

Causatives with small clause complements

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Abstract

We discuss the syntactic properties of a small subset of verbs in European Portuguese (EP) that have a causative interpretation and may also have a locative meaning, namely *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ and *deixar a* ‘make’. We show that in their non-locative interpretation they are causatives taking as their complement a Prepositional Infinitival Construction (PIC), which we analyze as an AspP, but also a domain in which a predication relationship is established. We thus show that the PIC in EP, which has previously been identified under perception verbs, can also occur as the complement of causatives and we contribute to identify a new class of causatives, which are syntactically distinct from *faire*-type causatives. We additionally explore a decausative counterpart of one of these syntactic causatives, *pôr-se a* ‘begin’, which we analyze as a raising verb, close to a semi-auxiliary, whose complement is also an AspP, but not exactly a PIC, to the extent that this AspP does not coincide with a domain in which a predication relationship is established.

Keywords: causatives, decausatives, infinitive, small clause.

1. Introduction

This paper analyses a particular class of verbs in European Portuguese (EP), including *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ and *deixar a* ‘make’, which occur in sequences that are superficially similar both to those where object control verbs appear and to those in which a perception verb may appear: they are preceded by a DP (which we can identify as DP1), and followed by another DP (which we identify here as DP2) and an infinitival domain introduced by the preposition-like element *a*. Schematically, this sequence is represented as [DP1 V DP2 *a* INF]. The relevant examples are presented in (1).

(1) a. O professor pôs os alunos a saltar.
 the teacher put the students A jump.INF
 ‘The teacher made the students jump.’

b. O professor deixou os alunos a saltar.
 the teacher made the students A jump.INF
 ‘The teacher made the students jump.’

Studies on this type of verbs are scarce and differ in the analysis they sketch. Raposo (1989), in a work on the Prepositional Infinitival Construction (PIC) in EP, briefly mentions the verb *pôr a* in a footnote, and characterizes it as a verb that selects an *a*-phrase to which it presumably assigns the Locative Θ -role (Raposo 1989: 302). Agostinho (2014) and Agostinho, Santos & Duarte (2018) analyze the same verb as part of the group of object control verbs. In a more recent and comprehensive study, Soares & Wood (2021, 2022) propose that *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ is a particular type of causative, expressing a change of location meaning, i.e., it is a locative causative. Recently, Santos & Gonçalves (2025) developed a study on the similarities and the differences between object control verbs and syntactic causatives. In this work, these authors consider that the verb *deixar a* ‘make’ also behaves like *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ (something that was not previously noticed) and that these verbs have a non-locative (ordinary) causative reading, as well as the locative causative version explored by Soares & Wood.

The main goal of this paper is to present additional evidence to the characterization of verbs such as *deixar a* ‘make’ and *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ as a particular type of causative verbs that may preserve their locative meaning, though not necessarily. This main goal will lead us to suggest a new type of causatives that cannot be reduced to the locative causatives discussed by Soares & Wood (2021, 2022) and which is also distinct from the well-known *faire*-type causatives (namely, *fazer* ‘make’, *deixar* ‘let’), analyzed by Kayne (1975), Burzio (1986), Raposo (1981), Guasti (1997), Gonçalves (1999), Cyrino (2010), Manzini (2022), among others.

We will present two new pieces of evidence that will be crucial in our discussion. First, we will argue that the cooccurrence with the locative adverb *lá* ‘there’ is a relevant test for unambiguously signaling the locative causative reading, distinguishing it from the ordinary causative reading of the class of verbs under discussion. Second, we will show that the infinitival complement of *deixar a* ‘make’ and *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ can be coordinated with a predicative AP or a predicative PP, and in this case the locative reading is lost – this behavior is a new type of evidence supporting the small clause analysis of the complement of these verbs in non-locative

contexts, in agreement with Santos & Gonçalves (2025). We will more generally show that the syntactic specificity of *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ and *deixar a* ‘make’ as causatives results from the possibility of selecting a small clause complement, as well as from the existence of the PIC in EP (Raposo 1989; Duarte 1992; Barbosa & Cochinel 2005). When discussing the nature of the predicative projection corresponding to the complement of these verbs, the present paper will also contribute (i) to support an analysis of the PIC as a predication domain, in line with Raposo (1989) and Barbosa & Cochinel (2005); (ii) to expand our knowledge of the distribution of the PIC in EP.

Finally, and in articulation with the previous discussion, we explore the properties of the verb *pôr-se a* ‘begin’, which we will propose to correspond to a non-causative verb, a fact that results from the presence of the clitic SE.

In the next section, we will develop the analysis for the causatives *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ and *deixar a* ‘make’, arguing for the existence of a non-locative interpretation of these verbs which takes as complement a small clause of an aspectual nature. We also consider the unexplored case of *levar a* ‘take / make’, distinguishing it from the preceding set of verbs. In section 3, we discuss the hypothesis that, when *pôr* combines with the clitic SE, it shows the properties of a raising non-causative verb, close to a semi-auxiliary. Section 4 summarizes the conclusions reached in the present paper.

2. *Pôr a* ‘put to / make’ and *deixar a* ‘make’ as ordinary causatives

2.1. Locative causatives and ordinary causatives

Soares & Wood (2021, 2022) establish a syntactic and semantic distinction between ordinary causatives and locative causatives and include in the latter type the verbs *pôr a* ‘put to’ and *ir a* ‘go / put to’, which they classify respectively as a transitive locative causative (TLC) and an intransitive locative causative (ILC). The examples by the authors are given in (2):

(2) Soares and Wood (2021: 213)

- a. Pus o polícia a lavar a roupa.
put1.SG the police officer A wash.INF the clothes
'I made the police officer wash the clothes.'
- b. A roupa foi a lavar.
the clothes went A wash.INF
'The clothes were put to wash.'

The main difference between these locative causatives and ordinary causatives as *fazer* ‘make’ in (3) is that the matrix verbs they classify as locative causatives have a locative meaning that is absent from ordinary causatives.

(3) Soares & Wood (2021: 213)

- Fiz o polícia lavar a roupa.
made.1SG the police officer wash.INF the clothes
'I made the police officer wash the clothes.'

In a fine-grained description of the locative causatives *pôr a* ‘put to’ and *ir a* ‘go / put to’, Soares & Wood (2021, 2022) ascribe them the following properties:

- (i) They entail the change of location of the theme;
- (ii) As a result of (i), they force an existence presupposition on the theme;
- (iii) They embed a PathP and a LocP, responsible for the change of location meaning - specifically, their complement is a PathP, dominating a LocP, which itself dominates a VoiceP and the vP headed by the verb in the embedded clause.

