

**Syntax at the interfaces:
On the restricted productivity of the French mediopassive
within the Romance family¹**

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September 2008

Abstract

The object of this article is to explore and analyse the fact, pointed out in previous linguistic works, that the productivity of mediopassives— a subtype of SE-constructions — is more restricted in French than in the rest of the Romance family. The paper examines separately rich-agreement mediopassives, where person-number inflection is fully specified, and poor-agreement ('impersonal') mediopassives, where person-number inflection is specified by default. As regards rich-agreement cases, a comparative description and a survey of the available linguistic literature leads me to discard or revise various descriptive assumptions put forward in previous works, separating along the way those constraints on mediopassives which obtain across Romance, from those which are specific to French. I argue that the more restricted productivity of the rich-agreement mediopassive in this language follows from a peculiarity of French independent from SE-constructions: the more restricted distribution of the controller of verb agreement in this language. As regards poor-agreement cases, I reexamine the incompatibility between SE and unergative predicates in impersonal constructions, and propose a new way of linking this restriction to the special structure of impersonal clauses in French. In both rich-agreement and poor-agreement cases, it ultimately appears that the restricted productivity of French mediopassives may be correlated to the weak morphological content of verbal inflection which singles out French among the Romance languages.

Keywords

French, mediopassive, Romance, SE-constructions, thematic structure, syntax/pragmatics relation, unaccusativity

¹ Acknowledgements.

1. Introduction

This article bears on French mediopassive constructions, briefly illustrated in (1), and whose productivity, discussed below, appears to be more restricted than that of their counterparts in other Romance languages — at least in Standard Italian (I), (European) Portuguese (P), Romanian (R)² and Spanish (S) (from now on: IPRS):

- (1) a. Les projets de lois, ça se vote à l'Assemblée Nationale.³
 DF.PL reform bill.PL DM.NSG SE vote.PRS.3SG in DF.SG Parliament
 Lit. 'Reform bills, it SE-acts in Parliament.'
 'Reform bills are acted in Parliament.'
- b. Il s'est voté deux projets de loi
 3NSG SE AUX.PRS.3SG vote.PP.NSG two reform bill.PL
 hier à l'Assemblée Nationale.
 yesterday in DF.SG Parliament
 Lit. 'It SE-acted two reform bills yesterday in Parliament.'
 'Two reform bills were acted yesterday in Parliament.'

The term *mediopassive*⁴ attempts to capture both the in-between voice status of SE-constructions (halfway between active and passive, cf. Stéfanini 1962, Méliis 1990), and the fact that this specific type of SE-construction may often be paraphrased or translated by *be*-passives, as witnessed by (1). The syntactic contexts hosting mediopassives are further subdivided here — for description's sake — into two subtypes: rich-agreement constructions, exemplified in (1a), and poor-agreement (or 'impersonal') constructions, exemplified in (1b). In section 2, mediopassives are characterized and distinguished from other SE-constructions. In sections 3 and 4, I review and discuss the evidence and assumptions put forward in the linguistic literature with respect to the two types of French mediopassives clauses illustrated by (1a) and (1b), and argue that they are subject to no specific restrictions within the Romance family: more precisely, the discrepancies observed between French and IPRS mediopassives stem out of two syntactic properties of French which are independent of SE-constructions.

Romance mediopassives, outside of French, further present a certain amount of variation between them (cf. Roegiest 2000, Muller 2007, a.o). This study essentially leaves aside these intra-Romance variations to focus on specificities of *French* within the Romance family, whose other members are designated together as IPRS.

² Romanian (R) is included in the IPRS acronym, although, apart from Table (2), the non-French examples quoted in this article are only taken from Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. The inclusion of R(omanian) is meant to hint that analogues of the quoted IPS examples are also licensed in R (according to the descriptive information found in Dobrovie-Sorin's works, completed by some further checking of my own).

³ Abbreviations used in the glosses: ACC = accusative; AUX = (perfect) auxiliary; DF = definite article; DAT = dative; DM = demonstrative; F = feminine gender; FUT = future; INF = infinitive; IPF = *imparfait* (tense); M = masculine gender; N = neutre gender; NEG = negation marker; NOM = nominative; PART = partitive (determiner); REFLPOSS = reflexive possessive; PP = past participle; PL = plural; PRS = present tense; PST = past tense; SG = singular; SUBJ = subjunctive

⁴ In using this term I follow Dobrovie-Sorin (1998, 2003a,b).

2. The mediopassive among SE-constructions and its grammatical restrictions

(2) The mediopassive among Romance SE-constructions

Construction	French [F]	Spanish [S]	Italian [I]	(European) Portuguese [P]	Rumanian [R]	English translation
1a. Reflexive	Marie s'est vue à la télé.	Maria se vió en la tele.	Maria si è guardata alla televisione.	A Maria viu-se na televisão.	Maria s-a privit la televizor.	Mary saw herself on television.
1b. Reciprocal	Pierre et Marie se sont embrassés.	Pedro y Maria se besaron.	Pietro e Maria si sono baciati.	O Pedro e a Maria beijaram-se	Petre si Maria s-au sarutat.	Peter and Mary kissed (each other).
2. Anticausative	La branche s'est cassée.	La rama se rompió/quebró.	Il ramo si è rotto.	O ramo partiuse.	Ramura s-a rupt.	The branch broke.
3a. Rich-agreement mediopassive	.Ces lunettes se nettoient facilement. ?Des lunettes se sont nettoyées hier sur cette table.	Estas gafas se limpian facilmente. Se limpiaron gafas ayer en esta mesa.	Questi occhiali si pullono facilmente. Si sono puliti degli occhiali ieri su questa tavola.	Estes ócu;los limpam-se com facilidade. Limparam-se óculos ontem nesta mesa.	Acesti ochelari se curata usor. Pe masa asta s-au curatat ieri ochelari.	These reading glasses SE-clean easily (are easy to clean). Reading glasses were cleaned yesterday on this table.
3b. Poor-agreement mediopassive	Il s'est nettoyé des lunettes hier sur cette table.					Glasses-cleaning took place yesterday on this table.
4. Impersonal SE/SI		Muchas veces se llega tarde. Nunca se esta contento..	Spesso si arriva in ritardo. Non si è mai contenti. [Cinque 88:522]	Muita(s) vez(es) chega-se tarde. Nunca se está contente.		'People often arrive late.' , One is never satisfied.'

2.1. SE/SI-constructions in French and Modern Romance

Table (2) distinguishes four types of Romance SE-constructions, whose common denominator is the occurrence — in the third person — of the clitic *se* (or *si*), realized as proclitic or enclitic, depending on the language and the construction. Following Reinhart & Siloni (2005), I assume that SE-constructions essentially differ as to their thematic structure:

- Reflexive and reciprocal (reciflexive) SE-constructions are construed semantically as transitive. The phrase controlling verb agreement is understood as supporting both the external and the internal thematic (theta) roles, as exemplified by the examples in (3):

- (3) a. Maria se vió en la tele. [S]
 Mary SE see.PST.3SG on DF.FSG TV
- b. Marie s'est vue à la télé. [F]
 Mary SE-AUX.PRS.3SG see.PP.FSG⁵ on DF.FSG TV
 Lit. 'Mary SE-saw on TV.'
 'Mary saw herself on TV.'
- (4) a. Los niños se véron en la tele. [S]
 DF.MPL children SE see.PST.3PL on DF.FSG TV
- b. Les enfants se sont vus à la télé. [F]
 DF.PL children SE AUX.PRS.3PL see.PP.MPL on DF.FSG TV
 Lit. 'The children SE-saw on TV.'
 'The children saw {themselves/each other} on TV.'

Under Reinhart & Siloni's (2005) analysis, these structures involve a valency ('arity') BUNDLING operation which links together the internal and external theta-roles on a single syntactic argument. Reciprocals differ from reflexives as to the further intricacies of their interpretation: reciprocals involve a nonsingular argument and a plural eventuality distributed between two or more participants.

- Anticausative SE-constructions are construed semantically as intransitive. Their predicate typically denotes a change of state or location, and the phrase which controls verb agreement receives the internal theta-role — generally the Theme role, which Reinhart & Siloni (2005) decompose into the two thematic features [-c, -m].⁶ Anticausatives owe their name to the fact that they may be matched up with transitive constructions whose external argument is specified as [+c(ause)] (cf. (5a)). Reinhart & Siloni (2005) argue that SE-anticausative formation, which generates (5b'), involves an arity *deletion* operation, which removes the [+c(ause)] role from the lexical entry of the verb:

- (5) a. Causative-transitive
 Le vent a cassé la branche. [F]
 DF.MSG wind AUX.PRS.3SG break.PP DF.FSG branch

⁵ In French, the past participle exhibits gender-number agreement with the syntactic subject whenever the perfect auxiliary is *être* ('be'). Since French SE-constructions always select *être* as their perfect auxiliary, the past participle exhibits gender-number agreement in all SE-constructions, in this language.

⁶ Reinhart & Siloni (2005) propose to analyse the thematic roles commonly labelled *Agent*, *Cause*, *Experiencer*, *Theme*, as the combinations of two binary thematic features: Dynamic Cause ($\pm c$), and Mental State ($\pm m$). Thus: Agent = [+c, +m], Cause = [+c, -m], Experiencer = [-c, +m], Theme = [-c, -m].

- a'. El viento rompió la rama. [S]
 DF.MSG wind break.PST.3SG DF.FSG branch
 'The wind broke the branch.'
- b. Anticausative SE
 La branche s'est cassée. [F]
 DF.FSG branch SE-AUX.PRS.3SG break.PP.FSG
- b'. La rama se rompió. [S]
 DF.FSG branch SE break.PST.3SG
 Lit. 'The branch SE-broke.'
 'The branch broke.'

- In mediopassive constructions as in anticausatives, the overt syntactic argument bears the internal theta-role. What distinguishes mediopassives from anticausatives is that the mediopassive interpretation further involves an implicit *external* theta-role, construed as an 'arbitrary' *human consciousness* optionally construed as 'active' (an Agent), depending on the lexical content of the verb. In (6a), for example, the implicit external argument of French *voir*/Spanish *ver* 'see' is construed as a mere consciousness (Experiencer), while that of French *conduire*/Spanish *manejar* 'drive' in (6b) is construed as an intentional cause (an Agent):

- (6) a. La Tour Eiffel se voit de ma fenêtre. [F]
 DF.FSG tower Eiffel SE-see.PRS.3SG from POSS.1SG-FSG window
- a'. La Torre Eiffel se ve desde mi ventana. [S]
 DF.FSG tower Eiffel SE-see.PRS.3SG from POSS.1SG window
 Lit. 'The Eiffel Tower SE-sees from my window.'
 'The Eiffel Tower is visible from my window.'
- b. Ces voitures se conduisent facilement. [F]
 DM.PL car.PL SE-drive.PRS.3PL easily
- b'. Estos coches se manejan fácilmente. [S]
 DM.MPL car.PL SE-drive.PRS.3PL easily
 Lit. 'These cars SE-drive easily.'
 'These cars drive easily/are easy to drive.'

The 'human consciousness' present in the interpretation of mediopassives is analysed by Reinhart & Siloni (2005) as resulting from an *arbitrarization* arity operation, which associates an indefinite argument role to the SE morpheme. In keeping with these authors' theory, we may analyse this arbitrary role as an instance of the [+m] feature, discharged by the SE morpheme. The presence of this feature in the interpretation distinguishes mediopassives from *be*-passives, as witnessed by the semantic contrast between the two French examples in (7): in the *be*-passive (7a), the external theta-role is UNSpecified — the burning event may be construed as intentionally triggered (implicit Agent: +c, +m) or as a natural consequence of the forest fires; in the mediopassive (7b), the burning event must be understood as deliberately triggered by a conscious indefinite human entity:

- (7) a. Chaque été, à cause des feux de forêt, [F]
 every summer, because of DF.PL fire.PL of forest,
 des arbres sont brûlés dans cette vallée.
 PART.PL tree.PL be.PRS.3PL burn.PP.MPL in DM.FSG valley
 'Every summer, due to the forest fires, trees are burnt
 in this valley.'

- b. Chaque été, à cause des feux de forêt, [F]
 every summer, because of DF.PL fire.PL of forest,
 des arbres se brûlent dans cette vallée.
 PART.PL tree.PL SE-burn.PRS.3PL in DM.FSG valley
 Lit. 'Every summer, due to the forest fires, trees SE-burn in this valley.'
 'Every summer, due to (the) forest fires, trees are burnt
 (by someone or other) in this valley.'

- The construction commonly labelled 'impersonal SE/SI' in the Romanistic literature is only attested in a subset of Romance languages including IPS, but excluding French, as well as Romanian according to Dobrovie-Sorin (1998) (see section 4 below). The prototypical representatives of this construction involve verbs which fail to assign an external theta-role: unaccusative, raising, or copular verbs, as exemplified by (8):

- (8) a. Seguido se llega tarde. [S]
 often SE arrive.PRS.3SG late
 a'. Spesso si arriva in ritardo. [I]
 often SI arrive.PRS.3SG late
 'One/people often arrive(s) late.'
 b. Nunca se esta contento. [S]
 never SE be.PRS.3SG satisfied.MSG
 b'. Non si è mai contenti. [I]
 NEG SI be.PRS.3SG never satisfied.MPL
 '{One is/people are} never satisfied.'

