

Anticausatives compete but do not differ in meaning: a French case study

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1 Introduction

In French as in many other Romance and Germanic languages, verbs undergoing the causative/anticausative alternation divide into two morphological and three distributional classes. With verbs of class A, the anticausative (AC) is morphologically *unmarked* (\emptyset -ACs), cf. (1). With verbs of class B, the AC is *marked* with the reflexive clitic *se* (*se*-ACs), cf. (2). ACs of class C allow *both* markings (\emptyset /*se*-ACs) allow both markings, cf. (3).

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|-----|----|--|----|---|
| (1) | a. | Le poulet cuit.
<i>The chicken \emptyset is cooking.</i> | b. | ??Le poulet se cuit.
<i>the chicken SE is cooking.</i> |
| (2) | a. | *L'image agrandit.
<i>The picture \emptyset is widening.</i> | b. | L'image s'agrandit.
<i>The picture SE is widening.</i> |
| (3) | a. | Le vase casse.
<i>The vase \emptyset is breaking.</i> | b. | Le vase se casse.
<i>The vase SE is breaking.</i> |

Several authors have proposed that the presence vs. absence of the reflexive clitic goes along with differences in meaning, see e.g. Labelle 1992, Doron & Labelle 2011, Labelle & Doron 2010, according to which *se*-ACs express externally caused events while \emptyset -ACs express internally caused events (claim 1) and *se*-ACs focus on the achievement of a result state while \emptyset -ACs focus on a process (claim 2). To derive these alleged differences in meaning, fundamentally different syntactic structures have been proposed for *se*-ACs and \emptyset -ACs: Labelle 1992 argues that *se*-ACs are unaccusative while \emptyset -ACs are unergative, whereas Doron & Labelle 2011 and Labelle & Doron 2010 (henceforth DL) propose that *se*-ACs and \emptyset -ACs are both unaccusative but differ substantially in their event decomposition and the position where the lexical root is merged in the structure.

The goal of this paper is to show that most of the meaning differences proposed to hold between *se*-ACs and \emptyset -ACs are either not existent or idiosyncratic/verb-specific. In particular, they cannot be generalized to the presence/absence of morphological marking. This makes a structural explanation of these meaning differences unfeasible: the presence vs. absence of *se* cannot be associated with syntactic differences driving meaning differences. To the extent that meaning aspects can be robustly associated with either marked or unmarked ACs, we argue that this holds *only for verbs of class C* (optional marking; cf. also Legendre & Smolensky 2009). We derive these within a *pragmatic* account: with verbs of class C (i.e. if a choice is possible), a pragmatic reasoning on the possible interpretations of the string [DP *se* V] (AC or also semantically reflexive) leads the speaker to prefer one version over the other. Note that we do not deny any *syntactic* differences between \emptyset -ACs and *se*-ACs: the presence of *se* suggests a syntactic extra-

- (8) a. Il vit le mouchoir *(se) rougir. (externally caused)
He saw the handkerchief (SE) redden.
 b. Jeanne (*se) rougit. (internally caused)
Jeanne (SE) reddened/blushed.

This claim raises the following problems. First, if the presence/absence of morphology has semantic effects in class C, the relevant semantic properties should also hold in class A and class B, respectively. This prediction holds at least in frameworks where the different morphology is directly correlated with different syntactic structures, which, in turn, are correlated with different event semantics, e.g. Labelle 1992, Labelle & Doron 2010, Doron & Labelle 2011 (it does not hold in the system proposed by Legendre & Smolensky 2009). However, as acknowledged by Rothemberg 1974 herself and later emphasized by Zribi-Hertz 1987, there is no systematic correlation between the presence/absence of the reflexive morphology and the type of causation expressed: verbs of class B can express internally caused events, cf. (9), and verbs of class A can express externally caused events, cf. (10).

- (9) a. L'univers s'agrandit. b. Le temps s'améliore.
The universe SE is getting bigger. The weather SE is getting better.
 (10) a. Le bâtiment explose. b. Le poulet cuit.
The building \emptyset is exploding. The chicken \emptyset is cooking.