Ordinary causatives lack all these properties and, according to Soares & Wood (2021), they additionally differ from locative causatives in the Voice heads they embed: ordinary causatives embed passive, active and unaccusative; TLCs embed passive and active; ILCs embed passive only.

In what follows, we briefly recover the discussion in Soares & Wood (2021, 2022) and illustrate the properties listed in (i) and (ii), also considering other verbs that present a locative and causative meaning. We also explore the compatibility of these verbs with a locative adverb, as a cue to the locative interpretation.

As shown by Soares & Wood (2021), the change of location of the theme is attested by the contrast between (4a) and (4b). The existence presupposition is attested by the examples in (5). The contrast between (4a) and (5b) shows that the only reason why (5b) is excluded is the fact that the embedded predicate *construir* ‘build’ does not allow to maintain the presupposition of the existence of the entity corresponding to the theme.

(4) Soares and Wood (2021: 217)

- a. O carro foi a pintar.
the car go.PST.3SG A paint.INF
'The car was put to paint.'
- b. #A casa foi a pintar.
the house go.PST.3SG A paint.INF

(5) Soares and Wood (2021: 218)

- a. *A mobília foi a construir.
the furniture go.PST.3SG A build.INF
- b. *O carro foi a construir.
the car go.PST.3SG A build.INF

The same can be shown for *pôr a* ‘put to / make’, as well as for two other verbs with both a causative and a locative meaning that Soares & Wood do not consider, namely, *deixar a* ‘leave / make’ and *levar a* ‘take / make’:

(6) Pus /deixei /levei o carro a pintar.
put.PST.1SG /left.PST.1SG /took.PST.1SG the car A paint.INF
'The car was put there / left / taken to be painted.'

(7) #Pus /deixei /levei a casa a pintar.
put.PST.1SG /left.PST.1SG /took.PST.1SG the house A paint.INF
'#The house was put there / left / taken to be painted.'

(8) *Pus /deixei /levei o carro a construir.
 put.PST.1SG /left.PST.1SG /took.PST.1SG the car A build.INF

It is of particular importance for Soares & Wood that these causatives maintain a locative meaning. We can indeed add an argument in favor of the possibility of maintaining a locative interpretation: the compatibility with a locative adverb, as shown in (9) and (10). The verb *deixar a* ‘let / make’ is particularly interesting in this context, since when combined with the locative adverb, it is ambiguous between a locative causative interpretation (the interpretation corresponding to “I left the student seeing the movie there and made him see it”) and a purely locative interpretation (the interpretation corresponding to “I left the student seeing the movie there”) - even though, as we will show, it can also occur as a pure causative, devoid of locative interpretation. The verb *levar a* ‘take / make’ shows a similar ambiguity.

(9) Pus /deixei /levei o estudante lá
 put.PST.1SG /left.PST.1SG /took.PST.1SG the student there
 a ver o filme.
 A see.INF the movie
 ‘I made the student see the movie there. / I left there the student seeing the movie (and made him see it). / I took the student there to see the movie (and made him see it).’

(10) O carro foi lá a pintar.
 the car go.PST.3SG there A paint.INF
 ‘The car was left there to be painted’.

The question that we now want to ask is whether these verbs always behave as locative causatives and, if they do not, what is the structure they project - we do not discuss here the syntactic structure of locative causatives, which was the main topic of Soares & Wood (2021). In what follows, we develop the discussion in Santos & Gonçalves (2025) and show that both *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ and *deixar a* ‘make’ can have a pure causative (non-locative) counterpart, i.e. from a semantic point of view, they can be “ordinary causatives”, to use Soares & Wood’s expression. However, we present novel evidence that the pure causative counterpart of these verbs is not ordinary in the sense that they do not occur in the same type of structure as *faire*-type causatives. As for *levar a* ‘take / make’, which also presents a pure semantically causative counterpart, devoid of locative meaning, we suggest that it behaves differently and is probably closer to the structure projected by implicative object control verbs.

2.2. The causatives *pôr a* and *deixar a* (vs. *levar a*)

As already noticed by Santos & Gonçalves (2025), the structures with *pôr a* presented by Soares & Wood (2021, 2022) always take an external argument with the properties of Agenthood, namely [+ human]. However, *pôr a* ‘put to / make’, as well as *deixar a* ‘make’ and *levar a* ‘take / make’ can occur with an inanimate external argument, as shown in (11).

(11) a. O medicamento pôs os bebés a dormir.
 the medicine put the babies A sleep.INF
 ‘The medicine made the babies sleep.’

b. O medicamento deixou os bebés a dormir.
 the medicine made the babies A sleep.INF
 ‘The medicine made the babies sleep.’

c. ?O medicamento levou os bebés a dormir.
 the medicine made the babies A sleep.INF
 ‘The medicine made the babies sleep.’

d. A ansiedade levou os alunos a desistir.
 the anxiety made the students A give.up.INF
 ‘The anxiety made the students give up.’

The contrast between (11c) and (11d) already singles out *levar a* and is probably justified by different aspectual restrictions on the embedded predicate, which we will come back to. However, at this point it is important to note that these verbs, at least when combined with a [- human] subject, are devoid of locative meaning and that they are all better translated as “make”. It is also interesting to note that in this case these verbs are no longer compatible with a locative adverb:

(12) a. *O medicamento pôs lá os bebés a dormir.
 the medicine put there the babies A sleep.INF

b. *O medicamento deixou lá os bebés a dormir.
 the medicine made there the babies A sleep.INF

c. *A ansiedade levou lá os alunos a desistir.
 the anxiety made there the students A give.up.INF

Even though the loss of locative meaning is clearer when the verb combines with a [- human] subject, it can also be obtained in other cases, also depending on the embedded predicate, as shown in (13):

(13) a. O palhaço pôs (*lá) a miúda a tremer.
 the clown put there the girl A tremble.INF
 ‘The clown made the girl tremble.’

b. O palhaço deixou (??lá) a miúda a tremer.
 the clown made there the girl A tremble.INF
 ‘The clown made the girl tremble.’

c. O palhaço levou (*lá) a miúda a tropeçar.
 the clown made there the girl A stumble.INF
 ‘The clown made the girl stumble.’

