

On the Transitivity Analysis of French Reflexive clitic 'se' and English Reflexives

Sungshim Hong · Mikyung Shin

(Chungnam National University) (Woosong University)

Hong, Sungshim & Shin, Mikyung. 2008. On a Transitivity Analysis of French Reflexive clitic 'se' and English Reflexives. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 16(2), 233-253. With all amount of studies and literature dedicated to it, the status of the French reflexive clitic 'se' is still highly controversial. The question is whether the reflexive clitic occurs with transitive predicates or intransitive predicates. In the case that it occurs with an intransitive, whether the predicates that allow 'se' is unaccusative or unergative has been the focus of intensive syntactic investigations. In this paper we discuss the issue with French reflexive clitic, 'se', examining a variety array of data and proposals. We argue against the uniform analysis of intransitivity, yielding that the reflexive 'se' behaves like a direct object with the difference in their feature specification. In other words, unlike non-argumental approaches advocated by Bouchard (1984), Marantz (1984), and Grimshaw (1990), we support argumental approach for the clitic 'se'. Those who have maintained the argumental approaches include Rizzi (1986) and Roberts (1997). We provide some new empirical data and new interpretations within Chomsky's (1995, 2000) Minimalist Program, implementing the transitivity hypothesis for 'se'. The conclusion we reach includes that it is difficult to characterize reflexive 'se' in a syntactically intransitive manner and that 'se' is neither an affix nor a morpheme. Rather, 'se' is an internal argument subcategorized by the transitive predicates with unvalued syntactic features. The argument 'se' with unvalued features is demanded by a transitive predicate in which 'se', a DP, raises to get valued via XP movement.

Key Words: reflexive clitics, (in)transitivity, unaccusatives, underspecified feature matrix, vP, non-clitic DP, Licensing configuration, LF

1. Introduction

This paper investigates properties of the French reflexive clitic *se*, one of the Romance reflexives. A lot of works on reflexives have been done in many languages under various theoretical perspectives for decades. Our main purpose is to redefine the paradoxical behaviour of derived reflexive *se*, a controversial class known to occur with both transitives and intransitive (unaccusative and unergative) verbs. We define that *se*, in French is a phi-incomplete nominal, whose only relevant morpho-syntactic feature is a person (π) feature. We argue that it originates as pronoun in the postverbal object NP position as English ‘himself’. We propose an account that derived reflexive predicates with *se* are transitives, and reflexivity is the **result of DP movement** from one thematic position to another, as opposed to structure reduction or direct merge of the clitic *se*.

Reflexive verbs take different morphological instantiations in these two languages. While in French (and Romance in general) reflexive verbs are formed by reflexive clitics (1a), in English they are morphologically identical to their transitive alternate (1b). Furthermore, while in English reflexives are lexically limited, in French the phenomenon is productive. Nonetheless, we argue that reflexivization is essentially the same phenomenon in English and French. Regarding the morpho-syntactic features of the reflexives, English reflexive ‘himself’ has complete phi-features as in (2a), but French reflexive *se* lacks number, gender in its phi-features matrix as shown in sentences (2b):

- (1) a. Paul *se* lave. Thematic direct object
 Paul *se*-REFL washes
 ‘Paul washes himself’
 b. Paul washes himself

- (2) a. Paul hates **himself**
 [3 Pers, Sg, Acc]¹⁾
- b. Paul **se** déteste _____
 [3 Person]
 [*u*-Num, *u*-Gen]
 Paul self-clitic hates
- (3) a. *Paul déteste **se/ le/la**
- b. Paul **se/ le/ la** déteste
 Paul se-REFL/him/her-clitic hates
 'Paul₁ hates himself/ him₂ / her'
- c. *Paul déteste Ψ (two-place predicate)
- d. Paul déteste Jean/ Marie
 'Paul hates Jean/ Marie'

As is shown above, *se*, like other clitics in French must raise to pre-verbal position. A regular transitive verb like 'lave' (= *wash*) needs to have its direct object in front of it as (1a) shows. If *se* stays in situ as (3a) the sentence is ungrammatical. Therefore, we propose that French *se*, unlike English reflexives needs to move close to the binder *Paul* to get its unvalued feature matrix. In other words, *se*, although it has unvalued features, is a DP.

