

**SPANISH *SE*-CONSTRUCTIONS: THE PASSIVE AND THE
IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTION**

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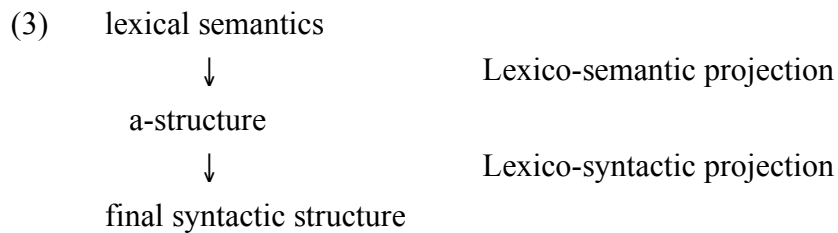
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2 The theoretical framework: Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG)

The theoretical framework underlying my analysis is Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG: Bresnan 1982, Bresnan 2001), cf. (3). A-structure functions as the interface between lexical semantics and final syntactic structure. In LFG, two levels of syntactic structure (= final syntactic structure in (3)) are distinguished, i.e., constituent structure (c-structure), accounting for constituency, and functional structure (f-structure), which models relations among the grammatical functions like subject, object, etc.:



(Bresnan 2001:303)

For the analysis given here, I will need especially LFG's linking theory, i.e. Lexical Mapping Theory (LMT). In LMT, argument mapping is mediated by argument structure (a-structure), a level of representation in which argument positions are classified by a system of distinctive features for grammatical arguments: $[\pm r]$ and $[\pm o]$.

The feature $[-r]$ refers to an unrestricted syntactic function, the kind of function which is not restricted as to its semantic role in the sense that it need not have any semantic role. The feature $[-o]$ refers to a non-objective syntactic function.

The features constrain the mapping of thematic roles onto grammatical functions. (4) shows the intrinsic features of grammatical functions (GF), (5) shows the semantic classification of a-structure roles (see Bresnan 2001:309).

(4) Grammatical Functions (GF) classified by Features

<i>GF</i>	<i>Features</i>	
SUBJ	$[-r, -o]$	r: restricted
OBJ	$[-r, +o]$	o: objective
OBJ θ	$[+r, +o]$	
OBL θ	$[+r, -o]$	

(5) Semantic Classification of A-Structure Roles for Function

patient-like roles	θ
	$[-r]$
secondary patient-like roles	θ
	$[+o]$

other semantic roles θ
 [-o]

A mapping calculus can be constructed from features, a thematic role hierarchy as in (6), and mapping principles (7), that produces the appropriate mapping of thematic roles onto grammatical functions:

(6) Thematic Hierarchy

agent > beneficiary > experiencer/goal > instrument > patient/theme > locative

(7) Mapping Principles

a. Subject roles

The thematically most prominent role classified [-o] has to be mapped onto the subject function when initial in the a-structure. Otherwise a nonagentive, unrestricted role classified [-r] is mapped onto the subject function.

b. Other roles

All other roles are mapped onto the lowest compatible function in the partial ordering (8), where the subject is the least marked.

(8) Partial Ordering of Argument Functions

SUBJ > OBJ, OBL θ > OBJ θ

Well-formedness constraints ensure that every sentence has a subject (9), and that two arguments cannot map onto the same grammatical function (10) (Bresnan 2001:311):

(9) The Subject Condition: Every predicator must have a subject.

(10) Function-Argument Bi-uniqueness

Each a-structure role must be associated with a unique function, and conversely.

The table in (11) shows the correct mapping of lexical conceptual structure (LCS) to functional structure (f-structure) for a transitive verb like *firmar* 'sign'.

(11) LCS		agent	theme
features	<i>firmar</i>	[-o]	[-r]
a-structure	'sign'	< x	y >
f-structure		SUBJ	OBJ

3 Classification of Spanish *se*-constructions

Before analyzing the passive and impersonal *se*-constructions in detail, I would like to give a list of the main uses of the Spanish reflexives. There are large differences in how reflexive constructions are classified, depending on the classification criteria as well as the theoretical frameworks. Subsequently, I will follow more or less the classification given in Kaufmann (2004).

The main uses are those in (12): the reflexive/reciprocal (a), the decausative (b), the middle (c), the causative (d), the passive (e), the aspectual (f), and the impersonal (g)

- (12) a. Juan se afeita. / Juan y Pedro se afeitan. *reflexive/*
Juan REFL shaves.SG / Juan and Pedro REFL shave.PL *reciprocal*
'Juan shaves.'
'Juan and Pedro shave each other.'
- b. El barco se hundió. *decausative*
The boat REFL sink.PAST
'The boat sank.'
- c. Este libro se lee fácilmente. *middle*
This book REFL reads easily
'This book reads easily.'
- d. Juan se afeita en la barbería. *causative*
Juan REFL shaves in the barber's
'Juan has himself shaved at the barber's.'
- e. Se firmó la paz. *passive*
REFL sign.PAST the peace
'The peace contract was signed.'
- f. Juan se durmió. *aspectual*
Juan REFL sleep.PAST
'Juan fell asleep.'
- g. Se invitó a todos los empleados. *impersonal*
REFL invite.PAST to all the employees
'All employees were invited.'

