The syntax and semantics of *laisser* in causative constructions: An experimental investigation

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Abstract

The French verb *laisser* ('to let') allows for two different syntactic constructions, an Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) construction and a *Faire*-Infinitive (FI) construction with a postverbal Causee, and for two different interpretations, *authorize*

and *not-intervene*. According to previous studies (e.g. Kayne 1975), constructions are related to interpretations: the ECM can express intentionality, the FI cannot. In this paper, we explore a different hypothesis: the ECM construction is underspecified and allows for both interpretations, while the FI is restricted to the not-intervening interpretation. We provide empirical evidence from three distinct forced choice tasks in which participants had to match constructions and interpretations. The results reveal that, contrary to both early observations and our initial hypothesis, both constructions may allow for both interpretations, and variation depends less on the syntactic configuration than on semantic and pragmatic factors, namely on the lexical inferences triggered by the embedded verb and the authority relation between Causer and Causee expressed in the contexts.

Keywords: causation, causative verbs, French, forced choice task, grammaticality judgment task.

1. Introduction

Like most Romance languages, French uses two main causative verbs, *faire* and *laisser*, roughly corresponding to English *make* and *let*. In this paper we focus on *laisser*, which displays an interesting yet underdiscussed alternation. It can appear in two distinct complex constructions; a construction with Exceptional Case Marking (from here on out, "ECM-construction") in which the lower subject, the Causee, appears in preverbal (pre-V) position, as in (1a), and a Faire-Infinitive ("FI") construction in which it is in postverbal (post-V) position, as in (1b).

(1)   French
       a. ECM:
           Lucie a   laissé   les enfants   lire.
           Lucie has let   the children   read
       b. FI:
           Lucie a   laissé   lire   les enfants.
           Lucie has let   read   the children
           'Lucie let the children read.'

Despite the abundance of work on Romance *make*-causatives,[1] less attention has been paid to Romance *let*-causative verbs and their distinct structures, even though the second construction is also of type Faire-Infinitive.[2] There are very few observations with respect to *let*-causative verbs in Romance: Kayne (1975) suggests for French *laisser* that there are interpretational differences between the two positions,

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[1]   See for French and Italian in particular: Kayne (1975), Guasti (1996), Folli & Harley (2007), among others.

[2]   We assume the term "Faire-Infinitive" as applying to *laisser* post-V constructions as well. In fact, Kayne intended for the term to cover post-V constructions in *faire*, *laisser*, and perception verbs: "we shall consistently write "faire" in the formulation of the various rules discussed in this chapter, despite their applying to "laisser" as well. This is not meant to have any systematic significance. The rules are in fact relevant to several other verbs, such as: "voir", "entendre", "écouter", "regarder", "sentir", "envoyer"" (Kayne 1975:106).

namely that the pre-V triggers inferences of 'collusion' or 'intentionality', while the post-V does not. Enghels & Roegiest (2012) show for French and Spanish that the two syntactic configurations behave differently with respect to factors like animacy of the Causer and Causee, which in turn could impact the way the two constructions are interpreted by speakers. Yet, the authors do not provide an explanation as to what exactly these two readings are, or as to why or how each of those readings arises.

Descriptively, then, there seem to be simultaneously two constructions available for *laisser*, as well as at least two distinct interpretations. We assume a link between structure and interpretation, as it has been done for the causative verb *faire*, which also allows for the Causee to be realized in preverbal position under very constrained circumstances. Abeillé et al. (1997) argue that this preverbal position of the Causee in constructions with *faire*, i.e. the ECM construction, is marked, in that it is exclusively associated with a reading of "strong coercion", while the FI construction can either encode strong or weak coercion.[3] If we are to assume a similar behavior for *laisser* and its two constructions, then we must posit that there are different degrees of letting, a stronger and a weaker one (and possibly some in between). Assuming that permissive readings allow for distinctions, we show that we have at least two distinct permissive contexts: (i) one in which an authorization is given, thus allowing the Causee to proceed with the result, which we call *authorize*, and (ii) one in which the Causee is already performing the event that coincides with the "result" and is not interrupted by the Causer, namely *not-intervene*. Following an approach in the spirit of Abeillé et al. (1997), we assume that one of the two syntactic constructions is underspecified, while the other is specified. Linking this to both Borel's (1972) and Kayne's (1975) proposals that the ECM construction accommodates an intentional reading while the FI does not, we formulate the following hypothesis, consisting of two parts:

HYPOTHESIS: First, in *laisser*-causatives, the ECM construction is underspecified and can thus be interpreted as either *authorize* or *not-intervene*. Second, the FI construction is restricted to an interpretation as *not-intervene*.

The paper is organized as follows: in Section 2, we discuss the structural realizations of syntactic causative constructions in *laisser* and how these have been described as encoding different types of causal relations (Kayne 1975; Soares da Silva 1998, 2012; Enghels & Roegiest 2012). We then develop the rationale for our experiments as well as our hypothesis, which ensue from the discussion about the previous work done on *laisser*. The three following sections are each about an experiment; Section 3 concerns our first experiment on *laisser,* Experiment 1, consisting of a forced choice task of aligning syntactic construction (ECM or FI) with a context that strongly suggests either an *authorize* or *not-intervene*-interpretation; Section 4 discusses the follow-up experiment, Experiment 2, consisting of the same forced choice task but in which all contexts were removed in order to distinguish between the influence of the contextual setting in terms of authority relation on the one hand and the syntactic construction on the other hand; Section 5 discusses our

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[3]   A reviewer made us aware of an alternative view of this contrast. According to Achard (1993a,b), and later on Reed (1999), the FI with *faire* is deemed vague, while the ECM construction is marked. This markedness would be due to the unexpected case marking of the pronoun encoding the Causee.

third experiment, Experiment 3, an acceptability judgment task of pairs consisting of a context and a syntactic construction in order to test the naturalness of constructions in one or the other interpretation. A more general discussion about our interpretation of the results can be found in Section 6. Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. *Let* in Romance

2.1. Introducing causatives

Causation can be encoded in at least three different ways crosslinguistically: by a lexical verb, such as *break* in (2), by a bound morpheme (such as the causative morpheme *-dür-* in Turkish *öl-dür-mek* 'to kill' added to the intransitive verb *öl-mek* 'to die'), or by an independent verbal head, as in (3). The morphological causatives found in Turkish or Korean are not found in Romance, therefore we will not be discussing them here. Lexical causatives are simplex monoclausal structures containing a single transitive verb; they are generally taken to encode direct causation, which implies spatiotemporal contiguity between the *causing event* and the *caused event* (Fodor 1970, Goldberg 1995). Syntactic causatives are more complex structures, generally understood as examples of indirect causation, since the Causer does not have direct control over the caused event (see Shibatani 1976; Kulikov 2001; Song 2006; Haspelmath et al. 2014; Heidinger 2015):

(2)   John broke the vase.

(3)   Suzanne a   fait   nettoyer la   cuisine à   Jean.
        Suzanne has made   clean.INF the kitchen to   Jean
        'Suzanne made Jean clean the kitchen.'

        It has been argued that these constructions form a CONTINUUM from a more direct type of causal relation in lexical causatives to a less direct one in syntactic ones (Shibatani & Pardeshi 2001; Lehmann 2016). Nevertheless, it ought to be noted that the partition of syntactic causatives and lexical ones into indirect vs. direct is not as clear-cut as it appears to be: it is possible for lexical causatives to encode indirect causation, and vice versa:

(4)   Martin (2018: 108)
        Fred killed Masha. He fired a shot at her on Sunday. She had a hemorrhage.
        She died on Monday.

(5)   En faisant son jogging, Farrah a   fait   tomber ses clés.
        by doing her   jogging Farrah has made   fall.INF her keys
        'During her morning jog, Farrah dropped her keys.'

        For the purpose of the present analysis, we will be focusing on French syntactic causatives, which have often been described as encoding INDIRECT CAUSATION, as they can describe a causal chain (i.e. a COMPLEX causal relation) in which the causing event

(e_1) and the caused event (e_2) are controlled by two separate and distinct entities: the Causer and the Causee.[4]

In a sentence like (3), Suzanne is understood as being the INITIATOR of the *cleaning the kitchen* event, even if she is not its Agent; she does not have direct control over the cleaning, Jean does. What Suzanne appears to have control over, however, is the role played by Jean as a Causee (in other words, as the initiator of the caused event). Such control may have been exerted in two possible ways: (i) either Suzanne is stronger than Jean, and she used PHYSICAL FORCE, or (ii) Suzanne has some form of AUTHORITY over Jean, which she can make use of it to INFLUENCE him to clean the kitchen. This tells us that, although the direct/indirect causation distinction remains a useful one to understand the division of labor between Causer and Causee in the causal chain, it does not account for more fine-grained distinctions, such as the one between physical and psychological force as encoded by a causative verb like *faire*.

As outlined in our description of the examples above, the broad notion of causation can be understood as an ensemble of force interactions between two (or more) entities. For Talmy (1988), entities have intrinsic force tendencies that, when in opposition with another entity's force tendency, yield a given force interaction. These interactions include *causing, letting, helping* and *hindering* for Talmy. Wolff & Song (2003), on the other hand, define three types of causal interactions, CAUSE, ENABLE and PREVENT, represented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Defining the three causal notions

	Tendency of the Causee for the result	Opposition between Causer and Causee	Occurrence of the result
CAUSE	N	Y	Y
ENABLE	Y	N	Y
PREVENT	Y	Y	N

Source: Wolff & Song (2003)

Firstly, and as pointed out by the aforementioned authors, these three causal notions refer to very different force interactions: CAUSE is defined as requiring an opposition between Causer and Causee (looking at (3) above, this means that Jean had no positive tendency towards cleaning the kitchen, but Suzanne's physical or psychosocial force was stronger than his). ENABLE-relations are characterized by some form of accordance between Causer and Causee, at least under Wolff & Song's categorization. In other words, if Susan *let* or *allowed* John to clean the kitchen, it is understood that John had a tendency towards cleaning the kitchen, and Susan either had a tendency towards John cleaning the kitchen (in which case they were in agreement) or she did not have a tendency against him cleaning the kitchen (in which case they were not in opposition).

As for the verbs that encode those causal notions, it is highly likely that two verbs that fall under the same category will behave differently from one another when

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[4]   Note, however, that not all syntactic causatives in French encode indirect causation. Notably, constructions in which (i) the Causee is non-volitional and non-force-generating and (ii) the embedded verb is an inaccusative verb tend to be interpreted as instances of direct causation, as is exemplified above in (5).

it comes to how the Causer's force is being exerted. Within the CAUSE category, the verbs *make* and *have* appear to behave differently when it comes to authority: while authority is not a necessary property of the Causer in *make*-causatives (see the discussion about (5) above), *have*-causatives require the Causer to have both authority over the Causee and control over the caused event (see Copley 2009 for a discussion on *have*-causatives). Similarly, *laisser* and *permettre* share some apparent properties, but eventually encode different types of relations. While *permettre* behaves like a typical ENABLE verb in which the Causer plays an active role in the occurrence of the caused event, *laisser* realizes relations in which the Causer is much more passive (because of indifference or defectivity, see Raffy 2021).

