

Deconstructing Voice

The syntax and semantics of *u*-syncretism in Spanish

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Abstract This paper focuses on a well-known pattern of systematic syncretism in Spanish *se* constructions. Detailed syntactic and semantic analyses are provided with the aim of sustaining two main theses. First, I conceive of *se* as a probe for A-movement. This probe is merged with Voice in order to satisfy a subcategorization restriction. Yet, being defective, it cannot receive a θ -role from Voice. As a probe it looks for a goal in its complement domain. If there is such a goal, then it A-moves to Spec,VoiceP, position in which it agrees with *se* and receives an additional agent θ -role from Voice, if there is one. This results in most, if not all, instances of the so-called “paradigmatic” *se* (*se* reflexives, inherent *se*, benefactive *se* and so on). There are cases in which there is no such a goal for *se*. In those scenarios, *Agree* fails and the clitic receives third person singular by default. This results in the so-called “non-paradigmatic” *se* (essentially, passive/impersonal *se*). Second, at LF, these two syntactic scenarios feed two different LF realizations. Whenever *se* has a goal with which it agrees, *se* itself is realized as a λ -abstractor, but as an indefinite variable whenever *Agree* fails, as in the case of passive/impersonal *se*. This theory dispenses, then, with particular Voice features (e.g., Active vs. Non-active) and with different types of *se* (paradigmatic vs. non-paradigmatic) but, more importantly, it does so by appealing to well-motivated restrictions on A-dependencies, namely, Activity and Minimality.

Keywords: Case, θ -roles; *se*-constructions; Spanish; syncretism

1 Introduction

The clitic *se* (or its agreeing variants: *me*, *te*, *nos*, etc.) occurs in a set of different syntactic and semantic contexts. Well-studied cases in the Spanish tradition involve the following four:

(1) **Ergative *se***

- a. La tormenta hundió al barco.
the storm sank DOM.the ship
'The storm sank the ship.'
- b. **Se** hundió el barco con la tormenta.
SE sank the ship with the storm
'The ship sank by the storm.'

(2) **Passive *se***

- a. La policía cerró las puertas para bloquear la salida.
the police closed the doors for block.INF the exit
'The police closed the doors in order to block the exit.'
- b. **Se** cerraron las puertas para bloquear la salida.
SE closed.3PL the doors for block.INF the exit
'The doors were closed in order to block the exit.'

(3) **Impersonal *se***

- a. Juan criticó a Ana.
Juan criticized DOM Ana
'Juan criticized Ana.'
- b. **Se** criticó a Ana.
SE criticized DOM Ana
'One/someone criticized Ana.'

(4) **Reflexive *se***

- a. Juan criticó a Ana.
Juan criticized DOM Ana
'Juan criticized Ana.'
- b. Ana **se** criticó.
Ana SE criticized
'Ana criticized herself.'

Yet, this pattern does not exhaust all the occurrences of the clitic *se* in Spanish. Aspectual/benefactive *se* is another well-studied case:

- (5) a. Juan comió la manzana.
 Juan ate the apple
 ‘Juan ate the apple.’
 b. Juan **se** comió la manzana.
 Juan SE ate the apple
 ‘Juan ate the apple.’

The more striking difference between both sentences is that aspectual/benefactive *se* cannot combine with bare objects:

- (6) Juan (***se**) comió pizza.
 Juan (*SE) ate pizza
 ‘Juan ate pizza.’

There is a debate whether this restriction follows from aspectual restrictions on bounded events (among many others, see [Basilico 2010](#)) or it is a restriction on inner subjects (see [MacDonald 2017b](#), who elaborates on ideas of [Cuervo 2003; 2014](#)). In [subsection 5.3](#), I will propose a benefactive analysis.

The same clitic occurs obligatorily with a subset of intransitive verbal predicates. This is the so-called *inherent se*:

- (7) a. Juan **se** quejó.
 Juan SE complained
 ‘Juan complained.’
 b. *Juan quejó.
 Juan complained
 c. *Juan lo quejó.
 Juan him/it complained

Again, the entire paradigm does not exhaust every use of the clitic *se* in Spanish, but it suffices to show what is one of my main points in this paper, namely, that these cases constitute a pattern of systematic syncretism. With [Embick \(2004\)](#), I will call this pattern *u-syncretism*, extending the use that he makes for, essentially, reflexives, unaccusatives and impersonals to all instances of *se* constructions presented so far. Such an extension is not trivial, since it includes cases in which there is an agent argument in the sentence not linked to any internal θ -role, like in (5b) or in (7a) just to mention two relevant cases.

On the proposal to be defended in what follows, the type of *u-syncretism* involved in the relevant *se* patterns is the surface manifestation of the presence of a defective category in the external argument position. Following original insights in [Embick \(2004\)](#) and, in particular, in [Pujalte & Saab \(2012\)](#), I defend the view that *se* is a syntactic expletive whose basic function is to satisfy a selectional property

of the Voice head. Unlike Pujalte & Saab (2012), who claim that *se* and its agreeing variants are inserted at PF, I contend that *se* is inserted in the syntax.¹ Conceptually, the main difference between the morphological and the syntactic views can be put in the following way: for the morphological approach, *se* syncretism is the result of the absence of a syntactic category in the standard external argument position in the syntax, whereas on the syntactic view, although deficient in a way to be explained, there *is* something in the syntax. Although it is hard to set apart both proposals on robust empirical basis, I will try to show that the syntactic approach provides a more balanced explanation of the particular behavior of impersonal/passive *se* regarding classic diagnostics for detecting the presence of syntactic material (pronominal binding, for instance). Moreover, the syntactic approach provides an interesting motivation for A-movement in Spanish, a non-trivial consequence, if correct. And finally, the syntactic approach seems to be better equipped to deal with linguistic variation in the relevant domain. At any rate, the research agenda is the same for both theories, namely, looking for a common property to *all se* constructions in Spanish. As far as I know, this project has not been explicitly developed in the Spanish generative and non-generative tradition. Recent proposals by Ormazabal & Romero (2019; 2020) share part of this agenda, but only with respect to the passive vs. impersonal *se* distinction, for which they show that it can be dissolved in favor of the same underlying configuration in the syntax, an hypothesis also defended by Pujalte (2012; 2020) and Saab (2014). Yet, a crucial difference between Ormazabal and Romero’s theory and Pujalte and Saab’s is precisely the status of *se*, i.e., the syntactic vs. the morphological approach. In this respect, as I have already advanced, I will be with Ormazabal and Romero and assume that *se* and its agreeing variants have some syntactic import. But unlike them, I will show that by “deconstructing” the formal makeup of the Voice head not only the passive/impersonal distinction can be eliminated but also the entire paradigm of *se* constructions referred so far.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I introduce the two basic theses to be defended in the rest of the paper, namely: (i) that *se* is a probe for A-movement and (ii) that depending on whether or not this probe succeeds in attracting a goal with which to agree the clitic itself is realized as a λ -abstractor or as an indefinite variable. The first thesis is technically implemented in section 3, where I show that there is robust evidence in favor of an analysis of *se* as a probe for A-movement. The evidence involves standard constraints on A-dependencies: Activity and Minimality. The theory is illustrated with reference to *se* reflexives and

¹ This is also the position taken by Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou & Schäfer (2015) and Schäfer (2008; 2017) for a subset of *se* constructions in Romance, mainly, anti-causative *se*. For reflexives, they assume a more standard approach, according to which reflexive *se* is a bound variable in object position. In section 6, I conjecture that this is probably the case for Italian, but not for Spanish.

impersonal/passive *se*. In [section 4](#), I implement the second thesis in detail, showing that whenever the clitic attracts an argument from its complement domain, the clitic is read as a λ -abstractor, but as an indefinite whenever *Agree* fails in the syntax. The broad picture is one in which there is only one *se* in Spanish. That this is the case is shown in [section 5](#), where the rest of paradigm is analyzed under the umbrella of the new theory. In [section 6](#), I briefly suggest some routes of analysis for handling some aspects of linguistic variation regarding the clitic system within Spanish and across other Romance languages. Among other things, I conjecture there that a simple assumption with respect to the formal makeup of clitics in Spanish and Italian can account in an interesting way why Spanish, but not Italian, has reflexive doubling. The final picture results in the following division in the clitic system: D-clitics and K-clitics (K = Case head projection). As far as *u*-syncretism is concerned, Spanish is a D-clitic language, i.e., a language in which the syncretic clitics are probes for A-movement, and Italian is a K-clitic language; concretely a language in which the relevant clitics are not syntactic probes, but bound anaphors. The final section contains a summary and some additional comments on the main empirical and theoretical contributions of this study.

2 On the syntactic nature of *se* and its LF import

Before entering into particular implementations, it's convenient to have a broad picture of the basic ingredients of the proposal. As I have already advanced, my research agenda is essentially the same as [Embick \(2004\)](#), namely, to have an account of *u*-syncretism. However, the pattern I am concerned with is broader since it includes cases in which an agent argument not linked to any internal θ -role is indeed present in the syntax. This could mask the "unaccusative" part of this type of syncretism. Yet, I will keep the term *u*-syncretism for two reasons, mainly. On the one hand, I would like to stress what my research agenda is about and, on the other hand, I would like to stress what *u*-syncretism is about in the sense I favor in this study; essentially, about having some sort of derived subject whenever possible. On [Embick's](#) and [Pujalte and Saab's](#) proposals, the common property behind patterns of *u*-syncretism is the absence of an external argument in Spec,VoiceP position. In the terms I favor here, the common property behind the relevant patterns of *u*-syncretism is the presence of a formally defective category in the regular external argument position. This argument is realized as *se* (or its agreeing variants). As we will see in detail, the clitic *se* does part of the job that any argument does, i.e., it satisfies subcategorization features of lexical or functional heads. But unlike regu-

lar arguments, *se* is not a θ -role receptor. This implies that the notion of *external argument* must be dissociated from the notion of *external θ -role*.

Just to give a preliminary illustration, let us consider the contrast between impersonal *se* and *se* reflexives, a contrast at the heart of *u*-syncretism.

- (8) a. Juan criticó a Ana.
 Juan criticized DOM Ana
 ‘Juan criticized Ana.’
 b. **Se** criticó a Ana.
 SE criticized DOM Ana
 ‘One/someone criticized Ana.’
- (9) a. Juan criticó a Ana.
 Juan criticized DOM Ana
 ‘Juan criticized Ana.’
 b. Ana **se** criticó.
 Ana SE criticized
 ‘Ana criticized herself.’

The common portion of structure in both cases is the presence of a defective DP (i.e., *se*) whose basic function is deleting a subcategorization [D]-feature in the Voice head ($\langle \dots \rangle =$ deleted material):

- (10) [_{VoiceP} *se* Voice[$\langle D \rangle$] [_{VP} criticar[$\langle D \rangle$] Ana]]

Now, the internal KP (KP = Case phrase projection) is interpreted as having the theme θ -role (like in (8)) or as having both the theme and the agent θ -roles (like in (9)) of the event, depending on other conditions that give rise to an impersonal or to a reflexive interpretation. The crucial ingredient is syntactic (and structural) Case. As extensively argued in Pujalte & Saab (2012; 2014), and Saab (2014; 2015), what makes the difference between these two types of sentences is the fact that the internal argument in reflexives, but not in transitive impersonals, is still active when the agent θ -role of Voice is discharged. A crucial principle of θ -role assignment is then related to Case valuation. I state this as follows:

- (11) Unvalued Case in K makes K visible for θ -assignment in the syntax.

The hypothesis in (11) is a restatement of the Visibility Condition (Chomsky 1986), according to which Case and θ -roles are closely related. In Chomsky’s original formulation Case assignment was a precondition for thematic interpretation at LF, although concrete implementations remained rather vague. In the restatement in (11), the connection between structural Case and θ -assignment is derived from the Activity Condition (Chomsky 2000; 2001), a general principle of syntactic compu-

tation that constrains the application of certain syntactic operations (e.g., *Agree*) by making reference to unvalued features. This study is in part an attempt to explicitly show how Activity connects to semantic interpretability of θ -roles at LF.

With this in mind, let us consider the reflexive and the impersonal derivations with (10) as the common underlying structure. As for reflexives, *se* merges with Voice and deletes its category feature, although it cannot receive a θ -role from Voice. Note now that the internal argument *Ana* does not get accusative Case, so it remains active and can get the external θ -role from Voice. Following Saab (2014), I further assume that Voice is a θ -role assigner only if specified with a [D]-feature, which is the case for all the constructions to be explored here.² I contend now that *se* has another crucial syntactic property, namely, it acts as a probe for A-movement. Thus, *Ana* moves to Spec,VoiceP and ends up associated with two θ -roles. This is an important difference between the present framework and Pujalte and Saab's, for whom the agreement dependency between the subject of, say, a reflexive sentence and the clitic is entirely implemented at PF. On the present theory, *se* has a set of unvalued ϕ -features and also an EPP feature, the trigger of movement. Schematically, we represent the final result as follows:

$$(12) \quad [\text{VoiceP Ana}_{[\textit{Theme-Agent}]} \textit{se} \text{Voice}_{\langle D \rangle}] [\text{VP criticar}_{\langle D \rangle} t]$$

This result in an A-dependency between *Ana*, *se* and the trace of *Ana*. Each of these elements has a particular realization at the interfaces. At PF, the *Agree* relation between *Ana* and the clitic is realized as morphological agreement, giving rise to what is known in the literature as “paradigmatic” *se* (e.g., *se*, *me*, *te*, *nos*, depending on the features of the subject). At LF, I claim that *se* is realized as a λ -abstractor, which abstracts over the trace of the moved element. As it is standard, the moved element saturates the argument the abstractor introduces. Here is a rough LF representation:

$$(13) \quad \text{LF: } [\text{VoiceP Ana}_{[\textit{Theme-Agent}]} \lambda \text{Voice} [\text{VP criticar } \textit{variable}]]$$

Note that the three elements identified in this A-dependency corresponds unequivocally to the three LF objects Heim & Kratzer (1998) assume for any A-movement chain (and other types of chains), namely, the moved argument XP, the index or the abstractor that XP movement creates, and the variable left by XP movement.

$$(14) \quad [\text{XP } [\alpha \textit{i} [\gamma \dots t_i \dots]]]$$

According to Heim & Kratzer (1998), this syntactic scenario feeds predicate abstraction at LF (Heim & Kratzer 1998: 186):

² This means that if Voice has an agent θ -role but not a subcategorization feature, it is not a thematic head. As argued in Saab (2014), this is the case of analytical passives. See also section subsection 5.4.

(15) **Predicate Abstraction Rule:**

Let α be a branching node with daughters β and γ , where β dominates only a numeric index i . Then, for any variable assignment g , $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^g = \lambda x. \llbracket \gamma \rrbracket^{g[i \rightarrow x]}$.

The difference between Heim and Kratzer's scenario in (14) and the scenario in (13) is that in the latter the abstractor (i.e., *se*) is dissociated from the movement operation and is base-generated in the external argument position. I will claim that this situation generalizes to other types of A-dependencies in Spanish, which also involves the syntactic activity of a clitic (e.g., accusative and dative clitic doubling). The empirical observation is that the presence of these clitics is the morphological counterpart of a given λ -abstractor, which is dissociated (i.e., not created by) from A-movement *per se*. Importantly, according to this theory about *se* reflexives in Spanish, the trigger of A-movement is not a θ -role in the Voice head. Such a θ -role ends up associated with the internal argument as a result of A-movement of the internal argument, but the motivation for movement is directly linked to the formal properties of *se*. This is a crucial difference with approaches that also allow for an argument to be associated to more than one θ -role, in particular, with the advocates of the movement theory of control and the movement theory of reflexivization (Hornstein 1999; 2001; Boeckx et al. 2008, among others). With this family of theories, I assume that θ -roles can be assigned both under both internal and external Merge (see Sheehan 2012), although I will leave open the possibility for a more liberal version of Θ -theory, according to which θ -roles can also be assigned under a certain distance between the thematic head and the thematic receptor (as proposed in Saab 2015). I also will keep θ -assignment restricted to the local domain of the eventive core normally instantiated by VoiceP, and not, say, to a larger domain like IP, as in Reinhart & Siloni (2005).³ This implies that a given argument can receive more than one θ -role but in the restricted domain of VoiceP in which it is merged. A conceptual motivation for this is connected to the eventive calculus. Suppose, for instance, that we allow a given K node receives more than one θ -role of the same type, say, an agent θ -role. Given the way in which the present system is designed, this would end up in a situation in which a given K head would have the following denotation, after conjunction reduction:

$$(16) \quad \llbracket K \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda e [\text{Agent}(x, e) \ \& \ \text{Agent}(x, e)] = \lambda e [\text{Agent}(x, e)]$$

By restricting θ -assignment to the same VoiceP domain, this situation is avoided. Another way of avoiding the elimination of a θ -role by conjunction reduction would

³ If some applied arguments are licensed above VoiceP, then by hypothesis they should be part of the same eventive core as VoiceP.

be restricting interpretation by phases or cycles. I will leave this particular issue of Θ -theory for future research. For the empirical realm I am concerned with here, we can stay with the more restricted view of θ -assignment. In this respect, the sole departing from the orthodox view is my explicit rejection of the ban of movement from θ -position to θ -position. As is well-known, this prohibition always remained axiomatic, i.e., it does not follow from any principled semantic or syntactic property of the system.

