

## TO BE OR NOT TO BE AN AUXILIARY VERB: THE CASE OF SPANISH *PONER(SE) A + INFINITIVE\**

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper studies two Spanish constructions with the verb *poner* ('to put') and an infinitive. The first one, <*ponerse a + infinitive*>, has traditionally been considered an inchoative periphrasis; however, we will show that its grammaticalisation is only complete with inanimate or impersonal subjects, while with animate subjects the structure keeps causative semantics. The second one, <*poner something / someone a + infinitive*>, has received much less attention in the literature. Although it originated together with its *se*-counterpart, it has not become a periphrasis and today exhibits a hybrid behaviour similar to that of verbs of influence on the one hand and restructuring causative verbs on the other. It will be shown that both constructions started with a causative-aspectual meaning ('triggering an event') that they keep today: *ponerse* has a causative meaning despite being an auxiliary and *poner* has an aspectual meaning despite not being an auxiliary, which explains many of their special characteristics. This paper will not only shed light on the diachronic and synchronic properties of these constructions but will also reflect on the limits between lexical and grammatical categories.

**Keywords.** verbal periphrases; grammaticalisation; restructuring; verbs of influence; causativity; aspect; grammatical categories

**RESUMEN.** Este trabajo estudia dos construcciones del español con el verbo *poner* y un infinitivo. La primera de ellas, <*ponerse a + infinitivo*>, se considera tradicionalmente una perífrasis verbal incoativa; sin embargo, demostraremos que su gramaticalización solo es completa en el caso de los sujetos inanimados e impersonales, mientras que con los sujetos animados la estructura retiene semántica causativa. La segunda, <*poner algo / a alguien a + infinitivo*>, ha recibido mucha menos atención en la bibliografía. Aunque se originó junto con su contrapartida reflexiva, no se ha convertido en una perífrasis y exhibe hoy un comportamiento híbrido que la acerca por un lado a los verbos de influencia y por otro a los causativos de reestructuración. Se demostrará que ambas construcciones comenzaron con un significado causativo-aspectual ('desencadenar el evento'), que mantienen hoy en día: *ponerse* tiene valor causativo, a pesar de ser un auxiliar, y *poner* tiene valor aspectual a pesar de no ser un auxiliar, lo cual explica algunas de sus peculiaridades. Este artículo no solo pretende arrojar luz sobre las propiedades diacrónicas y sincrónicas de estas construcciones, sino también reflexionar sobre los límites entre las categorías léxicas y gramaticales.

**Palabras clave.** perífrasis verbales; gramaticalización; reestructuración; verbos de influencia; causatividad; aspecto; categorías gramaticales

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\* This study has been carried out within the research group *Grammatica Varia. Estudios sobre Gramática y Variación* (GraVa), in the Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha. I want to thank Julia Escudero and the rest of the "clandestine grammarians" for their judgements, intuitions and comments, as well as the audience and the organizers of the monographic session "*Las categorías gramaticales. Relaciones y diferencias, treinta años después*", held at the XLVIII Symposium of the Spanish Linguistic Society (SEL) in January 2019.

## 1. Introduction

It is well-known that the limits among grammatical categories are not clear-cut (cf. Bosque 1989; Fábregas 2005; Iordăchioaia et al. 2013; Haspelmath 2015; Panagiotidis 2015, among many others), so they form a *continuum* along which linguistic expressions are arranged. In the case of the distinction between lexical and grammatical words, its permeability is mainly caused by grammaticalisation and semantic bleaching; therefore, when these processes are yet to be concluded, we may find strange situations at the synchronic level, so that the grammatical status of certain units is difficult to establish. This is the problem that will be addressed in this paper, regarding the Spanish verb *poner* ('put') in the following infinitive constructions:

- (1) a. Macarena puso a Luis a trabajar.  
Macarena put.PST.3.SG DOM-Luis<sup>1</sup> to work.INF  
b. Nerea puso el agua a hervir.  
Nerea put.PST the water to boil.INF  
c. Este libro puso a pensar a toda España.  
this book put.PST to think. INF to all Spain
- (2) a. Luis se puso a trabajar.  
Luis REFL.3SG. put.PST.3.SG to work.INF  
'Luis started to work'  
b. Se puso a llover.  
REFL.3SG. put.PST.3.SG to rain.INF  
'It started to rain'  
c. La tetera se puso a silbar.  
the kettle REFL.3SG. put.PST.3.SG to whistle.INF  
'The kettle started to whistle'

Linguists agree that the construction *<ponerse a + infinitive>* ('to put-SE to + infinitive') in (2) is an inchoative verbal periphrasis (Gómez Torrego 1988, 1999; García González 1992; Gómez Manzano 1992; Fernández de Castro 1999; Carrasco Gutiérrez 2006; NGLE 2009) even though it does not show a uniform behaviour with regard to the classic tests (see section 4). Its meaning is similar to that of other inchoative periphrasis such as *empezar a* ('to start to') but it has additional nuances: if the subject is animate, the periphrasis means that he or she starts the action with special effort, intention or intensity, while, if the subject is inanimate, the periphrasis means that the action starts in a sudden and rather unexpected way<sup>2</sup> (Gómez Torrego 1988; Comer & Enghels 2017; Carrasco Gutiérrez 2006).

The examples in (1), however, have received much less attention in the literature and their grammatical status is problematic. This construction means that the subject has set the necessary conditions for an event to happen: in (1a), Macarena sets the conditions for Luis to work –which may include encouraging him to do it–, in (1a) Nerea sets the conditions for the water to boil and in (1c) the book sets the conditions for the whole country to think. Therefore, it is semantically similar to causative restructuring constructions in (3) and also to constructions involving verbs of influence (4), but, as we will see in detail, it has an additional aspectual meaning, focusing on the initiation of the event.

<sup>1</sup> Differential Object Marking.

<sup>2</sup> In some examples, we can interpret more than one of these nuances at the same time: *Luisa se puso a estornudar* ('Luisa started to sneeze') means that she started sneezing suddenly and / or intensely.

