

# The French Reflexive Passive and Anticausative<sup>1</sup>

A diachronic view from the *par*-phrase

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## 1 Introduction

The goal of this article is twofold. First we want to describe how the distribution and the semantic properties of French *par*-phrases introducing external arguments in the context of the reflexive passive and anticausative developed from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to present-day French. In doing this we also face the following question: How can passives and anticausatives be distinguished at all when they are formally identical as in the case of the French reflexive passive and anticausative? This question is of special importance in the case of diachronic studies which do not allow any access to speaker's semantic intuition about a construction. The second goal of our article is to motivate an answer to this question that relies on the distribution and interpretation of the *par*-phrase.

To introduce the latter problem we will start with the well known observation that the French reflexive construction (*se+verb*) has several different uses. Different inventories of French reflexive constructions have been proposed in the literature (*cf.* among others Burston (1979), Lyons (1982), Melis (1990), Ruwet (1972), Wehrli (1986), Zribi-Hertz (1987)). Our paper will be concerned with two uses of this construction, namely the *reflexive passive* (RP) and the *reflexive anticausative* (RAC). Besides their form (*se+verb*), the RAC and RP share that in both cases

<sup>1</sup> We wish to thank Anne Zribi-Hertz, Artemis Alexiadou and Jasper Roodenburg for their helpful comments. Any remaining errors are ours.

the external argument of a corresponding transitive sentence is removed from subject position (*cf.* (1) and (2)).

- (1)a. ~~Jean~~ a pris cette décision hier.
- b. La décision s'est prise hier.
  
- (2)a. ~~Jean~~ a cassé cette branche.
- b. La branche s'est cassée.

There is however an important difference between the examples in (1b) and (2b): There is a clear semantic intuition that in the case of the reflexive passive in (1b) an implicit external argument is still present while this is not the case with the reflexive anticausative in (2b). This difference between passives and anticausatives is typically analyzed the following way: in the case of a passive the external argument is only suppressed but still present on the verb's argument grid while the external argument is completely deleted from the verb's argument grid in the case of anticausatives.

- (3)a. La décision s'est prise hier.      Suppression → Passive
- b. La branche s'est cassée.        Deletion → Anticausative

This difference with respect to the presence of an implicit external argument between (reflexive) passives and (reflexive) anticausatives is reflected by a number of further diagnostics such as the licensing of agent-oriented adverbs, control into purpose clauses, instrumental phrases or secondary predication (for a discussion of these diagnostics in French see Fagan (1992), Fellbaum/Zribi-Hertz (1989) or Lekakou (2005) among others).

However, when we want to investigate the status of the reflexive construction in earlier stages of French, these diagnostics are of little use because of their low frequency in the corpora. In Section 3 we will thus propose a way to distinguish between reflexive passives and reflexive anticausatives that does not rely on the above diagnostics but instead on the following two observations taken from the synchronic literature on passive and anticausative formation:

- (i) Only a subset of the verbs that form passives also form anticausatives

Anticausative formation is taken to be restricted to verbs that express a change of state event which can be conceptualized as unfolding without an external cause, while no such restriction holds for passive formation (cf. Levin/Rappaport Hovav (1995)). This can be seen in languages that make a morphological distinction between the two constructions. For example, the English verb *cut* cannot form anticausatives because its lexical semantics contains an agent-oriented meaning component (a manner component in the terms of Erteschik-Shir/Rapoport (2004)) that makes an anticausative conceptualization impossible (cf. (4)). A verb like *break* on the other hand does not have such a lexical semantic restriction and allows anticausative formation (cf. (5)).

- (4)a. John cut the clothesline  
 b. The clothesline was cut by John  
 c. \*The clothesline cut  
 d. \*The lightning cut the clothesline
- (5)a. Bill broke the window  
 b. The window was broken by Bill  
 c. The window broke  
 d. The storm broke the window

The data in (4) and (5) show an interesting empirical generalization in this respect. Verbs that restrict their external argument position to human agents do not form anticausatives. Verbs that are compatible with causes (e.g. *the storm, the lightening*) as external arguments in their transitive and passive use can form anticausatives (cf. Levin/Rappaport-Hovav (1995), Reinhart (2000)). The possibility of causes as subjects is a reflex of the lack of agent-oriented meaning components. This observation is also supported by the first condition of Zribi-Hertz's (1987) generalization on the formation of reflexive anticausatives in present-day French. Only those transitive verbs that (i) allow causes as subjects and (ii) have

a morphologically related form designating a resultative state can form reflexive anticausatives in present-day French.

