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The effect of literacy, text type, and modality on the use of grammatical means for agency alternation in Spanish

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Abstract

The paper explores developmental patterns in a set of grammatical constructions that Spanish speaker-writers can use for agency alternation. Although all these constructions downgrade agency, they differ in the way they do so, and in the formal devices they use for this purpose. Some promote a patient perspective (*ser*-marked passives and *se*-passives), others promote a generic interpretation of agents (*se*-impersonals and 2nd person singular), while still others impute a degree of autonomy to the situation denoted by the predicate (*se*-middles). All these constructions appear more frequently in expository texts than in narrative texts and, except for 2nd person singular pronouns, more appear in the written modality than in the spoken modality. However, only passives showed a clear developmental pattern. The study shows that, given the options of a particular language, the distribution of grammatical constructions is an outcome of communicative purposes – that is, a function of the type of text as perceived by the speaker-writer – in relation to thematic content and perceptions of written language as a discourse style.
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Keywords: Agency alternation; Expository/narrative; Passive; Middles; Impersonals; *Se*-constructions

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1. Introduction

This study explores developmental patterns in the use of a set of grammatical constructions that express differing amounts of involvement of the agents (or causes) of the states, activities, or events (i.e., 'situations') referred to by Spanish speaker-writers in the course of ongoing text production. Underlying this analysis is the assumption that the type and internal architecture of linguistic units used in text production across development from childhood to adolescence is constrained by genre and modality (Berman and Nir, 2004). Textual form and content are an outcome of *genre*, in the sense of the text types intended to fulfill particular functions as defined by social-cultural norms and conventions. They are also influenced by speaker-writer/addressee proximity as a function of social power, authority, and familiarity, factors that are sometimes defined as *Register* (Ravid and Tolchinsky, 2002).[1] These in turn interact with *Modality* of production – speech versus writing – which imposes online constraints on processing and reflects speaker-writer expectancies as to what should be said or written. Thus, text production involves the adaptation of linguistic and discourse structures to a situation defined by a complex of social, cultural, and communicative factors. Developing text production abilities involves discovering which units and categories are appropriate to what circumstances, how to put them together, and in what ways they interact. To trace this developmental process, texts should ideally be analyzed along a range of dimensions, to include (1) thematic content, (2) top-down or global discourse structure and organization, (3) clause linking, (4) bottom-up categories at the local level of phrases and clauses, and (5) rhetorical devices. *Thematic content* refers to what the text is about; different genres and registers are congruent with specific types of content (Berman, 2000). *Global structure* is the overall organization of a text into large text segments such as introduction and conclusion (Tolchinsky et al., 2002). Different genres entail differences in the overall architecture and organization of information in texts, which is further constrained by modality and register (Katzenberger, 2004). *Clause packaging,* akin to what is termed in the literature 'nexus' (Foley and Van Valin, 1984), 'clause linkage', 'clause combining' (Haiman and Thompson, 1988), 'syntactic packaging' (Berman and Slobin, 1994) and 'connectivity' (Berman, 1998), refers to the construction of large syntactic units consisting of a number of clauses that are syntactically and/or thematically interconnected (Cahana-Amitay and Sandbank, 2000). Clause packaging, too, is heavily influenced by on-line processing constraints, register, and genre (Gayraud et al., 2001). Finally, different *bottom-up categories* characterize specific text types, and are likewise constrained by modality and register. Thus, for example, use of modals is more frequent in expository texts than in narrative texts (Reilly et al., 2002) while verb tense and mood differs markedly between narratives and expository texts (Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2002).

A range of other studies in the larger, cross-linguistic project and its antecedents indicate that 4th graders (9–10-year olds) are well able to distinguish narratives from expository texts in their productions at the phrasal, clausal, text segment, and discourse

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[1] In fact, the terms 'genre' and 'register' have been used interchangeably by scholars in different research domains (Biber, 1995; Guenthner and Knoblauch, 1995), often for the same features (Miller, 1984).

levels. Moreover, the difference between these two genres becomes more linguistically marked with age, although adult university students appear less constrained than schoolchildren by the canonical features of genre, and tend to produce less homogeneous types of texts (Berman, 2001a,b; Berman and Nir, 2004 Berman and Ravid, 1999; Cahana-Amitay, 1999; Gayraud, 2000; Ravid et al., 2002; Tolchinsky et al., 1999). Text types produced under various circumstances also elicit usage of *rhetorical means* that present ideas, states, and action from different perspectives.

The present paper focuses on a selected set of *rhetorical means that* Spanish speaker-writers have at their disposal for expressing differing *degrees of agency* in relation to the ideas, states, and events that they talk or write about in their texts. The scope of these rhetorical means is the (semantic) proposition or a unit that in some sense corresponds to a syntactic sentence. The set of grammatical constructions we consider here encode different relations between the verb and its arguments, in particular between the subject and object arguments in syntactic terms or between the semantic roles of patient-undergoer and agent-perpetrator. Of particular interest to us here are constructions that have the function of promoting a patient perspective or downgrading an agent perspective. Some of these promote a patient perspective by voice alternation (active versus passive versus middle), while others downgrade agency by implying an unspecified agent.

We assumed that *agency alternation* is a 'genre feature' that will account for variations between narrative and expository texts.[2] Narratives involve people, actions, and objects as their protagonists and they function to describe events, whereas expository texts are centered on an idea or 'theme', and they function to construct that theme in the addressee's mind (Britton, 1994; Havelock, 1986; Katzenberger, 2004). Consequently, ''while narrative discourse is agent oriented and, furthermore, deals with the actions of particular agents, expository discourse lacks this agent orientation and deals more with generalities'' (Longacre, 1996: 245). The present study examines how children, adolescents, and adults alternate the structural options that are part of their language for expressing contrasts in agency.

The genre feature focused on here is related to the dimension of *Involvement* suggested by Chafe (1982) and Tannen (1985) for referring to the interactive features of texts. Chafe proposes that one of the underlying dimensions along which spoken and written texts vary is that of relative detachment/involvement.[3] Detachment is marked by use of passive voice, participles, attributive adjectives, and nominalizations, as against

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[2] Our use of the term 'genre feature' is inspired by Bibers notion of 'register features', as linguistic features that are differentially distributed across texts in different genres. For Biber, register serves ''as the general cover term associated with all aspects of variations in use'' (1995: 9). Bibers (1989) definition of genre, as text categorization based on external criteria relating primarily to author-speaker purpose, was adopted as suiting the present analysis, since our elicitation procedures defined for the subjects the purpose of the texts they were asked to produce, so that a priori we expected them to produce different types of texts that differ in strictly linguistic terms.

[3] In addition to the detachment/involvement dimension, Chafe (1982) also proposes a distinction between integration/fragmentation: Integration is marked by features that function to pack information densely into a text, such as nominalizations, non-finite participles, attributive adjectives, and series of prepositional phrases; fragmentation, in contrast, is marked by clauses juxtaposed in succession without connectives or joined by coordinating conjunctions.

involvement, which is expressed through use of first person pronouns, emphatic particles, and hedges. In terms of this dimension, conversational texts are described as *involved*, and academic texts as *detached*. Chafe's analysis is also concerned with the linguistic expression of what he considers as fundamental differences between writing and speaking, to the effect that writing is slower than speaking and that writers interact with their audience to a lesser extent than speakers. However, as suggested by Tannen (1985), the 'relative focus on personal involvement' may account for variations in all forms of discourse, cutting across genre- or modality-based dichotomies. One reason for the assumed generality of the 'involvement' dimension is the fact that modality (writing or speech) interacts with genre, since certain genres are more typical of one modality than another. Thus, conversation is more typical of speech, whereas expository discourse is more typical of writing. Indeed, studies of the difference between spoken and written language have been criticized for confounding modality with genre (Biber, 1986). As a result, they tend to define as general properties of speaking versus writing what might, in fact, be characteristic of, say, conversational interaction compared with an expository style of discourse independent of modality of production. Accordingly, the present analysis undertakes to compare the two genres of narrative and expository text in both the written and spoken modality, in an attempt to tease apart variations that can be attributed to modality compared with those that are due to genre.