- (3) Macarena hizo trabajar a Luis.  
 Macarena made work.INF DOM Luis  
 ‘Macarena made Luis work’
- (4) Andrea obligó a Diana a bailar.  
 Andrea forced DOM Diana to dance.INF  
 ‘Andrea forced Diana to dance’

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the study of (1-2) and to emphasise two fundamental problems concerning the distinctions among full verbs, auxiliary verbs and restructuring verbs. First, it is known that both auxiliaries (Gómez Torrego 1988, 1999; Topor 2005; García Fernández et al., 2006; Comer & Enghels 2017) and restructuring verbs (Comrie 1976; Cardinaletti 2004; Soares da Silva 2012) may exhibit different degrees of grammaticalisation, which causes non-uniform behaviours and classification problems. Secondly, our case study shows that permeability does not only affect the distinction between lexical and grammatical units, but also the limits among different kinds of grammatical words.

Following the diachronic study by Comer & Enghels (2017) and considering the synchronic properties of these constructions, we will conclude that they started their evolution together and parted ways at some point so that today their semantics are very similar while their syntax is not. This makes them a specially interesting case study for the relations between form and meaning. More specifically, we will hypothesise that both structures were evolving from the locative original meaning of *poner* to the meaning of a verb of influence: placing something somewhere > placing something / someone in an event > triggering an event. In this process, they obtained causative and aspectual semantics but later on their paths severed: the valency of the reflexive variant must have been reanalysed as if there was only one argument, which allowed it to become a periphrasis, while the *se*-less variant continued evolving on its own, becoming more grammaticalised than a true lexical verb of influence and heading towards semi-lexical restructuring causative verbs.

This paper is structured as follows: in section 2 we will provide a general overview of <*poner* + infinitive> constructions, focusing on their argument structure and their aspectual restrictions. In section 3 we will address their diachronic evolution and in section 4 we will study their synchronic behaviour in detail with regard to the main tests used to identify verbal periphrasis. Finally, section 5 will sum up the ideas presented throughout the paper and present the conclusions.

## 2. Overview of *poner*-constructions

### 2.1. <Ponerse a + infinitive>

This construction is considered a verbal periphrasis because it fulfills the two main properties any periphrasis must have: the condition of the single argument structure and the condition of the TAM meaning.

Firstly, both verbs express a single event: there is only one head –the infinitive– providing arguments, while the auxiliary verb *poner* merely bears grammatical information. Thus, the subject is not selected by *poner*, but by the infinitive:

- (5) Andrea / \*la chincheta se puso a bailar.  
 Andrea / the tack REFL.3.SG put.PST.3SG to dance.INF  
 ‘Andrea / \*the tack started to dance’

However, *ponerse* seems to keep some semantics of its own, which allows it to impose restrictions on the arguments. Although it is compatible with both animate and inanimate subjects, Carrasco Gutiérrez (2006) points out that the former need to be agents (6), which could be related to the meaning of “special implication of the subject” that was mentioned in the introduction:

- (6) a. Luisa se puso a dibujar.  
Luisa REFL.3.SG put.PST.3SG to draw.INF  
‘Luisa started to draw’  
b. \*Luisa se puso a recibir malas noticias.  
Luisa REFL.3.SG put.PST.3SG to receive.INF bad news  
c. \*Luisa se puso a envejecer.  
Luisa REFL.3.SG put.PST.3.SG to grow.old.INF  
‘Luisa started to grow old’

Furthermore, the subject of *ponerse* must be an external argument, and never an internal one, regardless of its animacy:

- (7) a. \*Los precios / los desempleados se pusieron a aumentar.  
the prices / the unemployed REFL.3.SG put.PST.3.PL to increase.INF  
‘The prices / the unemployed started to increase’  
b. \*La comida / Nerea se puso a enfriarse.  
the food / Nerea REFL.3.SG put.PST.3.SG to cool.down.INF  
c. \*La nieve / el niño se puso a caer.  
The snow / the kid REFL.3.SG put.PST.3.SG to fall.INF

In (8) we see that this restriction does not apply to other inchoative periphrasis, such as *empezar a* (‘to start to’):

- (8) a. La comida / Nerea empezó a enfriarse.  
the food / Nerea started to cool.down.INF  
b. La nieve / el niño empezó a caer.  
the snow / the kid started to fall.INF  
c. Los precios / los desempleados empezaron a aumentar.  
The prices the unemployed started to increase.INF

It is known that auxiliary verbs may retain, to some extent, a lexical meaning of their own, so this is not an impediment to classify *ponerse* as such. The fact that there is a single argument structure, shared by both verbs, is enough reason to claim that this structure is a periphrasis.

In the same vein, the second argument has to do with the grammatical information provided by the auxiliary verb, which fits the characteristic TAM (temporal, aspectual or modal) meaning that all periphrasis have. *Ponerse* has undergone a semantic bleaching, losing its original locative meaning and acquiring an aspectual one, which gives rise to some restrictions regarding the *aktionsart* of the infinitive. First, *ponerse* rejects states (Lamiroy 1987; Carrasco Gutiérrez 2006) (9) and achievements (10), and ignores, furthermore, the telos of an accomplishment (11):

- (9) \*Vicky se puso a tener fiebre.  
 Vicky REFL.3.SG put.PST.3.SG to have.INF a.fever  
 ‘Vicky started to have a fever’
- (10) a. \*El Capitán Garfio se puso a encontrar el tesoro.  
 the captain Hook REFL.3.SG put.PST.3.SG to find.INF the treasure  
 ‘Captain Hook started to find the treasure’  
 b. El Capitán Garfio se puso a saltar de alegría.  
 the captain Hook REFL.3.SG put.PST.3.SG to jump.INF of joy  
 ‘Captain Hook started to jump for joy’
- (11) Cristina se puso a escribir un cuento, pero no lo terminó.  
 Cristina REFL.3.SG put.PST.3.SG to write.INF a tale but not it finished  
 ‘Cristina started to write a tale, but didn’t finish it’

The ungrammaticality of (9) is due to the lack of an initial phase in states that could be focalised by this inchoative periphrasis and, as an anonymous reviewer points out, also due to the lack of an agentive subject. In (10), it is due to the fact that the initial and the final phase of achievements coincide and are inseparable; nevertheless, achievements are allowed in an iterative reading, where the periphrasis focalises the initiation of the sequence of events rather than the initiation of a single event (10b). Finally, in the case of accomplishments, the periphrasis only sees the beginning and ignores the telos, so it does not actually distinguish between them and activities.

