Constructionalization of verbal causative periphrases in French, ”faire”, ”laisser”, ”mettre à”, ”donner à” + Vinf

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Constructionalization of verbal causative periphrases in French *faire, laisser, mettre à, donner à + Vinf*

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1 Introduction

This study focuses on causative verbal periphrases. As Tesnière 1988, one of the first researchers in French Syntax, points out: "The normal causative auxiliary in French is the verb *faire* 'make' which has a fairly considerable number of uses. (a[1]. *La condensation de la vapeur d'eau fait pleuvoir* 'The condensation of the water vapor causes the rain to fall', b. *Bernard fait tomber Alfred* 'Bernard knocks down Alfred', c. *Charles fait frapper Alfred par Bernard* 'Charles gets Alfred to be hit by Bernard',[2] (…)" (1988: 266)) or d. *Elle me fait penser à une fleur* 'She reminds me of a flower'. In the causative structure, a new valence is expressed by the addition of another actant, a causative agent (b. and c.) or a causative source (a. and d.) of human nature (d.) or a natural element (a.) whose intervention can be direct (b. and c.), or indirect (a. and d.). While the canonical causative periphrastic construction in French is *faire Vinf* 'make', which is called a factitive, the causative form *donner à Vinf* 'give' corresponds to similar constructions encountered in several languages of typologically distinct families; Castilian, Khmer, Polish, Tibetan, Kurdish, among other languages (see Bouveret 2021, Akin & Bouveret 2021, Corre 2021; Gougenheim 1929, Newman 1996, 1998; Von Waldenfels 2012).

We extended our analysis to the other causative French verbal periphrases in order to constitute the whole paradigm of *faire Vinf* 'make', *mettre à Vinf* 'put', *laisser Vinf/laisser à Vinf* 'let' and *donner à Vinf* 'give'. Our methodology is based on a set of seven criteria meant to analyze verbal constructions, which makes it possible to refine the notion of causativity in these periphrases. Causation is then analyzed the same way as other categories such as TAM (Tense, Aspect, Modality), namely as a grammatical category that can give rise to semi-auxiliaries or to complex causal predicates or, more broadly, verbal causal periphrases.

The corpus consists of examples extracted from two sources: Europresse[3] (newspapers and press reviews, year 2021), and Frantext-ATILF (database 9th-21st century), (as an additional source for diachronic examples, BFM 2019 (the ENS-Lyon database of medieval French 9th-15th century. Our theoretical model for the present study is Construction Grammar (CxG) (Bouveret & Legallois 2012, Goldberg 1995) with a special focus on the perspective applying constructional insights to foreign language pedagogy, more specifically the acquisition of constructions (see Boas 2022, De Knop 2020, De Knop & Gilquin 2016 and Gilquin & De Knop 2016).

2 Concepts and methodology

We develop our approach by first explaining our criteria, which will allow us to contrast causative constructions, particularly when it comes to comparing different languages that take into account the

[1] The letters a, b, c, are inserted by the author, they are not present in the original text.
[2] Translated by the author.
[3] https://nouveau.europresse.com.

whole causative construction and argument structure from a syntactic and semantic point of view. Then, we will compare the French causative periphrasis with these criteria in order to differentiate the four quasi synonym verbs in causative complex-predicate : periphrastic constructions built with an infinitive combined with a first predicate: *faire, mettre, laisser, donner*. The criteria we develop in this study will strongly help with differentiating and making a choice in order to help the foreing language learner figure out which relevant construction to use in a given context. Then, we observe different syntactic and semantic elements in the construction, such as the type of subject, direct, indirect, agentive, non-agentive, or the type of causation (internal or external (see criteria in section below 2.2.)) that have an impact on the meaning of the four similar causative constructions.

2.1 Causative periphrases

The notion of causation is a fundamental category in the human conceptualization of the world and a cross-linguistic cognitive category (Sanders & Sweetser 2009, Shibatani 2002). As a universal property across languages, it refers to a complex reality, a causative situation, where someone or something causes someone else to act or cause a change of state / position of an object or a patient. Semantically, causative utterances involve at least two elements, a causative entity and an entity that undergoes the effect resulting from the cause. In other words, there are two events: a causative event and a caused event. The event caused is temporally subsequent to the causative event and the event caused is entirely dependent on the occurrence of the causative event.

