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## Grammatical encoding of agency in Asturian middle constructions

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Middle-passive constructions in Asturian –a Romance language spoken in the diglossic region of Asturias, in northern Spain– appear to optionally allow the occurrence of the reflexive pronoun *se* in them (*esti pan esmigáya(se) fácil*; ‘this bread crumbles easily’); this has been traditionally considered a pleonastic use of the reflexive due to the influence of Spanish, i.e. the dominant language in the territory (ALLA 2001). Here, I claim that the presence of such pronoun is not optional; instead, I argue that this clitic spells out a passive Voice head encoding the participation of an implicit generic agent/experiencer in the event, giving rise to a generic *se*-passive configuration. The *se*-less counterpart, on the contrary, is only possible with unaccusative verbs and those undergoing the causative alternation, thus resulting in a generic inchoative configuration. Among the evidence I present supporting this claim is the fact that only the reflexive variant can control into a purpose clause, but it does not license the insertion of the PP *por sí mesmu* (‘by itself’); this is quite the opposite of what happens with the *se*-less counterpart. Additionally, I explain that the presence/absence of the reflexive in middle contexts in Asturian and Asturian Spanish may be subject to crosslinguistic influence; therefore, several cases of linguistic transfer between Asturian and Asturian Spanish are teased apart and discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I focus on Asturian middle-passive constructions,<sup>1</sup> i.e. generic predicates denoting intrinsic properties of their notional object, syntactically realized as their grammatical subject (Ackema & Schoorlemmer 2006, *inter alia*). Specifically, I discuss the apparent optionality of the reflexive pronoun *se* in these sentences (1a), which is otherwise obligatory in other Ibero-Romance languages such as Spanish (1b) or Catalan (1c).

(1) *Asturian (GLLA 2001: 355)*

- a. Les fueyes mueyen(se) col orbayu.  
 the leaves wet.REFL with.the light rain  
 ‘Leaves get wet/are wetted with the light rain.’

*Spanish*

- b. Las hojas \*(se) mojan con la lluvia ligera.  
 the leaves REFL wet with the rain light  
 ‘Leaves get wet/are wetted with the light rain.’

*Catalan*

- c. Les fulles \*(es) mullen amb la pluja lleugera.  
 the leaves REFL wet with the rain light  
 ‘Leaves get wet/are wetted with the light rain.’

The *GLLA* provides a heterogeneous description of structures that can convey the middle reading, and whose classification criterion is whether the reflexive pronoun is required or not. Specifically, when referring to reflexively marked passives –and consequently middle-passive constructions like (1a)– the Academy explains that these are intransitive constructions in which “*un pronome se vien a torgar la posibilidá d’apaecer del complementu direutu; esi pronome ta, entós, en llugar del complementu direutu*” (ALLA 2001: 353) [‘a *se* pronoun thwarts the possibility of the direct object to appear; therefore, such pronoun occurs instead of the direct object;’ translation by the author]. Moreover, the *GLLA* points out that in these structures “*ye frecuente que l’usu del pronome reflexivu resulte potestativu*” (ALLA 2001: 355) [‘the use of the reflexive pronoun is frequently optional;’ translation by the author]. However, upon closer examination, it is easy to demonstrate that

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<sup>1</sup> Asturian is a Romance language spoken in the diglossic Principality of Asturias, in northern Spain, as well as in certain areas of the neighboring regions. Although Spanish remains the dominant language, the *Academia de la Llingua Asturiana* (‘Academy of the Asturian Language’) –ALLA, hereafter– has made laudable efforts in the last few decades to standardize and normalize Asturian, resulting in remarkable works such as the *Diccionariu de la llingua asturiana* (‘Dictionary of the Asturian Language’) (ALLA 2000), the *Gramática de la llingua asturiana* (‘Grammar of the Asturian Language’) (ALLA 2001) –henceforth *GLLA*–, or the *Diccionariu etimolóxicu de la llingua asturiana* (‘Etymological Dictionary of the Asturian Language’) (García Arias 2018). Consequently, scholars around the globe have been conducting research on the idiosyncrasies of the language, producing numerous analyses across the different linguistic and philological disciplines.

such optionality does not apply across the board. For instance, when these contexts contain verbs denoting an activity or accomplishment that notionally require the participation of an agent/experiencer in the event (e.g. *lleer*, ‘to read’), Asturian patterns with other Romance languages and the reflexive becomes compulsory, as shown in (2):

(2) *Asturian*

- a. Les noveles de misteriu lléen\*(se) con facilidá.  
 the novels of mystery read-REFL with easiness  
 ‘Mystery novels read easily.’

*Spanish*

- b. Las novelas de misterio \*(se) leen con facilidad.  
 the novels of mystery REFL read with easiness  
 ‘Mystery novels read easily.’

Here, I will argue that the presence of the reflexive clitic in sentences like (1a) is not optional; instead, I link it to the interpretation of an implicit generic agent in the event, which can be rephrased as *anyone* (e.g. *anyone can read mystery novels easily*, cf. (2)). I propose that *se* spells out a passive Voice projection in the structure (Marantz 1984; Kratzer 1996; Schäfer 2008; Suárez-Palma 2019; 2020) which contributes to the agentive reading, giving rise to a generic *se*-passive (3a). Moreover, I provide evidence showing that the *se*-less counterpart in Asturian is in fact non-agentive because they lack Voice; in other words, this variant is a generic inchoative/ anticausative configuration (3b).

(3) a. *Generic se-passive*

Les fueyes muéyense col orbayu.  
 $[_{\text{VoiceP}} \textit{se} [_{\text{VP}} \nu [_{\text{VP}} \textit{moyar} [_{\text{DP}} \textit{les fueyes}]]]]]$

b. *Generic inchoative*

Les fueyes mueyen col orbayu.  
 $[_{\text{VP}} \nu [_{\text{VP}} \textit{moyar} [_{\text{DP}} \textit{les fueyes}]]]$

Lastly, I explain that this phenomenon is subject to crosslinguistic influence. On the one hand, it is possible to find speakers who accept non-agentive middle contexts containing the reflexive clitic; I argue that this is due to the influence of Spanish, the dominant language in the region, which shows the presence of *se* in passive and numerous inchoative contexts.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, I present real instances of *se*-less non-agentive middle sentences in Asturian Spanish (AsturSp);

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<sup>2</sup> Not all inchoative contexts in Spanish require the reflexive clitic (e.g. *reventó el neumático*, ‘the tire burst’; *hirvió el agua*, ‘the water boiled’); I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out. See Vivanco Gefaell (2016) for an analysis of *se*-less sentences that denote a change of state as complex configurations comprising a resulting state.

this demonstrates that Asturian, in spite of being the minority language, has also exerted its influence over AsturSp, differentiating it from other dialects of Spanish.

