

UNIVERSITATEA „BABEȘ-BOLYAI”  
FACULTATEA DE LITERE  
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ DE STUDII LINGVISTICE ȘI LITERARE

**TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT**

**THE CAUSATIVE-INCHOATIVE ALTERNATION IN  
NATURAL LANGUAGES. A STUDY IN THEORETICAL AND  
APPLIED LINGUISTICS**

SUMMARY

**COORDONATOR ȘTIINȚIFIC:**

Prof. univ. dr. ȘTEFAN OLTEAN

**CANDIDAT:**  
MARIA POPONEȚ

Cluj-Napoca  
2017

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>                                   | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>  | <b>7</b>  |
| <br>  |           |
| <b>CHAPTER I: METHODOLOGY .....</b>                             | <b>15</b> |
| 1.1.Introduction .....  | 15        |
| 1.2.Quantitative methods.....                                   | 15        |
| 1.2.1. Statistical analysis of quantitative methods .....       | 17        |
| 1.2.1.1.Task I .....  | 17        |
| 1.2.1.2.Task II.....  | 25        |
| 1.2.1.3.Task III.....   | 27        |
| 1.2.1.4.Task IV .....   | 31        |
| 1.2.1.5.Task V .....  | 37        |
| 1.2.1.6.Task VI .....   | 40        |
| 1.2.1.7.Task VII.....   | 47        |
| 1.2.1.8.Task VIII .....   | 57        |
| 1.3.Conclusions .....   | 60        |
| <br>  |           |
| <b>CHAPTER II: THE CAUSATIVE-UNACCUSATIVE ALTERNATION .....</b> | <b>62</b> |
| 2.1.Introduction .....  | 62        |
| 2.1.1. The Unaccusativity Hypothesis .....                      | 62        |
| 2.1.2. Syntactic diagnostics of unaccusativity.....             | 63        |
| 2.2.The causative-inchoative alternation .....                  | 67        |
| 2.2.1. Theoretical accounts .....                               | 68        |
| 2.2.1.1.Causativization .....                                   | 68        |
| 2.2.1.2.Detransitivization .....                                | 69        |
| 2.2.1.2.1. Reinhart (2002) .....                                | 69        |
| 2.2.1.2.2. Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) .....               | 71        |
| 2.2.1.2.2.1.Membership .....                                    | 76        |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 2.2.1.2.2.1.1. Verbs of spatial configuration .....   | 78  |
| 2.2.1.2.2.1.2. Verbs of motion.....   | 81  |
| 2.2.1.2.2.1.3. Verbs of existence, appearance and disappearance .....   | 85  |
| 2.2.1.2.2.1.4. Verbs of emission.....   | 87  |
| 2.3.The causative-unaccusative alternation in Romanian.....   | 89  |
| 2.3.1. Verbs of change of state.....  | 90  |
| 2.3.1.1.The Romanian equivalents of Levin and Rappaport Hovav’s (1995) internally caused<br>verbs of change of state: morphological marking vs. event type..... | 97  |
| 2.3.1.2.An explanation for the morphological marking on inchoative verbs .....  | 107 |
| 2.3.1.2.1. Haspelmath (1993) .....  | 107 |
| 2.3.1.2.2. Spontaneous inchoative verbs in Romanian .....   | 108 |
| 2.3.1.2.3. Conclusion .....   | 110 |
| 2.3.2. Verbs of spatial configuration.....  | 110 |
| 2.3.2.1.Assume position verbs.....  | 111 |
| 2.3.2.2.Verbs that express a change in the position of an entity.....   | 114 |
| 2.3.2.3.Verbs that express a change over some spatial axis .....  | 115 |
| 2.3.2.4.Simple position verbs.....  | 116 |
| 2.3.3. Verbs of motion .....  | 118 |
| 2.3.3.1. Verbs of inherently directed motion .....  | 119 |
| 2.3.3.2. <i>Roll</i> -verbs.....  | 120 |
| 2.3.3.3. Agentive verbs .....   | 123 |
| 2.3.4. Verbs of existence, appearance and disappearance .....   | 125 |
| 2.3.5. Verbs of emission .....  | 128 |
| 2.3.5.1.Verbs of light emission.....  | 130 |
| 2.3.5.2.Verbs of sound emission .....   | 130 |
| 2.3.5.3.Verbs of smell emission .....   | 134 |
| 2.3.5.4.Verbs of substance emission.....  | 135 |
| 2.3.6. Aspectual verbs.....   | 137 |
| 2.3.7. Sum-up: The causative-unaccusative alternation.....  | 137 |
| 2.3.7.1.What licenses the participation in the causative-inchoative alternation .....   | 138 |
| 2.3.7.2.Further arguments against Reinhart (2002) and Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) ...  | 142 |