Soares & Wood (2021, 2022) claim that *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ as a locative causative is not compatible with embedded unaccusative predicates, contrasting with what they call ordinary causatives, i.e. *faire*-type causatives. However, Santos & Gonçalves (2025) present the examples in (14a, b) to show that unaccusative predicates can occur under *pôr a* and *deixar a* in sentences in which a change of location meaning is not maintained, namely when the matrix subject is [- human]. The

same can be shown for *levar a*, as we can see in (14c, d). The sentence in (14e) is a similar case presenting a [+ human] causee.

(14) a. Santos & Gonçalves (2025: 6)

Esse produto pôs / deixou a árvore a morrer.
 that product put / made the tree A die.INF
 'That product made the tree die.'

b. Santos & Gonçalves (2025: 6)

O calor pôs / deixou a manteiga a derreter.
 the heat put / made the butter A melt.INF
 'The heat made the butter melt.'

c. Esse produto levou a árvore a morrer.
 that product made the tree A die.INF
 'That product made the tree die.'

d. O calor levou a manteiga a derreter.
 the heat made the butter A melt.INF
 'The heat made the butter melt.'

e. O medicamento pôs / deixou / levou várias pessoas a morrer.
 the medicine made / made / made several people A die.INF
 'The medicine made many people die.'

We can also show that the (expected) difficulty to accept a locative adverb is maintained in these cases:

(15) *Esse produto pôs / deixou / levou lá a árvore a morrer.
 that product put / made / made there the tree A die. INF
 'That product made the tree die.'

(16) *O calor pôs / deixou / levou lá a manteiga a derreter.
 the heat put / made / made there the butter A melt. INF
 'The heat made the butter melt.'

(17) *O medicamento pôs / deixou / levou lá várias pessoas a morrer.
 the medicine put / made / made there several people A die. INF
 'The medicine made many people die.'

We take these facts as evidence that *pôr a* 'put to / make', *deixar a* 'make' and *levar a* 'take / make' maintain both a locative causative interpretation and a pure causative interpretation, stripped of locative meaning. A causative meaning is common both to syntactic causatives, i.e. *faire*-type causatives (such as *fazer* 'make' and *deixar* 'let'), and to a large number of object control verbs which occur in structures which are superficially similar to the structures projected by the verbs under discussion (e.g. *obrigar* 'force') - the latter was noted already by Raposo (1989) and Santos & Gonçalves (2025). As shown by Santos & Gonçalves (2025), the subset of object control verbs that have an implicative interpretation (in the sense of Karttunen 1971, 2012) can occur with both [+ human] and [- human] subjects, the latter case corresponding to a semantically bleached interpretation (as in (18)).

(18) a. A Teresa obrigou as filhas a comer a sopa.
 the Teresa forced the daughters A eat.INF the soup
 ‘Teresa forced her daughters to eat the soup.’

b. O regulamento obriga os edifícios a apresentar
 the regulation forces the building A present.INF
 uma saída de emergência.
 a exit of emergency
 ‘The regulation requires buildings to have an emergency exit.’

Santos & Gonçalves (2025) argue that object control verbs such as *obrigar* ‘force’, *forçar* ‘force’ and *impedir* ‘prevent’, which have a causative and implicative interpretation, can correspond either to a ditransitive verb with an embedded controlled infinitive complement or to a transitive verb whose complement is a defective CP, a FinP, whose head is filled by *a* and whose specifier position is the target of the movement of a DP which is an argument of the embedded verb (see (19)). Whereas cases such as (18a) are ambiguous between the ditransitive (object control) structure and the transitive structure, a case with an inanimate matrix and / or an inanimate embedded DP such as (18b) can only correspond to the transitive structure, i.e. in (18b) the DP [os edifícios] is an argument of the embedded predicate. In (19), we present the partial structure for (18b):

(19) obriga [FinP os edifícios [Fin' a [TP os—edifícios apresentar uma saída de emergência]]]

According to Santos & Gonçalves (2025), the verbs *obrigar* ‘force’, *forçar* ‘force’, *impedir* ‘prevent’ in their transitive counterpart (i.e. in structures such as (19)), even though combined with a single internal argument, differ from *pôr a* ‘put to’ and *deixar a* ‘make’, which also select a single internal argument: in the latter case, the authors argue that the embedded complement is a small clause, a projection of a Relator Phrase (RP) in the sense of Den Dikken (2006), whose head is the grammaticalized *a* (see (20), in which we present the relevant structure for (13a, b)).

(20) pôs / deixou [RP a miúda [R' a [TP PRO tremer]]]

In the case of the causatives *pôr a* and *deixar a*, as in (20), the embedded DP [a miúda] is inserted as the specifier of the embedded RP and a predication relation is established between this DP and the TP that is the infinitival complement of the Relator head; as a consequence of this predicative relation, the subject of the embedded infinitive is obligatorily controlled by the DP in Spec, RP. Control is maintained even when the embedded infinitive shows person and number morphology, a possibility in EP. As shown in (21a), the embedded infinitive may show person and number features matching the embedded DP [as miúdas]; however, a mismatching infinitive is generally impossible, as shown in (21c), with person and number mismatch, but also in (21b), a case presenting only number mismatch. A nominative subject is not available in the embedded TP – see (21c), which contrasts with the possibility of non-controlled inflected infinitives under non-implicative object control verbs (see Barbosa, 2021; Santos, 2023). Thus, we take this TP to be a domain of Control and

identify the controlled subject as PRO - for more discussion of these and related facts, see Santos & Gonçalves (2025).

(21) a. O palhaço pôs / deixou / levou as miúdas a tremer(em).
 the clown put / made / made the girls A tremble.INF(.3PL)
 ‘The clown made the girls tremble.’

b. *O palhaço pôs / deixou / levou a miúda a tremerem.
 the clown put / made / made the girl A tremble.INF.3PL

c. *O palhaço pôs / deixou / levou a miúda a tremermos (nós).
 the clown put / made / made the girl A tremble.INF.1PL we

The structure in (20) can more generally apply to the so-called PIC, typically found under perception verbs, and which other authors, namely Raposo (1989), Barbosa & Cochofel (2005) and Casalicchio (2019), have already analyzed as a small clause, even though they project the small clause differently. One of the arguments for the distinction between verbs that take the structure in (20) and verbs that take the structure in (19) comes from the availability of embedded expletives: whereas an expletive is available under the transitive counterpart of implicative verbs usually integrated in the object control class (i.e. a case in which these verbs select a complement corresponding to (19)), expletives are generally not available in the PIC, a fact already noticed by Barbosa & Cochofel (2005). The sentences in (22) to (25) exemplify this contrast, showing that the embedded complement of *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ and *deixar a* ‘make’ (22) patterns with the PIC under perception verbs (23) and differs both from what happens under implicative verbs of the type of *obrigar* ‘force’ (24) and from what is known to happen under *faire*-type infinitives (25) - for more discussion, see Santos & Gonçalves (2025). In all cases, we assume a null expletive, possible in a null subject language such as EP.

