

FRENCH CAUSATIVES: THE REFLEXIVITY PUZZLE*

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1 The Puzzle

Romance analytical causatives have presented linguists with challenges for decades. One of them concerns the behavior of reflexive SE-verbs in *faire-infinitive* (FI) causatives in French. In these constructions, transitive and intransitive verbs are treated differently: when the embedded verb is transitive, its subject (i.e., the Causee) must be introduced via the dative-case marker *à*, (1a); by contrast, when it is intransitive, the lower subject must be accusative-marked, (1b).

- (1) a. Jean fera laver la voiture **(à) Pierre*.
John make.FUT wash.INF the car **(to) Peter.DAT*
'John will make Peter wash the car.' (transitive)
- b. Jean fera travailler/tomber *(*à) Pierre*.
John make.FUT work.INF/fall.INF *(*to) Peter.ACC*
'John will make Peter work.' (intransitive)

The puzzle arises from the observation that, when a verb embedded under *faire* causative is reflexive-marked with the clitic *se*, its subject surfaces as accusative-marked, i.e. without the preposition *à*, in a way parallel to intransitive verbs, (2a,b). Furthermore, unlike other clitics that climb up to the matrix *faire* verb, the clitic *se* must appear on the embedded verb, (2a-c).

- (2) a. Jean fera *se* laver *Pierre*.
John make.FUT SE wash.INF Peter.ACC
'John will make Peter wash.' (reflexive SE-verb)
- b. Jean *le* fera *se* laver.
John him.ACC_{CL} make.FUT SE wash.INF
'John will make him wash.'

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- c. Jean **la** **lui** fera laver.
 John it.ACC_{CL} him.DAT_{CL} make.FUT wash.INF
 ‘John will make him wash it.’

Following the traditional view originating in Kayne (1975), such differences have been interpreted as indicating that reflexive SE-verbs are intransitives (a.o., Bouchard, 1984, Marantz, 1984, Wehrli, 1986, Kayne, 1988, Grimshaw, 1990, Pesetsky, 1996, Sportiche, 1998, Chierchia, 2004, Reinhart and Siloni, 2005, Charnavel et al., 2009). Taking for granted the intransitivity of SE-verbs, most of the debate since then has centered around the question of what type of intransitivity would be at hands, without reaching any consensus so far.

In the first part of this paper, we start by showing that intransitivity approaches to SE-verbs are dead-ends. Contra the traditional view, we argue that some of the core syntactic and semantic properties of reflexive SE-verbs can only be captured if they are analyzed as transitives with the clitic *se* being subject to anaphoric binding. As a result, the reflexivity puzzle offered by FI-causatives still remains to be solved. In the second part, we offer an explanation as to why, without *being* intransitives, SE-verbs *behave like* intransitives with respect to case assignment in FI-causatives, and show how a bound pronoun analysis of *se* provides a natural rationale for the different positioning of non-reflexive and reflexive pronominal clitics in these constructions.

2 Reflexive SE-verbs are *not* intransitives!

In order to facilitate the discussion, we will formulate two ‘straw man’ theories of the kind we argue against. These theories are stated in (3).

- (3) a. The Valency-Reduction Theory (VR):
 The role of *se* is to reduce one of the verb’s lexical argument it cliticises on.
 b. The Case-Reduction Theory (CR):
 The role of *se* is to reduce a lexical case feature on the verb it cliticises on.

Under both theories, the reflexive clitic *se* is treated as part of the verb’s morphology and reflexive SE-verbs as syntactically intransitives. Following VR, *se* combines in the lexicon with a dyadic/transitive verb and reduces it to a monadic/intransitive verb (e.g., Wehrli, 1986, Grimshaw, 1982, Chierchia, 2004). Reflexivization is assumed to obtain either via the reduction operation itself (i.e., reduction applies under identification of two arguments) or indirectly via a meaning postulate associated with the reduction operation. This second option is sketched in (4), as elaborated in Chierchia (2004). In a nutshell, if a two-place relation R (e.g., $\text{wash}(\theta_i, \theta_j)$) is reflexive-marked in the lexicon, the resulting one-place predicate, i.e. R_{REFL} , will be interpreted as $\lambda x.[R(x, x)]$ via meaning postulate (e.g., $\text{wash}_{\text{REFL}}(x) \leftrightarrow (x \text{ wash } x)$).¹

