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ENERGETIC REFLEXIVES IN SPANISH
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It has traditionally been claimed that reflexive constructions are to be analyzed as the identification of subject and object with the same participant in an event. It is clear that, while this approach accounts for a restricted pattern of reflexive expressions, it leaves unexplained several classes for which the best analysis has only been to list them in the lexicon. I show that there are several productive patterns of reflexive formation whose internal structure has not yet been explained. I propose that it is necessary to start from a different set of assumptions in such a way that the classic subject/object identification will be seen as only a special instance of a more complex network of symbolic structures. This paper focuses on the dialect of Mexico. Even though there may be differences regarding the behavior of a particular item, the fundamental claim is made to account for all modern dialects of Spanish.

Sentence (1) is an example of a prototypical reflexive formation; sentence (2) departs from this pattern:

(1) Juan se peinó 'Juan combed himself'
(2) La pelota se cayó de la mesa
    'The ball fell down from the table'

In (1) subject and object are identified as agent and patient with the same participant. It is obvious that (2) cannot be explained in the same manner. Inanimate objects such as balls are incapable of moving by means of their own resources. Obviously, this implies that we cannot claim the presence of an agent and a patient identified with the same participant. We are further unable to say that subject and object correspond to the same entity since the source of caerse (caer = 'to fall') is an intransitive verb with only one participant. Since the coreferentiality analysis proves to be inadequate, it is clear that a different approach to these matters is necessary.

We must first determine the meaning of sentence (2). Let us start by comparing (2) with (3):

(3) La pelota cayó de la canasta
    'The ball fell down from the basket'

In (3), the falling of the ball is conceived as a natural occurrence that is in agreement with the normal course of events. This would be the case in a basketball game, in which the ball falls from the basket many times during a match. In sentence (2) the ball is expected to remain on the table and its falling constitutes an unexpected action, an event that contradicts a normal expectation. The following examples support this view:
(4) a. La pelota (*se) cayó de la mesa como era esperado
    'The ball fell down from the table as was expected'
b. La pelota se (*Ø) cayó de la mesa inesperadamente
    'The ball fell down from the table unexpectedly'

Unexpectedness is a possible reading because the event contravenes
the natural conception of a state or an action. Natural events
don’t take the pronoun se, as the following examples show:

(5) a. La lluvia (*se) cae 'Rain falls'
b. En el otoño, las hojas (*se) caen de los árboles
    'In autumn, the leaves fall from the trees'

It is natural for rain to fall. In the same manner, leaves
normally fall from the trees in autumn. If leaves started falling
from trees in the spring, the reflexive se would be used to impose
the reading in which the action is conceived as counter to
expectation. Crucially, the non-reflexive form would be ruled out:

(6) En la primavera, las hojas se (*Ø) cayeron de los árboles
    'In spring, the leaves fell from the trees'

The contrast between reflexive and non-reflexive formations does
not depend on whether the participant is animate or not. The same
contrast can be found in processes with animate participants:

(7) Juan (*se) cayó al agua con toda elegancia
    'J. fell into the water with elegance'
(8) J. se (*Ø) cayó al agua vestido
    'J. fell into the water dressed'

Notice that (7) is conceived as an intended event and therefore
the reflexive se is ruled out, whereas in (8) the action is
accidental and only the reflexive use is adequate.

We have shown so far that the reflexive se introduces a reading
of 'unexpected change'. It is pertinent now to see what theoret-
ical assumptions are necessary to describe this phenomenon. I have
already been referring informally to the first basic notion:

(9) The construal of unexpected changes depends on the
    canonical conception of the elements involved in the event.

This assumption interacts with Langacker’s billiard-ball model
(1986), by which we tend to conceive the world as being populated
with discrete objects located in space. Some of these objects are
capable of moving around and also of inducing movement of other,
non-energetic elements in space, mainly through physical contact.
We have been dealing with three different kinds of elements: a) things
(leaves and balls) conceived as elements incapable of
changing location by means of their own resources; b) human beings
conceived as capable of exerting and controlling their own
energetic resources in order to induce changes; and c) natural forces conceived as energy sources that act constantly on any element in space. Interactions between such entities are encoded in language by means of different symbolic structures.

