Verónica Orqueda*, Silvana Arriagada and Francisca Toro

# Spanish [*auto* + V + *se*] constructions

**Abstract:** In this paper we analyse Spanish verbal constructions that accept both the clitic *se* and the prefix *auto-* in order to determine whether these formations are or are not more agentive than the corresponding non-prefixed constructions (*autocriticarse vs. criticarse*). The proposal arises from the discussion about the different semantic values observed in formations with *auto-* and explores the distinctive features of such formations in contrast to those without *auto-*. We carried out a twofold analysis: first, we applied a set of tests of agentivity and control to a sample of 130 verbs with *auto-* extracted from the Modern Spanish Reference Corpus (CREA) and compared the sample with its non-prefixed pronominal pairs (i.e. verbs with clitic *se*). Second, we carried out a series of surveys using similar tests with Spanish speakers to guarantee the acceptability of the corpus interpretations. We argue that prefixed constructions show a higher degree of agentivity and control by external arguments, which results in the impossibility of bidirectionally replacing these constructions with those that only have the clitic *se*.

**Keywords:** agentivity, reflexive constructions, prefixation, Spanish

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# 1 Introduction

Spanish offers a complex scenario, where a verb can occur with the clitic *se* by itself, as well as in constructions both with *se* and the prefix *auto-*, as examples (1a) and (1b) show:[1]

(1)  a.  *El      polvo    se    disuelve        en   el    agua*
         the     powder   SE    dissolve.PRS.3SG  in   the   water
         'The powder dissolves in water'
     b.  *El      polvo    se    auto-disuelve    en   el    agua*
         the     powder   SE    self-dissolve.PRS.3SG  in   the   water
         'The powder dissolves in water'

In addition, there are constructions where *se* combines with *sí solo/a* and with *sí mismo/a(s)* apparently with no difference in meaning from those only with *se*:

(2)  a.  *Ana    se    critica*
         Ana    SE    criticize.PRS.3SG
         'Ana criticizes herself'
     b.  *Ana    se    critica          a    sí misma*
         Ana    SE    criticize.PRS.3SG   to   herself
         'Ana criticizes herself'
     c.  *Se    disuelve        por   sí mismo*
         SE    dissolve.PRS.3SG   by    itself
         '(It) dissolves by itself'

Furthermore, we find heavily marked constructions with *auto-* + *se* + *sí mismo/a(s)*, that coexist with some of the previous constructions:

(3)  a.  *Capacidad    para    auto-gobernar=se*
         ability       for     self-govern.INF=SE
         'Ability to self-govern'
     b.  *Capacidad    para    gobernar=se    a    sí mismo*
         ability       for     govern.INF=SE   to   himself
         'Ability to govern oneself'

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**1** For the sake of space, the examples in Sections 1 and 2 are modified versions of constructions attested in our corpus, unless otherwise specified. The examples cited in this paper follow the general conventions of Leipzig glossing rules. However, morphological segmentation is restricted to *auto-* and clitics. The use of capitals for the clitic *se* in the glosses indicates any person/number form within the inflectional paradigm of this clitic.

c. *Capacidad para auto-gobernar=se a sí mismo*
ability     for    self-govern.INF=SE   to   himself
'Ability to govern oneself'

Notice that while these are different strategies in Spanish, it is not an easy task to find an exact parallel in the English translation. Lastly, there are also constructions with *auto-* but without *se*, as in (4):

(4)     *Auto-controla tu miedo*
self-control.IMP.2SG   your   fear
'Self-control your fear'[2]

As is evident, Spanish makes use of a wide range of possible combinations that are not necessarily easy to translate into other languages, and which have not been addressed in a truly comprehensive approach so far.

Traditionally, constructions with *auto-* have been considered redundant or cases of overlapping. García-Medall Villanueva (1988), for instance, is of the opinion that verbal formations with *auto-* and the clitic *se* are a kind of double reflexive marking phenomenon so he rejects constructions with both the prepositional phrase *a sí mismo/a(s)* and the prefix, as in *autocriticarse a sí mismo* 'to criticise oneself'. However, the coexistence of different constructions suggests that we still need a better understanding of their semantics and the exact relation between each of these constructions and reflexivity.

In this paper, therefore, and contrary to the explanation based on notions of redundancy or overlapping, we try to determine the exclusive and differential semantic contribution of *auto-* to verbal constructions with *se* (and all the corresponding person/number forms within the flexive paradigm: *me, te, se, nos, os*), and try to explain the difference between *se* constructions with and without the prefix. Our starting hypotheses are that, first, these strategies (pronominalization and prefixation) are not always interchangeable and do not result in necessarily identical values;[3] and second, constructions with *auto-* must be higher on the agentivity scale than those without it, as already pointed out by Felíu (2005). In this

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**2** Located at https://allevents.in/nogales/nogales-son-autocontrola-tu-miedo-y-habla-en-público/200019201445547 (accessed 20 April 2020). For the sake of space, this and other examples cited in the paper are slightly modified from its original version. However, such changes do not affect the analysis.

**3** The term 'pronominal verb' (or pronominalization strategy, here) refers to verbs that "contain in their conjugation non-accented pronominal forms with person features" (RAE and ASALE 2010: 788). Further distinctions according to the nature of the clitic are possible (aspectual, inherently reflexive, and so forth). However, we use this term in a broad sense, covering all verbs that accept a clitic pronoun with the same person and number features as in the verbal ending.

sense, agentivity would be a necessary semantic condition for the syntactic restrictions of reflexivity in Spanish.

# 2 Theoretical background and referential framework

## 2.1 An overview of formations with *auto-* and with *se*

Traditionally, the (neo)classical origin of *auto-* has led to its morphological classification as a 'prefixoid' (Lang 1990), as it occurs in terms like *autonomía* 'autonomy'. At the same time, it is a highly productive derivative prefix (Felíu 2003a, 2003b) that can be applied to lexical items belonging to all major word classes: verbal constructions, such as *autoprogramarse* 'to program oneself'; nominal constructions, such as *autopercepción* 'self-perception' and *autogol* 'own goal'; adjectival constructions, such as *autolimitado* 'self-limited' and *autoadhesivo* 'self-adhesive'; and even adverbial constructions, such as *autorreflexivamente* 'self-reflexively', which stem from adjectival formations in *-do/a* (Felíu 2003a, 2003b; Orqueda and Squadrito 2017). These must be differentiated from the lexeme (Varela Ortega 2005) that occurs in, e.g. *autismo* 'autism' and the cases of composition that arise through shortening from *automóvil* 'automobile', such as *autovía* 'highway'.

From a syntactic point of view, scholars do not always agree on whether this morphological process is capable of modifying the argumental structure. Thus, according to RAE and ASALE (2010: 176), *auto-* as well as *entre-* and *co-* are prefixes of argumental incidence and allow the emergence of new constructions with syntactic and valence constraints that may be different from those in the base. In turn, studies such as Felíu (2003a, 2003b) argue that these prefixes do not alter the valency of the base but instead establish a coreference relation between two arguments (semantic level).