Coming back to reflexivization, it is worth-mentioning that I am not claiming that A-movement is the way in which reflexivization proceeds universally. Even in Spanish, we have reflexives constructed via true anaphora subject to the principle-A of the binding theory, like in the following examples:

- (17) a. Ana depende de sí misma.
 Ana depends of herself
 ‘Ana depends on herself.’
 b. Ana soñó consigo misma.
 Ana dreamed with herself
 ‘Ana dreamed with herself.’

That reflexivization is an epiphenomenon within and across languages is a largely well-known fact (see Reuland 2011 for detailed discussion). My hypothesis here is that reflexives in Spanish come indeed in essentially two ways: through *se* reflexives and through reflexive pronouns (like *sí misma*). True reflexive pronouns occur in argument position and are bound variables of a certain type. In *se* reflexives, the clitic is just an abstractor at LF and a probe in the syntax, which as such attracts the internal KP to Spec, VoiceP.

Let us turn our attention to the impersonal derivation for (10). The activity of the internal argument is at the core of the difference with reflexives. Now, the scenario is this: the internal argument has its Case already valued when the θ -role of Voice has to be assigned. Since that neither the clitic nor the inactive internal argument can be receptors of the agent θ -role, this role stays in Voice:

- (18) [VoiceP *se* Voice_[Agent, <D>] [VP criticar_[<D>] Ana_[Theme, Acc]]]

A crucial consequence of this situation is that *se*, still a probe, cannot be associated to the internal argument. Because of this *Agree* failure (Preminger 2014), the clitic receives a third person singular interpretation by default at PF. At LF, however, no interpretation problem arises because, being a pure index of the *e* type, it can saturate the agent argument that remained unassigned in Voice. The two schematic representations that follow resume what I have said with respect to the syntax and semantics of impersonal *se*:

- (19) a. Syntax of VoiceP: $[\text{VoiceP } se \text{ Voice}_{[\text{Agent}]} [\text{VP criticar Ana}_{[\text{Theme,Acc}]}]]$
 b. LF of VoiceP: $\lambda e[\text{Agent}(se, e) \ \& \ \text{Theme}(\text{Ana}, e) \ \& \ \text{Criticar}(e)]$

Broadly speaking, there are then two main theses, one regarding the syntax of *se* constructions and another one regarding the way in which LF interprets the outputs that syntax produces:

- (20) *Thesis 1 (syntax)*: *se* is a probe for A-movement.
 (21) *Thesis 2 (semantics)*: The LF realization of *se* depends on the syntactic output. Either A-movement applies in the syntax and LF receives the instruction for predicate abstraction or there is no A-movement and, as a consequence, no abstraction. If the latter is the case, *se* satisfies the individual argument Voice requires.

The rest of this paper makes explicit these two theses through concrete syntactic and semantic implementations. But before entering into such implementations, let us comment on how the present proposal handles with the rest of the paradigm, in particular, with inherent *se* sentences.

As I have already advanced, one of the main contributions of this study is that the same common property underlies in the rest of the paradigm discussed so far. Crucially, the analysis covers in a simple way sentences involving inherent *se*, so, for a sentence like (7a) the agent DP is also generated as the sister of V:

- (22) a. Juan **se** quejó.
 Juan SE complained
 b. $[\text{VoiceP } se \text{ Voice}_{[\text{Agent}, \langle D \rangle]} [\text{VP quejar}_{[\langle D \rangle]} \text{Juan}]]$

Here V subcategorizes for the object KP, although it does not θ -mark it. This implies abandoning some standard assumptions regarding the connection between subcategorization and θ -assignment, in particular, Chomsky's stipulation that "subcategorization entails θ -marking" (Chomsky 1981: 37; see also Williams 1994: 78 for another type of criticism).⁴ As I argue in section 5, once such a stipulation is abandoned, the rest of the paradigm involving "*se* constructions" can receive a uniform account.

⁴ The need for abandoning such a stipulation was originally proposed by Postal & Pullum (1988), who provided several arguments in favor of dissociating θ -assignment and subcategorization. I am thankful to a reviewer for calling my attention to Postal & Pullum's work.

3 Syntactic implementations

In this section, I will deploy a syntactic implementation for the thesis regarding the syntax of *se* constructions, repeated below:

(23) *Thesis 1 (syntax): se* is a probe for A-movement.

The first important assumption relates to the formal makeup of the clitic *se* and its agreeing variants. I assume that *se* is a minimal/maximal nominal category projecting a D(P). Its feature matrix contains unvalued ϕ -features and an EPP feature, i.e., it is formally a probe:

(24)
$$\text{D}^{min/max} \begin{bmatrix} \phi: \text{unvalued} \\ \text{EPP} \end{bmatrix}$$

Clitics like *se* contrast with full nominals, which, by hypothesis, project a KP, not a DP, and have valued ϕ -features, at least in the normal case. I will make now the crucial assumption that whenever K has unvalued Case features, K itself can be a receptor of θ -roles:

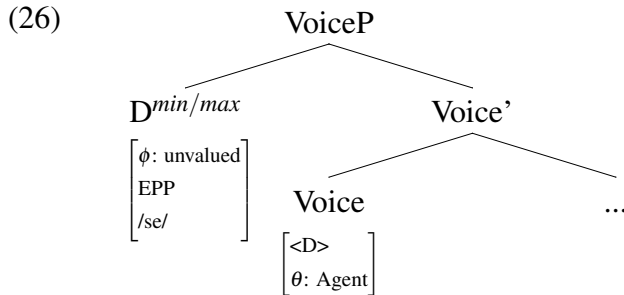
(25)
$$\text{KP} \begin{bmatrix} \text{Case: unvalued} \\ \phi: \text{valued} \\ \theta \end{bmatrix}$$

Importantly, I conceive of θ -roles as syntactic objects that are assigned by designated heads to active K projections. In other words, θ -roles are not features valued by *Agree*. Alternatively, we can think of θ -roles as being realized at some point of the syntax-LF interface by a subset of allosemy rules. In any case, what is crucial is (i) that θ -roles are syntactic elements that, depending on some structural conditions, must be assigned to K, and (ii) that, as we will see in detail in section 4, they are realized as functions from entities to event predicates at LF.

The corollary of the structural deficiency of the clitic *se* is that *se* itself cannot be a θ -role receptor, even when it merges with a θ -assigner like *Voice*.⁵ Therefore,

⁵ It is important to have in mind that this structural deficiency does not imply that these D-clitics do not receive case. In principle, I assume that they do, but in the post-syntactic component through the insertion of a dissociated K node like in [McFadden \(2004\)](#). In a Case theory containing K heads as crucial ingredients, there are also other options to consider not only for clitics but for full arguments, as well. For instance, some DPs that do not project a KP could receive some default case, as already proposed by [Bittner & Hale \(1996\)](#) for nominative arguments. Interestingly, if this were the case at least for some nominative full arguments in a subset of languages, this would impact in the semantic derivation too, since such DPs would not receive the Agent θ -role from *Voice*, which, as a consequence, would stay in *Voice* itself. The semantic realization this syntactic scenario feeds

as far as this aspect of the syntax of *se* constructions is concerned, *se* merges with Voice in order to delete a subcategorization [D]-feature in Voice, although the clitic does not receive a θ -role from it. In this respect, the common denominator of the entire *se* paradigm looks essentially like follows:



Since the clitic in Spec, VoiceP is a probe for A-movement, it looks for a suitable goal in its complement domain. Two basic scenarios may obtain: either the probe finds such a goal or it does not. In the first situation, this results in a reflexive sentence, but in an impersonal/passive one in the second one. Let us consider each scenario in turn.

3.1 The Role of Activity behind *u*-Syncretism

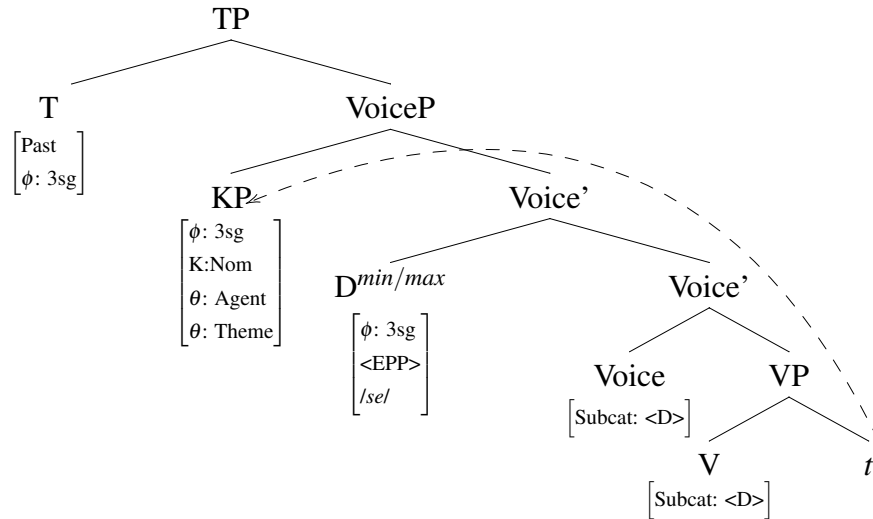
3.1.1 Scenario #1: A-movement and Agree

The syntax of a *se* reflexive sentence is similar to a transitive sentence, but with a crucial difference: in this type of reflexives, Voice does not assign/value accusative abstract Case. According to Pujalte & Saab (2012), this follows if Voice can enter the syntax with or without unvalued ϕ -features. If it has ϕ -features, then it values them through *Agree* against the internal object, like in simple transitives. If Voice is, instead, fully ϕ -defective, then there is no accusative valuation. Importantly, my general approach does not depend on this particular implementation. Other theories of Case assignment would do the same job, namely, deactivate the internal argument when there is such an argument present in the syntactic derivation. In fact, in passing, I will suggest other ways to approach this particular aspect of the theory in order to stress that I have no particular commitment with any theory of Case assignment (see also footnote 5).

would be very similar to what happens with passive/ impersonal *se*, with the difference that these DPs do have some referential import. At any rate, it is not part of the research agenda of this study to make any specific claim about the morphological case / abstract Case connection; therefore, I cannot do justice to the vast literature on this issue. My concern here is the connection between abstract Case and θ -roles, for which I do have a theory to offer.

Now, because of the formal defectiveness of Voice, the internal argument of a *se* reflexive transitive sentence, which has already received the theme θ -role from V, is active with respect to the probe that *se* instantiates. Therefore, the internal argument raises to Spec, VoiceP, deletes the EPP feature in *se* and receives an additional agent θ -role from Voice. In the following tree, I illustrate these aspects of the derivation:

- (27) a. Ana se criticó.
b.



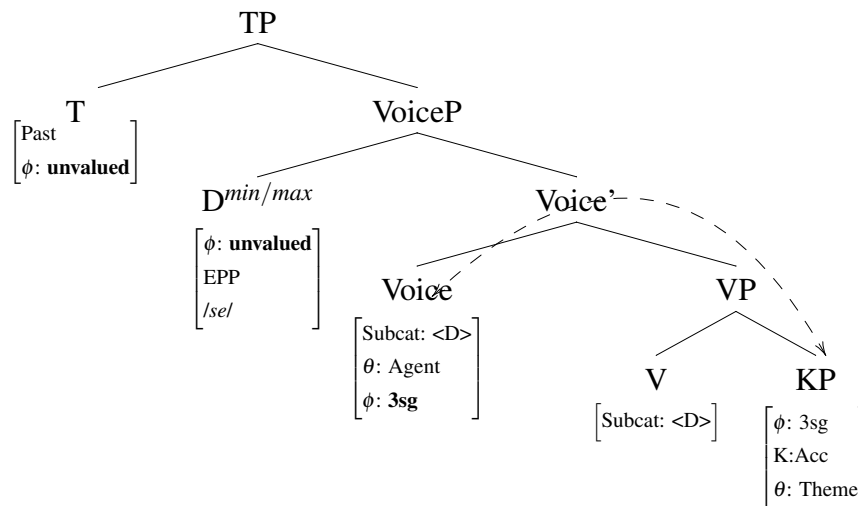
In this derivation, A-movement of the active KP to Spec, VoiceP creates a syntactic *Agree* dependency between this argument and the probe instantiated by the clitic. Thus, the clitic values its ϕ -features as third person singular. Once T is introduced into the derivation (or C, depending on assumptions about the locus of ϕ -features), it probes into its complement domain, finds KP, which is still active, and establishes an A-dependency with it. As a result of this new instance of *Agree*, T values its ϕ -features and KP receives nominative as its case value. The “visible” effects of these abstract *Agree* relations are morphological agreement between the subject, T and the clitic, and the case form of the subject (zero in this case). Importantly, this system derives all instances of the so-called “paradigmatic” *se* as the result of syntactic *Agree*. All the agreeing variants of the clitic (*me*, *te*, *nos*, etc.) obtain their features in the syntax and their surface form at PF. If *Agree* fails in the syntax, this, in turn, will result in the so-called “non-paradigmatic” *se*, i.e., impersonal/passive *se*. On this approach, there is no need for the basic division that most analyses of Spanish *se* make between the paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic types. In effect, according to the present theory, there is only one *se* in the syntax that merges with Voice, deletes its [D]-feature but, given its formal makeup (absence of K), cannot receive a θ -role. The main difference between paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic *se* relies on whether or not the probe instantiated by the clitic

succeeds attracting a full argument. As I have argued here, it does in the case of reflexive, and most cases of paradigmatic *se* (as we will see below), but it does not in non-paradigmatic *se* scenarios, to which I turn my attention now.

3.1.2 Scenario #2: *Agree* failure

Let us assume that in impersonal/passive structures with *se*, Voice, unlike paradigmatic *se*, is a probe for accusative Case Empirically, the contrast between the derivation of an impersonal/passive or a reflexive *se* sentence stemming from the same verbal root is clear and not subject to particular controversies, with the exception of passive *se*, which I will discuss below. In other words, there is no doubt that the contrast between (27) and (28) below is at least a contrast in the case form of the internal argument. Anyway, let me illustrate the assumption that Voice values the internal argument as accusative through the following tree (double arrow = *Agree* between Voice and the internal KP):

- (28) a. Se criticó a Ana.
b.



Note that Case valuation by Voice necessarily precedes Voice θ -assignment. Otherwise, the agent θ -role would be assigned to the internal argument even in impersonal *se* environments. Alternatively, one could conjecture that Case valuation applies before than θ -assignment because it depends on a functional head below Voice (e.g., α P, see López 2012).⁶ At any rate, the sole crucial difference between this tree and the tree in (27b) is in the formal content of Voice, which in the impersonal scenario contains a set of unvalued ϕ -features. Voice itself then establishes an A-dependency with the internal argument and, as a result, this argument is deacti-

⁶ Some of these alternatives are discussed in Saab (2015).

vated. The direct consequence of this is an *Agree* failure between *se* and the internal argument (see Preminger 2014 for extensive discussion and a theory on *Agree* failures). By the same reasoning, T cannot value its uninterpretable features either. For impersonal *se*, this generalized failure is resolved at PF by default agreement and PF deletion of the EPP feature in D. For passive *se*, a particular rule of postsyntactic agreement relates T and the object (see below). Therefore, the non-paradigmatic nature of impersonal and passive *se* is just the surface manifestation of this *Agree* failure and not the result of any intrinsic property of the clitic.

Now, because of this failure and the functional defectiveness of *se*, Voice does not discharge its θ -role to any KP. In LF terms, this means that the agent θ -role is realized in the Voice head. As we will see in subsection 4.2, this syntactic scenario feeds combination between *se* and the Voice head under regular Functional Application. I will postpone detailed discussion of this aspect of the theory to section 4.

At first glance, the theory I am developing seems to make an incorrect prediction with respect to passive *se* constructions, where the internal argument agrees with the verb (cf. (2) above):

- (29) **Se** cerraron las puertas para bloquear la salida.
 SE closed.3PL the doors for block.INF the exit
 ‘The doors were closed in order to block the exit.’

