Conceptual distance and transitivity increase in Spanish reflexives

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1. The problem

Although impersonal, passive-like and true reflexive constructions in Romance have been analyzed from a variety of perspectives with different degrees of success, the study of the wide variety of remaining reflexively-marked constructions is undoubtedly underrepresented in linguistic analysis. One important set of constructions not completely analyzed in current approaches are middle indirect constructions, i.e., se marked, nonreflexive transitive constructions. The lack of distinction between reflexive and middle constructions in current approaches and the almost exclusive consideration of examples like (1) give the misleading image that this construction type is restricted to cases in which the use of the clitic se in Spanish can only impose a complete interpretation (Strozer 1976; Arce 1989; Nishida 1994), which is to be derived in various ways from an indirect reflexive clitic. Completives are constructions in which the se marker highlights the maximal exploitation of the object by the clausal subject. Problematic for these accounts is the existence of completions exemplified in (2) where the reading is not complete:

(1) Adrián se lea el periódico de una sentada.
Adrian would read the paper in one sitting.

(2) Tongolele se baile una rumba inolvidable.
Tongolele danced an unforgettable rumba.

Examples like (2) have been analyzed as full involvement constructions (Maldonado 1992) where se marks a maximal degree of subject participation in the execution of the action designated by the verb. That the subject’s involvement is
maximal can be clearly seen from the fact that using adverbials like ‘sin mayor interés’ ‘without much interest’ render a grammatical output:

(3) ‘Tongolele se bailó una rumba sin mayor interés. ‘Tongolele danced a rumba without much interest’.

Not only have reflexively marked transitive constructions been reduced to composites in previous analyses, they also have been seen as exceptional cases to be marked in the lexicon to compose a list of verbs which will be ‘inserted in the syntax’ to obtain the desired construction (Nishida 1994). While the mechanism itself may produce the correct output, the general view of the phenomenon is too narrow. It fails to explain how full involvement constructions develop, how they relate to composites, how other meanings can be found in reflexively-marked transitive constructions, or what the syntactic/semantic conditions are for so called ‘reflexive markers’ to interact with transitive constructions. This approach is, in sum, too limited to capture important generalizations regarding the structure of reflexively-marked transitive constructions in general.

While Maldonado’s (1992) account of full involvement constructions as evolving from composites may be correct, it is again too limited to show how the whole system is organized. One obvious limitation of the approach is that the use of se is not limited to two meanings but in fact, as can be seen in (4), it corresponds to at least four closely-related construction types:

(4) a. Adrián se puso el sombrero. ‘Adrián put on the hat.

    Adrián se consiguió un empleo muy aventurero. ‘Adrián got a marvelous job.’
    Adrián se levantó el periódico de una sábana. ‘Adrián used to read the paper in one sheet’.
    Tongolele se bailó una rumba indescriptible. ‘Tongolele danced an unforgettable rumba’.

In the case of groomsing activities (4a), the clitic se highlights the location of the body part that the subject interacts with. Yet the se marker may also impose a benefactive as well as a comitative and a full involvement interpretation. One of the goals of this paper is to establish the conditions under which these readings are obtained.

A common strategy in current approaches to the multiplicity of functions of reflexively marked constructions is to propose the existence of a variety of se markers. While some distinctions may be insightful, others (spurious se, illogical se) only reflect the complexity of the problem, while others se, (a semipassive,
units whose degree of automatization depends on how entrenched they are in the cognitive organization of a specific language. A pivotal claim of cognitive grammar is that "linguistic expressions and grammatical constructions embody conventional, or spatial, schematic information, which constitutes an essential aspect of their semantic value. In choosing a particular expression or construction, a speaker construes the conceived situation in a certain way, i.e. he selects a particular image (from a range of alternatives) to structure its conceptual context for expressive purposes" (Langacker 1988:7). Alternative constructions therefore impose contrasting images of the conceived situation. The meaning of an expression includes both the knowledge system it evokes when the expression is activated (the various cognitive domains), as well as the particular conceptualizer the conceptualizer imposes on a scene.

One particular dimension of construal concerns the conceptualizer's ability to impose a profile on a base, which derives the semantic value of a linguistic expression. The base construes the conceptual domains which are directly relevant to the expression, hence necessarily accessed when the expression is used. The profile is a subregion within the base. It is that subregion that the expression designates and thus makes prominent within the base. In a specific sentence, the profile imposed on the base is a consequence of the particular way in which the conceptualizer construes the scene, and not an inherent property of the scene. According to the nature of their profile, the entities designated by linguistic expressions provide a semantic characterization as grammatical categories. They are divided into things and relations. Things "represent a region in some domain" (Langacker 1987a: 189), regions are being defined as a set of interconnected entities. "Relations profile the interconnections between two or more concepted entities" (Langacker 1987b: 198). Among the salient participants in a relation is the trajector which stands out as the primary figure within the profiled relationship and is construed as the element being located, evaluated, or described. At the clausal level the trajector is often recognized as the subject of the clause. The most prominent participant in the clause is the landmark and it is commonly equated with the direct object. The indirect object is thus defined as a secondary landmark which occupies a third degree of prominence in the clause.

A prototypical transitive construction is characterized as an action chain where the subject transfers some energy to the object participant inducing some change of state or location in it. In ditransitive constructions, the energy transmission involves relocating, in a concrete or an abstract manner, some object from the demarcation of the subject participant to that of the receiver. From Langacker (1991) I take the notion of demarcation as the virtual area in which some participant has mental or physical access to manipulate, control or have mental contact with a set of objects located within it. In a possessive relationship, for example, the object is possessed as long as it remains within the possessor's concrete or abstract demarcation. In most ditransitive constructions the object ends in the indirect object's demarcation. The following are morement representations of these constructions. To simplify the diagrams I only display the demarcation of non-subject participants (see Figures 1 and 2. Circle: participant; Big oval: participant's demarcation; Wide arrow: energy transmission; Narrow arrow: object change of state or location; Dotted arrow: experience's mental contact with object. Dotted arc: same participant.

A grammatical construction is a composite structure which specifies how two or more component expressions can be integrated to form a unit of greater complexity. Grammatical marking is seen as determined by cognitive strategies that impose the degree of prominence of different components of the event. Prominence is said to respond to the specific communicative needs of the conceptualizer to communicate specific messages in particular contexts.