(22) *As baixas temperaturas não põem/ deixam a nevar.
 the low temperatures NEG put / make A snow.INF

(23) *Eles não veem a nevar.
 they NEG see.PRS.3PL A snow.INF

(24) As baixas temperaturas não obrigam a nevar.
 the low temperatures NEG force A snow.INF
 ‘The low temperatures do not force it to snow.’

(25) As baixas temperaturas não fazem (necessariamente) nevar.
 the low temperatures NEG make necessarily snow.INF
 ‘The low temperatures do not necessarily make it snow.’

The impossibility of the embedded expletive is expected according to the structure in (20), which involves a Control relation. In the present section, we will explore a new argument in favor of the small clause analysis of complements of the causatives *pôr a* and *deixar a*, and we further detail this analysis, arguing for the aspectual nature of RP in these structures. At the same time, we argue that *levar a* is syntactically closer to implicative object control verbs, also in their transitive version,

than to causatives selecting small clause complements, even though it shares with the latter set of verbs the possibility of a locative interpretation.

First, we can show that both *pôr* and *deixar* can generally take a small clause as complement: the following examples show that these verbs can take small clause complements with an adjectival predicate (see (26)) and that the type of infinitival domain that we have identified under these verbs can be coordinated with this adjectival predicate (see (27)).

(26) A cerveja pôs / deixou a Ana bêbeda.
 the beer put / put the Ana drunk
 'The beer made Ana drunk.'

(27) a. A cerveja pôs / deixou a Ana bêbeda e a vomitar
 the beer put / put the Ana drunk and A vomit.INF
 'The beer got Ana drunk and made her vomit.'
 b. A cerveja pôs / deixou a Ana a vomitar e bêbeda.
 the beer put / put the Ana A vomit.INF and drunk
 'The beer got Ana drunk and made her vomit.'

Moreover, what was shown to happen in the complement of *pôr a* and *deixar a* is also seen under perception verbs, as it is the case of *ver* 'see' (28), and, even more interestingly, under certain copular verbs, namely the resultative *ficar* 'become' (29) - see Barbosa & Cochofel (2005) for a similar observation concerning the PIC under perception verbs.

(28) A Teresa viu o rapaz maldisposto
 the Teresa saw the boy sick
 e a suar durante todo o dia.
 and A sweat.INF during all the day
 'Teresa saw the boy sick and sweating all day.'

(29) a. O rapaz ficou maldisposto
 the boy became sick
 'The boy became sick.'
 b. O rapaz ficou a suar.
 the boy became A sweat.INF
 'The boy was sweating / started to sweat.'
 c. O rapaz ficou maldisposto e a suar.
 the boy became sick and A sweat.INF
 'The boy started sweating and started to feel sick.'

In (29), we show that *ficar* 'become' can cooccur with a predicative AP or with the type of infinitival clause headed by *a* that has been described as PIC under perception verbs and now under causatives; we also show that both the predicative AP and the infinitival domain can be coordinated, which we can interpret as a coordination of two small clause domains. The difference between the structures with the resultative copular verb *ficar* and the structures under the causatives *pôr* 'put / make' and *deixar* 'make' results from the fact that the subject of the embedded small clause under *ficar*

‘become’ raises to the matrix subject position. The possibility of coordinating the PIC with a predicative AP is a clear argument for the analysis of the infinitival domain under these verbs as a small clause, i.e. for the analysis in (20). Moreover, we can show that the coordination of a predicative AP with the infinitival domain is incompatible with a locative adverb, i.e. it is incompatible with the locative causative reading of *pôr a* and *deixar a* (see (30)), which is an argument for the small clause status of the complement of the non-locative causative *pôr a* and *deixar a*, as well as for the different natures of the locative and non-locative versions of the verb.

(30) a. */??O ladrão pôs / deixou a Ana lá a sangrar e inconsciente.
 the burglar put / put the Ana there A bleed.INF and unconscious
 b. O ladrão pôs / deixou a Ana a sangrar e inconsciente.
 the burglar put / put the Ana A bleed.INF and unconscious
 ‘The burglar caused Ana to bleed and loose consciousness.’

We can finally show that the possibility to embed clear small clause complements does not generalize to other syntactic causatives, namely *faire*-Inf causatives (31), or to the transitive counterpart of implicative object control verbs (32).

(31) a. O medicamento fez o rapaz suar durante todo o dia.
 the medicine made the boy sweat. INF during all the day
 ‘The medicine made the boy sweat all day.’
 b. *O medicamento fez o rapaz
 the medicine made the boy
 suar e maledisposto durante todo o dia.
 sweat.INF and sick during all the day
 c. *O medicamento fez o rapaz
 the medicine made the boy
 maledisposto e suar durante todo o dia.
 sick and sweat.INF during all the day

(32) a. O uso frequente obriga a máquina a desligar.
 the use frequent forces the machine A disconnect.INF
 ‘The frequent use forces the machine to disconnect.’
 b. *O uso frequente obriga a máquina a desligar e quente.
 the use frequent forces the machine A disconnect.INF and hot

Interestingly, *levar a*, which is also a causative and which, as we have shown, can also have a locative causative reading, does not allow either the coordination of the infinitival domain with a predicative AP or a clear case of an embedded adjectival small clause, contrary to what happens with *pôr a* and *deixar a* (33 and 34).

