Agentivity (and lack thereof) in Ibero-Romance middles

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THE DATA

- ➤ **Middle constructions denote inherent properties of the verb's notional object, which is realized as the grammatical subject. In Ibero-Romance are characterized by:**
  - Reflexive clitic *se*
  - Non-perfective tenses
  - Agreement between verb and notional object
  - Impossibility of introducing an agent with a *by*-phrase

- ➤ **Crosslinguistically, these sentences denote the participation of a generic agent in the event.**

- ➤ **Interestingly, in Asturian the reflexive pronoun is said to be optional (ALLA 2001).**
- (1) a. Este pan *(se) desmiga fácilmente (*por Juan)   *Spanish*
      this bread REFL crumbles easily   by Juan
  - b. Aquest pa *(s')esmolla fàcilment (*per Joan)   *Catalan*
  - c. Esti pan esmigáya(se) fácil (*por Xuan)   *Asturian*
      'This bread crumbles easily.'

- ➤ **These sentences allow insertion of a purpose clause controlled by its implicit agent; such clause forces the presence of the reflexive in Asturian.**
- (2) a. Esti pan esmigáya*(se) fácil *pa empanar cachopos.*   *Asturian*
  - b. Este pan *(se) desmiga fácilmente *para empanar cachopos.* *Spanish*
      'This bread is easy to crumble to bread steaks.'

- ➤ **Change of state verbs allow a non-agentive reading, which may be enhanced by means of a PP like *por sí mesmu/mismo* ('by itself'). This PP is only licensed in the absence of the reflexive in Asturian.**
- (3) a. Esti pan esmigáya(*se) fácil *por sí mesmo.*   *Asturian*
  - b. Este pan *(se) desmiga fácilmente *por sí mismo.*   *Spanish*
      'This bread crumbles easily on its own.'

- ➤ **On the contrary, activities/accomplishments notionally implying the participation of an agent, necessarily require the reflexive in Asturian.**
- (4) Les noveles de misterio lléen*(se) con facilidá.   *Asturian*
      the novels of mystery read REFL with ease
      'Mystery novels read easily.'

THE PROPOSAL

- ➤ **The presence of the reflexive in these languages spells out a passive Voice head encoding the participation of a generic agent (Kratzer 1996; Schäfer 2008).**

- ➤ **Two configurations can yield middle sentences containing change-of-state verbs:**
  - A generic reflexively marked passive, with Voice (5a)
  - A generic anticausative, without Voice (5b)

- ➤ **Cuervo's (2003) typology of verbalizing heads:**
  - Activities (e.g. *to sing, to read, etc.*): v_{DO}
  - Events of change/happening (e.g. *to fall, to happen, etc.*): v_{GO}
  - States/existentials (e.g. *to be excited*): v_{BE}

  - Causatives (e.g. *John broke the vase*): $v_{DO} + v_{BE}$
  - Anticausatives (e.g. *The vase broke*): $v_{GO} + v_{BE}$

(5) a.

b.

- ➤ While the reflexive in (5a) spells-out the form of the passivized Voice head in Ibero-Romance, it may also spell-out the verbalizing head of change (v_{GO}) in Spanish or Catalan; Asturian differs from those languages in that its v_{GO} does not have phonological content.

- ➤ Middle contexts containing change-of-state verbs allow the insertion of an additional dative argument, introduced by an affected applicative head (Cuervo 2003; Suárez-Palma 2020) which can be interpreted either as affected by the notional object's resulting state if merged below the first subevent (v_{DO} or v_{GO}), or as unintentional causer of the event if merged on top.

