
Mismatched Spanish Unaccusativity Tests

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4.1 Introduction

Mismatched unaccusativity tests offer strong evidence for a semantic analysis of split intransitivity.¹ In Spanish, two tests are said to distinguish unaccusatives from unergatives. First, unergatives, unlike unaccusatives, cannot be embedded in a causative construction with a generic null animate causee. Second, unaccusatives, unlike unergatives, can have postverbal bare plural subjects.² Mismatches arise with verbs like *heder* ‘stink’, for instance, which fail only one of the tests. I argue that mismatches like this one occur when a subject has mixed proto-patient and proto-agent properties, since different tests can be sensitive to different lexical entailment weightings.

I will also show that applying these tests to pronominal verbs in Spanish gives rise to analogous mismatches, offering additional support for the semantic analysis of split intransitivity. Pronominal verbs are de-

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2000 LS Annual Meeting in Chicago. I thank the participants in the session for useful comments and suggestions. Annie Zaenen’s (1993) paper on Dutch unaccusativity tests prompted me to look beyond the syntax of unaccusativity in Romance. In that paper, Annie showed that seemingly untractable exceptions could be accounted for in lexical-semantic terms, with interesting theoretical consequences. Annie has been a source of inspiration and support over the years: I am glad that this paper is published in a volume to celebrate her work.

²In other Romance languages, perfect auxiliary selection (BE or HAVE) is often used as an unaccusativity test (Burzio 1986, Legendre 1989, Perlmutter 1989, among others). In Modern Spanish, however, the only perfect auxiliary is *haber* ‘have’.

rived intransitives marked by a reflexive clitic. In Spanish, a pronominal verb often occurs as the inchoative member of the causative alternation, as in (1a). The semantic range of pronominal verbs, however, extends beyond the class of change-of-state predicates, as shown in (1b).

- (1) a. El espejo se rompió.
 the mirror SE broke
 ‘The mirror broke.’
- b. Los edificios se reflejan en la vidriera.
 the buildings SE reflect in the store.window
 ‘The buildings reflect in the store window.’

The semantic variation found among pronominal verbs, which will be central to the arguments developed in this article, contrasts with their syntactic homogeneity. The received view of pronominal verbs like *romperse* ‘become broken’ is that they are unaccusatives (Rosen 1988, Grimshaw 1990, Levin and Rappaport 1995).³ The reflexive clitic indicates that the surface subject is an underlying object. If diagnostics for unaccusativity, then, should produce consistent results when applied to pronominal verbs. I will show that this is not the case, and that the mismatches that arise receive clear characterizations in semantic terms. These results, I will argue, support Zaenen’s (1993) semantic approach to split intransitivity (see also Centineo 1986, 1996, Van Valin 1990, and Dowty 1991).

4.2 Two tests for unaccusativity in Spanish

As argued in Zubizarreta (1985), Burzio (1986), and Alsina (1996), the distribution of embedded verbs with null generic animate subjects in Romance causative constructions gives evidence for split intransitivity. Transitive verbs can appear in causatives with a generic null animate subject, as the example in (2a) shows, and so do unergatives, as shown in (2b) and (2c). Unaccusatives, on the other hand, cannot appear in the Generic Causee Construction (GCC), as the examples in (2d) and

³Several authors (Kayne 1975, Grimshaw 1982, Alsina 1996) have provided independent evidence for the valence-reducing nature of reflexive cliticization in Romance. I will assume with these authors that reflexive verbs are intransitive. The Spanish reflexive clitic serves many different functions. As in other Romance languages, it marks constructions in which the subject and object are coreferential (true reflexives), and also impersonal/passive constructions with an arbitrary human agent (see Mendikoetxea 2012 for an overview of the literature on the Spanish reflexive clitic and its functions). In this paper I limit the analysis to the different semantic classes of pronominal verbs, which I take to have only one semantic role to assign to their subjects (a different point of view is defended in Koontz-Garboden 2009).

