Anticausatives and Phase Extension

Anticausative verbs in many languages appear with a reflexive marker (1). I argue that the reflexive marker appears as a result of the phase properties of the clause. I adopt a familiar structural representation for the anticausative in which there is a causative light verb $v$ that takes a small clause complement interpreted as the resultant state of the event (Schäfer 2007 and others). I follow den Dikken (2006) and consider that a small clause contains a head $R$ that relates the small clause predicate to the subject. Here, the verbal Root forms the small clause predicate, with the internal argument $l\text{'image}$ (the derived subject) forming the subject of this small clause. In (1), I consider that the verbal prefix $a$- is the relator head and thus appears as the head of RP (2).

In addition, I follow den Dikken (2006) and consider that the RP small clause defines a phase. In the creation of the anticausative verb, the relator head $a$- and the verbal Root $\sqrt{\text{grand}}$ move as a complex head to the light verb $v$. Den Dikken (2006) considers that movement of the phase head $R$ up the tree results in phase extension; here phase extension extends the phase from RP to vP, making vP a phase. As a result of phase extension, the small clause subject (the internal argument) can no longer move to the specifier of TP because of the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC) (Chomsky 2001). Since this NP is now in the domain of the head of a vP phase, the PIC prevents a syntactic relation from being established between a head $T$ outside the vP phase and the NP in the domain of the phase head $v$. Thus, the NP cannot have its case features valued and also move to the specifier of TP (3).

Instead, there is an alternative derivation in which the reflexive is merged in the subject position of the small clause RP, with the NP merged in the specifier of vP. The NP and the reflexive would be co-indexed, allowing the NP to be interpreted as the subject of the small clause. With the NP in the specifier of vP, the PIC is no longer a problem, since the NP is no longer in the domain of the phase head but its specifier. In addition, the reflexive clitic can then move via head movement up the tree to T, with no violaton of the PIC (4).

This analysis can explain Labelle’s (1992) observation that anticausative verbs prefixed with $a$- always take the reflexive while their prefix-less counterparts do not (compare (5) and (1)). The verbs $s\text{'agrandir}$ and $\text{grandir}$ form a minimal pair, as do $s\text{'assécher/sécher}$ (to dry), $s\text{amaigrir/maigrir}$ (to thin) etc. Those verbs without the prefix lack a small clause structure because they lack the R head $a$-; thus, there is no phase boundary between T and the internal argument NP and no impediment to raising the NP. The verbal root combines directly with the light verb $v$ (7). No reflexive is needed here.

Also, this analysis can explain the contrast in Slavic in which anticausatives appear with a reflexive marker (8b) but the similar ‘accusative/unaccusative’ construction lacks the reflexive marker (8a) (Lavine and Freidin 2002, Markman 2003, Harves 2004). With the anticausative, the T agrees with the derived subject and this NP has nominative case. Thus, T must establish a syntactic relationship with the internal argument, value its case features and attract it to its specifier. The reflexive is needed because the NP must be generated in the specifier of vP to circumvent the PIC, with the reflexive as the small clause subject (9a). With the ‘accusative/unaccusative’, the NP has accusative, not nominative, case and T does not agree with the subject. Thus, T does not establish a syntactic relationship with the internal argument. I argue that the head $v$, not T, establishes a syntactic relationship with the NP in RP and values its case features, attracting this NP to its specifier (see also Markman 2003). No violation of the PIC occurs because, after the R head and the verbal Root move to $v$ and phase extension applies, RP is no longer a phase. Thus, there is no phase boundary crossed when $v$ establishes a relationship with the NP in RP. Since the NP can be generated in the specifier of the small clause RP, there is no need for the reflexive (9b). The light causative verb $v$ differs in the anticausative and the accusative/unaccusative because the later, but not the former, can value case features and is associated with an implicit causer argument. As Markman (pc) explains, the anticausative means the event happened on its own while the ‘accusative/unaccusative’ construction means that some force caused the event to happen.

This analysis treats the anticausative construction as syntactically but not semantically transitive, as in Schäfer 2007, Sæbø 2006 and others, in contrast to those analyses in Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995, Chierchia 2004, Koontz-Garboden 2006 and others, in which the construction is semantically transitive.
Examples

(1) a. L’image s’agrandit
    The picture made bigger
    The picture got bigger.

b. *L’image agrandit.
   the picture widen
   The picture is becoming wider.

(2) \[ [TP \quad T \quad v \quad [RP \quad [NP \quad l’image] \quad [R \quad a \sqrt{\text{grand}}]]]) \]

(3) *
\[ [TP \quad T \quad a-\sqrt{\text{grand}}-v \quad [RP \quad [NP \quad l’image] \quad [R \quad a-\sqrt{\text{grand}}]]]) \]

(4) \[ [TP \quad [NP \quad l’image], \quad se-T \quad [v \quad a-\sqrt{\text{grand}}-v \quad [RP \quad se, \quad [R \quad a-\sqrt{\text{grand}}]]]) \]

(5) a. Marie a grandi
    Marie has grown
    Marie has grown.

b. *Marie s’est grandi.

(7) \[ [TP \quad [NP \quad Marie] \quad T \quad [v \quad \sqrt{\text{grand}}] \quad [NP \quad Marie]] \]

(8) a. Podvaly zatopilo livnem
    Basements ACC flooded [-AGR] downpour INST
    Basements got flooded in the downpour.

b. Podvaly zatopili-s’ livnem
    Basements NOM flooded PL-REFL downpour INST
    Basements flooded in the downpour.

(9) a. anticausative
    without reflexive *
\[ [TP \quad T \quad R-\sqrt{\text{zatopil}}-v \quad [RP \quad [NP \quad podvaly] \quad [R \quad R-\sqrt{\text{zatopil}}]]]) \]

    with reflexive
\[ [TP \quad [NP \quad podvaly] \quad T \quad [v \quad R-\sqrt{\text{zatopil}}-v \quad [RP \quad sja, \quad [R \quad R-\sqrt{\text{zatopil}}]]]) \]

    b. accusative/unaccusative
\[ [TP \quad T \quad [NP \quad podvaly] \quad R-\sqrt{\text{zatopil}}-v \quad [RP \quad podvaly] \quad [R \quad R-\sqrt{\text{zatopil}}]]]) \]