FRENCH CAUSATIVES:
THE REFLEXIVITY PUZZLE*

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1 The Puzzle

Romance analytical causatives have presented linguists with challenges for decades. One of them concerns the behavior of reflexive se-verbs in faire-infinitive (FI) causatives in French. In these constructions, transitive and intransitive verbs are treated differently: when the embedded verb is transitive, its subject (i.e., the Causee) must be introduced via the dative-case marker à, (1a); by contrast, when it is intransitive, the lower subject/object must be accusative-marked, (1b).

(1) a. Jean fera laver la voiture à Pierre.
   John make.FUT wash.INF the car to Peter
   ‘John will make Peter wash the car’
   (transitive)
b. Jean fera travailler/tomber Pierre.
   John make.FUT work.INF/fall.INF Peter
   ‘John will make Peter work’
   (intransitive)

The puzzle arises from the observation that, when a verb embedded under faire causative is reflexive-marked with the clitic se, its subject surfaces as accusative-marked, i.e. without the preposition à, in a way parallel to intransitive verbs, (2a,b). Furthermore, unlike other clitics that climb up to the matrix faire verb, the clitic se must appear on the embedded verb, (2a-c).

(2) a. Jean fera se laver Pierre.
   John make.FUT SE wash.INF Peter
   ‘John will make Peter wash’
   (SE-reflexive)
b. Jean le fera se laver.
   John him.ACCCL make.FUT SE wash.INF
   ‘John will make him wash’

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c. Jean la lui fera laver.
   John it.ACC CL him.DAT CL make.FUT wash-INF
   ‘John will make him wash it’

Following the traditional view originating in Kayne (1975), such differences have been interpreted as indicating that SE-reflexives are intransitives (a.o., Bouchard, 1984, Marantz, 1984, Wehrli, 1986, Kayne, 1988, Grimshaw, 1990, Pesetsky, 1996, Sportiche, 1998, Chierchia, 2004, Reinhart and Siloni, 2005, Charnavel et al., 2009). Taking for granted the intransitivity of SE-reflexives, most of the debate since then has centered around the question of what type of intransitivity would be at hands, without reaching any consensus so far.

In the first part of this paper, we start by showing that intransitivity approaches to SE-reflexives are dead-ends. Contra the traditional view, we argue that some of the core syntactic and semantic properties of SE-reflexives can only be captured if they are analyzed as transitives with the se-clitic being subject to anaphoric binding. As a result, the reflexivity puzzle offered by FI-causatives still remains to be solved. In the second part, we offer an explanation as to why, without being intransitives, SE-reflexives behave like intransitives with respect to case assignment in FI-causatives, and show how a bound pronoun analysis of se provides a natural rationale for the different positioning of non-reflexive and reflexive pronominal clitics in these constructions.

2 SE-reflexives are not intransitives!

In order to facilitate the discussion, we will formulate two ‘straw man’ theories of the kind we argue against. These theories are stated in (3).

   (3) a. The Valency-Reduction Theory (VR):
       The role of se is to reduce one of the verb’s lexical argument it cliticises on.
   b. The Case-Reduction Theory (CR):
       The role of se is to reduce a lexical case feature on the verb it cliticises on.

Under both theories, the reflexive clitic se is treated as part of the verb’s morphology and SE-reflexives as syntactically intransitives. Following VR, se combines in the lexicon with a dyadic/transitive verb and reduces it to a monadic/intransitive verb (e.g., Wehrli, 1986, Grimshaw, 1982, Chierchia, 2004). Reflexivization is assumed to obtain either via the reduction operation itself (i.e., reduction applies under identification of two arguments) or indirectly via a meaning postulate associated with the reduction operation. This second option is sketched in (4), as elaborated in Chierchia (2004). In a nutshell, if a two-place relation \( R \) (e.g., wash(\( \theta_i, \theta_j \)) is reflexive-marked in the lexicon, the resulting one-place predicate, i.e. \( R_{REFL} \), will be interpreted as \( \lambda x. [R(x,x)] \) via meaning postulate (e.g., wash\( _{REFL} \)(x) \( \leftrightarrow \), x wash x)).