However, as shown by Pujalte (2012; 2020), Pujalte & Saab (2014), Saab (2014) and Ormazabal & Romero (2020), this is a kind of nominative illusion. Concretely, passive and impersonal *se* do not differ regarding their abstract Case structure; both instantiate the same abstract syntactic structure deployed in (28a). Therefore, in passive *se* configurations there is no nominative Case valuation. This can be corroborated in contrasts like the following ones, in which passive *se* does not admit nominative pronouns or proper names in subject position:⁷

- (30) a. Se encontraron cadáveres.
 SE found.3PL bodies
 ‘Bodies were found.’
 b. *Se encontró Juan/él.
 SE found.3SG Juan/he
 INTENDED: ‘He was found.’

⁷ Keep in mind that changing word orders does not alter these facts, i.e., the examples in (b) and (c) are still restricted to reflexive readings even if the subject occurs in preverbal position.

- c. *Me encontré yo.
 CL.1SG.ACC found.1SG I
 INTENDED: ‘I was found.’
 (b-c OK as reflexives; see Pujalte & Saab 2012)

Accusative pronominalization or differential object marking must be used here. This always results in an impersonal *se* sentence:

- (31) a. Se los encontré.
 SE CL.MASC.3PL.ACC found.3SG
 ‘They were found.’
 b. Se me encontré.
 SE CL.1SG.ACC found.3SG
 ‘I was found.’
 c. Se encontró a Juan.
 SE found.3SG DOM Juan
 ‘Juan was found.’

For some dialects, the right generalization seems to be that only those objects that are not explicitly marked as accusative show subject-verb agreement effects. In Pujalte (2012) and Pujalte & Saab (2014) this agreement difference between passives and impersonals is considered as purely morphophonological. If this is correct, we have to dissociate morphological case from morphological agreement. We refer the reader to those works and to Ormazabal & Romero (2020) and Pujalte (2020) for recent related proposals.

In summary, I have illustrated the role that the Activity Condition plays in the derivation of reflexives and impersonals/passives. In the next subsection, I turn my attention to the question whether other standard restrictions on A-movement play also a role in the derivation of *se* reflexives in Spanish. I will show that this is indeed the case and that by assuming that *se* reflexivization is an instance of A-movement, we can provide a straightforward account for certain intriguing reflexivization patterns in ditransitives.

3.2 *Reflexivization in ditransitives: Evidence for A-movement*

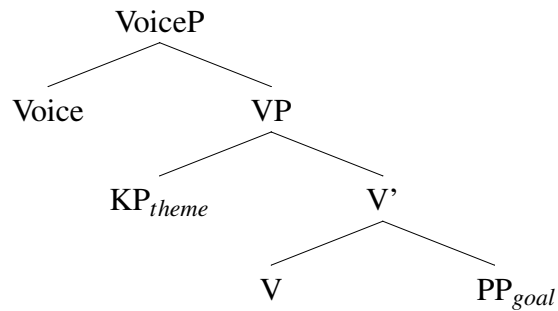
A crucial ingredient of the present theory is the view of *se* as a probe for A-movement. Regular diagnostics for A-movement (absence of WCO effects, for instance) cannot be tested in reflexives. Yet, there is empirical evidence coming from a contrast observed in Kaminszczik & Saab (2016; 2017) involving *se* reflexivization in ditransitive sentences. It is well-known that Spanish has a dative alter-

nation in which the goal KP can surface as a PP headed by *a* 'to' or as *a*-marked KP doubled by a dative clitic (see Masullo 2003; Demonte 1995; Cuervo 2003; see also Pujalte 2012 for another approach):

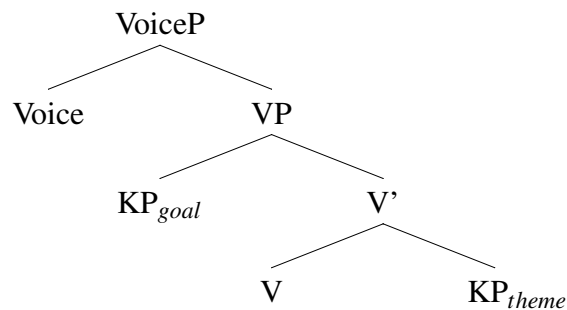
- (32) a. Juan entregó el libro a María.
 Juan gave the book to María.
 'Juan gave the book to María.'
- b. Juan le entregó el libro a María.
 Juan CL.3SG.DAT gave the book to María
 'Juan gave María the book.'

The example (32a) illustrates the prepositional variant of the alternation whereas (32b) illustrates what I will call without any theoretical commitment "the double object construction". Following main insights in the literature, I assume that the dative alternation reverses the c-commanding relations between the two internal arguments:⁸

- (33) *Prepositional construction*



- (34) *Double object construction*



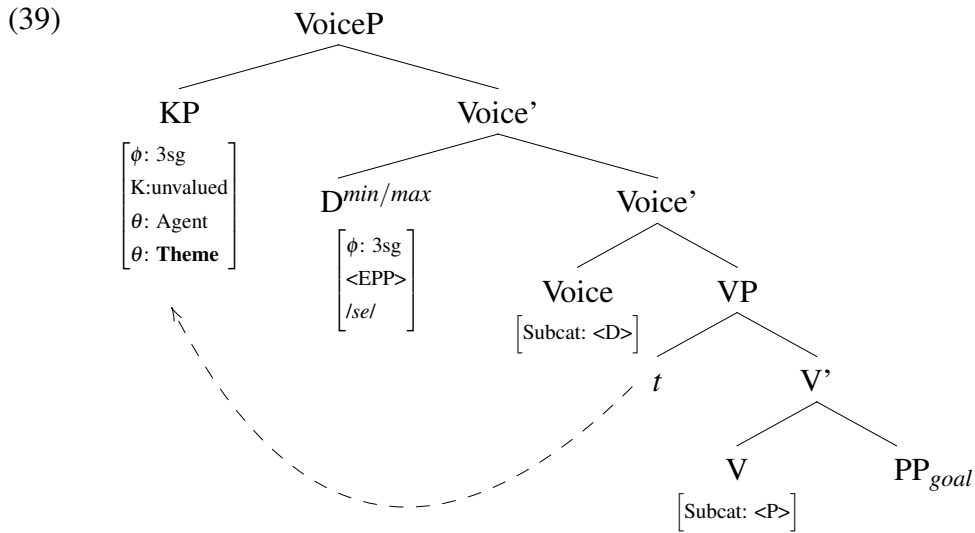
Assuming this analysis of the dative alternation, the following prediction arises with respect to reflexivization of the theme argument in both variants: only the theme KP in the prepositional variant can move attracted by *se*. This prediction is correct.

⁸ I also follow Pujalte (2012), according to whom true ditransitives like *recomendar* does not project a low applicative phrase. Yet, I think that the point I make in the body of the text is orthogonal to this issue.

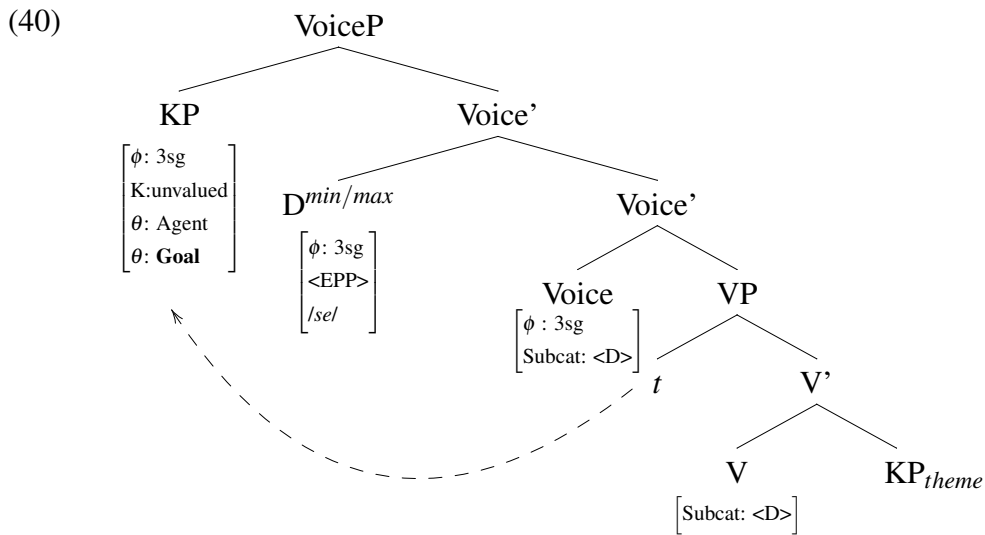
In the following examples, reflexivization of the theme KP is licensed only in the prepositional construction. In the double object construction, the result of reflexivizing the theme KP either is ungrammatical or gives rise to an idiomatic reading, which I indicate with parentheses below. In the latter case, *se* is not reflexive, but inherent/diacritic (more on this below):

- (35) a. Juan se entregó a la policía.
 Juan SE delivered to the police
 ‘Juan turned himself in/over the police.’
 b. *Juan se le entregó a la policía.
 Juan SE CL.3SG.DAT delivered to the police
 (NB: Ok in some dialects if read idiomatically as Juan made things easy for the police to have sex with him.)
- (36) a. Juan se recomendó a su jefe para ese trabajo.
 Juan SE recommended to her/his boss for that job
 ‘Juan recommended himself to her/his boss for that job.’
 b. *Juan se le recomendó a su jefe para ese trabajo.
 Juan SE CL.3SG.DAT recommended to her/his boss for that job
- (37) a. Juan se presentó a María.
 Juan SE introduced to María
 ‘Juan introduced himself to María.’
 b. *Juan se le presentó a María.
 Juan SE CL.3SG.DAT introduced to María
 (NB: OK if read as Juan suddenly appeared in front of María.)
- (38) a. Juan se regaló a María envuelto en un paquete.
 Juan SE give-a-present to María wrapped in a package
 ‘Juan gave himself as a present to María wrapped in a package.’
 b. *Juan se le regaló a María.
 Juan SE CL.3SG.DAT give-a-present to María
 (NB: Ok in some dialects if interpreted approximately as Juan did not oppose any resistance to María.)

Standard restrictions on A-movement account for why this contrast exists. Concretely, only in the prepositional construction the theme KP is local in the favored sense, as shown in (39).



In the double object construction, the goal KP is closer to the Voice head than the theme KP, which, as a consequence, cannot be attracted by the relevant probe that the clitic instantiates. Therefore, we correctly rule out any attempt to A-move the theme KP to Spec, VoiceP in this syntactic configuration. Put differently, in the double object construction, only the goal KP can be reflexivized.



The following example, in which the goal A-moves to Spec, VoiceP, shows that this argument can indeed be reflexivized:

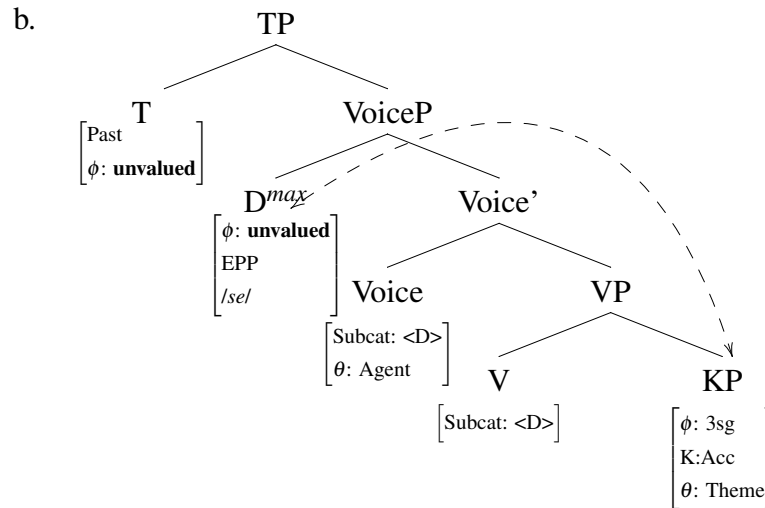
- (41) Juan se entregó el libro.
 Juan SE gave the book
 ‘Juan gave himself the book.’

Three comments are in order. First, we can assume here that dative Case is structural (at least in ditransitives), but, unlike nominative and accusative, is not valued by *Agree* with a given functional head, but through a PF mechanism that inserts the preposition *a* to an argument that has not valued its Case feature in the syntax. Pujalte (2012) motivates this operation by properties of the inheritance mechanism and the particular distribution of dative arguments in the syntax. I refer the reader to her work for details. Alternatively, dative Case is valued *via Agree* with a probe *above* VoiceP. Under both alternatives, the goal KP is active to get a second θ -role from Voice. At any rate, it is important to stress that these are auxiliary assumptions. In principle, the present theory is perfectly compatible with other Case theories offered in the literature. A prominent family of theories are the competition-based ones (among others, Marantz 1991; Preminger 2014; Baker 2015). According to such theories, nominals obtain their abstract Case value from competition among them in a certain structural domain. We can, then, adapt the present theory to such views by exploiting a particular feature of my analysis. In effect, recall that I have assumed that clitics are hybrid regarding their phrasal status. Following ideas by Chomsky (1995) and others, I have implemented this assumption by stipulating that clitics are minimal and maximal:

- (42) $D^{min/max}$
 $\left[\begin{array}{l} \phi: \text{unvalued} \\ \text{EPP} \end{array} \right]$

Now, let us assume that for reflexives the Case calculus exploits the feature [minimal], but that for impersonals, the feature [maximal]. If this is correct, Case determination in (28b) should be replaced by the following alternative analysis (double arrow = argument competition):

- (43) a. Se criticó a Ana.



This is an interesting move, with clear consequences for the issues I am exploring here. If this option is plausible, then the story would go as follows. In reflexives, at least as far as Case is concerned, D is [minimal] and, consequently, invisible for Case competition.⁹ For this reason, in reflexives the internal argument is active and can be attracted by *se*. In impersonals, the clitic, being maximal, counts for Case competition. Roughly speaking, once the clitic merges with Voice, it competes for Case with the internal arguments. Following roughly Baker (2015) and others, since the clitic c-commands the internal argument, this argument receives accusative with the consequence of becoming inactive for A-movement and further θ -assignment. Note now that on this approach the impossibility of reflexivizing the theme argument in double object configurations follows from Activity and not from Locality. Merging the goal argument above the theme results in accusative assignment to the theme argument and in its consequent inactivation for establishing further A-dependencies. Either way, we correctly rule out all the ungrammatical sentences we are discussing in this section and correctly rule in the grammatical ones.

In principle, it is hard to see which theory is better, since this depends to a great extent on theories concerning the morphological case / abstract Case connection and, as I said, this is something that cannot be resolved here (see footnote 5). It seems that the competition-based approach handles in a better way the fact that we can have pairs like the following ones, where the goal KP seems to be active or inactive depending on whether the sentence is reflexive or impersonal:

⁹ That D is minimal for Case consideration could follow from possible adjunction of D to Voice, as suggested by Embick (2004). Absence of adjunction would result in exploiting the feature [maximal].

- (44) a. Juan se entregó el libro.
 Juan SE gave the book
 ‘Juan gave himself the book.’
- b. Se le entregó el libro a Juan.
 SE CL.3SG.DAT gave the book to Juan
 ‘Someone/one gave Juan the book.’

The sentence in (44a) was already discussed above, when I explained why only the goal argument can be reflexivized in the double object construction. The sentence in (44b) has an impersonal reading, which is derived from the same underlying double object configuration. It is easy to see how a competition-based theory of Case would derive each sentence: either *se* is taken as minimal and we obtain the reflexive sentence or is taken as maximal and we obtain, instead, the impersonal sentence. Under the *Agree* theory of Case, it is not evident how the impersonal sentence is ruled in. In principle, if the goal is active when *se* is introduced, then it should be attracted to Spec, VoiceP obligatorily ruling out sentences like (44b). In order to account for pairs like these, the *Agree* based theory would perhaps require additional assumptions regarding the timing of Case valuation, in general, and the nature of the dative, in particular. But since there is no broad consensus regarding the nature of Spanish datives, we cannot resolve the issue here. Importantly, it seems that the theory should acknowledge the non-uniform status of datives (see Pujalte 2012 for a concrete non-uniform proposal). This is clear if we take into account that some datives do not intervene in A-movement. As I have already observed, sentences like (35b) are grammatical if interpreted not as reflexive sentences but as containing a type of inherent *se* clitic. As we will see in section 5.1, inherent *se* sentences also involves A-movement. If this is the case, then we are led to conclude that either the dative has inherent case or it is higher in the structure, both plausible solutions from what we can deduce from the vast literature on the issue.

