

Passive and impersonal *se* in the history of Portuguese

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1. Introduction:

In the introduction to the volume entitled *Diachronic Syntax: Models and Mechanisms*, which publishes papers presented at the Fifth Diachronic Generative Syntax Conference (DIGS V), the editors, Susan Pintzuk, George Tsoulas and Anthony Warner state that:

From one perspective, historical syntax is simply a branch of comparative syntax which happens to involve dialects that are closely related temporally. But one crucial difference between historical syntax and other types of comparative syntax is that the central empirical data of the former is E[xternal]-language, the data of the historical texts, whereas the essential objects of the latter is I-language, the internal grammar. (2000:9)

Leaving aside the claim about synchronic comparative syntax, which is consensual within the generative framework assumed by Pintzuk, Tsoulas and Warner, the authors' view about the field of historical syntax seems too conservative. It appears to leave beyond the scope of diachronic syntax the study of recent and ongoing stages of language change. In such cases spoken language records are likely to constitute a prime source of data (possibly in tandem with the "historical texts") and approaches to I-language guided by the introspective methods of synchronic generative syntax might even be tried. The distinction between the two kinds of historical inquiry, let us say the 'past perfect' research and the 'present perfect' one, was underlined in the call for papers of the *Second Freiburg Workshop on Romance Corpus Linguistics* (were this paper was first delivered). I quote:

Language change shall be considered, in this context, on different levels: as long-term change that modifies profoundly the language(s) involved, even altering its (their) typological structure, which for an adequate corpus-linguistic treatment requires databases with an important diachronic depth and which include evidence that comes inevitably from written sources only; and as middle and short term change, that emerges already from the comparison of very few texts or speaker generations and for which the constitution of corpora

with reduced diachronic depth is sufficient; corpora that, if focussing on recent stages of language change, may embrace written and spoken language data in all their manifestations.

Long term change (not reaching the present) and recent short term change do not represent two distinct types of (historical) change even though the methods to uncover the former are usually more constrained than the methods to approach the latter. When we consider particular cases of syntactic change we happen to find two kinds of situation which undermine a dichotomy scenario. On the one hand an earlier grammar in one language may happen to be a contemporary grammar in another language in which case spoken language data (or even introspective data) turn out to be a precious complementary source of historical knowledge even when we are dealing with old stages of long term change¹. On the other hand long term change may extend up to present days in which case the partition between long term and (recent) short term change collapses.

In this paper I will be dealing with change in syntactic structures which include the pronoun *se* in its passive and impersonal manifestations. I will first deal with change from Old Portuguese to Modern Portuguese (leaving aside nebulous changes from Proto-Indo-European to Latin and the more tangible ones from Latin to Old Romance). I will then focus on recent changes affecting *se* structures. This incursion in contemporary history will be shown to contribute to a better understanding of the earlier steps of the relevant change.² While I will be relying on previous work, namely by Anthony Naro (1976) and Rafael Lapesa (1981, 2000), with respect to the change from Old to Modern Portuguese, as for contemporary Portuguese I will bring into consideration some new data which sprouted from CORDIAL-SIN, a corpus of Portuguese regional dialects under development.³

¹ The interplay between diachronic and synchronic variation in the domain of negative polarity items in Romance is a case that comes to mind (see Martins 2000). Another example is object scrambling in Old Romance which can be better described and understood if we inquire on contemporary grammars displaying object scrambling, both in Indo-European and non Indo-European languages (see Martins 2002).

² The opposite trend of inquiry is also available and enlightening. That is, knowledge on the routes and mechanisms of language change can be put at work in order to check on the adequacy of linguistic models and synchronic descriptions, thus broadening our comprehension of grammar and the language faculty. But this will not be the topic of this paper.

³ CORDIAL-SIN (the acronym from the Portuguese name *Corpus Dialectal com Anotação Sintáctica*) is an ongoing project of annotated corpus of spoken European Portuguese regional dialects. The project main goal is to build a resource for linguistic research on syntactic dialectal variation. The corpus consists

In section 2 I will identify the change that took place between Old Portuguese and Modern Portuguese with respect to a set of *se* structures. As Naro (1976) and Lapesa (1981, 2000), among others, show *se* constructions underwent a similar change in Portuguese and Spanish, that is, passive *se* was reanalyzed as impersonal *se*.⁴ As there is some disagreement on whether the passive *se* construction survived to the reanalysis process, coexisting with the impersonal *se* construction in Modern Portuguese, in section 3 I will present the arguments given by Raposo and Uriagereka (1996) in order to show that the ‘agreeing’ *se* construction of Modern Portuguese is not a passive construction. Next, in section 4, I will identify a ‘double subject’ *se* construction found in some Portuguese regional dialects which represents a further development of the ‘agreeing’ *se* construction and constitutes new evidence that the ‘agreeing’ *se* sentences of Modern Portuguese are not passive. Finally in section 5, which concludes the paper, I will show how the analysis of the diachronic path of *se* that I will suggest also accounts for a non standard *se* construction well attested among urban educated Portuguese speakers.