   (4) Jean se lave. (‘John is washing’)
   Verb entry: lave\( _{TRANS} \) [Agent] [Theme]
   Reduction: SE lave\( _{REFL} \) [Agent] \{Theme\}
   IP: [Jean[Agent] [VP SE lave\( _{REFL} \)]
   LF: \( \exists e[\text{washing}(e) \& \text{Agent}(e, \text{jean}) \& \text{Theme}(e, \text{jean})]

\(^1\)A similar idea has been defended in Baauw and Delfitto (2005), according to whom the computational system does not allow valency reduction to take place neither in narrow syntax, nor in the course of the interpretation process. Under this view, predicates in French must be reduced in the lexicon.
Following CR, the role of *se* is solely to check a lexical case feature of the verb it cliticises on (Reinhart and Siloni, 2005). An example derivation is provided in (5). At the VP-level, the selection of *se* reduces the verb’s ability, here *laver* (i.e., *wash*), to check accusative case. Reflexivization obtains at the IP-level via an independent, bundling operation: upon the assignment of the external θ-role, the Theme role of the verb, which is still unassigned at this point, is bundled with the Agent role. Eventually, the ‘Agent-Theme’ bundle is interpreted as a distributive conjunction of θ-roles (e.g., [Agent-Theme](e, jean) ↔ (Agent(e, jean) & Theme(e, jean))).

(5) Jean se lave. (‘John is washing’)
Verb entry: *laver* [TRANS [Agent][Theme]]
VP: [SE lave _θ_1−Agent, _θ_1−Theme]
IP: [Jean(_θ_1, _θ_1) [VP SE lave]]
LF: \(\exists e[\text{washing}'(e) & \text{Agent-Theme}(e, \text{jean})]\)

In the following, we provide two arguments, one syntactic and one semantic, against the VR- and CV-intransitivity approaches to *se*-reflexives. First of all, it has been observed in recent years that the reflexive clitic *se* has the displacement property: it can cliticise on a verb distinct from the one that misses an argument, and therefore whose lexical case-feature need not be checked (see Labelle, 2008). This property is exemplified in (6) where *se* appears on the higher verb *laisser* (‘let’), while the missing accusative complement associates with the lower verb *berner* (‘deceive’).

(6) Displacement Property
Les citoyens se sont tous très souvent laissés bêtement [berner ___ par le maire].
the citizens SE be.AUX all very often let.pp stupidly [deceive ___ by the mayor]
‘The citizens very often let themselves all stupidly be deceived by the mayor.’
(Labelle, 2008:47)

We notice that a very similar point can be made with the so-called ethical *se*, where *se* is interpreted as a benefactive argument (i.e., the beneficiary of some event). For instance, a verb such as *cuisiner* (‘cook’) selects a direct object as a complement. Yet, it can also have an ‘add-on’ benefactive complement, which is introduced by the preposition *pour*, (7a). If it is right that this optional argument is introduced by a functional head distinct from the verb head, e.g. a high applicative head as proposed by Pylkkänen (2008), then *se* can in fact cliticize on a verb whose lexical entry has no θ-role/case-feature associated with the relevant argument *se* stands for, (7b).

(7) ‘Add-on’ Benefactive Argument
a. Jean cuisine un plat (pour Marie).
   john cook.PRES a meal (for Mary)
   ‘John is cooking a meal for Mary’

b. Jean (se) cuisine un plat.
   john (SE) cook.PRES a meal
   ‘John is cooking a meal for himself’

Secondly, the reflexive clitic *se* gives rise to patterns of ambiguity comparable to these observed with pronouns: in the relevant linguistic environments, it can receive both a sloppy and a strict
reading. Consider for instance the sentence in (8), adapted from Sportiche (2010), where se appears in the scope of the focus particle seulement/seul (i.e., ‘only’) which associates with the superficial subject; we note that a similar pattern of ambiguity obtains with other focus association operators such as même (‘even’).