This paper is organised as follows. In section 2, we show briefly previous studies on *se*. In section 3 we will show that the arguments in favor of the uniformed intransitivity hypothesis are flawed. In section 4, we will examine positive evidence supporting the transitivity analysis. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Previous studies

1) We basically assume the fundamentals of Feature set. See Chomsky (2000), Radford (2004a), Radford (2004b) Note that Case features are not of our immediate concern.

Previous analyses of Romance derived reflexives can be split into two major approaches, depending on whether the morpheme/clitic *se* is treated as a syntactic argument or as a valence reducing morpheme.

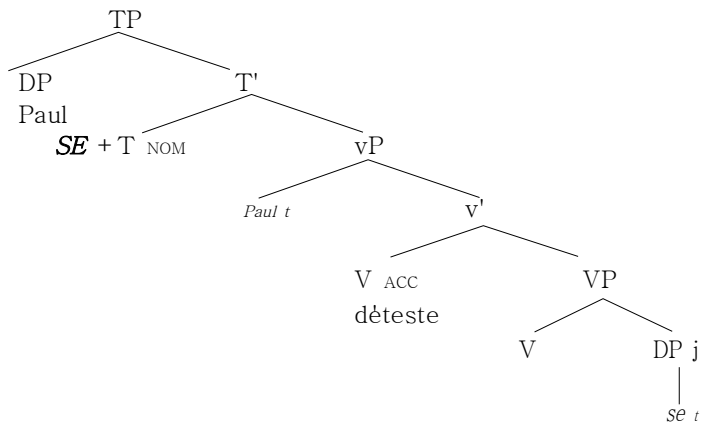
The argumental approach maintains that the reflexive pronoun *se* is a syntactic argument. First, transitive/pronominal analyses such as D'Alessandro (2001), Dobrovie-Sorin (1998), Fontana and Moore (1992), and Rizzi (1986) assume that clitic *se* is merged as the internal argument, or binds an empty nominal in the internal argument position, while the non-clitic DP is merged as the external argument of the transitive predicate. Second, unaccusative analyses (Kayne 1988, McGinnis 1999, Sportiche 1998) essentially assume that clitic *se* is the external argument of a light *v* predicate devoid of Case properties and that the non-clitic DP is merged as the VP-internal argument. Both these analyses assume that the non-clitic DP enters a checking relationship with T which ensures Nominative Case on this DP and licensing (via binding) of clitic *se* by this DP. They differ in that the transitive, but not the unaccusative perspective, assumes Accusative Case to be also checked in this derivation.

The non-argumental approach treats the *se* clitic as a valence-reducing morpheme, whose presence has semantic but not syntactic importance. And there is an argument regarding merge position of the non-clitic DP: internal argument(unaccusative) versus external argument(unergative) position. Various approaches to reflexive *se* can be summarized as in (4) with the sentence *Paul se déteste* 'Paul hates himself':

(4) Argumental approach

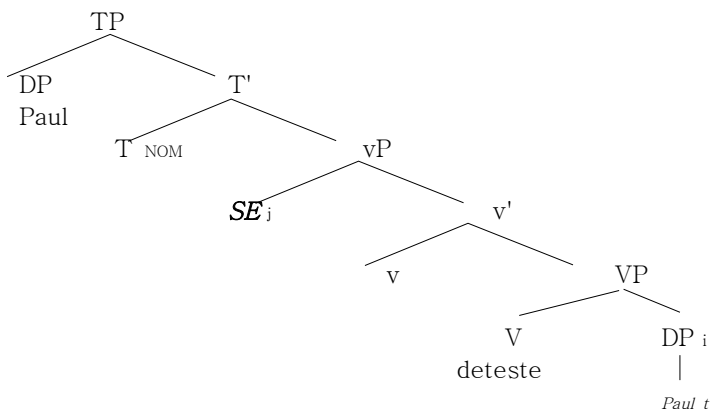
- I. Transitive/Pronominal approach (Rizzi 1986, Roberts 1997)
 - a. *SE* is (or binds) the internal argument.
 - b. Non-clitic DP is the external argument.

c. v assigns ACC, T assigns NOM.



