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# Arbitrary SE and accusative clitics in Catalan: Resolving (mis)matches in the syntax

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## Abstract

This paper is dedicated to co-occurrence restrictions induced by accusative clitics in contexts containing the SE marker with arbitrary interpretations. A less discussed pattern from Catalan is scrutinized in detail, through a comparison with Spanish data, which are better studied. Catalan is special in that accusative clitics do not uniformly produce ungrammaticality under arbitrary SE: the neuter *ho* clitic is not acceptable, while the *l*-clitic, restricted to individuation and/or animacy, is possible. We show that these splits are rooted in the syntax. Individuation and animate accusative clitics contain additional PERSON features which, due to their more extensive possibilities to get licensed, can avoid structural restrictions imposed by the presence of an impersonal/arbitrary structural component in the clausal configuration.

**Keywords:** Catalan, arbitrary SE, animacy, clitics, accusative, dative, Spanish.

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## 2. Arbitrary SE and accusative clitics: an uneasy relationship

The clitic-like element SE is present across Romance languages, where it covers a multiplicity of functions, ranging from the encoding of reflexivity to anti-causativity or the construction of middles (see especially Armstrong and MacDonald's (eds.) 2021 volume for comprehensive taxonomies). Among these, a prominent role is reserved to the impersonal or passive realization, under which an agent cannot be expressed overtly. The presence of SE indicates that the eventuality has an implicit, underspecified initiator. In many Western Romance languages, the overt DP (the entity which is affected by the action of the understood agent) can be used unmarked or marked. As such, example (2)a from Catalan conveys that some unspecified entity read the books, or that the books have been read by some unknown agent; similarly, the interpretation of (2)b, where the object is differentially marked, is that the authorities have always been greeted or somebody always greeted the authorities.

(2) a. Catalan - arbitrary SE with unmarked arguments and agreement

Es llegeixen llibres  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub> read.3PL book.PL  
 'Books are read'

b. Catalan - arbitrary SE with differentially marked objects

Sempre s'=ha/\*han saludat a les  
 always SE<sub>ARB</sub>=AUX.3SG/3PL greeted DOM the  
 autoritats  
 authority.PL  
 'The authorities have always been greeted'

Even if both examples presuppose an implicit agent, some morphosyntactic differences are relevant for our discussion here. First, we know that the overt argument in example (2)b is a direct object, and not a subject; the differential marker, generally seen with certain types of animates in the language, is only possible with direct objects, being always ungrammatical on subjects.<sup>2</sup> Second, when the overt argument is a marked direct object, as in (2)b, verbal agreement can only take the default third singular form. Unmarked arguments as in (2)a, on the other hand, normally trigger agreement.

A similar picture is seen in peninsular Spanish. The arbitrary interpretation of the arbitrary SE clitic is possible not only when the overt argument is unmarked,

<sup>2</sup> In the example below, the differential marker is added to the subject of the intransitive predicate *vingué*. The sentence results in ungrammaticality.

(i) \*A Maria vingué ahir  
 DOM Mary come.PST.3SG yesterday  
 Intended: 'Mary came yesterday' (Catalan)

normally inducing agreement as in (3)a,<sup>3</sup> but also with the differentially marked direct object in (3)b. Similarly to Catalan, the latter does not permit full agreement.<sup>4</sup>

- (3) a. Peninsular Spanish – arbitrary SE with unmarked arguments and agreement  
 Aquí se emiten/?emite los certificados  
 here SE<sub>ARB</sub> issue.3PL/3SG the certificate.M.PL  
 ‘The certificates are issued here’
- b. Peninsular Spanish – arbitrary SE with differentially marked objects  
 Se vio/\*vieron a los sospechosos  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub> see.PST.3SG/3PL DOM the suspect.M.PL  
 ‘The suspects were seen’ / ‘Somebody saw the suspects’

The precise interpretation of the SE clitic is another aspect unifying Catalan and Spanish (and other Romance languages). As mentioned above, and as discussed at length in the literature, the examples we have been examining permit readings that are similar to the passive and impersonal ones, given that the agent must be left implicit. An important line of research (see especially Belletti 1982, Burzio 1986, Manzini 1986, Cinque 1988, Cornilescu 1998, Dobrovie-Sorin 1998, 2021, Mendikoetxea 2008, Mendikoetxea and Battye 1990, Martins and Nunes 2016, MacDonald 2017, Fábregas 2021, among many others) has, in fact, supported the conclusion that there are two types of non-personal SE: i) the passive one, broadly signaled by the absence of differential marking and overt agreement as in (2)a or (3)a (the overt argument being assumed to be a subject which must trigger agreement), and ii) the impersonal one, as in (2)b or (3)b. In this latter realization, when the overt argument is differentially marked, it is unambiguously a direct object; under the old (but not unproblematic) assumption that (in-situ) direct objects generally do not trigger agreement in Romance, the expectation is that the marked objects in (2)b/(3)b should be possible only with default, third person verbal inflection.

More recent investigation has, however, shown that the division SE passive vs SE impersonal might be illusory, lacking deep (morpho-)syntactic correlates (for important discussion, see especially Ormazabal and Romero 2023, or Irimia et al. 2024). We follow this second line here and collapse passive and impersonal SE<sup>5</sup> under

<sup>3</sup> Various works also address the possibility of default singular agreement with unmarked arguments in these structures. We leave this alternation aside, as it is not immediately relevant to our discussion, but see Mendikoetxea and Battye (1990) for details.

<sup>4</sup> Overt agreement might be possible with marked objects and arbitrary SE in several varieties of Spanish, especially in Latin America. See, for example, the discussion by Ordóñez and Treviño (2011, 2016) which we will illustrate in the next section, or the remarks in Martín Zorraquino (1979), Fábregas (2021:151), Ormazabal and Romero (2023), a.o. Although we present some points related to variation in agreement, we do not address this aspect in detail. A comprehensive analysis of the possible agreement patterns goes beyond the data at hand and our more restricted goal, which is that of mapping interactions between accusative clitics and SE<sub>ARB</sub> in Catalan. In this language overt agreement with differentially marked objects is not possible under SE<sub>ARB</sub>, and the same restriction extends to plural accusative clitics (*l*-form).

<sup>5</sup> To be completely accurate, in fact, some of the interpretations rendered available by agent-less SE might be more similar to middles. We mention some aspects related to middles later in the paper.

the class of arbitrary SE, whose flagging characteristic is the obligatory removal of the overt agent (external argument). As the implicit agent can only be specified as third person,<sup>6</sup> the pronominal clitic cannot show its canonical person inflection, being set instead to the fixed SE form, corresponding to third person (and its phonetic variants). For this reason, this type of SE is also known as non-paradigmatic SE.

## 2.1. Arbitrary SE and accusative clitics

What we would like to explore in more detail is, instead, the way in which arbitrary SE interacts with accusative clitics. An important puzzle has been observed in this domain: although (in Western Romance) differentially marked direct objects are possible and natural under arbitrary SE (as evidenced by the examples above), when the direct object is replaced by its corresponding accusative clitic, the structure becomes ungrammatical, as we see in (4) and (5) from peninsular Spanish. The contrast exhibited by the sentences in (5) proves that both plural and singular accusative clitics get affected. Also, as ungrammaticality persists even with default third person agreement, all these contexts point to a deep incompatibility between accusative clitics and arbitrary SE.

- (4) Peninsular Spanish – accusative clitics ungrammatical with arbitrary SE  
 \*Se **los** vio/vieron  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub> CL.ACC.M.3PL see.PST.3SG/PL  
 Intended: ‘They were seen / Somebody saw them’ (e.g., the suspects)
- (5) a. Peninsular Spanish – differentially marked object (sg.) with arbitrary SE  
 Se vio **al** sospechoso  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub> see.PST.3SG DOM=the suspect.M.SG  
 ‘Somebody saw the suspect.’
- b. Peninsular Spanish – accusative clitic (sg.) ungrammatical with arbitrary SE  
 \*Se **lo** vio  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub> CL.ACC.M.3SG see.PST.3SG  
 Intended: ‘He/It was seen’

Understanding the precise root of this restriction is still a challenge in descriptive-typological and more theoretically oriented studies. An exhaustive explanation is not easy to come about because of a multiplicity of factors. On the one hand, there are varieties of Spanish where accusative clitics might be possible with arbitrary SE, at least for some cells in the clitic paradigm (plural and/or feminine forms being more easily accepted), if not for the full paradigm (as in Argentine Spanish). We will see some of these contexts in Section 5. On the other hand, there is also the problem of the wider Romance picture, much less addressed and understood (but see Pescarini 2019 for recent discussion). Once we go outside Spanish, one can easily find

<sup>6</sup> In many Romance languages overt verbal inflection for the first or second person is, indeed, ungrammatical with arbitrary SE (see D’Alessandro 2003 for detailed discussion). We leave aside here contexts in which the understood agent can include reference to 1<sup>st</sup> person plural, despite the presence of morphologically invariable SE, as in Italian (see D’Alessandro 2007). Catalan (similarly to Spanish) does not allow this possibility (Ordóñez 2021).



