ON BY ITSELF

Maria Poponeț

PhD Student, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Abstract: This paper argues that Romanian singur "alone" and de la sine "from self" do not point towards the causative structure and meaning of anticausatives. On the one hand, we show that some modified verbs do not accept the causative paraphrase, thus in this case the phrase does not add a causer (against Folli 2001, quoted in Schäfer 2007). On the other hand, even when modified verbs accept a causative paraphrase, the causative meaning does not seem to hold in the absence of the phrase. We argue that the general function of singur and de la sine is to deny the interference of an outside cause, which is equivalent to the subject entity causing the event for a subset of anticausatives. The causative paraphrase is thus accidental rather than defining for anticausatives modified by these phrases.

Keywords: anticausatives, sole causer, singur, de la sine, Romanian

1. Introduction

Anticausatives are intransitive verbs of change of state (i.e. unaccusatives) that have a causative counterpart (cf. Schäfer 2008), e.g. *The window broke. John broke the window.* In this paper, we argue that the modification of Romanian anticausatives by *singur* "alone" or *de la sine* "from self" does not indicate a cause in the argument structure of these verbs[1].

After presenting Chierchia's (2004) view on anticausatives in Section 2, in Section 3 we show that Romanian *singur* "alone" can modify both agentive verbs and anticausatives. The word, however, can bring about two distinct readings, and we show that anticausatives are reluctant to the sole cause reading. The interpretation of modified anticausatives which describe certain physical processes is not that the entity caused the change. We argue that *singur* "alone" denies the interference of an external cause, leaving space for external factors responsible for the change of state.

[1] Piñón (2001) and Folli (1999) also doubt that *by itself* indicates the causative semantics of anticausatives.

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In Section 4, following the suggestions in Horvath and Siloni (2013), we show that agentives and anticausatives are modified by distinct phrases due to agentivity. The section also discusses verbs which refer to biological or chemical processes which allow the causative paraphrase under modification. However, non-modified anticausatives do not seem to have a causative meaning, so there is no reason to postulate a cause in these verbs either. We conclude that *de la sine* "from self" denies the interference of an external cause, and the causative paraphrase is accidental for modified anticausatives.

2. The sole cause hypothesis (Chierchia 2004)

According to Chierchia (2004), Italian *da sé* "by itself" is a phrase which occurs in adjunct position and its antecedent must be construed as the sole cause of the event. The phrase is licensed by agentive subjects in either transitive (1) or reflexive (2) sentences.

(1) *Gianni mi ha picchiato da sé.*
Gianni CL.1SG.ACC have.AUX.3SG hit by self
"Gianni hit me by himself." (Chierchia 2004: 42, (37))

(2) *Gianni si è lavato da sé.*
Gianni SE be.AUX.3SG washed by self
"Gianni washed by himself." (Horvath and Siloni 2013: 219, (3a))

The author further argues that its exclusion from statives (3a), and verbs expressing involuntary physical functions such as *sudare* "to sweat" (3b), signifies that *da sé* is a structure sensitive to a cause role.

(3) a. **Gianni conosce il latino da sé.*
Gianni know.PR.3SG the Latin by self
"Gianni knows Latin by himself."

b. **Gianni ha sudato da sé.*
Gianni have.AUX.3SG sweat by self
"Gianni sweat by himself." (Chierchia 2004: 42, (39a,b))

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On the other hand, since the phrase can modify anticausatives, Chierchia argues that anticausatives must exhibit a cause. Thus, on his reasoning, in (4a) and (4b) the subject is both the cause and the theme of opening.

(4) a. *La porta si è aperta da sé.*
the door SE be.AUX.3SG opened by self
"The door opened by itself."

b. *La barca è affondata da sé.*
the boat be.AUX.3SG sunk by self
"The boat sank by itself." (Chierchia 2004: 43, (42a,b))

Supporting a reflexive analysis of anticausatives, Chierchia claims that *da sé* indicates the "x did the event" structure and meaning of the verb, which, according to this author, is "x did the event" even in the absence of *da sé*. In the next section, we show that (at least some examples of) modified anticausatives in Romanian do not mean "x did the event", thus the sole cause hypothesis of Chierchia does not hold. Following the suggestion in Schäfer (2007), we argue that the general function of the Romanian counterparts of this phrase in anticausatives is to deny the interference of a cause in bringing about the event.