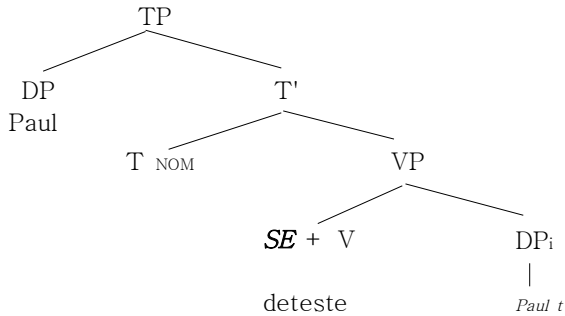
II. Unaccusative approach (Kayne 1988, McGinnis 1999, Pesetsky 1995, Sportiche 1998)

- a. *SE* is the external argument.
- b. Non-clitic DP is the internal argument.
- c. v is Caseless, T assigns NOM.

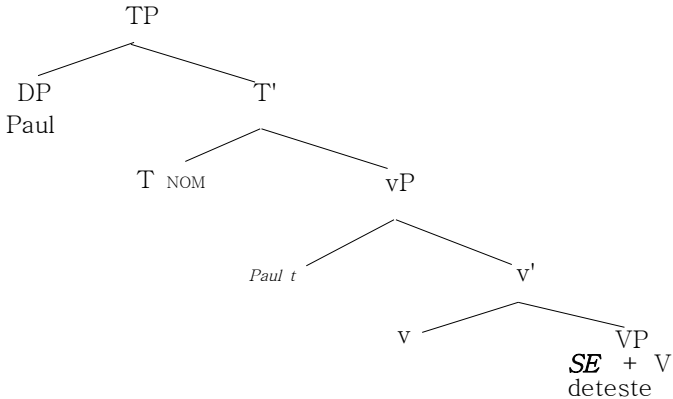


(5) Non-argumental approach

- I. Unaccusative approach (Bouchard 1984, Marantz 1984, Grimshaw 1997)
 - a. *SE* is a valence reducing morpheme which suppresses the external argument.
 - b. Non-clitic DP is the internal argument.



- II. Unergative approach (Chierchia 1989, Reinhart 1997, Reinhart & Siloni 2000)
 - a. *SE* is a valence reducing morpheme which suppresses the internal argument.
 - b. Non-clitic DP is the external argument.



The different analyses summarized in (4) and (5) reflect the idiosyncratic nature of reflexive *se*, whose behaviour cannot be

readily captured by one definite prototype. In this paper we show that French reflexive clitic *se* should be analysed as a direct object of a verb.

3. Against the Intransitive analysis of the reflexive 'se'

Of all the intransitive approaches, the unaccusative analysis has been the most popular one. Under this approach the subject of reflexives is an underlying object which has to raise to subject position for Case reasons, because the reflexive morphology absorbs its case. It has long been observed that there is a systematic difference in the properties of non-clitic English anaphors, and French clitics. In (6a), there are two structural Case positions -one for *Paul* and one 'himself'; in (6b), *Paul*, but not *se*, checks structural Case as in (6);

- (6) a. Paul hit himself.
 b. Paul s'est frappé
 Paul SE- was hit
 'Paul hit himself'

Both sentences express a referential dependency between the logical subject and the logical object.

Although those who support the unaccusative analysis do not really discuss the fact that unaccusatives and reflexives can share the same verbal form, the morphological evidence is the primary one in their argumentation. Auxiliary selection was long taken as evidence in favor of the intransitivity hypothesis because both reflexives and unaccusatives in French select *être* 'be', not *avoir* 'have' in past participles, just like passives:

- (7) a. Paul₁ l'₂ *est/*a* frappé
 Paul₁ him is / has hit
 'Paul₁ hit him'

- b. Paul₁ *s'est*/ * a frappé
 Paul₁ self is/has hit
 'Paul₁ hit himself'
- c. Paul₁ *était*/*avait frappé
 Paul₁ was/had hit
 'Paul₁ was hit'
- d. Paul *était*/*avait arrivé
 Paul was/had arrive

In (7a) and (7b) the subject *Paul* performs an action on himself, so the subject *Paul* can be an AGENT, while in (7c) the subject *Paul* is a PATIENT, and a THEME in (7d). We argue that *se* in (7b) behaves like a direct object, discarding the use of the auxiliary verb *être* 'be' as its first criteria to judge the status of a verb.