- (8) Mexican Spanish (Ordóñez and Treviño 2016: ex.7,8; glosses adapted)
- a. Se            rescató                            a            los                            alpinistas  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub>        rescue.PST.3SG            DOM        the            mountaineer.M.PL  
 ‘The mountaineers were rescued’
- b. Se            rescataron                            a            los            alpinistas  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub>        rescue.PST.3PL            DOM        the            mountaineer.M.PL  
 ‘The mountaineers were rescued’

In MS, just like in peninsular Spanish, DOM interacts with accusative clitics. Under dislocation to the left periphery, the differential object must be resumed by a clitic that uses accusative morphology in active contexts without SE<sub>ARB</sub>. A dative resumptive clitic is not grammatical in this context.

- (9) Mexican Spanish DOM under dislocation in active constructions without SE, Ordóñez & Treviño (2016: ex. 12, adapted)
- a. A            Juan, *lo*                            vieron            contento  
 DOM        Juan    CL.ACC.3M.SG    see.PST.3PL    happy.M.SG  
 ‘Juan, they saw him happy’
- b. \*A            Juan, *le*                            vieron            contento  
 DOM        Juan    CL.DAT.3SG    see.PST.3PL    happy.M.SG  
 Intended: ‘Juan, they saw him happy’

Dislocation of DOM in SE<sub>ARB</sub> contexts, on the other hand, follows different rules when it comes to the interaction with resumptive clitics. Importantly, the accusative form is not possible in this configuration; the only acceptable option is a direct object clitic with dative morphology. Additionally, if the differentially marked object is plural, verbal morphology cannot show agreement. Only the singular, default form of the verb is grammatical; thus, the important contrast between (10)b and (8)b.

- (10) Mexican Spanish DOM under dislocation in active constructions without SE, Ordóñez & Treviño (2016: ex. 13, adapted)
- a. A            Juan, *se*            ✓*le*/\**lo*                            vio  
 DOM        Juan    SE<sub>ARB</sub>    CL.DAT.3SG/CL.ACC.3SG.M    see.PST.3SG  
 contento  
 happy.M.SG  
 Intended: ‘Juan, they saw him happy’
- b. A            estos terrenos,            *se*            ✓*les*/\**los*  
 DOM        these lots                            SE<sub>ARB</sub>    CL.DAT.3PL<sub>DOM</sub>/CL.ACC.3M.PL  
 vendió/\*vendieron            a            un            buen            precio  
 sell.PST.3SG/sell.PST.3PL    at            a            good            price  
 ‘These lots, somebody sold them at a good price’<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In MS, dislocated objects normally take differential marking, regardless of animacy.



Another prediction is that clitics that are not structurally accusative should, in principle, be permitted with  $SE_{ARB}$ . This is borne out with indirect object dative clitics, as seen below (Spanish varieties do not normally have any other types of clitics).

- (13) Spanish – indirect object dative clitics possible with  $SE_{ARB}$   
 Se        **le/les**                responde  
 $SE_{ARB}$     DAT.3SG/PL    reply.3SG  
 ‘He is/They are being replied to’

If Burzio’s Generalization could derive the impossibility of accusative clitics with  $SE_{ARB}$ , some other theoretical mechanism will obviously be needed in order to explain the presence of differentially marked objects when they are not realized as clitics, as in (2)b, (3)b and (5)a. The challenge is that, despite their surface dative morphology these internal objects behave like structural accusatives (López 2012, Ormazabal and Romero 2013, Irimia 2023, a.o.). Ordóñez and Treviño (2016) postulate that the special features in differentially marked objects must be licensed in an exceptional manner, by a dedicated AGR projection. This projection is deployed whenever animacy is present in the  $vP$ ; inanimate objects, in turn, are licensed by T.

Continuing with the further details of Ordóñez and Treviño’s (2016) account, the pronominal element *SE* is merged in  $v/Voice$ ; additionally, an indefinite subject *pro* appears in Voice P and is bound by an arbitrary impersonal pronoun, which corresponds to the subject theta-role. This restricts T to 3<sup>rd</sup> person, but the number feature is unaffected. As the exceptional AGR licenses DOM, the prediction would be that T could never agree with DOM, as DOM is found in the domain of a lower licenser. Agreement between T and DOM would lead to a minimality violation. This derives the standard Spanish data, but leaves patterns such as those in (8)b) unexplained, as here we see DOM with agreement under non-paradigmatic *SE*. Their basic structure would be as in (14). How is agreement to be derived?

- (14) Spanish, Ordóñez & Treviño (2016: ex. 45)  
 [se rescataron [ $vP$   $v$  [a los alpinistas]<sub>*i*</sub> [AGR<sub>DOM</sub> [ $t_i$  VP]]]]

In order to account for alternation in agreement, Ordóñez & Treviño (2016) take the dislocation configurations as a starting point. The crucial observation is that agreement is *not* possible under dislocation; thus, an important split between non-paradigmatic *SE* with DOM under dislocation and non-paradigmatic *SE* with DOM in non-dislocated structures. As we have seen above in (10)b), dislocated structures can be made grammatical only if the differentially marked, superficially dative form of the resumptive clitic is present, and agreement disappears.

Ordóñez & Treviño (2016: 20) propose the generalization in (15). More specifically, what is blocking the probing of DOM by T is the clitic itself. In turn, for Ordóñez & Treviño (2016: 20), the presence of the clitic is an indication that DOM has moved to Spec of AGR. The latter contains an optional EPP feature triggering the movement of DOM and creating a configuration of clitic doubling as a result. Subsequently, the clitic is split from DOM and moves to T, as in (16). Another assumption made by the two authors is that AGR<sub>DOM</sub> is strong; it creates a phase, blocking agreement between T and DOM. To cite Ordóñez & Treviño (2016: p. 22): ‘in other words, a  $v$  dominated by *se* in which clitic doubling occurs is a phase, while

a vP in which the EPP feature for AGR does not attract the clitic is not, and thus allows probing of Tense.’ The more precise structure is in (17) (ex. 47 from Ordóñez & Treviño 2016).

- (15) **Generalization 2.** Whenever clitic doubling is realized, tense cannot probe DOM.
- (16) [se CL<sub>i</sub> rescató [vP v [a los alpinistas]<sub>i</sub> [CL<sub>i</sub>+AGR<sub>DOM</sub> [t VP]]]]
- (17) \*se rescataron [CL]<sub>i</sub>+Y T[plural] [v phase a los alpinistas vP [t<sub>i</sub> +Agr<sub>DOM</sub> [ t<sub>i</sub> VP ] ]

This analysis implies that there must be a clitic (al least covertly) in all instances in which default agreement occurs. And, to capture the MS configurations in which agreement is possible in non-paradigmatic SE, it must be the case that AGR is not always *strong* and it might not uniformly contain an EPP feature. Consequently, as DOM does not need to raise, no clitic configuration obtains, T can probe into vP, and agree with DOM, as in (18) (example 50 from Ordóñez & Treviño 2016).<sup>8</sup>

- (18) se rescataron T<sub>plural</sub> Y [vP t v [AGR [-EPP] [DOM<sub>A</sub> los alpinistas] VP ] ]]]

### 3.1. (Accusative) clitics and SE<sub>ARB</sub>: the view from Catalan

The question is whether the analysis which derives the ungrammaticality of accusative clitics with the SE<sub>ARB</sub> from the latter’s inability to license structural accusative Case can be extended to other Romance languages. The Catalan facts are particularly problematic given that the accusative clitics do not have a uniform behavior in this configuration. As we have seen, the examples we repeat below in (19) indicate that: i) the *l*-accusative clitic is possible; ii) the neuter *ho* accusative clitic, which cannot have an animate referent, is not possible.

<sup>8</sup> Note, however, that connecting ungrammaticality to the presence of the doubling clitic is not without problems even across the Spanish domain. As an anonymous reviewer correctly points out, in Puerto Plata Spanish, differentially marked objects are possible under dislocation in contexts with arbitrary SE even if the accusative resumptive clitic is present.

- (i) A las huelgas de hambre se **las** llama huelgas indefinidas  
 DOM the strikes of hunger SE<sub>ARB</sub> CL.ACC.F.PL call.3SG strikes open-ended  
 ‘Hunger strikes are referred to as open-ended strikes’

These data indicate, similarly to what we see with Catalan *l*-forms, that accusative clitics do not have a uniform nature across Romance languages. Saab (2022) shows that Argentinian Spanish accusative clitics stand for at least three types of structural representations. Among these, one (the resumptive clitic in dislocations) corresponds to a pure syntactic index, triggering Agree + A-movement. At LF, the index is read off as a mere stranded  $\lambda$ -abstractor triggering predicate abstraction. The abstracted predicate is, then, semantically saturated by the doubled object. Given that this element might not correspond to a D feature, no clash would be expected in the context of arbitrary SE. A reasoning along these lines would imply that doubling clitics in Mexican Spanish always contain a D feature. In any case, Rioplatense Spanish, just like Catalan, points to the crucial variation in the internal composition of accusative clitics which renders available complex interactions with SE<sub>ARB</sub>.



c. Partitive clitic with SE<sub>ARB</sub>

Se'n veuen (de cotxes blancs)

SE<sub>ARB</sub>=CL.PART see.3PL (of cars white)

Lit. 'Of them, they are seen (of the white cars)' /

'One sees of them (white cars)'

Additionally, the accusative *l*-clitic, which is possible with SE<sub>ARB</sub>, does not allow overt agreement on the predicate. As such, even if the accusative clitic takes the plural (masculine or feminine) form in (21), plural agreement is not possible. Accusative clitics are thus similar to differentially marked objects which block agreement in a similar way.

