

Passivity and Impersonality of the Romance Reflexive Clause

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Sohn, Joong-Sun. 2000. Passivity and Impersonality of the Romance Reflexive clause. *Linguistics* 8-1, 333-352. Romance reflexive clauses with agentive verbs are examined for their passivity and impersonality. This is done in terms of ability to occur with agent-licensing expressions and the word order. Generally, Romance reflexive clauses with agentive verbs are considered impersonal. The subject-initial clause may render a passive reading to a certain extent. However, it is still best accepted with indefinite, i.e., impersonal, agent implied. The passivity test performed in this work is expected to shed light on the definition of the reflexive-passive/impersonal, and further, on the functional evolution of the Romance reflexive.

1. Introduction

Romance reflexive clauses with an agentive verb are called with several different names from one linguist to another: a passive, a impersonal, sometimes a passive-impersonal, etc. This calls for a lot of disputes in synchronic approaches. In diachronic point of view, however, this phenomenon is natural since that the original function of the Proto-Indo-European reflexive pronoun has extended for other uses over time, and this change is still on-going. Basically, passiveness and impersonalness of the Romance reflexive clause is a matter of degree. Thus, the distinction between passive and impersonal is often blurred, especially when the implied agent is non-referential (cf. Posner 1996).¹⁾

This paper examines reflexive clauses with an agentive verb in

modern Romance languages for their passivity and impersonality. I will show, via passivity tests, that Romance reflexive clauses in general can be considered impersonal. To put it in terms of functional evolution, Romance reflexives have not functionally extended to the full passive use yet.

I will use the term *SE*-clause or construction as a representative for Romance reflexive clauses, and the actual reflexive form is used for specific languages.

Passivity of the *SE*-construction will be tested in terms of three factors: agent-licensing expressions (purpose clause, agent-oriented adverbial, and agent phrase), the perfective structure with a temporal specification (but without a agent-licensing expression), and word order.

The occurrence of an agent-licensing expression in a subject-initial *SE*-clause will constitute direct evidence for possessing a certain amount of passivity, because it semantically guarantees presence of an agent and the reflexive verb must somehow license it, although whether the agent can be syntactically realized on the surface level or not is another matter.

The perfective structure with a temporal specification is employed to differentiate eventive resultative from passive. A clause is eventive resultative when it is in the perfective aspect (i.e., in the perfect or past tense) with a temporal specification, and cannot occur with agent-licensing expressions. In Romance languages, reflexive-passives tend not to occur with a perfective tense.²⁾

1) The passive-impersonal taxonomy becomes more questionable when inchoative verbs are involved. Thus, in the following Spanish clauses, (ia) usually gives an inchoative sense, while (ib) may give either an inchoative or a passive sense (Butt and Benjamin 1988:146)

- (i) a. Tres barcos se hundieron.
 'Three boats sank'
 b. Se hundieron tres barcos.
 'Three boats sank' or 'Three boats were sunk'

2) For similar tendencies in other Indo-European groups, see Sohn (1998).

It appears that the ability of a *SE*-clause to take agent-licensing expressions and to occur in the eventive resultative varies to some extent depending on the order of the subject and verb. Therefore, the subject-verb word order factor is included in the passivity test.

A clause with the subject-initial order '*NP SE-V(-SE)*' is often called a passive, and a clause with the verb-initial order '*SE-V(-SE) NP*', an impersonal. Since in both types the verb agrees with the NP and in this sense the NP keeps its subject status, this taxonomy is not free of disputes (non-agreeing clauses will be discussed in Section 3). Due to this fact, even native speakers' intuitions are often found to be unreliable in distinguishing the two interpretations. The passivity test that is performed in this section is expected to shed a light on the distinction between the passive and impersonal, and further, their relative status in the functional evolution of the Romance reflexive construction.

2. Subject-verb agreeing *SE*-clauses

2.1 Italian

In Italian, agent-oriented adverbials freely occur in the verb-initial *si*-clause, while they occur less freely in the subject-initial clauses. Purpose clauses are allowed in both orders. For some speakers, however, perfect tense forms result in slight oddness with both purpose clauses and agent-oriented adverbials, as in (1) and (2, 3) below, respectively. The second Italian speaker I consulted accepted the subject-initial clauses (2b, 3b) which the first speaker marked a '?'.
 (1) a. *Si bruciano/bruciavano/(?)sono bruciati i libri per distruggere l'evidenza.*
 b. *I libri se bruciano/bruciavano/(?)sono bruciati per distruggere l'evidenza.*
 'The books are/were burned to destroy the evidence'