2.2. Syntactic causatives in Romance: the case of *faire* and *laisser*

Romance syntactic causatives are well-known for their different structures. Notably, the French causative verb *faire* (along with its Italian counterpart *fare*, both 'to make') can enter syntactic causative constructions in which the NP realizing the embedded subject (the Causee) must appear in postverbal position. The canonical preverbal position is not available for a nominal Causer, hence the infelicity of (6b) and (7b). These constructions are generally referred to as *Faire-Infinitives* (FIs), following Kayne (1975). When the embedded verb is intransitive, the lower subject is introduced as a direct object. However, when the embedded verb is transitive and the direct object is overtly expressed, the lower subject is introduced in a PP headed by *à,* it cannot be preverbal, as demonstrated in (7)[5] and it bears dative case, as evidenced by the dative causative clitic *lui* in (8).

(6)   a. Sophie a   fait   manger Quentin.
          Sophie has made   eat.INF   Quentin
      b. *Sophie a   fait   Quentin manger.
         Sophie has made   Quentin eat.INF
         'Sophie made Quentin eat.'

(7)   a. Sophie a   fait   manger une pomme à   Quentin.
          Sophie   has made eat.INF an apple   to   Quentin
      b. *Sophie a   fait   (à) Quentin manger une pomme.
        Sophie has made (to) Quentin eat.INF an apple
        'Sophie made Quentin eat an apple.'

(8)   Sophie la   lui   a   faite   manger.
     Sophie it.ACC he.DAT has made eat.INF
     'Sophie made him eat it.'

It has been proposed that the sentences above contain a complex predicate; the two verbs enter a relation of co-predication and function as a single predicate with only one set of arguments (Zubizarreta 1985; Cyrino 2010; Ciutescu 2013, among others;

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[5]   While our discussion is limited here to the variety of standard Metropolitan French, it is worth noting that the constructions (6b) and (7b) are actually grammatical in (some varieties of) Canadian French, as remarked by Reed (1992).

for an in-depth discussion on complex predicates and light verbs, see Butt 1993, 2010). In turn, this impacts the whole structure of the sentence: instead of having two separate clauses, *faire*-infinitives are understood as being monoclausal (and yet bi-eventive) structures. Evidence for monoclausality can be found in the availability of clitic climbing of the direct object of the embedded infinitive in these specific structures: the pronoun *la* 'it' in (8) above can procliticize all the way up onto *faire*, which should not be possible if they were part of separate clauses[6] (for an updated discussion on dative clitics in FIs in Romance, see Pineda & Sheehan 2023).

The ECM construction with a preverbal nominal causer is not available for *faire*, but it has been very early on observed in the literature that this position is available for clitic causers, which procliticize onto the causative verb *faire*, as in (9a-b):[7]

(9)   a. Le professeur   les   fera   lire   Proust
         the teacher   they.ACC   make.FT   read.INF   Proust.
         'The teacher will make them read Proust.'
      b. Le professeur   les   fera   le   lire.
         the teacher   they.ACC   make.FT   it.ACC   read.INF
         'The teacher will make them read it.'[8]

In (9a-b), the Causee is realized as a direct object of the matrix verb, and, as such, receives accusative case-marking, as an instance of an ECM construction. ECM constructions have been analyzed as being biclausal (Hyman & Zimmer 1976:193, Labelle 2017:303 and Sheehan 2020:375). This would mean that there are, in fact, two distinct structures for *faire*-causatives:[9] the regular FI construction, in which the Causee argument appears in **postverbal** position and which is monoclausal (described in Kayne 1975; Guasti 1996; Folli & Harley 2007), and the biclausal ECM with **preverbal** embedded subject, however only possible for clitic Causers. With respect to the existence of these two structures, Abeillé et al.'s (1997) proposal is twofold:

(i)   The two structures are not in complementary distribution, which is shown by the strong unacceptability of one of the two with full-fledged DPs.
(ii)   The two structures are not equivalent and trigger different inferences.

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[6]   It should however be pointed out that this *faire*-infinitive particularity does not replicate across all Romance languages. Ciutescu (2013) remarks that Spanish *hacer* allows for its Causee argument to appear either before or after the embedded verb, while Romanian *face* requires for its Causee to be in preverbal position. Thus, one should be careful when discussing 'the idiosyncrasies of Romance causatives', when the constraints discussed above are mainly constraints on French *faire* and Italian *fare*.
[7]   For early references and discussion, cf. Reed (1999), and also Abeillé et al. (1997:65), from which we take example (9).
[8]   Note that ECM with clitic Causees are only available for some speakers of French (see Hyman & Zimmer 1976:193, Labelle 2017:303, Sheehan 2020:375)
[9]   One could argue that there are actually three structures for *faire*-causatives: FI, *faire-par* (FP), and the "flat structure" described in Abeillé et al. (1997). While the contrast between FIs and FPs is an interesting one, it is not relevant to the present topic so we will not be expanding on it.

We will be focusing on (ii), i.e. the existence of different inferences for different structures. Let us briefly compare the two structures with transitive embedded verbs: (10a) representing the FI construction with the clitic causee in the dative, and (10b) representing the ECM construction with the clitic Causee in the accusative.

(10)   Jean a fait ranger leur chambre aux enfants.
        'Jean made the children tidy their room.'
    a. Jean leur   a fait   ranger leur chambre.
        Jean they.DAT has made   tidy   their room
    b. Jean les   a fait   ranger leur chambre.
        Jean they.ACC has made   tidy   their room
        'Jean made them tidy their room.'

For Authier & Reed (1991), (10a) with a dative Causee is an instance of an FI construction and it is to be understood as the default: it is not associated with any particular reading and can thus accommodate any. Conversely, (10b) with the clitic Causee in the accusative is an instance of an ECM construction. It realizes a situation in which the Causee (here, the children) has no choice but to perform the action encoded by the embedded verb. In other words, while (10a) could be understood as either (i) "Jean suggested that the children tidy up their room and they accepted", or (ii) "Jean physically coerced the children into tidying up.', only that second reading (ii) is available for (10b). Abeillé et al. (1997) nuance that point by saying that the Causee still retains some form of control, even though that control is lessened. Nevertheless, that would then mean that different positions for the Causee are correlated with different degrees of control of the Causer on the caused event.

We have seen in the introduction that *laisser* can also enter two distinct constructions, an ECM one and an FI one. The FI construction does allow for clitic climbing of both direct and indirect objects: both must climb up and procliticize on *laisser*, which again hints at a monoclausal structure with a complex predicate.

(11)   a. Le   barman   a   laissé boire   le   verre au   mineur.
           the   bartender has let   drink.INF   the   glass to-the minor
           'The bartender let the underaged man drink (alcohol).'
        b. Le   barman   le   lui   a   laissé boire.
           the   bartender   it.ACC he.DAT has   let   drink.INF
           'The bartender let him drink the glass (of alcohol).'

The ECM construction is taken to be biclausal (Den Dikken 2006; Roberts 2013; Hu 2018), much like its counterpart with *faire*. Unlike the *faire* ECM, *laisser* ECM constructions can take preverbal full-fledged DPs as Causees without any issue of acceptability. These constructions disallow clitic climbing of the direct object *le* for *le gateau*, as in (12b) (see also Reed 1996):

(12)   a. Marie a   laissé les enfants   manger le   gateau.
           Marie has   let   the children eat.INF the   cake
        b. *Marie   le   les   a   laissé manger.
           Marie   it-ACC they-ACC   has   let   eat.INF

    c. Marie les   a   laissés le   manger.
       Marie they-ACC has   let   it-ACC eat.INF
       'Marie let them eat it.'

While both constructions display higher negation on the matrix verb, the insertion of lower negation is only available with the ECM construction in (13a) – indeed, the FI construction in (13b) does not allow for it.

(13)   a. Marie a   laissé les enfants   NE PAS   manger le   gâteau.
         Marie has   let   the children   NEG   eat.INF the   cake
       b. *Marie a laissé   NE PAS   manger le   gâteau aux   enfants.
         Marie has let   NEG   eat.INF the   cake   to-the children
         'Marie let the children not eat the cake.'

2.3. Previous approaches to the interpretations of *laisser*

While the existence of two distinct structures for *laisser* has already been pointed out by several authors (along with some other Romance verbs like Spanish *dejar* and Portuguese *deixar*, although the structures differ), there is no clear consensus on the precise interpretation of the causal structure underlying these different structures. We have seen with *faire* that the two structures are associated with two degrees of control of both the Causer and the Causee on the caused event: while the FI is considered unmarked, or neutral, the ECM construction is to be understood as encoding a higher degree of control of the Causer on both the Causee and the caused event (which in turn means a lower degree of control of the Causee on said caused event).

In *laisser*-relations, the control on the caused event is generally understood as being transferred from the Causer to the Causee (Enghels & Roegiest 2012). Therefore, it is unlikely that the contrast between (10a) and (10b) is similar to what is at play in *laisser*-constructions. Nevertheless, Enghels & Roegiest (2014) do attempt to draw a mapping from morphosyntactic structure to degree of control. Their analysis is based on the Spanish verb *dejar* and the Portuguese verb *deixar* (both 'to let'); both verbs can either embed a non-finite clause like in the French FI construction or a complementizer clause in which the inflected verb is in the subjunctive mood. The latter structure can be roughly compared to the French ECM construction due to biclausality.[10] The authors come to the following results. The subjunctive construction is to be understood as the one in which the Causer has the lowest amount of control; under the hypothesis that (in)direct causation is reflected in structural complexity, the interpretation mirrors the syntax of the construction, as the Causee and the caused event appear in a separate clause with respect to the Causer. On the other hand, infinitival constructions are taken as encoding direct causation (in other words, a much higher degree of control), "with variable degrees of integration" (Enghels & Roegiest 2014:287). While Enghels & Roegiest argue that the two constructions are different and appear to map distinct causal interactions, they map the meanings of Spanish *dejar* and Portuguese *deixar* the opposite way of what Borel (1972) and Kayne (1975) claim

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[10]   As a matter of fact, Spanish also displays an ECM construction with *hacer*. However, it appears to be dispreferred by native speakers, who will more easily make use of the *hacer* + complementizer clause in the subjunctive construction.

for *laisser*.[11] Recall that they both propose that what makes the ECM construction different is that it possesses an *intentional* component that the FI lacks[12]. Consider Kayne's example in (14) below:

(14)   Kayne (1977:222, ex. 83)
        a. ECM:

Le	gardien	a	laissé	les	prisonniers	s'échapper.
the	guard	has	let	the	prisoners	escape.INF

        b. FI:

Le	gardien	a	laissé	s'échapper	les	prisonniers.
the	guard	has	let	escape.INF	the	prisoners

        'The guard let the prisoners escape.'

In (14a), the guard is to be understood as acting with "complicity", or "deliberate neglect" (Kayne 1977:222). There is none of that intentional flavor in (14b). Nevertheless, Kayne does not seek to provide an analysis as to what the exact parameters that make this intentional/complicity reading arise are, except for the structure that *laisser* enters.

> "L'assignement de structures profondes distinctes à des paires comme : *elle a laissé Jean partir* (*laisser* NP S), *elle a laissé partir Jean* (*laisser* – S) n'est pas artificielle si on se fonde sur l'interprétation sémantique, car les deux constructions ne sont pas, en vérité, nécessairement synonymes. […] La première semble impliquer un certain degré de collusion, ou une négligence délibérée (…). Mais pas la seconde[13]."

