

THE FORMAL PROPERTIES OF NON PARADIGMATIC *SE*\*Javier Ormazabal<sup>a,b</sup> & Juan Romero<sup>b,c</sup>*University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU)<sup>a</sup>, Basque Group for Theoretical Linguistics (HiTT)<sup>b</sup>, University of Extremadura (UEX)<sup>c</sup>*

**ABSTRACT.** Following Oca (1914), this article argues that passive and impersonal *se* constructions in Spanish are regular transitive constructions where the pronominal clitic *se* is the argumental subject. Several arguments (secondary predication, non-argumental predicates, control and obviation, anaphora binding, active morphology or its alignment with overt nominative pronouns, among others) show that (i) both constructions are active structures, (ii) despite what agreement facts might suggest, in both the internal argument of the verb is not the subject but the direct object throughout the derivation, (iii) *se* is the active nominative pronominal subject of the construction. We argue that the alleged ‘special’ properties of passive-*se* are not construction-specific but follow from the lexical specifications of *se* agreeing with Tense as a quirky subject.

**Keywords.** *se* constructions; quirky subject; Differential Object Marking; subject clitics

**RESUMEN.** Este artículo propone siguiendo a Oca (1914) que las construcciones con *se* pasivas e impersonales son construcciones transitivas normales cuyo sujeto es el clítico pronominal *se*. Distintos argumentos (predicación secundaria, predicados no argumentales, control y obviación, ligamiento de anáforas, morfología activa o su coherencia con el comportamiento de los pronombres nominativos explícitos entre otros) muestran que (i) se trata de dos construcciones activas, (ii) a pesar de lo que parecen sugerir los hechos de concordancia, en ambas construcciones el argumento interno del verbo no es el sujeto sino el complemento directo de la derivación y (iii) *se* es el sujeto pronominal nominativo de la construcción. Proponemos que las supuestas propiedades ‘especiales’ de la pasiva refleja no dependen de la construcción, sino que se siguen de las propiedades de la concordancia de *se* con Tiempo como sujeto caprichoso.

**Palabras clave.** construcciones con *se*; sujeto caprichoso; Marcado Diferencial de Objeto; clíticos de sujeto

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## 1. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to analyze the role of SE in non-paradigmatic SE constructions in Spanish. Specifically, we deal with so called *impersonal* (1a) and *passive* (1b) SE constructions as described in Mendikoetxea (1999) and other works.

- (1) a. Se dejó a las mujeres maltratadas sin protección efectiva  
**SE left.sg DOM** the women abused without protection effective  
 ‘Abused women were left without effective protection’  
 b. Se dejaron las reivindicaciones de los trabajadores en un cajón  
**SE left.pl** the demands of the workers in a drawer  
 ‘The workers’ demands were left aside’

In Standard Spanish, the key difference between (1a) and (1b) lies in verbal agreement. Thus while in SE impersonal construction (1a) number agreement with the complement *a las mujeres maltratadas* is not possible (2a), in SE passive constructions agreement between the verb and its complement is mandatory (1b)-(2b).

- (2) a. \*Se dejaron a las mujeres maltratadas sin protección efectiva  
**SE left.pl DOM** the women abused without protection effective  
 ‘Abused women were left without effective protection’  
 b. \*Se dejó las reivindicaciones de los trabajadores en un cajón  
**SE left.sg** the demands of the workers in a drawer  
 ‘The workers’ demands were left aside’

It is precisely because of this contrast that it is generally assumed that the complement in (1b) raises to subject position, while the complement in (1a) stays in object position, where it receives Differential Object Marking (DOM) (Rivero 2002). Analyses differ regarding the structural details of these relations, but there is a broad consensus in the literature that (1a) and (1b) are instances of different constructions.

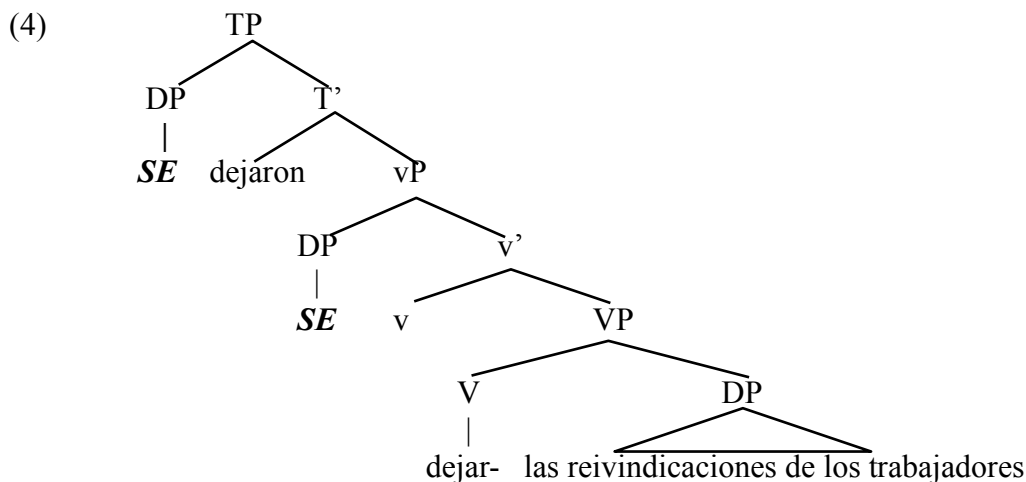
In this paper, we update a proposal already anticipated by Oca (1914) who suggested that the clitic SE is the subject of these sentences. We propose a unified derivation of SE-passives and SE-impersonals as regular active constructions where SE is the nominative subject (see Ordóñez 2018 for a partially similar analysis; also see Pujalte & Saab 2012, Pujalte 2013, Saab 2014 for a unification analysis in a different direction). The derivation we propose for both constructions is a regular active one, where SE generates in an argument position, and is constrained by the same restrictions as any other subject. As in transitive sentences, we also assume that DOM is a manifestation of object agreement, while non-DOM objects do not check agreement or require any syntactic licensing.<sup>1</sup> The derivations up to *v*P differ as follows, where (3a) corresponds to an impersonal SE construction and (3b) to a passive one:

- (3) a. [<sub>v</sub>P (a) *las mujeres maltratadas* [<sub>v</sub>P **SE** [<sub>v</sub>’ v [<sub>v</sub>P *dejar las mujeres maltratadas* (sin protección)]]]]]

<sup>1</sup> For most parts, the last assumption is not crucial for our analysis in this paper, which is compatible with other proposals deriving the difference between DOM and non-DOM objects. But our analysis fits particularly well to explain not only their different behavior with respect to a large battery of properties in “regular” transitive constructions (see Ormazabal & Romero 2007, 2013a,b for a thorough argumentation and references), but also to derive the different agreement patterns in SE constructions (Ormazabal & Romero 2019a).

- b. [<sub>VP</sub> **SE** [<sub>v'</sub> v [<sub>VP</sub> dejar las reivindicaciones de los trabajadores (en un cajón)]]]]

From that point on, they are exactly the same, with *se* merging in (Spec, TP) and checking agreement in T (we illustrate it with the derivation of inanimate objects):



The "nominative SE" hypothesis has been argued for impersonal SE in (1a) by many authors before us (e.g. Cinque 1988; see D'Alessandro 2007, ch. 2 for a comprehensive revision of the literature in this regard), but extending it to passive SE, as we do, has been very uncommon. We also argue that the characteristic properties of the constructions and their differences derive from the interaction of Case theory and the "quirky" nature of SE as the subject of the construction; specifically, its lack of number  $\phi$  features.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2 we go through some of the most characteristic properties attributed in the literature to non paradigmatic SE constructions in Spanish, and check whether these properties are compatible with the idea that SE is actually a nominative subject. For each test we make sure that the results are equally good for both impersonal and passive SE. In the light of these results, in section 3 we explore a way to derive SE's properties from more general condition of the system. We develop the hypothesis that SE is a regular nominative pronoun encoding person/animacy but not number, and present some interesting consequences.

## 2. General properties of passive and impersonal SE constructions

In this section we analyze the main distinctive properties of SE constructions discussed in the literature, most explicitly organized in Mendikoetxea (1999), Sánchez (2002) and the *Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española* (see RAE 2011). We complete the standard discussion of control with obviation tests and add new observations concerning the behavior of SE constructions in pseudo relatives and idiomatic expressions. We show that these properties are not only compatible with our proposal, but that in fact they support it in a remarkably straightforward way (for other evidence in the same direction, see Ordóñez 2018, MacDonalds & Maddox 2017, and references).

### 2.1. Agreement patterns

The general agreement situation in SE constructions in the case of non-transitive verbs is for T to appear in third person singular, arguably, a default form (5).