(21) a. Calan accusative clitics, SE<sub>ARB</sub> and default agreement (masculine)

Se'=ls veu/\*veuen

SE<sub>ARB</sub>=CL.ACC.3PL.M see.3SG/see.3PLb. Calan accusative clitics, SE<sub>ARB</sub> and default agreement (feminine)

Se les veu/\*veuen

SE<sub>ARB</sub> CL.ACC.3PL.F see.3SG/see.3PL

These facts are not compatible with Ordóñez & Treviño's (2016) analysis in the previous subsection. Accusative case should not be possible in non-active constructions, and thus the *l*-clitic should be banned just like the *ho* clitic. One could appeal to the hypothesis that differentially marked objects (the ones that take the superficial dative morphology in Spanish and Catalan) indeed involve an exceptional licensing mechanism, which overrides unavailability of structural accusative Case. This hypothesis could further be extended to the *l*-accusative clitic, under the assumption that it too presupposes an exceptional licensing strategy and is thus a subtype of differential object marking in the clitic domain.

There are, however, various problems with proceeding this way. First, simply saying the *l*-accusative clitic is exceptionally licensed might be just a restatement of the facts, with no deep insight into its nature. What is the more precise component in the internal composition of the *l*-clitic that accounts for its exceptionality? Second, given that the *l*-clitic has its Agr source, agreement would be expected, contrary to fact. And third, there are non-trivial problems for differentially marked objects which are not realized as clitics, but as full lexical DPs. If they were to involve an exceptional licensing mechanism, they should be possible in arbitrary constructions as long as overt agreement is not realized. That things are not so simple is demonstrated by various Romance languages, such as Romanian. Similarly to Spanish, accusative clitics are ungrammatical with SE<sub>ARB</sub>; the problem is that full DP differentially marked objects (which take oblique morphology) are also banned (see also Dobrovie Sorin 1998) even if the agreement on the verb is set to default third person singular. Dative clitics, instead, are permitted.

(22) a. Romanian – accusative clitics banned with SE<sub>ARB</sub>

\*Se îl/o/îi/le vede

SE<sub>ARB</sub> CL.ACC.3SG.M/3SG.F/3PL.M/3PL.F see.3SG

Intended: 'He/she is seen/They are seen'

b. Romanian – differentially marked objects banned with SE<sub>ARB</sub>  
 \*Se (îi) înscrie pe studenți  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub> CL./3PL.M register.3SG DOM student.M.PL  
 ‘The students are getting registered’

c. Romanian – datives possible with SE<sub>ARB</sub>  
 I se dau cadouri  
 CL.DAT.3SG SE<sub>ARB</sub> give.3PL gift.PL  
 ‘S/he is given gifts/Gifts are given to her/him’

What these facts seem to indicate instead is that i) the licensing of the structural accusative might be permitted in non-paradigmatic SE configurations under certain conditions, as evinced by Catalan, and ii) differential object marking might not involve an exceptional licensing mechanism (across Romance languages), which could uniformly override the absence of regular licensers in the clause. What we would need to examine thus are accounts which might be able to handle splits in the acceptability of accusative clitics in non-active configurations.

### 3.2. Mendikoetxea and Battye (1990)

Another prominent analysis into the nature of arbitrary contexts with the pronominal element SE comes from Mendikoetxea and Battye (1990). The observations made in this work are particularly relevant for us; the two authors assume that the licensing of structural accusative is possible, but only under certain conditions. Among these a prominent role is played by the position of the (accusative) clitic with respect to arbitrary SE. In some languages, such as Italian, accusative clitics are grammatical but only when they precede arbitrary SE, not when they follow. The relevant contrast is illustrated in (23).

- (23) Italian (accusative) clitics and SE<sub>ARB</sub>
- a. **Lo** si vede  
 CL.ACC.3SG.M SE<sub>ARB</sub> see.3SG  
 ‘He is seen’
- b. \***Si** **lo** vede  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub> CL.ACC.3SG.M see.3SG  
 Intended: ‘He is seen’

The *overt* position of the personal clitic in arbitrary configurations is undoubtedly relevant across Romance languages (for example, Romanian dative clitics as in (22)c are only possible in a pre- SE<sub>ARB</sub> position; see also other examples from Pescarini 2019). However, *overt* position does not seem to play a role in Catalan. The *l*-accusative clitic must be realized only post-SE<sub>ARB</sub> (the opposite as compared to Italian), while the *ho* accusative clitic is not possible regardless of whether it follows or precedes SE<sub>ARB</sub>. In section 5, however, we will provide some remarks about the possibility of a higher *covert* position for those types of accusative clitics which can escape the restrictions introduced by arbitrary/impersonal configurations.



- (26) a. Peninsular Spanish: ungrammatical linearly adjacent  $SE_{ARB}$  and accusative clitics

\*En Navidad, se **lo** suele poder abrazar  
 in Christmas  $SE_{ARB}$  CL.ACC.M.3SG tend.3SG can.INF hug.INF

Intended: ‘At Christmas, one tends to be able to hug him.’ (about Santa Claus)

- b. Peninsular Spanish: grammatical, non-adjacent  $SE_{ARB}$  and accusative clitics

En Navidad, se suele poder(=**lo**)  
 in Christmas  $SE_{ARB}$  tend.3SG can.INF- CL.ACC.M.3SG

abrazar=**lo**

hug.INF=CL.ACC.3SG.M

‘At Christmas, one tends to be able to hug him’

#### 4.1. (Non-) adjacency and its relevance

Why is it that non-adjacency induces an ameliorating effect? As MacDonald and Melgares (2021) correctly point out, impossibility to license accusative case cannot be what produces ungrammaticality in interactions between the accusative clitic and  $SE_{ARB}$ , given that such ungrammaticality can be repaired under non-adjacency. For MacDonald and Melgares (2021), it is instead a feature co-occurrence restriction when a clitic cluster is formed: linear adjacency of [D] heads is banned, and  $CL_{ACC}$  (*lo/los*) and  $SE_{ARB}$  are both specified as [D](efinite). In  $SE_{ARB}$ , T has an inherently valued D, which blocks the linking of the implicit external argument to discourse; this explains why only a non-referential interpretation can obtain. Indirect object  $CL_{DAT}$  is underspecified for D, and the cluster is licit. Additionally, as we have seen, across Spanish varieties there is also the possibility to restore the grammaticality in examples such as (25)a if accusative morphology is replaced by the dative, without a change in grammatical function; what is spelled out as dative on the surface is still an accusative direct object (DO) clitic *syntactically*. For MacDonald and Melgares (2021), the change from *lo* to *le* in (25)a is due to morphological impoverishment: the [D] feature on  $CL_{ACC}$  is deleted at PF, prior to Vocabulary Insertion. As this is a post-syntactic operation, no interpretive/grammatical effects ensue (eg., grammatical function stays unchanged as a DO).

MacDonald and Melgares’ (2021) main supporting argument for the presence of a D feature in accusative clitics comes from doubling contexts, which have been traditionally employed as a probe into the feature composition of the clitic itself (Suñer 1988, Nevins 2007, Ormazabal and Romero 2013, MacDonald and Melgares 2021, a.o.). It has been noticed that the accusative clitic double tends to be restricted to personal pronouns or DPs specified as definites, while being blocked on indefinite categories (for example indefinite DPs using the overt indefinite article, indefinite quantifiers, etc.). Some examples are below, illustrating doubled personal pronouns and a definite DP doubled by the accusative clitic (in Honduras Spanish doubling by accusative clitics is possible beyond personal pronouns). The indefinite negative quantifiers in (27)c.d have a different status in that they cannot be doubled by an accusative clitic.

## (27) Honduras Spanish: accusative clitics in doubling contexts

- a. **Lo** vi a **él**  
 CL.ACC.3SG.ACC see. PST.1SG DOM he  
 ‘I saw him’
- b. **Lo** vi a **el niño**  
 CL.ACC.3SG.ACC see. PST.1SG DOM the child  
 ‘I saw the child’
- c. No (**\*lo**) vi a **ninguno**  
 NEG CL.ACC.3SG.ACC see.PST.1SG DOM no one.M.SG  
 Intended: ‘I saw nobody’
- d. No (**\*lo**) arrestaron a **nadie**  
 NEG CL.ACC.SG.3M arrest.PST.3PL DOM nobody  
 Intended: ‘They did not arrest anybody’

Dative clitics, on the other hand, are not restricted in the same way. Across Spanish varieties they can (or even must) double both definites and indefinites, as the data below show:

## (28) Spanish: dative clitics in doubling contexts

- a. **Le** di un regalo a **el niño**  
 CL.3SG.DAT give. PST.1SG a present to the child  
 ‘I gave a present to the child’
- b. **Le** di un regalo a **un niño**  
 CL.3SG.DAT give. PST.1SG a present to a child  
 ‘I gave a present to a child’
- c. No **le** di un regalo a **ninguno**  
 NEG CL.3SG.DAT give.PST.1SG a present to no one. M.SG  
 ‘I didn’t give a present to anybody’
- d. No **le** di un regalo a **nadie**  
 NEG CL.3SG.DAT give.PST.1SG a present to nobody  
 ‘I didn’t give a present to anybody’

#### 4.2. PF accounts and Catalan

Let’s see now if the PF account presented above can derive the Catalan data. Obviously, adjacency is not an issue in this language. We have seen that the *l*-clitic is grammatical, regardless of whether it is placed in the immediate vicinity of arbitrary SE. In turn, Catalan indicates another problem: once the diagnostics are applied to test the presence of a D feature in the composition of the accusative clitic, the result is positive. For example, the *l*-form of the clitic can act as a double, similarly to what is seen in other Romance languages. However, just like in many Spanish dialects, it is

restricted just to pronouns. When fulfilling a resumptive function, it can also be seen with definites, but it is clearly blocked with indefinites.