The bottom line of these considerations is that for a certain number of examples the question whether we are dealing with a passive or an anticausative can be easily answered because these verbs do not form anticausatives at all, as can be seen from languages that make a morphological difference between passives and anticausatives as for example English above. We can thus safely categorize French reflexive constructions formed with agentive verbs as passives.

- (ii) Passives and anticausatives differ with respect to the expression of external arguments in PPs

As discussed in Alexiadou et al. (2006), passives and anticausatives differ crosslinguistically in the way they combine with prepositions introducing external arguments. This is once again illustrated for English below. It is well known that the English passive licenses all kinds of external arguments in the *by*-phrase, i.e. human agents as well as non-human causes or causing events (cf. (6a)). English anticausatives on the other hand do not license *by*-phrases. However, they nevertheless allow the introduction of non-human causes and causing events with the help of the preposition *from*. Crucially, human causes cannot be introduced in anticausatives (cf. (6b)).

- (6)a. The window was broken by John / by the explosion / by Will's banging  
 b. The window broke \*from John / from the pressure / from the explosion.

Notice that the same difference with respect to the semantic role of the external argument in passives and anticausatives holds for other languages, too (e.g. German, Greek, Italian, Romanian, Albanian (cf. Alexiadou et al. (2006), Kalluli (2006), Pustejovsky (1995))). The only variation we find is whether a language uses the same preposition in passives and anticausatives (this is the case in French as we will show below) or two different prepositions as English *by* vs. *from* above. Despite this

difference all these languages license causes but never agents in anticausatives. In our diachronic corpus study in Section 2 we will focus on this latter observation. Specifically, we will concentrate on the behaviour of the preposition *par* and investigate whether the semantic role of the external argument which is introduced by the preposition *par* in the context of reflexive constructions can provide us with a diagnostic for the distinction between French reflexive passives and anticausatives.

## 2 The corpus study: The distribution of *par*-phrases in the reflexive construction

### 2.1 Preliminary remarks

We extracted the data for this study from the French text corpus *Frantext*. We limited our search to four time periods from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to present-day French (1500-1599, 1630-1649, 1730-1749, 1980-1989) in order to keep the amount of data to be analyzed at a reasonable scale, while at the same time making sure to capture all substantial changes.

We were looking for combinations of the clitic *se* (or *s'*) and the preposition *par* with a maximal distance of three words between them. The relevant hits were coded for (i) the semantic role of the external argument in the *par*-phrase and (ii) the semantic verb class of the verb in the reflexive construction.

Concerning the semantic role of the argument in the *par*-phrase, we made a rough distinction between *par*-phrases introducing human agents (*cf.* (7)) and *par*-phrases introducing non-human causes (*cf.* (8)).

(7) *par*-agent:

- a. *Donc ne faut que par nous laschement se destruisse La gloire qu'on nous a de si long temps acquise. (La Taille, 1572, Saül le furieux: tragédie prise de la Bible, Frantext)*

- b. *Car de luy vient, en lui est et par luy [Dieu] se parfaict tout estre et tout bien, (Rabelais, François, 1533, Pantagrueline pronostication, Frantext)*
- (8) *par*-cause:
- a. *Tout vin donc ne s'aigris pas par la chaleur (Paulmier, 1589, Traité du vin et du sidre, Frantext)*
- b. *le contraire se monstre par les guerres (Lemaire de Belges, 1511, La Concorde des deux langages, Frantext)*

### 2.2 The semantic role of the external argument in the *par*-phrase

In this section we report our findings on the semantic role of the external argument expressed in the *par*-phrase. In accordance with the previous literature<sup>2</sup>, we found that *par*-agent was present in the reflexive constructions of earlier stages of French but has been lost completely in the course of time (*cf.* Table 1 and Figure 1).

