1. Introduction

This work sketches a global theoretical explanation of unaccusativity primarily based on contrasts such as these:

(1) a. He sinks the boat. b. The boat sinks. English
(2) a. Él hunde el barco. b. El barco se hunde. Spanish
(3) a. 船を沈める。 b. 船が沈まる。 Japanese

In these examples we see a verb in the causative alternation in three languages displaying three different strategies for the construction of the intransitive alternant, i.e., the one which allows the obviation of the semantic cause through the suppression of the external argument. If unaccusativity refers to those verbs or syntactic configurations where the subject is the entity undergoing a change (thus, an internal argument), verbs like *sink* show that unaccusativity can be syntactically built, since their notional object has the possibility of moving to the subject position when there is no distinct entity responsible for the initiation of its change of state. Verbs like *sink* are transitive verbs with the possibility of becoming unaccusative.

The object’s promotion to subject position depends on the presence of a *cause*, so we must have a clear notion about causativity before attempting any explanation of unaccusativity. Why did languages develop a grammaticalized expression of *cause*? And then, why do languages show divergent strategies to allow the non-expression of *cause*?

In our vision, argument structure is a system that delimitates the denotation of the verb by composition. If *sink* denotes any event of sinking, the presence of one or two arguments has no other meaning than that of tying the denotation of the verb to one unique event of *sinking* by virtue of the unambiguous referential capabilities of the DPs involved. Tradition connected argument structure with θ-roles, with the baroque supposition that verbs carried not only their own meaning, but actively selected the role of the participants involved in the action and depended on their presence to be grammatically satisfied. Consequently, verbs with transitivity alternations must be explained by lexical transformations, which are stipulative, not needed under our view, and counterintuitive with respect to the behavior and expressive capabilities of the verbs under consideration.

It seems to us that there is no sense in explaining the grammatical binding of the verb *sink* with its external argument by virtue of its semantic contribution of *agentivity*, when it can be grammatically suppressed under certain (pragmatic) circumstances without losing the supposition that the event was volitionally caused by someone. The consequent syntactic case rearrangement of the object does not seem to support the rigid θ-grid view either.

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Suppose that the external argument is a mere reference to the starting point of the event of change of state, and nothing else. This view could be supported by the fact that, as we will see, some locative elements can appear in this position and make an unergative verb behave as unaccusative verbs do (e.g. *Aquí duermen niños*, lit. ‘Here sleep children’). These were called “syntactic unaccusative constructions” by TORREGO (1989). In these cases, the subject position seems to be occupied by a grammatical entity capable of referring to a spatially identifiable individual. Only in this distribution, the semantic subject can be left as a bare noun in post-verbal position. It suggests that the syntactic subject position is awarded to the most delimited referential element, whether an argument or an adjunct.

Some Spanish transitive verbs can intransitivize with the apparent substitution of the external argument by the reflexive pronoun. The absence of the cause-denoting argument would result in an expression with only one subevent referent, and these verbs, usually called inchoative verbs, denote changes of state, and are characterized by having two discrete and identifiable subevents. It can be argued, then, that the reflexive pronoun is a defective reference to the initial notion of the entity undergoing the change of state.

There seems to be a problem with verbs displaying the same transitivity alternation without the *se* marker in the intransitive alternant (e.g. “Han subido los precios”, ‘The prices have risen’). The tradition has obstinately kept these verbs within the unaccusative label because of the following semantic criterion: the argument in subject position undergoes a change of state and thus, it is an internal argument in deep structure. The reliability of affectedness as a syntactic test is arguable (one could claim that the subject of *run* undergoes many changes, starting with an obvious change of place), and nowadays’ accounts prefer the notion of telicity as a delimiter of verb classes. With respect to telicity there is in fact a contrast between *se* and *se*-less verbs: we claim that all the verbs in the second group can get an atelic reading. This is easily explained in our framework: atelic verbs have homogeneous subevents, and if subevents are to be syntactically signaled by every argument (and even by other elements), there is no sense in having more than one argument expressed when the use of a verb is atelic.