- (2) a. Si bruciano/bruciavano/(?)sono bruciati i libri deliberadamente.
 b. ?I libri se bruciano/bruciavano/sono bruciati deliberadamente.
 'The books are/were burned deliberately'
- (3) a. Si maneggiano/maneggiavano/(?)sono maneggiate le macchine attentamente.
 b. ?Le macchine si maneggiano/maneggiavano/sono maneggiate attentamente.
 'The machines are/were handled carefully'

The *si*-clauses in (4, 5) with a temporal specification display a similar pattern as those with agent-oriented adverbials:

- (4) a. Si scriveva/è scritto il libro nel 1980.
 b. ?Il libro si scriveva/è scritto nel 1980.
 'The book was written in 1980'
- (5) a. Si costruiva/è costruito il ponte nel 1930.
 b. ?Il ponte si costruiva/è costruito nel 1930.
 'The bridge was built in 1930'

Sometimes, however, subject-initial clauses in the perfect tense like the following are found in the literature, although in my observation the majority of the perfective clauses with agentive verbs in the literature are verb-initial:

- (6) a. Il regalo si è comprato ieri.
 'The present was bought yesterday' (Burgio 1986:415)
 b. Molte battaglie si sono combattute invano.
 'Many battles were fought in vain' (Lepschy 1986:142)

The agent phrase is in principle not allowed in Italian. Sometimes *si*-clauses with agent phrases are found, but they are rare and considered unacceptable in ordinary speech (Lepschy 1986:142-3).

- (7) a. *Le finestre si rompono/sono rotte da Giovanni.
 'The windows are/were broken by John'
 b. *Il giornale si legge/è letto da molta gente.
 'The news paper is/was read by many people'

Compare these with those in (8) below which are found in the literature, especially (7b) above and (8a):

- (8) a. Questo giornale si legge ogni mattina da moltissimo gente.
 'This newspaper is read every morning by lots of people'
 (Lepschy and Lepschy 1988:222)
 b. Quest'opera si accoglie con entusiasmo da tutti.
 'This work is enthusiastically acclaimed by all'
 (Lepschy 1986:142; Lepschy and Lepschy 1988:224)

Notice that the agents here are an indefinite group of people. To anticipate, it appears that *SE*-constructions with agent phrases that are (marginally) accepted in Romance languages are mostly the cases in which the agent is an indefinite group of people. But still these agentive clauses are usually felt to be bookish at best in most modern Romance languages.

2.2 Spanish

In Spanish, the word order is relatively free, and in most cases it can be reversed. However, when the order is subject-initial, often there is no consensus with regard to acceptability of the occurrence of agent-licensing expressions. The clause in (9a), for example, is marginally acceptable to some speakers, and even the verb-initial (9b) is not completely acceptable, although better than the subject-initial (9a):

- (9) a. (??)Los libros se queman/quemaron deliberadamente.

b. (?)Se queman/quemaron los libros deliberadamente.

'The books are being/were burned deliberately'

In (10a) the present tense form is best accepted with an instructional reading, otherwise it may be less acceptable. The verb-initial counterpart is acceptable in both present and past tense.

(10) a. Las máquinas se manejan/(?)manejaron cuidadosamente.

b. Se manejan/manejaron las máquinas cuidadosamente.

'The machines are (should be)/were handled carefully'

Purpose clauses are less acceptable with the subject-initial form than with the verb-initial form (the grammatical judgements here are from a Mexican Spanish speaker. The Castilian Spanish speaker I consulted judged the subject-initial forms as almost bad, and the verb-initial forms as better but still odd, marking one '?'):

(11) a. ?Los libros se quemaron para destruir la evidencia.

b. Se quemaron los libros para destruir la evidencia.

'The books were burned to destroy the evidence'

(12) a. ?Las puertas se abrieron para dejar entrar el aire.

b. Se abrieron las puertas para dejar entrar el aire.

'The doors were opened to let the air come in'

Notice, however, that agent-licensing expressions are accepted only when the *se* is interpreted as impersonal. That is, the implied agent must be non-specific. They are not accepted when the *se* is interpreted as a passive marking, which implies a specific agent, as in (13). When Siewierska (1984) pointed out that Spanish *se*-construction cannot take agent-oriented adverbials like *deliberadamente* 'deliberately', presumably she was assuming the passive use of the construction.

(13) *Los libros se vendían deliberadamente a cien pesetas.

'The books were sold deliberately at 100 ptas.'