However, unlike *par*-agent, *par*-cause was not lost in the course of time, as can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 1 below. *Par*-cause was most frequent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (third period) and still exists in present-day French, although on a slightly lower level of frequency. Notice that *par*-cause has always been more frequent than *par*-agent; this holds even in the first period where the relative frequency of *par*-agent has its peak.

period	1500-1599	1630-1649	1730-1749	1980-1989
Corpus size (words)	4 959 545	4 011 824	7 740 490	7 026 999
<i>par</i> -cause	80	58	182	116
<i>par</i> -agent	45	11	13	0

Table 1: External arguments in a *par*-phrase (absolute frequencies)

<sup>2</sup> (i) *Par*-agent is ungrammatical in present-day French (Lagae (2002), Lamiroy (1993), Melis (1990), Ruwet (1972)) and (ii) *par*-agent was grammatical at earlier stages of the language (Brunot (1965), Brunot (1966), Fellbaum et al. (1989), Lamiroy (1993), Ruwet (1972), Stéfanini (1962))

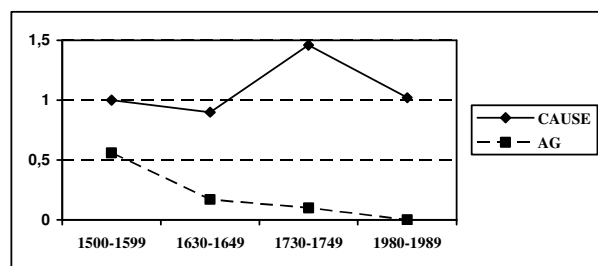


Figure 1: External arguments in a *par*-phrase (relative frequencies)<sup>3</sup>

Below we investigate whether there is a correlation between the specific semantic role expressed in the *par*-phrase and the semantic class of the verb in the reflexive construction.

### 2.3 Semantic verb classes and semantic roles

In this section we take a closer look at how different semantic verb classes combine with *par*-agent and *par*-cause. In the beginning of our investigation we started with a distinction between (i) verbs expressing a change of state in contrast to (ii) all other verbs. Our prediction was that non-agentive verbs expressing a change of state (e.g. *break*) should be ambiguous, i.e. allow for both interpretations in reflexive contexts; they could either be reflexive passives or reflexive anticausatives and they should therefore occur with both, *par*-phrases introducing agents (in the case of a passive) as well as *par*-phrases introducing causes (in the case

<sup>3</sup> The corpora for the different time slots do not have the same size. Therefore the absolute frequency of the different constructions has to be set in relation to the size of the respective corpus (number of occurrences of construction/size of corpus). We assigned the value 1 to the relative frequency in the first time slot of *par*-cause and calculated the respective values for the other time slots of *par*-cause and *par*-agent.

of a passive or an anticausative). With all other verbs the reflexive construction cannot receive an anticausative interpretation and is compatible only with *par*-phrases introducing agents as these verbs typically do not license non-human external arguments.

This prediction was to some extent borne out, but a closer inspection of the collected data lead us to the conclusion that such a bipartition is much too simplistic and needs to be replaced by a more fine grained distinction of verbal classes. Further, it turned out that *par*-phrases modifying reflexive verbs expressing a change of state introduced mainly causes but rarely agents. This is highly unexpected if these constructions can have a passive interpretation. We will discuss both these observations in detail below.

A close inspection of the behavior of the verbs of change of state in our study suggested to distinguish the following verbal subclasses: (i) *ordinary verbs of change of state*, (ii) *aspectual verbs* and (iii) *alternating verbs of appearance*. Note that these three subclasses have already been identified by Levin (1993) in her study of English verb classes. Further, we concluded that the verb *faire* should be treated separately, on the one hand because of its high frequency but also because of its special behavior. Below we exemplify these verb classes. We start by citing English verbs from Levin (1993), followed by French examples. Furthermore we give examples from our corpus that show the actual use of the verbs in the reflexive construction together with a *par*-phrase.