(33) a. O uso frequente leva a máquina a desligar.
 the use frequent makes the machine A disconnect.INF
 ‘The frequent use makes the machine disconnect.’

b. *O uso repetido leva a máquina a desligar e quente.
 the use frequent makes the machine A disconnect.INF and hot

(34) a. *O uso frequente leva a máquina quente.
 the use frequent makes the machine hot
 b. O uso frequente põe / deixa a máquina quente.
 the use frequent puts makes the machine hot

We thus claim that *levar a* does not select a small clause complement. Instead, we suggest that it syntactically behaves as implicative object control verbs and, therefore, that it admits a single FinP complement, as in (19) above.¹

Although a full analysis of *levar a* is beyond the scope of this paper, a more detailed description of the complements of *pôr a* ‘put to/ make’ and *deixar a* ‘make’, in contrast with the complement of *levar a* ‘take / make’, can further contribute to our understanding of the nature of the small clause under causatives. We have previously noticed that *pôr a* and *deixar a* differ from *levar a* in what concerns the type of embedded predicate that they combine with - see the remark on example (11) above. For instance, the contrast in (35) between the possibility to combine these verbs with the embedded predicates *dormir* ‘sleep’ vs. *adormecer* ‘fall asleep’ and *desmaiar* ‘faint’ seems to suggest a contrast between durative and non-durative situations: whereas *levar a* accepts embedded predicates that do not correspond to durative situations, as it is the case of culminations, *pôr a* and *deixar a* cannot be combined with this type of predicates.

¹ Santos & Gonçalves (2025) explore the possibility of embedded mismatching infinitives as a cue to object control (ditransitive) structures. The example in (i), with *levar a*, shows that an embedded infinitive mismatching the embedded DP in number features (but not person features) is possible with a split control reading, which corresponds to obligatory control - according to Santos (2023), inflected infinitives under implicative object control verbs are obligatorily controlled. Santos & Gonçalves (2025) show that true object control, corresponding to a ditransitive structure, is only possible under implicative verbs with a human / animate controller, a case in which structures with mismatching infinitives as in (i) are also possible. With an inanimate embedded DP, the structure under implicative verbs of the type of *obrigar* ‘force’ corresponds to a FinP, which is the single internal argument of the verb (as in (19)). In this case, the mismatching infinitive is not possible, and this is exactly what happens with *levar a* ‘take / make’, as shown in (ii).

(i) O João levou a Maria a construírem.
 the João made the Maria A build.INF.3PL
 o puzzle (juntos).
 the puzzle together
 ‘João made Maria build the puzzle with him.’

(ii) O esquentador levou a máquina da roupa
 the water heater made the washing machine
 a desligar(*em).
 A switch.off.INF(.3PL)
 ‘The water heater caused the washing machine to switch off.’

(35) a. O medicamento pôs os bebés a dormir /
 the medicine put the babies A sleep.INF /
 *adormecer / *desmaiar
 fall.asleep.INF / faint.INF
 ‘The medicine made the babies sleep.’

b. O medicamento deixou os bebés a dormir /
 the medicine made the babies A sleep.INF /
 *adormecer / *desmaiar
 fall.asleep.INF / faint.INF
 ‘The medicine made the babies sleep.’

c. O medicamento levou os bebés a ?dormir /
 the medicine made the babies A sleep.INF /
 adormecer / desmaiar
 fall.asleep.INF / faint.INF
 ‘The medicine made the babies sleep.’

It is also the case that some embedded predicates can undergo aspect shift under *pôr a* and *deixar a*. This is the case of the embedded *morrer* ‘die’ in (14c) above, which is semantically coerced into an event including a preparatory phase, therefore compatible with durative aspect. The previous observation can be further documented by the combination of the three verbs under discussion with an embedded predicate corresponding to a point, such as *tossir* ‘cough’. Even though *tossir* can be embedded under the three verbs, its interpretation differs: whereas under *pôr a* and *deixar a*, it is necessarily coerced to be interpreted as a process by being iterated (see (36a, b)), this is not the case under *levar a*, as we can see in (36c). As a final note, *desmaiar* ‘faint’ in (35a,b) is only acceptable if it undergoes a similar process of semantic coercion.

(36) a. O medicamento pôs os bebés a tossir
 the medicine put the babies A cough.INF
 (durante três horas / *uma vez).
 during three hours / one time
 ‘The medicine made the babies sleep (for three hours / ??once).’

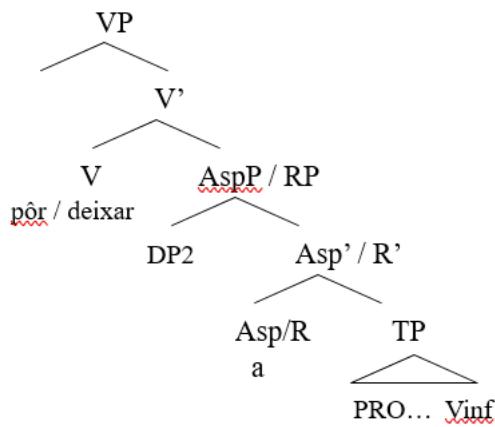
b. O medicamento deixou os bebés a tossir
 the medicine made the babies A cough.INF
 (durante três horas / *uma vez).
 during three hours / one time
 ‘The medicine made the babies sleep (for three hours / ??once).’

c. O medicamento levou os bebés a tossir
 the medicine made the babies A cough.INF
 (durante três horas / uma vez).
 during three hours / one time
 ‘The medicine made the babies sleep (for three hours / once).’

In the present paper, we are interested in *pôr a* and *deixar a*, namely those causatives that select small clause complements (the more detailed characterization of *levar a* is left for future research). We would like to suggest that the facts about aspectual restrictions can add to Santos & Gonçalves’ (2025) analysis of the

complement of the causatives *pôr a* and *deixar a* as a projection of a Relator, in the sense of Den Dikken (2006). Den Dikken (2006: 15) defines a Relator as “a placeholder for *any* functional head in the structure that mediates a predication relation between two terms”. According to this author, the Relator can be the copula, a prepositional element or even T. Thus, as the author also states, a Relator is not a particular category, and the RP “represents a *syntactic configuration* rather than a claim about the lexicon” (Den Dikken 2006: 16). This means that the analysis presented by Santos & Gonçalves (2025), even though correctly identifying the complement of the causatives *pôr a* and *deixar a* as an RP, falls short of identifying the syntactic category of the complement. In previous work on semi-auxiliaries, Gonçalves (1992) has identified *a* under the semi-auxiliary *estar a* ‘be+V.ing’ as an aspectual head. Duarte (1992), even though explicitly rejecting the analysis of the PIC under perception verbs as a small clause, identifies the *a* in the PIC under these verbs as an Aspect head with a [+ durative] feature. Barbosa & Cochofel (2005) also analyze the *a* in the PIC under perception verbs as an Aspect head - the structure they represent for the PIC seems to identify it with a headless small clause whose predicate is an AspP headed by *a*. What we suggest here is that what is normally designated as PIC can be identified as an AspP, which is itself a domain of predication, an RP. Therefore, we suggest the following structure for the PIC under the causatives *pôr a* and *deixar a* - as well as under perception verbs and possibly other contexts (see 37). This structure allows us to identify the PIC as both an AspP and a domain in which a predication relation is established (an RP).