Both the subject-initial and verb-initial form are allowed in the perfective aspect with a temporal specification in Spanish. But the clauses in this context are best accepted with non-specific agents implied. In (14a) below, for example, the agent is normally taken as a single author, and thus the clause presumably has a more passive-like meaning, rather than an impersonal meaning. For this reason, (14a) is not completely acceptable to some speakers. In (14b), building a bridge is supposed to involve a number of non-specific workers, and in that sense an impersonal interpretation is possible. The clause in (14c) will be best accepted with non-specific agents implied, i.e., with an impersonal interpretation, rather than with specific agents, i.e., with a passive interpretation:

(14) a. (?)El libro se escribió en 1980.

'The book was written in 1980'

b. El puente se construyó en 1930.

'The bridge was built in 1930'

c. Estas pinturas se pintaron hace 300 años.

'The pictures were painted 300 years ago'

The agent phrase is prohibited in principle, but are found in a few bookish examples. The clauses in (15a,b) are simply unacceptable. The one in (15c) sounds more natural with an instructional reading rather than with an actional or eventive reading. The clause in (15d) is bookish.

(15) a. *Las ventanas se rompieron por Juan.

'The windows were broken by John'

b. *Las casas se venden por el dueño.

'The houses are sold by the owner'

- c. Estos libros se leen por los maestros, no por los estudiantes.
'These books are supposed to be read by teachers, not by students'
- d. ?El periódico se lee todas las mañanas por mucha gente.
'The newspaper is read every morning by a lot of people'

As pointed above, the non-specificity of the agents contributes to the (marginal) acceptability of (15d).

2.3 Portuguese

Both purpose clauses (16) and agent-oriented adverbials (17, 18) are allowed in the verb-initial *se*-construction, but neither one is usually allowed in the subject-initial form:

- (16) a. Queimaram-se os livros para destruir a evidência.
b. ??Os livros queimaram-se para destruir a evidência.
'The books were burned to destroy the evidence'
- (17) a. Queimaram-se os livros de propósito.
b. ??Os livros queimaram-se de propósito.
'The books were burned deliberately'
- (18) a. Manipularam-se as máquinas cuidadosamente.
b. ??As máquinas manipularam-se cuidadosamente.
'The machines were handled carefully'

The case is the same for the clauses in the perfective aspect with a temporal specification (19, 20). Thus, the verb-initial form but not the subject-initial form is allowed in this context:

- (19) a. Construiu-se a ponte em 1930.
b. ??A ponte construiu-se em 1930.
'The bridge was built in 1930'
- (20) a. Pintaram-se estes quadros 300 anos atrás.

- b. ??Estes quadros pintaram-se 300 anos atrás.
 'The pictures were painted 300 years ago'

In modern Portuguese, agent phrases are quite strictly prohibited in the *se*-construction in any contexts:

- (21) a. *As janelas quebraram-se por João.
 'The windows were broken by John'
 b. *Os jornais lêem-se a cada manhã por muitas pessoas.
 'The newspaper is read every morning by a lot of people'

2.4 Romanian

In Romanian, *se*-constructions usually do not occur with purpose clauses and agent-oriented adverbials. The case is the same for *se*-clauses with an eventive resultative reading. For these situations periphrastic passive forms are normally used. However, acceptability of a *se*-clause can be more or less improved when the implied agent is a non-specific plural. Thus, the clause in (22b) is better accepted than (22a) because in the former the bridge is normally supposed to be built by a non-specific group of people, but in the latter the agent is supposed to be perceived as a single person.

- (22) a. ?*S-a scris cartea în 1930.
 'The book was written in 1930'
 b. S-a construit podul în 1960.
 'The bridge was built in 1960'
 c. Podul s-a construit în 1960.
 'The bridge was built in 1960'

Notice that when a subject-initial form with an agentive verb is employed, the subject NP is usually rather strongly emphasized (22c). In neutral contexts, the verb-initial form is more natural (Manoliu-Manea

1994:97-8).