The second problem for Claim 1 is that only verbs of class C (incl. *rougir*) with *animate subjects* are problematic as *se-AC*, cp. (11a-b). Moreover, these examples with animate subjects are in fact problematic *irrespective of the type of causation involved*; for instance, (12a-d), if acceptable, would express internally caused events, but (12e) would clearly denote an externally caused event. A related observation was already made by Zribi-Hertz 1987, see (12d-e), although she does not relate it to the difference between animate vs. inanimate subjects.

- (11) a. Il vit le mouchoir se rougir.
He saw the handkerchief SE redden.
 b. #Jeanne se rougit.
Jeanne SE reddened/blushed.
 (12) a. #Pierre s'est vieilli. (OK as pure reflexive)
Pierre SE grew older.
 b. #Pierre s'est maigri.
Pierre SE thinned.
 c. #Marie s'est pâlie.
Marie SE turned pale.
 d. #Marie s'est beaucoup vieillie à cause de ce travail épuisant. (*id.*:39)
Marie SE aged a lot because of this exhausting work.
 e. #Les gens se rougissent sous l'effet de ces lunettes. (Zribi-Hertz 1987:45)
People SE redden under the effect of these glasses.

On the other hand, *inanimate DPs* are generally acceptable in the *se*-variant of class C verbs, irrespectively of internal/external causation (the examples in (13) are mostly taken from the internet and where checked with further informants):

- (13) a. Ses yeux se sont rougis à l'annonce de la victoire.
Her eyes SE are reddened at the announcement of the victory.
- b. Le vin est un produit qui vit, [...] se vieillit.
The wine is a product that lives, SE ages.
- c. La laine est ressortie de la casserole vert foncé mais s'est pâlie.
The wool came out dark green from the pot but SE turned pale.
- d. Le métal s'est rougi sous l'effet de la chaleur. (Zribi-Hertz 1987:45)
The metal SE reddened under the effect of the warmth.
- d. [II] lance une campagne montrant une jeune femme qui fume (trop)
tranquillement une cigarette, et à mesure de ses bouffées, sa peau se vieillit.
*[he] launches a spot showing a young girl which is smoking a cigarette (too)
quietly, and with her puffs, her skin SE is aging.*

Note that (14a-b) below show that the COS in (13a, b) is conceived as internally caused, since the verb+object combinations at hand do not transitivize. Nevertheless, the reflexive construal is totally acceptable in (13a-b), in contradiction with Claim 1 according to which *se* is used only for externally caused eventualities. By contrast, verbs of class B (e.g. *s'amaigrir*) have the AC-reading with *se* even with animate subjects (cp. 15 with 12b).

- (14) a. *L'annonce de la victoire a rougi ses yeux.
The announcement of victory has reddened her eyes.
- b. *Le producteur/stockage a vieilli le vin.
The producer/storing aged the wine.
- (15) Marie s'est amaigrie/??a amaigri. (class B)
Marie SE is a-thinned/∅ a-thinned.

A third problem for Claim 1 is that when the COS is conceived as externally caused according to the transitivization test, the ∅-AC of class C verbs is not systematically ungrammatical. For us, (8a) repeated below is perfect without *se*, and we find examples such as in (16) in corpora (again also accepted by our informants).

- (8) a.' Il vit le mouchoir rougir. (pace Labelle 1992)
He saw the handkerchief ∅ redden.
- (16) a. [Son] cou a rougi au soleil.
Her neck ∅ reddened from the sun.
- b. La peinture a noirci sous l'effet de la fumée des bougies.
The painting ∅ blackened under the effect of the candles' smoke.

A fourth problem for Claim 1 is that it contradicts the intuition conveyed by traditional grammars. Indeed, *se*-ACs are often said there to underline some responsibility of the subject for the COS to evolve (authors cited by Zribi-Hertz 1987:24). For instance, Vendryes 1948 claims that the reflexive clitic marks “la participation du sujet au procès” [the participation of the subject to the process], Grevisse 1969 suggests that *se* “met en relief l'activité personnelle du sujet”, marks “un intérêt particulier de ce sujet dans l'action” [it focuses on the personal activity of the subject, marks a particular interest of this subject in this action], and Gougenheim assumes that *se* indicates that the subject “a contribué pour une part si

minime soit-elle à l'action subie" [contributed even for a very minimal part to the endured action]. We backed up this intuition with a small experiment: 8 native speakers were asked to pick among the *se*-AC and \emptyset -AC of two verbs of class C the one which attributes more responsibility/agentivity to the (inanimate) subject. They all chose the *se*-AC in (17) and (18):

- (17) a. La rose a flétri.
The rose \emptyset faded. b. La rose s'est flétrie.
The rose SE faded.
- (18) a. Le métal a rouillé.
The metal \emptyset rusted. b. Le métal s'est rouillé.
The metal SE rusted.