2.2. Reflexive and Middle Constructions

There is a basic contrast between reflexive and middle sr. Reflexives correspond to cases where the subject and the coreferential (in)direct object can be differentiated in the event although they make reference to the same entity in the real world. Cases of split representation of the participant like those involving mental spaces (Funckonir 1985) are evident reflexive examples. On the other hand, middles involve a low degree of separateness among participants and consequently a low degree of event elaboration (Kemmer 1992; Maldonado 1992). The following examples illustrate the contrast:

1a. Se imaginó bailando con Tongole.  
   Reflexive  
   'He imagined himself dancing with Tongole'.

1b. Se imaginó que Tongole le trae a la festa.  
   Middle  
   'He thinks that Tongole will go to the party.'

[Diagram not shown]
In (5a) the participant’s self-image in a scene dancing with Tongolele takes place in a mental space which differs from the speech event. The subject of *imaginar* is distinguished from the subject of *danza*. In contrast the clitic se in (5b) simply marks some mental image of Tongolele in a scene in which the conceptualizer is not present at all; there is thus no split self-representation. As can be seen in (6), the indirect reflexive clitic se in (b) corresponds to the indirect object clitic le of (a) while the middle se marker in (c) has no argumental counterpart:

(6) a. Alceira leve enviabas cartas a su amor platónico. 
    ‘Alceira used to send letters to her platonic love.’
    b. Era tal su soledad que Alceira se enviaba cartas a sí misma. 
    ‘Alceira’s loneliness was such that she would send letters to herself.’
    c. Alceira se conoce cada lugar. 
    ‘Alceira knows some (great) places’.

The contrast between indirect, indirect reflexive, and indirect middle constructions is illustrated in Figures 3, 4, and 5 (c:cl = participant, big oval = participant’s dominance, wide arrow = subject’s action, narrow arrow = object change of location, dotted arrow = experience’s mental contact with object, dotted arc = same participant). In the indirect object construction the subject and the recipient participants are distinct. In the indirect reflexive construction these differentiated participants are equated with the same referent (the dotted arc connecting the subject and the indirect object). In the middle construction only an undifferentiated participant is present. There is a correlation between the degree of participant differentiation and the degree of event elaboration (Kemmer 1992). Transitive constructions are higher in the scale of elaboration than reflexives, while middles are even lower on that scale. In Figure 3, the energy transfer from subject to object can be conceptually scanned. In Figure 4, the reflexive form is represented by the dotted arc connecting the subject and the indirect object. It designates that the energy transferred involves two

Figure 3. Indirect object

Figure 4. Indirect reflexive

participants with the same referent. Now in Figure 5, the event is processed in a gestaltic manner, for it needs not be scanned from the action of the agent to the change of state imposed on the recipient. Since in middle constructions there are no differentiated participants, the energy transfer cannot be tracked down. The conceptualization is thus reduced to the observable change of state designated by the verb.

As I have claimed elsewhere (Maldonado 1992, 1999), the middle marker’s core function is to focus on the event’s crucial moment of change. The notion of focus in Cognitive Grammar corresponds to a cognitive selection process where some portion of the event is chosen to receive a maximal prominence status letting the rest of the information of the event be present in a less prominent manner. In contrast with Foley and Van Valin (1984) and Lambrecht (1994), this definition is not restricted to a selection of the focal participants of a clause, it applies to the whole event so that the most informative part of the designated process can be selected as the main figure. This selection process can highlight not only participants but also some part of the process. I suggest that the middle se marker focuses on the core information designated by the verb. With transitive verbs it focuses on the interaction established between subject and object, while in intransitive clauses the focus is established on the most informative part of the process in which the subject participates. This explains why se commonly marks inchoative and inception aspectual meanings. Verbs of motion constitute transparent examples to observe the focusing effects of the middle clitic se. Consider the contrast between *‘go’ and *‘run’ ‘leave’.*

(7) a. Tachán fue a la casa. 
    ‘Tachán went home.’
    b. *Tachán fue. 
    ‘Tachán went’,
1. Transitivity decrease/increase

Common to most contemporary approaches to transitivity is the idea that or reduces
the transitivity of the clause. An argument of the verb is either deleted, (Rosse 1999;
Milton, Kimoto, and Li 1982). Possessive (by) involve

(mii). The window was opened.

(iii) A. Ali anah saw himself in the mirror.

(iv) g. A. Ali anah closed the mirror.

The assumptions made by most analyses to account for factorially marked
transitivity are contrary to a typological approach to transitivity, which
assumes that the two event types in a clause are independent and that the
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therefore the result of the interaction between the two clauses. The interaction
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transitive constructions: se is claimed to absorb the indirect object, as can be seen from the contrast in (11):

(11) a. Adrián le puso el sombrero a Valeria.
    'Adrián put the hat on Valeria'.

b. Adrián se puso el sombrero.
   'Adrián put the hat on'.

This analysis to reflexively marked transitive constructions has been rejected from a variety of perspectives. Seminal work by García (1975) pointed out that the low deixis of causatives and the high deixis of datives, the indirect Romance se marker—my middle se marker—implied a transitivity increase which rendered different types of intensified processes. Aricé (1989) called examples like (1) hypertransitives while Maldonado (1992) and Nishida (1994) have given arguments showing that in these constructions there is no argument loss. It can be seen from (12) that no argument has been deleted. While the presence of the se marker is obligatory in (12a), it is optional in (12b-d):

(12) a. Adrián puso el sombrero. (from (4a))
    'Adrián put the hat on'.

b. Adrián consiguió un empleo maravilloso. (from (4b))
   'Adrián got a marvelous job'.

c. Adrián lela el periódico de una ventana. (from (4c))
    'Adrián used to read the whole paper in one sitting'.

d. Tongolele bailó una rumba indistinta. (from (4d))
   'Tongolele danced an unforgettable rumba'.