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| 2.4. Conclusions..... | 147 |
|-----------------------|-----|

**CHAPTER III: THE STRUCTURE AND MEANING OF CAUSATIVE AND INCHOATIVE VERBS .....148**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 3.1.Introduction .....   | 148 |
| 3.2.The event structure of inchoatives.....  | 148 |
| 3.2.1. Premise: Alexiadou et al. (2006).....                                       | 149 |
| 3.2.2. Constructions exhibiting an implicit causative event .....                  | 151 |
| 3.2.2.1.The adversity causative in Japanese .....                                  | 151 |
| 3.2.2.2.The desiderative construction in Finnish .....                             | 154 |
| 3.2.2.3.Do inchoatives exhibit an implicit causative event? .....                  | 156 |
| 3.2.2.3.1. Evaluation of <i>from/de la</i> -PPs modification.....                  | 157 |
| 3.2.3. Do inchoatives exhibit an implicit causal entity? .....                     | 168 |
| 3.3.The event structure of lexical causatives .....                                | 174 |
| 3.3.1. Premise: lexical causatives have only one event represented in syntax ..... | 175 |
| 3.3.2. Evaluation of the proposal .....  | 188 |
| 3.4.Semantic analyses of inchoatives.....  | 192 |
| 3.4.1. Chierchia (2004) .....  | 192 |
| 3.4.1.1.Setting the framework.....   | 192 |
| 3.4.1.2.The causative alternation .....  | 196 |
| 3.4.1.3.Evaluation of the proposal based on Romanian data .....                    | 199 |
| 3.4.2. Koontz-Garboden (2009) .....  | 209 |
| 3.4.2.1.Setting the framework.....   | 209 |
| 3.4.2.2.Negation facts .....   | 215 |
| 3.4.2.3.Evaluation of the proposal .....   | 218 |
| 3.5.Conclusions.....   | 220 |

**CHAPTER IV: THE SEMANTICS AND SYNTAX OF ANTICAUSATIVE MORPHOLOGY .....221**

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| 4.1.Introduction .....          | 221 |
| 4.2.Inchoatives in French ..... | 221 |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| 4.3.Inchoatives in Italian.....   | 229        |
| 4.4.Inchoatives in Romanian.....  | 239        |
| 4.4.1. Semantic features of obligatorily <i>se</i> -marked inchoatives and obligatorily non- <i>se</i> -marked inchoatives .....          | 242        |
| 4.4.1.1.Obligatorily <i>se</i> -marked inchoatives .....  | 242        |
| 4.4.1.2.Obligatorily non- <i>se</i> -marked inchoatives.....  | 245        |
| 4.4.2. Semantic differences between <i>se</i> -marked and non- <i>se</i> -marked forms for inchoative verbs which show both variants..... | 246        |
| 4.4.2.1.Verbs for which the clitic <i>se</i> imposes selection restrictions .....   | 247        |
| 4.4.2.2.Verbs for which the clitic <i>se</i> does not impose selection restrictions .....   | 258        |
| 4.5.The structural representation of anticausative <i>se</i> .....  | 268        |
| 4.5.1. Approaches to inchoative <i>se</i> .....   | 269        |
| 4.5.1.1.Chierchia (2004) .....  | 270        |
| 4.5.1.2.Schäfer (2008) .....  | 274        |
| 4.5.1.3.Folli (2002) .....  | 279        |
| 4.5.1.4.Ramchand (2008) .....   | 283        |
| 4.5.1.4.1. Consequences of Ramchand’s (2008) theory for unaccusativity.....   | 297        |
| 4.6.Conclusions.....  | 306        |
| <b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>  | <b>308</b> |
| <b>APPENDIX: LINGUISTIC QUESTIONNAIRE.....</b>  | <b>312</b> |
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>   | <b>330</b> |