Note that these verbs can, in principle, be used transitively with a causer subject (so they are really anticausatives, not unergatives or pure unaccusatives), cf. (19).

- (19) a. Le gel a flétri les rameaux.
The frost faded the branches. b. L'humidité a rouillé le métal.
The humidity rusted the metal.

A fifth problem for Labelle's line of argumentation in favour of Claim 1 concerns the examples (20) below, which, so goes the claim, suggest an internal/external causation contrast. For our informants however, the examples in (20) do not show any tangible difference in grammaticality.

- (20) a. Après l'extraction du nerf, les dents noircissent.
b. *Après l'extraction du nerf, les dents se noircissent. (good for us)
After the extraction of the nerve, the teeth blacken.
c. Les murs près de la cheminée se noircissent.
d. ?Les murs près de la cheminée noircissent. (good for us)
The walls near the chimney are becoming black.

Other examples where Labelle 1992 identifies a meaning difference involve a contrast between bare verbs and a prefixed counterpart, cf. (21)-(22). We think that the slight meaning differences in these examples result from meaning differences between *grandir/agrandir* (the latter restricted to spatial/physical contexts), not from the class A vs. class B membership of the two verbs.

- (21) a. Les entreprises grandissent.
b. Les entreprises s'agrandissent.
The companies are getting bigger.
- (22) a. La plage d'ombre a grandi.
b. La plage d'ombre s'est agrandie.
The shadow spot got bigger.

Our interim conclusions are as follows. First, the claim that *se*-ACs are externally caused while \emptyset -ACs are internally caused cannot be upheld as it meets numerous counterexamples, cf. also Zribi-Hertz 1987. Second, anticausatives of class C (optional verbs) have to be realized as \emptyset -ACs if their DP is +human. However, this holds even if the verb expresses an externally caused event. Third, for verbs of Class C, speakers ascribe more responsibility for the COS to the DP in the *se*-variant than in the \emptyset -variant.

2.1 An alternative explanation: A pragmatic account

As just emphasized, there remain two robust differences between *se*-ACs and \emptyset -ACs, but they emerge only with ACs of class C: (i) Human DPs are out in *se*-ACs (difference A); (ii) If forced to choose the structure that ascribes more responsibility to the DP, speakers prefer the *se*-variant over the \emptyset -variant (difference B). We account for these both differences through a competition-driven pragmatic explanation.

2.1.1 Explaining difference A

Our account of difference A rests on three observations. The **first** one is that reflexively marked strings are ambiguous between a number of semantic argument structures. They can correspond to (i) a semantically reflexive verb, (ii) an anticausative and (iii) a reflexive passive or generic middle. Concentrating on the first two readings, a reflexively marked string could originate either from structure III or structure IV below:

- I. Causative:
 - a. [_{VoiceP} DP_{nom} Voice_{active} [_{VP} v [_{resultP} DP_{acc} result]]]
 - b. $\lambda x \lambda y \lambda e$ (agent/causer(e, y) & CAUSE(e, s) & theme(s, y))
 - c. DP_{NOM} verb DP_{ACC}
- II. \emptyset -ACs:
 - a. [_{VP} v [_{resultP} DP_{nom} result]]
 - b. $\lambda y \lambda e$ (CAUSE(e, s) & theme(s, y))
 - c. DP_{NOM} verb
- III. *se*-ACs:
 - a. [_{VoiceP} *se* Voice_{expletive} [_{VP} v [_{resultP} DP_{nom} result]]]
 - b. $\lambda y \lambda e$ (CAUSE(e, s) & theme(s, y))
 - c. DP_{NOM} *se*-verb
- IV. Reflexive:
 - a. [_{VoiceP} DP_{nom} Voice_{active} [_{VP} v [_{resultP} *se* result]]]
 - b. $\lambda x \lambda y \lambda e$ (agent/causer(e, y) & CAUSE(e, s) & theme(s, y) & (x=y))
 - c. DP_{NOM} *se*-verb

In sum, the structures III and IV differ syntactically and semantically, but do *not* differ in their morpho-phonology (i.e. surface string).