Manoliu-Manea (1994:102-3) advances the specificity of the agent to account the pattern in the following examples (23), which is similar to those in (22). She points out that reflexive-passives like (23a) are well accepted when the verb refers to non-specific agents, whereas their acceptability decreases when the verb refers to an action normally made by specific agents as in (23b,c):

- (23) a. Casa asta s-a construit acum 100 de ani.
 'This house was built 100 years ago'
 b. ??Cartea aceasta s-a scris acum 100 de ani.
 'This book was written 100 years ago'
 c. ?Tabloul acesta s-a pictat acum 100 de ani.³⁾
 'This painting was painted 100 years ago'

Subject-initial *se*-clauses with a facility adverbial are common but they sound most natural in contrastive contexts. Notice in the following clauses that all the subjects are given in a contrastive fashion (all from Manoliu-Manea 1994:106):

- (24) a. Mașina aceasta se conduce ușor.
 'This car drives easily'
 b. Casele de acest fel nu se vând.
 'Houses like this do not sell'
 c. Icoanele acestea nu se pictează ușor.
 'These icons are not easy to paint'
 d. Vinul roșu se bea la temperatura camerei.
 'Red wine is drunk at room temperature'

Purpose clauses are usually not allowed in Romanian:

3) According to the native speaker I consulted, the clause (23c) is as bad as (23b).

- (25) a. ??Se deschide uşa ca să lase clienţi înăuntru.
 'The door is opened to let the customers come in'
 b. ??Uşa se deschide ca să lase clienţi înăuntru.
 c. ?*S-au ars cărţile pentru a distruge dovezile.
 'The books were burned to destroy the evidence'

A feeling of something missing at the beginning of the clause adds oddity to (25a).⁴⁾ The clause in (25b) would sound more natural in an instructional reading, or with a strong emphasis on the subject. In a neutral event reading this clause becomes odd because of the reflexive sense it emits. Contextually (25c) is apt to be interpreted as involving a specific agent which is counter-impersonal.

Generally, clauses with agent-oriented adverbials are badly received. The subject-initial form in (26b) may be acceptable if the subject is very strongly contrasted. If not, it is bad.

- (26) a. ?*S-au ars cărţile în mod deliberat.
 b. ??Cărţile s-au ars în mod deliberat.
 'The books were burned deliberately'
 c. ?*Se conduc maşinile cu grijă.
 'The cars are driven carefully'

The following clauses without agent-oriented adverbials are acceptable in any tense (present/imperfect/perfect). The interpretation is more impersonal than passive:

- (27) a. Se cheltuie/cheltuiiau/s-au cheltuit mulţi aici.
 'One spends/used to spend/spent much money here'

4) When a clause began with the clitic *se*, the Romanian speaker I consulted often felt something was missing at the beginning of the clause. This may be related to the Second Position constraint on clitics ('after first accented word') which is commonly found in Slavic languages to which Romanian is adjacent, as well as in other languages that have Wackernagle's Law phenomena.

- b. Se vorbește/vorbea/s-a vorbit engleză aici.
'One speaks/used to speak/spoke English here'
- c. Se bea/bea/s-a băut mult whisky aici.
'One drinks/used to drink/drank much whisky here'

The agent phrase is normally prohibited in Romanian:

- (28) a. *Ușa se deschide de Ion.
'The door is opened by John'
- b. *Ferestrele s-au spart de Ion.
'The windows were broken by John'

As in other Romance languages, *se*-clauses with agent phrases are found sometimes. Again, in this case, the agent tends to be non-specific plural. In addition, notice that the acceptable clause (29a) does not denote an action, but a property of the subject. Thus it reads that the book is such a kind as supposed to be read by professors, not by students. The contrastive reading of the clause also contributes to its acceptability (for a similar view, see Manoliu-Manea 1994:107).

- (29) a. Cartea aceasta se citește de profesori, nu de studenți.
'This book is to be read by professors, not by students'
(Manoliu-Manea 1994:107)
- b. ?*Ușa se deschide de doi polițiști.
'The door is opened by two policemen'

(Ibid.:92)⁵⁾

5) There is disagreement among native speakers with the following agentive *se*-clause which has a specific agent. Thus, Manoliu-Manea gives it as acceptable (but may not be perfect, though), but the native speaker I consulted showed a strong objection to it:

- (i) Casa se vinde de proprietar.
'The house is sold by the owner'

The clause in (29b), which has a specific number of agents and is more action-oriented, is unacceptable. Manoliu-Manea (1994:91) claims that with accomplishment verbs the periphrastic passive is preferred in Romanian. The clause in (29b) is less acceptable because the verb is an accomplishment verb which refers to an event with an end point, i.e., a telic event.

2.5 French

Unlike other Romance languages, there are no subject-verb order alternations in the French *se*-construction. The passivity of the construction thus can be discussed only on the basis of the subject-initial form which is the norm in French.

Both purpose clauses (30) and agent-oriented adverbials (31) are allowed in the *se*-construction. As mentioned above, however, they are allowed only in the non-perfect tenses: the present and imperfect.