2. From Old Portuguese to Modern Portuguese

Sentences (1) and (2) below represent respectively the ‘agreeing’ and the ‘non-agreeing’ *se* constructions found in Portuguese. These sentences have identical meanings – sentences like (1) and (2) are commonly displayed in outdoor “homemade” advertisements.

of a geographically representative body of selected excerpts of spontaneous and semi-directed speech drawn from a rich recorded speech collection owned by the Centro de Linguística da Universidade de Lisboa (CLUL). This speech collection originated and grew within the scope of different projects of linguistic atlases developed during the past 30 years by the Variation Research Team of CLUL. CORDIAL-SIN is projected as a 500.000 words corpus. As the corpus grows, it is gradually made available online (See http://www.clul.ul.pt/english/sectores/cordialsin/projecto_cordialsin.html). The corpus is made available under four different formats: verbatim orthographic transcripts; normalized orthographic transcripts; morphologically tagged versions of the normalized transcripts; and syntactically annotated texts built on the morphologically tagged versions. Verbatim orthographic transcripts include the marking up of some phonetic and morphological variants, and of generalized spoken language phenomena such as hesitations, filled and empty pauses, repetitions, rephrased segments, false starts, truncated words, speech overlapping, unclear productions, etc. From these verbatim transcripts, normalized orthographic transcripts are automatically obtained by eliminating the marked up features of spoken language and phonetic transcriptions. The tagging and the syntactic annotation apply over the normalized transcripts.

⁴There is a large bibliography on this issue which I will not review in this paper. Having in view the diachrony of *se*, the work by Naro (1976) is central for Portuguese; with respect to Spanish, Lapesa (1981, 2000) is an innovative classic, what makes his work particularly appealing – Lapesa (2000) is a posthumous publication. A collection and overview of different approaches to *se* constructions is offered by Sánchez López, ed. (2002). The book includes an invaluable set of updated references and the reprinting of the important diachronic investigation of Monge (1955).

- (1) *Vendem-se batatas*
 sell-3PL-SE potatoes
 ‘We sell potatoes (here)’
- (2) *Vende-se batatas*
 sell-3SG-SE potatoes
 ‘We sell potatoes (here)’

Traditional grammarians interpret sentence (1), in contrast with (2), as a passive sentence connecting it with the *ser* ‘be’ + past participle passive. In sentence (1) *batatas* ‘potatoes’ is taken to be the subject, the pronoun *se* being a passive morpheme. Thus the agreement relation between *batatas* ‘potatoes’ and the verb is seen as a normal case of subject-verb agreement. In sentence (2), on the other hand, *se* is taken to represent the subject (with indefinite meaning) while *batatas* ‘potatoes’ is the direct object. Therefore the verb does not agree with *batatas* ‘potatoes’.⁵ As for *se*, this pronoun is defective with respect to person-number features, so it is unable to entail subject-verb agreement. Because the verb fails to undergo normal agreement it acquires the default agreement values, that is, third person singular. Within this tradition, which many contemporary Portuguese linguists still embrace, the *se* pronoun of the ‘agreeing’ construction in (1) is called *passive se* while the *se* pronoun of the ‘non agreeing’ construction in (2) is called *impersonal se*. An obscure feature of the ‘agreeing’ *se* construction if we were to take it as a passive construction is that it does not allow an overt prepositional agent phrase differently from the normal passive (that is, the *ser* ‘be’ + past participle passive). That’s why sentence (3) below is ungrammatical in contrast with sentence (4). The so-called passive *se* construction is obligatorily agent-less.⁶

- (3) **Vendem-se a bom preço pelo produtor*
 sell-3PL-SE at good price by-the producer

⁵ Traditional grammarians reject the impersonal *se* structures with transitive verbs, taking the impersonal *se* construction as a ‘correct’ option only with intransitive verbs. Historically, the impersonal *se* construction is earlier attested in sentences with transitive verbs since it results from the reanalysis of passive *se* structures.

⁶ Mateus et alii (2003) analyse *se* in the agreeing *se* construction as the agentive argument of a passive sentence. Thus the ungrammaticality of (3) above is thoroughly derived as there are two constituents bearing the same semantic role of agent. The problem with this kind of analysis is that it predicts against the facts that sentences like (3) would be ungrammatical in Old Portuguese as well (cf. sentence (5) below).

- (4) *São vendidas a bom preço pelo produtor*
are sold at good price by-the producer
'The potatoes are sold at a good price by the producer'

In Old Portuguese however sentences like (3) above are attested. Sentence (5) below, taken from Naro (1976), exemplifies the expression of the agent argument in the relevant kind of structure.

- (5) *Como Josep se conheceu pelos irmãos.*
how Josep SE knew-3SG by-the brothers
'How Josep was recognized by his brothers'
(Naro 1976: 789; fourteenth century)

Old Portuguese differs from Modern Portuguese in another elucidating way. In Old Portuguese the 'non-agreeing' *se* construction (represented by sentence (2) above) is not attested.

Anthony Naro (1976) offers a straight interpretation of these facts. According to Naro, the agreeing *se* construction was in Old Portuguese a passive construction but it came to be reanalyzed as an active construction at the end of the Middle Ages. After the reanalysis takes place different kinds of sentences unattested until then emerge. On the one hand transitive sentences not displaying agreement start showing up in the texts (see sentence (6) below). On the other hand the *se* construction is no more restricted to sentences with transitive verbs as it becomes an active construction (see sentence (7) below, with an intransitive verb, and sentences (8)-(9), with copular verbs).

- (6) *As outras cousas da grandeza desta terra e do seu governo e*
the other things of-the greatness of-this land and of-the its government and
costumes se guarda pera os livros de geografia
usages SE keep-3SG for the books of geography
'The other great things of this land and its government and usages have they
proper place in geography books (so I reserve them for that purpose)'
(Rodrigues 1913: 177; sixteenth century)
- (7) *O médico ... ainda não é chegado. Não lhe faltará que fazer, porque*
the doctor ... still not is arrived. not him will-lack-3SG what to-do, because

se adoece e morre muito

SE fall-sick-3SG and die-3SG a-lot

‘The doctor is not here yet. He will have plenty to do because people are always falling sick and dying (here)’

(Rodrigues 1913: 183; seventeenth century)

- (8) *É-se obrigado acaso a pagar fôro em metro às deusas do Parnaso?*

is-SE forced by-chance to pay rent in metre to-the goddesses of-the Parnassus?