The **second** relevant observation is that for some interpretations, the morphological form is fixed by the grammar (i.e. lexicon or syntax), whereas for others there is optionality:

- a) Reflexive semantics have to be expressed with the syntax in IV.
- b) Anticausative verbs of class A are lexically restricted to enter structure II.
- c) Anticausative verbs of class B are lexically restricted to enter structure III.
- d) Anticausatives of class C are compatible with both structure II and structure III.

With verbs of class A, an ambiguity between a reflexive and an anticausative interpretation will never arise. On the other hand, anticausative verbs of class B are at the surface ambiguous as their morpho-phonology could also convey the reflexive structure in IV. So here, grammar does not make disambiguation available. Finally, for anticausative verbs of class C, Structure II does not lead to ambiguity (only anticausative), while Structure III leads to an ambiguity of the surface string (anticausative or reflexive). In that latter case, grammar makes disambiguation available.

The **third** relevant observation is that semantically reflexive construals are overwhelmingly found with human agents acting on themselves but not with non-human causers acting on themselves.¹ Anticausatives, on the other hand, typically express a change of state and are overwhelmingly found with non-human DPs. As a consequence, Structure III leads to a salient ambiguity or alternative parse only if the DP is +human.

Alltogether, these three observations allow us to account for difference A with the help of the Gricean Maxim *Avoid ambiguity (if possible)!* (Grice 1989). The reasoning goes as follows: *if the full DP has agent properties (+human), the [∅-ACs] is preferred over the [se-ACs] to avoid that the hearer arrives wrongly at a reflexive interpretation.* If we do not find a similar effect with verbs of class B, it is because those *lexically enforce* the presence of *se*: the speaker has therefore no choice between several structures. Note that related competition effects have been observed to hold between semantically reflexive construals and *se*-passives. For instance, Zribi-Hertz 1982:361 observes that the *se*-passive is acceptable with an animate DP only if the verb involved is not a so-called 'naturally reflexive verb'. Obviously, the logic behind these facts is of the same kind here, namely to avoid that the hearer arrives at a pragmatically favored but wrong interpretation.

2.1.2 Explaining difference B

Remember difference B between marked and unmarked anticausatives: if forced to choose the structure that ascribes more responsibility to the DP, speakers prefer the *se*-variant over the ∅-variant. We can easily explain it as follows:

- (i) Responsible arguments are agents or causers.
- (ii) Agents/Causers map to the external argument position.
- (iii) *se*-ACs are formally ambiguous between an anticausative and a reflexive structure.
- (iv) ∅-ACs are not ambiguous
- (v) only reflexive structures involve an external argument position which could host a responsible DP (agent/causers)

That is, only the *se*-ACs string is compatible with an alternative derivation where the DP could be an external argument, i.e. responsible.

2.2 Further arguments for claim 1

In section 2.3, we exposed a first set of arguments in favour of Claim 1, showed the empirical problems they raise and provided an alternative pragmatic account of the remaining facts. The following subsections deal with additional arguments in favour of Claim 1 (external vs. internal causation) provided by Labelle 1992 and DL, and show that they are not decisive either.

2.2.1. Mettre à

As a further argument for Claim 1, Labelle 1992 and DL present the fact that *se*-ACs (both from class B and C) are excluded from the construction *mettre x à P*, cf. (24), an observation originally due to Zribi-Hertz 1987.

- (23) Le sucre (se) caramélise.
The sugar (SE) is caramelizing.

- (24) Il a mis le sucre à (*se) caraméliser.
He has put the sugar to (SE) caramelize.

According to DL, this construction describes "*the fact of creating the appropriate conditions for an autonomous [i.e. internally caused] process to take place*". Given Claim 1, *se*-ACs are predicted to be excluded from the structure, because they denote *externally* caused (i.e. non-autonomous) events. However, this argumentation misses several empirical facts, which make the above semantic characterization of *mettre à* unfeasible. First, transitive verbs are sometimes embeddable under *mettre à*, cf. (25a) and (26). The COS expressed by these transitive verbs is not conceivable as autonomous: *laver* does not form an anticausative, cf. (25b); *raccourcir* does, but the COS in (26a) is clearly conceived as external caused given the context. The acceptability of (25a) and (26a) therefore raise a first difficulty for the hypothesis that *mettre à* requires the embedded verb to express an autonomous COS.