3. *Singur* "alone"

Recall that according to Chierchia, *da sé* "by itself" indicates that the modified verb has a cause, which in the presence of the phrase is the sole cause. However, sole cause is an ambiguous phrase since agentives allow two types of continuations in Italian (cf. Schäfer 2007). The same situation holds in Romanian. Thus, the Romanian sentence (5), built on the model of Italian (1), allows two interpretations: one in which Ion hit Petru without outside help (6a), and the other in which no one caused him to hit Petru, he did it of his own accord (6b), as evinced by the possible continuations. Sentences containing reflexive verbs such as (7) also allow for the two interpretations (cf. (8a) and (8b)).

(5) *Ion l- a lovit pe Petru singur.*
Ion CL.3SG.ACC have.AUX.3SG hit PE Petru alone

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"Ion hit Petru by himself."

(6) a.

Ion	*a*	*realizat*	*lovitura*	*singur*[2].
Ion	AUX.3SG	performed	hit.the	alone
Nimeni	*nu*	*l-*	*a*	*ajutat.*
nobody	not	CL.3SG.ACC	AUX.3SG	helped

"Ion did the hitting alone. Nobody helped him."

b.

Nimeni	*nu*	*l-*	*a*	*determinat/*	*forţat*	*pe*	*Ion*
nobody	not	CL.3SG.ACC	AUX.3SG	made	forced	PE	Ion
să-		*l*	*lovească*	*pe*	*Petru.*		
SUBJ		CL.3SG.ACC	hit	PE	Petru		

"Nobody made/forced Ion hit Petru."

(7)

Ion	*s-*	*a*	*spălat*	*singur.*
Ion	SE	AUX.3SG	washed	alone

"Ion washed by himself."

(8) a.

Ion	*a*	*realizat*	*spălarea*	*singur.*
Ion	AUX.3SG	performed	washing.the	alone
Nimeni	*nu*	*l-*	*a*	*ajutat.*
nobody	not	CL.3SG.ACC	AUX.3SG	helped

"Ion did the washing alone. Nobody helped him."

b.

Nimeni	*nu*	*l-*	*a*	*determinat/*	*forţat*	*să*	*se*	*spele.*
nobody	not	CL.3SG.ACC	AUX.3SG	made	forced	SUBJ	SE	wash

"Nobody made/forced Ion wash himself."

Hence, at first glance, sole cause appears to be ambiguous. For instance, if Ion hit me without outside help, he is the sole cause of Petru ending up hit. Also, if no one forced him to hit

[2] The paraphrase is inspired from Potashnik (2009).

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Petru, the interpretation of the sentence would be that Ion caused himself to hit Petru/had the initiative to hit Petru, so he is the sole cause of the hitting process. However, since Chierchia argues that the phrase depends on a cause in the argument structure of the predicate it modifies (the phrase cannot add a cause to stative verbs (cf. (3a))), we believe that it is the first interpretation that he has in mind, i.e. the one in which the subject argument does the event without outside help.

However, this is exactly the interpretation that some anticausatives are reluctant to. The Romanian example (9) comprising the anticausative verb *a se usca* "to become dry" and the subject argument *părul* "the hair" does not have the meaning allowed by the transitive and reflexive sentences above (cf. (6a) and (8a)). The sentence does not mean that the hair did the drying (cf. (10a)). Rather, it dried without a hair drier due to crucial external conditions such as the heat; it could not have dried in a humid environment, for instance. We argue that with anticausatives, the phrase denies the interference rather than existence of an external cause, which is not equivalent to the hair doing the drying. Denying the interference means that some external factors may exist and they are responsible for the event. The example thus proves that the phrase is not licensed by a cause.

(9) *Părul* *s-* *a* *uscat* *singur.*
hair.the SE AUX.3SG dried alone
"The hair dried by itself."

(10) a. **Părul* *a* *realizat* *uscarea.*
hair.the AUX.3SG performed drying.the
"The hair did the drying"

b. *Nimeni/* *Niciun* *obiect* *n-* *a* *intervenit.*
nobody no object not AUX.3SG intervened
"Nobody/No object intervened."