While there is no real agreement as to where that "intentional component" arises from, both authors appear to agree on the ECM construction encoding an intentional act while the FI does not. However, one might wonder how the two views can be reconciled, mainly because Borel's and Kayne's views do not seem to address the involvement of the Causee at all: only the blocking and releasing performed by the Causer are treated in their approaches. This highlights that there is a clear need to treat the involvement of the Causee in *laisser*-causatives more in depth. Nevertheless, one could think that acting with "intentionality" or doing something in a "deliberate" fashion would be associated with a higher degree of control, or at least of involvement. But then the intuition is the opposite of what is assumed by Enghels & Roegiest (2012, 2014), for whom, as we have seen, the signature of *laisser*-verbs is rather the absence

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[11]   Note that this idea of a "reverse pattern" only holds if the subjunctive constructions of Spanish and Portuguese are really like the French ECM construction, which we cannot vouch for.

[12]   The two authors however disagree on where that intentional component arises: for Borel it is in the blocking, for Kayne in the releasing.

[13]   "The assignment of deep structures to pairs like *elle a laissé Jean partir* (*laisser* NP S), *elle a laissé partir Jean* (*laisser* – *S*) is not artificial if we base it off of semantic interpretation, for the two constructions are actually not necessarily synonymous. […] The former seems to imply some degree of collusion, or deliberate neglect (…). But not the latter.". Note that this quote and the page numbering of the previous examples are taken from the French edition of Kayne's (1975) book (see the reference entry for details).

of control of the Causer. Surely this must mean that "control" is too vague a notion to describe the types of causal relations that are encoded by *laisser*-causatives.

The question of the mapping from morphosyntax to interpretation remains: what factor is responsible for the choice of one interpretation over the other? Recall that we have two constructions that display distinct degrees of complexity: one is monoclausal (FI), while the other is biclausal (ECM). It is safe to assume that the degree of incorporation of the embedded infinitive impacts the interpretation of the causal relation encoded by the *laisser*-causative. We thus expect the biclausal structure to encode a clearly bieventive configuration, with one initiator per event: the Causer initiates the letting, the Causee the event encoded by the embedded verb. Conversely, the relation encoded by the FI (the *not-intervene* relation) does not require two initiators: the "result" is already ongoing at the time of the letting. These interpretations are also grounded in the syntax: Donazzan et al. (2023) note that the ECM construction allows for the introduction of an embedded external argument, introduced in the specifier of VoiceP. Conversely, the FI construction only selects a vP, which does not introduce an external argument; the complement of the FI thus reads as an event description. These observations motivate our choice to follow Borel's (1972) and Kayne's (1975) analyses for *laisser*-constructions.

2.4. Classifying *letting*-interpretations

Some help with the puzzle of *laisser*-causatives can be found by looking at the work done on other Romance *let*-verbs (Soares da Silva 1997, 2003; Espiñeira 1999; Maldonado 2007; Enghels & Roegiest 2012, 2014). Soares da Silva uses as a background Talmy's (1988) force-dynamic approach to the causal notion of *letting*, which allows him to define three interpretations for the Portuguese verb *deixar* ('to let'): (i) not-prevent, (ii) authorize, and (iii) let-go. Enghels & Roegiest (2012) adopt similar readings for *dejar*, namely *no oponerse, permitir,* and *soltar* (roughly 'not oppose oneself', 'permit', and 'release', respectively). We argue that that last reading is not a separate reading for *laisser* (as French uses the related word *lâcher* for 'to release'); as such, we will not be making reference to it in the present paper.

The definition given for *no oponerse* and *permitir*, respectively, are the following: the former is characterized by the PASSIVITY of the Causer, who simply does not interfere in the action that is being performed by the Causee, while the latter is defined as more DYNAMIC (that is, in which a change occurs through an act of the Causer): the Causee is granted permission to start performing the caused event. While no proper mapping from one given reading to one syntactic structure is drawn, Enghels & Roegiest (2012) seek to narrow it down by looking at the animacy/dynamicity features of both Causer and Causee ([+ANIMATE], [+DYNAMIC, -ANIMATE], [-DYNAMIC]) as well as the type of embedded verb (transitive/intransitive, unaccusative/unergative). To do so, they gathered data from two corpora: the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* (CREA) for Spanish, and the FRANTEXT corpus for French. The results of their inquiries are summed up in Table 2.

Table 2. The parameters of *dejar*- and *laisser*-causatives.

(our use)	Spanish				French			
	COMP SUB		FI		ECM		FI	
Enghels & Roegiest (2012)	*Dejar + que* (198) = 35%		*Dejar* + Inf + Causee (373) = 65%		*Laisser* + Causee + Inf (105) = 28%		*Laisser* + Inf + Causee (275) = 72%	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Causer [+ANIMATE]	194	98%	291	78,1%	97	92,4%	178	64,7%
Causee [+ANIMATE]	100	50,5%	108	29%	49	46,7%	48	17,5%
Causee [-DYNAMIC]	71	35,9%	220	59%	38	36,2%	198	72%
Transitive EV	86	43,4%	6	1,6%	37	35,2%	1	0,4%
Pronominal EV	43	21,7%	2	0,5%	39	37,1%	17	6,2%
Unaccusative EV	20	10,1%	54	14,5%	11	10,5%	24	8,7%
Unergative EV	49	24,7%	311	83,4%	18	17,1%	233	84,7%

Source: Enghels & Roegiest (2012:8)

Interestingly, it appears that, in their corpus, the FI construction is much more frequent than the ECM construction. This is all the more surprising that it appears to reject transitive embedded verbs altogether (we explain why it is so below in section 3.2.2). On the other hand, the pre-V construction *can* select transitive embedded verbs, and appears to favor animate Causers quite strongly (less than 8% of all pre-V constructions featured an inanimate Causer). Unlike animate Causers, animate Causees seem to be rather evenly distributed across the two constructions, which supports the assumption that both constructions are equally well-formed for animate Causees.

So far, none of this means that one structure is more strongly associated with one reading than the other. And yet, one can perhaps start seeing a pattern here: a permissive verb like *autoriser* ('to authorize') generally encodes the interaction of two sentient entities, and as such, fails to take any non-sentient arguments as subject and object (hence the oddness of (15b–d)):

(15) a. Jean autorise   les enfants   à   sortir de la   maison.
         Jean authorizes   the children   to   get.out of the   house
      b. #Le beau   temps   autorise   les enfants à sortir   de la   maison.
          the good   weather authorizes   the children to get.out of the   house
      c. #Jean autorise   la   poussière   à   sortir de la   maison
         Jean authorizes   the   dust   to   get.out of the   house
         (d'un   coup   de   balai).
         (with-one   sweep   of   broom)
      d. #Le vent/la fenêtre ouverte autorise   la   poussière à   sortir
          the wind/the window open   authorizes   the   dust   to   get.out
          de   la   maison.
          of   the   house

Therefore, we can hypothesize that the ECM construction, which strongly favors animate Causers and Causees, is more likely to receive an *authorize* reading than its FI counterpart. Incidentally, this matches Kayne's 'intentionality'/'complicity' remark: only an animate, sentient Causer can act *intentionally*. However, causal relations in general should be understood as *interactions* between two entities with intrinsic tendencies (Talmy 1988). While looking at animacy features of each Causer and Causee in isolation is a good way to start understanding *laisser*, it is necessary to look at both entities that enter the causal chain in order to be able to draw any conclusion as to what type of force-interaction can be encoded by which structure.[14]

2.5. Authorize vs. not-intervene

In the discussion about force dynamics and force theories in 2.1, we have discussed the importance of understanding causal relations as the interaction between two (opposing or not) forces/tendencies. This issue surrounding the involvement of both entities is one of the key points of discussion for Enghels & Roegiest (2012). Indeed, they start by treating *dejar-* and *laisser*-scenarios as cases of 'negative causation', which means that the 'power dynamics' of *laisser* is the opposite as the one in *hacer*-scenarios: the Causer exerts a lesser degree of 'control' over the caused event, while the Causee is more in charge of bringing about the caused event. There are two issues with such an analysis: (i) we have shown in the previous subsection that *laisser* can actually receive different interpretations and as thus, it can encode different degrees of what is understood as 'control', and (ii) the notion of exerted 'control' does not seem to be easily quantifiable in a non-arbitrary way. Additionally, Enghels & Roegiest merely sketch out a definition for their readings, and indeed one would think that these notions of "authorizing" and "not-intervening" are quite self-explanatory, both because of their names and because these two interpretations appear to be available cross-linguistically, for other Romance verbs like *lasciare* in Italian, *deixar* in Portuguese and *lasă* in Romanian, as well as for Germanic ones like *let*.

In force-theoretic terms, *laisser*-causatives seemingly encode an ENABLE-relation, following the ENABLE primitive of causation as defined in Wolff & Song (2003): a relation in which the Causee has a tendency (desire) towards the result which is not opposed by the Causer, and in which the result occurs. Now, this does not entirely solve our *authorize* vs. *not-intervene* issue, mainly because, if we keep this broad configuration in force-theoretic terns, both of them follow the ENABLE pattern (see (16)):

(16)   Didier a   laissé Manon   jouer   aux   jeux   vidéo.
        Didier has   let   Manon   play.INF   at-the games video
        'Didier let Manon play video games.'

        a. Manon wanted to play video games.
        b. Manon played video games.
        c. Didier wanted Manon to play video games (*authorize*) **OR**
        d. Didier was indifferent to Manon playing video games (*not-intervene*).

---

[14]   It must be noted that looking at *both* Causer and Causee simultaneously is something that Enghels & Roegiest (2012: 96) actually do, but only for *dejar* in Spanish.

While the inferences (16a) and (16b) appear to be constant across both interpretations, the locus of variation appears to be the Causer's involvement: either Didier has a tendency *towards* the goal/result (16c), or he is indifferent to it (16d). Once again, we are circling back to Kayne's 'complicity' proposal: the Causer is *complicit* if she acts in accordance with the Causee's goals. But of course, if we want to investigate these concepts further, it is necessary to define them more clearly. First, *letting* in general is to be understood as a type of CAUSATION BY INFLUENCE in that the Causer exerts psychosocial influence over the Causee. Notably, *laisser* fails to encode any form of physical causation, as is highlighted by the infelicity of (17) below:

(17) #Sidonie a   laissé la   porte se   fermer   en la   poussant.
       Sidonie has   let   the   door REFL   close.INF   by it   push-PTCP
       'Sidonie let the door close by pushing it.'

So, it seems that the crucial distinction between *authorize* and *not-intervene* is the way the Causer's influence is applied. But how is authority even 'granted' to the Causer? A necessary component to the Causer role is the (presupposed) ability to prevent the caused event from occurring (Donazzan, Raffy & von Heusinger 2020). In *authorize* scenarios, the Causer offers a choice to the Causee between several alternatives, and could remove any of these alternatives from availability if they wanted to (= PREVENT). Conversely, in *not-intervene* situations, the Causer simply does not stop an ongoing event from continuing, whether it be by choice or not.

This idea of would-be prevention is coupled in *authorize* scenarios with the notion of AUTHORITY. Authority is the ability that an Agent has to influence another Agent in their decision-making.

