

# THE EXPLETIVE SYNTAX OF ANTICAUSATIVES: EVIDENCE FROM THE *stylistic LE* PHENOMENON

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# INTRODUCTION

Chilean Spanish has been scarcely studied from a generative perspective. This is odd, as the dialect exhibits many puzzling morphosyntactic patterns.

- ➡ The microparametric study of the Spanish dialects spoken in the Southern Cone is still very incipient.

In this talk, I will present data from a syntactic phenomenon of Chilean Spanish: *stylistic LE* (Muñoz Pérez 2020a, Muñoz Pérez & Saab 2021).

I aim to show that *stylistic LE* supports a specific type of hypothesis on the nature of the *causative alternation*.

- ✓ *Stylistic LE* receives a straightforward account under the assumption that anticausative markers are *expletives* of sorts.
- ✓ If this analysis is on the right track, the pattern exemplifies a novel type of phenomenon in the realm of anticausativity.

*Stylistic LE* is a complex construction involving (i) *anticausative SE* and (ii) *affected datives*. Some basic assumptions concerning these domains are necessary.

# ANTICAUSATIVE *SE* AS AN EXPLETIVE

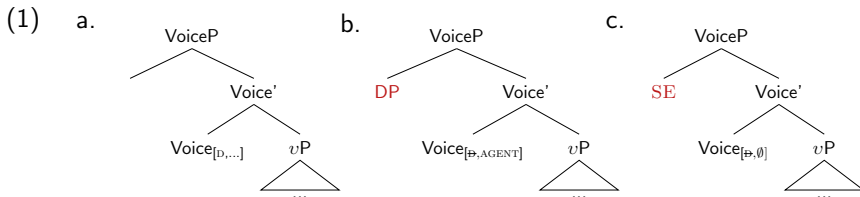
My starting point is the analysis of anticausative markers advanced in Schäfer (2008), Pujalte & Saab (2012), Alexiadou et al. (2015), among others.

The proposal in Schäfer (2008) goes more or less as follows.

- ✓ The external argument is introduced as the specifier of a *Voice* projection (e.g., Kratzer 1996).
- ✓ Merging a DP in this position satisfies a D-feature on *Voice*.
- ✓ There is a semantically vacuous variant of *Voice* that assigns no  $\theta$ -role to its specifier.
- ✓ However, this elements still requires merging an element of type D in the specifier position of VoiceP.
- ✓ In Spanish, this constituent is the reflexive element *SE*.
- ✓ Since *SE* carries no  $\theta$ -role, the anticausative interpretation is captured.

# ANTICAUSATIVE *SE* AS AN EXPLETIVE

The representations in (1) illustrate this analysis.



This account captures the *causative alternation* in a transparent way.

- (2) a. **Cosmo** abrió la puerta.  
Cosmo opened.3SG the door  
'Cosmo opened the door.'

cf. (1b)

- b. La puerta **se** abrió.  
The door REFL opened  
'The door opened.'

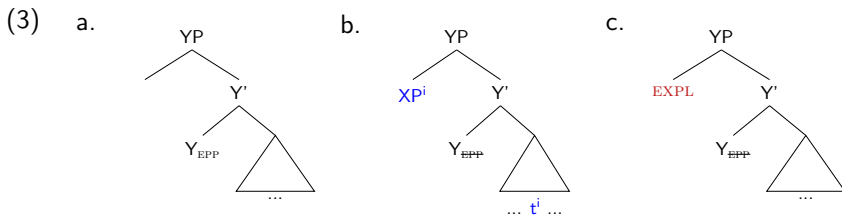
cf. (1c)

# ANTICAUSATIVE *SE* AS AN EXPLETIVE

One could object that this functioning does not fully resemble the typical behavior of expletives in other languages.

- ➡ In these, the formal feature on the relevant head can be satisfied through syntactic movement.

Consider the representations in (3).



The EPP-feature on Y could be checked alternatively through expletive insertion in [Spec,YP] or movement of XP to [Spec,YP].

