

Impersonals with Passive Morphology

Francisco Ordóñez and Esthela Treviño
SUNY-Stony Brook and UAM-Iztapalapa

1. Introduction

Impersonal SE constructions in Spanish, like examples in (1a), are quite common, but their passive counterparts like (1b) are clearly ungrammatical:

- (1) a. SE castigó a los niños con dureza.
SE punished to the children with harshness
b.*SE fue/fueron castigado(s) (a) los niños con dureza
SE was/were punished(pl) (to) the children with harshness

The ungrammaticality of (1b) is the expected state of affairs if one assumes that the clitic SE takes up the nominative case, and there is no source to case-mark the object, since Spanish passive participle verbs do not assign accusative case.¹ Nevertheless, the examples in (2a) and (3) are problematic for such a theory; these are cases where impersonal SE co-occurs with a periphrastic passive, and in which the theme object is present. For instance, compare (2a) with its non-passive counterpart in (2b). Sentences like (2a) and (3) have the following configuration, [...SE – Dat cl(goal) – PERIPH. PASS – DP(theme)].

- (2) a. por cuestiones de papeleos **se me fue denegada la visa.** SE + PERIPH. PASSIVE
because issues of red tape SE to-me was denied-PASS the visa
(<http://www.computrabajo.com.co>)
b. por cuestiones de papeleos **se me negó la visa.** REGULAR IMPERSONAL-SE
because issues of red tape SE to-me denied the visa.
- (3) Si por ventura traéis alguna doncella que vender, **se os será** muy bien pagada. (Cervantes)
If by chance you-pl.bring some maiden to sell, SE to-you will.be very well payed-PASS

The explanation in terms of case given above for (1a vs. 1b) is unavailable for these examples. Actually, matters become more intricate, when we contrast (1a vs. 1b) with very similar pairs like (4a vs. 4b). Observe that (4b) is attested and grammatical (see section 3), unlike (1b).²

- (4) a. ya todas las cosas con las que **se le acusó** a Jorge del Castillo...
already all the things with which SE to-him accused to jorge del castillo...
b. ya todas las cosas con las que **se le fue acusado a jorge del castillo** ya fueron cubiertas
already all the things with which SE to-him was accused-PASS to jorge del castillo already
were covered (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4G3k-kevcE>, comment by minu328)

¹ We should mention that there is a type of adjectival sentences in Spanish that do appear with the copula:

- i. **Se es** castigado en las escuelas privadas.
SE be-hab-3sg punished in the schools private

These sentences represent a different type of construction; for instance, unlike true passives, they receive a generic interpretation (i) vs. (iia); secondly, these sentences disallow the expression of the object, as in (iib);

- ii. a. *Se fue castigado en las escuelas privadas.
b. *Se fue/fueron castigado(s) (a) los niños en las escuelas privadas.

SE be-past-3sg/be-past-3pl punished(pl) (to) the children en the schools private

² All examples cited in this article are quoted verbatim.

Although the existence of sentences like (2a), (3), and (4b) has been occasionally acknowledged by certain grammarians (e.g., Cuervo 1874; Mendikoetxea 1999), these cases have been dismissed as resulting from some sort of “contamination” between an impersonal-*se* passive and a periphrastic passive. In this paper we will show, however, that this is not an isolated phenomenon; what we will call *Impersonal Periphrastic Passive* constructions (ImpPP hereafter), are not only common in Spanish but are also found in other languages. For instance, Icelandic has been found to have an analogous construction, (dubbed in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002 “the new impersonal”), and so has Irish (Noonan 1994, 2004); perhaps the best known parallel to this type of sentences relates to the *no/to* Slavic construction (Blevins, 2003; Kibort, 2001; Lavine 2005, Lavine and Franks, 2008, among others); and most recently, Sakha –a Turkic language– has been shown to display passives with accusative arguments (Baker and Vinokurova 2009),³ exhibiting parallel properties to the other languages mentioned. We will argue that what is common to all these languages, including Spanish, is that in spite of the passive morphology, there is a syntactically active agent along with the nominal patient-object argument. Due to space limitations, and the complexity of the Spanish data, we will not be able to go into any detail concerning the various languages referred to; we will, however, show the striking parallel between Spanish and these other languages in regards to the particular relevant properties that configure ImpPPs.