Notice that these restrictions are not shared by other inchoative periphrasis such as *empezar a* (‘to start to’), which seems to add a beginning to an event if there is none (12):

- (12) Vicky empezó a tener fiebre.  
 Vicky started to have.INF a.fever

In sections 3 and 4 we will develop the idea that both the restrictions imposed on the subject and the aspectual restrictions are due to the causative semantics that *poner(se)* acquired during its grammaticalisation process, when it lost its locative meaning and started being used with infinitives in order to convey the triggering of an event.

## 2.2. <Poner something / someone a + infinitive>

The main reason not to consider the construction <*poner* something / someone *a + infinitive*> a periphrasis is that it does not clearly express a single event and does not have a single argument structure (Gómez Torrego 1988): *poner* provides an external argument and there is another argument –*the girls, Macarena* in (13-14)– interpreted as the subject of the infinitive:

- (13) a. Cristina puso a las niñas a leer *Peter Pan*.  
 Cristina put.PST.3.SG DOM the girls to read.INF Peter Pan  
 b. Cristina las puso a leer *Peter Pan*.  
 Cristina them.ACC.F.PL put.3.SG to read.INF Peter Pan
- (14) a. Luis puso a Macarena a bailar.  
 Luis put.PST.3.SG DOM Macarena to dance.INF  
 b. Luis la puso a bailar.  
 Luis her.ACC.F.PL put.PST.3.SG to dance.INF

Considering the syntactic configuration of these structures as well as their causative semantics, there are, at least, two ways to address the problem of the subject of the infinitive. The first one is to analyse *poner* as a causative verb –similar to *hacer* (‘make’) or *dejar* (‘let’). The second option is to analyse *poner* as a verb of influence – similar to *obligar* (‘oblige, force’), *ayudar* (‘help’), *animar* (‘encourage’), *invitar* (‘invite’), etc.–. Given that causative verbs and verbs of influence are semantically similar, both analysis would account for the causative meaning that *poner* has acquired in this construction, a meaning that departs from its original locative one –indicating a semantic change– and, crucially, from the TAM meaning of verbal periphrasis. Nevertheless, causative verbs and verbs influence have major syntactic differences: the former undergo, together with the infinitive, a restructuring process into a monoclausal syntax while the latter select a direct object that controls the subject of the embedded infinitive.

A syntactic argument in favour of the second option is that *poner* always assigns accusative case to the argument that controls the infinitive (13b,14b), unlike analytic causatives, which exhibit ECM (Exceptional Case Marking): in *hacer* (‘make’) constructions, the subject of the infinitive gets default case, accusative if there is no true direct object competing for it (15b), and dative otherwise (15a). In this respect, *poner* behaves like verbs of influence (16).

- (15) a. Cristina les hizo leer *Peter Pan*.  
 Cristina them.DAT.PL made read.INF Peter Pan  
 b. Luis la hizo bailar.  
 Luis her.ACC.F.SG made dance.INF
- (16) Cristina las obligó a leer *Peter Pan*.  
 Cristina them.ACC.F.PL forced to read.INF Peter Pan

From a semantic point of view, however, the situation is more complex. *Poner*, unlike verbs of influence, does not work as a full verb. In this sense, it is more similar to *hacer* (‘make’), which has a semi-lexical status (Cardinaletti 2004; Vivanco 2019). As for the infinitive, its interpretation is that of a caused event –in (13), Cristina causes or triggers the event of the girls reading the book *Peter Pan*–, which matches both the meaning of verbs of influence and restructuring causative verbs.

The infinitive that Spanish verbs of influence select is similar to the one selected by verbs of movement (17b); they are introduced by the preposition *a* (‘to’) –like the *poner* infinitive and unlike the infinitive in analytic causatives– and have been interpreted as goal / purpose complements, although they may co-appear with goal and purpose adjuncts (17a-b), which poses some questions about their true thematic role, despite being arguments (Hernanz 1999; NGLÉ 2009).

- (17) a. Macarena entró (al bar) a saludar (para ser educada).  
 Macarena went.in to.the bar to greet.INF for be polite  
 ‘Macarena walked into the bar to say hello in order to be polite’  
 b. Andrea llevó a los niños (al parque) a jugar (para que dejen de llorar).  
 Andrea took DOM the kids to.the park to play.INF for that stop of cry  
 ‘Andrea took the kids to the park to play so that they would stop crying’

The infinitive that goes with *poner* –which is, after all, a verb of caused motion– may have, indeed, a purpose interpretation, especially if we think of examples such as (18b), compared to the non-infinitive construction in (18a):

- (18) a. Nerea puso la comida en el microondas para que se calentara.  
 Nerea put.PST.3.SG the food in the microwave for that REFL.3.SG warm.SBJV  
 b. Nerea puso el agua al fuego a hervir.  
 Nerea put.PST.3.SG the water to.the fire to boil.INF

However, in these examples, the presence of the locative arguments *in the microwave*, *on the fire*, allows *poner* to get its original lexical meaning back: *Nerea placed the water on the fire for it to boil*. When the locative meaning is missing, the interpretation of the infinitive is no longer that of purpose (13-14); *poner*, like *ponerse*, has a prospective meaning, related to its inchoative meaning, but its infinitive does not really express purpose nowadays. Nevertheless, in the next section we will see that the origin of this construction is close to verbs of influence and that, originally, the infinitive did have a goal / purpose meaning.

Besides its causative meaning, the construction *<poner something / someone a + infinitive>* has an aspectual one, something expected of auxiliaries but not of causative verbs nor verbs of influence. In fact, *<poner something / someone a + infinitive>* does not only have some aspectual content but shows exactly the same aspectual restrictions as *<ponerse a + infinitive>*: it disallows states (19) and achievements (20), and ignores the telos of accomplishments (21). Notice, however, that the initial phase of the event is focalised precisely thanks to the causative semantics, since the subject arranges the necessary conditions for the event to happen, triggers the event.