(18) Fernand a   laissé Josiane partir   sur   la   Lune.
       Fernand has   let   Josiane leave.INF   on   the   moon
       'Fernand let Josiane go to the Moon.'
       ⇨ Alternatives available to Josiane: go-to-the-Moon AND not-go-to-the-Moon

If (18) is understood as an *authorize* scenario in which Fernand gives permission to Josiane to fly to the Moon, Fernand needs to have either authority over Josiane (he is her boss, or her parent) or some form of control over the realization of the caused event (Fernand is the head of the French space program), or both (Josiane is an astronaut and Fernand is her boss, the head of the French space program). What the Causer actually does is offer a choice over alternatives, one of which is emphasized by the speaker/perceiver (go-to-the-Moon); however, unlike in CAUSE and PREVENT relations, no alternative is being removed or forced upon the Causee.

(19) Sidonie a   laissé se   fermer   la   porte.
       Sidonie has   let   REFL   close.INF   the   door
       'Sidonie let the door shut.'
       ⇨ No alternatives introduced, the door has already started closing.

There is no such requirement in *not-intervene* scenarios: Sidonie need not have any form of control or power over the door, since alternatives need not be introduced. This introduction of alternatives (or lack thereof) impacts the way we construe the

sequencing of events in *authorize* and *not-intervene* scenarios. When alternatives are introduced (*authorize*), the Causee can pick among them and then perform (or not) the caused event. The two events are thus successive in time. However, as shown in (19), *not-intervene* relations do not require the introduction of alternatives to the Causee because she is ALREADY bringing about the caused event (maybe she is already on the Moon, maybe she is on her way there). What the Causer is doing is merely witnessing it happen without impeding it (and never impeding it, for the whole duration of the caused event). Therefore, there is a clear aspectual difference between the two scenarios, which allows us to make a strong prediction on the interpretation of the *not-intervene* contexts: we understand *not-intervene*-letting as both durative and cotemporal with the caused event (see Talmy's 1988 EXTENDED LETTING and Copley & Harley's 2015 ENTRAINMENT).

3. Testing for the effect(s) of syntactic structure on the interpretation of laisser-causatives in the presence of context: Experiment 1

3.1. Set-up and predictions

In order to investigate the effect that the position of the Causee has on the interpretation of *laisser*-causatives, we conducted a forced choice study in which participants were shown one construction followed by two little scenarios, one encoding an *authorize*-relation, the other a *not-intervene* one. All scenarios have been tested in a pretest and accepted by native speakers. The participants were then asked to choose which scenario was the best paraphrase for the *laisser*-sentence they were being shown. Taking into account (i) the pattern of *faire*-causatives observed by Abeillé et al. (1997) and (ii) the assumption that there were different degrees of letting that are encoded by *laisser*, our hypothesis was that the two *laisser*-constructions were also associated with distinct meanings. Based on these two factors, we hypothesized that the ECM construction was underspecified and could be associate with either of the two meanings *authorize* and *not-intervene*, while the FI construction was restricted to *not-intervene*. This would also mean that *laisser*-FIs exhibit the opposite pattern to *faire*-FIs, as discussed above in section 2.2.

We expected that participants would generally accept the scenarios as good paraphrases for the *laisser*-sentences, regardless of which construction they were shown. This is due to the availability of a weaker and a stronger interpretation for *laisser*. We nonetheless expected that they would necessarily pick out the *not-intervene* scenario when shown the FI construction.

3.2. Methodology

3.2.1. Pretest
Because of the line between *authorizing* and *not-intervening* (especially when lexicalized by *laisser* or *let*) being a very thin one, we tried to make the contrast between the two contexts as stark as possible. The idea was thus to make the distinction very clear-cut, in order to get robust judgments from the participants to the main experiment. The goal was to make sure that we constructed appropriate scenarios and to filter out inappropriate ones, in order to keep 24 pairs of scenarios for the main test.

We built our contexts using the criteria defined at the end of Section 2, which we sum up in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Defining *authorize* and *not-intervene*.

Authorize	Not-intervene
e_1 and e_2 successive	e_1 and e_2 cotemporal
Causer's act of will	Causer's lack of act
Causer has authority over Causee (authority relevant)	Causer has little or no authority over Causee (authority not relevant)

While the notion of authority is easy to envision, because of its omnipresence in real life, we needed to think about how to evoke it quickly in the brief *letting* contexts we presented. We decided to present cases where the Causer has authority with respect to a given norm (e.g. parents have authority over children, guards over prisoners, CEO over employees, etc.), and can in turn bend the rules to some extent. So, in order to make our authority component more salient, we have created *authorize* scenarios in which there was a given rule already in place (whether it be a law, a company rule, or simply a house rule enforced by parents) which was then overruled by the Causer. Conversely, *not-intervene* scenarios contained no explicit authority relation between Causer and Causee, and we made sure to highlight that the event encoded by the embedded verb in the *laisser*-sentence was perceived as being ongoing.

The pretest was run with 30 pairs of scenarios, each pair with one *authorize* and one *not-intervene*. We composed two lists such that each scenario appeared in one condition on one list, and we balanced the conditions in each list. For each list, only one of the two conditions was shown to participants; this means that participants asked to rate the *authorize*-scenario for item #1 did not rate the *not-intervene* scenario of the same item. More importantly, none of the participants saw any of the *laisser*-sentences. As an example, participants were simply shown either the *authorize* or *not-intervene* condition, preceded by the question '*dans cette situation, qu'a fait/que fait Gaspard vis-à-vis de Dora*?' ('in this situation, what does/did Gaspard do with respect to Dora?') and followed by three possible answers: (a) *il/elle a donné/donne sa permission* ('he/she gave/gives his/her permission',) (b) *il/elle n'est pas intervenu.e/n'intervient pas* ('he/she did/does not intervene'), and (c) *aucun des deux* ('neither').

The 14 French participants (8 in list A and 6 in list B) were recruited among acquaintances and took the 15-minute survey on the Qualtrics platform without being paid, after receiving the link in an email or message. They were informed of their rights and data protection and were asked a couple of personal questions about their age, gender and mother tongue. Finally, the task of the pretest was briefly explained to them, along with an example to make sure it was all clear enough.

Following the judgments of the participants we categorized the 30 pairs of scenarios in three groups: i) in 'appropriate' or 'good' if both scenarios were very often chosen (between 6/8 and 8/8 for list A and 4/6 and 6/6 for list B, i.e. over 75% and over 67%, respectively) as well as low numbers of non-matching answers (≤ 1); ii) in 'partially appropriate' or 'average' if the scenarios had higher numbers of *neither-*

answers but still quite low numbers of non-matching answers (≤2); and iii) in 'not-appropriate' or 'bad' scenarios if items did poorly on one of the two conditions (≥ 3 'wrong' or unexpected answers) or across both. In total, the French pretest had 20 good items, 3 average items, and 7 bad items. For the main experiment we used the good and average items and constructed 1 new item to create a set of 24 pairs of scenarios.

3.2.2. Material of the main experiment 1
The test consisted of a 2x2 factorial design, manipulating syntactic structure and interpretation simultaneously. It contained 48 items in total: 24 critical items along with 16 filler items and 8 control items.

Each of the critical items consisted of a pair of *laisser*-sentences (an ECM and an FI) in which (i) the embedded verb is an intransitive verb, (ii) that intransitive verb is an activity verb, and (iii) both Causer and Causee are animate, volitional entities (which does not match the data of Enghels & Roegiest 2012 summed up in Table 2). The first constraint is explained by the very low frequency of the post-V position of the FI construction with a transitive embedded verb:[15]

(20)   a. ECM:
        Barbara laisse   son mari   poser   une étagère.
        Barbara lets   her husband   put-up a   shelf
      b. FI:
        ?Barbara laissé   poser   une   étagère à   son mari.
         Barbara lets   put-up a   shelf   to   her husband
        'Barbara let her husband put up a shelf.'

The second constraint concerns the embedded verb: all the verbs were activity verbs (as initially defined by Vendler 1957 – atelic, durative predicates), such as *danser* 'to dance', *fumer* 'to smoke', *marcher* 'to walk', *coudre* 'to sew', etc. We did not, however, control for tense or aspect and we simply used two aspectually neutral tenses (the *présent simple* and the *passé composé*). Aspectually neutral, here, means that each of these two verb forms can have more than one interpretation, therefore we can consider them less marked; the *présent simple* can either get a habitual or a progressive reading, while the *passé composé* merges perfective and perfect. Besides, the *passé composé* is the only perfective form used in oral communication. Lastly, the criterion in (iii) is explained by the availability of both the *authorize* and the *not-intervene* interpretations when both entities in the *laisser*-relation are Agents. Here is one of the critical items in (21) below:

(21)   a. ECM:
        Jean   a   laissé les enfants   jouer.
        Jean   has   let   the children play.INF

---

[15]   While we did not test the acceptability of such sentences on any informant, the results of Enghels & Roegiest's (2012) corpus search support this claim: they only found one occurrence of the FI with a transitive embedded verb, against 37 for the FI with an intransitive embedded verb (see Table 2).

b. FI:

Jean   a   laissé jouer   les enfants.
Jean   has let   play.INF the children
'Jean let the children play.'

a. [*authorize*-context] Dans cette maison, on ne joue pas aux jeux vidéo avant d'avoir fini ses devoirs. Quand Jean est rentré, ses enfants n'avaient pas encore fait leurs devoirs mais ils avaient rangé leurs chambres. Alors, il a choisi de les récompenser avec une heure de PlayStation.
'In this house, we do not play video games before having finished our homework. When Jean got home, his children had not done their homework yet, but they had tidied up their rooms. So, he chose to reward them with one hour of PlayStation.'

b. [*not-intervening*-context] Jean est rentré chez lui bien tard ce soir, et lorsqu'il est arrivé, ses enfants avaient fini de manger et faisaient une partie de cartes, alors qu'ils devraient être au lit. Comme ils étaient en train de finir, il est monté se doucher sans les réprimander.
'Tonight, Jean got home quite late, and when he arrived, his children had finished eating and were playing card games, even though they were supposed to be in bed. Since they were finishing up, he went upstairs to get a shower without lecturing them.'

In addition to the set of 24 critical items, a set of 24 fillers was also designed: 16 neutral fillers, as well as 8 control fillers. In order not to make them stand out, they also contained two volitional entities. For neutral fillers, both scenarios were acceptable and plausible paraphrases, as in (22):

(22)   Ils   ont   été   saluer Patricia.
       they have   been greet Patricia
       'They went to greet Patricia.'

a. Après plusieurs heures de route, les Dupont sont arrivés dans leur maison de vacances. Les enfants avaient envie de se détendre un peu, mais leur mère les a envoyés dire bonjour à leur voisine, Patricia
'After several hours in their car, the Duponts have arrived in their country house. The children wanted to chill for a bit, but their mother sent them to greet their neighbor, Patricia.'

b. Alors qu'ils déjeunaient sur leur terrasse, les Dupont ont aperçu leur voisine Patricia dans son jardin. Ils pensaient tous qu'elle était partie en vacances ! Ravis de la voir, ils ont donc traversé la route pour lui claquer la bise
'As they were having lunch on their terrace, the Dupont saw their neighbor Patricia in her garden. They thought she was on holiday! They were so happy to see her that they went and crossed the road to greet her.'

On the other hand, control items always contained an incoherent answer (here, (23a)), in order to screen out the participants that either were not attentive enough to the task or whose level of French was not fitting.