(2e) illustrate.⁴

- (2) a. El director del hospital hizo operar toda la noche.
 the director of the hospital made operate all the night
 ‘The director of the hospital made people operate all night long.’
- b. El capataz hizo trabajar incesantemente.
 the foreman made work without.pause
 ‘The foreman made people work without pause.’
- c. La película hizo llorar de emoción.
 the movie made cry of sorrow
 ‘The movie made people cry out of sorrow.’
- d. *El mago hizo desaparecer misteriosamente.
 the magician made disappear mysteriously
 ‘The magician made people disappear mysteriously.’
- e. *La directora hizo llegar a la escuela.
 the principal made arrive to the school
 ‘The principal made people arrive at school.’

Torrego (1989) and Isina (1996) discuss another unaccusativity test in Spanish. They show that bare plural subjects can appear in postverbal position with unaccusatives, as in (3a) and (3b), but not with unergatives, as in (3c), (3d), and (3e).⁵

⁴The tense in the GCC must be controlled to avoid a generic reading of the causative construction itself, which licenses null objects normally. For this purpose, all the examples discussed here have a causative verb in the preterite.

⁵Many speakers reject Torrego’s judgments, and some trained linguists have questioned the validity of the test. Postverbal plural subjects are ungrammatical with unergatives under a presentational reading. In my interpretation, sentences like (3c) and (3d) cannot mean ‘there are stars shining intensely’ or ‘there are calves grazing’. Sentences like (3a) or (3b), on the other hand, can have this presentational interpretation. They can be used in a newspaper headline, for instance, to report an event. The reason why this test has become so controversial is that under certain conditions unergatives can have postverbal bare plural subjects. This happens if the sentence has a preposed locative phrase making reference to a definite location, as in (), or if the bare plural NP is the focus of contrast, as in (B).

() quí pastan terneros.
 here graze calves
 ‘Calves graze here.’

(B) Pastan terneros, no cabras.
 graze calves, not goats
 ‘Calves graze, not goats’

In the first case, it can be argued that the bare plural noun denotes a property, such as it is part of the predicate. Sentence () is not about calves, but about the location: it specifies a property of the location designated by the adverb. In the second case, the sentence is not presenting a new event, or introducing a new

- (3) a. Llegan trenes con retraso.
arrive trains with delay
'Trains arrive with delay.'
- b. Desaparecen periodistas todos los meses.
disappear journalists all the months
'Journalists disappear every month.'
- c. ??Brillan estrellas con intensidad.
shine stars with intensity
'Stars shine intensely.'
- d. ??Pastan terneros por la mañana.
graze calves by the morning
'Calves graze in the morning.'
- e. ??Trabajan prisioneros de sol a sol.
work prisoners from sun to sun
'Prisoners work from dawn till dusk.'

In Torrego's analysis, an unaccusative like *llegar* 'arrive' can have a postverbal bare plural subject (PVBS) because its sole argument is an internal one. Bare plurals, she adds, can appear in object position (i.e. after the verb), as in (4a), but not in subject position, as (4b) shows. This shows that subjects of unaccusatives behave like objects, and subjects of unergatives behave like subjects of transitive verbs.

- (4) a. Las ardillas comen nueces.
the squirrels eat nuts
'Squirrels eat nuts.'
- b. *Pediatras vacunan a los niños.
pediatricians vaccinate to the children
'Pediatricians vaccinate children.'

4.3 Mismatches between the tests

When pronominal verbs are subject to the GCC test and the PVBS test, the results seem initially to support the unaccusative analysis of pronominal verbs. Verbs like *asfixiarse*, *arrepentirse*,⁶ and *arrojarse*, for instance, are excluded from the GCC, as shown in (5a), (5b), and (5c).

participant, but rather correcting a statement that has been uttered previously or that is presupposed or salient in the consciousness of the speakers. In sum, there are valid objections to an indiscriminate use of the postverbal bare plural subject test, which disappear when the presentational sense of the construction is taken into account.

⁶ *rrepentirse* 'repent, feel remorse' is inherently pronominal. That is, there is no transitive counterpart **arrepentir*, meaning 'cause to feel remorse.' This is a not uncommon occurrence among pronominal verbs.