Second, assuming that in double object constructions V enters the syntax with two θ -roles to assign, we should wonder why both θ -roles are not directly assigned to the object KP once V and this KP are merged, i.e., before the introduction of the indirect object:

- (45) [v' V KP_[*theme, goal*]]

If this happens, the indirect object would not receive a θ -role and, consequently, the resulting sentence would violate the Θ -Criterion. It seems then that the VP projection must be completed by External Merge of the indirect object before θ -assignment of the goal θ -role:

- (46) [v_P KP_{*goal*} [v' V KP_{*theme*}]]

Yet, this is not necessarily so. In principle, one could let (45) to take place in the syntax and to filter the result at LF. Alternatively, the step in (45) is blocked in the syntax by principles that regulate the timing of External Merge and θ -assignment. This second strategy is discussed in detail in Kaminszczik & Saab (2016). Any decision in this respect would crucially depend on the assumption that a given thematic head can have more than one θ -role and, obviously, on assumptions about the proper analysis of double object constructions. Space limitations prevent further inquiry into this technical issue.

Third, an anonymous reviewer wonders to what extent the evidence discussed here in favor of the thesis that *se* is a trigger of A-movement is dependent on the analysis of the dative alternation briefly introduced in this subsection, according to which the double object variant and the prepositional one are partially derived by reversing the c-commanding relations between the goal and theme arguments in each variant. This is an important question, especially, in view of the fact that standard tests to detect c-command relations between the relevant nominal phrases do not give rise to robust conclusions. Pujalte (2008; 2009) has shown that not all speakers react as predicted by the analysis of the dative alternation presented here. In particular, for many speakers presence or absence of the clitic does not produce any particular reaction regarding c-command relations. Exactly the same point is made in a recent paper by Pineda (2020). Both authors conclude then that with or without the clitic, the goal argument always c-commands the theme argument. For Pineda in particular, the clitic is the realization of a low applicative head introducing both internal arguments (see also Cuervo 2003). I find this hypothesis implausible. There is robust evidence that in the clitic doubling variant, the goal argument crosses the subject via A-movement. For instance, WCO effects are blocked whenever there is dative doubling, a clear indication that the first step of movement of the goal argument to Spec,CP is of the A-type:

- (47) ζ A quién_i ??(le_i) dio un libro su_i madre?
 to whom CL.3SG.DAT gave a book his/her mother
 ‘Whom does his/her mother give a book?’

Put differently, what the clitic clearly indicates, regardless of the c-commanding issue, is that the goal argument *has* to be active in the clitic doubling variant, otherwise A-movement of the indirect object should be blocked by Activity. It is reasonable to suppose that in the non-doubled variant, either the goal is a PP or has inherent Case. Under both analyses, presence of WCO whenever the clitic is absent is correctly predicted for a sentence like (47). Crucially, under both analyses, we also deduce why the goal argument does not intervene when the clitic is absent, even if we accept with Pujalte and Pineda that in the non-doubled variant, the goal argument c-commands the theme argument. If the inherent Case approach is

avored, then, of course, we need to make the further assumption that there is no defective intervention.¹⁰

In sum, in this section, I have argued that standard conditions on A-movement, essentially, Activity and Minimality, are attested in the derivation of impersonal and reflexive sentences containing the clitic *se*. In the next section, I focus on the semantic aspect of my theory in order to show that the syntactic derivations proposed so far give rise to two different inputs to LF.

4 Semantic implementations

I now turn my attention to *Thesis 2*, repeated below:

- (48) *Thesis 2 (semantics)*: The LF realization of *se* depends on the syntactic output. Either A-movement applies in the syntax and LF receives the instruction for predicate abstraction or there is no A-movement and, as a consequence, no abstraction. If the latter is the case, *se* satisfies the individual argument Voice requires.

I will proceed first making explicit some basic assumptions (4.1). Then I provide some detailed analyses for *se* reflexives (4.2) and for impersonal *se* (4.3). In passing, I will also provide comparisons with other approaches to reflexives and impersonal *se*.

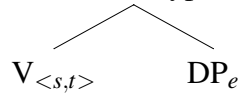
4.1 Basic assumptions

I propose that, at LF, θ -roles are semantically realized as functions from entities to event predicates (i.e., objects denoting in $\langle e, \langle s, t \rangle \rangle$), like V and Voice in Kratzer (1996). At least for the basic cases, these are the only semantic objects of this type, given that I assume a radical nonprojectionist view on thematic relations, according to which verbal predicates only denote event predicates (see Pietroski 2005 and Williams 2005, among others). A DP then cannot be combined directly with the verbal predicate for semantic reasons. For simple e -denoting DPs, direct combination with $V_{\langle s, t \rangle}$ would produce a noninterpretable object at LF:¹¹

¹⁰ Pineda, following Cuervo (2003), proposes that in both variants the dative argument gets inherent Case. This claim is made in order to account for the well-known fact that datives do not passivize in Spanish. This is part of a long-standing debate in the literature on Spanish datives. As far as I can tell, the inherent Case hypothesis does not derive the fact that doubled datives are active for A-movement. Interestingly, my suggestion in the body of the text is consistent with absence of passivization and with presence of A-movement in clitic doubling environments.

¹¹ Unless V comes with a θ -role that remains unassigned in the syntax and is semantically realized on V itself. We will see that this alternative semantic realization is available at least for the Voice head.

(49) ? Type Mismatch



In order to resolve this issue, let us first assume the following three axioms for semantic composition of binary nodes:

(50) **Functional Application (FA):** If α is a branching node, $\{\beta, \gamma\}$ is the set of α 's daughters, and $\llbracket \beta \rrbracket$ is a function whose domain contains $\llbracket \gamma \rrbracket$, then $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket = \llbracket \beta \rrbracket(\llbracket \gamma \rrbracket)$.

[Heim & Kratzer 1998: 44]

(51) **Predicate Modification for event properties (PM):** If α is a branching node, $\{\beta, \gamma\}$ is the set of α 's daughters, and $\llbracket \beta \rrbracket$ and $\llbracket \gamma \rrbracket$ are both in $D_{\langle s,t \rangle}$, then $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket = \lambda e \in D_{event}. \llbracket \beta \rrbracket(e) = \llbracket \gamma \rrbracket(e) = 1$.

[adapted from Heim & Kratzer 1998: 65]

(52) **Event Identification (EI):** If α is a branching node, $\{\beta, \gamma\}$ is the set of α 's daughters, and $\llbracket \beta \rrbracket$ is in $\langle e, \langle s,t \rangle \rangle$ and $\llbracket \gamma \rrbracket$ is in $\langle s,t \rangle$, then, $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda e_s. \llbracket \beta \rrbracket(e, x) \ \& \ \llbracket \gamma \rrbracket(e)$

[adapted from Kratzer 1996: 122]

Second, I assume that θ -roles have a specified denotation at LF; concretely, they denote functions from entities to event predicates:

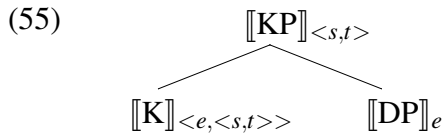
(53) a. $\llbracket \theta_{Theme} \rrbracket_{\langle e, \langle s,t \rangle \rangle} = \lambda x \lambda e. Theme(e, x)$
 b. $\llbracket \theta_{Agent} \rrbracket_{\langle e, \langle s,t \rangle \rangle} = \lambda x \lambda e. Agent(e, x)$

This removes the predicative import from Voice. Generalizing proposals in Myler (2014), Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou & Schäfer (2015), Wood (2015), Wood & Marantz (2017) and Schäfer (2017), I adopt the idea that Voice denotes the following identity function (maybe partial, if we want to introduce aspectual conditions, for instance):

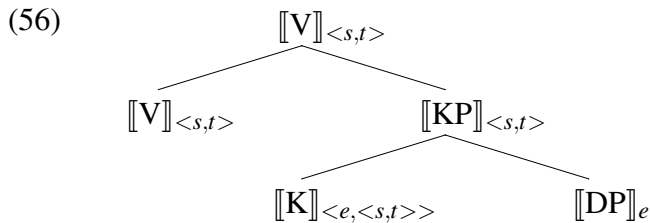
(54) $\llbracket Voice \rrbracket_{\langle \langle s,t \rangle, \langle s,t \rangle \rangle} = \lambda f. f$

The logic of the argument leads us to conceive of θ -roles as elements that are assigned/discharged on nominals in order to produce a legitimate predicative structure, according to which K, once it gets at least one θ -role, can take its complement DP as argument. As a concrete implementation, I have already assumed that DPs

project a K head that is the receptor of a given θ -role. Verbal predicates are, in the general case, pure event predicates and not internal argument introducers, an idea in accordance with Pietroski (2005) and Williams (2005), among others. Put differently, on this view, K heads are derived argument introducers. In this way, we motivate the need for an argument to have Case through a condition at play at the LF interface. In the abstract, K must receive a θ -role for interpretability considerations at LF and for producing a semantically well-formed combination:¹²



VP and KP cannot be interpreted by FA but by PM:



Again, the idea is not a novelty; it is at the heart of Pietroski's (2005) event semantics, according to which Merge is semantically equivalent to conjunction and not to FA. Here, I will not go as far as Pietroski, because I assume that Merge can indeed have as semantic correlates both FA and PM. At any rate, I do agree that this approach brings much more advantages than problems. In particular, it avoids stipulating conjunction as part of the predicate denotations and deducing it directly from PM. In what follows, I show how the theory proposed in section 3 and the assumptions about the semantic architecture just discussed offer an alternative to standard event semantics that it is extensionally equivalent to it in a number of cases, but superior in others. But before entering into detailed analyses, a clarification is in order.

As conceived here, structural K starts its syntactic life just as an empty semantic node. There are two initial points to make with respect to this. First, if K does not receive a θ -role, then either K is treated as an empty node at LF or it denotes an identity function. The move is well-known in contemporary formal semantics. This

¹² I assume with Williams (2005: 13, footnote 10) that “Quantifier Raising applies to all DPs of quantificational type, $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$, leaving a trace in type $\langle e \rangle$ ”. This move is well known in models where QR is motivated by LF considerations (Heim & Kratzer 1998). Note that perhaps I have to make the further assumption that quantificational DPs uses Spec,KP as a escape hatch. As noted by a reviewer, this predicts K stranding. If this is indeed the case, the stranding arises only at LF.

strategy avoids some of the criticisms that the Visibility Condition has received in the past (see Lasnik 2008 for an important overview). Expletives are a case at point.¹³ If expletives are K projections –perhaps with an empty semantic D head encoding, say, person features or other relevant category or inflectional properties–merged in Spec,TP, then K would not receive any θ -role, as desired, and would have no LF import at all:

- (57) a. It seems that Anne is here.
b. There are many guests here.

Second, other circumstances are also worth mentioning. It could be the case, for instance, that KP occurs in syntactic-semantic configurations in which it does not receive any θ -role because it is the argument of an $\langle e, t \rangle$ predicate. If its DP complement denotes, for instance, in e then, K either is empty at LF or denotes an identity function:

- (58) a. Anne is smart.
b. LF: $[[[_{AP} \text{crazy}]]_{\langle e, t \rangle} ([[_{KP} K [_{DP} \text{Anne}]]]_e)$

Of course, a proper analysis of copular or expletive sentences largely exceeds the limits of this study. These briefs comments only aim to show what I believe is the right way of conceiving of the different semantic realizations of K, namely, as alloemes in the sense of Marantz (2013) and Wood & Marantz (2017). Put differently, K semantic realization is contextually determined by the syntactic environment in which it is allowed to occur. Of course, alloemy should be properly restricted and I will do it in subsection 5.1, where I exploit this aspect of the theory in order to fill a gap in the syntax and semantics of *se*, namely, inherent *se* constructions.

4.2 SE reflexives

Let us see now how the derivation of a reflexive sentence proceeds (cf. (4)) at LF.

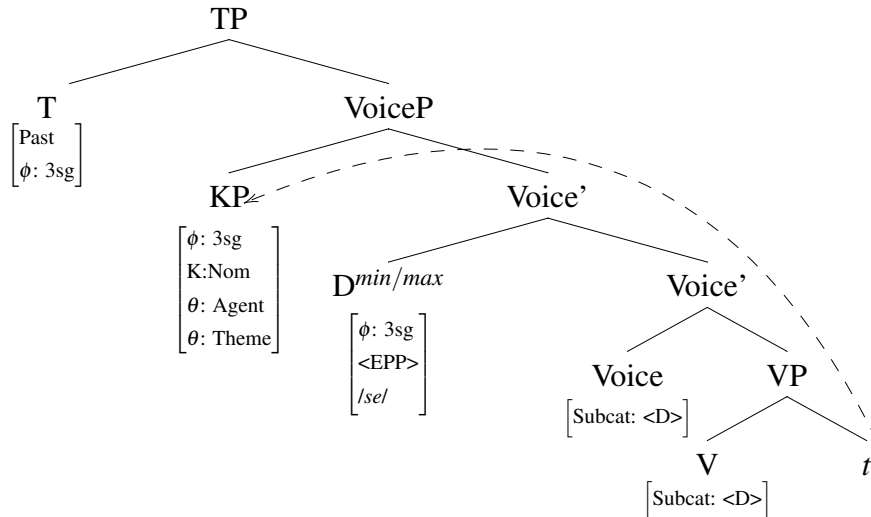
- (59) **Reflexive *se***
a. Juan criticó a Ana.
Juan criticized DOM Ana
'Juan criticized Ana.'

¹³ In the GB days, the Visibility Condition was also criticized for considerations involving *PRO*, a category with θ -role but without Case. Chomsky & Lasnik's (1993) theory of Null Case avoids this problem for the Visibility Condition although introduces new ones. The movement theory of control proposed by Hornstein (1999) and others also avoids the issue.

- b. Ana **se** criticó.
 Ana SE criticized
 ‘Ana criticized herself.’

Recall from [section 3](#) the syntax proposed for a reflexive sentence:

- (60) a. Ana se criticó.
 b.

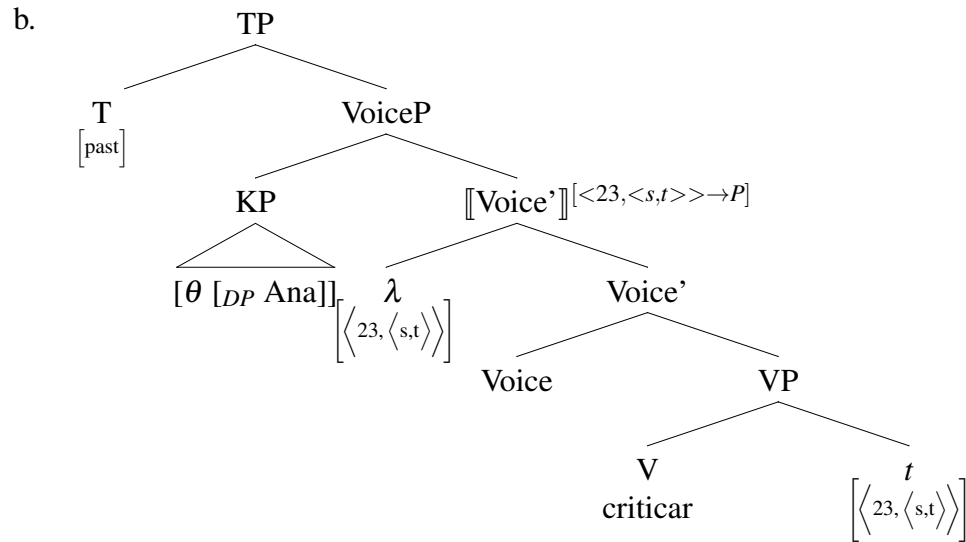


Note that there are only two important differences when compared with a regular transitive sentence: (i) the *Agree* dependency between the clitic and the internal argument, and (ii) the fact that the external θ -role is assigned to the active theme argument. As for the LF implementation of these two aspects, I propose that two θ -roles on the same head amounts to some sort of θ -bundling, which is read off as semantic conjunction at LF (see Reinhart & Siloni 2005). Essentially, this gives us the following semantic realization of any K with two θ -roles:

$$(61) \quad \llbracket \begin{bmatrix} \theta: \text{Agent} \\ \theta: \text{Theme} \end{bmatrix} \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda e. \text{Agent}(e, x) \ \& \ \text{Theme}(e, x)$$

Regarding the point raised in (i), the *Agree* dependency between the internal argument and the clitic is translated at LF as index identity, which amounts to saying that the clitic receives the same referential index as the trace of the displaced constituent. Focusing only on the relevant portions of the LF tree for (60b), consider the following LF representation:

- (62) a. Ana se criticó.



