

Deconstructing SE-Constructions: Number Agreement and Postsyntactic Variation

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Most analyses of nonparadigmatic SE sentences derive their agreement patterns structurally, forcing a passive/impersonal distinction against all evidence. Instead, we uniformly analyze them as regular sentences where the T-agreeing subject is *se* itself, an argumental clitic pronoun, with [person] but no number ϕ -features, and show that the overt argument, which has object properties, does not genuinely agree in syntax. We reveal a new asymmetry between postverbal and preverbal/null arguments, which conceals two postsyntactic processes with very distinctive properties: morphological Clitic Mutation into number agreement, and T's Number Harmony with a close DP, not ruled by syntax or morphology.

Keywords: nonparadigmatic SE-constructions, Clitic Mutation, Number Harmony, person/number agreement, quirky subjects, feature geometry, Agree, Match

[Impersonal *se*] is a normal transitive structure with no exotic properties, and we do not have anything interesting to say about it here. (Raposo and Uriagereka 1996)

1 Introduction

Traditionally, nonparadigmatic SE in Spanish has been analyzed as belonging to two constructions, referred to as *passive* (1a), where the verb agrees with its complement as in analytic passives (P-SECs), and *impersonal* (1b), where the verb shows default agreement (I-SECs).¹

- (1) a. Se censuraron los documentos.
SE censored.PL the documents.PL
'The documents were censored.'

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- b. Se censuró a los oponentes políticos.
 SE censored.SG DOM the opponents political.PL
 ‘The political opponents were censored.’

Distributionally, I-SECs (1b) are used in all contexts except in transitive configurations in which the object does not receive differential object marking (DOM) (1a). Theoretical approaches overwhelmingly assume this state of affairs and complete (1) with the opposite pattern in (2), generally considered ungrammatical or dialectal in the literature.

- (2) a. *Se censuró los documentos.
 SE censored.SG the documents.PL
 b. *Se censuraron a los oponentes políticos.
 SE censored.PL DOM the opponents political.PL

This divergence is derived by assuming the existence of two constructions with their own structural and case assignment properties (3) (a few authors analyze the divergence differently, most explicitly Oca 1914 and Otero 1972, 1973; also see references in footnote 1).

- (3) “If agreement is taken to be a diagnostic for nominative marking (Chomsky 1981, 1995), then [1a] clearly exhibits nominative case. Less clear is the status of [1b].”
 (Ordóñez and Treviño 2016:238)

However, the paradigm in (1)–(2) simplifies the facts (MacKenzie 2013). Our first goal, in section 2, is to show that variation on agreement in SECs is far more extensive than assumed in previous analyses, which makes most theoretical approaches to SECs empirically unsound. Furthermore, we uncover a structural distinction that has gone unnoticed in the literature so far:² while number agreement with *postverbal* objects exhibits a high and random degree of variation internal to every dialect, variation with *preverbal* and *null* arguments is systematic and mostly dialectally determined. Agreement with preverbal and null arguments splits dialects between *A(greement)-varieties*, where the argument covaries with number agreement (4b), and *C(litic)-varieties*, where both object clitic (4a) and subject number agreement (4b) are possible outputs (see section 2.2 for details).

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¹ The only analysis we are acquainted with where passive and impersonal SE are treated as the same syntactic construction is developed in a series of papers by Pujalte and Saab (see Pujalte and Saab 2012, 2014, Pujalte 2018, Saab 2018, 2020). There are important empirical and theoretical differences between their analysis and ours, but we share the leading idea of eliminating construction-based stipulative distinctions. See discussion below.

² DeMello (1995:71–72) mentions this asymmetry linked to the “educated language,” and Ordóñez and Treviño (2016) briefly refer to it with respect to the Mexican dialect.

- (4) a. (Los documentos) se los censuró.
 (the documents.PL) SE 3_{ACC.PL.MSC} censored.SG
- b. (Los documentos) se censuraron.
 (the documents.PL) SE censored.PL
- (Both) ‘The documents were censored.’

Our proposal is that (4a) and (4b) are two instances of the same clitic left-dislocation (CLLD) structure and that in (4b) postsyntactic morphological operations reshape the realization of the object clitic as number agreement. As we show in section 4.2, our analysis is supported by the behavior of SECs in clitic climbing and in idioms. We further argue that the change of the clitic into number agreement with preverbal and null objects (4) (*Clitic Mutation*) and the phenomenon of number agreement with postverbal objects (1)–(2) (*Number Harmony*) are two independent postsyntactic processes, neither of which constitutes a genuine subject agreement relation.

Our second goal is to present a unified analysis of SECs as regular sentences that do not require any construction-specific provision: properties attributed to SECs follow from the lexical features of *se*, an argumental pronoun in subject position, together with the application of postsyntactic processes at the interface levels. These processes are triggered when the subject is not specified for number, including *se*.

An advantage of our proposal is that it does not attribute to these structures emerging properties such as the removal of accusative case required to make the agreement pattern distinctions between [+DOM] and [–DOM] objects in Spanish. Furthermore, getting rid of the distinction between P-SEC (1a), I-SEC (1b), and clitic SEC (4a) is consistent with the absence of meaning differences between them (Mendikoetxea 1999) despite the fact that, with varying distribution, the three possibilities exist in all dialects. Evidence in section 2 shows that the patterns that allegedly support a passive approach are deprived of empirical motivation. An immediate consequence is that agreement cannot be used in these structures as a reliable test to uncover underlying syntactic relations. This raises a general issue about the meaning of overt evidence, and questions the foundations of approaches that require construction-specific P-SECs. In contrast, a purely derivational approach is perfectly equipped to explain the complete absence of semantic differences and provides a syntax able to relate to the whole range of PF representations.

The structure of the article is as follows. In section 2, we describe number agreement in SECs and show that it does not behave like a genuine subject agreement relation. In section 3, we summarize the logic and arguments in Ormazabal and Romero (O&R) 2019a to analyze SECs as regular active sentences where V’s complement is also its syntactic object and *se* is a pronominal subject. We detail the ϕ -features specified in the lexical entry of *se*, which agree with T and ultimately determine the overt agreement patterns. In section 4, we present the syntactic derivation common to all SECs. In a nutshell, *se* merges as the highest argument and behaves like a subject pronoun, maintaining ϕ -agreement and nominative-case-checking relations with T. We also briefly discuss our proposal regarding Agree as applied to SECs. In section 5, we derive the asymmetry between preverbal or null arguments and postverbal ones. While preverbal or null arguments are CLLD structures in which the direct object clitics *lo(s)/la(s)* ‘him/her/it/them’ in most cases

mutate into number agreement in the morphology, for postverbal complements agreement is a postsyntactic, extragrammatical phenomenon not subject to syntactic conditions; instead, it is amenable to a sociolinguistic approach (Otero 1973) whose domain of application is tightly circumscribed by the syntactic derivation. In section 6, we close with some general conclusions on crosslinguistic variation and on the properties of agreement in syntax and natural language processing.

2 Number Agreement in Detail

The regularity of number agreement in SECs has been grossly overestimated, possibly for reasons of normative pressure (MacKenzie 2013). In this section, we review all the attested agreement patterns in transitive SE structures and we conclude that number agreement is not a reliable criterion for distinguishing between P-SECs and I-SECs. In addition, we describe a new asymmetry between postverbal objects (section 2.1) and preverbal/null ones (section 2.2). Finally, in section 2.3 we briefly analyze agreement patterns with 1st and 2nd person.

For each agreement type discussed in this section, we have conducted an analysis of the data in *CORPES* and undertaken Google searches that corroborate our point.³ Given the nature of the database, our samples are mostly from written sources, which are more prone than speech to be conservative and match normative standards. We expect spoken language to depart from the norm to a larger extent, further supporting our conclusions, but the variation observed in the written samples is rich enough for our purposes.

2.1 Dysfunctional Agreement with Postverbal Elements

According to traditional descriptions, only 3rd person objects not marked for DOM (1)–(2) trigger number agreement. Here, we show that this description is not accurate and that number agreement with postverbal elements cannot be accounted for in syntactic terms (see Gallego 2016, Planells 2017, and Pujalte 2018 for observations in the same direction).

2.1.1. [–DOM] Objects Apart from some scattered observations pointing out cases where agreement between the verb and [–DOM] objects fails in SECs (Lemus 2014, Ordóñez and Treviño 2011, 2016, Pujalte 2018), the only systematic description of the range of variation is DeMello 1995. Our analysis of *CORPES* suggests that central and northern South American dialects show a stronger tendency than southern American and peninsular Spanish to exhibit a default 3rd person singular form, with no subject agreement whatsoever (5)–(6).

(5) Se censuró los documentos. (cf. (2a))

SE V.SG DP.PL

‘The documents were censored.’

³ Except when indicated, examples were retrieved from *CORPES*. The complete examples and source references, as well as a short explanation of our data retrieval procedure, are given in the online appendix (https://doi.org/10.1162/ling_a_00476). In the appendix, each example is identified with its corresponding number in the main text. Introductory examples are created to illustrate each basic pattern.

- (6) a. SE recuerda las versiones de Francesco Salviati, del Tintoretto.
 SE remember.3SG the versions.PL of Francesco Salviati of.the Tintoretto
 ‘Francesco Salviati’s, Tintoretto’s versions are remembered.’
- b. . . . donde se establecía las bases del nuevo gobierno.
 . . . where SE established.SG the bases.PL of.the new government
 ‘. . . where the foundations of the new government were established.’

Lemus (2014), from El Salvador, observes that in his own dialect both options, with and without agreement, are acceptable and are used interchangeably, underlining the complete absence of semantic effects in this alternation. It is also well-known that, independently of dialect, bare plural objects quite commonly do not trigger agreement (Sánchez López 2002 and references).⁴ But this agreement alternation is much more general and affects all kinds of objects (see the online appendix). To understand its distribution, in addition to dialectal trends, we must take into account a more general sociolinguistic condition (DeMello 1995): when the pressure exerted by formal education diminishes, lack of agreement increases.⁵

Following analyses for Italian (Cinque 1988, D’Alessandro 2007), two *LI* reviewers suggest that these facts might correspond to an alternation between a P-SEC and an I-SEC (see Ordóñez and Treviño 2016). However, this analysis is inconsistent with A-varieties. First, according to standard analyses, in I-SECs accusative case is not suppressed; instead, it is assigned to the object, as the presence of object clitics clearly indicates.

- (7) a. A tu hermana se la vio en malas compañías.
 DOM your sister SE 3ACC.SG.FM saw in bad companies
 ‘Your sister was seen in bad company.’
- b. Se nos obligó a hablar en público.
 SE 1ACC.PL forced to speak in public
 ‘We were forced to speak in public.’

If nonagreeing forms were impersonal, we would expect parallel examples with clitics to be fully available. That prediction is not borne out. Examples like (8b) with an object clitic are not

⁴ A Google search (10 February 2018) gave 843,000 results for the agreeing form, *se venden_{PL} casas* ‘houses are for sale’, compared with 718,000 for the nonagreeing one, *se vende_{SG} casas*. In the same direction, the collocation *dar las gracias* ‘to thank’ with plural *las gracias* (lit. ‘the thanks’) produced more hits in the nonagreeing version (*se da_{SG} las gracias*: 150,000 hits) than in the prescriptive agreeing one (*se dan_{PL} las gracias*: 119,000 hits). Data were even more striking when we included the singular dative clitic: 288,000 nonagreeing results (*se le da_{SG} las gracias*) vs. 63,500 agreeing ones (*se le dan_{PL} las gracias*); hardly 18% follow the Academia’s rule.

⁵ A clear indication that agreement in this context is perceived as unclear by many Spanish speakers are the countless queries made on this issue to normative linguistic institutions (RAE, Instituto Cervantes, FUNDEU, etc.). Otero’s (1972: 238) comment that while “educated people” exclusively use agreement forms, nonagreeing forms are common “on the other side of the tracks,” goes in the same direction.

acceptable in general. Thus, contrasting with postverbal arguments (8a), preverbal ones always show number agreement (8c).⁶

- (8) a. Se recibió tarde las invitaciones.
 SE received.SG late the invitations.PL
 ‘The invitations were received late.’
- b. *Se (las) recibió tarde.
 SE (3ACC.PL.FM) received.SG late
 ‘They were received late.’
- c. Las invitaciones se recibieron/*recibió tarde.
 the invitations.PL SE received.PL/received.SG late
 ‘The invitations, they were received late.’