#### 1) Verbs of change of state

##### 1.a) Ordinary verbs of change of state:

English: *break, enlarge, melt, open, close, etc.*, cf. Levin (1993: 240)  
 French: *accroître, amollir, changer, détruire, diviser, empirer, durcir, enflammer, enfler, gâter, grossir, etc.*

- (9)a. que la mer **se trouble** par l'impétuosité des vens, (Calvin, 1560, *Institution de la religion chrestienne*, Frantext)  
 b. Ma reputation **se tache** par ce crime, (Tristan l'heremite, 1639, *Pantheé*, Frantext)

- c. On met ordinairement les huitres dans du sable, où elles **se corrompent** par la chaleur extraordinaire du soleil; (Rollin, 1738, *Histoire ancienne des Égyptiens*, Frantext)
- d. Le troisième jour de sa marche, sa petite troupe, qui **s'étoit affoiblie** par les combats précédens, fut attaquée par des gens d'armes anglais, très-supérieurs en nombre. (Tencin, 1739, *Le Siège de Calais*, Frantext)
- e. Ses désirs, à la vérité, croissent et **s'échauffent** par les obstacles (Duclos, 1741, *Histoire de Madame de Luz*, Frantext)
- f. La soif, la faim, l'angoisse **se sont apaisées** par la lumière de la galaxie, et sur sa peau il y a, comme des gouttes, la marque de chaque étoile du ciel. (Le Clézio, 1980, *Désert*, Frantext)

1.b.) Aspectual verbs, i.e. verbs that describe the *initiation*, *termination* or *continuation* of an activity:

English: *begin, cease, commence, continue, end, finish, halt, keep, proceed, repeat, resume, start, stop, terminate*, etc., cf. Levin (1993:274)  
 French: *terminer, prolonger, maintenir, commencer, dissiper, établir, éteindre*, etc.

- (10)a. L'état **se maintiendra** par la reputation du prince, (Balzac (Guez de), 1631, *Le Prince*, Frantext)
- b. Nos entreprises furent plus justes qu'heureuses, elles **se terminent** par la perte entière de tous les avantages (Prévost, 1731, *Le Philosophe anglais ou Histoire de Monsieur Cleveland, fils naturel de Cromwell*, Frantext)
- c. la guerre hispano-américaine **s'achevait** par la victoire des états-Unis et l'indépendance de Cuba lorsque Aureliano Romero et sa femme Rosita débarquèrent à Buenos Aires (Ormesson, 1985, *Le Vent du soir*, Frantext)

1.c.) Alternating verbs of appearance:

English (so called 'reflexive verbs of appearance'): *assert, declare, define, express, form, intrude, manifest, offer, pose, present, proffer, recommend, shape, show, suggest*, etc., cf. Levin (1993: 259)

French: *caractériser, définir, expliquer, manifester, montrer, prouver, soutenir*, etc.

- (11)a. Rentrez, je ne puis voir qu'avec mille douleurs. Votre rébellion **s'exprimer** par vos pleurs. (Corneille, 1637, *La Suivante*, Frantext)
- b. Sa modestie **se déclara** par une honnête rougeur, (Prévost, 1731, *Le Philosophe anglais ou Histoire de Monsieur Cleveland, fils naturel de Cromwell*, Frantext)
- c. un système n'est autre chose que la disposition des différentes parties d'un art ou d'une science dans un ordre où elles se soutiennent toutes mutuellement, et où les dernières **s'expliquent** par les premières. (Condillac, 1749, *Traité des systèmes*, Frantext)
- d. Le «nouveau» héros ne se prend pas au sérieux, dédramatise le réel et **se caractérise** par une attitude malicieusement détachée vis-à-vis des événements. (Lipovetsky, 1983, *L'Ère du vide: essai sur l'individualisme contemporain*, Frantext)

2) Faire

- (12)a. une fosse obscure d'un profond goulphe, qui peu de temps paravant **s'estoit fait** par un terrible tremblement de terre (Aneau, 1560, *Alector ou Le Coq: histoire fabuleuse*, Frantext)
- b. mais bien loin que les changemens qui **se sont faits** par tant de révolutions dans la société, l'ayent corrompue, ils l'ont au contraire perfectionnée (Mably, 1740, *Parallèle des Romains et des François par rapport au gouvernement*, Frantext)