The paper is structured as follows: in Section 2, I delve into the data and the analysis; specifically, §2.1 examines data from agentive and non-agentive Asturian middle sentences incorporating purpose clauses, and §2.2 discusses more evidence stemming from the interaction between these structures with dative arguments; §2.3 deals with middle contexts containing unaccusative verbs of movement, and §2.4 tackles crosslinguistic transfer between Asturian and Asturian Spanish. Finally, Section 3 provides the concluding remarks.

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1. Voice in Asturian middle-passives

A careful observation of data from middle-passives in Asturian reveals that the optionality of the reflexive clitic *se* in them is evident in contexts where a verb denoting a change of state or location occurs in them. These verbs may convey both an agentive and a non-agentive reading, as shown in the two possible English translations of the examples in (4); in other words, these verbs participate in the causative alternation (Schäfer 2009, *inter alia*).

- (4) a. Esi pan esmigáya(se) fácil nes manes.  
 that bread crumbles.REFL easy in-the.PL hands  
 Non-agentive: ‘That bread crumbles in your hands easily.’  
 Agentive: ‘That bread is easy to crumble in one’s hands.’
- b. Los barcos de papel fúnden(se) rápido.  
 the boats of paper sink.REFL fast  
 Non-agentive: ‘Paper boats sink quickly.’  
 Agentive: ‘Paper boats are quick to sink.’
- c. Esti material ruémpe(se) fácil.  
 this material breaks.REFL easy  
 Non-agentive: ‘This material breaks easily.’  
 Agentive: ‘This material is easy to break.’

The non-agentive reading in these sentences can be enhanced by means of the insertion of a PP like *por sí mesmu* (‘by itself’), which can only be licensed in non-agentive contexts. Interestingly, for most speakers,<sup>3</sup> the presence of such PP necessarily requires the omission of the reflexive pronoun.

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<sup>3</sup> The lack of unanimous consensus with respect to the presence/absence of the reflexive in inchoative contexts is discussed in Section 2.4.

- (5) Esti pan esmigaya(\*?se) fácil por sí mesmu.  
 this bread crumbles.REFL easy by itself  
 ‘This bread crumbles easily by itself.’

On the other hand, the implicitly encoded generic agent in the agentive interpretation makes it possible for these structures to control into a purpose clause (6), which has been traditionally taken as evidence for the presence of implicit arguments in passives (cf. Bhatt & Pancheva 2006). Crucially, in that case, the reflexive pronoun must be present.

- (6) Esti pan esmigáya\*(se) fácil pa empanar cachopos.<sup>4</sup>  
 this bread crumbles.REFL easy for bread cachopos  
 ‘This bread is easy to crumble in order to make *cachopos*.’

Furthermore, when Asturian middle-passive sentences contain predicates expressing activities or accomplishments, i.e. events notionally requiring the participation of an agent or experiencer, the omission of the reflexive becomes ungrammatical (7); besides, these verbs only allow an agentive interpretation, which prevents them from licensing the PP *por sí mesmu* (‘by itself’) in these contexts, yet they admit a purpose clause.

- (7) a. Los poemas d’amor escriben\*(se) fácil (\*por sí mesmos) / pa namorar a  
 the poems of-love write.REFL fast by themselves.M for charm to  
 daquien.  
 someone  
 ‘Love poems are easy to write in order to win someone’s heart.’
- b. Les noveles de misteriu lléen\*(se) con facilidá (\*por sí mesmes) / pa  
 the novels of mystery read.REFL with ease by themselves.F for  
 entretenese.  
 entertain.REFL  
 ‘Mystery novels read easily in order to kill time.’
- c. El cascu históricu d’Avilés percuérre\*(se) fácil (\*por sí mesmu) / pa  
 the quarter historic of-Avilés go-through.REFL easy by itself.M for  
 conocer la so hectoria.  
 know the its history  
 ‘Avilés’ historic quarter is easy to visit in order to learn about its history.’

Considering the data above, it seems appropriate to tie the presence of *se* in Asturian middle-passives to the interpretation of a generic agent participating in the event. In structural terms,

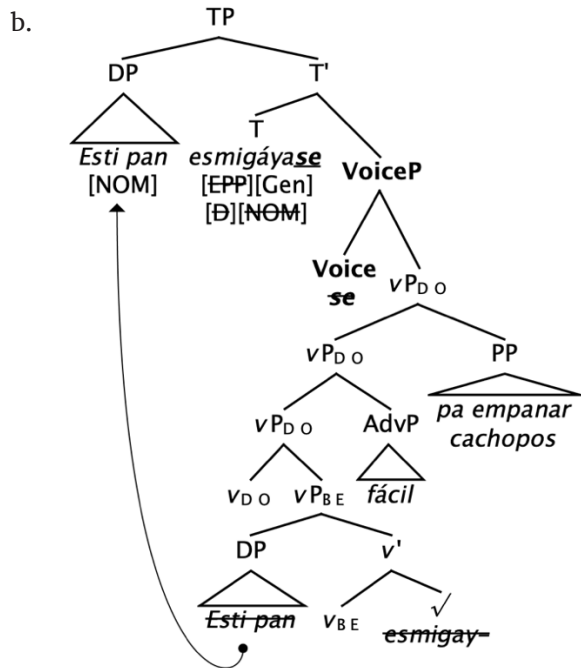
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<sup>4</sup> *Cachopos* are a traditional Asturian dish consisting of two large, breaded beef steaks usually stuffed with Serrano ham and cheese; heavy, yet undoubtedly tasty!

this can be accounted for by arguing that only the agentive version of middle sentences projects a Voice head which would normally introduce an external argument, yet it is passivized and spelled out by the reflexive clitic pronoun *se* in Asturian (Schäfer 2008; Suárez-Palma 2019; 2020; 2021). This configuration is indeed a generic *se*-passive construction.

