

## French SE Revisited: Deriving Inherent Reflexivity

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### Nutshell

We examine the French reflexive *se* in light of Alboiu et al.'s (2004) raising analysis and Moulton's (2005) proposal for inherently reflexive verbs. We propose a raising analysis for French reflexives in line with Alboiu et al., accounting for mixed unergative/unaccusative properties of reflexives. In doing so, we also develop a derivational account of inherent reflexive predicates.

### 1. Puzzles

- *SE* reflexives in Romance exhibit both unaccusative and unergative aspects
- *SE* as a lexical operator (Grimshaw 1990, Marantz 1984, Reinhart 1996, Reinhart & Siloni 2004) vs. a syntactic argument (internal vs. external) (Kayne 1988, McGinnis 1999, Alboiu et al. 2004) vs. a functional head (Labelle 2008)
- How to interpret *SE*? Reflexive, reciprocal, passive, middle voice, etc.

### 2. Background

#### 2.1. The paradoxical nature of French *SE*

##### 2.1.1. Unaccusative aspects

- (1) Auxiliary selection: *être* 'be' ✓ vs. *avoir* 'have' ✗
  - a. Jean a lavé son chien.  
Jean has washed his dog  
'Jean washed his dog.'
  - b. Jean s' est lavé.  
Jean SE is washed  
'Jean washed (himself).'
  - c. On a parlé anglais.  
on has spoken English  
'We spoke English'
  - d. On s' est parlé en anglais.  
on SE is spoken in English  
'We spoke to each other in English.'
- (2) Middle Voice (no plausible external argument)
  - a. Marie a brisé le vase.  
Marie has broken the vase  
'Marie broke the vase.'
  - b. Le vase s' est brisé (en tombant).  
The vase SE is broken (on falling)  
'The vase broke (on falling).'
- (3) Passive meaning (no external theta role)
  - a. Le ministre se préoccupe de l'état des finances.  
the minister SE worries of the state of the finances  
'The minister is worried about the state of the finances.'
  - b. Jean s' effraie toujours d' un rien.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wordreference.com/fren/effrayer>

Jean SE frightens always of a nothing  
Jean gets scared over nothing.

- c. Comment se prononce ce mot ?<sup>2</sup>  
how SE pronounce this word  
'How is this word pronounced?'

### 2.1.2. Unergative aspects

(4) Causative constructions (*faire*) patterns with unergative verbs, namely *no à* for <causee><sup>3</sup>

- a. Je ferai laver le chien à mon frère.  
I will.make wash the dog to my brother.  
'I will make my brother wash the dog.'
- b. Je ferai courir mon frère.  
I will.make run my brother  
'I will make my brother run.'
- c. Je le ferai laver à mon frère.  
I him will.make wash to my brother  
'I will make him wash my brother'.
- d. Je ferai se laver mon frère.  
I will.make SE wash my brother  
'I will make my brother wash himself.'

(5) *en*-cliticization: only internal-argument subjects allow it (Burzio 1986) (examples cited from Reinhart & Siloni 2005)

- a. Il en est arrivé trois hier soir.  
there of.them is arrived three yesterday evening  
'There arrived three of them yesterday evening'
- b. \*Il s' en est lavé beaucoup dans ces douches publiques, récemment.  
there SE of.them is washed many in these showers public recently  
'Recently, there washed many people in these public showers.'

### 2.1.3. Transitive aspects (?)

(6) ECM construction (citing Reinhart & Siloni 2005, originally from Marantz 1984)

- a. Jean considère Luc intelligent.  
Jean considers Luc intelligent  
'Jean considers Luc (to be) intelligent.'
- b. Jean le<sub>i</sub> considère t<sub>i</sub> intelligent.  
Jean him considers intelligent  
'Jean considers him (to be) intelligent.' (*him* being *Luc* in (1a))
- c. Jean se considère *t* intelligent.  
Jean SE considers intelligent  
'Jean considers himself to be intelligent.'

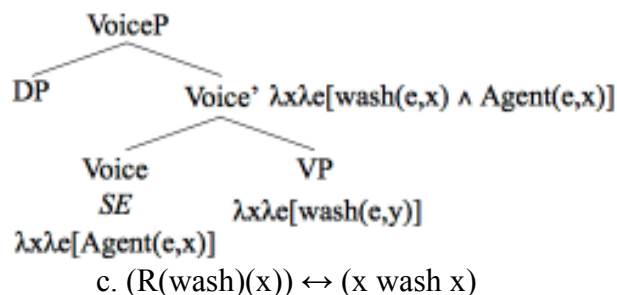
- Under Marantz's unaccusative analysis, SE is a lexical operator that suppress the external  $\theta$ -role, *Jean*, an internal argument, raises to the subject position [Spec,TP].