From a functional point of view, the divergent characterization of these new formations – as a consequence of the values of the prefix mentioned above – has been extensively discussed in the literature, not only in Spanish (Felíu 2003a, 2005; Mendikoetxea 1999, among others; RAE and ASALE 2010) but also in other Romance languages such as Italian and French (Mutz 2003, 2011). However, scholars do not agree about the precise number and functionality of these formations. Thus, for example, some authors acknowledge only the reflexive formations (Varela Ortega 2005), as in (5), with certain syntactic constraints such as coreference and the information provided regarding the valency and the argumental structure:

(5)     *Ana   se   auto-critica*
          Ana   SE   self-criticize.PRS.3SG
          'Ana criticizes herself'

Following Van Valin's proposal (2001) on macroroles, a reflexive verb construction with both *auto-* and the clitic *se* (for example, *autocriticarse* 'to criticize oneself' or *autorretratarse* 'to portray oneself') is a case of coreference between the Actor and the Undergoer.[4] In other words, these are cases of coreference between the external ($X_i$) and internal ($Y_i$) arguments [$X_i$, $Y_i$], where X and Y are two different but coreferential arguments. The reflexive use of *auto-* may indeed be reformulated with the verb + *se* + *a sí mismo/a(s)*, as was seen in (2b). However, claiming that the reflexive is the only meaning expressed by [*auto-* + V + *se*] constructions would lead us to discard forms such as *autoemocionarse* 'to get emotional oneself', in which a distinction between Actor and Undergoer cannot be made. The problem is that even though constructions like *autoemocionarse* 'to get emotional oneself' or *autodisolverse* 'self-dissolve' are not as frequent as *emocionarse* or *disolverse*, they are still in use and widespread in the different Spanish dialects.

     Within the range of non-reflexive constructions, *auto-* may also indicate reciprocity with a plural subject, as in (6a) below, which is confirmed by the possibility of rephrasing it with *mutuamente* 'mutually', as in (6b):

(6)    a.   *Los    compañeros   se   auto-estimulan       entre    ellos*
             the     classmates   SE   self-stimulate.PRS.3PL   between   them
             'The classmates stimulate each other'[5]
    b.   *Se   estimulan        mutuamente*
             SE   stimulate.PRS.3PL   mutually
             '(They) stimulate each other'

Yet other proposals point to the polyfunctional character of the prefix (e.g. Felíu 2005; Mendikoetxea 1999) and underline, in particular, the ability of the prefix to indicate the absence of a cause or external force, as was seen in (1b), and also as in (7) below:

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**4** Although the notion of Actor in Role and Reference Grammar does not correspond exactly to that of Agent in functional and cognitive approaches, in this work we opt for the Actor macrorole so we can leave agentivity as a semantic feature, as part of a series of segmentable semantic features that can be analysed independently (Gast 2007; Lidz 1996; König and Gast 2008).
**5** Adapted from https://marismawellnesscenter.wordpress.com/2014/09/24/que-es-la-pedagogia-montessori/ (accessed 20 April 2020).

(7)  a.  *El    papel mural   se    auto-adhiere*
         the    wallpaper    SE    self-adhere.PRS.3SG
         'The wallpaper is self-adhesive'
     b.  *Este   metal   se    auto-degrada*
         this    metal    SE    self-degrade.PRS.3SG
         'This metal degrades itself'

These examples show that [*auto-* + V + *se*] constructions can express an anticausative meaning. It is true, however, that these constructions are more restricted because not all verbal classes may belong to this construction type.

Alternatively, studies such as Lang (1990) make special mention of the intensification nuance and call into question whether the prefix necessarily expresses reflexivity or whether the reflexive meaning already pre-existed in the base to which *auto-* is added,[6] i.e. whether the semantic condition for the prefix is the reflexive character of the base to which it is attached (RAE and ASALE 2010). As a response to that, Felíu (2003a) argues that it is not entirely correct to suppose that there is a previous reflexive value, especially if nominal constructions that are not necessarily deverbal such as *autobiografía* 'autobiography' are considered. In fact, there are also cases with *se* that cannot be considered reflexive, neither in the prefixed construction nor in the non-prefixed base, as in (8):

(8)  *Cristóbal López   se    auto-controla       los    casinos*
     Cristóbal López   SE    self-control.PRS.3SG   the    casinos
     'Cristóbal López controls his casinos by himself'

In example (8), both a reflexive and an anticausative meaning must be ruled out. Instead, it is a transitive clause where *auto-* must be an intensifier and *se* something different.

The fact that the same prefix appears in such different constructions (reflexive, reciprocal, anticausative, and emphatic) is not unusual if we take into account functional typological proposals such as those of Haspelmath (2003), and König et al. (2013), who recognize the varied semantics and functions of reflexive markers.

The apparent overlapping of *auto-* with other strategies is seen in the fact that both the intensifying and the reflexive functions can also be expressed without the prefix and with the *sí mismo* strategy. This had led scholars to consider it a possible

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6 There are multiple definitions and approaches to the concept of intensification. For details, see König (2011); for a historical approximation to the *auto-* prefix, see Orqueda and Squadrito (2017) and Orqueda et al. (forthc.).

case of functional overlap, due to the shared anaphoric character, which occurs particularly in nominal formations. As the examples in (9) show, if these clauses are isolated, the construction with *auto-* must necessarily have a retrievable antecedent – the possessive in the case of (9b) – unless we take *autobiografía* as a text genre. There is a recoverable referent for *auto-* in (9b). In contrast, it is unknown whose biography it is in (9a).

(9)   a.   *La    auto-biografía    se    vende    bien
            the    auto-biography    SE    sell.PRS.3SG    well
            *'The autobiography sells well'

      b.   Su$_i$    auto-biografía$_i$    se    vende    bien
            his/her    auto-biography    se    sell.PRS.3SG    well
            'His/her$_i$ autobiography$_i$ sells well'

However, the anaphoric character is not enough to determine the presence of *auto-*, as was seen in (8). Furthermore, although these are nominal formations, it is worth noting that examples as in (10a) are possible and documented while those as in (10c) are not, especially considering that both *destrucción* 'destruction' and *infección* 'infection' accept the reinforcement with *sí mismo*, as in (10b) and (10d) respectively:[7]

(10)    a.   Auto-destrucción    de    sí mismo
              self-desruction    of    himself
              'Self-detruction of himself'

        b.   Destrucción    de    sí mismo
              destruction    of    himself
              'Destruction of himself'

        c.   *Auto-infección    de    sí mismo
              self-infection    of    himself
              *'Self-infection of himself'

        d.   Infección    de    sí mismo
              infection    of    himself
              'Infection of himself'

This comparison shows that the non-agentive nature of the event's first argument in *autoinfección* 'self-infection' (and not the possible paraphrase by *sí mismo*) could explain the non-existence of examples like (10c).

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**7** Example (10a): located at https://hemisferios.eu/es/2019/07/31/la-decision-de-sophie-tres-estados-de-la-sinrazon/; example (10b): located at https://www.blogdequk.com/2011/12/el-hombre-destructor-de-si-mismo.html; example (10d): located at https://www.elonce.com/secciones/sociedad/622460-quotestamos-actuando-y-equipnandonos-como-si-tuvinramos-un-brote-de-coronavirusquot.htm (accessed 4 May 2020).

Concerning the pronoun *se* (Gómez Torrego 1992; González Vergara 2006; Maldonado 1999; Montes Giraldo 2003),[8] the literature agrees on its multifunctionality. Apart from its use as a reflexive strategy, this complex clitic is also found in a wide range of constructions. Some of them are: reciprocals (*ellos se aman* 'they love each other'), impersonals (*aquí se vive bien* 'one lives well here'), anticausatives (*se abrió la puerta* 'the door opened itself'), and passives (*se venden casas* 'houses are sold'). Besides, it is inherent to diverse intransitive and transitive pronominal verbs, like *irse* 'to leave', *olvidarse* 'to forget'. Although the range of uses of the Spanish clitic *se* has expanded throughout the history of this language (e.g. Bogard 2006), its multifunctional nature was inherited from the Latin full pronoun *se*, which was used in reciprocal, reflexive and anticausative (Cennamo et al. 2015: 684) constructions already in Early and Classical Latin.

Regarding the comparison between [*auto* + V + *se*] constructions and [V + *se*] constructions, several authors propose, as already mentioned, a certain amount of functional similarity (Lang 1990; Mendikoetxea 1999; Varela Ortega 2005). The explanation given is that both processes (prefixing and the use of the *se* clitic) are used both in the formation of verbs with reflexive interpretation (*sacrificarse/ autosacrificarse* 'to sacrifice oneself') and in the formation of anticausatives with absence of external agent (*abrirse/autoadherirse* 'to open by itself/to adhere by itself').

