

## CASE ASSIGNMENT AND INCORPORATION IN SPANISH IMPERSONALS PASSIVES

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**I. GOAL:** This paper explores the variation of so-called Impersonal Periphrastic Passives (IPPs), a structure that combines features of impersonal and passive sentences. We argue that IPPs are licensed through the incorporation of a preposition into the copulative verb *BE*, resulting in an analytic version of *HAVE*. This explains why IOs are mandatory in IPPs straightforwardly. We further discuss why only ditransitive verbs license IPPs in all dialects of Spanish, transitive being restricted to those varieties that can turn DOs into IOs (through accusative displacement).

**II. THE DATA:** Ordóñez & Treviño (2011) observe that certain dialects of Spanish license an otherwise ungrammatical combination of impersonal *se* (which absorbs nominative Case) and passive morphology (which does accusative Case). Compare (1) and (2):

- (1) \*Se fueron castigados (a) los niños con dureza (Spanish)  
SE were punished DOM the children with harshness  
'Children were punished with harshness'
- (2) a. Se me fue denegada la visa (Colombian Spanish)  
SE to.me was denied-ppart the visa  
'The visa was denied to me'  
b. Se le fue acusado a Jorge del Castillo (Peruvian Spanish)  
SE to.him was accused-ppart DOM Jorge del Castillo  
'Jorge del Castillo was accused'

Ordóñez & Treviño (2011) dub the data in (2) *Impersonal Periphrastic Passive* (IPP), and compare them with similar evidence from Icelandic and Irish (see (3a) and (3b) below), arguing that they share the same ingredients: "a morphological periphrastic passive, impersonal morphology, and an NP in the object position with accusative, dative or genitive Case."

- (3) a. það var lamið stúlkuna í klessu (Icelandic)  
EXP was badly-beaten-neut.sg the.girl-f.sg.ACC in a.mess  
'The girl was badly beaten in a mess'  
b. Bhíothas ag bualadh Thomáis (Irish)  
was-imp at hit.nv Thomas.GEN  
'Thomas was hit'

Ordóñez & Treviño (2011) further note, going back to Spanish, that IPPs behave differently depending on the transitive (TR) or ditransitive (diTR) status of the verb: Only the former induce the dativization of the object. These authors argue that IPPs involve the presence of a voiceP (introducing an indefinite covert agent) and behave as *bona fide* transitive sentences, modulo object-to-subject and accusative Case assignment—that's why dative morphology is resorted to.

**III. TWO TYPES OF IPPs:** Building on the evidence provided by Ordóñez & Treviño (2011), we would like to argue that the TR / diTR cut does not merely affect the argument realization of the verb: It signals a dialectal cut. To see this, consider the basic asymmetry in (4) again:

- (4) a. Se le fue denegada la visa (diTR IPP) b. Se le fue criticado (TR IPP)  
SE cl.dat was denied the visa SE cl.dat was criticized  
'The visa was denied to him' 'He was criticized'

What we want to highlight is that while (4a) is allowed in all varieties of Spanish (even European ones, a fact not reported by Ordóñez & Treviño 2011), (4b) is not. Although we agree with some of the aspects of Ordóñez & Treviño's (2011) analysis (namely the fact that *se*'s presence triggers an impersonal interpretation), we would like to suggest an account that takes dative morphology to play a key role in IPPs (we do this right below, in IV). In addition to the analysis, a parameter is also needed in order to capture the (4a) vs. (4b) distinction; we address this issue in VI.

**IV. IPPs AND AUX SELECTION:** If we go back to diTR cases, Ordóñez & Treviño (2011) argue that the Theme argument does not receive nominative Case. Instead, it is headed by a preposition, just like the Goal argument, albeit silent. Ordóñez & Treviño (2011) rule out the possibility that nominative Case is assigned by capitalizing on (5), which is indeed rule out in all dialects (nominative Case is assigned to *pro*, given Ordóñez & Treviño's 2011 assumptions):

- (5) \*Se fueron vistos varios alumnos (Spanish)  
SE were seen many students  
'Many students were seen'

We submit that problem with (5) is not that nominative cannot be assigned, but rather that there is no dative argument. Dative, therefore, somehow rescues the derivation. How? We argue that IPPs involve a situation where a P (embodied in dative morphology) incorporates into the copulative verb of the periphrasis (BE) to yield an analytic version of HAVE (cf. Freeze 1992, Kayne 1993), as depicted in (6) (where P can be understood as an applicative head of sorts; Pyllkänen 2008):

(6) a. [<sub>VP</sub> [BE + P] [<sub>VP</sub> SE v [ DP<sub>GOAL</sub> t<sub>P</sub> [ V DP<sub>THEME</sub> ] ] ] ]

If correct, this entails that there is no actual passive, but rather a standard “AUX+P.Part” structure.

