

Week 2

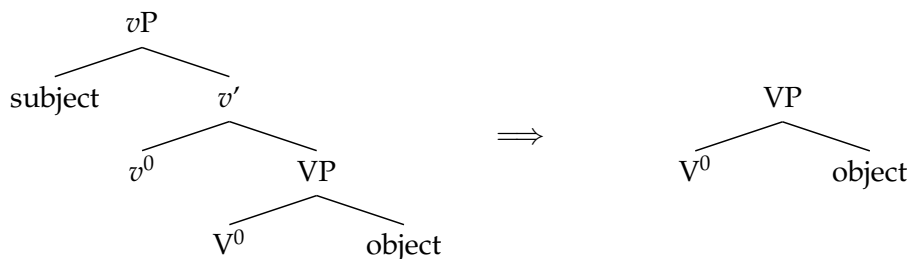
Passives and impersonals

April 27, 2009

1 Remembering last week

Last week we saw that passivization is an operation that removes the external argument of a verb. Since the external argument is merged in the specifier of vP , we can say that passivization is an operation that removes v^0 , creating a verb without an external argument.

(1) *A regular transitive verb gets passivized*



Since the constructions with *se* also appear to lack an external argument, it seems plausible to assume that *se* is part of an operation that also removes v^0 .

(2) *The reflexive passive*

Se leyeron los libros
SE read.3PL the books

(3) *The impersonal passive*

Se leyó los libros
SE read.3SG the books

Nonetheless, this cannot be the whole story. Passives have a residue of agentivity that allows the realization of the external argument through a *by*-phrase.

(4) *Possibility of a 'by'-phrase*

Los libros fueron leídos por los estudiantes
the books were read by the students

2 Further properties of the passive

Suppose, then, that a passive sentence contains a silent external argument. What type of argument is this? Clearly, it is different from regular unexpressed subjects on at least two properties.

- **Property #1:** A null subject can bind a reciprocal pronoun; a demoted subject cannot.

- (5) a. *pro* escribieron muchas cartas el uno al otro
they sent many letters to each other
b. * Muchas cartas fueron escritas el uno al otro *imp*
many letters were written to each other

- **Property #2:** A null subject can have a secondary predicate: a demoted subject cannot

- (6) a. *pro* leyó el periódico sentado
he read the newspaper sitting down
b. * El periódico fue leído *imp* sentado
the newspaper was read sitting down

A naïve solution: Assume a new type of null subject (*imp* instead of *pro*), and define it in such a way that it allows *by*-phrases and agent-oriented adverbs, but it cannot bind reciprocals or support secondary predication. Roberts (1987) does something like this. Obviously, this is only a restatement of the problem.

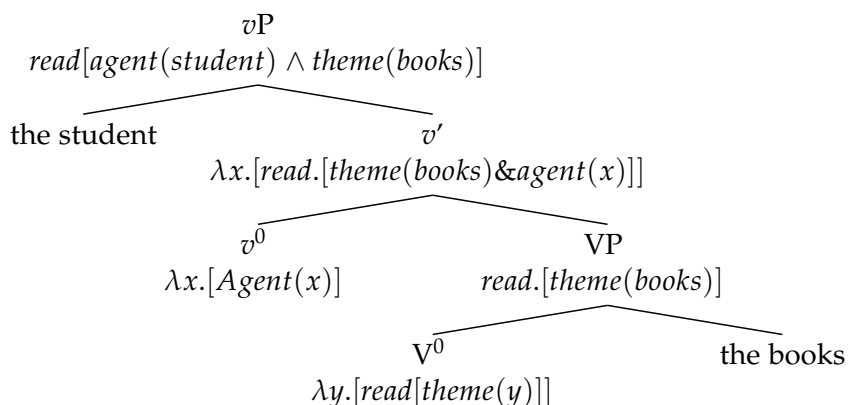
A better solution: Embick (1997) proposes that the external argument does not carry the notion of agentivity. The latter is contributed by v^0 , and the external argument is simply interpreted as an argument of an agentive predicate. Therefore, it is possible to remove the subject without removing agentivity.

Embick (1997): v^0 is a λ abstractor: it takes a non-agentive predicate (VP) and turns it into an agentive predicate that requires an extra argument to be merged in Spec v P. Formally:

$$(7) \quad \llbracket v^0 \rrbracket = \lambda x. [Agent(x)]$$

In a regular active clause, an external argument is merged in Spec v P, giving us this result.

- (8) *A structure for a transitive verb: active voice*



(15) *Reflexive*

- * Juan se cepilló los dientes por él
 Juan SE brushed his teeth by him

On the other hand, the behaviour wrt reciprocal binding and secondary predication is mixed: reflexive passives/middles and impersonals don't allow them, just like regular passives; on the other hand, reflexives do allow them.