Se não se é, não se deve andar sem arte e veia a versar.

if not SE is, not SE should go-around without art and vein to make-verses

‘Are one by any chance forced to pay rent to the goddesses of the Parnassus in metre? If not, then one should not write poetry when one lacks art and inspiration’

(Said Ali 1908: 97; nineteenth century)

- (9) *Aqui, senhor Pancrácio, está-se optimamente*

here, mr. Pancrácio, is-SE extremely-well

‘One feels extremely comfortable here, Mr. Pancrácio’

(Said Ali 1908: 97; nineteenth century)

Within a perspective that tightly relates syntactic change and language acquisition, Anthony Naro places the motivation for change in the surface syntactic similarity between normal active sentences and some Old Portuguese *se* passives. By comparing sentences (10) and (11) below we can see how native learners may have been driven to interpret a sentence like (11) as active. Three factors work together in hiding the passive nature of sentence (11): the lack of overt marking for subject-verb agreement (which is typical of third person singular), the omission of the agent argument, which would be expressed by a prepositional phrase, and the post-verbal placement of the subject. This structural ambiguity allowed a reanalysis of (11), a VS passive sentence, as a regular SVO active sentence. On the semantic level, the identity of meaning between an agent-less passive and an active sentence with an indefinite (or generic) subject smoothed the way for reanalysis.

- (10) *& porem o padre lee este evangelho na festa da trindade*

and so the priest read-3SG this Gospel in-the Feast of-the Trinity

‘and so the priest reads this Gospel on the Feast of the Trinity’

(Hypothetic sentence. Naro 1976: 802)

- (11) *& porem se lee este evangelho na festa da trindade*
and so SE read-3SG this Gospel in-the Feast of-the Trinity
'and so one reads this Gospel on the Feast of the Trinity'
(Naro 1976: 803; fifteenth century)

Rafael Lapesa (1981, 2000) identifies similar facts in Spanish and interprets them in the same vein as Naro (1976). From the fifteenth century on, but not before, the non agreeing *se* construction is found in Spanish (see sentence (12) below). In Spanish, as Lapesa points out, as soon as the reanalysis takes place we find clear indications of the switch from the (passive) NP-subject into an (active) NP-object. In the new active *se* construction the direct object may bear explicit marking either by being introduced by the preposition *a* (like in sentence (13) below) or by being expressed by an accusative clitic pronoun (like in sentence (14)).

- (12) *en el pueblo (...) se falla e deue fallar diversos linages e*
in the village (...) SE find-3SG and must-3SG find several lineages and
condiçiones
conditions
'In the village one finds, and must find, people from all kinds of social
background'
(Lapesa 2000: 813; fifteenth century)
- (13) *se robava a amigos como a enemigos*
SE would-rob-3SG to friends as-well-as to enemies
'One would rob both friends and enemies'
(Keniston 1937: 342; sixteenth century)
- (14) *en quanto al dinero si se lo maneja con prudencia...*
in what-concerns to-the money if SE it handle-3SG with caution...
'As for the money, if one is careful in dealing with it...'
(Lapesa 2000: 815; twentieth century)

With respect to Portuguese, animate direct objects are not introduced by the preposition *a* and a phonological restriction operating in Standard Portuguese prevents the co-occurrence of the clitic pronoun *se* with a third person accusative clitic. Only in

dialectal Portuguese can we find sentences like (15) which parallels sentence (14) from Spanish.

- (15) *Tinha-se um burrinho, ia-se buscar e levar a farinha.*
had-SE a small-donkey, went-3SG-SE fetch and take the flour
Trazia-se-o [o trigo] em grão e levava-se em farinha.
would-bring-3SG-SE-it [the wheat] in grain and would-take-3SG-SE in flour
‘We had a small donkey and we went to and fro with the flour. We used to bring the wheat grains (to the windmill) and go back with the flour’
(Porto Santo, Madeira. CORDIAL-SIN, PST 24)

Although there is a large general consensus between the views by Lapesa (2000) and Naro (1976) with respect to the topic under consideration, they diverge in one point. While Naro believes that the passive *se* construction survived the reanalysis process, persisting in Modern Portuguese in tandem with the impersonal construction, Lapesa takes both the non-agreeing and the agreeing *se* structures of Modern Spanish to be active constructions. To support his view Lapesa calls attention to sentences like (16) where the direct object is clearly identified by the presence of the preposition *a* although the verb displays third person plural agreement.

- (16) *si se diessen por inhábiles a los que se juzgan capaces de tan*
if SE would-give-3PL for incapable to the-ones that SE judge-3PL able of so
alto ministerio
high ministry
‘If we could discredit those who think themselves capable of such a high mission’
(Lapesa 1981: 402. Sixteenth century)

Similar sentences are found in contemporary Spanish, although they are considered non standard. Relevant examples are given in (17) to (19) below.