2. Icelandic and Irish parallels with Spanish

From the comparison of (2a) vs. (2b) and (4a) vs. (4b), it can be observed that the presence or absence of the periphrastic passive does not alter the mapping of the object. For instance, in (4b) it shows a prepositional *a*, as in a regular active. This is a rather unusual state of affairs if one assumes that periphrastic passives change argument structure and trigger object-to-subject promotion. Languages like Icelandic and Irish exhibit similar properties: a morphological periphrastic passive; impersonal morphology on these passive sentences; and a nominal argument in the object position with accusative, dative or genitive case, i.e., the standard case such arguments would get in a regular active sentence. In other words, these languages have an impersonal form in passive sentences with no object-to-subject promotion. Thus, in Icelandic, the passive participle emerges in the neuter form, which is taken to indicate an impersonal reading; compare (5a) with the regular passive in (5b).

- (5) a. Það-*EXPL* var lamið-*neut.sg stúlkuna-f.sg.ACC* í klessu.
 Expletive was badly beaten the.girl in a.mess
 b. *Stúlkun-NOM* var lamið-*f.sg.NOM* í klessu.
 the.girl was badly beaten in a.mess **Nom-pass**
(Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002, p. 98)

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) show that the Icelandic construction in (5a) is innovative; they offer a geographical distribution of users of the ImpPP, and show that adolescents versus adults, are by far the more frequent users of the construction. A most interesting finding of Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s study, is that innovative speakers consistently preferred dative objects over accusative ones, an observation the authors were unable to elucidate. Nevertheless, they do speculate that since innovators judged the construction more acceptable if the object was [+human], animacy may be playing a significant role.⁴ They noted, however, that morphological case did not seem to be a decisive factor.

As for Irish, traditional grammarians already noted what is known as the *autonomous* form: the verb stem shows the autonomous inflection for all tenses; when applied, the agent-subject appears suppressed, and the object remains as such, with the case marking that it normally takes in an active

³Actually, the paper cited acknowledges the work in Vinokurova (2005) where the author discusses the passive+acc sentences.

⁴Likewise, Maling (2002) shows an increase in dative objects in Icelandic; in monotransitive governing dative verbs, most of the patient-like arguments are animate ([+human]) and appear in the dative.

personal sentence. When the autonomous form co-occurs with a passivized verbal form, as in (6), there is no object-to-subject promotion either, and the object conserves its case marking.

- (6) a. Bhíothas ag bualadh Thomáis.
was.IMP at hit.NV Thomas.GEN
b. Bhí Seosam ag bualadh Thomáis. **Nom-pass**
was Joseph at hit.NV Thomas.GEN (Noonan 1994: 289)

Regrettably, we do not have information on whether the ImpPP is a widespread phenomenon or a restricted one; curiously enough, McCloskey (2007) does not include in his work data such as that given in (6a) above. The question is relevant because, as has been the case in Spanish, the constructions under investigation might seem like isolated cases. Judging from the fact that different languages appear to have developed the ImpPP innovation, we assume that some generalizations may be uncovered to account for the phenomenon; furthermore, traditional notions like *passive* –or passive constructions– must be re-defined. To sum up: impersonality is signaled in Spanish by the clitic *se*, in Icelandic by the neuter morphology, and in Irish by the autonomous form. In the three languages such impersonality morphemes appear in periphrastic passive sentences, and in all three languages objects surface as such; there is no object-to-subject promotion. Finally, in the three languages an agentive subject seems to be syntactically active (as demonstrated in the relevant works already cited), and a subject has indeed been suggested for the three languages, a matter to be discussed in Section 4.