Agentivity is a property of propositions, and hence is realized by nominals that serve different grammatical functions in a clause or sentence. The notion of *degree of agency* we adopt in the present context is very close in meaning and scope to that of 'eventive attribution' proposed by Clark (2001) as one of the basic semantic categories of human language and to that of 'agentivity' as discussed in studies of narrative development (Berman, 1993b; Berman and Slobin, 1994: 515–538). In the latter analyses of the 'frog story' picture-book oral narratives of children and adults, 'agentivity' constitutes one component of the more general dimension of *perspective*, with voice playing an important role as a distinguishing feature of different perspectives on a situation. The term *perspective* is used in a related but slightly different sense in linguistic analyses of grammatical aspect, on the one hand, (Smith, 1991) and in studies of aspect together with point of view, on the other (Fillmore, 1977). *Perspective* thus constitutes one aspect of the text-embedded notion of *discourse stance* that constitutes the unifying theme for the articles in this collection.

As characterized by Berman et al. (2002), *discourse stance* includes three functional dimensions of text-construction: (1) *Orientation*, (2) *Attitude*, and (3) *Generality* of reference and quantification. *Orientation* concerns the relation between the sender (speaker or writer), text (narration or exposition), and recipient (hearer or reader). *Attitude* concerns the relation between speakers-writers and the propositions in their texts. *Generality* concerns the generalizability or specificity of references to people, places, and times in the text. This paper examines the contribution of a selected set of constructions to the configuration of *discourse stance* in expressions of *generality*. We believe that the constructions selected for this analysis play a crucial role in distinguishing between the personalized, involved perspective of personal-experience narratives and the impersonal, detached perspective of expository discourse.

2. Linguistic means for expressing different degrees of agency

The grammatical constructions considered here form part of ''a cline or continuum of rhetorical means'' that speaker-writers of a language can use ''for moving from the personal to the general, from concrete to abstract, from specific to general, from immediate to distanced, from involved to detached'' (Berman and Nir, 2004). The relevant linguistic distinctions are expressed along the dimensions of word-internal morphology, lexicon, syntax, and semantic content. For example, at the morphological level, past tense is more personal, concrete, specific, and involved than present and future; 1st and 2nd person are more specific, immediate, personal, and involved than 3rd person. At the level of lexicon, dynamic, physical verbs are more concrete, specific, and involved than stative verbs, particularly ones that refer to internal states. Previous studies of the distribution of these devices have shown that they distinguish between personal narratives and expository text. For example, across languages and age groups, past tense (and perfective aspect, where relevant) was dominant in narratives compared with the timeless present and *irrealis* mood in expository texts (Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2002), and in choice of grammatical subjects, speaker-writers in different languages showed a preference for deictic and anaphoric personal pronouns in narratives and for impersonal pronouns and noun phrases with lexical heads in expository texts (Ravid et al., 2002).

The present study goes beyond these earlier analyses as well as analyses of passive constructions in different languages (Jisa et al., 2002) to focus on a broad group of constructions that serve to neutralize definitely specified or explicit agency by rendering it non-defined, generic, generalized, or implicit. The Spanish constructions in question are: 'periphrastic passives' with a form of 'be' + past participle, as in (1a) and (1b) (Keenan, 1985), *se*-marked passives, as in (2), *se*-marked impersonals, as in (3a) and (3b), *se*-marked middle voice constructions, as in (4), and active sentences with a 2nd person pronoun subject used with a generic sense, as in (5). All five constructions have the common function of downgrading agency, although they do so in different ways and by means of different formal devices.[4]

(1) Periphrastic [= syntactic, verbal] passives:
    (a) *personas que no <u>son aceptadas</u> por algún defecto físico* [pJ17mew]
    people who are not accepted for [=because of] some physical handicap
    (b) *Es un tema que en la sociedad no <u>está</u> muy <u>extendido</u>* [pH07mes]
    It is a topic that in (the) society is not very extended [=widespread]

(2) *Se*-marked passive:
    <u>*Se pueden solucionar las cosas*</u> [pA14mes]
    <u>*se*</u> can-to solve the things = 'Things can be solved'

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[4] In specifying speaker-writer identity in examples, we use the following convention: the 1st lower case letter stands for the language – p = Spanish (distinct from s = Swedish); the 2nd upper case letter stands for grade or age level G = grade school, J = junior high, H = high school, A = adult; the two digits give the subject number – 05 is the 5th subject in that age-group, 17 = the 17th in that age group; the next lower case letter stands for sex – m = masculine, f = feminine; and the last two letters identify text type and modality, as follows: ew = expository written, es = expository spoken, nw = narrative written, ns = narrative spoken.

(3) *Se*-marked impersonals

    (a) *Alguna vez que otra <u>se ha copiado</u> en un examen* [pA09fnw]

    = 'Every now and then (it happens that) someone has copied in an exam

    (b) *Y <u>se toma</u> por tonta a una persona* [pH03mew]

    and *se* taken for fool to a person = and (people) take a person for a fool = a person gets taken for a fool'

(4) *Se*-marked middles:

    Aun cuando no se dan estas condiciones [pA07mes]

    Even when these conditions are not given

(5) 2nd person generic pronoun subject

    Si <u>tú necesitas</u> aprobar un examen para llegar a la media entonces copiarás

    If <u>you need+2nd</u> to pass an exam to get an average (grade), then (you)

    <u>will-copy+2nd</u>' [pH15mes]

    As in other languages, passives in Spanish have a foregrounding function, in the sense that elements that are not the topic in the active voice become topicalized in the passive voice. This foregrounding function is met by a syntactic reordering of the semantic roles of agent and patient, and passives typically downgrade agency by promoting the patient to a topic position (Creissels, 2001a, b).[5] In examples (1a, b) and (2), the three passive constructions 'promote' the patient to subject position and all three suppress any explicit mention of the agent. Note, however, that an agent is logically implied in all three cases (Hidalgo, 1994).[6] The constructions in these three examples differ, however, in verb-morphology. The periphrastic passive is formed with the auxiliaries 'be' – *ser* in (1a) or *estar* in (1b) – plus the past participle of the verb, which are inflected for person and number subject agreement as well as for tense, aspect, and mood (Hidalgo, 1994:170).[7] *Ser*-marked passives are as close as possible in Spanish to the 'syntactic' or 'verbal' passives of English (Keenan, 1985). They encode perfective events (using a timeless present, as in (1a), or past tense) that are external rather than inherent to the grammatical subject, and they allow an overtly marked agent in a prepositional phrase marked by *por* 'by' in Spanish. However,

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    [5] In active voice, the subject of the verb may also be the agent of an action performed on the grammatical object as patient, whereas in passives the grammatical subject of the verb is not the agent but the patient of the action performed by the verb.

    [6] In Spanish as in other languages, passives are more felicitous if, first, they fail to specify an agent and, second, the passive subject is in some way evidently affected by the action expressed by the verb; that is, passive subjects are not simply thematic but should have undergoer status (Foley and van Valin, 1984). Third, canonical passives are general in reference, in the sense that the agent, whether explicitly stated or not, refers to a group, or the entire clause is 'gnomic', that is, general or proverbial in thrust (Longacre, 1996: 244).

    [7] It does not seem coincidental that the participial suffixal morpheme *-do/-da* in passives is the same as the past participle in compound tense-aspect forms, where the suffix indicates perfectivity of the events expressed by the verb. Spanish grammarians have argued that this suffix has the same sense of perfectivity in passive constructions as well, and so it is termed the 'passive participle' (De Miguel, 1992; Mendikoetxea, 1999). In fact, this dual role of so-called past (or 'passive') participles is shared by other Romance languages like French as well as by a Germanic language like English.

like what Keenan calls 'basic passives' in other languages, *ser*-marked passives typically avoid explicit mention of an agent, even though the agent is generally identifiable by context. *Estar*-marked passives, as in (1b), in contrast, correspond by and large to 'adjectival' or 'lexical' passives (Keenan, 1985). They encode resulting end-states (rather than events), they disallow overt agents (Hidalgo, 1994: 172), and they tend to take non-human surface subjects. As a result, passives with *estar* can often be translated into English *get*- passives.

Although *ser* and *estar* are the most frequently used verbs, other auxiliary-like or aspectual verbs may also appear in passive constructions, e.g., *venir* 'to come', *tener* 'to have', *acabar* 'to finish' (Mendikoetxea, 1999). Occurrences of past participles without any inflected verb are also considered passives in much of the literature (see Jisa and Viguié, 2005). In the present analysis, these non-finite participles will be considered as passives with verb ellipsis. Under the latter analysis, the question still remains as to how to interpret the (elided) auxiliary – *ser* or *estar* – although it is usually retrievable from context.

