

5. Croatian middle *se*-constructions

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This paper addresses Croatian middle *se*-constructions, viz. middle verbs, *se*-passives, and impersonal *se*-constructions from the joint perspective of Cognitive Grammar and some work of typological-functional provenance. The Croatian grammatical literature virtually never discusses these constructions under the label “middles”. In this paper we argue that all Croatian *se*-constructions, be they morphological (middle verbs) or syntactic (middles, passives, impersonals) have the basic semantic and pragmatic properties of middles. These properties can be subsumed under a single schematic meaning, viz. *low degree of event structure elaboration*, which results from detopicalizing event participants and topicalizing the event itself. From this follows our strong conviction that the term *povratni glagoli* ‘reflexive verbs’ must be replaced with the term *medijalni glagoli* ‘middle verbs’, and that the notion and label “reflexivity” should only remain applicable to reflexive transitive constructions, which differ profoundly from their middle counterparts semantically and syntactically.

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1. Introduction*

Upon reviewing Croatian reference grammars and other scholarly publications, one can conclude, without a hint of reservation, that middles, or the middle voice, are among the most undervalued and overlooked morphological and syntactic categories in the description of the Croatian language. Middles do not figure at all in most of our descriptive and prescriptive grammars (e.g. Pavešić & Vince 1971; Babić *et al.* 1991; Katičić 1991; Raguž 1997; Silić & Pranjković 2005). Even where they do make an appearance (e.g. Barić *et al.* 1995: 231), middles are handled with insufficient breadth and depth. At best, sections devoted to morphology mention middle verbs as one subtype of so-called pseudo-reflexive verbs. They are said to designate various natural occurrences (e.g. *mračiti se* ‘to grow dark’,

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naoblačiti se ‘to turn cloudy’, *bjelasati se* ‘to shimmer/glimmer white’) or processes taking place within humans (e.g. *sramiti se* ‘to feel ashamed, shy, bashful’, *čuditi se* ‘to wonder, to feel puzzled’, *nadati se* ‘to hope’). However, as a syntactic category, middles are nowhere to be found in Croatian grammars (although Belaj & Tanacković Faletar 2017: 292 mention the category). As far as other types of publications are concerned, middle constructions⁵⁵ are addressed in e.g. Oraić Rabušić (2018: 175–177) and Batinić Angster (2020: 64–65). However, they are limited to only generic *se*-structures exemplified by *Riža se kuha petnaest minuta* ‘Rice is cooked for fifteen minutes’, *Vrtovi se okopavaju motikama* ‘Gardens are tilled with hoes’, *Trava se zalijeva rano ujutro i uvečer* ‘Grass is watered in the early morning and evening’, etc. These generic structures are described as qualifying the designated process by expressing how it is typically performed. The neglect of the middle voice evidenced in Croatian linguistics and beyond should probably be attributed to the absence of a clear and unequivocal syntactic definition of the category, comparable to that available for the passive. And the reasons why such a definition is still missing may be due to the existence, cross-linguistically, of a range of functionally similar but far less controversial constructions. The same meanings that could be carried by middle-voice constructions find their expression, cross-linguistically, in a range of semantically more coherent and transparent morphological and syntactic constructions known under the much more current and universally well-established labels like the passive, impersonal constructions, reflexive verbs, etc.

«Since the term applies to diverse constructions, and in some cases to elaborate families of constructions, any single characterization is bound to be oversimplified». (Langacker 2008: 385)

One of the first attempts to define middles speaks to its cross-categorical and schematic character. Lyons (1969: 373) describes middles broadly as the voice where «the ‘action’ or ‘state’ affects the subject of the verb or his interests», which allows other morphosyntactic categories, foremost passives and other intransitive constructions, to be classed as middles.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ In line with cognitive constructional approaches to grammar we use the term *construction* in reference to any linguistic unit above the level of the morpheme.

⁵⁶ For instance, in their grammar of Bosnian, Jahić, Halilović & Palić (2000: 262) list middles as the third voice joining the usual active and passive. The middle is argued to express processes taking place without the subject’s volition. There is no mention of *se*-constructions as middles; the category is exemplified with constructions like *Ujesen lišće vene* ‘Leaves wither in the fall’, *Doći će ljepše stoljeće* ‘A better century will come’ and *Dedo je ostario* ‘Grandpa has grown old’.

Middles are made no less slippery by the label they carry. The designation ‘middle’ or ‘middle voice’ pegs them morphosyntactically as a very divergent, in-between category, belonging neither among transitive two-participant constructions nor among prototypical intransitive one-participant constructions. Yet, semantically and by extension, syntactically, middles are intimately connected to various reflexive, passive and impersonal constructions. In other words, they are extremely polysemous. Leaning on the relevant insights from the cognitive linguistic scholarship of the last few decades, this paper will argue for a somewhat broad conception of middles. From this perspective, Croatian will turn out to be a language with one of the most articulated systems of middle constructions, morphological and syntactic. All Croatian *se*-constructions will be shown to fall out from the schematic meaning of middles, viz. *low degree of event structure elaboration*. Their schematic counterpart for two-participant transitive constructions and constructions with the reflexive pronoun *sebe* ‘self’ is *high degree of event structure elaboration*. Both obviously derive from the semantic parameter of *relative elaboration of events* (Kemmer 1993: 3).⁵⁷ Based on this parameter, we may distinguish between middle and reflexive constructions. At the same time, as far as their position on the transitivity scale, both middles and reflexives land somewhere between its two ends marked by prototypical transitive two-participant (two-argument) constructions and prototypical intransitive one-participant (one-argument) constructions. The schematic meaning of low degree of event elaboration, common to all situation types coded by middles, follows from the *low degree of distinguishability of participants*; the lower the participant distinguishability, the lower the degree of event elaboration, and vice versa. In the case of passive and, especially impersonal constructions, their low degree of event elaboration is due to reduced event structure – the latter being a consequence of detopicalizing one or all participants and topicalizing the process itself.⁵⁸ Therefore, the degree of participant reduction is proportional to the degree of process topicalization,

⁵⁷ Lichtenberk’s (1991: 176) term *the degree of elaboration of situations* assumes that every situation can be linguistically coded in alternative ways, with more or less detail. It corresponds to the Cognitive Grammar notion of *construal*. See also Buttinelli (*this volume*, Chapter 11, section 2) for the distinction between subjective and objective construal in the context of the continuum between arguments and adjuncts.

⁵⁸ *Participant distinguishability* corresponds to what Langacker & Munro (1975) and Langacker (1976) call *non-distinctness of arguments*, Timberlake (1975, 1977) and Hopper & Thompson (1980) refer to as *individuation of participants*, and Lichtenberk (1991) terms *the degree of distinctness of participants*.

viz. processualization, while the low degree of event structure elaboration is ultimately a consequence of participant reduction. The remainder of this study elaborates on these semantic parameters, explaining how they bear on the analysis of middle verbs (2.1.) as well as middle, passive, and impersonal syntactic constructions (2.2.).

2. Discussion

This section examines in more detail single-participant⁵⁹ and multi-participant middle verbs (2.1.),⁶⁰ and syntactic middle *se*-constructions, viz. the prototypical middle, passive, and impersonal constructions (2.2.).

⁵⁹ The term *single-participant* is used in reference to single-participant middle verbs as opposed to multi-participant reciprocal middle verbs. The term *one-participant* is used to refer to intransitive verbs and absolute constructions/thematic processes featuring a single participant.