- (5) a. En esta empresa se **trabaja** sin descanso  
 In this company SE **work.3sg** without rest  
 ‘In this company people work restlessly’  
 b. Se **anduvo** hasta el cruce  
 SE **walked.3sg** until the crossing  
 ‘People walked until the junction’  
 c. Se **llega** antes por aquí  
 SE **arrive.3sg** earlier by here  
 ‘You arrive earlier this way’

With transitive verbs, cross-linguistic and dialectal variation among Romance languages and dialects is considerable (see observations in footnote 2). In Standard Spanish there are two possibilities: on the one hand, in those contexts where the object must receive DOM (6a)-(6b), the verbal complex appears in the default 3rd person form (6c)-(6d), as in (5).

- (6) a. \*Se asustaron los niños  
 SE frighten.**pl** the children  
 b. \*se asustó los niños  
 SE frighten.**sg** the children  
 c. \*se asustaron a los niños  
 SE frighten.**pl** **DOM** the children  
 d. se asustó a los niños  
 SE frighten.**sg** **DOM** the children  
 ‘The children were frightened’

On the other hand, when the object cannot be marked for DOM (7a)-(7b), the verb triggers number agreement with it (7c)-(7d) (observe the contrast between (6c) and (7c)).

- (7) a. \*Se tiraron a las colillas al suelo  
 SE threw.away.**pl** **DOM** the cigarette butts to.the floor  
 b. \*Se tiró a las colillas al suelo  
 SE threw.away.**sg** **DOM** the cigarette butts on.the floor  
 c. Se tiraron las colillas al suelo  
 SE threw.away.**pl** the cigarette butts to.the floor  
 d. \*Se tiró las colillas al suelo  
 SE threw.away.**sg** the cigarette butts on.the floor  
 ‘The cigarette butts were thrown away on the floor’

This description does not honor dialectal variation,<sup>2</sup> but it corresponds to the standard description of the phenomenon. It is important to note that what is relevant for

<sup>2</sup> Number agreement is a very unstable phenomenon subject to all sorts of intervening factors. Although part of this variation plausibly has syntactic roots (see, especially the systematic differences between pre-verbal and post-verbal DPs), other factors are clearly extralinguistic. In this paper we strictly keep to the standard, normative variety described in the text. In Ormazabal & Romero (2019a) we present a more detailed description and theoretical analysis of the agreement patterns, their failure and distribution, and the range of variation both dialectally and structurally. Also see references in that paper, especially D’Alessandro 2007 for Italian and Romance and Ordóñez & Treviño (2016) for Mexican dialect of Spanish. In our analysis, number agreement in these configuration is argued to be a post-syntactic

agreement is (the lack of) DOM, not the properties of the DP. So, in those cases where DOM is assigned to secondary predicates (8a,b) or infinitival subjects (8c) (see Ormazabal & Romero 2013a,c), the verb does not express number agreement. On the other hand, when an animate object does not receive DOM, it can agree, and it often does (9).

- (8) a. se dejó/\*dejaron sin hojas a todos los árboles del parque  
SE left.sg/pl without leaves DOM all the trees of.the park  
'The trees from the park were left without leaves'
- b. se llama/\*llaman a estas obras novelas  
SE call.sg/pl DOM these literary.works romans  
'These works are called novels'
- c. se vio/\*vieron a los aviones estrellarse contra la montaña  
SE saw.sg/pl DOM the planes to.crash against the mountain  
'The planes were seen crash against the mountain'
- (9) se traían /\*traía niños para cubrir las bajas  
SE brought.pl/sg children to replace the casualties  
'Children were brought to substitute vacancies'

As we argue in section 3, this agreement pattern follows naturally from our proposal if, as generally assumed, SE lacks number features. As in other quirky case environments (e.g. Icelandic) default agreement is obtained unless a suitable DP checks number agreement (see, for instance, Sigurðsson & Holmberg 2008, and section 3.1). In such contexts the number-agreeing DP does not need to be the subject of the clause. In fact, as we will show next, this element continues to be the VP internal argument in *SE*-passive constructions in Spanish.

## 2.2. A non-overt argument is always needed

As observed in the literature (Mendikoetxea 1999, Sánchez 2002, and references therein for discussion and examples), non-paradigmatic *SE* constructions are compatible with almost all types of verbs: transitive, unaccusative, unergative, ditransitive, psych verbs, alternating verbs (locative, dative, causative-inchoative, etc.), propositional verbs, etc.; even, under certain circumstances, raising verbs, as we discuss in section 3.2 below.

However, from the point of view of the argument structure, there is a general constraint against *SE* constructions: They are not available with argumentless verbs, typically atmospheric ones (*llover* 'to rain', *atardecer* 'to get dark' etc.), as the example in (10) illustrates.<sup>3</sup>

phenomenon involving in fact two different mechanisms: clitic mutation in the case of preverbal objects and number harmony with postverbal ones.

<sup>3</sup> There are at least two other general restrictions. One of them has to do with the animacy requirement of the subjects, discussed in sections 2.4 and 3.1; the second one affects constructions where there is another obligatory source for *SE* in addition to the impersonal one, including inherently *SE*-marked verbs (i), anticausative use of transitive alternations (iib), and reflexive constructions with *SE* (iii), among others:

- (i) a. \*Se se arrepiente de la cooperación  
SE SE regret of the cooperation  
'SE regret his/her cooperation'
- b. \*Se se desmaya cada vez que la ve  
SE SE faint each time that her sees  
'SE faints each time SE sees her'

- (10) (\*se) llueve  
 SE rain.sg  
 Intended: 'It's raining'

The following contrast in (11) is interesting because, as indicated in the translation, (11a) is ambiguous. However, only the first meaning ('x smells like a rose') is available in the *SE* construction (11b):

- (11) a. Huele a rosas  
 Smells like roses  
 '(S)he smells like roses'  
 'There is a rose smell'  
 b. Se huele a rosas  
 se smells like roses  
 'Someone/Everybody smells like roses'

Thus, the distribution of *SE*-constructions is exactly what is predicted if *SE* stands for the highest argument: In those cases where V's theta grid lacks any argument, there is no position where *SE* can be inserted, and, in consequence, a non paradigmatic *SE* construction cannot be generated.

### 2.3. Infinitive control and subjunctive obviation

A second property of *SE*-constructions that supports the presence of a syntactically active subject is that they show the same obligatory control/disjoint reference distribution as in infinitive/subjunctive alternations of any other regular active sentences. The minimal pair in (12) illustrates it in Spanish:

- (12) a. Los trabajadores intentaron enviar un representante a la reunión  
 The workers tried to.send a representative to the meeting  
 'The workers tried to send a representative to the meeting'  
 b. Los trabajadores intentaron que enviara(n) un representante a la reunión  
 The workers tried that send.SUBJ.sg/pl a representative to the meeting  
 'The workers tried for her/him/them (≠ the workers) to send a representative to the meeting'

(12a) is a regular infinitival structure with *intentar* ('try'), where the subject of the embedded infinitival construction must be obligatorily controlled by the matrix subject

- (ii) a. El niño \*(se) perdió/hirió cuando volvía a casa  
 The child SE lost/wound.3sg when returned to home  
 'The child got lost/hurt himself when he was coming back home'  
 b. \*Se se perdió/hirió cuando volvía a casa  
 SE SE lost/wound.3sg when returned to home
- (iii) a. Juan se veía en medio de una terrible depresión  
 Juan SE was.seeing in middle of a terrible depression  
 'Juan could see himself in the middle of a terrible depression'  
 b. \*Se se veía en medio de una terrible depresión  
 SE SE was.seeing in middle of a terrible depression

The impossibility of *SE-SE* combinations is not a trivial matter and raises interesting questions related to both morphology and syntax, but those issues are independent of non-paradigmatic *se* constructions as such. These issues go beyond the scope of this paper and will be left aside here (see Burzio 1986, Cinque 1995, Martins & Nunes 2016, 2017, and references for discussion).

*los trabajadores* ('the workers'). As it is well known, if the embedded infinitival construction is substituted by a subjunctive complement (12b), the subject of that subjunctive clause must be referentially disjoint from the main subject *los trabajadores* ('the workers'). This disjoint reference effect between the two subjects is characteristic of Romance subjunctive constructions with volitional verbs and some other types of predicates like *decidir* 'decide', *intentar* 'try', *proponer* 'propose', etc. Given that, consider now the minimal pair of *se* constructions in (13).

- (13) a. Se intentó enviar unos representantes a la reunión  
SE tried.sg to.send a representative to the meeting  
'They (generic, indefinite) tried to send a representative to the meeting'
- b. Se intentó que enviara(n) unos representantes a la reunión  
SE decided.sg that send.SUBJ.(pl) some representatives to the meeting  
'They (generic, indefinite) tried for x (x ≠ them) to send some representatives to the meeting'

In (13a), the infinitival subject must be controlled by the matrix “implicit” argument of the *SE* constructions, whatever its generic/indefinite interpretation is. In contrast, the subject of the subjunctive complement in (13b) must be disjoint in reference from the “implicit” argument of the matrix clause.