These data seem to indicate that the subjects of pronominal verbs, like the subjects of unaccusatives, passives, and true reflexives, are underlying objects at some level of representation.

- (5) a. ??El humo hizo asfixiarse durante el incendio.
 the smoke made suffocate.SE during the fire
 ‘Smoke made people suffocate during the fire.’
 b. ??El director de la escuela hizo arrepentirse.
 the director of the school made repent.SE
 ‘The school principal made people repent.’
 c. ??Los bomberos hicieron arrojarse desde el segundo piso.
 the firefighters made throw.SE from the second floor.
 ‘Firefighters made people jump off from the second floor.’

The PVBS test should give the opposite result since unaccusatives are allowed to have postverbal bare plural subjects. My own judgments are that verbs like *arrojarse* and *asfixiarse* can have postverbal bare plural subjects, as in (6a) and (6b).⁷ This is expected under the assumption that all pronominal verbs are unaccusatives.

- (6) a. Se arrojan inquilinos por desesperación.
 SE throw tenants by despair
 ‘Tenants jump out of despair.’
 b. Se asfixian bomberos por descuido.
 SE suffocate firefighters by lack.of.care
 ‘Firefighters suffocate when they are careless.’
 c. Se derrumban edificios sin aviso.
 SE fall.down buildings without warning
 ‘Buildings fall down without warning.’

In the idealized model assumed by the standard syntactic analysis of unaccusativity, the GCC test and the PVBS test should divide all intransitives into two complementary classes. None of the intransitive verbs that appear in the GCC should be able to occur with postverbal bare plural subjects, and all the intransitive verbs that occur in the PVBS construction should be excluded from the GCC. Moreover, all pronominal verbs should behave as unaccusatives, passing the PVBS test but not the GCC test. There are, however, some critical examples that do not fit in this picture.

⁷There is considerable variation in acceptability across dialects and individuals about these examples. The data in this paper reflect my own dialect: River Plate Spanish. As an anonymous reviewer points out, it would be desirable to back up individual grammaticality judgments with corpus data. Even though that is outside the scope of this investigation, I hope the results I introduce here will guide further research in that direction.

First, there are some verbs that behave more like unergatives than like unaccusatives, in spite of being marked by a reflexive pronoun. Verbs like *revolcarse* ‘roll on’, *arrastrarse* ‘crawl’, and *menearse* ‘swing’, can occur in the GCC, as shown in (7a) to (7c).⁸

- (7) a. El sargento hizo revolcarse en el barro.
 the sergeant made roll.SE in the mud
 ‘The sergeant made people roll in the mud.’
- b. Las balas hicieron arrastrarse sobre el pavimento.
 the bullets made drag.SE over the pavement
 ‘Bullets made people crawl on the pavement.’
- c. La música hizo menearse toda la noche.
 the music made swing.SE all the night
 ‘The music made people swing all night.’

second problem is that there is a mismatch not predicted by a syntactic theory of unaccusativity. verb like *heder*, for instance, is excluded from the GCC, as in (8a). Therefore, it should be able to have a postverbal bare plural subject, but (8b) shows this is not the case. Moreover, the same mismatch between the PVBS and the GCC tests is observed for pronominal verbs. *Reflejarse* ‘reflect’ fails both tests, as shown by (9a) and (9b).

- (8) a. *El entrenador hizo heder.
 the coach made stink
 ‘The coach made people stink.’
- b. *Hieden atletas.
 stink athletes
 ‘athletes stink.’
- (9) a. ??La vanidad hizo reflejarse en las vidrieras.
 the vanity made reflect.SE in the shop.windows
 ‘Vanity made people reflect in the shop windows.’
- b. ??Se reflejan clientes con claridad.
 SE reflect customers with clarity
 ‘Customers reflect clearly.’

⁸There are many speakers of Spanish for whom infinitives embedded under causative constructions cannot have a reflexive pronoun under any circumstance (Moore 1996). For those speakers, the sentences in (7a) to (7c) will be ungrammatical. Care should be taken to test these sentences with speakers who may accept embedded reflexives in their dialect.