(8) **Focus Association Operators**

Seulement/Seul Jean est accusé.
only john SE be.AUX accuse.PP
‘Only John accused himself’

a. John accused himself and nobody else accused themselves. (sloppy)
b. John accused himself and nobody else accused John. (strict)

In (8), the focus particle asserts that no contextually salient alternative to John satisfies the property denoted by its scope, i.e. *se accused*. However, as observed by Sportiche (2010), this property can receive two interpretations illustrated in (9) by the two distinct ways in which the asserted content of this sentence can be denied; we note that similar results obtain using Question-Answer congruence tests.

(9) a. Non, Marie s’est aussi accusé. (‘No, Mary accused herself too’)
b. Non, Marie l’a aussi accusé. (‘No, Mary accused him too’)
c. #Non, Marie a aussi accusé Pierre. (‘No, Mary Mary accused Peter too’)

In (9a), the speaker denies the proposition that there is no individual *x* other than John such that *x* accused *x*, on the ground that Mary accused herself too. In (9b), however, the speaker denies the proposition that there is no individual *x* other than John such that *x* accused John, on the ground that Mary accused John too. Note that (9a) and (9b) are the only two felicitous denials a speaker can produce. For instance, it is not possible for a speaker to deny (8) on the ground that there is an individual *x* other than John such that *x* accused someone that is neither *x*, nor John, (9c).

The sloppy vs. strict meaning of *se*-reflexives pertains to a wider range of environments (e.g., with ECM predicates, modal auxiliaries, DO-constructions, benefactive arguments). For the sake of generality, we provide below additional instances of this phenomenon: the interpretation of *se* with *do it* anaphora, (10), and in superlative constructions, (11).

(10) **Do it Anaphora**

Jean s’est dénoncé avant que son complice ne le fasse.
john SE be.AUX denounce.PP before that his accomplice NE it CL does
‘John denounced himself before his accomplice does it’

a. John denounced himself before John’s accomplice denounces himself. (sloppy)
b. John denounced himself before John’s accomplice denounces John. (strict)

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2We notice that this second argument is also problematic for the Voice analysis of *se* developed in Labelle (2008). According to Labelle (2008), the reflexive *se* is base-generated as the head of a Voice Phrase (VoiceP): it introduces the external argument of the verb, combines with an open VP (i.e., a VP containing an unsaturated internal argument) and identifies the external argument of the verb to the missing argument of the VP that it combines with, yielding a reflexive one-place predicate. Although this analysis correctly account for the examples in (6) and (7), it does not predict the availability of the strict readings we are presenting in this section.
(11) **Superlative Constructions**

At the procès, Jean s’est le mieux défendu.

‘At the trial, John defended himself the best’

a. It is John who defended himself the best. (sloppy)
b. It is himself that John defended the best. (strict)

Taken all together, these facts show that the clitic *se* does not operate *solely* at the lexical level, regardless of whether we hypothesize that its role is to reduce a lexical argument or a lexical case-feature of the verb. Therefore, VR and CR have both to be rejected on empirical grounds. Alternatively, the data suggest that (i) *se* is added in the course of the syntactic derivation, and that (ii) its interpretation gives rise to the same kind of ambiguities (sloppy vs. strict reading) as regular pronouns. The displacement property - together with the availability of ‘fake reflexive’ readings - provides us with a fine-grained linguistic signature which is better captured if *se* is analyzed as a bound pronominal clitic, and *se*-reflexives as transitives.³

### 3 The Puzzle Strikes Back

If *se*-reflexives are transitives, then why do they *behave like* intransitives in FI-causatives? In the following, we offer a solution to this puzzle that capitalizes on Pesetsky’s (2011) idea that reflexive pronouns are marked with REFLExIVE case. But before going on, let us make explicit some basic assumptions regarding the syntactic structure of FI-causatives.

There are two syntactic properties that an analysis of FI-causatives must capture: word-order and case-marking. With respect to word-order, the Causee always follow the internal argument, even though it is introduced higher in the structure. To capture this fact, some researchers have proposed that the Causee is a rightward-specifier to *vP* (e.g., Folli and Harley, 2007), whereas others have proposed that the relevant word-order is derived by VP-fronting (e.g., Kayne, 1975, Burzio, 1986, Ippolito, 2000, Campanini and Pitteroff, 2012). We will follow the latter proposal here as it correctly predicts the different positions of modifiers and indirect objects. For instance, as pointed out by Campanini and Pitteroff (2012), an indirect object can follow the Causee, (12); the possibility of this word-order remains unexplained if the Causee is introduced as a right specifier.