The first evidence that auxiliary selection does not necessarily determine the status of the verb comes from the following data. Non-reflexive intransitive verbs as *dormir* 'sleep' or *réussir* 'succeed' in French select auxiliary *avoir* 'have' instead of *être* 'be':

- (8) a. Jean *a*/*est dormi.
 Jean has slept
 'Jean slept'
- b. Jean *a*/*est réussi
 Jean has succeeded
 'Jean succeeded'

The second evidence comes from the number agreement fact in expletive structures, and participle agreement with the auxiliary *avoir* 'have' and *être* 'be'. Following is the another claim of the intransitive analysis of *se*:

- (9) a. If an auxiliary is HAVE, past participle agreement does not take place.
 b. If an auxiliary is BE, past participle agreement takes place.

However, consider the following constructions:

- (10) a. Il **arrive**/*arrivent trois filles
 there arrives/*arrive three girls
 'There arrive three girls'
- b. Il **était**/*étaient arrivé trois filles.
 there was/ *were three girls
 'There arrived three girls'
- c. Trois filles **se sont** frappées
 three girls SE were hit
 'Three girls hit themselves'

In unaccusative structure with the expletive *il* 'there' (10a) and (10b), there is no number agreement between the subject *trois filles* 'three girls' and the verb *arrivé* 'arrive' (10a) and the auxiliary *était* 'was' (10b), unlike reflexive verb in (10c) and passive (10d). This shows that *é* reflexives do not pattern with unaccusative verbs contrary to the intransitivity claim. We assume that the behavior of participle agreement is a consequence of the choice of auxiliary.

The third evidence comes from the generalization given in (9a). If past participle agreement is triggered by the choice of auxiliary, not by movement of an internal argument, either (9a, 9b) or (9b) should hold as the relation between auxiliary selection and past participle agreement. But (9a) is not always true in French. In following structures with the auxiliary *avoir* 'have' past participle agreement do occur:

- (11) a. Je les **ai** achetés hier.
 I them have bought-plur. yesterday
 'I bought them yesterday'
- b. Je l'**a** vue hier
 I her have seen yesterday
 'I saw her yesterday.'

The selection of *être* 'be' by French *se* is not good evidence of defining *se* intransitive reflexive. Morphological arguments are not very strong since one cannot predict the auxiliary of a verb from its transitivity status. Auxiliary selection cannot be taken as evidence that these verbs are intransitive.

The fourth argument against the intransitivity analysis comes from *en*-cliticization. It has been argued that French *se* cannot undergo *en*-cliticization, one of the unaccusative diagnostics identified in the literature. Reinhart & Sioni (2000) argue that reflexive intransitives pattern with unergatives. Specifically, *en*-cliticization is possible with unaccusatives as in (12b), while reflexive intransitives do not allow *en*-cliticization, as in (13b):

- (12) a. Il est arrivé trois filles hier soir.
 it is arrived three girls yesterday evening
 'There arrived three girls last night.'
- b. Il **en** est arrivé trois hier soir.
 it of.them is arrived three yesterday evening
 'There arrived three of them last night.'
- (13) a. Il s'est lavé beaucoup de tourists dans ces douches.
 there REFL-is washed many of tourists in these showers
 'Many tourists washed in these showers.'
- b. *Il **s'en** est lavé beaucoup dans ces douches.
 there REFL-of.them is washed many in these showers
 'Many of them washed in these showers.'
 (Reinhart & Sioni 2000, with a minor modification)

However, we note that the facts are divergent. The following example from Bouchard (1988:42) similar to (13a) has been reported as acceptable:

- (14) Beaucoup **s'en** détestent les uns les autres, de ces gens.
 Many REFL-of.them hate the one the others of these people
 'Many of these people hate one another.'

Therefore it is not clear whether *en*-cliticization is impossible with reflexives or not. None of auxiliary selection, past participle agreement and *en*-cliticization seems to be evidence for intransitivity of reflexive *se*. Based on the findings we have provided, we now conclude that intransitive approaches are undermined and no longer tenable. The next question is whether the other approach, i.e. transitive account, can be advocated. If so, on what grounds can we support the transitive approach to *se*?