Notice also that, in contrast, control/obviation context are highly degraded in analytical passives in minimal pair structures:

- (14) a. \*(Allí) fue decidido enviar un representante a la reunión  
(There) was decided to.send a representative to the meeting
- b. \*(Allí) fue decidido que enviara un representante a la reunión  
There was decided that send.SUBJ a representative to the meeting

These facts are, again, completely in line with our proposal. As far as there is a subject in the matrix clause, as we propose *SE* is, the subject of the embedded clause can have conjoint or disjoint reference with it, and, in consequence, it is expected to have a conjoint subject with infinitives (13a), and a disjoint one with subjunctive mood (13b).<sup>4</sup>

#### 2.4. The “missing” argument is always animate

There is an important property that has been interpreted in different ways in the literature but, considered in a broader context, supports the analysis of *SE* as a pronominal argument occupying the subject position in these constructions. We are referring to the well observed fact that the missing argument always has an animate interpretation (Mendikoetxea 1999, Sánchez 2002, and references therein). Consider, for instance, change of state verbs. This kind of verbs typically allow animate agents as well as non-animate causes as subjects in their transitive version (15a). When they enter into a non paradigmatic *SE*-construction, the cause loses the ability to refer to an inanimate entity (discard anticausative readings).

<sup>4</sup> Given that these verbs require a clausal complement, passive *SE* constructions cannot be directly tested in this case.

- (15) a. El fuego/pirómano quemó muchos libros/a muchos inocentes aquella noche  
 The fire/pyromaniac burned many books/**DOM** many innocents that night  
 ‘The fire/the pyromaniac burned many books/many innocent people that night’
- b. Se quemaron muchos libros aquella noche  
 SE burned-3pl many books that night  
 ‘Many books were burned that night’ (animate generic agent only)
- c. Se quemó a muchos inocentes aquella noche  
 SE burned-3sg **DOM** many innocents that night  
 ‘Many innocent people were burned that night’ (animate generic/arbitrary agent only)

This restriction equally affects passive (15b) and impersonal (15c) constructions. This property has, at least, two important consequences: On the one hand, it sharply distinguishes passive SE from analytic passives, where inanimate causers are perfectly fine (16).

- (16) Muchos libros fueron quemados/destruidos por el fuego aquella noche  
 Many books were burnt/destroyed by the fire that night

On the other hand, the animacy restriction makes *SE* constructions incompatible with verbs that do not select animate arguments (e.g., *ocurrir* ‘to happen’, *transcurrir* ‘to pass’, *rielar* ‘to shimmer (the moon)’ (17)), making the distribution of *SE* closer to the one of strong pronouns.

- (17) a. \*se/\*él ocurre /implica que...  
 SE/he happens/implies that...
- b. \*se/\*él transcurrió (un día)  
 SE/he passed (one day)

Many impersonal constructions share this property with *SE*-constructions (Fernández-Soriano & Taboas 1999). In fact, it has been claimed that animacy is a general requirement of arbitrary/generic subjects (e.g. Cinque 1988). However, this statement is not completely accurate. It is true that arbitrary/generic subjects tend to be animate in many such contexts,<sup>5</sup> but when the selectional properties of the verb requires it, the generic interpretation is available for many inanimate implicit arguments but never for *se*, as the contrast in (18) illustrates.

- (18) a. Al PRO ser expresamente recopilados para la enciclopedia, los datos  
*at.the PRO be expressly compiled.pl for the encyclopedia, the data*  
 adquieren una importancia especial  
*acquire an importance special*  
 ‘Being specifically collected for the encyclopedia, data acquire a special importance’.

<sup>5</sup> Observe that generic properties are necessarily restricted: we can make generic statement about *lions* or *comets*, but it is hard to conceive a property that can be attributed to everything in a generic fashion. Arbitrary and generic readings are easy to obtain with animate *null* nouns because their reference, human beings, is morphosyntactically marked as such, as shown, for instance, by DOM. Non animate null arguments, on the other hand, encompass all the objects in the world: What property can plausibly be shared by everything?



- b. #Cuando se es expresamente recopilado para la enciclopedia, se adquiere una importancia especial  
*When SE is specifically collected for the encyclopedia...*  
 Intended: 'When something is collected for the encyclopedia, it acquires a special importance.'

It does not matter how easy to obtain an inanimate lecture is, the result is completely ungrammatical with non paradigmatic SE constructions (19).<sup>6</sup>

- (19) a. #Al rotarse de manera regular, sabemos que el peso está equilibrado  
 at.the rotate.SE of fashion regular, know.1pl that the weight is balanced  
 'When rotating SE in a regular fashion, we know the weight is balanced'  
 b. #Que se tenga demasiada resolución conlleva gastar demasiada energía  
 That SE have.SUBJ too.much resolution implies to.spend too.much energy  
 'Having too much resolution implies heavy energy consumption'  
 c. #En esta pajarería se come mucho alpiste  
 In this pet.shop SE eat.3sg a.lot canary.grass  
 "In this pet shop a lot of canary grass is eaten" (only possible if it is eaten by people)  
 d. #Aquí, si se es rugoso, se sobra (=si la tela es rugosa, sobra)  
 here, if SE is rough, SE leave.over (if the fabric is rough, it is left over)

As suggested above, the distribution of the facts makes SE close to strong pronouns in Spanish. In fact, the animacy restriction systematically puts together impersonal constructions with 2nd or 3rd person agreement (Fernández-Soriano & Taboas 1999), and *se* in SE constructions, differentiating it from impersonal silent/implicit arguments in infinitival constructions (18a) or middle sentences (see sec. 3.4). That strongly suggests that the animate/non-animate distinction in impersonal sentences falls squarely within a more general animacy generalization establishing that overt pronouns entering into agreement relations obligatorily have animate interpretation (see Cardinaletti &

<sup>6</sup> Compare examples in (19) with the perfectly grammatical ones in (i). Other examples with generic readings can be easily construed with verbs selecting inanimate arguments:

- (i) a. (el estudio del cosmos) nos muestra que es posible PRO rotar sin perder el eje  
 (the study of.the cosmos) 1sD show.3s that is possible PRO to.rotate without to.lose the axis  
 'The study of the cosmos shows us that it is possible (for a body) to rotate on its own axis'  
 b. Al PRO rotar de manera regular, sabemos que un planeta puede albergar vida  
 at.the to.rotate in way regular know.1p that a planet can harbor life  
 'When a planet rotates in a regular way, we know it can harbor life'  
 c. PRO Tener demasiada resolución conlleva gastar demasiada energía  
 to.have too.much resolution implies to.consume too.much energy  
 'Having too much resolution implies consuming too much energy'  
 d. La teoría ontológica nos dice que si ocurre PRO debe existir.  
 The theory ontological 1pD says that if happens must exist  
 'The ontological theory tells us that if it happens, it must exist'

These examples are construed with verbs that—obligatorily or most frequently—select inanimate arguments. In (19a)-(ia), the verb *rotar*, 'rotate', takes usually a very specific set of arguments: those characterized for having a regular geometry, what makes them capable of doing a regular spin on an axis. Since the argument is so restricted, it is easy to make generic statements with inanimate interpretation. This fact is shown even more clearly by *ocurrir* in (id), a predicate that requires for an eventive argument and, consequently, cannot take animate subjects.

Starke 1999). Thus, for instance, in subject position (20a,b), the pronoun *ella* can only refer to *her*, but as a P complement it can both refer to *her* and to (feminine) *it* (20c).

- (20) a. La niña cayó ↔ ella cayó  
 The girl fell she fell  
 b. La silla cayó ↔ \*ella cayó  
 The chair fell it<sub>fem</sub> fell  
 c. Salió sin la silla/la niña ↔ salió sin ella  
 Get.out.3sS without the chair/the girl ↔ get.out.3sS without it<sub>fem</sub>/her  
 ‘(S)he left without the chair/the child/’ ‘... without the chair/the child/’it/her’

Similarly, what the distribution of facts in this section indicates is that impersonals with overt first and second or third person pronouns and, crucially for us, *se* in SE constructions also fall within the same group inducing animacy effects, as opposed to silent pronominal arguments, which do not. In section 3.1 we will come back to a possible syntactic explanation for this generalization; for the time being, the important point is that if SE is an overt subject pronoun, as we propose, the fact that its interpretation must be animate can be assimilated to the parallel behavior of other pronominal elements.