In order for changes to happen some kind of energy must act upon an element for it to undergo a change. Before the action takes place there may be some resistance controlling the state of the element to be affected. This creates a situation of Force Dynamics, as proposed by Talmi (1985), in which an energetic element (the antagonist) imposes a change on another element (the agonist) by blocking or overwhelming the force with which the element was maintained in a particular fashion before that energy acted on it.

Based on these notions, I will propose that the reflexive construction is used when there is a situation of opposing forces in which one force overcomes the other. Generally speaking, natural expectations and canonical conceptions of world events constitute the resisting force being overcome. In the most transparent examples, the encounter of physical forces is also of the construal of an event that runs counter to expectations. To take the simplest case, in (3) the strength of gravity makes the ball fall down. Notice that the ball, not being self-energetic, cannot offer resistance to the influence of gravity. Consequently, since there is no conflict between competing forces, the reflexive form cannot be used. In the reflexive sentence (2), the table is a resisting force that neutralizes the influence of gravity. This interaction constitutes the initial state of affairs. For a change to happen some other unspecified force must act upon the ball, moving it beyond the table's edge, in such a way that the neutralizing effects of the table have been suspended.

The different conceptions of leaves falling can be accounted for in the same way. In (5) the branch of the tree prevents the leaf from falling off during the whole year until autumn comes and leaves fall. The falling of leaves in the autumn is conceived as a normal event that follows the behavior of biological elements. In such cases, no reflexive formation can take place, as (5) shows. In (6), it runs counter to expectation to see them fall in the spring, as the tree is expected to prevent leaves from falling. This conception constitutes the baseline for the event described in the reflexive sentence. Some unspecified force (a storm, a plague, etc.) must act on the tree in order to cancel its controlling effects over the leaves in such a way that they are left to the mercy of gravity. It is this canceling effect that imposes the "unexpected" reading of sentence (6). As predicted, only the reflexive construction is used in this case.

A similar explanation can be proposed for animate participants. In (7) Juan does not offer any resistance to the natural strength of gravity. The lack of force conflict rules out the possibility of using a reflexive form. In (8) the situation is reversed. A person in a standing position neutralizes the influence of gravity, unless some kind of obstacle cancels this resisting
energy. In such a case, the change of location is not volitional and it constitutes a contradiction of natural expectations. In such cases only the reflexive formation is allowed, as (8) shows. We may now account for cases in which, even though the notion of accidentality is present, the reflexive form is ruled out:

(10) Después de que le dispararon el ratero (**se) cayó muerto
"After they shot him the thief fell dead"

The context imposes a different conception of the subject of caer. Notice that the act of shooting takes place before the thief falls. Consequently, the act of falling takes place when the thief is not conceived as capable of resisting the influence of gravity. Since no particular conflict of forces is being profiled the use of se is inappropriate.

The contrast between the intransitive non-reflexive sentences and the reflexive formations of this verb is based on the pattern shown in figure 1:

Figure 1 (cf. page 18)

The circle represents the participant. The downward arrow indicates change of location, whereas the downward angle stands for the strength of gravity. In caerse the upward angle shows the resisting energy imposed against gravity. This force is canceled by an unspecified force (the line crossing it) and gravity becomes a stronger force (the sign +).

The schema proposed in figure 1 constitutes the simplest case of this kind of reflexive formation in Spanish. The schema just proposed is not a semantic idiosyncrasy of this verb. I will claim that in fact, not only is this pattern quite productive in Spanish, but it also follows from a fundamental opposition between absolute and energetic construals as explained by Langacker (1986, 1987a). In the absolute construction the event can be either static or dynamic but no energy is put in profile; for instance, in the intransitive use of caer only the event of falling is being portrayed—no special reference to speed, manner, or conflict of forces has been made at all. The reflexive se in Spanish is a device by means of which absolute construals are transformed into energetic ones. For the same type of event, the verb can occur either alone or with a reflexive marker, depending on whether the event is anticipated or contravenes one’s expectations. If the event runs in the direction of expectations, the construction will be absolute, but if it runs counter to this abstract force the syntactic form will be construed in force-dynamic terms and encoded with the reflexive se. Langacker (1987b) has shown that the absolute/energetic distinction is attested in other languages: in French, non-reflexive verbs that take the auxiliary être ‘be’ are absolute, as opposed to energetic verbs that take the auxiliary avoir ‘have’. Absolute verbs like aller ‘go’, venir ‘come’, arriver ‘arrive’, partir ‘leave’, etc. make no
specification concerning the rate or the method of locomotion. On the other hand, energetic verbs like *courir* 'run', *voler* 'fly', *nager* 'swim' specify the manner and rate of locomotion. In a similar fashion, Langacker hypothesizes that the three morphological classes of Cupeño, as reported by Hill (1969), are based on the absolute/non-absolute distinction: verbs with the suffix -ine are volitional and active, while those marked with -yaxe tend to have the opposite properties. As opposed to these polar suffixes, verbs with zero marking are energy-neutral: most verbs for states of mind ('be angry'), natural bodily processes ('see'), behavior of plants, animals, inanimate objects and the weather ('bloom', 'rain'). What is crucial is how an event is viewed subjectively. In Cupeño, zero forms refer predominantly to processes that run according to the normal course of events, as they are conceived either in the physical domain or in the cultural sphere. "A process counts as energetic only when it rises above this baseline" (Langacker 1987b:8).