- (19) \*Luisa puso a Vicky a tener fiebre.  
 Luisa put.PST.3.SG to Vicky to have.INF a.fever  
 (20) \*El Capitán Garfío puso al grumete a encontrar el tesoro.  
 the captain Hook put.PST.3.SG to.the cabin.boy to find.INF the treasure  
 (21) a. Carlos puso a Cristina a escribir un cuento, pero ella nunca lo terminó.  
 Carlos put to Cristina to write a tale but she never it finished  
 b. Carlos puso la comida a calentar, pero al final la comió fría.  
 Carlos put the food to warm but in.the end it ate cold

If we compare (19) to its *ponerse*-counterpart in (9), we see that in this case ungrammaticality can no longer be related to the lack of an agentive subject –the subject of the infinitive here– because these are not needed in the *<poner something / someone a + infinitive>* –as shown by examples such as (1b), (18b)–; therefore, the explanation here can only be of an aspectual nature.

Therefore, we find that out of the two essential conditions of periphrasis, the single argument structure and the TAM meaning, the causative variant of *poner* fulfills the latter but not the former. The question of the argument structure has been enough reason in the literature not to classify this construction as a periphrasis; however, this leaves us with the problem of finding out what else it is and why it has the aspectual meaning of a periphrasis, without being one.

In the following sections we will argue that the inchoative meaning is linked to the causative one, because the focus is on the triggering of the event and, crucially, we will argue that this is something shared by *poner* and *ponerse* thanks to their common evolution. We will conclude that the current grammatical status of the *poner*-construction is hybrid, preserving many properties of verbs of influence but undergoing further grammaticalisation towards causative verbs.

### 3. A brief note on the evolution of *poner(se)* + infinitive

It is well-known that verbal periphrasis develop through grammaticalisation processes in which a lexical verb undergoes semantic bleaching and acquires grammatical properties until it becomes an auxiliary verb (cf. Fernández de Castro 1999; García Fernández et al. 2006; Comer & Enghels 2017); thus, at the synchronic level, it is frequent to find periphrasis whose auxiliaries have not concluded this evolution and preserve some lexical properties. This seems to be case for *ponerse*, which, as we have seen, keeps the ability to impose semantic restrictions on the subject and which, as we will see in section 4, does not show a uniform behaviour with regard to other syntactic diagnoses. As for causative *poner*, it is evident that it has undergone a semantic change with syntactic consequences, but it is not clear at which point of its evolution it is now nor what is the direction this change will follow next: is it really turning into an auxiliary verb, like *ponerse*, or is it taking a different path?

Comer & Enghels (2017) study the evolution of these constructions over the history of the Spanish language and conclude that they originated in the 13th century and followed a parallel development.<sup>3</sup> Considering this, they claim that both structures are the same verbal periphrasis, with a causative and an inchoative variant; however, as we have seen, such statement is controversial because for *se-less poner*.

According to these authors, there was a metaphorical extension process based on a basic pattern of caused movement (22). The preposition *a* ('to') attests that speakers conceptualised the event of the infinitive as an aim for a near future, while the use of preposition *en* ('in'), which alternated with *a* until the 17<sup>th</sup> century (24), indicates that the construction had also the meaning of "placing" something, someone or one's self in a situation or event.<sup>4</sup> Examples such as (23), very similar to (18), would be the bridging context between the meanings of "placing somewhere" and "placing in an event".

(22) Phase 1.

- A. Put something in a place
- B. Put someone / oneself in a place
- C. (Bridging context) Put someone / oneself in an event

Phase 2. Competition among *a* (goal), *en* (location) and  $\emptyset$ .

Phase 3. Fixation of *a*. Switch context: *Poner* someone to do something / *ponerse* to do something.

Phase 4. Conventionalisation and expansion of the construction to other contexts.

(adapted from C&E 2017: 921)

(13th c.) (C&E 2017: 916)

(23) Si no, tomen lech d'asnas prietas e mezclen con ella olyo de sísamu,  
if not take.2.PL milk of.donkey black and mix with it oil of sesame  
e **pónganla a escalentar** sobr'el fuego; [...].<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Unlike Verroens' (2011) hypothesis for French, who claims that, in this language, the reflexive variant was derived from the causative one at a later phase of its evolution.

<sup>4</sup> As an anonymous reviewer points out, (23) and (24) have very similar interpretations. The idea that the constructions oscillate between the locative semantics and the propective semantics is based on the very meaning of the prepositions *en* ('in') and *a* ('to').

<sup>5</sup> [CORDE]: Toledo, Abraham de, *Moamín. Libro de los animales que cazan*.

and put.it to warm over.the fire  
 ‘Otherwise, take black donkey milk and mix it with sesame oil and put it on the fire for it to warm up’.

(15th c.) (C&E 2017: 909)

- (24) ‘Señor,’ rrespondyó el cantor, ‘es la más mala persona del mundo, Sir, answered the singer is the most bad person of.the world y no tyene cabe sy syno ladrones y rrufyanes y gente and not has under himself but thieves and thugs and people **que le ponga en hazer mal, y en muchas desonestydades, y por cyerto** that him put in do bad and in many dishonesties and for sure que anoche en la cámara hablaban de vos.’<sup>6</sup> that last.night in the chamber spoke.3.PL of you ““Sir”, the singer answered, “he is the most evil person in the world, and he is only surrounded by thieves and thugs and people who make him do evil and many dishonest things and I am sure that they were talking about you last night in the chamber’

(17th c.) (C&E 2017: 920)

- (25) **Se puso** en un lugar alto **a ver** la batalla.<sup>7</sup>  
 REFL.3.SG. put in a place high to see the battle  
 ‘He moved to a high place to see the battle’.