# ANTICAUSATIVE *SE* AS AN EXPLETIVE

Many languages display these alternations in contexts that allow for *expletive insertion*. Take the this pattern from Finnish (Holmberg & Nikanne 2002: 71).

(4) a. [TP [T' leikkii **lapsia** kadulla]]  
play children in.street

b. [TP **Lapsia**<sup>i</sup> [T' leikkii **t**<sup>i</sup> kadulla]]  
children play in.street

*DP movement*

c. [TP **Sitä** [T' leikkii **lapsia** kadulla]]  
EXPL play children in.street

*expletive insertion*

As is well-known, similar patterns can be found in English.

(5) a. [TP [T' is **a man** in the garden]]

b. [TP **A man**<sup>i</sup> [TP is **t**<sup>i</sup> in the garden]]

*DP movement*

c. [TP **There** [TP is **a man** in the garden]]

*expletive insertion*

# ANTICAUSATIVE *SE* AS AN EXPLETIVE

The question is why similar patterns do not arise with Spanish anticausatives, i.e., why is that movement of a constituent cannot satisfy the D-feature on *Voice*.

- (6)
- 
- This predicts that the anticausative marker *SE* could be absent from the construction, which is strongly disallowed in Spanish

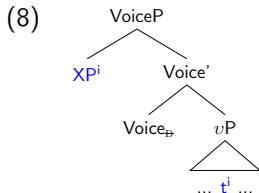
- ✓ One could argue that there are no elements within *vP* that could yield a grammatical derivation if moved to [Spec, VoiceP].

English offers many examples in which *expletive insertion* is the only way to generate a grammatical representation.

- (7)
- [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>T'</sub> seems that the kids are asleep]]
  - \* [<sub>TP</sub> The kids [<sub>T'</sub> seem that *t<sup>i</sup>* are asleep]]
  - [<sub>TP</sub> It [<sub>T'</sub> seems that the kids are asleep]]

# ANTICAUSATIVE *SE* AS AN EXPLETIVE

I take that a configuration in the lines of (8) is a missing data point supporting the claim that anticausative *SE* is an expletive.



## THING TO REMEMBER:

A pattern in which (i) an element replaces anticausative *SE*, while (ii) preserving the anticausative reading, supports the claim that *SE* is an expletive.

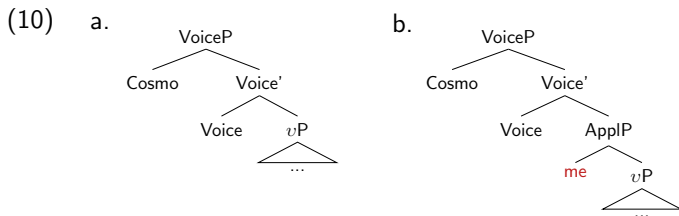


# AFFECTED DATIVES

The second ingredient I need to introduce involves *affected datives* in Spanish.

- (9) a. Cosmo abrió la puerta.  
Cosmo opened.3SG the door  
'Cosmo opened the door.'
- b. Cosmo **me** abrió la puerta.  
Cosmo DAT.1SG opened.3SG the door  
'Cosmo opened the door and I was affected by this.'

Cuervo (2003) argues that the *affected dative* is an Applicative head selecting a *vP* that denotes a resulting state. The trees in (10) illustrate the analysis.



# AFFECTED DATIVES

An *affected dative* can be combined with *anticausative SE* in a sentence.

- ➡ In the resulting construction, the dative phrase tends to be interpreted as an *unintentional causer* (Cuervo 2003, Kallulli 2006, Schäfer 2008, i.a.).

(11) Se me cerró la puerta.

REFL DAT.1SG closed.3SG the door

'I unintentionally caused the door to be closed.'

(12) A los vecinos se les rompió el televisor.

DAT the neighbours REFL DAT.3PL broke.3SG the television

'The neighbours unintentionally caused the TV to be broken.'

(13) Se te hundió el bote.

REFL DAT.2SG sank.3SG the boat

'You unintentionally caused the boat to sink.'