- (4) Jean *se* lave. (‘John is washing’)
 Verb entry: $\text{lave}_{\text{TRANS}}$ [Agent] [Theme]
 Reduction: SE $\text{lave}_{\text{REFL}}$ [Agent] [~~Theme~~] (Valency Reduction)
 IP: [Jean]_[Agent] [VP SE $\text{lave}_{\text{REFL}}$]
 LF: $\exists e[\text{washing}'(e) \ \& \ \text{Agent}(e, \text{jean}) \ \& \ \text{Theme}(e, \text{jean})]$

¹A similar idea has been defended in Baauw and Delfitto (2005), according to whom the computational system does not allow valency reduction to take place neither in narrow syntax, nor in the course of the interpretation process. Under this view, predicates in French must be reduced in the lexicon.

Following CR, the role of *se* is solely to check a lexical case feature of the verb it cliticises on (Reinhart and Siloni, 2005). An example derivation is provided in (5). At the VP-level, the selection of *se* reduces the verb's ability, here *laver* (i.e., 'wash'), to check accusative case. Reflexivization obtains at the IP-level via an independent, bundling operation: upon the assignment of the external θ -role, the Theme role of the verb, which is still unassigned at this point, is bundled with the Agent role. Eventually, the 'Agent-Theme' bundle is interpreted as a distributive conjunction of θ -roles (e.g., [Agent-Theme](e, jean) \leftrightarrow (Agent(e, jean) & Theme(e, jean))).

- (5) Jean se lave. ('John is washing')
 Verb entry: lave_{TRANS} [Agent][Theme]
 VP: [SE lave θ_i -Agent, θ_j -Theme] (Case Reduction)
 IP: [Jean(θ_i , θ_j) [VP SE lave]]
 LF: $\exists e$ [washing'(e) & [Agent-Theme](e, jean)]

In the following, we provide two arguments, one syntactic and one semantic, against the VR- and CR-intransitivity views on reflexive SE-verbs. Firstly, it has been observed in recent years that the reflexive clitic *se* has the *displacement* property: it can cliticise on a verb distinct from the one that misses an argument, and therefore whose lexical case-feature need not be checked (see Labelle, 2008). This property is exemplified in (6) where *se* appears on the higher verb *laisser* ('let'), while the missing accusative complement associates with the lower verb *berner* ('deceive').

- (6) **Displacement Property** (Labelle, 2008:47)
 Les citoyens se sont tous très souvent laissés bêtement [berner __ par le maire].
 the citizens SE be.AUX all very often let.PP stupidly [deceive __ by the mayor]
 'The citizens very often let themselves all stupidly be deceived by the mayor.'

Secondly, the reflexive clitic *se* gives rise to ambiguity patterns comparable to these observed with pronouns: in the relevant environments, it can receive both a sloppy and a strict reading.² Consider for instance the example in (7), adapted from Sportiche (2010), where *se* appears in the scope of the focus particle *seulement/seul* ('only') which associates with the superficial subject.³

- (7) **Focus Association Operators**
 Au procès, seul Jean_F s'est bien défendu. ('At the trial, only John_F defended himself well.')
- a. John defended himself well; nobody else defended themselves well. (✓ sloppy)
 - b. John defended himself well; nobody else defended him well. (✓ strict)

²We notice that this second argument is also problematic for the Voice analysis of *se* developed in Labelle (2008). According to Labelle (2008), the reflexive *se* is base-generated as the head of a Voice Phrase (VoiceP): it introduces the external argument of the verb, combines with an open VP and identifies the external argument of the verb to the missing argument of the VP that it combines with, yielding a reflexive one-place predicate. Although this analysis correctly accounts for examples of (6), it does not predict the strict readings we are presenting in this section.

³We notice here that similar ambiguity patterns obtain with 'the only/sole NP', (i) from P. Schlenker (p.c.), as well as with other focus association operators such as *même* ('even'), (ii).