(23)   Elle a   quitté Tristan.
       she has left   Tristan
       'She broke up with Tristan.'

      a.   Après avoir consulté une voyante, Mélanie a conclu que sa relation ne la satisfaisait plus. Sans aucune hésitation, elle a envoyé un texto à Maxime pour lui annoncer qu'elle le plaquait.
'After seeing a fortune teller, Mélanie realized that she was no longer happy in her relationship. Without any hesitation, she sent Maxime a text to tell him they were over.'

      b.   C'est en discutant avec ses amies que Mélanie s'est rendue compte que Tristan était un pervers narcissique. Celles-ci l'ont alors urgée de rompre avec lui et de couper tout contact. Après de longues tergiversations, elle a annoncé à Tristan qu'elle préférait qu'ils se séparent.
'While chatting with her friends, Mélanie realized that Tristan was a manipulative narcissist. Her friends urged her to break up with him and to cut all ties. After hesitating for a while, she told Tristan that it would be better if they went their separate ways.'

3.2.3. Procedure

The questionnaire was implemented with the online survey software Qualtrics. The participants were asked a couple of personal questions (gender, age, and native language) and were informed about their personal rights and data protection. Subsequently, they were told that they were going to be shown a short sentence, followed by two little scenarios. They were instructed to pick which of the two scenarios seemed to be the best paraphrase for the sentence above, without thinking about it for too long. Additionally, they were shown an example (which was not a *laisser*-example) in order to make the task as explicit as possible.

Figure 1. Illustration of task in Experiment 1 on French *laisser*-constructions (pre-V vs. post-V) and its interpretation (*authorize* vs. *not-intervene*).

> Elle a laissé Sarah prier
>
> En France, on ne prie pas dans les lieux publics. Mais Mme Martin est très soucieuse du respect des libertés individuelles dans son école, alors lorsque Sarah lui a demandé si elle pouvait aller se recueillir, elle a bien évidemment accepté.
>
> Quand Joëlle est entrée dans la chambre de Sarah, celle-ci était en train de faire sa prière du soir. C'est pas grave, elle lui lirait son histoire plus tard.

Critical items and filler items were all randomized and distributed over two separate lists (A and B) in a Latin square design, which means that for each individual critical item, each list only contained either one of the two structure condition. Each list contained 48 items in total (24 critical, 24 fillers). The items were all presented one at a time.
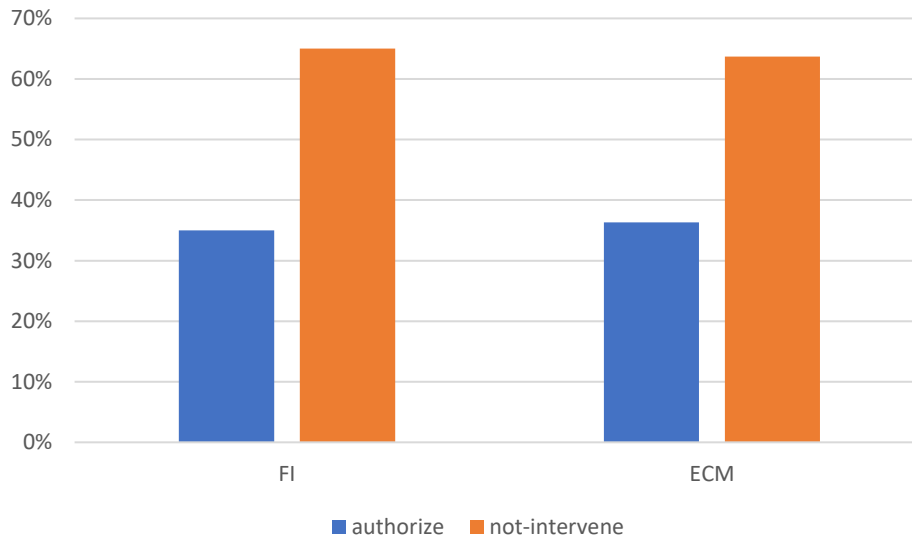
3.2.4. Participants

37 participants (31F, 6M) native in French were recruited among acquaintances that had neither taken part in the pretest nor heard about the research that we were conducting. Three of those participants were removed as they failed to answer for more than two of the control items correctly. Up to two errors were accepted on the control items for two reasons. Firstly, both filler and control items were made to be fairly ambiguous in order to resemble the critical items (see (21) and (22) above). Secondly, participants were not asked to rate the grammaticality of a sentence, and were specifically told at the beginning of the test that this was not a grammar task. This made wrong answers less salient. In the end, only the responses of the 34 remaining participants (28 female, 6 male, list A = 14, list B = 20) were considered.

3.3. Results and discussion

Inspection of the data shows that ECM (pre-V) and FI (post-V) *laisser*-sentences were interpreted in the same way by our participants: both were mainly associated with *not-intervene* scenarios (64,3%). Nevertheless, they were still able to map *laisser*-sentences (regardless of pattern) to authorize scenarios, with a very minor preference in pre-V contexts (36,3%, against 35% for the post-V), see Figure 2. This shows that our base assumption was correct: there are indeed several degrees of letting, and *laisser* is able to lexicalize them. We had however not anticipated such a strong preference for *laisser* as *not-intervene*. This means that the two readings are not on an equal repartition.

Figure 2. The distribution of *authorize* vs. *not-intervene* answer per construction.

Besides, this rather strong preference for *not-intervene* is constant across constructions. So far, this does not support our hypothesis. Further inspection shows that we find the expected variation among the judgments of participants, but we do see that the $1/3^{rd}$ vs. $2/3^{rd}$ distribution is not observable across all items; a few (5 of them) display higher numbers of *authorize* answers. These items had the embedded verbs *coudre* 'to sew', *cuisiner* 'to cook', *fumer* 'to smoke', *pagayer* 'to paddle', and *surfer*

'to surf'. In total, *authorize* answers represent 35,7% of all answers, while *not-intervene* ones amount to 64,3%. Yet, *coudre* got 52,9% of *authorize* answers, *cuisiner* 67,6%, *fumer* 73,5%, *pagayer* 70,6%, and *surfer* 67,6%.

      Overall, we remark that *laisser* can very well receive an *authorize* reading or a *not-intervene* one. However, the two readings are obviously not on an equal distribution: participants appeared to have been keener on mapping *laisser*-sentences, regardless of the construction (ECM or FI), to *not-intervene* scenarios. Enghels & Roegiest (2012) do point out that the *authorize* interpretation for French *laisser* and Spanish *dejar* was available mostly in informal contexts, or for 'weak permissions'; in cases where permission is more firmly expressed, it is likely that speakers will make use of more explicit permission-verbs like *autoriser/autorizar* 'to authorize', *permettre/permitir* 'to allow/permit'. The idea that *laisser* merely express weak permission might explain French speakers' general preference for *not-intervene* paraphrases for the *laisser*-sentences.

      On another note, we have observed that a few items did not follow the general pattern: a high number of participants favored *authorize* scenarios for five specific items (the embedded verbs for the *laisser*-sentences in these items being respectively *fumer* 'to smoke', *cuisiner* 'to cook', *surfer* 'to surf', *coudre* 'to sew', and *pagayer* 'to paddle'). Since these represented quite a small minority (20% of all items), we tried to find similarities between these items that could have made participants pick the *authorize* scenarios over the *not-intervene* ones. A first observation is that, for these five items, the *laisser*-sentences were in the present tense, while almost all the others were in the *passé composé* (a tense generally understood as being perfective). If this is what is at play, is it a question of tense (present vs. past) or a question of aspect (imperfective vs. perfective)? Would we obtain similar results with an imperfective past tense like the *imparfait*?

      Another factor is a more conceptual one, and thus perhaps more difficult to account for. In a lot of the *authorize* contexts that we created (see above), the norm (or established rule) and the Causer are either the same person, or they are on the same level of authority (parents, two different doctors etc.). But in three of our five examples, the norm was embodied by a different person than the Causer. Let us have a look at item #5 in (24) below:

(24)   Il laisse les employés fumer   / Il laisse fumer   les employés.
        he lets the employees smoke.INF   he lets smoke.INF the employees
        'He lets his employees smoke.'

    (a)   La loi interdit de fumer dans les espaces publics. Toutefois, le patron du restaurant sait que tous les membres de son équipe ont besoin d'une pause-clope de temps en temps, et aujourd'hui il souhaite qu'ils puissent se relaxer après le rush du soir.
          'The law forbids people to smoke in public places. However, the restaurant owner knows that all of his team needs a cigarette break once in a while and today he wants them to be able to relax after the evening rush.'

    (b)   Tout le monde est parti en pause-clope. Le patron, Bertrand, ne fume pas, et aimerait avancer sur plusieurs tâches. Il commence alors sans eux, et attend qu'ils reviennent.

'Everybody went on cigarette break. The boss, Bertrand, does not smoke, and would like to move on with several tasks. He starts without them and waits for them to come back.'

In (24), the norm is the law (European law states you cannot smoke in public buildings), and the Causer is the restaurant owner. The main effect of his authorization is that employees can smoke. But it gives us an additional effect: he and his employees are breaking the law, which is typically frowned upon. Somehow, *authorize* scenarios which contained a bigger gap between the established rule (or norm) and the Causer's action were more likely to be picked than their *not-interfere* counterparts and other types of *authorize* scenarios. Besides, the *laisser*-sentence shown to participants contained an explicit authority relation: 'the employees' are necessarily understood as being under the authority of their boss in the context of work. Lastly, this effect could simply be due to the general preference of participants for one of the two scenarios offered to them. In (23), perhaps they deemed it more plausible that a boss would let his employees smoke inside a public building than one in which a boss waits for his employees and starts working without them.

4. Testing for the effect(s) of syntactic structure on the interpretation of laisser-causatives in the absence of context: Experiment 2

4.1. Set-up and predictions

The unexpectedness of the results of Experiment 1 led us to consider that the scenarios shown to the participants could influence their answer more than the structure of the *laisser*-sentence. In order to remove the effect of "scenario-likelihood", we conducted a second experiment in most points similar to the first: Experiment 2 is also a forced choice study in which participants were shown one *laisser*-sentence (either ECM or FI); however, this time, they had to choose only between two interpretations expressed by two paraphrases of the *laisser*-sentence: *il/elle donne/a donné sa permission* ("he/she gives/gave permission"), or *il/elle n'intervient pas/n'est pas intervenu.e"* ("he/she does not intervene/did not intervene").
We expected that the removal of contextual clues would force participants to rely more on the *laisser*-sentence itself and its structure to map it to a particular interpretation. In other words, we expected that this new set-up would highlight interpretational differences between the two constructions.

4.2. Methodology

4.2.1. Material
Much like its predecessor, Experiment 2 consisted of a 2x2 factorial design, manipulating syntactic structure and interpretation simultaneously. It however differs from Experiment 1 with regards to two things. Firstly, as mentioned above, participants were not asked to pick between two little scenarios; instead, they were simply given a choice between "he/she gives/gave permission" and "he/she does/did not intervene". Secondly, Experiment 2 contained no fillers (neutral or control), only

critical items, which once again consisted of the same 24 pairs of *laisser*-sentences discussed in section 3.2.2.

4.2.2. Procedure

While the recruitment of the informants was done over the platform Prolific, the survey itself was again implemented on Qualtrics. Again, the participants were asked a couple of personal questions (gender, age, and native language) and were informed about their personal rights and data protection. Subsequently, they were explained the task: they were about to be shown a series of sentences, followed by two possible answers, and they needed to pick which of the two answers seemed most appropriate.