(29) Catalan: accusative clitics as doubling and resumptive

- a. **El** veig **a ell**  
 CL.ACC.M.SG see.1SG DOM he  
 ‘I see him’
- b. **El/Aquest** llibre, **el** vaig llegir  
 the /this book CL.ACC.M.SG read.PST.1SG  
 ‘The book, I read’
- c. **Tots els** llibres, **els** vaig llegir  
 all the books CL.ACC.M.PL read.PST.1SG  
 ‘All the book, I read’
- d. \***Un** llibre, **el** vaig llegir.  
 a book CL.ACC.M.SG read.PST.1SG  
 ‘A book, I read it’
- e. \***Cap** llibre, no **el** vaig llegir  
 no book NEG CL.ACC.M.SG read.PST.1SG  
 Intended: ‘Any book, I didn’t read (it)’
- f. \***A** **ningú**, no **el** vaig veure  
 DOM nobody NEG CL.ACC.M.SG see.PST.1SG  
 Intended: ‘Anybody, I didn’t see (him)’

In fact, the *l*-clitic is *fully homophonous* with the definite article (see also Roca 1992, 2009 or Bernstein et al. 2018, 2019, a.o.); we repeat here Table 2 and to its side we attach a table containing the paradigm of the definite article. The clear similarity is evident (a result which is, in fact, not surprising for the Romance languages):

**Table 2.** Catalan accusative clitics – third person

	Singular	Plural
M	<i>el</i>	<i>els</i>
F	<i>la</i>	<i>les</i>

**Table 3.** Catalan definite articles

	Singular	Plural
M	<i>el</i>	<i>els</i>
F	<i>la</i>	<i>les</i>

MacDonald and Melgares (2021) predict that the accusative *l*-clitic should be ungrammatical in the passive-impersonal context. This is, however, contrary to fact. One conclusion for Catalan could thus be that linear adjacency of [D] heads is not relevant when it comes to how accusative clitics and SE<sub>ARB</sub> interact.

Interestingly, if we examine the behavior of the *ho* clitic, we notice that it too might pass some of the diagnostics supporting the possible presence of a D feature. Although the contexts of use of *ho* are much more restricted especially under doubling

and dislocation, this clitic is possible as a double for the universal quantifier *tot* ('all', 'everything'), a category which has been shown to interact with definiteness in important ways. In example (30)b we see that it can also resume the neuter demonstrative pronoun. Indefinites or indefinite quantifiers are not allowed.

(30) Catalan *ho* clitic as resumptive

- a. **Ho** vull tot  
 CL.ACC.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub> want.PRS.1SG all/everything  
 'I want everything/ I want it all'
- b. Això, jo no **ho** he dit mai  
 this.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub> I NEG CL.ACC.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub> have.1SG said never  
 'This (thing), I have never said'
- c. \*Un secret, jo no **ho** he dit mai  
 a secret I NEG CL.ACC.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub> have.1SG said never  
 'A secret, I have never said'
- d. \*Algun secret, jo no **ho** he dit mai  
 some secret I NEG CL.ACC.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub> have.1SG said never  
 'Some secret, I have never said'

Indirect object dative clitics do not have any of these restrictions; they are not only permitted but in fact, in some contexts, even required with definites and indefinites alike, regardless of whether they are full DPs or quantifiers.

(31) Catalan indirect objects and clitic doubling

- a. **Li** dono un regal **al nen**  
 CL.3SG.DAT give.1SG a present to.the child  
 'I give a present to the child'
- b. **Li** dono un regal **a un nen**  
 CL.3SG.DAT give.1SG a present to a child  
 'I give a present to a child'
- c. No **li** dono cap regal **a ningú**  
 NEG CL.3SG.DAT give.1SG any present to nobody  
 'I don't give a present to anybody'

At this juncture we can take stock of what we have discussed up to this point. The puzzle we need to solve refers to accusative clitics and arbitrary SE, which in Catalan exhibit an unusual picture: the two classes can co-occur if the accusative clitic takes the *l*-form but are ungrammatical when the inanimate *ho* clitic is used instead. Extending various accounts that have been proposed for Spanish, where the patterns are more uniform, is not an easy task. Given that the *l*-accusative clitic is possible, the problem cannot be the restriction on accusative case licensing in this type of impersonal (contra O&T 2016). Similarly, the blocking factor cannot simply be a PF one under which sequences of D features are not well formed under adjacency. The *l*-

clitic passes the diagnostics which are canonically used to detect the presence of a D feature in its internal composition. Additionally, the well-formedness of the  $SE_{ARB}$ -CL.ACC clitic clusters is not a matter of position either: ungrammaticality ensues regardless of whether the *ho* clitic precedes or follows the impersonal pronominal.

## 5. Co-occurrence restrictions, labelling and the role of grammaticalized animacy

The explanation we propose builds on several ingredients. First, while we agree with MacDonald & Melgares (2021) in that accusative Case can be licensed in  $SE_{ARB}$  (in the languages under discussion), we differ in that we illustrate cases where ungrammaticality in  $SE_{ARB}$  clitic clusters is not a matter of PF. Subsequently, we investigate a different path: the clash is caused when categories with *mismatching* (values of) features are found on the same (extended) head in the syntax, such as in the cluster  $\{[+D]_{CL_{ACC}} [-D]_{SE_{ARB}}\}$ . We build on Otero (1986, p.91) and subsequent work which formalizes the functional role of  $SE_{ARB}$  as “to ‘absorb’ the plus value of  $[+D]_{(ef)}$  in a finite Infl”, thus blocking linking to the discourse. If a clitic with  $[+D]$  ends up on the same head as  $SE_{ARB}$ , a clash should arise. Of course, this would predict that the cluster  $\{[+D]_{CL_{ACC}} [-D]_{SE_{ARB}}\}$  should never be grammatical; we see however that (Romance) languages have ways to work around this restriction, besides non-adjacency: Catalan  $[CL_{ACC}-SE_{ARB}]$  clusters contrast in grammaticality, although both *el* and *ho* give indication of the presence of  $[+D]$ . The question then becomes: what type of mechanism is responsible for rendering the  $[+D]$  feature opaque in some environments?

In a nutshell, we propose that it is the *label* that counts; even if the category might contain  $[+D]$ , the higher label might ‘protect’  $[+D]$ , thus rendering it unproblematic for  $[-D]$  in  $SE_{ARB}$ . Under this hypothesis, certain types of  $CL_{ACC}$  (animate, individualized, etc.; *el* form or  $le_{DAT=DO.ANIM}$ ) contain additional features above D, and it is these features that provide the label, as in (32)a. This avoids a clash with  $[-D]$  label of  $SE_{ARB}$ . In turn, *ho* (or  $CL_{ACC}$  in the relevant varieties of Spanish) lacks additional labelling structure; being default  $[+D]$  ((32)c), cannot escape the clash. We take advantage of research on: i) whether features related to animacy, individuation, etc. are simply an index on D or head their own (labelling) projection (e.g., K head; López 2012 for differential object marking, a.o.); ii) enriched DP configurations, with a difference between so-called ‘low D’ (above which various projections related to individuation, animacy, referentiality,  $gender_{\gamma}$  etc. can be merged) and ‘high D’ (Bernstein, Ordóñez & Roca 2019, 2020). Higher INDIV/ANIM, and also features related to gender, as in (32)a, act as categories that can ‘protect’ D in cluster formation. This also correctly predicts the existence of dialects where the  $SE_{ARB}$ -CL.ACC restriction holds only with CL.ACC.MASC (default  $[+D]$ ), but not with CL.ACC.FEM ( $*se_{ARB} lo_{CL.ACC.M} ve$  vs  $\checkmark se_{ARB} la_{CL.ACC.F} ve$ ). For lack of space and also because the issue is not immediately relevant for Catalan, we will not be discussing in detail differences in gender, focusing instead on differences in animacy and individuation

- (32) a. Animate  $CL_{ACC}$ :  $[_{ANIM} Anim/Indiv [D D [_{ACC} ACC...]]]$   
 b. Gender  $CL_{ACC}$ :  $[\gamma Gender [D D [_{ACC} ACC...]]]$

c. CL<sub>ACC</sub> (*ho*): [D +D [ACC ACC...]]

