

Control in *se*-‘passives’ in Romanian Ion Giurgea & Maria Aurelia Cotfas

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1. The problem. Schäfer & Pitteroff (2017) argue that control by an implicit argument in passive configurations is possible across languages: it is generally found with attitude verbs as in (1), which relies on Landau’s (2015) logophoric control, and only in some languages (German, Dutch, Norwegian, Icelandic) with non-attitude verbs as in (2), which rely on Landau’s (2015) predicative control.

- (1) It was promised [to do the shopping]
 (2) a. *It was managed/tried/dared/stopped [to raise taxes again]
 b. Først da ble det stoppet [å røyke] (Norwegian)
 only then was it stopped to smoke
 ‘Only then people stopped smoking’

The facts of Romanian challenge this generalization. First, since copular passives cannot be used in the counterparts of (1)-(2), because they disallow clausal subjects in general (see (3)), the generalization should be tested with *se*-passives. But *se*-passives cannot take active infinitive complements, as shown by Dobrovie-Sorin (1998), who includes this among the arguments against the existence of a ‘nominative’ *se* (an *active* impersonal *se*) in Romanian:

- (3) *A fost promis {să-l aducem pe Ion /că va veni Maria}
 has been promised SBJV-CL.ACC bring.1 DOM Ion / that will come Maria
 (4) *S-a promis a merge la cumpărături
 SE-has promised to go to shopping

However, examples of this type become acceptable if *se* is replicated on the embedded verb:

- (5) S-a promis a se ține seama de toate doleanțele
 SE-has promised to SE take account-the of all grievances
 ‘It was promised to take into account all the grievances’

One might argue that, due to the predominance of the subjunctive with such verbs, the phenomenon of control is weakened in Romanian even with infinitives, so that (5) might not involve control. Moreover, Cotfas (2012) has shown that even implicative verbs, which involve obligatory control in other languages, may accept disjointed subjects in Romanian. However, we find the pattern *se*-matrix V – *se*-embedded V also with aspectual verbs, for which disjointed subjects are clearly impossible in Romanian:

- (6) Atunci s-a început a se dilua laptele cu apă.
 then SE-has started to SE dilute milk-the with water-the
 ‘Then, people started to dilute milk with water’ ([http://informatiicenzurate.ro/...](http://informatiicenzurate.ro/))
 (7) S-a început să se discute despre asta.
 SE-has started SBJV SE discuss.3 about this
 ‘People started to talk about this’ ([http://inliniedreapta.net/monitorul-neoficial/...](http://inliniedreapta.net/monitorul-neoficial/))

Another observation is that there is a clear preference for *se*-passives wrt. copular passives in the embedded clause in these environments: although examples of the type (8) can be found, they are extremely rare (a Google search for *s-a început a* ‘SE has-begun to’ revealed, for verbs with a projected theme, 50 ex. of *se*-infinitives vs. just 6 of copular passive infinitives; with the subjunctive, we found 38 ex. of *se*-infinitives vs. just one of a copular passive)

- (8) S-a început a fi împărțită pe hălci
 SE-has begun to be divided.FSG in pieces
 ‘(The factory) started to be divided in chunks’ ([http://confluente.org/...](http://confluente.org/))

The data presented here raise two questions: (i) why is an active embedded verb impossible (see (9))? and (ii) why are (6)-(7) acceptable, and (8) at best marginal?

- (9) *S-a început a discuta / a dilua laptele cu apă
 SE-has begun to discuss to dilute milk-the with water-the

2. Why some solutions don't work. At first sight, examples (6)-(7) resemble the 'double passives' encountered in control configurations in some languages (e.g. Spanish, Norwegian, Chamorro), which have been analyzed by Wurmbrand & Shimamura (2017) as reflecting a special type of Voice restructuring, in which the embedded Voice head comes with an unvalued voice feature that agrees with the matrix Voice. However, this analysis cannot extend to the Romanian data because it predicts that *personal* double passives should be allowed, contrary to fact (agreement of the matrix verb with the theme is disallowed; it is only possible without matrix *se*, but then we would be dealing with an instance of raising):

(10) ?? Asemenea lucruri se încep a se face / să se facă tot mai des.

such things se begin.3PL to SE do /SBJV SE do.3 ever more often

An analysis of (6)-(7) as involving no control, but rather a subject clause corresponding to the nominal subject in (11)a does not explain the clear preference for *se*-passives in the embedded clause (see (11)b and the discussion above (8)):

(11) a. S-a început plantarea grâului

SE-has started planting-the wheat-the.GEN

b. S-a început {a se planta / să se planteze/ ?? a fi plantat/??să fie plantat} grâu.

SE-has started to SE plant/SBJV SE plant/ to be planted SBJV be planted wheat-the

3. Our solution. We base our analysis on the proposal that *se*-passives differ from copular passives by projecting an (arbitrary) null external argument in SpecvP, a proposal already made for independent reasons: (i) Giurgea (2016) used it in order to explain the fact that *se*-passives disallow certain themes, namely those that require *pe*-marking obligatorily or optionally accompanied by clitic doubling when functioning as objects: he proposed that these DPs have a Person feature, and the null external argument in SpecvP, which also has a Person feature (cf. its restriction to human agents), acts as an intervener for Person agreement:

(12) a. S-au adus {prizonierii / *ei / *frații Popescu} la judecată

SE-have brought prisoners-the / they / brothers-the P. to trial

b. Au adus {prizonierii / *ei / *frații Popescu} / I-au adus pe ei ...

have brought prisoners-the they brothers-the P. them-have brought DOM they ...

(ii) MacDonald & Maddox (2018) use this proposal to account for the fact that definite inalienable possessives, which rely on control by the subject, can occur with *se*-passives in Spanish and Romanian, but not with copular passives:

(12) Aici, pentru a pune o întrebare {se ridică / #este ridicată} mâna.

here for to put a question SE raises is raised hand-the

We propose that the control relation in (6)-(7) obtains between the PRO external arguments of the matrix and embedded verbs, and that this relation involves Agree (cf. Landau 1999, 2013, Chomsky 2001 et seq., etc.), which we analyze as feature unification. Therefore, the {+human +ARB} feature of the matrix PRO must also occur on the embedded PRO, which requires the use of the *se*-Voice, the only configuration that allows this type of external argument. This explains why (6)-(7) are the normal choice in case of a control verb in the *se*-passives, whereas (4) is excluded (due to lack of agreement) and (8) is marginal (relying on a subject clause with no control, corresponding to the nominal subject in (11)a). As for the case licensing of the theme in examples such as (6), we note that nominative licensing of themes of *se*-passives in complement infinitives is independently attested in Romanian (e.g. *Sperăm a se respecta această regulă* 'hope.1PL to SE obey this rule').

Selected references: Dobrovie-Sorin, C. 1998, Impersonal *Se* Constructions in Romance and the Passivization of Unergatives, *Linguistic Inquiry* 29 (3): 399-438; Landau, I. 2015, *A Two-Tiered Theory of Control*, MIT Press; MacDonald, J. & M. Maddox 2018, Passive *se* in Romanian and Spanish. A subject cycle, *Journal of Linguistics* 54, 389-427. Schäfer, F. & M. Pitteroff 2017, Implicit arguments under control, talk given at the *Cambridge Workshop on Voice*, May 22-24; Wurmbrand, S. & K. Shimamura 2017, The features of the voice domain:

actives, passives, and restructuring, in R. d'Alessandro, I. Franco & A. Gallego (eds.), *The verbal domain*, 179-204, OUP.