The analysis presented here relies on Cuervo's (2003) typology of verbalizing heads; this linguist proposes three different types of event introducers/verbalizing heads, each corresponding to a simple eventive structure. Thus, activities (e.g. *lleer*, 'to read') are verbalized by  $v_{DO}$ ; verbs of change or happening (e.g. *asoceder*, 'to happen') by  $v_{GO}$ ; and finally, states and existentials (e.g. *tar cansáu*, 'to be tired') by  $v_{BE}$ . Moreover, these events may combine with each other giving rise to complex structures such as causatives (e.g. *Florinda quemó les fabes*, 'Florinda burnt the beans'), through the combination of an activity verbalizing head and stative one denoting the resulting state ( $v_{DO} + v_{BE}$ ), or inchoatives (e.g. *quemaron les fabes*, 'the beans burned'), by means of clustering a dynamic subevent of change and a stative one ( $v_{GO} + v_{BE}$ ). Given this, the derivation of the generic *se*-passive in (6) is shown in (8).

(8) a. *Esti pan esmigáyase fácil pa empanar cachopos.*

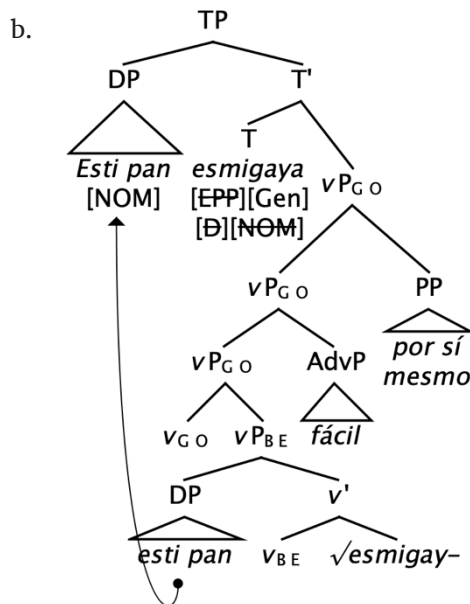


Because (8a) is an agentive structure entailing a resulting state, the derivation in (8b) must comprise an activity subevent ( $v_{DO}$ ) that triggers the change of state process until it reaches a particular end state ( $v_{BE}$ ), i.e. the state of being *crumbled* in this case. The combination of these

two verbalizing heads generates a causative configuration. The locus for the agentive reading is the Voice head merging on top of  $v_{DO}$ , which would normally introduce an external argument in the derivation. Here, however, the reflexive pronoun *se* spells out the Voice head and renders it passive. The complement of  $v_{BE}$  is the root *esmigay-*, which undergoes head movement until reaching  $T^{\circ}$ , and the internal argument *esti pan* sits in its specifier and is probed to SpecTP by  $T^{\circ}$  to satisfy its EPP feature, thus licensing nominative case. Following Suárez-Palma (2020), I assume that the generic interpretation is possible through the presence of a generic operator Gen in  $T^{\circ}$ .

The agentless counterpart, on the other hand, does not host a VoiceP –hence the absence of *se-* and is therefore a generic unaccusative/inchoative structure. Thus, verbs like those in (7), which necessarily subcategorize for an external argument, can never appear without the reflexive in unaccusative contexts like middles; the same applies for the causative variant of the ones in (4). In other words, the presence of the reflexive clitic pronoun in middle sentences in Asturian is not optional, as it has been proposed in the literature thus far. Instead, it is determined by the type of verb entering the derivation, as well as by its idiosyncratic argument and event structures. The derivation for the non-agentive middle in (5) is given in (9).

(9) a. *Esti pan esmigaya fácil por sí mesmo.*



What (9) shows is another bieventive structure comprising a subevent of change ( $v_{GO}$ ) and a stative one ( $v_{BE}$ ), which give rise to an inchoative construction. The root *esmigay-* is verbalized

on its way to T°. Finally, the internal argument raises to SpecTP to check the EPP features in T°, becoming the sentence's grammatical subject.<sup>5</sup>

In this section I have demonstrated that the reflexive and non-reflexive counterparts of Asturian middle constructions containing a change of state verb show structural differences. On the one hand, the *se*-variant entails an agentive reading which allows the insertion of a purpose clause, whose infinitive is controlled by the sentence's implicit external argument; I explained this is due to the presence of a passive Voice projection spelled out by *se* in the derivation. On the other, the *se*-less variant is non-agentive because it lacks Voice –hence the absence of *se*–, which makes it possible to license a *by itself* PP. Next, I discuss additional data concerning Asturian middle sentences and datives which further support my claim that the presence of the reflexive in Asturian middle contexts involves the projection of Voice.

## 2.2. Asturian middle-passives and datives

In Suárez-Palma (2020), I develop an analysis of middle constructions in Spanish containing change-of-state predicates; I point out that Spanish middle contexts containing change-of-state verbs allow the insertion of a non-core dative argument which can be interpreted either as unintentional causer of the change of state (10.i), or as affected by the notional object's resulting state whether it is internally (10.ii) or externally (10.iii) caused.<sup>6</sup>

(10) *Suárez-Palma (2020: 25)*

(A Sandra<sub>i</sub>) la madera de roble se le<sub>i</sub> quema fácilmente.

Sandra.DAT the wood of oak REFL 3SG.DAT burns easily

i. 'Sandra unintentionally makes oak wood burn easily.'

ii. 'Oak wood burns easily, and Sandra is affected by it.'

iii. 'It is easy to burn Sandra's wood, and she's affected by it.'

Crucially, I show that the first two interpretations, i.e. unintentional causer (11.i) and affected by an internally caused event (11.ii), become unavailable should a purpose clause be inserted in the structure; in such case, the dative can only express affectation by an externally caused change of state (11.iii). The infinitive in such prepositional phrase is controlled by the implicit generic agent in the sentence –instantiated by means of the reflexive pronoun *se*– and not by the dative,

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<sup>5</sup> The same derivation can also account for generic inchoative structures in Spanish, the only difference being that the reflexive clitic *se* is present in these contexts, as shown in (1b) above. According to Cuervo (2003) and Suárez-Palma (2020), the reflexive spells-out the subevent of change  $v_{GO}$  in these configurations.