Two formal aspects are important, and we will be addressing them in detail: i) Are features related to animacy/individuation an index on D or do they head their own projection (e.g., a K head, as proposed for differential object marking, López 2012, Ormazabal and Romero 2013, a.o.)? ii) What are the precise differences between ‘low D’, above which various projections related to individuation, animacy, gender, referentiality can be introduced, and ‘high D’ (Bernstein, Ordóñez & Roca 2018, 2019)? Our presentation confirms the hypothesis that what is at stake is precisely the internal composition of clitics in the syntax, even if additional structure in Catalan CL<sub>ACC</sub> *el* is not signaled at PF via *dative* morphology, as it happens in leísta Spanish.

## 5.2. Some notes on the salience of animacy in arbitrary constructions

Given that presence/absence of a D feature might not be the property setting aside the *l*-accusative clitic from the *ho*-accusative clitic, we need to ask another obvious question: what exactly in their internal nature distinguishes these two categories such that they produce diverging results in the context of arbitrary SE? In this subsection we will provide some remarks pertaining to the ways in which the two accusative clitics relate to animacy.

Descriptive and prescriptive grammars of Catalan mention that the *ho* clitic cannot have an animate referent (e.g. GIEC 2016: § 13.8.1). For example, the direct object in the sentence in (30)a repeated here in (33)a cannot be animate; the same restriction is seen in (33)b-d.

(33) Catalan *ho* clitic

- |    |                                    |             |                |
|----|------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| a. | <b>Ho</b>                          | vull        | tot            |
|    | CL.ACC.N.SG <sub>INANIM</sub>      | want.1SG    | all/everything |
|    | ‘I want everything/ I want it all’ |             |                |
| b. | <b>*Ho</b>                         | vull        | tothom         |
|    | CL.ACC.N.SG <sub>INANIM</sub>      | want1SG     | everyone       |
|    | ‘I want everyone’                  |             |                |
| c. | <b>Ho</b>                          | vaig veure  | (*el nen)      |
|    | CL.ACC.N.SG <sub>INANIM</sub>      | see.PST.1SG | the child      |
|    | ‘I saw it (*the child)’            |             |                |
| d. | <b>Ho</b>                          | estimo      | (*el nen)      |
|    | CL.ACC.N.SG <sub>INANIM</sub>      | love.1SG    | the child      |
|    | ‘I love it (*the child)’           |             |                |

Additionally, *ho* cannot stand for individualized entities; *ho* in (34)a-b does not track a clearly delimited entity or count noun, such as ‘lie’. On the other hand, *ho* can denote predicates and properties (see especially Espinal and Giusti 2024). In (34)c-d, *ho* resumes the predicate *be teacher*, which encodes a property. As we see, the *ho* clitic can alternate with the partitive *ne* clitic in this context.

- (34) Catalan *ho* clitic (example (34c) from Giusti and Espinal 2024: 24)
- a. Això, jo no **ho** he dit  
 his.N.SG I NEG CL.ACC.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub> have.1SG said  
 mai  
 never  
 ‘This (thing), I have never said’
- b. \*Aquesta mentida, jo no **\*ho/!l’**  
 this.F.SG lie I NEG CL.ACC.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub>/CL.ACC.N.SG  
 he dit mai  
 have.1SG said never  
 ‘This (lie), I have never said’
- c. La Maria és mestra.  
 the Maria be.3SG teacher.F.SG  
**Ho/N’**és des del 1980  
 CL.ACC.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub>/CL.PART since 1980  
 ‘Maria is a teacher since 1980’
- d. (De) divertit, l’ Albert **ho/n’** és  
 DE funny the Albert CL.ACC.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub>/CL.PART is  
 ‘Albert is funny’

Another limitation on *ho* is related to cardinality: plurals are not admissible, regardless of whether they are interpreted as existential or specific.

- (35) Catalan *ho* clitics and plurality
- a. \*Uns llibres, **ho** he comprat  
 some books CL.ACC.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub> have.1SG bought  
 ‘These books, I have bought’
- b. \*Aquests llibres, **ho** he comprat  
 these books CL.ACC.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub> have.1SG bought  
 ‘These books, I have bought’

In turn, the *l*-clitic is not possible as an anaphor on predicates or properties of kinds; the two sentences in (36) are ungrammatical with the *l*-accusative clitic.

- (36) a. Catalan *l*-clitic and predicates  
 La Maria és mestra.  
 the Maria be.3SG teacher.F.SG  
**Ho/N’/\*L’**és des del 1980  
 CL.ACC.N.SG<sub>INANIM</sub>/CL.PART/CL.ACC.F.SG since 1980  
 ‘Maria is a teacher since 1980’
- b. Catalan *l*-clitic and predicates  
 Admiro els lleons. Jo també  
 admire.1SG the lions I also



(Bartra 2002: §16.3.2.3d). As the native speakers indicate and as also confirmed by the grammars, in the sentences below the direct object tracked by the *l*-clitic *cannot be inanimate*.

(39) a. Catalan *l*-clitics and  $SE_{ARB}$ : animacy restriction

Se'l veu pel carrer (aquell futbolista  
 $SE_{ARB}=CL.ACC.3SG.M$  see.3SG on.the street (that football player  
 /#aquell cartell)  
 /that sign)  
 'He is seen on the street, that football player' (# 'It is seen on the street,  
 that sign')

b. Catalan *l*-clitics and  $SE_{ARB}$ : animacy restriction

Se'ls requereix per a la conferència  
 $SE_{ARB}=CL.ACC.3PL.M$  require.3SG for the conference  
 (aquests experts/#aquests requisits)  
 'They are requested for the conference, these experts//#these requirements'

In order to more adequately assess the relevance of animacy we have decided to run a small questionnaire. We tested several  $SE_{ARB}$  constructions containing an accusative clitic, and for each of them we provided our informants with two possible referents for the accusative clitic, an animate one and an inanimate one, as shown in (39) above. Most speakers agreed that the animate referent was the only possibility. In addition, we also tested the same examples adding a manner adverb, thus turning the construction into a middle one, as shown (40), in which case our informants did accept the inanimate referent too, as expected and described in the grammars.

(40) Se'l veu fàcilment pel carrer (aquell  
 $SE_{ARB}=CL.ACC.3SG.M$  sees easily on.the street (that  
 futbolista/aquell cartell)  
 football player/that sign)  
 'He is easily seen on the street, that football player/It is easily seen on the street,  
 that sign'

One of the speakers pointed out that in some restricted cases inanimate referents might be possible (for example, an inanimate referent in (39)a) and had doubts as for the grammaticality of an animate referent in (39)b. Another possibly problematic example provided by this speaker is in (41), which similarly appears to allow an inanimate.<sup>9</sup>

(41) Se'l veu pel carrer (aquell cotxe)  
 $SE_{ARB}=CL.ACC.3SG.M$  sees on.the street (that car)  
 'It is seen on the street, that car'

Be it as it may, what we can point out is that we might not be dealing with an impersonal or arbitrary construction in the cases that allow inanimate referents, but again rather with a middle. Importantly, in order for this structure to be well-formed,

<sup>9</sup> One could argue, however, that there is some personification or metonymic interpretation of a car as an entity that moves.

the presence of manner oriented or generic adverbials is needed for most speakers, a defining trait of middle configurations. The formal literature has pointed out important differences between middle and impersonal constructions (Fagan 1992), but such a discussion goes beyond the limits of this paper, and we need to postpone it for future research. In any case, given that examples with reference to inanimates are not common, we leave them aside.

### 5.3. Animacy, individuation and labeling

Taking stock of what we have obtained up this point, we have confirmed the following properties of arbitrary SE constructions in their interactions with accusative clitics in Catalan:

- i) only the *l*-clitic is possible, not the *ho* clitic
- ii) the *l*-clitic appears to be limited to animates in these contexts
- iii) both the *l*-clitic and the *ho* clitic give evidence of the presence of a D feature
- iv) Otero (1986) supports the hypothesis that the presence of arbitrary SE indicates the absence of a D feature in T (and thus reference is possible only to a non-specific, non-referential, generic implicit agent)

On the basis of these four points, one analysis we could pursue goes along these lines: the ungrammaticality of the  $SE_{ARB}\text{-}HO\text{-}CL.ACC\text{-}INANIM$  clitic cluster is due to these two categories exhibiting contrasting (values of) features, namely obligatory absence of D in  $SE_{ARB}$  (pace Otero 1986) and obligatory presence of D in *ho* clitic. As the accusative Case in the *ho* clitic might be linked to the D head (ie., might be present on the D head), if this feature will be licensed once the clitic raises to T, ungrammaticality will follow. T cannot license a D feature and thus the *ho* clitic cannot be realized. This also accounts for the observation that a clitic containing a D feature might be possible with  $SE_{ARB}$  as long as it does not need to be licensed by T. The clitic might be licensed in the domain of a lower predicate, for example in restructuring contexts. This derives the contrast between contexts with  $SE_{ARB}\text{-}CL.ACC\text{-}D$  adjacency and contexts in which the two clitics are not adjacent, such as the patterns MacDonald and Melgares (2021) discussed for Honduras Spanish (and which extend to other Spanish varieties). We repeat the relevant data here:

- (42) Honduras Spanish, MacDonald and Melgares (2021)
- a. Ungrammatical linearly adjacent  $SE_{ARB}$  and accusative clitics
 

En Navidad,	se	{*lo / √le}	suele
in Christmas	$SE_{ARB}$	CL.ACC.M.3SG / CL.DAT.3SG=DOM	tend.3SG
poder	abrazar		
can.INF	hug.INF		

 Intended: ‘At Christmas, one tends to be able to hug him.’ (about Santa Claus)
  - b.  $SE_{ARB}$  and accusative clitics grammatical if not linearly adjacent
 

En Navidad,	se	suele	poder({√lo / *le})
in Christmas	$SE_{ARB}$	tend.3SG	can.INF=CL.ACC.M.3SG / CL.DAT.3SG=DOM
abrazar=	{√lo / *le}		
hug.INF-CL.ACC.M.3SG / CL.DAT.3SG=DOM			

 ‘At Christmas, one tends to be able to hug him.’