There are proposals linking the atelicity of an intransitive alternant with the grammatical class of unergative verbs, but this could result in a cyclic argument, so we will avoid all use of the split intransitivity labels and will consider unaccusativity as a broad syntactic configuration with many levels of application both intra- and cross-linguistically.

To our knowledge, there is no unavoidable reason for postulating a different nature for every different use of the reflexive pronoun *se*. We believe that every interpretation it can get is the result of the interaction of its basic referential function with different contexts. So, our analysis should be able to explain the basic reflexive uses of the pronoun, the reflexive passive, and the so-called aspectual use, which we can get by combining the reflexive pronoun with unaccusative verbs (*irse, caerse*) or with transitive verbs which do not become intransitive with the pronoun (*comerse*).

Every language has different strategies available to leave unexpressed the external argument of a verb without suppressing it semantically, when the context requires such a structure. We list them in a complexity hierarchy, with the same verb example *break*:

1. **Morphology**
   
   *break* 
   しゅう *kowa-s* 
   しゅうる *kowa-ruru*

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2 This view was originally developed and thoroughly justified in GALLARDO (2007).
3 See, for instance, PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ (2003).
4 REINHART & SILONI (2005), for instance, argue that only the reflexive use of *se* occupies the internal argument position, and the subject corresponds to the external argument, in a similar fashion as that of an unergative verb. We don’t think their vision is adequate, at least for the languages under consideration here.
5 Verbs which clearly behave in an unaccusative way even prior to the application of the reflexive pronoun, and which get a new interpretation, typically related with inchoativity or, we claim, with *space*, when *se* is added.
II. Reflexive pronoun *se* (*romper/romperse*)

III. Periphrastic passive (*get/be broken, 壊される kowa-sareru, *ser roto*)

We should note that English and Japanese do not use anything similar to strategy II, while Spanish uses it productively. Strategy I is not available in Spanish, and strategy III is much less used than in the other two languages, and in fact sounds strange with the verb *romper* (*La ventana fue rota por Juan, ‘The window was broken by John’*).

This crosslinguistic distribution is functionally logical if it is the case that Romance languages specialized in an intermediate-level strategy, while non-directional languages (English and Japanese, from the languages under consideration) make use of both the simplest and the most complex strategies. As a side effect, we explain the contrast in frequency between the use of the passive in Spanish and in English.

2. Grammatical expression of *cause*

Early researches in causation, like, for instance, the classical SHIBATANI (1976), and subsequent work until our days have focused on the notion that causative constructions and causative verbs codify two subevents: one action triggering the change, and the change of state produced. It seems that primitive causative expressions contained the two events in separate sentences. Grammaticalization consisted in the fusion of these two into only one biargumental predicate. It is a way for language to iconically reflect the cohesion one must necessarily observe between two events in the real world to consider them cause and effect, even if this is only a supposition made up by human cognition. In this sense, the presence of two individuals in the argument structure of a transitive verb could be considered as a trace of a once bieventive structure, and they retain their function as referential markers to the two close, but differentiated, segments of time corresponding to each subevent.

The external argument position in causative predicates seems to convey the semantic information as to which entity in the world is related with the event by virtue of being present (or pragmatically accessible) in the space and time corresponding to the initial action triggering the event. This must be the common semantic contribution of every external argument, irrespective of its involvement in the action as a volitional agent or an inanimate cause. So, when the external argument is left unexpressed the sentence still has the implication that the change of state is being caused by something or by someone. What we express by this means is that the initial subevent cannot be made specific by the reference to a known individual in the relevant context. In other words, sentence (5) does not mean that the sinking of the boat was causeless, or that an intrinsic property of the boat was responsible for the sinking event. It means that there was no known entity coexistent with the undergoer entity in the initial time of the change of state who could be the alleged cause responsible for the sinking. We may choose to use this expression (i) because we do not know what the cause was (this is called the *inchoative reading of se*), or (ii) because it is an undetermined participant and has no relevance (yielding the so-called *reflexive passive reading of se*):

(4) Los trabajadores hundieron el barco.                               (5) Se hundió el barco.
‘The workers sank the boat.’                                            ‘The boat sank.’

