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## What Causes the Alternation of Agentive Verbs in Brazilian Portuguese?

### Abstract

It has been noted that agentive verbs, i.e. verbs that would not be expected to undergo the causative alternation, according to Levin & Rappaport Hovav (1995), participate in a causative-like alternation in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). I call this alternation 'the agentive alternation' (AA). In this paper, I argue that the AA is a byproduct of the loss of the clitic *se* that occupies the position of an external argument in VoiceP (Schäfer 2008). I show that the AA alternation is different from the causative alternation and the verbs that participate in the AA share characteristics with BP unmarked generic middles. Importantly, in spite of the loss of voice morphology, BP unmarked middles project unaccusative syntax. As a result, there is no difference between middles and anticausatives in BP in respect to their transitivity status and verbs previously only licensed in middles were generalized as alternating verbs.

# What Causes the Alternation of Agentive Verbs in Brazilian Portuguese?

Janayna Carvalho\*

## 1 Introduction

In the literature on argument structure in Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth BP), it is generally claimed that the verbs undergoing the causative alternation are in expansion in this language (Whitaker-Franchi 1989, Pacheco 2008, Negrão and Viotti 2008, among others). (1) and (2) exemplify this alternation with the verb *lavar* ‘wash’, and (3) and (4) with *construir* ‘build’.

- (1) O João/ \*O vento lav-ou a roupa.  
The John/ \*The wind wash-PST.3SG the cloth  
‘John/\*The wind washed the clothes.’
- (2) A roupa lav-ou. A roupa está lav-ando.<sup>1</sup>  
The cloth wash-PST.3SG. The cloth is.3SG wash-PROG  
‘The clothes got washed. The clothes are getting washed.’
- (3) O João/\*A chuva constr-uiu um prédio.  
The João/\*The rain build-PST.3SG a building  
‘John/\*The wind built a building.’
- (4) Um prédio constr-uiu. Um prédio está constr-uindo.  
A building build-PST.3SG A building is.3SG build-PROG  
‘A building got built.’ ‘A building is getting built.’

Besides *wash* and *build*, several verbs that would not be expected to alternate, according to Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995), participate in this causative-like alternation in BP. However, differently from verbs licensed in the causative alternation, *wash* and *build* do not comply with a central requirement of such an alternation, the Underspecified argument condition, stated in (5).

- (5) **Underspecified argument condition:** Only transitive verbs that do not restrict the  $\theta$ -role of their external argument to agents enter the (anti)causative alternation.

(Alexiadou et al. 2015)

According to this condition, a verb like *break* will be licensed in the causative alternation, since it can have either an agent or a cause as external arguments: *John/The wind broke the vase*. Verbs like *wash* and *build* would not be candidates for this alternation since they do not license causes as external arguments, as the ungrammaticality of the DPs *O vento* ‘The wind’ in (1) and *A chuva* ‘the rain’ in (3) illustrate.

For this reason, the two sets of sentences above will be treated as examples of an agentive alternation (AA), since only verbs that can have an agentive external argument are licensed in it. For the time being, we will remain neutral about the structure of sentences (2) and (4). They will be referred to as the intransitive member of the AA.

Historical data suggest a connection between sentences such as (2) and (4) and the loss of voice morphology. Cyrino (2013) conducted a corpus search and concluded that the first appearance of sentences such as (2) and (4) coincide with the loss of *se* in anticausatives, passives, impersonals and middles, and the emergence of SV order in BP.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For some speakers, sentences such as (2) are only grammatical if the verb is in the progressive form. This is the reason why we give two possible forms for the intransitive member in (2) and (4).

<sup>2</sup>Voice morphology in BP is being progressively lost in all contexts in which it was formerly obligatory: anticausatives (cf. Ribeiro 2010), passives (Naro 1976, Nunes 1990), impersonals (Galves 2001, Nunes 1990,

However, as noticed in previous work (cf. Negrão and Viotti 2008, Cyrino 2013), sentences such as (2) and (4) are incompatible with the exponent of voice morphology in BP, the clitic *se*. (6) can only be grammatical under a (weird) reflexive reading, which is not relevant here.

- (6) \*A roupa se lav-ou.  
 The cloth SE wash-PST.3SG  
 Intended: The clothes got washed.

Given this scenario, a question that immediately comes to mind is: can we assume that there is a relation between the loss of voice morphology in BP and the AA alternation? In order to answer such a question, we will compare the structures of the eventualities that have lost voice morphology in BP with sentences such as (2) and (4).