However, in contrast to [*auto-* + V (+ *se*)] constructions, which may be cases of intensification, non-prefixed constructions with *se* (e.g. *sacrificarse*) cannot be considered intensifiers. This distribution is coherent with the implicative generalization proposed by König and Siemund (2000: 59): "If a language uses the same expression both as an intensifier and as reflexive anaphor, this expression is not used as a marker of derived intransitivity or aspectual marker". This would suggest that the intensifier marker should be *auto-*, while *se* is responsible for the intransitivity derivation. In other words, if the construction *López se autocontrola los casinos* 'López controls his own casinos' has an intensifying nuance, this value is provided by *auto-*, and not by *se*, because *auto-* can be used elsewhere as a reflexive marker but not as an intransitivizer, while *se* can be an intransitivizer but not an intensifier elsewhere. Following this generalization, it seems natural that in cases in which the subject is an Undergoer, as in (11), the intransitive derivation (anticausativity) is due to *se* and, consequently, the *auto-* prefix indicates something different:

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**8** Because it is not the focus of the present investigation, we leave aside the discussion about the morphological status of *se*.

(11)       *Este    mensaje    se    auto-destruirá       en    cinco    segundos*
            this     message    SE    self-destruct.FUT.3SG    in    five     seconds
            'This message will self-destruct in five seconds'

Note that, within a narrow definition, it is impossible to assign a reflexive interpretation to (11), because it is a case of external argument reduction. These formations are very complex, so ambiguous readings or specific interferences may arise that make the classifications and analysis less clear. Other examples, such as (12), are interpreted as non-reflexive attributives or self-benefactives and indicate that the Actor performs the process by his or her own means or for himself/herself, being a beneficiary of the verbal basis:

(12)       *Una    querella    por    auto-adjudicar=se    un    aparcamiento*
            a      lawsuit    for    self-reward.INF=SE    a     parking.lot
            'A lawsuit for self-rewarding a parking lot'

## 2.2 A Construction Grammar approach to [*auto-* + V + *se*] structures

For this investigation, we used the model of Construction Grammar, based on the existence of constructions as basic units of analysis, i.e. form-meaning pairs (Traugott 2015), which are "pairings of form with semantic or discourse function, including morphemes or words, idioms, partially lexically filled and fully general phrasal patterns" (Goldberg 2006: 5). Concerning the new meanings associated with *auto-*, research has addressed how adding specific prefixes can affect the agentivity degree in the resulting constructions, either by increasing the agentivity of the arguments of the process or by decreasing it (Rooryck and Vanden Wyngaerd 2011). Synchronically, this framework allows us to analyse different languages from the notion of construction, and not from the notion of word, which can vary from one language to the other and whose limits are still diffuse.

Understanding a construction as "a form-meaning pairing in which the meaning of the whole is not derivable from the parts or a string whose meaning is predictable from its parts, but which occurs with sufficient frequency for it to be stored as a pattern" (Trousdale 2010: 52), let us consider the prefixed formations to be a new construction. Such a new construction has semantic and syntactic values not necessarily shared by the non-prefixed base. In this sense, verbal formations with *auto-* and the clitic *se* emerge as a specialization of non-prefixed constructions without the clitic *se*, with new values and semantic interpretations.

Furthermore, this model favours the connection between a synchronic and a diachronic perspective as the emergence of new constructions is due to the evolutionary process by which its schematicity, its productivity, and its non-compositionality are increased (Traugott 2015). Within this model, the emergence of a new pair is considered a "constructionalization", that is, the rise of a new type of construction from others, with a "new syntax or morphology and new coded meaning, in the linguistic network of a population of speakers" (Traugott and Trousdale 2013: 22). In this sense, and following other proposals (Givón 2001; Haspelmath 2008), the new semantic features associated with the constructions with *auto-* arise in conjunction with new syntactic constraints.

Finally, we have also chosen this approach because it acknowledges the particular context of constructions for the analysis. We believe that considering the whole context of the new constructions is crucial for understanding the rise of new form-meaning pairs. This approach has a significant effect on the diachronic development because from a historical point of view grammaticization is not restricted only to the grammaticized element. "Instead, it is the grammaticizing element in its syntagmatic context, which is grammaticized. That is, the unit to which grammaticization properly applies to constructions, not isolated lexical items" (Himmelmann 2004: 31). Considering the context and a usage-based approach are fundamental for our research because the analysed units can be ambiguous in isolation and grant more than one interpretation depending on the context. In short, to thoroughly analyse the functioning and behaviour of these constructions, it is necessary to observe how they behave in their contexts of appearance, in order to show possible relations or decisive aspects.

## 2.3 A proposal for the distribution of constructions

As has been shown in the previous sections, pronominal constructions with or without *auto-* may fall into a range of different syntactic patterns: passive, impersonal, reflexive, reciprocal, anticausative, and transitive. Each type of construction can be identified according to not only the number of arguments but also the semantic macrorole associated with each one, which enables us to take into account both levels of analysis in an intrinsic relationship. Thus, while reflexive structures imply a higher degree of agentivity in the subject, by having an Actor, both passive and anticausative structures are expected to have a subject (Undergoer) with a low degree of agentivity.

From our point of view, Table 1 schematizes the distribution of functions among the three possible strategies (a. [V + *se*], b. [*auto-* + V + *se*], c. [*auto-* + V]):

**Table 1:** Functions of [V + *se*], [*auto-* + V + *se*], and [*auto-* + V] constructions.[9]

|  | **[V + *se*]** | **[*auto-* + V + *se*]** | **[*auto-* + V]** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Passive | Yes | No | No |
| Anticausative | Yes | Yes | No |
| Reciprocal | Yes | Yes | No |
| Reflexive | Yes | Yes | No |

Table 1 shows that [*auto-* + V + *se*] constructions are compatible with the reciprocal and reflexive functions because these have highly agentive Actors. In contrast, such constructions are not compatible with passives due to the non-agentive nature of Undergoers. In turn, anticausatives can be found in [*auto-* + V + *se*] constructions, but their subjects could be characterized as having more control over the event. As we will argue in the next pages, although the different strategies seem to overlap with each other in some functions of this schema, there is a clear continuum that relates these strategies with the semantic features of the the functions studied.

# 3 Methods

## 3.1 Sample

We applied a series of tests on two types of samples to evaluate differences between the constructions with and without the *auto-* prefix: (a) sample 1: 130 verbs extracted from a written corpus; (b) sample 2: linguistic assessments of Spanish speakers taken from their answers to a semi-directed interview.

In sample 1, we analysed 130 verbs extracted from the Modern Spanish Reference Corpus (CREA). CREA is composed of a wide range of oral and written texts from all Spanish-speaking countries and produced between 1975 and 2003.[10] Given that the constructions studied were found in texts from practically all countries, we consider this a pan-dialectal phenomenon. Although some of the verbs obtained from the corpus were clearly coinages, others can be easily

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**9** Note that reflexive verbal constructions with *auto-* and without *se-* are possible only with a self-benefactive meaning, e.g. in (29). In turn, reflexive nominal formations are also logically possible as the clitic does not work with nouns and adjectives.

**10** The countries included in CREA are Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Spain, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

checked to be existing forms in simple searches on web pages from different geographical areas.