The 24 critical items were randomized and distributed, here again, over two separate lists A and B in a Latin square design. The items were presented one at a time.

4.2.3. Participants

For this second experiment, 50 participants (20F, 30M) were recruited anonymously and randomly through the online platform Prolific. Any potential participant that was not a native speaker of Mainland French or that had not lived in mainland France for a long time, was automatically screened out. This allowed us to avoid issues related to dialect variations across francophone countries. The 50 informants received 3.96€ for their participation to the survey, which was expected to take them about 20 minutes. The survey itself was set up on the platform Qualtrics.

4.3. Results and discussion

The results of Experiment 2 replicate those of Experiment 1: there is an overwhelming general preference of native speakers of French for the *not-intervene* reading for *laisser* (67,4%), even though *authorize* remains available (32,6%). This preference appears to replicate over both the pre-V and the post-V conditions, with respectively 66,2% and 68,2% of *not-intervene* answers.

Figure 3. Distribution of *authorize* vs. *not-intervene* answers across the two conditions in Experiment 2.
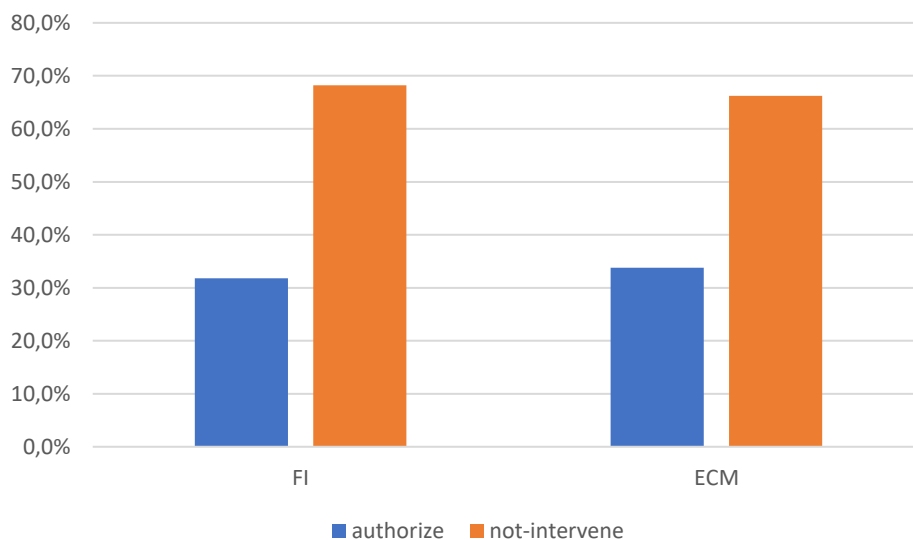
Here again, the results do not appear to support our hypothesis, in that there is still a rather high number of *authorize* answers in the post-V condition. Indeed, even though there are slightly more *authorize* answers under the pre-V condition (33,8%, as opposed to 31,8% in post-V contexts), this difference is too limited to prove that one of the two constructions is more marked than the other.

Despite participants strongly favoring *not-intervene* regardless of the position of the Causee argument, some items still received higher *authorize* ratings than *not-intervene* ones. Here again, five items stood out with over 50% of *authorize* answers. Much like with the 'odd' items of Experiment 1, we tried to find similarities between these items in order to figure out what might have made them stand out for the test-takers. Since there was no context that participants could rely on, we looked at the embedded verb for each of these items: *conduire* ('to drive'), *fumer* ('to smoke'), *nager* ('to swim'), *pique-niquer* ('to picnic'), and *skier* ('to ski'). Both *jouer* ('to play') and *surfer* ('to surf') received the 50% of *authorize* answers and 50% of *not-intervene* ones.

As a brief reminder, we were left with three possible explanations for the items that behaved differently in Experiment 1: (a) the *authorize* contexts seemed more plausible to participants for these five given items, (b) it was an effect of aspect, or (c) conceptually, the *authorize* items scenarios encoded a starker deviation from the established norm. Considering that the contexts had been removed in Experiment 2, neither (a) nor (c) could apply here. And in Experiment 2, (b) does not stand anymore, since only one out of the five diverging items is in the present tense (the other four being in the *passé composé*). Interestingly enough, the only item that received over 70% of *authorize* answers in both experiments is also the only one that is in the present tense among the odd items of Experiment 2: the *fumer*-item (see the discussion about (32) in Section 4.4). However, because the other items in the present did not receive more *authorize* answers here in Experiment 2, it seems likely that this was not the decisive factor for the choice of an *authorize* interpretation over a *not-intervene* one. Rather, it seems that different factors come into play: for the *authorize*-items of Experiment 1 (except the *fumer*-item), we believe it was purely an effect of scenario-preference of the participants' behalf: one scenario must have seemed more plausible than the other, hence it was favored over the other one. In Experiment 2, however, participants were never shown any scenario; they could thus neither rely on them nor find one more likely than the other. Therefore, the preference for an *authorize* reading over a *not-intervene* one (which goes against the general tendency for *laisser*) is an effect of the embedded verb, and of whatever value is attributed to it by participants. For *fumer*, we have proposed above that construing a situation in which smoking is not permitted is rather easy: smoking is indeed not permitted in public buildings in countries of the European Union, for instance. As a contrast, the *réviser*-item, with the embedded verb *réviser* 'to review', received 100% of *not-intervene* answers: as opposed to smoking, which can be viewed as both negative and a breach of the law in some contexts, reviewing one's lesson is quite uncontroversial and is even perceived as a positive trait (as it is linked to seriousness and being a hard-working student).

The results of the Experiment 2 confirm the intuition we got from Experiment 1: the position of the lower subject is not the main factor when it comes to the use/processing of *laisser*-causatives. It is plausible that it still plays a role (as we do still agree with Kayne's intuition with respect to the pair of sentences in (18)), however, if it is a relevant factor, it is not the primary one. Thus, our hypothesis is not

supported: not only is there no clear one-to-one mapping from structure to interpretation, but it is also unsure whether the two constructions are even understood differently by native speakers. What remains to be understood is *what*, exactly, makes native speakers interpret *laisser*-causatives one way or another. The 'context likeliness' issue was corrected for in this test, and the only clues participants could rely on were either the structure (which we expected them to rely on) and the value they attributed to the embedded verb.

4.4. Removing all clues: nonce-word pilot (Experiment 2a)

In order to try to tease the factors for interpretation of *laisser*-causatives apart, we ran a short nonce-word pilot as a follow-up to Experiment 2: we call this pilot Experiment 2a. This means that the pilot was presented to participants of Experiment 2 as a 'second part', for which the design and the task were exactly the same as in the first part. In this pilot, participants were shown *laisser*-sentences, followed by two possible answers: *il/elle donne sa permission* 'he/she gives his/her permission' or *il/elle n'intervient pas* 'he/she does not intervene'[16]. The only difference with Experiment 2 is that the embedded verbs of the *laisser*-sentences in the pilot were made-up words that resembled French verbs, but did not correspond to any existing French verb (for instance, they all had an *-er* ending), see one of the 8 critical items in (25) below:

(25)   Carine laisse Valentin prabasser / Carine laisse prabasser Valentin.
        Carine lets   Valentin prabasser   Carine lets   prabasser   Valentin
       'Carine lets Valentin prabasser.'

     a. Elle donne sa permission.
        'She gives her permission.'
     b. Elle n'intervient pas.
        'She does not intervene.'

       The aim of removing the embedded verb was twofold: (i) it forced participants to rely solely on the structure (ECM or FI) that they were being shown, and (b) it allowed us to have a clearer picture when it comes to the importance of the embedded verb in the interpretation of *laisser*-causatives.
       The results matched our suppositions: all of our 8 nonce-words items received between 64% and 76% of *not-intervene* answers, and none of them stray from that pattern. Besides, and despite a slight increase in ratings, the number of *authorize* answers was not made much higher by the Causee being in pre-V position, as is shown in Figure 4.

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[16]   As this pilot was kept rather short, we controlled for tense and aspect by keeping all of the items in the present tense, which would prevent additional effects from arising and blurring out judgments.

Figure 4. Distribution of *authorize* and *not-intervene* answers across both conditions in nonce-words pilot
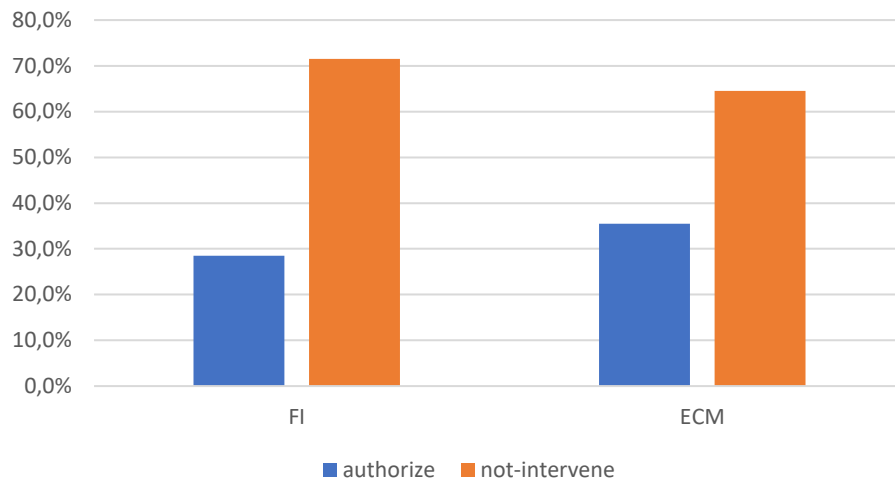
This confirms that *laisser*, regardless of any other factor, tends to be interpreted as *not-intervene* by native speakers of French. Regarding our hypothesis, the results of the nonce-word pilot show that the removal of all context clues makes the morphosyntactic differences between the two constructions more salient to French speakers. However, the removal of the embedded verb seems to affect their ability to pick out the *authorize* reading. This might be a hint that speakers rely more heavily than expected on the value they attribute to the embedded verb.

Overall, we observe that the interpretation of *laisser* is not mainly dependent on structure; and it does not seem to depend solely either on the amount of context provided to participants. We summarize the results of the two experiments and the pilot on *laisser* in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. Distribution of *authorize* and *not-intervene* across both conditions in Experiments 1, 2, and 2a
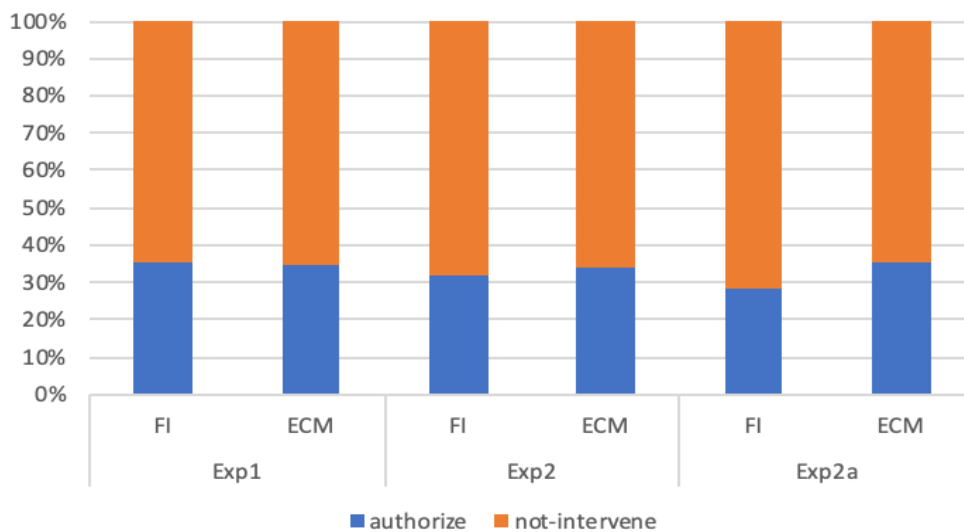
The general effect of the structure is not to be completely ruled out: it appears that, in all three cases, the amount of *authorize* answers is slightly higher in the pre-V

condition than it is in the post-V condition. That contrast is particularly sharp in the nonce-word pilot, even though none of those result allow us to align with an analysis in which the ECM construction would favor the *authorize* interpretation. One additional remark that can be made, however, is that the *authorize* interpretation was most salient and available regardless of the construction to participants when they were given a lot of context (as a reminder, in Experiment 1, participants where shown little scenarios. Conversely, they were only shown short sentences with little to no context in Experiment 2).