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we show that there is no covert agent of any type in sentences as (2) and (4), since they do not pattern with passives and impersonals in the relevant tests. As anticausatives, the intransitive variant of the AA does not have an implicit agent.

In Section 3, we compare the intransitive member of the AA with anticausative sentences. Even though both types of sentences are unaccusative, their event structure is not the same. The unaccusative members of the AA alternation are monoeventive, whereas the unaccusative members of the causative alternation are bieventive.

Finally, in Section 4, we draw some commonalities between unmarked middles in BP, middles without voice morphology, and the intransitive member of the AA. It will be shown that their structure match: both are monoeventive unaccusatives.

The results of this comparison give us an understanding of the relation between the loss of voice morphology and the agentive alternation. With the loss of voice morphology in BP, unmarked middles continued to project an unaccusative syntax, instead of resorting to a unergative structure as Dutch or English middles do. As a result, there is no difference between middles and anticausatives in BP in respect to their transitivity status and verbs previously only licensed in middles were generalized as alternating verbs.

## 2 Is There an Implicit Agent Available?

In this section, we apply several tests to check whether there is an implicit argument of any kind in the intransitive variant of the agentive alternation.

Let us first compare the structure of these sentences with the structure of (analytic) passives.<sup>3</sup> As the verbs licensed in the AA are agentive, one can think that the intransitive member of this alternation is a passive sentence. Contrasting with passives, neither by-phrases (7a), nor purpose clauses (8a), or subject-oriented adverbs are licensed (9a) in the intransitive member of the AA.

- (7) a. \*A roupa lav-ou pelo João.  
 The cloth wash-PST.3SG by.the John  
 b. A roupa foi lav-ad-a pelo João.  
 The cloth was wash-PTCP-F by.the John  
 ‘The clothes were washed by John.’
- (8) a. \*A roupa lav-ou para organizar a casa.  
 The cloth wash-PST.3SG to organize the house  
 ‘The clothes were washed to organize the house.’  
 b. A roupa foi lav-ad-a para organizar a casa.  
 The cloth was wash-PTCP-F to organize the house  
 ‘The clothes were washed to organize the house.’

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among many others) and middles (Pacheco 2008).

<sup>3</sup>We chose to compare the intransitive member of the AA to analytic passives and se-impersonals, but not se-passives because the latter are extremely rare in everyday speech. Moreover, se-passives pattern with se-impersonals with respect to agentivity tests in BP.

- (9) a. \*A roupa lav-ou deliberadamente.  
 The cloth wash-PST.3SG deliberately  
 ‘The clothes were washed deliberately.’  
 b. A roupa foi lav-ad-a deliberadamente.  
 The cloth was wash-PTCP-F deliberately  
 ‘The clothes were washed deliberately.’

As we have hypothesized that the emergence of the intransitive member of the AA is tied to the loss of voice morphology in BP, it is worth to examine how impersonal *se*-constructions, in which an agent is also present, behave in respect to these tests. *Se*-impersonals patterns with analytical passives in respect to agentivity tests, but one, namely the availability of the *by*-phrase, as shown in (10). As the intransitive member of the AA does not license purpose clauses and subject-oriented agents, it cannot be said to be an impersonal sentence without overt morphology, for example.

- (10) \*Se com-e muito bem pelo João.  
 Se eat-PRES.3SG very well by.the John  
 (11) Se com-e muito bem para agradar a mãe.  
 Se eat-PRES.3SG very well to pleasure the mom  
 ‘One eats very well in order to pleasure his mom.’  
 (12) Se com-e bem deliberadamente naquele lugar.  
 Se eat-PRES.3SG well deliberately in.that place  
 ‘One eats very well deliberately in that place.’

In Table 1, we summarize the results of these tests, showing that the intransitive member of the AA does not have an available agent. In this respect, the intransitive member of the agentive alternation patterns with anticausative sentences.

Tests	Passives	Se-impersonals	Intransitive member of the AA
By-phrases	X	-	-
Purpose clauses	X	X	-
Agent-oriented adverbs	X	X	-

Table 1: Diagnostics for a syntactically represented agent.