The opposition between absolute non-reflexive and energetic reflexive constructions is quite productive in Spanish. I will try to show the ways in which the absolute/energetic opposition is manifested in several kinds of intransitive verbs.

(11)a. La pelota rodó por las escaleras
   'The ball rolled down the stairs'

b. Juan rodó por las escaleras como se lo habían pedido en la filmación de la película
   'Juan rolled down the stairs as they had asked him to do in the shooting of the film'

c. J. perdió el conocimiento y (*se) rodó por las escaleras
   'J. became unconscious and rolled down the stairs'

d. J. se (*Ø) rodó por las escaleras cuando se tropezó con Ana
   'J. rolled down the stairs when he tripped over A.'

Examples (11a and b) constitute clear cases of absolute construals. They are parallel to (2) and (7) respectively. Since no opposition of forces is profiled the reflexive form cannot occur. In (11c) Juan has lost his capacity to resist gravity before the act of falling takes place, in such a way that the event is construed as absolute following the pattern of (11a). Only the energetic construal in (11d) requires a reflexive construction. It parallels example (8). Juan's stumbling over Ana cancels his resisting capacity and gravity becomes a stronger force that induces an unexpected change. The schemata proposed for *caer/caerse* also represent the composition of *rodar/rodarse*.

As might be expected, physical forces need not participate in an energetic construal. Desires and expectations constitute abstract forces that turn absolute construals into energetic ones. There is a gradation, of course: there are verbs in which the overwhelmed force is simultaneously a physical force and a mental expectation. This is shown in the following sentences:
(12)a. León sonrió al ver jugar a su hija
   'Leon smiled when he saw his daughter play'
b. Tachita se sonrió al ver que Juan la miraba
   'T. smiled when she noticed that J. was looking at her'

We are concerned now with self-energetic participants. In these cases reactions to external impressions constitute the internal energy that flows in the event, as it is manifested corporally. The contrast between (a) and (b) should be clear. In (12a) the action is perceived as a natural event. It is only seen as an instance of the capacities normally attributed to any human subject: the participant uses his own resources to smile. Even though energy is involved, the action counts as non-energetic or absolute because it is seen as natural and expected.

The explanation given for (12a) doesn't hold for (12b), in which Tachita's eye contact with Juan makes her lose control of her expression and her smiling comes as an unexpected change. Different intentions (shyness and amazement, etc.) may act as antagonistic forces, which the subject participant is unsuccessful at holding back. This emotional behavior comes from a balance-of-forces situation. In the reflexive form the person is expected to hold back any emotional manifestation. This expectation invokes a neutralizing force that prevents a reaction from emerging. When the impulse is stronger than the inhibition the resulting act contravenes the natural course of events and is grammatically encoded in Spanish by the reflexive formation. Needless to say, the schema given in figure 1 also represents the structure of these verbs, provided that the conflict of forces is now abstract.