Since now the index the clitic has is a sister of Voice', predicate abstraction of Voice' is triggered:

(63) **Predicate Abstraction Rule:**

Let α be a branching node with daughters β and γ , where β dominates only a numeric index i . Then, for any variable assignment g , $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^g = \lambda x. \llbracket \gamma \rrbracket^{g[i \rightarrow x]}$.

As advanced in [section 2](#), unlike the implementation in [Heim & Kratzer](#), I propose that A-movement does not leave an index as a sister of Voice'. The clitic itself is the LF realization of such an index as a result of syntactic *Agree*. More concretely, I am assuming here that (at least some) probes are pure λ -abstractors at LF (or indexes in the original terms in [Heim & Kratzer 1998](#)). This view of Spanish *se* as an abstractor contrasts with the more familiar idea of reflexive *se* as a bound variable ([Embick 2004](#); [Doron & Hovav 2007](#); [Schäfer 2008](#); [2017](#); [Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou & Schäfer 2015](#), among others). Truth-conditionally, both approaches are, of course, indistinguishable, but I think that they can still be empirically distinguished on syntactic grounds, as I will suggest in [section 6](#), where I conjecture that the bound variable analysis is correct at least for Italian. Conceptually, the hypothesis of *se* as a mere abstractor makes *se* more inactive semantically, a fact that seems to be in consonance with the view of a subset of clitics as purely formal material (say, agreement markers). This puts reflexive *se* in Spanish (not in Italian, as we will see) on a par with inherent *se*, which is obviously semantically inert. The thesis is attractive because allows for a conjecture regarding variation in the clitic systems of Romance, namely, the idea that pronominal clitics, which are born as variables, can become probes in the syntax and abstractors at LF because of

well-known grammaticalization processes. I postpone the discussion on this issue to section 6.

Coming back to the derivation of our *se* reflexive sentence, with Heim & Kratzer (1998), I am also assuming that variables can be of any semantic type, so that we can stipulate assignment functions for any semantic type, as well. This is explicitly stated by Heim & Kratzer as follows:

- (64) A partial function g from indices to denotations (of any type) is a (variable) assignment iff it fulfills the following condition: For any number n and type τ such that $\langle n, \tau \rangle \in \text{dom}(g)$, $g(n, \tau) \in D_\tau$.

[adapted from Heim & Kratzer 1998: 292]

According to my analysis, the variable left by A-movement corresponds to an event predicate variable, i.e., it denotes in $\langle s, t \rangle$. The KP *Ana*, which has the denotation in (61) for the K node, serves as the argument for the predicate opened by index assignment (i.e., the LF realization of *se* after *Agree*). This gives us the following denotation for VoiceP:

- (65) $\llbracket \text{VoiceP} \rrbracket^g = \lambda P. \lambda e [\text{Criticar}(e) \ \& \ P(e)] (\lambda e_1 [\text{Agent}(\text{Ana}, e_1) \ \& \ \text{Theme}(\text{Ana}, e_1)])$

After the relevant λ -conversions, we end up with a standard event semantics for the entire sentences:

- (66) $\llbracket \text{TP} \rrbracket^g = \exists e [\text{Criticar}(e) \ \& \ \text{Agent}(e, \text{Ana}) \ \& \ \text{Theme}(e, \text{Ana}) \ \& \ \text{Past}(e)]$

Before closing this subsection, I would like to consider some arguments that have been provided in the literature against one of the aspects of my analysis, namely, its “unaccusative part”. In effect, my analysis shares with an important part of the literature on the topic the idea that in *se*-reflexivization the KP that gets two θ -roles does not originate as an external argument. The idea comes originally from Marantz (1984) and has been dubbed as the “unaccusative hypothesis” for reflexives, a misleading term, in my view. As already discussed in Embick (2004), to claim that the subject of a reflexive is not the external argument (i.e., a DP in Spec, VoiceP) does not imply that reflexives are unaccusatives. They are not in many respects. The basic functional structure of a reflexive is identical to the functional structure of, say, a transitive sentence (or ditransitive, of course) and not identical to that of an unaccusative sentence, which arguably has as a minimum a different flavor of Voice (see Folli & Harley 2005). Besides this, since its original formulation, arguments have been adduced in favor or against the alleged unaccusative nature of reflexives. Reinhart & Siloni (2005) offer two well-known arguments against the unaccusative nature of reflexives in French connected to the (im)possibility of impersonal con-

structions with inverted subjects, and to the (im)possibility of *en*-placement from these inverted subjects. Whereas unaccusative sentences allow for both constructions, reflexive sentences reject them. This kind of argument has been shown as inconclusive by Rooryck & Wyngaerd (2011) and by Sportiche (2014). I refer the reader to those works for detailed discussion. Sportiche, however, claims that, while Reinhart & Siloni's arguments does not show what has to be shown, there is still another argument that makes the unaccusative hypothesis untenable. This involves association with focus in reflexives and middles. The basic fact is related to the ambiguity of the sentence below:

- (67) Solo Juan se considera inteligente.
 only Juan SE considers intelligent
 'Only Juan considers himself intelligent.'

[adapted from Sportiche 2014: 311]

This sentence has a sloppy reading, according to which Juan is the only one that has the reflexive property, and a strict reading, according to which Juan is the only one that considers Juan intelligent:

- (68) a. λx (x considers x smart)
 b. λx (x considers Juan smart)

[Sportiche 2014: 312]

The following denials allow to disambiguate the sentence in one way or another:

- (69) a. No, yo también me considero inteligente.
 no, I too CL.1SG consider intelligent
 'No, I consider myself intelligent too.'
 b. No, yo también lo considero inteligente.
 no, I too CL.3SG.ACC consider intelligent
 'No, I consider him intelligent too.'

[adapted from Sportiche 2014: 311]

Crucially, denial of the theme argument is impossible:

- (70) #No, Juan también me considera a mí inteligente.
 No, Juan also CL.1SG.ACC considers DOM me intelligent
 'No, Juan considers me intelligent, too.'

[adapted from Sportiche 2014: 314]

This contrasts with middles, which, according to Sportiche, have a clear unaccusative syntax:

- (71) a. En la India, solo el arroz se come con los dedos.
 in the India, only the rice SE eats with the fingers
 ‘In India, only rice is eaten with the fingers.’
- b. No, en la India, el pan también se come con los dedos.
 no, in the India, the bread also SE eats with the fingers
 ‘No, in India, bread too is eaten with the fingers.’
- c. No, los indios comen también el pan con los dedos.
 no, the Indians eat also the bread with the fingers
 ‘No, Indian people too eat bread with the fingers.’
- [adapted from Sportiche 2014: 313]

Sportiche’s reasoning goes as follows. If reflexives were unaccusative, we would expect an additional reading, according to which association with focus would only affect the theme argument, as in middles, i.e., the reading Juan considers only Juan intelligent should be available. But as the infelicity of (70) indicates, this is not borne out. I think that this reasoning is misleading, since the focus structure in reflexives and middles is clearly different. From the focus marking on the subject in (67), we can derive two different questions under discussion (QuD, see Roberts 2012), namely, *Who considers himself intelligent?* for the sloppy reading, or *Who considers Juan intelligent?* for the strict one. Both (67) and the denials in (69) are congruent with one or another QuD, but (70) is not, because in this case the alternatives are computed over the theme object with independence of the agentive subject. Therefore, this denial is not congruent with the focus marking of the original assertion in (67). The sentence in (70) is congruent with a radically different QuD, namely, *Who does Juan consider intelligent?* In turn, in the middle pattern in (71), both denials are congruent with the QuD that the original assertion tries to answer, i.e., *What is eaten with the finger in India?* Certainly, the sentence in (71c) seems to presuppose another QuD, namely, *What does Indian people eat with the fingers?* However, this QuD and the original one entail each other, so the discourse is perfectly congruent. Of course, a full exploration of the interesting connections between focus and reflexivization would take me too far from the original goals of this study, but I think that these considerations suffice to show that there is no expectation that middles and reflexives behave in the same way when it comes to evaluating their behavior under focus.

4.3 Impersonal SE

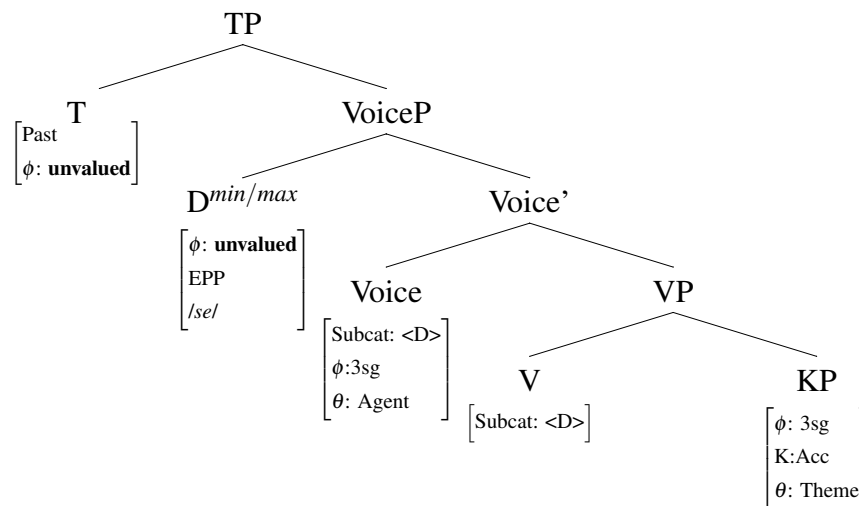
Let us move on now to the syntax and semantics of impersonal *se* constructions, whose basic example is repeated below (cf. (3)):

(72) **Impersonal *se***

- a. Juan criticó a Ana.
 Juan criticized DOM Ana
 ‘Juan criticized Ana.’
- b. **Se** criticó a Ana.
 SE criticized DOM Ana
 ‘One/someone criticized Ana.’

Recall our syntax for passive/impersonal *se* from subsection 3.1.2:¹⁴

- (73) a. Se criticó a Ana.
 b.



The more obvious LF implementation for a passive/impersonal *se* derivation in the present framework is as follows. Since the agent θ -role was not assigned to any KP in the syntax, it is directly realized on Voice in the same way as in [Kratzer's \(1996\)](#) original proposal, i.e., as a function from entities to event predicates:

$$(74) \quad \llbracket \text{Voice}_{\text{Agent}} \rrbracket_{\langle e, \langle s, t \rangle \rangle} = \lambda x \lambda e. \text{Agent}(e, x)$$

Now, I propose that given the clitic *se* did not form any A-dependency in the syntax, it is semantically realized as a free variable without any referential index; put differently, as a pure indefinite in the terms originally proposed by [Heim \(1982\)](#). This idea of assimilating *se* to indefinites in Heim's sense was already proposed by [Chierchia \(2004\)](#) (see also [Mendikoetxea 2008](#) for Spanish). On my account, this is derived from a particular syntactic derivation, one in which *Agree* failed. If we follow Heim, the variable we obtain at LF ends up existentially closed, unless some

¹⁴ The semantic and syntactic derivation for a passive *se* construction would proceed exactly in the same way, with the agreement differences between both types of sentences being determined at PF.

operator in the environment unselectively binds *se*. As is well-known, at least since Cinque (1988), impersonal *se* has a quasi-universal and a quasi-generic version. Chierchia noticed that the quasi-generic reading also supports E-type readings, a fact that provides direct evidence for the variable nature of impersonal/passive *se*:

- (75) a. Se criticó a Ana.
SE criticized DOM Ana
'One/someone criticized Ana.'
- b. Si se llega temprano, se trabaja mejor.
if SE arrives early SE works better
'If one arrives early, one works better.'

With Chierchia, I then contend that impersonal/passive *se* is an indefinite that can be unselectively bound in certain contexts. For the basic episodic, existential cases, the derivation is straightforward: *se*, as an entity variable, combines with Voice through functional application:

- (76) $[[\text{VoiceP}_{Agent}]] = \lambda x \lambda e [\text{Agent}(x, e) \ \& \ \text{Criticar}(e) \ \& \ \text{Theme}(\text{Ana}, e)](se)$

But recall that this semantic result is a consequence of a defective probe in the syntax, one that cannot value any of its ϕ -features. This makes impersonal/passive *se* in Spanish syntactically different from other indefinites. For instance, as noticed by Saab (2014), episodic impersonal *se* constructions do not tolerate secondary modification, reflexivization or pronominal binding:

- (77) a. *Ayer se besó a María borracho.
yesterday SE kissed DOM María drunk.MASC. SG
INTENDED: 'One_i/someone_i kissed Mary drunk_i.'
- b. *Aquí se lava (a sí mismo).
here SE washes DOM himself
INTENDED: 'One/someone washes oneself.'
- c. *Aquí se puede dejar su saco.
here SE can leave.INF her/his coat
INTENDED: 'One_i/someone_i can leave her/his_i coat here.'

Replacing *se* by *uno* 'one' renders all these sentences grammatical. This shows that *se* has no interpretable and valued ϕ -features. MacDonald (2017a), however, argues that inalienable possession constructions in impersonal *se* sentences empirically justify the presence of an arbitrary *pro* in the syntax. The following example is adapted from MacDonald (2017a):

- (78) Se levantó la mano para hacer una pregunta en clase.
 SE raised the hand for make.INF a question in class
 ‘Someone/one raised her/his hand to ask a question in class.’

In order to account for both (77) and (78), Ormazabal & Romero (2019) propose that the subject of an impersonal *se* sentence is a minimally specified syntactic category (see also Rivero 2001). Assuming that this subject lacks inflectional features like gender or person directly accounts for all the cases in (77), given that syntactic binding requires inflectional matching. At the same time, they also account for (78), because the implicit possessor in the DP *la mano* does not have person features. I am assuming here that the description provided by Ormazabal & Romero (2019) of impersonal/passive *se* is equivalent to my defective probe. Yet, a crucial difference between their analysis and mine is that they seem to accept the basic division between paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic *se* (i.e., between impersonal/passive *se* and the rest). In my view, this type of lexical division loses the generalization that the kind of syncretism we are exploring here is systematic, not accidental. On my analysis, instead, there is only one *se* that participates of, at least, two different syntactic derivations, one in which there is an *Agree* relation between the clitic and an active argument, and another one in which there is not. Once this minimal difference is accepted, the rest of the differences between, say, impersonals and reflexives fall in place. An *Agree* relation in the syntax feeds the interpretation of the clitic as an abstractor at LF, whereas whenever *Agree* fails, no A-chain can be formed in the syntax and the clitic remains as a LF variable without any index (i.e., as an indefinite in Heim’s terms).

Note now that generic impersonals behave differently with respect to some of the tests that detect syntactic activity. For instance, secondary predication is licensed in generic impersonal *se* sentences:

- (79) Cuando se vive borracha, se muere feliz.
 when SE lives drunk.FEM.SG SE dies happy
 ‘When one lives drunk, one dies happy.’

This indicates that generic *se* sentences require a different syntactic analysis, one that perhaps includes a generic operator in the syntax. This is exactly what we expect if impersonal *se* is view as a variable that can be unselectively bound.

In sum, in these two sections, I have provided a detailed syntactic and semantic derivation of a set of argument alternations involving the clitic *se*. Taking this set as a case study has been proved useful as a way of illustrating the research agenda of this study, namely, providing an explicit theory of Case/ θ interactions in syntax and semantics with the aim of making sense of a particular pattern of systematic *u*-syncretism in Spanish. Importantly, I have brought new theoretical considerations

for a positive reconsideration of the Visibility Condition, according to which the role of Case in natural languages is producing interpretable objects at LF.

5 Extensions

5.1 *Inherent SE*

An important consequence of the model developed here is its structural flexibility. In other words, in principle there is no ban for an agent θ -role to be derived within the domain of VoiceP. Among other important consequences, this implies abandoning principles such as UTAH (Baker 1988) that impose strict correlations between θ -roles and syntactic positions. This view has also important empirical consequences in the domain of Spanish *se* constructions. As is well known, there is subset of quasi-reflexive sentences that seems to resist any principled account. I am referring to inherent *se* constructions. Here is a list of pronominal verbs that combine with paradigmatic *se*, taken from Di Tullio (2005):

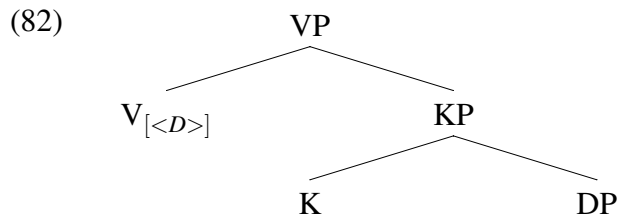
- (80) **Inherent *se*:** quejarse ‘to complain’, arrepentirse ‘to regret’, dignarse ‘to deign’, adueñarse ‘to take possession’, vanagloriarse ‘to plume’, jactarse ‘to brag’, regodearse ‘to deligh’, atreverse ‘to dare’, enterarse ‘to find out’, desperezarse ‘to stretch’, atenerse ‘to keep’, percatarse ‘to notice’, estremecerse ‘to shudder’, desentenderse ‘to disengage’, etc.