Furthermore, if P-SECs were passives in that DOM is not assigned to the object, animate arguments would agree with the verb. However, that option is not attested, either with 3rd person animate arguments or with 1st/2nd person ones.

- (9) a. *Se censuraron los oponentes políticos.
 SE censored.PL the opponents political.PL
 ‘The political opponents were censored.’
- b. *Se censuraron/censuramos nosotros.
 SE censored.PL/censored.1PL we
 ‘We were censored.’

The only way to allow case assignment in (8a) and to block P-SEC in (9) is to resort to some mechanism where DOM objects are excluded a priori. We cannot see how that could be

⁶ A reviewer observes that for Mexican Spanish, Ordóñez and Treviño (2016) do report the existence of a doubling strategy.

- (i) A estos terrenos se les vendió a un buen precio.
 DOM these lands.PL SE 3PL.DAT sold.SG at a good price
 ‘These lands were sold at a good price.’

This is not a general pattern in dialectological terms: the only reference to it that we know of is Ordóñez and Treviño’s, and it is not clear to us how extensive the phenomenon is even in that area. It does not counterexemplify our objection in the text, since the clitic strategy should be available each time the nonagreeing structure is an option; in other words, it should be general. Furthermore, the clitic is not the predicted accusative *lo* but the dative *le*. And, most importantly, the context is also exceptional in that the clitic doubles an inanimate DOM argument. In fact, Ordóñez and Treviño themselves explicitly observe that the clitic strategy is impossible in Mexico with [–DOM] objects; see footnote 13 below.

Altogether, these properties suggest that two independent processes are involved in (i). On the one hand, the use of the clitic *le* in contexts where doubled objects are marked with DOM is common in American Spanish, except in the Southern Cone, with deep historical roots (see footnotes 9 and 33, and references there). On the other hand, as a geographically limited phenomenon—most probably a linguistic innovation—DOM extends to inanimate NPs in certain contexts in the same direction as in other American dialects mentioned in footnote 13; see references there for extensive discussion. Obviously, in a variety where DOM has extended to mark inanimate arguments, contexts where *le* surfaces are expected to also include cases like (i), where the doubled argument is a DOM inanimate.

captured derivationally in a principled way, and in fact we know of no attempt in the literature to explain this distribution of facts. In that sense, traditional analyses, including generative ones, are constructionist in nature.

To compound matters, finding a coherent proposal for the cases discussed so far would only cover one corner of the problem since, as we show in section 2.1.2, the rule also fails to apply on the opposite side of the equation. In many cases, impossible syntactic agreement holds between the verb and any noun phrase in the sentence (long-distance agreement (section 2.1.3), complements of prepositions, and even nominal adjuncts (section 2.1.4)).

2.1.2 [+DOM] Objects According to traditional descriptions, [+DOM] objects do not trigger agreement. For 3rd person objects, the description does not accord with the data in these contexts either, and the sentence marked as ungrammatical in (2b), repeated here, is much more common than usually assumed (see DeMello 1995, Planells 2017).

- (10) Se censuraron a los oponentes políticos.
 SE V.PL DOM DP.PL
 ‘The political opponents were censored.’

As a matter of fact, examples in written texts are readily available in every Spanish dialect, and much more frequently in oral Spanish.

- (11) a. En 1996 se eligen a las primeras autoridades municipales.
 in 1996 SE elect.PL DOM the first authorities municipal.PL
 ‘In 1996 the first local authorities were elected.’
 b. Al iniciarse la menstruación se aislaban a las jóvenes.
 when beginning the menstruation SE isolated.PL DOM the young.women.PL
 ‘When menstruation started, the young women were isolated.’

MacKenzie (2013) studied frequencies of singular/plural in ‘se+V+a+plural object’ sequences in the CREA corpus for *elegir* ‘choose’, *invitar* ‘invite’, *nombrar* ‘name’, and *matar* ‘kill’. Agreement results ranged from 9.65% with *invitar* to 38.89% with *elegir*.

As these observations show, the distribution of agreement with [\pm DOM] objects hardly reflects anything more than a choice prescribed by the Academia through the school system. The weaker the influence of the Academia, the greater the asystematicity of the agreement patterns in SECs: agreement between V and DOM objects permeates the Spanish language, and it is only consistently rejected by speakers who show a highly prescriptive behavior.

2.1.3 Long-Distance Agreement A context where this dysfunctional agreement shows up frequently is long-distance agreement relations, where the complement of an infinitival clause agrees with the matrix V (see, e.g., Boeckx 2004, Bhatt 2005, Etxepare 2006).

- (12) Se decidieron [censurar los documentos].
 SE V.PL [Tenseless clause V_{infinitive} DP.PL]
 ‘It was decided to censor the documents.’

CORPES yields many such results for all geographical areas, and a Google search for *se requieren hacer* ‘it is required to make’ (5 June 2018) yielded 17,400 hits. Among the examples we observe long-distance agreement not only with [–DOM] objects (13a–b) (Gallego 2019) but also with verbs such as *nombrar* ‘to appoint’ and with [+DOM] verbs (13c).

- (13) a. En esta profesión se requieren hacer evaluaciones.
 in this job SE require.PL to.make evaluations.PL
 ‘In this job you must conduct evaluations.’
- b. Se valoran reducir las superiores a 1,300 euros.
 SE evaluate.PL to.reduce the superior.PL to 1,300 euros
 ‘Reducing those (pensions) higher than 1,300 euros will be considered.’
- c. Se requieren nombrar a los responsables de la Dirección Nacional.
 SE require.PL to.appoint DOM the people.in.charge from the Directorate National
 ‘It is necessary to appoint National Directorate leaders.’

Note that these structures disallow analytic passives (14a) and clitic climbing (14b).

- (14) a. *Las evaluaciones fueron requeridas hacer.
 the evaluations.PL were.PL required to.do
- b. *Las requirió hacer.
 3ACC.PL.FM required to.do

Therefore, agreement between the matrix verb and the complement of the embedded infinitive is completely unexpected in this syntactic context as well. Moreover, irregular agreement is found even in hyperraising configurations.

- (15) Se consideran que hay personas con categorías superiores e inferiores.
 SE consider.PL that there.are persons.PL with categories superior and inferior
 ‘It is considered that there are people superior and inferior to others.’

In (15), the matrix verb agrees with the subject of the finite subordinate clause. The number of Google hits for this structure rises to 8,260,000 (6 June 2021), including cases of number agreement with embedded 1st and 2nd person subjects (see the online appendix).

2.1.4 Other Dysfunctional Agreement Patterns: P-Complements and Adjuncts Agreement in SECs is even messier than described so far. The verb may agree with complements of lexical prepositions (Gallego 2016, examples from peninsular Spanish).

- (16) Se hablaron [de los documentos].
 SE V.PL [PP P DP.PL]
 ‘The documents were talked about.’
- (17) a. Dijo que se hablaron [PP con las autoridades].
 said that SE talked.3PL with the authorities.PL
 ‘He/She said that the authorities were talked to.’

- b. Es bueno reconocer cuando las cosas se hacen bien y se piensan en
 is good to.acknowledge when the things SE make.PL well and SE think.PL in
 nosotros.

us

‘It is good to acknowledge when things are well done and people think about us.’

Although marginal compared with previous phenomena, examples like (17a–b) are not isolated cases: a Google search for *se hablaron de temas* ‘issues were talked about’ (8 March 2018) produced 6,350 instances of plural agreement between *hablar* and P’s complement *temas* (18), many of them from formal sources.

- (18) Aclaró que tampoco se hablaron de temas de la farándula.
 explained that neither SE talked.PL about issues.PL of the show.business
 ‘He/She explained that show business issues were not mentioned either.’

This kind of agreement is found even in long-distance relations: for *se deben recurrir* ‘it must be resorted to’ Google returned 26,900 hits (5 June 2018).⁷

- (19) Indicó que se deben recurrir a otras figuras.
 pointed.out that SE must.PL resort to other legal.concepts.PL
 ‘He/She pointed out that other legal concepts should be resorted to.’

Finally, it is surprisingly common to find examples where agreement is not triggered by arguments, but in fact by temporal DP-modifiers.

- (20) Se bailan los lunes.
 SE V.PL DP_{Adjunct}.PL
 ‘People dance on Mondays.’
- (21) a. . . . donde no se abren los domingos.
 . . . where no SE open.PL the Sundays.PL
 ‘. . . where stores do not open on Sundays.’
 b. Se trabajan los fines de semana y festivos.
 SE work.PL the weekends.PL and holidays.PL
 ‘We work on weekends and holidays.’

For instance, a Google search for *se abre los domingos* ‘it is open on Sundays’ (5 June 2018) returned 27,400 hits for the irregular plural agreement pattern *se abren los domingos* and 27,300 for the expected singular one, *se abre los domingos*. Although these data do not fit with standard P-SECs (the verbs are not transitive), their morphological behavior mimics it. In section 2.1.5, we

⁷ Although the sequence *se deben recurrir a* is ambiguous, showing regular agreement when it means ‘to appeal’, the first 50 hits in the search are all instances of irregular agreement with the complement of the preposition, with the meaning ‘to resort to’.

argue that these agreement patterns cannot be understood as subject agreement in any syntactically coherent way.

2.1.5 Number Agreement Is Not Subject Agreement If we consider the whole range of data, subject agreement behavior is completely unexpected. Numbers are big enough to dismiss them as performance errors. True subject agreement is much more regular and predictable: it neither appears with unexpected elements nor suddenly disappears with agreeing ones. Thus, in contrast to (21), temporal nominal adjuncts never trigger agreement in other contexts, not even with impersonal verbs.

- (22) Llueve/*Llueven todas las tardes/los domingos.
 rain.SG/rain.PL all the afternoons.PL/the Sundays.PL
 ‘It rains every afternoon/on Sundays.’

And true subject agreement is never affected, not even in most favorable contexts. For instance, while bare plurals easily fail to agree in SECs (Mendikoetxea 1999, Sánchez López 2002), bare plural subjects of unaccusative sentences can never avoid agreement.

- (23) Cayeron/*Cayó almohadillas.
 fell.PL/fell.SG small.pillows.PL
 ‘Small pillows fell.’

Moreover, as in SECs, in inchoative sentences (a) the verb ends up agreeing with its complement, and (b) there is a *se* intransitivizing the verb. Despite the similarity between the two structures, agreement failure is unattested in inchoative sentences.

- (24) Se durmieron/*durmió los niños.
_{SEINCH} slept.PL/slept.SG the children.PL
 ‘The children fell asleep.’

Finally, in contrast to data presented in section 2.1.1, in analytic passive sentences lack of agreement between the verb and its complement is clearly ungrammatical.

- (25) a. Fueron/*Fue asesinados muchos opositores al régimen.
 were/was killed many opponents.PL to.the regime
 ‘Many opponents of the regime were killed.’
 b. Fueron/*Fue rescatados los cuerpos.
 were/was recovered the bodies.PL
 ‘The bodies were recovered.’

The conclusion is clear: agreement facts in SECs do not work as predicted by theories based on syntactic agreement. In order to explain their agreement patterns, we cannot simply treat them as subjects, because this is not the way subject agreement behaves. As shown in (22), we cannot resort to a default syntactic agreement either, because, in clear contrast to subject agreement behavior in SECs, default agreement is systematic (D’Alessandro 2007, López 2020). Furthermore, in the next section we show that there is a clear asymmetry in agreement behavior between

postverbal and preverbal arguments, an asymmetry that, again, is not present in regular subject agreement relations.

2.2 Agreement with Preverbal/Null Arguments

When the internal argument is null or appears preverbally,⁸ it covaries with an object clitic in some cases and with a verbal plural agreement in others. Both structures in (26) exist in all dialects of Spanish, but their distribution diverges, yielding what we have called A(greement)- and C(litic)-varieties.