4.4 semantic explanation of the mismatches

The mismatch between the PVBS test and the GCC test for unaccusatives can be accounted for in semantic terms. Postverbal bare plural subjects can appear with telic predicates like *regresar*, *desaparecer*, *arrojarse*, or *asfixiarse*, but not with verbs like *heder*, *trabajar*, *arrastrarse*, or *reflejarse*, which are atelic. This is summarized in Table 1.

INTRANSITIVE	<i>trabajar</i> 'work'	<i>heder</i> 'stink'	<i>regresar</i> 'return'	<i>desaparecer</i> 'disappear'
PRONOMINAL	<i>arrastrarse</i> 'crawl'	<i>reflejarse</i> 'reflect'	<i>arrojarse</i> 'throw oneself'	<i>asfixiarse</i> 'suffocate'
ATELIC	+	+	–	–
VOLITIONAL	+	–	+	–
			postverbal bare plural subject OK	

TABLE 1 Distribution of postverbal bare plural subjects.

Telicity also seems to play a role in determining the distribution of predicates in the GCC. Telic predicates like *regresar*, *desaparecer*, *arrojarse*, or *asfixiarse* are excluded from this construction. Not all atelic predicates, however, can appear in the GCC. While predicates like *arrastrarse* and *trabajar* do, other atelic predicates, like *heder* and *reflejarse*, are excluded. The critical factor here is volitionality. The events denoted by *arrastrarse* and *trabajar* are under the volitional control of the subject, but this is not the case with the events denoted by *heder* and *reflejarse*. What makes a predicate into a viable candidate for the GCC is the combined strength of being atelic and being under the volitional control of the subject. Volitional predicates are excluded from this construction if they are telic, as is the case with *arrojarse* and *regresar*. This is summarized in Table 2.⁹

⁹Marín and McNally (2011) discuss a class of Spanish pronominal verbs that refer to psychological events (i.e. *aburrirse* 'get bored', *enfadarse* 'get upset'). They notice that, like other pronominal verbs, they are inchoative, but differ from change-of-state predicates like *romperse* 'break' by being atelic. An anonymous reviewer judges psychological pronominal verbs like these to be OK in the GCC, which is consistent with my claim that telic predicates are excluded from it. However, it is not clear if these predicates are volitional. It may be that sentience is a more predictive feature of these predicates. I leave this issue for further research. The same reviewer, however, claims that atelic predicates like *pelearse* 'fight' and *confesarse* 'confess' are excluded from the GCC, in spite of being volitional. But these predicates are ambiguous between an atelic and a telic interpretation. *Pelearse* can

INTRANSITIVE	<i>trabajar</i> 'work'	<i>heder</i> 'stink'	<i>regresar</i> 'return'	<i>desaparecer</i> 'disappear'
PRONOMINAL	<i>arrastrarse</i> 'crawl'	<i>reflejarse</i> 'reflect'	<i>arrojarse</i> 'throw oneself'	<i>asfixiarse</i> 'suffocate'
ATELIC VOLITIONAL	+ +	+ -	- +	- -
	Excluded from generic causee construction			

TABLE 2 Distribution of predicates in the generic causee construction.

It is now easy to see where the mismatches in the test results occur. It is with verbs that are at once atelic and non-volitional. This generalization has consequences for a theory of split intransitivity.

4.5 Split intransitivity and proto-roles

Unaccusative mismatches have been found in languages that mark split intransitivity overtly. In Dutch, for instance, there are two tests for unaccusativity: auxiliary selection and formation of impersonal passives. In general, unaccusatives take *zijn* 'be' as the perfect auxiliary, and cannot form impersonal passives. But Perlmutter (1978) and Zaenen (1993) notice some remarkable exceptions. *ankomen* 'arrive' takes *zijn* and appears in impersonal passives, whereas *stinken* 'stink' takes *hebben* 'have' (the auxiliary preferred by unergatives) but cannot form impersonal passives. Zaenen's explanation for the mismatches is a semantic one: Telic verbs combine with *zijn*, but verbs that appear in impersonal passives must be under the volitional control of the subject. The two tests, she concludes, are orthogonal to each other, and are not related to deep unaccusativity, as claimed in the syntactic analysis. Since the tests are sensitive to semantic differences, then split intransitivity should also be characterized semantically.