- (25) a. Il a mis le pantalon à laver.
He put the trousers to wash.
b. *Le pantalon a lavé.
The trousers washed.
- (26) a. Il a mis le pantalon à raccourcir chez le tailleur.
He put the trousers to shorten at the tailor.
b. Le pantalon a raccourci.
The trousers shortened.

Second, clearly internally caused COS verbs are sometimes *not* acceptable under *mettre à*, cf. (27a). (Note that one can imagine 'appropriate conditions for flowers to blossom'). Third, verbs of class B can enter the construction if the reflexive is dropped, cf. (28).

- (27) a. *Il a mis les roses à fleurir/ le pain à pourrir.
He put the roses to blossom/ the bread to rotten.
b. Il a mis la pâte à lever.
He put the dough to rise.
- (28) a. Il a mis le fichier à convertir.
He put the file to convert.
b. Le fichier *(se) convertit.
The file (SE) is converting.

In conclusion, while DL are right to claim that there are clearly lexical-semantic restrictions on the verbs that can be embedded under 'mettre à', these are neither captured by the distinction between internal vs. external causation nor by the morphology an AC takes.

2.2.2. The distribution of *de*-PPs

The second additional argument that Labelle 1992 and DL offer in favour of Claim 1 rests on the distribution of *de*-PPs with anticausatives. Zribi-Hertz 1987 observes after Boons *et al.* 1976 that in presence of a certain *de*-PP, verbs of class C can sometimes *only* form *se*-ACs, cf. (29a-b). Labelle 1992 compares (29) where the \emptyset -version of optional verbs reject a *de*-PP with cases where it accepts it, cf. (30).

- (29) a. Le ballon gonfle (*de gaz carbonique).
The ball \emptyset is inflating (with carbon dioxide).
b. Le ballon se gonfle (de gaz carbonique).
The ball SE is inflating (with carbon dioxide).
- (30) Marie a rougi de honte.
Marie \emptyset blushed from shame.

Labelle sees the paradigm illustrated in (29)-(30) as a further confirmation of Claim 1. Her reasoning can roughly be reconstructed as follows:

- (i) \emptyset -ACs denote autonomous processes (Claim 1)
(ii) Given Claim 1, the subject of \emptyset -ACs must be conceived as the main Actor (the Responsible entity) of the event *e*.
(iii) Distinction between Causing entity and Responsible entity:
the *de*-PP is acceptable in \emptyset -ACs as soon as the entity it denotes is a mere Cause of *e*, but does not have the responsibility in *e*.
(iv) the *de*-PP expresses a mere Cause in (30), but the responsible entity in (29a), hence the contrast.

This line of argumentation raises two difficulties. First, Labelle offers no clear independent ground for the distinction between *causing* and *responsible* entities. Second, the \emptyset -form of *gonfler* intransitive is acceptable with *avec*-PPs, whose argument arguably plays the very same role in the event as the problematic *de*-PP in (29a), cf. (31)-(33), all taken from the internet.

- (31) Il a gonflé avec de l'Hélium!
It \emptyset inflated with helium.
- (32) Le [volcan] Tharsis a gonflé avec du magma au cours des premiers milliards d'années de la planète.
The volcano Tharsis \emptyset inflated with magma in the first billions of years of the planet.
- (33) L'oeil [...] a gonflé avec du sang qui est entré dedans.
The eye \emptyset inflated with blood which entered in it.

So whatever is the constraint explaining the ban on *de*-PPs with some \emptyset -ACs like *gonfler* in (29a), it cannot be due to the fact that the denoted entity is conceived as responsible of the event, since the licensed *avec*-PP has arguably the same thematic role.

Note that *enfler*, another translation of *inflate*, does not take a *de*-PP, even with the reflexive morphology, cf. (34). This suggests that the constraint on the *de*-PP is not purely of a conceptual nature.

- (34) Le ballon (s')enfle (*de gaz carbonique).
The balloon (SE) inflated with carbon dioxide.

We are unsure whether the (non-)availability of *de*-phrases is totally idiosyncratic (verb specific) or whether there are generalizations to be made. In any case, the explanation building on the contrast 'responsible entity' vs. 'causer' does not seem to accurately account for the empirical picture.