- (26) a. DP/∅_{SE} Object.clitic + V
 b. DP/∅_{SE} V.Number.agreement

Preverbal [+DOM] arguments, including 1st and 2nd person ones, exhibit a completely uniform pattern cross-dialectally: they are always doubled by a pronominal clitic (27a) and never trigger subject agreement (27b) (cf. (10)).⁹

- (27) a. Ayer (a las oponentes políticas) se *(las) censuró.
 yesterday (DOM DP.PL) SE (3ACC.PL.FM) V.SG
 ‘Yesterday the political opponents were censored.’
 b. * Ayer (a las oponentes políticas) se censuraron.
 yesterday (DOM DP.PL) SE V.PL

Verbal agreement is strictly circumscribed to preverbal/null [−DOM] arguments in all varieties; no significant exceptions are found either in corpora or in oral elicitations in which any other preverbal element might trigger number agreement. (We will come back to the special case of relative clauses and \bar{A} -dependencies in section 5.2.)

- (28) Finalmente (los documentos) se censuraron/*censuró.
 finally (the documents.PL) SE V.PL/V.SG
 ‘Finally, the documents were censored.’

In C-varieties, the clitic strategy extends to [−DOM] objects, so that the agreement option illustrated in (28) coexists with the clitic option in (29).

⁸ Following a reviewer’s suggestion, we use *null argument* as a term for contexts where the referential DP agreeing with the verb or doubled by the clitic is not overt; no theoretical content should be attributed to it. In fact, we do not think there is a null argument strictly speaking. In section 4, we argue that in both cases the argumental DP is the clitic itself, whose reference is a definite description that was previously introduced into the discourse (in the case of null topic contexts) or that was introduced by the left-dislocated DP (when that preverbal topic is present). In section 4, we will adjust the terminology (*null/left-dislocated topics*) accordingly.

⁹ There is interesting variation regarding which specific clitic is used and the extent of DOM in each linguistic area, but it is mostly due to dialectal differences regarding DOM itself (Fernández de Lagunilla 1975, Mendikoetxea 1999, 2008, De Benito 2013, Ordóñez 2018, MacDonald and Melgares 2021), rather than different conditions on SECs. The only case that does seem to be sensitive to SECs is the presence of *leísmo* in non-*leísta* dialects (see Mendikoetxea and Battye 1990, Fernández Ordóñez 1999, Rigau and Picallo 1999, Ordóñez and Treviño 2016, MacDonald and Melgares 2021). See footnote 33 for discussion.

- (29) (Los documentos) se *(los) censuró.
 (the documents.PL) SE (3ACC.PL.MSC) V.SG
 ‘(The documents,) they were censored.’

With preverbal/null [–DOM] objects, agreement is mandatory (28)–(29). There are no relevant cases lacking either agreement or an object clitic (cf. (8)). Variation is strictly established on the agreement/clitic strategy distinction; it does not affect number.

The clitic strategy is reported in the literature (Santiago 1975, Sánchez López 2002, and references), but it has not been exhaustively described, and standard theories on SECs tend to ignore it. The clitic strategy coexists with the agreement strategy in the southern half of South America (*NGLE*, García Negroni 2002). Both are commonly found in *CORPES* examples from that area, and all our (linguist) consultants from the Buenos Aires area agree that (a) they are equally available and (b) there is no semantic difference between them.¹⁰

- (30) a. Se las puede sujetar en postes [las orquídeas].
 SE 3ACC.PL.FM can fasten to poles [the orchids]
 b. Se pueden sujetar en postes [las orquídeas].
 SE can.3PL fasten to poles [the orchids]
 (Both) ‘The orchids can be fastened to poles.’
- (31) a. Estas ponderaciones se las realiza por sectores.¹¹
 those considerations.PL.FM SE 3ACC.PL.FM make.SG by sectors
 b. Estas ponderaciones se realizan por sectores.
 those considerations.PL.FM SE make.PL by sectors
 (Both) ‘Those considerations are made by sectors.’

¹⁰ We are very thankful to Carlos Muñoz, Mercedes Pujalte, Andrés Saab, and Pablo Zdrojewski for patient discussion and important clarifications.

¹¹ There is a subtle split between null and overt preverbal objects. For null ones, most of our consultants (from Argentina) observe a slight preference for (30a), also noting some tendency to use clitics in colloquial contexts and agreement in formal ones. With preverbal objects, the situation is reversed, and our consultants highly prefer the agreement pattern over the clitic one. In fact, they find sentences like (ia) “strange” or even “somehow degraded” (though not ungrammatical), in contrast to (ib), which they consider completely natural.

- (i) a. ??Las orquídeas se las puede sujetar en postes de madera.
 the orchids.PL SE 3ACC.PL.FM can fasten to poles of wood
 b. Las orquídeas se pueden sujetar en postes de madera.
 the orchids.PL SE can.3PL fasten to poles of wood
 (Both) ‘The orchids can be fastened to wooden poles.’

However, this may be a particularity of the Rioplatense dialect, as confirmed by *CORPES*, where we find almost no clitic example with preposed objects from Argentina and Uruguay, but where examples increase as we go north and become very common in Ecuador.

Our Argentinian consultants “save” these examples by DOM-marking the preverbal object, which suggests that in Rioplatense the conditions under which DOM applies are gradually changing. According to Di Tullio and Zdrojewski (2006) and Di Tullio, Saab, and Zdrojewski (2019), SECs, together with exceptional case marking and causatives, are the contexts where inanimate [+DOM] is most evident, but the phenomenon is general, and very productive, in left-dislocated contexts. Also see Liman Spanish (Sánchez 2006, 2010, Sánchez and Zdrojewski 2013, and references) and Santiago de Chile’s dialect (Silva-Corvalán 1980) for a similar process.

In clear contrast, the clitic is impossible with [–DOM] postverbal objects in both varieties.

- (32) *Se las puede sujetar las orquídeas en postes.
 SE 3ACC.PL.FM can fasten the orchids.PL to poles
 ‘The orchids can be fastened to poles.’

In the rest of the dialects, object clitics with preposed and null [–DOM] objects are sometimes attested, but in general terms subject number agreement (28) is the sole strategy for all speakers in A-varieties,¹² including dialects where postverbal arguments tend not to agree.¹³ The result is that SECs may lack agreement with postverbal arguments but they obligatorily agree with preverbal ones.

- (33) a. Se censuró/censuraron los documentos.
 SE V.SG/V.PL DP.PL
 b. Los documentos se censuraron/*censuró.
 DP.PL SE V.PL/V.SG
 (Both) ‘The documents were censored.’

Standard descriptions fall short regarding the significance of the clitic structure. Insofar as our description is right, approaches based on constructions are forced to postulate three different constructions—passive, impersonal, and clitic SECs—that show no meaning or use differences and, quite tellingly, extend to all dialects in one way or another.

To complete the picture, 1st and 2nd person objects show no dialectal or idiolectal variation whatsoever. They never allow number or person subject agreement, and they always manifest themselves through an obligatory object clitic, as in any transitive clause.

- (34) a. *(Nosotros) se censuramos/censuraron (nosotros).
 (us) SE censored.1PL/censored.PL (us)
 b. (A nosotros) se nos censuró.
 (DOM us) SE 1PL censored.SG
 ‘(Us), we were censored.’

¹² Examples with clitics are occasionally elicited from a variety of geographic areas, but they are uncommon outside the area described as belonging to the C-variety, where they are legion. This clitic/agreement alternation has a strange status outside that area: even speakers who do not produce the clitic form (including the authors) do not find clitic sentences ungrammatical; they often go unnoticed if produced by other speakers; they do not induce interpretive issues; and, as said, examples appear in the corpus now and then (see the online appendix). However, speakers clearly differentiate the status of the clitic strategy as extraneous to their own grammar and generally do not make use of it.

¹³ Ordóñez and Treviño (2016) and MacDonald and Melgares (2021) report that in Mexico and Honduras the clitic strategy is impossible with [–DOM] objects. Our *CORPES* data include some cases from both areas, but they are very infrequent (see footnote 12).

- (i) a. (Las estrellas fugaces), se las puede ver con mayor facilidad.
 (the stars shooting.PL) SE CL.PL.FM may.SG see with greater ease
 ‘(The shooting stars), you may see them more easily.’
 b. (sus funciones) cuando se las quiere simular por esquemas clásicos
 (their functions.PL) when SE CL.PL.FM want simulate by schemes classic
 ‘(their functions) when you want to simulate them by classical schemes’

2.3 Summary and Preview

The behavior of number agreement in SECs is exceptional with respect to Spanish subject agreement in several respects:

1. With preverbal/null arguments, subject agreement alternates with object clitics in some dialects, systematically occurs with [–DOM] objects only, and never fails.
2. With 1st and 2nd person as well as with preverbal 3rd person [+DOM] objects, no agreement is possible; they are uniformly represented as object clitics.
3. With postverbal elements, agreement is erratic. It frequently fails with [–DOM] objects and unexpectedly occurs with other DPs: [+DOM] direct objects, long-distance DPs, or complements of Ps and adjuncts. This distribution sharply contrasts with that of analytic passives, where subject agreement is robust and systematic.

In what follows, we present an integral analysis of SECs that derives distributions 1 and 2. We also argue that although distribution 3 should be analyzed by extragrammatical mechanisms—thus, it is not predictable in morphosyntactic terms—the properties of the derivation condition the domain in which the unsystematic agreement alternations may appear. With that goal in mind, in section 3 we summarize the gist of the argumentation in O&R 2019a supporting a unified analysis of I-SECs and P-SECs, and we present the lexical properties of *se* that make it possible. In sections 4 and 5, we detail the derivation and discuss the postsyntactic operations responsible for “subject” number agreement with the object, and the distribution of facts presented so far.

3 The Properties of SE Structures in a Nutshell

The primary focus of most analyses of SECs has been to justify the status of P-SECs as “selective passives” where accusative case is removed, but only for [–DOM] complements.¹⁴ These analyses not only require ad hoc mechanisms, but also are based on false empirical claims. First, [–DOM] objects may be realized as object clitics, which dismantles the idea that they may not receive accusative case.¹⁵ Second, preverbal and postverbal arguments show radically different behavior, which questions their subjecthood. More generally, their behavior in SECs invalidates number agreement as evidence for nominative case or subjecthood. This alone indicates that the passive approach is not on the right track, but there are independent positive arguments that confirm the same conclusion.

¹⁴ Proposals can be broadly divided between those that argue for two different *se* tokens and those that argue that *se* is inserted in different designated positions. For a good state-of-the-art report on nonparadigmatic *se* and thorough discussion of the issues involved, see especially Mendikoetxea 1999 for Spanish, D’Alessandro 2007 for Italian, and Sánchez López 2002 for Romance in general with special attention to Spanish. We set aside Romanian, which may require an independent analysis (Dobrovie-Sorin 1998).

¹⁵ Mendikoetxea (1992), Ordóñez (2004), and Torrego (2008) argue that Italian and Spanish differ in that the former allows the clitic strategy but the latter does not. As the discussion in section 2 shows, that is not the right generalization.

3.1 A Regular Active Sentence with *Se* as the Subject

The proposal in O&R 2019a,¹⁶ developing a suggestion by Oca (1914),¹⁷ is that P-SECs are just active transitive sentences, where the internal argument of V is a regular direct object and the subject is the clitic *se*. The peculiarities of these constructions—especially those regarding agreement—are due to the lexical properties of *se*, with no difference between passive and impersonal SECs.

A. P-SECs are active sentences morphologically and syntactically (Raposo and Uriagereka 1996, Rivero 2001). First, P-SECs may be formed with all transitive predicates allowing [−DOM] complements (with only the restrictions imposed in point C). That includes, crucially, predicates completely resistant to analytic passivization, where it is not even clear that the alleged accusative case existed in the first place (e.g., measure complements; Mendikoetxea 1999). Second, they do not accept *by*-phrases (Pujalte 2013, Saab 2014, *NGLE* 41.6.1, and references). Third, they do not “passivize” [+DOM] objects.

B. Consequently, contrary to what number agreement might suggest, the internal argument is the syntactic object. That is shown, among other things, by the fact that it can be modified by pseudorelatives (Aldama 2016, O&R 2019a) and that, unlike subjects of analytic passives, it may not be controlled from outside (MacKenzie 2013). Furthermore, idiomatic readings of fixed object idioms are not lost in P-SECs, showing that grammatical relations have not been altered (O&R 2019a; also see section 5.1).

