

Locality constraints on θ –theory: Evidence from Spanish ditransitives

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Abstract

In this paper, we focus on a pattern of Spanish *se*-reflexivization in ditransitive contexts that has not received due attention in the previous literature, namely, the impossibility of reflexivizing the direct object in presence of a dative clitic. In doing so, we will argue in favor of a particular long-distance approach to θ -assignment and against attract-based models. We will also defend the view of *se* as an edge marker (i.e. a *v* expletive) and argue against the hypothesis of *se* as residue of A-movement.

Key words: θ –theory, dative alternation, locality, reflexives, Spanish ditransitive constructions.

1. Introduction

The aim of this work is to account for a sharp contrast in the realm of ditransitive sentences in Spanish. Concretely, the direct object (DO) of a ditransitive sentence cannot be reflexivized in presence of a dative clitic that realizes the indirect object (IO). Reflexivization of the DO is perfectly grammatical whenever the IO is realized as PP. Such a contrast is illustrated with prototypical ditransitives like *entregar* ‘to gave’ (1) and *recomendar* ‘to recommend’ (2), but the pattern generalizes to most ditransitive predicates like, e.g., *presentar* (‘to introduce’), *regalar* (‘to give a gift’), *ofrecer* (‘to offer’), among others (DOM = Differential Object Marking):¹

¹ The phenomenon in (1-2) was tangentially discussed by Bonet (1991) in the broad context of her analysis of the so-called Person-Case Constraint:

- | | | | |
|-----|------------|------------|---------------|
| (i) | *Me | le | recomendaron. |
| | CL.1SG.ACC | CL.3SG.DAT | recommend.3PL |

As Bonet already noticed whereas (i) is strongly ungrammatical across speakers, (1) and (2) give rise to a weaker ungrammaticality judgment. What is more, as we will see in section 3, some speakers seem to accept sentences like (1) and (2). For these reasons, we believe that the reflexive paradigm should be kept apart from the set of facts that fall under the Person-Case Constraint. Further research should (dis)confirm this claim.

- (1) a. Juan se entregó a sí mismo a las autoridades.
 J. SE delivered. 3SG DOM himself to the authorities
 b. *?Juan se les entregó a sí mismo a las autoridades.
 J. SE CL.3PL.DAT delivered.3SG DOM himself to the authorities
 ‘Juan turned himself in/over to the authorities.’
- (2) a. Juan se recomendó a sí mismo a su jefe.
 J. SE recommended. 3SG DOM himself to his boss
 b. *?Juan se le recomendó a sí mismo a su jefe.
 J. SE CL. 3SG.DAT recommended. 3SG DOM himself to his boss
 ‘Juan recommended himself to his boss.’

In what follows we explain this contrast as a problem of thematic intervention under a long-distance approach to θ -role assignment and a particular theory of *se*-reflexivization that treats *se* as a PF expletive (Pujalte and Saab, 2012, 2014). In section 2, we introduce some theoretical assumptions about the different ways in which θ -theory can be constrained in terms of activity and locality. In section 3, we show how such a constrained theory accounts for the main pattern presented above as a phenomenon of thematic intervention. In section 4, we provide independent evidence for our approach by showing how the analysis makes right predictions when it comes to other complex interactions between reflexivization and θ -assignment. In section 5, we compare our analysis with an alternative approach framed under the Movement Theory of Reflexivization (Hornstein 2001, among others) and argue that it cannot account for the entire paradigm we will discuss here. Finally, in section 6, we present some concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical assumptions

2.1 Locality and theta-role assignment

A core assumption of the analysis we will propose is that θ -assignment can take place in long-distance configurations. Thus, we assume the following hypothesis:

- (3) Principle of theta-role assignment (informal):
 A θ -head H can assign a θ -role to a given argument A iff A is active and local with respect to H.

More formally:

(4) Principle of theta-role assignment:

An argument DP A receives a theta-role from a thematic head, $x_{[D]}$, in the domain of a νP if and only if:²

(A) *Activity*: A has an unvalued K feature at the point of the derivation where the theta role of $x_{[D]}$ is being evaluated/assigned (i.e., A is active within the νP domain to enter into further A-dependencies).

(B) *Locality*: A is the closest local argument to $x_{[D]}$; (i.e., A is not contained in the domain of another $y_{[D]}$ of the same type as $x_{[D]}$ c-commanded by $x_{[D]}$ and there is no closest argument A' local to $x_{[D]}$).