#### 2.5. SE constructions have active morphology and active syntax

From the point of view of voice morphology, both SE impersonal and SE passive constructions are active sentences (Rivero 2002). As shown in (21a)-(22a), the verb has exactly the same form as in their regular active pairs (21b)-(22b):

- (21) a. En ese país se asesina a los opositores  
 In this country SE assassinate.sg A the opposing  
 'In this country, dissidents are assassinated'  
 b. En este país el ejército asesina a los opositores  
 In this country the army assassinate.sg A the opposing  
 'In this country, the army assassinates the dissidents'  
 (cfr. los opositores SON asesinADOS ‘dissidents are assassinated’)  
 (22) a. En este país se censuran las iniciativas políticas  
 In this country SE censor.pl the initiative political  
 'In this country the political initiatives are censored'  
 b. En este país las instituciones censuran las iniciativas políticas  
 In this country the institutions censor.pl the initiative political  
 'In this country, the institutions censor the political initiatives'  
 (cfr. las iniciativas SON censurADAS, ‘initiatives are censored’)

Furthermore, this construction is compatible with any kind of verbal complement, crucially including those that reject analytic passive constructions. For instance, complements of the verb *tener* (‘to have’) in (23) and measurement complements such as (24) and (25) cannot passivize, but they may appear in passive SE constructions with no restriction (but see Ordóñez & Treviño 2011).

- (23) a. María tiene tres hijos / los últimos modelos de Ferrari  
 María has three children / the last models of Ferrari  
 ‘María has three children / the latest Ferraris’

- b. \*Tres hijos / \*los últimos ferraris son tenidos (por María)  
 Three children / the latest Ferrari are had by María
- c. cuando se tienen tres hijos / los últimos modelos de Ferrari...  
 when SE have.3pl three children / the last models of Ferrari
- (24) a. María corrió cien metros  
 María run one.hundred meters  
 ‘María run one hundred meters’
- b. \*Cien metros fueron corridos  
 One.hundred meters were run
- c. se corrieron cien metros  
 Se run.3pl one.hundred meters
- (25) a. El niño pesa cincuenta kilos  
 The kid weights fifty kg
- b. \*Cincuenta kilos son pesados por el niño  
 fifty kg are weighted by the kid
- c. Si se pesan cincuenta kilos<sup>7</sup>  
 If SE weighted.pl fifty kg

Not only that, *SE* passives are compatible even with analytical passives:

- (26) a. En este país, cuando se es opositor, se es asesinado  
 In this country, when SE is opposing, SE is assassinated  
 ‘In this country, when you are a dissident you are assassinated’
- b. En este país, el opositor es asesinado  
 In this country, the opposing is assassinated  
 ‘In this country, dissidents are assassinated’

It has also often been observed that *SE* constructions contrast with analytical passives in that they do not license *by*-phrases (see *Nueva Gramática de la lengua española* (=RAE 2011) 41.6.1, Pujalte 2013, Saab 2014: fn 16, and references):

- (27) a. \*Se destruyeron los puentes por el enemigo  
 SE destroyed.pl the bridges by the enemy
- b. \* Se abrió la puerta por el guardián  
 SE opened the door by the guardian

As observed by many authors, *by*-phrases are more or less acceptable, with a lot of idiolectal variation, with “expressions that designate institutions, government entities or groups of members, as in *por las autoridades* (‘by the authorities’), *por el ministerio* (‘by the ministry’), *por la gente* (‘by the people’)” [RAE 2011, p. 785.; translation ours], mostly in administrative and judiciary texts. However, Pujalte (2013: 234; also see Saab 2014: fn. 16) observes that these *by*-phrases do not share the same properties and distribution as agentive *by*-phrases in regular passives. In particular, they allow *por parte de* (‘on behalf of’) as paraphrases, something not possible with *by*-phrases in general (see op. cit. for details).

In support of Pujalte’s conclusion we may add that the *por (parte de)* phrase is not restricted only to *SE* passives but it also appears with impersonal *SE*, and even with

<sup>7</sup> For some speakers (including one of the authors of this paper), both (24c) and (25c) are possible, even better, without agreement: *se corrió cien metros*, *se pesó cincuenta kilos*.

first and second person object clitics. Thus, insofar as they are accepted, native speakers do not perceive any important grammaticality difference among examples in (28):<sup>8</sup>

- (28) a. %Se convocó la reunión por (parte d)el gobierno  
SE called the meeting by part of.the government  
'The meeting was called by the government'
- b. %Se convocó a los sindicatos por (parte de)l gobierno  
SE called DOM the unions by part of.the government
- c. %Se nos convocó por (parte de)l gobierno  
SE us called by part of.the government  
'The unions/we were called to a meeting by the government'

All that suggests that the *por (parte de)*-phrase in SE constructions is an adjunct, of a type different from standard *by*-phrases in analytical passives and closer to the discourse-oriented modifier function it has in sentences like (29):

- (29) Nosotros, por nuestra parte, hemos decidido organizar una reunión  
We by our part have.1pl decided organize a meeting  
'We, on our part, have decided to organize a meeting'

One could argue that passive *SE* constructions are a different kind of passivization, but a transformation not subject to any constraint would be almost a unique situation, specially when we consider cases such as (24)-(25), where it is not even clear that

<sup>8</sup> We were inquired about this issue by a reviewer who, interestingly, gave us as evidence the example in (ia), an impersonal construction not a passive-*se* one. Similarly, one of the two examples discussed in RAE (2011) (ib), as well as one of the main examples in Pujalte's discussion (ic), also repeated by Saab, are both impersonal *se*-constructions.

- (i) a. Se atacó al presidente por (parte de) x  
SE attacked DOM-the president by (part of) x  
'The President was attacked by x'
- b. Se convocó por el Gobierno Regional a un concurso de novelas.  
SE held by the government regional to a contest of novels  
'A novel contest was held by the Regional Government.'
- c. Se convocó a una reunión por parte de los vecinos.  
SE called to a meeting by part of the neighbors  
'A meeting was convened on behalf of the neighbors'.

The fact that none of the authors involved in the discussion seem to be aware of this shift from passive to impersonal indirectly supports our argument in the text. We have also found examples of that sort in a very quick query to *CORPES XXI* [see *RAE Databank*]:

- (ii) a. [...] que se pueda presumir por parte de nadie que los consejeros[...] aceptan la financiación [...]  
that SE can.subj presume by part of nobody that the ministers accept the funding [...]  
'That anybody could presume that the ministers [...] accept public financing [...]'
- b. [...] nuevamente se ha buscado / por parte del Gobierno vasco [...] centrar el debate en la autodeterminación [...]  
'Once again the Basque Government searched to center the debate on the issue of self-determination [...]'
- c. la solución [no es] intentar acabar con parte del patrimonio de Los Espejos como se pretende por parte de algunos miembros municipales.  
'The solution [is not] to try to exhaust the patrimony of Los Espejos as some City councilors pretend'

accusative Case can be assigned,<sup>9</sup> and, in consequence, it is hard to see how a voice transformation may proceed, how it may be triggered. Moreover, as shown in (21a), and in contrast to (26a), in *SE* constructions DOM is assigned as in regular active transitive sentences (see also section 2.1, and Rivero 2002).

Altogether, this makes the “passive” hypothesis of *SE* constructions with transitive inanimate objects implausible. Quite to the contrary, *SE* constructions are regular active sentences with *SE* in subject position, as proposed. Nothing exceptional happens at the VP-internal level except for the well-known agreement patterns to which we will return in section 3 and, in more detail, in Ormazabal & Romero (2019a).

#### 2.6. *SE must be in a Nominative Case position: the case of infinitives*

It has also been observed that *SE* is incompatible with those infinitives that do not license nominative subjects, but allowed in infinitival constructions where overt subjects are licensed (Cinque 1988; Mendikoetxea 1999). The contrast between (30) and (31) present minimal pairs with infinitival and tensed subjunctive complements, and (32) is a case of prepositional infinitives allowing overt pronominal subjects. In all cases, *SE* and personal pronouns behave the same way:

- (30) a. \*Es mejor descubrir-se a la culpable/tus intenciones  
Is better to.discover-SE DOM the culprit/ your intentions  
b. \*Es mejor descubrir yo al culpable/tus intenciones  
Is better to.discover I DOM.the culprit/your intentions
- (31) a. Es mejor que se descubra al culpable/tus intenciones  
Is better that SE discover.SUBJ DOM.the culprit/your intentions  
'It's better that the culprit/your intentions be discovered'  
b. Es mejor que yo descubra al culpable/tus intenciones  
Is better that I discover.1sgSUBJ DOM.the culprit/your intentions  
'It's better that (if) I discover the culprit'
- (32) a. Al descubrir-se al culpable/tus intenciones...  
At.the discover-SE DOM.the culprit / your intentions  
'When the culprit was discovered...?/When your intentions were discovered...'  
b. Al descubrir yo al culpable/tus intenciones...  
At.the discover I DOM.the culprit/ your intentions  
'When I discovered the culprit/your intentions'

This contrast fits particularly well in our proposal, provided that the overt pronoun *se* is a regular pronominal subject that shows the properties and distribution of any other overt subject in the language, including nominative Case (Oca 1914).

#### 2.7. *Pseudo-relatives*

The behavior of *SE*-construction with pseudo-relatives also supports our analysis. As the baseline structure for our argument notice first that pseudo-relatives are not allowed in subject position in Spanish, neither in active (33b) nor in passive (33c) constructions (Aldama 2016: eexx. (58)-(59)):

- (33) a. Los reporteros fotografiaron a Superman que aterrizaba sobre un rascacielos  
The journalists photographed DOM Superman that landed on a skyscraper  
'The journalists took pictures of Superman landing on a skyscraper'

<sup>9</sup>As it is the general case in impersonal *SE* constructions (cf. section 2.5).