### 3 A Comparison between Anticausatives and the Intransitive Member of the Agentive Alternation

#### 3.1 The Possessor Raising Test

Besides not having an implicit agent available, anticausatives and the intransitive variant of the agentive alternation pattern with respect to a unaccusativity test. Possessor raising in BP has been argued to be a phenomenon restricted to unaccusative verbs. Regardless of the analysis for possessor raising structures one wants to adopt (Cançado 2010, Rodrigues 2010, Andrade and Galves 2014, among others), all authors agree that the possessor can only be raised in unaccusative structures. As the moved possessors end up in SpecTP, this movement would never be licensed if some other constituent had been assigned a nominative case. Hence, the ungrammaticality of (13) and (14) is expected, since *trabalhar* ‘work’ and *encontrar* ‘find’ are transitive verbs and their external arguments, *o funcionário* ‘the employee’ and *a menina* ‘the girl’, respectively, are the candidates for occupying SpecTP.

- (13) \*[Essa escola]<sub>i</sub> trabalh-a [o funcionário t<sub>i</sub>] [todos os dias].  
 this school work-PRES.3SG the employee all the days  
 (Meaning: ‘This school employee works everyday.’)  
 (14) \*[Esse rapaz]<sub>i</sub> encontr-ou [a menina] [o carro t<sub>i</sub>].

this boy find-PST.3SG the girl the car  
(Meaning: ‘The girl found this boy’s car.’)

(Andrade and Galves 2014)

If the intransitive member of the agentive alternation is unaccusative, one expects to find possessor raising in these constructions. (15) illustrates that this prediction is borne out. This sentence was posted on a newspaper’s facebook page by its administrator as a comment to a report whose headline is “Dog learns again how to walk after an alligator attack.” In this context, this is clearly an unaccusative sentence, since the dog did not amputate his own paw.

- (15) Vitório<sub>i</sub> amput-ou [a pata t<sub>i</sub>].  
Vitório amputate-PST.3SG the paw  
‘Vitório had his paw amputated.’

(16) is a version of the same sentence without the possessor raised, so the similarity to sentences (2) and (4) can be noticed. In (16), as in (2) and (4), the verb is an agentive verb i.e., a verb that can only have an agent as external argument in transitive sentences.

- (16) A pata do Vitório amput-ou.  
The paw of.the Vitório amputate-PST.3SG  
‘Vitório had his paw amputated.’

Up to now, we have demonstrated: (i) that the intransitive member of the AA does not have an agentive element and (ii) that it has an unaccusative structure. In the next Section, we are going to compare the structure of these sentences with anticausatives, whose structure is well known in the languages of the world. More specifically, it is known that anticausative sentences are formed with result roots and are bieventive. In Section 3.2 and 3.3, we investigate if the intransitive member of the AA is built with these ingredients.

### 3.2 The Type of Root Involved: Manner or Result Roots?

It has been argued that there are at least two types of verbal roots in the languages of the world: manner and result roots (Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998, among others). In an informal definition, manner roots lexicalize the process of an action, but not its result; whereas result roots lexicalize the result, but not its process. Hence, one of the aspects in which these two classes differ is the denial of the result. A contradiction arises if a result verb is denied.

- (17) #John just broke the vase, but it is not broken.

With manner verbs, on the other hand, the denial of the result part of the action does not yield a contradiction.

- (18) John just swept the floor, but nothing is different about it.  
(Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998)

The same contrast can be reproduced with BP data. Observe that the denial of the result does not yield a contradiction with verbs such as *lavar* ‘wash’ and *pintar* ‘paint’. These are manner verbs licensed in the AA.

- (19) A roupa lav-ou/ pint-ou, mas não ficoulav-ad-a/ pint-ad-a,  
Thecloth wash-PST.3SG/ paint-PST.3SG but not got wash-PTCP-F/ paint-PTCP-F  
vamos ter que lavar/ pintar de novo  
FUT.AUX.3PL have.INF that wash.INF/ paint.INF again  
‘The cloth was already washed/painted, but didn’t get properly washed/painted, we will have to wash it again.’

This contrasts with verbs, such as *break*, licensed in the causative alternation, which cannot have its result part denied.

- (20) #A janela quebr-ou, mas não fic-ou quebr-ad-a.  
 The window break-PST.3SG but not get-PST.3SG break-PTCP-F  
 ‘The window broke, but it is not broken.’

The difference between these two types of roots is also seen in participial constructions. Manner roots cannot be resultative adjectives, while result roots can. Embick (2004) notices that there are three types of participles in English: eventive, stative and adjectival. Stative and adjectival participles are claimed to be related to the feature *fient*, which, for the author, would be a kind of *become* operator.

The roots of the verbs that participate in the causative alternation are suitable for ‘resultative-like sentences’ with verbs of creation. The adjectives in bold describe the state those objects were in when they were created.