- (17) *Se contrataban a eventuales.*
SE would-hire-3PL to temporaries
‘One would hire temporary workers’

(Martínez 1999: 2772)

- (18) *Con estas obras se molestan a los peatones.*

with these works SE damage-3PL to the pedestrians

‘This kind of building works is inconvenient to people walking by’

(Martínez 1999: 2772)

- (19) *Se vendían y compraban a los esclavos.*

SE would-sell-3PL and would-buy-3PL to-the slaves

‘One would sell and buy slaves’

(Martínez 1999: 2772)

3. The non passive nature of the ‘agreeing’ *se* construction

As I said before, the idea that the agreeing *se* construction might be an active construction is not popular among Portuguese grammarians and linguists. A remarkable exception is the analysis of the agreeing *se* construction worked out by Eduardo Raposo and Juan Uriagereka, in 1996, in the paper entitled “Indefinite *se*”. I will thus summarize some of the arguments put forth by Raposo and Uriagereka to support the view that the agreeing *se* construction in Portuguese is not a passive construction.

First argument

In sentences (20) to (22) below the subject of the adjectival predicate *ser difícil* ‘be difficult’ is an inflected infinitival clause in extraposed position. When the subject of the inflected infinitival clause occurs in preverbal position a grammatical sentence is derived be the sentence active, like (20) below, or passive, like (21). An agreeing *se* structure with the same word order, however, is ungrammatical, as (22) below shows. Only the order displayed by (23) is allowed.

- (20) *Vai ser difícil os tribunais aceitarem os documentos*

will be difficult the courts to-accept-3PL the documents

‘It will be difficult for the courts to accept the documents’

(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 754)

- (21) *Vai ser difícil os documentos serem aceites*

will be difficult the documents to-be-3PL accepted

‘It will be difficult for the documents to be accepted’

(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 754)

- (22) **Vai ser difícil os documentos aceitarem-se*
 will be difficult the documents to-accept-3PL-SE
 ‘It will be difficult for someone or other to accept the documents’
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 754)
- (23) *Vai ser difícil aceitarem-se os documentos*
 will be difficult to-accept-3PL-SE the documents
 ‘It will be difficult for someone or other to accept the documents’
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 754)

The observed contrast between (21) and (22) does not arise when the extraposed subject clause is a finite clause, as sentences (24) and (25) below show. Differently from (22), sentence (25) is grammatical even though the subject clause is a *se* structure.

- (24) *Vai ser difícil que os documentos sejam aceites*
 will be difficult that the documents be accepted
 ‘It will be difficult that the documents be accepted’
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 96: 755)
- (25) *Vai ser difícil que os documentos se aceitem*
 will be difficult that the documents SE accept-3PL
 ‘It will be difficult that someone or other accepts the documents’
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 755)

It is a well known fact that infinitival clauses do not allow topicalization as the contrast between (26) and (27) below exemplifies – *esses documentos* ‘those documents’ being the topicalized constituent.

- (26) *Vai ser difícil que esses documentos, o tribunal (os) possa aceitar*
 will be difficult that those documents, the court (them) may accept
 ‘It will be difficult that those documents, the court may accept them’
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 755)
- (27) **Vai ser difícil esses documentos, os tribunais aceitarem-(nos)*
 will be difficult those documents the courts to-accept-3PL-(them)
 ‘It will be difficult those documents, for the courts to accept (them)’
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 756)

Given this set of data the ungrammaticality of (22) in contrast to (21) can be accounted for if we take the constituent *os documentos* ‘the documents’ to occur in the canonical subject position in (21) (the *ser* ‘be’ + past participle passive) but not in (22) (the *se* structure). In (22) the constituent *os documentos* ‘the documents’ is topicalized. Thus the ungrammaticality of this sentence has the same cause as the ungrammaticality of (27). The fact that the constituent *os documentos* ‘the documents’ (the internal argument of the verb) is not allowed to become the syntactic subject shows that the *se* sentence in (22) (differently from the *ser* ‘be’ + past participle sentence in (21)) is not a passive sentence.

Second argument

In complement inflected infinitival clauses selected by epistemic verbs an inflected auxiliary must occur in the left periphery of the infinitival clause. In such clauses the subject occurs either in post auxiliary position or to the left of the verbal complex, as sentences (28) and (29) with a passive inflected infinitival clause exemplify. The post auxiliary position represents the canonical subject position. The order auxiliary-subject is derived in this configuration because the inflected auxiliary moves to a higher position in clause structure than the normal position of the subject.

- (28) *Eu penso terem os presos sido fuzilados*
 I think to-have-3PL the prisoners been shot
 ‘I think that the prisoners were shot’
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 757)
- (29) *Eu penso terem sido fuzilados os presos*
 I think to-have-3PL been shot the prisoners
 ‘I think that the prisoners were shot’
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 757)

When the complement inflected infinitival clause is a *se* structure only the position to the left of the verbal complex is available for the constituent usually taken as being the subject as the ungrammaticality of sentence (31) below, in contrast to (30) shows. Again the ungrammaticality of (31) can be accounted for under the hypothesis that in the

agreeing *se* structure the internal argument of the verb cannot be projected to the position of subject.

(30) *Eu penso terem-se fuzilado os presos*
I think to-have-3PL-SE shot the prisoners
'I think that someone or other shot the prisoners'
(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 757)

(31) **Eu penso terem-se os presos fuzilado*⁷
I think to-have-3PL-SE the prisoners shot
'I think that someone or other shot the prisoners'
(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 757)

Third argument

Bare noun phrases are licensed as direct objects but not as subjects. So sentence (32) below is well formed while (33) and (34) are ungrammatical.