Due to the thematic properties of the verbs, we cannot assume here that an external argument has been reduced, absorbed or demoted: in these structures, the SE/SI morpheme itself seems to provide the one and only argument of the lexical predicate, assuming subject status. These structures thus do not share the 'passive flavour' of mediopassive constructions, which involve transitive predicates whose external argument undergoes reduction. A reasonable assumption (Napoli 1973, Roegiest 2000, Muller 2007) is therefore that the impersonal SE/SI of IPS diachronically results from the reanalysis of the reflexive marker as a nominative 'arbitrary' pronoun semantically similar to French *on* — a nominative clitic historically derived from Latin *homo* ('human being') and interpreted as indefinite or 'arbitrary':

- (9) a. On arrive souvent en retard. [F]
 on arrive.PRS.3SG often late
 'One/people often arrive(s) late.' [= (8a/a')]
 b. On n' est jamais content. [F]
 on NEG be.PRS.3SG never satisfied
 '{One is/people are} never satisfied.' [= (8b/b')]

2.2. The diachronic development of SE/SI-constructions

From a diachronic perspective, an assumption shared by many authors (cf. Stéfanini 1962, Mélis 1990, Muller 2007, a.o.) is that SE/SI-constructions developed from Latin to Modern Romance along the four steps distinguished in (10):

- (10) The diachronic development of Romance SE/SI-constructions
 (i) reflexive ⇒ (ii) anticausative ⇒ (iii) mediopassive ⇒ (iv) impersonal

Latin SE starts out as a nonnominative relational nominal (accusative *se*, dative *sibi*) denoting the 'self' and hence entering binding relations, either nonlocally (in indirect discourse, cf. (11a)), or locally (11b,c), in which case it triggers a reflexive reading:

- (11) a. Orat te pater_z [ut ad se_z venias.]
 ask.PRS.3SG 2SG.ACC father.NOM that to SE.ACC come.SUBJ.PRS.2SG
 'Your father_z asks you to come and see SE (= him_z).'
 b. Superbi_z se_z laudant.
 proud.MPL.NOM SE.ACC praise.PRS.3SG
 'Proud people praise themselves.'
 c. Oppugnat Brutum_z, civem
 besiege.PRS.3SG Brutus.MSG.ACC citizen.ACC
 non sibi_z, sed s_z-uae civitati natum.
 NEG SE.DAT but REFLPOSS.3SG-FSG.DAT city.DAT born.MSG.ACC
 'He_k besieges Brutus_z, a citizen born not for SE_z (= himself), but for his_z city.'

[adapted from Sausy 1963: 54-55, translations my own]

Due to the coreferential relation construed between SE/SI and a lexical co-argument in such cases as (11b), the reflexive interpretation leads to an ambiguous thematic status for the lexical argument, which may *a priori* receive the external or internal thematic role. If it is construed as the internal argument, an unaccusative thematic structure follows,⁷ typically denoting a change of state or location affecting the Theme participant (12a): the anticausative reading arises. Context allowing, an implicit external role is further added to the interpretation, resulting in the mediopassive reading (12b):⁸

- (12) a. Les grosses branches se sont cassées. [F]
 DF.PL thick.FPL branch.PL SE AUX.PRS.3PL break.PP.FPL
 Lit. 'The thick branches SE-broke.' (= broke themselves > became broken).'
 b. Les grosses branches se cassent avec un outil. [F]
 DF.PL thick branch.PL SE break.PRS.3PL with a tool
 Lit. 'Thick branches SE-break with a tool.'
 'Thick branches {are/should be} broken with a tool.'

⁷ On the diachronic development of anticausatives, cf. Heidinger (2008)

⁸ Diachronic studies (cf. Stéfanini 1962, Muller 2007, Heidinger 2008, and the references quoted therein) report that the anticausative and mediopassive readings were already licensed in Late Latin SE-constructions. The following mediopassive example, found by Ernout & Thomas (1953), is quoted by Muller (2007):

- (i) Mala rotunda... toto anno servare se possunt.
 apple.PL round.PL all year preserve SE can.PRS.3PL
 Lit. 'Round apples can SE-preserve all year long.'
 'Round apples can be preserved all year long.'

[Palladius, 4th century; ex. from Ernout & Thomas 1953, §234
 quoted by Muller 2007; gloss and
 and English translation my own]

The emergence of impersonal SE/SI involves the reanalysis of SE/SI as a subject pronoun — the nominative controller of verbal agreement. As recalled by Muller (2007), this change may be assumed to result from a neutralization of verb agreement in the mediopassive construction, leading from (13a) (mediopassive) to (13b) (impersonal):

- (13) a. Si mangiano le mele. [I]
 SI eat.PRS.3PL DF.FPL apple.PL
 Lit. 'si-eat apples.'
 'Apples may be eaten/are edible.'
- b. Si mangia le mele. [Tuscany dialect]
 SI eat.PRS.3SG DF.FPL apple.PL
 Lit. 'si-eats apples.'
 'One eats apples.'
 [adapted from Muller 2007, ex. (23)-(24)]

2.3. Two restrictions on the French mediopassive

A large body of work has already been published on Romance SE/SI constructions, and more specifically on the mediopassive, the focus of this study. Two interesting restrictions have been pointed out, suggesting discrepancies between French mediopassives and their IPRS cousins, and between mediopassives and *be*-passives. The first restriction involves rich-agreement mediopassives, and the other, poor-agreement (impersonal) mediopassives.

The first restriction is illustrated by French (14b) contrasting with French (14a,c) and Spanish (15), which suggest that the French rich-agreement mediopassive is aspectually more restricted than the *be*-passive on the one hand, and than the IPRS rich-agreement mediopassive, on the other:

- (14) a. Les lunettes se nettoient avec un mouchoir blanc. [F]
 DF.PL glasses SE-clean.PRS.3PL with a.M handkerchief white
 'Reading glasses SE-clean with a white handkerchief.'
 'Reading glasses {are/should be} cleaned with a white handkerchief.'
- b. ?*Ces lunettes se sont nettoyées hier à huit heures et quart.
 DM.PL glasses SE AUX.PRS.3PL clean.PP.FPL yesterday at eight fifteen
 Lit. 'These reading glasses SE-cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'
 [ex. (14b) and judgement from Ruwet 1972: 95, translation mine]
- c. Ces lunettes ont été nettoyées hier à huit heures et quart.
 DM.PL glasses AUX.PRS.3PL be.PP clean.PP.FPL yesterday at eight fifteen
 'These reading glasses were cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'
- (15) a. Las gafas se limpian con un pañuelo blanco. [S]
 DF.FPL glasses SE clean.PRS.3PL with a handkerchief white
 Lit. 'Reading glasses SE-clean with a white handkerchief.'
 'Reading glasses {are/should be} cleaned with a white handkerchief.'
- b. Estas gafas se limpiaron ayer a las ocho y cuarto.
 DM.FPL glasses SE clean.PST.3PL yesterday at eight fifteen
 Lit. 'These glasses SE-cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'
 'These glasses were cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'

- c. Estas gafas fueron limpiadas ayer a las ocho y cuarto.
 DM.FPL glasses be.PST.3PL clean.PP.FPL yesterday at eight fifteen
 'These reading glasses were cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'

Such data have led various scholars (see below section 3.1) to the descriptive generalization informally rephrased in (16):

- (16) In French, the rich-agreement mediopassive is restricted to *Middle* (= generic, deontic, habitual) readings ;
 in IPRS, it may also take on *Eventive* readings.

This 'aspectual' restriction is believed to be specific of the French *rich-agreement* mediopassive. In French impersonal constructions, which exhibit default (3NSG) subject-verb agreement, eventive readings are acknowledged as available for the mediopassive, as illustrated by (17):

- (17) Il s' est nettoyé des lunettes sur cette table
 3Nsg SE- AUX.PRS.3SG clean.PP PART.PL reading glasses on DM.FSG table
 hier à huit heures et quart.
 yesterday at eight hour.PL and quarter
 Lit. 'It SE-cleaned glasses on this table yesterday at eight fifteen.'
 'Yesterday at eight fifteen someone or other cleaned reading glasses on this table.'

Another restriction, first pointed out by Zribi-Hertz (1982) and further discussed by Dobrovie-Sorin (1998, 2003b), concerns the poor-agreement (impersonal) mediopassive in French, which, unlike both the poor-agreement (impersonal) *be*-passive in French (18a), and the impersonal SE/SI-constructions in IPRS (18b), cannot host any sort of intransitive predicate, not even unergatives, as witnessed by (18c):

- (18) a. Il ne sera jamais plus couru sur ce stade. [F]
 3SG NEG AUX.FUT.3SG never more run.PP on DM.MSG stadium
 Lit. 'It will never again be run on this stadium.'
 (i) 'It (= today's marathon) will never again be run on this stadium.'
 (ii) 'No running will ever again take place on this stadium.'
- b. Nunca más sera corrido en este estadio. [S]
 never more be.FUT.3SG run.PP on DM.MSG stadium
 Lit. 'Never more will be run on this stadium.'
 (i) 'It (= today's marathon) will never again be run on this stadium.'
 (ii) *'No running will ever again take place on this stadium.'
- c. Il ne se courra jamais plus sur ce stade. [F]
 3SG NEG SE run.FUT.3SG never more on DM.MSG stadium
 Lit. 'It will never again SE-run on this stadium.'
 (i) 'It (= today's marathon) will never again be run on this stadium.'
 (ii) *'No running will ever again take place on this stadium.'
- d. Nunca más se correrá en este estadio.
 never more SE-run.FUT on DM.MSG stadium
 Lit. 'Never more will SE-run on this stadium.'
 (i) 'It (= today's marathon) will never again be run on this stadium.'

(ii) 'No running will ever again take place on this stadium.'

Sections 3 and 4 will aim at shedding light on the unacceptability of (14b) and (18c), respectively.

3. The rich-agreement mediopassive and its restrictions

In search of a satisfactory analysis of the unacceptability of (14b) in French, I will first survey and discuss the available linguistic literature bearing on the generalization in (16), and then propose an alternative synthesis of my own.

3.1. The aspectual theory

Under the widespread assumption phrased in (16), the rich-agreement mediopassive is more restricted in French with respect to its *aspectual properties*, than it is in IPRS. This idea originates in works on French (Stéfanini 1962, Obenauer 1970, Ruwet 1972, Boons, Guillet & Leclère 1976, Mélis 1990, Lamiroy 1993), suggesting that the French rich-agreement mediopassive is only open to generic, habitual or deontic readings, and is thus in aspectual complementary distribution with the *be*-passive, assumed to be perfectivity-inclined. The assumption that French mediopassives are aspectually restricted seems taken for granted by various scholars working on IPRS (Cinque 1988, Raposo and Uriagereka 1996, Dobrovie 1998, 2003b). The French/IPRS contrast is assumed to follow from the fact that, for some reason or other, the distribution of *be*-passives is more restricted in IPRS than it is in French (cf. Lamiroy 1993): by systemic complementarity, the mediopassive therefore takes on whatever interpretations the *be*-passive cannot convey, and conversely.

However, the generalization in (16) cannot be upheld.

- As pointed out by Carlier (2002) and Lagae (2002), the *be*-passive is productively acceptable under a generic, deontic, or habitual reading, as witnessed by the French examples in (19):

- (19) a. Chez nous, le homard est mangé au crochet
 at 1PL DF.MSG lobster be.PRS.3SG eat.PP.MSG with-DF.MSG hook
 au moins une fois par an.
 at least one time per year
 'At our place, lobster is eaten with a hook at least once a year.'
- b. Le homard doit être mangé au crochet.
 DF.MSG lobster must.PRS.3SG be.INF eat.PP.MSG with-DF.MSG hook
 'Lobster must be eaten with a hook.'
- c. Le homard n' est pas facilement attrapé
 DF.MSG lobster NEG be.PRS.3SG NEG easily catch.PP.MSG
 avec une épousette.
 with a.FSG fishing net
 'Lobster is not easily caught with a fishing net.'

- As noted by Boons, Guillet, Leclère (1976), Zribi-Hertz (1982), Guéron (1996) and Lagae (2002), the French rich-agreement mediopassive is, conversely, open to an eventive reading, with a restricted but undeniable productivity:

- (20) a. La question s'est discutée hier matin
the issue SE-be.PRS.3SG discuss.PP yesterday morning
avec passion dans la salle du conseil.
with passion in DF.FSG meeting room
Lit. 'The issue SE-discussed passionately [\approx was discussed passionately]
yesterday morning in the meeting room.'
[adapted from Boons, Guillet, Leclère 1976:132]
- b. Le passage à l' heure d'été s'est fait
DF.MSG change to DF.SG hour of summer SE-be.PRS.3SG do.PP.MSG
dimanche dernier à l' aube.
sunday last at DF.SG dawn
Lit. 'The change to summer time SE-did [\approx was done] last Sunday at dawn.'
- c. *La Marseillaise* ne s'est chantée qu' une seule fois
DF.FSG Marseillaise NEG SE-be.PRS.3SG sing.PP.FSG *que* one.FSG single.FSG time
pendant ce très long match.
during DM.MSG very long game
Lit. 'The *Marseillaise* SE-sang [\approx was sung] only once during that
very long game.'
- d. La réunion s'est tenue dans une université
the meeting SE-be.PRS.3SG hold.PP.FSG in a.F university
désormais désertée par les étudiants.
from now on desert.PP.FSG by DF.PL student.PL
Lit. 'The meeting SE-held [\approx was held] in a university by now
deserted by its students.'
- e. L' appartement s'est vendu hier
DF.MSG apartment SE-AUX.PRS.3SG sell.PP.MSG yesterday
pour 1 million d'euros.
for 1 million of euros
Lit. 'The apartment SE-sold [\approx was sold] yesterday for 1 million €.'

• As observed by Wehr (1995:235), the intuition that the mediopassive is 'imperfective-inclined' and the *be*-passive, 'perfective-inclined', is not specific to French, but common to all Romance languages. This generalization is supported as regards Spanish by Bosque & Demonte (2000), who argue that only lexically *perfective* verbs denoting an event or change of state may freely combine with the *be*-passive. Furthermore, one prototypical subclass of mediopassive clauses, illustrated by (21), 'predicate an inherent property of the grammatical subject (the notional object of the verb)' [1641: my translation]:

- (21) a. Esta camisa se lava muy bien con lejía.
DM.FSG shirt SE wash.PRS.3SG very well with soap powder
Lit. 'This shirt SE-washes very well with soap powder.'
'This shirt is easy to wash/washes easily with soap powder.'
- b. Las luces reflectantes se ven fácilmente.
DF.FPL light.PL reflective.PL SE see.PRS.3SG easily
Lit. 'Reflective lights SE-see easily.'
'Reflective lights are easy to see.'