- (13)a. J'appelle fricassée une mixtion superflue de ces deux langues, qui **se fait** par sottetelets glorieux et non par gens resolués et pleins de bon jugement. (Dolet, 1540, *La Maniere de bien traire d'une langue en aultre / D'avantage de la punctuation de la langue francoyse / Plus des accents d'ycelle*, Frantext)
- b. Ils avoueront même que si les bonnes maisons **se font** par les femmes, de même la tranquillité se maintient dans les états, quand les reines secondent les sages intentions des rois; (Lenglet du Fresnoy, 1735, *L'Histoire justifiée contre les romans*, Frantext)

3) Other verbs (i.e. necessarily agentive verbs)

- (14)a. Un (dictes vous) livre trepelu, qui **se vend** par les bisouars et porteballes, au tiltre: le Blason des Couleurs. (Rabelais, 1542, *Gargantua*, Frantext)
- b. que la sagesse de Dieu ne **se comprend** point par les plus excellens du monde. (Calvin, 1560, *Institution de la religion chrestienne*, Frantext)
- c. Et au moins se trouveroit il une chose au monde, de tant qu'il y en a, qui **se croiroit** par les hommes d'un consentement universel. (Montaigne, 1592, *Essais*, Frantext)

The diachronic change of the distribution of the two types of *par*-phrases with these semantic verb classes is shown in Table 2. The table shows that verbs of change of state do not form a consistent class with respect to PP-modification but that instead the three subclasses (i) *ordinary verbs of change of state*, (ii) *aspectual verbs* and (iii) *alternating verbs of appearance* need indeed to be distinguished.

Ordinary verbs of change of state like *amollir*, *endurcir*, *empirer*, etc. appeared quite frequently with *par*-cause in the first three time periods but nearly never in present-day French (cf. (15) for the ungrammaticality of example (9a.) in Modern French).

- (15) \*La mer se trouble par l'impétuosité des vents.

Alternating verbs of appearance and aspectual verbs on the other hand underwent quite a different diachronic development; while they showed up quite rarely with *par*-cause in the first and second time period (compared to ordinary verbs of change of state) they appeared much more frequently with *par*-cause in the third and fourth time slot. Crucially they are the only verb classes compatible with *par*-cause in present day French. These developments are further illustrated in Figure 2.

A further result is that the verbs which do not express a change of state were always quite incompatible with *par*-cause and appeared mainly with *par*-agent. This is expected as these verbs also do not license cause subjects in their transitive use. Further, we had already mentioned before that modification by *par*-agent got lost in Modern French (cf. (16) for the ungrammaticality of example (14b.) in Modern French).

- (16) \*La sagesse de Dieu ne se comprend point par les plus excellents du monde.

What is surprising however, is that verbs expressing a change of state showed quite the opposite behavior: All three subclasses of verbs of change of state have in common that they had always been quite incompatible with *par*-agent. Taking together all three subclasses of verbs expressing a change of state and all four time periods, we find just 11 examples where such verbs are modified with *par*-agent. This is unexpected as we hypothesized before that these verbs should be ambiguous between a passive and an anticausative reading when occurring with reflexive morphology. But if these constructions could get a passive interpretation then there is no reason why modification with *par*-agent should be (nearly) non-existing. This observation needs certainly further discussion (see Section 3).

Finally the verb *faire* shows a somewhat special behavior: it is the only verb that showed up frequently with *par*-cause as well as with *par*-agent. Further, *faire* is by far the verb with the most occurrences with *par*-agent. However, both properties only manifest in the first time period and were lost in the course of time. For present-day French no examples were found with either *par*-cause or *par*-agent.

period	1500-1599	1630-1649	1730-1749	1980-1989
Corpus size (words)	4 959 545	4 011 824	7 740 490	7 026 999
<i>par-cause</i>				
ordinary verbs of change of state	47	34	67	9
alternating verbs of appearance	9	6	69	77
aspectual verbs	10	11	37	30
faire	14	4	6	0
other	0	3	3	0
<i>par-agent</i>				
ordinary verbs of change of state	2	2	0	0
alternating verbs of appearance	1	0	0	0
aspectual verbs	3	1	2	0
faire	26	4	7	0
other	13	4	4	0

Table 2: *Par-cause* and *par-agent* with different semantic verb classes (absolute frequencies)