As noted in the introduction, the two main properties of these predicates are that they cannot occur without the pronominal element, and that they reject transitive uses:¹⁵

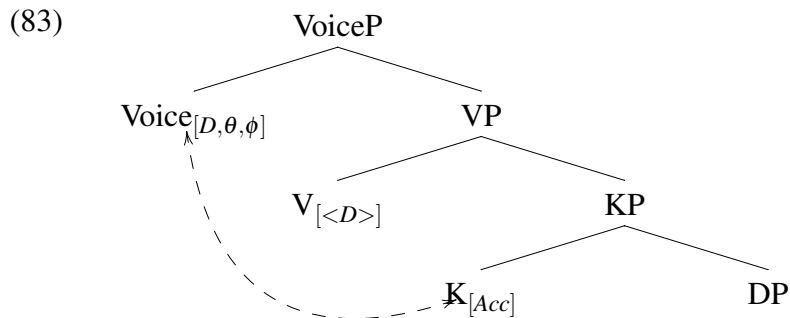
- (81) a. Juan se quejó.
 Juan SE complained.
 ‘Juan complained.’
 b. *Juan quejó.
 Juan complained
 c. *Juan lo quejó.
 Juan him/it complained

¹⁵ As noted by an anonymous reviewer, a subset of these predicates can take prepositional complements. Indeed, this is the case with *quejar* in examples like *Se quejó del problema* (‘She complained about the problem.’). In order to keep the illustration simple, in what follows, I do not represent such arguments. Nothing changes if there is more than argument in the VP domain or in a larger structure. The crucial point is the derived nature of the subject of inherent *se* sentences.

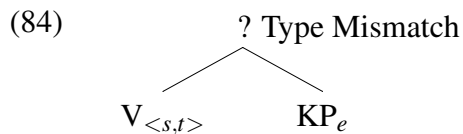
In the previous section, I made explicit the hypothesis that K is subject to allosemy, i.e., to syntactically conditioned polysemy. There are, of course, contexts in which a derivation crashes just because the syntax does not provide a suitable output for LF interpretation. Consider the following situation. The category V selects a KP, but does not have any θ -role to assign. Recall that being specified for a [D]-feature is a precondition for being a θ -role assigner. The reverse does not hold: having a [D]-feature does not force the bearer of such a feature to be a thematic assigner. This is obvious for functional heads like, say, T. In other words, nothing in the formal system prevents this configuration, where V is not a thematic head:



Now, if Voice is introduced with ϕ -features in the next derivational step, the internal KP would be automatically deactivated (double arrow = Case valuation):



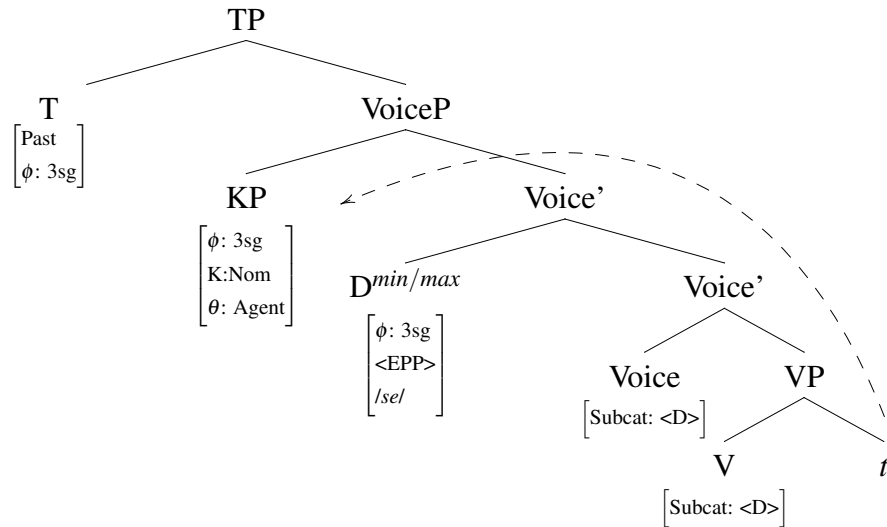
Here, K is invisible for receiving the θ -role from Voice, which would then assign it to a potential external KP, if any. Either way, the VP cannot receive a proper denotation at LF. If the DP denotes in e and K is empty or an identity function, we obtain a type mismatch at LF (cf. also (49)):



This is how we can reinterpret a violation of the Θ -Criterion in the present framework. A KP without θ -role in the relevant domain cannot provide the right denota-

tion for semantic computation at LF. Now, suppose that Voice is ϕ -defective. Under this circumstance, Voice assigns its θ -role to the internal KP:

- (85) a. Juan se quejó.
b.



At LF, this produces a legitimate output. Thus, the relevant interpretation of VoiceP for a sentence like (81a), repeated below, would be as in (86b):

- (86) a. Juan se quejó.
Juan SE complained
'Juan complained.'
b. $\llbracket \text{VoiceP} \rrbracket = \lambda e[\text{Quejar}(e) \ \& \ \text{Agent}(e, \text{Juan})]$

The remaining routine of LF computation until TP is trivial.

Before concluding this subsection, we should wonder whether this approach predicts that all instances of inherent *se* results in a unaccusative syntax.¹⁶ I think that there is no expectation that this should be the case, since unaccusatives do not have an agentive syntax in the first place. Yet, I do think that this approach would predict a mixed behavior of the subject of inherent *se* constructions. This seems to be correct. Consider, for instance, the fact that inherent *se* verbs, like unaccusatives, are incompatible with *-dor* nominalizations (e.g., *trabajador* 'worker' vs. **quejador* 'complainer'), but, unlike unaccusatives, they cannot participate in

¹⁶ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this question.

absolute constructions (e.g., *Llegado Juan...* ‘Once Juan arrived...’ vs. **Quejado Juan...* ‘Once Juan complained...’).¹⁷

In summary, the proposed system provides thus a principled reason of why inherent *se* sentences show the transitivity restriction commented above: if Voice valued Case with the internal argument, this argument would remain without a proper denotation and a type mismatch would obtain at LF. At the same time, the theory also explains why clitic insertion is unavoidable here; i.e., why they are inherently pronominal verbs. The reason is that the internal KP receives the θ -role associated with the Voice head, preventing thus the introduction of another KP in Spec, VoiceP. In true reflexive sentences, none of these restrictions show up because V is a thematic head; therefore, Voice can occur with or without ϕ -features giving rise to the reflexive alternation.

I think that this approach to inherent *se* generalizes to what Di Tullio (2005) calls “diacritic *se*”, a “type” of *se* in which the presence or absence of the clitic changes the basic meaning and valence of the verbal predicate. This set is very broad and, at first glance, there are no systematic meaning connections among the different verbal predicates that combine with this type. For instance, the verb *acordar* means ‘to agree’ but ‘to remember’ when it combines with the clitic:

- (87) a. Juan acordó las condiciones.
 Juan agreed the conditions
 ‘Juan agreed to the conditions.’
 b. Juan **se** acordó de Ana.
 Juan SE rememebered of Ana
 ‘Juan remembered Ana.’

The crucial difference with inherent *se* is that in cases like these there is some sort of competition between the variants with and without the clitic that results in a meaning change. One way of making sense of this competition consistent with the present framework is encoding the difference in the formal makeup of the verbs that participate in this alternation. Thus, I conjecture that the nonpronominal variant enters the syntax with a θ -role that is absent in the pronominal one:

- (88) a. [_{VP} V_[D,θ] KP]
 b. [_{VP} V_[D] KP]

For a transitive verb, the analysis in (88a) has nothing special, i.e., the relation between V and the internal KP is mediated through θ -assignment and its meaning

¹⁷ My analysis also predicts the impossibility of passivizing the derived subject of an inherent *se* sentence (e.g., *Juan fue quejado*, Lit: ‘Juan was complained’). Yet, as pointed out to me by a reviewer, this does not seem to be the case in German (see Schäfer 2012).

is compositionally determined at LF. In contrast, the relation between V and the internal KP in (88b) is not derived through principles of thematic assignment and semantic composition, but is stored in memory and interpreted by accessing the Encyclopedia. In other words, determination of the meaning in cases like (88b) requires access to arbitrary lists and lot of lexical and world knowledge. One of the most interesting consequences of this way of approaching the issue is that it provides a solution to the problem of metonymic readings in fake reflexives:

- (89) Juan se explica bien.
 Juan SE explains well
 ‘Juan explains his words / his actions well.’

According to Labelle (2008), these constructions constitute a serious challenge for the “unaccusative” hypothesis of reflexives and, at the same time, support her own approach. On her analysis of French reflexives, the clitic *se* is the surface manifestation of a particular Voice head, which requires an open predicate as argument. Thus, in a sentence like (89), the verb introduces a variable making reference to Juan’s words or actions, which is not syntactically satisfied. As a result, the predicate remains open and can combine with this particular Voice head:

- (90) $[[\text{explicar}]] = \lambda x \lambda e. [\text{explicar} (e, x_{\text{words}})]$ [adapted from Labelle 2008: 864]

There are two main problems with this analysis. First, the individual variable in (90) comes from a dubious paraphrase of the original sentence, based exclusively on certain meaning intuition connected to the verb meaning. The most obvious meaning of a sentence like (89) is just that Juan is clear. This concrete meaning is exclusively based on some encyclopedic knowledge about the verb at hand and the syntactic environment in which it appears. Second, Labelle’s strategy does not generalize. As she acknowledges, there are other predicates whose meaning cannot be resolved introducing the type of denotation proposed in (90). Consider the following Spanish sentence translated from the French example in Labelle (2008: footnote 24):

- (91) Juan se trata.
 Juan SE treats
 ‘Juan looks after his health.’

Here, the meaning of *tratarse* is related to medical care. This is fully unpredictable and, consequently, must be listed in the Encyclopedia. Myriads of verbs participate in the type of alternation we are discussing and, for each case, accessing to lexical and world knowledge is unavoidable.

Now, according to Embick & Marantz (2008), special meanings pertain to the lowest domain of the clause (in their terms, the lowest category-defining head and the Root). If Labelle’s examples are particular instances of inherent/diacritic *se*, as I am proposing, then we can make sense of the particular meanings that these predicate have when they occur as pronominal verbs. The two sentences in (89) and (91) would then receive the same analysis:

- (92) a. [*VoiceP se* Voice [*VP* explicar_[D] Juan]]
 b. [*VoiceP se* Voice [*VP* tratar_[D] Juan]]

The data discussed so far show not only that Labelle’s argument against the “un-accusative” hypothesis does not hold, but that her theory fails to account for many instances of inherent/diacritic *se*, including standard cases like *quejarse*, for which an open predicate analysis does not seem plausible.

5.2 Ergative SE

The sentences in (1), repeated below, have received much attention in the literature (see Schäfer 2008 for extensive discussion and references, and Pujalte 2012 for Spanish in particular):

- (93) **Ergative *se***
 a. La tormenta hundió al barco.
 the storm sank DOM.the ship
 ‘The storm sank the ship.’
 b. **Se** hundió el barco con la tormenta.
 SE sank the ship with the storm
 ‘The ship sank by the storm.’

Unlike impersonals or reflexives, ergatives have no agentive meaning. For this sentence, the sinking event can be related to an internal or an external cause. The *con*-phrase in (93b) introduces an external cause. Internal cause readings in Spanish can be triggered by adjectives like *solo* ‘solo’.

- (94) El barco se hundió solo.
 the ship SE sank only
 ‘The ship sank by itself.’

Interestingly, ergatives are also compatible with a non-agentive participant of the event. This participant is realized as a *dativo de interés*, a variety of the ethical dative:

- (95) A Juan se le quemó el asado.
 to Juan SE CL.3SG.DAT burned the barbecue
 ‘The barbecue burned on Juan.’

Space reasons prevent me from providing a detailed analysis of *se* ergative constructions and comparing it with the huge literature on the topic, but some considerations are worth-mentioning. First, the analysis proposed for inherent *se* in the previous section has obvious consequences for the proper analysis of ergatives. A core ingredient of my approach to inherent *se* is abandoning Chomsky’s assumption that subcategorization entails θ -marking, an idea already proposed in Postal & Pullum (1988). An inherent *se* configuration is one in which the verb subcategorizes for a KP that is θ -marked by Voice, not by V. The logic of this system allows for a situation in which V has a subcategorization feature and θ -role but Voice has only a [D]-feature, i.e., it is not a θ -assigner. I would like to suggest now that this logical option is indeed instantiated by anti-causatives:

- (96) a. El barco se hundió.
 b.
-

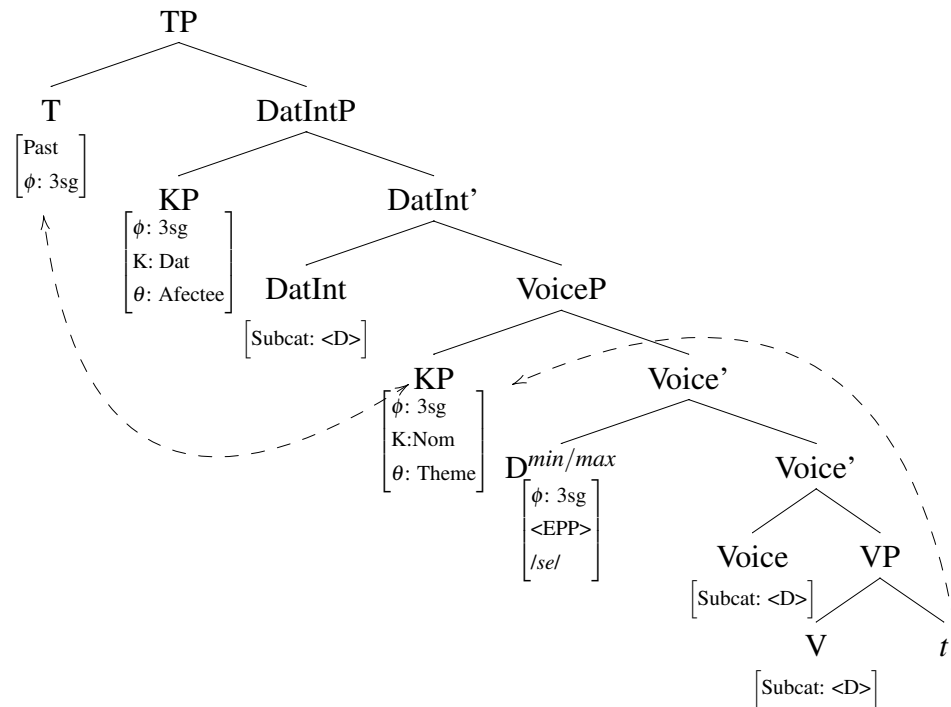
Here, the internal KP receives a θ -role from V and Case from T, since Voice does not have ϕ -features. The semantic computation at LF is routine. Note only that in this case, Voice does not introduce any θ -role, so its unique contribution reduces to the identity function it denotes (cf. (54)):

- (97) $[[\text{Voice}]]_{\langle\langle s,t \rangle, \langle s,t \rangle\rangle} = \lambda f.f$

This analysis captures in a direct way the non-agentive property of ergatives. Moreover, it also explains in a simple way the compatibility of *se*-ergatives with the *dativo de interés* illustrated in example (95). The reasonable strategy would be adopting an applicative analysis for this special dative.¹⁸

(98) a. A Juan se le quemó el asado.

b.



In principle, it seems that the theory captures in a very similar way the poorly understood alternation among unacusatives predicates with and without *se*:

(99) a. Juan murió.

Juan died

b. Juan se murió.

Juan SE died

‘Juan died.’

¹⁸ I assume that this particular Appl head, which I call *DatInt*, merges above Voice, but semantically we would get the same result if it is merged below Voice. Under both analyses, the applied argument obtains inherent Case from the Appl head. This assumption would be motivated because of the inertness of this type of applied argument with respect to any other A-dependency in the clause in which it occurs (e.g., T-agreement or A-movement). In any case, the *dativo de interés* should not be confused with other well-known high applicatives in the literature, like the benefactives to be discussed in the next subsection.

- (100) a. Cayó una persona al río.
 fell a person to.the river
 b. Se cayó una persona al río.
 SE fell a person to.the river
 ‘A person fell into the river.’

