

On impersonal *se* and null subjects in Romance

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Introduction: This paper discusses the significance of being a consistent null subject language (CNL) and the availability of impersonal *se* (*Imp_{se}*) in Romance. An example of *Imp_{se}*, where the verb does not agree with the overt theme DP is in (1a), which contrasts with passive *se* (*Pass_{se}*) in (1b), where the verb does agree with the overt theme DP, from European Portuguese (EP).

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| (1)a. Vende-se estas casas.
sell.3sg.-se these houses
"They are selling these houses." | b. Vendem-se estas casas.
sell.3pl.-se these houses
"They are selling these houses." |
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We claim that *Imp_{se}* spells out T (in the spirit of Belletti 1982, Otero 1986, Cinque 1988, and Mendikoetxea 2008) with a valued version of Holmberg's (2005 et seq.) [uD]-feature that T bears in CNLs. We thus link *Imp_{se}* to being a CNL: no [uD] in T, no *Imp_{se}*. By assuming this connection, we claim, we can explain how Puerto Rican Spanish (PRS), in contrast to Peninsular Spanish, is losing *Imp_{se}*: it is losing [uD] in T, as argued independently by Ticio (2018).

The syntax of *Imp_{se}*: We take *se* in *Imp_{se}* to spell-out T with a valued version of [uD] à la Holmberg (2005, 2010). On this account, the [uD] must be valued by an A-topic, (see Frascarelli 2007), thus, the null external argument of a verb in 3rd sg. will be referential. Holmberg argues that this explains why in non-CNLs, like Brazilian Portuguese (BP), the null subject of a verb in 3rd sg. can receive a non-referential interpretation as in (2a), while the null subject of a verb in 3rd sg. in a CNL only receives a referential interpretation as in Peninsular Spanish in (2b).

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| (2) a. No Sul come churrasco.
in.the south eat.3.sg. barbecue.
'In the south one eats barbecue.' | b. En el sur, come carne.
in the south, eat.3.sg. meat
"In the south, s/he eats meat." |
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Nevertheless, when there is some special morphology on the verb, like *Imp_{se}*, a non-referential interpretation of the null external argument can arise. We propose that *se* in *Imp_{se}* spells out T with a valued [D] feature. Consequently, no A-topic can value [D] in T, since it is already valued; this precludes a referential interpretation of the null subject (cf. Sigurdsson 2011). As expected, *Imp_{se}* cannot introduce a discourse referent for later reference (Maddox 2018), illustrated in (3a) (in contrast to indefinite *uno* in 3b), and it cannot refer to an antecedent previously introduced in the discourse either, illustrated in (3b), from Peninsular Spanish.

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| (3)a. Si se gan-a mucho dinero, #compr-a muchas cosas inútiles.
If <i>Imp_{se}</i> earn-3SG much money, #buy-3SG many things useless | b. Si uno gan-a mucho dinero, (*se) compr-a muchas cosas inútiles.
If one earn-3SG much money (* <i>Imp_{se}</i>)buy-3SG many things useless
"If one earns a lot of money, one buys many useless things." |
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***Imp_{se}* vs. *Pass_{se}*:** Consider an implication of this analysis of *Imp_{se}* in the context of an approach to *Pass_{se}*, which takes *Pass_{se}* to spells out Voice (MacDonald 2017, MacDonald & Maddox 2018), which minimally lacks accusative case. In *Pass_{se}*, the theme DP controls verbal agreement and surfaces in nominative as illustrated in (4a), but not in with *Imp_{se}* in (4b), from Italian (D'Alessandro 2004:59). (See also 1 above).