Moreover, as has been pointed out in several analyses (García 1975; Maldonado 1992; Nishida 1994), there is a contrast between the value of se in clear reflexive situations, and what I have called middle se marked transitive constructions. It can be seen from (13b) that the cleft se is the counterpart of the indirect object clitic le and that it designates an indirect reflexive reading. On the other hand in (13c), se imposes a complete middle reading whose function does not correspond to the value of le in (13a):

(13) a. Adrián le leyó una historia a Valeria.
    'Adrián read a story to Valeria'.

b. Adrián se leyó una historia a sí mismo. Reflexive
   'Adrián read a whole story'.

c. Adrián se leyó una historia. Complete
   ‘Adrián read a story to himself’.

Exactly the same situation holds for the full involvement reading. While pragmati-

ally odd, the reflexive marker in (14b) corresponds to the indirect object clitic le, yet these two are to be distinguished from the se marker that highlights an increased degree of subject involvement in (14c):

(14) a. Tongolele le bailó una rumba a su amante.
   'Tongolele danced a rumba for her lover'.

b. Tongolele se bailó una rumba. Reflexive
   'Tongolele danced a rumba for herself'.

c. Tongolele se bailó una rumba indistinta. Full involvement
   'Tongolele danced an unforgettable rumba'.

A third piece of evidence is that benefactive, completive and full involvement constructions do not correspond to argument loss reflexives in the use of the emphatic phrase a sí mismo 'to himself'. Notice that while the indirect reflexive in (15a) can take the emphatic phrase, the middle constructions lead to ungrammatical results.

(15) a. Era tal su soledad que Alcura se envió cartas a sí mismo.
    'Alcura’s loneliness was such she would send letters to herself'.

b. Juan se ha encontrado a sí mismo una buena colocación.
   'Juan has found himself a good position'.

c. Se le leyó a sí mismo la novela.
   'He read himself the novel'.

d. Se bailó a sí mismo una rumba.
   'Tongolele danced a rumba'.

In examples (15b-d) the only grammatical reading to be obtained would be an indirect reflexive with a split self representation, which is commonly used for contrastive purposes. The examples in (16) are appropriate for that particular reading:

(16) a. Juan se ha encontrado a sí mismo, no a su hermano una buena colocación.
   'Juan has found for himself not for his brother a good position'.

b. Se le leyó a sí mismo, no a su hermano, una novela emocional.
   'He read a sentimental novel to himself, not to his brother'.

c. Se bailó a sí mismo, no a su amante, una rumba indistinta.
   'She danced an unforgettable rumba for herself, not for her lover'.
that characterize highly transitive constructions. The high degree of transitivity of middle se transitive constructions has already been acknowledged in the current literature (completes, Strozer 1976; hypertransitives, Arce 1989; quantized vs.; Nishida 1994). Yet the analysis has in most cases been restricted to structural facts. Strozer and Arce argue for the requirement for the direct object to be accompanied by a determiner. While the observation is, in general terms, correct, it is insufficient to account for cases of unbounded objects, as evidenced by the following:

(17) a. Los almuerzos se suben la canción.
    'The students know the song [by heart]'.

b. *Los almuerzos se suben el español.
    'The students know Spanish [by heart]'.

Nishida has observed that inherently telic transitive verbs in combination with quantified direct objects always yield a telic expression. Following Krifka (1989), he further suggests that there must be a correlation between the uniqueness of the quantified object and the aspectual property of the verbal predicate. The uniqueness of the object is thus mapped to the perfectiveness of the event. Only under these conditions can se be used. Although he highlights very important properties of the construction Nishida, however, misses a crucial point. In his critique of Arce's analysis, he proposes that in sentences like (18):

(18) Juan se come bien la poesía española.
    a. 'John knows well the Spanish poem'.

b. *John knows Spanish poetry well'.

(Nishida)

only the reading referring to some specific poem is correct. The collective reference to the Spanish poetry is ruled out. According to Nishida, because instead of being quantized it makes a cumulative reference (Quine 1960). Yet it must be stressed that both readings are correct. Example (18b) is as flawless as (19):

(19) Borges se sabía al delicioso la literatura fantástica.
    'Borges knew by heart [like the palm of his hand] fantastic literature'.

The problem is best analyzed in terms of BOUNDEDNESS (Langacker 1987b). A noun was defined as a region in some domain. A bounded noun is a region whose concrete or abstract boundaries are perceptible in a specific event. I propose that both the object and the event must be bounded for se to apply. Crucial to the proper interpretation of (18b) and (19) is for the object to be seen as a bounded unit regardless of how vast or abstract the object may be. If one can impose boundaries on the Spanish literature to be treated as a unit, there is no restriction for it to take a middle se completive marker. This explains why the Spanish language, in (17b), music in general, and other unbounded elements do not meet the requirements of the completive construction.

The same notion explains the incapability for this construction to have sentential objects, as can be seen from (20b):

(20) a. Aprendió a leer a los tres años.
    'He learned to read when he was three years old'.

b. *Se aprendió a leer a los tres años.
    'He learned to read when he was three years old'.

Boundedness predicts that only count, not mass nouns, will produce the correct output. Indeed, this can be seen from the following contrast:

(21) a. Platóscubaba de beberse dos cubos de agua. (Jiménez: 82)
    'Plato has just drunk two buckets of water'.

b. *Platóscuchaba de beberse dos cubos de agua.
    'Plato has just drunk buckets of water'.

Likewise, one can expect that the se construction will be sensitive to the instance type contrast. We can see that this is the case not only for concrete but also for abstract objects. The (a)-examples contain instances while the ungrammatical output in (b) are constructed with their corresponding types:

(22) a. Gabriela, no te vamos a dar pastel hasta que te comas la carne.
    'Gabriela, we are not going to give you cake until you eat up [all] your meat'.

b. *Gabriela, no te vamos a dar pastel hasta que te comas carne.
    'Gabriela, we are not going to give you cake until you eat up meat'.

(23) a. Es un maestro que se capta la voluntad de los alumnos en un instante. (Molinier)
    'He is a teacher that captures the students’ will in an instant'.

b. *Es un maestro que se capta voluntad de los alumnos.
    'He is a teacher that captures the students’ will in an instant'.