- (21) O João fabricou a cadeira **torta**.  
 The John manufacture-PST.3SG the chair bent
- (22) Os pedreiros já construíram o portão **quebr-ad-o**.  
 The bricklayers already build-PST.3PL the gate break-PTCP-M
- (23) A porta foi modelada **abert-a**.  
 The door COP.PST model-PTCP-F open.PTCP-F
- (24) A saia foi costurada **fech-ad-a**.  
 The skirt is.PST sew-PTCP-F close-PTCP-F
- (25) João preparou o chá **quente**.  
 John prepare.PST the tea hot

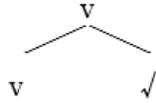
Consider now sentences from (26) to (31), in which roots of the verbs licensed in the AA are employed in resultative-like sentences. Contrasting with the former set of data, the adjectives in bold below do not describe the state of the objects when they were created. In other words, they cannot be resultative adjectives.

A possible interpretation for some of these sentences is that the entities were already in a given state before the action described by the verb took place. Sentence (26), for example, is well-formed if Joana’s hair was already “organized” when she started the braiding. Observe, however, that this is not the interpretation in which we are interested, since it is not compatible with a resultative meaning.

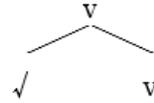
- (26) \*Joana trançou o cabelo **arrum-ad-o**.  
 Joana braid.PST the hair organize-PTCP-M
- (27) \*Joana fabricou o copo **lav-ad-o**.  
 Joana manufacture.PST the cup wash-PTCP-M
- (28) \*Os pedreiros modelaram a argila **cort-ad-a**.  
 The bricklayers model.PST the clay cut-PTCP-F
- (29) \*A Maria costurou a roupa **pass-ad-a**.  
 The Mary sew.PST the cloth iron-PTCP-F
- (30) \*A Maria preparou a comida **frit-a**.  
 The Mary prepare.PST the food fry-PTCP-F
- (31) \*Eles criaram a perna **amput-ad-a**.  
 They create.PST the leg amputate-PTCP-F

This difference between manner and result roots are accounted for if manner roots are merged as modifiers of *v* (as manner adverbs are), whereas result roots are merged as complements of *v*, therefore they can lexicalize the result of an action. See the structures in (32) and (33), adapted from Embick (2004:376).

## (32) Result root



## (33) Manner root



As we have been showing that the verbs entering the AA are formed from manner roots and the verbs entering the causative alternation are derived from result roots, we already have a first distinction between the internal structure of these two classes. The verbs entering the AA are merged as modifiers of *v*, specifying the means of the action, whereas the verbs entering the causative alternation are merged as result roots, specifying the result part of the action.

### 3.3 Monoeventive or Bieventive?

One more test can help us to refine the differences between anticausatives and the intransitive member of the AA. Anticausative verbs exhibit two readings with the adverb *again*, namely a repetitive and a restitutive reading. The presence of a restitutive reading with *again* points to a resultative layer in the syntax (von Stechow 1996), since it modifies the result of the action. In this respect, anticausatives contrast to the intransitive member of the AA, in which only a repetitive reading is expected to arise.

In the examples below we use a scenario adapted from Alexiadou and Iordachioaia (2014), which could, in principle, evoke both repetitive and restitutive readings. In (34) and (35), we test a verb licensed in the AA, *vender* ‘to sell’. With both the transitive and the unaccusative counterpart, only a repetitive reading arises.

- (34) **Transitive counterpart:** João vendeu a casa de novo. Todas as outras vezes outra pessoa tinha vendido a casa. É a primeira vez que o João conseguiu vender a casa.

John sold the house again. In all previous occasions, another person had sold the house. This is the first time John managed to sell the house.

A. João vendeu a casa de novo. ‘John sold the house again’ ✓ - only repetitive

- (35) **Intransitive counterpart:** João colocou a casa para vender de novo. Todas as outras vezes, outra pessoa tinha vendido a casa. É a primeira vez que o João conseguiu vender a casa. Como resultado da ação de João . . .

John put the house up for sale again. In all previous occasions, another person had sold the house. This is the first time that John managed to sell the house. As a result of John’s action . . .

A. A casa vendeu de novo. ‘(lit.)The house sold again’ ✓ - only repetitive

The unavailability of a restitutive reading with *vender* ‘sell’ is because a further selling of the house will not restate a previous one. All new sellings are interpreted as repetitive actions, because *vender* ‘sell’ does not have a result part.