⁶⁰ A finer classification and semantic elaboration of middle verbs is outside the scope of this paper. A few remarks are in order though. Middle verbs fork into two main classes: (i) *single-participant* and (ii) *multi-participant*. Single-participant middle verbs designate processes directed at or taking place within one subject – agent or experiencer (singular or plural). They include (a) prototypical middle verbs, which have their counterparts in direct or indirect transitive reflexive constructions (e.g. *kupati se / kupati sebe* ‘bathe / bathe oneself’, *brijati se / brijati sebe* ‘shave / shave oneself’, *gledati se / gledati sebe* ‘look at oneself’, *sagraditi si / sagraditi sebi* ‘to build for oneself’, *pokloniti si / pokloniti sebi* ‘to gift oneself’, etc.); (b) middle verbs with no counterparts in reflexive constructions but with counterparts in the form of prototypical transitive verbs (e.g. *buditi se / buditi* ‘to wake up / to wake up Obj’, *pomicati se / pomicati* ‘to move / to move Obj’, *micati se / micati* ‘to move / to move Obj’ *osjećati se / osjećati* ‘to feel Adj/ to feel Obj’, *spuštati se / spuštati* ‘to lower oneself / to lower Obj’, *dizati se / dizati* ‘to lift oneself / to lift Obj’, *zapustiti se / zapustiti* ‘to let oneself go, to neglect oneself / to neglect Obj’, etc.); (c) redundant middle verbs, which have similar meanings with or without the particle *se*, i.e. in their middle and prototypically intransitive shape (e.g. *klizati se / klizati* ‘to skate’, *skijati se / skijati* ‘to ski’, *blistati se / blistati* ‘to glisten’, *šetati se / šetati* ‘to stroll’, etc.) and (d) middle verbs found only with the particle *se*, so-called *reflexiva tantum* verbs (e.g. *kajati se* ‘to regret’, *smijati se* ‘to laugh’, *bojati se* ‘to fear’, *svađati se* ‘to quarrel’, etc.). Multi-participant middle verbs designate processes which two or more subjects (agents or experiencers) direct at each other. These are reciprocal middle verbs, with counterparts in explicit constructions featuring the phrase *jedan drugog* ‘each other, one another’ in various gender, case and number forms (e.g. *grudali su se / grudali su jedni druge* ‘they were in a snowball fight / they were in a snowball fight with each other’, *svađali su se / svađali su se jedni s drugima* ‘they argued / they argued with each other’, *poljubili su se / poljubili su jedno drugo* ‘they kissed / they kissed each other’, etc.). Except for Silić & Pranjković (2005), Croatian reference grammars call single-participant middle verbs from class (a) and multi-participant reciprocal verbs *real reciprocal verbs*, while single-participant verb classes (b), (c) and (d) are tagged as *pseudo-reflexive verbs*.

2.1. Middle verbs

2.1.1. Single-participant middle verbs

Three features are common to all accounts of *se*-constructions in the Croatian grammatical literature: (i) regardless of theoretical and methodological bias, no use is ever made of the term “middle verb”; without exception these verbs are called reflexive verbs; (ii) the prevailing view is that, with all reflexive verbs, *se* is the enclitic form of the reflexive pronoun *sebe* ‘self’ (Barić *et al.* 1995: 231–232; Raguž 1997: 163; Pavešić & Vince 1971: 374–375), even in passive and impersonal constructions (Katičić 1991: 143–146; Barić *et al.* 1995: 452); and (iii) in verbs where *se* cannot be replaced by *sebe*, *se* is categorized as a particle; where the substitution is an option, *se* is categorized as an accusative-marked object clitic (Ivić 1962, 1967; Browne 1974; Belaj 2001; Silić & Pranjković 2005: 40–41).⁶¹ To the best of our knowledge, only Barić *et al.* (1991: 675–676) and Oraić Rabušić (2018) treat *se* uniformly as a particle, whereby Barić *et al.* (1991: 675) claim that with so-called real reflexive verbs *se* is substitutable by *sebe*. Examples (1a–d) suffice to show that *se* cannot always be replaced with *sebe* and that it is not an enclitic accusative form of the reflexive pronoun, therefore not an object. Instead, it should be treated as a particle clitic even with verbs where it formally alternates with the reflexive pronoun:⁶²

- (1) a. *Marija se_{MM} počešljala.*
 ‘Mary combed her hair’
 b. **Marija je počešljala sebe_{RM}.*⁶³
 ‘Mary combed her hair.’
 c. *Marija je prvo počešljala sebe_{RM}, a onda dijete.*
 ‘Mary first combed her hair, and then the child’s.’
 d. **Marija se_{MM} počešljala, a onda dijete.*
 ‘Mary combed her hair, and then the child’s.’

⁶¹ In the remainder of the paper the enclitic form *se* will be referred to as the *light form*, while the full form *sebe* will be referred to as the *heavy form*.

⁶² The idiomatic English translations of Croatian examples often do not reflect the distinctions between Croatian middle and reflexive constructions. For this reason, in section 2.1. we will provide minimum glossing, using the gloss MM for the middle marker *se* and RM for the reflexive marker *sebe*. We will also gloss any case markings that prove instrumental to the middle-reflexive contrast.

⁶³ Putting semantic-pragmatic criteria aside, this sentence is acceptable; otherwise, it is not. Without a supporting co-text and context no native speaker of Croatian would ever use such a construction.

When it comes to proving that the mentioned constructions feature pronouns, we might be inclined to rely on a comparison with similar constructions featuring personal pronouns – on the assumption that the distributional restrictions on the heavy (HF) and light (LF) form of personal pronouns were identical. Compare (2a–d):

- (2) a. *Marija ga_{LF} je počesljala.*
 ‘Mary combed his hair.’
 b. **Marija je počesljala njega_{HF}.*
 ‘Mary combed his hair.’
 c. *Marija je prvo počesljala njega_{HF}, a onda dijete.*
 ‘Mary first combed his hair, and then the child’s.’
 d. **Marija ga_{LF} je počesljala, a onda dijete.*
 ‘Mary combed his hair, and then the child’s.’

However, this reasoning is flawed – primarily because the use of light vs. heavy forms of personal pronouns has nothing to do with event structure reduction caused by low participant distinguishability. The use of heavy forms is motivated only by the pragmatic context, i.e. the need to emphasize the participant, which then requires that a relationship or contrast with another entity also be established. Therefore, the light and heavy forms of personal pronouns do not differ in kind – categorically, they are both pronouns. On the other hand, reaching for a light form of the reflexive pronoun *sebe* is iconically motivated; the light form results from a reduced distinguishability of event participants. This makes the light form *se* an integral part of the verb, and thus also a particle, not a pronoun.