(12) Jean *fera* acheter un livre (pour Pierre) à Marie (pour Pierre).

‘John will make Mary buy a book for Peter’

In line with Ippolito (2000) and Campanini and Pitteroff (2012), we will further assume that *faire* causative embeds an Applicative head (*v*ₐₚₐₙ) which introduces the Causee. The resulting syntactic structure of FI-causatives is sketched out in (13).

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³We propose the term ‘fake reflexives’ as a reminiscence of a phenomenon already studied in the literature on binding, namely ‘fake indexicals’. We believe that the ambiguity generated by the use of indexicals (e.g., *my*/*your*) is the mirror image of this generated by the use of reflexives like *se* or *himself*. In the case of indexicals, one needs to account for the puzzling fact that they can have a sloppy (i.e., fake indexical) readings; in the case of reflexives, one needs to account for the puzzling fact that they can have a strict (i.e., fake reflexive) readings.
Let us now move to the question of case-marking: the Causee surfaces with `DAT(IVE)` in transitives, but with `ACC-USATIVE` in intransitives. While these facts present a challenge to a functional approach to Case (cf. Torrego, 2010), they can straightforwardly be handled by a configurational approach to Case-marking (e.g., Folli and Harley, 2007, Campanini and Pitteroff, 2012). For the time being, we follow the configurational approach elaborated in Baker and Vinokurova (2010), modulo that we consider the smallest relevant domain for case assignment to be `vP` (as opposed to `VP`). The assignment rules for `ACC` and `DAT` case are stated in (14).

\[(14) \quad \begin{align*}
&a. \text{ If there are two distinct NPs in the same } vP\text{-phase such that } NP_1 \text{ c-commands } NP_2, \text{ then value the case feature of } NP_1 \text{ as } DAT \text{ unless } NP_2 \text{ has already been marked for case.} \\
&b. \text{ If there are two distinct NPs in the same phase such that } NP_1 \text{ c-commands } NP_2, \text{ then value the case feature of } NP_2 \text{ as } ACC \text{ unless } NP_1 \text{ has already been marked for case.}
\end{align*}\]

An illustration of the procedure we propose for case-assignment in transitive and intransitive FI-causatives is given in (15a) and (15b), respectively.

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4We differentiate here `vP` from `VoiceP`, which is assumed to be the head responsible for the introduction of the external argument. This is crucial because if `VoiceP` were the relevant domain (as opposed to `vP`), all subjects in transitive clauses would be (incorrectly!) predicted to surface as dative-marked. Baker and Vinokurova (2010) explicitly mention that `ApplP` should be considered as part of the relevant domain for case assignment: ‘If goal phrases are generated in the specifier of an applicative head, distinct from the core verb, then we must consider the ApplP to be a kind of extended VP, with the maximal VP (i.e., ApplP) counting as the relevant phase for [case-marking].’
(15) a. Transitive FI-causatives, e.g. John fera laver Marie à Pierre
\[ v_{app}^{P} à Pierre,\text{DAT} \ [v_{app}^{P} \ [v_{app}^{P} laver Marie]] \] by (14a)
\[ CP \ Jean \ fera \ [v_{app}^{P} \ [v_{app}^{P} laver Marie,\text{ACC}]] \text{[v}_{app}^{P} \ à Pierre,\text{DAT} \ [v_{app}^{P} \ laver Marie]]] \] by (14b)

b. Intransitive FI-causatives, e.g. Jean fera travailler Pierre
\[ CP \ Jean \ fera \ [v_{app}^{P} \ [v_{app}^{P} travailler]] \text{[v}_{app}^{P} \ Pierre,\text{ACC} \ [v_{app}^{P} \ travailler]]] \] by (14b)

This analysis predicts that, whenever the internal argument of a transitive verb bears some sort of lexical case, then the Causee should bear ACC instead of DAT, i.e. it should not be introduced by à. This is indeed what we find with verbs that lexically mark their complements with prepositions:

(16) Jean fera regarder vers / rire de / dépendre de / tirer sur Pierre (*à) Marie
John make.FUT watch towards / laugh of / depend of / shoot on Peter (*to) Marie
‘John will make Mary look at/laught at/depend on/shoot Peter’

Turning to our puzzle, we have seen that the behavior of SE-reflexives differs from the behavior of regular transitives in two respects: (i) Case requirements, and (ii) Clitic climbing. We argue that both discrepancies naturally fall out from the properties of se as a bound pronominal clitic.