4. In favor of the transitivity analysis

4.1 Past participle agreement

As we have already seen in 3, complex tenses in French are built with either auxiliary *avoir* 'have' or *être* 'be' and the past participle of the main verb, which agrees in gender, number with the subject or direct object. Since direct objects can trigger past participle agreement in some constructions, this can serve as an important criterion for analysing *se* as a direct object. We show that past participle agreement in French is well accounted for if all reflexives pronouns can be analysed as objects. (15) demands that the past participle must agree with the subject:

- (15) Marie est arrivée
 Marie is arrived. FEM
 'Marie has arrived'

(16) is a typical transitive clause, which shows no agreement with the subject if the direct object *sa fille* 'her daughter' does not precede the verb:

- (16) La mère a lavé sa fille
 the mother has washed her daughter
 'The mother has washed her daughter'

However, agreement with a direct object that precedes the verb is obligatory: in transitive clitic pronoun (17), relative pronoun (18), or the inverted direct object of a question (19):

- (17) La mere **l'** a lavée
 the mother her.FEM.D.O has washed.FEM
 'The mother has washed her'
- (18) la fille **que** la mère a lavée
 the daughter i.FEM that i D.O the mother has washed.FEM
 'The daughter that the mother has washed'
- (19) Combien de bouteilles ton frère a-t-il achetées?
 how many of bottles.FEM.D.O your bother has he bought.FEM.PL
 'How many bottles did your brother buy?'

We show that agreement has the same source in the preceding reflexive clitic *se* which we analyse as a direct object:

- (20) a. La mere **s'** est lavée
 the mother REFL.D.O. is washed.FEM
 'The mother has washed herself'
- b. L'histoire **que** Paul s'est rappelée ~
 the history_i that i D.O Paul SE-was recalled.FEM
 'The history that Paul recalled~'

Therefore, the claim that the participle agreement seems to be indeed triggered by the preceding direct object reflexive, not by the subject as with unaccusative (16), is further supported by the agreement behavior of indirect reflexive construction in (21):

- (21) La mere **s'** est lavé les mains
 the mother herself.OBJ is washed.MASC the hands.D.O
 'The mother washed her hands'

In (21) there is neither agreement with the reflexive clitic nor agreement with the subject; the surface outcome of *lavé* is unexpected since one might expect *lavée* (FEM agreement). Hence, with reflexive constructions, there is only agreement with a preceding direct object 'the hands'. One could be tempted to explain this complex agreement pattern by postulating either of two arguments: (i) the past participle agrees with the subject of an intransitive unaccusative verb or (ii) with a preceding direct object.

Therefore we are in a position to argue for the transitivity hypothesis, since the account of the unaccusatives, reflexives and transitives with direct objects is also possible. Concerning past participle agreement in complex tenses, we propose that reflexives behave rather as transitives and that the *se* in (20) are objects in the contexts.

4.2 French causative constructions

Since Kayne(1975) the asymmetry between (22) and (2) in the following has long been regarded as evidence of intransitivity of the reflexive *se*:

- (22) Je ferai [courir Paul]
 I will-make run Paul
 'I will make Paul run'
- (23) Je ferai [laver Max à Paul]
 I will-make wash Max Paul
 'I will make Paul wash Max.'
- (24) Je ferai [se laver Paul]
 I will-make himself wash Paul
 'I wil make Paul wash himself'

However, this argument does not seem strong when we consider all (a)'s of (25)-(27). Their underlying representations are in (b)s:

- (25) a. Je ferai [courir Paul]
 I will-make run Paul
 'I will make Paul run'
- b. Je ferai [Paul courir _____]
- (26) a. Je ferai [laver Max à Paul]
 I will-make wash Max Paul
 'I will make Paul wash Max'
- b. Je ferai [Paul laver Max **ACC**]
- (27) a. Je ferai [**se laver** Paul]
 I will-make himself wash Paul
 'I will make Paul wash himself'
- b. Je ferai [Paul laver se-REFL **ACC**]

The example (25a) and (25b) are simple demonstrations of causative construction with single argument in its embedded clause. Note that *Paul* appears at the end of the clause. Now consider (26)–(27). The underlying structure of (26a) is (26b). In (26b) we can see that *Paul* precedes the predicate *laver* followed by 'Max-Acc'. Whatever operation that applies to (26b) will apply to (27b) as well. In other words, *Paul* in (26b) is extraposed to the end of the clause,²⁾ yielding the surface word order of (26a). Likewise, *Paul* in (27b) gets extraposed to sentence final position. What we should note here is that in (26b) Dative case *à* must accompany *Paul*. In (27b), however, *à* is missing. Our explanation for this contrast is that before *Paul* in (27b) gets extraposed to the end of the sentence, *se* raises to the position in front of the verb *laver*. Since there is no accusative-bearing NP due to the movement of *se*, the postposed subject *Paul* does not require *à*. Therefore, the lack of *à* in (27b) provides another piece of evidence that *se* behaves like a direct