The first set of arguments show that the se marker in reflexively marked transitive constructions does not correspond to an argument of the verb and thus it is not a reflexive marker. Not only its behavior but its meanings correspond to the function of amiddle marker. Clearly, the se marker use with count, instantiated and bounded nouns and its rejection of mass, type, unbounded and sentential objects suggest a construction with the highest degree of transitivity. The term hypertransitive, suggested by Arce, to identify this construction type is undoubtedly adequate.

4. Linguistic proximity and the status of se

The question regarding the status of the se marker is at issue now. There seems to be agreement in previous analyses in considering se as a marker of completeness ac-
tions. Arce suggests that by enhancing the patient quality of the direct object and making it a "complete bearer of the verbal action" (1989: 295), se marker shifts to an aspectual markers that se is also an aspectual marker that applies mainly to accomplishments. Se marks the verb in the lexicon and the se marked into the tree structure as a new unit (se + verb). Common to both analyses is the fact that the group of verbs that enter the construction is a restricted set that most typically corresponds to verbs of consumption. Interestingly enough, Arce observes that the class of bytransitive verbs has extended to se verbs of motion, yet no account is offered for that group. Nishida admits that in this case there are no accomplishments—which fully correspond to his telic verbs—but also some achievements. Yet, since accomplishments are predominant, other verbs types are simply left aside. Nishida’s classification of verbs is problematic for it includes se constructions that have no relationship whatsoever with the expected complete reading. Moreover, a closer look at the verb classes that can take se reveals that they pertain to a class that the Nishida calls “creating an abstract performance object”: EXPERIENCE PERFORMANCE: esquematizar una obra ‘put up listening an opera’, ensayar una sonata ‘listen a whole symphony’ AGENT PERFORMANCE: bailarse un tango ‘dance a tango’, cantarse una canción ‘sing a song’. Allegedly, the acceptance rate was rather low in all dialects so Nishida did not feel the need to account for them. Now EXPERIENCE PERFORMANCE had a rate of 60-80 per cent while AGENT PERFORMANCE rated between 40-60 per cent. What these numbers show is that there is a significant amount of speakers whose use of se is not accounted for by that analysis. The frequency of use is too high to accept the possibility of disqualifying them as mere errors or performance deviations. I should stress that in Mexican Spanish these examples are not problematic, and that speakers of other dialects either take them as correct or see them as novel but not grammatical. These reactions, I believe, coincide with Nishida’s results. But even if they were marginal, it seems to me that what type of formulation we would need to account for novel uses like these in the language. The question, believe, is on what grounds are speakers allowing themselves to bring new expressions into an old construction? In other words, if Arce is right in identifying an extended use of se to motion verbs, we still need to explain the cognitive connections that allow such a derived pattern.

Two facts must be stressed about previous approaches. First, the presence of verbs of motion or “agent performance” in the construction is acknowledged but not accounted for. Second, while full involvement constructions are left aside, the benefactive use of se is simply not addressed, most probably because it has traditionally been thought of as belonging to a different area. The need for an alternative approach that gives a shifted account of intensified benefactives, completives and full involvement construction is unquestionable.

I suggest that the focusing function of se accounts for all the data. In previous work (Maldonado 1992, 1999), I have suggested that there is a basic schema of the pronominal clitic se on which attention is being focused regarding the pivotal moment of change. It is not surprising then that in the clitic se, different aspectual perfective properties can be recognized. The focusing properties of se account for a wide variety of constructions. So-called "reflexive passives": se resolvió el problema ‘the problem got solved’, spontaneous events: se revistió el globo ‘the balloon cropped’, dynamic situations: se subió a la mesa ‘He got jumped on the table’, unexpected events: se cayó ‘he fell down’ and so forth, correspond to that basic construction. Reflexives-marked transitive constructions only differ from other middle constructions in one respect: in non-transitive middles a participant or some facet of the event may be downplayed to allow the terminal part of the event to be most prominent; while in reflexively-marked transitive constructions the focalizing focus of the clitic se simply projects the nuclear meaning of the verb without ‘bleaching’ other components of the event. Thus, if the verb portrays some type of benefaction, the clitic se will give it maximal prominence. The same will be true for consumption, execution or subject involvement. In all cases the core property of the verb will be highlighted in a considerable manner. In what follows, I will give specific details of how the focusing function applies to different classes of intransitive verbs.

As a first step, I will reintroduce, with a broader interpretation, Arce’s observation by which verbs that participate in reflexively marked transitive constructions “have an incorporeal sense”. A closer look at the three main meanings at task (benefactive, completive and full involvement constructions), will show they all have the property of bringing the direct object into the subject’s domain or keep it within its boundaries for interaction. All the verbs in question are seen as having an incorporeal sense. This property will set the basic conditions for se to apply as a focalizer of some portion of an event. The meanings to be obtained therewith will be determined by the semantic properties of each verb class. I will address each group in a separate manner.

5. Focalized benefactives

The verbs in this class undoubtedly share an incorporeal meaning (causar ‘attract’ captar ‘capture’, abortar ‘abolit’, deservir ‘reserve’, ganar la lotería ‘win the lottery’) either bringing in the object or impeding it from leaving the subject’s domain. Notice from the following examples that the student’s will and the job are brought into the domain for the subject’s interests. The relocation of the object shows the avoided inference that the event is beneficial for the subject. The use of the
clitic se in the b-examples does nothing more than focalize the beneficial inference implied by the verb:

(24) a. La nuestra captó la voluntad de los alumnos.
   ‘The teacher captured the student’s good will’.

b. És un maestro que se captó la voluntad de los alumnos. (Molina)
   ‘He is a teacher that captures [for himself] the student’s good will’.

(25) a. Consiguí un trabajo en una banca.
   ‘He got a job in a bank’.

b. Se consiguió un empleo a sólo dos cuadras de su casa.8
   ‘He got himself a job only two blocks away from home’.

For events that presuppose an intense experience, the use of se is the default. Although its absence is pragmatically awkward, it is not ungrammatical, as can be seen from the contrast in (26):

(26) a. Valeria se ganó la lotería.
   ‘Valeria won the lottery’.

b. ??Valeria ganó la lotería.
   ‘Valeria won the lottery’.

Needless to say, if the event were against the subject’s interest, the clitic se will profile its negative effects:

(27) Con esto conducito se ganó una buena paliza.
   ‘With such behavior, he got a good spanking’.