### 2.2. SE as a (lexical) operator (Reinhart & Siloni 2004)

- (7) a. *laver* 'wash' < $\theta_1$ ,  $\theta_2$ >  
b. Reduction: *R*(wash) < $\theta$ >

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/french-passive-constructions-1368850>

<sup>3</sup> Not only unergative verbs, but unaccusative verbs also do not have *à* for <causee> in *faire*-causative constructions.



- Reduction, which is *SE* in French, is a lexical operator that applies to two-place predicates and suppresses the internal  $\theta$ -role. Therefore, SE verbs become intransitive verbs, unergative to be exact.

### 2.3. SE as a Voice head (Labelle 2008)

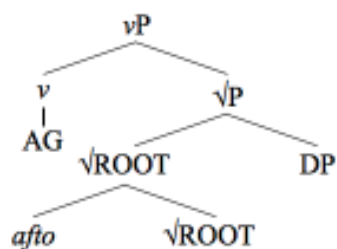
(8) a lexical entry SE:  $SE = \lambda P \lambda x \lambda e [P(e, x) \wedge \text{Agent}(e, x)]$

- Voice is a functional head following Kratzer (1996)
- *SE* is generated as a Voice head merging with VP.
- *SE* combines with an open VP via Functional Application; *open* means containing an unsaturated internal argument
- DP merges in [Spec, VoiceP]
- *SE* moves to its surface position, namely, under T (in tensed clauses)

(9) VoiceP

### 2.4. Alboiu et al. (2004) Analysis

- DP subject initially merges as a complement of the verb (VP-internal position)
- The DP raises to receive an external  $\theta$ -role
- *SE* is a trace of a moved internal argument (realized at PF).
- *SE* is cliticized at PF.



### 2.5. Inherent Reflexivity

(10) Prefix *auto-* (cited from Labelle 2008): *SE* must co-occur with inherently (lexically) reflexive verbs, e.g. *autoproclamer*, *autosuggérer*, *autoanalyser*, etc.

- Vous aviez encouragé Mobutu à s' autoproclamer maréchal.  
you had encouraged Mobutu to SE self-proclaim marshal  
'You had encouraged Mobutu to proclaim himself marshal.'
- Je peux m' autosuggérer plein de trucs.  
I can SE.1 $\pi$ .sing self-suggest many of things  
'I can suggest a lot of things to myself'

- c. Il s' est autocr   cette carapace.  
he SE is self-created this shell  
'He created this shell around himself.'
- d. Jean s' autoanalyse.  
Jean SE self-analyze.PRES.3π.sing  
'Jean is analyzing himself/undergoing self-analysis'
- (11) *afto*-reflexive structure for Modern Greek by Embic (2004)<sup>4</sup>
- a. O Yanis *afto*-katastrafike.  
the Yani self-destroy.Nact.3π.sing  
'Yani destroyed himself.'

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. Adopted assumptions from Alboiu et al. (2004)

- The argument of the reflexive merges in object position and raises to [Spec,vP], obtaining two  $\theta$ -roles (following Hornstein 2001).
- (12) Movement for  $\theta$ -roles in Hornstein (2001 p. 37).
- a.  $\theta$ -roles are features on verbs
  - b. Greed is enlightened self interest (X merging with Y, at least one feature of either X or Y is checked)
  - c. A D/NP "receives" a  $\theta$ -role by checking a  $\theta$  feature of a verbal/predicative phrase that it merges with
- The lower copy requires Case (ACC), it is overtly spelled out at PF as *SE* (following Halle & Marantz 1993)

#### 3.2. Problems with other approaches

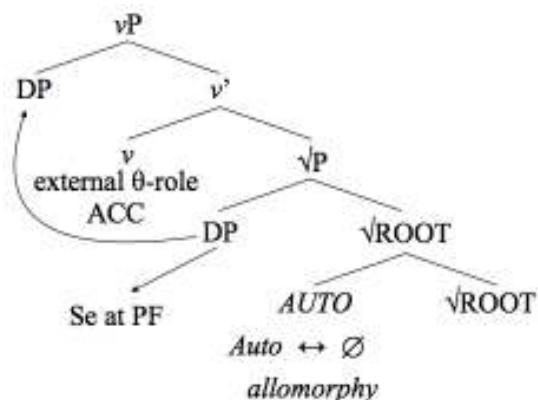
##### 3.2.1. SE as a lexical operator (e.g. Reinhart & Siloni 2004)