- c. Los trabajos escritos a maquina
 DF.MPL work.PL write.PP.MPL with typewriter
 se leen más deprisa.
 SE read.PRS.3PL more quickly
 Lit. 'Works written with a typewriter SE-read more quickly.'
 'Typed works are quicker to read.'
 [translated from Bosque & Demonte 2000: 1641]

As regards Italian, we may note that the mediopassive examples given by Cinque (1988) mostly exhibit generic/deontic /habitual readings, as in (21):

- (22) a. Qui, gli spaghetti si mangiano spesso. [I]
 here DF.MPL spaghetti SI eat.PRS.3PL often
 Lit. 'Here spaghetti SI-eat often.'
 'Here, people often eat spaghetti.'
 [adapted from Cinque 1988:554]
- b. Da qui, si vedono le montagne. [I]
 from here SI-see.PRS.3PL DF.FPL mountain.PL
 Lit. 'From here, SI-see the mountains.'
 'The mountains are visible from here.'
 [adapted from Cinque 1988:555]
- c. In questo negozio, non si fanno mai sconti. [I]
 in DM.MSG shop NEG SI-do.PRS.3PL never discount.PL
 Lit. 'In this shop, discounts never SI-give.'
 'In this shop, {discounts are never given/we never give discounts}.'
 [adapted from Cinque 1988:555]

Half of the mediopassive examples which Cinque presents as having 'specific time reference' actually have a property rather than eventive reading, and their French analogues i (23a', b') are — unlike, e.g., (10d) — quite acceptable:

- (23) a. Questo vestito si lavò facilmente, sembra. [I]
 DM.MSG piece of clothing SI -wash.PST.3SG easily it seems
 Lit. 'This suit SI-washed easily, it seems.'
 'This piece of clothing was easy to wash, it seems.'
- a'. Apparentment, ce vêtement s'est lavé [F]
 apparently DM.MSG piece of clothing SE-AUX.PRS.3SG wash.PP.MSG
 facilement.
 easily
 Lit. 'Apparently, this piece of clothing SE-washed
 easily [≈ was easy to wash].'
- b. Questo tavolino si trasportò facilmente, pare. [I]
 DM.MSG table SI-move.PST.3SG easily it seems
 Lit. 'This table SI-moved easily, it seems.'
 'This table was easy to move, it seems.'
- b'. Apparentment, cette table s'est transportée facilement. [F]
 apparently DM.FSG table SE-AUX.PRS.3SG move.PP.FSG easily
 Lit. 'Apparently, this table SE-moved [≈ was moved] easily.'
 [Italian examples adapted from Cinque 1988:559]

The descriptive generalization in (16), phrased in aspectual terms, must therefore be discarded. It however remains true that IPRS license eventive mediopassive constructions which find no counterparts in French. Thus the Spanish examples in (24), given by Bosque & Demonte (2000: 1670), cannot be literally translated in French by rich-agreement mediopassives:

- (24) a. Se temen las nuevas movilizaciones anunciadas. [S]
 SE fear.PRS.3PL DF.FPL new.FPL protest.PL announce.PP.FPL
 Lit. 'SE-fear the announced new protests.'
 'The announced new protests are being feared.'
- a'. *^PLes nouvelles mobilisations annoncées se craignent. [F]
 DF.PL new.FPL protest.PL announce.PP.FPL SE-fear.PRS.3PL
 Lit. 'The announced new protests SE-fear.'
 (i) #'The announced new protests fear themselves.'
 (ii) *'The announced new protests are being feared.'
- b. Se están enviando cartas a todos los ayuntamientos. [S]
 SE be.PRS.3SG send.ing letter.PL to all.MPL DF.MPL town council.PL
 Lit. 'Letters are SE-sending to all town councils.'
 'Letters are being sent to all town councils.'
- b'. ?^PDes lettres sont en train de s'envoyer [S]
 part.PL letter.PL be.PRS.3PL progr. SE-send.INF
 à toutes les municipalités.
 to all.FPL DF.PL town council.PL
 Lit. 'Letters are SE-sending to all town councils.'
 (i) #'Letters are sending themselves to all town councils.'
 (ii) ?'Letters are being sent to all town councils.'

While the Spanish SE-sentences in (24a,b) are naturally open to the mediopassive reading, their French mediopassive translations in (24a',b') sound strange because the only interpretation they seem to allow — the reflexive reading — is pragmatically deviant. We also observe in (24) that word order is different in the Spanish examples and in their French translations: in the Spanish examples, the initial position is filled by SE, while in the attempted French translations, SE must be preceded by the controller of verb agreement. This point is indeed crucially relevant, and will be further discussed below.

All eventive mediopassives in IPRS are not SE-initial, however. The few Spanish illustrations of this observation found in Bosque & Demonte (2000: 1674-75) happen to have an acceptable literal equivalent in French:

- (25) [Pusieron a la venta unos pisos sin construir en la carretera de Madrid [S]
 a muy bajo precio]
 [They put up for sale unbuilt apartments on the road leading to Madrid]
- a. Los pisos se vendieron rápidamente, y luego los promotores
 DF.MPL apartment.PL SE sell.PST.3PL quickly and then DF.MPL developer.PL
 se escaparon con el dinero sin construirlos.
 SE-flee.PST.3PL with DF.MSG money without build.INF-3MPL.ACC
 Lit. 'The flats SE-sold quickly [= were quickly sold], and then the
 developers took off with the money without building them.'

- a'. Les appartements se vendirent rapidement, puis les promoteurs [F]
 DF.PL flat.PL SE-sell.PST.3PL quickly and then DF.PL developer.PL
 s'enfuirent avec l' argent sans les -construire.
 SE-flee.PST.3PL with DF.SG money without 3PL.ACC build.INF
 = (25a)
- b. LOS PISOS se vendieron, y no los CHALETS! [S]
 DF.MPL apartment.PL SE-sell.PST.3PL and NEG DF.MPL summer cottage.PL
 Lit. 'The APARTMENTS SE-sold, not the SUMMER COTTAGES!'
- b'. Les APPARTEMENTS se sont vendus, mais pas les BUNGALOWS. [F]
 (= (25B))

Cinque (1988) however gives two instances of Italian mediopassive sentences, reproduced in (26), where the controller of rich agreement is preverbal, and whose literal French translation disallows the mediopassive reading:

- (26) a. Il nemico si temette senza ragione. [I]
 the enemy SI fear.PST.3SG without reason
 Lit. 'The enemy si-feared [= was feared] without reason.'
- a'. *^PL'ennemi s' est craint sans cause. [F]
 DF.SG enemy SE-AUX.PRS.3SG fear.PP.MSG without cause
 Lit. 'The enemy SE-feared without cause.'
 (i) #'The enemy feared themselves without cause.'
 (ii) ??'The enemy was feared without cause.'
- b. Carlo si invitò con estrema difficoltà, sembra. [I]
 Carlo SE-invite.PST.3SG with extreme difficulty it seems
 Lit. 'Carlo SI-invited with extreme difficulty, it seems.' (= was invited)
- b'. *^PApparentment, Carlo s' est invité [F]
 apparently Carlo SE- AUX.PRS.3SG invite.PP.MSG
 avec énormément de difficulté.
 with a great deal of difficulty
 Lit. 'Apparently, Carlo SE-invited with great difficulty.'
 (i) #'Apparently, Carlo invited himself with great difficulty.'
 (ii) ??'Apparently, Carlo was invited with great difficulty.'
- [(26a,b) adapted from Cinque 1988:559]

Here as in (24) above, the French analogues of the original mediopassives seem only open to a reflexive reading, discarded as pragmatically infelicitous. Starting with (24) above, this precise judgement is transcribed here by **P*, meaning: 'unacceptable under the (medio)passive reading'.

The same judgement actually applies to French (10b), contrasting with Spanish (10d): (10b) is not ungrammatical but infelicitous because it could only be construed as reflexive, a pragmatically deviant interpretation. A similar contrast is observed below between the Portuguese example in (27a), given by Raposo & Uriagereka (1996) as an illustration of mediopassive SE, and its French literal counterpart in (27b), which resists the mediopassive reading glossed in (27b-ii) and only allows the reflexive reading glossed in (27b-i), once again discarded as pragmatically deviant:

- (27) a. Essas salsichas compraram-se ontem [P]
 DM.FPL sausage.PL buy.PST.3PL-SE yesterday
 no talho Sanzot.
 in-DF.MSG butcher-shop Sanzot
 Lit. 'These sausages SE-bought yesterday at the Sanzot butcher-shop.'
 'Yesterday someone or other bought these sausages at the S. butcher.'
 [example and English translation from Raposo & Uriagereka (1996: 750)]
- b. ^{?*P} Ces saucisses se sont achetées hier [F]
 DM.PL sausage.PL SE AUX.PRS.PL buy.PP.FPL yesterday
 à la boucherie Chevy.
 at DF.FSG butcher-shop Chevy
 Lit. 'These sausages SE-bought yesterday at the Chevy butcher-shop.'
 (i) # 'These sausages bought themselves/each other yesterday
 at the Chevy butcher-shop.'
 (ii) ?? 'These sausages were bought yesterday at the Chevy butcher-shop.'

These data lead me to the preliminary descriptive generalizations in (28):

- (28) a. The complementary aspectual inclinations of the *be*-passive and mediopassive are not specific to French, but extend to other Romance languages. Therefore this property does not account for the contrasts between French and IPRS: (10b/d), (23a/a', b/b'), (24a/b).
- b. Such examples as French (10b), (23a',b'), (24b), are not ungrammatical: they allow the reciflexive reading of the SE-construction but resist the mediopassive reading, and are thus rejected as pragmatically infelicitous.

Under these assumptions, we are left with the question rephrased in (29):

- (29) Why do such IPRS sentences as (10d), (24a,b), (26a,b), (27a), allow for the mediopassive reading to be construed, while their French analogues do not?

3.2. The structural approach

3.2.1. Raposo and Uriagereka on Portuguese

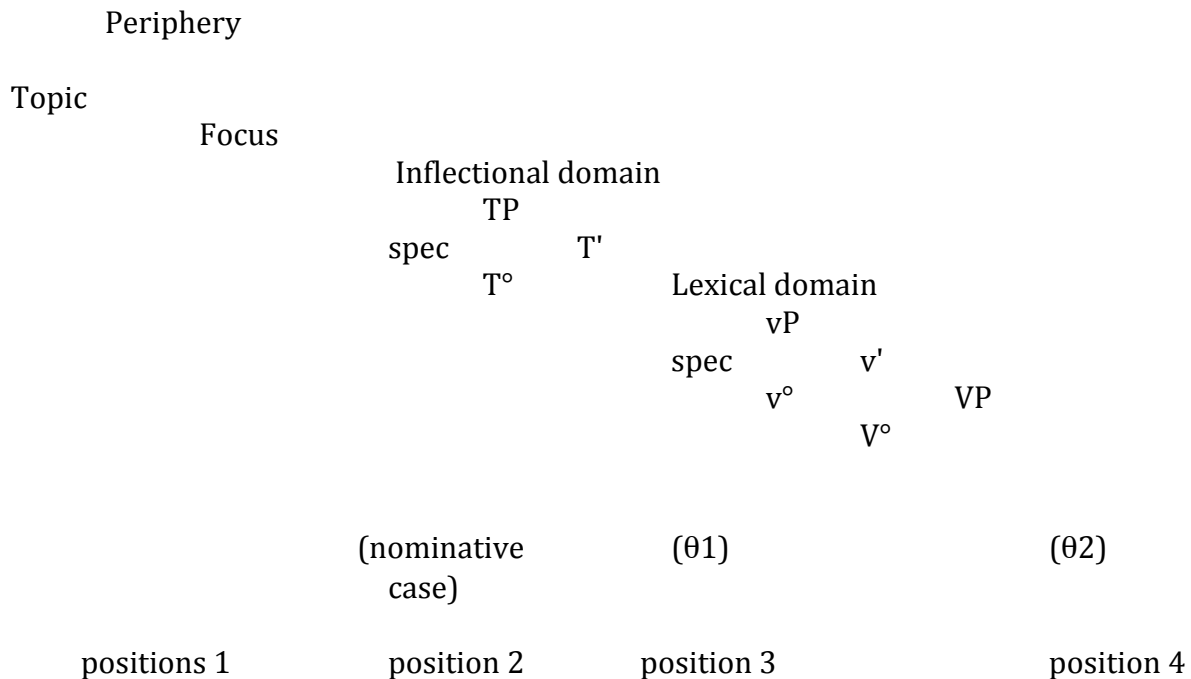
Raposo & Uriagereka (1996) (from now on: R&U) propose an interesting analysis of the Portuguese mediopassive, which they call *indefinite SE* and only illustrate by eventive sentences such as (27a) above, or (30a,b) below:

- (30) a. Ontem compraram-se demasiadas salsichas no talho Sanzot. [P]
 yesterday buy.PST.3PL-SE too many sausage.PL at.the butcher-shop S.
 Lit. 'Yesterday SE-bought too many sausages at the S. butcher-shop.'
 'Yesterday someone or other bought too many sausages at the S. butcher-shop.'
 [R&U's translation: R&U 1996: 750]]
- b. MUITAS SALSICHAS compraram-se ontem no talho Sanzot. [P]
 many.FPL sausage.PL buy.PST.3PL-SE yesterday at.the butcher-shop S
 Lit. 'MANY SAUSAGES se-bought yesterday at the Sanzot butcher-shop.'

'People bought MANY SAUSAGES yesterday at the S. butcher-shop.'
 [R&U's translation: R&U 1996: 750]

R&U's analysis is framed within the minimalist view of sentence structure sketchily represented in (30) :

(31) Argument positions in the sentence



The gist of R&U's analysis is that in Portuguese mediopassive sentences such as (27a) or (30), the controller of verb agreement altogether fails to be represented in the specifier of Tense (spec TP) — position 2 in diagram (31) — at any stage of the derivation. In other words, it never stops to be identified as *the internal argument* — it does not undergo 'promotion to subject status', even when it occurs preverbally. In the derivation of (27a) and (30b), the overt NP⁹ *essas salsichas* or *muitas salsichas* is directly positioned in the clause periphery (positions 1), in a Topic or Focus slot, from which it binds an empty category in object position (position 4). Under this analysis, verb agreement in these examples is controlled *from position 4*, not from position 2 or 3 — the assumption being that the expression which is inserted in position 3 and bears the external theta-role in mediopassive constructions (SE, under the authors' theory) is too weak to control agreement, hence allows the internal argument to check it (a last-resort strategy). In support of their theory, R&U provide three pieces of empirical evidence internal to the grammar of Portuguese.

First, if the NP which controls verb agreement in a mediopassive sentence sits on the left of the verb, it must precede an extracted *wh*-phrase (32a,b), whereas the controller of verb agreement in *be*-passives may follow it (32c):

⁹ Throughout this article the *NP* abbreviation is used to denote noun phrases, regardless of their internal syntactic structure.