Several syntactic tests well-known from the generative literature support this view. Essentially the *sebe/se* alternation is compared to that between the heavy (*njega, njih, mene*) and light (*ga, ih, me*) accusative form of personal pronouns, showing that the forms of personal pronouns are in free distribution, whereas those of the reflexive pronoun are not. These are the so-called secondary predication test, shown in (3) (Oliva 2001: 203; Oraić Rabušić 2018: 66), the test of modification with the *kao*-phrase in (4) (Moskvljević 1997: 111; Oraić Rabušić 2018: 67–68) and the comparative construction test, shown in (5) (Zec 1985: 365; Oraić Rabušić 2018: 71). These tests show that in the case of personal pronouns both forms are coreferential with the accusative of the secondary predicate and of the nominal in the *kao*-phrase and the comparative construction. As for the reflexive pronoun, only the heavy form is coreferential with the accusative while the light form binds the nominative, cf. (3–5):

- (3) a. *Petar je njega_{ACC} cijeloga_{ACC} uredio.*
 ‘Peter cleaned all of him up.’
 b. *Petar ga_{ACC} je cijeloga_{ACC} uredio.*
 ‘Peter cleaned all of him up.’
 c. *Petar je sebe_{RM-ACC} cijeloga_{ACC} uredio.*
 ‘Peter cleaned himself all up.’
 d. *Petar se_{MM} cijeli_{NOM} / *cijeloga_{ACC} uredio.*
 ‘Peter cleaned himself all up.’
- (4) a. *Njih_{ACC} su predstavili kao dobre studente_{ACC}.*
 ‘They presented them as good students.’
 b. *Predstavili su ih_{ACC} kao dobre studente_{ACC}.*
 ‘They presented them as good students.’
 c. *Sebe_{RM-ACC} su predstavili kao dobre studente_{ACC}.*
 ‘They presented themselves as good students.’
 d. *Predstavili su se_{MM} kao dobri studenti_{NOM} / *dobre studente_{ACC}.*
 ‘They presented themselves as good students.’
- (5) a. *Petar je branio mene_{ACC} uspješnije nego Anu_{ACC}.*
 ‘Peter defended me more successfully than (he defended) Anne.’
 b. *Petar me_{ACC} je branio uspješnije nego Anu_{ACC}.*
 ‘Peter defended me more successfully than (he defended) Anne.’
 c. *Petar je branio sebe_{RM-ACC} uspješnije nego Anu_{ACC}.*
 ‘Peter defended himself more successfully than (he defended) Anne.’
 d. *Petar se_{MM} branio uspješnije nego Ana_{NOM} / *Anu_{ACC}.*
 ‘Peter defended himself better than Anne (defended herself) / better than (he defended) Anne.’

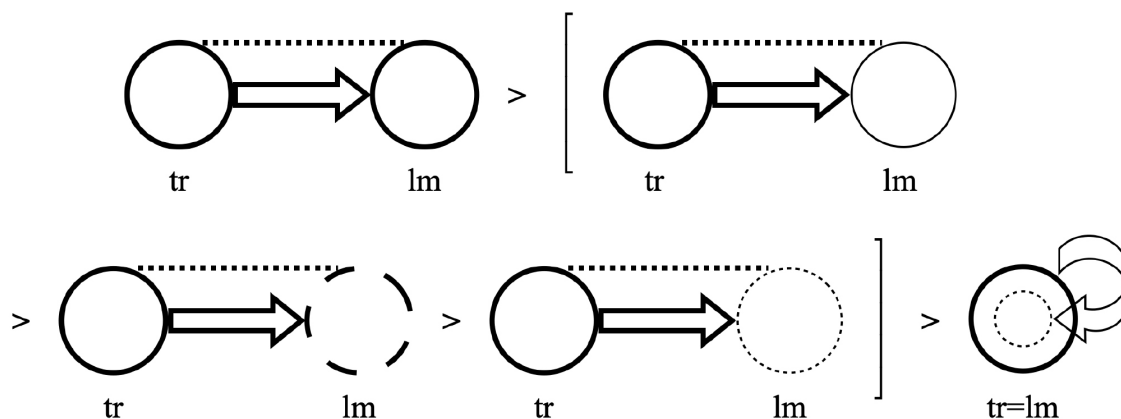
The examples above prove that the heavy and the light form of the reflexive pronoun are not syntactically equivalent. *Se*-verb constructions show a markedly different syntactic behaviour in comparison with constructions featuring reflexive pronouns, suggesting that they also symbolize different conceptual/semantic configurations. Syntactically, the light form can by no means or criteria be considered a reflexive pronoun. Ergo, the label *reflexive verb* is a poor fit for what should in fact be termed *middle verb*. To be sure, the label *reflexive verb* is not inaccurate. It is even more common in the pertinent literature (e.g. Hopper & Thompson 1980; Haiman 1983; König 2001; König & Siemund 2000; Smith 2004, etc.). Its downside, however, is that it is motivated exclusively by morphological facts. This is inconsistent with the continuous view of grammar as spanning morphology,

syntax, and semantics – the only view, to our mind, which guarantees a proper explanation of how structure and function meet in the grammatical constructions of any language. The light form *se* originated in the reflexive pronoun, but their diachronic morphological relationship has been weakened through grammaticalization. Syntactically, the link between the two has all but disappeared as the pronominal function of the light form changed to that of a particle via the following grammaticalization chain [_{MORPH.} *se*_{PRON} > *se*_{PRON}] > [_{SYNT.} *se*_{PART.}]. The particle function of the Croatian middle marker *se* is semantically consistent with comparable grammaticalization processes taking place in other languages where an etymological link exists between the primary reflexive marker and the middle marker.⁶⁴ In other words *se* was subject to *desemanticization*, semantic bleaching, depletion (Heine & Reh 1984; Lehmann 1985) or loss (Traugott & König 1991) of the primary form's semantic function – a grammaticalization tendency usually accompanied by the loss of phonological, morphological, and syntactic autonomy. The Croatian middle marker *se* is thus a component of every middle verb, i.e. all middle verbs are special lexical units. This grammaticalization path also explains why it is not possible for a language to have middle markers without also having reflexive markers (Kemmer 1993: 241), while the opposite holds, viz. languages can have reflexive markers without having middle markers – as evidenced by English. Croatian light form *se* is a particle because, like all other particles, its function is modificational. It modifies the verb-designated

⁶⁴ Middle markers are attested in relatively few languages. Among languages that have them, there are so-called two-form languages, where the reflexive-middle contrast is coded by two forms (Haiman 1983 and Smith 2004 use the terms *heavy* and *light form*), like Russian, Croatian, Icelandic, Romanian, Hungarian and Turkish. There are also languages with one only form, the so-called one-form languages like French, Spanish and German. Languages also differ in the morphological means available for coding middle markers. Clitics or unbound morphemes are used in Croatian, French, Spanish (Maldonado 1992, 1999, 2000, 2008) and Romanian (Calude 2017), whereas other languages use verb affixes – for instance *-mai* in Classical Greek, *-st* in Icelandic, *-sja* in Russian, *-kod-* and *-köz-* in Hungarian. Finally, in some languages, the reflexive and the middle marker are morphologically related. For instance, in Croatian, Czech and Russian the middle developed from the primary reflexive. In others, like Romanian, Turkish, Latin, modern Greek there is not even so much as a semantic connection (Manney 2001: 22). Other languages missing a morphological connection between middles and reflexives include some South-American and Mexican languages (Maldonado 2009). Maldonado (2009) also argues that in Spanish there are many cases suggesting that the middle was not derived from the reflexive.

action by limiting the extent of event structure elaboration via reducing the degree of conceptual distinguishability of its participants.⁶⁵ This semantic function makes *se* different from the reflexive pronoun *sebe*, whose meaning has the opposite effect. The relationship between the reflexive pronoun *sebe* and the particle clitic *se* may be compared to what happens in photography when we zoom in or out by adjusting focal length in order to change the angle of view or magnification. Compare Figure 1, where dotted lines mark correspondences between the same entity functioning as the trajector (agent/subject) and the landmark (theme⁶⁶ / object).