The corpus analysed by Comer & Enghels demonstrates that causative *poner* has evolved at a slower pace, which is why today it is less grammaticalised, has a lesser extension and exhibits a lesser degree of syntactic incorporation. This may explain, at least partially, the aforementioned contrasts, that is, the fact that <*ponerse* + infinitive> shows a more typical periphrastic behaviour than <*poner* something / someone *a* + infinitive>: in the former case, *poner* is more grammaticalised as an auxiliary than in the latter.

Nevertheless, the fact that the *se*-less variant has an extra argument –whose presence is essential to get the causative semantics– is still an obstacle to analyse it as a periphrasis and it is most likely the reason for its slow evolution –actually, it will probably always stop *poner* from becoming an auxiliary–.

Having said that, does the structure with *poner* really have one more argument than the structure with *ponerse*? We are now in a position to rethink the problem from a different perspective: both constructions originate at the same time and evolve in a parallel way because they are, from the beginning, the same thing. Starting from the locative meaning of *poner*, a metaphorical extension process took place, so that someone places someone in an event. When both arguments are coreferential, we are simply before a case of reflexivity: someone places himself in an event (25). In other words, we do not have two verbs *poner*, a causative and an inchoative one, but a single verb *poner* that can be used reflexively.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> [CORDE]: Anonymous, *La corónica de Adramón*.

<sup>7</sup> [CORDE]: López, Diego, *Declaración magistral sobre los emblemas de Andrés Alciato*.

<sup>8</sup> We use the term “reflexive” here in a broad sense, since the introduction of *a sí mismo/a* (‘him/herself’) is ungrammatical: \**Luisa se puso a sí misma a dibujar* (‘Luisa put herself to draw’). In Spanish, many verbs of motion bear the clitic *se* despite disallowing *a sí mismo* and despite not having standard reflexive semantics –an agent performing an action on himself–: *levantarse* (‘to stand up’), *sentarse* (‘to sit down’), *arrodillarse* (‘to kneel’), etc. Therefore, the origins of this construction with a verb of caused motion show nothing but an interaction between (causative) reflexive semantics and motion semantics.

Over this process, the meaning of “placing someone in an event” turns into the current meaning of “arranging the necessary conditions for this event to happen, triggering the event” and this is what gives rise to the causative and aspectual semantics. Although the causative content is less obvious in the reflexive variant, it shows up in the fact that only external arguments are allowed as subjects –(7), repeated here as (26)– and also in the aforementioned meaning of “bigger implication, effort, involvement of the subject” that differentiates *ponerse* from other inchoative periphrasis.

- (26) a. \*Los precios / los desempleados se pusieron a aumentar.  
           the prices / the unemployed REFL.3.SG put.PST.3.PL to increase  
           ‘The prices / the unemployed started to increase’  
   b. \*La comida / Nerea se puso a enfriarse.  
           the food / Nerea REFL.3.SG put.PST to cool.down  
   c. \*La nieve / el niño se puso a caer.  
           The snow / the kid REFL.3.SG put.PST to fall

I conjecture, therefore, that at some point of the diachronic evolution of <*poner a* + infinitive>, the reflexive variant was reanalysed as a periphrasis thanks to the coreferentiality of its arguments: the *se* pronoun must have stopped being interpreted as a second argument and have started being thought of as belonging to the verb (27). Although a deeper diachronic study would be in order to confirm and detail this hypothesis, what we know today is that *se* is not interpreted as an argument anymore and the *ponerse*-construction is considered a verbal periphrasis with two verbs sharing a single argument structure and denoting a single event.

- (27)  $[X]_1 \textit{poner} [Y]_2 \textit{a inf.} > [X_i]_1 [SE_i]_2 \textit{poner a inf.} > [X]_1 [\textit{ponerse}] \textit{a inf.}$

Thus, there was only one construction at the beginning, but it eventually split into two: one was reanalysed as periphrasis, undergoing a faster evolution, while the other continued with the grammaticalisation path it had originally taken. This path, however, remains mysterious. It seems that the *se*-less *poner* went through a semantic change from locative verb to verb of influence, with which it picked up aspectual semantics related to the triggering of the event. Nowadays its behaviour is still hybrid: it shares properties of auxiliaries, verbs of influence and causative verbs but it is none of them. Nevertheless, in the next section we will see that the most likely direction *poner* is taking in its ongoing evolution is that of restructuring causative verbs.

#### 4. Synchronic properties of *poner*-constructions

Section 2 focused on the two main properties defining verbal periphrasis, the single argument structure and the TAM meaning, and showed that while *ponerse* fulfills both, *poner* only fulfills the latter. In section 3 we have seen that, according to Comer & Enghels (2017), these structures originated at the same time and evolved together, and we have conjectured that it is actually one single construction whose reflexive variant was reanalysed as a periphrasis. In this section, we will go into detail about their synchronic behaviour by applying the syntactic tests that establish the auxiliary character of a verb, comparing the results with causative verbs and verbs of influence.

There are many diagnoses to identify verbal periphrasis (see Topor 2005 for an overview), but not all of them are considered equally valid, either because not all periphrasis give positive results –due to unfinished grammaticalisation processes– or because there are other non-periphrastic constructions that do give positive results.

Thus, the following selection of tests is based on Topor (2005) and García Fernández et al. (2006) and includes the most standard ones: commutation, interrogatives, cleft sentences, clitic climbing and passives, together with the single argument condition and the TAM meaning condition.

Among the constructions that work with these tests without being periphrasis we find, precisely, analytic causatives. Analytic causatives are complex predicates subject to restructuring, the two verbs behave like a unit to some extent and create a monoclausal structure –only one domain for case assignment–, but they keep certain syntactic and semantic independence –both verbs provide arguments– (see Comrie 1976; Kayne 1975; Iglesias Bango 1992; Wurmbrand 2004; Folli & Harley 2007; Soares da Silva 2012; Campanini & Pitteroff 2013; Vivanco 2019); furthermore, causative verbs are not fully grammatical units in Spanish, but semi-lexical ones (Cardinaletti 2004, Vivanco 2019). Therefore, although periphrastic and causative constructions share some properties, they are significantly different.