Regarding case-marking, the observation is that the Causee surfaces with DAT in transitive constructions, but with ACC in SE-reflexives. We argue that this parallels the case of transitive verbs which assign lexical case to their complement, (16). However, instead of stipulating a lexical case marking on se, we follow Pesetsky (2011) and treat se as bearing REFL(EXIVE) case. Pesetsky (2011) observes that, under a configurational approach to case, case marking and binding should be treated on a par, as both operations rely on c-commanding relations and local domains (i.e., phases). In order to accommodate this proposal in our system, we reformulate (14) as follows:

(17) If there are two distinct NPs in the same CP-phase such that NP1 c-commands NP2:
   a. If NP1 and NP2 are co-indexed: value the case feature of NP2 as REFL.
   b. Else (i.e., NP1 and NP2 are disjoint):
      i. If NP1 and NP2 are in the same vP-phase: value the case feature of NP1 as DAT, unless NP2 has already been marked for case.
      ii. Else (i.e., NP1 and NP2 are not in the same vP-phase): value the case feature of NP2 as ACC, unless NP1 has already been marked for case.

It follows from (17) that, in reflexives FI-causatives, the pronominal clitic se shall be marked with REFL, while its antecedent NP, i.e. the Causee, shall be marked with ACC, as shown in (18):

(18) Reflexive FI-causatives, e.g. Jean fera se laver Pierre
   a. \[ v_{app}^{P} \ Pierre \ [v_{app}^{P} \ se,\text{REFL} \ laver]] \] by (17a)
   b. \[ CP \ Jean \ fera \ [v_{app}^{P} \ [v_{app}^{P} \ se,\text{REFL} \ laver]] \text{[v}_{app}^{P} \ Pierre,\text{ACC} \ [v_{app}^{P} \ se,\text{REFL} \ laver]]] \] by (17bii)

We now turn to the question of why se obligatory remains on the lower predicate, while other non-reflexive clitics can raise up to the matrix verb faire. We argue that se is prohibited from...
raising to *faire* only when such a movement would yield a Strong Crossover violation. In (19a), *se* has already established a binding relation with the lower NP Pierre, i.e. the Causee. If it raises further to the matrix verb, then it will move across its binder and syntactically bind it, thus yielding a Strong Crossover violation.\(^6\) In (19b), on the other hand, *se* is bound by the higher NP Jean, i.e. the Causer, and so it obligatorily raises up to *faire*. Note that there is no Causee argument in this case - or if there is one, it has to be an adjunct (e.g., *par Pierre*) as in the *faire par* (FP) causatives (see Kayne (1975), Folli and Harley (2007) for an analysis of FP-causatives; see Section 4 for cases involving an intervening Causee).

\[(19)\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{John}_i \text{ will make Pierre}_j \text{ wash himself}_j \\
& \begin{array}{c}
\text{Jean}_i \langle \text{ClP} \neg (\text{se}_j) \rangle \langle \text{TP} \text{ fera} \langle \text{vappP} \langle \text{VP} (*\text{se}_j) \text{ laver} \rangle \langle \text{Pierr}_j \langle \text{VP} \text{ se}_j \text{ laver} \rangle \rangle \rangle \\
\end{array}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{b. } & \text{John}_i \text{ made himself}_i \text{ be washed (by Pierre}_j) \\
& \begin{array}{c}
\text{Jean}_i \langle \text{ClP} \neg (\text{se}_i) \rangle \langle \text{TP} \text{ fera} \langle \text{vappP} \langle \text{VP} \text{ laver se}_i \rangle \langle \text{par Pierre}_j \rangle \rangle \rangle \\
\end{array}
\end{align*}\]