The class of '*se*-passives' illustrated in (2) are equivalent to *ser*-marked passives but not to *estar*-marked passives with respect to the type of event encoded, the agency attribution, and the inanimacy of patients. Here, the *se*-marker promotes the patient to the subject function and controls subject agreement.[8] In both formal and semantic terms, this construction type is equivalent to *ser*-marked passives – as indicated by the fact that in translation to English, a syntactic passive is needed. The situation denoted by the verb is external rather than inherent to the grammatical subject and the agent can only be mentioned explicitly in a prepositional phrase, even though it is implied. Unlike *ser*-marked passives, grammatical subjects in *se*-passives are usually inanimate and they are typically posposed in VS order. Also, *se*-passives are not aspectually constrained, and they can appear in both perfective and imperfective aspect.

Se-marked impersonals, as in (3a) and (3b), are also formed with the multifunctional clitic *se*, but in this case *se* functions neither to promote the patient nor to turn a transitive construction into an intransitive one, but rather to shift from personal into impersonal. The *se*-marked impersonal never specifies agents, but – like the plural impersonals of Spanish and other languages[9] (see note 9) – typically marks nonspecific or generic human agency (de Miguel, 1992). Like plural impersonals, *se*-impersonals are strictly subjectless constructions (Berman, 1980), and they invariably take a 3rd person singular form of the verb that has no subject to agree with. In these active voice constructions, the object of the verb is not the grammatical subject as in passives, but either the patient remains

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[8] Spanish grammarians (e.g., Esbozo de la RAE 1973) refer to the *se*-marked passive as *pasiva refleja* 'passive reflexive', probably because the patient remains the grammatical subject of the clause, as is the case in middles and also in canonical reflexives. Another, related reason may be use of a clitic pronoun traditionally included in the paradigm of 'reflexive pronouns'. In fact non-reflexive constructions are often defined as reflexives just because they make use of *se*.

[9] In Spanish, Impersonals can either be marked by *se* or they can take a predicate- initial 3rd person plural verb, as in *tomaron todas las precauciones* '(they) took+PL all the precautions' closely parallel to subjectless plural impersonals in other languages, like the case of Hebrew in our sample (Berman, 1980). In such contexts, a subject-requiring language like English needs a generic pronoun like *they* or an agentless passive (Jisa et al., 2002; Reilly et al., this volume).

in direct object position or there is no patient at all. The difference between passives and *se*-impersonal is syntactic (Mendikoetxea, 1999): Passives have an explicit grammatical subject since the patient has been promoted to this position, whereas in *se*-impersonals, the subject is an 'empty' category and, if the verb is transitive, the patient remains in object position. With transitive verbs, the typically animate object is introduced by the preposition *a* 'to', like in other types of active constructions, as in the example in (3b).

There is little semantic difference between passives and *se*-impersonals. The same construction (3a) can have either a passive reading (*una persona fue tomada por tonta* 'a person was taken for a fool') or an active one *(alguien) tomó por tonta a una persona* '(someone) took a person for a fool' – as indicated by the two alternative English glosses. However, the active interpretation is favored when impersonals are constructed with intransitive verbs, as in (3a), which cannot be paraphrased in Spanish by passives.

As noted, English offers two ways of rendering these impersonal constructions depending on the presence or absence of an object noun phrase: If there is a direct object, canonical passive is preferred in order to topicalize it, while if the verb is intransitive, English might prefer an impersonal construction in the active voice with a generic pronominal subject like *one, you* or *they*.

The next construction type we consider are *se*-marked middles, as illustrated in (4). These differ from all the previous cases both semantically and syntactically, while still functioning to downgrade agency. Like passives (but unlike actives), middles promote the Patient and downgrade the Agent. However, middles differ semantically from passives because passives logically imply agency and can include them syntactically as an oblique non-subject argument. Middles, in contrast, impute some degree of autonomy to the surface subject, and syntactically they can never take an agentive 'by' phrase. One possible indicator of the autonomy of middle voice predicates is that they might be read as having an oblique adjunct, nonagentive phrase with a kind of reflexive sense, as in the example in (4'), although this would be unacceptable in actual use.

(4')   *que por una razón u otra siempre se producen (*a sí mismas) discriminaciones con respecto a personas*
        That for one or another reason always *se* produce+PL discriminations
        (*to themselves) with respect to people = 'For one reason or another, discriminations always are produced ∼ arise with respect to people'

Middles thus differ from passives because they do not allow use of an agent 'by phrase'. And they differ from (transitive) sentences in the active voice since they are morphologically marked by the de-transitivizing clitic *se*.[10] As a rule, these constructions have inanimate abstract subjects, although in many cases they take the form of collective or institutional subjects, presumably peopled by humans, as in (6a), or implying human agency, as in (6b).

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[10] Although some middles have no morphological marking, e.g., *el tiempo aclara* 'the weather clears up', our analysis is confined to those that are overtly marked as such.

(6)   a.   *que dentro de las clases se hacen grupos muy cerrados* [pA20fes]
            that inside the classroom very closed groups are formed

        b.   *unas tensiones internas que <u>se despliegan</u>* [pA18fesd]
            certain internal tensions that unfold

Thus, it is possible to impute different degrees of agency (in the sense of 'involvement of the referent of the surface subject in the situation') to the same surface forms depending on the nature of the subject nominal and the kind of verb involved. The participants in (6a) will be interpreted as more active than those in (6b), for example. In no case, however, can the referent of the surface subject of a middle voice construction be construed as *volitional*. Even when people are the referent of the subject (*grupos* in (6a)), the participants are not represented as having intentionally created these groups. By characterizing middles in this way in relation to agency, we separate *se*-middles from other kinds of related constructions commonly found in Spanish.

In effect, besides the *se*-constructions discussed so far, Spanish has a number of constructions lying between active and passive voice, which are marked with the multifunctional clitic *se* and which have in common '*un brouillage*' or a 'fogging' that obscures the distinction between agent/patient (Creissels, 2001a, b). In syntactic terms, these are active-voice constructions, but their verbs have lost an argument because of the identification of subject and object rather than for purposes of downgrading agency, as in the case of passives. In these constructions, the action expressed by the verb affects the subject, which in clauses with transitive verbs coincides with the object. These constructions include canonical *reflexives* (which can be replaced or extended by 'self' pronouns)[11] and *reciprocals* (which can be paraphrased by 'each other' pronouns)[12].

From the semantic perspective of voice, these latter are also middle voice constructions, but they differ from *se*-middle*s* in several ways: (a) *reflexives* make use of the whole paradigm of pronouns (*me, te, <u>se</u>, nos, os, <u>se</u>*), (b) the predicate does not denote an inherent property of the subject/object, (c) the co-referential subject and object are 'fused' in a single, surface subject argument, and (d) the action is typically intentional (i.e., the subject is volitional).

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[11] In fact, many of the problems with categorization of *se* forms is because this clitic is included in the class of what are traditionally known as 'reflexive pronouns', which may explain errors in labeling verbs that do not entail any reflexive content (see note 8). We treat as 'reflexives' only prototypical instances where *une entité exerce sur elle-meme une action qui normalement met en jeu deux entités distinctes assumant les roles d'agent et de patient* 'an entity exercises on itself an action that normally would be performed by two entities assuming distinct roles of agent and patient' (Creissels, 2001a), that is, cases where there is a semantic equivalence between subject and object. Accusative and oblique reflexives are also treated together here, where subject and object refer to the same entity (Jackson-Maldonado et al., 1998). However, it is sometimes hard to pinpoint constructions that denote prototypically reflexive situations versus ones that cannot be interpreted as reflexive in meaning.

[12] Other related constructions are ones where use of a clitic pronoun marks the verb as reciprocal, confined to pronouns with plural reference – *nos, os, se*. With certain verbs such as *pelear* 'to fight' or *pelearse* 'to fight one another', the reciprocal meaning is transparent, but some verbs traditionally treated as reciprocal do not necessarily involve reciprocality, e.g., *insultar* vs. *insultarse*, 'to insult' vs. 'to insult each other'. Other verbs may express reciprocity if explicitly marked as such, for example, by *entre sí*, 'between them', *el uno al otro* 'each other'. All these verbs have transitive alternants with an obligatory second argument.