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Fernández Soriano (1999b) and Fernández Soriano & Mendikoetxea (2013) analyze these non-core datives as introduced by an applicative head relating them to other arguments or events. Although is based solely on Cuervo (2003) for the sake of brevity, I refer readers to those other two studies given their abundant, interesting data and sharp observations.



as shown in (11). It is also the participation of such generic agent in the event that rules out the interpretation of the change of state being internally caused.

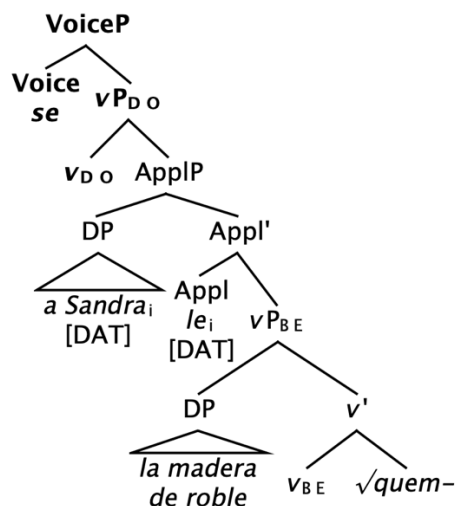
(11) *Suárez-Palma (2020: 25)*

(A Sandra<sub>i</sub>) la madera de roble se<sub>k</sub> le<sub>i</sub> quema fácilmente para PRO<sub>k/\*i</sub>  
 to Sandra the wood of oak REFL 3SG.DAT burns easily for  
 hacer carbón.  
 make coal

- i. ‘When making coal, Sandra unintentionally makes oak wood burn easily.’
- ii. ‘When making coal, oak wood burns easily and Sandra is affected by it.’
- iii. ‘It is easy to burn Sandra’s oak wood in order to make coal.’

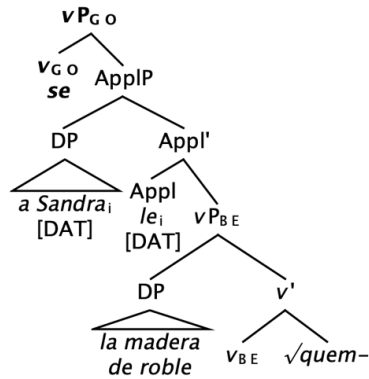
Following Cuervo (2003), I explain that an affected applicative head<sup>7</sup> is responsible for introducing these dative arguments in the derivation. The dative’s different interpretations are structurally determined by the position this functional head occupies in the derivation. Thus, the affected reading arises when Appl –which is spelled out as a dative clitic pronoun– merges below the first subevent and is therefore applied to the notional object’s resulting state ( $vP_{BE}$ ). Depending on whether the first subevent is an activity one ( $v_{DO}$ ) (12a) –in generic passive contexts– or one of change ( $v_{CO}$ ) (12b) –in generic inchoative configurations– the dative may be interpreted as affected by an externally or internally caused change of state, respectively.

- (12) a. *Appl = affected by an externally caused change of state*  
 (A Sandra<sub>i</sub>) la madera de roble se le<sub>i</sub> quema fácilmente.  
 ‘It is easy to burn Sandra’s oak wood.’



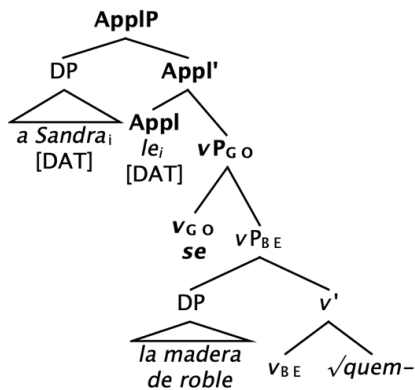
<sup>7</sup> See also Pylkkänen (2002).

- b. *Appl* = affected an internally caused change of state  
 (A Sandra<sub>i</sub>) la madera de roble se le<sub>i</sub> quema fácilmente.<sup>8</sup>  
 ‘Sandra’s oak wood burns easily, and she is affected by it.’



Alternatively, Cuervo (2003) points out that the applicative head may merge on top of the first subevent, giving rise to the accidental causer interpretation; however, I show that this is only possible in the generic inchoative variant (13), i.e. where no Voice head fills the position above  $v_{GO}$ ; this accounts for the data in (11).

- (13) *Appl* = accidental causer;  $\emptyset$  Voice  
 (A Sandra<sub>i</sub>) la madera de roble se le<sub>i</sub> quema fácilmente.  
 ‘Sandra unintentionally makes oak wood burn easily.’



I conclude that there exists a competition between the applicative head and Voice for the position atop the first  $vP$ , and adduces to Wood and Marantz’s (2017) notion of  $i^*$ , an argument-introducing functional head whose spell-out form varies depending on its surrounding environment. Thus,  $i^*$  would be realized as Voice<sup>o</sup> when its complement is  $v_{DO}$  (14a), and as Appl<sup>o</sup> when it is  $v_{GO}$  (14b). The causative instances containing Voice –active or passive– and an affected applicative simply

<sup>8</sup> Note that Spanish, unlike Asturian, shows the reflexive clitic *se* in many inchoative structures. Cuervo (2003) and Suárez-Palma (2019, 2020) assume this pronoun spells out the subevent of change  $v_{GO}$  in this language.

start with two  $i^*$  in the Numeration (15c); the one that merges before is realized as Appl, and the last one to merge becomes Voice.

- (14) a.  $[_{i^*P} i^* [_{VP} v_{DO}]] \rightarrow [_{VoiceP} Voice [_{VP} v_{DO} [_{VP} \dots]]]$   
 b.  $[_{i^*P} i^* [_{VP} v_{GO}]] \rightarrow [_{AppIP} Appl [_{VP} v_{GO} [_{VP} \dots]]]$   
 c.  $[_{i^*P} i^* [_{VP} v_{DO} [_{i^*P} i^*]]] \rightarrow [_{VoiceP} Voice [_{VP} v_{DO} [_{AppIP} Appl [_{VP} \dots]]]]]$

Interestingly, the data from Asturian in (15) show that this phenomenon is also attested in this language, although slightly different. In Asturian, the accidental causer interpretation is only possible in the absence of *se* (15b).