(37)



A note should be added concerning DP2 in the frame [DP1 V DP2 *a* INF] that we have initially identified, i.e. the subject of the embedded small clause in the analysis presented in (37). Even though different authors assume a small clause analysis of the PIC, they differ in their analysis of this small clause, including the position in which the embedded DP is externally merged: whereas Casalicchio (2019) argues that the DP is merged as the subject of the embedded predicate and raises to the specifier position in the small clause, Santos & Gonçalves (2025) take an approach close to Barbosa & Cochofel (2005) by assuming that the DP is inserted in the specifier of the Relator projection and controls the embedded subject. Casalicchio (2019: 103) argues for the raising analysis based on reconstruction effects, supported by examples that the author recognizes to be felt by speakers as “sometimes a bit marginal” and which we consider ungrammatical (example (66) in Casalicchio, 2019). Santos & Gonçalves

(2025) present a strong argument against a raising analysis inside the small clause, which comes from the fact that whereas *faire*-Inf is possible with ordinary causatives, as well as with the class of so-called implicative object control verbs that project the structure in (19), it is impossible under the class of causatives we are dealing with. In (38), we present the relevant contrast between ordinary causatives (38a) and *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ and *deixar a* ‘make’ (38b) and we also show that the latter behave as perception verbs with a PIC complement (38c), but not as perception verbs in the Raising-to-Object context (38d) – the contrast between (38b) and (39) also shows that only *faire*-Inf is responsible for the ungrammaticality of (38b).

(38) E a tarte?

and the pie

‘What about the pie?’

- a. O cozinheiro não a deixou preparar ao ajudante.
the chef NEG CL.3SG.ACC let prepare.IMP to.the assistant
‘The chef didn’t let the assistant prepare it.’
- b. *O cozinheiro não a pôs / deixou a preparar ao ajudante.
the chef NEG CL.3SG.ACC made / made A prepare.IMP to.the assistant
‘The chef made / made the assistant prepare.’
- c. *O cozinheiro não a viu a preparar ao ajudante.
the chef NEG CL.3SG.ACC see A prepare.IMP to.the assistant
- d. O cozinheiro não a viu preparar ao ajudante.
the chef NEG CL.3SG.ACC see prepare.IMP to.the assistant
‘The chef did not see the assistant prepare it.’

(39) O cozinheiro (não) pôs / deixou o ajudante a preparar a tarte.
the chef NEG made / made the assistant A prepare.IMP the pie
‘The chef didn’t make / made the assistant prepare the pie.’

The fact that the PIC, both under the causatives *pôr a* and *deixar a* and under perception verbs, disallows *faire*-Inf is easily explained if we assume, along with Gonçalves (1999) for EP, that *faire*-Inf targets the argument structure of the embedded verb. As stated in (37), the DP in the specifier position of RP is not merged as an argument of the embedded verb, disallowing *faire*-Inf. The contrast between the Raising-to-Object structure in (38d) and the PIC under the same verb in (38c) is particularly telling: only in the former is the DP *o ajudante* ‘the assistant’ merged as an argument (the subject) of the embedded verb and *faire*-Inf is correctly expected in this case.

As a final note, we highlight that by showing that the PIC occurs under causatives in EP, we have argued for a wider distribution of the PIC than previously assumed in the literature, namely we point to a distribution that goes beyond the contexts in which we find (predicative) gerunds in other Romance languages or in Brazilian Portuguese. This fact should be considered in attempts of unified analyses of both constructions, as the one we find in Casalicchio (2019).

In the next section, we explore a structure in which *pôr a* selects an AspP which is not an RP. As we will also show, this corresponds to a decausative use of the verb, and not to the syntactic causative.

3. The decausative *pôr-se a* ‘begin’: the path to a semi-auxiliary

In EP, there is a form of the verb *pôr a* ‘put to’ that cooccurs with the clitic SE, and has an inchoative reading, as in (40):²

(40) Os sinos puseram-se a tocar.
 the bells put=SE A ring.INF
 ‘The bells began to ring.’

Like under the causative *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ analyzed in the previous sections, the infinitival domain is introduced by *a* and has a durative reading. However, contrary to what happens under the causative verb, an infinitive presenting overt inflection is not possible under *pôr-se a* ‘begin’ (41):

(41) *Os sinos puseram-se a tocarem.
 the bells put=SE A ring.INF.3PL
 ‘The bells began to ring.’

We will use the label *decausative verb* to identify *pôr-se a*, in the sense that, in such a context, the external role of the matrix verb *pôr a* ‘put to / make’, which is marked as [+c(ause)], a feature shared by the roles Agent, Causer and Instrument (Reinhart 2002), is eliminated altogether, resulting in the reduction of the theta-grid of the verb.³ This means that the decausative *pôr-se a* does not select an external argument, like raising-to-subject and semi-auxiliary verbs. The unavailability of an embedded inflected infinitive noted above is in line with the properties of this type of verbs. Moreover, this verb can cooccur with meteorological verbs, with expletive subjects, which constitutes an argument in favor of the raising hypothesis (see 42). The possibility to cooccur with embedded meteorological verbs has been noted by Barroso (2016), who classifies the verb as a semi-auxiliary.

(42) Barroso (2016: 113; adapted)
 Olha, pôs-se a chover!
 look put.PST.3SG A rain
 ‘Look, it began to rain!'

² The construction with *deixar-se a* ‘let=SE’ exemplified in (i) is infrequent, but it is an issue that deserves attention in future work:

(i) <https://pplware.sapo.pt/informacao/ja-conhece-proximo-smartphone-da-nokia/>
 A Nokia deixou-se a dormir durante anos.
 the Nokia let=SE A sleep.INF for years
 ‘Nokia let itself sleep for years.’

³ Reinhart (2002) considers that the suppression of the [+ c] feature may be associated to the reduction of the theta-grid of the verb; most analyses of causatives and causative-inchoative alternation verbs also consider that the verb in the inchoative alternate is decausativized (terminological differences aside, see Haspelmath 1993, Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995, Paducheva 2003, Reinhart & Siloni 2005, Horvath & Siloni 2011, among others). We will not discuss this here and we believe that a deeper analysis that considers the role of the Lexicon in the structure with *pôr-se a* must be developed in future work.

The decausative structure is morphologically identified by the presence of the clitic SE, typically present (although not always mandatory in EP) in the causative-inchoative alternation (see (43)).