Crucial to this schema is the fact that the focalized ton-nafactive effects are determined by the degree of proximity established between subject and object. The more inherent the relationship between them is the more the se marker is required. The precise details of this phenomenon are beyond the limits of this paper, however I can still hint at some obvious points. The lack of a se marker in (28a) correlates with the fact that the folk conceptualization of time has everything but a permanent presence. The benefactive of not wasting time can in fact be profiled by se as in (28b), but the crucial fact is that the marginality of (28d) is determined by the absence of the se marker in a construction where subject and object have an inherent possessive relationship:

(28) a. Como le habló por teléfono en lugar de ir a verlo, ahorró mucho tiempo.
   ‘Since he called him over the phone, he saved a lot of time’.

b. Como le habló por teléfono en lugar de ir a verlo, se ahorró mucho tiempo.
   ‘Since he called him over the phone, he saved himself a lot of time’.

194 a. Reservé mesa para cuatro personas.
   ‘I reserved a table for four’.

b. Nos reservamos el derecho de admisión.
   ‘We reserve ourselves the right of admission’.

c. *Reservamos el derecho de admisión.
   ‘We reserve ourselves the right of admission’.

The bene/naive-factive reading imposed by the predicate in all these cases is stressed by the clitic se as it focalizes on the semantic core of the verb. A parallel phenomenon will be seen as we analyze verbs of consumption.

6. Completives

There is a class of telic verbs (beber ‘drink’, comer ‘eat’, fumar ‘smoke’, etc.) that designates consumption or exploitation of the object. Notice first that all the verbs in this class share with the previous class the requirement that the object must be brought into or be located within the subject’s domain. Only under these conditions can the object be consumed. Moreover, if object exploitation constitutes the core of the verb, it should be expected for the middle se marker to signal that the object is fully exploited. Full exploitation depends on boundedness, as shown in Section 3. I have already suggested that in completive constructions both event and aspect must be bounded. That the whole event must be bounded can be seen from Noshita’s (1994) argument by which no gradual adverb is compatible with the completive construction. In contrast with (30a), in (30b) an aguantar ‘a little’ produces a semantically clash with the completive inopportunity of the clitic se.
(30) a. Anoche Valeria tomó un poquito más de leche.
   ‘Valeria drank some more milk last night.’

b. *Anoche Valeria se tomó la leche un poquito más.
   ‘Valeria drank the milk a little more last night.’

That the object must be consumed to exhaustion can best be seen in the following dialog:

(31) –Valeria, ¿Tómaste la leche? ‘Valeria, drink your milk’.
   –Ya me (‘Yo la tomé’, ‘I already did’).
   –No es cierto, todavía te falta medio vaso.
   ‘That’s not true, you still have half a glass to go’.

It is not under discussion whether Valeria has drunk milk but whether the whole glass of milk has been consumed. This of course does not preclude the possibility of marking bounded partial units that as such can also be fully exploited. In her defense Valeria could have made the following utterance:

(32) Pero ya me tomé la mitad.
   ‘But I have drunk half of it’.

This of course allows that the construction be used to report on work in progress. The only condition to be met is that the affected portion be constituted as a bounded unit:

(33) a. Se leyó medio reporte en diez minutos.
   ‘He read half the report in ten minutes’.

b. Se fuma tres cuartos de cigarrillo al día.
   ‘He smokes three quarters of a pack a day’.

Figures 6–9 illustrate the input of se with respect to lexicalized benefactives and completives. Figure 6 shows that the subject brings the object within his dominion. Figure 7 shows that the inherent benefaction of the verbal meaning i.e., bringing an object, is only profiled by the se marker. Figure 8 shows the relocation of the object into the subject’s dominion and that such object is partially affected by the action. In contrast, Figure 9 highlights not only that the object is totally affected by the action (the black circle), but also that its completion benefits subject (circle = participant; big dotted oval = subject’s dominion; wide arrow = subject’s action; simple arrow = object’s relocation; squiggly arrow = object change of state; black circle = fully affected object). These diagrams also show that the benefaction implied by relocating the object within the subject’s dominion is the shared feature of these constructions and that completion only derives from focusing on the subject-object interaction designated by the verb. Completable constructions thus do not constitute an add-labeled idiosyncratic construction but one naturally related to other middle transitive constructions.

We are now in a position to account for abstract situations. Sstrozer (1976) made the assumption that the object of completive constructions had to be referential. Níchola has adequately rejected that proposal based on negation: Juan no se leyó
ningún libro ‘Juan didn’t read any book’ and wh-questions: ¿Qué libro te leiste? ‘What book did you read?’ As for abstract objects, he observes, based on Kripke (1989), that Compositional Constructions are HOMOMORPHIC: ‘since they obey a condition of graduality: ‘every part of the event corresponds to some part of the object’. In beberse un vaso de vino ‘drink up a glass of wine’, for example, ‘every part of the object denoted by a glass of wine maps onto a part of the drinking event’ (1994:336). The proposal is enlightening for all concrete situations and even for some abstract ones. With objects that have a clear beginning and end the event is accomplished mirroring consumption verbs. The object becomes smaller as the event advances. Reading a story through constitutes a pristine example:

(34) Adrián se leía el periódico de una sentada.
‘Adrián would read the paper in one sitting’.

Now non-dynamic situations are problematic. It is not evident how they can obey the graduality condition. Here Nishida makes a great effort to extend the analysis to areas that are difficult to defend. In subverte la lección ‘to know a whole lesson’, he suggests that a lesson can be partitioned into qualitatively different parts and analogously the state of knowing the lesson can be partitioned into different parts of knowledge. Although the parallelism is nicely drawn and may be relevant in a variety of situations, it forces that an inference be taken as a restrictive rule. While the proposal accounts for verbs like leer ‘read’, aprender ‘learn’ memorizar ‘memorize’, it fails to capture verbs like saber ‘know’ and conocer ‘be familiar with’ which have a gestalt-like behavior. Consider the following examples:

(35) a. El maestro se aprendió mi nombre el primer día de clases.
‘The teacher learned my name the first day of school’.
b. tenia otro presidio que se conocía un bar increíble . . . se sabe cada sitio!
‘I have a cousin who knows of an incredible bar . . . he knows such places’.