For the elaboration of the sample, we first collected the complete data of constructions prefixed with *auto-* from CREA, after the elimination of the cases in which *auto-* does not correspond to the prefix but to the neoclassical lexeme (*autismo*) or to the standard lexeme in compound words (*autovía*). From this first filter, we obtained 13,214 cases in total, distributed into adjectives (2494), verbs (1755), nouns (8953), and adverbs (12). As the object of the study was the analysis of verbal constructions, we created a random sample from those 1755 verbs, with a confidence level of 95% and a maximum margin of error of 4%. This filter resulted in 447 tokens in total, corresponding to 170 types, from which the non-pronominal forms had to be subtracted. The application of a new filter of erroneous cases or cases causing problems of interpretation helped us to reduce the sample to 130 instances of pronominalized verbs.

Regarding the semantic categorization of verbs, these were not studied independently but from the context in which the verbs appeared, following the proposal of Construction Grammar (Traugott 2015; Hoffmann and Trousdale 2013), in order to understand most of these new formations and their possible semantic and syntactic restrictions. Then, for the contrastive work, we selected the same verbs without *auto-*, also from CREA, with contexts as similar as possible, to be able to compare them and explore the semantic peculiarity of the prefixed formations.

Next, 41 semi-directed interviews conducted with adult speakers of the city of Santiago, Chile, constitute sample 2. The aim of using surveys was not to obtain a sociolinguistic characterization but rather to corroborate the data obtained from the written corpus because we started from the supposition that the phenomenon has spread in the different speech communities. In other words, we believe that this survey, although restricted to one specific variety, should confirm the results from sample 1, as long as this is a pan-dialectal phenomenon. It would be interesting, however, to corroborate this information in later studies.

Among other tests in the interviews, we asked the respondents to choose the more natural expression in cases of contrast between prefixed and non-prefixed constructions. In addition, we asked for respondents' grammatical judgements (e.g. *Do (a) and (b) mean the same?*) and reformulation (e.g. *What does this mean to you?*).

## 3.2 Diagnostic tests

The selected sample of pronominal and prefixed forms was subjected to a series of tests of agentivity and quantification of certain features, such as the number of

**Table 2:** Agentivity tests applied to the corpus.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Imperatives | The imperative mood (*autoprográmate* 'program yourself') should be acceptable for constructions with a high degree of agentivity. |
| 2. Number of arguments | We looked for evidence of the prefix affecting the valency and argument structure from the base: *autocontrolarse* 'control oneself' < *controlar* 'control' (trans.) |
| 3. Animacy | We used a scale for the arguments' animacy ([0] = inanimate; [1] = 'animized', and [2] = animate), based on the premise that with a higher degree of animacy, there is a higher degree of agentivity. |
| 4. Nominalizations | Nominalizations that refer to action processes (*autogobernarse* 'self-governing' > *autogobierno* 'self-government') should be acceptable for constructions with a high degree of agentivity. |
| 5. Nominal formations in *-dor* | We analysed the hypothesis that *-dor* formations are connected to highly agentive bases (*autoadministrarse* > *autoadministrador* 'to self-administer > self-administrator'). |
| 6. Control verbs | We analysed the acceptability of infinitival clauses controlled by an event verb (Grimshaw 1990) under the hypothesis that this implies a higher degree of agentivity as long as the existence of an agent that does something volitionally is assumed (Tsunoda 1981). |
| 7. "Compel" verbs | These constructions as a complement to verbs such as *as forzar* 'force' and *obligar* 'compel' (*lo obligaron a autoprogramarse* 'he was compelled to program himself') should be acceptable if there is a high degree of agentivity. |
| 8. (Non-)intentional adverbs | A higher degree of agentivity should be compatible with adverbs such as *deliberadamente* 'deliberately', *cuidadosamente* 'carefully', or *a propósito* 'on purpose' (*se autoprogramó a propósito* '(s)he programmed him/herself'), and not with *accidentalmente* 'accidentally' or *espontáneamente* 'spontaneously'. |
| 9. Cleft sentences | Cleft sentences (*lo que hizo x fue* 'what he/she did was' + non-finite verb clause) and negated cleft sentences (*lo que hizo fue autoprogramarse* 'what (s)he did was to program him/herself') should be acceptable if there is a high degree of agentivity. |

arguments, mainly extracted and adapted from the work of Lakoff (1966) and Dowty (1991). The aim of our agentivity tests was to analyse the behaviour of such formations in different semantic and syntactic contexts and to assess whether the constructions with *auto-* were interpreted as possessing a higher degree of agentivity, presenting, in particular, a higher degree of volition or control over the action. The tests that were applied and compared between constructions with and without the prefix, were the following (See Table 2):

In addition, we considered a series of semantic features that could be related to the existence of an Actor in the clauses in which the constructions appeared. Some

**Table 3:** Compatibility with intentional adverbs.

|  | + **accidentally (non-volitive)** | + **on purpose (volitive)** | **Both** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Formations with *auto-* | 3.6% | 80.6% | 15.5% |
| Formations without *auto-* | 9.4% | 54.3% | 36.2% |

of them show the existence of an Actor that makes a change from an Undergoer to a new state, put emphasis on the Actor's responsibility in the performance of an action that is considered volitional (Dowty 1991), or indicate the existence of an agent as an energy source that produces changes by its action (Cruse 1973; Tsunoda 1999; Hundt 2004; Verhoeven 2010).

Although the initial aim of the tests was to detect stativity, they are useful for evaluating the agentivity scale of analysed constructions and thus distinguishing between agentive and non-agentive constructions. As Levin (2009: 8) points out, "several purported stativity tests are agentivity tests". Therefore, if we think not in discrete or binary terms but instead in terms of a continuum of agentivity, we see that the higher the acceptance of tests is for the constructions concerned, the greater is the degree of agentivity, taking into account, of course, the contextual restraints on these constructions.

# 4 Results and discussion

## 4.1 Results of the corpus analysis

As a first general result, we can state that not all tests are equally conclusive. They do, however, show a tendency to connect prefixed constructions with a higher degree of agentivity or control. In this section, we describe some of the tests applied to the sample individually, followed by the overall results.

### 4.1.1 Compatibility with intentional adverbs

As shown in Table 3, one of the most useful tests was the compatibility of formations with *auto-* and volitional adverbs, which emphasizes the agentive and volitional nature of the verbal event and its incompatibility with adverbs of spontaneity or accidentality or with inanimate subjects. Almost all prefixed cases admitted a volitional adverb, while in the cases without *auto-* this alternative was neither the only nor the most dominant one.

(13) and (14) illustrate the compatibility and incompatibility of formations with the adverbs mentioned above:[11]

(13)   a.   *Una        querella    por     auto-adjudicar=se*
            a           lawsuit     for     self-reward.INF=SE
            (*a propósito/accidentalmente*)    *un   aparcamiento*
            (on.purpose/accidentally)          a     parking.lot
            'A lawsuit for self-rewarding a parking lot (on purpose/accidentally)'

       b.   *Julie      pudo        adjudicar=se    (a propósito/accidentalmente*)
            Julie       can.PST.3SG adjudicate.INF=SE (on.purpose/accidentally)
            *seis puntos en     el      segundo     set*
            six  points  in     the     second      set
            'Julie (…) could adjudicate (on purpose/accidentally) six points in the second set'

(14)   a.   *Las        líneas      editoriales    se      negocian,*
            the         lines       editorial      SE      negotiate.PRS.3PL
            *se         auto-aniquilan             (a propósito/accidentalmente*)
            SE          self-destroy.PRS.3PL       (on.purpose/accidentally)
            *cuando     termina      un      gobierno*
            when        end.PRS.3SG  a       government
            'The editorial lines are negotiated, they self-destruct (on purpose/ accidentally) when a government ends'

       b.   *Cuando    materia y            antimateria     colisionan,*
            when        matter and          antimatter      collide.prs.3pl
            *se        aniquilan           (*a propósito/accidentalmente*)
            se          destroy.prs.3pl     (*on.purpose/accidentally)
            *y          la      masa    se      convierte               en      energía*
            and         the     mass    SE      convert.PRS.3SG         into    energy
            'When matter and antimatter collide, they self-destruct (*on purpose/ accidentally) and the mass is converted into energy'

If we now consider the analysis only on the base of the acceptability of the *a propósito* 'on purpose' reinforcement, the closer connection to prefixed constructions is also evident, as seen in Table 4.