At least two of the historically differentiated uses of *se* depend only on the contrast of the referential capabilities of the external argument occupied by the reflexive pronoun, but the structure and the function of the pronoun should remain the same in both constructions. We are giving regularity to syntax and reduce variation to the referential capabilities of pronouns as we already know that pronouns and referential elements in general can vary across languages.

If we change slightly the pragmatic context, by supposing that boats may have a self-sinking mechanism, the reflexive interpretation would automatically be possible for the same sentence. We only need to assume that the reflexive pronoun suspends the interpretation of the external
argument and that one possible way to solve the compositional interpretation of the sentence is by copying the reference of the internal argument to the cause position. Whether something can be a causer or not is information stored in our world-knowledge system, and syntax can be left free of such distinctions.

Maintaining the same supposition, but with a plural internal argument, we could easily get a reciprocal use of the reflexive pronoun, in which each of the boats would be responsible for the sinking of the other. Interpretation is flexible and, we claim, intimately related to the common properties of referential elements.

3. Grammatical absence of cause crosslinguistically

In the crosslinguistic typology of HASPELMATH (1993), languages are divided between those with a morphological marker in one of the forms of the verb with the transitive alternation and those without a directional marking, i.e., languages with both forms unmarked (like English to increase, to increase) or with both forms equally marked (the case of Japanese 増やす fu-yasu (tr) / 増える fu-eru (intr) ‘to increase’).

Spanish is classified as a directional opposition language, since the reflexive pronoun se is considered a morphological marker of intransitivity. In many languages, in fact, reflexive morphology (when available) is responsible for the marking of intransitive alternants: “if [the] intransitive is marked, [the marking] is often identical to the marking of lexical reflexivity” (DORON 2003: 2). Most recent accounts consider the pronoun a marker with the meaning of inchoativity or some kind of aspectual particle. What we think is still compatible with this typological classification. Our view departs from the classification insomuch as we put the emphasis on the active syntactic function of the pronoun as a referential entity, and not as a fixed or grammaticalized morphological signal of intransitivity.

Under the common view that arguments convey thematic information, we should get this semantic interpretation out of an inchoative sentence like the one in (5):

(5) \( \lambda P \lambda x [P(x,x)] \)

This formula, according to DORON (2003), does not reflect in any way the real interpretation we give to (5). We can say (5) even when we know the exact entity responsible for the event of sinking. And, if the responsible participant is an inanimate entity, the agentivity implied in the formula is impossible to assign in the real interpretation of the sentence.

We can solve this puzzle by our assumption that arguments do contribute to the denotation of a predicate only with the reference to an individual representing the starting point (in time and space) of the change of state. Then, the interpretation of this sentence is relevant in its contrast with the transitive version: the reflexive acts as a duplicate reference of the affected entity, only that it is situated in the initial time and space of the event. It is the contextually accessible referent before the change. We should explain why some verbs require this strategy for the expression of a change while others do not in the following sections.

If we are right, there is no need for the explanation given by DORON (2003: 6) “middle morphology attributes the instigation of the denoted event to the patient itself”. According to her, this can be resolved following the proposal by CHIERCHIA (1989), according to which “middle and reflexive verbs have identical semantics”, because the following pair of examples share the same truth-conditions:

(6) The vase broke.
(7) The vase broke itself.

Another proof that these verbs have a reflexive component is that expressions with a clear reflexive meaning in Spanish behave in English like regular inchoatives, i.e., without marking (example 10). This could mean that there is a hidden reflexive in the English alternation, or
simply, as we prefer to put it, that reflexivity is just one of the possible readings when a syntactic configuration allows for the suspension of the external argument.