C. The subject of the sentence is the clitic *se* (Oca 1914). As such, *se* shows properties typical of overt pronominal subjects in Spanish, including its animacy interpretation: the structure is only possible when the subject is argumental, and it is disallowed by verbs that reject animate subjects (Mendikoetxea 1999). *Se* receives nominative case; it is therefore incompatible with infinitives that do not license nominative subjects, but allowed in tensed clauses in general as well as in infinitival constructions licensing overt subjects (Cinque 1988, Mendikoetxea 1999). It also raises in raising-to-subject contexts (see Mendikoetxea 1999, Martins and Nunes 2016, O&R 2019a:sec. 3.2 for extensive discussion).

D. *Se* is syntactically active. It may host secondary predication (Demonte 1986, Rivero 2001, Martins and Nunes 2016, O&R 2019a, and references). (See Pujalte and Saab 2012 for different judgments; also see Collins 2017, 2021 for a related discussion regarding short passives in English and, more generally, implicit arguments.) SECs also show the same obligatory control/disjoint reference distribution in infinitive/subjunctive alternations as any other active sentence, no matter whether *se* is interpreted as a generic or an indefinite, and it may bind anaphoric elements vague enough not to conflict in features with it, as we argue next.

¹⁶ In many respects, the present article and O&R 2019a complement each other and may be seen as two sides of the same proposal. Space limitations and the very dynamic of the present article advise against extending section 3 further by repeating our arguments there. See O&R 2019a, Mendikoetxea 1999, and references there for extensive discussion of the properties listed in this section and for additional ones.

¹⁷ Otero (1972, 1973) makes a similar proposal. Raposo and Uriagereka (1996) also make some suggestions in the same direction, although they end up proposing a mechanism of accusative absorption in the spirit of standard passive-like analyses.

The idea that *se* is the missing argument has already been proposed for I-SECs (Cinque 1988, Mendikoetxea 1999, D'Alessandro 2007, and references). The reasons to discard this idea for P-SECs are theory-internal pre-Minimalist arguments that no longer hold (see O&R 2019a: sec. 3 for discussion). In sum, a derivation of I-SECs and P-SECs where *se* itself is the sentential subject and receives nominative case from T straightforwardly derives all the structural properties of nonparadigmatic SECs listed above in a natural and unified way. In the next section, we present the details of *se*'s lexical entry. Extending MacDonald 2017, we consider *se*'s binding properties as particularly indicative of its syntactic status, giving a clear indication about its formal feature specifications.

3.2 Interpretable Features in *Se*

Saab (2014) observes that unlike other impersonal elements such as *uno* 'one' or *la gente* 'people', the subject of SECs does not allow pronominal binding (35); from this, he concludes that there is no syntactic subject.¹⁸

- (35) Aquí uno/la gente/**se* puede dejar su saco y marcharse.
 here one/the people/*SE* can leave.INF his/her coat and leave
 'Here one/people may leave their coat and leave.'

However, the inability to bind the pronoun may also reflect a feature mismatch between *su* and its antecedent *se*. In Romance, determiners may act as bound variables, but unlike the 3rd person pronoun *su*, this variable gets its person from the binder.¹⁹ As observed by MacDonald (2017: 364), unlike in (35) *se* can bind the less specified determiner variable in (36).

- (36) Aquí *se* puede dejar el saco.
 here *SE* can leave.INF the coat
 'One_i can leave his/her_i coat here.'

¹⁸ Also see Burzio 1986 and Otero 1986. Burzio discusses the Italian contrast in (i) and notes, attributing the observation to Guglielmo Cinque (pers. comm.), that *si* cannot bind a possessive.

- (i) a. **Si* ama i suoi/loro eroi.
SE loves the his/her heroes
 'One loves one's heroes.'
 b. *Si* loda spesso *se* stessi.
SE praises often themselves
 'One often praises oneself.'

(Burzio 1986:80n47; glosses and translations adapted)

Burzio interprets this as indicating that *si* has number features but lacks person features, and that 3rd person reflexive *se* *stessi* is an impersonal form, while *suoi/loro* are specified for 3rd person; but see the discussion in the text for a different interpretation. We are very grateful to Andrés Saab, who brought Burzio's observation to our attention and contributed very valuable discussion.

¹⁹ We frame the discussion in a weak definite approach (e.g., Guéron 1983, 2006; see Espinal and Cyrino 2017 for extensions) because this approach is based on the morphological features of the determiner and maps most directly to the observation that determiners and possessive pronouns behave differently with respect to binding by *se*. However, in virtually all approaches (e.g., Vergnaud and Zubizarreta's (1992)) the nondenoting determiner and the difference between it and possessive pronouns play a role and our point is equally relevant.

If the divergence arises from the feature specifications of *su* and the determiner,²⁰ two conclusions follow. First, *se* is a syntactically active subject and, as such, has the ability to bind a c-commanded anaphoric element; in that sense, nonparadigmatic *se* clearly contrasts with other *se*-clitics (Alcaraz 2021). Second, given the contrast between minimally specified determiners and fully specified 3rd person pronouns, we must conclude that *se* is not 3rd person. This conclusion is supported by the fact that SEC interpretation is not confined to generic or existential 3rd person, but *se* may refer to any animate argument, including 1st (37a) and 2nd (37b) person (see, e.g., Cinque 1988, Mendikoetxea 1999, Menuzzi 1999, D'Alessandro and Alexiadou 2003, O&R 2019a).

- (37) a. ¿Se puede? [knocking on the door]
 SE can.3SG
 ‘May I?’
 b. Aquí no se habla. [a father looking at his son]
 here no SE speak.3SG
 ‘You cannot speak here.’
 (Oca 1914:576)

The specific interpretation *se* adopts is mostly determined on pragmatic grounds. Notice, also, that 1st and 2nd person subjects in the next clause may corefer with the subject of the impersonal construction in these contexts.²¹

- (38) a. ¿Se puede? Si te viene mejor, venimos en otro momento.
 SE can.3SG if 2DAT.SG come better come.1PL in other moment
 ‘May we? If it suits you better, we will come some other time.’
 b. ¡Aquí se cumplen las reglas! Si no, te vas a vivir por tu cuenta.
 here SE comply.PL the rules if not 2DAT.SG go.2SG to live on your own
 ‘Here you must comply with the rules! Otherwise, better go live on your own.’

Since *se* is always animate, following Richards (2014) we assume that animacy in pronouns is encoded as [person]. We thus interpret *se*'s ability to bind anaphoric determiners but not 3rd person pronouns as indicating that the person feature is underspecified, in the sense that it lacks a specific 1st, 2nd, or 3rd value. Let us see how these results may be put together.

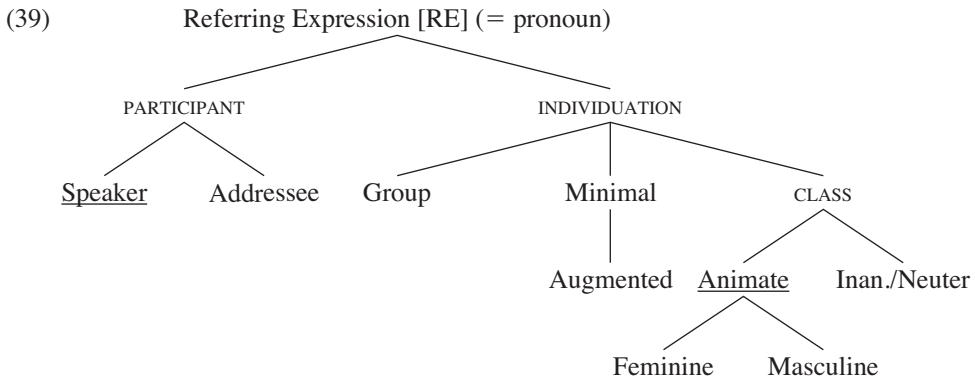
²⁰ Eric Reuland (pers. comm.) observes that in general, underspecification does not create an offending feature mismatch: Dutch *zich*, underspecified for number and gender, is generally bound by a full DP. Similarly, in Russian a full DP may bind *sebjá*, underspecified for person, gender, and number. However, in those cases the more specified object is the binder, and the less specified one is the bindee. The binding problems with SECs arise in the reverse situation: the binder *se* (underspecified for person and lacking number) fails to bind *su*, which is specified for person. In that respect, the contrast with *uno* as a potential binder of *su*, mentioned by Saab, and the possibility of weak determiners in the bindee position are quite revealing. Collins (2021) provides a similar argument for the presence of an implicit argument in passive constructions.

²¹ We are grateful to Eric Reuland for bringing those facts to our attention.

ϕ -features, as well as their internal organization, play an important role at different grammatical levels and their interfaces (also see Ackema and Neeleman 2018 and references for extensive, though slightly different, discussion and implementation):

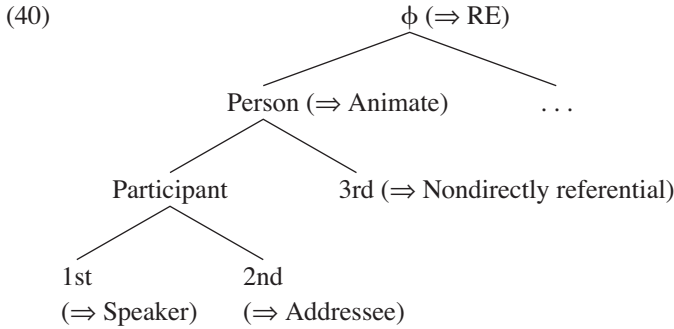
- At the computational level, interpretable features determine the behavior of lexical items and the corresponding feature values of the functional projections they agree with.
- At the semantic level, the feature structure of these syntactic objects—in the cases we are discussing, the pronouns—must be interpreted.
- The morphology component operates on the features of the pronoun as well as on the noninterpretable features valued in the agreeing functional heads.

Focusing on its person features, semantically *se* is always animate (i.e., [person]), but truly devoid of any person value and interpreted contextually. It must therefore be distinguished from 3rd person animate pronouns (*ella/él* ‘she/he’) and from no-person ones, such as sentential subjects or object clitics *lo(s)/la(s)* ‘he/she/it/them’, as we discuss below (also see Trommer 2008). Most feature hierarchies stemming from Harley and Ritter’s (2002) are morphology-oriented and do not leave enough room for such fine-grained distinctions in the syntactic derivation, far less in the semantic component. In particular, both their hierarchy in (39) and their conception of underspecification are too narrow (see, e.g., D’Alessandro and Alexiadou 2003, McGinnis 2005, Bianchi 2006, D’Alessandro 2007).

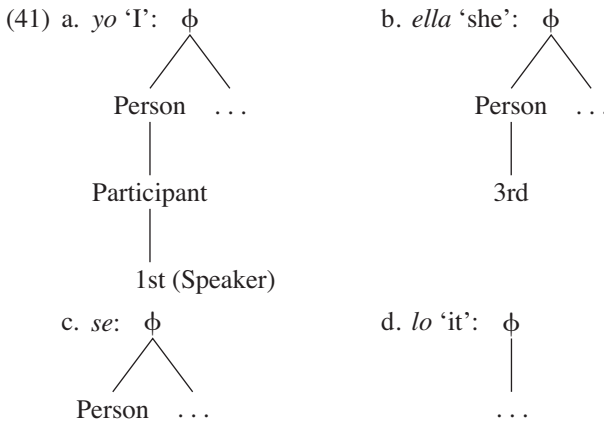


Assigning a 3rd person value by default to underspecified [person], as in Harley and Ritter’s morphological hierarchy—or Béjar’s (2003) syntactic version—makes the wrong interpretive predictions even if an overruling mechanism is allowed. In order to capture the observed distinction, we need a more articulated [person] geometry that incorporates Harley and Ritter’s unmarked values (see, e.g., McGinnis 2005; also see D’Alessandro 2007:26ff. for a similar discussion and a different solution).²²

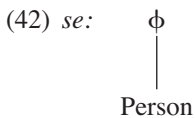
²² Harley and Ritter (2002) locate the animate/inanimate distinction as a hierarchical subdivision under the Class node. It must also be reconsidered accordingly; see O&R 2022.



The resulting feature specifications of the relevant forms are distinguished in (41); we also include a 1st person pronoun for illustration.



To complete the picture, there is independent evidence and general consensus that *se* lacks number feature specifications (Mendikoetxea 2012, Harris and Halle 2005, and references).²³ In sum, its lexical entry contains the feature information in (42).