This test is interesting when applied to anticausatives. Although the demotion of the Actor/Force is the most salient feature that defines anticausatives (which

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**11** Although some of the analysed examples may be alien to certain varieties of Spanish, to guarantee the maximum descriptive level of this work, we checked not only within the corpus, but also with examples found in the press and with speakers about the most doubtful cases, to rule out *hapax legomena* and completely exceptional cases.

**Table 4:** Acceptability of *a propósito* as the only possible interpretation.

|  | + *auto-* | − *auto-* |
|---|---|---|
| + *a propósito* | 104 | 70 |
| − *a propósito* | 26 | 59 |

should, therefore, be non-volitional), examples with *auto-* show a more volitional interpretation than is the case with non-prefixed verbs/constructions:

(15)  a.  *Estos      sistemas* (…)      *se          auto-organizan*
these      systems                SE          self-organize.PRS.3PL
*en        niveles    (a propósito/\*accidentalmente)*
in         levels     (on.purpose/\*accidentally)
'These systems organize themselves (on purpose/ \*accidentally) in levels'

b.  *Las      bacterias        devoran        al        insecto*
the      bacteria        devour.PRS.3PL    to.the  insect
*y        se reproducen              (? a propósito/accidentalmente)*
and      SE reproduce.PRS.3PL        (? on.purpose/accidentally)
'Bacteria devour the insect and reproduce themselves (? on purpose/ accidentally)'

(16)  a.  *Este mensaje se auto-destruirá        (a propósito/accidentalmente)*
this  message SE  self-destroy.FUT.3SG (on.purpose/accidentally)
*en    cinco      segundos*
in     five       seconds
'This message will destroy itself (on purpose/accidentally) in five seconds'

b.  *Este    mensaje    se destruirá        (? a propósito/accidentalmente)*
this    message    SE destroy.FUT.3SG (? on.purpose/accidentally)
*en    cinco      segundos*
in     five       seconds
'This message will destroy itself (? on purpose/accidentally) in five seconds'

Note that (15a) accepts a volitional adverb because the subject is animized. This means that although it is inanimate, higher degrees of control and agentivity over the event are granted in this context. With regard to the examples in (16), an interesting difference between (a) and (b) arises. As stated above, the *se* strategy is polysemic, which is due to a long process of grammaticalization. *Se destruirá* is an anticausative alternation in cases such as (16b), and it blocks the Actor or external

cause as an Actor-backgrounding passive and as an impersonal. Unlike non-prefixed constructions, the impersonal and the passive interpretations are automatically ruled out in cases with *auto-* as in (16a). This is made evident by the impossibility of adding an external cause in clauses with prefixed formations:[12] \**este mensaje se autodestruirá por la explosión* \*'this message will be self-destroyed by the explosion/this message will be destroyed by the explosion', an operation that is possible for passives: *este mensaje se destruirá por la explosion* 'this message will be destroyed by the explosion' (the addition of an external cause necessarily to the passive interpretation of *se*). As for the impersonal interpretation, this is usually a less controlled event because of the lack of an Actor, and this is not consistent with the tests that accept formations with *auto-*, which tend to show a higher degree of control.

### 4.1.2 Animacy of the main argument

As shown in Table 5, another feature associated with the higher agentive nature of cases with *auto-* is the significant number of animate or animized subjects, the latter understood as nominal elements not animate initially, but which act as such. This 'animization' can be checked by means of the type of adjectives with which they combine or through other forms of qualification.

As Table 5 shows, there is a substantial difference between prefixed constructions with an animate referent (60.9%) and prefixed constructions with a non-animate referent (16.4%), as well as the non-prefixed constructions with a non-animate referent (34.4%). In (17a), for example, an inanimate element, science, turns into an animate noun as it is equated to a monster; in (17b) and (17c), in turn, the choice of a mental process and action, respectively, points to a higher degree of animacy or agentivity of the initially inanimate subject, the company and the Constitution.

**Table 5:** Animacy scale for arguments in formations with and without *auto-*.

|  | − **animate** | +/− **animized** | + **animate** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prefixed constructions | 16.4% | 22.6% | 60.9% |
| Non-prefixed constructions | 34.4% | 12.2% | 53.2% |

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**12** Several cases of pronominal verbs without *auto-* in the corpus have no exact parallel to those with the prefix. Most commonly, these are passives or impersonals. Notwithstanding this, it is still possible to compare constructions. As will be shown, the different behaviour is due precisely to the different degree of agentivity. Compare the following set: (a) *las grasas del pescado **se digieren** con facilidad* 'fish fats are easily digested'; (b) *algunas especies **se autodigieren** volviéndose de colour negro* 'some species self-digest and turn black'.

(17)    a.  *La   ciencia   es     un      monstruo que   se   auto-perfecciona*
            the  science  is      a       monster   that  SE   self-improve.PRS.3SG
            'Science is a self-improving monster'

        b.  *Desde   sus      orígenes   la      empresa*
            from     its      origins    the     company
            *se       ha                auto-concebido   como     interdisciplinar*
            SE        have.PRS.3SG      self-conceive.PP  as       interdisciplinary
            'From its origin, the company has conceived itself as interdisciplinary'

        c.  *Ante    una   posible       amenaza   a       la      democracia*
            facing  a      possible      threat    to      the    democracy
            *la        Constitución          se      auto-defiende*
            the        Constitution          SE      self-defend.PRS.3SG
            'When faced with a possible threat to democracy, the Constitution has
            self-defense mechanisms'

### 4.1.3 Imperatives

Prefixed constructions also tend to accept imperatives, as is the case in (18b):

(18)    a.  (…) *para  que  cada  usuario  se  auto-programe        los contenidos*
                 for    that  each  user     SE  self-program.SBJV.3SG  the  contents
            '(…) So that each user programs the contents himself'

        b.  → ¡***Auto-prográma=te***        los      contenidos!
              self-program.IMP.2SG=SE   the      contents
            → 'Program the contents yourself!'

Note, however, that this test is not as conclusive as the previous ones and that it
does not mean that non-prefixed constructions are impossible with imperative
mood, rather that they express a different semantic value:

(19)    a.  *El          teléfono* (…)   *se      programa            y       se*
            the          telephone (…)  SE      program.PRS.3SG     and     SE
            *le          asigna          un       número*
            it.DAT.3SG   assign.PRS.3SG  a        number
            'The telephone is programmed and assigned a number'

        b.  → * *¡Prográma=te!*
              program.IMP.2SG=SE
            → * 'Self-program!'