Figure 1. Metaphorical portrayal of the reduction of participant distinguishability in transitive reflexive constructions and middle verbs



Various intermediate stages are normally not accessible to processing, which is why in Figure 1 they are enclosed in brackets. Rarely, they may gain some cognitive salience and thus become accessible, cf. the middle verb *okupati se* ‘take a bath/bathe oneself; take a swim’ in (6a–b):

- (6) a. *Ivan se_{MM} ujutro okupao i otišao na posao.*
 ‘Ivan took a bath in the morning and went to work.’

⁶⁵ This is why generativists have traditionally treated such particles and other grammaticalized reflexive forms as *detransitivizers* (e.g. Rosen 1989; Grimshaw 1982; Zec 1985; Moskovljević 1997). Interestingly, Maldonado (2008) argues the opposite for Spanish, viz. a middle marker is found to increase transitivity.

⁶⁶ In accordance with Cognitive Grammar, the label *theme* is used in reference to a macrorole, whose prototypical microrole is patient. It corresponds to the notion of *undergoer* in Role and Reference Grammar (Foley & Van Valin 1984; Van Valin & LaPolla 1997).

- b. *Na putu smo zastali u jednoj uvali, okupali se_{MM} i nastavili dalje.*
 ‘We stopped along the way in a lagoon, took a dip and moved on.’

Okupati se in (6a) is a verb denoting a body care routine. This type of verbs assumes that particular parts of the body are affected by the process which the agent initiates and directs at himself. The same verb in (6b) does not imply involvement of particular body parts. It simply denotes the process of immersing the body in the water and moving the limbs to keep oneself afloat. This example suggests that it may be profitable to think of some middle verbs as scalar in terms of the degree to which they elaborate the structure of the designated event.

Since in Croatian the reflexive-middle contrast between *sebe/se* is very pronounced, we will next turn to exploring its syntactic and semantic ramifications.

The basic difference between reflexive *sebe-* and middle *se-* constructions is that the former are only valid under specific semantic and pragmatic conditions. They depend on the existence of a relationship or, in the words of Haiman (1983: 804), of a contrast with some other event, as shown above in (1b–c). More examples are given below:

- (7) a. *Pogledaj se_{MM} kako izgledaš!*
 ‘Take a look at yourself.’
 b. **Pogledaj sebe_{RM} kako izgledaš!*
 ‘Take a look at yourself.’
 c. *Pogledaj prvo sebe_{RM} a onda sudi drugima!*
 ‘First take a look at yourself, and then judge others.’
 d. **Pogledaj se_{MM} a onda sudi drugima!*
 ‘First take a look at yourself, and then judge others.’
- (8) a. *Zašto se_{MM} stalno gledaš u ogledalu?*
 ‘Why do you keep looking at yourself in the mirror?’
 b. **Zašto sebe_{RM} stalno gledaš u ogledalu?*
 ‘Why do you keep looking at yourself in the mirror?’
 c. *Gledaj sebe_{RM} baš te briga za druge.*
 ‘Mind yourself, don’t concern yourself with others.’
 d. **Gledaj se_{MM} baš te briga za druge.*
 ‘Mind yourself, don’t concern yourself with others.’

Several factors explain why the acceptability of reflexive transitive constructions with an emphatic reflexive pronoun, as they are commonly dubbed, depends on the existence of a relationship with other entities or events (e.g. Ivić 1983: 118; Haiman 1983; Calude 2017). The first is the contrast between expected and unexpected information, i.e. between informational predictability and unpredictability. Haiman (1983: 802) associates informational predictability/unpredictability with language economy and shows that with reflexive constructions, among others, the predictable information is preferably coded by shorter, phonologically lighter forms. Longer forms are associated with unpredictable information.⁶⁷ Using a frequentist argument, where higher frequency is seen as proportional with predictability, Haspelmath (2008) argues that more frequent scenarios will be coded with less linguistic material and vice versa. In his analysis of reflexive constructions, Haiman sets up another distinction, viz. between so-called *introverted* and *extroverted* verbs.⁶⁸ Introverted verbs are self-directed, i.e. the activity designated by such verbs is directed at the subject (for instance body care verbs, like *kupati se_{MM}* ‘bathe (oneself)’, *brijati se_{MM}* ‘shave (oneself)’, *češljati se_{MM}* ‘comb (oneself)’, etc.). Extroverted verbs are other-directed, e.g. *voljeti* ‘love’, *mrziti* ‘hate’, *udarati* ‘hit’, *gledati* ‘watch’, etc. In view of these two factors, verbs of body care clearly must take the light form in neutral contexts. Since they are prototypically introverted verbs, the information that the action is spontaneous and subject-directed is expected and the verbs receive lighter coding. If, in turn, these verbs are used with the heavy form, viz. the reflexive pronoun *sebe*, the notion of unexpectedness follows automatically. The situation assumes the air of unexpectedness as it now communicates a non-spontaneous, voluntary action directed at the agent’s body but begs for “additional explanation”. In examples (1a–d), for instance, this explanation involves reference to a relationship with another animate entity. *Pogledati* ‘take a look’ and *gledati* ‘look at, mind’ (7–8) in turn are extroverted verbs – where the other-directedness of action is the expected information. When accompanied by the heavy form *sebe*, these verbs

⁶⁷ Haiman (1983: 802) draws an interesting analogy between the relationship of predictable/unpredictable contrast to lighter/heavier linguistic coding, and not spelling out the country of destination in national mail traffic.

⁶⁸ Haiman’s (1983) introverted/extroverted contrast was embraced by e.g. Everaert (1986, 1991), Reuland (1998), Huang (2000), König & Siemund (2000), König (2001) – who labels introverted verbs *self-directed* and extroverted verbs *other-directed* – and Smith (2004).

communicate an unexpected information and involve an obligatory contrast with “the other” (7c). Such a contrast is excluded in the case of the light form *se* (7–8d). If, however, these verbs migrate semantically from the domain of extrovertedness toward that of introvertedness, as they do in (7a) and (8a), the situation is interpreted as expected and the light form *se* is sanctioned. In (7a) the imperative form *pogledaj se_{MM}* ‘take a look at yourself’ is used as a pragmatic strategy to chastise the interlocutor and make him aware of the consequences of his actions (this is often the case with reprimanding the child for dirtying their clothes during play). Example (8a) is something of an idiomatic expression communicating narcissistic demeanour. It is not so much about directing the gaze to the entity as a whole, as it is about the gaze being directed at specific body parts and details of appearance. Haiman (1983: 803) adds the unexpected/expected quality of the object as another factor in the choice between heavy or light form. This factor contributes to the neutrality/acceptability of (8a) as the expected object of gaze in the mirror is the subject, not someone else. With the extroverted verbs *voljeti* ‘love’ and *mrziti* ‘hate’ (9a–d), other-directedness explains the distribution of the heavy form *sebe* vs. the light form *se*. The light middle form *se* is not acceptable as it directs the action at the subject.⁶⁹ The heavy form *sebe*, as usual, implies a contrast, as in (9d):

- (9) a. ??*Mrzio / Volio sam se_{MM} cijeli život.*
 ‘I’ve hated/loved myself all my life.’
 b. ??*Mrzio / Volio sam sebe_{RM} cijeli život.*
 ‘I’ve hated/loved myself all my life.’
 c. **Mrzio / Volio sam se_{MM} više nego tebe.*
 ‘I’ve hated/loved myself more than (I’ve hated/loved) you.’
 d. *Mrzio / Volio sam više sebe_{RM} nego tebe.*
 ‘I’ve hated/loved myself more than (I’ve hated/loved) you.’