Dixon ranks the means of expression of causation on a scale of compactness (Dixon 2000: 74), in decreasing order, such as lexical causatives, morphological causatives and syntactic / periphrastic causatives. Causative value is inherent in the semantics of lexical causative verbs, which are the most compact. For causative verbs, the event caused is an integral part of the lexical information conveyed by the verb, for example, *kill, break, close*, etc. Generally, lexical causatives fall into three groups, depending on the type of result they encode: (a) change of state (*crack, crumble, decompose*); (b) change of location (*sliding, spinning, swinging*) and (c) emitting certain sounds or lights (*shining, radiating, buzzing*) (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1994). Some intransitive verbs, when used with a complement, can become causative (Novakova 2006) (*resign / he resigned Claire*). Morphological causatives include different morphological processes. The addition of a causative affix to the verbal root is the most common (e.g. *-iser* in *standardiser, standard* +*-iser* 'make smth standard'). Syntactic causatives of the *faire Vinf* 'make' type are the least compact as they involve complex predicates. Those are the *periphrastic causative verbs* that we will focus on in this chapter.

2.2 Criteria for analyzing causative verbal constructs

These criteria applied to verbal constructions are partly inspired by Dixon 2000, Gosselin 1996, Gosselin 2005, Gosselin 2011, Levin 1993, Levin & Rappaport Hovav 2005, Sanders & Sweetser 2002, and Shibatani 2002. They make it possible to contrast units of distinct levels, morphemes, periphrasis, lexical units, complex words or phraseological units. In order to differentiate the causative periphrases within the paradigm, we distinguish the following seven criteria:

a. Modal criterion:
The force of causation, factitive or deontic (permission vs obligation)
Is the subject's intention expressed through a modality (subject of an agentive nature and volitional utterance) (e.g.: *faire faire un devoir* 'having an assignment done')?

b. Aspectual criterion:
Do the nuances between verbs in constructions relate to a phasal aspect (for example, pre-processual *mettre à chauffer* 'start to heat' vs *faire chauffer* 'heat')?
c. Nature of the cause:
Direct
Indirect
implicit
manipulative causation, does it imply the presence of an explicit or implicit intermediate agent ("mediated causation" Shibatani 2002)?
d. Source of the cause: is it an agent, a patient, a source, a beneficiary, a recipient ?
e. Valence and argument structure
f. Diathesis:
does the construction allow alternations: pronominal (reflexive or reciprocal), transitive (single or double complement), intransitive, ditransitive?
Is a THAT-complement allowed ? (*faire que X soit Z*/or *faire en/de sorte que* 'make X become/do Z, eg. *Faire que la Seine soit un lieu ouvert et vivant* ('make the Seine become an open and lively place').
g. Degree of phraseology of the construction (e.g.: *laisser à désirer / à redire* 'leaving something to be desired' / 'to be faulted'), (e.g.: *ton attitude laisse à désirer* 'your attitude leaves something to be desired').

Table 1: *Causative criteria*

In our opinion, these criteria are necessary for analyzing any event structure, in particular causative constructions. Furthermore, in contrastive analyses across languages, using such criteria help with refining the comparison between distinct systems.

3 The French paradigm *faire/ laisser/ mettre à/ donner à + Vinf*

The factitive construction *faire Vinf* 'make' is the most common and allows flexible syntactic properties: (a) every syntactic construction is accepted (direct and indirect transitive, intransitive, passive, pronominal, THAT), (b) It is construed with any type of infinitive, and (c) with any kind of subject (agent, patient, beneficiary, source). It is therefore the most typical construction but also the most syntactically flexible since it's the only one amongst the four constructions to allow any argument structure and any subject in any possible causative situation, direct, indirect, mainpulative as seen above based on our Europress corpus. *Faire* 'make' can always be used when causality must be expressed, except with a permission value as opposed to the causative *laisser* Vinf 'let' construction (e.g.: *let the dog out*). The periphrasis of *faire Vinf* expresses direct, indirect or manipulative causality, but more typically it is used in a volitional agentive construction, contrasting with the *laisser V*'let' in permissive agentive uses.