4.1 The passive *se*-construction

The passive *se*-construction can only be derived from transitive verbs, and it is only available in the third person. In contrast to the periphrastic passive in (16a), the reflexive passive cannot be used when the agent of the action is mentioned (16b):

- (16) a. Los contratos fueron firmados por el futbolista. *periphrastic*
The contracts were signed by the soccer player *passive*
'The contracts were signed by the soccer player.'
- b. *Los contratos se firmaron por el futbolista. *reflexive*
The contracts REFL sign.PAST by the soccer player *passive*
'The contracts were signed by the soccer player.'

As in the periphrastic passive, the theme of the transitive verb is realized as a subject in the passive *se*-construction, see (17):

- (17) a. El futbolista firmó los contratos. 'The soccer player signed the contracts.'
agent theme
SUBJ OBJ
- b. Se firmaron los contratos. 'The contracts were signed.'
theme
SUBJ
- c. Los contratos se firmaron. 'The contracts were signed.'
theme
SUBJ

The word order with the subject placed after the verb as in (17b) is less marked in passive *se*-constructions, but (17c) is also possible.

That the agent is present on the level of LCS in passive *se*-constructions can be shown by the classical agent diagnostics, for example, by adding a purpose clause (18) or an agentive adverb (19):

- (18) Se firmaron los contratos para ganar más dinero.
REFL sign.PL the.PL contracts in order to earn more money
'The contracts were signed in order to earn more money.'
- (19) Se retrasaron las reuniones deliberadamente.
REFL delay.PL the.PL meetings deliberately
'The meetings were delayed deliberately.'

It follows from these facts that we need different passive rules for the periphrastic passive and for the reflexive passive, not only with respect to the morphological change, but also in order to account for different behaviors concerning the realization of the agent role. For the reflexive passive, I propose an operation, the Reflexive Passive Operation, that **suppresses** the [-o] feature of the agent argument, thus preventing it from being realized at functional structure. Applying the Reflexive Passive Operation gives the result in (20): the agent cannot be mapped onto functional structure. According to mapping principles, the y-argument is mapped onto the subject function.

(20)	LCS		agent	theme
	features	PRED	-	[-r]
	a-structure		-	< y >
	f-structure	REFL +	-	SUBJ

The structure shows that the agent argument is present at LCS as an implicit argument. In contrast, the Periphrastic Passive Operation **blocks** the realization of the agent argument, and it may be realized as oblique object, cf. (21):

(21)	LCS		agent	theme
	features	PRED _{pass}	[-o]	[-r]
	a-structure		< x	y >
	f-structure		(OBL)	SUBJ

Thus, the difference between the reflexive passive and the periphrastic passive comes out naturally by assuming suppression on the one hand, and blocking on the other hand. The effect is that with suppression, there is no mapping of the agent onto f-structure, whereas with blocking, the agent may be mapped onto an oblique function.

4.2 The impersonal *se*-construction

The impersonal *se*-construction can be used with many kinds of verbal predicates¹, as shown in (22). Examples include intransitive, unaccusative (22a) as well as unergative (22b), copulative (22c), and transitive (22d) predicates:

(22)	a.	Se	entra	por aquí.	<i>unaccusative</i>
		REFL	enter.PRES	by here	
		'One enters here.'			

¹ Examples are taken from Sánchez López (2002) and Butt and Benjamin (2000).

- b. En este país se duerme mucho. *unergative*
 In this country REFL sleep much
 ‘People sleep a lot in this country.’
- c. Se es feliz cuando se es honesto. *copulative*
 REFL is happy when REFL is honest.
 ‘One is happy when one is honest.’
- d. Se encontró a los alpinistas desaparecidos. *transitive*
 REFL found to the.PL mountaineer.PL disappeared.PL
 ‘One has found the missed mountaineers.’

In contrast to the passive *se*-construction, impersonal reflexive constructions do not have an overt (theme) subject, as can be seen in the examples in (23): (23c) is ungrammatical because the verb *invitaron* ‘invite.PL’ neither agrees with the direct object *a todos los empleados* ‘all employees’ nor with a possibly existing null subject.

- (23) a. El jefe invitó a todos los empleados. *active*
 the boss invite.SG.PAST to all.PL the.PL employees
 ‘The boss invited all the employees.’
- b. Se invitó a todos los empleados. *impersonal*
 REFL invite.SG.PAST to all.PL the.PL employees
 ‘All employees were invited.’
- c. *Se invitaron a todos los empleados.
 REFL invite.PL.PAST to all.PL the.PL employees

Some linguists treat the *se* of the impersonal construction as subject (for example Oesterreicher 1992, Rivero 2002 or D’Alessandro 2004), equivalent to German *man* or French *on*. However, this is in contradiction with the distributional facts shown in (24) and (25) (cf. Mendikoetxea 1999, Sánchez López 2002, Suñer 1976; 1983).