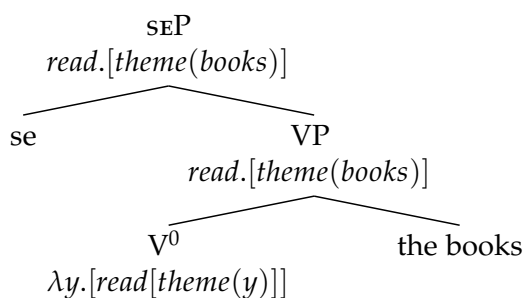
- (16) a. * Se escribieron muchas cartas el uno al otro
 SE wrote.3PL many letters to each other
 b. * Se escribieron muchas cartas sentados
 SE wrote.3PL many letters sitting down
- (17) a. * Se escribió muchas cartas el uno al otro
 SE wrote.3SG many letters to each other
 b. * Se escribió muchas cartas sentado
 SE wrote.3SG many letters sitting down
- (18) a. Juan y Pedro se cepillaron los dientes el uno al otro
 Juan and Pedro SE brushed the teeth to each other
 b. Juan y Pedro se cepillaron los dientes sentados
 Juan y Pedro se brushed the teeth sitting down

4 Summary

	PASSIVE	REFL. PASSIVE	IMPERSONAL	REFLEXIVE
Allows <i>by</i> -phrases	yes	no	no	no
Allows reciprocal binding	no	no	no	yes
Allows secondary predicates	no	no	no	yes

5 Analysis

In the reading assigned for this week, Juarros argues that *se* is merged in SpecvP and blocks merger of the external argument. This is possibly the case for reflexive passives and impersonals. For this to work, we have to say that *se* corresponds to an indefinite pronoun (*someone*).

(19) *A structure for reflexive passives and impersonals*

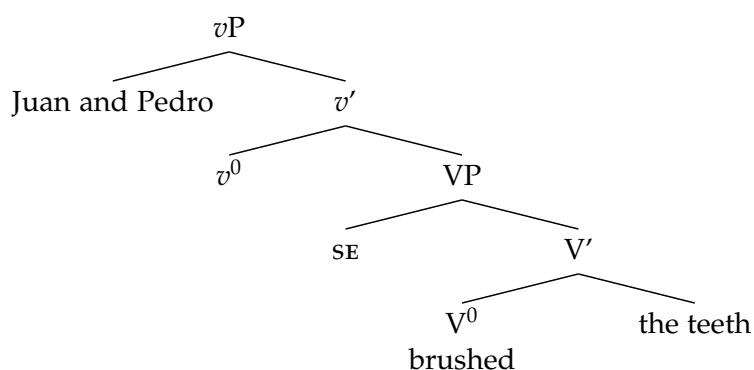
What can we do with this?

- Just as in regular passives, there is no external argument that can bind a reciprocal or support a secondary predicate.
- But, unlike in regular passives, there is not even an external argument position at which to attach a *by*-phrase.

Obviously, this means that the *se* we see in reflexives has to be a different *se* than the one we see in reflexive passives and impersonals.

- Sentences with reflexive *se* can bind reciprocals and support secondary predicates, which shows that they contain a regular external argument.
- *By*-phrases are impossible for the same reason they are also impossible in regular active sentences: the external argument is already expressed by regular means, therefore we cannot express it again through a *by*-phrase.

(20) *A structure for a reflexive verb*



Evidence for this analysis: reflexive *se* only occurs when the subject is third person. Otherwise, one gets *me/nos* (1st person, singular/plural) and *te/os* (2nd person, singular/plural).

- (21) a. Nosotros **nos** hemos cepillado los dientes
 we REFL have brushed our teeth
 b. Vosotros **os** habéis cepillado los dientes
 you REFL have brushed your teeth

In contrast, in reflexive passives and impersonals, we are stuck with *se*.

- (22) a. * Nos leyeron los libros
 SE read.3PL the books
 b. * Nos leyó los libros
 SE read.3SG the books

6 Summary #2

- In regular passives, the external argument position is left empty, but v^0 is still present.
- In reflexive passives and impersonals, *se* prevents the merger of v^0 altogether.
- In reflexives, *se* is an argument of the verb and it doesn't affect the merger of v^0 .

7 Agreement patterns

In passives and reflexive passives, the verb shows full agreement with the internal argument, whereas in impersonals, it shows default agreement.