5. Testing for the effect(s) of contextual clues on syntactic choices: Experiment 3

5.1. Set-up and predictions

Some colleagues we informally consulted suggested that the problem ought to be treated the opposite way, and that the participants ought to be met with an acceptability judgement task instead. Therefore, we decided to show participants a scenario in one of the two conditions (*authorize* or *not-intervene*), followed by one of the two *laisser*-constructions (pre-V or post-V). They were then asked to rate the *laisser*-sentence on a scale of one to seven stars, In which one star meant that the *laisser*-sentence was a poor paraphrase for the scenario, and seven stars meant it was a perfect paraphrase for it.

Since we wanted to test whether the ECM construction was underspecified and the FI was marked, we assumed that having the participants rate one sentence instead of picking one of two options would allow for more nuanced judgements. Therefore, we expected two things: (i) the ratings should generally be rather good across both *not-intervene* and *authorize* conditions for the ECM construction, and (ii) for the FI, only the *not-intervene* condition should be deemed acceptable. In other words, we expected lower ratings only for FI-*authorize* pairs.

5.2. Methodology

5.2.1. Pretest
Much like for Experiment 1, all the scenarios were pretested before being used in the main test, in order to make sure that they were interpreted by native speakers as encoding either *authorize* or *not-intervene* scenarios. Overall, 31 critical items were tested, each containing an *authorize* and a *not-intervene* scenario. The procedure for the pretest of Experiment 3 is the same as for Experiment 1: it consisted of a forced-choice preference task implemented on Qualtrics. The items were distributed over two lists; therefore, each participant only saw one of the two conditions for each item.

The questionnaire was distributed among 13 native speakers of French recruited among acquaintances (8 women and 5 men; 6 in list A and 7 in list B). They were informed of their rights and data protection, and were asked to provide some additional personal information, such as gender, native language, and age. Then, they were shown the instructions to the experiment, followed by an example item. Based on the criteria already established above, we found that 28 items were considered appropriate, while 3 were inappropriate, or 'bad'. Out of the 28 appropriate ones, the best-rated 24 items were selected for the main test, while the other 7 were deleted. This

shows that participants had a clear understanding of the distinction between *authorize* and *not-intervene*.

5.2.2. Material

Unlike Experiments 1 and 2, Experiment 3 was not a forced-choice task; instead, we ran an acceptability judgment task of a 2x2 design. Each of the critical items consisted of a scenario from the pretest, followed by a *laisser*-sentence. We allowed for all possible combinations of conditions (namely (a) *authorize*/pre-V, (b) *authorize*/post-V, (c) *not-intervene*/pre-V, (d) *not-intervene*/post-V) to be shown to participants. Participants were asked to rate the acceptability of the *laisser*-sentence **as a paraphrase** for the scenario that it followed on a Likert scale from 1 to 7 (in which 1 was an unacceptable paraphrase and 7 an ideal paraphrase).

Additionally, Experiment 3 contained filler items (16 neutral, 8 control). Much like critical items, the fillers consisted of a scenario, followed by a short sentence. For those items, informants were expected to find most of them acceptable, except for 4 of the control items.

5.2.3. Procedure

Much like for Experiment 2, informants were recruited through the platform Prolific; and the survey was implemented on Qualtrics. Here again, the participants were asked a couple of personal questions (gender, age, and native language) and were informed about their personal rights and data protection. The task was then explained to them: they were going to be shown a little scenario, followed by a short sentence. They were asked to rate the acceptability of the short sentence with respect to the scenario: if said sentence was a completely unacceptable paraphrase, they were to rate it with 1 star, and if said sentence was a perfect paraphrase, then they were to rate it with 7 stars. This time, the 24 critical items were randomized and distributed, over four separate lists (A, B, C, and D) in a Latin square design together with the 24 filler and control times, such that each participant saw 48 items. The items were presented one at a time.

5.2.4. Participants

For Experiment 3, 100 participants (37F, 61M, 2 non-specified) were recruited anonymously and randomly through the online platform Prolific. Any potential participant that was not a native speaker of French from France, or that had not lived in France for a long time, was automatically screened out. This allowed us to avoid issues related to language use differences across francophone countries. The 100 informants received 3.96€ for their participation to the survey, which was expected to take them about 20 minutes. The survey itself was set up on the platform Qualtrics.

Four of those participants were removed as they failed to answer more than two of the control items correctly. Only the responses of the 96 remaining participants (37F, 57M, 2NS, list A = 24, list B = 24, list C = 23, list D = 25) were considered for our analysis.

5.3. Results and discussion

The results of this acceptability task provide more empirical data on (i) acceptability of the interpretation, (ii) the acceptability of the construction and (iii) on potential interactions as hypothesized above. Firstly, we see that the *not-intervene* interpretation

is judged better than the *authorize*-interpretation across constructions. This mirrors the results of our first forced choice tasks, where participants interpreted in 2/3 or the cases the constructions as *not-intervening* and only in 1/3 as *authorizing* (also across constructions). Secondly, the results also show that the ECM is numerically more acceptable than the FI construction. Since the task differed (participants of our previous experiments were given a construction and asked for a context), we cannot compare this result with the results of the other experiments. However, we can still observe that the results of Experiment 3 seem to coincide with what we have previously observed in Experiments 1 and 2, both with respect to the interpretation and to the morphosyntax: (i) French speakers favor the *not-intervene* interpretation for *laisser*, and (ii) the ECM construction is preferred over the FI one. Regarding the first observation, the numbers are here again clear: regardless of the construction they were shown, informants gave higher ratings to *laisser*-paraphrases preceded by *not-intervene* scenarios. While the average rating for *authorize* scenarios was 5,89 out of 7, the average rating for *not-intervene* scenarios was 6,26. Additionally, out of all 24 items in the *not-intervene* condition, 20 were rated higher than 6 out of 7 (83,3%), across both ECM and FI conditions. As for the second observation, the overall preference for the ECM construction is noticeable despite being rather marginal: the ratings for the *not-intervene* conditions are higher when the paraphrase that participants were asked to rate was in the ECM condition. Lastly, we do see non-significant interaction between construction type and interpretation.[17]

Figure 6. Distribution of ratings across all four conditions in Experiment 3.

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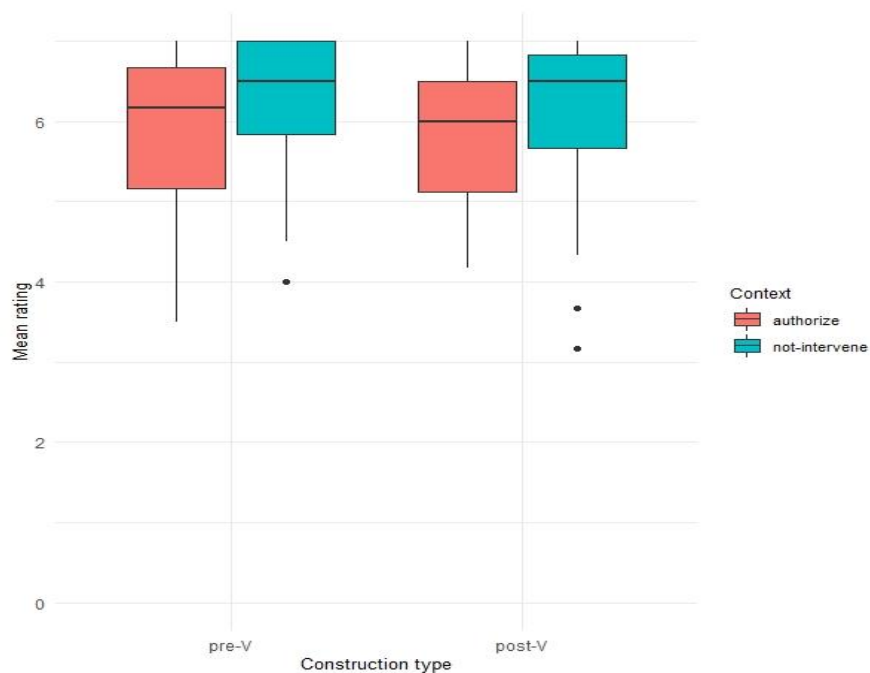
[17] We fitted a linear mixed-effects model to the data with *context* (*authorize* vs. *intervene*) and *construction type* (*ECM* vs. *FI*) as well as their interaction as fixed effects, and random intercepts for participant. Only for *context* was the result significant (Estimate= -0.36806; SE=0.04781; t= -7.698; p< 0.001). A Bayesian mixed-effects model with cumulative link function and maximal random effects structure (by participant and by item) fitted to the same data also revealed very similar results (for *context*: Estimate= 0.77; Error= 0.29; Credible Interval= [0.20; 1.35], while for both *construction type* and the interaction null effects cannot be excluded with confidence given the model and the data).

Even though some individual items diverge from the general pattern, the expectations discussed above are not met: save for a couple of diverging items in which the FI-*authorize* gets the lowest rating, generally it is deemed as acceptable (more or less) as its ECM-*authorize* counterpart. However, we observe that the *authorize* context is rated lower than the *not-intervene* one, regardless of structure: this effect of context is significant (rating generally 0.5 higher on the scale). This effect of context aside, we cannot observe any effect of construction type, or of interaction between context and construction, that would be statistically significant. We take these two observations to mean that French speakers associate *laisser* a given lexical value, namely, *not-intervene*. This value appears to be more central to the interpretation of *laisser*-causatives than the syntactic structure of the construction.

Here again, we might want to look at diverging items in order to find more hints as to what triggers the *authorize* interpretation for *laisser*. There are three items for which the *authorize* conditions (both ECM and FI) are rated higher than 6 while the *not-intervene* ones are below 6: *fumer* 'to smoke', *surfer* 'to surf', *pêcher* 'to fish'. Both *fumer* and *surfer* were already non-conforming in previous experiments (*fumer* in Experiment 1 and 2, *surfer* in Experiment 2).[18] Considering that the effect of scenario-likelihood is not relevant here in Experiment 3, there are only two options remaining: either the *authorize* reading arises from the value attributed to the embedded verb, or it is triggered by contextual elements from the scenario that were interpreted as introducing a strict rule and/or an authority relation. While we cannot define for certain what value participants may have associated with our three verbs, we can take into account the contexts that were shown to participants. The case of the *fumer*-item has been discussed at length, it has already been made clear that it refers both an explicit authority relation and an implicit law. Both the *surfer* and the *pêcher* item in the *authorize* scenario make reference to overt rules. In the *surfer* item, it is stated that "beginners are not allowed to get into the water during the first lesson". Similarly, in the *pêcher* item, the holder of authority (and upholder of the law), the fishery warden sees that the Causee "does not have his fishing license". The existence of an obvious law (that is being overridden by the Causer) that should prevent the caused event seems here again to make the *authorize* reading more accessible.