(32) *O Nestor compra salsichas no talho Sanzot*
the Nestor buys sausages at-the butcher-shop Sanzot
'Nestor buys sausages at the Sanzot butcher-shop'
(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 760)

(33) **Salsichas são compradas no talho Sanzot*
sausages are bought at-the butcher-shop Sanzot
'Sausages are bought at the Sanzot butcher-shop'
(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 760)

(34) **Salsichas custam caro no talho Sanzot*
sausages cost expensive at-the butcher-shop Sanzot
'Sausages are expensive at the Sanzot butcher-shop'
(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 760)

On the other hand, a bare noun phrase may undergo topicalization as far as it is base generated as the direct object and does not move via the subject position. Thus sentence (35) below is grammatical but (36) and (37) are ungrammatical. The ungrammaticality

⁷ Sentence (31) above would be grammatical under an interpretation of *se* as reflexive/reciprocal.

of the passive sentence in (36) is due to the fact that the underlying object *salsichas* ‘sausages’ has moved into the topic position via the subject position. The active sentence in (37) displays topicalization of the subject.

- (35) *Salsichas, o Nestor compra no talho Sanzot*
sausages the Nestor buys at-the butcher-shop Sanzoy
‘Sausages, Nestor buys at the Sanzot butcher-shop’
(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 760)
- (36) **Salsichas, são compradas no talho Sanzot*
sausages are bought at-the butcher-shop Sanzot
‘Sausages, (they) are bought at the Sanzot butcher-shop’
(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 760)
- (37) **Salsichas, custam caro no talho Sanzot*
sausages cost expensive at-the butcher-shop Sanzot
‘Sausages, (they) are expensive at the Sanzot butcher-shop’
(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 760)

Under the analysis of the agreeing *se* construction as active, the underlying direct object of a *se* sentence does not move into the subject position at any step of the derivation (in opposition to passives). Therefore a bare noun phrase base generated in the object position of a *se* sentence can be topicalized. Sentence (38) below is a relevant example (to be contrasted with (36) above).

- (38) *Salsichas, vendem-se no talho Sanzot*
sausages sell-3PL-SE at-the butcher-shop Sanzot
‘Sausages, someone or other sells at the Sanzot butcher-shop’
(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 761)

Fourth argument

Both topicalized phrases and *wh*- phrases are left-peripheral (sentential) constituents. In Portuguese topics necessarily precede *wh*- phrases as sentence (39) below exemplifies. The order *wh*- phrase + topic results in ungrammaticality as sentence (40) below shows.

- (39) *Esses livros, a quem entregaste?*
 those books to whom gave-2SG
 ‘Those books to whom did you give?’
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 764)
- (40) **A quem esses livros, entregaste?*
 to whom those books gave-2SG
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 764)

In passive sentences when the syntactic subject is not topicalized occurring instead in the canonical subject position the order wh- phrase + subject surfaces. See sentence (41) below. Crucially the same constituent order is not allowed in *se* sentences; thus the ungrammaticality of (42). In sentence (42) the internal argument of the verb has no access to the (canonical) subject position because (42) is not a passive sentence.

- (41) *Em que loja esses livros foram comprados?*
 in what store those books were bought
 ‘In what store were those books bought?’
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 1996:765)
- (42) **Em que loja esses livros se compraram?*
 in what store those books SE bought-3PL
 (Raposo & Uriagereka 1996:764)

Fifth argument

In subject control structures the null subject of the infinitival clause can be identified and licensed by the syntactic subject of a passive main clause. So in sentence (43) below the internal argument *os presos* ‘the prisoners’ plays that role (of identifying the null embedded subject) as it moves into the subject position of the main clause. In sentence (44) however the constituent *os presos* ‘the prisoners’ cannot play the same role because in the agreeing *se* construction the internal argument of the verb is not projected to the position of subject.

- (43) *Os presos foram espancados antes de fugir*
 the prisoners were spanked before of to-escape
 ‘The prisoners were spanked before they escaped’

(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 789)

(44) **Os presos espancaram-se antes de fugir*⁸

the prisoners spanked-3PL-SE before of to-escape

‘Someone or other spanked the prisoners before they escaped’

(Raposo & Uriagereka 1996: 789)

According to Raposo and Uriagereka (1996) in the agreeing *se* construction the internal argument of the verb is assigned nominative Case by a left-peripheral functional head (F in their analysis) and is therefore involved in a Subject-verb agreement relation. The pronoun *se*, which occupies the canonical subject position (that is, Spec of Infl) is a ‘minimal argument’ being assigned null Case. The pronoun *se* is defective with respect to person-number features and it is therefore unable to entail subject-verb agreement (because the verb fails to undergo normal agreement, it acquires the default agreement values, that is third person singular). I do not wish to go into a theoretical discussion here, but I will have to say that I do not adopt the analysis pursued by Raposo and Uriagereka (1996). I agree with Raposo and Uriagereka as for the hypothesis that in Portuguese nominative Case may be assigned not only by Infl but by a left-peripheral functional category as well. In previous work I have identified such category as Sigma (Σ) or Pol (two alternative labels for the same entity).⁹ This category is associated with the expression of sentential polarity values (affirmation, negation, modality) and plays an important role with respect to clitic placement (its strong nature accounting for the enclitic pattern of clitic placement in finite clauses in Portuguese).¹⁰ I assume that in standard European Portuguese the two nominative Case assigners, that is Infl and Σ , cannot be simultaneously active. Departing from Raposo and Uriagereka (1996) I take the pronoun *se* both in the agreeing and in the non agreeing *se* constructions to be a normal argument (the external argument of the verb) which is assigned nominative Case by Infl. The internal argument of the verb (when we are dealing with transitives) is both a semantic and a syntactic object, being assigned accusative Case. I thus take the agreeing *se* construction to display agreement between the verb and the direct object.

⁸ Sentence (44) above would be grammatical under an interpretation of *se* as reflexive/reciprocal.