3 Alleged meaning difference 2: Aspectual differences

As mentioned in the introduction, \emptyset -ACs and *se*-ACs have also been claimed to show *aspectual* differences. According to Labelle 1992 and DL, \emptyset -ACs focus on the *process*, whereas *se*-ACs focus on the *final state* of the COS (what we called claim 2 above). LD explain these alleged aspectual contrasts through a difference in the syntactic structure of each form. Very briefly, in the \emptyset -AC, the two verbal projections *v* and *V* are supposed to be present; *v* introduces an activity subevent, and *V* a change leading to a state. The verbal root merges with *v*, hence the focus on the process. On the other hand, in the *se*-AC, only *V* is present and thus no process subevent is introduced. The verbal root therefore has to merge with *V*, hence the focus on the result state.

One immediate problem for an analysis along this line is that there is no indication/empirical argument that the two ACs differ in event complexity (e.g. the number of readings with adverbs like ‘again’ seems to be identical). In fact, traditional event decomposition tests, like the interpretation of negation or the French construals corresponding to *almost* and *again*, force to conclude that the two constructions have the same event decomposition (we illustrate this for class C, but the point holds for class A and class B, too):

- (35) a. La branche a failli casser.
The branch almost broke.
(i) counterfactual reading (nothing happened to the branch)
(ii) scalar reading (something happened to the branch but it was not broken at the end)
- b. La branche a failli se casser.
The branch almost SE broke.
(i) counterfactual reading
(ii) scalar reading
- (36) a. La soupe a re-refroidi.
The soup has again cooled down.
(i) repetitive reading (two cooling down events)
(ii) restitutive reading (two states of being cool)
- b. La soupe s’est re-refroidie.
(i) repetitive reading
(ii) restitutive reading

Moreover, as we show in detail through sections 3.1 to 3.4 below, the empirical arguments in favour of Claim 2 are not convincing (*pace* Legendre & Smolensky 2009, who also argue for an aspectual difference between marked and unmarked AC, but only within class C verbs).

3.1 The distribution of *in* and *for* adverbials

According to Labelle 1992:398, *for*-phrases are acceptable only with \emptyset -ACs, because they denote a process and no state, cf. (37a). Since *se*-ACs focus on the result state, they are more natural with *in*-adverbials, cf. (37b).

- (37) a. Le ciment a/*?s’est durci pendant 3 heures. (judgments of Labelle 1992:398)

- The cement ∅/SE hardened for 3 hours.*
b. Le ciment a/s'est durci en 3 heures. (*ibid.*)
The cement ∅/SE hardened in 3 hours.

According to our judgements however, the empirical claim illustrated in (37a) does not hold. For us (37a) is acceptable with both ACs, and further examples where the reflexive variant of class C verbs combines with *for*-adverbials can be found in corpora and are accepted by our informants, cf. e.g. (38a-e).

- (38) a. Le temps s'est radouci pendant 3 ou 4 jours.
The weather softened for 3 or 4 days.
b. J'ai eu le ventre qui s'est durci pendant quelques secondes mais rien de douloureux.
My belly SE hardened for some seconds but nothing painful.
c. un carnet d' adresses qui s'est épaissi pendant trente-cinq ans est précieux.
An address book that SE thickened for thirty five years is very useful.
d. L'afflux d'émigrants s'est ralenti pendant quarante ans.
The immigrants flood SE got slower for forty years.
e. Tel petit in-18, in-12, ou même in-32, qui s'est noirci pendant vingt années à l'étalage d'un bouquiniste, sur le quai Voltaire ou sur le pont de la Cité, renferme dans ses maigres flancs trois ou quatre pages échappées aux recherches des plus infatigables bibliophiles.
Such small in-18, in-12, or even in-32, which SE blackened for twenty years in the window of a second-hand bookseller, encloses in its thin sides three or four pages having escaped the hunting of the most tireless book lovers.

Besides this first difficulty, we note that the alleged contrast in (37a,b) does also not manifest itself in class A or class B. Indeed, we find \emptyset -ACs of class A licensing *in*-adverbials as well as *se*-ACs of class B licensing *for*-adverbials, cf. (39).

- (39) a. *Le T-Shirt a séché en deux minutes.*
The T-Shirt ∅ dried in two minutes.
b. Son état s'est amélioré pendant plusieurs mois, les médecins s'occupant de lui parlant de véritables miracles.
His state SE got better for several months, the doctors taking care of him were speaking of true miracles.