(8) Max washed the child.
(9) Max washed.

REINHART & SILONI (2005) point out that these valence-reducing arity operations (intransitivization) remove completely the external argument from the semantic structure, in contrast with the passive:

(10) The ice was melted (with a candle).
(11) The ice melted (*with a candle).

This gives sense to our scheme: English and Japanese have two ways to make a verb unaccusative because each way has different expressive possibilities. In the passive, the causing argument can be expressed through an adjunct, which leads the authors to suppose it is still present at some level of semantic representation. In the lexical unaccusative it is impossible because there are less structural positions to be filled, or maybe because some kind of covert reflexive element is blocking the external argument position with its impoverished reference.

The previous contrast does not fully work in Spanish:

(12) El hielo fue derretido (con una vela).
(13) El hielo *(se) derritió (con una vela).

In (14) the instrumental adjunct is incompatible with an inchoative reading, but works fine with a reflexive passive interpretation, where there is an undetermined human agent. Even with the inchoative reading the adjunct is possible if it has a cause interpretation, i.e., there is no human involved in the action and only the effects of the candle are responsible for this event.

The presence of an instrumental adjunct automatically triggers the passive interpretation because of a conceptual semantic incompatibility between the absence of an agent and the presence of an instrumental. We think that a unified syntactic structure for both is unavoidable, since the shift of function from one to another depends only on how instantiates the vague referential range of the pronoun.

In conclusion, there is no decausativization in Spanish in the terms of REINHART & SILONI (2005). There is no zero-derivation capable of leaving the verb without any structural space left for the external argument.

4. Intransitive alternants without se

We should rethink whether se-less intransitive alternants are truly unaccusative structures. If they are not unaccusative, we can maintain the generalization that verbs with inchoative alternation need the pronoun in the intransitive. Verbs such as subir or caer (‘rise’ and ‘fall’) can be intransitivized optionally without se. In this case, we get an atelic reading of the event. The change does not reach a conventionalized endpoint, and obviously, it depends on pragmatic world knowledge to determine whether the se-less variant is tolerable. We propose a telicity test in the following examples: the emphatic reiterative construction ‘verb + conjunction + verb’ does not imply any complete event in (15) because there is no se, while it does imply many events of falling completely to an endpoint in (16):

(14) Juan caía y caía en el vacío en su sueño. 
Juan ‘was falling’ into the space in his dream. (i.e. ‘Juan went on falling continuously…’)
(15) Juan se caía y se caía en su sueño.
Juan fell again and again in his dream.
We share this observation with some researchers, like for instance PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ (2003): “the correlation between unaccusativity and telicity holds unambiguously in Spanish”. In BORER’s (1994, 2005) proposal, this correlation is necessary, since the author considers that argument structure is the result of the projection of functional heads intimately related to aspect. This represents an improvement with respect to the general idea that having a patient subject makes a verb automatically unaccusative. It seems more relevant whether the change of state reaches a conventional state of completion or not, and the pronoun is a syntactically visible consequence of it. In any case, there is certain circularity in the definition of verbal classes and we should avoid it. This happens, for instance, when PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ (2003) gives her account for the atelic intransitives we are discussing in this section: “gradual realization verbs in Spanish have a variable behavior: if telic, they are unaccusative; if atelic, they are unergative.”

Even though we share the intuition that se-less intransitives look semantically closer to unergatives, and that we proposed in GALLARDO (2007) to classify atelic unaccusatives within the unergative class, we try to avoid considering the classes unergative / unaccusative as lexically marked, closed sets. Following our conception of compositional meaning, then, the only condition for a verb to be unergative is to have in external argument position an entity controlling the development of the event, which ends up necessarily as atelic in the absence of any other semantic delimiter of the action.