A construal in which the resisting force that creates the environment for a reflexive formation can only be equated with desires and expectations is of course found in the language. Take, for example, the verb encoger 'to shrink':

(13)a. La lana (*se) encoge 'Wool shrinks'
b. Los pantalones de polyester no (*se) encogen
   'Polyester trousers don't shrink'
(14)a. Aunque estos pantalones son prelavados, se (*0)
   encogieron
   'Even though these trousers are prewashed, they
   shrunk (unexpectedly)'
b. La etiqueta lo advirtió, pero yo no hice caso y el
   sweater se (*0) encogió
   'The label warned me, but I ignored it and the
   sweater shrank'
c. El sweater se (*0) me encogió 'The sweater shrank on me'

Common to the set of absolute examples is the fact that they describe the tendencies of different materials to undergo a change in different situations. The view of the facts is done in an absolute fashion, as no particular expectation is imposed by the speaker on the elements involved in each process. In (13a), wool
is conceived of as a kind of material that tends to shrink. (13b) shows that the process of shrinking normally doesn’t take place with certain kinds of material. The scene is construed objectively, i.e. excluding the speaker’s subjectivity from the scope of predication. Notice that these examples are in present tense, the canonical linguistic strategy used to describe “ever true situations” of the type dos más dos son cuatro, ’two plus two equals 4’. One can predict that when the event is construed perfectly it will be tied in to a specific set of circumstances which will allow for the speaker’s expectations to play a determinant role in the use of se. If clothes shrink as a consequence of a particular set of circumstances the reflexive form can be used. This is in fact what happens in (14). Notice that the level of participation of the speaker increases gradually from (14a), in which there is a particular event reported by the speaker as unexpected; to (14b), in which the subject’s carelessness causes the change of state; to (14c), where the affectedness of the speaker is explicitly encoded by means of the ethical dative me.

It shouldn’t be surprising to find that the antonym of enconger, namely ceder, ‘to give’ and its reflexive counterpart estirarse, ‘to stretch’; would be construed in exactly the same manner:

(15)a. El algodón/la lana cede ‘Cotton/wool gives’
   b. El sweater de lana/de algodón se cedió/se estiró
      ‘The cotton/wool sweater got all stretched out’

The following is a more transparent example of the same kind of construal:

(16)a. Esa pluma (*se) corre suavemente sobre el papel
      ‘The pen runs smoothly on the paper’
   b. Por usar la vieja pluma fuente, la tinta se (*Ø)
      corrió sobre el papel y ahora no hay manera de borrarla
      ‘Because of using the old fountain pen, the ink ran
       over the paper and now there is no way to erase it’

It should be clear that in (16a) the pen does not present any resistance to being manipulated over the paper. The construal is absolute. In (16b) the ink produces an undesired stain on the paper. The resisting force here is the desire for the event not to happen. When such a desire is contradicted the event runs counter to expectations and the energetic reflexive formation is employed.

We are now in a position to explain what in traditional grammar has been considered an anomalous case of reflexive constructions. The examples always given for the so-called ‘reflexiva anómala’ (Yoshida 1986) are the following:

(17) El tejado se (*Ø) llivió
      ‘The ceiling leaked because of the rain’
Traditional grammars have been unable to explain this kind of sentences since their basic hypothesis is to see them as a departure from a subject/object-identification reflexive sentence. In (17) it is clear that the ceiling offers resistance up to the point where the energy exerted by the weight of the water overwhelms this resistance. Besides this physical explanation, an abstract balance-of-forces situation is present: ceilings are canonically expected to protect the space they cover from the falling of any object, and the dripping of water runs counter to normal expectations. The same explanation holds for example (18). The bathtub's change of location can only be interpreted as accidental, as the nature of the initiative force causing the process remains unspecified. Common to these examples is the fact that the overwhelmed agonistic force is an expectation imposed on an inanimate participant not capable of undergoing a change based on its own resources. It shouldn't be surprising to find that traditional grammars show an obvious confusion in the characterization of this kind of construal. Notice that whereas lloverse and salirse are considered deviations from reflexive constructions, the following examples are considered as departures from passives; the so-called "pseudo-passives":

(19) Se (*Ø) torció el árbol 'The tree got twisted'  
(20) Se (*Ø) secó el árbol 'The tree dried out'

From our perspective, such division is inadequate. Suffice it to say that they are also construed in an energetic fashion: the agonistic force is always a natural expectation and the antagonistic force is in general terms highly schematic. The following schema represents the internal composition of this set of verbs:

Figure 2 (cf. page 18)

The wavy line inside the circle represents the change undergone by the participant. The unspecified stronger force is the left-to-right angle with the sign '+', and the expectation being contravened is the right-to-left angle.

