subjects. Interestingly, Nash shows that it is possible to detect a clear interpretive cost/reflex of structural reduction: the Georgian aorist in (10b) describes events which are terminated before the reference time; but although the events are concluded, they are interpreted as non-culminated, i.e. sentence (11 b) simply states that Vano was engaged in a car-drawing event, but it is not entailed that Vano finished the drawing of a car.

- (11) a. vano- $\emptyset$  xaT-av-s      mankana-s  
 Vano-NOM      draw-TS-3sg.      car-ACC  
 “Vano is drawing a car”
- b. vano-m xaT-a      mankana- $\emptyset$   
 Vano-ERG      draw-AOR-3sg.      car-NOM  
 “Vano drew a car”

(Georgian from Nash 2014)

We take the interpretive effect (no entailment regarding the culmination of the event in (11b) above), together with the overt morphological evidence illustrated in (10 a-b) to suggest that there might indeed be a non-trivial correlation between functional defectivity and licensing of oblique case.



## 5. Conclusions

In short, we treat the dativized argument of Romance causatives as an oblique subject. The parallel is with ergative subjects of split-ergative languages (Baker and Atlamaz 2013, Nash 2014 a.o.). We have reviewed evidence suggesting that the Romance causative complement and perfective sentences in the ergative alignment are formally similar in that they are functionally defective syntactic environments i.e. they are possibly VoicePs or vPs crucially lacking the TP layer<sup>10</sup>. Our account explains in a principled way why the embedded subject of the causative complement shows up as a quirky dative. In the functionally impoverished causative complement there is no potential structural case licenser. It therefore becomes natural to assume that some projection/head must be introduced in the structure under investigation for the purposes of case assignment to the causee. In the present paper we have adopted Manzini and Franco (2016), Manzini and Savoia (2011)'s analysis of oblique case. We have thus proposed that the Romance causee gets dative case via the  $Q\subseteq$  elementary predicate. The *a* preposition under this approach is nothing but the lexicalization of this elementary predicate. The introduction of the elementary predicate prevents the derivation from crashing in that it ensures that the causee gets connected with the lower VP. As a result, the causee is interpreted as possessing/having in its domain of inclusion the lower VP event. Note that the proposal put forth here might be able to formally capture the notion of “affectedness” (or the “obligation effect” in Folli and Harley 2007’s terms) which has been discussed in the classical works on Romance causatives (e.g. Guasti 1997). If the causee qualifies as the possessor of the lower VP event, it naturally follows that it can be affected by the lower VP event.

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<sup>10</sup> An anonymous reviewer points out that if we are right in claiming that structural case is unavailable in the causative complement, we should expect the causee to surface as nominative. Nominative is commonly assumed to be the default case in Italian (Schütze 2001). The current approach does not have recourse to notions of competition or default (typically advocated in current OT or DM analyses). Moreover, let us incidentally note that it doesn’t always seem entirely clear whether Nominative is actually the default case in Italian:

(i) Chi hanno visto/ baciato ieri al cinema? \*Io.NOM/Me.ACC  
 Who has been kissed/seen yesterday at the movies? I/Me  
 “Who was seen/kissed yesterday at the movies?”

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