- b. ??Superman que aterriza sobre un rascacielos es una estampa para no perderse  
 Superman that lands on a skyscraper is a sight to not miss  
 'Superman landing on a skyscraper is a sight not to miss'
- c. ??Superman que aterrizaba sobre un rascacielos fue fotografiado por la  
*Superman that was landing on a skyscraper was photographed by the*  
 multitud  
*crowd*  
 'Superman landing on a skyscraper was photographed by the crowd'

As Aldama observes, the sharp marginality of the passive construction is directly related to the presence of the pseudo-relative: if it is eliminated, the sentence is perfectly acceptable. Moreover, even the minimally differing (34b), where the pseudo-relative is substituted by a non-restrictive relative clause is acceptable:

- (34) a. Superman fue fotografiado por la multitud  
 Superman was photographed by the crowd  
 b. Superman, que aterrizaba sobre un rascacielos, fue fotografiado por la multitud  
 Superman that was landing on a skyscraper was photographed by the crowd  
 'Superman, who was landing on a skyscraper, was photographed by the crowd'

In clear contrast, pseudo-relative phrases can appear with the overt argument of passive *SE* constructions:

- (35) a. Se veían los trenes que llegaban a cocheras  
**SE** saw.pl the trains that arrived to sheds  
 'The trains could be seen arriving to sheds'
- b. Se fotografiaron los pájaros que pasaban hacia el norte  
**SE** took.pictures.of.pl the birds that passed.3pl toward the North  
 'Pictures of the birds were taken heading towards the North'

The contrast between (33b-c) and (35) indicates that the agreeing NP in (35a-b), *los trenes* ('the trains') and *los pájaros* ('the birds') respectively, cannot be the subject — because if it were the pseudo-relative reading would not be available. In other words, contrary to what agreement facts might suggest, the complement of the verb is not in subject, but in object position. Again, this is what we expect if *SE* is the actual subject.

## 2.8. Idioms

The behavior of idiomatic expressions supports our argument that *se*-constructions are not passives and that the internal argument of the VP is the direct object of the structure. In general, idioms of the *meter la pata*-type (literally 'to put the (animal-)leg on it' = Eng. *to put your foot on it*), where the fixed idiomatic part is the combination of the verb and the object, show up in regular transitive configurations (36); that includes impersonal constructions with second person subjects like (36a), as well as fully referential subjects like (36b-c). In contrast, these idioms are impossible in passive constructions and, more generally in constructions where the derivation breaks down the structural connection of the idiomatic parts (37).

- (36) a. Cuando metes la pata, ...  
 When put.2.on the leg..  
 'When I put your foot on it...'

- (37) b. Echamos la casa por la ventana.  
 Threw.1 the house through the window  
 ‘We went overboard’
- c. A tu amigo le han dado calabazas  
 DOM your friend 3sD have given pumpkins  
 ‘Someone gave your friend the brushoff’
- a. \*Cuando la pata es metida,...  
 When the leg is put, ...
- b. \*La casa fue echada por la ventana.  
 The house was thrown through the window
- c. \*Calabazas le fueron dadas a tu amigo  
 Pumpkins 3sD were given DOM your friend

Sharply contrasting with analytical passives in (37), fixed object idioms are perfectly alright in passive SE contexts.

- (38) a. Si se mete la pata,...  
 If SE put.on the leg..  
 ‘When someone puts his/her foot on it...’
- b. En las celebraciones familiares se echa la casa por la ventana.  
 In the celebrations familial SE throw the house through the window  
 ‘In family celebrations, people go overboard’
- c. Se le dieron calabazas a tu amigo  
 SE 3sD gave pumpkins DOM your friend  
 ‘Someone gave the brushoff to your friend’

Notice that, for instance, the verbal form *dieron* (‘gave’) in (38c) maintains plural agreement with *calabazas* (‘pumpkins’) but, given what we have seen before, this must be the object, and not the subject of the sentence. Once again, this shows that number agreement is not an indication of subjecthood, contrary to standard assumptions.

## 2.9. Summary

The properties discussed through this section support a derivation of impersonal and passive *SE* constructions in which *SE* itself is both the “missing” argument and the sentential subject entering into a regular nominative Case relation with T. This analysis fits nicely with most of the characteristic properties discussed in this section, and extends naturally to accommodate subtle differences previously not considered in the literature:

- The obligatory presence of an argument, since *SE* is a (non-expletive) pronoun;
- Its control/obviation properties which requires the presence of a syntactically active argument;
- The animacy interpretation of *SE*, which can be linked to the broader generalization on overt pronouns;
- The active morphology and syntax of both impersonal and passive constructions;
- The regular distribution of the pronoun *SE* in terms of Case-requirements;
- The availability of pseudo-relatives modifying the verbal complement in passive *SE* constructions, which shows that it is not the subject of the construction despite number agreement issues; and

- SE constructions withhold the idiomatic meaning of transitive idiomatic expressions.

The fact that when the right conditions are met (transitive verb with inanimate object), the verbs agrees in number with the object, is the most evident divergence with the general picture we have presented. However, given the lack of number features in SE, this fact is still compatible with our proposal if SE is treated as a quirky subject. In the next section we deal with the basic morphosyntactic facts of our proposal: the type of features it encodes, how it raises to subject position, etc. We also provide additional evidence that supports our analysis and deal with some potential problems.

### 3. The role of the defective argument

The idea that SE is the missing argument required for SE constructions is not a new one (see Cinque 1988, Mendikoetxea 1999, D'Alessandro 2007, and references therein). The proposal that SE raises to subject position is not new either (see Oca 1914), but it has been discarded by most authors mainly for two reasons. On the one hand, it is a clitic, and in G&B approaches this essentially means that it cannot raise to subject position (but see e.g. Fr. *il* ('he'), *je* ('I'), etc.). Therefore, SE is condemned to attach to a head, (e.g. Cinque 1988). And on the other hand, agreement facts —interpreted as indicating that the object receives nominative— do not conform to the “nominative *SE*” hypothesis point by point.

However, the battery of properties discussed in section 2, including agreement facts, are straightforwardly explained if SE is mapped to a  $\theta$ -position and moved to (Spec, TP), where it receives nominative case.<sup>10</sup> In addition, G&B theoretical objections to clitic movement are no longer tenable. In this section we develop some ideas concerning the nature of SE and explore some of their consequences. The result will be a structure where SE is a regular nominative pronoun encoding person/animacy but not number.

#### 3.1. *SE* as a nominative pronoun

In section 2.4 it was observed that the missing argument is necessarily interpreted as animate. Cinque assumes that it is so because animacy is a “characteristic” of the class of generic, arbitrary NPs (Cinque, 1988: 536); however, as we have shown, animacy restriction with *SE* can be subsumed under a more general phenomenon affecting other pronouns. What is interesting about this property is that 3rd person pronouns are not inherently animate; they are so only when they enter into an agreement relation, as the contrast in (20), repeated in (39) shows.

- |      |    |   |   |  |
|------|----|---|---|--|
| (39) | a. | La niña cayó                              | ↔ | ella cayó                                  |
|      |    | The girl fell                             |   | she fell                                   |
|      | b. | La silla cayó                             | ↔ | *ella cayó                                 |
|      |    | The chair fell                            |   | it <sub>fem</sub> fell                     |
|      | c. | Salió sin la silla/la niña                | ↔ | salió sin ella                             |
|      |    | Get.out.3sS without the chair/the girl    | ↔ | get.out.3sS without it <sub>fem</sub> /her |
|      |    | ‘(S)he left without the chair/the child/’ |   | ‘... without the chair/the child/’it/her’  |

<sup>10</sup> This proposal also relates SE to impersonal pronouns in other languages, e.g. *man* in Germanic languages (Egerland 2003; Malamud 2012; and references therein) *a gente* in Brazilian Portuguese (Menuzzi 1999; Martins 2005) or *on* in French.



It thus seems reasonable to assume that the locus of the generalization is agreement, and not the strong/clitic pronoun opposition. In other words, agreement properties of Tense in Spanish specify not only 1/2/3 person and number, but also animacy. The nominative pronominal paradigm is thus morphologically realized according to (40). Note that this is exactly the same paradigm we find for object agreement, where 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person are represented via clitic doubling and DOM, animate arguments via DOM, and inanimate arguments are left unmarked (see Ormazabal & Romero 2013a for a fully fledged proposal concerning Spanish objects).<sup>11</sup>

(40)

PERSON	1st	2nd	3rd	animate	unmarked
NOMINATIV E	yo	tú	él/ella	se	DPs
ACCUSATIV E	me	te	lo/la	le/la	DPs

Following (40), nominative agreement specifies person features required to distinguish 1/2/3, animacy, specificity/EPP, and number (see Harley & Ritter 2002; D'Alessandro & Alexiadou 2003). When T expresses animacy, but no specific person, it is represented by *SE*. Note that since the subject pronoun *SE* has no inherently specified person features, it is not semantically confined to third person. As observed by Oca, *SE* may be interpreted as a first person (41a), a second person (41b), an indefinite (41c), or a generic (41d) [Oca 1914; also see Cinque 1988, Menuzzi 1999, Mendikoetxea 1999; D'Alessandro & Alexiadou 2003, among others].