With these ingredients, in the next section we present a formal analysis of SECs as regular sentences that derives the agreement distribution in section 2 as well as the structural properties summarized in section 3.1 and developed in detail in O&R 2019a.

²³ In the Italian tradition, Napoli (1976), Belletti (1982), and Burzio (1986), among others, propose that *se* is singular, while Chierchia (1995) argues that it is semantically plural. See also D'Alessandro 2007 and references for discussion.

4 The Derivation

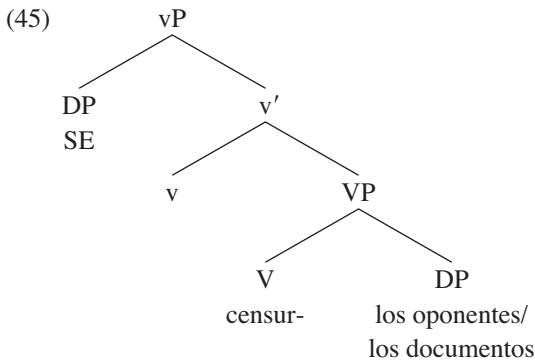
4.1 The Syntax of *Se*-Constructions

From the point of view of the syntactic derivation, this article's epigraph, from Raposo and Uriagereka 1996, may be extended to all nonparadigmatic SECs.

(43) P-SECs and I-SECs are normal syntactic structures with no exotic properties.

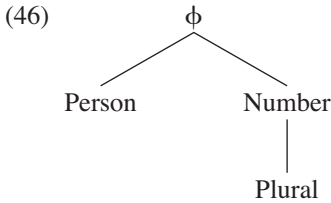
That is, no selective case absorption or argument suppression operation is involved in P-SECs, and both constructions, P-SECs and I-SECs, follow the same derivation. *Se* is introduced by external Merge in the argument position determined by the predicate: the external argument position for transitive active sentences (44) (= (1)) and unergatives, and the internal argument position for unaccusatives and passive sentences. We illustrate the derivation with transitive structures because they cover all the relevant structural properties under discussion.

- (44) a. *Se censuraron los documentos.*
 SE V.PL DP.PL
 'The documents were censored.'
- b. *Se censuró a los oponentes políticos.*
 SE V.SG DOM DP.PL
 'The political opponents were censored.'

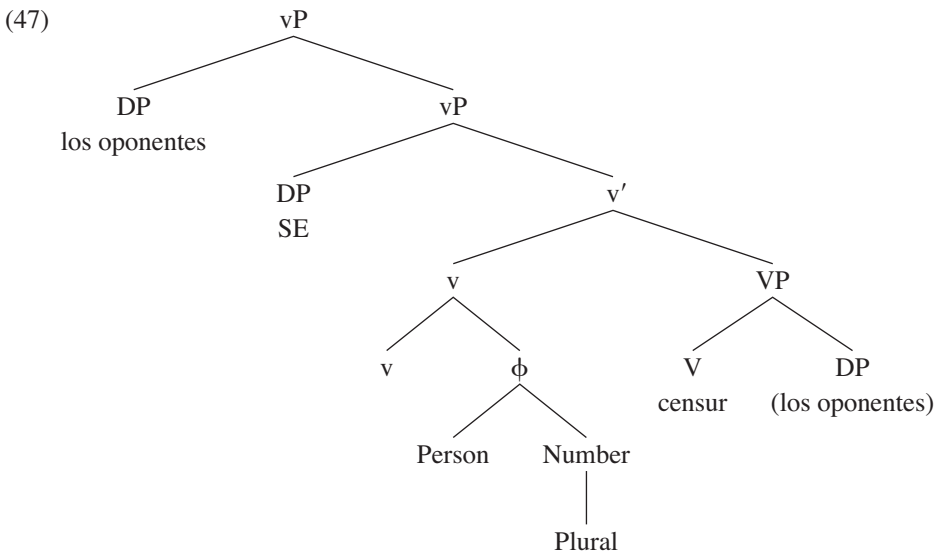


The derivational difference between [+DOM] and [-DOM] objects is equally observed in any transitive structure; it is therefore independent of the properties of *se*. Following proposals in Torreño 1998, López 2012, and O&R 2013a,b, 2016, 2019b, we assume that [+DOM] and [-DOM] objects are structurally different and that object agreement is triggered only by [+DOM] objects, the ones encoding person (Richards 2014). [-DOM] objects (44a) lack [person] and do not enter into an agreement relation with *v*.²⁴ In conclusion, the DP in (46a)—(a) *los oponentes políticos* ‘the political opponents’—has the following ϕ -feature representation:

²⁴ See O&R 2013a,b, 2022 for extensive discussion, including dialectal variation, and for some differences between case and agreement relations; also see footnote 25. The “inert nature” of inanimate objects from the point of view of agreement explains, for instance, why these elements may incorporate in polysynthetic languages, why they do not trigger Person-Case Constraint effects, and why in Spanish 3rd person inanimate object clitics behave like determiners and not like agreement markers (Roca 1996, Bleam 1999, O&R 2013a, Alcaraz 2021).

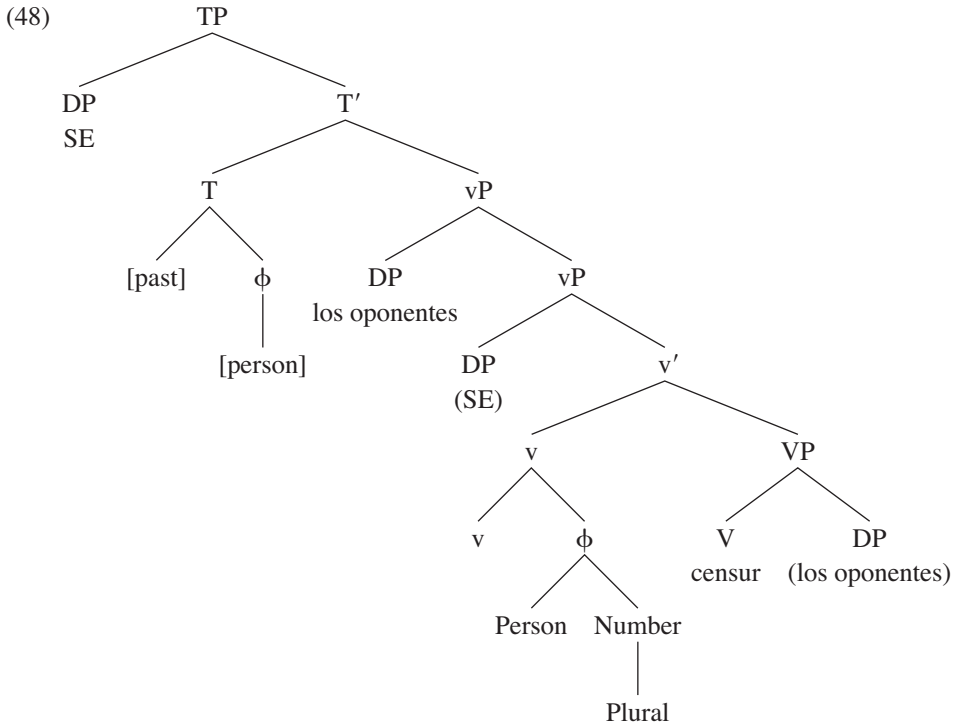


Simplifying things a bit, assume that Agree is realized in Spec,vP and that v enters the derivation as [*u*φ] and is valued via Agree, which copies the feature specifications of its controller, the DOM object (see section 4.3 for details, discussion, and references). The resulting structure after the application of Agree between the probe v and the animate argument *los oponentes* is shown in (47).²⁵



In (47), accusative case has been assigned to the object in both constructions. From that point on, the derivation is the same for (44a) and (44b). T is merged and triggers agreement with *se*, as with any other subject. T enters the derivation specified as [*u*φ] and copies the feature values of the closest argument, *se* (see section 4.3). Finally, *se* moves to Spec,TP, where it checks the EPP feature in T and receives nominative case.

²⁵ The analysis extends to 1st and 2nd person objects (see O&R 2013a,b, 2022). However, our analysis works equally well if person clitics are not agreement markers but pronominal clitics (e.g., Baker and Kramer 2018 and references). Their distinctive behavior does not depend on our specific analysis of DOM and dative doubling; rather, it depends on the fact that 1st and 2nd person clitics and animate arguments are specified for person while inanimate *lo(s)/la(s)* are not.



This part of the derivation is the same independently of whether *se* is generated in the external or internal argument position, as in passives.

- (49) En este país, cuando se nace opositor, se es asesinado.
 in this country when SE born opposing SE is assassinated
 'In this country, when you are born a dissident you are assassinated.'

In sum, no ad hoc mechanism is postulated. The derivation is restricted by exactly the same general conditions constraining any other syntactic derivation where the subject has a more articulated ϕ -feature structure, and by nothing else. Its characteristic features are determined by those of the lexical elements involved, as in any other case. The only remaining issue is the agreement pattern, to which we will return in section 5.

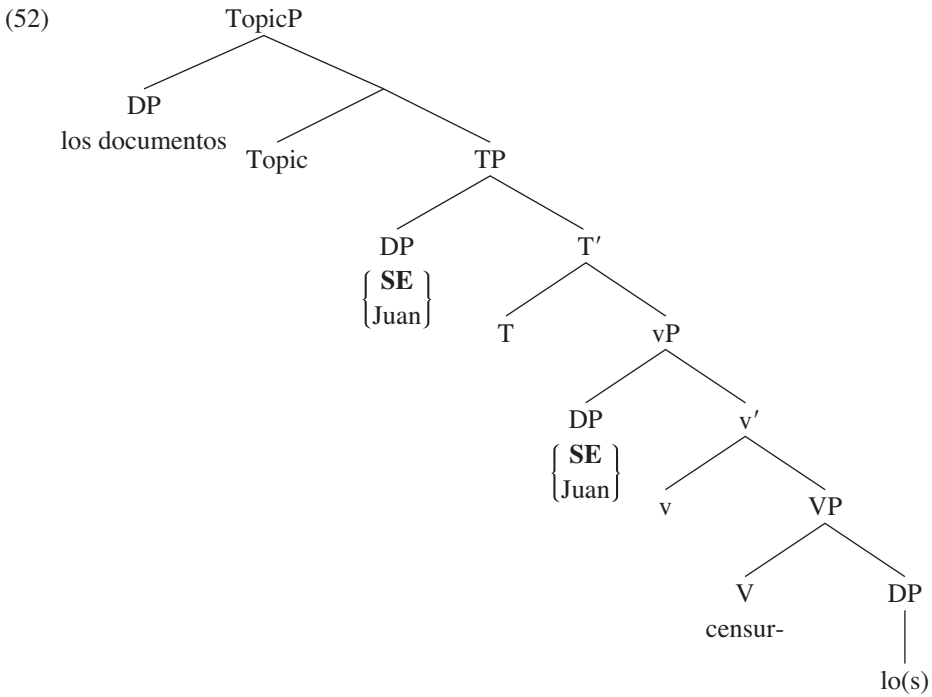
4.2 Clitic Left-Dislocation and Dialectal Variation

Consider the derivation of sentences containing a preverbal/null argument, as in (50a–b). Remember that, as discussed in section 2.2, this structure is subject to dialectal variation.

- (50) a. (Los libros) se vendieron.
 (the books.PL) SE sold.PL
 b. (Los libros) se los vendió.
 (the books.PL) SE 3ACC.PL.MSC sold.SG
 (Both) 'The books,) they were sold.'

Raposo and Uriagereka (1996) and Martins and Nunes (2016) argue that preverbal arguments in sentences like (50a) are not in subject position, nor associated to it, but left-dislocated.²⁶ According to our approach, the structure of (51b) is the structure found in CLLD in Romance languages (51a). We assume that the object DP is base-generated in a nonargument position (Van Riemsdijk 1997)²⁷ and that D-clitics *lo(s)/la(s)* are merged in the internal argument position, from where they cliticize to the verb (see, e.g., Roca 1996, Uriagereka 1997, O&R 2013a). The derivation is represented in (52).

- (51) a. Los documentos Juan los censuró ____.
 the documents.PL Juan 3ACC.PL.MSC censored.SG
 ‘The documents, Juan censored them.’
- b. Los documentos se los censuró ____.
 the documents.PL SE 3ACC.PL.MSC censored.SG
 ‘The documents, somebody censored them.’