**V. PREDICTIONS:** The proposal in (6) has some interesting consequences. To begin with, we can explain why *all cases of IPP* deploy dative morphology. This is not explained by Ordóñez & Treviño (2011). This also accounts for the fact that (7a) and (7b) have the same interpretation:

(7) a. Se le fue denegada la visa SE cl.dat was denied the visa  
 ‘The visa was denied to him’  
 b. Se le ha denegado la visa SE cl.dat was denied the visa  
 ‘The visa was denied to him’

Now, if IPP involve an analytic version of HAVE, we would expect for accusative Case to be available. It is not, though, as Ordóñez & Treviño’s (2011) point out. We would like to argue that this is not due to the passive periphrasis (according to (6), there is no passive periphrasis proper), but to the presence of non-paradigmatic *se*, which blocks accusative Case more generally. The data below, from European and Mexican Spanish, provide arguments that this is so:

(8) a. \*El arroz, se lo come cada día the rice SE cl.it eat every day  
 ‘The rice, it is eaten every day’  
 b. Al niño, se lo regañó ayer (Eur. Spanish) DOM the child SE cl.him scolded yesterday  
 ‘The child, he was scolded yesterday’  
 (9) a. A Juan, se le vio contento DOM Juan SE cl.him saw happy  
 ‘Juan, he was seen happy’  
 b. A María, se le vio contenta (Mex. Spanish) DOM María SE cl.her saw happy  
 ‘María, she was seen happy’

These examples, provided by Ordóñez & Treviño (2016), reveal two things. One: *se* licenses accusative *lo* under DOM alone. And two: *se*’s presence triggers dative Case, as *le* is mandatory in (9), regardless of the object’s gender. These facts come together if we assume that DOM involves a “dativization” (cf. Roca et al. 2016). If so, then the facts in both (8) and (9) tell us that *se* suppresses accusative Case, which makes Dative’s presence obligatory—to license the internal argument.

**VI. A PARAMETER:** As noted above, whereas diTR IPPs are available in all varieties of Spanish, TR IPPs are not. We would like to argue that this parameter is due to the fact that only certain dialects can turn the internal argument into a full-fledged IO dependent. To be specific, the relevant dialects may have a strategy to promote the DP from Theme to Goal, making dative Case mandatory, instead of accusative. The parameter could, consequently, be formulated as follows:

(10) Can L involve ACC → DAT (accusative displacement)? Yes / No

(10) makes sense within the present account of IPPs, since dative (more precisely, a P) is necessary. The details of (10) are admittedly subtle, as what is called “dative” involves a fine-grained typology (cf. Cuervo 2003, Romero 2011, among others). Interestingly enough, TR IPPs seem to be restricted to American varieties, many of which are the only ones that display a full-dativization of the Theme argument, as the Mexican data above reveal.

From this perspective, there is no need to postulate a covert P for the would-be DO in DiTR IPPs (as Ordóñez & Treviño 2011 suggest): That NP receives nominative Case (as the agreement facts reveal), and (5) is ruled out simply because, since, as there is no P (dative), no P-to-BE incorporation can take place, which makes it possible for *se* and passive morphology to coexist, which we assume is ruled out because they both deprive v\* from its φ-features (accusative Case).

**VII. CONCLUSIONS:** We have argued that IPPs reveal a situation where P (dative morphology) plays a key role in licensing of a P-to-BE incorporation, resulting in an “AUX+P.Part” structure where *se* absorbs accusative Case, and the arguments receive Dative (in TR IPPs) or nominative and dative (in diTR IPPs). We have further argued that the limited availability of IPPs hinges on the possibility for certain dialects to deploy a full dativization of Theme arguments.

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