- (41)
- a. ¿Se puede? [knocking the door]  
SE can.3s  
'May I?'
  - b. Aquí no se habla [a father looking at his son]  
here no SE speak.3s  
'You cannot speak here'
  - c. Se dijo que no podríamos  
SE said.3s that no might.1p  
'It was said that we could not do it'
  - d. Si se habla alto siempre se molesta a alguien  
if se speak.3s loud always se bother.3s DOM someone  
'If someone speaks loud, she always bothers someone'

The idea that *SE* lacks number agreement features altogether is a common place in the literature (Suñer 1983; Otero 1986), and the fact that it may have singular or plural interpretation contextually (41) also points to the same conclusion. This leaves open the

<sup>11</sup> Table in (34) represents Standard *leísta* dialect (Ormazabal & Romero 2007). Regarding person, see discussion in D'Alessandro (2007). Regarding DOM the issue is far more complex than acknowledged in the text (see Torrego 1998, Leonetti 2008, Rodríguez-Mondoñedo 2007, Ormazabal & Romero 2013a,c, 2019b, and references therein). for some interesting modifications with important theoretical consequences, see Alcaraz (2019).

possibility for number features in T to be checked by other arguments, as it is regularly the case in other quirky subject, and double object configurations.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, the fact that the complement of the verb agrees in number with the verb does not imply that it is the subject; not only for all the reasons provided in section 2, but also because under certain circumstances —again, as in other quirky Case configurations— it fails to trigger agreement. Consider the sentence in (42).

- (42) se les envió (a los enfermos) todas las medicinas que necesitaban  
 SE 3pD sent.3s (DOM the sick.people) all the medicines that needed.3pl  
 Sick people were sent all the medicines they needed

What is interesting about (42) is the fact that Tense does not agree with any of the internal objects, neither with the goal (*sick people*), nor with the theme (*all the medicines*). The verb appears in a default 3rd singular despite the fact that the DO is plural.<sup>13</sup> If the theme were the subject it would obligatorily trigger agreement in (42), as it does in analytic passives (43), including post-verbal subjects (43b).

- (43) a. las medicinas les fueron enviadas (a los enfermos)  
 the medicines 3pD were sent (DOM the sick.people)  
 ‘Sick people were sent medicines’  
 b. les fueron enviadas (a los enfermos) las medicinas  
 3pD were sent (DOM the sick.people) the medicines  
 ‘Sick people were sent medicines’

Again, this is a strong indication that the issue in passive SE constructions is not about being transitive, not even about the [-DOM] object to require Case; it is rather about T's ability to check its number agreement, left unchecked by its subject SE, with some proximate element, not necessarily the theme (see also sec. 2.5). In (42), the subject position is filled by SE and number agreement is still available. The theme is of the right type to check that agreement, but the goal, being closer to T, blocks that relation. Being a transitive construction, the theme is in its regular position and does not need to agree with T to check its features. Consequently, no agreement is realized, but the sentence is grammatical (see, for instance, D'Alessandro 2003; Sigurðsson & Holmberg 2008; and references therein for a similar situation in other quirky subject configurations, and experiencer intervention in Torrego 1996).

<sup>12</sup> The asymmetry between number and person agreement is in the roots of many theoretical and technical complications in the analysis of agreement restrictions —*Person-Case Constraint (PCC)*, and beyond— since the first syntactic analyses (Albizu 1997, Ormazabal & Romero 1997, Anagnostopoulou 1997, Béjar & Rezac 2003) to our days. For instance, it is the main motivation for Bejar & Rezac's (2009) double cycle and for Baker's (2008) *Structural Condition on Person Agreement (SCOPA)*. We have shown elsewhere that person and number agreement behave differently with respect to other properties, which makes agreement suspicious as a unified operation/relation (also consider the discussion in the next footnote).

<sup>13</sup> This is not an absolute constraint, but a tendency (see Ormazabal & Romero 2019a for a complete restatement of number agreement in these constructions in post-syntactic terms). Not agreeing is more common in dative contexts than in non dative ones. For instance, the non-agreeing *se les envía mensajes* ('messages are sent to them) has 1890 hits in Google, while the agreeing version has 1420. However, when the dative is not present, the figures change dramatically: 45200 for the agreeing version, against 19400 for the non agreeing one. The issue, however, is more complex than that, since dative clitic number seems to have some effect on verbal number agreement. For instance, in the expression *dar las gracias* ('to thank') when the clitic is plural, singular and plural agreement are used half of the time each; when the clitic is singular, singular agreement is strongly preferred (136,000 vs. 65,000).

In sum, we have proposed that SE is generated in a theta position and moved to (Spec, TP). As a consequence, it behaves as any other overt pronoun and is subject to the animacy generalization. On the other hand, since it lacks number features, T number may –but does not need to—be checked by other local arguments, when available, a situation common to other quirky subject configurations.

### 3.2. Raising to subject

If, as we have argued, SE moves to subject position as any other pronoun, it is predicted to move in raising constructions from an embedded context to the matrix subject position. It has been claimed in the literature that this prediction is not borne out (see Sánchez 2002: 45 and references therein). However, it is worth observing that Martins & Nunes (2016) note a dialectal split between Brazilian and European Portuguese with respect to raising, and that there are many examples in Spanish accepted as grammatical by Spanish speakers.<sup>14</sup> In sentences from (44)-(47) *SE* raises, as a regular DP, to matrix subject position. In the b-pairs it is shown that SE comes from the embedded sentence.<sup>15</sup>

- (44) a. se parecía haber perdido los sentidos  
SE seemed.3sS have lost the senses  
'Senses seemed to have been lost'
- b. \*se parecía que (se) había(n) perdido los sentidos  
SE seemed.3sS that SE have(sg/pl) lost the senses
- (45) a. se parecía haber ganado en altura  
SE seemed have gained in altitude  
'Altitude seemed to have been gained'
- b. \*se parecía que (se) había ganado en altura  
SE seemed that SE had gained in altitude

<sup>14</sup> Very plausibly, the relative marginality of this construction and what looks more an idiolectal variation rather than a clear dialectal difference, are connected to the relative marginality of 1st and 2nd person argument raising in the same contexts:

- (i) a. Juan parece haber sufrido mucho  
Juan seems.3sg to.have suffered a.lot  
'Juan seems to have suffered a lot'
- b. (??) (Vosotros) parecéis haber sufrido mucho  
You seem.2pl to.have suffered a.lot  
'You guys seem to have suffered a lot'
- c. (??) (Nosotros) parecemos haber sufrido mucho [cfr. "(nosotros) parecemos tontos"]  
We seem.1pl to.have suffered a.lot  
'We seem to have suffered a lot'

Although we do not have an explanation for the marginality of either (ib-c) or some of the *se*-examples with raising, their parallelism is quite suggestive, given our discussion of the animacy effects in sections 2.4 and 3.1.

<sup>15</sup> We are aware that this point is a quite controversial one. That is the reason why we have gathered quite a few examples from *CORPES XXI* (see RAE Databank) and from a Google search, a small sample of which is reproduced in the text and in this note [also see, the observation in the previous note].

- (i) a. En 1957 se parecía haber pasado a un plano que...  
b. ...cuando se parecía haber llegado a un principio de acuerdo...

It is worth observing, that our native intuitions coincide with these judgments in general, although there is some uncertainty about number agreement in sentences like (44).

- (46) a. Con ello, se parece abogar por dotar a la percepción de una unidad  
 With it, **SE** seem.3sS advocate for provide to the perception of a unity...  
 'With that, providing perception with a unity seemed to be advocated for'  
 [adapted from *CORPES*, 17/11/2016]
- b. \*Se parecía que (se) abogaba por dotar a la percepción de una unidad...  
**SE** seemed.3sS that **SE** advocate.past for provide to the perception of a  
 unity...
- (47) Las dos adolescentes desencajaban...  
 The two adolescents un-fitted.3rd.pl.
- a. ... entre la angustia y la impaciencia que se parecía respirar en la casa  
 among the anguish and the impatience that **SE** seemed.sing to.breathe in  
 the house  
 'The two teenagers didn't fit into the anguish and the impatience that one seemed  
 to breathe in that house'  
 [adapted from *CORPES*, 17/11/2016]
- b. \* ... entre la angustia y la impaciencia que se parecía que (se)  
*among the anguish and the impatience that **SE** seemed.sing that **SE***  
*respiraba(n)*  
*breathe.sg/pl*  
 [Arce, Alicia: «En las buenas y en las malas». Núñez, Agustín (coordinador)  
*Radioteatro*. Asunción: Arandurã, 2008. From *CORPES*, consulted  
 17/11/2016]

Moreover, if we consider relative judgements, *SE*-raising is considerably better than analytical passives, which are absolutely impossible in these contexts (48).