(43) a. A bomba afundou o navio.
 the bomb sank the ship
 ‘The bomb sank the ship.’
 b. O navio afundou-se.
 the ship sank=SE
 ‘The ship sank.’

Considering the role of SE in the causative-inchoative alternation in (43), we suggest that this clitic in *pôr-se a* is also responsible for the decausative reading of (40). Indeed, in (44) only the causative interpretation of *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ is obtained, as we showed in the previous sections, and in this case, the subject of that verb corresponds to its external argument (Causer), contrary to what happens in (40), with *pôr-se a*:

(44) a. O vento pôs os sinos a tocar.
 the wind put the bells A ring.INF
 ‘The wind made the bells ring.’
 b. A Maria pôs os sinos a tocar.
 the Maria put the bells A ring.INF
 ‘Maria made the bells ring.’

Therefore, the inchoative reading of the decausative *pôr-se a* in (40) results not only from the fact that the focus is on the beginning of the action but also from the fact that the verb meaning “excludes a causing agent and presents the situation as occurring spontaneously.” (Haspelmath 1993: 90).

Interestingly, the decausative structure is, in general, allowed with internally caused verbs, in the sense of Smith (1970), and Levin & Rappaport Hovav (1995), i.e. verbs that select an argument that, due to its inherent properties, brings about the eventuality. This adequately characterizes the verb *tocar* ‘ring’, but also *florescer* ‘flower’ or *andar* ‘move’ in (45):

(45) a. As plantas puseram-se a florescer
 the plants put=SE A flower.INF
 (com a chegada da primavera).
 with the arrival of.the spring
 ‘The plants began to flower with the arrival of spring.’
 b. A bicicleta pôs-se a andar (com o vento).
 the bike put=SE A move.INF (with the wind)
 ‘Because of the wind, the bike began to move.’

In the context of embedded externally caused verbs, that is, those that denote an eventuality requiring the existence of an external cause that is responsible for bringing about that eventuality (Smith 1970, Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995), the

occurrence of the decausative *pôr-se a* is, in general, impossible if the Causer argument of the embedded verb occurs as the (matrix) subject (46).

(46) a. *O vento pôs-se a partir o copo.
 the wind put=SE A break.INF the glass
 b. *O sol pôs-se a derreter a manteiga.
 the sun put=SE A melt.INF the butter

As it happens with *pôr a* ‘put to’, the animacy of the DP in the (higher) subject position is relevant to identify the decausative structure. In the examples (40) and (45), with inanimate subjects, a clear decausative reading is the only possibility, in the sense that the subject does not denote the cause responsible for bringing about the eventuality. Furthermore, in this context, there is a complete deagentivization (see Paducheva 2003 for Russian decausatives). However, with human subjects, the scenario is more complex. Consider the example in (47):

(47) Os prisioneiros puseram-se a saltar.
 the prisoners put=SE A jump.INF
 ‘The prisoners began to jump’.

If the context is enlarged, it is possible to obtain two readings: a clear non-causative counterpart of the matrix verb in (48a) and a counterpart which maintains a matrix subject with Agenthood properties in (48b).

(48) a. Os prisioneiros puseram-se a saltar com os choques elétricos.
 the prisoners put=SE A jump.INF with the shocks electric
 ‘Because of the electric shocks, the prisoners began to jump.’
 b. Os prisioneiros puseram-se a saltar com uma corda.
 the prisoners put=SE A jump.INF with a rope.
 ‘The prisoners began to jump with a rope.’

The difference between the two sentences is the meaning of the PP: in (48a) it refers to the cause that brings about the eventuality described, but (in 48b) it denotes the instrument the prisoners used to jump. In this last sentence, the subject *the prisoners* is clearly the Agent, since Instruments require the presence of an Agent as noted by Siloni (2002), Reinhart & Siloni (2005) and Horvath & Siloni (2011), among others. On the contrary, with inanimate subjects in the context of *pôr-se a*, Paducheva’s (2003: 176) claim that “the most conspicuous feature of decausatives is that they are non-agentive” applies: the DP in the subject position is non-agentive, even in the context of the embedded verb *saltar* ‘jump’ (49), which contrasts with (48b); interestingly, the realization of the cause as an adjunct PP makes the sentence more acceptable, since it makes the non-agentive reading of the subject clearer.

(49) Os parafusos puseram-se a saltar ?(com a vibração do carro).
 the bolts put=SE A jump.INF with the vibration of.the car
 ‘The bolts began to jump with the car vibration.’

It is also worth noting that *pôr-se a* imposes other semantic restrictions on the embedded predicate; for example, it hardly combines with predicates that denote non-durative situations, as in (50), which is expected assuming our proposal that the infinitival domain under *pôr a* has a durative interpretation, as mentioned before, and if the presence of SE does not affect this interpretation.

(50) a. *O bebé pôs-se a nascer.
 the baby put=SE A be.born.INF
 b. *O doente pôs-se a desmaiar.
 the patient put=SE A faint.INF

The fact that this verb constrains the aspectual nature of the embedded predicate makes it close to the aspectual verbs analyzed in Oliveira, Cunha & Gonçalves (2004). Note that, as it happens with other aspectual verbs, when the embedded culmination can undergo semantic coercion, it can occur in the embedded complement. In (51), the culmination is coerced into a durative / iterative situation and the result is grammatical.

(51) O doente pôs-se a desmaiar (de cinco em cinco minutos).
 the patient put=SE A faint.INF from five to five minutes
 ‘The patient started to faint every five minutes.’

In what follows, we will discuss the syntactic structure of the decausative *pôr-se a* ‘begin’ by focusing on cases with inanimate subjects. Actually, it is likely that the syntactic structure of the sentences with *pôr-se a* is the same regardless of the animacy of the subject, as the difference seems to be related to interpretation. We leave this question open for future work.

The data presented above show that (i) the decausative counterpart of *pôr a* is only possible when the clitic SE occurs; (ii) the inflected infinitive gives rise to ungrammatical sentences under *pôr-se a*, contrary to what happens with the causative version of the verb; (iii) *pôr-se a* exhibits the properties of a raising verb, since it lacks an external argument, the matrix subject corresponding to an argument of the embedded verb.