- The lexical operator must be sensitive to the verbal entries that have two arguments. However, in French, *SE* can occur in dative constructions.
- (13) a. Elle s' est donn   la mort.  
she SE is given the death  
'She gave herself death.' (she killed herself)
- b. Un archipel pauvre en ressources naturelles s'est donn   une puissante industrie.<sup>5</sup>  
an archipelago poor in resources natural SE is given a powerful industry  
'An archipelago poor in natural resources gave itself a powerful industry.'
- c. On s' est donn   des coups de pare-chocs pour se f  liciter.<sup>6</sup>  
on SE is given some knocks of bumpers for SE celebrate  
'We gave ourselves bumpers shots for celebrating.'
- Given the asymmetrical relationship between the objects (Barss & Lasnik 1986) and the Larson's double-object construction (1988), even if Reduction (*SE*) applies to ditransitive verbs, it cannot suppress the internal thematic role. That is, these *SE* verbs are not unergative.
  - Crucially, no room for a unifying account for *SE* constructions
- ##### 3.2.2. SE as a functional head (e.g. Labelle 2008)
- Labelle argues that the emphatic *lui-m  me* occupies an argument position; *SE* not being an argument (but a functional head) can account for this.

<sup>4</sup> Nact = non-active voice

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1962/01/A/24580>

<sup>6</sup> Denmat, T. 15/JUL/2017. Retrieved from <http://www.sofoot.com/on-s-est-donne-des-coups-de-pare-chocs-pour-se-feliciter-445488.html>



- (14) \*<sup>2</sup>Lui-même je regrette que Pierre a vu.  
 himself I regret that Pierre has seen  
 ('Himself I regret that Pierre saw.')
- (15) Lui<sup>1</sup> je me demande pourquoi Pierre<sup>2</sup> a vu.  
 him I me ask why Pierre has seen  
 'Him<sup>1</sup>, I wonder why Pierre<sup>2</sup> saw.'

- Given that adjuncts are sensitive to islands (Cinque 1990), the contrast above makes sense if *lui-même* is an adjunct, not an argument.
- Labelle argues that *SE* is a Voice head in the sense of Kratzer (1996).
  - First, Labelle argues that *SE* is a lexical head, which is contradicted by Kratzer (1996). Voice is a functional head, not a lexical head (pp. 116-9)
  - Second, Labelle's middle voice account, *SE* having an expletive function, i.e.  $\lambda P\lambda x\lambda e [P(e, x)]$ , is contradicted by the very nature of the Voice head.

### 3.3. Proposal: Raising account & Moulton's approach to Inherent Reflexivity

- Inherent reflexive verbs require coreference between the subject and the object.
  - Moulton (2005) proposes that inherently reflexive predicates and their non-reflexive counterparts are polysemous with distinct denotations
    - SR is a presupposition of strong reflexivity defined as identity of the Agent of *e* and *x* in all possible worlds.
  - Part of Moulton's motivation for this polysemous approach is the difference in meaning between the two. Washing oneself consists of a different set of actions from washing another person.
- (16) a.  $[[wash_1]] = \lambda x.\lambda e. wash(x,e) \ \& \ SR(wash_1)$   
 b.  $[[wash_2]] = \lambda x.\lambda e. wash(x,e)$
- Moulton's approach predicts that we should find numerous languages in which *wash<sub>1</sub>* and *wash<sub>2</sub>* are lexicalized differently. We know of no such cases.
  - We assume a single entry for *wash* (17b), and derive the inherent form compositionally following Embick's analysis of the *afro*-reflexive.
  - Having two  $\theta$ -roles explains why SE constructions display both unaccusative and unergative properties.
  - Auxiliary selection is attributed to whether DP is merged as an internal argument or not; thus, SE reflexives, SE being a legacy of movement of an internal argument, align with unaccusatives.
  - If *v* assigns no typical external  $\theta$ -role, e.g. <agent>, but putatively something else this structure applies to middle-voice constructions.

- Specifically, we suggest the following denotation for *auto-*.

$$(17) \quad [[\text{auto}]] = \lambda P. \text{SR}(P)$$

- We propose that verbs of grooming and others have a null allomorph of *auto-*.

#### 4. Conclusion

We have proposed that French reflexives are derived in the same way as other Romance languages, namely the single argument raises from object to subject position. Further, we proposed that inherently reflexive verbs are derived compositionally by an SR operator that introduces a presupposition on the identity between the subject and the object.

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