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| (4) a. In Italia essi / *li si mangiano
in Italy they.Nom.3pl/ *them.Acc.3pl si eat.3pl
"In Italy, people eat them." | [Pass _{se}] |
| b. In Italia *essi /li si mangia
in Italy *they.Nom.3pl/them.Acc.3pl si eat.3sg
"In Italy, people eat them." | [Imp _{se}] |

Since *se* is within the verb phrase in Pass_{se}, it can affect the argument structure properties of the predicate, while in Imp_{se}, *se* is outside the verb phrase (in T), and does not affect the argument structure properties of the predicate. Consider Romanian, argued to lack Imp_{se} (Dobrovie-Sorin 1992), where only an agreeing DP is grammatical, patterning with Pass_{se}, as in (5a). Moreover, in contrast to Peninsular Spanish (Italian and EP), *se* cannot appear in copula or analytical passive constructions, in (5b) and (5c) respectively in Romanian.

- (5) a. Se construiesc/*construiește locuințe noi
 SE.3 built.3pl / built.3sg. houses.nom new.nom.pl
 “New houses are built.”
 b. *Adesea se este trădat de prieteni falși. c. *Nu se este niciodată mulțumit.
 frequently, se is betrayed by friends false not se is never satisfied
 “One is frequently betrayed by false friends.” “One is never satisfied.”

Additionally, although Romanian has a differential object marker, *se* cannot appear with it, again, in contrast to Peninsular Spanish, as illustrated in (6a) and (6b) respectively.

- (6) a. *În școala asta se pedepsește pe elevi. b. Se llamó a los bomberos.
 in school this se punish DOM students.the. Imp_{se} called DOM the firefighters
 “In this school, they punish the students.” “Mary is known as a good mother.”

CNLs and Imp_{se}: Our analysis links Imp_{se} directly to a property of CNLs – the [uD] feature in T à la Holmberg (2005, 2010). This is a positive result, since, as far as we are aware, only CNLs have developed Imp_{se} constructions. Spanish, Italian, EP and Brazilian Portuguese have Imp_{se}, but French does not. In this light, note Caribbean varieties of Spanish, observed to be drifting away from being CNLs (Camacho 2013). Consider Puerto Rican Spanish (PRS). A variety of syntactic patterns suggest that it is losing its CNL property (see Ticio 2018 a.o.). Consider just one property here: the use of overt pronouns has increased, importantly, without a contrastive meaning or a change in topic (Navarro 1948, Morales 1986, Toribio 2000), typical of CNLs, as illustrated in the discourse in (7), from Ticio (2018:92).

- (7) Yo no pude estar allí, yo oí la gritería, pero yo estaba en mi oficina en una reunión
 I not could be there, I heard the yelling, but I was in my office in a meeting
 In fact, Ticio (2018) claims explicitly that these (and many other patterns) can be explained by the loss of [uD] in T in PRS. We claim that this has affected the grammatical status of Imp_{se} in PRS. Most of our PRS speakers do not like Imp_{se} with DOM (6b), in copula constructions (8a) nor in the periphrastic passive (8b), in contrast to Peninsular Spanish.

- (8) a.(*)En este país se es perseguido por la policía. b.(*)Aquí se está bien.
 In this country Imp_{se} is pursued by the police Here Imp_{se} is good
 “In this country, one is pursued by the police.” “It is nice here.”

Importantly, there are some PRS speakers that do like Imp_{se} with DOM (6b), in copula constructions (8a) and in the periphrastic passive (8b). Interestingly, moreover, 3rd sg. still appears only to have a referential interpretation in PRS, as in illustrated in (2b) above for Peninsular Spanish. We take these patterns to indicate that there is a change in progress: PRS is losing its status as a CNL: it is losing [uD] on T with the consequent effect of losing Imp_{se}. That PRS is losing Imp_{se} is further corroborated by data from the Corpus del Español: NOW. A search for Imp_{se} with adjectives showed this pattern to be much more frequent in Peninsular Spanish than in PRS. For example, with ‘se está pendiente/one is on the look out for’ we found 310 tokens in Peninsular and only one in PRS. For Imp_{se} with periphrastic passive, we found 109 tokens in Peninsular Spanish and only 16 in PRS in the Corpus del Español: Web/Dialects.

Selected Reference: Ticio. 2018. On Puerto Rican Spanish subjects. In M. Gonzalez-Rivera (ed.), *Current Research in Puerto Rican Linguistics*. Routledge.