We also exclude from the set of *se*-middles other *se*-marked middle voice constructions in which the *se*-marker encodes inchoative (e.g., *ponerse a,* 'set to') or other aspectual functions (e.g., *irse* 'go away'). Finally, we exclude from consideration constructions with 'lexical *se*', that is, verbs that occur only with *se*- marking and do not have any transitive alternative (e.g., *desmayarse* 'to faint', *llamarse* 'to be called'). In principle, the same verbs may appear in *se*-middle, middle inchoatives, and passives. It is the verb semantics in conjunction with a particular linguistic or extralinguistic context that determines the interpretation of a sentence as passive or middle. For example, the same verb can be interpreted as either implying an agent, as in (7b), or not, as in (7a), roughly translatable into English 'these do not sell'.[13]

(7)   a.   *Estos libros no se venden = Se* -middle
              = These books do not sell' (because they are bad, intrinsic property)
       b.   *Estos libros no se venden = Se*-passive
              = These books are not for sale (because the owners refuse to sell them)

The last type of construction we consider is the one illustrated in (5). This illustrates a very common device for downgrading agency in Spanish (as in other languages in our sample, see for example the article on Dutch by van Hell, Verhoeven, Tak and Oosterhout, this volume): what is termed the *arbitrary singular* in Spanish grammars. Here, 2nd person has lost its deictic value of indicating a specific addressee, and is used with a generically indefinite sense which, again, interacts with temporal and aspectual factors (for example, it is more likely in the context of the less specific, timeless present tense and imperfective aspect).

In sum, besides the multiple distancing devices that Spanish speaker-writers may employ along the dimensions of word-internal morphology, lexicon, and semantic content, the language affords them at least five construction types that function to downgrade agency by promoting a patient perspective (*ser*-marked passives and *se*-passives), by presenting a resultant situation (*estar*-passives), by imposing a generic interpretation of agents (*se*-impersonals and 2nd. Person singular), or by imputing a degree of autonomy to the situation denoted by the predicate (*se*-middles).[14] These are alternative structures (along the lines noted in Jisa et al. (2002) for use of passives in different languages) that

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[13] Two other features of the verbal slot play an important role in determining a generic versus non-generic interpretation of the subject: presence or absence of modals and grammatical aspect. The same verb preceded by a modal will lend to a more generic interpretation, e.g., *se ve* 'is seen' vs. *se puede ver* 'can be seen'. Perfective aspect contributes to a non-generic existential interpretation *cierta gente* 'certain people', *alguien* 'anybody', and Imperfective aspect – to a universal interpretation *todo el mundo* 'everybody', *uno* 'one'. Aspect may also determine interpretation of a sentence as a *se*-middle, where the predicate expresses an inherent quality *se arregla* 'it fixes = gets settled' or as inchoative (perfective) *se arregló* 'it was fixed = got settled'.

[14] Clearly, any attempt to distinguish between construction types on strictly morphosyntactic grounds is controversial. As noted, morphosyntactic criteria fail to account for the existence of independent constructions involving the Spanish clitic *se*. Bartra (2002) refuses to use subject-verb number agreement to distinguish *se*-impersonal from *se*-passive since in Catalan, this is subject to dialectal and stylistic variation, and so he considers both *se*-passives and *se*-impersonals as 'structures with an unspecific subject'. Other scholars, also relying on purely formal criteria, consider that *se* middle and *se* passive constructions in fact belong to a single category, even though they agree that *se* impersonals have a separate status (Creissels, personal communication).

speaker-writers may choose in order to present a situation from the perspective of the situation in itself or of the entity affected by the situation rather than from the perspective of its perpetrators. Speaker-writer choice is constrained not only by situational factors (genre, modality of production, and register) but also by the availability of these competing structures in a specific language (Berman, 1979).

3. Patterns of use

Passive constructions are used relatively infrequently in Spanish compared with other modern European languages. Instead, Spanish speaker-writers show a marked preference for active constructions (Spanish Real Academy Grammar (RAE), 1973); reliance on so-called 'passive reflexive' and 'impersonal' constructions also serves to limit the number of *ser*-marked 'true' or 'syntactic' passives used. The generalization in the RAE has been criticized, first, for not being based on empirical evidence, since no corpus was available at the time; second, it considered only *ser*-passives; and third, it did not take into account possible effects of communicative contexts on the use of these constructions (de Kock and Gomez Molina, 1990: 95). Unfortunately, studies that attempted to overcome these limitations failed to produce clear-cut results. For example, de Kock and Gomez Molina (1990) analyzed literary texts written by 19 Spanish authors, revealing nearly 20% occurrences of 'passive constructions' but they included periphrastic passives (both *ser* and *estar* passives) as well as many *se*-marked constructions including *se-passive*s and the different types of middles. Lack of relevant distinctions between these functionally and structurally disparate constructions may explain why there was almost no difference when separate counts were conducted for periphrastic passives and *se*-marked constructions.

A similar distribution was found by Green (1975), who examined occurrences of related constructions in journalistic, literary, and scientific written texts as well as in public speeches. Taking into account only *ser*-passives and *se*-marked construction with subject-verb agreement in oral language (*se*-passives), he found that less than one percent (0.59%) of the total number of conjugated verbs were in the form of *ser*- passives and under two percent in the form of *se*-passives (1.59%).

Similar findings were reported by Barrenechea and Rossetti (1975) for a recording of six hours of 'free conversation' from ten different subjects. In contrast, *se*-marked constructions were found to be very frequent in the language of professional journalists in discourse contexts where the theme or the event rather than the agent-perpetrator of the events was highlighted (Hidalgo, 1994). However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies are available that differentiate systematically between different types of *se*-marked constructions. Nor have these and related constructions been examined in relation to their occurrence in contrasting genres and modes of production, as in the present study. Further, our study is the first to undertake such an analysis in a developmental perspective, by considering how these devices are put to use by non-professional speaker-writers of different ages and levels of schooling.

Note that our study is not concerned with the *acquisition* of means for alternating agency. On the contrary, we assume that the forms examined below are all structurally available to the speaker-writers in the age-ranges under consideration, where the youngest

subjects are grade-schoolers aged 9 years or more. True, passives are considered to be a
'late acquisition' in Spanish as they are in a language like Hebrew, where patient
topicalization or agent-downgrading can be achieved by straightforward changes in word
order or by reliance on subjectless impersonal constructions (Berman, 1979, 1993a, in
press). However, in other languages, children have been shown to use passive constructions
from as early as 2 to 3 years, apparently because new referents cannot appear in subject
position (Demuth, 1989, for Sesotho; Pye and Paz, 1988, for Mayan Quiché). There is also
growing evidence that passives are acquired quite early even in English (Budwig, 1990; de
Villiers and de Villiers, 1985; Marchman et al., 1991). The crosslinguistic study of oral
narratives by Berman and Slobin (1994) also shows a clear increment in use of passives
with age, but the English sample reveals that there are occurrences as early as age 3,
whereas in Spanish (as in Hebrew) full syntactic passives were used by only one adult
narrator. The Spanish subjects, children and adults alike, tend to use *se*-marked
constructions to provide an inchoative, event-focused perspective on events. The authors
suggest that in Spanish passive is ''a rare and probably literary form'' and that Spanish
provides other more accessible alternatives to passive constructions (Berman and Slobin,
1994: 531; Slobin, 1993).[15]

The studies above concern oral narrative discourse based on a pictured storybook, so
that it is difficult to know in how far the relative scarcity of passives they reveal applies
more generally to other communicative circumstances as well. The findings are partially
contradicted by Jisa et al.'s (2002) earlier study of the distribution of passive voice
constructions in personal narratives and expository text in five languages (Jisa et al., 2002).
This study, which concerned forms marked with passive verb morphology of the kind that
allow an overt oblique agent phrase, revealed that Spanish and Hebrew differed
significantly from the other languages in their sparse use of passives. The authors interpret
this finding in relation to a key typological feature shared by Hebrew and Spanish which
(unlike Dutch, English and French) allow null subject constructions and which both have
impersonal constructions for downgrading agency as well as productive morphological
means for middle voice constructions (by use of the clitic *se* in Spanish and by intransitive
verb morphology in Hebrew). These constructions provide alternative means to passive
voice for focusing on the event and/or on the patient rather than on the agent of an action or
event. The idea is that, as noted earlier, speaker-writers may tend to avoid the use of
passives when these are 'in competition with' other rhetorical means at their disposal.
Nevertheless, shared developmental trends emerged across all five languages in Jisa et al.'s
(2002) sample: Children in the two younger groups – grade-schoolers and junior-high-
school children – used passives less than older subjects – high-schoolers and university
students. Moreover, in all five languages, passive constructions were much more frequent

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[15] Our classification took into account morphosyntactic as well as discursive and semantic criteria in order to
distinguish between *se* impersonal and *se* passives, since each expresses different degrees of agentivity. It was also
important for this analysis to separate *se*-middle constructions – where no specific agent can be identified – from
se-passives whose agent can be inferred (and sometimes even expressed) within or beyond the limits of the same
clause. For example, left dislocating OVS orders are used even by 3-year-olds and an undergoer perspective can
also be expressed by a preverbal clitic that copies the object NP with the preposition *a* 'to' (*Aquí el buho le ha
tirado del arbol* **al niño** 'Here the owl **him** has pulled from-the tree **the boy**'). These two devices can be combined
to achieve a functional equivalent of the English passive, without a voice alternation in verb morpholology.

in expository texts than in narrative texts. The authors conclude that reliance on passive construction in monologic texts is a function of increased exposure to written language and greater experience with literacy-related activities. However, since their study concerned only written texts, it failed to consider modality as a factor in passive usage.