Donner à Vinf 'give' is typically associated with cognition verbs (*think, believe, guess, reflect, meditate*, etc.), in constructions where the subject is agentive or non-agentive of an indirect or direct causal nature:

(1) *Gabrielle Piquet donne à réfléchir.*
'Gabrielle Piquet makes us think'
(*Le Monde* 31/01/2020-Europresse)

(2) *L'événement nous donne à réfléchir.*
'the event allows us to think'

(*20 minutes*, 3/09/2021-Europresse).

In this context, the construction does contrast with *laisser Vinf* 'let' in non-agentive factitive indirect uses*:*

(3) *C'est une mutation qui laisse penser.*
'this is a mutation that let us think that (…)'
(*L'express* 22/05/2021-Europresse)

or even *faire Vinf* 'make' in constructions with a patient, ***Paul la fait penser à son chimpanzé*** 'Paul reminds her his chimpanzee' (example extracted from and clitic analysis developped by Lamiroy & Charolles 2011: 9). They differentiate from the strong causation involved with agentive *faire Vinf* 'make' of a volitional direct nature:

(4) *Cela me fait penser à écrire avec une plume.*
'it makes me think of writing with a feather'
(*La Nouvelle République du Centre Ouest*, 27/05/2010).

Thus, the constructions *donner Vinf* 'give, *faire Vinf* 'make' and *laisser Vinf* 'let' appear with cognition verbs (*penser, croire, réfléchir*, etc.). Causativity in French in causal periphrases has been widely analyzed in the French linguistic literature for the verb *faire* 'make' (see Abeillé et al. 1996, Lamiroy & Charolles 2011, Tesnière 1988) but little for the verbs *donner* 'give' or *laisser* 'let' except Gougenheim 1929. We present the *donner à Vinf* 'give' construction in more detail with a specific focus on diachrony. *Faire Vinf* is commonly known as the factitive construction in French and progressively learned by children during language acquisition in French comparatively to *donner à Vinf* (see Benziska et al. 2010). We propose in this study our hypothesis of a *give Vinf* causative construction, whose causative meaning of the full lexeme comes from a grammaticalization process as a semi-auxiliary < full verb, and which is one of the typological meanings of *to give* across the world (Von Waldenfels 2012).

3.1 The construction *donner à Vinf* 'give to Vinf' from a diachronic and synchronic point of view

The construction *donner à Vinf* 'give to Vinf' appears firstly attested in a written text of the 12th-early 13th century (BFM 2019 database):

(5)

seroit	*doneit*	*a*	*entendre*
3SG-be-COND.	*3SG-give*	*to*	*hear-INF*
'would	*be*		*heard'*

(*Vie de saint Benoit*, 12thC./13thC (manuscript Paris, BnF, fr. 24764, DialGreg2, p. 73.).

The following collocations are found in the BFM database with two classes of verbs, cognition verbs and food/drink or host verbs (13thC *à entendre* 'to listen'; 14th C *a boire* 'to drink', *a congnoistre* 'to know'[4], *a manger* 'to eat' /15thC : *a hosteler* 'to host' (à 'to' is found either with or without any accent).

[4] The variation for the verb *connaitre* 'know' and other verbal or nominal forms are extensive in medieval French, e.g. know-INF forms are: *conoistre, connoistre, counoistre, cunoistre ; congnoistre ; conuistre, cunuistre ; conostre, conustre ; congnostre, cognostre ; conoiestre*.

(6) *donna* *a* *boire*
3SG-donner-PRET *PREP* *boire-INF*
'gave to drink'
(Les enfances Garin de Monglane, 1400 : 11. Ca. 1460- FRANTEXT).

Medieval French still has a lot of phonetic variations, the different variations of the verb *donner* 'give' in abstract or concrete contexts are *duner, donar, doner, donner*. The construction is used most frequently by authors such as Christine de Pizan at the beginning of the 15th century. This period is known as the Moyen français 'Middle French' (Abeillé et al. 2020).