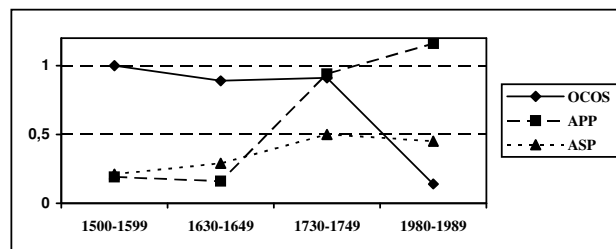


Figure 2: *Par-cause* with 3 sub-classes of verbs of change of state (relative frequencies)

### 3 Discussion: Passive or anticausative?

In the preceding section we presented the diachronic change of the distribution of *par*-phrases introducing external arguments in the context of reflexive constructions from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to present-day French. To collect and present this data was the first goal of this study. It corroborated earlier findings that the *par*-phrase introducing agents disappeared in the course of time from the context of French reflexive constructions.

Moreover it brought about the so far not discussed observation that *par*-phrases introducing non-human causes underwent a quite different development. Not only had these *par*-phrases always been much more frequent in the context of French reflexive constructions but they are also still frequent in Modern French. Nevertheless, *par*-phrases introducing causes underwent some diachronic change, too. While they were found in the first period of our investigation (1500-1599) mainly with ordinary change of state verbs, but rather seldom with alternating verbs of appearance and aspectual verbs, the situation changes drastically within the third period (1730-1749); from then on *par-cause* is mainly found with alternating verbs of appearance, to some extent also with aspectual verbs but very rarely with ordinary verbs of change of state.

The fact that *par-agent* and *par-cause* behaved and developed quite differently raises an important question. Since all examples we collected involved reflexively marked verbs we might wonder whether the different diachronic developments affect the reflexive passive and the reflexive anticausative to the same extent. However, to make any statement about the distribution of *par*-phrases with the reflexive passive and anticausative we have to find a way to categorize the examples of our corpus as passives and anticausatives, which is not a trivial issue given their formal identity.

A number of examples from our corpus can be safely categorized as passives on the basis of the restrictions on anticausative formation discussed in Section 1. Recall that only a subset of the verbs that form passives also form anticausatives. Crosslinguistically, only verbs that allow causes as their subject can form anticausatives. It follows that verbs which license only agents but not causes as subjects do not form anticausatives.

satives and we can therefore conclude that French reflexive constructions with all kinds of *agentive* verbs should be categorized as passives.

There are however many other verbs in our corpus which from a crosslinguistic perspective are predicted to form both passives and anticausatives. These are verbs expressing a change of state which do not restrict their subjects to be agents. For these verbs the question whether we are dealing with a reflexive passive or a reflexive anticausative remains unanswered.

In the introduction we mentioned a number of tests and diagnostics that were proposed in the literature to differentiate between passives and anticausatives. As mentioned, these standard tests and diagnostics which typically target on the presence vs. absence of an implicit external argument are not applicable in a diachronic study.

However, we discussed one further difference between passives and anticausatives that turns out to be more suitable for our purpose. For a number of languages it is attested that passives and anticausatives differ from each other with respect to the expression of external arguments in PPs; while passives license both agents and causes in a prepositional phrase, anticausatives license only causes but never agents.

Under the assumption that this also holds for French, we can use the *par*-phrase as a diagnostic at least for the examples with *par*-agent and safely categorize them as passives. For the other examples, i.e. those with *par*-cause, the *par*-phrase does not seem to directly provide a diagnostic for the categorization as passive or anticausative. Still, we think that a categorization of all examples on the basis of the *par*-phrase is possible.

Our proposal crucially relies on the observation that PPs introducing agents and PPs introducing causes are nearly in complementary distribution with respect to semantic verb classes. The former appear mainly with verbs that we expect not to form anticausatives (*agentive* verbs), the latter appear mainly with verbs that we expect to form both passives and anticausatives. This is illustrated by the following table, where we make a three-way distinction between (i) all kinds of verbs expressing a change of state, (ii) the verb *faire* and (iii) all other verbs not expressing a change of state.

period	1500-1599	1630-1649	1730-1749	1980-1989
Corpus size (words)	4 959 545	4 011 824	7 740 490	7 026 999
<i>par</i> -cause				
verbs of change of state	66	51	173	116
faire	14	4	6	0
other	0	3	3	0
<i>par</i> -agent				
verbs of change of state	6	3	2	0
faire	26	4	7	0
other	13	4	4	0

Table 3: *Par*-cause and *par*-agent with different semantic verb classes (absolute frequencies)

Table 3 shows a strong dissociation of types of *par*-phrases and semantic verb classes. We find *par*-agent mainly with verbs that crosslinguistically do not form anticausatives and we find *par*-cause mainly with verbs that – from a crosslinguistic perspective – we would expect to form both passives and anticausatives. The fact that verbs that do not form anticausatives also do not allow for causes in the *par*-phrase is predicted by the generalization that we introduced in Section 1.