# AFFECTED DATIVES

The same type of interpretation is attested in a variety of languages.

- (14) Joannie      zbił      się      kubek.  
Joanna.DAT broke REFL mug.NOM  
'Joanna unintentionally broke the mug.'

*Polish*

- (15) Benit      i-u                      thye                      dritarja.  
Ben.DAT DAT.CL3S-NACT broke.AOR.3S window.NOM  
'Ben unintentionally broke the window.'

*Albanian (Kallulli 2006: 274)*

- (16) Dem      Peter zerbrach versehentlich die      Vase.  
the.DAT John broke accidentally the.NOM vase  
'Peter accidentally broke the vase.'

*German (Schäfer 2008: 81)*

- (17) A      Francesca si      ruppe il                      vaso.  
to.DAT Francesca REFL broke the.NOM vase  
'Francesca unintentionally caused the vase to break.'

*Italian (Alexiadou et al. 2015: 45)*

# STYLISTIC *LE*

Chilean Spanish also displays this pattern.

- (18) *Se me* rompió la radio.  
SE DAT.1SG broke.3SG the radio  
'I unintentionally caused the radio to be broken'

But it also exhibits the option of introducing an invariable and non-referential dative clitic *LE*. As (19) and (20) show, *SE* becomes optional in this context.

- (19) *Me* *le* rompió la radio.  
DAT.1SG LE broke.3SG the radio
- (20) *Se me* *le* rompió la radio.  
SE DAT.1SG LE broke.3SG the radio

I call this alternation *stylistic LE*. To my knowledge, no similar phenomenon has been reported for other languages exhibiting unintentional oblique causers.

# STYLISTIC *LE*

*Stylistic LE* is possible with verbs that participate in the *causative alternation*, e.g., *romper* 'to break', *hundir* 'to sink', *abrir* 'to open', etc.

- (21) a. Se me            hundió    el   bote.  
         SE DAT.1SG sank.3SG the boat  
         'I unintentionally caused the boat to sink.'
- b. Me            le hundió    el   bote.  
         DAT.1SG LE sank.3SG the boat
- c. Se me            le hundió    el   bote.  
         SE DAT.1SG LE sank.3SG the boat
- (22) a. Se me            cerró            la   puerta.  
         SE DAT.1SG closed.3SG the door  
         'I unintentionally caused the door to be closed.'
- b. Me            le cerró            la   puerta.  
         DAT.1SG LE closed.3SG the door
- c. Se me            le cerró            la   puerta.  
         SE DAT.1SG LE closed.3SG the door

# STYLISTIC *LE*

The alternation is also attested with verbs of change that acquire an inchoative value when used with *SE*, e.g., *caer* 'to fall', *morir* 'to die'.

- (23) a. Se me            cayeron las llaves.  
         SE DAT.1SG fell.3PL the keys  
         'I unintentionally caused the keys to fall.'
- b. Me            /e cayeron las llaves.  
         DAT.1SG LE fell.3PL the keys
- c. Se me            /e cayeron las llaves.  
         SE DAT.1SG LE fell.3PL the keys
- (24) a. Se me            murió    la planta.  
         SE DAT.1SG died.3SG the plant  
         'I unintentionally caused the plant to die.'
- b. Me            /e murió    la planta.  
         DAT.1SG LE died.3SG the plant
- c. Se me            /e murió    la planta.  
         SE DAT.1SG LE died.3SG the plant

# STYLISTIC *LE*

Lastly, spurious *LE* also appears with psych-verbs formed with *SE* that have a dative clitic as experiencer, e.g., *olvidarse* 'to forget', *ocurrirse* 'to occur'.