The bulk of so-called *reflexiva tantum* verbs are introverted verbs.⁷⁰ In fact, they are highly introverted verbs featuring subjects in the semantic

⁶⁹ Some Croatian native speakers may find *se* acceptable with the verbs *mrziti* and *voljeti*. In our native speaker judgement, it is not. In fact, an informal search of the *Riznica* corpus did not return a single such token. Perhaps some examples could be found in other corpora, but what matters more is that with these verbs *se* forms are highly marked, and sit on the very brink of acceptability.

⁷⁰ Milković (*this volume*, Chapter 6) offers a diachronic survey of *reflexiva tantum* psychological verbs in the history of Croatian.

role of experiencer. The light form *se* is non-optional because the process takes place subject-internally. In other words, the conceptual configuration underlying these verbs reflects iconically onto the form. Given the extremely low degree of event structure elaboration, these verbs are among the most prototypical middle constructions. Among prototypical middle verbs we also find those that designate natural states and processes. Recall that in some grammars these are the only types of verbs tagged as middles. They include deadjectival verbs like *zelenjeti se_{MM}* ‘to be/glow green’, *crvenjeti se_{MM}* ‘to be/glow red’, *žutjeti se_{MM}* ‘to be/glow yellow’, *bjelasati se_{MM}* ‘to be/gleam white’, *crnjeti se_{MM}* ‘to be/gleam black’ etc., and designate processes resulting in states and properties coded by the adjectives.

Redundant middle verbs are usually described as having the same meaning with or without the *se* particle, cf. *skijati se_{MM}* / *skijati* ‘to ski’, *klizati se_{MM}* / *klizati* ‘to skate’, *šetati se_{MM}* / *šetati* ‘to walk’, *blistati se_{MM}* / *blistati* ‘to glisten’, etc. However, these variants only share a semantic base. Their differences come to the fore especially with verbs denoting various sporting activities (Belaj 2001). The middle form will be more common in non-competitive contexts, while the particle-less form is the only acceptable form in references to competitive, especially professional sports. Compare:

- (10) a. *Na zimovanju je bilo jako lijepo, bilo je puno snijega, pa smo se_{MM} skijali / ?skijali od jutra do mraka.*
 ‘We had such a good time during winter holidays, there was lots of snow, so we skied from morning till night.’
- b. *Janica Kostelić jučer je izvrsno skijala u Wengenu / *Janica Kostelić jučer se_{MM} izvrsno skijala u Wengenu.*
 ‘Janica Kostelić skied amazingly yesterday in Wengen.’

What is more, in the context of professional sports, forms without the *se* particle may even be transitive:

- (11) a. *Jučer je skijala svoju posljednju utrku.*
 ‘Yesterday, she skied her last race.’
- b. *Osim slaloma skijat će i veleslalom.*
 ‘Besides slalom, she will also ski the giant-slalom.’

Shifts between middle and non-middle forms are mainly due to the fact that the middle form blocks transitivity, allowing the action to be construed as an exercise undertaken for the subject’s sheer amusement.

In the domain of professional sports, however, reference is made to other animate participants or to inanimates metaphorically construed as event participants. A similar contrast is found in measure expressions, which can be coded as adverbials or as arguments (participants) with prototypical intransitive verbs like *trčati* ‘run’, *hodati* ‘walk’, *plivati* ‘swim’, etc. (Belaj & Tanacković Faletar 2017: 168), cf. 12:

- (12) a. *Trčao je osamsto metara do kuće.*
 ‘He ran **eight hundred meters** to the house.’
 b. *Na Olimpijskim igrama trčao je osamsto metara.*
 ‘He ran **800-meters** (i.e. the 800-meter race) in the Olympics.’

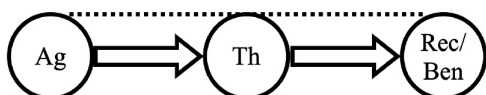
Apart from verbs with the particle *se*, which represents the highest grade of grammaticalization of the light accusative form of the reflexive pronoun, we should also consider indirect middle constructions with *si*, the light dative form of the reflexive pronoun marking a beneficiary/recipient. The *si* form alternates with the heavy form *sebi* in reflexive constructions. Cf. (13):

- (13) a. *Kupio si_{MM-DAT} je kuću.*
 ‘He bought himself a house.’
 b. **Kupio je kuću sebi_{RM-DAT}*
 ‘He bought a house for himself’
 c. *Kupio je kuću sebi_{RM-DAT} a ne djeci.*
 ‘He bought a house for himself, not for the children.’
 d. **Kupio si_{MM-DAT} je kuću, a ne djeci.*
 ‘He bought himself a house, and not for the children.’

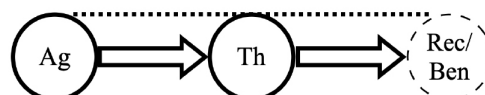
Given the distribution of the light and the heavy form shown in (13a–d) above, we conclude that indirect middle and reflexive pairs behave exactly like direct middles and reflexives in (1). In other words, the contrasts can also be explained by appealing to the conceptual-semantic parameter, viz. a lower or higher degree of participant distinguishability and event elaboration. The only difference with indirect pairs is that *si* is not a particle but a reflexive pronoun, which means that unlike *se*, it functions syntactically as an indirect object – just like its heavy form *sebi*. Compare Figures 2a–b.

Figure 2. Conceptual-semantic difference between indirect reflexive and middle constructions

a. indirect reflexive



b. indirect middle



Further evidence that the light form *si* is as much a pronoun and an indirect object as the heavy form *sebi* comes from the following distributional fact. Namely, unlike the distribution of *se/sebe* in (5), the distribution of *si/sebi* with respect to the case (nominative/dative) of the comparative construction in (14c–d) is identical to the distribution of the light and heavy forms of personal pronouns in (14a–b), allowing of course for the difference in meaning:

- (14) a. *Petar meni_{DAT} kupuje odjeću češće nego Ana_{NOM} / Ani_{DAT}*
 ‘Petar buys clothes for me more often than Ana does.’
 ‘Petar buys clothes for me more often than for Ana.’
- b. *Petar mi_{DAT} kupuje odjeću češće nego Ana_{NOM} / Ani_{DAT}*
 ‘Petar buys clothes for me more often than Ana does.’
 ‘Petar buys clothes for me more often than for Ana.’
- c. *Petar sebi_{RM-DAT} kupuje odjeću češće nego Ana_{NOM} / Ani_{DAT}*
 ‘Petar buys clothes for himself more often than Ana does for herself.’
 ‘Petar buys clothes for himself more often than for Ana.’
- d. *Petar si_{MM-DAT} kupuje odjeću češće nego Ana_{NOM} / Ani_{DAT}*
 ‘Petar buys clothes for himself more often than Ana does for herself.’
 ‘Petar buys clothes for himself more often than for Ana.’