Associated definitions:

Contained: X is contained in Y if at least one segment of Y dominates X .

Sameness: x is a thematic head of the same type as y if x and y are thematic heads which introduce the same structural argument (internal or external).

Closeness: Given two active DPs, Y and Z , such that Y and Z are local to a given theta-role assigner $x_{[D]}$, Y is closer to $x_{[D]}$ than Z if Y c-commands Z .

[Saab 2014: 143]

This theory is more liberal than other approaches that only allow for θ -assignment under Merge (see Sheehan 2012 and Saab 2015 for recent discussion). Instead, the theory we assume dispenses with this Merge condition and put θ -assignment on a par with other phenomena in the A-realm (e.g., agreement), where syntactic dependencies are derived from the interaction between syntactic activity in DPs and a more flexible locality constraint between the elements under relation. For the purposes of this paper, *closeness* will be the crucial ingredient regarding the main pattern in (1-2). But before providing the details of our analysis, let us first to describe the working of this theory in the larger domain of *se*-constructions in Spanish.

2.2. *SE-Reflexivity in Spanish*

A theory that assumes long-distance dependencies for θ -assignment under the conditions just sketched directly accounts for the syncretism between impersonal and reflexive *se*-constructions in Spanish, among other related *se*-constructions:

- (5) a. Juan se critica (a sí mismo). *Reflexive*
 J. SE criticizes.3SG (DOM himself)
 ‘Juan criticizes himself.’
 b. Se castigó a los culpables. *Impersonal*
 SE punished.3SG DOM the culprits
 ‘One punished the culprits.’

² The notation $x_{[D]}$ stands for a head with a subcategorization feature of the $[D]$ type that makes that head a potential θ -role assigner.


Following Pujalte and Saab (2012), we adopt the hypothesis that formal features (i.e., categorial and ϕ features) do not need to be inherently specified on probe heads (*pace* Chomsky 2000), which we assume are C and category-defining heads (v , n and so on; see Embick and Marantz 2008). Thus, in order to explain the syncretism in (5), Pujalte and Saab propose that the crucial difference between reflexives and impersonals is that the former have an underlying agentive v unspecified for ϕ -features.

- (6) a. [_{vP} v [D] [_{RootP} Root + DP]] *Se-Reflexives*
b. [_{vP} v [D, ϕ] [_{RootP} Root + DP]] *Impersonal-se*

Under these configurations, both internal DPs will get a patient θ -role from the Root. Yet, once v is introduced, the internal argument will be accessible to further θ -assignment depending on the inflectional make up of this head. Thus, in reflexive sentences the internal argument receives also an agent role from v , given that this DP is active in the relevant sense (7).

- (7) *Se-Reflexives: Locality ok, Activity ok*
[_{vP} v [D] [_{RootP} Root + DP_{theme, agent}]]
 θ
- (8) *Se-reflexives: Nominative valuation*
[_{CP} C_[ϕ] [_{TP} T [_{vP} v [D] [_{RootP} Root + DP_{theme, agent, K:Nom}]]]]
 κ

In turn, the internal argument of impersonals receives accusative case from inflected v and, as a consequence, it is frozen for establishing further thematic dependencies (9):

- (9) *Impersonal-se: Locality ok, Activity **
[_{vP} v [D, ϕ] [_{RootP} Root + DP_{K: ACC, theme, * agent}]]
 θ κ' 

Put differently, the activity condition on θ -assignment as formulated in (4A) explains the difference between reflexives and impersonals that use the clitic *se*. As for the presence of this clitic, we also follow Pujalte & Saab and assume that *se* (and its agreeing variants) is the PF-reflex of a unsaturated [D] feature on v . Notice, indeed, that this featural information is shared by both impersonals and reflexives. An unsaturated [D] feature crashes at PF unless PF can implement some repair strategy. For the cases we are exploring in this section, *se*-insertion is precisely an instance of this type of strategy.

