

The clitic *se* and inchoative constructions in Brazilian Portuguese: a replication of Lundquist et al.'s (2016) experiment

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In the well-known causative alternation, a verb appears either in a causative-transitive or in an inchoative-intransitive form. The inchoative form is marked with a reflexive pronoun in some languages, such as Norwegian (1), but unmarked in others, such as English (2). Contrasting marked (Norwegian) and unmarked (English) inchoatives, Lundquist et al. (2016) conducted an experiment in which participants were shown videos of caused events (e.g. a person breaking a window); each event had two versions: a causative (theme-focus) and an agentive (agent-focus) version. After each video, participants were given a Yes-No question built with the inchoative form of the verb used to describe the scene (e.g. *did the window break?*) – marked in Norwegian and unmarked in English. Their results showed that English speakers say “Yes” regardless of agentivity, but Norwegian speakers say “Yes” only about half the time, with strong effects of marking and agentivity. The authors conclude that different versions of the inchoative structure differ morphosyntactically and semantically across languages, each language having its own pattern. However, Lundquist et al. (2016) do not consider the occurrence of marked and unmarked inchoatives with the same verb, in a single language. Such case occurs in Brazilian Portuguese (BP) (3), and raises the question of whether this type of language behaves like English or Norwegian. So, we conducted a replication of Lundquist et al.'s (2016) experiment with BP speakers, but instead of comparing two languages, we compared two forms of the same verb (marked or not with the reflexive clitic *se*). Our results (Tables 1 and 2) indicate that also within a single language there are effects of marking and agentivity. Unmarked inchoatives reached 90.8% of Yes-responses in the theme-focus context. Reflexive-marked inchoatives reached 72.1% of Yes-responses in the theme-focus context. Comparatively, unmarked inchoatives reached 67.8% of Yes-responses in the agent-focus context and reflexive-marked inchoatives reached 47.1% of Yes-responses in the theme-focus context. In constructional approaches, the causative alternation is an epiphenomenon which emerges when a single verb can be found in two argument structure constructions: transitive and inchoative (Croft 2012; Ruiz de Mendoza & Miró 2019). Assuming this perspective and considering the distinct form-meaning associations found in the experiments, we conclude that the so-called alternation involves, in fact, two different inchoative constructions, besides the transitive construction. Our results confirm the descriptions of Maldonado (2006), Cançado & Amaral (2010), Negrão & Viotti (2015), and Haspelmath (2016): the *se*-marked inchoative construction indicates a non-agentive energetic event, and the unmarked inchoative construction does not conceptualize a causer. Although our data brings evidence for BP, we believe that two inchoative constructions might also be available in other languages. Norwegian presents both marked and unmarked inchoatives, although both constructions are not possible for the same verb (Lundquist et al. 2016). Even in English reflexive-marked inchoatives can be found (Lakoff 1970: 38, Levin 1993: 84), as in (4). We believe that the experimental results presented here corroborate a constructional approach for the causative alternation, more specifically the idea that two inchoative constructions are available in individual languages.

- (1) a. Peter åpnet vinduet.
Peter opened window.DEF
'Peter opened the window.'
b. Vinduet åpnet seg.
window.DEF opened REFL
'The window opened.'
(Lundquist et al. 2016: 8)
- (2) a. John broke the stick (with a rock).
b. The stick broke.
(Fillmore 1970: 126)
- (3) a. O moço abriu a porta do carro.
the guy opened the door of.the car
'The guy opened the car door.'

- b. A porta do carro (se) abriu.
 the door of.the car REFL opened
 'The car door opened.'
 (Cançado, Amaral & Meirelles 2017)
- (4) a. "This mirror broke itself!"
 b. "It just kind of melted itself."
 c. "[...] as if the door opened itself on seeing the Honda key-chain dangling from your front pocket."
 COCA (the Corpus of Contemporary American English, Davies 2008-).

Table 1: Number of Yes-Responses per verb and context: 444 observations, 74 participants, 6 items.

Verb	Yes-responses in Unmarked/Agent-focus context	Yes-responses in Unmarked/Theme-focus context	Yes-responses in Marked/ Agent-focus context	Yes-responses in Marked/ Theme-focus context	Total number of Yes-responses per verb
<i>Abrir</i> 'open'	18	19	7	6	50
<i>Fechar</i> 'close'	13	20	5	15	53
<i>inclin</i> ar 'bent'	11	20	6	7	44
<i>Espalhar</i> 'scatter'	7	14	12	16	49
<i>Derreter</i> 'melt'	15	15	12	19	61
<i>Quebrar</i> 'break'	16	19	7	12	54

Table 2: Model coefficients (logit) for Yes-Responses: 444 observations, 74 participants, 6 items.

Fixed Effect	Estimate	SE	T value	p	Random effect	Variance
Intercept	0.68387	0.04883	14.006	< 0.001	Participant Intercept	0.04
Agent Focus (video)	0.22789	0.05579	4.084	< 0.001	Verb Intercept	0.005
Refl.Marked (question)	-0.21790	0.05794	-3.761	< 0.001		
Ag.Focus:Refl.Marked	0.02013	0.08151	0.247	0.694		

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