(15) *Generic se-passive*

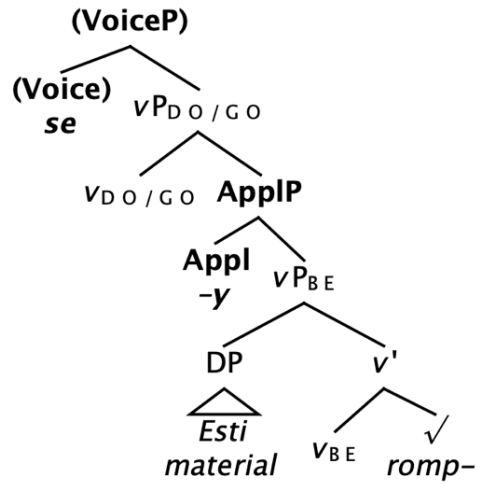
- a. (A Xuan<sub>i</sub>,) esti material ruémpese-y<sub>i</sub> fácil.  
 to Xuan.DAT this material breaks.REFL.3SG.DAT easy  
 i. ‘Xuan accidentally causes this material to break easily.’  
 ii. ‘This material breaks easily, and Xuan is affected by it.’  
 iii. ‘It is easy to break Xuan’s material, and he is affected by it.’

*Generic inchoative*

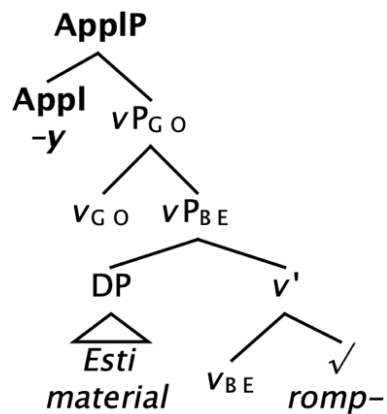
- b. (A Xuan<sub>i</sub>,) esti material ruémpe-y<sub>i</sub> fácil.  
 to Xuan.DAT this material breaks.3SG.DAT easy  
 i. ‘Xuan accidentally causes this material to break easily.’  
 ii. ‘This material breaks easily, and Xuan is affected by it.’  
 iii. ‘It is easy to break Xuan’s material, and he is affected by it.’

The examples in (15) show that both the generic passive and the generic inchoative counterparts of Asturian middles can host an affected applicative, spelled out as the third person dative clitic pronoun *-y* in this case, and optionally duplicated by a dative DP (*a Xuan*). While in the generic *se*-passive the dative can only receive one interpretation, i.e. affected by an externally caused change of state (15a.iii), the generic inchoative allows two readings for this argument, namely accidental causer (15b.i) and affected by an internally caused change of state (15b.ii), but rules out that of affected by an externally caused event (15b.iii). As in the Spanish examples above, these data further demonstrate that the reflexive clitic pronoun *se* in Ibero-Romance languages is linked to the projection of a passive Voice head encoding the participation of an implicit external argument in the event. Because Voice<sup>o</sup> fills the position above  $vP_{DO}$ , Appl<sup>o</sup> can only merge below it, therefore denoting the affected reading, but never the unintentional causer one. In the *se*-less variant, on the other hand, the lack of Voice allows the applicative to merge either above or below  $vP_{GO}$ , which accounts for the two possible readings in (15b). In (16), the two possible merging positions of the applicative are synthesized.

- (16) a. *Applicative as affected by an event (with and without Voice)*



- b. *Applicative as unintentional causer (no Voice)*



Next, I discuss middle contexts containing alternating unaccusative verbs of movement.

### 2.3. Unaccusative predicates in Asturian middle contexts

The reflexive pronoun –although optional– is occasionally required with certain unaccusative verbs of movement for deictic (17a) or telicity (17b) reasons in languages like Spanish; in Asturian, however, it is banned.

- (17) *Spanish*

- a. La luz ?\*(se) marcha fácilmente en esta casa tan vieja.  
 the light REFL goes easily in this house so old  
 ‘The power goes out easily in this old house.’

- b. Los niños (se) caen fácilmente cuando comienzan a caminar.<sup>9</sup>  
 the kids REFL fall easily when begin.1PL to walk  
 ‘Kids fall down easily when they start walking.’

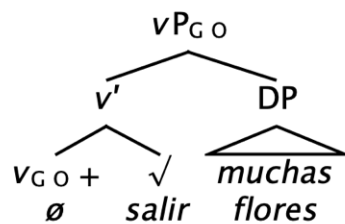
*Asturian*

- a. La lluz marcha(\*se) fácil nesta casa tan vieya.  
 the light goes-REFL easy in-this house so old  
 ‘The power goes out easily in this old house.’
- b. Los guajes cayen(\*se) fácil cuando entamen a andar.  
 the kids fall-REFL easy when begin.1PL to walk  
 ‘Kids fall down easily when they start walking.’

Cuervo (2014) elaborates an analysis of unaccusative verbs of movement in Spanish that alternate between a reflexive and a *se*-less variant (e.g. *caer(se)*, ‘to fall’; *salir(se)*, ‘to come out’). The key to her proposal is that the non-reflexive variants align with pure unaccusative verbs in that they convey a monoeventive event of change ( $v_{GO}$ ) without entailing a resulting state, i.e. no  $v_{BE}$  (18a); on the other hand, the reflexive counterparts do involve a resulting state, and are therefore bieventive ( $v_{GO} + v_{BE}$ ) (18b), just like the inchoative structures discussed above. Because the nature of these verbs is unaccusative, no Voice head merges in either structure.

(18) *Adapted from Cuervo (2014: 52)*

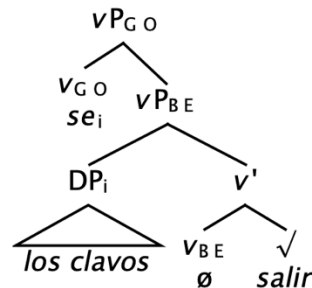
- a. Salieron muchas flores.  
 ‘Many flowers appeared.’



<sup>9</sup> In Spanish, the reflexive pronoun tends to be omitted in atelic contexts with the verb *caer* (‘to fall’), as in (ia), and it becomes optional in others where telicity is implied, such as (ib).

