

test sentence is a (short) passive (e.g., *The ladder has been tipped over*) or an AC (e.g., *The ladder has tipped over*). We tested short passives of causatives rather than transitive causatives in order to keep the number of overt arguments constant across conditions. **Morphology:** whether the anticausative is morphologically marked or unmarked (relevant for French only). 25 verbs were tested across 50 items in English; 18 +*se* verbs and 9 –*se* verbs were tested across 54 items in French (\pm *se* verbs were not used to avoid the problem of competition between forms). The visual stimuli were the same across languages. Participants were divided in two groups; all of them saw all pictures, but the pairing between sentence types and pictures was different between groups.

5. Our predictions were as follows. As descriptions of +AG pictures, passives should be fully acceptable. In the same +AG condition, *marked* ACs should be felt infelicitous by participants sensitive to the non-literal meaning of our test sentences: the corresponding causative expressions being structurally-defined alternatives, marked ACs should trigger a clear no-agent SI (clashing with the presence of the agent in the +AG condition). *Unmarked* ACs should be rated better than marked ACs, since the corresponding causative is not a structurally-defined alternative. Furthermore, marked and unmarked ACs should be rated well as descriptions of –AG pictures. Passives were expected to be slightly penalized in the same –AG condition, since the intervention of an invisible agent, although always plausible, needs to be accommodated for the passives to describe –AG pictures felicitously.

6. Our predictions were confirmed by the results (see Fig. 1a). Both in English (left panel) and French (right panel), passives were at ceiling in the +AG condition. AC statements were rated less well than passives as descriptions of the same +AG pictures in both languages ($p < .01$). But in French, marked ACs receive much lower ratings than unmarked ones, confirming hypothesis (5). In the same +AG condition, the means for unmarked ACs is high but the responses somewhat scattered, which we take to indicate that unmarked ACs do trigger a SI, but a rather weak one. Assuming that passive test sentences play the role of contextual alternatives in our experiment, this confirms that the SI is weaker when the alternative is contextual only. Turning to –AG pictures, ACs received higher ratings than passives in both languages, as expected. Responses for passives were somewhat spread out, suggesting that participants differed in their readiness to accommodate the intervention of an invisible agent.

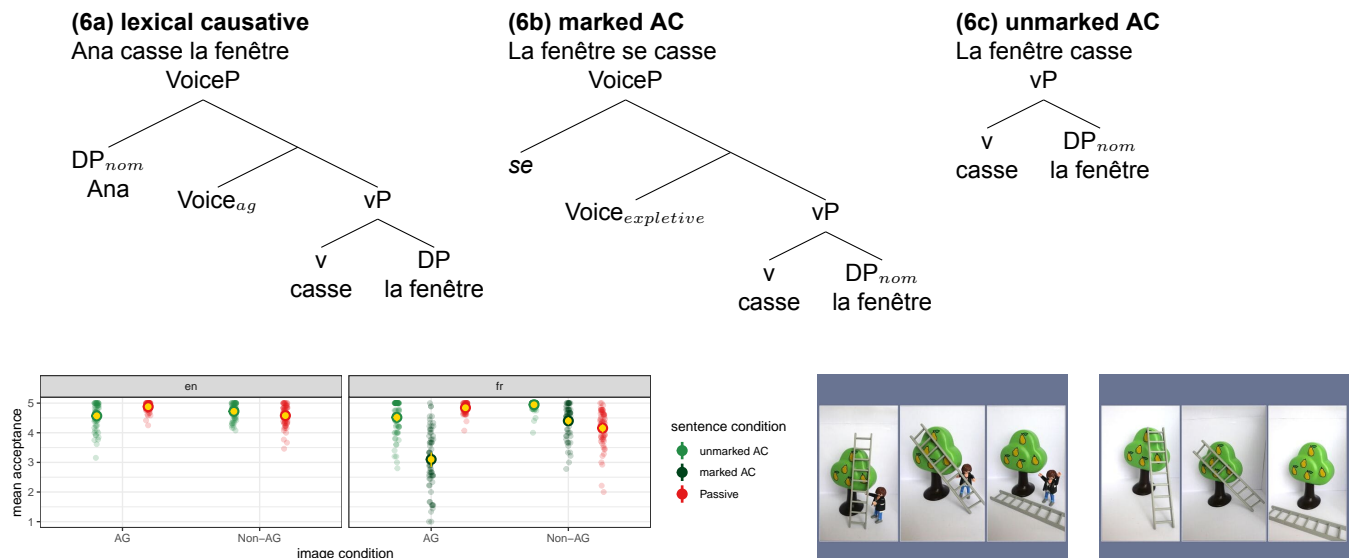


Figure 1: (a) Results: Mean acceptance per person (b) Two pairs of visual stimuli (+AG and –AG pictures);