(23) *Passive*

Los libros fueron leídos
the books were.3PL read

(24) *Reflexive passive/middle*

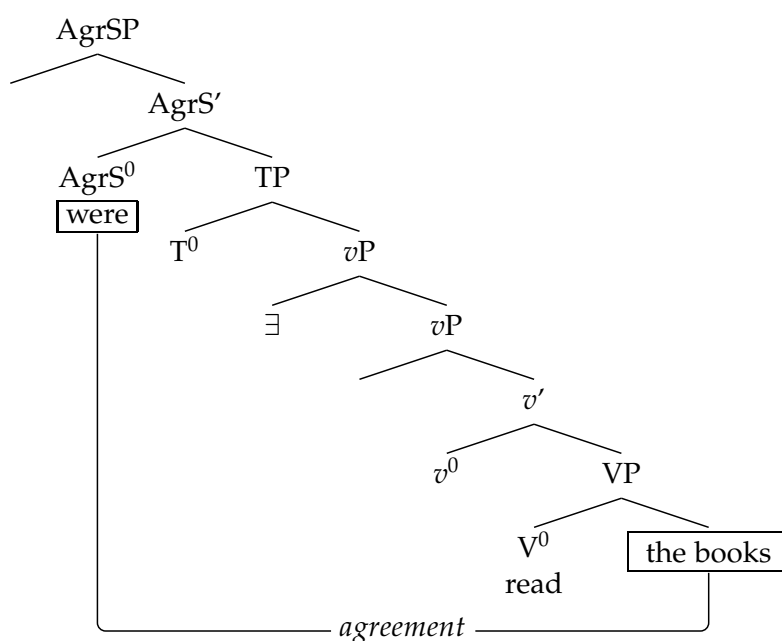
Se leyeron los libros
SE read.3PL the books

(25) *Impersonal*

Se leyó los libros
SE read.3SG the books

The analysis of passives is relatively straightforward: agreement is determined by AgrS⁰. Since there is no external argument to agree with, AgrS⁰ agrees with the internal argument (with a subsequent step of movement to SpecAgrSP).

(26) *Agreement in passives*



Note that, according to Juarros' assumptions, it must be the case that passive clauses do not have an AgrOP layer, which is responsible for (i) accusative case assignment; and (ii) positioning of direct object clitics. This explains why the internal argument of a passive cannot be cliticized.

(27) *Direct object cliticization*

a. Los libros, nosotros **los** hemos leído
the books we CL have read

- b. * Los libros, **los** han sido leídos
the books CL have been read

Why is there an agreement difference between reflexive passives and impersonals? In the paper we read, Juarros argues that this is because *se* can affect the feature structure of AgrS⁰ in various ways.

- In reflexive passives, *se* deletes the [person] feature of AgrS⁰ and eliminates the case feature of AgrOP. Therefore, the argument of the verb can only trigger number agreement (singular vs. plural), and there is no possibility of object cliticization.

(28) *Only person agreement in reflexive passives*

- a. Se necesitan muchos libros
SE need.3PL many books
- b. * Se necesitáis vosotros
SE need.2.PL you

(29) *No object cliticization in reflexive passives*

- * Se **los** necesitan
SE CL need.3PL

- In impersonals, *se* eliminates all agreement features from AgrS⁰, but keeps the case feature of AgrOP. This derives obligatory singular, 3rd person agreement, and allows for cliticization of the object argument.

(30) *Object cliticization in impersonals*

- Se **los** necesita
SE CL need.3SG

Reflexives are not an argument-structure-changing process, so we shouldn't expect anything to affect agreement. This is correct. Additionally, note that they also allow direct object cliticization, although not of the familiar kind: in this case, *se* is the object clitic fulfilling the same function as *los* in (30).

8 Final summary

- In passives,
 1. v^0 is retained, but the external argument position is left empty. The open variable is existentially closed by an \exists operator.
 2. AgrS⁰ retains all its features, but AgrO⁰ loses its case feature.
- In reflexive passives,
 1. *se* prevents the merger of v^0 and of an external argument.
 2. AgrS⁰ loses its [person] agreement feature, and AgrO⁰ loses its case feature.
- In impersonals,

1. *se* prevents the merger of v^0 and of an external argument.
 2. AgrS^0 loses its agreement features, but AgrO^0 keeps its case feature
- Reflexives are not an argument-structure-changing process, hence nothing comparable happens. The *se* that we see in reflexives is a regular internal argument of the verb, not a functional head that suppresses an argument.

Final table of properties of passives and constructions with *se*

	PASSIVE	REFL. PASSIVE	IMPERSONAL	REFLEXIVE
Allows <i>by</i> -phrases	yes	no	no	no
Allows reciprocal binding	no	no	no	yes
Allows secondary predicates	no	no	no	yes
Subject agreement	full	only number	none	full
Object cliticization	no	no	yes	yes (with <i>se</i>)