- (i) a. El dinero no (?se) cae del cielo.  
 the money not REFL falls from-the sky  
 ‘Money doesn’t fall from the sky.’
- b. Los niños (se) caen constantemente cuando comienzan a andar.  
 the kids REFL fall constantly when begin.1PL to walk  
 ‘Kids fall down constantly when they begin to walk.’

- b. Se salieron los clavos.  
‘The nails came off.’



The reflexive pronoun in (18b) phonetically realizes the phi-features of the entity denoted by the DP displaying the resulting state, which sits in the specifier of  $v_{BE}$ . Cuervo argues that the function of *se* in these contexts is twofold: (i) to satisfy  $v_{GO}$ 's requirement to have an argument, as well as (ii) to favor the DP's reading as the undergoer of the process of change and holder of the resulting state.

These two configurations show several structural differences, including telicity: while the *se*-less variant can be atelic, the one with the reflexive is necessarily telic, as shown in the examples in (19), with the verb *caer* ('to fall').<sup>10</sup>

(19) Adapted from Cuervo (2014: 51)

Atelic

- a. El paracaidista cayó durante dos minutos/\*en dos minutos.<sup>11</sup>  
the parachutist fell during two minutes in two minutes  
‘The parachutist fell for two minutes.’

<sup>10</sup> An anonymous reviewer points out to me that the verb *caer(se)* is exceptional in many senses, since in certain Western Peninsular dialects of Spanish it can be transitive (ii), the equivalent of *tirar* ‘to let fall’ in Standard Spanish, thus giving rise to a causative alternation. I thank the reviewer for this remark, and I refer the reader to Jiménez-Fernández & Tubino-Blanco (2019) for a recent analysis of this phenomenon.

(ii) Pedro cayó el jarrón.  
Pedro fell the vase  
‘Pedro knocked over the vase.’

Although the causative counterpart of *caer* is not available in Asturian or Asturian Spanish, the present proposal predicts that, if it were, it would be reflexively marked in (middle)-passive. As far as I know, the unaccusative verb of movement *marchar(se)*, shown in the examples in (17) above, lacks a causative counterpart both in Asturian and in Spanish.

<sup>11</sup> A reviewer suggests that this non-reflexive example would be grammatical with the PP *en dos minutos* if such temporal complement refers to the time it takes the parachutist to fall from the airplane to the ground, i.e. *caer* can be telic without *se*; I agree with their judgments. Additionally, this same reviewer adds that *el paracaidista se cayó durante dos minutos* would be acceptable if the temporal PP refers to the duration of the parachutist's resulting state, i.e. the parachutist was on the ground for two minutes as a result of falling. Vivanco Gefaell (2016) explores the relation between temporal adjuncts and *se*-sentences in Spanish.

*Telic*

- b. El paracaidista se cayó \*durante dos minutos/en dos minutos.  
 the parachutist REFL fell during two minutes in two minutes  
 ‘The parachutist fell in two minutes.’

Interestingly, the verb *cayer* (‘to fall’) in Asturian cannot co-occur with the reflexive under any circumstances, yet it admits both the telic and the atelic readings found in (19) for Spanish.

- (20) L’avión cayó mientras/en dos minutos.<sup>12</sup>  
 the-plane fell for in two minutes  
 ‘The plane fell for/in two minutes.’

Cuervo (2014) points out that the reflexive and non-reflexive variants of these unaccusative predicates in Spanish differ in terms of the types of DPs they select as arguments; thus, while the *se*-less variant can take bare NPs as complements (21a), the *se*-variant cannot (21b), a phenomenon also contemplated by Masullo (1992) and Fernández Soriano (1999a).<sup>13</sup> As (21c) shows, the Asturian verb allows both bare NPs and full DPs.

- (21) *Spanish – Adapted from Cuervo (2014: 50)*  
 a. Cayeron piedras.  
 fell stones  
 ‘Stones fell.’

<sup>12</sup> Although both interpretations are grammatical, my informants point out to me that, in order to make the atelic reading more evident, they would opt for a periphrastic construction which, according to them, would sound more idiomatic:

- (i) L’avión tuvo cayendo dos minutos.  
 the-plane was falling two minutes  
 ‘The plane was falling for two minutes.’

<sup>13</sup> An anonymous reviewer notes that the *se*-variant does indeed allow bare plural NPs as internal arguments (i.a), and I agree; however, this is not possible with singular bare nouns (i.b). In fact, Cuervo (2014) bases her examples on Masullo’s “\**se derritió manteca*,” (1992: 272) (intended: ‘butter melted’), which contains a singular NP. It might be the case that plural NPs are in fact DPs containing a null partitive determiner, equivalent to *des* (‘some’) in French (i.c); I leave this hypothesis open for future research.

- (i) a. Se cayeron piedras.  
 REFL fell.3PL stones  
 ‘Stones fell.’  
 b. \*Se cayó piedra.  
 REFL fell stone  
 ‘A stone fell.’  
 c. \*(Des) pierres sont tombées.  
 PART stones are fallen.F.PL  
 ‘Stones fell.’

- b. Se cayeron \*(las) piedras.<sup>14</sup>  
 REFL fell the stones  
 ‘The stones fell.’

*Asturian*

- c. Cayeron(\*se) (les) piedras.  
 Fell.REFL the stones  
 ‘(The) stones fell.’

The data in (21c) showing that Asturian unaccusative constructions are less rigid in allowing both NPs and full DPs as internal arguments than their Spanish counterparts,<sup>15</sup> together with the fact that both the telic and atelic interpretations in (19) are available in (20), suggest that the two configurations proposed by Cuervo (2014) (cf. (18) above) are available in Asturian. The difference between this language and Spanish is therefore that  $v_{GO}$  receives no phonological content in the former, as I have been pointing out so far. Moreover, these unaccusative predicates can occur in generic middle contexts which must necessarily be agentless, i.e. generic inchoative/unaccusative configurations, as seen in (17) above, repeated in (22).

(22) *Spanish*

- a. Los niños se caen continuamente cuando aprenden a andar.  
 the kids REFL fall continuously when learn to walk  
 ‘Kids fall constantly when they start walking.’