3. Spanish ImpPP-Distribution and Properties

We already stated in the Introduction that periphrastic passives with impersonal-*se* have been deemed almost an aberrant formation conflating two passives. Nevertheless, it appears to be an established form; our example (3) shows that Cervantes already used it. As a matter of fact, a Google search produced entries in the thousands containing an ImpPP utterance;⁵ from our search it is plain that all Spanish varieties make use of the ImpPP. We have also gathered data from mass media, printed documents, even dissertations that confirms that this construction is actually widely used both in Latin American and Peninsular Spanish. We include here some exemplars.

- (7) con la Constitucion de 1991 *a los afrodescendientes se les fue visto* como a una fuerza politica
([http:// afrocolombianos.blogspot.com/](http://afrocolombianos.blogspot.com/)) COLOMBIA
- (8) ... por cierto **se le fue criticado** a Emilio el presidente municipal de GDL. , por imprimir
propaganda... (<http://www.tapatios.com/foros/about8966.html>) MEXICO
- (9) Pero como O'Hannah cerró Guantánamo, **se le fue entregado** a la justicia Argentina,
(<http://www.el-ndi.com.ar/2009/01/obvio-que-me-vas-recordar-pedazo-de.html>) ARGENT
- (10) **se les ha sido propuesto estudiar** la situación del aerogenerador dentro de la parcela 5
(www.zaragoza.es/contenidos/medioambiente/acta31_10_07.pdf) SPAIN
- (11) al momento de su aprehensión **no se le fue hallado** *ningún arma de fuego*
(<http://www.jca.tsj.gov.ve/decisiones/2006/octubre/>) VENEZUELA
- (12) *a Osmar Martínez se le fue absuelto* de pagar el resto de su castigo EL SALVADOR
(<http://www.elgrafico.com/index.php?cat=4&arc=allg>)

The main characteristics drawn from these, and all examples examined, are:

a) ImpPPs are used with both, monotransitive and ditransitive verbs. However, they behave differently. Therefore, these will be treated separately in subsections 3.1 and 3.2.

⁵ As an example, an *advanced search* performed in January 2010 for the structure “se les ha sido” yields, quote: “Results –... of about **12,200,000 Spanish** pages for “**se les ha sido**”. (0.11 seconds).”

b) The theme/patient may appear overtly, or covertly expressed by a null argument *pro*.

(13) Se os será bien pagada **pro**.

SE to-you-plural will be well paid.

(14) SE me fue negado **el permiso** para mi marido.

SE to-me was denied **the permit** for my husband.

c) The ImpPPs are not constrained to express genericity; they appear conjugated in all tenses unlike the adjectival predicates mentioned in footnote 1.

d) A dative clitic must always be present in all dialects of Spanish, regardless of whether it is an inherent dative or not. This clearly contrasts with regular periphrastic passives, and regular active impersonal SE sentences, in which the clitic is optional, as shown in the contrasts between the pairs in (15) and those in (16):

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| (15) a. Se *(le) fue absuelto a Osmar Martínez... | IMP |
| SE (to-him) was absolved to Osmar Martínez | |
| b. Se (le) absolvió a Osmar Martínez... | REGULAR IMPERSONAL-SE |
| SE (to-him) absolved to Osmar Martínez | |
| (16) a. Se *(le) fue otorgado el premio al francés... | IMP |
| SE (to-him) was awarded the prize to the Frenchman | |
| b. (Le) fue otorgado el premio al francés... | REGULAR PERIPH. PASSIVE |
| (To-him) was awarded the prize to the Frenchman | |

3.1. Monotransitive verbs

Examples of ImpPPs with monotransitive verbs are the following:

- (17) por cierto se *(le) fue criticado *(a) Emilio el presidente municipal de GDL...
by the way SE to-him was criticized to Emilio the president major of GDL
- (18) Se *(le) fue encarcelado y puesto en arresto domiciliario.
SE **to-him** was put in jail and house-arrest
- (19) motivo por el cual a dicha reunión **se les** fue invitado *(a)l Dr. Erazo Mañón ...a...
the reason why to such meeting SE **to-them** was invited to the Dr. Erazo M...to...
(www.metepec.gob.mx/transparencianew/AdministracionMunicipal/SecretariadelAyuntamien)