- (25) a. Se me            olvidó            eso.  
SE DAT.1SG forgot.3SG that  
'I forgot that.'
- b. Me            le olvidó            eso.  
DAT.1SG LE forgot.3SG that
- c. Se me            le olvidó            eso.  
SE DAT.1SG LE forgot.3SG that
- (26) a. Se me            ocurrió            eso.  
SE DAT.1SG occurred.3SG that  
'That occurred to me.'
- b. Me            le ocurrió            eso.  
DAT.1SG LE occurred.3SG that
- c. Se me            le ocurrió            eso.  
SE DAT.1SG LE occurred.3SG that

# STYLISTIC *LE*

No other syntactic context allows *Stylistic LE*. Superficially similar sequences of *SE+CL<sub>dat</sub>* make the alternation unacceptable.

- (27) a. Cosmo se me quejó (a mí).  
Cosmo SE DAT.1SG complained.3SG to me  
'Cosmo complained to me.'
- b. \*Cosmo me le quejó (a mí).  
Cosmo DAT.1SG LE complained.3SG to me
- c. \*Cosmo se me le quejó (a mí).  
Cosmo SE DAT.1SG LE complained.3SG to me

*inherent SE*

- (28) a. No se me dio ningún ejemplar.  
not SE DAT.1SG gave.3SG no copy  
'No copy was given to me.'
- b. \*No me le dio ningún ejemplar.  
not DAT.1SG LE gave.3SG no copy
- c. \*No se me le dio ningún ejemplar.  
not SE DAT.1SG LE gave.3SG no copy

*impersonal SE + argumental dative*



# STYLISTIC *LE*

The alternation is only attested with 1SG and 2SG datives.

- (29) a. Se **me** quemó el pan → (Se) **me** le quemó el pan  
*'I unintentionally caused the bread to be burned.'*
- b. Se **te** quemó el pan → (Se) **te** le quemó el pan.  
*'You unintentionally caused the bread to be burned.'*
- c. Se **le** quemó el pan → \*(Se) **le** le quemó el pan.  
*'He unintentionally caused the bread to be burned.'*
- d. Se **nos** quemó el pan → \*(Se) **nos** le quemó el pan.  
*'We unintentionally caused the bread to be burned.'*
- e. Se **les** quemó el pan → \*(Se) **les** le quemó el pan.  
*'You<sub>PL</sub> unintentionally caused the bread to be burned.'*  
*'They unintentionally caused the bread to be burned.'*

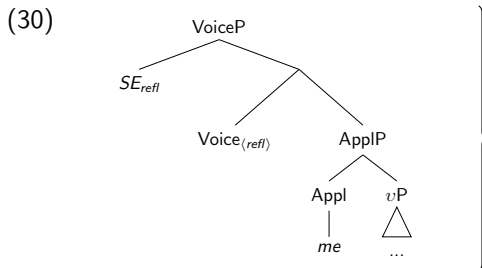
In what follows, I will attempt to sketch an account of *stylistic LE* that attempts to capture the properties and restrictions discussed so far.

# TOWARDS AN ACCOUNT OF STYLISTIC *LE*

The main ingredients of my analysis have been already introduced.

- ✓ Anticausative markers such as Spanish *SE* are expletives of a semantically null *Voice* projection.
- ✓ Affected datives are introduced through an Applicative head “sandwiched” between VoiceP and *v*P.

Combining these assumptions yields the representation in (30) for anticausative structures with affected datives in General Spanish.



I assume that semantically vacuous *Voice* requires a reflexive element [+REFL] as an expletive instead of a constituent carrying a D-feature.

See Rivero (2010) on how this structure accounts for psych-verbs of the *olvidar* ‘to forget’ class.

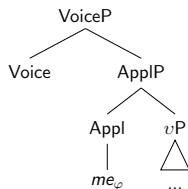
# TOWARDS AN ACCOUNT OF STYLISTIC *LE*

I take that the relevant parameter of variation distinguishing General and Chilean Spanish in these constructions is the possibility of *splitting the Applicative head*.

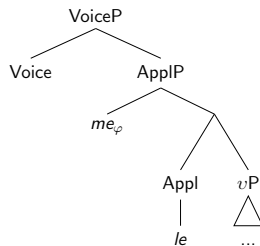
- ✓ In General Spanish, the Applicative both (i) introduces  $\varphi$ -features that are interpreted referentially, and (ii) functions as an applicative marker.
- ✓ In Chilean Spanish, the  $\varphi$ -features can appear as a clitic in [Spec, ApplP] and receive dative case from the applicative marker *LE*.