As for the *se*-marked constructions investigated in this study, research on acquisition of the different types of *se* expressions in Spanish typically fails to consider *se*-marked impersonals or passives. Jackson-Maldonado et al. (1998) study of *se* in naturalistic speech samples of two- and three-year old children acquiring Spanish found only rare use of reflexive and reciprocal *se*, whereas middle-voice uses of *se* (where the patient remains the grammatical subject of the clause) were more frequent and emerged earlier on. It could be, however, that the fact that their study failed to distinguish between aspectual/inchoative *se*-middles (e.g.: *Valeria se cayó de la silla* 'Valeria fell off the chair') and other middles of the type considered here (as in examples 6a and 6b) might account for the fact that the middles they examined showed up as early as age 3 years.

Aguado (1995) also found that in the same age-range, only a tiny percentage (around 3%) of all children's uses of *se*- could be considered as reflexives, even though he acknowledged that some kind of reflexive sense can often be detected. This suggests that we need to be very careful when interpreting children's uses of *se*. A similar point is raised by Gathercole's (1990) analysis of different uses of *se* by children aged from 3 to 11: She found 'an impressive accuracy' in young children's production of *se* despite its multifunctionality, noting that for some verbs, the reflexive meaning functions as the default interpretation.

In an earlier study, Rosado et al. (2000) focused on 'depersonalizing *se*' in *se-marked* impersonals and passives and found age and text type to be crucial determinants of the relative frequency of these two construction types. There was a marked increase in use of impersonals and *se* passives from the youngest group to the adults. Moreover, communicative purposes had an effect on how the forms were distributed: Proportion of depersonalizing *se* was shown to vary with genre and to occur more frequently in expository texts than in narrative texts at all four developmental levels. Modality of production, on the other hand, did not prove to be a differentiating factor in one direction or another. In line with these findings, we expected to find a clear tendency for the target constructions to be used more in expository texts than in narrative ones, and we predicted that text-type would have a stronger effect than modality in this respect.

4. Data-base

The data-base for the present study consisted of a sample of the (Iberian) Spanish-language texts collected in Cordova elicited for the original crosslinguistic project (see Berman and Verhoeven, 2002, Section 2.2). The corpus included four texts produced by 10 participants at each developmental level: grade school, junior high school, high school, and university. This yielded a total of 160 texts divided equally between two modalities (spoken and written) and two genres (narrative and expository). After being shown a video on interpersonal conflicts in a school setting, participants were asked to talk and to write about '*something similar that happened to you*' and '*your reflections on the topic of problems at*

school'. These instructions were assumed to elicit two contrasting accounts: one focused on incidents or happenings related to conflicts at school from a personal point of view (a personal-experience narrative) and another that focused on the topic itself from an analytical point of view (an expository account).

5. Findings

All 160 texts included in the study were coded for the target constructions: *ser*-marked and *estar*-marked periphrastic passives, *se*-marked passives, *se*-impersonal, *se*-middles, and 2nd person singular. As noted, the category of *se*-middles was restricted to forms imputing a degree of autonomy to the surface subject. Also excluded from the analysis were predicate-initial 3rd person plural impersonal constructions and clauses with nongeneric 2nd person pronouns.

Importantly, categorization of target constructions took into account the textual contexts in which they were used, since in many cases, isolated clauses were not clearly assignable to any of the relevant categories. For example, the clause illustrated in (8) can have both a reflexive reading '(they) did not see themselves as needy people' or a passive reading '(other people) did not see them as needy people', and only the discourse context decides in favor of the latter as the appropriate interpretation in this particular instance.

(8)   *No se veían como personas necesitadas*   [pA11mnw]
       Reflexive interpretation: '(they) did not see+PLUR themselves as needy people'
       Passive interpretation: 'they were not seen (by others) =as needy people'

That is, the coding of construction-types in the form/function approach adopted here is necessarily the outcome of textual analysis rather than an automatic procedure based on surface morpho-syntactic forms. Both authors coded all the target constructions, and cases of disagreement in coding were resolved by discussion.

5.1. General distribution of target constructions

The target constructions constituted 7.7% out of the total 6346 clauses included in the text sample, but they did not occur with a similar frequency. Fig. 1 represents the relative distribution of the target constructions over all the texts taken together.

Out of a total of nearly 500 (489) relevant constructions, almost half (44.7%) were 2nd person singular; next came *se*-impersonals (20.08%), passives (14.7%), middles (13.08%), and middle *se-passives* (6%). This finding shows that speaker-writers clearly prefer active constructions to passive or middle constructions. They also prefer constructions that imply human agency (2nd person, *se*-impersonals, passives) to constructions that do not do so (*se*-middles). Also, assuming that all these constructions share the common function of agency downgrading, speaker-writers clearly prefer constructions that downgrade by nonspecific references (2nd person, *se*-impersonals) or by avoiding explicit mention of
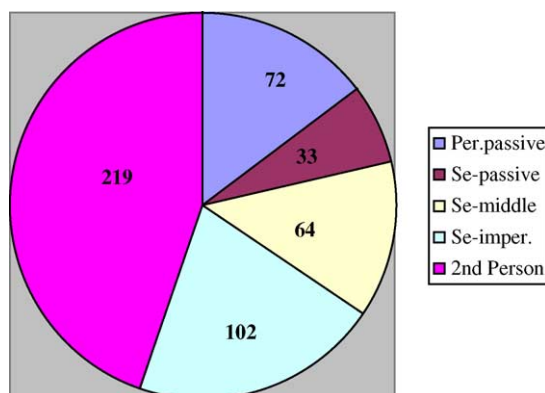
Fig. 1. General distribution of target constructions(in absolute numbers).

agents (periphrastic passives); they are more reluctant to use constructions that impute autonomy to the events that they are describing (*se*-middles). Morphological structure (i.e., use of clitic *se*) cannot explain these preferences, since *se*-impersonals formed with this marker do appear among the preferred constructions. To support the claim that morphological complexity does not explain user preferences, we looked at the frequency of use of other constructions that are morphologically equivalent to the target constructions (since they include the clitic *se*), but serve other functions (i.e., reflexive, reciprocal, aspectual, and pronominal *se*-constructions). Out of a total of 854 morphologically equivalent constructions (all *se*- constructions), nearly half (45.4%) were 'pronominal verbs' (e.g., *llamarse* 'to be called'), that is, cases where the se- marker is an inherent part of the lexical entry for that verb rather than the marker of an independent semantic or grammatical category. The rest were – to much the same extent of around 10% – aspectual (e.g., *se perdió* 'get lost' – 10,7%), reflexive (e.g., *encerrarse (en sí mismo)* 'to lock within yourself' – 10.4%), reciprocal (e.g., *alimentarse (mutuamente)* 'to feed each other' – 10%), impersonal (11.9%); slightly fewer were middles (7.4%), and only 3.8% were *se*-passives. In sum, the more lexicalized forms (so-called 'pronominal verbs') were by far the most frequent, while other, semantically more specified forms were used with rather similar frequency, with middles and *se*-marked passives used the least of the *se* -constructions.

Why are *se*-passives so rare? Recall that in implication of agency, *se*-passive constructions are semantically equivalent to *ser*-marked periphrastic passives, although explicit mention of an agent is much more exceptional in *se*-passives than in *ser*-marked passives. In the Spanish tradition, it is generally assumed that *se*-marked passives are more common than other forms of passives (particularly *se*-impersonals). This was not the case in our data-base, however. One possible interpretation is that *se*- passives were less used in this context because they are less agentive than periphrastic passives, which carry a logical implication of agenthood even where no agent is mentioned (Keenan, 1985). This issue deserves more careful research – perhaps in a structured situation in which speakers-writers are asked to encode similar events caused by agents who are more identifiable or less – to see whether differing degrees of agenthood do indeed elicit constructions that differ along the lines just described.