- (i) Jean est le seul étudiant qui se trouve intelligent.
 'John is the only student who finds himself to be smart.' (✓ sloppy; ✓ strict)
- (ii) Au procès, même Jean_F s'est bien défendu.
 'At the trial, even John_F defended himself well.' (✓ sloppy; ✓ strict)

In (7), the focus particle asserts that no contextually salient alternative to John satisfies the property denoted by its scope, i.e. *SE defended well*. Yet, as observed by Sportiche (2010), this property can receive two interpretations, i.e. (7a) vs. (7b), which are illustrated further in (8) by the two distinct ways in which the asserted content of this sentence can be denied felicitously; similar results obtain using Question-Answer congruence tests.

- (8) a. Non, Pierre aussi s'est bien défendu! ('No, Peter defended himself well too!')
 b. Non, Pierre aussi l'a bien défendu! ('No, Pierre defended him well too!')

This pattern of ambiguity is also found in FI-causatives:

- (9) À des fins stratégiques, le procureur fera seulement s'accuser Jean_F.
 'Strategically, the attorney will make only John_F accuse himself.' (✓ sloppy; ✓ strict)

The ambiguity of reflexive SE-verbs pertains to a wider range of environments (e.g., with ECM predicates, modal auxiliaries, double object constructions, benefactive arguments). For the sake of generality, we provide below additional instances of this phenomenon: the interpretation of *se* in *it*-cleft constructions, (10), and with *do it* anaphora, (11).

(10) ***It-Cleft***

- Lors de son procès, c'est Jean qui s'est le mieux défendu.
 'At his trial, it is John who defended himself the best.' (✓ sloppy; ✓ strict)

(11) ***Do it Anaphora***

- a. Jean s'est dénoncé avant que son complice ne le fasse.
 'John has denounced himself before his accomplice did it.' (✓ sloppy; ✓ strict)
 b. Le procureur fera se dénoncer Jean avant que Pierre ne le fasse.
 'The attorney will make John denounce himself before Peter does it.' (✓ sloppy; ✓ strict)

It is beyond the scope of this paper to review in detail the syntactic distribution of both readings. But before going on, a clarification point is in order. It has been reported in the previous literature that the strict reading of SE-verbs is unavailable - or less readily available - in certain environments such as phrasal comparatives, (12a), and TP ellipsis, (12b).

(12) a. **Phrasal Comparatives**

- Lors de son procès, Jean s'est mieux défendu que son avocat.
 'At his trial, John defended himself better than his lawyer.' (✓ sloppy; *strict)

b. **TP Ellipsis**

- Lors de son procès, Jean s'est bien défendu. Son avocat aussi.
 'At his trial, John defended himself well. His lawyer too.' (✓ sloppy; ?? strict)

Several orthogonal factors might be responsible for such discrepancies. For instance, it has been proposed in Moracchini (2014) that the unavailability of strict readings in sentences of (12a) directly follows from the structural properties of *phrasal* (as opposed to *clausal*) comparatives in French. For TP ellipsis, on the other hand, it has been argued by Marty and Moracchini (2015) that the relevant readings are in fact available but hard(er) to access upon introspection. They show for instance that these readings are readily available in TP ellipsis constructions like (13).

- (13) a. Jean se trouve très drôle. Sa femme pas du tout.
 ‘John finds himself to be very funny. His wife not at all.’ (✓ sloppy; ✓ strict)
- b. Jean se trouve trop mince. Sa femme pas assez.
 ‘John finds himself to be too. His wife not enough.’ (✓ sloppy; ✓ strict)

They show further that these readings become fully accessible to speakers once the appropriate Question Under Discussion (QUD) is set up explicitly: e.g., the ‘referential’ QUD in (14a) forces the strict reading of (12b), while the ‘reflexive’ QUD in (14b) forces its sloppy reading.