⁹ Σ stays for ‘Speech Act’, ‘Pol’ stays for ‘Polarity’. Laka (1990) takes Neg(ation) and (emphatic) Aff(irmation) to be different instantiations of Σ (developing an idea put forward by Chomsky (1957)). Also Gleitman (1966) groups Negation and Affirmation together under the label σ and proposes that σ is present in all clauses even when it lacks overt content. The functional category Pol which plays a central role in work by Culicover (1992) and Zanuttini (1994, 1997) appears to have a similar content as Σ .

¹⁰ See Martins (1994), Martins (2003), Costa and Martins (2003).

This agreement relation is mediated by the pronoun *se* which, I suggest, carries variable underspecified person-number features. Before I continue, let me make clear what I am assuming with respect to feature theory.

Arguing for a feature theory accessible, as a module of grammar, to both syntax and phonology, Rooryck (1994) applies the phonological notion of underspecification to syntactic features. I will be relying on Rooryck's insight on the nature of the feature system, namely on the idea that features are associated with one of three possible values: specified (+), nonvariable underspecified (**0**) and variable underspecified (α). Rooryck's feature system is single-valued (or 'unary') in the sense that no element is characterized by the explicit specification of the fact that it lacks a certain property. The nonvariable underspecified value (**0**) for a certain feature is a notational device that marks the absence of the property conveyed by that feature. Borrowing a metaphor from phonological work on vowel harmony, a nonvariable underspecified feature can be said to be 'opaque' inasmuch as it cannot enter nor trigger 'harmony' relations (i.e. agreement-like relations). On the contrary, variable underspecified features can enter operations leading to the filling in of their former underspecified value. That is, α -features are context-sensitive; given an adequate environment, they can 'harmonize' (with it) and are therefore said to be 'transparent'.

'Nonvariable' or 0-features should be thought of as 'neutral' features: they have no positive or negative value for a given feature, they simply mark the absence of a specific feature value. In terms of an Attribute – Value feature system, this means that a given feature has an Attribute specification without a Value. [...] variable underspecified features should be thought of as 'chameleonlike' features [...] 'Variable' or α -features do not have a value of their own: their value needs to be 'filled in' by the features of the elements surrounding them. (Rooryck 1994:209)

Assuming the kind of feature theory worked out by Rooryck (1994) we can think of the agreeing and the non agreeing *se* constructions of Modern Portuguese as minimally distinct. While in the non agreeing *se* construction the pronoun *se* has non variable underspecified person-number features (that is, 0-features), in the agreeing

construction *se* has variable underspecified person-number features (that is, α -features) and seeks an associate in order to fill in the values of its underspecified features. The relation between *se* and the object Noun Phrase is not an expletive-associate type relation however because *se* and the object NP do not share the same Case. It is a looser relation which has an effect only with respect to agreement.

4. The Double subject *se* construction in dialectal Portuguese

In some Portuguese dialects, as we will see next, the associate of *se* for agreement purposes is like *se* a subject. In this dialectal double subject *se* construction the relation between *se* and its associate is tighter as it requires semantic compatibility. These dialects differ from standard Portuguese in that Infl and the category Σ can be simultaneously active with respect to nominative Case assignment. But the standard and the dialectal agreeing constructions are similar with respect to the mechanism of agreement. In both cases the agreement relation between the verb and a Noun Phrase is mediated by *se* which carries variable underspecified person-number features. The dialectal ‘double subject’ structure appears thus to have originated in the Modern Portuguese ‘single subject’ agreeing *se* structure. It represents one further step in the change from the passive *se* sentences of Old Portuguese to normal active sentences.

Sentences (45) to (47) below exemplify the double subject *se* construction. At the present stage of development of the project CORDIAL-SIN we still do not have a clear view of the distribution of the double subject *se* construction in the Portuguese territory. It is however clear that although the double subject *se* construction can be witnessed in different points of the continental Portuguese territory, it is particularly well attested in the insular dialects of Madeira and Porto Santo.

Sentences (45) to (47) below show the co-occurrence in the role of subject of the impersonal *se* and the pronominal expression *a gente*.

- (45) *E depois, chegando ao tempo da poda, a gente sega-se esses*
and after, arriving to-the time of-the pruning, the people cut-off-3SG-SE these
olhos todos e deixa-se este só
eyes all and leave-3SG-SE this-one only
‘After that, when the time comes for the pruning, we remove all these sprouts
leaving only this one’
(Camacha, Porto Santo. CORDIAL-SIN, PST 01)

- (46) *E era assim que se a gente vivia!*
 and was so that SE the people would-live-3SG
 ‘And that’s how we used to live’
 (Lavre, Alentejo. CORDIAL-SIN, LVR 04)
- (47) *Não sabem o que a gente se passámos aí*
 not know-3PL the what the people SE went-through-1PL there
 ‘You don’t know all we’ve been through’
 (Câmara de Lobos, Madeira. CORDIAL-SIN, CLC 15)

A gente literally translates as ‘the people’ which is its etymological meaning, but the former Determiner Phrase sequence was reanalyzed as a pronoun that has been gradually replacing the first person plural pronoun *nós* ‘we’ in spoken Portuguese.¹¹ *A gente* is clearly winning the competition with *nós* in most Portuguese dialects. With respect to subject-verb agreement the pronominal expression *a gente* may trigger agreement in third person singular or in first person plural in most varieties of Portuguese (although the second option, i.e. agreement in first person plural, is taken to be non standard). In a few dialects third person plural agreement is also found for the pronominal *a gente*. Sentences (45) to (47) display the two more common options of agreement, third person singular in (45)-(46) and first person plural in (47). *A gente* is largely the most common associate of *se* in the double subject *se* construction as far as the current attestations in the dialectal corpus let us see. This particular association between *a gente* and the impersonal *se* in the double subject *se* construction has a semantic motivation since *a gente* and *se* are both indefinites. In the sentences under consideration however *a gente* introduces a semantic restriction on the interpretation of the impersonal *se*. The indefinite subject expressed by *se* is to be interpreted within the world delimited by *a gente* which in the relevant examples refers to the community to which the speaker belongs. In the double subject *se* construction thus the potential unrestricted generic interpretation of impersonal *se* appears to be blocked. The contrastive effect displayed by the excerpt in (48) below is elucidating.