The following possible Romanian example reinforces the claim that the phrase denies someone's interference although there is obviously an external cause. It is clear that the sentence does not mean that the door did the opening, but rather the door opened from the wind alone, nobody opened it.

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(11) *Uşa* *s-* *a* *deschis* *singură* *de la* *vânt.*
door.the SE AUX.3SG opened alone from wind
"The door opened by itself from the wind."

In the next section, we will show that Romanian agentives and anticausatives are modified by different phrases for agentivity reasons. The section also shows that sometimes denying the interference of an external cause is equivalent to asserting that the subject is the cause. However, this is accidental for the use of the phrase in the context of anticausatives. Moreover, the fact that the causative meaning may not be present in the absence of the phrase points towards the lack of a cause in anticausatives.

4. *De la sine* "from self"

Horvath and Siloni (2013) notice that in languages like Hebrew, Hungarian and Romanian there are two distinct "without outside help" phrases: one for agentive verbs and another for anticausatives. While the agentive one depends on an agent, the one in anticausatives, they argue, does not depend on a causer.

In Romanian, we assume the former to be *el însuşi* "he himself" and variants depending on person, gender and number, and the latter the invariant form *de la sine* "from self". Below we can see that agentives as in (12) take *el însuşi*.

(12) *Ion* *a* *spart* *geamul* *el* *însuşi.*
Ion AUX.3SG broken window.the he himself
"Ion broke the window by himself."

The interpretations triggered by Romanian *el însuşi* are highly dependent on context. The prominent interpretation of (12) is that Ion broke the window without outside help (cf. (13a)). Although less handy, the continuation in which nobody made the agent do the event (cf. (13b)) is also possible.

(13) a. *El* *a* *realizat* *spargerea* *singur.* *Nimeni* *nu*
he AUX.3SG performed breaking.the alone nobody not

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l-	*a*	*ajutat.*	
CL.3SG.ACC	AUX.3SG	helped	

"He did the breaking alone. Nobody helped him."

b.

Nimeni	*nu*	*l-*	*a*	*determinat*	*să-*
nobody	not	CL.3SG.ACC	AUX.3SG	made	SUBJ
l	*spargă.*				
CL.3SG.ACC	break				

"Nobody made him break it."

Anticausatives, by contrast, take a different phrase in Romanian, namely *de la sine*. *Ea însăşi "*she herself' is banned as it is sensitive to agentive subjects.

(14) a.

**Uşa*	*s-*	*a*	*deschis*	*ea*	*însăşi.*
door.the	SE	AUX.3SG	opened	she	herself

b.

Uşa	*s-*	*a*	*deschis*	*de la*	*sine.*
door.the	SE	AUX.3SG	opened	from	self

"The door opened by itself."

Below we give some examples adapted from the internet, comprising anticausatives modified by *de la sine*[3], whose common interpretation is that no outside cause interfered in bringing about the event.

(15)

Malpoziţia	*piciorului*	*se*	*va*	*corecta*	*de la*	*sine.*	
malposition.the	leg.GEN	SE	AUX.FUT.3SG	correct	from	self	

"The leg malposition will correct by itself."

(16)

Creierul	*se*	*modifică*	*de la*	*sine.*
brain.the	SE	transform.PR.3SG	from	self

"The brain transforms by itself."

[3] *De la sine* and *singur* are usually in free variation with Romanian anticausatives.

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(17) *Boala s- a vindecat de la sine.*
disease.the SE AUX.3SG healed from self
"The disease healed by itself.'

(18) *Hernia s- a retras de la sine.*
hernia.the SE AUX.3SG withdrawn from self
"Hernia withdrew by itself."

(19) *Flăcările s- au stins de la sine.*
flames.the SE AUX.3PL become extinct from self
"The flames became extinct by themselves."

(20) *Spiritele s- au calmat de la sine.*
spirits.the SE AUX.3PL calmed from self
"The spirits calmed down by themselves."

(21) *Lucrurile se rezolvă de la sine.*
things.the SE solve.PR.3PL from self
"Things get solved by themselves."

(22) *Negii vor cădea de la sine.*
verrucae.the AUX.FUT.3PL fall from self
"The veruccae will fall by themselves."

(23) *Abcesele izbucnesc de la sine.*
abcesses.the irrupt.PR.3PL from self
"Abcesses irrupt by themselves."