- (14) a. Qui a bien défendu Jean lors de son procès?
 ‘Who defended John well during his trial?’ ((12b): *sloppy; ✓ strict)
- b. Qui s’est bien défendu lors de son procès?
 ‘Who defended himself well during his trial?’ ((12b): ✓ sloppy; *strict)

Taken all together, these facts show that the clitic *se* does not operate *solely* at the lexical level, regardless of whether we hypothesize that its role is to reduce a lexical argument or a lexical case-feature of the verb. Therefore, VR and CR have both to be rejected on empirical grounds. Alternatively, the data suggest that (i) *se* is added in the course of the syntactic derivation, and that (ii) its interpretation gives rise to the same kind of ambiguities (sloppy vs. strict reading) as regular pronouns. The displacement property - together with the availability of ‘fake reflexive’ readings - provides us with a fine-grained linguistic signature which is better captured if *se* is analyzed as a bound pronominal clitic, and reflexive SE-verbs as transitives.⁴

3 The Puzzle Strikes Back

If reflexive SE-verbs are transitives, then why do they *behave like* intransitives in FI-causatives? In the following, we offer a solution to this puzzle that capitalizes on Pesetsky’s (2011) idea that reflexive pronouns are marked with REFLEXIVE case. But before going on, let us make explicit some basic assumptions regarding the syntactic structure of FI-causatives.

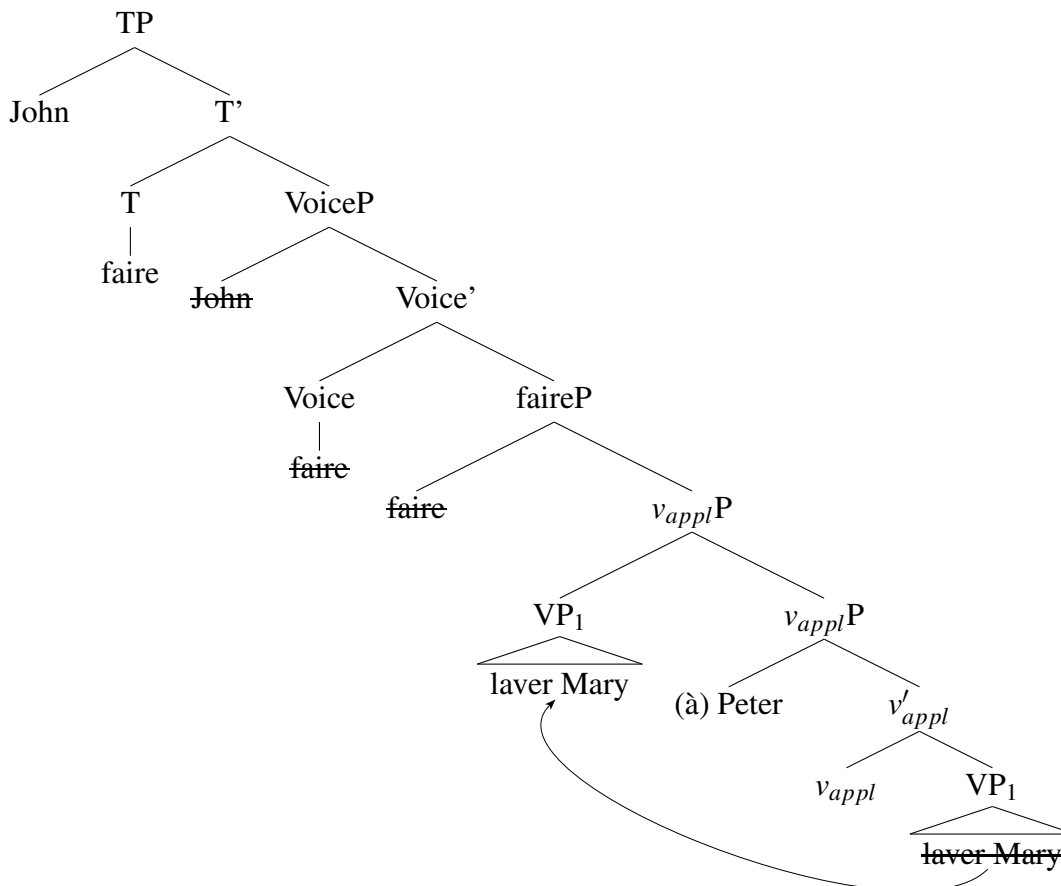
There are two syntactic properties that an analysis of FI-causatives must capture: word-order and case-marking. With respect to word-order, the Causee always follows the internal argument, even though it is introduced higher in the structure. To capture this fact, some researchers have proposed that the Causee is a rightward-specifier to *vP* (e.g., Folli and Harley, 2007), whereas others have proposed that the relevant word-order is derived by VP-fronting (e.g., Kayne, 1975, Burzio, 1986, Ippolito, 2000, Campanini and Pitteroff, 2012). We will follow the latter proposal here as it correctly predicts the different positions of modifiers and indirect objects. For instance, as pointed out by Campanini and Pitteroff (2012), an indirect object can follow the Causee, (15); the possibility of this word-order remains unexplained if the Causee is introduced as a right specifier.