2) We do not discuss the nature of this rightward movement of the "subject" of the French causative construction. Kayne considers rightward movement/rightward adjunctions to be "stylistic rather than syntactic." See Radford (1997) for a relevant discussion,

object, an internal argument of *laver*. In other words, there is only one DP/NP argument, 'Paul' in (27a), and because of that 'Paul' needs no Dative case marker, *à*. Raising of *se* shows that *Paul* doesn't demand *à*, Dative case. So the correct surface form can be derived by raising the direct object along with infinitive as in (28):

- (28) Je ferai [Paul laver se-REFL ACC]
 = Je ferai [Paul se-REFL ACC laver _____]
 = Je ferai [_____ se-REFL ACC laver Paul]

Our argument is further supported by the following data:

- (29) Paul a laissé [Marie se contredire _____]
 Paul has let Marie se- REFL contradict
 (30) Paul a laissé [Marie I' embrasser _____]
 Paul has let Marie him/her kiss

In (29) *se* occupies the same position as object clitic *le* in (30), which is an embedded clause. What motivation is there for *se* to raise next to *Marie*? We propose that *se* containing a bundle of underspecified features needs to be licensed by the regular DP/NP, *Marie*. This feature licensing triggers the overt movement of *se*. The feature matrix of *se* is the following:

- (31) a. SE.....
 [3 Pers]
 [*u*-Num]
 [*u*-Gen]
 b. Licensing configuration
 [_{TP} Marie_i [_{T'} se_k ... [_{vP} t_i] [_{VP} ... t_k].....]]
 [3 Pers] [3 Pers]
 [Sg-Num] [*u*-Num]
 [M-Gen] [*u*-Gen]

Based on the Principle of Full Interpretation (Chomsky 1995), *se*

needs to be licensed by XP, *Marie*, in (31b). When *se* gets licensed by a fully specified DP, *Marie*, the interpretation of the sentence is completed. In other words, the overt and obligatory movement of the French reflexive clitic is triggered by the need to get a full specification of itself.

We assume that the intransitivity approach from Kayne (1975) to Reinhart & Siloni (2000) treat (25) parallel to (27). But we argue that we do not have to postulate reflexives to be intransitives in order to account for these data. The intransitive analysis leads to wrong predictions about behavior of reflexivized transitives and intransitives in causatives.