**Keywords:** the causative-inchoative alternation, unaccusativity, lexicalist accounts, syntactic accounts, Romanian, the event structure of inchoatives, the event structure of lexical causatives, reflexive analyses of inchoatives, the semantics of anticausative *se*, the syntax of anticausative *se*

## Summary

This thesis, *The causative-inchoative alternation in natural languages. A study in theoretical and applied linguistics*, examines the causative-inchoative alternation, a phenomenon dealing with the interface between lexical semantic meaning, syntax and morphology. In the course of the paper, we aim to shed light on a number of controversial aspects regarding the syntax, semantics and morphology of inchoatives and lexical causatives in Romanian. While we mainly focus on Romanian data, our approach is comparative in essence, constantly drawing conclusions relative to English and Romance data.

The causative alternation is exhibited by verbs which show transitive and intransitive versions, where the transitive means “cause to V-intransitive” (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 79). The syntactic relevance of the causative alternation lies in its being one of the main diagnostics for unaccusativity, the hypothesis according to which unaccusative verbs project their unique argument in object position (cf. Perlmutter 1978, Burzio 1986). The inventory of the verb classes that take part in the causative alternation reveals that the great majority of them are verbs of change of state, whence the focus on the causative-inchoative alternation.

The study of the causative alternation involves the examination of the main theoretical accounts that tackle this issue within the generative framework, analyses which assume a fixed mapping between theta roles and syntactic positions. Although it is generally agreed that the verbs participating in the causative alternation present one lexical entry, there remains the question of the location of the derivation of one variant from the other, either in the lexicon, or in syntax, giving rise to two types of accounts, i.e. lexicalist and syntactic. Hence, another research objective is the identification of the advantages and drawbacks of the theories examined.

Conclusions are reached either based on theory-internal considerations alone, or by resorting to qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative methods involved collecting attested examples from the internet, whereas the quantitative methods involved gathering data on acceptability judgments for a variety of constructed sentences. Thus, our enterprise is not only

theoretical, but also applicative, seeking to establish the viability of theoretical assumptions based on the opinions of Romanian speakers.

Our major research achievements cover the following topics: the inventory of the verb classes that take part in the causative alternation in Romanian, the event structure of inchoatives, the event structure of lexical causatives, the rejection of the reflexive analyses of inchoatives, the meaning associated with anticausative *se*, the syntax of anticausative *se*.

The thesis is structured in four chapters, as follows:

In Chapter I, *Methodology*, we discuss the results of the quantitative tasks of our research. The data gathering procedure involved a linguistic questionnaire comprising 8 different tasks, which was distributed on line via e-mail. 33 people agreed to fill in the linguistic questionnaire, which required the age, mother tongue and the language spoken predominantly in the last 5 years. A few variables emerged from these criteria. The participants could be split into three groups according to their age, each group comprising 11 members. Other participant variables are mother tongue and the language spoken predominantly in the last 5 years. The great majority of the respondents are native speakers of Romanian, i.e. 32 people, while one of them is a native speaker of Hungarian. Almost all of them spoke mainly Romanian in the last 5 years, i.e. 31 people, but for one participant who spoke English in the last 5 years, and the participant with Hungarian mother tongue who spoke Hungarian and Romanian.

In the great majority of tasks, i.e. Tasks I, II, III, IV, VII, the participants had to rate sentences on a five-point Lickert scale, in Task V, they had to rate sentences on a two-point rating scale, while in Tasks VI and VIII, the participants had to choose the meaning they associate with a given sentence from a set of four options.

In Task I, we tested the acceptability of the transitive for inchoative verbs listed as solely intransitives in *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române*. The results of this task showed that, in general, speakers considered the transitives of internally caused verbs of change of state debatable (3) when the subject is a natural cause, and completely unacceptable (1) when the subject is an agent.

In Task II, we tested the acceptability of causes introduced by *de la* “from”-PPs to the inchoative *a se sparge* “break”, which were deemed almost perfect (4).