In both cases, Voice only denotes an identity function, but in the *se* variant, Voice also comes with an inherent [D]-feature. Again, this is the perfect counterpart of inherent *se*. It seems that dissociating subcategorization and θ -marking provides an explanation for the existence of this kind of “deviant” cases.

Truth-conditionally, this alternation does not produce any variation, but there is, however, a subtle difference in meaning for each member of pair in the alternation. For instance, as noted by Pujalte (2012) and others, the sentence in (99b) is incompatible with the dead being provoked by a volitional agent.

- (101) a. Juan murió fusilado.
 Juan died shot
 b. #Juan se murió fusilado.
 Juan SE died shot
 ‘Juan died shot.’

The casuistic is extremely complicated (making reference to the cause of the event, to the truth of the propositional complement, to the source of the event, and so on), but it seems that there is a very abstract property in common for each pair, namely, the variant with *se* introduces a presupposition regarding the semantic nature of the internal argument of the predicate involved in the sentence. This idea can be implemented in the present system by stipulating that the variant with *se* comes with a presupposition in Voice. Putting the idea in a more technical way, I conjecture that *se*-Voice denotes a partial identity function, whereas Voice lacking [D] is just an identity function:

- (102) a. $[[\text{Voice}]] = \lambda f.f$
 b. $[[\text{Voice}_{[D]}]] = \lambda f : \text{presupposition}.f$

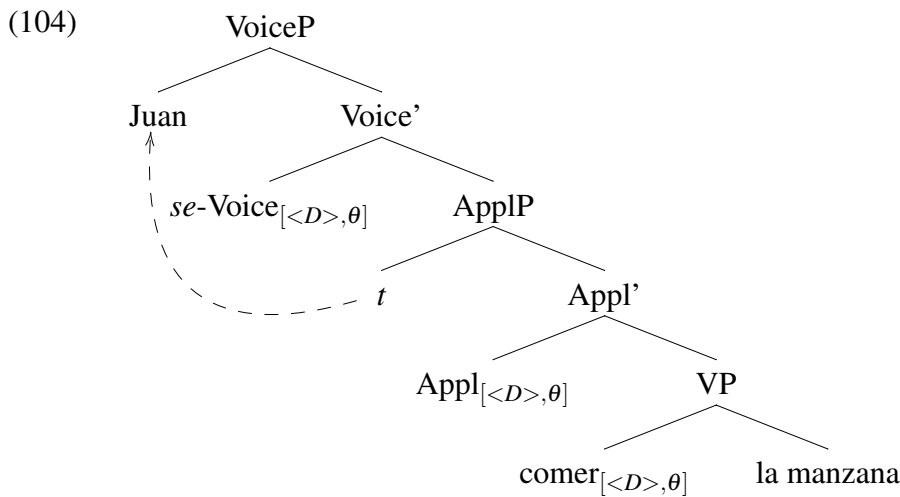
Thus, both sentences lack an agent θ -role, but the version with *se* has particular syntactic and a semantic properties: because of the probe nature of *se*, it triggers A-movement in the syntax but also induces a presupposition in the semantics.

5.3 Aspectual/Benefactive SE

Recall the basic alternation that gives rise to the so-called aspectual *se*:

- (103) a. Juan comió la manzana.
 Juan ate the apple
 ‘Juan ate the apple.’
 b. Juan *se* comió la manzana.
 Juan SE ate the apple.
 ‘Juan ate the apple.’

A high applicative analysis, along the lines of Labelle’s approach, with the corresponding modifications, seems to be a good analytical option, which fits the expectations of my analysis. Here is a tentative analysis:¹⁹



The applied argument receives two θ -roles, one from Appl and another one from Voice. Minimality under A-movement is obviously satisfied, but it remains to be seen why Activity is satisfied as well. This is connected to the general question about Case assignment for some applied arguments. In Spanish, they are syncretic with the dative Case in ditransitives and in other related environments. I assume here that the benefactive values its Case with a probe above Voice. Alternatively, if a competition-based approach is assumed, we can see that at the phase level (the VoiceP) *Juan* is in the position of getting nominative not dative, which means that it was active in a previous derivational step.

Of course, the tree in (104) is an oversimplification; in particular, it says nothing related to well-known facts about the behavior of direct objects in these aspectual/benefactive *se* environments (for instance, the incompatibility with bare objects). But I think that these issues are orthogonal to my point here and, for this

¹⁹ For Spanish, MacDonald (2017b) has proposed a similar analysis, but like Labelle, he also generates the subject DP in Spec, VoiceP. Given the arguments I have given regarding the need for accounting for the syncretism pattern, I do not see any reason to proceed in this way.

reason, I leave them open for future investigation. I also leave open discussion with other alternatives that are compatible with my general theory, as well. In principle, my analysis seems to be consistent with [Campanini & Schäfer \(2011\)](#), according to whom aspectual *se* is not derived from a high applicative syntax but of a low one.

The considerations made in this section had the main goal of making explicit how to proceed methodologically given any occurrence of the clitic *se* in Spanish. The crucial methodological step is this: unless empirical evidence dictates otherwise, assume that *se* is a probe for A-movement. Given the θ -system proposed here, there is *a priori* no reason to suppose that an agent KP is also a Voice specifier. Yet, that this is or is not the case is a purely empirical matter. For the *se* constructions analyzed in this paper, this methodological move has brought the important empirical result of making sense of the apparent chaos in the realm of *se* constructions. Showing that this strategy can be generalized requires a case-by-case study.

5.4 Summary: Voice deconstructed

The following table summarizes the formal aspects regarding both the formal content of Voice and the formal content of the KP that establishes an *Agree* relation with the clitic and a thematic relation with Voice, in those cases in which there is indeed such a KP in the derivation:

Table 1: Voice deconstructed.

	Reflexive	Impersonal/ Passive	Inherent	Ergative	Benefactive
Subcategorization, θ and ϕ specification in Voice	$\begin{bmatrix} \text{D} \\ \theta: \text{Agent} \\ (\phi: \text{unvalued}) \end{bmatrix}$	$\begin{bmatrix} \text{D} \\ \theta: \text{Agent} \\ (\phi: \text{unvalued}) \end{bmatrix}$	$\begin{bmatrix} \text{D} \\ \theta: \text{Agent} \end{bmatrix}$	$\begin{bmatrix} \text{D} \\ \theta: \emptyset \end{bmatrix}$	$\begin{bmatrix} \text{D} \\ \theta: \text{Agent} \\ \phi: \text{unvalued} \end{bmatrix}$
Is there an A-dependency between <i>se</i> and a KP in the domain of Voice?	Yes $\begin{bmatrix} \text{K: unvalued} \\ \theta: \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Theme} \\ \text{Goal} \\ \text{etc.} \end{array} \right\} \end{bmatrix}$	No	Yes $\begin{bmatrix} \text{K: unvalued} \\ \theta: \emptyset \end{bmatrix}$	Yes $\begin{bmatrix} \text{K: unvalued} \\ \theta: \text{Theme} \end{bmatrix}$	Yes $\begin{bmatrix} \text{K: unvalued} \\ \theta: \text{Benefactive} \end{bmatrix}$

What is *se*, then, under the present proposal? It is a D-clitic that satisfies the subcategorization requirement of Voice. Since it is defective in the sense that it does not project K, the clitic cannot be a receptor of θ -roles. The table above shows that a subcategorization [D]-feature in Voice is what *all* instances of *se* have in common. Thus, we derive the presence of *se* as syntactic expletive. Now, *se* is also

a probe, and as such can attract a KP, which is able to receive the agent θ -role, if there is such a role in Voice. According to the present theory, all the syntactic environments in which there is an active KP result in an A-chain with the moved KP, the clitic and the trace of KP as the members of the chain. Again, this is what all instances of the so-called paradigmatic *se* have in common, namely: a derived subject, which is born as an active KP within the complement domain of Voice. This is the *unaccusative* part of this kind of *u*-syncretism.

Thus, simple reflexive sentences like (4) instantiate a case in which Voice has a [D]-feature and an agent θ -role but no ϕ -features. In this scenario, the internal KP moves to a position from which it values the ϕ -features of the clitic, deletes the EPP feature the clitic has, and receives a θ -role from Voice:

- (105) a. Juan criticó a Ana.
 Juan criticized DOM Ana
 ‘Juan criticized Ana.’
 b. Ana *se* criticó.
 Ana SE criticized
 ‘Ana criticized herself.’

It could be the case that Voice has also unvalued ϕ -features and enters into an *Agree* relation with some direct object, but there is still another active KP in the VP domain. This is the case of reflexivization of goal KPs in ditransitive constructions (cf. ex. (44a)):

- (106) a. Juan le entregó el libro a María.
 Juan CL.3SG.DAT gave the book to María
 ‘Juan gave María the book.’
 b. Juan *se* entregó el libro.
 Juan SE gave the book
 ‘Juan gave himself the book.’

Because of Minimality, an object KP cannot be reflexivized in the same double object contexts (cf. (35b)):

- (107) *Juan *se* le entregó a la policía.
 Juan SE CL.3SG.DAT delivered to the police

There are cases in which V subcategorizes a KP although it does not θ -mark it. In those cases, such an argument can be properly interpreted if (i) Voice has an unassigned agent θ -role (because of the defective nature of *se*), but (ii) it does not have ϕ -features. This scenario results in the so-called *inherent se* (cf. (7)):

- (108) a. Juan **se** quejó.
 Juan SE complained
 ‘Juan complained.’
 b. *Juan quejó.
 Juan complained
 c. *Juan lo quejó.
 Juan him/it complained

As proposed in many works on anti-causatives (see Schäfer 2008 for an original proposal), Voice could be also semantically empty, but still subcategorize for a nominal. If *se* is inserted, then the clitic itself satisfies this subcategorization requirement and, in addition, triggers A-movement of the theme KP. Note that it is necessary that V selects such a KP and also θ -marks it, otherwise, the argument cannot be properly interpreted at LF. This is the so-called *ergative or anti-causative se* (cf. (1)):

- (109) a. La tormenta hundió al barco.
 the storm sank DOM.the ship
 ‘The storm sank the ship.’
 b. **Se** hundió el barco con la tormenta.
 SE sank the ship with the storm
 ‘The ship sank by the storm.’

The set of paradigmatic clitics discussed to some extent in the present study is completed by the so-called *aspectual/benefactive se*, which is a case in which Voice combines with *se* (keeping then its θ -role) but also has ϕ -features. If there is an added benefactive in its domain, then *se* attracts the benefactive, which agrees with it, and receives the agent θ -role from Voice (cf. (5)):

- (110) a. Juan comió la manzana.
 Juan ate the apple
 ‘Juan ate the apple.’
 b. Juan **se** comió la manzana.
 Juan SE ate the apple.
 ‘Juan ate the apple.’

Whenever the clitic fails to attract a KP, either because such a KP is simply not there (e.g., impersonal *se* coming from unergative verbs, cf. (111) below) or because there is such a KP but with a Case feature already valued (e.g., passive and impersonal *se* coming from transitive predicates; cf. (2) and (3)), we obtain the so-called non-paradigmatic *se*:

- (111) a. Ana trabajó bien.
 Ana worked well
 ‘Ana worked well.’
 b. **Se** trabajó bien.
 SE worked well
 ‘One/someone worked well.’
- (112) a. La policía cerró las puertas para bloquear la salida.
 the police closed the doors for block.INF the exit
 ‘The police closed the doors in order to block the exit.’
 b. **Se** cerraron las puertas para bloquear la salida.
 SE closed.3PL the doors for block.INF the exit
 ‘The doors were closed in order to block the exit.’
- (113) a. Juan criticó a Ana.
 Juan criticized DOM Ana
 ‘Juan criticized Ana.’
 b. **Se** criticó a Ana.
 SE criticized DOM Ana
 ‘One criticized Ana.’

In these situations, the agent θ -role in Voice remains unassigned in the syntax. At LF, this θ -role is then realized on Voice itself, which takes *se* as an indefinite argument. As discussed in section 3.1.2, the difference in agreement between impersonal and passive *se* boils down to a different mechanism of agreement resolution at PF, as proposed in Pujalte (2012; 2020), Pujalte & Saab (2014) and Ormazabal & Romero (2020).

Thus, the present theory conceives of most, if not all, instances of the clitic *se* and its agreeing variants as triggers for A-movement, i.e., formal probes. There is no need for specific *se* constructions. There is only one expletive *se* acting as a syntactic probe. Whenever A-movement succeeds the computational component generates what we superficially call “paradigmatic” *se* sentences. Whenever *Agree* fails, because there is no A-movement, the system generates what we superficially call “non-paradigmatic” *se* sentences.

The theory also dispenses with Voice features of any type (e.g., Active vs Non-Active). The syntax only manipulates three types of formal objects: subcategorization features, θ -roles and ϕ -features. Such material is manipulated under well-known restrictions, namely, Activity and Minimality.

There are of course many remaining issues opened by the present research agenda. As noted by a reviewer, we should explore what type of combinations

of the formal features discussed so far are really present across languages.²⁰ Moreover, if we really want to eliminate Voice features entirely, we should integrate analytical passives into the picture. As suggested in Pujalte & Saab (2012) and Saab (2014), the analytical passive would be a case in which there is an agentive Voice head present in the derivation, but no subcategorization feature in the same head and, thus, no clitic.²¹ Given that, by hypothesis, a thematic head must have a category feature in order to be a θ -role assigner, there is no agent θ -role assignment in analytical passive contexts and Voice is realized as having an existentially closed agent. This would explain why, for instance, there is no pronominal binding of a possessor in cases like the following one, which, as shown by MacDonald (2017a), minimally contrasts with the example (78), repeated below:

- (114) *Fue levantada la mano para hacer una pregunta en clase.
 was raised the hand for make.INF a question in class
 INTENDED: ‘Someone/one raised her hand to ask a question in class.’
 (Ok under a non-inalienable possession reading)
- (115) Se levantó la mano para hacer una pregunta en clase.
 SE raised the hand for make.INF a question in class
 ‘Someone/one raised her/his hand to ask a question in class.’

This is, in a nutshell, how the present research agenda should be expanded in the future. I think that the agenda is interesting since it opens our analytic space in some intriguing ways. If the theory is at least partially correct, we should push the deconstruction project even further. I cannot explore such additional research routes here, but before closing this article, I would like to provide some final conjectures regarding the question of how some clitics, which are born as regular variables, become formal probes.

6 Some remarks on variation

The theory deployed so far is a theory about a fragment of Spanish grammar. I have tried to be as exhaustive and explicit as possible within the reasonable limits of an article. Yet, it is important to stress that, as usual in grammatical theory, the theory cannot be exhaustive. On the one hand, it does not cover every syntactic environment in which the clitic *se* can occur in Spanish in general and in different dialects in particular, and, of course, it does not cover other Romance languages. Moreover, the theory has remained silent about the way in which the clitic *se* and

²⁰ In addition, as pointed out by another reviewer, the present system should provide a plausible account of how agentive modifiers work.

²¹ See also the discussion around example (131) in section 6.

its agreeing variants fit into the system of Spanish clitics. Having said this, I would not like to finish this study without providing at least some conjectures regarding the routes that the theory can take in order to address some of these variation issues.

In principle, the system presented in the previous sections is able to make sense of certain variation aspects within a given language and across Romance (and perhaps beyond) making use of a minimal assumption, namely:

- (116) **Conjecture:** Within and across languages clitics can come in at least two guises: $D^{min/max}$ or $K^{min/max}$.

This is, of course, not a novelty. Manipulating the formal makeup of pronominal systems within and across languages is a fruitful strategy when it comes to explaining variation facts (see [Cardinaletti & Starke 1999](#), among many others). I have argued here that *se* is defective in the sense of non-projecting a K head above D:

- (117) $D^{min/max}$
 $\left[\begin{array}{l} \phi: \text{unvalued} \\ \text{EPP} \end{array} \right]$

This makes a subset of Spanish clitics deficient both formally and semantically. Syntactically, they do not receive structural Case and, consequently, no θ -role. This results in a semantic type of deficiency, as well: absence of a θ -role forces the semantic realization of clitics either as λ -abstractors or as indefinites.

But assume now that, on occasions, clitics can project K, like I show below (I remain neutral as far as the status of their ϕ -features is concerned):

- (118) $K^{min/max}$
 $\left[\begin{array}{l} \phi: (\text{un})\text{valued} \\ \text{K: unvalued} \\ \theta: \end{array} \right]$

This simple difference has large consequences for the syntax of clitic constructions. Indeed, I think that Romance languages can be divided in at least two types as far as reflexivization is concerned, depending on whether they have D-reflexives or K-reflexives. I have already defended the thesis that in Spanish *se* is a D-clitic. Consider now Italian.