- (15) Jean fera acheter un livre (pour Pierre) à Marie (pour Pierre).
 John make.FUT buy.INF a book (for Peter) to Mary (for Peter)
 ‘John will make Mary buy a book for Peter.’

⁴We propose the term ‘fake reflexives’ as a reminiscence of a phenomenon already studied in the literature on binding, namely ‘fake indexicals’. We believe that the ambiguity generated by the use of indexicals (e.g., *my/your*) is the mirror image of this generated by the use of reflexives like *se* or *himself*. In the case of indexicals, one needs to account for the puzzling fact that they can have a sloppy (i.e., fake indexical) readings; in the case of reflexives, one needs to account for the puzzling fact that they can have a strict (i.e., fake reflexive) readings.

In line with Ippolito (2000) and Campanini and Pitteroff (2012), we will further assume that *faire* causative embeds an Applicative head (v_{appl}) which introduces the Causee. The resulting syntactic structure of FI-causatives is sketched out in (16).

(16) Jean fera laver Marie à Pierre



Let us now move to the question of case-marking: the Causee surfaces with DAT(IVE) in transitives, but with ACC(USATIVE) in intransitives. While these facts present a challenge to a functional approach to Case (cf. Torrego, 2010), they can straightforwardly be handled by a configurational approach to Case-marking (e.g., Folli and Harley, 2007, Campanini and Pitteroff, 2012). For the time being, we follow the configurational approach elaborated in Baker and Vinokurova (2010), modulo that we consider the smallest relevant domain for case assignment to be vP (as opposed to VP).⁵ The assignment rules for ACC and DAT case are stated in (17).

- (17) a. If there are two distinct NPs in the same vP -phase such that NP_1 c-commands NP_2 , then value the case feature of NP_1 as DAT unless NP_2 has already been marked for case.
- b. If there are two distinct NPs in the same phase such that NP_1 c-commands NP_2 , then value the case feature of NP_2 as ACC unless NP_1 has already been marked for case.

⁵We differentiate here vP from VoiceP, which is assumed to be the head responsible for the introduction of the external argument. This is crucial because if VoiceP were the relevant domain (as opposed to vP), all subjects in transitive clauses would be (incorrectly!) predicted to surface as dative-marked. Baker and Vinokurova (2010) explicitly mention that ApplP should be considered as part of the relevant domain for case assignment: ‘If goal phrases are generated in the specifier of an applicative head, distinct from the core verb, then we must consider the ApplP to be a kind of extended VP, with the maximal VP (i.e., ApplP) counting as the relevant phase for [case-marking]’.

An illustration of the procedure we propose for case-assignment in transitive and intransitive FI-causatives is given in (18a) and (18b), respectively.