*Asturian*

- b. Los guajes cayen de cutio cuando entamen a andar.  
 the kids fall continuously when begin to walk  
 ‘Kids fall constantly when they start walking.’

As inchoative configurations, these constructions license the insertion of a *by itself* PP.

(23) *Spanish*

- a. Los aviones se caen raramente por sí solos.<sup>16</sup>  
 the planes REFL fall rarely by themselves  
 ‘Planes rarely fall down by themselves.’

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<sup>14</sup> See MacDonald (2017) for an analysis along the lines of Cuervo (2014) of the fact that internal arguments in Spanish aspectual *se* sentences cannot be bare either. This author claims that these objects –just like the ones in inchoative constructions– are also subjects, in this case of a complex predicate comprising a verb and a null PP. Therefore, they are subject to Cuervo’s (2003; 2014) *Revised Bare Noun Phrase Constraint*, which is based on Suñer’s (1982):

(i) *Bare Noun Phrase Constraint Revised* (Cuervo 2014: 54):

An unmodified common noun cannot be the subject of a predicate under conditions of normal stress and intonation.

<sup>15</sup> At least for those speakers who share Cuervo’s (2014) judgments.

<sup>16</sup> The non-reflexive variant of this example does also allow a *by itself* PP: e.g. *las aceitunas raramente caen por sí solas del árbol*; ‘olives rarely fall off the tree by themselves.’ I thank an anonymous reviewer for this example.



*Asturian*

- b. Los aviones cayen raramente por sí mesmos.  
 the planes fall rarely by themselves  
 ‘Planes rarely fall down by themselves.’

Moreover, because these constructions lack Voice, they are expected to allow an applicative head to merge above  $v_{GO}$ , and therefore entail a certain degree of agency. The example in (24) shows that this is the case, and that the dative can control into a purpose clause.

- (24) A Antón<sub>i</sub> cáyen-y<sub>i</sub> les coses de cutio pa fadiar a Xuacu.  
 to Anton.DAT fall-3SG.DAT the things continuously for annoy to Xuacu.ACC  
 ‘Antón constantly drops stuff to annoy Xuacu.’<sup>17</sup>

In sum, all the examples above demonstrate that  $v_{GO}$  does not have a spell-out form in Asturian inchoative configurations, and that the reflexive pronoun *se* encodes an external argument in unaccusative structures such as passives or middle-passives.<sup>18</sup> This leads us to discuss an apparent exception concerning unaccusative verbs of movement which appears to challenge this claim in the next session.

## 2.4. Linguistic transfer between Asturian and Asturian Spanish

The *GLLA* notes that certain verbs expressing movement such as *dir* (‘to go’), *quedar* (‘to remain’), or *escapar* (‘to flee’) may occur along with the reflexive pronoun, although “*paez preferible prescindir d’él*” (ALLA 2001: 354) [‘it seems preferable to dispense with it;’ translation by the author].

- (25) *ALLA (2001: 354)*
- a. Él foi(se) pa casa d’atapecida.  
 he went.REFL for house of-dusk  
 ‘He left for home at dusk.’
- b. Quedé(me) en pueblu tres díes más.  
 stayed.1SG.REFL at village three days more  
 ‘I stayed in town for three more days.’
- c. Escapó(se) un lladrón de la cárcel.  
 fled.3SG.REFL a thief from the jail  
 ‘A thief escaped from prison.’

In Spanish, the presence of the reflexive with verbs of movement leads to semantic and structural differences. In addition to the differences in telicity mentioned above –i.e. the reflexive version

<sup>17</sup> Note that this sentence has an additional meaning in which stuff falls *onto* Antón.

<sup>18</sup> This excludes inherently reflexive verbs, such as *arrepentise* (‘to regret’), or *es mucise* (‘to slip’).

implies perfective aspect, whereas the *se*-less variant is interpreted as imperfective–, this pronoun becomes obligatory if the meaning to be conveyed is that of vacating a particular location, as shown in (26) (Sánchez López 2002). In other words, the reflexive plays, in a way, the role of a deictic, referring to a point of departure or arrival, whereas the non-pronominal counterpart denotes movement within a continuum, either spatial or temporal (Maldonado 1997).

- (26) a. Se marchó de aquí porque no aguantaba más.  
REFL left from here because not endure anymore  
'She left because she couldn't take it any longer.'
- b. Se vinieron de Arizona para escapar del calor.  
REFL came.1PLfrom Arizona for escape from-the heat  
'They returned from Arizona in order to escape the heat.'

Similarly, in the example sentences in (18), repeated below as (27) for convenience, the Spanish verb *salir* is interpreted as 'to come out' in the *se*-less variant (27a), and as 'to come off' in the pronominal one (27b), where the reflexive stands for the aforementioned point of departure. The same contrast can be found in Asturian, i.e. while the non-pronominal version allows both readings (27c), the pronominal one is necessarily interpreted as 'to come off' (27d).

(27) *Spanish – Adapted from Cuervo (2014: 52)*

- a. Salieron muchas flores.  
'Many flowers appeared.'
- b. Se salieron los tornillos.  
'The screws came off.'

*Asturian*

- c. Salieron munches flores.  
'Many flowers appeared.'
- d. Salieron/Saliéronse los torniellos.  
'The screws came off.'

Notice that the meaning of these verbs is compositional, since the type of DP they select as their internal argument conditions the possible interpretations. In (27c), the flowers are more likely to be interpreted as the entity sprouting from, rather than coming off, a certain place. However, if we think of a particular structure, like a carnival float, which is decorated with flowers that are attached/glued to it and they suddenly come off, (27c) would be an optimal candidate to express such context in Asturian, whereas the reflexive would be required in Spanish. Additionally, when a dative occurs in sentences containing these verbs in Asturian, this argument assumes such deictic role, which translates into certain redundancy if the reflexive pronoun is also present. Note that this is so independently of whether the dative argument is inanimate or not, as show in (28).

- (28) a. Saliéron(?se)-y<sub>i</sub> los torniellos al radiu.<sup>19</sup>  
 exited.3PL.REFL-3SG-DAT the screws to-the radio.DAT  
 ‘The screws came off the radio.’
- b. Salió(?se)-y un güesu del coldu a Enol.  
 exited.1SG-REFL-3SG.DAT a bone of-the elbow to Enol.DAT  
 ‘One of Enol’s elbow bones jolted.’