In addition, contrary to what happens with *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ (see section 2.2.), the infinitival domain does not correspond to a small clause: as shown in (52), the infinitival complement cannot be coordinated with a predicative AP.⁴

⁴ Sentences like (i) are acceptable for some speakers:

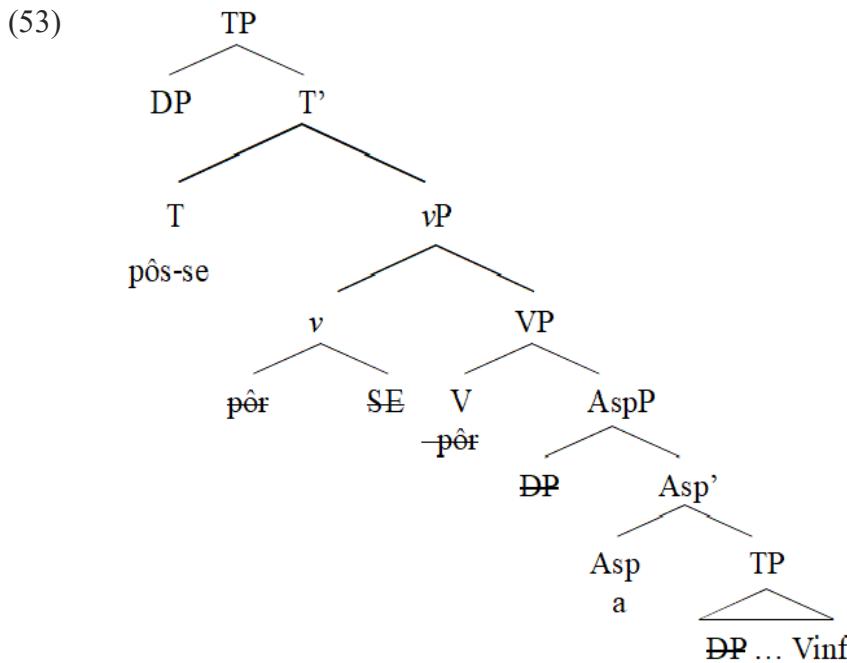
(i) O Pedro pôs-se doente e a tossir.
 the Pedro put=SE ill and A cough.INF
 ‘Pedro became ill and began to cough.’

In this case, the order of the members of the coordination is relevant, contrary to what happens with *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ in (27):

(ii) *O Pedro pôs-se a tossir e doente.
 the Pedro put=SE A cough.INF and ill

(52) *Os sinos puseram-se a tocar e desafinados.
 the bells put=SE A ring.INF and out.of.tune

To account for these properties, we claim that the structure projected by *pôr-se a* corresponds to what is represented in (53):



We suggest that the infinitival complement of *pôr* is an AspP, whose head is lexicalized by *a*, the category that is responsible for the durative reading of the complement. In the case of this structure, the Asp head *a* does not correspond to a Relator, i.e., the AspP is not an RP, contrary to what happens in the context of the causative *pôr a* ‘put to / make’. This is expected since the DP that lands in the matrix subject position is merged within the embedded TP where the embedded predication is established - in contrast, in the case of the causative *pôr a*, a DP is externally merged in Spec, AspP and a predication relation is established at this level, justifying the RP status of this AspP.

The structure in (53) also accounts for the decausative nature of the structure: we propose that the clitic SE is merged in *v*, corresponding to an unaccusative *v* which does not project a specifier (as Adger 2003 proposes for unaccusative structures). The matrix Spec,TP is then the landing site for the DP, an argument of the embedded verb, which moves to this position to satisfy the EPP feature of matrix T, simultaneously checking nominative Case. This is also in agreement with the defective nature of the embedded T, which in the case of this structure never shows embedded inflection or licenses a nominative subject. Finally, since this structure does not involve Control, expletives are allowed in the infinitival domain, as shown in (42) above. Again, this contrasts with the causative *pôr a* ‘put to / make’ (54).

However, in (i) the verb does not correspond to the decausative form (when combined with the predicative AP it is akin to the copula verb *ficar* ‘become’), so this sentence does not challenge our observation about (52).

(54) *Pôs a chover.
put.PST.3SG A rain.INF

These properties of *pôr-se a* ‘begin’, namely the raising structure and the aspectual nature of the infinitival domain, suggest that the verb *pôr-se a* is close to a semi-auxiliary.

As a final note, it is interesting to consider that there are Romance languages in which the inchoative structure is available, but the causative is not. Although in our analysis the structure with *pôr-se a* is similar to the inchoative counterpart of a causative in the causative-inchoative alternation, some more discussion is needed to know whether this is indeed an instantiation of this type of alternation. Data from French (55) and Italian (56) show that the inchoative structure may be available in the language, whereas the causative is not:

(55) a. Elle s’ est mise à courir.
she SE is put A run.INF
‘She began to run.’

b. *Le médicament a mis les bébés à dormir.
The medicine has put the babies A sleep

(56) a. Lucia si è messa a correre.
Lucia SE is put A run.INF
‘Lucia began to run.’

b. *La medicina ha messo a dormire i bimbi.
the medicine has put A sleep.INF the babies

The ungrammaticality of the (b) examples may simply result from the fact that the PIC small clause is not available in these languages.

4. Conclusions

The discussion carried out in the present paper allowed to support Santos & Gonçalves’ (2025) claim in favor of the existence in EP of a particular type of syntactic causatives that differs from the well-known *faire*-type causatives and that also differs from what Soares & Wood (2021, 2022) have characterized as locative causatives. This type of causatives, which do not necessarily maintain a locative meaning, even if they are identical to some verbs which have been classified as locative causatives, select a complement which is an aspectual domain and also a small clause. The ability to select a small clause as complement places these verbs in a position which is to that extent close to copular verbs. Moreover, the discussion of the properties of the infinitival structure under these verbs has led to the conclusion that it shares its main properties with the so-called Prepositional Infinitival Construction (PIC), typically discussed for EP in the context of the complement of perception verbs. The present paper leads to the conclusion that the PIC has a wider distribution than previously thought, being able to occur as the complement of causatives. However, the distribution and the properties of the PIC in EP are issues that justify further research.

We have also discussed the nature of an inchoative counterpart of one of these newly identified syntactic causatives. The discussion allowed us to distinguish a case in which the embedded aspectual domain is not identified as a small clause. In this case, we argue that the DP ending up in the matrix subject position is an argument of the embedded verb and raises to matrix Spec, TP. From a syntactic point of view, this corresponds to a structure by all means similar to what has been suggested for aspectual semi-auxiliaries (see Gonçalves 1992). This discussion therefore helps to characterize the syntactic continuum at the ends of which are main verbs and pure auxiliaries.

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