6. General discussion

We started with three main observations. Firstly, *laisser*-causatives mirror their *faire*-counterparts in that they also display two distinct structures: a Faire-Infinitive structure, and an ECM one. Secondly, these two structures in *faire*-cases have been analyzed as being associated with distinct interpretations: the FI construction is understood as being underspecified in that it can encode distinct degrees of coercion, while the ECM is marked and is restricted to strong coercion (Abeillé et al 1997). Lastly, the literature on *laisser* mentions the availability of an "intentional" interpretation for the *laisser*-ECM, which is supposedly unavailable for *laisser*-FI

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[18]   We investigated the individual by-item effects on *context* and interaction using the random effects estimates from the Bayesian model output. For *context*, we found that *danser, dormir, méditer,* and *jardiner* deviated positively by more than one standard deviation (sd) from the average slope estimate for *context*, while *pêcher, fumer, cuisiner* and *surfer* deviated negatively from it by one sd or more. However, for the interaction effect, no strong deviation by any verb was found.

(Kayne 1975). This led us to hypothesize that *laisser* displayed the opposite pattern to *faire*, in which its ECM is the underspecified construction while the FI is the marked one. We conducted a series of questionnaires in French to empirically test said hypothesis.

Even though the results did not support our hypothesis, they still shed some new light on previous approaches to *laisser* (which can potentially apply to other Romance *let*-verbs). Indeed, they yielded two crucial pieces of information about *laisser* that we do not believe have been mentioned before. First, *laisser* can without much issue accommodate both *authorize* and *not-intervene* interpretations. However, it must be understood as encoding mainly *not-intervene* relations, at least as a default interpretation. The question of what makes the *authorize* reading arise remains open, and we will give possible leads below. Second, *laisser* does indeed follow a pattern that is the opposite of the one of *faire* as described in Abeillé et al. (1997): while the FI construction is available, it is not *as* available as the ECM, which on the other hand, appears to be the default.

Regarding the preference for *not-intervene*, there are several possible explanations. For instance, it could be due to *authorize-laisser* being in competition with too many other *authorize* predicates[19] (such as *permettre* 'to permit', *autoriser* 'to authorize', *donner la permission* 'to give one's permission', and more distantly, *accepter* 'to accept', *acquiescer* 'to acquiesce' and *approuver* 'to approve', which all encode configurations in which the Causee's desire to perform the event denoted by the embedded verb is the driving force of action). All in all, one could say that the effect of scenario-likelihood only goes so far, and it does not apply in Experiments 2 and 3. Instead, it appears that participants rely on the lexical meaning of the embedded verb to decide on the interpretation of the given *laisser*-sentence. This is supported by the data in Table 4: some verbs appear to be more strongly interpretable as *authorize* or as *not-intervene*, as they received the same ratings across experiments and languages. The items containing the verbs *fumer* ('to smoke'), which we have discussed at length throughout this article, were always understood as encoding *authorize* situations, no matter what level of context was provided to participants. Similarly, *méditer* was interpreted by most participants as *not-intervene*. This means that the *authorize* reading is generally available for *laisser* but is marginal, and can only be forced through factors other than structure and/or position of the Causee.

Table 4. Activity verbs of diverging items across all three experiments[20]

	High Authorize	**High Not-intervene**
Experiment 1 (with context)	*coudre, cuisiner, **fumer**, pagayer, surfer*	*pique-niquer, **méditer**, grignoter, dormir, **travailler***
Experiment 2 (no context)	***fumer**, conduire**, pique-niquer, skier*	***dormir**, parler, **méditer**, **travailler**, chanter*
Experiment 3 (no context)	***fumer**, surfer**, pêcher*	***dormir**, pique-niquer, **méditer***

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[19]   Note that this does not hold true across all Romance languages: Spanish speakers are more likely to associate *dejar* with an *authorize* reading (see Raffy 2021). This supports the view that French might have a wide variety of lexical alternatives.

[20]   The verbs in bold indicate that the same verb was found across the two experiments. The italics show a reverse pattern (i.e the verb is rated once as *not-intervene* and then later as *authorize*).

Regarding the preference for the ECM construction, it is unclear what makes *laisser* so different from *faire*, despite them being two causative light verbs that exhibit a similar alternation. We would however like to point to two pieces of information that may help clarify the situation. The first piece of information concerns *laisser* only. The conclusions we have drawn for our experiments apply solely to causal relations between two animate, sentient entities and is not to be generalized to all *laisser*-constructions. Indeed, it appears that *laisser*-relations in which both entities are non-volitional and non-force-generating are better expressed through the FI construction (26a) than through the ECM one (26b):

(26)   a. Le mur   rongé de   salpêtre laisse suinter un peu   d'eau.
          the wall   gnawed of   saltpeter lets   seep.INF a little   water
       b. ??Le mur   rongé   de salpêtre   laisse un   peu   d'eau suinter.
          the wall gnawed of saltpeter   lets   a   little   water seep.INF
          'The wall, riddled with saltpeter, lets a little water seep through.'

This pattern is replicated in other Romance languages which also display two distinct constructions. As an example, Spanish speakers favor the FI construction over the biclausal construction with a complementizer clause when referring to *letting* interactions between two inanimate entities:

(27)   Spanish
       a. Las cortinas   dejan   pasar   la luz.
          the curtains   let   pass   the light
       b. ??Las cortinas   dejan   que la   luz   pase.
          the curtains   let   that the   light   pass.SBJV
          'The curtains let light through.'

Therefore, it does not seem like the two constructions are truly in competition; instead, they might just appear in some very specific and distinct contexts.

The second piece of information concerns both *laisser* and perception verbs such as *voir* 'to see', *regarder* 'to watch', *entendre* 'to hear', *écouter* 'to listen'. Much like *laisser* and *faire*, French perception verbs also allow for the embedded subject to be realized in either of the two positions (Kayne 1975). However, much like *laisser* (and unlike *faire*!), the acceptability of the sentences is really degraded when the embedded verb is a transitive verb that takes a direct object:

(28)   French
       ??Philippe a   laissé boire   une bière à Sylvain.
         Philippe has let   drink.INF a   beer to Sylvain
         'Philippe let Sylvain drink a beer.'

(29)   French
       ??Philippe a   vu   boire   une   bière   à   Sylvain.
         Philippe has seen   drink.INF   a   beer   to   Sylvain
         'Philippe saw Sylvain drink a beer.'

While the two constructions are both available with an intransitive embedded verb, the infelicity of the FI construction with an embedded direct object might be a factor for the general preference for the ECM construction.

Lastly, it should be made clear that this does not mean that Kayne (1975) is completely wrong in saying that the ECM construction is to be interpreted as MORE INTENTIONAL than its FI counterpart in the example that he gives. While we do agree with him for the example that he gives (that can be found in (14) above and is repeated below as (30)), we think it ought to be approached with a bit more nuance:

(30)   a. ECM :
        Le   gardien a   laissé les   prisonniers   s'échapper.
        the   guard   has   let   the   prisoners   escape.INF
        b. FI:
        Le   gardien a   laissé s'échapper   les   prisonniers.
        the   guard   has   let   escape.INF   the   prisoners
        'The guard let the prisoners escape.'

There are two additional factors in that Kayne fails to mention: (i) the Causer-Causee pair explicitly describes an asymmetrical authority relation[21] (it is common world knowledge that guards have authority over prisoners), and (ii) *s'échapper* 'to escape', in this context, has a negative and abnormal connotation – guards are paid to see to it that their prisoners do *not* escape. While it appears that structure *does* play a role in this specific instance, it does not to the same extent when there is no authority relation between Causer and Causee and when the event denoted by the embedded verb is not deemed as going against the norm. Also, it is worth noting that the possibility of modulating contextual parameters is offered in particular by the force-theoretic approach to causation that we chose to follow in this paper; it would also be interesting to see how experimental results might shed light on the soundness of other types of approaches, as for instance the logical approach to direct or indirect causation defended by Reed (1999). Lastly, to elaborate further on this discussion about structure, it should be pointed out that the previous proposals made by Borel, Kayne, and later on by Reed for the two interpretations for *laisser* not only follow from introspective judgment, but also differ from one another on several points. The aim of our experimental approach was (i) to update and clarify our understanding of *laisser*-causatives and their interpretations, and (ii) shed a different light on the constructions by tackling them from a different angle.

7. Conclusion

Romance languages show a systematic alternation between different syntactic configuration of causative relations. This alternation depends, among other factors, on the particular Romance languages, the kind of the causative verb and on whether or not the embedded subject is nominal or pronominal. For *make*-causatives, the

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[21]   One of the participants in Experiment 2 explained in a comment that they found it difficult to pick an *authorize* answer for *laisser* when there was no clear authority relation between the two entities (e.g. parent-child, teacher-student, doctor-patient, etc.).

alternation is semantically conditioned in the sense that it is more felicitous with an agentive embedded verb where the embedded subject (Causee) is forced or coerced to act by the Causer or the cause. (Abeillé et al. 1997; Guasti 1996; Kayne 1975; Labelle 2017; Sheehan 2020). However, there are only very few studies on *let*-causatives in Romance. Various authors (Borel 1972; Kayne 1975; Achard 1993a,b; Reed 1999; among others) have claimed that in French the two syntactic configurations of *laisser* express a semantic contrast, which is linked in some way or other to the involvement of the Causer and the Causee. In this paper we have formulated and empirically tested the hypothesis that French *laisser* can either enter an underspecified ECM construction or a marked FI construction restricted to a *not-intervene* reading.

The results of our three grammaticality judgment experiments do not support our hypothesis based on the predictions of Borel (1972) and Kayne (1975) for French, regardless of the richness (or lack thereof) of the contexts provided to participants. We take this to mean that structure is not the main factor for interpretation for *laisser*-causatives, despite what is stated in the literature, be it in terms of the direct mapping of argument structure or in terms of markedness. What those results tell us, however, is a more general fact about causal relations: participants were less likely to picture a relationship of authority between the two agents when that authority relation had not been made explicit. In the boss vs employee scenario in the *fumer*-item, the authority relation is obvious; conversely, there is no clear authority relation between two agents that are simply mentioned by name.

We think that these results are crucial for the understanding of causative constructions in general. First, they show that *let*-causatives are quite different from *make*-causatives in whether or not different syntactic configurations mirror contrasts in the causative relation. Furthermore, *let*-causatives seem to be less sensitive to the level of force coerced on the Causee and more sensitive to the kind of authority relation between Causer and Causee. We believe there is a hierarchy of factors that come into play when interpreting *laisser*-causatives; and while structure is part of that hierarchy (as is supported by examples (25) and (26) above), it is not the driving force. The availability of a norm or an authority relation (either implicit or explicit) in the context makes the *authorize* interpretation more salient. These fine-grained contextual parameters would need more research.

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