2.1.2. Multi-participant reciprocal middle verbs

Reciprocal middle verbs designate activities which two or more participants direct at each other/one another, which means that subjects/agents/experiencers also qualify as themes. Typologically, reciprocal middle verbs are secondary relative to single-participant middle verbs, viz. they constitute a functional extension of single-participant middle verbs and not the other way around (Lichtenberk 1991: 171). As with single-participant middle verbs, an iconic meaning-form relationship exists with multi-participant middles too. Middle constructions with the *se* particle involve a low degree

of participant distinguishability and event elaboration; a higher degree of their distinguishability/elaboration is found with explicit constructions (EC) featuring the phrase *jedan drugoga* ‘each other, one another’, cf. (15a–d):

- (15) a. *Grudali su se*_{MM}
 ‘They were in a snowball fight.’
 b. *Grudali su jedni druge*_{EC-ACC}
 ‘They threw snowballs at each other.’
 c. *Poljubili su se*_{MM}
 ‘They kissed.’
 d. *Poljubili su jedno drugo*_{EC-ACC}
 ‘They kissed each other.’

Similarly to single-participant middle verbs discussed in 2.1.1., multi-participant middles also allow both direct reciprocal middle verbs and indirect reciprocal middles with their explicit counterparts. Indirect reciprocal middles are exemplified in (16a–d). In their object slots we no longer see the *se* particle, but the light dative form *si* with the semantic role of beneficiary/recipient:

- (16) a. *Dali su si*_{MM-DAT} *poklone za Božić.*
 ‘They gave **themselves** Christmas presents.’
 b. *Dali su jedni drugima*_{EC-DAT} *poklone za Božić.*
 ‘They gave **each other / one another** Christmas presents.’
 c. *Čestitali su si*_{MM-DAT}
 ‘They congratulated **each other/one another.**’
 d. *Čestitali su jedni drugima*_{EC-DAT}
 ‘They congratulated **each other/one another.**’

In both direct and indirect constructions, the light and heavy form contrast mainly along the parameter of simultaneity/sequentiality (Lichtenberk 1991, Kemmer 1993: 109).

The lighter, middle form communicates a simultaneous event, the form with *jedan drugoga/jedni drugima* symbolizes a sequential event. Put differently, the light form involves holistic event condensation, the heavy form communicates a dispersive, analytical event construal. Example (15c) thus reads as one simultaneous kiss and (15d) as two kisses. As with constructions featuring the heavy reflexive form *sebe* (cf. 1c and 7c), this difference can be accentuated by adding a contrasting adversative clause (cf. *Poljubili su jedno drugo* ‘They kissed each other’ > *Prvo je x poljubio*

y, **a potom je y poljubio x** ‘First x kissed y, and then y kissed x’). This is also possible in the case of indirect reciprocal middles (cf. *Čestitali su jedni drugima* ‘They congratulated each other/one another’ > *Prvo je x čestitao y, a potom je y čestitao x* ‘First x congratulated y, and then y congratulated x’).⁷¹ Kemmer (1993: 110) remarks quite accurately that the simultaneity inherent to the light form often carries implications of social interaction (absent from the heavy form). This is especially prominent in verbs of perception, cf. (17a–d):

- (17) a. *Vidjeli su se_{MM} jučer u gradu.*
 ‘They saw each other in town yesterday.’ i.e. ‘They met.’
 b. *Vidjeli su jedan drugoga_{EC-ACC} jučer u gradu.*
 ‘They saw each other in town yesterday.’ i.e. ‘They sighted each other but did not meet.’
 c. *Čuli su se_{MM} jučer telefonom.*
 ‘They heard from each other by phone yesterday.’
 d. *Čuli su jučer jedan drugoga_{EC-ACC} na zabavi.*
 ‘They heard each other yesterday at the party.’

Whereas (17a and c) imply social interaction – (17c) explicitly and (17a) implicitly – in (17b and d) there are no such implicatures, there is not even the idea of simultaneity of perception. It is just as likely that two people saw/heard each other at different moments in time. However, social interaction may be the only implicature triggered by reciprocal middle constructions, in which case explicit reciprocal constructions are ruled out, cf. (18a–d):

- (18) a. *Vidjet ćemo se_{MM} uskoro.*
 ‘We’ll see each other soon.’
 b. **Vidjet ćemo uskoro jedan drugoga_{EC-ACC}.*
 ‘We’ll see each other soon.’
 c. *Čut ćemo se_{MM} uskoro.*
 ‘We’ll hear from each other soon.’
 d. **Čut ćemo uskoro jedan drugoga_{EC-ACC}.*
 ‘We’ll hear from each other soon.’

⁷¹ Lichtenberk (1991: 172) presents an interesting case from the Austronesian language To’aba’ita in the Solomon Islands. The language has an explicit reciprocal form *kwailiu*, which also means, among others, *front-back*. This form proves that the more basic sense of spatial reciprocity may metaphorically map onto sequentiality in explicit reciprocal constructions.

The reason why explicit reciprocal constructions in (18b and d) are objectionable is that they do not allow the visual or auditory event to be construed as a matter of pure perception – rather the purpose/goal of the visual/auditory event is highly salient and implies some form of planned social interaction (cf. e.g. *Svakako ćemo se_{MM} uskoro vidjeti / čuti* ‘We will definitely soon hear from / see each other’ > *Svakako ćemo se_{MM} uskoro vidjeti / čuti kako bismo porazgovarali o tome* ‘We will definitely soon see each other / hear from each other so we can talk about this’). In both (17) and (18), the metonymy VISUAL OR AUDITORY PERCEPTION FOR SOCIAL INTERACTION allows the notion of social interaction to be communicated via verbs of perception. However, (18) arguably involves a higher degree of pragmatic inferencing. An explicit reciprocal construction is also unsuitable for so-called collective reciprocal meanings (Lichtenberk 1985; Kemmer 1993: 98–102) as found with verbs like *okupiti se_{MM}* ‘gather’, *ujediniti se_{MM}* ‘unite’, *naći se_{MM}* ‘come together’, etc. The middle construction is the only coding option since collective scenarios do not profile interactions between event participants to any notable extent/at all. Collectives communicate a summary construal of individuals as a compact unity without any emphasis on the interaction between them, cf. (19a–d):

- (19) a. *Okupili su se_{MM} kako bi proslavili godišnjicu mature.*
 ‘They gathered to celebrate their graduation anniversary.’
 b. **Okupili su jedni druge_{EC-ACC} kako bi proslavili godišnjicu mature.*
 ‘*They gathered one another to celebrate their graduation anniversary.’
 c. *Ujedinili su se_{MM} kako bi se obranili od neprijatelja.*
 ‘They united to defend themselves against the enemy.’
 d. **Ujedinili su jedni druge_{EC-ACC} kako bi se obranili od neprijatelja.*
 ‘*They united one another to defend themselves against the enemy.’

However, since there are verbs whose middle forms have single-participant meanings, the explicit reciprocal construction is the only coding option for multi-participant reciprocity, as in (20a–d):⁷²

- (20) a. **Hoće li doći? – pitali su se_{MM}.*
 ‘Are they coming? – they asked each other.’

⁷² *Hoće li doći? – pitali su se* in (20a) is grammatical in the sense ‘they were wondering if they would come’.