In parallel, the other constructions *faire Vinf* 'make' and *laisser Vinf* 'let' are found earlier. *Faire Vinf* 'make VInf' is first found in the 12th. in BFM 2019 texts (*faire tenir* 'make hold', *faire disne* 'make dine'), also from the 12th century pour *laisser Vinf* 'let Vinf' (*laisser* 'let'+ *prendre* 'take', *occir* 'kill', *aller* 'go', *ester* 'be', *perir* 'die', *cheoir* 'fall'). The other modal verbal periphrases in *pouvoir V*inf 'can' are found earlier in Old French, since the 9th century, for example *pouvoir détourner* 'being able to divert' read in *Les Serments de Strasbourg* (*The Oaths of Strasbourg*), first attested in a written text in Roman French dated from 842 (BFM 2019).

Later, in Christine de Pisan, the periphrasis is extremely common:

(7) *me vouloir donner du mal*
'give myself trouble'(1405: 99)

(8) *donner à souffrir*
'give to suffer' (1405: 12)

(9) *devoir donner*
'have to give' (1405: 1)

(10) *donner à gagner*
'give to earn' (1405: 214)
(Christine de Pisan Poems-Frantext).

The verb *donner* 'give' in factitive constructions behaves as a factitive semi-auxiliary (cf. Gougenheim 1929; Bouveret 2021), and the construction takes on the value of a causative verbal periphrasis. Its values can vary from a simple factual causation to an obligation, a deontic modality.

The construction *donner Vinf* 'give' is statistically weak, Willems (2005) mentions 6 occurrences in a contemporary corpus of 600 examples. The construction is, however, semantically rich, it is a polysemous construction, and, accordingly to our 2012 study based on three corpora representative of different discourse genres[5], the construction is organized in four sub-classes (a, b, c, d, see below) wether a simply causative or a phraseological construction in our contemporary Europresse database (2021) and three classes (a, b, c) in the diachronic data Frantext-ATILF and BFM 2019 not mentionning the

[5] Corpus A: *Word Sketch Engine*, LEXCOM, Adam Kilgarriff, University of Brighton, UK. French Web corpus, http://www.sketchengine.co.uk/.
Corpus B: Base textuelle *Frantext*, ATILF-CNRS, University of Nancy, France. Literature corpus. Period consulted 1980–2000, http://www.frantext.fr/.
Corpus C: *Le Monde* 2002, Newspaper corpus, Le Migou tool, OLST Montreal, http://olst.ling.umontreal.ca/ressources/corpus-du-migou/

completely fixed phraseological construction. The (a) category includes the most abstract uses of the verb, whereas the other categories (b) to (d), even if phraseological, rely on concrete meanings of the verb:

a. give + cognition verbs (*réfléchi*r, 'think', voir, 'see', etc). (e.g. *donner à penser* 'give (matter) to think') . see example (11).
b. give + verbs of food/drink verbs (e.g. *donner à boire 'give to drink')*
c. give + other non food/drink common everyday actions that always needs a direct object. (e.g. *donner sa montre à réparer* 'give ones watch/car to repair') –
d. give + phraseological constructions (e.g.: *donner du grain à moudre* 'give to think', *donner du fil à retordre* 'give hard time')

Table 2: *Classes of infinitives in* donner VInf *'give Vinf' contempory constructions*

(11) *Cette exposition donne à voir des paysages insolites*.
'This exhibition make visible unusual landscapes.'
(Centre Presse Aveyron 07/06/2021- Europresse)

Thus, whereas the verbal causative periphrasis *donner Vinf* 'give' in diachrony is weakly attested from the 12th to the 13th century, it becomes more common between the 15th and 16th centuries, a period where other complex predicates expressions are plentiful, as argued by Fagard & De Mulder (2007).

Nowadays, the construction (a), (b), (c) in Table 1 above, is a factitive construction similar to the *faire Vinf* 'make' kind, in which *donner* 'give' has a causative semi-auxiliary function, (d) is fully phraseological with an abstract meaning, coming from the concrete expressions and extended metaphorically and metonymically form concrete to abstract expressions, not present in diachonic corpora.

A semantic value of transfer is conferred to the *give Vinf* construction still present in some of its causative uses. Indeed, the verb *give* as a full lexeme (Croft 1990, Goldberg 1995) belongs to two constructions of transfer: a CAUSED-possession construction, expressing a concrete physical transfer, and a CAUSED-result construction, expressing a mental transfer of experience. We now compare and contrast the four constructions based on their argument structures.