- (48) a. \* Los sentidos habían sido parecido(s) perder  
 The senses had.3pl been seemed(pl) lost
- b. \*... entre la angustia y la impaciencia que eran parecidas respirar  
 among the anguish and the impatience that was seemed.sing to.breathe.sg/pl

It could be argued that in these contexts *SE* is not actually moving to subject position, but that it is just clitic-climbing to *parecer* by head to head movement at PF. That seems to be the case of unaccusative *SE* in examples like (49):

- (49) a....pero la opción se parecía haber desvanecido... (El Heraldo de Aragón, 22-7-2010)  
 ... but the option **SE** seemed.3s have vanished...  
 'but the option seemed to have vanished'
- b. Justo cuando parecía que todo le iba a ir bien, que se parecía  
*Just when seemed.3s that all to.him was to go well, that **SE** seemed*  
*haber liberado de su sambenitos psicósomáticos*  
*have liberated from his stigmata psychosomatic*  
 'Just when everything seemed to go wel for him, that he seemed to have gotten  
 rid of his psychosomatic stigmata...'  
 (<http://www.enclavedecine.com/2013/01/midseason-2013-vuelven-californication-y-girls.html> 15-3-2016)

However, data in (49) seems to be restricted to unaccusative *SE* constructions, or constructions where *SE* has an aspectual value, where crucially the clitic does not stand

for an argument (see Armstrong 2013 and references therein). In contrast, clitic climbing is not available for cases of paradigmatic *SE* with argumental import (e.g. reflexives) (50) nor for other argumental clitics (51)-(52).

- (50) a. Parecía haberse visto a sí mismo por primera vez  
seemed.3s have.SE seen DOM himself for first time  
He seemed to have seen himself for the first time  
b. \*Se parecía haber visto a uno/sí mismo por primera vez  
SE seemed.3s have seen DOM oneself/himself for first time
- (51) a. Parecía haberlo visto  
seem.3sg have.Cl3msDO seen  
'(S)he seemed to have seen it'  
b. \*lo parecía haber visto  
Cl3msDO seem.3sg have seen
- (52) a. Parecía haberle enviado una carta  
seem.3sg have.Cl3msIO sent a letter  
'(S)he seemed to have sent him a letter'  
b. \*le parecía haber enviado una carta  
Cl3msIO seem.3sg have sent a letter

This contrast suggests that clitic climbing is available for cases in which the clitic has V-functional import, possibly an aspectual one, but it is not available when it represents an argument relation, either as an agreement head or as an argument. According to our proposal, *SE* raises to subject position in (44)-(47) a-pairs for Case reasons. Data on this subsection, although admittedly marginal (see fn. 16, and 17), is predicted by our analysis and, as a consequence, contributes to the conclusion that *SE* is a nominative pronoun in the specifier of T.

### 3.3. Secondary predication

An additional argument that supports our analysis is found in secondary predication. Based on the ungrammaticality of examples like (53), the general claim in the literature is that secondary predication on the “implicit” argument is not possible in *SE* constructions (example slightly modified from Saab (2014): ex. (29); also see Pujalte & Saab (2012); although see Mendikoetxea 2008):

- (53) \*Ayer se besó a María borracho.  
yesterday SE kissed DOM Mary drunk  
Intended: ‘One<sub>i</sub>/someone<sub>i</sub> kissed Mary drunk<sub>i</sub>.’

However, when tense, modal and aspectual considerations are controlled for, secondary predication is rather natural in these constructions (54) for both generic and episodic readings, as shown in Demonte (1986), and Collins (2017).

- (54) a. ¡No se besa a María borracho!  
not SE kiss.sg DOM María drunk.masc  
'You cannot kiss Mary drunk!'  
b. Se puede ir a clase/conducir/besar a Pedro borracho  
SE may.sg go to class/drive /kiss DOM Peter drunk.masc  
'You may go to class/drive/kiss Peter drunk'

- c. A la política se viene llorado de casa  
 To the politics **SE** come.3sg cried from home  
 Lit. 'To politics one comes cried from home' [intended: 'In politics, you do not complain when deals do not fit your wishes'; A.Rivera to M. Rajoy (Spanish president)]
- d. Si se nace pobre, lo más probable es que se muera miserable<sup>16</sup>  
 If **SE** is.born pour, the most probable is that **SE** die.subj miserable  
 'If you are born poor, it is most likely that you will die miserable'

The same conclusion extends to "passive" *SE*. Thus, for instance, no grammaticality contrast arises between (54a) and (55) [cfr. Martins & Nunes 2016, sect. 3.1]:

- (55) ¡No se hacen los exámenes borracho!  
 Not **SE** do.pl. the exams drunk.masc  
 'You (gen.) cannot do the exam drunk'

As observed to us by Andrés Saab (p.c.), modality is playing an important role in the grammaticality of these examples in a direction that is not totally clear to us (see Pujalte & Saab 2012, D'Alessandro 2007, and Saab 2018 for interesting observations on the different semantic interpretation of *SE* constructions and their syntactic correlations). Without denying the role modal operators and other elements may play in (54)-(55), notice that other examples may also be constructed where these factors do not play such a decisive role:

- (56) a. Allí, todos los años se celebran las fiestas vestidos con trajes típicos  
 There, every the years **SE** celebrate.pl the festivities dressed with vests typical  
 'There, they (gen.) celebrate their festivities every year dressed in regional costumes'
- b. En mi tiempo se abordaban concentrado los problemas  
 In my time **SE** address.past.plur concentrated.masc.sg. the problems  
 'When I was young, you would address problems concentrated'
- c. En esta empresa se trabaja siempre, se trabaja dormido y se trabaja despierto  
 in this company **SE** works always, **SE** works asleep and **SE** works awake  
 'In this company you always work, you work asleep, and you work awake.'

Moreover, *SE* constructions clearly contrast with analytical passives, where secondary predication on the implicit argument is impossible even when the sentence is tempered or embedded in some modal contexts:

- (57) a. \*¡María no es besada borracho! / ¡No es hecho el examen borracho!  
 Maria not is kissed drunk.masc / not is done the exam drunk
- b. \*Allí, todos los años las fiestas son celebradas vestidos con trajes típicos  
 There, every the years the festivities are celebrated dressed with vests typical

Summing up, it is possible to have a secondary predicate on *SE* in both impersonal and passive constructions, which confirms, once again, that the argument *SE* stands for is syntactically present.

<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Silvia Gumiel for this example.

3.4. *Middles*

Further evidence for our proposal comes from the comparison between passive and middle *SE* constructions. One of the key properties of middle constructions is word order. In contrast to passive *SE* construction, where the preferred word order is *V – Theme*,<sup>17</sup> in middle constructions the theme must precede the verb (Mendikoetxea 1999).

- (58) a. Esta madera se corta fácilmente  
This wood SE cut easily  
'This wood cuts easily'  
b. # Se corta esta madera fácilmente  
SE cut this wood easily

Although a full justification is beyond the scope of this paper, the reasons to assume that the clause initial DP occupies the subject position in the middle construction in (58a) are quite compelling.<sup>18</sup> In that case, if we extended our proposal to analyze *SE* in middle constructions as the subject, both *esta madera* and *SE* would be satisfying the same syntactic relation, an unwelcome result. However, there is an important difference between middle and impersonal/passive *SE* constructions that suggests that the clitic has a very different nature in each of them: sharply contrasting with impersonal and passive *SE* constructions, there is no animacy requirement in the case of middle constructions. Mendikoetxea (1999) explicitly observes that middle sentences "describe a state that requires the participation of a cause or an agent [... but passive and impersonal *SE* constructions] describe an action or an activity which requires necessarily and forcefully the intervention of an intentional agent..." (p.1643).

Following our analysis, animacy is a property of agreement, and it is satisfied by *SE* (see sec. 3.1). Given the lack of animacy effects in middle constructions, *SE* cannot be the overt subject pronoun. Our proposal instead is that it should be treated as a voice morpheme. Evidence comes from three different sources. First, although it is not the preferred pattern, in middle constructions animate preverbal DPs may appear without DOM, triggering subject number agreement (examples from M. Zorraquino, apud Sánchez 2002: 66):<sup>19</sup>

- (59) a. Los maridos no se encuentran fácilmente  
The husbands no SE found.3p easily  
'Husbands are not found easily'  
b. Las mujeres no se conocen nunca bien  
The women no SE know.3p never well  
'Women are never known well'

<sup>17</sup> See Raposo & Uriagereka (1996), Martins & Nunes (2016) for arguments showing that object preposing in passive *SE* constructions does not target the subject position but it is in a left dislocated one.