- ➤ Crucially, the unintentional causer interpretation is only possible in the *se*-less generic anticausative in Asturian (5b above), where the position above v_{GO} is not filled by Voice, unlike in the generic *se*-passive counterpart (5a).
- (6) *Generic anticausative*
  - a. A Xuan$_i$,   esti material ruémpe-y$_i$ fácil.   *Asturian*
        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.'~~

  Generic se-passive
  - b. A Xuan$_i$,   esti material ruémpe**se**-y$_i$ fácil.   *Asturian*
        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.'~~
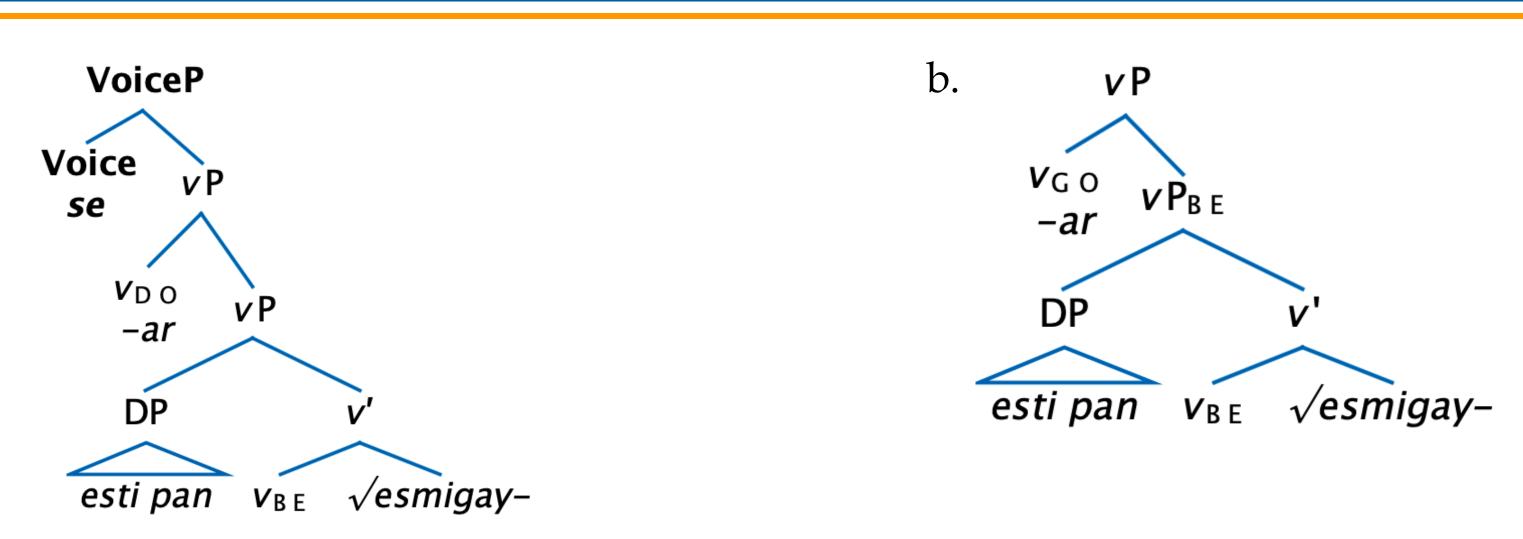   - iii. 'It is easy to break Xuan's material, and he is affected by it.'

- ➤ These data suggest there exists a competition between the dative introduced by the applicative head and Voice for the position atop the first subevent. This phenomenon can be explained by adducing to Wood & Matantz's (2017) notion of *i**, i.e. an argument introducing functional head whose spel─out form varies depending of its surrounding environment; thus, *i** would surface as Voice in the context of v_{DO} and as Appl when its complement is v_{GO}.
- (7) *Applicative as unintentional causer* (no Voice)
  - a. [$_{ApplP}$ [$_{DP}$ *a Xuan$_i$*][$_{Appl}$ -y$_i$ [$_{vPGO}$ [$_{vPBE}$ [$_{DP}$ *esti material*] [$_{vBE}$ [$_√$ *romp*-]]]]]
  Applicative as affected by an event (with or without Voice)
  - b. ([$_{VoiceP}$ [$_{Voice}$ *se*) [$_{vPDO/GO}$ [$_{ApplP}$ [$_{DP}$ *a Xuan$_i$*] [$_{Appl}$ -y [$_{vPBE}$ [$_{DP}$ *esti material*] [$_{vBE}$ [$_√$ *romp*-]]]]]]])

CONCLUSIONS

- ➤ **The presence of the reflexive in Asturian is not optional. The reflexive in Ibero-Romance middle contexts stands for a Voice projection in the structure codifying the participation of a generic agent in the event.**

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