3.2 Constructive criterion and argumentative structure*, faire, laisser, mettre à Vinf*

Faire Vinf 'make' is the most common construction, but also syntactically the most flexible construction, as it expresses all causal values except permission, which is typically expressed by *laisser Vinf* 'let'. The subject with *faire Vinf* 'make' is often a direct source of the cause, an agent expressed directly or indirectly as in (12), or an indirect agent as in (13), or even a manipulative agent as in (14):

(12) *L'article 173 de la loi ALUR — que vous connaissez tous, bien sûr — a fait souffler un vent nouveau sur les sites*
'French Article 173 of the ALUR law - which you all know, of course - has brought a new wind to the sites.'
(Bull. du droit de l'environnement industriel, 1/11/2016-Europresse)

(13) *Si les juges avaient à se reprocher d'avoir fait mourir sur la roue un père innocent*.
'*If the judges had to blame themselves for having killed an innocent father on the wheel.'*
(*Le Magazine Littéraire*, 1/03/2015-Europresse)

(14) *L'entreprise vendait des vêtements en gros qu'elle faisait fabriquer en Extrême-Orient*.
'The company sold wholesale clothes that it had manufactured in the Far East.'
(Pleine Vie, 3/05/2021-Europresse).

Comparatively, *laisser Vinf* 'let' amongst the causative paradigm, allows a distance between the source of the cause and its effect, the effect produced is a modalization of the cause (15) and leads to phraseological expressions such as *laisser à désirer* 'be unsatisfactory' to express a negative opinion (16):

(15) *La mise en place du confinement laisse à penser que (…).*
'The implementation of confinement suggests that (…)'.
(*La Tribune*, 17/04/2020-Europresse)

(16) *Plusieurs choses laissent à désirer*.
'Several things are unsatisfactory'.
(Décideurs magazine, 28/07/2020-Europresse).

In contrast, *mettre à Vinf* 'put' (17) has in general no causal value, except when construed with durative verbs, often cooking verbs and an agentive subject (18):

(17) *Quand nos cheveux se mettent à blanchir*.
'When our hair is turning white'
(Le Huffington Post – France (3/03/2016))

(18) *Puis recouvrir du flan et mettre à cuire pendant quarante minutes environ*.
'Then cover the gelly and let cool during about 40 mns.'
(Le monde, 3/06/2021-Europresse)

(17) as a pronominal construction has no causative value whereas e.g. *Mettre les asperges à blanchir/blanchir les asperges (author)* (*'blanch the asparagus'*) has a causation meaning. On the other side, *il se mit à pleurer* (author) ('he began to cry') is exclusively aspectual (and inchoative pre-processual phase explains *se mit à* 'started to', but no causal value is implied. In this agentive causative construction *mettre à* Vinf 'put' has a pre-processual inchoative value. The bi-valency is mostly common for *mettre Vinf 'put'*, no third beneficiary argument is accepted, contrary to the three other verbal constructions *faire* 'make', *laisser* 'let', and *donner* 'give'.

3.3 Modal criterion: factitive or deontic values

The construction *laisser à Vinf* 'let' has modal permissive values (19):

(19) *Accepter que son ado aille au cinéma en début d'après-midi avant de le laisser assister à une séance en début de soirée.*
'Accepting that your teenager goes to the cinema at the beginning of the afternoon before

letting him attend a screening at the beginning of the evening'.
(*Le Journal des femmes* 28/06/2021-Europresse).

These two deontic values of permission or obligation require an agentive-type subject. In contrast, source-type subject constructions bear a factitive value (e.g. *Ce voile laisse passer la lumière* 'This veil allows light to pass through' (author).

Besides the nature of the cause, its strength differs according to the four verbs in these causal periphrases. *Laisser à Vinf*, 'let' can be validated by an external source of validation, reality, or it can be a permission if one considers an implicit agent (20) whereas the negative modality has a jussive value since *ne pas laisser Vinf* 'not let' is equivalent to prohibiting (21):

(20) *Les premiers éléments de l'autopsie laissent à penser à une intervention extérieure.*
'The first elements of the autopsy suggest an external intervention'
(*La Dépêche du Midi*, 16/11/2021-Europresse)

(21) *L'Union européenne n'a aucune raison de se laisser intimider par de telles manœuvres ni de laisser ses citoyens se faire malmener.*
'The European Union has no reason to allow itself to be intimidated by such maneuvers nor to allow its citizens being manhandled'.
(*Le Monde*, 9/06/2021-Europresse).

