THE ROLE OF SE IN SPANISH AGREEMENT VARIATION

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1. GOAL. This paper links two cases of non-nominative subject structures in Spanish: psych-verbs with a dative experiencer (DPVs) and non-paradigmatic SE sentences, cf. (1)-(2). Both structures show T-IA agreement in ‘standard’ Spanish, but they can also display a lack of agreement (see (5)-(6) below). We claim that the variation pattern in both structures follows from the presence of SE, which in those cases cannot be a Probe because it is not merged in a functional head position. This analysis supports an account for variation whereby speakers ‘recycle’ possibilities that are already available in their grammar (Biberauer 2011, 2017).

2. DATA. Spanish T can locally agree with a DP in IA position in the context of DPVs, as in (1) (see e.g. Pujalte 2015), and SE sentences, as in (2) (see e.g. Sánchez-López 2002).

(1) (A mí) me gusta-n los libros
    ‘I like books’
(2) Se busca-n unos lingüístas
    ‘Linguists are wanted’

DPVs have been compared to ‘quirky subject’ structures in Icelandic (see e.g. Sigurðsson 1992), since they also require a dative marked subject bearing the experiencer role (López 2007, D’Alessandro 2007, among others). However, in Spanish, T displays full φ-agreement (person and number) and there is no person restriction on the DP in IA position:

(3) (A María) le gusta-s tú
    to Mary her like-2SG you.NOM.2SG
    ‘Mary likes you’

We maintain that the dative argument is not a defective intervener in DPVs (Torrego 1996), arguably because it is a high applicative (cf. Cuervo 2010, Pujalte 2015). On the other hand, se cannot be a dative argument (leaving aside PCC phenomena), but does show similar properties to those of quirky subject structures. Firstly, the IA cannot be 1st or 2nd person, i.e. there is a person restriction, see (4a). Secondly, person agreement is banned (4b):

(4) a. *Se busca-s tú  b. *Se busca-mos unos lingüístas
    SE search-2SG you
    ‘You are searched for’
    SE search-1PL some linguists
    ‘We linguists are searched for’

The example in (4b), from López (2007), proves that the impossibility of person inflection in SE sentences does not depend on the person restriction, since the IA is syntactically 3rd person.

2.1. VARIATION. Along with (1) and (2), Spanish displays variation in agreement: the verb shows 3SG inflection regardless of the number of the IA, as shown in (5)-(6).

(5) Nos gusta los libros
    we.DAT like-3SG the books
    ‘We like books’
(6) Se busca unos lingüístas
    SE search.3SG some linguists
    ‘Linguists are searched for’

Non-agreeing SE sentences (cf. (6)) are well-known (see e.g. Mendikoetxea 1999), but the pattern in (5) has only been reported in few descriptive dialectology works (Quilis 1983, Vigara Tauste 1992). We will provide evidence for non-agreeing DPVs from oral corpora and social networks, which seem to confirm that this pattern is optional in spontaneous language (cf. Vigara Tauste 1992). Furthermore, it is not due to phonetical factors, since it is present in dialects where there is no elision of the verb ending, such as the one from Madrid (Quilis 1983).

3. PROPOSAL. The gist of our analysis is that SE is responsible for the person restriction facts and, at the same time, it may intervene in agreement depending on its structural position. We assume that SE is 3rd
person and underspecified for number (cf. D’Alessandro 2007) and that this underspecified feature cannot always probe. When SE cliticizes on \( v \) (cf. Roberts 2010), it probes and yields partial agreement (only in number) (cf. (7)). However, when SE is merged in Spec, \( v \), it cannot be a Probe but a Goal (cf. (8)).

\[
(7) \quad \text{a. } [vP \text{ SE } v_{[3P][uN]} \backslash [V \text{ DP}_{[3SG]}]] \quad \text{agreeing SE (cf. (2))}
\]

\[
(7) \quad \text{b. } T \quad [vP \text{ SE } v_{[3P][uN]} \backslash [V \text{ DP}_{[3SG]}]]
\]

As we see in (7), \( v \) has the features of SE via cliticization (Roberts 2010), it can probe and agree in number with the IA. Then, T agrees in number with \( v \), which corresponds to the number of the DP, and multiple agreements in person with \( v \) and the DP. According to the conditions on Multiple Agree, the agreeing elements must have non-conflicting feature specification (Anagnostopoulou 2005), in other words, since SE is 3\(^{rd} \) person, the IA must also be 3\(^{rd} \) (D’Alessandro 2007).

\[
(8) \quad T_{[3P][3N]} \quad [SE_{[3P][uN]} \quad [vP \quad v_\ldots]] \quad \text{non-agreeing SE (cf. (6))}
\]

On the other hand, if SE merges in Spec, \( v \), its uN feature cannot probe. Therefore, T agrees with SE resulting in 3\(^{rd} \) person and default number (singular), (cf. (8)). The featural configuration of \( v \) is not relevant and correctly predicts that \( v \) can be \( \phi \)-complete, i.e. assign accusative:

\[
(9) \quad \text{Se nos busca/*n}
\]

SE us.ACC search.3SG/*3PL

“We are searched for”

Regarding DPVs, the regular full \( \phi \)-agreement pattern (cf. (1)) is expected if \( v \) is defective (Chomsky 2000, 2001), since there is no SE in the structure that triggers person restrictions nor introduces a valued person feature on \( v \). We propose that the variation pattern (cf. (5)) can be accounted for by the same analysis proposed for non-agreeing se (cf. (8)): a covert SE may enter in the derivation yielding lack of agreement, shown in (10):

\[
(10) \quad \text{Nos } T \quad [(SE_{[3P][uN]} \quad [vP \quad v \quad [vP \quad \text{gusta los libros}]]] \quad \text{non-agreeing DPV (cf. (5))}
\]

In this sense, we defend that variation arises because an already existing element in the language, in this case SE, is ‘recycled’.

4. CONCLUSIONS. Our analysis suggests that SE can be merged either in a functional or a lexical position because of its featural configuration. This structural difference has an impact on Agree, yielding the two possible agreement patterns in SE-sentences. We have claimed that a more ‘exotic’ variation pattern, namely lack of agreement in DPVs follows from the same analysis. This proposal supports the view on syntactic variation that speakers can ‘recycle’ possibilities already present in their grammars.