5.2. *Effect of developmental level, text-type and modality on target constructions*

Our next analysis considered the effect of developmental level, text-type, and modality on general distribution of the target constructions. We predicted a general increase with age in the use of these linguistic means, a marked effect of text type, and a lesser effect of modality. To test these predictions, we performed a series of ANOVA's measuring each construction-type separately. Because speaker-writers produced texts of different lengths, all the analyses were performed on mean proportions of construction-types out of number of clauses. Results showed that for periphrastic passives, there was a significant three-way interaction between developmental level, text-type, and modality ($F = 2.756$, $p < .05$) as well as an interaction between modality and age ($F = 4.187$, $p < .01$). Use of passive voice increases steadily with age, and this increment is particularly marked in expository written texts. *Se*-middles yielded an interaction between text type and modality ($F = 3.853$, $p < .05$), and no significant change with age, although they were particularly frequent in written expository texts. *Se*-impersonals showed an interaction between genre and age ($F(3) = 3.718$, $p < .05$), with use increasing with age particularly in expository texts. Periphrastic passives showed a significant effect of developmental level independently of text-type and modality ($F(3) = 3.281$, $p. < .05$), and periphrastic passives and *se*-middles showed a significant effect of modality ($F(1) = 4521$, $p < .05$ for middles and $F(1) = 11.383$, $p < .005$ for passives). On the other hand, distribution of the target constructions was significantly affected by text-type (periphrastic passive $F(1) = 1.696$, $p. < 005$, middles $F(1) = 10.994$, $p < .005$, *se*-impersonal $F(1) = 16495$, $p < .001$, *se*-marked passive $F(1) = 4.893$, $p < .005$ and 2nd person singular only a significant effect of genre $F(1) = 5.907$, $p < .05$). Below we consider the effects of each variable separately in order to gain a more detailed picture of patterns of use.

Fig. 2 represents the distribution of constructions in expository and narrative texts. All construction-types appear in both types of texts, but they are all much more frequent in expository texts than in narrative ones. For every construction-type, the mean proportion of occurrences in expository texts is at least double the number in narrative texts.
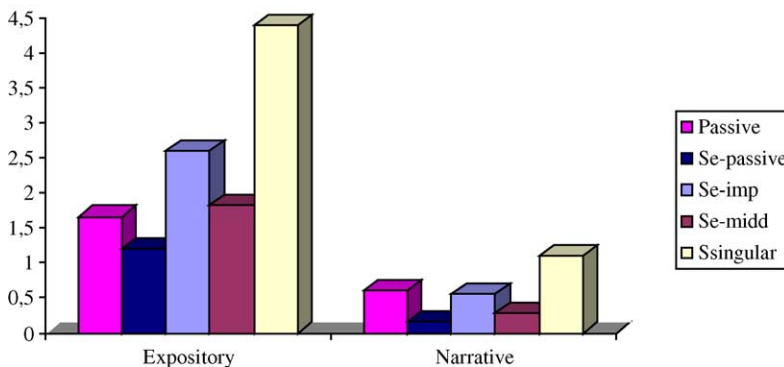

Fig. 2. Frequency of target constructions: Text type(mean proportion of construction type out of number of clauses).
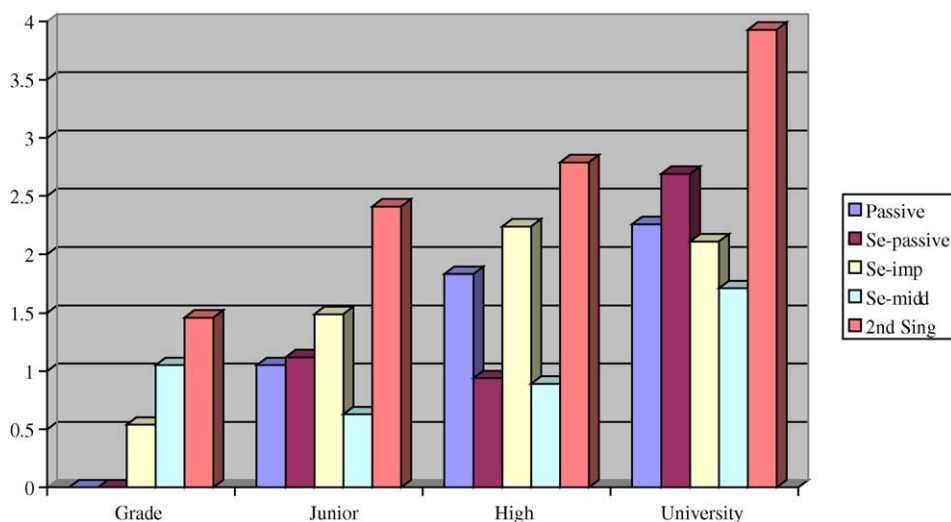
Fig. 3. Frequency of the target constructions: developmental levels (mean proportion of target constructions out of number of clauses).

Fig. 3 represents the distribution of construction types by developmental level. 2nd person generic is the preferred construction at grade-school level, although *se*-impersonal and *se*-middles are already present in the youngest age-group. In general, the actions or situations described in grade-school texts are rather concrete, and they are mostly about physical fighting, verbal disputes, property rights, or cheating (Berman, 2000; Ravid and Cahana-Amitay, 2005). As illustrated in (9), what grade-schoolers achieve through generic use of 2nd Singular is that the perpetrators of the described actions or those responsible for the state of affairs remain unspecified.

(9)   *si tú estás en tu colegio y te empiezan a pegar pues tú te quieres defender*
       'If you are at your school and (they) start+PLUR beating you then you want to
       defend yourself'   [pG03fes]

The use of middles appeared in a different context, when participants made an explicit metalinguistic reference to the topic they were discussing, made some sort of generalization, or provided an explanation of the situations they described. The examples of middles in (10) are very illustrative, even though they are ill-formed.

(10)   a.   *Este tema se [*] trata*
            esta realidad se nutría a sí misma [pA06mnw]
            'This topic *se* treats/deals
            this reality feeds itself'
       b.   *Para que el mundo se haya [*] major*   [pG20mew]
            so that the world *se* is better

The expression in (10b) is ill-formed because the verb is pronominalized in an inappropriate context and because the existential verb should be in initial position. The resulting expression seems a mixture of two possible constructions (*para que el mundo se haga mejor* 'so that the world *se* be better' and *para que haya un mundo major* 'so that (there) be a better world'). The boy took the pronominalization and word order from the first expression and the verb from the second. These examples are illustrative because they look like an attempt to use forms that sound good (it is 'proper' in this context to write about 'themes' and to say that 'themes are treated' or that 'the world should improve'), but in order to maintain a consistent level of formality in the lexicon, the younger children appear to relax morphology. At all events, we can characterize this as an attempt to meet genre-expectations.

Passive constructions emerged only in the junior high school group. Use of periphrastic passives increased significantly with developmental level, whereas *se* marked passives decreased from junior to high school and then increased at university level. As for the other construction types, use of *se*-impersonals and 2nd singular generics increased steadily with age, but middles tended to increase and then to slightly decrease at university level. Except for passives, however, none of these constructions revealed a separate effect of developmental level in isolation, but only in interaction with text type or with text-type and modality. This means that the use of these constructions increases not as a function of age *per se,* but in order to serve the specific functions defined by the types of texts that participants were producing.

As in the case of grade-school texts, it should be noted that the emergence of passives and the increase in use of other forms occurs together with a change in the thematic content of the texts. In effect, beyond junior high school, participants do not merely relate to concrete situations or provide judgmental comments on the conflicts they describe. Rather, they start to relate to more general topics such as ostracizing, social discrimination, social acceptance, equality, and so on, as illustrated in (11). To take a perspective on these phenomena, speaker-writers resort to impersonal, passives and, rather less, to middles.

(12)   *La violencia puede ser generada bajo cualquier circunstancia*
         Los signos de agresión, tanto física como psicológica, pueden ser iniciados
         ante cualquier circunstancia y en cualquier lugar   [PAd11mew]
         Violence can be generated under any circumstance.
         The signs of aggression, both physical and psychological, can be initiated in
         any circumstance and in any place'

Another variable that had some effect on the distribution of target constructions was modality. Fig. 4 represents the distribution of construction types by this variable.