5. Syntactic Unaccusative Constructions

There is another construction we will take into consideration. The following is a classification by LEVIN & RAPPAPORT HOVAV (1995) of unaccusative verbs not fulfilling their requirement of being telic:

I. Gradual realization verbs (descender ‘descend’, mejorar ‘improve’)
II. Non-agentive manner-of-motion verbs (rodar ‘roll’, botar ‘bounce’)
III. Syntactic unaccusative constructions (Aquí juegan niños, ‘There are kids playing here’)

Our explanation for I and II was already mentioned in section 4 above. The existence of III proves that unaccusativity is the result of certain syntactic configuration. They show (see TORREGO (1989)) a canonical unergative verb with a post-posed bare plural subject. The allowance for this kind of subject is often used to diagnose unaccusativity, somehow relating its properties to an internal position origin. Some unergative verbs behave like unaccusatives in this way only when there is a locative element occupying the canonical position (and maybe some of the functions) of a subject.

This rather surprising behavior fits naturally within the logic of our proposal. Subject position is occupied by agents or causers by virtue of their referential properties. By signaling a known entity, the external argument restricts the interpretation of the verb to a specific event in space and time. Arguments do not contribute to the event’s semantics any thematic information. In this sense, a locative element can be a candidate for carrying out the functions of the external argument (though not occupying exactly the same position because of its different grammatical category).

Non impersonal verbs require a nominative subject: it can be the external argument, or the internal one, when the first is not available. But a locative expression can override this restriction at least with respect to word order (the post-posed subject behaves as an internal

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6 We agree together with PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ (2003) with this radical proposal, while most of the researchers only admit that this correlation is a tendency.
object with respect to position, but has to be nominative because there is no default case in Spanish.\footnote{The post-posed subject is nominative because there is no other default case in Spanish. In Catalan, it appears in the partitive:}

We should not ignore that there is a semantic relation between the locative and the grammatical subject of the sentence, the argument. We do not get a free interpretation for the argument: once the space is delimited by the locative, the referent of the subject is bound to that context. The sentence “Aquí juegan niños” means ‘there are (certain) kids playing here’, instead of ‘this is the place where (any) kid plays’. This is the reason why the subject can be left in bare plural form: the deictic reference to a determinate space is yet established by the locative, so the subject is freed from the task. You have to recognise who ‘the kids’ are by looking to which kids are in the referred space.

There seems to be a position in the pre-verbal area where some referential entity has to be, regardless of any thematic or case relations, not only to determine what is the source of the event (role usually attributed only to the agent or the cause), but to indicate a spatially recognisable frame where the denoted kind of event has to be interpreted.

Let’s suppose this position can be also filled with abstract information. The canonical lexical unaccusatives convey in its root certain deictical implication. In verbs like ‘to come’, ‘to be born’, a movement from another place to \textit{here} is implied. So, they do not need an overt locative.

By postulating that there is a silent one (or something coindexed with the one implied in the root) we get to keep a uniform syntactic structure for all kinds of unaccusatives:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(16)] Aquí juegan niños. *Juegan niños. *Juegan niños aquí.
\textit{Here play kids.} *Play kids. *Play kids here.
\item[(17)] [locación por deixis] llegan trenes.
\textit{[deictical location] arrive trains.}
\item[(18)] [locación por deixis] hacen niños.
\textit{[deictical location] are born kids.}
\end{enumerate}

If these verbs behave in an unaccusative way just because of this deictical component they possess conceptually, we could think they are in all other respects the same as unergatives. It is not our intention to change the verb class label: our aim is just to unify all kinds of unaccusativity as the same syntactic phenomenon, while leaving verbs undivided into lexical classes.

In Spanish, \textit{se} is the element most commonly used to fulfil the verb’s requirement of a locator of the denoted event, when there is no distinct entity in external argument position to play the same role. With \textit{se} making a partial reference to the undergoer entity when in its initial position, the verb becomes able to denote both subevents needed in a change of state meaning. We have just seen that a semantic component in the verb’s conceptual meaning allows it to behave unaccusatively without an external argument, without a locative, and without a pronoun. Their ability to come bare of such initial-subevent-related information made them visible enough for grammarians to discover unaccusativity and to relate these verbs to passive and middle-voice constructions.