After Root-to-T movement, PF receives the complex head in (10) with an uncanceled [D] feature on v . Post-syntactic insertion of *se*, a purely D property, satisfies this subcategorization requirement of v .³

$$(10) \quad [{}_{\text{T}}^0 \underline{se} [{}_{\text{T}}^0 [v^0 v + v_{\text{D}}] \text{T}] \text{AGR}]$$

Yet, clitic insertion at PF is not an unrestricted operation; it is subjected to the following version of the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC) operating at PF:

- (11) PIC:
H and its edge are spelled out at the next (strong) phase. The domain of H is spelled out at the phase of HP. A head h adjoined to H is in the domain of H.
[Marvin 2002: 26]

This means that, at the time PF performs the repair strategy, *se* can be inserted in order to satisfy an unsaturated feature on v , but it cannot be inserted to satisfy a feature within the Root domain (12), because such a domain is no longer available for further computation:

$$(12) \quad * [{}_{\text{T}}^0 \underline{\text{CL}} [{}_{\text{T}}^0 [v^0 v_{\text{D}}] + v] \text{T}] \text{AGR}]$$

This is confirmed by the fact that there are not impersonal constructions with an arbitrary object in Spanish (13):

- (13) a. *Juan *se* escondió. (ok as reflexive)
J. SE hid.3SG
‘Juan hid something.’
b. [_{VP} Juan v [_{RootP} *SE Root_P] ...]

Summing up, the view of *se* as an edge marker captures some important generalizations regarding syncretism and θ -assignment. As we will see in the next section, this view also allows for a straightforwardly account of the contrast in (1) and (2).

3. Deriving the main pattern

³ As shown in Pujalte and Saab (2012), the insertion of a clitic at the top of the T head would trigger agreement between the clitic and the agreement morphemes. In impersonals or third person reflexives, the final output will be then /se/, but /me/, /te/, /nos/, etc, whenever AGR is specified for the relevant agreement features.

As noticed, the empirical observation that we must account for is that reflexivizing the theme argument in presence of the dative clitic is ungrammatical (see (1) repeated here as (14)).

- (14) a. Juan se entregó a sí mismo a las autoridades.
 J. SE delivered. 3SG DOM himself to the authorities
 b. *?Juan se les entregó a sí mismo a las autoridades.
 J. SE CL.3PL.DAT delivered. 3SG DOM himself to the authorities
 ‘Juan turned himself in/over to the authorities.’

Following Masullo (1992), Demonte (1995) and Cuervo (2003), we assume a version of the dative alternation in Spanish, according to which the presence of the dative clitic indicates two things: (i) that the goal argument is a DP and not a PP, and (ii) that it c-commands the theme argument. In other words, there is an alternation between a prepositional construction (PC from now on), and a double object construction (DOC) similar to the one that is observed for English in pairs like *John gave a book to Mary* / *John gave Mary a book* (Larson 1988, among others). Additionally, we assume that the internal DPs of DOCs are active at the point in which their θ -roles are calculated. In (15) and (16) we provide a simplified version of both structures.

(15) Prepositional Construction

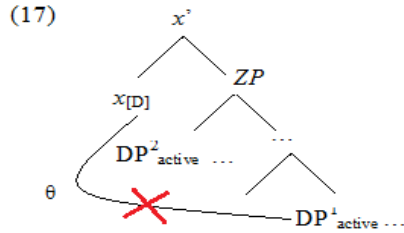
- a. Juan entregó el premio al ganador.
 J. gave. 3SG the award to the winner
 ‘Juan gave the award to the winner.’
 b. [_{VP} Juan_{agent} v [_{RootP} [_{DP} el premio_{theme}] [_{Root} [_{PP} al ganador_{goal}]]]]

(16) Double Object Configuration

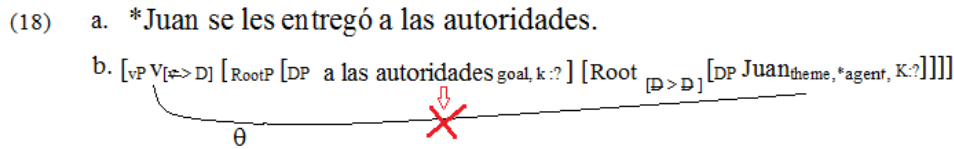
- a. Juan le entregó el premio al ganador.
 J. CL. 3SG. DAT gave. 3SG the award to the winner
 ‘Juan gave the winner the award.’
 b. [_{VP} Juan_{agent} v [_{RootP} [_{DP} al ganador_{goal}] [_{Root} [_{DP} el premio_{theme}]]]]

The relevant difference between (15) and (16) is that, according to the definitions in (4), the DOC has two DPs that are active and local with respect to *v*, so they compete for the agent role. In turn, in the PC the DP does not compete for thematic assignment with a PP, so it does not raise any locality consideration.