Except for 2nd person singular, the other target constructions were used more frequently in the written modality than in the spoken modality, even though there was a separate effect of modality only for periphrastic passives and *se*-middles ($F(1) = 4521$, $p < .05.$). These results suggest that modality has an effect on construction type, since, except for the more typically colloquial 2nd person singular, all are preferred for the written modality over the spoken modality.
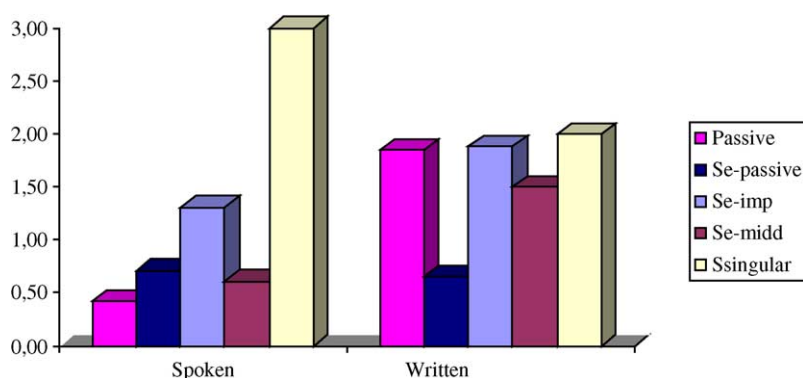
Fig. 4. Frequency of target constructions: Modality (mean proportion of target constructions out of number of clauses).

5.3. Patterns of use of periphrastic passive

The previous analysis considered *ser-* and *estar*-marked passive together. Below we show that use of these two constructions is sensitive to text type and modality. *Estar*-marked, adjectival or 'lexical' type passives were relatively more common among the younger children in narratives and in the spoken modality, whereas syntactic or 'verbal' passives with *ser* were preferred by the older age-groups in expository texts and in the written modality.

Over half total number of passive constructions (55.7% of 72) were *ser*-passives and the rest (44.3%) were *estar*-passives. These two constructions formed the bulk of the passives, although there were a few formed with other verbs (e.g., *acabar* 'to finish', *tener* 'to have') or with a past participle alone, as in example (15)

(13)   *porque al final van a acabar destrozados todos*
          'Because in the end all are going to end up (being) destroyed' [pj08mesb]

(14)   y la tenían discriminada entre comillas *[pH08fns]*
          'And they had [= kept] (her) discriminated in quotes' [ph08fnsb]

(15)   *que todo lo relacionado con él es lo peor*
          'that everything related to him is the worst' [ps16fewd]

The only passive construction at grade-school level was an *estar-* passive, while in the two older groups (high school and university), use of *ser*-passive was more frequent relative to *estar*-passives. However, this difference was not as marked developmentally as it was with respect to the other two variables of modality and genre. In the written modality, half the passives (48.5%) were *ser*-passives and one-third (31.4%) were *estar*-passives; in speech, by contrast, less than ten percent were *ser*-passives (7%). As for genre, in expository texts, almost half were *ser*-passives (40%) and only about a quarter (24.3%)

were *estar* passives. In narrative texts there were roughly similar numbers of *ser*- and *estar*-passives (15.7% and 20%, respectively). In nearly half of all passive constructions, the grammatical subject was posposed, and for the rest the subject was fully retrievable from context even though it was not explicitly mentioned.

In sum, among the constructions available to Spanish speakers for modulating agency, 2nd person singular generic subjects and impersonals turn out to be the preferred constructions, and middles attributing autonomy to the surface subject and *se*-marked passives are the least preferred. Periphrastic passives lie between these two poles. Only passives reveal a clear developmental change in use; the other constructions reflect a higher level of adaptation to the text type produced. Interestingly, other related *se*-constructions (reflexives, reciprocals, aspectuals, pronominal verbs) reveal an inverse pattern. They all show a significant effect of developmental level, but no effect of genre or modality (reciprocals $F(3) = 5.714$, $p < .005$ and reflexives and pronominals $F(3) = 3.445$, $p < .001$).

5.4. Individual patterns of use

So far, analyses have related frequency of use to preferences or choices, with the constructions analyzed treated as sets of options available to speaker-writers. The purpose of our next analysis is to examine the repertoire of construction-types used by members of each age group to see in how far these constructions are affected by individual preferences. To this end, we calculated the number of construction types used by each individual subject to arrive at 'individual repertoires' for each developmental level (Fig. 5.).

The number of participants producing different construction types increases dramatically with age. At grade-school level, three out of ten children produced only
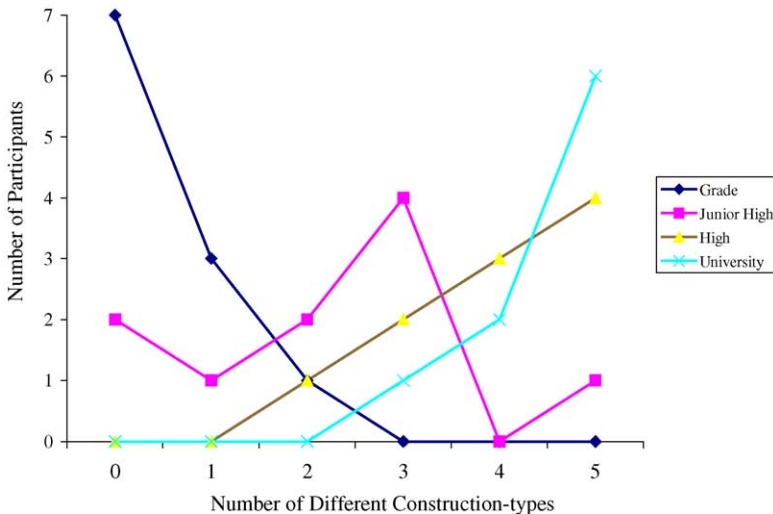

Fig. 5. Individual Repertoire. (mean proportion of target constructions out of number of clauses).

one of the relevant constructions (impersonal, middle, <u>or</u> 2nd person singular) and only one child was able to produce two different types of constructions; in junior high-school, most children were able to produce three or more different construction types, while at high school and university level, most participants produced the whole range of construction-types. This means that not only does the number of occurrences increase with developmental level, but there is also a widening of the repertoire of constructions deployed by an individual speaker-writer.

Example (16) illustrates the occurrence of all five target constructions in an expository text written by a 16-year-old high-school girl asked to discuss the topic of violence in school. The Spanish text is given on the left, translated into English on the right, corrected for spelling and other errors (e.g., occasional lack of gender agreement).

Text of a high-school girl

*En el vídeo expuesto **se pueden apreciar algunos de los factores**,* *Se*-marked passive, with the implication that there is somebody (an unspecified person or persons) who does the appreciating of the video. Note that the use of an abstract noun (*factores*) as the postverbal subject will promote use of a middle construction in the next clause).	In the video shown *se* can+PLUR to-appreciate some of the factors = 'In the video (that was) shown, some of the factors can be observed . . .'
*Que más frecuentemente **se pueden suceder dentro del entorno de un instituto*** *Se-* middle [Infelicitous use of verb *suceder* 'happen' because this verb is appropriate for events which in fact could be evaluated in the video, but since the writer used an abstract noun (*factores* 'factors'), she is forced into using a *se*-middle. The use of the modal *poder* 'can, be able to' contributes to the generic reading]	That most frequently *se* can + PLUR (to-)happen in the environment of a high-school
*Así, como en tantos, en este instituto (el del vídeo) **hay alumnos**,* Existential	So, as it happens in many others, in this high-school [= the one in the video] have+EXIST [= there are] students
sea porque no se corresponde con la personalidad de dicho grupo, Pronominal	be it because (he/she) does not *se* correspond with [= suit to] the personality of that group
o simplemente por una antipatía que no tiene razón alguna	or simply because (of) an antipathy that has not any reason
El caso es	The thing is
que por una razón u otra siempre	that for one reason or

se producen discriminaciones con respecto a personas *Se*-marked passive, implying that someone is responsible for producing discrimination

another always *se* produce+PLUR discriminations with respect to (other) people = 'discriminations always arise/are produced with respect to others'

que en realidad pueden ser tan capaces (tanto académicamente, como física o moralmente) que los componentes de determinadas pandillas Infelicitous use of *que* as the second element in a comparative construction (instead of *como*)

That in reality can be as capable (just as academically as physically or morally) that the components of certain groups