- (30) a. Une usine, ça se brûle/brûlait/[^]s'est brûlée pour toucher l'assurance.
'A factory is/used to be/was burned to collect the insurance'
(Wehrli 1986:267; imperfect and perfect forms added - JS)
- b. Les portes s'ouvrent/s'ouvraient/[^]se sont ouvertes pour laisser entrer les clientes.
'The doors are/used to be/were opened to let the customers come in'

If *de către* 'from the direction of' instead of the short *de* 'by' is used, acceptability of the clause becomes uncontroversial:

- (ii) Casa se vinde de către proprietar.

Another example comes from Șerban (1970:241) quoting a Sadoveanu's poem:

- (iii) Întocmindu-se de către oameni pricepuți, planul va reuși.
'Being prepared by the skilful men, the plan will succeed'

- (31) a. Les livres se brûlent/brûlaient/*se sont brûlé délibérément.
 'The books are/used to be/were burned deliberately'
 b. Les voitures se conduisent/conduisaient/*se sont conduites
 prudemment.
 'The cars are/used to be/were driven carefully'

The *se*-clause with an agentive verb structure (32) is not allowed in the perfective structure, either:

- (32) a. *Le pont s'est construit en 1930.
 'The bridge was built in 1930'
 b. *Le poisson s'est cuit.
 'The fish was cooked'
 c. *Le verre s'est mis sur la table.⁶⁾
 'The glass was put on the table'

The agent phrase is rather strictly prohibited in the French *se*-construction (Donaldson 1973:75-6):

- (33) a. *La fenêtre s'est cassée par Jean.
 'The window was broken by John'
 b. *Les cartes se battaient par le donneur.
 'The cards were shuffled by the dealer'

3. Intransitive and non-agreeing transitive impersonals

Relatively clear cases of the impersonal *se*-construction are those derived from intransitive verbs and those in which the subject and the

6) The native French speaker I consulted showed an objection to the following clause which was quoted by Dobrovie-Sorin (1994:168) as acceptable:

- (i) Cette question s'est discutée hier.
 'This question was discussed yesterday'

verb do not agree. Intransitive reflexive clauses are illustrated by the following:

- (34) a. Si dorme bene a questa temperatura. (Italian)
 b. Se duerme bien en esta temperatura. (Spanish)
 c. Dorme-se bem nesta temperatura. (Portuguese)
 d. Se doarme bine la aceast temperatur. (Romanian)
 'One sleeps well in this temperature'

While intransitive *se*-impersonals are standardized in all Romance languages (except French), non-agreeing transitive impersonals have not been completely standardized in most Romance languages. They are, however, common in the colloquial speech forms.⁷⁾

- (35) a. Si compra due penne. (Italian)
 'One buys two pens' (Lepschy 1986:146)
 b. Se alquila los apartamentos. (Spanish)
 'One rents the apartments' (Otero 1972:237)
 c. Matou-se os escravos. (Portuguese)
 'One killed the slaves' (Azevedo 1980:73)
 d. Se citete multe cari azi (Romanian)
 'One reads many books these days'

Non-agreeing forms are less common in Romanian than in others, and are often considered slovenly. In Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, they are very common and it is often pointed out that only prescriptive purists condemn the use of them. Otero (1972, 1973), for instance, claims that in Spanish the non-agreeing form is grammatical, and the agreeing form is 'agrammatical', acceptable but ungrammatical.⁸⁾

7) The non-agreeing form of the impersonal is allegedly not allowed in Sardinian (Jones 1993) and Catalan (Hualde 1992), which are also varieties of the Romance language.

Notice, however, that when the subject NP occupies the pre-verbal position, the verb must agree with the subject. If not, the clause is unacceptable.

- (36) a. *Due penne si compra. (Italian)
 'One buys two pens'
 b. *Los apartamentos se alquila. (Spanish)
 'One rents the apartments'
 c. *Os escravos matou-se. (Portuguese)
 'One killed the slaves'
 d. *Multe cari se citete atunci. (Romanian)
 'One reads many books these days'

The ungrammaticality of these clauses is not brought about by the fact that agent-taking verbs like these prefer the subject NP to occur post-verbally. The same ungrammaticality is produced by inchoative verbs, which are free of the word order constraint:

- (37) a. *Le porte si e apre. (Italian)
 b. *Las puertas se abre. (Spanish)
 c. *As portas se abre. (Portuguese)
 d. *Uile se deschide. (Romanian)
 'One opens the doors' (or, 'The doors are opened')

In this respect, at least, the word order and agreement is not a purely stylistic variation in Romance languages.