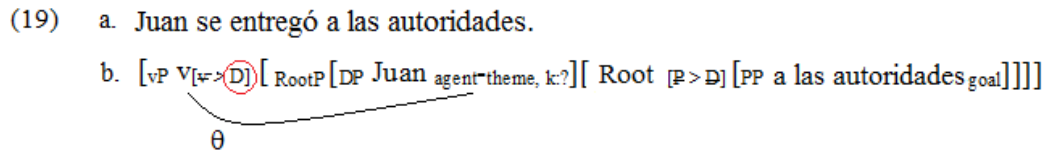
With this in mind, the contrast in (14) is accounted for in the following way: the sentence in (14b) violates *closeness*, as defined in (4) and schematized as follows:



(14b) is a concrete instance of this abstract configuration, in which the agent role has to be assigned to the closest DP, namely, the goal argument, which c-commands the theme argument. The analysis in (18b) illustrates this concrete violation of *closeness*:



In (14a), given that the theme argument is the unique DP active and local with respect to the thematic head *v*, it can receive an additional agent role without triggering intervention issues. This is illustrated in (19):



Shortly, under the theory assumed in this paper, the contrast in (14) follows without further ado. However, before closing this section, we would like to make some additional remarks with respect to some putative counterexamples to the main empirical observation under inspection in this paper. As already noticed by Bonet (1991) for Catalan, some speakers seem to accept sentences like (14b). Yet, Bonet suggests that in such cases we are dealing with fake reflexive sentences. We agree with Bonet's suggestion and believe indeed that it is further confirmed by Spanish data. In this respect, consider the following minimally modified version of (14b):

- (20) Juan se le entregó a María enteramente (*a sí mismo).
 J. SE CL.3SG.DAT deliver. 3SG to M. entirely (DOM himself)
 'Juan let María have him.'

This sentence is perfectly grammatical if interpreted with an idiomatic meaning (cf. the translation in (20)), not a true reflexive one. Evidence for this claim comes from the incompatibility of the anaphor *a sí mismo* ‘himself’ in (20), which is always accepted in pure reflexives. The pattern in (20) is quite general. Thus, a verb like *presentar* ‘to introduce’ (e.g., *María le presentó a Juan a Pedro* ‘María introduced Juan to Pedro’) change its meaning whenever *se* co-occurs with the dative clitic (e.g., *María se le presentó a Juan* ‘María appears in front of John’). We refer to AUTHOR in press for a detailed analysis of this pattern.

4. Further Predictions

Given the assumptions introduced in section 2, the occurrence of the clitic *se* in (14) is the result of a repair strategy implemented at PF in order to saturate a [D] feature on little *v*. As mentioned, this strategy is conditioned by a version of the strong PIC (see 11). At least two additional predictions follow from this theory. First, we predict that *se*-reflexivization in the Root domain should be impossible. This prediction is confirmed by examples like (21), where the DP *María* cannot bear both the goal and the theme argument:

- (21) *Juan *se_i* recomendó a María_i.
 J. SE recommended.3SG to M.
 Intended: ‘Juan recommended María to herself.’

Here, a single DP, *María*, with the theme and the goal roles, cannot be derived, because one of the two [D] features of the Root remains unsatisfied at PF, as we can see in the simplified analysis in (22c):

- (22) a. *Juan *se_i* recomendó a María_i.
 b. [_{VP} Juan *v* [_{RootP} Root_{[D] < [D]} María_{theme, goal}]] Syntax
 c. [_{VP} Juan *v* [_{RootP} **se* Root_{[D] < [D]} María_{theme, goal}]] PF

Second, we also correctly predict that, given a simple ditransitive configuration, an argument subject to *se*-reflexivization cannot have three θ -roles:

- (23) *Juan se recomendó.
 J. SE recommended.3SG
 Intended: ‘Juan recommended Juan to Juan.’
 (Ok: ‘Juan recommended himself to someone.’)⁴

In (23) a single DP receives three θ -roles, theme, goal and agent. This means that the Root has two [D] features. When the Root merges with this DP, it discharges the two θ -roles to the only local and active DP present in the derivation. Then, when v merges, the DP receives the agent role, and, again, a [D] feature of v remains unsatisfied. At PF, *se*-insertion satisfies this [D] feature on v . However, like in (22c), PF cannot rescue the surviving [D] feature within the Root domain.