- (32) a. Esses livros, em que loja se compraram ?¹⁰ [P]
 DM.MPL book.PL in what shop SE-buy.PST.3PL
 Lit. 'These books, in what shop SE-bought?' (= 'were they bought?')
- b. *^PEm que loja esses livros, se compraram ? [P]
 in what shop DM.PL book.PL SE-buy.PST.3PL
 Lit. 'In what shop these books SE-bought?'
 (i) # 'In what shop did these books buy themselves?'
 (ii) * 'In what shop did someone or other buy these books?'
- c. Em que loja esses livros foram comprados ? [P]
 in what shop DM.MPL book be.PST.3PL buy.PP.MPL
 Lit. 'In what shop these books were bought?'
 'In what shop were these books bought?'
 [adapted from Raposo & Uriagereka 1996:764-765]

R&U conclude that the preverbal argument in a mediopassive sentence occurs further up in the structure than the preverbal argument in a *be*-passive: therefore, in diagram (31), the argument of the (medio)passive must be located in the clause periphery (positions 1).

Second, the NP argument of a mediopassive sentence cannot occur preverbally (in Portuguese) in an inflected infinitive (35b). In this respect, the argument of the infinitive mediopassive behaves like the object of a transitive infinitive (33b), and contrasts with the argument of the infinitive *be*-passive (34b):

- (33) transitive inflected infinitive, without and with object topicalization [P]
- a. Vai ser difícil [os tribunais aceitarem
 AUX be difficult DF.MPL court.PL accept.INF.3PL
 os documentos].
 DF.MPL document.PL
 'It will be difficult for the courts to accept these documents.'
- b. *Vai ser difícil [esses documentos, os tribunais
 AUX be difficult DM.MPL document.PL DF.MPL court.PL
 aceitarem (-nos)].
 accept.INF.3PL -3MPL.ACC
 Lit. 'It will be difficult for these documents, the courts to accept (them).'
- (34) passive inflected infinitive [P]
- a. vai ser difícil [serem aceites os documentos].
 AUX be difficult be.INF.3PL accept.PP.PL DF.MPL document.PL
 Lit. 'It will be difficult (for) to be accepted the documents.'
- b. Vai ser difícil [os documentos serem aceites].
 AUX be difficult DF.MPL document.PL be.INF.3PL accept.PP.PL
 'It will be difficult for the documents to be accepted.'
- (35) mediopassive inflected infinitive [P]
- a. Vai ser difícil [aceitarem-se os documentos].
 AUX be difficult accept.INF.3PL-SE DF.MPL document.PL
 Lit. 'It will be difficult (for) to accept-SE the documents.'

¹⁰ On the proclitic or enclitic realization of Portuguese SE, see, e.g., Rouveret (1999).

3.2.2. Extending the structural theory: Dobrovie-Sorin on French

In their analysis of Portuguese mediopassives, R&U only focus on eventive clauses, leaving aside habitual, deontic and generic mediopassives, whose interpretations are commonly captured by the term *middle* (cf. Lekakou 2002, 2005). First considering Portuguese, Dobrovie-Sorin (2003a,b) argues that the lexical argument of mediopassives, in this language, does not sit in the same structural position in eventive clauses and in middle clauses.

First, unlike the preverbal argument of eventive mediopassives (32b), the preverbal argument of middle mediopassives may follow a WH-phrase or a focused phrase, as witnessed by (37):

- (37) Em que momento do espectáculo a luz [P]
 in what moment of -DF.MSG show DF.FSG light
 se viu bem?
 SE-see.PST.3SG well
 Lit. 'At what point during the show did the light SE-see well?'
 'At what point during the show could the light be seen easily?'
 [adapted from Cabredo Hofherr & Dobrovie-Sorin 2007, ex. (15a)]

Second, unlike the argument of an eventive mediopassive such as (35b), the argument of a middle mediopassive may be preverbal in an inflected infinitive, as witnessed by (38):

- (38) a. Vai ser difícil [esta luz ver-se de longe]. [P]
 AUX be difficult DM.FSG light see-SE from afar
 Lit. 'It will be difficult for this light to see-SE from afar.'
 'It will be difficult for this light to be {seen/visible} from afar.'
- b. Vai ser difícil [este lindo vestido lavar-se facilmente]. [P]
 AUX be difficult DM.MSG pretty dress wash-SE easily
 'It will be difficult for this pretty dress to wash-SE easily.'
 'It will be hard for this pretty dress to wash easily.'
 [adapted from Cabredo Hofherr & Dobrovie-Sorin 2007, ex. (14)]

Applying R&U's reasoning to these data, Dobrovie-Sorin (2003a,b) claims that, since the preverbal argument of eventive mediopassives sits in the clause periphery (diagram 31, positions 1), the preverbal argument of middle mediopassives must sit inside the inflectional domain (position 2). Following the same lead, Cabredo-Hofherr and Dobrovie-Sorin (2007) (hereunder: CHDS) assume that only eventive mediopassives involve an implicit external argument in their syntactic or semantic representation, and that this argument may only be licensed if the canonical subject position (diagram 31, position 2) is 'semantically available', viz. either *phonetically empty*, or *filled by an expletive*. This theory specifically predicts that eventive mediopassives may only be licensed in null-subject languages (therefore in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, but not in French), or in French-type impersonal constructions where position 2 is filled by an overt nominative pronoun, as in (39):

- (39) Il s'est nettoyé 35 paires de lunettes sur cette table mercredi
 3NSG SE-AUX.PRS.3SG clean.PP 35 pair.PL of glasses on DM.FSG table Wednesday
 Lit. 'It SE-cleaned 35 pairs of reading glasses on this table on Wednesday.'
 '35 pairs of reading glasses were cleaned on this table last Wednesday.'

Dobrovie-Sorin's theory of mediopassives accurately emphasizes the distinction between eventive and middle readings. However it raises some descriptive problems.

First, the assumption that the preverbal argument of middle mediopassives is NOT topical must be refined. From the point of view of Information Structure, the argument of middle mediopassives typically denotes a preidentified discourse referent — a topic. Thus, middle sentences such as *Cette lumière se voit de loin* 'This light SE-sees from afar', *Cette chemise se lave à la machine* 'This shirt SE-washes in the washing machine', are typically felicitous in contexts in which the preverbal argument denotes a discourse-linked referent, as in (40), not in contexts such as (41), calling for athetic reading:

- (40) a. — Tu préfères {cette lumière/chemise}?
 2SG prefer.PRS.2SG {DM.FSG light / shirt}?'
 'Do you prefer this {light/shirt}?'
 b. — Oui, elle se voit de loin.
 yes 3FSG SE-see.PRS.3SG from afar
 'Yes, it is visible from afar.'
 b'. — Oui, elle se lave à la machine.
 yes 3FSG SE-wash.PRS.3SG in DF.FSG washing machine
 'Yes, it washes/can be washed in the washing machine.'
- (41) a. — Qu'est-ce qui se passe ?
 'What's going on?'
 b. — #Cette lumière se voit de loin.
 'This light is visible from afar.'
 b'. — #Cette chemise se lave à la machine.
 'This shirt washes/can be washed in the washing machine.'

Attested examples confirm that middle mediopassives have a Topic-Comment information structure.¹¹ This assumption conflicts with Dobrovie-Sorin's analysis, which

¹¹ Karen Lahousse pushed my way several such examples which include the following, found in an internet advertisement:

- (i) Mastrad Tagine en silicone framboise. (...)
 Mastrad tajine in silicone strawberry
 En silicone souple et incassable,
 in silicone souple and unbreakable
la tagine se range et se lave facilement.
 DF.FSG tajine SE-put.away.PRS.3SG and SE-wash.PRS.3SG easily
 Parfait pour la cuisson au four et au micro-ondes.
 perfect for DF.FSG cooking in-DFMSG oven and in-DFMSG microwave
 Lit. 'Mastrad tajine in strawberry-coloured silicone.
 Made of souple and unbreakable silicone, *the tajine*
SE-puts away and SE-washes easily. Perfect for the oven
 and the microwave.'

treats as NONTOPICAL the argument of middle mediopassives. It however, does not suffice to prove that the preverbal argument of middle mediopassives is positioned in French in the clause periphery. Under the assumption, adopted in section 3.5 below, that predicate agreement is always checked in the spec,TP position in French, the preverbal NP in French middle sentences such as (40b-b') must be represented in spec,TP regardless of its informational status. French thus crucially contrasts with Portuguese where — under R&U's well-supported assumption — the preverbal argument of mediopassives sits in the clause periphery when focused or topicalized, while the spec,TP position stays unfilled. Under these assumptions, the contrast between R&U's example in (35b), where the (eventive) mediopassive reading fails to arise, and Dobrovie-Sorin's examples in (38), where the (middle) mediopassive reading is licensed, may be accounted for under a combined rephrasing of R&U's and Dobrovie-Sorin's theories. First, assume (contrary to R&U) that no structural restriction *a priori* keeps the argument of an inflected infinitive from occurring in clause-peripheral position. Second, assume (contrary to Dobrovie-Sorin) that the preverbal argument of middle mediopassives is topical, *therefore* (under R&U's assumptions) clause-peripheral *in Portuguese*. Third, assume that the positioning of the preverbal NP in the clause periphery is a marked property, which needs to be overtly signaled by prosody and/or contextual factors. Now considering (35b), we may assume that since no selectional or prosodic or informational factors signal the infinitive's argument as focal or topical, this NP is construed, by default, inside the inflectional domain, so that the reflexive reading arises (and is discarded as pragmatically infelicitous); in (38), on the other hand, selectional properties within the infinitive favour a Property (rather than eventive) reading, *therefore* the topical construal (hence peripheral positioning) of the preverbal NP, so that the mediopassive reading obtains.

The fact that the preverbal argument of Portuguese mediopassives may precede (32a) or follow a *wh*-phrase (37) is consistent with Rizzi's (1997) assumption that Topic is a recursive category within the clause periphery. The fact that the argument of the mediopassive linearly follows the *wh*-phrase, as in (37), thus does not suffice to prove that it sits in the inflectional domain rather than in the clause periphery. It is indeed possible for a dislocated (hence, clause-peripheral) topic to be preceded by a *wh*-phrase, as witnessed by the French examples in (42):

- (42) a. Tu peux me dire avec qui t-on copain,
 2SG.NOM can.PRS.2SG 1SG.DAT tell with whom POSS.2SG-MSG friend
 il compte passer la soirée ?
 3MSG.NOM expect.PRS.3SG to spend DF.FSG evening
 Lit. 'Can you tell me with whom your friend, he is expecting
 to spend the evening?'
 'Can you tell me who your friend is expecting to spend the evening with?'
- b. Depuis quand les requins, ils mangent des légumes ?
 since when DF.PL shark.PL 3MPL eat.PRS.3PL PART.PL vegetable.PL
 Lit. 'Since when sharks, they eat vegetables?'
 'Since when do sharks eat vegetables?'

These French examples suggest that the acceptability contrast between (32a) and (32b) in Portuguese does not follow from a general ban on the *wh*—Topic order. We may

however assume that the noninitial position is a secondary choice for signaling the NP as a focus or topic, so that any further factor favouring its nontopical/nonfocused reading is likely to lead it to be construed in spec,TP. A crucial contrast between Portuguese (32a) and French (42a,b) is that the latter examples are not SE-constructions. In Portuguese (32b), since the NP is not straightforwardly identified as a topic or focus, it is construed, by default, in the spec,TP position, so that the reflexive reading is selected over the mediopassive — and then discarded on pragmatic grounds. Only in (32a), where the clause-initial NP straightforwardly stands as clause-peripheral topic, does the mediopassive reading obtain.

CHDS's theory further relies on the assumption that unlike *be*-passives and eventive mediopassives, middle mediopassives do not contain an implicit Agent. This assumption is based on the paradigm in (43), which is argued to show that an Agent is syntactically active in (43a,b), but not in (43c):

- (43) a. Ces livres ont été vendus pour aider les pauvres.
DM.PL book.PL AUX.PRS.3PL be.PP sell.PP.MPL in-order-to help DF.PL poor.PL
'These books were sold in order to help the poor.'
- b. Il s'est vendu plus de 300 livres anciens
3NSG SE-AUX.PRS.3SG sell.PP.NSG more than 300 book.PL antique.PL
pour aider les pauvres.
in-order-to help DF.PL poor.PL
Lit. 'It SE-sold more than 300 antique books in order to help the poor.'
- c. Ces livres se vendent facilement
DM.PL book.PL SE-sell.PRS.3PL easily
(**pour aider les pauvres.*)
in-order-to help DF.PL poor.PL
'These books SE-sell easily (in order to help the poor).'

CHDS's assumption is however challenged by such minimal pairs as the one in (7) above, which suggests that, unlike *be*-passives, middle SE-constructions do contain an external <+m(+c)> theta-role in their interpretation. Furthermore, the acceptability of an adverbial purpose clause does not suffice to prove that the matrix clause contains an Agent,¹² as witnessed by the following English examples:

- (44) a. This window-pane is bullet-proof in order to protect the president.
b. This peg is square in order to fit into this hole.

The unacceptability of the purpose clause in (43c) must therefore be explained otherwise than by the absence of a <+m> role in the matrix clause.¹³

¹² This is pointed out in Fellbaum & Zribi-Hertz (1989), Zribi-Hertz (1993).