Otra de las situaciones que ocurren más frecuentemente

Another of the situations that occur more frequently

son los enfrentamientos entre determinados alumnos

are the struggles between certain students

que pueden sentirse ofendidos por una simple opinión personal o por una mala palabra

that might feel offended because of a simple opinion or a bad word

y con las peleas físicas sacian la ofensa a su orgullo

and with (the) fights satisfy an offence to their honor

que según ellos **ha sido manchado** Periphrastic passive with *ser*

that according to them has been- attacked

Por último y el más común de los tres, es el factor

The last and the most common of the three is the factor

que siempre y en toda clase conllevan los exámenes

That always and in any classroom imply (the) exams

En todo control **se espera** *Se*-impersonal, generic reading

In any test, *se* hopes [= people hope]

a que surja un pequeño descuido del professor

that will-come out a little careless of the teacher = 'that the teacher will be a little careless'

para así poder completar una de las preguntas

in order so to-be-able to-complete one of the questions

que por olvido, se ha quedado incompleta *Se*-middle (with 'pronominal verb' *quedar-se* 'to-stay')

that, by mistake, *se* has remained incomplete

o cambiar el examen

or to-change the exam

que como un favor, te lo ha completado tu compañero y amigo

that as a favor, to you it has completed your classmate and friend = your classmate and friend has completed for you

Unas u otras, son situaciones

Ones or the others are situations

que continuamente están dentro del medio de los alumnos	that are continuously in the environment of the students
y que a pesar del interés de todos, **nunca se podrán extinguir del medio de los institutos** A double reading is possible depending on the imputation of autonomy to the situations -*se*-middle- where the situations disappear in and of their own volition, so to speak OR where some unspecified agent or agents are seen as being responsible for these situations being done away with *pH04few*	And that, in spite of everybody's interest, never *se* could to-extinguish in the context of high schools = 'could never disappear/melt away versus be eliminated in the context of high schools'

Note that when this girl refers to discrimination, social ostracizing, or cheating on an exam, she uses passives or impersonals, both of which imply human agency. When she attempts to make more abstract descriptions and explanations, she uses a middle-voice construction. The themes (discrimination, ostracizing) are central to the text, but the agents of these situations are apparently beyond the control of this young adolescent, deriving as they do from very abstract underlying causes.

6. Conclusions

This paper examined the contribution of a set of grammatical constructions to the configuration of *discourse stance*. Generic 2nd person singular, *se*-impersonals, periphrastic passives, *se*-marked passives, and *se*-middles emerge as appropriate diagnostic means of distinguishing Spanish expository texts from narrative texts. Because they share the common feature of downgrading agency, we could conclude that they encode a particular type of discourse stance that is in general more typical of expository discourse than of narrative discourse. However, in the particular expository texts considered here (texts concerning social and moral conflicts at school) speaker-writers appear to make particular choices between various constructions, and these choices change with developmental level and are affected by modality of production.

At the most general level, we can conclude that participants decide to present the topics they are discussing in relatively nonspecific terms, typically by leaving the agents or causes of these states of affairs as generically unspecified or unexpressed. This *generality* (Berman et al., 2002; Longacre, 1996) in orientation was lacking from the personal-experience narratives produced by the same participants. We should recall, however, that leaving agents unspecified is more favored than attributing self-instigated

or 'autonomous' origins to the situations in question. This general pattern is shared across the groups, but takes different expressive forms at each developmental level.

Most of the grade-school children use non-deictic 2nd person subjects as a construction that yields a generic interpretation of agency. This finding coincides with findings reported by van Hell et al. (this volume) concerning the use of Dutch 2nd person singular *je* 'you', which is also highly typical in expository texts and is also affected by written or spoken modality. Although the younger children's texts show some incipient attempts to use other means of agency downgrading, including *se*-impersonal and *se*-middles, only at high school and more markedly in adulthood do the diverse means of expression become truly incorporated into the participants' repertoires. That is, all passive forms – periphrastic and *se*-marked, impersonals, and middles – enter the picture. In spite of the widening of the repertoire, however, active voice is still preferred to any form of passives or middles, and when passives are used, speaker-writers opt for periphrastic passives rather than for *se*-marked passives or *se*-middles.

This increase in the repertoire of agency downgrading devices coincides with an increase in the abstractness and explicit specification of the topics in the texts. At grade school level, the perpetrators of events are undetermined, but the situations themselves are typically quite concrete. In other words, generic perpetrators are used as agents of specific conflicts (e.g., cheating, breaking telephones). With school level, participants increasingly write and talk about violence, aggression, freedom, happiness, ostracizing, discrimination, social equality, etc. Thus, findings of expansion in the kinds of devices used for downgrading agency, on the one hand, and of a corresponding extension in the *content* of the texts, on the other, support a general finding about other languages in this project (Ravid and Cahana-Amitay, this volume). They also agree with the findings about modal expressions of propositional attitudes in expository texts in three other languages sampled (Reilly et al., 2002), as well as with evidence of a major developmental cut-off point in adolescence, as predicted by Berman et al. (2002).

Most of the canonic 'syntactic' passives (with the auxiliary *ser* and a past participle) are used to refer to processes of social acceptance, ostracizing, and/or violence. This suggests that choices of particular constructions need to be considered in relation to thematic content. When discussing such social processes and states of affairs, junior high school students avoid explicit mention of the agent, not because this is unimportant or not central to the text (on the contrary, in many cases this situation or process constitutes the very topic of the text) but because the agents are 'vaguely diffuse entities' (Longacre, 1996) beyond the control of the person producing the text. These 'agents' are *circunstancias* 'circumstances', *numerosos grupitos* 'numerous groups', *numerosos factores* 'numerous factors', etc. – in other words, themes that participants prefer to discuss by means of *se*-impersonals and passives rather than by *se*-middles, evidently because *se*-middles suggest an autonomy or self-instigation of events of a kind that these young people do not seem to believe accounts for the phenomena they are discussing. Further research is needed to explore in detail the relationship between thematic content and construction type as well as the relation between local and textual topics. It would be interesting to know the extent to which choice of passives or middles is motivated, for example, by local discourse context (the relative topicality of agent and patient at clause level), by global aspects of the

discourse context (the main character in a topical, foregrounded position), or by textual themes constituting the discourse topic of the entire text.

It is important to recall that although *se*-middles are not very frequent, they are used increasingly with age in the context of expressions containing abstract nouns and higher register verbs. This may be due to participants' attempts to adjust their texts to genre-appropriate forms that conflict with levels of agentivity attributed to the states of affairs being described. We speculate that use of *se*-middles might increase if speakers-writers were asked to discuss, for example, natural catastrophes in which human agenthood is not implied.

A clear finding of this study is that 'agent downgrading' is a *genre feature* typical of expository texts and largely lacking in the narratives of the same subjects. Results show, however, that it might also be a *modality feature*, although to a less marked extent. And in fact, the constructions in question are more typical of the written modality than of the spoken one, particularly in the case of passives and *se*-middles. In the introduction, we noted the distinction between *modality* as a mode of production that imposes different online constraints on speaking and writing (Strömqvist et al., 2000) and *modality* as a discourse style that triggers certain expectations about what should be said or written. We do not think that preferences for certain constructions in speech and others in writing is a result of online constraints. Rather, we believe that these preferences derive from participants' construals of written language as 'a special kind of discourse style' (Ravid and Tolchinsky, 2002).

Although we do not wish to claim that there are fully reliable criteria for differentiating between written and spoken language (cf. Biber, 1995), it is clear that literate people have certain expectations about what should appear in written texts as opposed to spoken ones. Further research is needed in this connection. We suggest, however, that the kind of constructions we were examining here are conceived by literate persons as more appropriate for the written modality than for the spoken modality, and consequently, they tend to be produced more in writing than in speech. These expectations are part of *discourse stances* both in different text types and in different modalities.

This finding also provides support for certain cases of interaction between modality and genre. What sounds appropriate for an expository text often sounds appropriate for written language as well, and vice versa. Along the same lines, it is surely no coincidence that the generic 2nd person *tú* is so common among the younger children, on the one hand, and in the spoken modality, on the other. This establishes a link between the more colloquial, personalized, specific nature of personal-experience narratives (about a specific protagonist 'me' and antagonist 'him' or 'her', addressed to a 'you') and the generalities typical of the younger children's expository texts. Again, these findings are clearly consistent with those about the use of pronouns and passives in the Dutch and English samples (van Hell et al. and Reilly et al., 2005) about expressions of propositional attitudes in English, French, and Hebrew (Reilly et al., 2002).

Beyond our interest in the use of rhetorical patterns and the general development of text-construction abilities, our study demonstrates the need for a multifaceted perspective on variable grammatical patterning in a particular language. Our analysis has attempted to achieve this by adopting a three-pronged approach (developmental,

intergenre, intermodal) to the use of agency downgrading constructions in Spanish texts. The study provides support for Biber's (1999) 'strong position' regarding the importance of age, genre, and modality in the study of discourse and grammar. We have seen that genre constraints, modality constraints, and developmental grammatical constraints all figure importantly in the production of extended pieces of discourse by young writer-speakers.

Acknowledgements

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