- (24) *Juan se recomendó.
 $[_{vP} \text{ SE } v_{[D]} [_{\text{RootP}} \text{Root}_{\{[D] < [D]\}} \text{DP}_{\{\text{theme, goal, agent}\}}]]$

Importantly, both (21) and (23) can be obtained whenever a true syntactic anaphor like *a sí mismo/a* ‘to himself/herself’ is introduced in the relevant position (see AUTHOR, in press, for detailed discussion):

- (25) a. Juan recomendó a María a sí misma.
 J. recommended.3SG DOM M. to herself
 ‘Juan recommended María to herself.’
 b. Juan se recomendó a sí mismo.
 J. SE recommended.3SG to himself
 ‘Juan recommended himself to himself.’

In (25a), the anaphor in the goal position is syntactically bound by the theme DO that c-commands it. Notice that this is possible only under the PC and not the DOC. In turn, in (25b) the anaphor, also in the PP position, is bound by *Juan*, the argument that receives both the theme and the agent θ -role. Again, this is an option available only under the prepositional version of the dative alternation.

In this section, we have shown how our analysis can be extended to cover new empirical observations regarding *se*-reflexivization in ditransitive contexts. In the next section, we compare our approach with a possible alternative framed in the movement theory of reflexivization (Hornstein, 2001, among others) and argue that it cannot properly account for the entire set of data discussed in this paper.

⁴ Other predicates that satisfy the pattern above: *Juan se presentó* (‘to introduce’), *Juan se compró* (‘to buy’), *Juan se vendió* (‘to sell’), *Juan se envió* (‘to send’), etc.

5. An alternative analysis

In section 2, we assume a theory of θ -assignment that dispenses with the requirement that thematic roles are discharged under (internal or external) Merge. In 5.1., we briefly introduce the movement theory of reflexivization (Hornstein, 2001 and subsequent work) that precisely rests on the assumption of Merge as a necessary condition for thematic assignment. In 5.2, we test this theory against the Spanish data we have discussed so far and show that it has no obvious account for some of the patterns we have explored in section 4. Then, we conclude that the theory we defend in this paper has a broader empirical coverage.


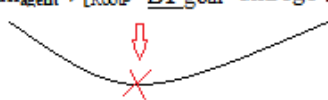
5.1 The Movement Theory of Reflexivization

According to the proponents of the MTR (Hornstein 2001; Boeckx, Hornstein, and Nunes, 2008; among others) reflexive structures can be derived through A-movement into θ -positions. The anaphor –SE, SELF, or null SELF- is semantically inert: it is not correferential to (or bound by) an antecedent, nor a predicate operator whose semantic function is to change the valence of the predicates they saturate. It is just a residue of movement. On this account, reflexive constructions involve a fully specified v that can value Case features. As it is generally accepted, once a DP has its case-feature checked, it is frozen for further A-movement operations (Chomsky 2001, among others). Thus, SE/SELF elements are case-checking morphemes that value case within the vP , so the internal argument is free to move to Spec, vP to receive the external θ -role and, then, to value nominative case when the relevant probe C is introduced into the derivation. Consider then a possible derivation for a reflexive sentence:⁵

- (26) a. Juan se critica (a sí mismo).
 J. SE criticizes.3SG (DOM himself)
- b. $[CP C_{\phi} [TP Juan_{Nom} T [vP <Juan>_{agent} V_{\phi} [RootP Root [DP SE_{Acc} - <Juan>_{theme}]]]]]$

As reflexives are treated as a variant of A-movement, they will obey standard locality restrictions for A-chains. So, the initial pattern in (1-2) might be ruled out as a minimality effect (27.b):

⁵ Unrealized copies between $< >$.

- (27) a. PC: Juan se entregó a las autoridades.
 [vP Juan_{agent} v[R_{root}P se <Juan_{theme}> entregó PP_{goal}]]

- b. DOC: *Juan se les entregó a las autoridades.
 *[vP Juan_{agent} v[R_{root}P DP_{goal} entregó se <Juan_{theme}>]]


Despite its initial appeal, this approach presents some shortcomings that weaken it, especially, when compared with the analysis presented in section 3. In the next subsection we focus on this matter.

5.2. Some problems for the MTR

As we have just shown, it is possible to explain the pattern (1-2) as a minimality effect: the dative argument blocks the movement of the theme to Spec,vP. However, this view loses the generalization that argumental datives do not block A-movement. Thus, while an added dative blocks A-movement in Spanish (28a), an argumental dative does not (Pujalte and Saab 2011):⁶

- (28) a. *Juan me parece trabajar. (non-argumental dative)
 J. CL.1SG.DAT seems.3SG work.INF
 b. Juan me prometió hacerlo. (argumental dative)
 J. CL.1SG.DAT promised.3SG do.INF-it
 ‘Juan promised me to do it.’