- (48) *O que a senhora chama de dourada é as choupas. O que a senhora se*
 the what the lady call-3SG of *dourada* is the *choupas*. the what the lady SE

¹¹ See Nascimento (1989), Lopes (1999), Menuzzi (1999, 2000), Pereira (2003), Costa and Pereira (forthcoming).

chama douradas, é esse choupa. Mas em França há desse que
call-3SG douradas, is that-one choupa. but in France there-is of-that-one that
a gente chama-se dourado. Mas isso aqui chama-se choupas
the people call-3SG-SE dourado. But that-one here call-3SG-SE choupas
 ‘The fish you call *dourada* is in fact *choupa*. What you call *douradas* is what we
 call *choupa*. But in France they have the kind of fish that we call *dourado*. But
 that other one we call it *choupas* here’
 (Câmara de Lobos, Madeira. CORDIAL-SIN, CLC 21)

In sentence (48) *a senhora* ‘the lady’ identifies metonymically the foreign world to which the interviewer belongs in contrasts to the familiar world identified by *a gente* ‘the people’.

The associate of *se* in the double subject *se* construction can be a null subject pronoun as sentences (49) and (50) below show. The fact that a null subject is possible in these structures shows that we are not dealing with a Clitic Left Dislocation structure with the clitic *se* doubling a topicalized subject.

- (49) *Não se conhece esse peixe, não se conhece*
 not SE know-3SG that fish, not SE know-3SG
 ‘We do not know that fish, we do not know it’
 (Câmara de Lobos, Madeira. CORDIAL-SIN, CLC 21)
- (50) *Nunca se vimos este peixe*
 never SE see-1PL that fish
 ‘We never saw that kind of fish’
 (Câmara de Lobos, Madeira. CORDIAL-SIN, CLC 18)

As for semantic interpretation, sentences (49) and (50) above also involve some restriction on the interpretation of *se*, which is imposed by the denotation of the null subject. So sentence (49) does not mean that a certain fish (depicted in the interviewer’s album) is generally unknown; it means that the speaker and his comrades within the fishing community of Câmara de Lobos do not know it. In the same vein sentence (50) means that a certain fish was never seen at Câmara de Lobos, not that nobody ever saw such fish elsewhere. When the associate of *se* for agreement purposes is a subject, it always works as a restrictor with respect to the semantic values of the pronoun *se*.

A pattern of subject-verb agreement in third person plural is also found in sentences representing the double subject *se* construction, either with and overt subject associated with *se* (see sentence (51) below) or with a null associate (see sentence (52) below).

- (51) INQ¹² *Então e como é que era dividido o peixe? O senhor não tinha direito a levar peixe para casa?*
 ‘So how did you share the fish? Weren’t you entitled to take some fish home with you?’
- INF2¹³ *Tinha. Mas ele lá – o guarda-fiscal – dizia (...)... Depois tinha que se levar escondido, que era pouco. Se fosse demais, já (...) não se podia levar.*
 ‘I had that right, yes. But the man there, the revenues-officer, said (...)... So we had to hide it, and we could take only with us a little amount of fish. If it was too much, we couldn’t take it.’
- INF4 *Que eles não deixavam. O guarda-fiscal não deixava.*
 ‘Because they would not allow it. The revenues-officer would not allow it.’
- INF3 *Às vezes peixe roído (...). O peixe que era roído então sempre dividiam (...) para o pessoal.*
 ‘Some times bitten fish (...). Bitten fish was distributed among us.’
- INF2 *O peixe que não tinha consumo, vá lá.*
 ‘Fish that no one would buy, that’s it.’
- INF3 *Que não tinha consumo.*
 ‘Fish that no one would buy.’
- INF1 *O peixe que não tinha consumo é que eles se dividiam*
 the fish that not had-3SG consumption is that they SE divided-3PL
logo.
 at-once
 ‘The fish that wouldn’t be sold was the one to be shared among us’
 (Porto Santo, Madeira CORDIAL-SIN, CLC 14)
- (52) *Ah! Pois. Cá nunca se usaram isso. Mas eu, por acaso, ainda há pouco*
 oh! exactly. here never SE used-3PL that. but I, by chance, still there-is little
tempo – talvez aí há uns..., três semanas ou quatro –, dei duas latas
 time – maybe like there-is some..., three weeks or four –, gave-1SG two cans
dessas a um rapaz para apanhar os passarinhos. É visco. O visco.
 of-those-ones to a boy to catch the birds. is birdlime. the birdlime

¹² ‘INQ’ stays for interviewer.

¹³ ‘INF’ stays for interviewee.

‘Oh, that! People would never use that here. But it’s funny, I recall having sold some three or four weeks ago two cans of that to a boy who wanted to go and catch birds. The name is *visco* (birdlime), the *visco*’.