¹³ The paradigm of data in (i)-(iii) below suggests a semantic parallel between EASY copular constructions (examples (a) and (b)) and mediopassive clauses in which the EASY predicate has been adverbialized (examples (c)):

Last but not least, CHDS's theory is contrived to predict that rich-agreement mediopassives cannot have eventive readings in French, a prediction proved incorrect by such examples as those in (20) above, or (45) below:

- (45) a. Cette horrible tour s'est construite en 2002.
 DM.FSG horrible tower SE-AUX.PRS.3SG build.PP.FSG in 2002
 Lit. 'This hideous high-rise SE-built in 2002.'
 'This hideous high-rise was built in 2002.'
- b. Cette sonate s'est jouée hier
 DM.FSG sonata SE-AUX.PRS.3SG play.PP.FSG yesterday
 pour la première fois.
 for DF.FSG first.FSG time
 Lit. 'This sonata SE-played yesterday for the first time.'
 'This sonata was played yesterday for the first time.'
- c. Deux tonneaux ne suffiraient pas à contenir tout
 two barrel.PL NEG suffice.COND.3PL NEG to contain all

<p>(i)a. *[[PRO_{INDEFINI}] vendre ces livres est facile] pour aider les pauvres. '[Selling these books is easy] to help the poor.' b. [[PRO_{INDEFINI}] vendre ces livres pour aider les pauvres] est facile. '[Selling these books to help the poor] is easy.'</p>	<p>c. ?*Ces livres se vendent facilement pour aider les pauvres. 'These books SE-sell easily to help the poor.'</p>
<p>(ii)a. [[PRO_{INDEFINI}] vendre ces livres est obligatoire] pour aider les pauvres. '[Selling these books is obligatory] to help the poor.' b. [[PRO_{INDEFINI}] vendre ces livres pour aider les pauvres] est obligatoire. '[Selling these books to help the poor] is obligatory.'</p>	<p>c. Ces livres se vendent obligatoirement pour aider les pauvres. 'These books SE-sell obligatorily to help the poor.'</p>
<p>(iii)a. [[PRO_{INDEFINI}] vendre ces livres est nécessaire] pour aider les pauvres. '[Selling these books is necessary] to help the poor.' b. [[PRO_{INDEFINI}] vendre ces livres pour aider les pauvres] est nécessaire. '[Selling these books to help the poor] is necessary.'</p>	<p>c. Ces livres SE vendent nécessairement pour aider les les pauvres. 'These books SE-sell necessarily to help the poor.'</p>

We note that the purpose clause may occupy two different positions in the copular sentences (a) and (b), and that its acceptability and/or interpretation is sensitive to whether it is adjoined to the nonfinite subject clause, or to the entire finite clause. The interpretations licensed in the (a) and (b) examples are also available in the (c) examples, although the adverbialized predicate can only occupy one linear position in these mediopassive clauses. The acceptability judgements borne on the (c) examples combine those borne separately on the corresponding (a) and (b) examples. The contrast between (i) and (ii)-(iii) suggests that the negative judgement borne on (i-a), and on (i-c) under the same reading, originates in the semantic properties of the EASY predicate rather than in the morphosyntax and semantics of the mediopassive.

- ce qui s'est {bu /mangé} au mariage.
 that which SE-AUX.PRS.3SG drink.PP.NSG/eat.PP.NSG at-DF.MSG wedding
 Lit. 'Two barrels would not suffice to contain all that which
 SE-drunk/ate at the wedding.'
 'Two barrels would not be enough to contain all that was
 drunk/eaten at the wedding.'
- d. Une collecte s'est aussitôt organisée.
 a.FSG collection SE-AUX.PRS.3SG right away organise.PP.FSG
 Lit. 'A collection SE-organized right away.'
 'A collection was organized right away.'
- e. Cette action s'est préparée dans le plus grand secret.
 DM.FSG action SE-AUX.PRS.3SG prepare.PP.FSG in DF.MSG greatest secrecy
 Lit. 'This action SE-prepared in strict secrecy.'
 'This action was prepared in strict secrecy.'

I conclude that although the Middle/Eventive distinction should certainly be taken into account in the description of mediopassives, the structural analysis proposed by Dobrovie-Sorin cannot be upheld.

3.4. Syntax and Information Structure: Guéron (1996) on French

Unlike CDHS (2007), Guéron (1996) acknowledges the restricted productivity of eventive mediopassives in French, exemplified above in (20) and (45). Under this author's perspective, what therefore needs to be explained is not why eventive readings are banned from rich-agreement mediopassives in French, but why they are licensed in some cases but not in others, e.g. in (46b) but not in (46a,c):

- (46) a. ?*L' Amérique s'est découverte en 1492.
 DF.SG America SE-AUX.PRS.3SG discover.PP.FSG in 1492
 Lit. 'America SE-discovered in 1492.'
 (i) #'America discovered itself in 1492.'
 (ii) ??'America was discovered in 1492.'
- b. Ce crime s'est commis hier soir.
 DM.MSG crime SE-AUX.PRS.3SG commit.PP.MSG yesterday evening
 Lit. 'This crime SE-committed last night.'
 (i) #'This crime committed itself last night.'
 (ii) 'This crime was committed last night.'
- c. ?*Ce crime s'est commenté hier soir.
 DM.MSG crime SE-AUX.PRS.3SG comment.PP.MSG yesterday evening
 Lit. 'This crime SE-commented last night.'
 (i) #'This crime commented-on itself last night.'
 (ii) ??'This crime was commented-on last night.'

Guéron's analysis combines information and aspectual structure, and articulates the four assumptions in (47):

- (47) Guéron's (1996) theory accounting for (46)
- Any eventive clause must include a focus and a presupposition at LF.
 - Focus either falls on the middle of the event E, or on the endpoint of E.
 - Focus falls on the middle of E if the argument which specifies the person

feature in Infl is interpreted as an individual who maintains and controls the duration of E.

- d. Focus falls on the endpoint of E if there exists an argument inside VP or NumP which is specified for Number and whose own volume is interpreted as measuring or delimiting the duration of E.
[Guéron 1996: 70 (English translation my own)]

Under this theory, (46a) is ill-formed because it violates the focalization constraint phrased in (47a). This sentence denotes an event developing through time; under (47b), its syntactic subject (the argument controlling the person feature in Infl) should control the duration of the event. However, the NP *l'Amérique* cannot be construed as the entity controlling the duration of the discovering event — the sentence is therefore rejected. (46b) is on the other hand acceptable because although this sentence is construed as eventive, the denoted event has no duration. Correlatively, the syntactic subject cannot be interpreted as controlling the duration of the event, and the result is a well-formed *thetic* clause, in which verb selection is contextually predictable, so that focus falls on the endpoint of the event '(hier soir 'last night')'. The analysis thus also predicts the obligatory character of the adverbial. If a nonpredictable verb is inserted, as in (46c), instead of the contextually predictable verb in (46b), the mediopassive reading is once again rejected.

Guéron's theory faces some empirical and descriptive problems. First, the assumption that eventive mediopassives are *thetic* is too strong, since their argument may be topicalized, as in (48):

- (48) A — Et ta pièce?
and 2SG-FSG play
'And your play?'
B — Ma pièce, elle s'est jouée hier
1SG-FSG play 3FSG SE-AUX.PRS.3SG play.PP.FSG yesterday
pour la dernière fois.
for DF.FSG last.FSG time
'My play, it SE-played yesterday for the last time.'
'My play, it was played yesterday for the last time.'

Second, it is difficult to reconcile the assumption that the predicate *découvrir* (*l'Amérique*) ('discover (America)') involved in (46a) 'has a duration', with the fact that it typically denotes what Vendler (1967) labelled an *achievement*, — a punctual event characterized by its lack of durational content, as witnessed by its negative response to the 'during' test in (49):

- (49) *Christophe Colomb a découvert l'Amérique
Christopher Columbus AUX.PRS.3SG discover.PP DF.FSG-America
pendant une heure/semaine.
during one hour/week
Lit. 'Christopher Columbus discovered America for an hour/a week.'

The well-formedness of such examples as (50) on the other hand suggests that French rich-agreement mediopassives *may* in other cases denote events having inherent duration, a fact also left unpredicted by Guéron's theory:

- (50) a. Cette question (, elle) s'est déjà discutée
 DM.FSG issue 3SG SE-AUX.PRS.3SG already discuss.PP.FSG
 hier pendant une heure et demie.
 yesterday during one hour and half
 Lit. 'This issue (, it) already SE-discussed yesterday for an hour and a half.'
 'This issue was already discussed yesterday for an hour and a half.'
- b. Pendant que la collecte s'organisait au premier,
 while DF.FSG collection SE-organize.IMP.3SG on-DF.MSG first (floor)
 une bagarre éclatait au sous-sol.
 a.FSG fight break out.IMP.3SG in-DF.MSG basement
 Lit. 'While the collection was SE-organizing on the first floor,
 a fight was breaking out in the basement.'
 'While the collection was being organized on the first floor,
 a fight broke out in the basement.'

Third, although the verb is often idiomatically linked to its argument in French rich-agreement eventive mediopassives, this property does not hold in all cases: for instance, there is no idiomatic link in (45). Furthermore, the tendency for the verb to be contextually predictable is common to eventive and middle rich-agreement mediopassives, as shown by the parallel behaviour of (51a) and (51b):

- (51) a. L' opération chirurgicale s'est {effectuée/*bâclée}
 DF.SG operation surgical.FSG SE-AUX.PRS.3SG perform.PP.FSG/botch.PP.FSG
 hier.
 yesterday
 Lit. 'The surgical operation SE-{performed/*botched up} yesterday.'
 (i) 'The surgery was performed yesterday.'
 (ii) *'The surgery was botched up yesterday.'
- b. Ce genre d'opération chirurgicale,
 DM.MSG kind of operation surgical
 ça {s'effectue /*se bâcle } régulièrement.
 it SE-perform.PRS.3SG/SE-botch.PRS.3SG regularly
 Lit. 'This type of surgical operation SE-{performs/*botches up} regularly.'
 (i) 'This type of surgery is regularly performed.'
 (ii) *'This type of surgery is regularly botched up.'

Fourth, it still remains unclear, under Guéron's theory, why the French rich-agreement eventive mediopassive in (52a) contrasts in acceptability with its Spanish homologue in (52b):

- (52) a. ?**CE CRIME-LA* , il s'est commenté hier soir. [F]
 DM.MSG CRIME-LOC 3MSG SE-AUX.PRS.3SG comment.pp yesterday evening
 Lit. 'THAT CRIME, it SE-commented on last night.'
 (i) # 'THAT CRIME commented on itself last night.'
 (ii) ?* 'THAT CRIME was commented on last night.'
- b. *ESTE CRIMEN* se comentó ayer en la noche. [S]
 DM.MSG crime SE-comment.PST.3SG yesterday in DF.FSG night
 Lit. 'THAT CRIME SE-commented on last night.'

THAT CRIME was commented on last night.'

Although these two sentences seem equivalent with respect to aspectual and informational structure, they contrast in acceptability: Spanish (52b) is open to the mediopassive reading, while French (52a) resists it.

3.5. Articulating properties: syntax, semantics, pragmatics, information structure

In this section I submit an alternative approach which incorporates various assumptions and observations previously put forward in the linguistic works discussed above. The leading hypothesis proposed here is that the morphosyntax and semantics of mediopassives is subject to no further restrictions in French, than in other Romance languages, and that whatever peculiarities seem specific to them are consequences of French-Romance contrasts which are independent of mediopassives themselves.

As regards rich-agreement mediopassives, my assumption is that their more restricted productivity in French (cf. (52a/b), etc.) is an effect of the more restricted distribution of syntactic subjects, in this language. The generalizations phrased below are respectively assumed to apply across Romance (53), and in French only (54):

(53) Properties holding across Romance

a. **BE-passive vs. mediopassive**

In both constructions the external argument is reduced.

However the BE-passive allows its suppression, while the mediopassive involves a $\langle +m(\pm c) \rangle$ external theta-role in its interpretation.

b. **Thematic Markedness hierarchy**

reciflexive \langle anticausative \langle mediopassive

c. **Processing consequences of (53b)**

Working out the interpretation of a SE-clause involves choosing among the three available options: reciflexive/anticausative/mediopassive.

Everything else being equal, unmarked theta-structures are favoured over marked ones.

The selection of a marked theta-structure must be motivated by favouring factors.

PROPERTIES FAVOURING THE MEDIOPASSIVE READING INCLUDE:

- Any factor signaling the lexical NP as the internal argument, e.g.: selectional properties, determiner selection, scope properties, semantic incorporation effects.

- Any factor contributing to activate a $\langle +m(\pm c) \rangle$ external role *distinct from* the lexical NP, e.g.: verb selection, modals, instrumental, agent- or experiencer-oriented adverbs, *easy/tough* predicates.

PROPERTIES DISFAVOURING THE MEDIOPASSIVE READING INCLUDE:

Any factor favouring the construal of the lexical NP as the external argument.

d. **Agent prominence in spec,TP**

All other things being equal, the NP in spec,TP is associated with the external thematic role.

(54) French/Romance contrast

- a. In Romance languages other than French (IPRS), the controller of verb agreement may be generated below Tense and surface postverbally. This position is canonical for the argument of unaccusative predicates.
- b. In French, the controller of verb agreement is canonically raised to spec,TP and surfaces preverbally.

The generalization in (53a) is based on such minimal pairs as (7) above. The generalization in (53b) is consistent with both the diachronic development of SE-constructions from Latin to Romance, recalled in (10), and with their synchronic properties. Anticausatives and mediopassives have a marked thematic structure, as 'passive' clauses are marked with respect to 'active' clauses: in rich-agreement anticausatives and mediopassives, as in rich-agreement BE-passives, the controller of verb agreement instantiates the internal argument. Mediopassives are further marked with respect to anticausatives because they involve (55b) a human participant (<+m(±c)>) which is absent from anticausatives (55a).

- (55) a. Plusieurs branches se sont cassées tout à coup.
 several branch.PL SE-AUX.PRS.3PL break.PP.FPL suddenly
 Lit. 'Several branches SE-broke suddenly.'
 'Several branches suddenly broke.'
- b. Ici le sous-bois se brûle souvent.
 here DF.MSG undergrowth SE-burn.PRS.3SG often
 Lit. 'Here the undergrowth SE-burns often.'
 'Here the undergrowth is often burnt (by someone or other).'