The second argument Labelle 1992 offers in favour of Claim 2 is that verbs of class A, which normally enter the unmarked construction only, sometimes can form *se*-ACs (that is shift to class C), but only in perfective sentences and in presence of *in*-adverbials, so that the focus is put on the result. Her hypothesis is that in that case, the perfective morphology and the *in*-adverbial have a licensing role on the use of the *se*-construction, cf. (40) (all judgments taken from Labelle 1992). This *prima facie* supports the view that *se*-ACs focus on the result state.

- (40) a. Le poulet s'est cuit en très exactement 30 minutes. (Zribi-Hertz 1987:344)
The chicken cooked in exactly 30 minutes.
b. *Le poulet se cuisait. (OK as passive)

- c. *Le poulet s'est cuit pendant trois heures.

According to our intuition however, *cuire* is **not** shifted to class C in (40) --- with the reflexive, it strongly tends to be interpreted as a passive. One piece of evidence for this is provided by the interpretation of *tout seul* 'by itself'. Under the most natural interpretation of (41b), *tout seul* gets with *se cuire* the reading it gets with *se-passives*:

- (41) a. La branche s'est cassée toute seule.
The branch SE broke by itself.
Reading (i): no entity caused the breaking of the branch (anticausative)
Reading (ii): it was very easy to break the branch (passive)
- b. Le poulet s'est cuit tout seul.
The chicken SE cooked by itself.
#Reading (i): no entity caused the cooking of the chicken (anticausative)
Reading (ii): it was very easy to cook the chicken (passive)

For us, (40b) and (40c) are in fact acceptable once the passive interpretation is made salient in the context. We think that if this passive interpretation is more accessible out of the blue with a *en*-adverbial (cf. (40a) than with a *for*-adverbial (cf. (40c), it is because the telic interpretation triggered by *en*-adverbials is very easily associated with an *intentional* interpretation. This in turns makes the interpretation of the implicit argument that goes with the passive reading more salient.

As a further argument for our reanalysis of Labelle's data, we observe that causer-PPs are acceptable with the \emptyset -version but are quite degraded under the *se*-marking; this follows if *se-passives* have an agentivity restriction on the implicit argument.

- (42) a. L'oeuf a cuit sous l'effet de la chaleur.
The egg cooked under the effect of the warmth.
- b. ??L'oeuf s'est cuit sous l'effet de la chaleur. (cf. also Kupferman 2009)
The egg cooked under the effect of the warmth.

3.2 The argument of *muer*

The second set of arguments in favour of Claim 2 offered by Labelle 1992 and DL bears on the verb *muer*, which, so the claim, forms a *se-AC* only in presence of a resultative *en-PP* (43a), while it forms a \emptyset -AC only without it, cf. (43b). DL argue that since the *se-AC* focuses on a result state, an explicit description of this state is needed in (43a), and since the \emptyset -AC focuses on the process, the state is de-emphasized. This is supposed to make an explicit state description impossible.

- (43) a. L'oiseau s'est mué *(en un monstre à trois têtes).
The bird SE changed (in a monster with three heads).
- b. L'oiseau a mué *(en un monstre à trois têtes).
The bird \emptyset moulted (in a monster with three heads).

Again, we do not think that the paradigm of *muer* supports Claim 2. To begin with, we do not agree with the judgment in (43b); cf. also the following examples (44), all found on the internet.

- (44) a. Jadis réputé pour sa formule café et dessert, le [restaurant] Lézard a mué en un hybride
Formerly known for his cafe and dessert formula, he restaurant Lézard \emptyset changed in a hybrid.
- b. Il a mué en un bon groupe de rock.
It \emptyset changed in a good rockband.
- c. La voix a mué en un croassement démoniaque.
The voice \emptyset changed in a demonic cawing.

We propose the following alternative analysis for the remaining accurate data (43a). On one hand, *muer* **with** *en*-PP (*muer en*) is an AC of class C (or alternatively of class A for speakers rejecting (43b) with the *en*-PP and examples in (44)). On the other hand, *muer* **without** *en*-PP is an unergative verb (cf. also Zribi-Hertz 1987). We see three arguments in favour of the hypothesis that the intransitive *muer* is lexically ambiguous (between an anticausative and an unergative construal). First, only *muer en* can be transitivized, cf. (45). Second, only *muer en* allows an adjectival passive, cf. (46). Third, *muer* with or without *en*-PP is lexicalized differently in other languages (e.g. *transform into* vs. *molt* (**into*)) and the same meaning difference holds in French examples in (45a, b).