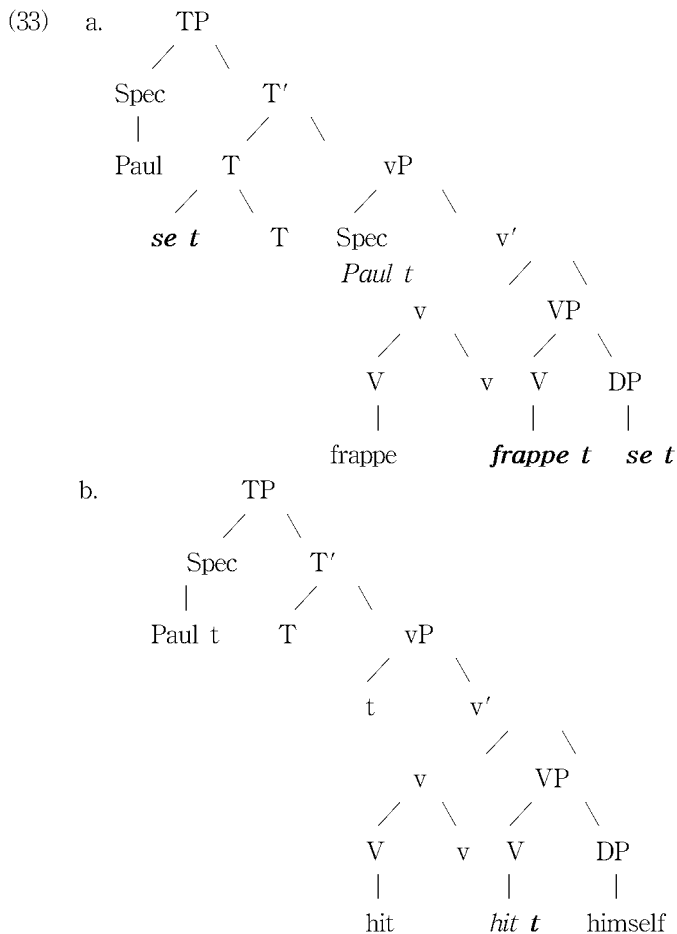
4.3 SE as transitive object clitic

Chomsky (1986) proposes that English reflexives may be like French *se* at LF. So the LF representation for (32a) would be (32b). French verbs overtly move to T in syntax as Rizzi (1997) has suggested or Clitic Phrase, but English 'himself' doesn't. Instead, if English verbs also raise to T at LF, then 'himself' may be in a precisely analogous configuration in (32b). There are two locality conditions at work in (32b): condition on movement, and constraint that, at LF, a reflexive must agree with the Specifier to whose head it is attached. But the 'distance' between an antecedent and a reflexive is deducible from constraints:

- | | | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------|--|-----------------------|
| (32)(=2) a. | Paul ₁ | | hit | | himself |
| | | | | | [3Pers] |
| | | | | | [Sg-Num] |
| | | | | | [M-Gen] ³⁾ |
| b. | Paul ₁ | himself ₁ | hit | | t |
| c. | Paul | se | frappe | | t |
| | Paul | self-REF | hates | | |
| | 'Paul hit himself' | | | | |

3) we are not concerned about Case here: Accusative Case can be treated as one of the uninterpretable features.

We suggest *se* in French is a phi-incomplete, underspecified argument nominal, whose sole relevant morpho-syntactic feature is a person (π) feature, unvalued number or unvalued feature. It is an internal argument, and non-clitic DP is an external argument as shown in (33):



Therefore, we have argued that English reflexives and French reflexive clitic *se* do share some syntactic properties, but they are different from each other in that English reflexives are fully specified DP/NP and French reflexive clitics are underspecified DP/NP. Since English reflexives have no motivation to overtly raise to T, they raise at LF. French reflexive clitic *se* need to overtly raise to T in narrow syntax.⁴⁾ The motivation for this movement is because of the underspecified feature matrix of the clitic.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have proposed an account which views derived reflexive clitic *se* as a transitive object clitic. *Se* lacks some inherent feature values, which makes it an underspecified argument. We have shown that treating the predicates with *se* as intransitives is untenable and paradoxical with respect to some empirical data. We, instead, have argued that in reflexive constructions, French reflexive clitic *se* can be better analysed as a direct object which undergoes raising to T⁵⁾, and the predicates with *se* must be transitive verbs. In particular, we have shown that asymmetry between reflexive verbs and non-reflexive transitive verbs in French causative constructions can be explained by setting up a different underlying structures.

The lack of Dative case *a* in French causative constructions is a critical piece of evidence for the syntactic movement of *se*, which we consider to be parallel to other transitive constructions. Furthermore, the past participle agreement fact in some cases

4) What Guasti (2002) discusses is very reminiscent of what we have argued for. English is a non-Verb raising language, whereas Italian, French, and other Romance languages are Verb raising languages and they do allow finite verbs to overtly raise to T (I).

5) Whether this landing site is an A position or A' position is another issue to which we will return in the subsequent research.

provide additional support for us. Clitic *se* is (internally) merged from the internal argument position, just like other XPs. We have shown that the french *se* must be a kind of XP, assuming the Uniform Theta Role Assignment Hypothesis. We have also provided our speculation that this movement is triggered by the need for its insufficient feature specifications to be valued for Full Interpretation principle.

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Sungshim Hong
Chungnam National University
220 Kung-dong, Yuseong-gu, Daejeon, Korea
Phone: 82-42-821-6519
Email: vshong@cnu.ac.kr

Mikyung, Shin
Woosong University
Jayang-Dong, Tong-ku, Daejeon Metropolitan City
Phone: 82-42-630-9186
E-Mail: aprilmk@wsu.ac.kr

Received: 30 March, 2008

Revised: 1 June, 2008

Accepted: 12 June, 2008