In Catalan, non-adjacency does not remove ungrammaticality in arbitrary SE constructions with *ho*. We take this to indicate that the D feature needs licensing; but it cannot get licensed neither in T neither in the domain of the lower predicate. As for the *l*-clitic, the evidence is undeniable that it contain a D feature (see discussion in Section 3). Why is it that this D feature does not produce a clash given that the T head in arbitrary constructions must be specified as [-D]? We propose that an answer can be provided once we scrutinize in more detail the structure and labeling options in clitics that permit reference to individual entities, which moreover get restricted just to animates.

Crucially, we can follow some insights from another domain, where grammaticalized animacy is relevant, namely differential object marking. As we have seen, in both Spanish and Catalan, certain types of direct objects, crucially including referential animates, need to have a special marker whose morphology is homophonous with that of the dative. In some varieties of Spanish (the *léista* ones) this type of oblique marking also extends to clitics which allow reference to animates, as we have seen above. The formal literature has pointed out that differentially marked objects are active syntactically, in non-trivial ways. For example, a higher position is overt in many languages (Baker 2015). In the same line, López (2012) has pointed out that reflexes of a higher position for DOM can be identified even for Romance languages, where an overt, preverbal placement is not otherwise possible. As López (2012) shows, differentially marked objects, as opposed to unmarked direct objects, can bind into an indirect object that is found in a linearly preceding position. One relevant example is provided in (43). This indicates that marked objects have the possibility to (covertly) raise to a position above the indirect object.

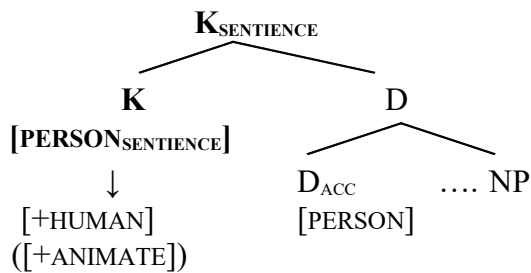
- (43) Spanish DOM and binding into indirect objects, López (2012: 20b,c, p. 41)
- a. \*Juan le entregó a sí mismo un hombre  
 Juan CL.DAT.3SG deliver.PST.3SG DAT REFL.3 same a.M.SG man  
 Intended: ‘Juan delivered a man to himself’
- b. Juan le entregó a sí mismo a  
 Juan CL.DAT.3SG deliver.PST.3SG DAT REFL.3 same DOM  
 un hombre  
 a.M.SG man  
 ‘Juan delivered a man to himself’

Another important conclusion obtained in formal studies is that the special syntactic behavior of marked objects is a result of their featural internal composition, which is different from that of unmarked direct objects. While the latter can be DPs (or NPs for bare direct objects), marked objects might require more complex (sets of) functional projections, for example a KP layer. The K functional head houses an uninterpretable Case feature (López 2012, Ormazabal and Romero 2013, Bárány 2018, a.o.), or a [PERSON] feature which requires licensing, and which is read off as individuation or animacy (Cornilescu 2000, Richards 2007, Irimia 2020, 2021, a.o.). Of course, we will need to say a few words about this animacy-related [PERSON] feature, given that definiteness has similarly been claimed to be encoded in the syntax as a [PERSON] feature (see especially Longobardi’s work) housed in the D head. Why

is it that [PERSON] in D, linked to definiteness, produces a co-occurrence restriction with  $SE_{ARB}$ , while [PERSON] in K, linked to individuation and animacy, can avoid the co-occurrence restriction?

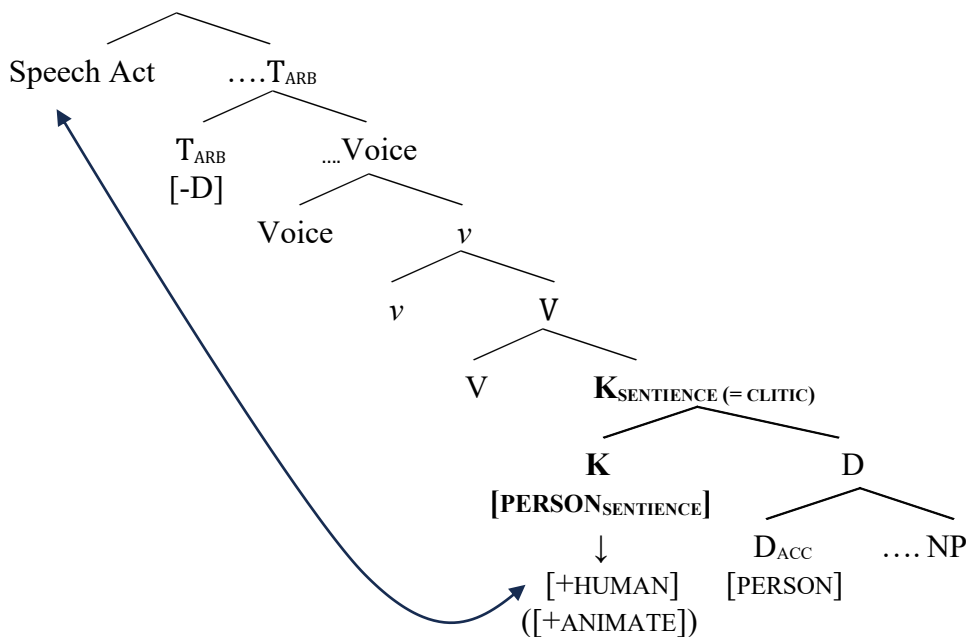
What we would like to propose is that the [PERSON] feature in K (44) can be licensed by a projection related to SENTIENCE or speech act participants (building on Speas and Tenny 2003, d'Alessandro 2003, Bianchi 2003) in the higher CP layer. This restricts its domain to entities with a [+HUMAN] feature, or in some cases also animates, as normally only these categories are adequate as speech act participants.

(44) Accusative clitics with individuation/animacy specification: [PERSON] feature in KP related to SENTIENCE/ANIMACY



As a result of the presence of a higher licenser, accusative clitics with an animacy/individuation specification escape the clash with  $SE_{ARB}$ . When they raise, their landing site is not T and, thus, their [PERSON]<sub>SENTIENCE</sub> feature will not be licensed by T, which lacks a D feature, following Otero (1986). Their access to a distinct (higher) licenser which is specified with SENTIENCE features allows them to avoid the clash with T, as schematically represented in (45).

(45) Licensing of [PERSON]<sub>SENTIENCE</sub>: avoiding clash with T

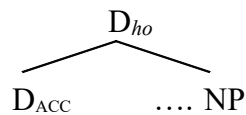


We have seen in (23), from Italian, that accusative clitics are grammatical only when they precede  $SE_{ARB}$ . This confirms the hypothesis of a higher licensing position above T, with the remark that in Italian the relevant functional projection in the CP domain is not restricted only to SENTIENCE, but encodes INDIVIDUATION more generally (As a result, Italian accusative clitics do not need to have an animacy/humanness restriction. They are grammatical as long as they are licensed in a higher position that allows them to escape the clash with [-D] in T).

Additionally, our proposal is in line with experimental results which have convincingly shown that animate clitics have a different behavior from clitics with inanimate reference. Almeida and Ordóñez (2023) and Cyrino and Ordóñez (2018)<sup>10</sup> investigate contexts involving both TP ellipsis and argument ellipsis. They notice that DOM animate antecedents severely limit the availability of sloppy readings in argument ellipsis with clitics. As this effect is not found with TP ellipsis, the two studies derive the special behavior of clitics with an animacy restriction by assuming that differential marked objects must raise above  $vP$ . Subsequently, the pronominal form doubling DOM undergoes vehicle change and becomes a pronoun in configurations with ellipsis.