One of the properties of these examples is that the theme corresponds to a [+human] object. Such objects must be preceded by the preposition *a*, as illustrated above. More importantly, in the ImpPP, the [+human] theme must co-occur with the dative clitic in all Spanish dialects. This is true even for the Rioplatense dialect, extensively explored in Ordóñez and Treviño (2006), (2007a,b), a Spanish variety that resists dative clitics in regular active impersonal-*se* constructions. However, we have found examples with inanimate themes, and these, too, crucially require the presence of the preposition and the dative clitic, as seen in the contrast between (20a) and (20b):

- (20) a. Se **les** fue analizado **a** estos datos como casos de aplicativos; (Student paper)
SE to-them was analyzed to these data as cases of applicatives
- b. *Se fue/fueron analizado(s) estos datos como casos de aplicativos.
SE was/were analyzed(pl) these data as cases of applicatives

In this respect, the Spanish ImpPP construction differs from the analogous ones in Icelandic and Irish where the DP-object emerges with the usual morphological case it bears in an ordinary active sentence. However, as we stated in Section 2, the Icelandic data show a non-negligible percentage of

dative [+human] theme/patient objects, (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002). The schema is the following⁶:

(21) –SE – DAT-CL – PASSIVE – *a*-DP(THEME/PATIENT)

It seems to be a fact of Spanish grammar that an accusative object, be it a DP or a clitic, is absolutely barred in passive sentences. The language resorts to the dativization of an otherwise DO. The question of nominative case, and the syntactic status of the clitic *se* remain to be discussed. We delay discussion of these issues until Section 4.

3.2. Ditransitives and verbs with Clausal complements

Within ditransitive sentences, there is always a dative object, and a DP argument or a subordinate [±finite] clause.

(22) **a nuestra institución** Dominican Artist **se le** fue aprobado *el permiso* para lanzar la programación
to our institution Dominican Artist SE to.it was approved the permit to launch the programming
(http://dominicanartist.blogspot.com/2007_11_01_archive.html)

(23) Además, **se le** fue entregado **a cada vecino** *un cuadernillo* en el que se encuentran
Additionally, SE to-her/him was given to each neighbor a notebook in which SE find
(http://claramenteweb.com.ar/sitio/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=49)

(24) **a ellos** **se les** fue permitido *practicar su religion...*
to them SE to-them was permitted to practice their religion.
(<http://www.thercg.org/es/sep/ayecwthp-es.html>)

(25) **A ellos** continuamente **se les** fue dicho *que casi cualquier uso de gobierno* era
To them continuously SE to-them was said that any use of the government was...
(<http://www.thercg.org/es/sep/ayecwthp-es.html>)

In all of the examples the dative corresponds to the goal argument of the construction, in contrast to the monotransitive examples we saw previously. The schema for this configuration is the following:

(26) –SE – CL-DAT – PASSIVE – DP(THEME) – *a* DP (GOAL)
–SE – CL-DAT – PASSIVE – [±FINITE]-clause – *a* DP (GOAL)

Finally ditransitives show a special behavior when both objects are animate. In such cases, the preposition fails to appear with the theme/patient, a manifestation of the language rule that prohibits two *a*-DP arguments in the same clause:

(27) Porque como no **se le** fue entregado *el niño* cuando era pequeño **a Shier Kan**,
Because since not SE to-him was handed-over the boy when was little to Shier Kan,
(http://html.rincondelvago.com/aventuras-de-mowgli_rudyard-kipling.html)

However, it is possible that two animate arguments bearing syntactic object features co-appear, only if one of them is a first or second person clitic, as shown in the regular impersonal sentences in (28).

⁶ As an anonymous reviewer points out, this schema for languages with regular dative LE is predicted to be replicated in *laista* dialects: dialects that use the same form for dative feminine and acusative feminine. We leave for further research the implications for *laista* dialects since they involve a different clitic system not necessarily based on case, but on gender.