(Lavre, Évora. CORDIAL-SIN, LVR 29)

In sentence (51) *eles* ‘they’, the third person nominative pronoun, refers to the officers supervising the trading of fish in the market reserved for fishermen and fishmongers. Sentence (51) means that the fishermen would share the unsold fish as set by the officers at the fish-market. In sentence (52) the null third person plural subject refers to the people in town who used to catch little birds. The sentence means that among the local bird catchers (a group that does not include the speaker) the birdlime was not used to catch birds.

5. Conclusion

The diachronic path of *se* from the Old Portuguese *se* passive to the different impersonal *se* constructions found in Modern Portuguese is illustrated by figure 1 below. The Old Portuguese (O.P.) *se* passive originated two types of active *se* structures which belong to standard Modern Portuguese (M.P.), the agreeing and the non agreeing *se* constructions. In some regional Portuguese dialects a third type of impersonal *se* structure is found, where the pronoun *se* and an associate noun phrase both take the role of subject. The dialectal data support the idea that the agreeing *se* construction of standard Portuguese is an active structure because under this perspective it appears as the natural link between the Old Portuguese passive and the dialectal double subject *se* construction.

FIGURE 1

O. P.	<i>Pescam-se sardinhas...</i> fish-3PL-SE sardines 'Sardines are fished' ... [PASSIVE]	<i>Pesca-se sardinha...</i> fish-3SG-SE sardine 'The sardine is fished' ... [PASSIVE]	
Standard M. P.	<i>Pescam-se sardinhas...</i> fish-3PL-SE sardines 'One/we fish sardines' ... [ACTIVE (agreeing)]	<i>Pesca-se sardinhas...</i> fish-3SG-SE sardines 'One/we fish sardines' ... [ACTIVE (non agreeing)]	<i>Pesca-se sardinha...</i> fish-3SG-SE sardine 'One/we fish sardine' ... [ACTIVE (ambiguous)]
Non standard M.P.	<i>A gente pesca(mos)-se sardinhas</i> the people fish-3SG/(1PL)-SE sardines 'We fish sardines' [ACTIVE (double subject)]		

I will finally mention a type of *se* sentences often found in the Portuguese press. They appear to belong to an urban dialect of educated people (differently from the double subject *se* construction). As sentences (53) and (54) below show in the relevant dialect there is agreement between the verb and an oblique verbal complement.

- (53) *A Espanha pretende que, ainda antes das adesões previstas para 1996,*
the Spain want-3SG that, still before of-the adhesions foreseen for 1996,
se avancem com as reformas institucionais.
SE go-ahead-3PL with the reforms institutional
'Spain wants the European Union to start the agreed institutional reforms
without waiting for 1996, when new countries will join the European Union'
(*Público*. Peres & Mória 1995:236)
- (54) *Nos matrimónios terminar-se-ão com esperas absurdas, como as que*
in-the marriages end-SE-will-3PL with delays absurd, as the-ones that
decorrem enquanto duram os "banhos".
happen-3PL while last-3PL the banns
'An end will be put to the absurd waiting periods that marriages imply – waiting
for the banns to expire, for instance'
(*Expresso*. Peres & Mória 1995:236)

The sentences above show that the manifestation of agreement between the verb and a nominal constituent does not necessarily identify that constituent as Nominative, ergo as

the sentential subject. Under the proposed analysis of the standard Modern Portuguese agreeing *se* construction sentences (53) and (54) represent an extension of the object-verb agreeing option (the pronoun *se* acting as the mediator in the agreement relation between the verb and the object). While in the standard grammar this option is restricted to agreement between the verb and the direct object, in the relevant urban dialects agreement is allowed between the verb and an oblique object. Figure 1 above should thus be replaced with Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

O. P.	<i>Pescam-se sardinhas...</i> fish-3PL-SE sardines 'Sardines are fished' ... [PASSIVE]	<i>Pesca-se sardinha...</i> fish-3SG-SE sardine 'The sardine is fished' ... [PASSIVE]	
Standard M. P.	<i>Pescam-se sardinhas...</i> fish-3PL-SE sardines 'One/we fish sardines' ... [ACTIVE (agreeing: V-dir. obj)]	<i>Pesca-se sardinhas...</i> fish-3SG-SE sardines 'One/we fish sardines' ... [ACTIVE (non agreeing)]	<i>Pesca-se sardinha...</i> fish-3SG-SE sardine 'One/we fish sardine' ... [ACTIVE (ambiguous)]
Non standard M.P.	Rural dialects	Urban dialects	
	<i>A gente pesca(mos)-se sardinhas</i> the people fish-3SG/(1PL)-SE sardines 'We fish sardines' [ACTIVE (double subject)]	<i>Avancem-se com as reformas</i> go-ahead-3PL-SE with the reforms 'One must go ahead with the reforms' [ACTIVE (agreeing: V-oblique object)]	

Besides dealing with some intricacies of the history of *se* in Portuguese, this paper is intended to show how relevant the Present can be to help historical linguists understand the Past. Under this perspective corpora of spoken language are a desirable and in fact necessary source to reconstruct aspects of the history of attested languages. In this work I have put emphasis on data coming from a corpus of Portuguese regional dialects. The common view about the relevance of dialects description for historical linguistics is that dialects matter as far as they are conservative, in this way providing the researcher with invaluable prints of the past. I have tried to show that regional dialects, like other varieties of spoken language, also matter when they are innovative because dialects may manifest new steps of long term ongoing change. As a whole picture allows a better integration and comprehension of details than an incomplete one, we must put together as many pieces as we can to get a clear view of our object of inquiry.

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