As we show in section 5.1, there are strong reasons to assume that (52) is the structural description for both (50b), with an overt clitic, and (50a), where the clitic shows up as number

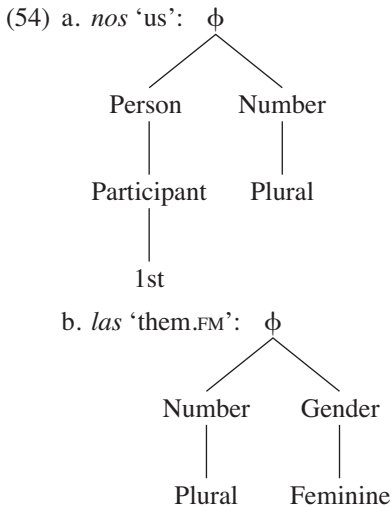
²⁶ Raposo and Uriagereka (1996) and Martins and Nunes (2016) present a battery of arguments concerning Galaic-Portuguese, but many of their arguments extend to Spanish and Romance in general.

²⁷ We represent the dislocated element in Spec,TopicP, but nothing hinges on this decision as long as the pronoun cliticizes from the argument position.

agreement. The derivation extends to nonovert arguments, where a null topic stands for the dislocated element, and to animate and 1st/2nd person objects. In this case, however, there is no variation: all dialects and speakers follow the object clitic strategy.

- (53) a. A vosotros Juan os censuró.
 DOM you Juan 2ACC.PL censored.SG
 ‘As for you, Juan censored you.’
 b. A vosotros se os censuró.
 DOM you SE 2ACC.PL censored.SG
 ‘As for you, you were censored.’
 c. *A vosotros se censurasteis.
 DOM you SE censored.2PL

We will come back to the ungrammaticality of (53c) in section 5.1. At this point, it is important to stress that the main difference between (50) and (53) is that 1st/2nd person pronouns are fully specified for person and number, while the clitic *lo(s)* has no [person] (Roca 1996, O&R 2013a,b, Alcaraz 2021; in (54), we abstract away from issues concerning the feature geometry of number and gender).



From this point on, the derivation continues as in (48), where the subject *se* agrees with T.

4.3 Excursus on Formal Features, Agree, and Match

We have concluded that *se* is a subject pronoun specified for person and lacking number features. This is not the only context where the subject is not fully specified for agreement features (see section 5.2), and any approach to T-agreement must account for them. The Agree mechanism in Chomsky 2000, 2001 is subject to a completeness condition on Match, under feature identity; however, contexts where the goal is not ϕ -complete and the derivation converges show that it

cannot be a general condition for agreement. As an illustration, consider SECs: even if our analysis of P-SECs (55b) (= (1a)) were not on the right track, I-SECs (55a) still constitute one case among a myriad of cases where the subject—be it *se*, a null pronoun, and so on—could never qualify to *completely* satisfy subject agreement ϕ -features.

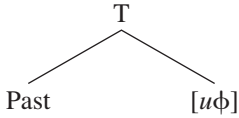
- (55) a. Se corre mejor en pista.
 SE run.SG best on track
 ‘One runs best on a track.’
 b. Se censuraron los documentos.
 SE censored.PL the documents.PL
 ‘The documents were censored.’

The mere existence of default verbal agreement in all impersonal contexts, where no possible number agreement checker is available, may be taken as evidence that number agreement does not need to be valued. The same extends to [person]; see, for example, Béjar’s (2008:148) analysis of Subject [3rd person]-Object [3rd person] combinations in Mordvinian. By the same token, given that (55a) is grammatical, a second-cycle analysis for (55b) would be stipulative; in fact, as shown in section 2, if there were a second cycle (e.g., Anagnostopoulou 2003, 2005, Rezac 2003, Béjar and Rezac 2009), we would expect number features that remain unvalued in the first cycle to be available for Agree to be established with the object, showing a consistent pattern, contrary to fact. If, as we have argued, number agreement in transitive contexts is not syntactic, not only can second-cycle agreement not be imposed over the derivation—in fact, it must be prevented.²⁸

As Baker (2008) observes, Match lacks explanatory power. The idea of a set of prearranged, arbitrarily defined feature slots to be valued by the goal might be appropriate to feed the morphological component. However, in the syntactic component it looks like a conspiratorial prerequisite that fails to capture the systematic properties of agreement in natural language. It is, in some sense, a very short-sighted “lookahead” from the lexicon into the computation.

Notice, in addition, that when combined with a hierarchy where features do not have intrinsic values but depend on their place in the geometry, Match, as standardly established, is hard to codify from a strictly formal point of view. As Béjar (2003, 2008) observes, each node entails the presence of all the superordinate nodes, so that when a pronoun is specified for [1st person], that specification entails that all the nodes up to the root of the hierarchy are also specified. Given those entailment relations and assuming that the hierarchy of features in T is identical to that of pronouns (the null hypothesis), a [*u*person] probe would be general enough to target all goals that have person features. Following our proposal in section 3, that would include *se* [person], as well as [3rd person] and all [participant] goals. Generalizing even further, the simplest system would be one where the probe in T is specified as [*u* ϕ] (see Deal 2021 for a related proposal).

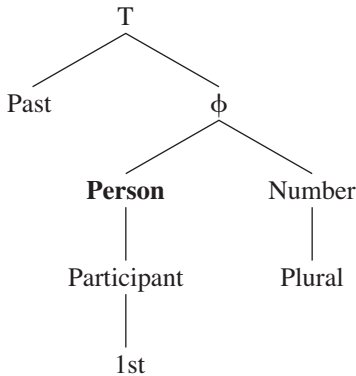
²⁸ This conclusion has important consequences for the treatment of agreement restrictions, especially those phenomena associated with the Object Agreement Constraint (the Person-Case Constraint and its extensions). See O&R 2007, 2013a,b, 2019b for some evidence that facts similar to those described here are also present in Person-Case Constraint contexts.

(56) *T as a syntactic probe (before Agree)*

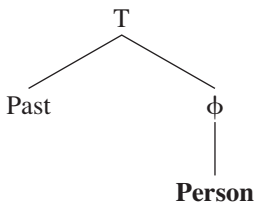
The Agree relation copies the entire hierarchical structure of the goal into the probe.²⁹ Since T ϕ -features are uninterpretable, the idea that Agree copies whatever the goal brings to the picture is both suitable for its morphological analysis and in compliance with standard views on agreement in natural languages. The resulting complex head will be different depending on the set of features the subject contributes to the agreement relation, as desired.

(57) *Result after application of Agree*

a. With *nosotros* 'we'



b. With *se*



Under these natural assumptions, agreement in SECs is regular by all criteria. Consequently, T's $[u\phi]$ is completely valued in the syntax. However, the number slot in the resulting matrix of features is empty, since it is absent in the feature matrix of *se*. In other words, the agreement problem is not syntactic, but morphological.

²⁹ The result is close to Baker's (2008) desideratum, which we fully share, for a design where

all Fs are potential agreeers and they agree with whatever features they can find in their environment according to structural principles. If agreeing functional heads are not prespecified as agreeing in particular features, it follows that there cannot be any matching condition of the kind Chomsky envisions. This condition should become superfluous—at least if agreement in ϕ -features is the only relevant kind of agreement in natural languages. (Baker 2008:44)

Given the discussion so far, the agreement asymmetry between postverbal and preverbal positions corresponds to the difference between in-situ and CLLD objects in regular transitive clauses. As we discuss next, the two resulting structures will be exposed to different fates after syntax.

5 Postsyntactic Processes

We have shown that agreement behaves differently depending on the position of the NP. With preverbal topics, its morphological manifestation is obligatory, either as an object clitic or as subject agreement. In contrast, with postverbal NPs the only morphological device used is subject number agreement, but in a semirandom fashion. As a consequence, we conclude that each type of agreement follows a different path. For preverbal/null topics, the A-position is occupied by a clitic. In some dialects, it mutates postsyntactically into number subject agreement (section 5.1). For postverbal NPs, the verb may show up marked with a default singular number or it may harmonize postsyntactically with a plural NP (section 5.2).

5.1 Dialectal Variation in Morphology: Clitic Mutation

The pronoun *se* is the only subject clitic in Spanish. It cliticizes onto T the same way French *il* ‘he’ and impersonal *on* do. Similarly, the determiner head *lo(s)/la(s)* ‘him/her/it/them’ in object position cliticizes onto the verbal complex. The result of the computational component’s inner workings is a morphological word that includes the two clitics, the verbal root, and all the T features.

(58) *se* + *los* + *censur* + INDIC.PAST.PERSON
 SE + 3ACC.PL + CENSOR + INDIC.PAST.PERSON
 ‘They were censored.’

The presence of the object clitic in C-varieties is the straightforward manifestation of the structure in (58), while in A-varieties it is spelled out as subject number agreement. Subject agreement is therefore an alternative morphological expression of the same structural description expressed in C-varieties by the clitic. We term this particular morphological process *Clitic Mutation* (CIMut), an instance of a family of agreement effects including clitic cluster phenomena, agreement displacement, and eccentric or omnivorous agreement (e.g., Bonet 1991, Hale 2001, Rezac 2008). In other words, there is no P-SEC, but a regular active structure whose object clitic is morphologically camouflaged as subject agreement.

In what follows, we present direct evidence supporting our analysis (section 5.1.1), and we detail the conditions under which CIMut applies in the morphology (section 5.1.2). Finally, we provide independent crosslinguistic evidence for the proposal (section 5.1.3).

5.1.1 Evidence for Clitic Mutation There are three different contexts that constitute strong evidence for CIMut. First, consider idioms containing a nonreferential clitic, such as *liarla parda* ‘to make a complete mess’, *matarlas callando* ‘to go about things slyly’, *pasarlas canutas* ‘to have a rough time’, and *verlas venir* ‘to see them coming’. The clitic is part of the idiom and

must be present under all circumstances (59) (García-Page 2010 and references). As expected, passivization is completely impossible (60).

- (59) a. En esos pueblos, siempre *(la) liamos parda.
 in those villages always (3ACC.SG.FM) mishandle.we brown.SG.FM
 ‘In those villages, we always make a complete mess.’
 b. En la guerra, siempre *(las) pasamos canutas.
 in the war always (3ACC.PL.FM) pass.we CANUTAS.PL
 ‘In the war, we always have a rough time.’
- (60) a. *En esos pueblos, siempre es liada parda (por nosotros).
 in those villages always is mishandled.SG.FM brown.SG.FM (by us)
 ‘In those villages, we always make a complete mess.’
 b. *En la guerra, siempre son pasadas canutas (por nosotros).
 in the war always are passed CANUTAS (by us)
 ‘In the war, we always have a rough time.’

Nonparadigmatic SECs are the only exception where the clitic disappears. In those cases, which sound completely natural in A-varieties,³⁰ if the clitic of the idiom is singular, the verbal form shows up in the singular (61a), and if it is plural, the verbal form is obligatorily plural (61b).

- (61) a. En esos pueblos, siempre se *(la) lia parda.
 in those villages always SE (3ACC.SG.FM) mishandle.SG brown.SG.FM
 ‘In those villages, people always make a complete mess.’
 b. En la guerra, siempre se *(las) pasan canutas.
 in the war always SE (3ACC.PL.FM) pass.PL CANUTAS.PL
 ‘In the war, people always have a rough time.’

Next, consider clitic climbing. In transitive structures (62), including SECs (63), all dialects show enclisis to the embedded infinitive ((62a), (63a)). The clitic may also climb to the finite verb; there it appears as a proclitic (62b). However, in SECs there is a split: in C-varieties the clitic is preserved (63b), while in A-varieties it shows up as subject agreement (63c).

³⁰ Speakers of the C-varieties only allow the clitic version and consider the agreement (CIMut) version impossible (examples from Andrés Saab, pers. comm.).

- (i) a. En estas lides, nunca se *(la) saca barata.
 in those affairs never SE it.FM get cheap
 ‘In those affairs, you never have it easy.’
 b. cuando se las tiene/*se tienen todas a favor
 when SE them has.SG/SE have.PL all in favor
 ‘when you have everything in your favor’

The contrast in (i) makes the clitic origin of the agreement in (61) fully evident. On the other hand, the fact that the clitic is part of the idiom, combined with Rioplatense speakers’ strong preference for the clitic strategy in null argument contexts (see footnote 11) might be responsible for the unavailability of the agreement strategy in these cases, though we do not have a formal explanation at this point.