Zaenen's approach cannot be extended to Spanish directly, however, since one of the Spanish tests seems to be sensitive to a cocktail of semantic properties. Dowty (1991) proposes a semantic theory of argument selection that may be used to arrive at the desired analysis. He argues that unergative subjects are more like prototypical Agents, whereas unaccusative subjects are more like prototypical Patients. For

also mean 'fall out, become estranged', while *confesarse*, understood as 'going to confession', is not an activity but an accomplishment (confession ends when the subject tells all of his/her sins to the priest).

Dowty, thematic roles are sets of entailments, determined by the lexical semantics of the predicate. The two prototypical thematic roles, or proto-roles, are characterized by the following entailments:

Proto-agent Properties	Proto-patient Properties
VOLITIONAL	CHANGES STATE
SENTIENT	INCREMENTAL THEME
CAUSALLY ACTIVE	CAUSALLY AFFECTED
MOVING	STATIONARY
EXISTS INDEPENDENT FROM EVENT	EXISTS DEPENDENT ON EVENT

In a sentence with two arguments (i.e. a transitive verb), the subject will display a heavier proportion of proto-agent properties than the object. This principle allows for different combinations of semantic properties, defining degrees of prototypicality for agents and patients. This approach can be extended to account for patterns of split intransitivity. Subjects of unergative verbs, Dowty says, normally have more proto-agent properties than subjects of unaccusatives. The subject of a verb like *run*, often classified as unergative, must be volitionally involved in the event, and has the property of moving. verb like *die*, on the other hand, which is typically unaccusative, is associated with the entailment that its subject undergoes a change of state, and is not volitionally involved in the event.

Dowty also notices that certain entailments about a predicate's arguments are determined by that predicate's aktionsart. In particular, subjects of telic intransitives are associated with proto-patient properties. First, telic predicates often have an argument that 'measures out' the event (as suggested in Krifka 1989 and Tenny 1992). In a sentence like *Max ironed the shirt* the condition of the shirt determines whether the ironing has been accomplished or not. Dowty introduces the notion of incremental theme to refer to these arguments, a property that he places among those characterizing a prototypical Patient.¹⁰ Second, a telic verb of motion like *drop*, for instance, entails movement on the part of its object. Because the predicate is telic, movement is to a

¹ There are conflicting opinions as to whether arguments that measure out the event are always internal arguments. Tenny (1992) claims that subjects of transitive verbs are never incremental themes, but Dowty (1991) and Jackendoff (1996) disagree with that. In the majority of cases, however, incremental themes are realized as objects, and only when the incremental theme is associated with additional proto-agent entailments can it appear as a subject (in line with Dowty's argument Selection Principle). For this reason, the classification of incremental themehood as a proto-patient property seems well grounded. Ackema and Moore (1999, this volume) discuss additional issues regarding a proto-property theory of argument mapping.

definite location. This change of location counts as a change of state, and therefore as a proto-patient property. Telic motion verbs like *rub*, *scratch*, *stomp*, or *pounce* also entail movement on the part of their subject. But when the manner of motion is more important than the specific change of location, movement does not count as a change of state and must be considered a proto-agent property. Telicity, then, is not directly involved in the classification of a predicate as unaccusative or unergative. Only the proto-patient properties associated with the argument of intransitive telic predicates are. This explains the observation that unaccusatives tend to be telic without invoking aktionsart as a direct factor in the classification of a predicate.