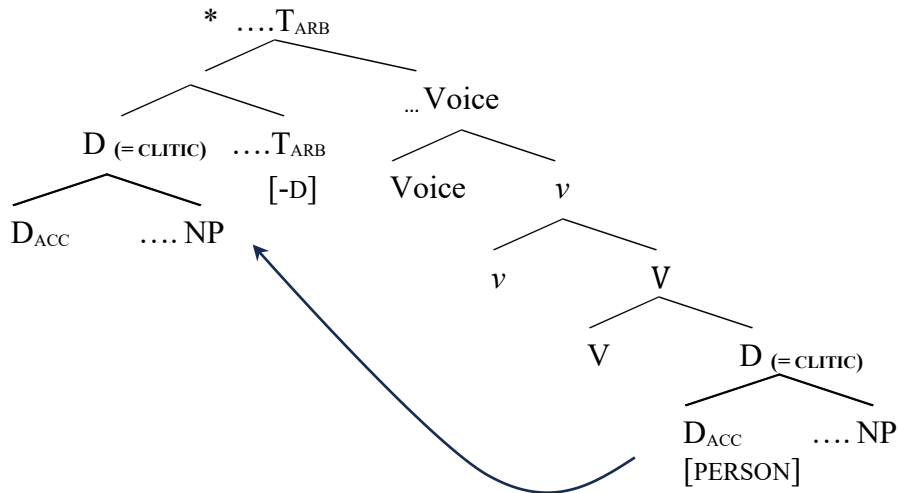
Turning now to the inanimate *ho* clitic, based on the observations presented above, we can postulate a structure such as in (46). Thus, the inanimate, non-individuated accusative clitic contains the projecting [D] head but no additional [PERSON] feature, as the K layer is missing.

- (46) (Types of) Accusative clitics without individuation/animacy specification: [PERSON] feature in D



This predicts that, when the *ho* clitic raises to  $T_{ARB}$ , a clash will arise. The inanimate accusative *ho* and  $T_{ARB}$  have conflicting sets of features, as  $T_{ARB}$  is [-D]. A schematic representation is in (47).

<sup>10</sup> We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out to us the relevance of these works.

(47) Inanimate accusative *ho*: clash with  $T_{ARB}$ 

An important question raised by an anonymous reviewer relates to the composition of the *ho* accusative clitic. More precisely, do we have strong evidence that this clitic indeed contains a D feature? We agree that the data regarding clitic doubling of the universal quantifier in (33)a is not as strong as needed, and also not sufficient. If it turns out that the inanimate *ho* clitic does not specify the D functional layer, the precise way in which we have derived the ungrammaticality with  $SE_{ARB}$  might prove problematic.

While it is clear that the structure of *ho* requires further, more detailed investigation, what we want to point out here is that there are other plausible ways to derive the clash, still maintaining the structural deficiency of  $SE_{ARB}$ . For example, the restriction to inanimates could be attributed to the *ho* clitic being specified as category which contains a default third person feature, similarly to the third person accusative clitics discussed by Nevins (2007). On the  $SE_{ARB}$  side, various accounts (see especially Dobrovie-Sorin 2021) propose that the impersonal interpretation is a result of the T head being inherently endowed with the underspecified feature ARB, signalling at LF the presence of an implicit, arbitrarily interpreted or referentially unspecified, 3<sup>rd</sup> person default Initiator. Under this second line, we can reduce the clash along the lines of Nevins (2007): a cluster of two categories specified as third person (is banned in the syntax).

In the next subsection we will be looking at additional sets of restrictions involving accusative clitics in the context of  $SE_{ARB}$ . These new sets of data provide further support to the conclusion that the animate *l*-accusative clitic involves licensing by a [SENTIENCE] related projection, solidifying the syntactic nature of these clashes.

#### 5.4. Additional evidence for a syntactic source

Additional evidence that the  $CL_{ACC}-SE_{ARB}$  restriction is not simply a PF one comes from contrasts such as those in (48) and (50) below, holding in the same dialects in which accusative clitics are not possible with  $SE_{ARB}$  unless there is grammaticalized animacy/individuation. The only difference between the contrasting sentences in each of these two sets resides in the nature of  $me_{CL.DAT}$  – ethical dative in (48)b and (50)b vs. goal dative in (48)a and (50)a. In both Catalan and (leísta) Spanish,  $CL.DAT_{IO=GOAL}$  is

possible by itself with SE<sub>ARB</sub>, as expected, and CL<sub>ACC=DO.ANIM</sub> is possible by itself too. We have already seen the relevant examples, but we also repeat them here in (49) for Catalan and (50) for Spanish.

## (48) Catalan

a. \*L'home,            **se**    **me**            **l'**            envia  
 the=man    SE<sub>ARB</sub>    CL.DAT<sub>GOAL</sub>    CL.ACC.M.3SG    send.3SG  
 Intended: 'The man, he is sent to me'

b. El            nen,    **se**    **me'l**            suspèn  
 the            kid    SE<sub>ARB</sub>    CL.DAT<sub>ETH</sub>=CL.ACC.M.3SG    suspend.3SG  
 molt  
 much  
 'My kid, he is suspended on me (quite a lot)'

## (49) a. Catalan impersonal constructions

**Se**    **m'**            envia            (el nen/llibre)  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub>    CL.DAT.GOAL    send.3SG    (the kid/book)  
 'I.GOAL am being sent (the kid/book)'

## b. Catalan impersonal constructions

L'home,            **se**            **l'**envia  
 the=man            SE<sub>ARB</sub>            CL.ACC.M.SG.ANIM=send.3SG  
 'The man, they are sending him'

## (50) Leísta Spanish

a. \*Al            hombre,            **se**    **me**            **le**  
 DOM. the man            SE<sub>ARB</sub>    CL.DAT<sub>GOAL</sub>            CL.DAT=DO.ANIM.SG  
 envía  
 send.3SG  
 Intended: 'The man, he is sent to me'

b. A            mi    hijo,    **se**    **me**            **le**  
 DOM    my    son    SE<sub>ARB</sub>    CL.DAT.ETH            CL.DAT=DO.ANIM.M.SG  
 suspende            mucho  
 suspend.3SG            much  
 'My son, he is suspended on me (quite a lot)'

## (51) Leísta Spanish

a. **Se**            **me**            envía            (el libro)  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub>            CL.DAT.GOAL    send.3SG            (the book)  
 'I.GOAL am being sent (the book)'

b. **Se**            **le**            envía  
 SE<sub>ARB</sub>            CL.DAT=DO.ANIM.M.SG            send.3SG  
 'He is being sent'

Based on the remarks presented in the previous sections, the grammaticality of dative clitics in arbitrary SE configurations would be expected. MacDonald and Melgares's (2021) diagnostics involving clitic doubling suggest that dative clitics are not specified with a D feature and thus should not clash with the D feature in T<sub>ARB</sub>. Alternatively, if T<sub>ARB</sub> lacks a D feature, dative clitics should not be problematic as they lack one too. Additionally, in Catalan accusative clitics and dative clitics can co-occur, but only in active, personal configurations which do not involve arbitrary SE. This is seen in (52); the leísta Spanish facts are more complex, as only the inanimate accusative form of the clitic is possible in the context of a goal dative clitic. The differentially marked (dative) form results in ungrammaticality, as seen in (53)b. In their classical work on the leísta differentially marked direct object clitics, Ormazabal and Romero (2007) underlined the same type of restriction and attributed it to the need of both dative clitics and differentially marked direct object clitics to undergo a special type of agreement ('The Object Agreement Constraint'). As only one Agree relation can be established, configurations such as the one in (53)b result in ungrammaticality.

## (52) Catalan

- a. (\*Se)      me                      l'                      envia  
           SE<sub>ARB</sub>      CL.DAT1              CL.ACC.3M.SG    send.3SG  
 'He sends him/it to me'
- b. (\*Se)      me                      l'                      ha                      explicat  
           SE<sub>ARB</sub>      CL.DAT1              CL.ACC.3M.SG    have.3SG          explained  
 'He explained that to me'
- c. M'          ho                      ha                      dit  
           CL.DAT1    CL.ACC.3N          have.3SG          said  
 'He said that to me'
- d. Li                      ho                      ha                      dit  
           CL.DAT3.SG      CL.ACC.3N          have.3SG          said  
 'He said that to him/her'

## (53) Leísta Spanish

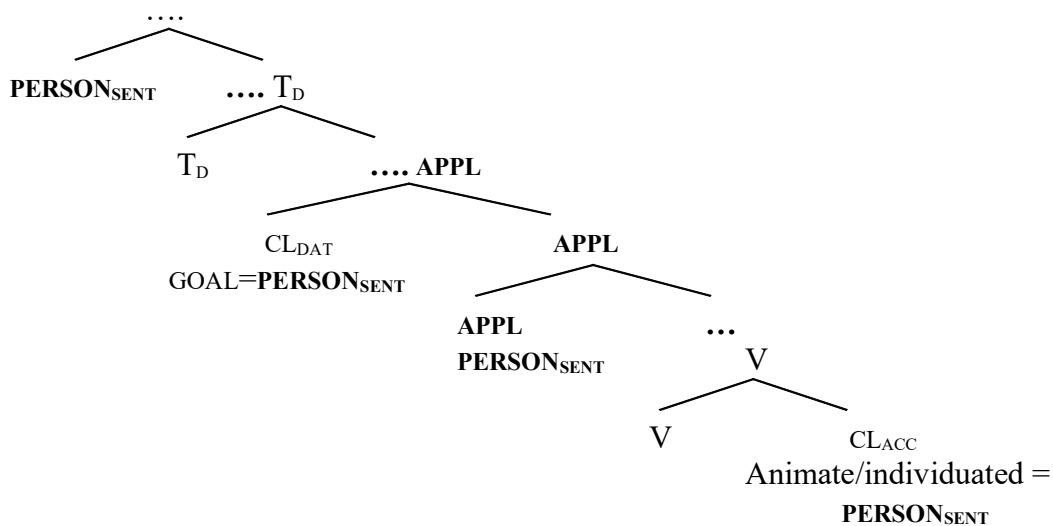
- a. Me                                      lo                                      enviaron  
           CL1.DAT<sub>GOA</sub>                      CL.ACC.3M.SG                      send.PST.3PL  
 'They sent it to me'
- b. \*Me                                      le                                      enviaron  
           CL1.DAT<sub>GOAL</sub>                      CL.DAT=DOM<sub>ANIM</sub>.3M.SG                      send.PST.3PL  
 Intended: 'They sent him to me'

For Catalan, we see therefore that matters are more complex when it comes to accusative clitics and the ways in which they interact with other clitics in the context of SE<sub>ARB</sub>. Two questions are salient: i) why is it that accusative clitics cannot co-occur with dative clitics in SE<sub>ARB</sub> configurations (48)a, while they can do so in active, personal sentences (52)a?; ii) what is the difference between goal datives and ethical datives, such that the co-occurrence restriction is avoided with the latter?