Our theoretical restructuring has a typological advantage. It reduces the variation between non-directional opposition languages (English and Japanese, amongst many others) and directional opposition languages (Spanish) to just one localized feature: the former have a special $\v$-head, or a zero morpheme occupying $\v$, which allows the localization of the event without specifying causes or agents. We could conceive this element as a default semantic locative. We have seen in this section that the strong requirement for a definite subject (known as subject EPP in generative literature) could be reduced to one minimal common denominator,
the locative function of (external) arguments and other elements. The following Japanese examples try to illustrate the point:

(19) 車を止めてください。
kuruma-wo tomete kudasai.
‘Stop the car’

(20) 車が止まった。
kuruma-gaNOM tomatta.
‘The car stopped’ (with ‘se’ in Spanish)

In Japanese, the morphologically marked verb pair tomeru / tomaru equals to English stop / stop and to Spanish detener / detenerse. The presence of suffix –aru in opposition to suffix –eru legitimates the affected object to appear in nominative case without the expression of any other causer or agent responsible for the event of stopping the car (but it is not impossible to have one in the semantic representation). We suppose that this morpheme is an instantiation of v, and from its head position it gives a default interpretation to its empty specifier, which is the locus for external arguments giving their implicit locative information. In English, a special kind of v is what allows the alternation, but without phonological realization. In Spanish, we propose there are not two types of v. There is only one, which always requires some referential entity in its specifier. The pronoun se is an economical grammatical resort to play that role.

6. Hard to explain unaccusatives: morir and morirse

We have a proposal for transitivity alternations according to which a transitive causative verb such as “subir” (‘to raise’) has two different intransitive uses: “subir” (like in “El paro sube”, ‘The unemployment rate raises’), denoting an atelic event like any unergative verb; and “subirse” (“La falda se le subió”, ‘The skirt raised to her’). We propose that in this last use, everything remains unchanged with respect to the normal transitive use, except for the reflexive pronoun in external argument position, which blocks the possibility of interpreting any causer entity in the argument structure and gives rise to an unaccusative structure. The function of the reflexive pronoun here is not different than in any other use, and if this is true, the reflexive is just one of the many interpretations that this pronoun can trigger. It would be more exact to call this pronoun the anticausative pronoun, for instance.

It is hard to find the contrast between morir and morirse (‘to die’). They are, at first glance, interchangeable in every context. But we could find a context where the telic accomplishment reading is necessary, and then prove that only the use with se is appropriate:

(21) ¡Este hombre se muere!
‘This man is dying!’

(22) *¡Este hombre muere!
‘This man is dying!’

(23) ¡Este hombre se nos muere!
‘This man is dying (and we are affected)’

(24) *¡Este hombre nos muere!
‘This man is dying to us!’

Thanks to the reflexive pronoun, the initial subevent of the change of state event is present in the argument structure and contributes to the denotation of two discrete moments in time. The tense in (22) is an imminent present and has some duration in it. The referent of the DP is imminently turning to be in another state, and the change is relevant to us. In fact, we can add a dative affected entity only with the pronominal version of the verb (24).

While in Spanish the verb to die admits the pronoun optionally and in most cases it does not lead to an interpretative contrast, the verb “nacer” (‘to be born’) needs always the pronoun. This is hard to explain for the traditional assumption that both are canonical unaccusative verbs.

(25) *El niño se nació en febrero.
If *se* was to be related with *aspect*, the contrast would be impossible to explain since both verbs denote a clearly telic event. On the contrary, these examples support our referential analysis. The only contrast between the events denoted by these verbs is that in *nacer* a new entity appears in the world, while in *morir* a known entity changes of state. *Se* is incompatible with *nacer* because the entity is conceptualized as new in the event scene.