#### 4.1. NP / CP commutation

The infinitive in a periphrasis is not an embedded clause and so it cannot be replaced by a NP, a pronoun or a CP:

- (27) a. \*Julia debe eso / ello.  
           Julia must that / it  
       b. \*Julia debe juego.  
           Julia must game  
       c. \*Julia debe que juegue.  
           Julia must that play.3.SG.SBJV

The CP question is especially relevant, since embedded infinitives are control structures that alternate with finite clauses when the subject is not coreferential with any element in the main clause. This shows that the argument structure is not shared in embedded clauses, but it is, in fact, in verbal periphrasis or, in other words, this shows that verbal periphrasis are not control structures. Additional proof for this is the fact that periphrasis allow meteorological verbs (García Fernández et al. 2006):

- (28) a. Hoy puede nevar.  
           today can snow  
           ‘It can snow today’  
       b. Hoy va a nevar.  
           today goes to snow  
           ‘It is going to snow today’  
       c. Hoy se ha puesto a nevar.  
           today REFL.3.SG. has put to snow  
           ‘It has started to snow today’

Analytic causatives reject NPs (29b) but allow CPs (29c). The acceptability of CPs is a distinctive feature of Spanish, as opposed to English, French or Italian, and has been interpreted as a sign that in this language *hacer* (‘to make’) and the infinitive have a lesser degree of syntactic fusion than in others (cf. Soares da Silva 2012; Vivanco 2019).

- (29) a. Macarena hizo jugar a Luis.  
 Macarena made play to Luis  
 ‘Macarena made Luis play’  
 b. \*Macarena hizo juego a Luis.  
 Macarena made game to Luis  
 c. Macarena hizo que Luis jugara.  
 Macarena made that Luis play.3.SG.SBJV

As for verbs of influence, while *para* (‘for’) purpose clauses allow the commutation with a CP (30b), those introduced by *a* require a controlling element within the main clause (31b) –either the subject or the object– and lack a finite variant. Furthermore, verbs of influence accept commutation with a pronoun (32):

- (30) a. Andrea<sub>i</sub> ayudó a Diana<sub>j</sub> [para Ø<sub>j</sub> ganarse su<sub>i</sub> amor].  
 Andrea helped DOM Diana for win.INF her love  
 b. Andrea<sub>i</sub> ayudó a Diana<sub>j</sub> [para que ella<sub>j/k</sub> fuese feliz].  
 Andrea helped DOM Diana for that she be.3.SG.SBJV happy  
 (31) a. Andrea<sub>i</sub> ayudó a Diana<sub>j</sub> [a Ø<sub>j</sub> cargar las cajas].  
 Andrea helped DOM Diana to carry.INF the boxes  
 b. \*Andrea ayudó a Diana [a que Ismael cargara las cajas].  
 Andrea helped DOM Diana to that Ismael carry.3.SG.SBJV the boxes  
 (32) Andrea ayudó a Diana a eso / ello.  
 Andrea helped DOM Diana to that it

*Ponerse* systematically rejects the commutation of the infinitive with a CP or a NP<sup>9</sup> (33-35), which confirms the single argument structure issue. However, it admits commutation with a pronoun, but only when the subject is animate (33d, 34d, 35d) (Carrasco Gutiérrez 2006):

- (33) a. Julia se puso a jugar.  
 Julia REFL.3.SG put.PST. to play.INF.  
 b. \*Julia se puso a juego.  
 Julia REFL.3.SG put.PST. to game  
 c. \*Julia se puso a que jugara.  
 Julia REFL.3.SG put.PST. to that play.3.SG.SBJV  
 d. Julia se puso a ello.  
 Julia REFL.3.SG put.PST. to it  
 (34) a. Se puso a nevar.  
 REFL.3.SG put.PST to snow.INF  
 b. \*Se puso a nieve.  
 REFL.3.SG put.PST. to snow.NOUN  
 c. \*Se puso a que nevara.  
 REFL.3.SG put.PST to that snow.3.SG.SBJV  
 d. \*Se puso a ello.  
 REFL.3.SG put.PST to it

<sup>9</sup> Notice that a sentence like *Vicky se puso al piano* has a locative interpretation (‘Vicky sat at the piano (to play)’).

- (35) a. La tetera se puso a silbar.  
the kettle REFL.3.SG put.PST to whistle.INF  
b. \*La tetera se puso a silbido.  
the kettle REFL.3.SG put.PST to whistle.NOUN  
c. \*La tetera se puso a que silbara.  
the kettle REFL.3.SG put.PST to that whistle.3.SG.SBJV  
b. \*La tetera se puso a ello.  
the kettle REFL.3.SG put.PST to it

According to Topor (2005), if the periphrasis rejects at least one of the commutations, it is enough reason to consider it as such. These data show, in fact, that the grammaticalisation of *ponerse* is not completely finished but, most importantly, they show that *ponerse* behaves like an auxiliary when the subject is inanimate or impersonal and like an influence verb otherwise. Notice that the appearance of inanimate and impersonal subjects in this construction did not occur until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to Comer & Enghels (2017), so they themselves mean that the construction is more grammaticalised. Animate subjects, however, seem to partially resist grammaticalisation.

In turn, *poner* exhibits a more uniform behaviour, disallowing all commutations,<sup>10</sup> regardless of animacy –notice that meteorological verbs are not found in this construction–:

- (36) a. Macarena puso a Luis a bailar.  
Macarena put.PST. DOM Luis to dance.INF.  
b. \*Macarena puso a Luis a tango.  
Macarena put.PST DOM Luis to tango  
c. \*Macarena puso a Luis a ello  
Macarena put.PST DOM Luis to it  
d. \*Macarena puso a Luis a que bailara.  
Macarena put.PST DOM Luis to that dance.3.SG.SBJV
- (37) a. Nerea puso el agua a boil.  
Nerea put.PST the water to boil.INF  
b. \*Nerea puso el agua a ebullición.  
Nerea put.PST the water to boiling.NOUN  
c. \*Nerea puso el agua a ello.  
Nerea put.PST the water to it  
d. \*Nerea puso el agua a que hirviera.  
Nerea put.PST the water to that boil.3.SG.SBJV
- (38) a. Este libro nos puso a pensar.  
this book us put.PST to think  
b. \*Este libro nos puso a pensamiento.  
this book us put.PST to thinking.NOUN  
c. \*Este libro nos puso a ello.  
this book us put.PST to it  
d. \*Este libro nos puso a que pensáramos.  
this book us put.PST to that think.1.PL.SUBJV

<sup>10</sup> Again, *poner la comida al fuego* has a locative meaning ('to put the food on the fire').