If all that matters is avoidance of liner adjacency of [D], PF accounts would predict that there should be no difference between the goal dative and the ethical dative in examples such as (48): dative clitics are not problematic with  $SE_{ARB}$  (49)a, and animate accusative clitics are possible too. In turn, syntactic accounts have demonstrated that interactions between dative and accusative clitics are rooted in the syntax. Under competition-based accounts, (certain types of) accusative clitics and dative clitics need licensing in the syntax<sup>11</sup> (for example, via a special AGREE operation). Ungrammaticality ensues when the configuration might not contain enough licensers such that both classes can have their relevant features valued in an adequate manner (Anagnostopoulou 2003, Béjar and Rezac 2003, a.o.).

For convenience, we will be assuming here that both animate accusative clitics and dative clitics contain a  $PERSON_{SENT}$  feature that needs to be licensed in the syntax. We also follow Irimia (2023) or Gravely and Irimia (2022) who have examined PCC-type interactions between differentially marked accusative clitics and dative clitics. One important conclusion reached in these works is that, although differentially marked direct object clitics have a special behavior in PCC contexts, there is variation across Romance languages when it comes to the availability of  $PERSON_{SENT}$ -related licensers. Some languages (such as Romanian or Galician) might contain more than one  $PERSON_{SENT}$  licenser. Catalan seems to be in this class too. Active, personal sentences such as (52)a, where animate/individuated accusative clitics are possible with dative clitics, indicate the presence of a  $PERSON_{SENT}$  licenser below T, for example Appl (a canonical licenser of dative clitics), and also another  $PERSON_{SENT}$  licenser above T, which can license the animate/individuated accusative *l*-clitic. A schematic representation follows the lines of (54);  $T_D$  stands for a referential T, as the D ( $PERSON$ ) feature is present.

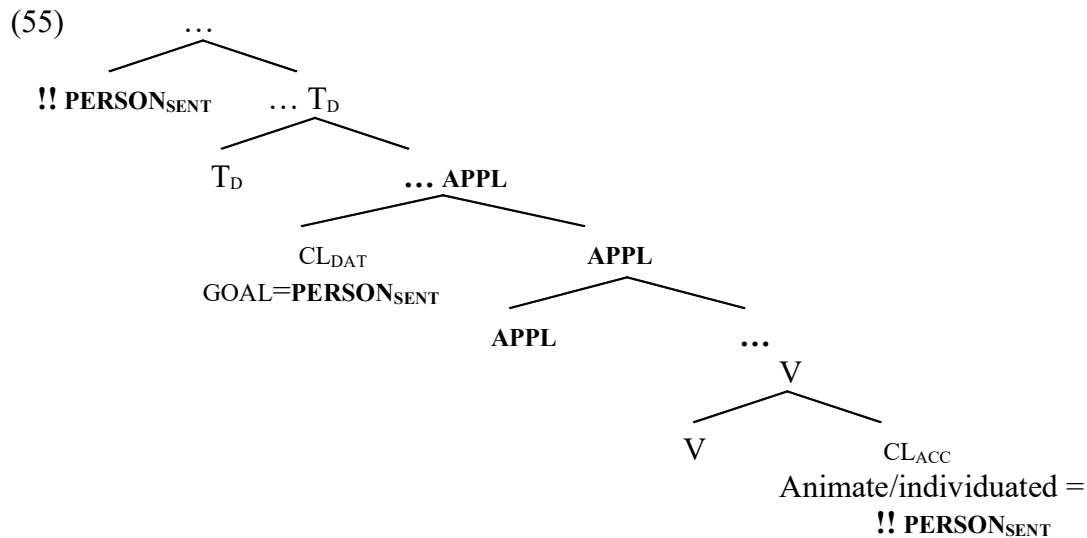
- (54) Catalan *l*-accusative clitics and dative clitics in active, personal sentences - (52)a



Dative clitics and neuter accusative clitics are predicted to be possible too, as both categories can be adequately licensed.

<sup>11</sup> See the rich literature related to the P(erson) C(ase) C(onstraint) effects. We do not go into the detailed typology here as it is not immediately relevant to our present discussion.

Complications arise when the syntactic component related to impersonal/arbitrary semantics is introduced. Following Otero (1986) we have assumed the absence of the D feature in T. What we would like to propose is that a person-less, default T deactivates the lower  $[\text{PERSON}_{\text{SENT}}]$  in the lower  $\nu\text{P}$  domain (on the APPL head). This results in competition for licensing, and ultimately crash: only one  $[\text{PERSON}_{\text{SENT}}]$  licenser is available for two categories that need the relevant licensing. The category that cannot get licensed forces the derivation to abort. Therefore, example (48)a is ungrammatical; it contains  $\text{SE}_{\text{ARB}}$ , a dative goal clitic and the accusative *l*-clitic, but there are not enough licensers for both the dative goal clitic and the accusative *l*-clitic (55).



Turning to leísta Spanish, we have seen that a dative goal clitic and the differentially marked accusative clitic (which surfaces overtly as a dative) cannot co-occur, regardless of whether the configuration is active/personal or impersonal. We repeat two relevant examples below. The ungrammaticality of (56)a is straightforward; incompatibility of the goal dative clitic and the differentially marked accusative clitic is instead due to a parametric difference between leísta Spanish and Catalan: the latter allows more than one  $[\text{PERSON}_{\text{SENT}}]$  licenser in the clausal configuration, while in leísta Spanish there can be only one  $[\text{PERSON}_{\text{SENT}}]$  licenser. Therefore, if two categories requiring this type of licensing are present, they cannot be both licensed and the derivation will crash.

(56) Leísta Spanish

- a. \*Al hombre, se me le  
 DOM.the man  $\text{SE}_{\text{ARB}}$  CL.DAT<sub>GOAL</sub> CL.DAT=DO.ANIM.SG  
 envía  
 send.3SG  
 Intended: ‘The man, he is sent to me’
- b. \*Me le enviaron  
 CL1.DAT<sub>GOAL</sub> CL.DAT=DOM<sub>ANIM</sub>.3M.SG send.PST.3PL  
 Intended: ‘They sent him to me’

Lastly, but equally important for our purposes, if the goal dative clitic is replaced by an ethical dative, grammaticality is restored. This is due to the fact that ethical datives do not require licensing in the syntax in terms of a [PERSON<sub>SENT</sub>] feature. This behaviour is not surprising – the rich literature on PCC effects (beginning with Perlmutter 1976, Bonet 1991, a.o.) has shown that, cross-linguistically, ethical datives are exempt from co-occurrence restrictions triggered by other types of datives, such as goal datives.

## 6. Conclusions

This paper is dedicated to a problematic aspect in the grammar of Romance languages, namely co-occurrence restrictions induced by the impersonal/passive/ arbitrary SE clitic and accusative clitics, especially for the third person. In the realm of such interactions, we have focused on less studied data from Catalan, which we compared to varieties of Spanish. The puzzle raised by Catalan is that certain types of accusative clitics are possible with SE<sub>ARB</sub>, while others result in ungrammaticality. After evaluating both syntactic and PF accounts that have been formulated in the literature in order to explain the ungrammaticality of *se lo* sequences, we have shown that such effects have a syntactic nature, but syntactic accounts need nevertheless to be further adjusted in order to capture all the relevant patterns. Importantly, what matters is the precise internal structure of the (accusative) clitic. The presence of PERSON features related to *grammaticalized animacy* which labels opens up the possibility of accusative clitics with SE<sub>ARB</sub> in both Catalan and leísta Spanish. In turn, PERSON features might create co-occurrence restrictions with other categories which might equally contain PERSON features (for example, goal dative clitics). In configurations where there is only one person licenser, ungrammaticality will arise. Going beyond Catalan and Spanish, mapping the internal structure and the licensing needs of the various types of clitics involved reduces apparently disparate CL<sub>ACC</sub>-SE<sub>ARB</sub> patterns to a unified mechanism in syntax, while also deriving variation; eg., Italian CL<sub>ACC</sub> is only possible in a higher position than SE<sub>ARB</sub> (Mendikoetxea & Battye 1990, D’Alessandro 2007; *√ lo si vede* vs *\*si lo vede*), indicating a higher licenser for the labelling [PERSON] category in CL<sub>ACC</sub>. As we have shown, the higher licenser is similarly relevant for Catalan and leísta Spanish.

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