- (62) a. Intentó censurarlas.
 tried.SG to.censor.3ACC.PL.FM
 b. Las intentó censurar.
 3ACC.PL.FM tried.SG to.censor
 (Both) ‘He/She tried to censor them.’
- (63) a. *All dialects*
 Se intentó censurarlas.
 SE tried.SG to.censor.3ACC.PL.FM
 b. *C-varieties*
 Se las intentó censurar.
 SE 3ACC.PL.FM tried.SG to.censor
 c. Se intentaron censurar.
 SE tried.PL to.censor
 (All) ‘Somebody or other tried to censor them.’

The parallelism is maintained across the board. In long-distance clitic climbing, A-varieties retain the clitic in all the intermediate positions (64a–b) and mutate it only when it reaches the *se*-clause (64c), exactly as CIMut predicts.³¹

- (64) a. Se tiene que empezar a comprar-los.
 SE must.SG that to.begin to to.buy-3ACC.MSC.PL
 b. Se tiene que empezar-los a comprar.
 SE must.SG that to.begin-3ACC.MSC.PL to to.buy
 c. Se tienen que empezar a comprar.
 SE must.PL that to.begin to to.buy
 (All) ‘Someone has to begin to buy them.’

Finally, CIMut is also subject to clitic-clustering effects. When there is more than one clitic, the entire cluster must climb together ((65a–b) vs. (65c–d)). As expected under CIMut, SECs’ subject agreement behaves in this respect like a clitic (66). If it were true subject agreement, the ungrammaticality of (66c) would be completely unexpected, since subject agreement does not interfere with clitic clusters in other contexts (65a–b).

³¹ This agreement is subject to all the constraints clitic climbing shows in parallel contexts: adjunct *wh*-islands (i), intervention effects with negative heads, and so on.

- (i) a. Se sabe leerlas.
 SE know.SG to.read.them
 b. Se saben leer.
 SE know.PL to.read
 c. Se sabe cómo leerlas.
 SE know.SG how to.read.them
 d. *Se saben cómo leer.
 SE know.PL how to.read
 (cf. **Las sabemos cómo leer*)
 (All) ‘It is known how to read them.’

- (65) a. Intentaron censurártelas.
 tried.they to.censor.2DAT.SG.3ACC.PL.FM
 b. Te las intentaron censurar.
 2DAT.SG 3ACC.PL.FM tried.PL to.censor
 c. *Te intentaron censurarlas.
 2DAT.SG tried.PL to.censor.3ACC.PL.FM
 d. *Las intentaron censurarte.
 3ACC.PL.FM tried.PL to.censor.2DAT.SG
 (All) ‘They tried to censor them to you.’
- (66) a. Se intentó censurártelas.
 SE tried.SG to.censor.2DAT.SG.3ACC.PL.FM
 b. Se te intentaron censurar.
 SE 2DAT.SG tried.PL to.censor
 c. *Se intentaron censurarte.
 SE tried.PL to.censor.2DAT.SG
 d. *Se te intentó censurarlas.
 SE 2DAT.SG tried.SG to.censor.3ACC.PL.FM
 (All) ‘Someone tried to censor them to you.’

We know of no previous discussion of these facts in the literature, but we see no possible explanation for them in traditional terms. In contrast, this is precisely what CIMut predicts, since subject number agreement is structurally an object clitic, and it only surfaces as number agreement after morphological manipulation.

5.1.2 Clitic Mutation and Its Domain of Application In this section, we make explicit the properties of the syntax-morphology interface. We do not pretend to lay out a morphological analysis in such an intricate area as clitic-agreement interactions; instead, we thoroughly describe the conditions that syntax imposes on CIMut. According to our analysis, the syntax supplies the morphology with a T head valued for [person], but not for [number]. Since the exponent of the T head in Spanish encodes number, the morphology needs to assign it a value. A priori, there are two options: (a) the value may be assigned by default, or (b) some element is blended into the morphological word to provide a value for it. C-varieties generally have both options available. In (67a) object features are realized as a clitic and subject agreement is set by default, while in (67b) object clitic features blend with subject agreement. In A-varieties, only CIMut is available (67b).³²

³² A reviewer raises the possibility of relating the optionality/obligatoriness of CIMut in C- and A-varieties to “a more general property of the availability or lack thereof of clitic doubling in the respective varieties.” That is an interesting possibility, although there are some complications: what makes clitic doubling in Rioplatense and other varieties different is that (a) the clitic cooccurs with postverbal objects in contexts where it is impossible in other dialects and (b) clitic doubling is tightly linked to the presence of DOM (see footnote 11). In contrast, the contexts where CIMut applies are precisely those where doubling is possible in the other dialects as well, and there are many examples of the C-variety where DOM is not involved. We have not been able to overcome these two complications to make the proposal coherent with the whole picture, but it is certainly a very good suggestion to follow, especially from a diachronic and a dialectological perspective.

- (67) a. (Los documentos) se los censuró.
 (DP_{Topic}.PL) SE 3_{ACC.PL.MSC} V.PAST.SG
 b. (Los documentos) se censuraron.
 (DP_{Topic}.PL) SE V.PL
 ‘(The documents,) they were censored.’

Following Distributed Morphology postulates, for instance, we can assume that an impoverishment rule is applied. This rule removes any conflicting feature—in this case, gender and accusative—paving the way for CIMut. A strikingly similar effect is found in the interaction of clitics. Bonet (1991, 1994) observes that in many clitic clusters in Romance the output is opaque with respect to the information encoded by the same clitics in isolation. According to her, in those contexts the clitics suffer an impoverishment process, as a consequence of which their representation corresponds to the PF realization of another clitic.

Consider now the distribution of the clitic/agreement strategies for [+DOM] objects, including pronouns (53a–c), vs. the distribution of strategies for [–DOM] objects. ((68b–c) repeat (27a–b).)

- (68) a. A las oponentes políticas Juan *(las) censuró.
 DOM DP.PL Juan (3_{ACC.PL.FM}) V.SG
 ‘Juan censored the political opponents.’
 b. A las oponentes políticas se *(las) censuró.
 DOM DP.PL SE (3_{ACC.PL.FM}) V.SG
 c. *A las oponentes políticas se censuraron.
 DOM DP.PL SE V.PL
 ‘The political opponents were censored.’

Remember that, unlike number, person agreement is valued between *se* and T (section 4.3). The difference between these contexts and those where CIMut applies is that the clitics in (68), [+DOM] object clitics, contain [person]. We may thus assume that these person features conflict with the person feature in T and, in consequence, the clitic cannot mutate.³³ Similarly, when T fully specifies [person] and [number] (e.g., (62)), the clitic has no room in T’s resulting morphological

³³ Two reviewers raise the fact that many non-*leísta* speakers use the clitic *le* in these particular contexts. This generalized use of *le* poses a problem for virtually all approaches, since it specifically arises in I-SECs, commonly analyzed as regular transitive structures since Cinque 1988. We do not have a full explanation for this fact, but within the logic of our proposal it is probably linked to the blocking effects on CIMut compelled by clitics specified for person features. In this specific context, there is evidence that *le* does not have the same syntax as in other transitive clauses. Consider the following sentences:

- (i) *A nadie le viste.
 DOM no.one 3_{ACC.SG} saw.2SG
 ‘You did not see anybody.’
 (ii) A nadie se le vio.
 DOM no.one SE 3_{ACC.SG} saw.3SG
 ‘No one was seen.’

Negative quantifiers cannot be clitic-doubled in Spanish unless the clitic is the morphological exponent of a syntactic agreement node (O&R 2013a and references). The contrast between (i) and (ii) suggests that the clitic is realizing different features in each sentence: while in (i) it is a pronominal clitic, in (ii) it is an agreement head.

exponent to mutate into subject number agreement, not even with *lo(s)/la(s)* (68c). In sum, CIMut is possible when lack of [number] in the subject and lack of [person] in the object cooccur.

With CIMut, Spanish morphology deals with the fact that subject agreement is morphologically mandatory at the expense of object clitics. As we discuss next, with some interesting differences, that is a property that CIMut shares with other morphological phenomena crosslinguistically.

5.1.3 Extensions: Clitic Mutation in a Broader Morphological Context Crosslinguistically, CIMut belongs to the family of effects known as *agreement displacement*. To illustrate, in Basque, under certain conditions, ergative agreement takes the form and position of absolutive agreement. In order for this Ergative Displacement (ED) to take place, a necessary condition is that the absolutive argument be 3rd person, an agreement that happens to lack a morphological exponent ((69c–d) vs. (69a–b)).

- (69) a. Nik zu maite z -intu-da -n.
 I.ERG you.ABS love 2ABS-AUX-1ERG-PAST
 ‘I loved you.’
- b. Zuk ni maite n -indu-zu -n.
 you.ERG I.ABS love 1ABS-AUX-2ERG-PAST
 ‘You loved me.’
- c. Zuk bizitza maite z -enu-en (vs. *u -zu -n).
 you.ERG life.ABS love 2ERG-AUX-PAST (vs. AUX-2ERG-PAST)
 ‘You loved life.’
- d. Nik bizitza maite n -u -en (vs. *u -da -n).
 I.ERG life.ABS love 1ERG-AUX-PAST (vs. AUX-1ERG-PAST)
 ‘I loved life.’

Most analyses interpret this distribution as indicating that absolutive agreement is defective for [participant], but we have extensively argued elsewhere that no agreement relation holds with 3rd person objects in many languages including Basque (O&R 2007). If this is correct, the ergative element colonizes the absolutive slot in (69c–d) when it lacks person features altogether. This description is not very different from diachronic accounts (Gómez and Sáinz 1995, Lakarra 2005, Ariztimuño 2017), where the subject pronoun is argued to occupy the first position precisely in those cases where no object pronoun may occupy it (historically, Basque lacks 3rd person pronouns).

Current analyses of ED mostly propose syntactic solutions (e.g., Ortiz de Urbina 1989, Rezac 2008, Béjar and Rezac 2009); however, there is also a long tradition of morphology-based explanations (e.g., Laka 1993, Albizu and Eguren 2000, Fernández and Albizu 2000, Arregi and Nevins 2012). The clear similarities between CIMut and ED argues for a morphological approach. The main difference between ED and CIMut is that while in the latter [person] has been checked between T and *se*, in the case of Basque there is no person agreement in v. That explains why the entire ϕ -feature set of the ergative can take over the object agreement slot in Basque while only number is involved in CIMut, and why CIMut does not apply to animate clitics. The differ-

ences then follow from the different morphological specifications of the host exponents in each case, as desired.

5.2 *A Postsyntactic Phenomenon: Number Harmony*

Agreement in SECs with postverbal DPs exhibits radically different properties. In addition, its structural description does not include an object clitic; as a result, it cannot be an instance of CIMut. In this section, we argue that this agreement is the reflex of a post-PF procedure that we call *Number Harmony* (NH).

5.2.1 Conditions for Number Harmony The only role syntax plays in NH is in providing a structure where the set of ϕ -features in T includes a [person] value supplied by *se* but no [number], and where there is a DP nearby in postverbal position (70). Unlike in CIMut, in NH the V-object relation is not represented in V's morphological word.

- (70) Se + censur + **past.indic.person** los documentos
 SE + censor + **past.indic.person** the documents
 'The documents were censored.'

Agreement follows two different paths in that context: either it takes a default value (71a) or it adopts the value of the closest nominal (71b). When the closest nominal is singular, as expected the verb never shows up in plural (71c).

- (71) a. Se censuró los documentos.
 SE censored.SG the documents.PL
 b. Se censuraron los documentos.
 SE censored.PL the documents.PL
 c. *Se censuraron el documento.
 SE censored.PL the document.SG

In all cases, "closest" is computed in pure linear proximity terms, as shown by the battery of long-distance cases discussed in section 2.1.