(24) *Depresiile dispar de la sine.*
depressions.the disappear.PR.3PL from self
"Depressions disappear by themselves."

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Judging from these examples, one can argue that in some situations the fact that no cause is identified can be equivalent to the interpretation that the entity or its properties caused the change. Below we have a verb describing an event which is usually perceived to be internally caused (cf. Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995), and seems to allow the causative paraphrases (26a) and (26b), with and without *de la sine* (cf. (16) and (25)).

(16) *Creierul se modifică de la sine.*
brain.the SE transform.PR.3SG from self
"The brain transforms by itself."

(25) *Creierul se modifică.*
brain.the SE transform.PR.3SG
"The brain transforms."

(26) a. *Creierul cauzează modificarea.*
brain.the cause.PR.3SG transformation.the
"The brain causes the transformation."

b. *Proprietăţi ale creierului cauzează modificarea.*
properties of brain.GEN cause.PR.3PL transformation.the
"Brain properties cause the transformation."

Still, with examples like (17) the paraphrases are only marginally acceptable if the disease is regarded as a series of biological and chemical reactions some of which can bring about the end of the disease.

(17) *Boala s- a vindecat de la sine.*
disease.the SE AUX.3SG healed from self
"The disease healed by itself.'

(27) a. **Boala a cauzat vindecarea.*
disease.the AUX.3SG caused healing.the

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"The disease caused the healing."

b. ??*Proprietăţi ale bolii au cauzat vindecarea.*
properties of disease.GEN AUX.3PL caused healing.the
"Disease properties caused the healing."

Even so, it is not the case that the sentence without *de la sine* (cf. (28)) necessarily carries the meaning of the one modified by it[4]. (28) does not necessarily convey the meaning expressed in (29).

(28) *Boala s- a vindecat.*
disease.the SE AUX.3SG healed
"The disease healed."

(29) ?**Proprietăţi ale bolii au cauzat vindecarea.*
properties of disease.the AUX.3PL caused healing.the
"Disease properties caused the healing."

Most of the verbs which are likely to allow the causative paraphrase describe events involving entities whose biological or chemical properties are capable of causing the change themselves, i.e. the verbs may express internally caused events. Biological or chemical modifications can occur independently, but they can also be externally triggered, that is why the modified sentences are not equivalent to the non-modified ones. Such anticausatives do not warrant a causative meaning in the absence of *de la sine*.

The next example that we found on the internet is particularly telling as its meaning cannot be that teeth grinding or its properties caused its disappearance, rather the grinding disappeared without any treatment.

(30) *Scrâşnitul dinţilor trece de la sine la*
grinding.the teeth.GEN go away.PR.3SG from self at

[4] Folli (2001, quoted in Schäfer 2007) also argues that Chierchia's account predicts identical interpretations for the anticausatives modified by *by itself* and those which are not modified. However, the two may be used in different contexts.

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copii,	*adulţii*	*au*	*nevoie*	*de*	*tratament.*
children	adults.the	have.PR.3PL	need	of	treatment

"Teeth grinding goes away by itself in the case of children, adults need treatment."

(31) a. **Scrâşnitul dinţilor a cauzat dispariţia scrâşnitului.*
grinding.the teeth AUX.3SG caused disappearance.the grinding.GEN
"Teeth grinding caused the disappearance of grinding."

b. **Proprietăţi ale scrâşnitului dinţilor au cauzat dispariţia scrâşnitului.*
properties of grinding.GEN teeth.GEN AUX.3PL caused disappearance.the grinding.GEN
"Teeth grinding properties caused the disappearance of grinding."

The possibility of the causative paraphrase is accidental rather than defining in the case of anticausatives modified by *singur* or *de la sine*. Thus, sometimes denying the interference of an external cause is equivalent to the subject argument causing the change; but this is most likely due to the phrase as non-modified anticausatives are reluctant to a causative interpretation.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we showed that in the case of anticausatives the general function of Romanian *singur* "alone" and *de la sine* "from self" is to deny the interference of an external cause in bringing about the event. Some examples indicate that the phrases are neither licensed by a cause, nor do they add one. On the other hand, even when the causative interpretation is possible under modification, non-modified anticausatives do not warrant a causative meaning, hence they are less likely to exhibit a cause.

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