The anticausative reading, which arises in (55a), reduces the valency of the verb — the event is understood as occurring 'spontaneously', 'of its own accord' (cf. Reinhart & Siloni 2005). The mediopassive interpretation, which arises in (55b), further involves an external theta-role and is thus richer as to its theta-structure, and more complex to process, than the anticausative reading. The processing criteria in (53c) crucially rely on the markedness hierarchy in (53b) between the competing theta-structures of SE-constructions. They therefore do not extend to *be*-passive clauses, which are unambiguous as to their thematic structure and thus involve no such competition. This accounts for the contrast between (14b) and (14c) above, repeated below in (56a/b):

- (56) a. ?*Ces lunettes se sont nettoyées hier à huit heures et quart.
 DM.PL glasses SE AUX.PRS.3PL clean.PP.FPL yesterday at eight fifteen
 Lit. 'These reading glasses SE-cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'
 [ex. (14b) and judgement from Ruwet 1972: 95, translation mine]
- b. Ces lunettes ont été nettoyées hier à huit heures et quart.
 DM.PL glasses AUX.PRS.3PL be.PP clean.PP.FPL yesterday at eight fifteen
 'These reading glasses were cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'

In (56a), but not in (56b), the preverbal NP may *a priori* be construed as the external argument (resulting in the reflexive reading) or as the internal argument (resulting in the anticausative or mediopassive reading), but the competition disfavours the mediopassive (see above and below). In (56b), on the other hand, the preverbal NP is

straightforwardly construed as the raised internal argument of the lexical verb. The same properties account for minimal pairs such as (57), involving a bare nominal in preverbal subject position:

- (57) a. Allusion a été faite à ce problème.
 mention AUX.PRS.3SG be.PP make.PP.FSG to DM.MSG problem
 Lit. 'Mention was made of this problem.'
- b. ??Allusion s'est faite à ce problème.
 mention SE-AUX.PRS.3SG make.PP.FSG to DM.MSG problem
 Lit. 'Mention SE-made of this problem.'
- [adapted from Lagae 2002: 134]¹⁴

In the *be*-passive sentence (57a), the preverbal NP is straightforwardly identified as the internal bare argument of the verb. In the mediopassive sentence (57b), however, the selectional relation between the bare noun and the verb is not sufficiently restricted to warrant the identification of the surface subject as the internal argument. Hence the unmarked (reciflexive) reading is selected for the *SE*-construction, but the sentence is rejected as deviant since this reading conflicts with the ban on ungoverned bare nouns in French. (57b) is not totally unacceptable as a mediopassive; but with the parallel availability of the *be*-passive in (57a), there seems to be no motivation for selecting the mediopassive for (57b).

The generalization in (54) is a well-known restriction which seems to single out French among the Romance languages. In Modern French, the expression controlling verb agreement must canonically¹⁵ be positioned in spec,TP (diagram 31, position 2) and surface as preverbal. In other Romance languages, the controller of verb agreement may surface as postverbal, and *must* surface as postverbal if it is neither topicalized nor focused and the predicate is unaccusative. This constraint is illustrated in (58) by French-Spanish comparison:

- (58) — [¿Que pasa que hay tanto ruido [S]
 what happen.PRS.3SG that there-is so-much noise
 en el negocio?]
 in DF.MSG store

¹⁴ Lagae (2002) suggests that French rich-agreement mediopassives cannot host a bare nominal in subject position. This constraint is too strong, however, for I find (i) below quite acceptable with a mediopassive reading:

- (i) Assistance se prête rarement en Grèce
 assistance SE lend.PRS.3SG seldom in Greece
 à des Turcs sans papiers.
 to PART.PL Turk.PL without document.PL
 Lit. 'Assistance *SE* seldom lends in Greece to undocumented Turks.'
 'Assistance is seldom lent in Greece to undocumented Turks.'

The mediopassive reading is accessible if the preverbal bare noun is straightforwardly interpreted under the scope of the verb — as the *internal* argument. This analysis is more natural in (i) above than in (57b) in the text, due to the more idiomatic selectional restriction between the bare noun and the verb (*prêter assistance* 'to lend assistance').

¹⁵ The controller of rich agreement *may* be postverbal in what is known as *stylistic inversion* constructions, but this pattern is submitted to tight conditions involving syntax, semantics, and information structure. Cf. Kayne & Pollock (2001), Lahousse (*passim*). Under Lahousse's assumptions, the VS order is either licensed by the activation of the left periphery (Lahousse 2003), or associated with a specificational reading (Lahousse 2006).

- [Pourquoi tout ce raffut dans le magasin ?] [F]
 why all.MSG DM.MSG racket in DF.MSG store
 'Why is there such a racket in the shop?'
- a. — *Dos Yankis entraron. [S]
 two Yankee.PL enter.PST.3PL
 Lit. 'Two Americans came in.'
- a'. — Deux Américains sont entrés. [F]
 two American.PL AUX.PRS.3PL enter.PP.MPL
 'Two Americans came in.'
- b. — Entraron dos Yankis. [S]
 enter.PST.3PL two Yankee.PL
 Lit. 'Came in two Americans.'
- b'. — *Sont entrés deux Américains. [F]
 AUX.PRS.3PL enter.PP.MPL two American.PL
- c. — Il est entré deux Américains. [F]
 3NSG AUX.PRS.3SG enter.PP.NSG two American.PL
 Lit. 'It entered two Americans.'
 'Two Americans walked in.'

In French (58a')/(58b')/(58c), the lexical argument can only be postverbal in the impersonal construction (58c), which involves poor agreement. The controller of rich agreement must be realized preverbally, as in (58a'). In Spanish, the controller of rich agreement is canonically *postverbal* (58b) in *unaccusative* clauses, and is only moved up if it is topicalized or focused and lands in the left periphery, as in (59):

- (59) [¿Parece que Juan y Maria entraron muy despacito?] [S]
 seem.PRS.3SG that John and Mary enter.PST.3PL very quietly
 [Apparement, Jean et Marie sont entrés tout doucement ?][F]
 apparently John and Mary AUX.PRS.3PL enter.PP.MPL very quietly
 'John and Mary seem to have entered very quietly?'
- a. — ¡No ! JUAN entró despacito, pero MARIA NO !
 no John enter.PST.3SG quietly, but Mary no
 'No! JOHN entered quietly, but MARY did NOT!'
- b. — Mais non ! JEAN (, il) est entré [F]
 but no John 3MSG.NOM AUX.PRS.3SG enter.PP.MSG
 doucement, mais PAS MARIE !
 quietly but not Mary
 'No! JOHN entered quietly, not MARY!'

Mediopassive sentences are syntactically unaccusative, since the overt lexical argument which controls verb agreement bears the internal thematic role. It is therefore expected that mediopassives should pattern with unaccusatives with respect to the structural position of their NP argument. This expectation is borne out:

- (60) a. Ontem compraram-se demasiadas salsichas no talho Sanzot. [P]
 yesterday buy.PST.3PL-SE too-many.FPL sausage.PL at-the butcher-shop S
 Lit. 'Yesterday SE-bought too many sausages at the S butcher-shop.'
- b. *Hier se sont achetées trop de saucisses [F]
 yesterday SE-AUX.PRS.3PL buy.PP.FPL too-many sausage.PL

- à la boucherie Chevy.
at DF.FSG butcher-shop Chevy
- c. Hier il s' est acheté trop de saucisses [F]
yesterday 3SG SE-be.PRS.3SG buy.PP too many sausages
à la boucherie Chevy.
at DF.FSG butcher-shop Chevy
Lit. 'Yesterday it SE-bought too many sausages at the C butcher-shop.'
- d. ESSAS SALSICHAS, compraram-se ontem [P]
DM.FPL sausage.PL buy.PST.3PL-SE yesterday
no talho Sanzot.
in-DF.MSG butcher-shop Sanzot
Lit. 'THESE SAUSAGES, SE-bought yesterday at the S butcher-shop.'
'THESE SAUSAGES were bought yesterday at the Sanzot butcher-shop.'

R&U's innovative assumption concerning Portuguese rich-agreement mediopassives thus applies to all unaccusative constructions: in Romance languages other than French, the argument of an unaccusative predicate is canonically realized under the scope of V (diagram 31, position 4), *from which position it controls verb agreement*. When this argument occurs preverbally, it is positioned in the clause periphery from which it binds the internal-argument position, and it is construed as topicalized or focused, *while the spec,TP position is, crucially, left empty*, as argued by R&U (cf. 3.2.1 above). In French, on the other hand, the controller of verb agreement must generally occur in spec,TP, regardless of thematic structure. This contrast may be derived from the massive impoverishment of verb inflection which struck French (between its Old and Middle periods), a consequence of the general drop of consonant endings (cf. Fouché 1961): using a minimalist-type phrasing, we may say that in Romance languages other than French, Inflection is strong enough to check nominative case, whereas in French, where Inflection is too weak to do so, nominative case must be checked by an overt phrase in spec,TP.

Let us now see how this general contrast between French and IPRS may be tied up with the generalizations in (53)-(54) to account for the comparative data involving rich-agreement mediopassives. Consider the French/Spanish contrast exemplified in (14b)/(15d) above and repeated below under (61):

- (61) a. ?*Ces lunettes se sont nettoyées hier à huit heures et quart.
DM.PL glasses SE-AUX.PRS.3PL clean.PP.FPL yesterday at eight fifteen
Lit. 'These reading glasses SE-cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'
(i) #'These glasses cleaned themselves yesterday at eight fifteen.'
(ii) ?*'These glasses were cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'
- b. Estas gafas se limpiaron ayer a las ocho y cuarto.
DM.FPL glasses SE-clean.PST.3PL yesterday at df.fpl eight and fifteen
Lit. 'These reading glasses SE-cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'
(i) #'These reading glasses cleaned themselves yesterday at eight fifteen.'
(ii) 'THESE READING GLASSES were cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'

In Spanish as in French, the SE-construction is *a priori* open to a reflexive, anticausative, or mediopassive reading, with this latter option corresponding to the most marked theta-structure (53b). In French, the argument (*ces lunettes*) is automatically positioned in spec,TP, and since the context contains no factor favouring

the marked (mediopassive) reading over the unmarked (reciflexive) one, the unmarked reading is selected, and then discarded as pragmatically deviant (#). In Spanish, on the other hand, where verb agreement may be controlled from an internal-argument position (53d), the structural position of the preverbal NP depends on the thematic role assigned to it: if the preverbal NP bears the external role, the syntax is transitive, the NP is positioned in spec,TP, and the sentence is construed as reciflexive — a pragmatically deviant reading in (61b). But if the NP bears the internal thematic role, the syntax is unaccusative and the preverbal position of the argument must be motivated by focus or topic — properties signaling a peripheral position. Since the spec,TP position is left vacant in unaccusative clauses, the mediopassive and reciflexive readings do not compete for the same syntactic structure. If, on the other hand, the preverbal NP cannot — for some reason or other — be assigned to a peripheral position, the reciflexive reading is selected and the mediopassive reading discarded: this situation is for instance illustrated above by the inflected-infinitive examples in (35b) and (36c), quoted by R&U.

The parametric variation phrased in (54) accounts for the French/Italian contrasts illustrated in (26) and the French/Portuguese contrasts illustrated in (27): in Italian (26a,b) and Portuguese (27a), if the NP is assumed to bear the internal theta-role, the syntax is unaccusative, and the spec,TP position is empty; these Italian and Portuguese sentences are therefore licensed as mediopassive, provided the preverbal NP is construed as topicalized or focused.¹⁶ In the French examples (26a',b') and (27b), on the other hand, since the preverbal NP is automatically positioned in spec,TP, the unmarked thematic structure leading to the reciflexive reading is *a priori* favoured over the mediopassive.

We yet have to account for the contrast between French (14a) and (14b), slightly amended below in (62), which form a minimal pair: why is the mediopassive reading more freely licensed under a generic/habitual/deontic, than under the eventive, interpretation?

- (62) a. Les lunettes se nettoient à huit heures et quart. [F]
 DF.PL glasses SE-clean.PRS.3PL at eight hour.PL and quarter
 'Reading glasses SE-clean at eight fifteen.'
 'Reading lasses {are/must be} cleaned at eight fifteen.'

¹⁶ Interestingly, the Spanish analogues of Italian (26a,b) are not licensed as mediopassives by my Spanish-speaking consultants, even if the preverbal NP is focused or topicalized:

- (i) a. *^PEL ENEMIGO se teme sin razon. [S]
 DF.MSG enemy SE-fear.PRS.3SG without reason
 Lit. 'THE ENEMY se-fears without reason.'
 (i) #'THE ENEMY fears themselves without reason.'
 (ii) *THE ENEMY is feared without reason.'
- b. *^PCARLO se invitó con mucha dificultad.
 Carlo SE-invite.PST.3SG with much.FSG difficulty
 (i) #'CARLO invited himself with much difficulty.'
 (ii) *'CARLO was invited with much difficulty.'

This contrast between Spanish and Italian may be correlated to the special requirement that *human* internal arguments must be dative-marked by *a*, in Spanish. It follows that the preverbal NP in (i-a/b) fails to be identified as a topicalized or focused internal argument, as its nonhuman homologue in, e.g., (61b). Although the preverbal NP in (i-a/b) is prosodically signaled as contrastive, it is construed as the external argument, located in spec,TP. Contrastively, Italian does not distinguish human from nonhuman internal arguments by means of case marking, hence equally licenses (26a,b) and the analogue of (61b) as mediopassives (provided the preverbal NP bears contrastive stress).

- b. [?]P Ces lunettes se sont nettoyées hier à huit heures et quart.
 DM.PL glasses SE AUX.PRS.3PL clean.PP.FPL yesterday at eight fifteen
 Lit. 'These reading glasses SE-cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'
 (i) # 'These reading glasses cleaned themselves yesterday at eight fifteen.'
 (ii) ? 'These reading glasses were cleaned yesterday at eight fifteen.'

My judgement on (62b) is that the mediopassive reading is not strictly unavailable; it is, rather, blocked by the reflexive reading, which is selected and then discarded as pragmatically strange. The mediopassive reading fails to be considered in this isolated, temporally-anchored, eventive clause, while it naturally comes to mind in the habitual/generic sentence (62a). I assume that two factors could be relevant here: first, it is reasonable to assume that all other things being equal, eventive interpretations favour the construal of the argument located in spec,TP as a 'dynamic cause' (+c). By inhibiting this feature, the habitual or deontic operator inversely contributes to favour the mediopassive reading. Furthermore, the habitual or deontic operator requires a human consciousness from whose perspective habit or modality may be assessed — thus the licensing of the indefinite [+m] role required by the mediopassive. Note that point-of-view markers or evidentials may also contribute to favour the licensing of the external [+m] role, hence of the mediopassive, even under eventive readings: thus, I find (63) more acceptable as a mediopassive than (62b) above:

- (63) Ces lunettes se sont manifestement nettoyées hier
 DM.PL glasses SE AUX.PRS.3PL obviously clean.PP.FPL yesterday
 avec un mouchoir blanc.
 with a.M handkerchief white
 Lit. 'These reading glasses obviously SE-cleaned yesterday with
 a white handkerchief.'

Here the adverb *manifestement* 'obviously' suggests that the speaker is, say, Sherlock Holmes, investigating the sequence of events leading to the present state of the reading glasses. This context makes it natural to assume an implicit indefinite cleaner-agent, distinct from the glasses themselves, and whose presence is further consistent with the instrumental phrase.¹⁷ In the poorer context provided in (62b), where nothing points to an implicit indefinite human external role distinct from the syntactic subject, the mediopassive theta-structure is not considered.