In sum, the distribution of agreement in these contexts does not show any of the properties of a syntactic checking relation. Additionally, it lacks a morphological motivation: there is no possible source for the plural morpheme within the morphological word in (71) and, unlike in CIMut, the agreement patterns in unpredictable ways. The same conclusion may be reached concerning PF: the application of the plural number mechanism is larger by far than the domain of regular phonological processes, as clearly shown by the hyperraising case (15) from section 2.1, repeated here.

- (72) Se consideran que hay personas con categorías superiores e inferiores.
 SE consider.PL that there.are persons.PL with categories superior and inferior
 'It is considered that there are people superior and inferior to others.'

In (72), the nominal triggering plural marking in the matrix verb is an argument of the embedded clause, far from any conceivable prosodic unit with it.

As far as we can see, the only option in these contexts is that agreement patterns are determined by extragrammatical factors. For speakers who invariably resort to number harmony with [-DOM] direct objects (P-SECs) and to a singular default in the rest of the cases (I-SECs), we must assume that this additional regularization process is a learned strategy imposed by means of socioeducative pressure.³⁴

In the next section, we briefly review other instances of subjects lacking number specification in Spanish that follow a similar pattern. We show that in some cases number agreement works essentially as it does in SECs, while in other cases it is fully determined, sometimes in completely unexpected ways.

5.2.2 Other Agreement Patterns That Grammar Cannot Deal With In addition to contexts of gender agreement that we cannot consider here (Benmamoun, Bhatia, and Polinsky 2009, Demonte and Pérez Jiménez 2012), the same uncertainty also appears in other so-called impersonal contexts (see also Feliu to appear for verbs taking an infinitive clause as subject).

5.2.2.1 Existential haber and hacer In Standard Spanish, agreement between the verb and the nominal phrase is not recommended in existential *haber* and *hacer* contexts (NGLE 41.6b), and for many speakers the only option is a default 3rd person form. However, the use of plural agreement, where the verbal form reflects the number of its nominal argument, is increasing considerably, and in some areas it is becoming general.

- (73) *Había/Habían* tres sillas en el porche.
 there.was/there.were three chairs in the porch
 ‘There were three chairs on the porch.’

Agreement in these contexts is remarkably similar to what we find with SECs, including a high degree of dialect-internal and idiolectal variation. In the case of *haber*, while the impersonal present form, *hay*, is invariant, the past form is regular 3rd person with a corresponding plural form *habían*. Consequently, NH appears in the past but almost never shows up in the present, reinforcing the conclusion that we are not dealing with syntactic or morphological agreement (DeMello 1991, Gràcia i Solé and Roca 2017, O&R 2022).

Regarding *hacer*, when the complement includes a measure phrase, for some speakers it often triggers number agreement on the verb (74b).

- (74) a. *Hace* frío/treinta grados (fuera)/varios días.
 make.SG cold/thirty degrees (outside)/several days
 ‘It is cold.’ / ‘It is thirty degrees.’ / ‘It was several days ago.’
 b. *Vivir sin* calefacción cuando hacen 2 grados bajo cero es
 to.live without heating when make.PL two degrees.PL below zero is
 inacceptable.
 unacceptable
 ‘For people to live without heating when it is -2° Celsius is unacceptable.’

³⁴ This predicts that variation should be more detectable in preschool children even in highly educated environments, a prediction we cannot test at this point.

As in SECs, NH with *haber/hacer* is idiolectal and arguably subject to cultural pressure.

5.2.2.2 Neuter Subjects The situation is different in copulative sentences whose subject is the neuter deictic pronoun *eso* or a propositional subject.

- (75) Luis dice que *eso* son tonterías pero para mí no lo son.
 Luis says that that.NEUT are nuts but for me not CL are
 ‘Luis says that those things are nuts, but they aren’t for me.’

In (75), the pronoun in subject position does not encode number, and the predicate, *tonterías*, determines agreement. Agreement is obligatory; default singular is rejected. Similarly, with propositional subjects it is determined by the predicate.

- (76) Que lleguen tarde o heridos son preocupaciones de padre (pero para mí no lo son).
 that arrive.SBJ late or hurt are worries of father (but for me not CL are)
 are)
 ‘That they arrive late or hurt are a father’s worries (but they aren’t for me).’

Note that in these cases where the predicate is replaced by the invariant predicative clitic *lo*, plural agreement is still obligatory (*para mí lo son*).

5.2.2.3 \bar{A} -Movement When the complement of V \bar{A} -moves to a preposed position, clitic doubling is not possible (77).

- (77) a. ¿Qué documentos (*los) censuraron?
 which documents.PL (3ACC.PL.MSC) censored.PL
 ‘Which documents did they censor?’
 b. Los documentos que (*los) censuraron fueron publicados.
 the documents.PL that (3ACC.PL.MSC) censored.PL were published
 ‘The documents they censored were published.’

In SECs, these structures exhibit the lack of systematicity typical of NH (78). In fact, this is the only case where even speakers who otherwise always adhere to the norm show some degree of variation.

- (78) a. ¿Qué documentos se censuró/censuraron?
 which documents.PL SE censored.SG/censored.PL
 ‘Which documents were censored?’
 b. Los documentos que se censuró/censuraron fueron publicados.
 the documents.PL that SE censored.SG/censored.PL were published
 ‘The documents they censored were published.’

This exceptional behavior is expected in our analysis: while arguments in CLLD are base-generated in the left periphery, the \bar{A} -chain tail in (78) includes a postverbal copy of the object in its VP-internal position. Clitic doubling is thus not possible, and consequently CIMut lacks the structural conditions to apply (58). In contrast, this \bar{A} -chain configuration is a potential target

for NH to apply, and the lack of systematicity reappears: (79a) illustrates the lack of number with plural objects, (79b) the case of plural agreement with DOM objects, and (79c) long-distance number agreement.³⁵

- (79) a. *los servicios que se proporciona a los alumnos*
 the services.PL that SE provide.SG to the students
 ‘the services that are provided to students’
- b. *selección de las personas a las que se entrevistaron*
 selection of the people.PL DOM the that SE interviewed.PL
 ‘selection of the people that were interviewed’
- c. *las comunicaciones realizadas o que se prevén hacer*
 the communications.PL realized or that SE expect.PL to.do
 ‘the communications that were realized or those that were expected to be realized’

In sum, different pieces of evidence converge and support our proposal that subject number agreement in SECs conceals two different phenomena with very distinctive properties, both occurring postsyntactically, namely, CIMut and NH.

CIMut is a rather regular and systematic morphological process by means of which an argument D-clitic shows up morphologically as number agreement. It coexists with a clitic strategy whose distribution is also systematic and predictable both dialectally and in terms of the configurations where it applies. The dialectal cut lies between its optionality in C-varieties and its obligatoriness in A-varieties.

On the other hand, NH is a less systematic, extragrammatical phenomenon with a vague distribution. NH in SECs shares many properties with similar agreement “failures” sketched in section 5.2.2. Moreover, its distribution seems to be largely determined by sociolinguistic and stylistic factors, such as social acceptability and acquisition of the Academia’s norm, that escape the domain of grammar.

6 Further Extensions

If the results in this article are on the right track, they open new questions about and ways of researching old issues regarding the syntax and morphology, as well as processing, of agreement. They also raise questions about crosslinguistic variation and diachronic change.

6.1 On Crosslinguistic Variation

An important issue that often arises concerning our proposal is how cross-Romance variation fits into the picture. Our analysis of Spanish *se* illustrates that a fine-grained investigation is required before deciding the situation in each language; consequently, our observations here must perforce be considered highly speculative.

³⁵ Effects of this type have often been reported in research on agreement intervention in language processing (Mancini et al. 2014, Zawiszewski, Santesteban, and Laka 2016, Villata 2017). A general postsyntactic analysis of a larger variety of default agreement configurations seems to us worth pursuing. However, a detailed analysis of NH exceeds our area of expertise and goes far beyond our goals in this article.

An important contribution of Cinque's (1988) seminal analysis of *se/si* is that it links the differences between P-SECs and I-SECs to the lexical properties of the different *se* items involved. From our point of view, putting the burden of explanation on the lexical properties, as Cinque does, seems the right strategy to account for the behavior of nonparadigmatic SECs and other SECs language-internally. As shown, the effects of a minimal lexical distinction may be considerable at different levels of the grammar and beyond. Similarly, divergences in diachronic evolution may be responsible for important synchronic differences in the Romance family.

The diachronic diversification of Latin *SE*'s attributes and cliticization patterns is not uniform. In the case of Iberian languages, although some authors (e.g., Maddox 2021) present a unified approach to the evolution of all *ses*, some facts suggest a split at least since the 16th century (Monge 1954 for Spanish, Martins 2005 for Portuguese). If that is correct, as the Latin reflexive *SE* evolved, a variety of lexical clitics with particular specifications emerged in Romance languages, resulting in different subsystems both language-internally and crosslinguistically. Taking Spanish as an arbitrary reference point, different possibilities arise for the evolution of nonparadigmatic *se*.

First, some languages have taken a completely different path, most characteristically French and many dialects of Portuguese, which developed alternative impersonal structures with *on* (Wolfsgruber 2017) and *a gente* (Martins 2005 and references), respectively.

Second, Romanian might illustrate the case of a language that presents a more conservative evolution. Following MacDonald and Maddox (2018) and Maddox (2021), some of its properties suggest that diachronically *se* is in a different stage—a different lexical item in synchronic terms: though a clitic pronoun in Spanish and Italian, *se* is a voice marker in Romanian. Consequently, agreement facts must be derived very differently, which is consistent with the observation (Cornilescu 1998, Dobrovie Sorin 1998, Giurgea 2019) that Romanian does not show agreement mismatches of the kind exemplified here.

Third, other languages may have gone further in diversifying lexical *se* items. For instance, Italian has developed a 1st person plural *se*—similar to French *on* or Portuguese *a gente*—that does not exist in Spanish and Catalan (Cinque 1988, Chierchia 1995, D'Alessandro 2007, Ordóñez 2021).

If lexical diversification constitutes an important source of crosslinguistic variation, a priori we will not expect to be able to determine the direction of the changes. Consequently, we have no expectations about what the output will be in each system. However, what we could expect is that the resulting lexical item will be internally coherent relative to the general properties of syntactic derivations, as we have argued for *se* in Spanish, with clear empirical predictions about its syntax and morphology.

6.2 *On Agreement in Syntax and Processing*

A different area where much work may be advanced is in determining more precisely the syntax and morphology of “defective agreement” contexts and the limits of variation at the postsyntactic level. Once we reconsider number agreement facts in those new terms, the possible contexts of defectiveness and its potential to reanalyze many constructions (quirky subjects, long-distance

agreement, expletives, etc.) are quite broad. Our proposal also has consequences for the analysis of classical agreement restrictions and their extensions. In particular, if number agreement in many of these contexts is treated as a postsyntactic effect, what Baker (2008) calls the “two-and-a-half agreement” factor becomes an “at-most-two-agreement” factor, reducing the playing field of possible explanations for agreement restrictions considerably. That is particularly clear if, as argued here, syntactic agreement applies in a single cycle.

Related to the previous point is a question regarding the organization of agreement among the different components in the faculty of language in the broad sense (Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch 2002, Fitch, Hauser, and Chomsky 2005). The issue is how to capture the syntactic and processing differences reported in the literature, such as the ones concerning person vs. number vs. gender. Cartographic approaches (e.g., Shlonsky 1989, Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008, Mancini et al. 2014) interpret these asymmetries as reflecting the projection of independent functional heads in syntax. Other proposals (e.g., Chomsky 1995, 2000) argue for an “all at once” checking operation, combined with some processes in other components of the grammar. It is worth noting that the two approaches are not incompatible, and in fact it might be the case that we are dealing with a nonuniform system (see, e.g., Dillon et al. 2013, Zawiszewski, Santesteban, and Laka 2016 for discussion). However, if the line of analysis we propose can be effectively extended, there is room to reinterpret the evidence for separated probes in a more compact syntactic system (Ackema and Neeleman 2019, O&R 2022, and references). Fine-grained theoretical and experimental work on the syntax of agreement restrictions as well as on language processing would help to clarify some of these issues.

Finally, as mentioned several times above, our results on SECs intermingle in a complex way with the analysis of DOM, clitic doubling, and the syntax and morphology of Romance clitics. As we have suggested, most of the issues involved are independent of SECs, but these structures provide a tool particularly well-suited to reveal new properties of the system of clitics and agreement.

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