(31)

a.



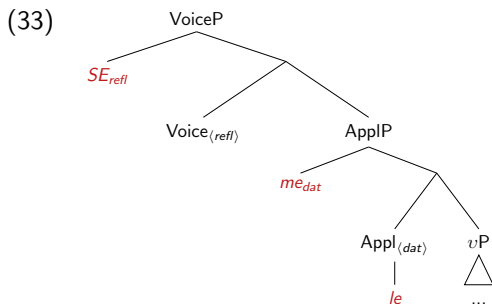
b.



# TOWARDS AN ACCOUNT OF STYLISTIC *LE*

This offers an immediate analysis for cases such as (32), in which the sequence of clitics *SE*+*CL*<sub>dat</sub>+*LE* surfaces.

- (32) *Se me le* cerró la puerta.  
SE DAT.1SG LE closed.3SG the door  
'I unintentionally caused the door to be closed.'

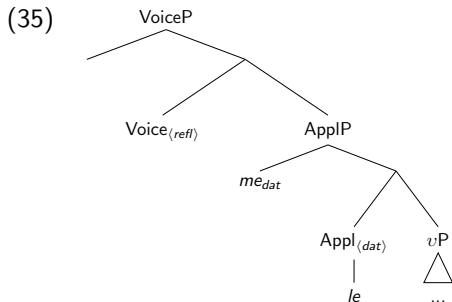


## TOWARDS AN ACCOUNT OF STYLISTIC *LE*

Consider now the case in which there is no anticausative *SE* in the construction, and the sentence surfaces with a sequence of clitics *CL<sub>dat</sub>+LE*.

- (34) *Me le* cerró la puerta.  
DAT.1SG LE closed.3SG the door  
'I unintentionally caused the door to be closed.'

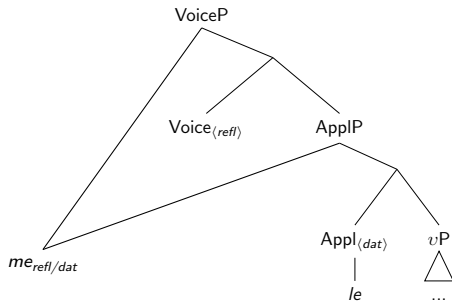
This seems to entail that there is no element in (34) able to fill [Spec,VoiceP], i.e., no reflexives. If this position is not filled, the sentence should be ungrammatical.



# TOWARDS AN ACCOUNT OF STYLISTIC *LE*

I contend that the dative clitic in [Spec,AppIP] is able to fill [Spec,VoiceP] via *syncretism*; 1SG.DAT and 2SG.DAT are syncretic with reflexives.

(36)



If this analysis is on the right track, the stylistic *LE* construction provides the missing data point supporting the claim that anticausative markers are expletives.

- ➡ This is a case in which insertion of the expletive *SE* is in complementary distribution with movement of a constituent to [Spec,VoiceP].

# TOWARDS AN ACCOUNT OF STYLISTIC *LE*

Syncretism is known to repair selectional mismatches in a number of contexts e.g., Zaenen & Karttunen (1984), Pullum & Zwicky (1986), Dalrymple & Kaplan (2000), Himmelreich (2017), Bergsma (2019), Muñoz Pérez (2020b).

Consider the following German data from Himmelreich (2017).

- (37) Hans mag<sub><ACC></sub> [ wen<sub>ACC</sub> Maria hasst<sub><ACC></sub> ].  
Hans likes                      who        Maria hates  
*'Hans likes whoever Maria hates.'*
- (38) Hans vertraut<sub><DAT></sub> [ \*wem<sub>DAT</sub> / \*wen<sub>ACC</sub> Maria mag<sub><ACC></sub> ].  
Hans trusts                      who                      Maria likes  
*'Hans trusts whoever Maria likes.'*
- (39) Hans mag<sub><ACC></sub> [ was<sub>ACC/NOM</sub> Maria zur Weißglut treibt<sub><NOM></sub> ].  
Hans likes                      what                      Maria to    rage                      drives  
*'Hans likes whatever infuriates Maria.'*

# TOWARDS AN ACCOUNT OF STYLISTIC *LE*

The claim that reflexive–dative syncretism plays a role in the pattern allows to explain the restrictions attested in the construction.