Habitual or deontic modality does not necessarily suffice to allow the mediopassive reading to arise. Thus, in the habitual SE-clause in (64a), whose syntactic subject denotes a human entity, the mediopassive reading loses the competition against the (albeit pragmatically weird) reflexive reading. In (64b), however, the mediopassive reading naturally arises, due to the adverb *discrètement* 'discreetly', construed here as addressee-oriented, and thus provides the implicit [+m] role required for the mediopassive theta-structure to be licensed:

- (64) a. [?]*Une personne à cheveux verts se dévisage souvent dans la rue.
 a.F person with hair green SE-stare-at.PRS.3SG often in DF.FSG street
 Lit. 'A person with green hair SE-stares.at often in the street.'

¹⁷ As emphasized by Reinhart & Siloni (2005), the Instrumental role must be licensed by an Agent (+m, +c, in their terms).

- (i) ?'A person with green hair often stares at themselves in the street.'
 (ii) *'A person with green hair is often stare-at in the street.'
- b. Une personne à cheveux verts se dévisage DISCRETEMENT, mon fils.
 a.F person with hair green se stare.at.prs.3sg discreetly my son
 Lit. 'A person with green hair SE-stares at discreetly, my son.'
 (i) ?'A person with green hair stares at themselves DISCREETLY, my son.'
 (ii) 'A person with green hair should be stared at DISCREETLY, my son.'

In the cases illustrated in (20) and (45) above, the mediopassive reading naturally arises although these sentences are construed as eventive and do not contain any instrumental or other phrase pointing to an implicit indefinite Agent distinct from the syntactic subject. Here, as rightly emphasized by Guéron (1996), the selectional relation between the NP argument and the V, is a crucially enlightening factor. First, the syntactic subject is unambiguously assigned the internal theta-role; second, the predicate requires a human external argument. The reflexive reading is thus discarded and the mediopassive reading, selected.

The crucial relevance of the selectional restriction linking the preverbal NP to the mediopassive verb further accounts for the well-known general reluctance of mediopassive verbs to be focused (cf. Fellbaum & Zribi-Hertz 1989, Guéron 1996). Correlatively, mediopassive verbs are usually not clause-final, but followed by some complement or adjunct phrase sitting under primary stress. In many French mediopassives of the form *NP se V (X)*, the verb is 'appropriate' to the NP (65b) or semantically light (66b). This general tendency is not specific to French mediopassives, for most NP-initial IPRS mediopassives provided in the linguistic literature similarly contain lexical material on the right of the verb. French examples illustrating this general property are given in (65)-(66):

- (65) a. ??Cette voiture se conduit.
 DM.FSG car SE-drive.PRS.3SG
 Lit. 'This car se-drives.'
- b. Cette voiture se conduit facilement.
 DM.FSG car SE-drive.PRS.3SG easily
 Lit. 'This car SE-drives easily.'
 'This car drives easily/is easy to drive.'
- (66) a. ??L'opération chirurgicale s'est effectuée/commentée.
 DF.SG surgery SE-AUX.PRS.3SG carry-out.PP.FSG/comment.PP.FSG
 Lit. 'The surgery SE-carried out/commented-on.'
 (i) #'The surgery carried itself out/commented upon itself.'
 (ii) ?*'The surgery was carried out/commented upon.'
- b. L'opération chirurgicale s'est effectuée
 DF.SG surgery SE-AUX.PRS.3SG carry-out.PP.FSG
 dans d'excellentes conditions.
 in PART excellent.FPL condition.PL
 Lit. 'The surgery SE-carried out in excellent conditions.'
 'The surgery was carried out under excellent conditions.'
- c. ?L'opération chirurgicale s'est commentée
 DF.SG surgery SE-AUX.PRS.3SG comment.PP.FSG
 dans d'excellentes conditions.

- in PART excellent.FPL condition.PL
 Lit. 'The surgery SE-commented-on under excellent conditions.'
 (i) #'The surgery commented upon itself under excellent conditions.'
 (ii) ?'The surgery was commented-on under excellent conditions.'
 [ex. (66) adapted from Guéron 1996]

I assume that the 'appropriateness' of the verb with respect to the preverbal NP — its contextual selectional predictability — contributes to favour the identification of the preverbal NP as the internal argument of the verb, leading to the mediopassive theta-structure. An NP>V selectional expectancy suggests a head-complement relation between V and NP, hence that the NP should receive the internal thematic role. The predictability of the verb is, by definition, in conflict with its sitting under focus — focus signaling new, unpredictable information. It follows that the verb's high degree of predictability from the preverbal NP stands as a favouring factor for the mediopassive reading to arise. If verb selection is unpredictable (66c), or if the verb sits in clause-final position, the preverbal NP correlatively tends to be construed — by default — as the external argument — and the reflexive theta-structure obtains.

Under our proposed analysis, the properties of mediopassives in French and Romance raise the important issue of the relation between syntax and pragmatics in the processing of human language. The interpretation of SE-clauses is crucially calculated on the basis of *formal* linguistic properties (thematic and syntactic structure), *not* on pragmatic grounds: in many cases, we note that the only available interpretation for a SE-clause is precisely the *least* felicitous from a pragmatic viewpoint.

4. The poor-agreement mediopassive and its restrictions

French mediopassives also contrast with IPRS mediopassives in 'impersonal' constructions — those exhibiting default verb agreement. In Italian, Spanish and Portuguese — illustrated by Spanish in (67) — impersonal SE-constructions may host all sorts of verbs — verbs taking an NP (67a), CP (68b) or PP (67c) internal argument, unergative verbs (67d), unaccusative verbs (68e), or even 'be' (67f):

- (67) a. Se alquila pisos.¹⁸ [S]
 SE-rent.PRS.3SG flat.PL
 Lit. 'SE-rents flats.'
 'Flats for rent.'
 [adapted from Lamiroy 1993/Muller 2007]
- b. Se descubrió que la casa ja estaba vendida. [S]
 SE-discover.PST.3SG that DF.FSG house already be.IPF.3SG sell.PP.FSG
 Lit. 'SE-discovered that the house was already sold.'
 'It was/we discovered that the house was already sold.'
- c. Se pensó en Juan para reemplazar el presidente. [S]
 SE-think.PST.3SG in John for replace.INF DF.MSG president
 Lit. 'SE-thought of John for replacing the president.'
 'We/they/people thought of John for replacing the president.'
 [adapted from Bosque & Demonte 2000 :1689]

¹⁸ As emphasized by Muller (2007), Spanish normative grammars recommend rich agreement in such cases (*se alquilan pisos*), but the poor-agreement construction is nevertheless productively attested in colloquial Spanish (at least in some dialects).

- était déjà vendue.
 be.IPF.3SG already sell.PP.FSG
 Lit. 'It se-discovered that the house was already sold.'
 'It was discovered that the house was already sold.'
- c. *Il se pense à Jean pour remplacer le président. [F]
 3NSG SE-think.PRS.3SG in John for replace.INF DF.MSG president
 Lit. 'It SE-thinks of John for replacing the president.'
 'John is being thought of for replacing the president.'
- d. *Il se travaille beaucoup ici. [F]
 3NSG SE-work.PRS.3SG a lot here
 Lit. 'It SE-works a lot here.'
- e. *Il s'arrive plus vite à Paris par ici. [F]
 3NSG SE-arrive.PRS.3SG more quickly in Paris by here
 Lit. 'It SE-arrives in Paris more quickly this way.'
- f. *Quand il s'est maltraité par la vie, [F]
 when 3NSG SE-be.PRS.3SG mistreat.PP.NSG by DF.FSG life
 il se change d'attitude.
 3NSG SE change.PRS.3SG of attitude
 Lit. 'When it SE-is mistreated by life, it SE-changes attitude.'

Dobrovie-Sorin links the properties of French impersonal mediopassives to the special make-up of impersonal clauses in this language, involving the 'expletive' (default) pronoun *il* in subject position. The unacceptability of the mediopassive with unaccusative verbs (69e), and in the temporal clause in (69f)), shows that in French as in Romanian, nominative SE fails to have developed — a restriction which we may straightforwardly correlate, in French, to the development of impersonal *il* — a point to which we return below. With unergative verbs (69d), French mediopassives are banned while their Romanian homologues are licensed. Under Dobrovie-Sorin's analysis, the occurrence of expletive *il* creates a binding conflict in French:

- (70) *Il_z se_k mange e_k trop ici. [F]
 3NSG SE eat.PRS.3SG too much here
 Lit. 'It SE-eats too much here.'

Under Dobrovie-Sorin's analysis, SE is licensed here as a passivized cognate object, and needs to be bound but fails to be since expletive *il* cannot bind it — if it did, it would be referential, not expletive. Thus, mediopassive SE is expected to occur with unergative verbs (as in (68d)) only in null-subject Romance languages (which exclude French), where this binding conflict fails to arise. This analysis correctly predicts the acceptability contrast between (70) above and (71) below, if we assume that SE is bound in (69) by the lexical argument *trop de chocolat*; but for this claim to be consistent with Chomsky's (1981) Binding Theory, we must assume that SE is moved from a position where it is c-commanded by *trop de chocolat*, e.g.:

- (71) Il_z se_k mange_v trop de chocolat_k e_v e_k ici.
 3NSG SE eat.PRS.3SG too much chocolate
 Lit. 'It SE-eats too much chocolate here.'
 'People eat too much chocolate here.'

However, the assumption that SE instantiates a passivized cognate object in (71) conflicts with the fact that the lexical argument (*trop de chocolat*) must obviously receive the internal theta-role from the verb 'to eat'.

I follow Dobrovie-Sorin in assuming that the restrictions on French impersonal mediopassives crucially correlate with the special make-up of impersonal clauses in this language. I however submit an alternative analysis, which crucially involves contrasting impersonal mediopassives with impersonal *be*-passives. Note that while unergative predicates fail to be licensed in impersonal mediopassives in French, they are licensed in impersonal *be*-passives, and that the inverse array of data is observed in other Romance languages:

- (72) a. Il a été couru sur ce stade [F]
 3{M/N}SG AUX.PRS.3SG be.PP run.PP.{M/N}SG on DM.MSG stadium
 plus de 1555 fois.
 more than 1555 time.PL
 Lit. 'It was run on this stadium more than 1555 times.'
 (i) 'It (= this marathon) was run on this stadium more than 1555 times.'
 (ii) 'Running occurred on this stadium more than 1555 times.'
 ('This stadium was run on more than 1555 times.'
- b. Il s'est couru sur ce stade [F]
 3{?M/*N}SG SE-AUX.PRS.3SG run.PP.{M/N}SG on DM.MSG stadium
 plus de 1555 fois.
 more than 1555 time.PL
 Lit. 'It SE-ran on this stadium more than 1555 times.'
 (i) ?'It (= this marathon) was run on this stadium more than 1555 times.'
 (ii) *'Running occurred on this stadium more than 1555 times.'
 ('This stadium was run on more than 1555 times.'
- (73) a. Fue corrido en este estadio [S]¹⁹
 be.PST.3SG run.PP.MSG on DM.MSG stadium
 más de 1555 veces.
 more than 1555 time.PL
 Lit. 'It (M/*N) was run on this stadium more than 1555 times.'
 (i) 'It (= this marathon) was run on this stadium over 1555 times.'
 (ii) *'Running occurred on this stadium over 1555 times.'
 ('This stadium was run on over 1555 times.'
- b. Se corrió en este estadio más de 1555 veces. [S]
 SE run.PST.3SG on DM.MSG stadium more than 1555 time.PL

¹⁹ In at least one variety of (Mexican) Spanish, the verb *correr* 'to run' may also be used as a transitive verb meaning 'expel'. Under this reading it takes a referential human object (rather than a race-denoting cognate object), and the following sentence is thus acceptable:

(i) e fue corrido de este estadio
pro be.PST.3SG expel.PP.MSG from DM.MSG stadium
 más de 1555 veces.
 more than 1555 time.PL
 '(S)he was expelled from this stadium more than 1555 times.'

The transitive use of *correr* (pointed out to me by Marcela San Giacomo) is left aside in the description of (73a) proposed in the text.

Lit. 'SE-ran on this stadium more than 1555

(i) ?'It (= this marathon) was run on this stadium more than 1555 times.'

(ii) 'Running occurred on this stadium more than 1555 times.'

('This stadium was run on more than 1555 times.'

To assess the acceptability of the French examples in (72), we must consider the morphological features of the nominative pronoun *il*, which may either be fully specified as 3MSG, i.e. 3rd person, Masculine, Singular, or receive default values — [-person] (3), [-gender] ('neutre'), [-number] (nonplural): 3NSG. In the first case, *il* points to a preidentified discourse referent compatible with its feature values and construed as the cognate (race/marathon-denoting) internal argument of the verb *courir* 'run'; in the second case *il* is the 'impersonal' pronoun, whose features have default values and is thus unable to relate to a preidentified discourse referent. The French pair in (72) shows that *il* can be construed as the impersonal pronoun in the *be*-passive (72a), but not in the mediopassive (72b). The SE-sentence in (72b) could only — albeit uneasily²⁰ — be licensed as a mediopassive if *il* were construed as the race-denoting cognate internal argument of *courir*. In the Spanish examples in (73), on the other hand, only the SE-construction may receive the impersonal reading glossed in (73b-ii). The argument of the *be*-passive in (73a) can only be construed as a referential, race-denoting cognate internal argument. What we want to understand here is why impersonal *be*-passives and mediopassives pattern the way they do in French and Spanish when they host unergative predicates; in other words, why there is a contrast between French (72a-ii/b-ii) and Spanish (73a-ii/b-ii).

The key factor lies, I assume, in the syntactic properties of the impersonal nominative pronoun *il*, a pronoun crucially characterized by the default values of its ϕ -features. As a pronoun, this element introduces a discourse referent standing as a topic with respect to the following predicate. But due to the default values of its features, it cannot be linked to a preidentified discourse referent, hence cannot partake in anaphoric relations. As a consequence, impersonal *il* can only introduce a *new* (non discourse-linked) and *vague* ('indefinite') topic, unrelated to any lexical noun.²¹ This vague topic is able to saturate the argument structure of only a small class of verbs: weather verbs (e.g. *Il pleut* 'it is raining'). With all other — nonmeteorological — predicates, the vague topic introduced by impersonal *il* needs to be further cataphorically reidentified by a phrase stranded on the right of the inflected verb. This latter situation is typically illustrated by (74):

- (74) a. *Il_z est tombé plusieurs tuiles_z.* [F]
 3NSG AUX.PRS.3SG fall.PP.NSG several tile.PL
 Lit. 'It fell/has fallen several tiles.'
 'Several tiles fell/have fallen.'
- b. *Il est bon que Marie travaille.*
 3NSG be.PRS.3SG good that Mary work.SUBJ.3SG
 Lit. 'It is good that Mary should work.'