If this interpretation is correct, we may be in a position to explain the contrast between the next couple of sentences:

(21)a. El papá de Juan murió 'Juan's father died'  
b. El papá de Juan se murió 'Juan's father died'

García has analyzed sentence (b) as a case in which the subject is doubly mentioned by the verb ending and by the clitic se. The effect of double mention is that the only participant ever involved in the event absorbs all the available 'functions' (logical 'subject' and logical 'object') and excludes the
possibility of having an 'exterior' agent. A kidnapper asking for ransom might threaten a father as follows:

(22) Me das $1,000 o tu hijo muere
    'Give me $1,000 or your son will die'

Se "implies that the dying is the exclusive affair of the son" (1975:8). Even though García’s analysis is highly suggestive, it proves inadequate not only for morirse but also for the set of energetic constructions given previously. Inanimate elements cannot act on their own accord to produce a change perversely. They do not qualify as being simultaneously logical agents and patients. Therefore the event must be induced by external forces. Instead of claiming that se rules out all external forces, I claim that it allows such forces to act but at the same time it blocks the possibility of making a specific participant responsible for their action. This analysis can account for the ironic interpretation of examples like the following:

(23) Me das $1,000 o tu hijo se muere en mis manos
    'Give me $1,000 or your son will die in my hands'

Some initiative force drives the event in such a way that it overwhelms a resisting expectation. However, the stronger initiative force cannot be identified with a specific participant; it can only be represented in highly schematic terms. We know that somebody (the speaker in this case) drives the event as the oblique phrase suggests, and yet the use of se portrays the identity of the participant as being unknown. These concepts allow us to characterize the absolute/energetic contrast. In the absolute morir, the act of dying is seen objectively as a change of state in which no particular subjective expectations are included:

(24) Don Nico murió suavemente, se quedó dormido y ya no despertó
    'D. N. died smoothly, he fell asleep and he didn’t wake up'

(25) Cuando don Nico murió, su hijo ya tenía treinta años
    'When D. N. died, his son was already thirty years old'

It is well acknowledged in the literature that morirse implies a high level of accidentality, i.e. the speaker’s expectations play an important role in the construal, as they constitute the agonistic forces overwhelmed by the undesirable happening:

(26)a. Don Nico se murió sin que su hijo pudiera hablar con él
    ‘Don Nico died without his son being able to talk to him’

b. A Juan se (*0) le murió su papá
    ‘To John died his father’ = ‘John’s father died on him’

Similar to correrse la tinta, what constitutes the energetic
situation in (26) is the fact that death comes when some other participant didn’t expect it to happen. Implicit in the meaning of (26a) is the wanting of su hijo to talk to don Keño; it is also explicit because of the dative marker le that Juan is affected by his father’s death in (26b).

The absolute/energetic contrast also allows us to explain the difference between aparecer and aparecerse.

(27) Juan (*se) apareció en televisión por primera vez ayer
   'J. was on television for the first time yesterday'

(28) En el parto, la cabeza del bebé fue lo primero que (*se)
    apareció
   'In the childbirth the head of the baby was the first thing that appeared'

(29) Juan se (*ö) apareció en la fiesta sin invitación
   'J. showed up at the party without invitation'

(30) El vampiro se (*ö) apareció en su cuarto en la noche
   'The vampire showed up in her room in the night'

In all these examples an element that was not there before appears in the scope of predication. It should be clear that the only difference is that in the reflexive construction the presence of the participant in the setting is not expected.

This analysis is not restricted to intransitive verbs. It can also account for reflexive constructions with transitive counterparts. Following the Billiard-ball model, by which some energetic entity may induce movement of other elements in space mainly through physical contact, I assume that in a prototypical finite clause, the subject is an agentive energy source who transmits energy through an action chain to an energy sink which is encoded by the object. Prototypical transitive processes are schematized as follows:

Figure 3 (cf. page 18)

The clitic se is used in Spanish to produce sentences that depart from this basic schema in different ways. In this paper, I will limit myself to discussing the most productive pattern in Spanish:

(31)a. El ratero ahogó al anciano
   'The thief drowned the old man'

b. El anciano se (*ö) ahogó 'The old man drowned'

The transitive sentence is construed following the prototypical pattern of an action chain in agreement with a Force Dynamics situation: in the initial state of affairs the object resists the influence of gravity to keep afloat. Then the subject ratero imposes enough energy to overwhelm the object’s resisting force and the change of state takes place. In the reflexive construal the initial state of affairs is the same as in ahogar; but now the internal resisting energy of the patient is canceled either by an
internal force, such as fatigue, or by some external unspecified stronger energy. Contrast the following schema with the one proposed for the transitive construal (action chain).