8) As a matter of fact, by 'ungrammatical', Otero means the impossibility of the generation of the relevant construction through the Transformational Grammar. For debates about this grammaticality issue, see Contreras (1973) and Westphal (1979, 1982), who criticizes Otero. The point here is that in Spanish the non-agreeing *se*-impersonal is widespread in speech enough to be a serious issue in any modern grammar. The case is the same in Italian and Portuguese.

Unlike other Romance languages, French has not developed intransitive *se*-impersonals at all. It has transitive *se*-impersonals but they are different from those in other Romance languages, in that the expletive pronominal *il* is employed for the subject position in these clauses, which is a Germanic influence:

- (38) a. Il se trouve que nous sommes né(e) dans la même ville.
 'We happen to have been born in the same city'
 (lit. 'One finds that...') (Lang and Perez 1996:135)
- b. Il se pense plus de choses qu'il ne s'en dit.
 'One thinks more than one says' (Posner 1996:269)

These *il-se*-impersonals form a contrast to subject-initial *se*-clauses with agent-licensing phrases (see 30-31 above). By this contrast with the *il-se*-impersonal as well as the prohibition of the subject-verb inversion that is allowed in other Romance languages, passivity of the subject-initial *se*-clauses with agent-licensing phrases in French becomes more conspicuous, although they do not allow syntactic realization of the agent, and the implied agent is indefinite.

4. Conclusion

We have seen that in many Romance languages a subject-initial *SE*-clause tends to be more limited in occurrence with agent-licensing expressions than does a verb-initial *SE*-clause. This word order factor, however, is not crucial for distinguishing the passive and impersonal, since it only represents a tendency. The *SE*-constructions (e.g., in Spanish) that do not conform to this tendency seem to raise problems for the notion that the subject-initial *SE*-clause and verb-initial *SE*-clause must represent the passive and impersonal, respectively.

However, when the word order factor combines with other factors such as the ability to take agent-licensing expressions, and the evolutionary patterns of the *SE*-construction, the resolution of the

SE-construction into a passive or an impersonal becomes less controversial. Specifically, it turns out to be reasonable to claim that the verb-initial *SE*-construction is impersonal-oriented, whereas the subject-initial *SE*-construction is more or less passive-oriented. By 'more or less passive-oriented' here, it is intended that the subject-initial clause still involves a certain portion of impersonalness; to put it more specifically, it does not imply a specific agent, but implies an indefinite agent.

Table 1 below summarizes the passivity tests of the Romance *SE*-construction discussed so far.

Table 1. Ability for *SE*-construction to take agent-licensing expressions

	French	Italian	Romanian	Spanish	Portuguese
Purp clause	Y	Y/Y	N/N	N/Y	N/Y
AgO-Adv	Y	N/Y	N/N	N/Y	N/Y
Agent phrase	N	N/N	N/N	N/N	N/N
Perf-Temp	N	N/Y	N/N	Y/Y	N/Y

Subject-initial/Verb-initial clause (only applicable to subject-initial in French); Y=Able to take or occur with it; N=Unable to take or occur with it; Purp clause=Purpose clause; AgO-Adv=Agent-oriented adverbial; Perf-Temp=Perfective with a temporal specification.

There are two more reasons to prefer the term 'impersonal' for the verb-initial form in Romance languages, one synchronic and one diachronic. First, this form is much less able to take agent phrases than the subject-initial form in all the Romance languages. Diachronically, two clearly-defined impersonal *SE*-constructions have been developing: *SE*-constructions derived from intransitive verbs, and transitive *SE*-constructions in which the subject and the verb do not agree. These impersonal constructions have been commonly used over time. Whereas, there is none among the Romance languages that have developed the subject-initial form for the full-fledged passive use (see Sohn 1998 for details of the functional evolution of the reflexive in Romance and other Indo-European languages).

Finally, an explanation is in order regarding the tendency for *SE*-clauses to occur in the imperfect aspect, which we have seen above. The notion of impersonalness involved in such reflexive clauses account for this tendency. A clause denoting a completed event (i.e., a telic event) tends by nature to imply a specific agent. Whereas, a clause describing an incomplete, habitual or iterative event, i.e., an atelic event, more often does not imply a specific agent but rather a non-specific one (cf. *The door was opened* vs. *The door is opened with this key*; *One argued that...* vs. *One might argue that...*). That is, impersonal agents tend to call for a clause in the imperfective aspect.

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