

Text-type specific conventions, subordinate environments and ambiguity (avoidance) in Medieval Spanish passive *se*-constructions

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The Latin reflexive pronoun *se* has knowingly developed into a middle marker in the Romance languages and can mark today a wide variety of constructions. In Spanish, it serves e.g. as a marker of (non-)oppositional middles, anticausatives, passives and impersonal active constructions (cf. Sansò 2011, De Benito Moreno 2022 among many others; for a typology of *Middle Voice Systems* cf. Inglese 2021). It is known that already Medieval Spanish texts exhibit constructions that are to be classified as passive *se*-constructions. In these, a theme subject (in this case *el pan* 'the bread' in (1)) agrees with the verb (cf. Lapesa 1950, Monge 1955, Ricós 1995, Bogard 2006 among others).

- (1) verán por los ojos cómo se gana el pan
see.FUT.3PL by the eyes how REFL earn.PRS.3SG the bread
'They will see by the eyes how bread is earned.' [*Cid*, 90]

However, from about 1250 onwards, structures are found that move away from the passive interpretation on formal grounds, e.g. constructions in which no theme subject is expressed anymore. This creates more and more ambiguous environments that open up the way for what should rather be analyzed as impersonal active *se*-constructions (cf. Giacalone Ramat & Sansò 2011 for an extensive study on similar developments in Old Italian).

It has been posited in the literature that the development of impersonal active *se*-constructions involves a reanalysis of the se_{passive} V subject structure to se_{imp} V object_(former subject) structure (cf. Bassols de Climent 1948, Monge 1955, Detges & Waltereit 2002, Martins 2005 among others), i.e. the fact that on the surface level, the post-verbal subject of a passive *se*-sentence occupies a position shared (on the surface level) by the object of transitive SVO configurations, seems to provide crucial, ambiguous grounds to fuel a reanalysis which then leads to visible changes, e.g. instances in which the lexical subject is dropped, not readily identifiable or not necessary anymore.

An analysis of legal texts (CORDE, 1250-1400 C.E.) reveals new insights on passive *se*-constructions on several levels: On a general, textual level, these texts exhibit a style that tries to avoid ambiguity in that lexical DPs are often further specified by the use of relative clauses (cf. Temperley 2003) to make clear e.g. which legal party is being referred to, whose belongings are at stake, etc.

- (2) Et aquellas cosas que se pueden uender [...]
and those things COMP REFL can.PRS.3SG sell.PTCP
'And these things which can be sold' [*Fuero de Soria*, p.161]

Interestingly, it appears that precisely this text-type specific tendency seems to favor the use of passive *se*-constructions. This is reflected in that between 80% and up to 90% of all passive *se*-sentences of the quantitatively analyzed legal texts are found in subordinate constructions as shown in (2)). This is much higher than the occurrence of passive *se*-constructions in subordinate environments in e.g. scientific texts (showing greater variance, 30% to 60% depending on the text). The novel data are significant because the high text-type specific occurrence of passive *se* in subordinate structures and specifically relative *que* bring two important ingredients for the further development of impersonal active *se* to the table:

- i) *se* is forced into a preverbal position in these subordinate contexts – as opposed to main clause configurations where at this stage *se* could also be found in post-verbal positions cf. Fontana 1993, Bouzouita 2008, MacKenzie 2019 i.a. – thus fixing the *se* + verb linearization in

- passive *se*-constructions which in turn has been viewed to be crucial for an SVO (re-)interpretation.
- ii) in structures like lexical DP + *que* + *se* + verb, the connection between the lexical DP as the subject of a passive sentence is weakened because the DP is positioned outside the subordinate structure that contains the *que* + *se* + verb complex. This syntactic configuration seems to be connected to a higher frequency of elliptic structures in later legal texts.

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