This analysis predicts that if the Causee is bound by the Causer, then *se* should appear on *faire*. This is indeed possible even though, in order for the sentence to sound natural, additional linguistic materials is often required to convey that the Causer really forced himself doing something (e.g., the emphasizer *lui-même*, (20a), or a purpose-adjunct, (20b)).

\[(20)\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{Jean se fera } (*\text{lui-même}) \text{ laver la voiture.} \\
& \text{‘John will make himself wash the car’} \\
\text{b. } & \text{Jean se fera travailler dur } ??\text{ (pour rattraper le temps perdu).} \\
& \text{‘John will make himself work hard to catch up’}
\end{align*}\]

In sum, we have shown that the apparent ‘peculiar’ properties of *se*-reflexives in FI-causative are predicted by the properties of *se* as a bound variable. By way of conclusion, we present below a previously unnoticed puzzle that seems to be explained under our analysis.

### 4 A New Puzzle (\((\text{Un-cover})\)-ed)

We conclude this paper by drawing the reader’s attention to a paradigm, (21), which provides empirical evidence for the dependence between case-marking and binding. In (21a), the embedded clitic *le* is bound by the Causer, and the intervening Causee, surfacing as a clitic on *faire*, is marked with ACC. By contrast, when the embedded clitic is free, the Causee clitic is marked with DAT, (21b). (21c) shows that if the clitic is bound by the Causer, then it cannot climb up to the matrix verb (i.e., Principle B violation); when it is free, however, climbing becomes possible, (21d).

\[(21)\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{Jean}_i \langle \text{ClP} \neg (\text{le}_j) \rangle \langle \text{TP} \text{ fera} \langle \text{vappP} \langle \text{VP} \langle \text{le}_j \text{ laver} \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle \\
& \text{\hspace{1cm} (John}_i \text{ made him}_j \text{ wash him}_j) \\
\text{b. } & \text{Jean}_i \langle \text{ClP} \neg (\text{lui}_j) \rangle \langle \text{TP} \text{ fera} \langle \text{vappP} \langle \text{VP} \langle \text{laver lui}_j \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle \\
& \text{\hspace{1cm} (John}_i \text{ made him}_j \text{ wash him}_j) \\
\text{c. } & \langle \text{ClP} \neg (\text{le}_j) \rangle \langle \text{TP} \text{ fera} \langle \text{vappP} \langle \text{VP} \langle \text{le}_j \text{ laver} \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle \\
\text{d. } & \langle \text{ClP} \neg (\text{lui}_j) \rangle \langle \text{TP} \text{ fera} \langle \text{vappP} \langle \text{VP} \langle \text{laver lui}_j \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle \\
\end{align*}\]

\(^6\)We follow Kayne (1975) and Sportiche (1996) in assuming that clitics move to a c-commanding position, heading their own clitic projection (ClP).
The contrast in (21a) vs. (21b) is explained under the assumption that the embedded bound clitic le gets in fact REFL case in (21a). Following the case-marking rule in (17a), it is predicted that le should be marked with REFL in this configuration as it is c-commanded in the same CP-phase by a co-indexed NP, i.e. the higher NP Jean. The problem is that, if this explanation is on the right track, then the one-to-one correspondence between REFL case and reflexive morphology breaks down, which means that REFL case does not have a sole exponent. We notice however that that there is a REFL-ACC syncretism among 1st and 2nd person personal pronouns, e.g. me/te/nous/vous, which bear the same morphology in bound and free environments. Under this view, se would not be the exponent of REFL case but rather the result of a spell-out rule along the following lines:

(22) Let \( \alpha \) be a 3rd person pronominal clitic. If \( \alpha \) is bound by an NP \( \beta \) within the same CP-phase and there is no NP intervening between \( \alpha \) and \( \beta \), then \( \alpha \) is spelled-out as ‘se’; otherwise, it is spelled-out as ‘le’.

For now, we can only think of the paradigm in (21) as an evidence that bound pronouns within the CP-phase get REFL case irrespectively of their reflexive marking (se vs. le). Further research is thus needed in order to make any safe conclusion regarding the interaction between binding and case-marking within the CP-domain. In any event, this new paradigm proves once again that FI-causatives remain a privileged (play-)ground for linguistic inquiries.

References