- (45) a. Pierre a mué sa voix *(en un croassement démoniaque).
Pierre changed his voice in a demonic cawing.
- b. *Le virus a mué l'oiseau. (Zribi-Hertz 1987:40)
The virus moulted the bird.
- c. Le virus a mué l'oiseau en un monstre à trois têtes. (*ibid.*)
The virus transformed the bird in a monster with three heads.
- (46) a. *L'oiseau est mué. (Zribi-Hertz 1987:42)
The bird is moulted.
- b. L'oiseau est mué en un monstre à trois têtes. (*ibid.*)
The bird is transformed in a monster with three heads

3.3 The argument of the restriction on metaphorical uses

A third kind of arguments in favour of Claim 2 rests on the restriction on the metaphorical uses of anticausatives. Lagane 1967 and Ruwet 1972 observed that sometimes, with verbs of class C, the *se*-AC is blocked when the verb is used in a metaphorical way, cf. (47)-(49).

- (47) a. La sauce s'épaissit.
The sauce is thickening up.
- b. La nuit *(s')épaissit.
The night is deepening.
- (48) a. La plante (se) tasse.
The plant is packing down.
- b. Le problème *(se) tasse.
The problem is packing down.
- (49) a. La sauce (se) réduit.
The sauce is reducing.
- b. Le problème *(se) réduit.
The problem is reducing.

Labelle 1992:393 proposes to see in these facts another confirmation of Claim 2: the metaphorical transfer does not operate on the process, but only on the state. That is, under the figurative reading, the

abstract entity is not “presented as undergoing a physical process of [...] thickening up; they are rather presented as being in a state which [...] can be described as [...] more thick”.

Apart from the fact that it is not completely clear why metaphorical uses should involve a focus on the result state rather than on the process, we do not think that there is a true generalization here. First, we observe that with other verbs, the metaphorical use enters the unmarked construction, cf. (50), again taken from corpora. Second, in some cases, the zero-AC is marked *on the literal use*, rather than on the metaphorical one, cf. (51).

- (50) a. Le progrès ralentit.
The progress is getting slower.
b. Lorsqu'ils sont entourés de béni oui-oui, leur esprit ramollit.
When they are surrounded by yes-men, their spirit gets softer
c. A la fin l'argent a tari et le commerce a fini.
At the end money dried up and business stopped.
- (51) a. ?Mon livre épaissit.
My book is thickening.
b. ?Mes fichiers épaississent.
My files are thickening.

4 Conclusions

In this paper, we contested previous analyses according to which \emptyset -ACs and *se*-ACs systematically differ in meaning, on the basis of new data, mostly found in corpora. We argued that French \emptyset -ACs and *se*-ACs *do not show* systematic meaning differences wrt focusing on subevents and internal vs. external causation. This supports our claim that the presence vs. absence of *se* should not be associated with fundamentally different syntactic structures predicting such semantic differences. Finally, we showed that the true remaining meaning differences accurately noticed by Labelle 1992 and DL are either restricted to class C verbs and follow from pragmatic considerations, or are idiosyncratic to individual verbs.

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¹ Non-human DPs can be put in a semantically reflexive construal, but then the reflexive relation must be marked via the addition of an intensifier. So in order e.g. to translate *the branch broke itself*, the intensifier is needed in French, cf. *la branche s'est cassée elle-même*. Without intensifier (e.g. *la branche s'est cassée*), only the anticausative reading is available, see Schäfer & Vivanco 2013. In fact, these authors claim that in anticausative structures, the intensifier is even not allowed, so that non-human DPs with verbs of class C never lead to an ambiguity. As a consequence, the claim by Koontz-Garboden 2009 (who follows a proposal by Chierchia 2004) that anticausatives marked with a SE-reflexive are semantically reflexive although their nominative DP is non-human cannot be upheld. This hypothesis has been convincingly refuted by Horvath & Siloni 2011, 2013 and Schäfer & Vivanco 2013.