### 4.1.4 Other tests

We also applied other tests with useful results although with some limitations due to the nature of these constructions. One of them is the acceptability of cleft sentences, closely connected to the animacy test. While almost all of the prefixed cases admit cleft sentences (20b) and negated cleft sentences (22b), their compatibility with pronominal formations without a prefix is questionable (21b, 23b) as the following examples show:

(20)  a.  *Él   se   asume           y      auto-rrotula        coreógrafo*
          he   SE   assume.PRS.3SG  and  self-label.PRS.3SG  choreographer
          'He assumes the role and calls himself as a choreographer'

      b.  → *Lo que      hizo           él       fue*
          what        do.PST.3SG     he       be.PST.3SG
          *auto-rrotular=se           coreógrafo*
          self-label.INF=SE           choreographer
          → 'What he did was to call himself as a choreographer'

(21)  a.  *Nunca supimos   (…)   por qué...*
          *...el    mercado   (…)   se   rotula    Mercado de Guzmán el Bueno*
          the     market    SE   label.PRS.3SG *Mercado de Guzmán el Bueno*
          'We never knew why the market is called Guzmán el Bueno Market'

      b.  → *\*Lo que      hizo          el      mercado     fue*
          what        do.PST.3SG    the     market      be.PST.3SG
          *rotular=se      Mercado de Guzmán el Bueno*
          label.INF=SE    *Mercado de Guzmán el Bueno*
          → *'What the market did was to be called Guzmán el Bueno Market'

(22)  a.  *ETA   es           una organización   mucho  más    compleja que*
          ETA  be.PRS.3SG   a     organization   much   more   complex that
          *se auto-rregenera* (…)    *como cualquier organismo vivo*
          SE self-regenerate.PRS.3SG as    any        organism living
          'ETA is a much more complex organization, which regenerates itself
          like any other living organism'

      b.  → *Lo que hizo       ETA   fue       no   auto-rregenerar=se*
          what   do.PST.3SG ETA   be.PST.3SG NEG  self-regenerate.INF=SE
          → 'What ETA did was not to self-regenerate'

(23)  a.  *La      economía   española  no   se        regenera*
          the     economy    Spanish   neg  SE        regenerate.PRS.3SG
          'The Spanish economy does not regenerate'

b. → ? *Lo que     hizo            la       economía  española*
what     do.PST.3SG       the      economy    spanish
*fue          no   regenerar=se*
be.PST.3SG   NEG  regenerate.INF=SE
→ ? 'What the Spanish economy did was not to regenerate'

As these examples show, (20b) is acceptable as a derivation from the prefixed construction in (20a) while (21b) is not. The same contrast is evident in negated constructions: (22b) versus (23b). Note that the examples in (21) are barely comparable to those in (20) given the inanimate nature of the subject. However, a consequence of this difference is the impossibility of accepting a cleft sentence in (21). Interestingly enough, even when *autorrotularse* 'to call one-self' seems not to be comparable to *rotularse* 'to be called', it is evident that only *autorrotularse* admits an agentive interpretation. In order to obtain a similar reading without the prefix, we need an intensifying marker instead, as in (24):

(24)     *Si me fue mal en una prueba de matemáticas…*
*me rotulo         a mí mismo como malo para las matemáticas*
SE  label.PRS.1SG to myself   as    bad  for  the  math
'If I fail the math test … I label myself as "bad at math"'[13]

Another test was the paraphrasability with constructions of the type *prefirió* 'preferred', *hacerse cargo de* 'take charge of', *su propio/a* 'his/her own' + nominalization, which introduce a behavioural process (*preferir*) that denotes a volitional choice:

(25)     a. *Gil y Gil   se   postula        como      candidato*
Gil y Gil   SE   stand.PRS.3SG  as        candidate
*a    presidente  de   la     asociación*
for  president   of   the    association
'Gil y Gil stands as a candidate for president of the association'
b. → *Gil y Gil     prefirió           hacer=se     cargo    de*
Gil y Gil     prefer.PST.3SG     take.INF=SE  charge   of
*su        propia   postulación*
his/her    own      nomination
→ 'Gil y Gil preferred to take charge of his own nomination'

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    c.   *Serpa     se     auto-postula          como*
        Serpa    SE    self-nominate.PRS.3SG    as
        *interlocutor     del       presidente*
        spokesperson  of.the    president
        'Serpa nominates himself as the president's spokesperson'

    d.   → ? *Serpa        prefirió            hacer=se     cargo    de*
            Serpa       prefer.PST.3SG    take.INF=SE   charge   of
            *su        propia     auto-postulación*
            his/her   own      self-nomination
        → ? 'Serpa preferred to take charge of his own self-nomination'

As is evident in these examples, the presence of behavioural and volitional verbs makes these constructions redundant since a high degree of control and agentivity is already present. Although it is possible to think that the paraphrase *su propio/a* 'his/her own' is sufficient, this may still be ambiguous, so we have opted for a more redundant structure that ensures the maximum reduction of possible ambiguities. Note, however, that this is a complex test because these nominalizations are neological units, which makes the acceptability criteria highly problematic.

    There is a similar problem, though with significant results, in the analysis of the derivation with *-dor* for the prefixed formations:

(26)    a.   *Me     auto-rreprochaba     de     mi     cobardía*
         SE     self-reproach.PST.1SG  of     my    cowardice
         *por    no     haber=le         contestado*
         for   neg   have.INF=3SG.DAT  reply.PP
        '(I) reproached myself for my cowardice for not having replied (to her/him)'

    b.   → ? *Soy          un     auto-rreprochador*
            be.PRS.1SG   a      self-reproacher
        → ? 'I am a self-reproacher'

    c.   *Aldo   ya          no      se    reprochaba     el     sadismo*
        Aldo   already     NEG    SE    reproach.PST.1SG  the    sadism
        *de    jugar     con     su      presa*
        of    play.INF  with   his      prey
        'Aldo no longer reproached himself for the sadism of playing with his prey'

    d.   → *Es   un    reprochador*
        is     a      reproacher
        → '(He) is a reproacher'

**Table 6:** Results of the application of tests to the CREA corpus.

|  | + *auto-* | – *auto-* |
|---|---|---|
| Incompatibility with the type '*prefer to* + nominalization' | 68.9% | 16.2% |
| Derivation with *-dor* suffix | 68.9% | 82.2% |
| Embedding with control verbs | 83.8% | 70.8% |
| Complement to 'to compel' verbs | 80.0% | 69.2% |
| Imperatives | 74.6% | 66.9% |
| Cleft sentences | 95.4% | 78.5% |
| Negated cleft sentences | 86.9% | 68.5% |

Overall, there is an interesting tendency for prefixed constructions to show a higher degree of agentivity and control. As Table 6 shows, there is no dichotomous but rather a gradual difference between these constructions when we apply the tests.

Summing up the results from the CREA corpus, we can claim that there is a higher tendency in pronominal constructions with *auto-* to accept features related to control and agentivity. These features are typical of reflexive constructions but not limited to them.

## 4.2 Results from interviews

As stated above, this instrument aimed to verify results from the analysed corpus data by making use of Spanish native speakers. The primary outcome is that the interviews reveal a general tendency for cases with *auto-* to be considered more agentive, while non-prefixed constructions are more underspecified regarding control and agentivity as Tables 7 and 8 show.

As Tables 7 and 8 show speakers tend to prefer verb forms with *auto-* in unambiguous agentive, volitional, and animate/animized contexts. Furthermore, there is a tendency to perceive prefixed constructions as more intentional and involving more engaged Actor subjects. This became particularly clear when we asked speakers to explain or paraphrase the given sample. In most prefixed constructions, speakers opted for expressions highly marked for volition or responsible engagement, such as "the subject **wanted** to do x", "he had the **intention** of

**Table 7:** Linguistic judgements and choices of verbal formations with *auto-* in two examples.

|  | Passive, non-intentional and inanimate contexts | Agentive, volitive and animate/animized contexts |
|---|---|---|
| *Autoconsiderarse* | 2.4% | 70.7% |
| *Autoprescribirse* | 17.1% | 90.2% |
| Total verbal forms with *auto-* | 10.8% | 89.1% |

**Table 8:** Judgements on the event's volition, spontaneity, or intentionality.

|  | Prefixed constructions | Non-prefixed constructions |
|---|---|---|
| Perception of a more intentional action | 78.8% | 21.9% |
| Perception of spontaneous action (*regenerarse/ autorregenerarse* set) | 51.2% | 48.7% |
| Perception of a more agentive action of which the subject is responsible | 70.7% | 29.2% |

performing x", or "he was **responsible** for performing x". In contexts that lacked these features or were ambiguous regarding them, speakers tended to choose the option without *auto-* as in (27):