Task III tested the acceptability of emotion causes introduced by *de/de la* “of/from”-PPs to unergatives. The results of this task showed that Romanian unergatives are preferably modified by emotion causes introduced by *de* “of”-PPs, rather than *de la* “from”-PPs.

Task IV, which sought to establish if there is an implicit causal entity/causer in inchoatives, gave rather inconclusive results. We believe that the test merely reveals that inchoatives are preferably followed by a non-agentive cause, whereas passives are preferably followed by an agent in Romanian.

Task V, consisting in a test for the identification of the event structure of lexical causatives, showed that at least some lexical causatives are bi-eventive in Romanian.

In Task VI, which made use of a test designed to identify the change/reflexive meaning of various types of verbs of change, our respondents assigned the change meaning to inchoatives, non-agentive verbs of manner of motion and verbs of appearance/disappearance in high percentages, providing further evidence against the reflexive analyses of unaccusatives embraced by Chierchia (2004) or Koontz-Garboden (2009).

Task VII, which tested the aspectual properties of optionally *se*-marked inchoatives, showed that under modification by *în* “in”-PPs and *timp de* “for”-PPs there are not significant differences between the *se*-marked variant and the non-*se*-marked variant. Since the two variants do not differ in telicity, an unergative analysis of non-*se*-marked inchoatives is not warranted.

Task VIII, a follow-up to the test in Task VII, aimed to see if non-*se*-marked inchoatives are ascribed the *a face/a produce* “make/produce”+noun paraphrase. The results of Task VIII, where two non-*se*-marked inchoatives, out of the four inchoatives put to the test, are assigned the *a face/a produce* “make/produce”+noun paraphrase in figures higher than 50%, are invalidated by the results of Task VII.

Chapter II, *The causative-unaccusative alternation*, examines the classes of verbs that participate in the causative alternation in Romanian. After reviewing some representative lexicalist analyses, we present Levin and Rappaport Hovav’s (1995) classification of unaccusative verbs in English. Based on the assumption that the participation in the alternation is regulated by the semantic concepts of internal and external causation, these authors argue that the participation in the causative alternation is restricted to verbs of change of state and non-agentive verbs of manner of motion.



Drawing on Dragomirescu's (2010) classification of unaccusative verbs in Romanian, we investigate the participation of these verbs in the causative alternation, and we agree that, although the great majority of them are verbs of change of state, other unaccusative verbs take part in the alternation (cf. Dragomirescu 2010). We refine Dragomirescu's (2010) classification of verbs of spatial configuration and verbs of movement, and we argue that Romanian verbs of emission are unergative.

Making use of the results obtained in Task I, we examine the Romanian counterparts of Levin and Rappaport Hovav's (1995) internally caused verbs of change of state in English, and we investigate the correlation between internal and external causation and the morphological marking on verbs of change of state. The concepts of internal and external causation cannot account for the morphological marking on all these verbs of change of state. Moreover, internal and external causation cannot account for the participation in the transitive-unaccusative alternation of stative verbs of spatial configuration like *a se găsi* "be found".

Chapter III, *The structure and meaning of causative and inchoative verbs*, is structured in three parts: The first part of the chapter investigates the event structure of inchoatives, and seeks to establish if inchoatives have an implicit causative event or an implicit causal entity/causer in their meaning. We resort to the comparison between inchoatives, on the one hand, and unergatives and statives, on the other hand, with a view to detecting an implicit causative event in inchoatives. We argue that the acceptability of causes introduced by *de la* "from"-PPs to all these verb types can be taken as evidence that inchoatives have no implicit causative event in their meaning.

On the other hand, Härtl's (2003) test designed to detect an implicit causal entity/causer in inchoatives is applied to Romanian data. In Task IV, the participants in our survey had to rate the continuations to a series of verb constructions: the *se*-marked inchoative *a se sparge* "break", the non-*se*-marked inchoative *a seca* "dry", and their passive counterparts followed either by an agent or a cause. The inchoatives followed by causes received higher scores than the inchoatives followed by agents, whereas the passives followed by agents received higher scores than the passives followed by causes. We argue that the test does not track down an implicit causal entity in inchoatives, but merely indicates a preference for particular types of causers after inchoatives and their passive counterparts.