The same is attested in passive structures where, as is well-known, datives do not block A-movement (Ormazabal and Romero 2007):

- (29) El libro le fue entregado.
 The book CL.3SG.DAT was.3SG delivered
 ‘The book was delivered to someone.’

Evidently, these facts run against an analysis in terms of minimality for the basic contrasts in (1) and (2), unless additional assumptions were adopted.

Consider now the paradigm discussed in section 4, repeated here in (30) and (31):

⁶ We are assuming that control structures are derived through A-movement, an assumption that is at the core of the MTR, as well (Hornstein 2001).

- (30) *Juan_i se_i recomendó a María_i.
 J. SE recommended.3SG to M.
 Intended: 'Juan recommended María to herself.'

- (31) *Juan_i se_i recomendó.
 J. SE recommended. 3SG
 Intended: 'Juan recommended Juan to Juan.'

The MTR does not seem to have a proper account for these facts. As for the impossibility of reflexivizing internal arguments of the Root domain (30), there is no reason to forbid movement from theme to goal position in DOCs because there is no minimality violation. As we can see in (32) below, nothing intervenes in the movement of the DP *María*.

- (32) a. *Juan se recomendó a María.
 b. [_{CP} C_φ [_{TP} [_{DP} Juan_{Nom}] T [_{vP} <Juan>_{agent} V_φ [_{RootP} [_{DP} María_{goal, Dat}] [_{Root} [_{DP} SE_{Acc} -<María>_{theme}]]]]]]]

One may argue that this could be explained as a merge-over-move effect. However, as shown in Saab (2014, 2015) there are other cases of impossible reflexivization that does involve neither minimality nor merge-over-move considerations. In this respect, consider the impossibility of reflexivizing the external argument of an active causative (33):

- (33) *Juan se hizo trabajar.
 J. SE made.3SG work.INF
 'Juan made himself work.'

This movement, again, should be allowed under MTR assumptions. This problem does not arise under the theory adopted in section 2. If active causatives involve two *v* heads (heads of the same type), the lower *v* thematically intervenes between the higher *v* (that would assign the causer role) and the DP that acts as external argument of the caused sentence (see Saab, 2014, 2015 for a detailed explanation).

Coming back to our main objection, the MTR has no obvious account for (31) either. In principle, the MTR would rule in a sentence in which a single DP bears three θ -roles as follows:

- (34) a. *Juan se recomendó.
 b. [_{TP} [_{DP} Juan_{Nom}] T [_{vP} [_{DP} <Juan>_{agent}] v [_{RootP} [_{DP} <Juan>_{goal}] [_{Root} [_{DP} SE_{Acc} -<Juan>_{theme}]]]]]]]

The DP *Juan* is base-generated in the theme position, and then it moves to the goal and agent positions respectively. One can argue that the ungrammaticality could be explained assuming some ban against double *se*-marking.

(35) * $[_{VP} \text{Juan}_{agent} v [_{RootP} \text{se-} \langle DP_{goal} \rangle \text{Root se} \langle DP_{theme} \rangle]]$

But if this ban were on the right track, one would wonder why PF cannot repair double *se*-marking in the relevant cases. Effectively, if copy pronunciation is subjected to considerations of PF convergence (Nunes 2004), the ban in (35) should be avoided at that level. Although this criticism is indirect, we think that the MTR open more problems than solutions, especially, when compared with the account offered in section 3. If such problems can be resolved on other reasonable assumptions is something that the proponents of the MTR should make explicit.

6. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have analyzed complex patterns of reflexivization in Spanish, as the impossibility of reflexivizing the theme argument in presence of a dative clitic (section 3), or the ungrammaticality that results from reflexivizing arguments within the Root domain (section 4). We have proposed an answer to these patterns in terms of a locality problem in θ -assignment. These locality conditions are independently necessary in other domains involving *se*-constructions in Spanish (see Pujalte and Saab 2012 and Saab 2014, 2015). In addition, we have also provided independent evidence for the view that *se*-insertion is subject to some strong version of the PIC. Finally, we have shown that this general view on θ -assignment and its interactions with *se*-insertion is superior in non-trivial ways to an attract-based alternative that conceives of θ -features as triggers of movement and the clitic *se* as a residue of such movements.

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