²⁰ Uneasily for the same reasons as in, e.g., (14b). See section 3 above.

²¹ 'Neutre' is not a possible gender value for French lexical nouns, which must be either Masculine or Feminine.

Verbs which readily enter this impersonal-*il* construction are typically unaccusative, existential, or raising verbs. The main point is the necessary correlation between the impersonal subject pronoun *il* and a postverbal lexical XP (e.g. *plusieurs tuiles*). From a semantic viewpoint, impersonal *il* is analogous to a weak neutre pronoun such as English *it* in extraposition contexts, and the postverbal phrase stands as a referent identifier. From a syntactic viewpoint, a French impersonal clause such as (74) involves a split expression formed of the impersonal pronoun *il* raised to subject (spec,TP) position and its reidentifying adjunct stranded on the right of the verb in the basic argument position. The relation between impersonal *il* and its cataphoric correlate in French (75a) is similar to the relation between *it* and its 'extraposed' correlate in English (75b):

- (75) a. It_z is wonderful [that Mary won] $_z$.
 b. Il_z est tombé [plusieurs tuiles] $_z$. (= (74))

As an impersonal subject pronoun, neutre *il* however has a broader distribution in French than does impersonal *it* in English, because the cataphoric correlate of *il* is not restricted to a tensed clause, as in (74b) and (75), but may also be instantiated by other categories — in particular a noun phrase, as in (74a). As regards Information Structure, impersonal *il* introduces a new topic, with its cataphoric correlate pertaining to the focus component:

- (76) a. — Qu'est-ce qui est tombé ?
 what AUX.PRS.3SG fall.PP.NSG
 'What (kind of thing) has fallen?'
 b. — [Il] $_{TOP}$ est tombé [plusieurs tuiles] $_{FOC}$
 Lit. 'It $_z$ has fallen SEVERAL TILES $_z$.'
 'SEVERAL TILES have fallen.'

If the cataphoric correlate of impersonal *il* is a noun phrase, it is generally nondefinite and nonreferential, since any discourse-linked or self-referential expression (e.g. a first name, a definite-referential NP) would conflict with the default specification of the impersonal pronoun; thus the 'definiteness effect', characteristic of French impersonal clauses (cf. Guéron 1996), obtains:

- (77) a. Il_z arrivera [un drôle de paquet] $_z$.
 3NSG arrive.FUT.3SG a.MSG weird sort of parcel
 Lit. 'It will arrive a weird sort of parcel.'
 b. ?* Il_z arrivera {Jean/le paquet} $_z$.
 3NSG arrive.FUT.3SG John/DF.MSG parcel
 Lit. 'It will arrive {John/the parcel}.'

The analysis of impersonal *il* as a deficient topical pronoun contrasts with the common view that it is an 'expletive' element devoid of semantic function, whose presence is only motivated by the assumed necessity for a clause to contain a subject — the so-called EPP constraint (Extended Projection Principle).

The contrast between unergative impersonal *be*-passives and mediopassives, illustrated in (73), may now be accounted for under the assumption (Couquaux 1979, Gaatone 1998, Carlier 2002) that *be* passives are basically organized as raising

structures involving a small clause (nontensed predication) embedded under existential *be*. The initial complex structure of *be*-passives thus crucially contrasts with the simplex structure of mediopassives, where the *be* element, when it occurs as in (78b), always instantiates the perfect auxiliary, never the existential predicate (cf fn. 5):

(78) *Be*-passive vs. mediopassive (schematic derivations)

a. *be*-PASSIVE

	PRS	AUX	être	θ1	commettre	le crime] ²²
				θ2		
le crime _z	a		été	[t _z	commis	t _z]
'The crime	has		been		committed.'	

b. MEDIOPASSIVE

	PRS	AUX	SE-commettre	le crime
			θ1	θ2
le crime _z	s'est		commis	t _z
'The crime			SE-committed.'	' ²³

In impersonal *be*-passives and mediopassives, as in other impersonal clauses, the underspecified topic introduced by impersonal *il* must be correlated to a postverbal reidentifier. In impersonal mediopassives, impersonal *il* straightforwardly bears the internal theta-role of the verb (cf. (78b)), and the cataphoric adjunct contributes to identify the intended referent. These conditions are satisfied when the verb governs an NP (69a) or CP (69b), but they are not satisfied when the verb is followed by a PP (69c) — since a PP cannot be coindexed with *il* — nor when the verb is intransitive (69d-f). On the other hand, due to the complex structure of impersonal *be*-passives (72a), the topic introduced by *il* may either be construed as the argument of the lexical verb, or as the argument of existential *be*, treated as the matrix V-head. Correlatively, the cataphoric correlate of impersonal *il* may either reidentify the internal argument of the lexical past participle (79a), or the entire participle phrase, construed as the argument of existential *be*:

(79)	a.	<i>Il</i> _z	a	été	commis	<i>plusieurs crimes</i> _z
		3NSG	AUX.PRS.3SG	be.PP	commit.PP.NSG	several crimes
		Lit. 'It was committed several crimes.'				
		'What was committed was: several crimes.'				
	b.	<i>Il</i> _z	a	été	<i>commis</i>	<i>plusieurs crimes</i> _z .
		3NSG	AUX.PRS.3SG	be.PP	commit.PP.NSG	several crimes
		Lit. 'It was committed several crimes.'				
		'What was was: [several crimes committed].'				

²² The symbols θ1 and θ2 stand for the external and internal theta-roles, respectively.

²³ The structural position of the mediopassive clitic SE is left unspecified here. The assumption that SE occurs in the *v* head signaling Voice, explored by Lidz (1995,1996), would be consistent with the various properties discussed in this study.

The two types of interpretation involve two different information structures; the selection of one or the other is, naturally, context-sensitive, cf.:

- (80) a. — Est-ce que des méfaits quelconques ont été commis ?
'Were any misdeeds committed?'
- b. — Oui : *il* a été commis PLUSIEURS CRIMES. [= (79a)]
Lit. 'Yes: *it_z* was committed SEVERAL CRIMES_z.'
- (81) a. — Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé ?
'What happened?'
- b. — *Il* a été COMMIS PLUSIEURS CRIMES. [= (79b)]
Lit. '*It_z* was SEVERAL CRIMES COMMITTED_z.'

The acceptability of unergative impersonal *be*-passives in French is further evidence that the claim that the past-participle phrase may provide the cataphoric correlate of impersonal *il* :

- (82) *Il_z* a déjà été *couru_z* sur ce stade.
3NSG AUX.PRS.3SG already be.PP run.PP.NSG on DM.MSG stadium
Lit. '*It_z* has already been RUN ON THIS STADIUM_z.'
'Running has already taken place on this stadium.'

The ban on unaccusatives in French impersonal *be*-passives (Perlmutter 1978) may be attributed to the semantic content of so-called unaccusative verbs.²⁴ The interpretation of impersonal *be*-passives such as (82) requires an activity-denoting participle phrase reidentifying the sentence topic. Typical unaccusatives such as *arriver* 'arrive' have a purely existential lexical content, which does not enable them to identify a discourse referent:

- (83) ?**Il* a déjà été arrivé sur ce stade.
3NSG AUX.PRS.3SG already be.PP arrive.PP.NSG on DM.MSG stadium
Lit. 'It has already been arrived on this stadium.'
'Arriving has already taken place on this stadium.'

The structural ambiguity of impersonal *be*-passives, shown in (80)/(81), is correlated to the ambiguous status of the *be* morpheme, basically the existential predicate, as sketchily represented in (78a), but further reanalysed as a functional 'passive auxiliary', no longer as a lexical V-head. Since impersonal mediopassives do not contain the existential copula, we do not expect them to present the same ambiguity as impersonal *be*-passives. More precisely, we do not expect the past participle phrase to be able to provide the cataphoric correlate of impersonal *il* in SE-constructions. This prediction is borne out by the unacceptability of unergative verbs in French impersonal mediopassives, illustrated above by (72b).

Assuming that only an *overt* pronoun may introduce a *new* discourse referent, the ungrammaticality of unergative impersonal *be*-passives in Romance languages other than French — illustrated by Spanish (73a-ii) — may be correlated to the absence of an

²⁴ See Manente (2008) for an interesting update on the Unaccusativity Hypothesis, based on Italian/French comparison.

overt impersonal subject pronoun analogous to neutre *il* in French. A *be*-passive sentence such as Spanish (73a) may only be construed as involving a covert referential internal argument of the verb — either a fully specified argument (cf. fn. 19), or a cognate argument (cf. (73a-i)).²⁵

5. Summary and conclusion

The goal of this article was to explore and explain the restrictions limiting the productivity of French mediopassive constructions, first in rich-agreement, then in poor-agreement ('impersonal') contexts. In rich-agreement SE-constructions, the mediopassive reading seems more restricted in French than in other Romance languages, although we have seen that contrary to a current assumption, Modern French

²⁵ I have left aside in section 4 another constraint suggested by Dobrovie-Sorin (1986) and Zubizarreta (1987), stating that in French impersonal mediopassives, unlike in impersonal *be*-passives, the cataphoric correlate of impersonal *il* cannot be a tensed clause. Dobrovie-Sorin (1986) illustrates this restriction with the following examples:

- (i) a. Il {a été /*s'est} prévu
 3NSG AUX.PRS.3SG/SE-AUX.PRS.3SG plan.PP.NSG
 que nous partirons à 10 heures.
 that we leave.FUT.1PL at 10 o'clock
 Lit. 'It {was planned/SE-planned} that we will leave at 10.'
- b. Il {a été /*s'est} jugé
 Il {a été /*s'est} jugé
 3NSG AUX.PRS.3SG/SE-AUX.PRS.3SG find.PP.NSG
 que Jean était coupable.
 that John be.IPF.3SG guilty
 Lit. 'It {was found/SE-found} that John was guilty.'
- c. Il {a été/?s'est} suggéré
 3NSG AUX.PRS.3SG/SE-AUX.PRS.3SG suggestPP.NSG
 que nous partirons à 10 heures.
 that we leave.FUT.1PL at 10 o'clock
 Lit. 'It {was suggested/SE-suggested} that we will leave at 10.'
 [adapted from Dobrovie-Sorin 1986]

The generalization put forward by Dobrovie-Sorin is however too strong, since the sentences in (ii) are perfectly acceptable:

- (ii) a. Il s'est (longtemps) {dit /prétendu}
 3NSG SE-AUX.PRS.3SG for a long time say.PP.NSG/argue.PP.NSG
 que Jean manquait d'audace.
 that John lack.IPF.3SG of daring
 Lit. 'It SE-said/argued for a long time that John lacked daring.'
- b. Il se raconte partout
 3NSG SE-tell.PRS.3SG everywhere
 que Jean a manqué d'audace.
 that John AUX.PRS.3SG lack.PP of daring
 Lit. 'It SE-tells everywhere that John (then) lacked daring.'

It further appears that the impersonal *be*-passive is not always acceptable with verbs of propositional attitude — compare (i) with (iii):

- (iii) a. *Il a été {pensé/cru} que nous partirons à 10 heures.
 3NSG AUX.PRS.3SG be.PP think/believe.PP.NSG that we leave.FUT.1PL at 10 hour.PL
 Lit. 'It has been thought/believed that we will leave at 10 o'clock.'
- b. *Il est souvent prévu que les glaciers vont fondre.
 3NSG be.PRS.3SG often anticipate.PP.NSG that DF.PL glacier.PL AUXFUT.PRS.3PL melt.INF
 Lit. 'It is often anticipated that the glaciers will melt.'

These variations in acceptability are indeed interesting, but clearly do not reveal any property specific to mediopassives.

licenses, like other Romance languages, what is commonly known as *passive-SE* constructions — viz., *SE*-constructions often paraphrasable by *be*-passives and combining rich agreement with an eventive reading. In poor-agreement *SE*-constructions, the mediopassive is only available with transitive verbs. The descriptive assumptions presented here are consistent with the idea (put forward by Dobrovie-Sorin *passim*, Muller 2007, Heidinger 2008) that the mediopassive is, like the anticausative, but a special interpretive development of reflexive *SE*-constructions. I have first assumed that the mediopassive reading involves a marked thematic structure with respect to the reflexive, and that this marked status of the mediopassive obtains across Romance. I have further claimed that the restrictions specific to French mediopassives follow from two syntactic properties which are independent of *SE*-constructions:

[P1] The fact that the syntactic subject of finite clauses generally raises to spec,TP in French, surfacing in preverbal position even in unaccusative clauses:

[P2] The fact that French impersonal constructions contain the overt neutre nominative pronoun *il* in preverbal position.

Property P1 accounts for the fact that rich-agreement mediopassives have a more restricted productivity in French than in the rest of Romance. Due to Property P1, the reflexive and mediopassive theta-structures always compete for the same structural configuration in French rich-agreement clauses, and the competition must be settled on lexico-semantic grounds. In other Romance languages, the reflexive and mediopassive theta-structures are each attached to a different syntactic configuration in NP-initial *SE*-clauses. Correlatively, NP-initial *SE*-clauses resist the marked mediopassive reading in a greater number of contexts in French, than they do in IPRS.

Property P2 accounts for the fact that the so-called 'impersonal *SE*' has failed to develop in French, and for the incompatibility of all intransitive predicates — including unergatives — with impersonal mediopassives in this language. Property P2 further sheds light on the existence of intransitive impersonal *be*-passives in French, contrasting with their nonexistence in other Romance languages.

Should we assume that the properties P1 and P2 in Modern French both result from the fact that person-number inflection, in this language, has become massively underspecified on finite verbs — contrasting with their IPRS homologues, the two restrictions on the French mediopassive discussed in this study could be diachronic effects of a single phonological change — the deletion of consonant endings which struck French between its Old and Middle periods (Fouché 1961).

Under the proposed analysis, the synchronic study of French mediopassives from a Romance-comparative perspective is interesting evidence that syntax — thematic and syntactic structure — takes precedence over pragmatics in the resolution of certain types of ambiguities. The involved synchronic properties further point to a diachronic change — the checking of nominative case in French — which affected morphosyntax but was itself triggered by a phonological event.

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