- ➡ Assume that only those dative clitics that are syncretic with reflexives can split from the Applicative head.

(40)	REFLEXIVE	DATIVE	STYLISTIC <i>LE</i>
1SG	<i>me</i>	<i>me</i>	✓
2SG	<i>te</i>	<i>te</i>	✓
3SG	<i>se</i>	<i>le</i>	✗
1PL	<i>nos</i>	<i>nos</i>	✗
2PL	<i>se</i>	<i>les</i>	✗
3PL	<i>se</i>	<i>les</i>	✗

There is an independent explanation for why stylistic *LE* is ungrammatical with 1PL dative clitics, i.e., *nos* ‘us’.

- ➡ The intuition is that the syncretic element can “function” as a reflexive and as a dative clitic at the same time...



# TOWARDS AN ACCOUNT OF STYLISTIC *LE*

Consider the following patterns in Spanish. The pair in (41) shows that a 3SG.DAT dative can co-appear with a 3PL and 1PL subjects; data from Rivero (2008: 215).

- (41) a. A Ana le            apetecen ellos.  
      DAT Ana 3SG.DAT yearn.3PL they.NOM  
      ‘Ana yearns for them.’
- b. A Ana le            apetecemos nosotros.  
      DAT Ana 3SG.DAT yearn.1PL we.NOM  
      ‘Ana yearns for us.’

Acontrast arises if reflexives are introduced: 1PL reflexives cannot co-appear with dative forms. Thus, their incompatibility with stylistic *LE* is accounted for.

- (42) a. A Ana se        le            antojan ellos.  
      DAT Ana 3.REFL 3SG.DAT fancy.3PL they.NOM  
      ‘Ana fancies them.’
- b. \*A Ana nos        le            antojamos nosotros.  
      DAT Ana 3.REFL 3SG.DAT fancy.1PL we.NOM  
      ‘Ana fancies us.’

\*1PL.REFL+*LE*

# TOWARDS AN ACCOUNT OF STYLISTIC *LE*

Thus, we can summarize the analysis as follows.

- (43) a. **Se me** cerró la puerta.  
SE DAT.1SG closed.3SG the door  
'I unintentionally caused the door to be closed.'  
b. [VoiceP **SE** [Voice' Voice<sub><REFL></sub> [AppIP **me** [<sub>v</sub>P ... ]]]

- (44) a. **Me le** cerró la puerta.  
DAT.1SG LE closed.3SG the door  
b. [VoiceP **Me** [Voice' Voice<sub><REFL></sub> [AppIP **t<sup>i</sup>** [AppI' **LE** [<sub>v</sub>P ... ]]]]

- (45) a. **Se me le** cerró la puerta.  
SE DAT.1SG LE closed.3SG the door  
b. [VoiceP **SE** [Voice' Voice<sub><REFL></sub> [AppIP **me** [AppI' **LE** [<sub>v</sub>P ... ]]]]

# IN THIS PRESENTATION...

- I discussed the hypothesis that anticausative markers are expletives of sorts.
- I saw that a missing piece of evidence concerning this hypothesis is a pattern in which an anticausative marker is in complementary distribution with movement of a constituent to [Spec,VoiceP].
- I presented the phenomenon of stylistic *LE*, an alternation that arises in Chilean Spanish in context of affected datives and anticausative *SE*.
- I provided an analysis for this construction assuming that Spanish *SE* is an expletive whose position can be filled by other elements in the phrase marker.
- I have suggested that stylistic *LE* provides the missing piece of evidence for the hypothesis that anticausative markers are expletives.

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