One need not go to the extreme of breaking down a name into letters or syllables to meet the graduality condition. Likewise, the idea of having to decompose a bar into its compositional pieces of furniture seems less adequate. What these verbs highlight is the MENTAL SCENE: that the subject has over the object. By scope I mean the area within the object that the subject’s mind can cover. I suggest that the clitic or imposes a FULL SCOPE interpretation. Without the middle marker these verbs are normally classified as states yet with the clitic se they acquire some properties of accomplishment. Notice first that the change in meaning always goes from simple mental familiarity to complete knowledge:

(36) a. ¿Se la respuesta, pero no completa.
‘I know the answer but not completely’.
b. Me la recuerda (‘pero no completa’).
‘I know the answer by heart’ (‘but not completely’).

I.e verbs that only imply mental contact, the use of se is marginal. An illustrating point is conocer ‘be familiar with/know’ which can either mean some kind of mental contact or take the reading of a deeper knowledge. Only with the latter can conocer be used with the se marker as in (37b). The questionable example in (36b) corresponds to the mental contact reading:

(37) a. Conocí muy bien a Valeria.
‘I know Valeria very well’.
b. Me la conoci como la palma de mi mano.
‘I know Valeria like the palm of my hand’.

b. ¿Nos conocemos la propuesta.
‘I am familiar with the proposal’.
b. ¿Nos conocemos la propuesta.
‘I am familiar with the proposal by heart’.

The requirement for the clitic se to take verbs of a high degree of mental scope explains why aprender ‘learn’, a verb whose scope radiates at the lower end of the scale, without the se marker normally takes sentential and unbounded objects as in (39a), while with the middle marker the object must be bounded, as in (40b). With the wide scope reading aprenderse se means ‘to memorize’. Moreover the increase of scope imposed by se explains why with verbs of high degree of control, like memorizar ‘to memorize’, the clitic se is redundant, as (41b) shows:

(39) a. Aprendí francés a bailar a los 15 años.
‘I learned French to dance when I was 15 years old’.
b. Me aprendí francés a bailar a los 15 años.
‘I learned French to dance when I was 15 years old’.

b. ¿Nos conocemos la canción.
‘I learned the song’.
b. Me aprendí la canción.
‘I learned the song by heart’.

(40) a. ¿Nos memorizó la canción.
‘I memorized the song’.
b. ¿Nos memorizó la canción.
‘I memorized the song’.
Based on these data, a generalization of focusing se is thus at hand:

Maximal Exploitation Condition

(42) a. The focusing se marker transforms incorporative transitive verbs of high mental scope into verbs of full scope.

b. Incorporative transitive verbs take well-bounded objects located in the subject’s dominion to impose a maximal degree of exploitation.

While in agreement with Nishida’s graduality condition, this proposal accounts for gestaltic events that do not allow a homomorphic analysis. What telic and non-telic verbs share is that a well-bounded concrete or abstract object is located within the subject’s dominion to allow maximal exploitation. Saber ‘know’ and conocer ‘be familiar with’ have been problematic due to their imperfective ‘Aktionsart’.

That they cannot be used in imperfective situations can be seen from the fact that in (43) se conoció is ungrammatical, while se supo takes a performance reading. As in English, ‘to know’ in a perfective context not only means to have some knowledge but also to express it overtly as in (44):

(43) a. *Valeria se conoció la ciudad.
   b. Valeria knew the city.

(44) a. *Valeria supo la respuesta y se ganó el premio.
   b. Valeria knew the answer and won the prize.

To sum up, imperfective verbs like saber and conocer can only be used with se in imperfective situations if they take an accomplishment reading. In imperfective situations, they can take the focusing se marker since they satisfy the maximal exploitation condition. These facts have been attested by the grammaticality of (35), (360) and (37b).

As for perfective verbs, finer details can be highlighted. Full mental scope presupposes some point in time or space in which the event of covering the whole object is completed. It is thus predicted by the focusing function of se that the event will, by default, take place in restricted space/time contexts. The crucial examples showing that the event is compressed are (45b) and (45d). The former would be fine to designate a special or meaningful accomplishment, not to express a predictable routine act. The latter is ruled out since the use of the adverbial phrase en una sentada ‘in one sitting’ requires the event to be compressed by the middle se marker.

(45) a. *Leí la última novela de García Márquez.
   b. *Me leí la última novela de García Márquez.
   c. *Leí la última novela de García Márquez en una sentada.
   d. *Leí García Márquez’s most recent novel.

A further feature of the construction is that the object to be ‘incorporated’ must be of considerable significance for the event. The transitive use of correr ‘to run’, aporstar ‘to bet’ or jugar ‘to risk’ illustrates this point:

(46) a. Antonio se ‘(*) jugó el pellejo/a la chamba/a la vida por ayudar a su hermano.
   b. *Antonio put his skin/job/life on the line to help his brother.

Object meaningfulness is commonly relative to time and space restrictions. This is particularly the case with verbs of motion:

(47) a. Se corrió el maratón de la Ciudad de México.
   b. He ran the [whole] Mexico City Marathon.
   c. Se corrió los cien metros en diez segundos.
   d. He ran the 100 meters in ten seconds.
   e. Se subió el sube el Himalaya en dos días.
   f. He went up/climbed up the Himalayas in two days.

The previous examples are grammatical without se. They would however be pragmatically odd since those special acts would be expressed as if they were routine. With verbs that imply full subject involvement, the focusing se marker is obligatory and the object must be meaningful:

(48) a. Rigoberto apostó diez pesos en la séptima carrera.
   b. Rigoberto bet ten pesos in the seventh race.
   c. Rigoberto apostó al sueldolito casa en la séptima carrera.
   d. Rigoberto bet all his salary/his house in the seventh race.
   e. *Rigoberto se apostó un peso en la séptima carrera.
   f. *Rigoberto bet one peso in the seventh race.

I have claimed so far that common to focalized benefactive and completive is the law that a bounded object must be either brought into or located within the subject’s dominion for the focusing se marker to profile the core meaning of the verb. I have also pointed out that completable constructions by default involve a restricted setting. Moreover, I have illustrated that the object must always be highly significant for the event. The analysis is now set to account for full involvement constructions.