In light of these data, I will continue to claim that Asturian, again, does not require the reflexive in (27d) and (28a), in spite of their being inchoative configurations, because  $v_{GO}$  does not have a phonetic form in this language. Moreover, I will assume that the fact that the reflexive is possible for a number of speakers in those contexts is a transfer from Spanish, due its major influence and dominance in the region; this adds on to the list of attested phenomena arising from the contact between these two languages (D’Andrés 2002, *inter alia*).

This transfer is not exclusive to verbs of movement. In fact, those undergoing the causative alternation can occasionally admit the reflexive pronoun in their agentless variant.

- (29) a. Fundió’l barcu (por sí mesmu).  
 sank-the boat by REFL same  
 ‘The boat sank by itself.’  
 ‘S/he sank the boat.’
- b. Fundióse’l barcu (por sí mesmu).  
 sank.REFL-the boat by REFL same  
 ‘The boat sank by itself.’  
 ‘The boat was sunk.’

What is interesting about the example in (29a) is the fact that structural ambiguity arises between an inchoative construction and an active causative configuration with an omniscient subject if the *by itself* PP is omitted. On the other hand, in (29b) the ambiguity emerges between an inchoative structure and a *se*-passive. It might well be that Asturian speakers choose the pronominal variant in order to disambiguate cases like (29a). In fact, if the theme in (29) occurs preverbally, the sentence becomes unquestionably inchoative, and the reflexive becomes redundant.

- (30) El barcu fundió(#se) (por sí mesmu).  
 the boat sank.REFL by REFL same  
 ‘The boat sank.’

Finally, it should also be noted that the opposite is true too, i.e. Asturian Spanish (AsturSp) also shows transfer from Asturian in this regard. Thus, it is possible to find *se*-less inchoative contexts

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<sup>19</sup> My informants point out that, although the reflexive variant is possible, they would choose the *se*-less counterpart over it in the context of an affected dative.

in AsturSp, such as the ones in (31a-c), which are compared to their respective Standard Spanish counterparts (31a'-c').<sup>20</sup>

(31) *AsturSp (Inchoative)*

- a. Estas toallas no secan ni pa' Dios.  
these towels not dry nor for God  
'These towels won't dry.'
- b. La piel acaba como escamando.<sup>21</sup>  
the skin ends like scaling  
'The skin ends up becoming scaly.'
- c. [La faba] se me deshace.<sup>22</sup> Y la morcilla 'ta aquí con el  
the bean REFL 1SG.DAT break up and the blood sausage is here with the  
palillu, ¿eh? **No escapó.**<sup>23</sup>  
toothpick not fled.3SG  
'The bean breaks up on me. And the blood sausage is right here, with a toothpick.  
It hasn't gone anywhere.'

*Standard Spanish (Inchoative)*

- a'. Estas toallas no se secan ni para la de tres.  
these towels not REFL dry nor for the of three  
'These towels won't dry.'
- b'. La piel acaba escamándose.  
the skin ends scaling.REFL  
'The skin ends up becoming scaly.'
- c'. La morcilla no se escapó.  
the blood sausage not REFL escaped  
'The blood sausage hasn't gone anywhere.'

In this section, I have provided additional evidence that inchoative configurations in Asturian are non-pronominal, and I have proposed that those cases where the reflexive arises in such contexts can be accounted for by adducing to the influence of Spanish, the dominant language

<sup>20</sup> This trend appears to be a common feature in the northwestern varieties of European Peninsular Spanish, as discussed in the *Nueva gramática de la lengua española* (RAE-ASALE 2009: 3110). Additionally, de Benito Moreno (2015) provides quantitative data about the abundance of *se* in different dialects of the language and arrives at the same conclusion.

<sup>21</sup> RTPA. (2020, May 18). *Informativo Matinal*. [Video]. Radio Televisión del Principado de Asturias.

<sup>22</sup> This speaker alternates the reflexive inchoative from Standard Spanish with the *se*-less variant from Asturian; the mixture of both is common in AstSp. Notice that the sentence in bold *no escapó* is necessarily in Asturian Spanish, and not in Asturian, since negation in this language is not *no* but *nun*.

<sup>23</sup> Güela Pepi. (2020, April 19). *¡FABADA ASTURIANA de la GÜELA PEPI! \*Recetas güela pepi\* – Paso a paso* [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mzk5BpCSVpw>.

in the region. Moreover, I have shown that the transfer is bidirectional, since instances of *se*-less inchoative sentences are abundant in AsturSp.

### 3. Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that the apparent optionality of the reflexive pronoun *se* in Asturian middle-passive contexts is not such, as it had been proposed in the descriptive work on this language; rather, it is associated with the projection of a passive Voice head encoding the participation of a generic external argument in the event, just as it happens in run-of-the-mill reflexively marked passives. On the contrary, inchoative configurations are necessarily non-pronominal in Asturian given their non-agentive nature, i.e. no Voice head merges in these contexts, and therefore the reflexive pronoun is not required. In other words, the verbalizing head of change  $v_{GO}$  does not have a spell-out form, unlike in Spanish, or other closely related Ibero-Romance languages, such as Catalan; these languages show the reflexive in many inchoative configurations, particularly those entailing an end state (cf. Cuervo 2014).

Additionally, I showed that this phenomenon is subject to crosslinguistic influence, since certain inchoative cases and others containing unaccusative verbs of movement may appear reflexively marked are due to the influence of Spanish, the dominant language in the region. In a similar fashion, Asturian has impacted on the grammar of Asturian Spanish, and it is possible to encounter multiple instances of inchoative and unaccusative sentences lacking the reflexive in this dialect, contrary to what is expected in Standard Spanish and other dialects.

Finally, these assumptions would benefit from diachronic studies that would help determine at what point in the history of the languages the transfer began to take place; I leave this question open for further inquiry.

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## Abbreviations

ACC = accusative, DAT = dative, EPP = Extended Projection Principle, D = determiner, F = feminine, Gen = Generic, M = Masculine, NOM = Nominative, PL = plural, PART = partitive, REFL = reflexive, SG = singular, 1/2/3 = first/second/third persons

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## Competing interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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