(27)    *En el siglo XVI la división urbana de la ciudad se conformaba por la villa y sus barrios.* (…)

       *El     centro de la ciudad  \_\_\_\_ (**se consideraba**/se auto-consideraba)*
                          …

       the    downtown         \_\_\_\_ (SE considered/se self-considered) …
       … *como la villa, mientras que las zonas periféricas se designaban barrios*
       'In the XVIth century the urban division of the town was made up of the village and its neighbourhoods. The downtown \_\_\_\_\_ (**was considered**/ was self-considered) the village, while the peripheral areas were designated as neighbourhoods'

## 4.3 Discussion

As has been shown extensively in this paper, pronominal constructions with *auto-* seem to relate to control and agentivity features more than those without the prefix. Although one may relate these features to the reflexive nature of (some of) these constructions, this is an oversimplification as agentivity and control features are similarly found in non-reflexive pronominal constructions with *auto-*:

(28)    *Prendas    que    se    auto-lavan*
      clothes    that    SE    self-wash.PRS.3PL
      'Self-cleaning clothes'[14]

The inanimate nature of the subject in (28) makes it impossible to consider it a reflexive construction, although the use of the prefix points to the absence of an external agent and the capacity of self-control by the clothes. Therefore, agentivity and control are not restricted to reflexive constructions.

Another piece of evidence that connects the agentivity feature to the presence of the prefix, and not merely to the reflexive nature of the construction, is that non-pronominal constructions such as those in (29a) and (29b) are also highly agentive:

(29)  a.  *Auto-controle*          *su*      *glucemia*
          self-control.IMP.2SG   your    blood.sugar.level
          'Check your blood-sugar level yourself'
      b.  *Estos*    *auto-estimulan*        *la*      *liberación*   *de*   *histamina*
          these    self-stimulate.PRS.3PL   the     release        of     histamine
          'They self-stimulate histamine release'

(29a) and (29b) are transitive and display highly agentive subjects, which can only be due to the use of the prefix. It seems evident, therefore, that even when *auto-* is not necessarily by itself an agentivity or control prefix, verbal constructions with it are prone to acquire such values.

A third argument in favour of this interpretation comes from the comparison between *autosuicidarse*, literally 'to self-commit suicide', and *automatarse* 'to self-kill'. Although we did not use these verbs in the interviews (as they did not come up in the sample), the widespread use of *autosuicidarse* on Internet websites in diverse Spanish varieties reveals the large spread of this phenomenon:

(30)  a.  *Jou*   *se*   *auto-suicidó*              *a*      *sí mismo*
          Jou    SE    self-suicide.PST.3SG        to      himself
          *el*    *solo*   *sin*        *ayuda*    *de*    *nadie*
          he     alone   without     help       from   nobody
          'Jou committed suicide, he did it alone without anyone's help'
      b.  *Resulta curioso que vayan a por …*
          *una*     *página*        *que*      *se*    *auto-suicidó* ….
          a        web.page        that      SE     self-suicide.PST.3SG
          …*cuando cambió la ley. No se si sus creadores habrán participado en
          la creación de otras ¿pero acaso aún hay alguien que visite* 'Series.ly'*?*
          'It is curious that they go for a web page that committed suicide when
          the law changed. I wonder whether their creators might have
          participated in the creation of other pages. Is there still anyone who
          visits *'Series.ly'*?'
      c.  *Un*   ruquito   *se*   *auto-suicidó*              *en*   *Indaparapeo*
          a     ruquito   SE    self-suicide.PST.3SG        in     Indaparapeo
          'A *ruquito* committed suicide in Indaparapeo'

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**14** Examples (28) to (32) are extracted from different websites.

    d.   *Juan Carlos Vélez,*   *¿se*    *auto-suicidó*
        Juan Carlos Vélez      se    self-suicide.PST.3SG
        *marcándo=se*       *con*   *el*   *GEA?*
        identify.GER=SE    with  the  GEA
        'Did Juan Carlos Vélez commit suicide by identifying himself with the
        GEA?'

From a strictly normative point of view, it could be claimed that these are redundant formations because of the reflexive lexical nature of the verb *suicidarse* (confirmed by the incompatibility with *a sí mismo/a*). Still, Spanish speakers often prefer that option, thus granting the subject more control over the event. These constructions are primarily in contexts of online games as seen in (30a), suggesting a degree of greater control by the Actor because, in this way, participants may choose to leave the game. Something similar happens in (30c): the body of the text of this note further explains the possible causes that may have caused that person to take such a decision. In some cases, moreover, the expression acquires an ironic or ludic value indicating a character mocking the event. Finally, as seen in (30d), this construction appears frequently in political discourse, possibly disseminated in Latin America through a public commentary by former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

    Compared to constructions with *suicidarse* 'to commit suicide', the prefix in constructions with *automatarse* is used to add an agentive and control feature and thus to disambiguate it from the accidental reading that is typically rendered by the verb *matarse* in Spanish:

(31)    a.   *Un*  *soldado*  *se*    *mató*      *accidentalmente*
           a    soldier  SE   kill.PST.3SG   accidentally
           'A soldier got killed accidentally'
      b.   *\*Un*  *soldado*  *se*    *auto-mató*     *accidentalmente*
            a    soldier  SE   self-kill.PST.3SG   accidentally
           \*'A soldier 'self-killed' accidentally'

The fourth and last argument comes from our review of proscriptions found in prescriptive texts. As the example below shows, the use of *auto-* in most of these constructions is usually blocked; this shows that there is a "need" to battle against the widespread "faulty" use of this prefix:

(32)    *¿Qué ejemplos deben rechazarse por* **incorrectos?**
      a.   *Ese grupo se autodestruyó. / Ese grupo se destruyó.*
      b.   *Ese cantante se suicidó. / Ese cantante se autosuicidó.*
      'Which examples must be rejected as **incorrect**?

a. That band self-destroyed. / That band destroyed itself.
b. That singer commited suicide. / That singer committed self-suicide.'[15]

Another similar judgement can be found in "*Cuando los autos chocan*" ('When autos crash'),[16] where the journalist steadily complains about the "abuse" of this prefix in the press. These examples indicate that the normative idea is usually that *auto-* is incorrect or superfluous.

## 4.4 A possible explanation for agentive constructions with *auto-*

Although we find the use of *auto-* in verbs early in the history of Spanish, the vitality of these particular pronominal agentive constructions is recent and relates to another ongoing change that affects non-prefixed constructions only with *se*. As was stated earlier in this paper, constructions with *se* are highly polysemous because they allow many diverse interpretations (reciprocal, reflexive, anticausative, and so forth). It is plausible, therefore, that the use of the prefix arose as a way to disambiguate, in parallel with the already existing reinforcement by the prepositional phrase *a sí mismo/a(s)*. This hypothesis is in line with the claim that constructions with *se* show a decrease of the Actor's relevance and the subsequent privileging of the Undergoer on the semantic level of the clause. Thus, as González Vergara (2014: 156) concludes from a Role and Reference Grammar approach, "constructions with *se* display the non-specification of the highest-ranking role in the logical structure". If this is the case, we can expect that the prefix seeks the opposite effect.

It is also interesting to compare verbal and nominal constructions, with and without *auto-*. The noun *reproche* 'reproach', for instance, is not as ambiguous regarding the valency as is the verb *reprocharse* because the verbal construction can be both reflexive and transitive. The prefix in the noun *autorreproche* probably does not function necessarily as a disambiguating device as it does in *autorreprocharse*. The reflexive reading is less controversial, therefore, in nominal formations than it is in verbal formations.