This deontic value is more typical with *faire Vinf* 'make Vinf' (22), but can also be found with *donner à Vinf* 'give' (23):

(22) *Après le petit examen qu'il me fit subir.*
'After the little examination he made me undergo.'
(Le Monde, 19/04/2014-Europresse*)*

(23) *La directrice de l'école des filles (…) a donné à faire des devoirs à ses élèves relatifs au patriotism.*
'The principal of the girls' school gave her students homework on patriotism.'
(L'Union, 6/11/2021-Europresse)

On the other side, a simple factitive value is interpretable in (24), (25):

(24) *L'interminable longueur d'une pandémie n'a certes jamais donné à réfléchir à l'occupante bronchitique du Claridge.*
'The interminable length of a pandemic has certainly never leed think the bronchial occupant of the Claridge'.
(*Les Echos*, 11/05/2021-Europresse)

(25) *Aujourd'hui, on vient le voir de toute la France pour lui donner à réparer sa voiture.*
'Nowadays, they come from everywhere in France in order to bring her their car to be repaired'
(Libération, 27/09/202-Europresse)

In contrast *donner à Vinf* 'give' (25), compared to *faire Vinf* 'make' (24) adds a pre-processual aspectual phase to the event in (24) whereas (23) is simply causative. These pre-processual phases are theoretical perspectives in the TAM (Tense Aspect Modality) literature using intervals (Gosselin 2011), or particularly in the CXG TAM studies (Michaelis 2004).

> *Nous considérons 'l'aspect de phase', sous lequel est présenté un procès (état ou évènement), comme le résultat d'une opération de sélection d'une partie (phase) du temps constitutif de ce procès (…) ce temps constitutif ne se limite pas (…) au temps 'interne' du procès (i.e. compris entre ses bornes initiale et finale), mais englobe aussi les phases préparatoire et résultante du procès*. (Gosselin 2011: 1)
>
> 'We consider the phasal aspect, under which a process (state or event) is presented, as the result of an operation of selection of a part (phase) of the constitutive time of this process (...) this constitutive time is not limited (…) to the 'internal' time of the process (i.e. between its initial and final limits), but also includes the preparatory and resultant phases of the process (Gosselin 2011: 1).'[6]

4 Conclusion

To conclude this study, we can say that even if in French *faire Vinf* 'make' is known as the most typical causative periphrasal construction (Abeillé et al. 1996, Gougenheim 1929, Tesnières 1988), other causative verbal periphrases are common and they are used in contexts as near synonyms depending on combinatorial criteria. Another interesting fact concerns the verb *donner* 'give' amongst these four causative periphrasal constructions, and its transfer value in Chinese, Dalabon, English, French, Khmer, Kurdish, Polish, Romanian, Spanish, Tibetan. The verb is expressed as a causative, a light verb, a derivational morpheme, or a directional preposition. Thus, it can be said that the form *donner Vinf* 'give' as a causative construction in French corresponds to a typological fact encountered in other languages of distinct families (Corre 2021, Gougenheim 1929, Newman 1996, 1998, Von Waldenfels 2012). Over time, the verb *donner 'give'* in French has gradually evolved by analogy with other verbal semi-auxiliaries. This is a case of linguistic change illustrating the grammaticalization of a verb from full meaning towards a semi-auxiliary construction. As a causative semi-auxiliary, it follows a "grammaticalization scheme" over several centuries such as other semi-auxiliaries of TAM (e.g. *aller 'go'* = full verb > *aller 'go'* = immediate future auxiliary> intentionality (see Traugott & Dasher 2002, Traugott & Trousdale 2013) but less developed in two stages instead of three. The criteria proposed in this study allow to describe the nature of the causativity in these French verbal periphrases and we hope it will be helpful to refine their uses. This will hopefully allow the French learners to use all of these four (*faire, mettre à, laisser, donner à*) + *Vinf* constructions more appropriately.

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