These data are not only surprising because *poner* behaves more like a periphrasis than *ponerse*, but also because it rejects the commutation with a CP, unlike analytic causatives, despite having a complex argument structure. In this sense, *poner* seems closer to verbs of influence, with an infinitive controlled by the direct object of the main verb.

#### 4.2 Interrogatives

Auxiliary verbs cannot be interrogated without the main verb –which must be replaced by *hacer* (‘to do / to make’)– because they constitute a unit (39). This is one of those diagnosis giving positive results with other non-periphrastic constructions, such as analytic causatives (40), but it fails with verbs of influence because they select a true embedded structure (41).

- (39) ¿Qué debe \*(hacer) Julia?  
 what must do Julia  
 ‘What must Julia?’
- (40) ¿Qué le hizo \*(hacer) Macarena a Luis?  
 what him made do Macarena DOM Luis  
 ‘What made Macarena Luis?’
- (41) ¿A qué obligó Andrea a Diana?  
 to what forced Andrea DOM Diana

Once more, *ponerse* shows a mixed behaviour: it can be independently questioned only when the subject is animate (Carrasco Gutiérrez 2006):

- (42) ¿A qué se ha puesto Luis?  
 to what REFL.3.SG. has put Luis
- (43) \*A: -¿A qué se ha puesto hoy? B: -A nevar.  
 to what REFL.3.SG. has put today to snow
- (44) A: -\*¿A qué se ha puesto la tetera? B: - A silbar.  
 to what REFL.3.SG. has put the kettle to whistle

On the other hand, *poner* cannot be interrogated without the infinitive. Nine out of ten informants find (45-47) ungrammatical unless they are interpreted as echo questions or a contrastive context is added:

- (45) \*¿A qué puso Macarena a Luis?  
 to what put.PST Macarena DOM Luis
- (46) \*¿A qué puso Nerea el agua?  
 to what put.PST Nerea the water
- (47) \*¿A qué nos puso este libro?  
 to what us put.PST this book

Once again, the two *poner*-constructions differ and it is the *se*-less variant the one that behaves more like a periphrasis –although, in this case, it is also behaving like analytic causatives–. For the second time, *ponerse* works like a verb of influence when the subject is animate, and like a periphrasis when it is not.

#### 4.3. Cleft sentences

The unit formed by the auxiliary and the main verb in a periphrasis cannot be severed in a cleft sentence (48). This test, like the previous one, also applies to analytic causatives (49). Verbs of influence can, on the contrary, participate of cleft sentences, as expected (50):

- (48) \*Lo que debe Julia es estudiar, no trabajar.  
 it what must Julia is study not work  
 ‘What Julia must is study, not work’
- (49) \*Lo que Macarena hizo a Luis fue trabajar, no estudiar.  
 it what Macarena made DOM Luis was work not study  
 ‘What Macarena made Luis was work, not study’
- (50) A lo que obligó Andrea a Diana fue a cargar las cajas.  
 to it what forced Andrea DOM Diana was to carry the boxes

In this occasion, the two *poner*-constructions show a similar behaviour: the acceptability is unclear, but there is no robust ungrammaticality:

- (51) a. ?A lo que se puso Luis fue a trabajar.<sup>11</sup>  
 to it what REFL.3.SG put.PST Luis was to work  
 b. \*A lo que se puso fue a nevar.  
 to it what REFL.3.SG put.PST was to snow  
 c. ?A lo que se puso la tetera fue a silbar.  
 to it what REFL.3.SG put.PST the kettle was to whistle
- (52) a. ?A lo que puso Macarena a Luis fue a trabajar.  
 to it what put.PST Macarena DOM Luis was to work  
 b. ?A lo que puso Nerea el agua fue a hervir.  
 to it what put.PST Nerea the water was to boil  
 c. ?A lo que nos puso este libro fue a pensar.  
 to it what us put.PST this book was to think

These tests confirm that *ponerse* is more grammaticalised with impersonal subjects and also that *poner* is more grammaticalised than true lexical verbs of influence.

#### 4.4. Clitic climbing

The limits between two verbs must be transparent for clitic climbing to happen. This phenomenon is typically found in periphrasis (53) and restructuring structures (54), but not in other verb sequences that do not constitute a unit, such as the one formed by a verb of influence and its infinitive (55), where only the pronominalised direct object of the main verb may appear before it (55b):

- (53) a. No puedo verlo.  
 not can see.it.ACC  
 ‘I cannot see it’  
 b. No lo puedo ver.  
 not it.ACC can see

<sup>11</sup> García Fernández et al. (2006) consider it ungrammatical when the subject is not human and doubtful otherwise.

- (54) a. Cristina hizo leer *Peter Pan* a los niños.  
Cristina made read Peter Pan to the kids  
b. Cristina les hizo leerlo.  
Cristina them.DAT made read.it.ACC  
c. Cristina lo hizo leer a los niños.  
Cristina it.ACC made read to the kids  
d. Cristina se lo hizo leer.  
Cristina them.DAT<sup>12</sup> it.ACC made read
- (55) a. Andrea obligó a Diana a leer *El Principito*.  
Andrea forced DOM Diana to read the little.prince  
b. Andrea la obligó a leerlo.  
Andrea her.ACC forced to read.it.ACC  
c. \*Andrea lo obligó a leer a Diana.  
Andrea it.ACC forced to read DOM Diana  
d. \*Andrea se lo obligó a leer.  
Andrea her it forced to read

This test is not useful with *ponerse* because no reflexive periphrasis allows clitic climbing (García Fernández et al. 2006):

- (57) a. Vicky se puso a ver *Pulp Fiction*.  
Vicky REFL.3.SG put.PST to watch Pulp Fiction  
b. \*Se la puso a ver.  
REFL.3.SG it.ACC.F put.PST to watch

