

What causes the alternation of agentive verbs in Brazilian Portuguese?

Janayna Carvalho (Universidade de São Paulo/Universität Stuttgart)

i. The phenomenon: It has been noted that agentive verbs, i.e. verbs that would not be expected to undergo the causative alternation, according to Levin & Rappaport Hovav (1995), participate in a causative-like alternation in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). (Cyrino 2007/2013; Negrão & Viotti 2008/2010) (1) and (2) exemplify the unaccusative counterpart of this agentive alternation (AA).

1. Essa calça não arrumou mais.

Lit.: This pants not fixed more. 'These pants did not get fixed anymore.'

2. Essa casa construiu no começo do século. (Pacheco 2008, adapted)

Lit.: This house built in the beginning of the century.

'This house was built in the beginning of the century.'

ii. Claim: In this paper, I argue that the AA is a byproduct of the loss of the clitic *se* that occupies the position of an external argument in VoiceP (Schäfer 2008) and gets an arbitrary human reading in middles (Lekakou 2005). I show that this alternation is different from the causative alternation and the verbs that participate in the AA share characteristics with BP unmarked middles. Importantly, in spite of the loss of voice morphology, BP unmarked middles project unaccusative syntax. As a result, there is no difference between middles and anticausatives in BP and verbs previously only licensed in middles were generalized as alternating verbs.

iii. Is this a causative alternation? There is no covert agent of any type in the unaccusative variants of the AA. They do not license purpose clauses, by-phrases or agent-oriented expressions. See the test for the verb *construir* (build) in (3).

3. Essa casa construiu *para valorizar a região/*voluntariamente/*pelo João.

This house built *to valorize the region/ *voluntarily/*by John.

'This house got built *to valorize the region/*voluntarily/*by John.'

Furthermore, several tests demonstrate that (1) and (2) differ from sentences that undergo causative alternation. **First**, the transitive variant of the AA can only have an agentive external argument, as (4) and (5) show. This is one important point of contrast with verbs that undergo the causative alternation (6). According to Levin & Rappaport Hovav (1995), and Reinhart (1992), only verbs that allow all types of external arguments can participate in the causative alternation.

4. ✓João/#O vento/ não arrumou essa calça. 5. ✓O pedreiro/ #O vento/ construiu essa casa.

John/ #The wind/ not fixed this pants The bricklayer/ #The wind/ built this house.

6. ✓João/✓O vento/ quebrou a janela.

John/The wind/ broke the window.

Second, as expected, the unaccusative variant of the AA accepts PPs introducing agents, not causes (see 7 for the verb to arrumar (*fix*)). Verbs that participate in the causative alternation accept PPs introducing causes, not agents (8). *Com o João* in (8) is licensed if it is interpreted as an instrument.

7. Essa calça arrumou com um bom costureiro/*com o vento.

This pants fixed with a good sewer/*with the wind.

'These pants got fixed with a good sewer/*with the wind.'

8. A janela quebrou *com o João/com o vento.

The window broke*with the John/with the wind. 'The window broke from the wind/*from John'

Third, the unaccusative variant of the AA does not have a result state component, contrasting again with the verbs that undergo the causative alternation: **i.** adjectival passives are ungrammatical or ill-formed with these verbs, contrasting with the well-formedness of adjectival passives with *quebrar* (break). (compare the data in (9)); **ii.** These verbs do not have a restitutive reading with *again*. In (10), the whole action of *arrumar* (*fix*) and *construir* (*built*)

took place again. However, with *quebrar* (*break*) either the whole action took place again (repetitive) or the object is restituted to a previous state (*the state 'opened window' is restituted*).

9. Essa calça ficou *arrumada/ Essa casa ficou *construída/ A janela ficou ✓quebrada.

*This pant got fixed/ *This house got built/ The window got broken.

‘These pants got fixed/This house got built/ The window got broken.’

10. A calça arrumou/A casa construiu/ A janela quebrou/ de novo.

The paint fixed/The house built/The window broke/ again.

‘These paints got fixed/ The house got built/ The window broke/again.’

All these tests indicate that the agentive verbs that alternate have a different syntax from verbs that normally undergo causative alternation. More specifically, the latter have a result component as the test with the readings of ‘*de novo*’ (*again*) demonstrates, and as a result they are bi-eventive. Agentive verbs are monoeventive.

iv. The AA and middles: As sentences (1) and (2) are in the perfective aspect, they cannot be interpreted as middles. Nevertheless, the verbs that participate in the AA alternation share similarities with unmarked middle constructions (e.g. English and Dutch). This type of middle sentences and the AA pattern alike in terms of selection. Stative verbs are not licensed ((11) is not licensed in the AA; (12) is not licensed as a middle sentence) and some agentive verbs that would in principle be eligible for AA and middles are out ((13) and (14)).

11. *Matemática soube. 12. *Matemática sabe fácil.

*Math knew *Math knows easy. *Math knows easily’

13. *João assassinou. 14. *Pessoas assassinam fácil. (*middle, ✓object drop)

*John assassinated. *People assassinate easy *People assassinate easily.’

However, differently from unmarked middle constructions that are said to project a unergative syntax (Ackema and Schoorlommer (1995)), BP middles are built on unaccusative syntax.

The choice of a transitive verb (*raise*) rather than its unaccusative counterpart (*rise*) demonstrate the unergative syntax of English middles.

15. Obedient daughters raise/*rise more easily than disobedient sons. (Lekakou 2005)

16. Peruca cai/*derruba fácil.

Wig fall/*make.fall easy ‘Wigs fall easily’

What we can conclude from this is that BP middles share characteristics with both type I middles such as the selection of the verbs, and type II middles, morphologically marked middles, which project unaccusativity syntax.

v. Analysis: The crucial difference that tells apart middles and anticausatives in languages in which both eventualities have an unaccusative structure is that the arbitrary human reading is attributed to voice morphology in the presence of a generic operator in middles (see Lekakou 2005). Voice morphology in BP is in a process of disappearance, yet the language has maintained an unaccusative syntax for middles. Without the clitic *se* and with the maintenance of the unaccusativity syntax for middles, there is no element to receive the arbitrary human reading. Therefore, depending on what is inserted in the numeration, these verbs can either get a middle interpretation or an anticausative-like one. Crucially, in languages where middles and anticausatives have different structures (e.g. English) or in which the arbitrary human reading is attributed to voice morphology (e.g. French), there is a structural separation between the two eventualities and monoeventive verbs do not alternate.

English	Middles [VoicePDP ₁ [VP V _{tl}]]	Anticausative [vP[V DP]]
French	Middles [VoiceP <i>se</i> (= <i>arb</i>)[VP V DP]]	Anticausative [VoiceP <i>se</i> [vP[V DP]]]
BP	Middle/unaccusative syntax - [vP [V DP]]	

Selected References: Cyrino, S. (2013). Argument promotion and SE-constructions in Brazilian Portuguese. *The Naples-Capri Papers*. Lekakou, M. (2005). *In the middle, somewhat elevated*. PhD Dissertation. Levin, B., & Hovav, M. R. (1995). *Unaccusativity*. MIT Press. Negrão, E. V., & Viotti, E. (2008). *Estratégias de impessoalização no português brasileiro*. Contexto. Schäfer, F. (2008). *The syntax of (anti-) causatives*. John Benjamins Publishing.