This can be contrasted with the availability of both readings with *abrir* ‘open’. In the actions described below, the ambiguity between restituting a former state in which the door was open and repeating the action of opening the door is due to the availability of two layers in (anti)causative sentences. If the adverb attaches to the upper layer, a repetitive reading arises, if attaches to the resultative layer, the restitutive reading arises.

- (36) **Transitive counterpart:** João abriu a porta de novo. Todas as outras vezes outra pessoa tinha aberto a porta. É a primeira vez que João conseguiu abrir a porta.

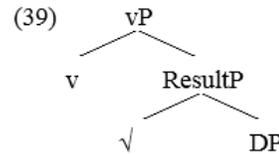
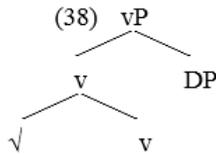
John opened the door again. In all previous occasions, another person had opened the door. This is the first time that John managed to open the door. As a result of John's action . . .  
A. João abriu a porta de novo. '*John opened the door again.*' ✓ *repetitive/restitutive*

- (37) **Intransitive counterpart:** João abriu a porta de novo. Todas as outras vezes outra pessoa tinha aberto a porta. É a primeira vez que João conseguiu abrir a porta. Como resultado da ação de João . . .

John opened the door again. In all previous occasions, another person had opened the door. This is the first time that John managed to open the door. As a result of John's action . . .  
A. A porta abriu de novo. '*The door opened again.*' – ✓ *repetitive/restitutive*

### 3.4 The Structure of Anticausatives and the Intransitive Member of the AA

In sum, the tests offered in this Section show that the intransitive member of the AA and anticausative sentences have different structures in spite of being both unaccusative. (38) corresponds to the structure of the intransitive member of the AA and (39), to anticausatives.



In the next section, we finally compare the intransitive member of the AA with unmarked generic middles, given the fact that they have also been affected by the loss of voice morphology.

## 4 Generic Middles and the Intransitive Member of the AA

There is one more eventuality with which we need to compare the unaccusative member of the AA. Recall we affirmed that the structure of middles also changed in BP. They also lost/have been losing expletive voice, which led to changes in their structure.

According to Ackema and Schorlemmer (2007), there are at least two types of middles in the languages of the world. Type I represents the properties of unmarked middles in the languages of the world, and type II represents the properties of marked ones.

Type I middles	Type II middles
English – <i>This book reads easily</i>	French – <i>Ce livre se lit facilement.</i>
Only agentive verbs	Experiencer and stative verbs as well
Do not accept subject-oriented expressions	Accept subject-oriented expressions

Table 2: Properties of two types of middles.

Examples (40) and (41) demonstrate that the loss of *se* in BP has made middles in this language pattern with type I middles. Neither stative verbs (40) nor subject-oriented expressions (41) are licensed if middles are unmarked.

- (40) Matemática \*(se) sabe bem (quando se estuda muito).  
Math se know-PRES.3SG well (when se study.PRES a.lot)  
'One knows math well when one studies a lot.'
- (41) Receita de bolo \*(se) prepar-a com atenção. (Pacheco 2008)  
Recipe of cake se prepare-PRES.3SG with attention.

‘One prepares cake recipes with attention’

However, in spite of the fact that BP and English middles fall inside the same category according to Ackema and Schoorlemmer’s (2007) typology, they do not have the same structure. There are some factors demonstrating that the agent interpretation can be recovered in English but not in BP middles.

The presence of adjunct gerundives and anaphora elements in English middles were part of a debate about whether elements can be licensed logophorically in English middles or whether these elements point to the presence of a PRO in the structure of English middles (Stroik 1995, Zribi-Hertz 1993). Be that as it may, the adjunct gerundive in (42) and the anaphoric element in (43) do not have any possible counterparts in BP (cf. (44) and (45)), pointing to a difference in their structure.

- (42) Most physics books read poorly even after reading them several times. (Stroik 1995:168)  
 (43) ??A maioria dos livros de física não lê fácil mesmo depois de ler eles várias vezes.<sup>4,5</sup>  
 (44) Books about oneself never read poorly. (Stroik 1995:166)  
 (45) \*Livros sobre si mesmo nunca leem rápido.

Apart from these semantic/syntactic differences, there is a conclusive piece of evidence showing that BP middles are unaccusatives. As the unaccusative variant of the AA, they allow possessor raising.

- (46) [Esse tipo de sala]<sub>i</sub> encera [o chão t<sub>i</sub>] fácil.  
 This type of room wax-PRES.3SG the floor easy.  
 ‘This type of room can be easily waxed.’  
 (47) [Cachorro]<sub>i</sub> opera [a pata t<sub>i</sub>] fácil.  
 Dog operate-PRES.3SG the paw easy.  
 ‘Dogs’ paws can be easily operated.’