7. Full Involvement

I have already pointed out that examples like (2), repeated here for convenience, have been left aside in previous analyses. In full involvement constructions what is
being focused on is the degree of participation of the subject in the event. His/her involvement is maximal. In (49) the unique dancer Tongolele not only danced a rumba, but she performed it with maximal expressiveness:

(49) Tongolele se bailó una rumba ineludible.
Tongolele danced an unforgettable rumba.

Two obvious facts attest the subject's full involvement in the event: the impossibility of having adverbials that imply lack of commitment (50a), and the less stringent requirement for the object to be qualified as out of the ordinary. The example in (50b) is marginal since there is no adjective adding extra attributes to the noun rumba.

(50) a. *Tongolele se bailó una rumba ineludible sin interés.
 b. ??Tongolele se bailó una rumba.
Tongolele danced a rumba.

Moreover, these examples clearly illustrate that the degree of participation of the subject is crucial. Verbs that are high in subject involvement contrast with those at the lower end of the scale in the same manner that saber 'know' contrasts with conocer 'be familiar with' (see previous section). Verbs with low degree of participation like probar 'taste' (51a) cannot take the se focusing marker as can be seen in (51b). Those whose default degree or involvement is higher, like saborear 'savor', can be marked by se to have maximal involvement as in (52b). It is predictable that the adverbial phrase 'without much interest' introduces a semantic clash between its diminishing meaning and the full involvement reading of saborear 'enjoy tasting' as in (52c):

(51) a. probó la sopa sin mayor interés.
He tasted the soup without much interest.

(52) a. Saboreó la sopa con enorme placer.
He enjoyed the soup with enormous pleasure.

(53) a. Lola Beltrán se cantó un bolero con toda el alma.
Lola Beltrán sang a bolero with all her soul (nightly).

b. Tomás Segovia se recitó a Ríke con una profundidad excepcional.
Tomás Segovia recited Ríke's poetry with exceptional depth.

That the construction shares core properties with focalized benefactives and cooperate in the construction is clearly evidenced because of the requirement of full involvement constructions to have bounded events and objects. The ungrammaticality of (54a) in response to the presence of a mass noun:

(54) a. *Éllo se cantaba boleros.
 'She used to sing boleros'.

b. Anoche Daniel Santos se (%) cantó un bolero que nos sacó las lágrimas.
 Last night Daniel Santos sang a song that made us cry.

As for the aspectual requirement for the event to be bounded, the imperfect cantaba is ruled out with the imperfect habitual reading; however, it is grammatical when it involves iterative delimiting actions as in (55a). The use of se with a present tense (i.e. not historical, not habitual present which are bounded situations) is ruled out, as in (55b) shows:

(55) a. Ello se cantaba un bolero increíble que no hemos podido olvidar.
 'She used to sing an incredible bolero that we have not been able to forget'.

b. *Ello se canta un bolero increíble.
 'She sings an incredible bolero'.

Whether the object is brought within the subject's dominion or whether it is simply located within its boundaries is irrelevant for the construction. The condition is that the object be activated by the subject's performance within the dominion. In performing verbs the condition is that the object be available for the subject's disposition. Now, in an abstract manner it is also the case that the object is not maximally explored: Although the piece to be played/interpreted keeps its basic properties, for the purpose of its event representation, it takes a specific shape manifested in the subject's expressiveness. The agent's involvement is highlighted by the focusing focus of the clitic se.

Figure 10 represents the nuclear properties of the construction. The dotted lines corresponding to 'bringing the object into the dominion' indicate its secondary role in the construction. In contrast, the crucial parts of the event are in continuous lines. The fact that the object is somehow affected is indicated by the squiggly arrow and the subject's performance, even more prominent than the object exploitation, is
7.1. Effected Objects and the Full Involvement Construction

Once the path of the subject’s performance is activated, the possibility of having effected objects is now available. We can see this as a pattern licensed by the full involvement construction: dancing or singing music is a way of bringing some artistic product into existence. No mention of this construction type is found in current literature. In fact, the narrow version of incorporative verbs will exclude effected objects since they cannot be manipulated or explored the way independent bounded objects can. However, effected objects presuppose a high degree of subject involvement in the event. This feature relates this construction type to full involvement constructions.

The degree of subject involvement can be tested from the fact that in this construction type the se middle marker is obligatory, as can be seen from the ungrammaticality of examples (56c) and (57b):

(56)  *Se echó una cena exquisita.
   a. ‘He made an exquisite dinner’
   b. ‘He gobbled up an exquisite dinner’
   c. ‘Echó una cena exquisita (with the focalized reading).’
   ‘He made an exquisite dinner’

(57)  a. Te aventuraste una fiesta sensorial y un buen puntacho.
   ‘You threw a great party/told a great joke’.
   b. *Aventuraste una fiesta sensorial y un buen puntacho.
   ‘You threw a great party/told a great joke’.

Another crucial feature of the construction is the requirement for the object to be of special significance in the event. While this requirement seems to be not stringent in the completive construction, in the full involvement construction with effected objects, it is compulsory. In (58b) the lack of an existent adjective makes the output ungrammatical:

(58)  a. Pancho Segovia se escribió una novela impresionante.
   ‘Pancho Segovia wrote an impressive novel.’
   b. *Pancho se escribió la novela.
   ‘Pancho wrote up/finished the novel.’

As opposed to the plain full involvement construction where the subject’s performance is more prominent than the exploitation of the object, in the full involvement construction with effected object the final properties of the object are as crucial as the subject’s action.

In Figure 11, both the arrow and the direct object circle are dark to highlight them in main figures in the event. Notice also that since the object is created in the event, the idea of incorporating an external object does not apply (circle=participant; big oval=subject’s domination; wide arrow=subject’s action; squiggly arrow=object change of state).

Figure 10. Bualarse

Figure 11. Echarse una cena exquisita
As in previous constructions, the function of the middle clitic se is to highlight or intensify by focalization the core properties of the verb. Being that the object of these transitive verbs is created by the subject’s accomplishment, it is expected that the focusing function of the clitic will be to highlight the verb’s core properties. Thus not only is the subject fully involved in the event but the output of his/her act must correspond to the high standards of his/her performance. The grammaticality of examples (56) to (58) attest to the validity of this analysis.