4.6 Proto-roles and unaccusative mismatches in Spanish

Dowty’s theory of proto-roles, then, and its consequences for an analysis of split intransitivity, can be used to account for the distribution of embedded verbs in the GCC in Spanish. Volitional atelic verbs of the class of *arrastrarse* ‘crawl’ and *trabajar* ‘work’ can appear in the GCC because their subject is volitional (a key proto-agent property). Moreover, this argument is not associated with such prominent proto-patient properties as being causally affected by the event, undergoing a change of state, or measuring out the event. Of all the verbs in Table 2, then, *arrastrarse* and *trabajar* have the highest number of proto-agent entailments about their subject. At the other end of the spectrum there are verbs like *asfixiarse* ‘choke’ and *desaparecer* ‘disappear’, the subjects of which have no proto-agent properties. Neither one has a subject that controls the event volitionally. Moreover, the subject of *asfixiarse* undergoes a change of state, and so does the subject of *desaparecer*, with the additional proto-patient property of ceasing to exist as a consequence of the event. Verbs with these characteristics are excluded from the GCC, as most other typically unaccusative verbs would be. In between these two classes are verbs with a mixed set of entailments about their subjects. *Arrojarse* and *regresar*, which express motion verbs with a definite location, have a subject that undergoes a change of state (a proto-patient property) but are volitional (a proto-agent property). The subjects of *reflejarse* and *heder*, on the other hand, have none of the proto-patient properties associated with telicity, but they lack the proto-agent property of having a subject that controls the event volitionally.

The GCC, then, rejects anything but “top-shelf” unergatives, i.e. verbs associated with the highest number of proto-agent entailments.

The PVBS test, on the other hand, is less selective. Telicity (or the associated proto-role properties) is sufficient to determine whether a verb will pass or fail the PVBS test.¹¹ The syntactic analysis of split intransitivity could be saved by stating that unergatives like *heder* or *reflejarse* are arbitrarily excluded from the GCC, but this misses an important generalization having to do with the semantics of the predicates in question. The semantic analysis I have defended here, on the other hand, predicts that if any of the predicates which cannot have postverbal bare plural subjects are going to be excluded from the GCC, they will be like *heder*, and not like *trabajar*, i.e. the class of intransitives that are not associated with the heaviest proportion of proto-agent entailments about their subjects. The mismatch between the two tests for split intransitivity in Spanish, then, shows the semantic analysis of split intransitivity to be more explanatory than the syntactic analysis.

4.7 Argument realization with pronominal verbs

Returning now to the issue of whether all pronominal verbs are unaccusatives, it can be seen from the data discussed here that, in Spanish, some pronominal verbs pair up with unergatives. These are verbs like *arrastrarse*, *menearse*, and also *reflejarse*. These verbs are associated with proto-agent entailments about their subject. In a theory in which the tests for split intransitivity pick up semantic differences among different classes of intransitive verbs, this result is to be expected. There is no empirical evidence in Spanish to support the claim that the reflexive clitic is always a mark of unaccusativity, as claimed in Rosen (1988), Grimshaw (1990), and Levin and Rappaport (1995) for Romance at large. To be more precise, I claim that in Spanish there is no clear evidence of syntactic unaccusativity at all. In my search for unaccusativity tests in Spanish, I have found that even the evidence for deep unaccusativity in Spanish can be accounted for in semantic terms (Ranovich 2000, 2003b). When a language lacks strong evidence for deep unaccusativity, the motivation to represent some subjects as underlying objects disappears.

Clear evidence for deep unaccusativity in Romance is found in French and Italian, whose reflexive verbs take the ‘be’ auxiliary in the perfect tense.¹² However, as I have shown in this study, the Spanish pronominal

¹¹ hierarchy of split intransitivity is also proposed in Sorace (2000) to account for variation in auxiliary selection in Italian.

¹²Old Spanish used to have a split auxiliary system as well, but it was also split across verbs with reflexive clitics. The diachrony of such split auxiliary systems gives additional support to the semantic approach to split intransitivity, as I argue in Ranovich (2003a, 2009).

verbs seem to display the same degree of variation in their lexical semantic properties as plain intransitives (Legendre and Smolensky 2009 reach a similar conclusion for French inchoatives). These considerations must be taken seriously in a semantic account of unaccusativity in Romance, because if all reflexive verbs take the same auxiliary as unaccusative verbs regardless of their semantics, the syntactic analysis of split intransitivity can reclaim territory. Some of these issues have been discussed in Centineo (1986), (1996), and Van Valin (1990), but more work needs to be done. I hope my study of split intransitivity in Spanish shows the kind of data that needs to be considered when researching split intransitivity in Romance.

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