7. Motion verbs with *se* and verbs of appearance

Pronominal usages of motion verbs are said to be related with the initiation of the event, thus attributing an inchoative aspectual marker nature to the reflexive. It is not necessary to mention special functions of the pronoun under our vision of argument structure.

Consider the following sentence, which is ungrammatical without the use of *se*. We propose different ways for making it grammatical, and then try to reduce their common semantic contribution:

(26) *Juan fue de aquí.*  ‘John went of here’
(27) Juan *se* fue de aquí.  ‘John went of here’
(28) Juan fue *desde* aquí.  ‘John went from here’
(29) Juan fue de aquí a Londres.  ‘John went from here to London’
(30) Juan salió de aquí.  ‘John came out of here’

In (30), it is obvious that adding the endpoint of the movement makes the sentence good. In the others, it is the origin of the movement what seems to be implied. If *se* makes reference to the initial location of the individual, its function is parallel with the others. We need to have referents for the two locations implied in the displacement. This is how the aspectual contribution works.

The use of *se* with verbs of appearance is very restricted: *amanecerse* (opposed to *ponerse*), *surgirse*, *brotarse*, *manarse* (opposed to *acabarse*, *agotarse*), *nacerse* (opposed to *morirse*), *acudirse*, *aparecerse* (opposed to *marcharse*). The pronoun is incompatible with these verbs since they denote the introduction of a new referent in the discourse.

There is this special use of the unaccusative *caer* (‘to fall’) related with appearance:

(31) *Cae la lluvia.*  ‘Rain falls’
(32) *Se cae la lluvia.*

We commented earlier that *caerse* (telic) seems to imply the arrival to the endpoint of the movement, while *caer* (atelic) can be unbounded (it contains no endpoint implicature). Contrary to expectations, the event denoted by (32) is a movement reaching a determinate endpoint and should allow *se*. It is evidence in favour of our referential analysis: in this particular case, the thing that falls can only be named *lluvia* ‘rain’ once the movement is started, and *se* cannot make reference to its initial state because it is not the same referent yet.

8. Conclusion

Our proposal combines elements from both formal grammar and cognitive grammar in order to resolve some irregularities in the conception of unaccusativity both inside the Spanish grammar and typologically across languages. It is not useful to consider the reflexive pronoun *se* an intransitive morphological marker or aspectual operator. We think that it is a way to fulfil a verbal requirement of spatio-temporal delimitation of the event through its external argument position. The other two languages under consideration here use specific morphology (overt or

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covert) in order to block that requirement in the relevant position and get a *pure* unaccusative structure. In Spanish, this construction is formed syntactically. *Se* is the most economical way to get a configuration where the internal argument ends up in subject position and the external argument is linked to the initial subevent of the same entity. We can get a similar construction using the periphrastic passive, but it has a much more restricted use. English and Japanese, which both lack this intermediate structure, use productively both the morphological and the periphrastic strategies for unaccusativity.

The reflexive pronoun blocks the position of the external argument and this triggers the movement of the internal argument to subject position, while at the same time maintaining the minimal reference to the initial position of the entity, representing the initial subevent of the change of state. Some presentational and some motion verbs do not allow the presence of se because there is no accessible initial referent. There are some other verbs expressing a change undergone by the subject, but they appear without se. This class contains atelic verbs, with homogeneous subevents that do not have discrete referents, and verbs conceptually containing some kind of locative delimitation that directly fulfils this requirement. The terms unaccusative and unergative, we claim, are not the most appropriate notions to describe these mechanisms.

These proposals seek to preserve a conception of the system where each grammatical unity has a uniform function, and where different readings of the same construction are the result of the interaction between the constant structural meaning and the conceptual meaning lexically encoded. Because of space, we leave unexplained the so-called “perfective use” of the pronoun (“comerse”, ‘to eat”), “inherent se” (“quejarse”, ‘to complain’) and “reflexive impersonal” (like in “Se busca a los mejores candidatos”, ‘*The best candidates are being sought’), but we believe that they can be explained under the same analysis.

**Bibliography:**