The tremendous ambiguity of *se* and the possible solutions in Spanish have different parallels in other Romance languages. An ongoing tendency is the one

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**15** The English translation *self-suicide* is obviously redundant. However, we prefer to preserve this form in our translation to indicate that this is one option in the original test. Interestingly, a quick look at *self-suicide* on some web pages indicates, at least, that this also exists in English.
**16** Extracted from https://www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/cuando-los-autos-chocan-nid369379 (accessed 17 September 2019).

found in Brazilian Portuguese, where the *se* clitic is dropped as a disambiguating device: "the null *se* construction is more associated with cognition middles, change of posture, anticausatives, passive-impersonal and impersonal domains […] Those event types that imply a high degree of control tend to occur with overt *se* constructions" (Afonso and Soares da Silva 2019: 22). Interestingly enough, *se* began to be dropped in some recent instances in Spanish too, as in the new unergative *entrenar* ('to train oneself'), as a recent development from a previous transitive counterpart ('to train someone') to *entrenarse* ('to train oneself'): "The intransitive non-pronominal construction is also admitted, which prevails in current usage" (RAE and ASALE 2005, s.v. *entrenar(se)*, translation ours).

# 5 Conclusions

The data presented here allow us to confirm that, overall, [*auto-* + V + *se*] constructions are not limited exclusively to the reflexive interpretation. Although they are polysemous constructions, we may conclude that there is a tendency to associate them with a higher degree of control and volition (and consequently, a macro-feature of agentivity) by the Actor, compared to the non-prefixed constructions, which are underspecified regarding those features. Thus, these two types of constructions are not synonymous, nor is the prefix strategy merely pleonastic. As our analysis suggests, the diverse strategies might be located at different points in a hypothetical continuum of agentivity, as shown in Figure 1.

Thus, the pronominal verbal formations underspecified for agentivity and those that are non-agentive (passive, impersonal, anticausative) concentrate on the less agentive pole. The addition of the prefix increases the degree of agentivity progressively through the sub-features of control, volition, and active engagement of the external argument. Finally, heavily marked constructions making use of all the strategies are found on the extreme right pole. This last type demonstrates the possible dissimilar values provided by each strategy and the need for disambiguation by speakers.

Thus, our study strongly suggests that the prefix *auto-* contributes a unique semantic nuance to the pronominal constructions because there is a regular tendency to increase the degree of agentivity. In this sense, agentivity would be a necessary semantic condition for the syntactic constraints on reflexivity. In other words, while reflexive constructions need to be highly agentive, not all highly agentive constructions are reflexive. From a Construction Grammar approach, the formations prefixed with *auto-* correspond to new constructions and provide an example of 'constructionalization': a new pair of form (prefixed pronominal construction) and meaning (heavily marked as agentive) emerges from the simple and semantically ambiguous pronominal construction.
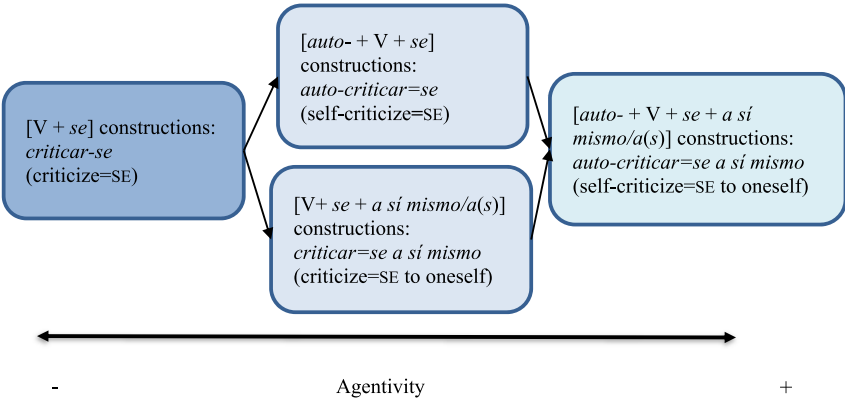
**Figure 1:** Continuum of agentivity in pronominal verbal constructions.

Finally, as a possible explanation, we have suggested that the emergence of these cases might relate to the ongoing change experienced by the polysemous constructions with *se*, which are generally characterized by a less prototypical Actor (or even by the Undergoer macrorole). Again, we think that a Construction Grammar approach provides a solid model for this, as we need to consider the construction as a whole in its synchronic and diachronic context to explain how a specific semantic feature emerges.

# Appendix:  List of 130 verbs from CREA

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. autoabastecerse | 2. autoadjudicarse | 3. autoadmitirse | 4. autoafeitarse |
| 5. autoacusarse | 6. autoadministrarse | 7. autoafirmarse | 8. autoalabarse |
| 9. autoalimentarse | 10. autocandidatearse | 11. autoconfesarse | 12. autoconvocarse |
| 13. autoanalizarse | 14. autocastigarse | 15. autoconocerse | 16. autocorregirse |
| 17. autoaniquilarse | 18. autocensurarse | 19. autoconscientizarse | 20. autoconvertirse |
| 21. autoasegurarse | 22. autocertificarse | 23. autoconstituirse | 24. autocriticarse |
| 25. autoasignarse | 26. autoconcebirse | 27. autoconstruirse | 28. autoconvencerse |
| 29. autocalificarse | 30. autocondecorarse | 31. autocontrolarse | 32. autodiagnosticarse |
| 33. autocatalizarse | 34. autoconferirse | 35. autocomprenderse | 36. autocompensarse |
| 37. autocrearse | 38. autodepreciarse | 39. autodestaparse | 40. autodisolverse |
| 41. autocrisparse | 42. autodeprimirse | 43. autodestruirse | 44. autodramatizarse |
| 45. autodebilitarse | 46. autodepurarse | 47. autodetenerse | 48. autoformularse |
| 49. autodeclararse | 50. autodescalificarse | 51. autodeterminarse | 52. autogenerarse |
| 53. autodefenderse | 54. autodescartarse | 55. autodiferenciarse | 56. autoformarse |
| 57. autodefinirse | 58. autodescomponerse | 59. autodigerirse | 60. autoflagelarse |

(continued)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 61. autodenigrarse | 62. autodesignarse | 63. autodirigirse | 64. autoexpulsarse |
| 65. autodenominarse | 66. autodespedir | 67. autodisciplinarse | 68. autofertilizarse |
| 69. autoduplicarse | 70. autoelogiarse | 71. autoexcluirse | 72. autofianciarse |
| 73. autoelegirse | 74. autoemocionarse | 75. autoexcusarse | 76. autoexpatriarse |
| 77. autoeliminarse | 78. autoengañarse | 79. autoexigirse | 80. autoexonerarse |
| 81. autogestionarse | 82. autoinfectarse | 83. autolesionarse | 84. autonombrarse |
| 85. autogobernarse | 86. autoinhabilitarse | 87. autolimitarse | 88. autoobservarse |
| 89. autogolearse | 90. autoinmolarse | 91. autojubilarse | 92. autopercibirse |
| 93. autogolpearse | 94. autoinscribirse | 95. autollamarse | 96. autoperfeccionarse |
| 97. autoidentificarse | 98. autoinstaurarse | 99. automatricularse | 100. autopostularse |
| 101. autoincriminarse | 102. autoimponerse | 103. autoinventarse | 104. autopreciarse |
| 105. autoinculparse | 106. autointoxicarse | 107. automedicarse | 108. autopremiarse |
| 109. autopresentarse | 110. autoproclamarse | 111. autoprogramarse | 112. autoprescribirse |
| 113. autoprivarse | 114. autorreforzarse | 115. autorresponsabilizarse | 116. autosecuestrarse |
| 117. autoprotegerse | 118. autorregenerarse | 119. autorretratarse | 120. autosuperarse |
| 121. autorganizarse | 122. autorregularse | 123. autorrotularse | 124. autovalorarse |
| 125. autorrealizarse | 126. autorreprocharse | 127. autotitularse | 128. autoxidarse |
| 129. autorrecetarse | 130. autorreproducirse | | |

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