- b. *Hoće li doći? – pitali su jedan drugoga*_{EC-ACC}
 ‘Are they coming? – they asked each other.’
- c. **Ubili su se*_{MM}
 ‘They killed each other.’
- d. *Ubili su jedan drugoga*_{EC-ACC}
 ‘They killed each other.’

A reciprocal middle may occasionally take the explicit form. Instead of (15b), for instance, one may opt for the tautologous *Grudali su se*_{MM} *jedni s drugima*_{EC-INSTR} ‘They were in a snowball fight with each other’. Because of tautology, this construction is rare (even colloquially) but it is not unacceptable. It is a comitative construction featuring an obligatory instrumental case. Since its function is to increase the level of explicitness (cf. *Grudali su se*_{MM} *jedni s drugima*_{EC-INSTR} ‘They were in a snowball fight with each other’/**Grudali su se*_{MM} *jedni druge*_{EC-ACC} ‘They threw snowballs at each other’) we may argue that it is an example of an explicit-explicative construction. Recall that it was argued in section 2.1.1. that even among middle verbs events may be elaborated to various degrees. The claim was illustrated with *Na putu smo zastali u jednoj uvali, okupali se*_{MM} *i nastavili dalje* ‘We stopped on our way in a lagoon, took a dip and moved on’, which elaborates the event to a lower degree than *Ivan se*_{MM} *ujutro okupao i otišao na posao* ‘Ivan took a bath in the morning and went to work’. It is similar with reciprocal middle verbs, except that differences in degree are here brought out by contrasting different verbs. Thus, e.g. *Njih se*_{MM} *dvoje dobro slažu* ‘The two of them are getting along well’ or *Ova se*_{MM} *dva dijela police savršeno poklapaju* ‘These two sections of the shelf align perfectly’ elaborate the events to a lower degree than *Grudali su se*_{MM} ‘They were in a snowball fight’ or *Svađali su se*_{MM} ‘They were arguing’. Generally, higher degrees of event elaboration will tend to be associated with animate participants rather than inanimate, because not all participant types are equally conceptually accessible on the animacy hierarchy.

2.1.3. Reciprocal-middle contrast and the scalar nature of transitive constructions

Let us wrap up this section with a cursory look at the reflexive-middle contrast from the perspective of the gradience of transitive constructions. The transitive prototype or the *canonical event model* (Langacker 1991: 286; Belaj & Tanacković Faletar 2017: 157–158) and the associated *source – path*

– *goal* image schema involve a transfer of energy along the event chain⁷³ featuring two prototypical participants – the agent (subject) as the “head” or source of the event chain and the patient (direct object) as its “tail” or target/goal – causing a change of state in the target participant. Against these, there are prototypical one-participant intransitive constructions. In the transitivity cline discussed in Hopper & Thompson (1980: 277), reflexive constructions were argued to sit between prototypical transitive and prototypical intransitive scenarios:⁷⁴

«Reflexives in many languages have properties which can be explained by appealing to their intermediate status between one-argument and two-argument clauses: compared with one-argument clauses, they may be more Transitive...; compared with two-argument clauses, they typically display features associated with lower Transitivity». (Hopper & Thompson 1980: 277)

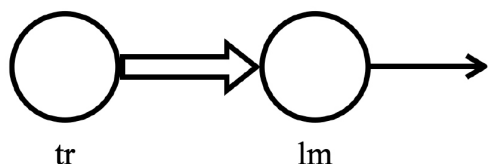
In the typological study cited above, Hopper & Thompson do not discuss middle constructions per se. Nevertheless, as there are important conceptual-semantic and consequently syntactic differences between prototypical reflexive constructions (referred to by Faltz (1977: 3) as the archetypal reflexive context), and middle constructions, their implicit transitivity scale *two-participant event* > *reflexive* > *one-participant event* should also accommodate middles. Because of their low degree of participant distinguishability and low degree of event elaboration, middle constructions sit squarely within the domain of intransitivity, i.e. they are closer to prototypical intransitive constructions. Therefore, we may propose the following transitivity scale for languages which, like Croatian, differentiate between transitive reflexive and intransitive middle constructions – [_{TRAN.} *two-participant event* > *reflexive constructions (reflexive)*_{TRAN.}] > [_{INTR.} *middle verbs* > *one-participant event*_{INTR.}] – as shown in Figure 3.

⁷³ Cognitive linguistics is indebted to Talmy’s (1985, 2000) model of *force dynamics* for the idea of an event chain, which proved instrumental to the analysis of various grammatical constructions.

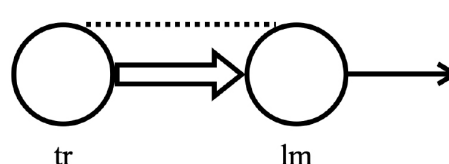
⁷⁴ On the gradience of transitive constructions in Croatian, cf. Belaj & Tanacković Faletar (2017), and for English, cf. Rice (1987).

Figure 3. A scale showing progressive reduction in participant distinguishability and event structure elaboration

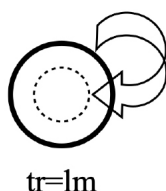
a. prototypical two-participant transitive event



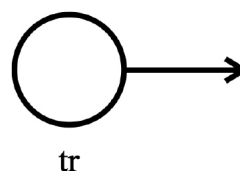
b. reflexive event



c. middle



d. prototypical one-participant intransitive event



The conceptual proximity between middle verbs and prototypical intransitive verbs is corroborated in Croatian dialects by various intransitive verbs that regularly appear in the middle form. For instance, *plakati se_{MM}* ‘to cry’ vs. *plakati* ‘to cry’, *sjesti se_{MM}* ‘to sit oneself down’ vs. *sjesti* ‘to sit’. Cf. also the reciprocal middle *razgovarati se_{MM}* ‘to talk’ vs. *razgovarati* ‘to talk’. Further evidence of their proximity comes from the already mentioned redundant middles like *ustati se_{MM}* / *ustati* ‘to get up’, *skijati se_{MM}* / *skijati* ‘to ski’, *klizati se_{MM}* / *klizati* ‘to skate’, *šetati se_{MM}* / *šetati* ‘to walk’, etc.⁷⁵

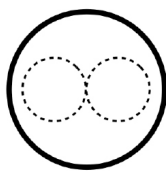
While reflexive constructions are characterized by the separation of ego, or as put by Langacker & Munro (1975), by the mind/body distinction, in middle verbs the ego is whole; there is not so much as an inkling of distinct participants being involved. One could say that, as far as the degree of participant distinguishability and event elaboration, middles represent more schematic construals than reflexive constructions, and reciprocal middle verbs compare to explicit reciprocal constructions in the same way. Middle verbs thus designate a holistic entity where a reduced phonological pole iconically represents a reduction on the conceptual-semantic pole.

⁷⁵ The form *sjesti se_{MM}* ‘to sit oneself down’ is also motivated by analogy with *ustati se_{MM}* ‘to get (oneself) up’.

Langacker (1991: 371) draws a remarkable parallel between middle single-participant verbs and *pluralia tantum* nouns, on the one hand, and reflexive constructions and regular plurals on the other. This is illustrated in Figure 4a–d.