The second part of the chapter investigates the event structure of lexical causatives in Romanian. In particular, we seek to establish if lexical causatives are mono-eventive, as claimed for related languages (e.g. Martin and Schäfer 2014), or bi-eventive. The results of the test in Task V prove that at least some lexical causatives in Romanian have both the causative event and the change of state event represented in syntax.

The third part of the chapter reviews two renowned reflexive analyses of inchoatives in the literature. Chierchia's (2004) analysis is rejected based on the comparison between reflexive verbs and inchoatives modified by phrases carrying the meaning "by itself" in Romanian. We also briefly discuss the results of Task VI, which tested the meaning of unaccusatives that are not modified by phrases carrying the meaning "by itself". The assignment of the change meaning to unaccusative verbs in high percentages represents further evidence against the reflexive analyses of unaccusative verbs in Romance.

Schäfer and Vivanco's (2013) arguments against Koontz-Garboden's (2009) reflexive analysis of inchoatives based on negation facts in Spanish are also reviewed for the sake of completeness. The only evidence in favour of the reflexive analysis of inchoatives is formal, i.e. the morphological marking with the reflexive pronoun *se*. This argument will be rejected in the following chapter.

Chapter IV, *The semantics and syntax of anticausative morphology*, has two parts: The first part of the chapter investigates the correlation between morphological marking and the interpretation of inchoatives, and begins with the semantic differences identified by Labelle (1992) in French, and the aspectual differences identified by Folli (1999, 2002) in Italian. Labelle (1992) claimed that in pairs of optionally *se*-marked inchoatives, the non-*se*-marked variant expresses a spontaneous event, whereas the *se*-marked variant expresses a costly event. Folli (1999, 2002) argued that in pairs of optionally *si*-marked inchoatives, the *si*-marked version is telic, while the non-*si*-marked version is atelic.

Romanian inchoative verbs are examined to see if they behave in a similar fashion to the inchoatives in related Romance languages. We show that some of the inchoative verbs which display optional morphological marking in Romanian are, in fact, specialized for certain verb plus object strings. Usually, the non-*se*-marked version expresses an event that was perceived as spontaneous in the moment of verb dubbing, while the *se*-marked version expresses a departure

from this (implicit) meaning. Importantly, despite morphological marking, the *se*-marked version may also express a spontaneous event in the world.

We also argue that there is no correlation between morphological marking and event type with inchoative verbs which show optional morphological marking. On the other hand, we test the aspectual properties of optionally *se*-marked inchoatives which do not display selection restrictions. Based on the results of Task VII, we argue that optionally *se*-marked inchoatives which do not display selection restrictions exhibit similar aspectual properties, and, consequently, an unergative analysis of non-*se*-marked inchoatives is not warranted. Our findings contradict Labelle's (1992) assumption that non-*se*-marked verbs of change of state are necessarily unergative. Moreover, our results show that Folli's (1999, 2002) findings do not apply to Romanian. It is not the case that the *se*-marked version in pairs of optionally *se*-marked inchoatives is telic, while the non-*se*-marked version is atelic.

The second part of the chapter reviews some of the analyses proposed for inchoative *se* in Romance languages, in search for an analysis for anticausative *se* exhibited by inchoatives, non-agentive verbs of manner of motion, and, by extension, stative verbs of spatial configuration in Romanian. We believe that Ramchand's (2008) analysis, which arguably syntacticizes the concepts of internal and external causation in Levin and Rappaport Hovav's (1995) lexicalist analysis, can account for anticausative *se* in Romanian. Adjusting Schäfer's (2008) assumption to Ramchand's (2008) framework, we believe that *se* viewed as the expletivization of the head of the phrase that introduces the external argument can account not only for the relation between lexical causatives and inchoatives or non-agentive verbs of manner of motion, but also for the relation between transitive *a găsi* "find" and the unaccusative verb of spatial configuration *a se găsi* "be found". Nonetheless, the theory is not exempt from problems as the mapping between syntax and event structure that it assumes cannot account for the valence of unaccusative verbs like *a dispărea* "disappear".