- (18) a. Transitive FI-causatives, e.g. *John fera laver Marie à Pierre*
 [_{v_{appl}P} **à Pierre**.DAT [_{VP} laver **Marie**]] by (17a)
 [CP **Jean** fera [_{v_{appl}P} [_{VP} laver **Marie**.ACC][_{v_{appl}P} à Pierre.DAT [_{VP} ~~laver Marie~~]]]] by (17b)
- b. Intransitive FI-causatives, e.g. *Jean fera travailler Pierre*
 [CP **Jean** fera [_{v_{appl}P} [_{VP} travailler][_{v_{appl}P} **Pierre**.ACC [_{VP} ~~travailler~~]]]] by (17b)

This analysis predicts that, whenever the internal argument of a transitive verb bears some sort of lexical case, then the Causee should bear ACC instead of DAT, i.e. it should not be introduced by *à*. This is indeed what we find with verbs that lexically mark their complements with prepositions:

- (19) Jean fera regarder **vers** / rire **de** / dépendre **de** / tirer **sur** Pierre (*à) Marie
 John make.FUT watch towards / laugh of / depend of / shoot on Peter (*to) Marie
 ‘John will make Mary look at/laught at/depend on/shoot Peter.’

Turning to our puzzle, we have seen that the behavior of SE-verbs differs from the behavior of regular transitives in two respects: (i) Case requirements, and (ii) Clitic climbing. We argue that both discrepancies naturally fall out from the properties of *se* as a bound pronominal clitic.

Regarding case-marking, the observation is that the Causee surfaces with DAT in transitive constructions, but with ACC in SE-constructions. We argue that this parallels the case of transitive verbs which assign lexical case to their complement, (19). However, instead of stipulating a lexical case marking on *se*, we follow Pesetsky (2011) and treat *se* as bearing REFL(EXIVE) case.⁶ Pesetsky (2011) observes that, under a configurational approach to case, case marking and binding should be treated on a par, as both operations rely on c-commanding relations and local domains (i.e., phases). In order to accommodate this proposal in our system, we reformulate (17) as follows:

- (20) If there are two distinct NPs in the same CP-phase such that NP₁ c-commands NP₂:
- a. If NP₁ and NP₂ are co-indexed: value the case feature of NP₂ as REFL, unless NP₂ has already been marked for case (e.g., lexical case).
 - b. Else (i.e., NP₁ and NP₂ are not co-indexed):
 - i. If NP₁ and NP₂ are in the same vP-phase: value the case feature of NP₁ as DAT, unless NP₂ has already been marked for case.
 - ii. Else (i.e., NP₁ and NP₂ are not in the same vP-phase): value the case feature of NP₂ as ACC, unless NP₁ has already been marked for case.

It follows from (20) that, in reflexive FI-causatives, the pronominal clitic *se* shall be marked with REFL, while its antecedent NP, i.e. the Causee, shall be marked with ACC, as shown in (21):

- (21) Reflexive FI-causatives, e.g. *Jean fera se laver Pierre*
 a. [_{v_{appl}P} **Pierre** [_{VP} **se**.REFL laver]] by (20a)
 b. [CP **Jean** fera [_{v_{appl}P} [_{VP} **se**.REFL laver][_{v_{appl}P} **Pierre**.ACC [_{VP} ~~se-REFL laver~~]]]] by (20bii)

⁶We notice that it is generally under question whether *se* has case. Kayne (1975), for instance, argues in favor of caseless *se* in French (see also Anagnostopoulou, 2003). Since we treat *se* as an NP, we find it more appealing to assume that, just like any other NP, *se* bears a case.

We now turn to the question of why *se* obligatory remains on the lower predicate, while other non-reflexive clitics can raise up to the matrix verb *faire*. We argue that *se* is prohibited from raising to *faire* only when such a movement would yield a Strong Crossover (SCO) configuration. In (22a), *se* has already established a binding relation with the lower NP *Pierre*, i.e. the Causee. If it raises further to the matrix verb, then it will move across its binder and syntactically bind it, thus yielding a SCO configuration.⁷ In (22b), on the other hand, *se* is bound by the higher NP *Jean*, i.e. the Causer, and so it obligatorily raises up to *faire*. Note that there is no Causee argument in this case - or if there is one, it has to be an adjunct (e.g., *par Pierre*) as in the *faire par* (FP) causatives (see Kayne (1975), Folli and Harley (2007) for an analysis of FP-causatives; see Section 4 for cases involving an intervening Causee).