- (28) a. A ti sólo se **te** (goal) asignó **a** dos de los becarios (theme) para evaluarlos.
To you only SE to-you assigned to two of the scholarship holders to evaluate.them
- b. Se **me** (goal) dio a cuidar **a** estos infantes (theme).
SE to-me gave to take-care-of to those infants

The same pattern can be seen in ImpPP; notice that ambiguity may arise, as illustrated in (29). So, *to the students* could be either the goal or the theme of the commendation:

- (29) Se **me-GOAL/THEME** fue encomendado *a los mejores estudiantes-* **GOAL/THEME**.
SE to-me was entrusted to the best students

Interestingly, we have found that plural agreement on the verbal constituents in (29) renders the sentence not only grammatical, but unambiguous as well:

- (30) Se **me- GOAL** fueron-**3pl** encomendados-**3pl,m** *a los mejores estudiantes-***3pl,m-THEME**
SE to-me were entrusted to the best students

Examples like (30) demonstrate that the theme-object preceded by the preposition *a* triggers agreement on both, the auxiliary and the passive participle. This is a phenomenon commonly assumed to be non-existent in practically all the literature reviewed on Romance impersonals; nevertheless, it is pervasive in all Spanish varieties, as shown in Ordóñez and Treviño (2007a,b):

- (31) a. ¿Con qué tipo de testimonios se condenaron-**3pl** [**a** estas personas-**3pl**]? (p.47)
With what type of testimonies SE condemned [to these persons]?
(Alejandro P. Urtusuástegui y H. E. Flores, “Acteal. La otra injusticia”, *Nexos*, julio 2006.)
- b. ...desde el inicio de los disturbios se han-**3pl** detenido [**a** 398 personas-**3pl**].
since the beginning of the riots SE have detained [to 398 persons]
(*La Nación*, Argentina, 11 Nov. 2005)
- c. En la gramática generativa, se analizan-**3pl** [**a** las construcciones de doble objeto-**3pl**]
In generative grammar, SE analyze [to the double-object constructions]....
(Final term-paper, A.E., July 2006).

The agreement behavior exposed here, along with other agreement facts to be analyzed in the next section, are directly relevant for the discussion of case assignment; in particular, its role in determining whether it is a good diagnostic for valuing nominative case, (Chomsky 2001).

4. Case, agreement and the status of *se*

4.1. Agreement

In ditransitive ImpPP, when a theme/patient DP emerges it may trigger both verbal (Aux) and participial agreement, and it shows a tendency to remain postverbal. Although many sentences exhibit full agreement, examples with partial or lack of agreement are common; thus, we believe these are not performance errors. Examples (32) to (35) are sentences with full agreement; in (36) to (39) we illustrate cases with partial or lack of agreement.

i) ImpPP with Full Agreement:

- (32) Se les confía, explícitamente, esa capacidad instrumental del ordenamiento social:
se les ha-**3sg** sido confiada-**3sg,f** *una palabra pública-***3sg,f** que precede a la acción y...
(www.unp.edu.ar/noticias/noticias/colcdoriv.htm)

- (33) ...uno aprende *muchas cosas-3pl,f* que no se le han-**3pl** sido enseñadas-**3pl,f**, yo pienso que he aprendido cosas muy importantes para mi ...
(http://html.rincondelvago.com/alma_1.html)
- (34) A estos animales se les han-**3pl** sido conferidas-**3-pl,f** *habilidades-3pl,f* para comunicarse de manera particular con el hombre y otras tantas extraordinarias, lo cierto como ...
(www.delphinus.com.mx/delfines.php)
- (35) *Su respeto por el medio ambiente y el género humano-3,pl,m* también se le han-**3pl** sido reconocidos-**3pl,m** en Francia, donde le encomendaron el diseño de la Escuela Nacional
(www.universia.es/portada/actualidad/noticia_actualidad.jsp?noticia=90654)

ii) ImpPP with Partial or Lack of Agreement:

- (36) ...es UNA PLANTA-**3sg,f** que se le ha-**3sg** sido encontrada-**3sg,f** *un extenso uso terapéutico-3sg,m* a través del mundo, (*El Buscador*, November 2006, p.36)
- (37) así como las damas invitadas fueron recibidas por guapas edecanes y se le fue-**3sg** entregado-**3sg,m** *una rosa-3sg,f* a cada una de las damas
(<http://proyectoinformativo.spaces.live.com/> Proyecto Informativo Veracruzano)
- (38) ...y propaganda política en donde invierten *los 696 mil 683 pesos-3pl,m* que se les fue-**3sg** aprobado-**3sg,m** para sus gastos de precampañas.
(http://rotativo.com.mx/reginacantu/cuatro_politicos_cuatro_ideas_en_queretaro/52.html)
- (39) que *el señor Pedro Castillo-3sg,m*, no violó LA NORMA PENAL-**3sg,f** por la que se le está-**3sg** siendo juzgada-**3sg,f**, es decir,
(www.clavedigital.com/ktmlite/files/uploads/Progreso/Recurso%20Pedro%20Castillo.doc)

The cases that illustrate lack or partial agreement make evident that there seems to be a high degree of confusion as to which DP should be the trigger of agreement features on the auxiliary verb and/or on the participial constituent. For instance, the examples (36) and (39) show that the true trigger, the DP highlighted in italics, is not the actual nominal prompting such features on the participial. In these examples, the phrases appearing in small caps are the actual triggers; in (36) and (39) the head of the relative clause sets off the agreement process. On the other hand, in examples like (40) below, the verb shows default third person agreement; the object is interpreted as an event rather than as a plurality of objects. There are certain classes of verbs, indeed, that may favor this interpretation (among others, certain verbs of saying). Thus, in this type of examples, agreement is sparked off by a semantic effect.

- (40) a los gobiernos ...se les ha-**3sg** sido asignado-**3sg,m** las funciones-**3sg,f** administradora, supervisora...
to the governments SE to-them has been assigned the functions, administrative, supervising
(http://www.tc.gob.pe/notas_prensa/nota_09_049.html)

The hardest cases to explain, though, are those offered in (30) and (31) above –(*SE-V/pPass-part-pl – a-DP-pl*)–; they are quite numerous and widespread. Of course, we might take them to indicate that, under certain conditions, DOs in Spanish –even those preceded by the preposition– may trigger verbal agreement; there is already the well-known case of existential *haber*. This may actually be the correct analysis, and if it is, we would be led to conclude that agreement is not a reliable diagnostic for nominative case marking. Thus, case assignment to the DP that induces verbal agreement in ditransitive ImpPPs, remains to be explained –see Section 4.2–. Agreement, as a grammatical phenomenon, has also to be accounted for in a new light, at least in regards to the Spanish grammar. From the data discussed here, it seems plain that the structural position that a particular argument

occupies is independent of any putative licensing condition on agreement; most revealing though, is the fact that verbal agreement may be triggered by nominative and accusative/dative objects. Thus, at the very least, agreement behaviors seem to be independent of any syntactic licensing conditions. In view of all this, we concur with the proposal that agreement is best explained as a post-syntactic phenomenon, (see, among others, McFadden 2004, and Bobaljik 2008), and independent of case assignment.⁷

4.2. Case and the status of SE

From the facts observed in the data thus far discussed, the main question is why ditransitive ImpPPs seem to behave differently from their monotransitive ImpPPs counterparts: in monotransitives the theme/patient is realized as an *a-DP* and the dative clitic is required to co-occur, unlike what we see in regular passives; this is depicted in (41a) vs. (41b). In ditransitives, the theme/patient surfaces as a DP, and ImpPPs appear to have the same syntactic realization of their arguments as regular passives, illustrated in (42a) vs. (42b). Thus, monotransitive ImpPPs induce dativization of the theme object, whereas ditransitives do not.