<sup>18</sup> Notice that our concern here is not about the much debated issue of which specific position preverbal subjects occupy in Spanish. Our point is that whatever that position is, it is *SE* in passive *SE* constructions but the argument DP in middle constructions that occupies that position.

<sup>19</sup> Sentences in (59) contrast with those in (i), so called impersonal middle constructions, with the same meaning, but retaining DOM and lacking number agreement:

- (i) a los maridos no se les encuentra fácilmente  
dom the husbands no SE 3pD find.3s easily  
(ii) a las mujeres no se las conoce nunca bien  
dom the women no SE 3pO know.3s never well

Examples in (59) show that the diathesis of the verb is somehow affected in middles (optionally) blocking object Case assignment, as in the case of inchoative constructions. This option is not available for transitive impersonal constructions, suggesting that the middle construction is not active (see sec. 2.5).

A second piece of evidence comes from the fact that in many cases SE is not required to form a middle construction. For instance, (58a) is not ungrammatical if SE is suppressed (60a). This option is in general available for those verbs that may have a non-agentive external argument.<sup>20</sup>

- (60)
- a. Esta madera corta fácilmente  
‘This wood cuts easily’
  - b. Los bosques queman fácilmente  
‘Forests burn easily’
  - c. Los barcos de hierro hunden fácilmente  
‘Iron boats sink easily’
  - d. El hielo derrite fácilmente  
‘Ice melts easily’
  - e. las cuerdas de la guitarra tensan fácilmente  
‘Guitar strings tauten easily’
  - f. estos palos rompen fácilmente  
‘These sticks break easily’

Finally, middle voice is manifested in the morphology of many languages of the world, including Spanish where there is a specific morpheme, *-dizo*, to derive middle adjectives (61). That suggests that middle voice is somehow formally encoded in the grammar.

- (61)
- a. Un terreno anegadizo  
a land flood.deriv-suffix  
‘A frequently flooded land’
  - b. Una persona asustadiza  
a person frighten.deriv-suffix  
‘An easily frightened person’

Differences between middle sentences and impersonal/passive constructions indirectly support our analysis. If middles are formed by adding the morpheme *SE* as a pure anticausative (Zubizarreta 1986, Cinque 1988, and subsequent work), the different behavior can be readily explained. The external argument is not projected, therefore no animacy effects are expected, and no Case is assigned to the object. In other words, *SE* does not qualify as a strong pronoun, and, in consequence, it cannot raise to subject position.

### 3.5. *Anaphora binding reanalyzed*

It is generally claimed that anaphora binding is impossible in non-paradigmatic *se*-constructions. Consider the following contrast from Pujalte & Saab (2013), Saab (2014):

<sup>20</sup>However, it may also appear with other verbs such as *vender* ‘to sell’.



- (62) a. Aquí uno/la gente puede dejar su saco y marcharse  
 here one/the people can leave.INF his/her coat and leave  
 'Here one/people may leave their coat and leave'  
 b. \*Aquí se puede dejar su saco.  
 here SE can leave.INF his/her coat  
 Intended: 'One<sub>i</sub> can leave his/her<sub>i</sub> coat here.'

As they observe, possessor clitics may be bound by a generic antecedent, such as *uno* ('one') or *la gente* ('people') in (62a), but *SE* does not count as a possible binder (62b).

However, the ungrammaticality of (62) may involve a feature mismatch between *SU*, a third person pronoun, and *SE*, which, as argued, has no person specification. That conclusion is supported by the fact that when we control for the feature mismatch binding becomes possible. Thus, it has been observed that determiners may act as bound anaphora in Romance (called 'expletive definites'): (63a) and (63b) are virtually synonymous sentences (Guéron 1983; 2006; Espinal & Cyrino 2017 and references):

- (63) a. Andrés levantó la mano en el turno de preguntas  
 Andrés raised the hand in the turn of questions  
 'Andrés raised his hand in the question session'  
 b. Andrés levantó su mano en el turno de preguntas  
 Andrés raised the hand in the turn of questions  
 'Andrés raised his hand in the question session'

However, unlike the bound pronoun *SU* in (63b), which has person features fully specified, the bound determiner gets its person interpretation from the binder. This may be observed by comparing (63) with (64), where the subject is second person singular. Notice that while the anaphoric pronoun *tu* must change morphologically to second person, the same form of the determiner *la* will be interpreted as third or second person depending on the person feature specifications of its antecedent.

- (64) a. Tú levantaste la mano en el turno de preguntas  
 You raised the hand in the turn of questions  
 'You raised your hand in the question session'  
 b. Tú levantaste tu mano en el turno de preguntas  
 You raised your hand in the turn of questions  
 'You raised your hand in the question session'

As expected *SE* does not allow binding of the person pronoun, but it may bind the less specified determiner variable (MacDonald 2017):

- (65) a. Se levantó la mano en el turno de preguntas  
 SE raised the hand in the turn of questions  
 'Someone's hand was raised in the question session'  
 b. \*Se levantó su mano en el turno de preguntas  
 SE raised his/her hand in the turn of questions  
 'Someone's hand was raised in the question session'

Unlike *su* (*his/her*), the anaphoric determiner in the DP is not specified for person features, which makes it possible for *SE* to bind it. The same effect is illustrated by the

contrast between Pujalte & Saab’s original example in (62b) and its minimal pair in (66):

- (66) Aquí se puede dejar el saco.  
 here SE can leave.INF the coat  
 ‘One<sub>i</sub> can leave his/her<sub>i</sub> coat here.’

In sum, these examples provide strong independent evidence for our proposal that what makes *se* especial in these constructions is simply that it is not specified for person (see also sec. 2.4, and Rivero 2002).<sup>21</sup>

### 3.6. Summary

Given our discussion, it seems that when we control for intervening factors *SE* is compatible with raising to subject, secondary predication and anaphora binding. Added to the results in the previous section, everything supports our proposal that *SE* is the sentential subject. We also have presented a possible way to analyze the animacy effects on pronouns that not only provides a unified account of the behavior of strong pronouns but also incorporates *SE* to the picture in a natural way, provided that we are dealing with a nominative clitic that checks animacy with Tense in a standard agreement relation, but is defective otherwise. As a consequence of this defectiveness, number agreement obtains in the same way as in other quirky case environments, and shows the same well known intervention restrictions when a dative blocks the relation between Tense and the VP internal argument. Thus, there is no argument—nor empirical or theoretical—to assume that the internal argument raises to subject position.

## 4. Conclusion

In this paper we have shown that *SE* is not the by-product or the morphological expression of a certain conspiracy of abstract relations. In the same vein, non paradigmatic *SE* constructions are not the result of a theta grid manipulation or a diathesis change. On the contrary, as the higher argument in the sentence, *SE* is the real

<sup>21</sup> The same analysis might extend to account for the following contrast between overt indefinite *uno* (‘one’) and *se*-constructions reported by MacDonald & Melgares’ (2017; attributed to Maddox):

- (i) a. Si uno gana mucho dinero, compra muchas cosas inútiles.  
 If one earns much money, buys many things useless  
 ‘If one earns a lot of money, one buys many useless things.’  
 b. Si se gana mucho dinero, #compra muchas cosas inútiles.  
 If SE earns much money, #buys many things useless

If we are correct, what makes it impossible for *se* to be the antecedent of an embedded pro-argument is its lack of person features. Note that, contrasting with (ib), (iia-b), where *se* is the antecedent of a second *se* or an indirect object clitic doubling an indefinite non-referential DP, the sentence is good:

- (ii) a. Si se gana mucho dinero, se compran muchas cosas inútiles.  
 If SE earns much money, se buy.pl many things useless  
 ‘If one earns a lot of money, one buys many useless things.’  
 b. Si se duerme bien, se le alegra a uno el espíritu  
 If SE sleeps well, SE cl.dat3. cheer.up DOM one the spirit  
 ‘Sleeping well gladdens one’s spirit’

An additional advantage of our approach is that it is not necessary to complicate Holmberg’s (2010) theory of pro, which they assume, with complex assumptions about how the subject gets its properties in impersonal *se*-constructions.

subject of the sentence, which triggers passive and impersonal *SE* constructions simply because of its inability to check all the features in T. This clitic checks a [+animate] agreement relation, what makes its behavior on the one hand similar to that of strong pronouns, and on the other hand similar to DOM. We have also shown that SE satisfies the nominative subject relation as any other pronoun does.

If on the right track, the results of this paper support a derivational view where no construction-particular properties must be attributed to non-paradigmatic SE “constructions”, against prevailing constructionist views both within and outside generative approaches. They also contribute to understand the nature of agreement relations, and specially, those of default agreement involved in quirky Case assignment. In Ormazabal & Romero (2019a) we explore some of the properties of default number agreement in these and similar contexts. We leave for future research the interactions between the clitic SE and object clitics regarding the use of generalized *leísmo* for masculine animate objects, and to the *Person Case Constraint*.

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