Middle Passive SE Constructions in Romanian

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Similar to other Romance languages, or even to some Slavic varieties (see Medova 2009: XVII), the Romanian accusative reflexive clitic SE is a polyfunctional marker, being involved in quite unrelated constructions. An extensive literature deals with the heterogeneity of the reflexive marker, which is attested cross-linguistically (Pană Dindelegan 1972; Dobrovie Sorin 1998, 2007; Folli 2001; Alboiu *et al.* 2004; D'Alessandro 2004; Kallulli 2006; Cornilescu and Nicolae 2016 – for Romanian and Romance languages, Israeli 1992; Rivero and Sheppard 2003; Grahek 2006; Marelj 2004 and Medova 2009 – for Slavic languages, Steinbach 2002; Alexiadou and Doron 2012; Alexiadou 2014 – for Germanic languages, among others).

The Romanian clitic SE is employed in five types of configurations (see Vasilescu 2013: 174−9): (i) constructions with syntactic reflexives (1a), (ii) constructions with reflexive lexical formatives (1b), (iii) constructions with reflexive lexico-grammatical formatives, marking a grammatical opposition (1c-d), (iv) constructions with reflexive grammatical formatives (1e-f), and (v) reflexive doubling constructions (1g).

(1) a. Ion$_i$ *se$_i$*   spală
         Ion   CL.REFL.ACC.3SG washes
         `Ion washes himself`

     b. Ion   *se*   holbează   la   Maria
         Ion   CL.REFL.3SG   stares   at   Maria
         `Ion stares at Maria`

     c. Ion   *s-a*   supărat   pe   Maria   (intransitive, psych)
         Ion   CL.REFL.3SG=has   got angry   on   Maria
         `Ion got angry with Maria`

     d. Ion   a   supărat-o   pe   Maria   (transitive, causative)
         Ion   has   upset=CL.ACC.F.3SG   PE$_{DOM}$ Maria
         `Ion upset Maria`

     e. *Se*   aduce   cafeaua.   (*SE*-passive)
         CL.REFL.PASS   brings   coffee.DEF
         `The coffee is brought/served`

     f. *Se*   vorbeşte mult   despre   ea.   (*SE*-impersonal)
         CL.REFL.IMPERS   speaks   much   about   she
         `They speak a lot about her`

     g. Ion   *se$_i$*   cunoaşte   *pe*   *sine$_i$*   foarte   bine.
         Ion   CL.REFL.ACC.3SG knows   PE$_{DOM}$ self.ACC   very   well
         `Ion knows himself very well`

The SE-passive in (1e) above is an alternative construction for the analytical passive (formed with *fi* `be` plus the participle of the verb (2a)), and is preferred in modern Romanian whenever the agent remains non-realized (2b), in contexts with post-verbal subject (2c), or with non-entity-denoting reading of the passive subject (2d) (see Dragomirescu 2013: 169−173); the passive value of SE also occurs in intransitive constructions which are reorganised as SE-impersonals, as the result of the suppression of the human subject (2e):

(2) a. Cartea   este   scrisă   de   Maria
         book.DEF   is   written   by   Maria
         `The book is written by Maria`

     b. Cartea   aceea   încă   nu   *s-a*   scris
         book.DEF   that   yet   not   CL.REFL.PASS=has   written
         `That book has not been written yet`

     c. *Se*   va   publica   o   nouă   carte   despre   el
         CL.REFL.PASS   AUX.FUT.3SG publish.INF   a   new   book   on   him
         `A new book about him will be published soon`

d.	Aici	*se*		vând	timbre
	here	CL.REFL.PASS		sell	stamps

`Stamps are sold here`

e.	*Se*		doarme	mult	în	vacanţă
	CL.REFL.IMPERS		sleeps	much	in	holidays

`One sleeps a lot during the holidays`

For certain verbs (mainly transitives with an ergative correspondent), like *acri* (`sour`), *coborî* (`descend`), *opri* (`stop`), *tăia* (`cut`) etc., the opposition active/passive/passive-impersonal/unaccusative reveals the use of three kinds of *se* (see 3c-e):

(3)	a.	Ion taie pâinea	(transitive)
		`Ion cuts the bread`	
	b.	Pâinea este tăiată (de Ion)	(BE-passive)
		`The bread is cut by Ion`	
	c.	Pâinea *se taie* înainte de a o mânca	(SE-passive₁)
		`Bread should be cut before eating it`	
	d.	Pâinea *se taie* uşor / mai uşor decât carnea	(SE-passive₂)
		`Bread can be cut easily / easier than meat`	
	e.	Maioneza *se taie* dacă nu pui muştar	(unaccusative)
		`Mayonnese curdles if you don't add mustard`	

While (3e) is the distinctive reflexive form of the ergative verb, there is a subtle semantic difference between (3c-d): SE-passive₂ encompasses an arbitrary interpretation of the implicit argument, following from the generic interpretation of the agent (Steinbach 2002: 18), whereas with SE-passive₁, a particular event may be described (the agent `is not identified with an internal argument, but is rather understood as unspecified group of people` (Medova 2009: XVII), and it is supressed only because of discursive reasons).

The paper aims to show that in Romanian, some instances of SE-passive and SE-impersonal constructions (which are not necessarily involved in the opposition active/passive/passive-impersonal/unaccusative) exhibit the characteristics that we have briefly described for SE-passive₂, and that they may allow an interpretation in terms of middle passive. The analysis conducted on a rather extensive corpus of both spoken and written data will focus on the particular contexts in which the middle passive reading is triggered: (i) the adverbial modification; (ii) the modal/procedural interpretation of the event; (iii) the responsibility of the subject; (iv) the arbitrary.

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