- (41) a. ...se **les** fue expuestos como lo que son, un Partido bravucón. *ImpPP*
 SE to-them was exposed as what they are, a bullying Party
 (Noticias MVS, C. Aristegui, Nov. 13, 2009)
- b. Fueron expuestos como lo que son, un Partido bravucón. *Nom-Pass*
 were exposed as what they are, a bullying Party
- (42) a. **Se le fueron-3pl** decomisadas-**3pl,f** varias armas-**3pl,f** al dueño de El Cubo *ImpPP*
 SE to-him were confiscated various arms to the owner of El Cubo
- b. **Le fueron-3pl** decomisadas-**3pl,f** varias armas-**3pl,f** al dueño de El Cubo *Nom-Pass*
 to-him were confiscated various arms to the owner of El Cubo

From the contrasts in (41) and (42) the immediate question is what prevents the theme/patient argument in monotransitives—as in (43)—to agree with the auxiliary and to be case-marked as nominative:

- (43) *Se fueron vistos varios alumnos
 SE were seen many students

Clearly, if nominative is assigned in (42a), we may assume that there is no other syntactic element competing for such case; the only other candidate in sight is the clitic *se*. Following Dobrovie-Sorin (1998), one could argue that *se* absorbs accusative and, as a consequence, leaves the theme/patient free to become a nominative (subject?). However, this analysis is problematic because, among other things, it does not work for monotransitive ImpPPs, since the theme object requires both the preposition *a* and the doubling dative clitic.

In order to find a suitable explanation, there are at least two matters to be taken into account. The first concerns the fact that in monotransitive ImpPPs, [\pm Anim] objects must surface preceded by the preposition. The second has to do with the syntactic nature of the clitic *se*, since it is the particle that defines the sentence as impersonal, and which is also responsible for the morphosyntactic effects observed thus far. We begin by addressing the second issue.

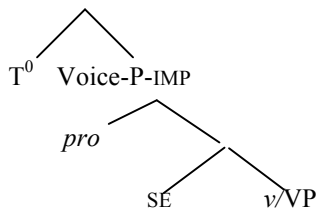
⁷ In response to one of the anonymous reviewers' concerns regarding the possibility that post-syntactic Agr in the "rather special" SE-constructions might just be a "secondary option", there are three reasons to discourage this alternative. First, SE-constructions show both the expected and the unexpected agreement patterns with theme-objects realized either as DPs or as *a-DPs*. Second, there are other contexts where unexpected Agr behaviors are observed –e.g., Roberge's (1999) 'quaint agreement' phenomena in Romance. Third, the theory loses much of its explanatory and predictive power if optional application of principles are advocated.

4.2.1. *SE*: an Impersonal Voice

The impersonal clitic *SE/SI* in Romance languages has been variously analyzed as an argumental, non-argumental clitic (Cinque 1988); as an ambiguous nominative-accusative clitic (Dobrovie-Sorin 1998; D'Alessandro 2004); as a subject clitic (Raposo and Uriagereka 1996); and even as an inflectional morpheme of little *v*, (Torrego 2008).

In this article, we propose yet another way to solving the problem of the morphosyntactic nature of impersonal *se*. First, as has been abundantly noted, in impersonal sentences the actor/agent argument is “suppressed”. In languages like Irish, the *autonomous* inflection on a (tensed) verb induces such effect; in Icelandic, the participial verb surfaces with neuter (non-agreeing) morphology. In Spanish, we have *se*, and this clitic induces default third person agreement. Moreover, we will argue that *se* directly affects the syntactic externalization of the agent, or most prominent argument. Our proposal is that impersonals in Spanish are morphosyntactically formed by the projection of an Imp-VoiceP, whose head is precisely the clitic *se*. The idea of a projection of that sort has been put forward in, e.g. Kratzer (1996), Pylkkänen (2002), Collins (2005), Schäfer (2008), among many others. Following much of Kratzer’s arguments, we assume that subjects are merged in VoiceP; we further assume that in the impersonal case, an indefinite subject *pro*⁸ appears in Spec of Voice-P; the configuration is partially depicted in (44).