Figure 4 (cf. page 18)

Based on these diagrams we may identify three basic ways in which the reflexive se construal departs from the prototypical action chain schema: 1) whereas the causer of the action is the agent in the transitive sentence, in the reflexive ahogarse the causer is not specified; 2) in the reflexive use, a Force Dynamics situation in which the resisting force is either canceled or overwhelmed by some unspecified force is present; 3) even though anciano is a patient, a participant downstream in the energy flow, he is encoded as the subject, instead of the object of the sentence.

This is a highly productive construal in Spanish; verbs like desinflarse 'deflate', descomponerse 'put out of order', desgastarse 'wear out', romperse 'break', doblerse 'bend down', are prototypical cases.

(32)a. Juan rompió la taza 'Juan broke the glass'
    b. La taza se (*Ø) rompió 'The glass broke'.

The integrity of the cup is maintained based on some internal energy. When this energy is overwhelmed by a stronger unspecified force, the reflexive form is used.

There are verbs that allow either the energy source or the energy sink to be put in profile:

(33)a. Juan estrelló el coche 'J. crashed the car'
    b. Juan se estrelló 'J. crashed'
    c. El coche se estrelló 'The car was crashed'.

Sentence (33c) is construed following the pattern of ahogarse: the patient is profiled as a subject and the initiator of the event is not encoded. (33b) is more interesting, because Juan could meet the requirements to be a volitional agent and patient in subject position. But what se does is to remove volitionality. The lack of volitionality determines the construal of accidental events. The human being is prototypically conceived as being in control of his acts, despite the existence of distractors. It is when an internal or an external unspecified distractor overwhelms the internal energy of the subject that the reflexive formation can take place. The removal of agentivity and the existence of the unspecified initiative force make the event unexpected. The diagram offered for ahogarse also represents the structure of accidental verbs like estrellarse (cortarse 'cut oneself', pegarse 'hit oneself', quemarse 'burn oneself' are prototypical examples of this productive construal).

The complexity of the network of "reflexive" construals in Spanish overwhelms the limitations of this paper. Notice finally
that intransitive absolutes in which no energy is profiled (figure 5) become energetic by adding a schematic force and at the same time transitives (figure 3) become energetic by eliminating the volitional/agentivity characteristic of the action chain construal. With these two strategies polar opposite constructions coincide in the same result: the energetic schema proposed in figure 6.

Figure 1
caer/rodar

Figure 2
caerse/rodarse
sonreirse/encogerse

Figure 4
ahogarse/estrellarse

Figure 5
S/AG O/PAT

Footnotes

1. The Spanish reflexive pronoun system is as follows: me 1st singular, te 2nd singular, nos 1st plural, se elsewhere.

2. The star * is used to indicate a high degree of unnaturalness of the sentence under specific circumstances. It is not used to mark a radical opposition between grammatical and ungrammatical utterances.

3. This is the equivalent form of estirarse 'to stretch' that takes place in the construal with animate participants: Juan se estiró al bostezar 'J. stretched while yawning' Notice that Juan is
able to undergo a change by means of his own resources. The notion of unexpected change is obviously not at play here. This is the case of a different construal in which internal energy of self-energetic elements induces change. The most representative examples of this construal are verbs like pararse ‘stand up’ and sentarse ‘sit down’.

4. In fact this kind of "reflexive" is a two-step departure from real reflexives. The first step is the removal of volitional-agentivity in what has been called pseudo-reflexive constructions of the type Juan se enoja ‘J. gets mad’. The second step is the removal of animacy. Since the subject of this construction type is not able to induce any kind of change and yet the affectedness of the subject participant is present as in normal reflexives, the best solution has been to recognize its anomaly in different ways: attenuated reflexive (Gili Gaya 1972 Sec.58; Real Academia Española 1978 Sec.764); the extreme weakening case of the reflexive sense (Seco 1972:200; Bello y Cuervo 1960 Sec.764).

References