What is surprising is the fact that verbs that should form both passives and anticausatives hardly allow for agents. This is unexpected because for these verbs we do not expect any restrictions on the semantic role of the external argument, whether it appears in subject position or in a PP. However, we have to keep in mind that *par*-agent underwent a general decline from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on and does no longer exist in Modern French. (*cf.* Table 1 and Figure 1). Therefore we cannot derive any conclusions from the dissociation of *par*-agent and *par*-cause in the second to fourth time period in Table 3. But in the first time period of Table 3 *par*-agent was still common and for this period the dissociation is highly significant. In this period verbs of change of state show a strong preference for *par*-cause over *par*-agent (66/6) although *par*-agent is still

available. The only way we can make sense of this dissociation is to assume that there is a strong preference of verbs expressing a change of state to be used as reflexive anticausatives, while a use as a reflexive passive is disfavored. The observed dissociation follows naturally under the assumption that verbs of change of state have such a preference for anticausatives and that only passives, but not anticausatives license *par*-agent. Another consequence of this view is that *par*-cause and the anticausative use of the reflexive construction correlate. The *par*-phrase would thus in fact give us a diagnostic for the categorization of the examples as passives or anticausatives. Of course, this reasoning presupposes that verbs undergoing the causative alternation do not show a comparable preference for causes in their transitive use; an assumption that seems very reasonable.

Once we accept a distinction based on the *par*-phrase, our assertions on the diachronic changes presented in Section 2 can be restated more precisely. The most striking observation would be that the reflexive passive and the reflexive anticausative have undergone quite different changes. While *par*-phrases completely disappeared from the context of the reflexive passive, this is not the case for the reflexive anticausative. Nevertheless, the distribution of *par*-phrases in the context of the reflexive anticausative has substantially changed. In the case of the reflexive anticausative the change is, however, a reorganization of the semantic verb classes the *par*-phrase appears with. While the *par*-phrase nearly disappeared from the context of reflexive anticausatives formed with ordinary verbs of change of state, it became more frequent with aspectual verbs and alternating verbs of appearance.

One objection that could be brought up against our proposal concerns the behavior of the verb *faire* that does not seem to fit the picture since it appears both with *par*-cause and *par*-agent. However, *faire* is highly polysemous; we expect that this verb was sometimes used as an aspectual verb (licensing *par*-cause) and sometimes as a verb of creation (licensing *par*-agent).

#### 4 Conclusion and outlook

We have shown that the distribution of *par*-phrases introducing external arguments in the context of reflexive constructions has substantially changed from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to present-day French. The most obvious change is that *par*-phrases introducing agents have disappeared from the context of reflexive constructions. The distribution of *par*-phrases introducing causes also changed. But unlike *par*-agent, *par*-cause still appears in the context of reflexive constructions present-day French. What has changed are the semantic verb classes that *par*-cause appears with.

In the second part of our paper we focused on the question which of the examples are reflexive passives and which are reflexive anticausatives. After showing that the usual diagnostics and tests that keep passives and anticausatives apart are inapplicable in our case, we tentatively concluded that the dissociation of semantic verb classes and types of *par*-phrases might be one between passive and anticausative.

Further research on this topic will involve the following three points: (i) the integration and analysis of Middle French data, (ii) the distribution of external arguments introduced by the preposition *de* in the context of reflexive constructions and (iii) the distribution of the NPs expressed in the *par*-phrase of the reflexive construction as subjects and in *par*-phrases of the corresponding transitive use of a verb. With regard to this last point we are interested in differences between verb classes that correlate with different diachronic developments of the *par*-phrase in the reflexive construction.

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