- (22) a. *John_i will make Pierre_j wash himself_j*
 Jean_i [_{CIP} *(se_j) [TP fera [_{v_{appl}P} [VP (*se_j) laver] Pierre_j [VP se_j laver]]]]] (SCO)
 ↑ × ↓
- b. *John_i made himself_i be washed (by Peter_j)*
 Jean_i [_{CIP} se_i [TP fera [_{v_{appl}P} [VP laver se_i] (par Pierre_j)]]]] (No SCO)
 ↑ ↓

This analysis predicts that if the Causee is bound by the Causer, then *se* should appear on *faire*. This is indeed possible even though, in order for the sentence to sound natural, additional linguistic material is often required to convey that the Causer really forced himself doing something (e.g., the emphasizer *lui-même*, (23a), or a purpose-adjunct, (23b)).

- (23) a. Jean se fera *(lui-même) laver la voiture.
 ‘John will make himself wash the car.’
- b. Jean se fera travailler dur ??(pour rattraper le temps perdu).
 ‘John will make himself work hard to catch up.’

In sum, we have shown that the apparent ‘peculiar’ properties of reflexive SE-verbs in FI-causative are predicted by the properties of *se* as a bound variable. By way of conclusion, we present below a previously unnoticed puzzle that seems to be explained under our analysis.

4 A New Puzzle ((Un-cover)-ed)

We conclude this paper by drawing the reader’s attention to a paradigm, (24), which provides empirical evidence for the dependence between case-marking and binding. In (24a), the embedded clitic *le* is bound by the Causer, and the intervening Causee, surfacing as a clitic on *faire*, is marked with ACC. By contrast, when the embedded clitic is free, the Causee clitic is marked with DAT, (24b). (24c) shows that if the clitic is bound by the Causer, then it cannot climb up to the matrix verb (i.e., Principle B violation); when it is free, however, climbing becomes possible, (24d).

- (24) a. Jean_i le_j.ACC fera le_{i,*j,*k} laver. (John_i made him_j wash him_{i,*j,*k})
 b. Jean_i lui_j.DAT fera le_{*i,*j,*k}.ACC laver. (John_i made him_j wash him_{*i,*j,*k})
 c. *Jean_i le_j.ACC le_{i,*j,*k} fera laver.

⁷We follow Kayne (1975) and Sportiche (1996) in assuming that clitics move to a c-commanding position, heading their own clitic projection (CIP).

d. Jean_i le_{*i,*j,k}.ACC lui_j.DAT fera laver.

The contrast in (24a) vs. (24b) is explained under the assumption that the embedded bound clitic *le* gets in fact REFL case in (24a). Following the case-marking rule in (20a), it is predicted that *le* should be marked with REFL in this configuration as it is c-commanded in the same CP-phase by a co-indexed NP, i.e. the higher NP *Jean*. A potential concern is that, if this explanation is on the right track, then the one-to-one correspondence between REFL case and reflexive morphology breaks down, that is REFL case does not have a sole exponent. We notice however that there exists, for instance, a REFL-ACC syncretism among 1st and 2nd person personal pronouns in French, e.g. *me/te/nous/vous*, which bear the same morphology in bound and free environments. Furthermore, as pointed out to us by H. Demirdache, similar syncretic patterns are found for 3rd person pronouns in several creoles (e.g., ‘li’ in Seselwa and Mauritian Creole, ‘en’ in Saramaccan) as well as in non-creole languages like Tahitian (cf. Snyder, 1999). Thus, pursuing our view, *se* would not be the exponent of REFL case but rather the result of a spell-out rule along the following lines:

(25) Let α be a 3rd person pronoun marked with REFL case. If α is bound by an NP β within the same CP-phase and there is no NP intervening between α and β , then α is spelled-out as ‘se’; otherwise, it is spelled-out as ‘le’.

For now, we can only think of the paradigm in (24) as evidence that bound pronouns within the CP-phase get REFL case irrespectively of their reflexive marking (*se* vs. *le*) in standard French. Further research is thus needed in order to make any safe conclusion regarding the interaction between binding and case-marking within the CP-domain. In any event, this new paradigm proves once again that FI-causatives remain a privileged (play-)ground for linguistic inquiries.

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