The reader may have noticed that if unmarked middles in BP undergo possessor raising and license agentive verbs, as we see in (46) and (47), the difference between middles and the unaccusative member of the AA is aspectual in nature. In other words, (46) and (47) read like middles if they are generic sentences and as the unaccusative members of the AA if they are eventive.

As the agent is not present in BP middles, the only information conveyed by middles in this language is that these events hold true in virtue of the property assigned to the theme (derived grammatical subject) (Lekakou 2005). No “agent feeling” or real agent is represented in unmarked middles in this language. (48) and (49) represent the syntactic structure of middles in English and BP, respectively.

- (48) GEN [<sub>VoiceP</sub> Voice [<sub>VP</sub> V DP]] = English middles  
 (49) GEN [<sub>VP</sub> V+ DP]] = BP middles

## 5 Conclusion: Lack of Voice as the Cause of Agentive Alternation in BP

A widely accepted fact about syncretic systems is that they employ the same morphology for a variety of different meanings. In order to capture the morphological commonality in a wide range of events, one can argue for a common starting point in all events that share a given piece of morphology.

<sup>4</sup>*Poorly* was replaced for *not easy* in (43), as the translation of this adverb is not suitable for middles in BP. This is one more difference between BP and English middles. The latter type of middles licenses a broader category of adverbs. BP middles license only manner adverbs, which modify a lower part of the structure. For reasons of space, we will not be able to address this question in this paper.

<sup>5</sup>A side remark about the register in this sentence. We could use the clitic form for the object (“*los*”, in this case), but we chose to use the full pronoun in order to produce the most natural sentence possible.

For the sake of the argument here, we will assume that these eventualities share a great piece of their derivation and the differences arise in virtue of the type of root (for example, following previous literature, we have shown that manner and result roots are licensed in different structures in BP) or other operators (Cinque (1988) has demonstrated the relation between non-specified tense and the impersonal reading, and specified tense and the indefinite reading).

This being the case, when syncretism was fully active in BP, the structure employed for middles in this language could be available for other eventualities as well. (50) and (51) show that the same VP *vender casas* ‘sell houses’ can get different interpretations in virtue of the presence of other elements in the derivation. In (50), the middle interpretation arises due to the presence of a generic operator and a manner adverb. The indefinite reading arises in (51), with T being specified for time and in the absence of the generic operator, since the sentence is episodic.

- (50) GEN [<sub>VoiceP</sub> Voice se [<sub>VP</sub> V DP]] = middle  
 Vend-em -se casas facilmente nesta região.  
 Sell-PST.3PL -se house.PL easily in.this region  
 ‘Houses sell easily in this neighborhood.’
- (51) T[+past] [<sub>VoiceP</sub> Voice se [<sub>VP</sub> V DP]] = indefinite reading  
 Vend-eu -se casas nesta região.  
 Sell-PST.3SG -se house.PL in.this region  
 ‘One sold houses in this neighborhood.’

With the (ongoing) loss of the syncretism, the language would be expected to develop an unergative/transitive syntax for middles, as it has been advocated for English middles, but BP has been employing an unaccusative structure so far. The question would then be: with the possibility of forming non-marked unaccusative middles in BP, is it still possible to use the same structure to convey different meanings, in a similar way to the different readings arising in (50) and (51)?

We want to claim that this is indeed possible in BP and that the unaccusative variant of the agentive alternation is a byproduct of this possibility. Basically, whenever a VP composed of a manner root and a DP is inserted in syntax there are at least three possibilities for it, concerning the final derivation. One of them is to merge a full DP in the specifier of Voice and generate a transitive sentence. The other two possibilities have the same syntactic structure and derive different readings depending on the presence of operators.

- (52) a. This VP can compose a middle sentence if a generic operator is merged on top of it.  
 → *Esse carro lava fácil.* (This car washes easily)
- b. This VP can compose an unaccusative sentence — the unaccusative variant of the agentive alternation — if no generic operator is added.  
 → *The car washed.* (The car was washed)

Thus, the loss of VoiceP in BP presents us with a case in which the syntax continued to employ the same structures for eventualities in spite of the loss of the morphology. With the loss of the clitic *se*, middles in this language are nothing more than generic unaccusatives. When a generic operator is not inserted into the derivation, the intransitive member of the AA is generated.

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