(44)



The impersonal character of *SE* and the indefinite nature of the null pronominal impose an interpretation where the silent subject must be taken to mean an actor/performer or agent, independent of transitivity; (whether the indefinite pronoun is inherently [+human] (Egerland 2003, Chierchia 1995) or such semantic feature is derivative is not relevant for our present purposes). It is a known fact that impersonals of the sort being studied here appear with unergative and unaccusative verbs, including Icelandic and Irish impersonals. This is relevant in that a subset of impersonals may be formed out of passivized transitive verbs.

If Impersonal and Passive –at least– involve both a VoiceP, then in the ImpPPs we have been discussing, both VoicePs coexist in the same structure. Unlike VoiceP-IMP whose specifier is occupied by *pro*, the spec of VoiceP-PASS –in Collins (2005) work– is a landing site for the raised ParticipialP. Thus, in an ImpPPP construction, a passivized sentence may be “impersonalized”; the merging of VoiceP-IMP adds an indefinite impersonal subject. It seems that the grammar of Spanish speakers takes as input a structure containing an affected object for which an indefinite impersonal actor/performer can be spelled out. In other words, the historical derivation from an active sentence (containing its own actor/performer subject) into a passive transformation is lost, and the grammar starts anew, and is able to compute, up to the partial structure where it does so, a semantically transitive input; it then inserts a VoiceP-IMP to represent the corresponding acting subject, albeit an indefinite one. The morphosyntactic consequences are, thus, the ones we have shown: the theme/object remains as such: no object-to-subject promotion. In Spanish, accusative case-marking is unavailable with impersonal *se* sentences, generally, and the dative is instead used. We turn next to the question of whether nominative is assigned, particularly, in regards to ditransitive ImpPPs.

⁸ The merging of a generic or arbitrary *pro/PRO* in impersonal sentences has been proposed in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) for Icelandic, McCloskey (2007) for Irish, and Mendikoetxea (2008) for Spanish, although none of the authors assume a projection like Voice-P. However, Mendikoetxea (2008), and Rivero (2002) suggest that *se* is merged outside of v/VP (as high as T or higher up); Rivero (2002) further proposes that *se* in Spanish, Polish and Italian co-occurs with a null featureless NP in subject position (Spec of VP).

4.2.2. Case

As we have said, in monotransitive ImpPPs the thematic object surfaces with dative: an *a-DP* with the obligatory co-occurrence of the dative clitic. The problematic cases are those of ditransitives; the thematic object surfaces as a DP, and the goal as a Dat *a-DP*, as expected. We have also said that accusative clitics are barred in ImpPPs. Thus, we have to explain what case is assigned to the DP in ditransitives, as well as whether nominative is assigned or not to this argument. Given the fact that [\pm Anim] theme/patient objects must surface preceded by the preposition *a*, and based on data concerning the co-appearance of an object clitic and an (inherent) dative PP, (examples 29-30), we propose the following tentative explanation. In ditransitives there are two *a-DP* constituents, as schematically shown in (45) below; the one corresponding to the goal always surfaces with the dative preposition, whereas the theme/patient is marked with a phonologically null preposition.

(45) [_{VOICE-P-IMP} P_{FO} SE ... [_{VP} V [_{PP} Ø DP]-THEME/PAT [_{PP} P DP]-GOAL ...

Recall that there is a general constraint in Spanish where two dative *a-DPs* may not appear in the same (simple) sentence; thus, the language resorts to a silent preposition.

Now, where has nominative case gone? From all the facts reviewed so far, it is plainly clear that there is no argument in the structure that can bear nominative, except the indefinite *pro* in Spec of VoiceP, (44, and 45). As suggested in Mendikoetxea (2008), such *pro* lacks Φ -features, and, we suggest, is assigned default Nominative. Agreement, as we demonstrated, has no bearing on the assignment of nominative case, since *a-DPs*, as well as DPs, may trigger agreement on the verbal copula. Consequently, our proposal is that in Spanish ImpPPs, and probably in regular (non-passivized) impersonal-*se* sentences too, objects surface as such: theme/patients emerge either as *P-DPs* or as *ØP-DPs*, whereas goals always surface as dative PPs. Nominative is the default case assigned to the indefinite *pro* subject, and agreement is handled post-syntactically.

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