8. Conclusions

In this paper I have made the claim that the meanings to be found in nonreflexive se marked transitive constructions all correspond to the basic schema of the middle clitic se. As is the case for other middle constructions, the se marker has the basic function of focusing on the pivotal moment of change. In most cases the inductive forces that drive the event are downplayed or let the change itself be the most prominent figure in the event. Middle se marked transitive constructions differ from other reflexively marked cases in that the focusing function of the middle marker takes place without diminishing the prominence of other members in the construction. Since the se marker does not occupy an argument position, it does not reduce the transitivity of the event. On the contrary, the focusing function of the clitic compresses the event selecting its nuclear properties to give them special prominence. Consequently, the transitivity degree of the clause will be increased and the core meaning of the verb will be focalized. The high degree of transitivity is attested by the requirement of all middle transitive constructions to have bounded objects combined with verbs of high degree of subject involvement, telic verbs being the prototype.

Instead of having unrestricted polysemy attributed to the se marker, as it has been the case for many current approaches, I have claimed that the four meanings share the same basic focusing schema. The claim is thus extremely simple: if the verbs profile a benefactive reading by bringing the object into the subject’s dominion, the middle clitic se will make the construction a focalized benefactive one, of the type represented in Figure (12). If the verb not only brings in an object but also profiles some type of concrete or abstract consumption, then the se marker will allow for the exploitation to be maximal. This is shown in the diagonal circle representing the totally affected object in Figure (13). If the verb profiles the subject’s performance of an action related to some cognate object, then such performance will be focalized to have a maximal degree of subject involvement as is represented by the blackened arrow in Figure (14). Finally, if the verb designates the creation of an object, then the subject’s performance and the object itself will be most prominent.

Figure 12. Conseguir un trabajo
Figure 13. Leer una novela
Figure 14. Bailarse un tango
Figure 15. Echarse una cena exquisita

In the event se marking. Thus in Figure 15, both the arrow and the object are represented in boldface. I have also claimed that Ace’s notion of intransitive verbs should be reanalyzed with a se meaning. It is a requirement of the construction that the object be located in the subject’s dominion. The ways in which the object is located in that
dominion vary. In some cases it is already there although it is not always in an active manner (subertere, conociere); in others it is created by the subject’s action. Yet the prototype corresponds to cases in which the object is brought from a location outside the subject’s control. In this sense, the use of some primitive semantic feature like [GET] would represent adequately what these constructions have in common. Notice however that the specific meaning to be obtained does not come from the incorporative meaning of [GET] but from the focusing function of [SE] applied to the core properties of each verb group. What we have is a conceptual network with an incorporative requirement for the SE marker to exploit by focalization the core properties of the verb.

From the network, further common properties of these constructions can be understood. The fact that the object is in the subject’s dominion drives the presupposition that subject benefaction is central to this group of constructions. This is more obvious for emphatic benefactives, but it is also present in the subsequent constructions: an act of consumption developed to completion is also carried out for the benefit of the subject. In a similar manner, we prize ourselves for performing an action with great efficiency, in the full involvement construction ( Charging una cena equitativa), benefaction is a crucial invited inference. Another common property of middle marked transitive constructions can be understood from the previous network: given a wider interpretation, object exploitation is also present in all constructions. Not only eating up a cake but also singing a song and even creating an object with excellent manipulative maximality of the object. Whether created or brought into the subject’s dominion, the interaction with the object is taken to its upper limits. What we have is a schema of events with a high degree of interaction which becomes maximal with the focusing properties of the SE marker.

I have rejected the view that the SE clitic is a reflexive morpheme that “extends” to an aspectual marker, since completive is only one of the meanings to be obtained by a broader focusing function of middle markers in general. Completeness derives from the internal properties of the verb as they are profiled by the clitic, but the clitic itself preserves its basic structure. In this sense it is more adequate to talk about construction meaning as suggested by Goldberg (1995) than accepting a variety of meanings of the clitic which are more semantic extensions of a reflexive morpheme.

Evident though it is that we obtain an aspectual reading of completeness with verbs of consumption, it is not the case that SE becomes an aspectual marker as such. The clitic SE covers its thematic role in which the other features of the construction (consumption telic verb, bounded instantiated object, perfective aspect) determine the aspectual complete reading. The danger of accepting an aspectual SE marker as an extended category derived from the true reflexive marker only leads to the mistaken idea that there is a wild and chaotic polysemy governing the behavior of reflexive markers in general. From that perspective Locative SE, Benefactive Emphatic SE, Full Involvement SE, Effectuated Object SE, Completable SE should be incorporated to a list already too long of SE markers. That there is polysemy in reflexively marked constructions is clear, yet the meanings to be found across the languages of the world for middle markers consistently occupy the same semantic areas: routine actions, spontaneous events, inceptive changes, dynamic or abrupt motion changes, unplanned occurrences, focalized benefaction and completeness are the most common ones. Since these meanings are found over and over in a variety of unrelated languages, as can be attested in the major typological reflexive/middle studies in current literature (Faltz 1985; Klaiman 1991, among others), we must infer the presence of one (or very few) schematic representations that license the formation of a variety of related constructions. In this paper I have suggested that the focusing function of SE constitutes a major schema for middle constructions which, applied to different domains, designates different and yet related readings. The network thus developed gives a coherent pattern that speakers exploit to handle the variety of contexts that would otherwise be overwhelming in everyday communication.

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Notes

1 Considerations in effect for persons and number. The same set of pronouns is used for direct or indirect coreferential objects. As can be seen below, the SE marker covers most sines of the paradigm.

1st person singular

not first person plural

2nd person singular

2nd person plural (Spanish)

se all other

2 Work: A well known category between reflective (Se mira en el espejo) and impersonal se (No creo en los problemas de la Marche austriaca). The problem was corrected very carefully in the distinction between reflective and middle SE is crucial for the proper understanding of a complex of uses involving the use of the SE marker.

3 A fully developed analysis of parameters and other dynamic situations can be found in Maldonado (1991, 1993, 1999).
References