- (24) a. Ella siempre habla mucho. *active*
 she always talks much
 ‘She always talks a lot.’
- b. *Se siempre habla mucho.
 REFL always talk much

c. Siempre se habla mucho. *impersonal*
 always REFL talks much
 ‘One doesn’t talk a lot.’

(25) a. Ella no habla mucho. *active*
 She not talk much.
 ‘She doesn’t talk a lot.’

b. *Se no habla mucho.
 REFL not talk much.

c. No se habla mucho. *impersonal*
 not REFL talks much
 ‘One does not talk a lot.’

Se does not have the distribution of subject pronouns in Spanish, neither with adverbs (24) nor with negation (25). Therefore, I assume that the subject is implicit, see (26) and (27).

(26) PRO siempre se habla mucho.
 ‘One always talks a lot.’

(27) PRO no se habla mucho.
 ‘One does not talk a lot.’

I do not assume an explicit subject argument. This is in accordance with the analysis of, e.g., Otero (1986) or Campos (1989) who analyzes the implicit subject of the impersonal *se*-constructions as an empty indefinite pronoun (PRO_{indef}).

In LFG, the PRO is accounted for by the interaction between constituent structure and functional structure. The empty element is not present at c-structure, but is there as PRO in the f-structure, see (28) and (29).

(28)

SUBJ	[PRED PRO NUM SG PERS 3]
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(29) Impersonal <i>se</i> -construction		
LCS	(...)	(...)
features	(...)	(...)
a-structure	(...)	(...)
f-structure	SUBJ	(...)
c-structure	∅	

So there is no suppression or blocking in this case. However, the realization of the thematic argument is limited to a PRO.

For a transitive predicate like *invitar* ‘invite’ in a sentence like (30a) (= 23a), the active/transitive mapping structure is indicated in (31), and the impersonal mapping structure of (30b) (= 23b) can be seen in (32):

(30) a. El jefe invitó a todos los empleados. *active*
the boss invite.SG.PAST to all.PL the.PL employees
‘The boss invited all the employees.’

b. PRO Se invitó a todos los empleados. *impersonal*
REFL invite.SG.PAST to all.PL the.PL employees
‘One invited all the employees. / All employees were invited.’

(31) LCS		agent	theme
features	<i>invitar</i>	[−o]	[−r]
a-structure	‘invite’	< x	y >
f-structure		SUBJ	OBJ

(32) LCS		(agent)	theme
features	<i>invitar</i>	[−o]	[−r]
a-structure	‘invite’	< x	y >
f-structure	REFL +	SUBJ=PRO	OBJ

The subject of the impersonal sentence is PRO, and this is the agent role.

For an unaccusative verb like *entrar* ‘to enter’, for example in (33a) with an overt subject, and in (33b) with an implicit subject, we get the mapping structures in (34) and (35), respectively.

(33) a. Juan entra por aquí. *unaccusative*
 Juan enter.PRES by here
 ‘Juan enters here.’

b. PRO Se entra por aquí. *impersonal*
 REFL enter.PRES by here
 ‘One enters here.’

(34) LCS theme
 features *entrar* [-r]
 a-structure ‘enter’ < x >
 f-structure SUBJ

(35) LCS (theme)
 features *entrar* [-r]
 a-structure ‘enter’ < x >
 f-structure REFL + SUBJ=PRO

In the case of an unaccusative verb, there is only a theme argument. This argument is realized as an overt subject in the unaccusative construction, whereas it is a PRO in the impersonal construction. The *se* indicates the change of the construction.

To sum up, the interpretation of the implicit argument in the passive and impersonal *se*-constructions result from different operations or conditions on different levels of the grammar.

5 Conclusion

Consider the sentences in (36):

(36) a. Es difícil vender periódicos en un país donde se leen poco.
 is difficult sell newspapers in a country where REFL read.PL little
 ‘It is difficult to sell newspapers in a country where they aren’t read much.’

b. Es difícil vender periódicos en un país donde se lee poco.
 is difficult sell newspapers in a country where REFL read.SG little
 ‘It is difficult to sell newspapers in a country where people don’t read much.’

(Butt and Benjamin 2000)

Both sentences, (36a) and (36b), contain implicit information. However, in (36a) we have a reflexive passive with a blocked agent argument. In this case, the theme argument of transitive *leer* ‘read’ is realized as subject (*periódicos* ‘newspapers’). In (36b), there is no agreement between *periódicos* ‘newspapers’ and *lee* ‘read.SG’, so an implicit PRO-subject must be assumed.

The two different *se*-construction readings are produced on different levels of the grammar. In the case of the **passive *se*-construction** (36a), the agent argument’s [-o] feature is suppressed, thus preventing it to be mapped onto functional structure.

In the **impersonal *se*-construction** (36b), the subject is there at the f-structure level. However, it is not realized at c-structure.

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