As is well-known, this language does not allow for reflexive doubling, which means that *se stesso* and *si* are in complementary distribution.²²

²² See [Verdecchia \(2020\)](#), who claims that there is a strong correlation between clitic doubling and reflexive doubling in Romance. Spanish is a language with both clitic doubling and reflexive doubling and Italian is a language that lacks both options. In the terms of the present theory, this would suggest that in Italian a big part of the elements of its clitic system is still realized as pure variables.

- (119) a. Gianni difende se stesso.
Gianni defends himself
b. Gianni si difende.
Gianni SI defends
'Gianni defends himself.'
c. *Gianni si difende se stesso.
Juan SI defends himself

Interestingly, Spanish is a language that licenses reflexive doubling productively:

- (120) Ana se criticó a sí misma.
Ana SE criticized DOM herself
'Ana criticized herself.'

A plausible analysis of reflexive doubling would involve a big KP in object position (see Uriagereka 1995 and Kayne 2002), in which the antecedent-reflexive pronoun dependency is syntactically resolved. If the anaphor is the head of such a big KP, its antecedent KP in its specifier, then it receives the theme θ -role from V. Once Voice is introduced, it values the anaphor as accusative and *se* attracts the subject KP to Spec, VoiceP, position in which it values the inflectional features of *se* and in which it receives its agent θ -role from Voice:

- (121) [VoiceP Ana_[Agent] se Voice_{<D>}] [VP criticar [KP *t*_{Ana} a sí misma_[theme]]]]

Thus, licensing reflexive doubling in the syntax is a way of splitting the two relevant θ -roles in two different KPs. This crucially impacts in processes of KP focalization.²³ As we have seen in subsection 4.2, Spanish non-doubled *se* reflexives do not allow for focalization of the theme θ -role with independence of the agent θ -role. Focalization of the theme θ -role in doubled reflexives is well-attested:

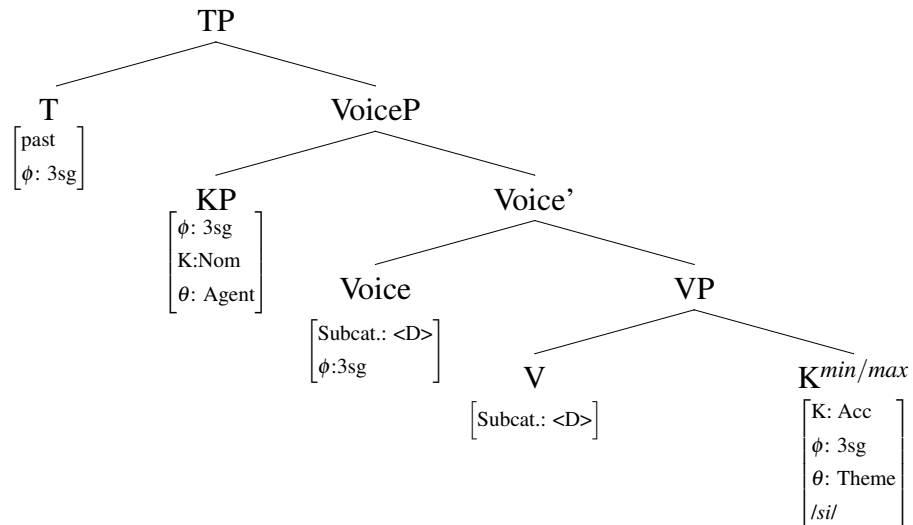
- (122) Ana se criticó a sí misma, no a Paula.
Ana SE criticized DOM herself, not DOM Paula
'Ana criticized HERSELF, not PAULA.'

This follows from the analysis in (121) without further ado.

Now, let us consider absence of reflexive doubling in Italian. If reflexive *si* is a K-clitic, then the clitic itself values accusative Case with Voice and receives the theme θ -role from V. My analysis for a *si* reflexive sentence in Italian is then as follows:

²³ See Labelle (2008) and Doron & Hovav (2007), who use this as a test against the "unaccusative" analysis of reflexives. As I show in the main text, their criticism does not apply to my system.

- (123) a. Gianni si difende.
 b.



This is essentially the analysis proposed by Schäfer (2008; 2017) for reflexives in Romance. On this analysis, K-clitics are true bound variables, and not λ -abstractors. This is not a subtle difference, but, without a doubt, is masked by the superficial similarities between Spanish and Italian. At any rate, the proposal suggested in (123) explains straightforwardly why Italian does not license reflexive doubling. An analysis along the lines of (121) is correctly ruled out for Italian for Case reasons. In effect, since the clitic receives both accusative Case and the theme θ -role, the anaphor *se stesso* cannot co-occur with it.

On the other hand, note that if the clitic moved to Spec, VoiceP as a K^{min/max} category, we would end up with a partial structural similarity between K-clitics and D-clitics. This similarity could be at the heart of the syncretism pattern across Romance. Plausibly, all these clitics are born as arguments and, in some cases, mutate into formal probes.

This division into two types of clitics can be also instantiated within a same language. There is indeed robust evidence that in Rioplatense Spanish accusative and dative clitics come in both guises, i.e., as D-clitics and K-clitics. As shown in detail by Di Tullio, Saab & Zdrojewski (2019), accusative clitic doubling in Rioplatense Spanish involves A-movement of the object to a position above the subject. In the following example, I provide a simple case of optional accusative doubling in the dialect:

- (124) Ana (lo) criticó a Juan.
 Ana CL.3SG.ACC criticized DOM Juan
 'Ana criticized Juan.'

Note now that focus movement of the object can repair WCO only under clitic doubling, a strong indication of A-movement:

- (125) A JUAN_i ??(lo_i) criticó su_i madre.
 DOM JUAN CL.3SG.ACC criticized his mother
 ‘His mother criticized JUAN.’

As we saw in section 3.2, the same observation applies to doubled datives (cf. (47)):

- (126) ¿A quién_i ??(le_i) dio un libro su_i madre?
 to whom CL.3SG.DAT gave a book her/his mother
 ‘Whom does her/his mother give a book?’

These facts suggest that doubling clitics are probes for A-movement above Voice, as schematized below, a view consistent with Sportiche’s (1996) classical proposal of clitics as Voice heads.

- (127) [DATP Probe_{DAT} [ACCP Probe_{ACC} [VoiceP Probe_{SE}]]]

But of course, Rioplatense Spanish also uses clitics as free variable arguments:

- (128) a. Ana lo criticó.
 Ana CL.3SG.ACC criticized
 ‘Ana criticized him.’
 b. Ana le dio un libro.
 Ana CL.3SG.DAT gave a book
 ‘Ana gave her/him a book.’

And like in almost all Spanish dialects, Rioplatense also uses clitics as bound variable arguments in clitic left dislocation and clitic right dislocation scenarios:²⁴

- (129) a. A Juan, Ana lo criticó.
 DOM Juan, Ana CL.3SG.ACC criticized
 ‘Juan, Ana criticized him.’
 b. A Juan, Ana le dio un libro.
 to Juan Ana CL.3SG.DAT gave a book
 ‘Juan, Ana gave him a book.’
 (130) a. Ana lo criticó, a Juan.
 Ana CL.3SG.ACC criticized, DOM Juan
 ‘Ana criticized him, Juan.’

²⁴ I refer the reader to Di Tullio, Saab & Zdrojewski (2019) for arguments in favor of distinguishing these clitic duplications from clitic doubling.

- b. Ana le dio un libro, a Juan.
 Ana CL.3SG.DAT gave a book, to Juan
 ‘Ana gave a book to him, Juan.’

So, it seems that we have good reasons to think that Spanish has both D-clitics and K-clitics. In simple terms, the clitics in (124)–(126) are D-clitics, whereas those in (128)–(130) are K-clitics.

This is not the unique source of variation within and across languages. As argued by Pujalte & Saab (2012), in some particular configurations *se* is a probe of Tense not of Voice. This seems to be the case with the so-called [–argument] *se*, famously proposed by Cinque (1988).

- (131) Cuando *se* es castigado sin razón...
 when SE is punished without reason...
 ‘When one is punished without a reason...’

We also owe to Cinque the important observation that this type of *se* does not have the same distribution as other instances of impersonal *se*. On the one hand, they are licensed in generic environments but not in episodic ones:

- (132) *Ayer *se* fue castigado sin razón...
 yesterday SE was punished without reason...
 INTENDED: ‘Yesterday one was punished without a reason...’

On the other hand, they are incompatible with absolute nonfinite clauses:

- (133) *Al *serse* castigado sin razón...
 to.the be_{INF}-SE punished without reason...
 INTENDED: ‘One being punished without a reason...’

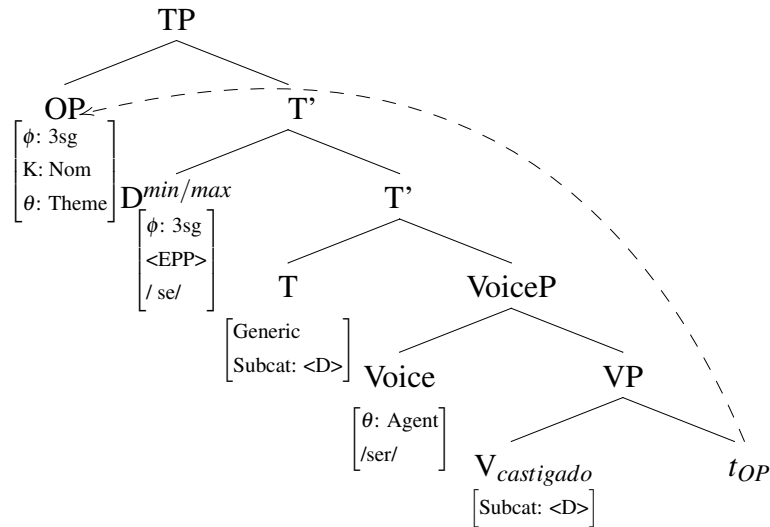
Note that the so-called [+argument] *se* is grammatical in the same environments:

- (134) Al castigarse a Ana sin razón...
 to.the punish_{INF}-SE DOM Ana without reason...
 INTENDED: ‘Ana being punished without a reason...’

As mentioned in subsection 5.4, Pujalte & Saab (2012) argue that we can eliminate features like [–argument] if we allow that certain generic Tense nodes come with a subcategorization [D]-feature. In their system, this feature is resolved at PF. But we can maintain the same idea under the syntactic approach to *se* insertion. So let us assume that certain generic Tense nodes come with a formal probe. As for analytic passives, I also assume with Pujalte & Saab that they have an agent θ -role in Voice

but no a [D]-feature. Therefore, in analytical passives Voice does not require a specifier.²⁵ Now, generic T requires a generic operator, which is attracted by the probe that *se* instantiates. This is illustrated in the following tree:

(135)



This analysis captures the restricted occurrence of [–argument] *se* to generic environments and also its distribution in (non)finite clauses. As argued in Pujalte & Saab (2012), absolute clauses require predicate fronting, which is in complementary distribution with expletive *se*. Alternatively, this distribution could also follow from the generic property of Tense, which is absent in nonfinite clauses. I have to postpone a full exploration of this type of alternatives for future research. The hope is that the distribution of the probe *se* across the functional structure of the clause gives us different "flavors" of impersonal/passive *se* in Spanish and beyond without the need for stipulating [α argument] features.²⁶

7 Concluding remarks

In this study, I have discussed the main properties of *se* constructions in Spanish with the aim of sustaining two main theses on the syntax-interface connection of such constructions:

(136) *Thesis 1 (syntax): se* is a probe for A-movement.

²⁵ The agent θ -role is then existentially closed at LF.

²⁶ Note that this distribution of impersonal/passive *se* is not captured in recent proposals like, for instance, Ormazabal & Romero (2020), according to which impersonal/passive *se* is just a regular nominative pronoun.

- (137) *Thesis 2 (semantics)*: The LF realization of *se* depends on the syntactic output. Either A-movement applies in the syntax and LF receives the instruction for predicate abstraction or there is no A-movement and, as a consequence, no abstraction. If the latter is the case, *se* satisfies the individual argument Voice requires.

On the empirical side, the theory I have defended allows for the unification of many instances of *se* syncretism in Spanish. In particular, I have detected what I think is the common denominator in those scenarios in which the clitic *se* occurs, namely, impersonal/passive *se*, reflexive *se*, ergative *se*, inherent *se* and aspectual/benefactive *se*, among others. This common property is a probe merged in Voice. Being a probe of the relevant type, *se* triggers A-movement of an argument in its complement domain, if there is one. In that scenario, the clitic agrees with the moved goal, which in turn receives an additional θ -role from Voice, in those cases in which Voice has such a θ -role. At LF, the clitic is realized as a λ -abstractor. If there is no such a goal, then the clitic fails to agree in the syntax and agreement is entirely resolved at PF. At LF, it is realized as an indefinite in Heim's sense. I have provided several arguments to the effect of showing A-movement properties in the relevant environments; essentially, I have shown that typical activity and minimality effects constraining other type of A-dependencies are clearly detected in the relevant patterns explored here. The conclusion is self-evident: *se*-constructions are the superficial manifestation of an abstract syntactic scenario connected to well-known properties of the A-system.

On the theoretical side, this study makes what I think are two relevant contributions. First, it really dissolves the need for postulating a variety of *se* constructions in favor of one abstract underlying property, i.e., the presence of a syntactic probe under Voice. The theory dispenses with unmotivated Voice features (like the features [Active] vs. [Non-Active] used, for instance, in Embick 2004) and suspicious features for particular instances of *se* (like, Cinque's 1988 [\pm argument] feature). In this respect, my theory aligns with similar approaches in the literature for which those features are also deconstructed (among others, Alexiadou et al. 2015 and Wood 2015). If the theory is on the right track, then the computational system only manipulates θ -roles, ϕ -features and subcategorization features. Nothing else. Deconstructing Voice in this favored sense seems then a good theoretical move, one that brings us further progress in our understanding of *u*-syncretism in Spanish and, hopefully, beyond.

Second, I think that this study also makes a contribution to the debate about the proper nature of abstract Case. A great deal of the generative theorizing in the last 40 years has been devoted to elucidate the nature of Case, a category resistant to extra linguistic (or more properly, extra syntactic) considerations or motivations

(although see [Hinzen 2014](#) for a recent reconsideration). Case Theory, as conceived in the GB era, was under dispute under two views in competition: (a) The Case Filter and (b) The Visibility Condition. At that time, there were reasons to call the Visibility Condition into question (*PRO* theory, expletives, etc.) and, perhaps, this was the reason that led us to favor a more formal approach within the Minimalist Program (Checking Theory, Valuation Theory, among other important alternatives). A flavor of redundancy, however, persisted in the formal approach, as lucidly argued in [McFadden \(2004\)](#). This redundancy boils down to the basic fact that abstract Case can in principle be derived from licensing considerations. McFadden's strategy was relegating Case determination to morphology, a move that implied abandoning abstract Case Theory. I agree with McFadden's criticism but not with the way in which Case Theory is resolved. In my view, any version of the (syntactic or morphological) formal approach only deals with Case/case interactions; i.e., with the syntax-morphology interaction. And that is, without a doubt, an essential part of Case Theory. There is, however, another aspect at the core of Case Theory, which is -as it should be evident at this point- Case/ θ interactions, and this is, again without a doubt, another essential aspect of the theory, but one that connects the syntactic properties of Case to its semantic effects.²⁷ Here is where the Visibility Condition enters into the picture again. On the reconsideration of such a condition made in this study, Case is syntactic, θ -roles are also syntactic, but the associations between Case and θ -roles that are syntactically determined (via alloosemy) have a crucial impact in the semantic derivation.

Abbreviations

ACC = accusative, CL = clitic, DAT = dative, DOM = differential object marking, FEM = feminine, INF = infinitive, MASC = masculine, NOM = nominative, PL = plural, SG = singular

²⁷ This aspect of Case Theory is, to a large extent, independent of the particular implementations made here. If I am correct, what is at the core of Case theory is the role of abstract Case in semantic interpretation. As noticed by an anonymous reviewer, in principle, the idea can be implemented in alternative frameworks in which θ -roles are deduced entirely from LF configurations. At any rate, I would like to stress that for the "semantic effects" of abstract Case, I do not mean any tight connection between specific Case values (nominative, accusative, dative, and so on) and specific θ -roles (agent, theme, goal, and so on). Of course, we know that such one-to-one connection does not exist and I have provided several derivations here in which nominative can realize the agent θ -role, the theme θ -role or both, depending on particular syntactic scenarios. What I have tried to show in this study is how K heads license one or another interpretation depending on syntactic conditions like Activity.

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Competing interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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