The *se*-less *poner*, however, also blocks clitic climbing, so that it behaves, once again, like a verb of influence –compare (55) to (57)–:

- (57) a. Cristina puso a las niñas a leer *Peter Pan*.  
Cristina put.PST DOM the girls to read Peter Pan  
b. Cristina las puso a leerlo.  
Cristina them.ACC.F put.PST to read.it.ACC  
c. \*Cristina lo puso a leer a las niñas.  
Cristina it.ACC put.PST to read DOM the girls  
d. \*Cristina se lo puso a leer.  
Cristina them it put.PST to read

#### 4.5. Passives

A crucial difference between periphrasis and analytic causatives is that only the former can build passives (58) while the latter disallows them either because the *causee* is not the internal argument of neither the infinitive nor *hacer* (59a-b), or because it competes with the external argument of *hacer* for the subject position (59c). The internal argument of the infinitive can marginally become the subject of a passive in Italian and Spanish (59d-e). The same contrast applies in the case of impersonal *se*-passives (58b *versus* 59f):

- (58) a. El libro debe ser publicado.  
the book must be.INF published

<sup>12</sup> In Spanish *se* is the allomorph used for dative clitic *le* when it appears next to an accusative clitic.

- b. Se debe publicar el libro.  
REFL.3.SG must publish.INF the book
- (59) a. \*Kafka fue hecho escribir.  
Kafka was made write.INF
- b. \*Kafka fue hecho publicar el libro (por Max Brod).  
Kafka was made publish.INF the book by Max Brod
- c. \*Max Brod hizo el libro ser publicado.  
Max Brod made the book be.INF published
- d. ?El libro fue hecho publicar en 1925.  
the book was made publish.INF in 1925
- e. El paquete fue hecho llegar al ministro.  
the parcel was made arrive.INF to.the minister
- f. \*Se hicieron publicar los libros.  
REFL.3.SG made.3.PL publish.INF the books

As for verbs of influence, it is possible to passivise their direct object (60a), but not the direct object of the infinitive (60b) unless the infinitive is the passive form (60c); in other words, the finite verb and the infinitive do not constitute a unit and do not passivise together –unlike periphrasis–, but it is possible for the finite verb to embed a passive clause –unlike causatives where the monoclausal structure prohibits that–.

- (60) a. Diana fue obligada a leer el libro.  
Diana was forced to read.INF the book
- b. \*El libro fue obligado a leer / a ser leído  
the book was forced to read.INF to be.INF read
- c. Andrea ayudó a Diana a ser escuchada.  
Andrea helped DOM Diana to be.INF listened

Once more, the test is not valid for *ponerse*, since all reflexive periphrasis disallow passives (García Fernández et al. 2006):<sup>13</sup>

- (61) \**Pulp Fiction* se puso a ser vista.  
Pulp Fiction REFL.3.SG put.PST to be.INF seen

In turn, *poner* behaves exactly like analytic causatives in this respect, establishing a strong contrast with periphrasis on the one hand and verbs of influence on the other. Notice that (62b), compared to (60a), is unexpected if we think about *the kids* as the direct object of *poner*.

- (62) a. \*El libro fue puesto a leer.  
the book was put to read.INF
- b. \*Los niños fueron puestos a leer el libro.  
the kids were put to read.INF the book
- c. \*Cristina puso el libro a ser leído.  
Cristina put the book to be.INF read

<sup>13</sup> This may have something to do with the external argument restriction on subjects described in (6-7).

This means, once again, that *poner* is more grammaticalised than lexical verbs of influence but, crucially, it also means that the direction of this grammaticalisation might not be that of auxiliary verbs but that of causative verbs.

## 5. Conclusions

We have refined the properties of *<ponerse a + infinitive>* and its relation to *<poner something / someone a + infinitive>*, which had been ignored over the years. Despite the fact that today one is a periphrasis and the other is not, they share certain semantic and syntactic properties due to the fact that they were once a single construction.

Even though all *ponerse*-constructions are verbal periphrasis, according to the data in section 4, grammaticalisation has only been completed for inanimate and impersonal subjects, with which the construction behaves like a true periphrasis, giving positive results to all syntactic tests. This kind of subjects was not used with *ponerse* until the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Comer & Enghels 2017), so they are themselves a step in the grammaticalisation process and can be considered an evidence of the reanalysis of the verb's valency: *ponerse* can only take inanimate and, above all, impersonal subjects if *se* is no longer interpreted as a coreferential argument.

On the other hand, with animate subjects *ponerse* is still resisting full grammaticalisation as an auxiliary verb; it behaves to some extent like a verb of influence, which is the diachronic step it gave before taking the periphrasis path. It was in that step when *ponerse* got its causative-inchoative meaning, which is preserved today and which is responsible for the semantic restrictions on the subject and on the *aktionsart* of the infinitive. It is important to notice that this specific causative-aspectual meaning is exclusive of *poner*-constructions, since true verbs of influence, causative verbs and auxiliary verbs do not have it.

*<Poner something / someone a + infinitive>* behaves like a verb of influence with regard to the preposition *a*, case marking, and the blocking of clitic climbing. As we have said, this was most likely the beginning of its diachronic evolution; however, today *poner* is more grammaticalised than a lexical verb of influence, which is why it rejects commutation, independent interrogation and independent focalisation, behaving like an auxiliary or a causative verb. Although this is an ongoing change whose specific direction is difficult to predict, the passive data suggest that *poner* is moving towards causative verbs like *hacer*. This would mean a strong syntactic change from a structure where the direct object controls the embedded infinitive into a construction where the infinitive and *poner* restructure together.

To conclude, *poner*-constructions are just one more example that the limits between grammatical categories are not clear-cut but must be understood as a *continuum*. *Poner*-constructions challenge all limits among categories: first they underwent a change from a lexical meaning –locative verb– to another –verb of influence– and then they turned into grammatical elements: *ponerse* became a true auxiliary verb while *poner* is now in a semi-functional state, sharing properties of lexical and grammatical items at the same time.

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