Figure 4a–d. Parallel between *pluralia tantum* nouns/middle verbs and regular plurals/reflexive constructions

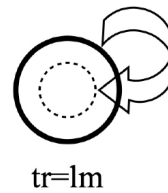
a. *pluralia tantum* nouns



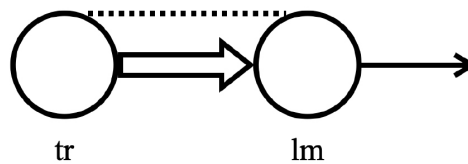
c. regular plural



b. middle verbs



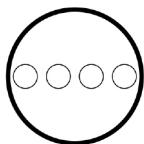
d. reflexive constructions



In addition to the parallelism between *pluralia tantum* nouns and single-participant middle verbs, we may also propose an analogy between collective nouns and reciprocal middle verbs, and between regular plurals and explicit reciprocal constructions (Fig. 5a–d).

Figure 5a–d. Parallel between collective nouns/reciprocal middle verbs and regular plurals/explicit reciprocal constructions

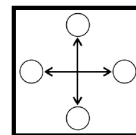
a. collective nouns



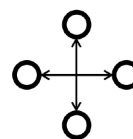
c. regular plurals



b. reciprocal middle verbs



d. explicit reciprocal constructions



Examples (21a–b), cited by Moskovljević (1997: 110) and Oraić Rabušić (2018: 69) demonstrate perfectly the difference between a holistic and separate conception of the ego and how this underlies the distinction between middle and reflexive constructions. In this example *se* is seemingly substitutable by *sebe*:

- (21) a. *Ivan se_{MM} brani bolje od Marka.*
 ‘Ivan defends himself better than Marco.’
 b. *Ivan sebe_{RM} brani bolje od Marka.*
 ‘Ivan defends himself better than Marco.’

As duly noted by the mentioned authors, (21b) can be interpreted in three ways: *Ivan brani sebe_{RM} bolje nego što brani Marka* ‘Ivan defends himself better than he defends Marco’/ *Ivan sebe_{RM} brani bolje nego što ga Marko brani* ‘Ivan defends himself better than Marco defends him’ > *Ivan brani sebe_{RM} bolje nego što Marko brani sebe_{RM}* ‘Ivan defends himself better than Marco defends himself’. Yet, only the latter matches the meaning of the *se*-construction in (21a). Besides *se*- and *sebe*-constructions differing in the number of permissible interpretations (one vs. many), a more fundamental difference is that not even the construction *Ivan brani sebe_{RM} bolje nego što Marko brani sebe_{RM}* ‘Ivan defends himself than Marco defends himself’, stands as a true semantic equivalent to the *se*-construction in (21a). Their semantic base is indeed equivalent, however, they each involve a different construal or type of event elaboration – a far more important contrast to our mind. In the middle *se*-construction characterized by low event elaboration, the profile only includes the fact that Ivan is more successful defending himself than Marco. In the reflexive *sebe*-construction, in turn, because the ego is separated, Ivan and Marco come to be construed as defence attorneys each defending himself as the defendant.

2.2. Middle, passive, and impersonal constructions

This section is devoted to syntactic constructions with the particle *se*. This includes prototypical middle constructions where middle is the only profiled meaning, and the functionally adjacent passive and impersonal *se*-constructions, which can be construed as functional extensions of general middle semantics. The latter constructions hold on to their primary passive and impersonal semantics but also harbour the meaning of middles in their semantic base, which is the contribution of the basic semantics of the

se particle. We first discuss the relationship between middle and passive constructions (2.2.1.), and then move on to examine the relationship between middles and impersonals (2.2.2.)

2.2.1. Middle and passive constructions

As stated in the introduction to this paper, middle constructions are hardly ever mentioned in the Croatian literature. Even when they are (Oraić Rabušić 2018: 175–177; Batinić Angster 2020: 64–65), only the most prototypical middles denoting static generic/habitual situations – as exemplified in (22a–c) are considered:⁷⁶

- (22) a. *Krumpir se kuha pola sata.*
 ‘Potato is boiled for half an hour.’
 b. *Vrtovi se okopavaju motikama.*
 ‘Gardens are tilled with hoes.’
 c. *Kruh se reže nožem.*
 ‘Bread is sliced with a knife.’

Such middles occasionally surface in discussions of the passive construction, where they are usually singled out for their generic nature. Because they are perceived as lacking dynamicity they suffer one of two fates: (a) they are either excluded from the passive category (Vukojević 1992) or (b) they are included among passives, but only as a highly marginal member (Belaj 2004; Belaj & Tanacković Faletar 2017). Their generic nature is indicated by calling attention to their incompatibility with adverbials signalling a passive interpretation, like *sada* ‘now’, *upravo* ‘at this very moment’, *danas* ‘today’, *jučer* ‘yesterday’, etc.; and conversely, their compatibility with those indicating habituality, like *obično* ‘usually’, *u pravilu* ‘as a rule’, *redovito* ‘regularly’, etc. Indeed, given that middles topicalize the process at the expense of its participants (Manney 2001: 40; Calude 2017), these generic constructions come out as prototypical middles with their extremely low degree of event elaboration and consequently a

⁷⁶ In her typological study couched in the generative Theta System theory (Reinhart 2002), Marelj (2004) also advocates limiting the middle to the prototypical generic constructions shown in (22a–c).

strongly profiled process, stripped of its participants.⁷⁷ They have a highly schematic, generic agent, which is cognitively hardly accessible. In that respect, these middles are similar to passives since both are strategies of detopicalization of the agent. But unlike passives, these middles take this to the extreme. Passives generally, including the Croatian *se*-passive, are primarily strategies of topicalization of the theme participant. This has strong cognitive ramifications since, despite agent detopicalization, the topicalization of the theme in the target domain of the event chain implies that the agent is still cognitively accessible and quite specific. The dynamic nature of the passive construction implies the existence of a relation between the entity at which the action is directed and the entity responsible for its instigation. Let us compare the middle construction *Vrtovi se okopavaju u proljeće* ‘Gardens are tilled in the spring’ and the passive *Vrtovi se okopavaju već tjedan dana* ‘The gardens are being tilled for a week now’. The agent cannot be expressed in either the middle or the passive, but in the passive, it is cognitively more accessible because it is more specific (cf. the active counterpart *Moj susjed vrt okopava već tjedan dana* ‘My neighbour has been tilling the garden for a week now’). In the middle, the agent is a very schematic type and could be glossed as *ljudi* ‘people’ or at its most specific *vrtlari* ‘gardeners’. Nonetheless, we still contend that Croatian *se*-passives are akin to the middle because they feature the *se* particle. To put it simply, passive *se*-constructions are not middles if compared with the prototypical generic middle. But they are middles considering how they relate to the Croatian periphrastic passive, which is formed with the passive participle and the auxiliary *biti* ‘be’. Compare *Kuća je izgrađena u dva mjeseca* ‘The house was built in two months’ and *Kuća se gradila dva mjeseca* ‘The house was built for two months’. The periphrastic passive clearly profiles a state, the *se*-passive profiles the process.⁷⁸ Since *se*-passives involve a lower degree

⁷⁷ Their generic nature often results in idiomatization, which may be thought of as “habitualization” of the highest order. Cf. *Loš glas daleko se čuje* – similar in meaning to ‘Bad news travels fast’ – but here indicating the fast spread of bad reputation. Or *Prvi se mačići bacaju u vodu* lit. ‘First kittens end up down the drain’, a saying which suggests that the first failed attempt may be excused, etc.

⁷⁸ Because they profile a state, periphrastic passive constructions are much more frequent with participial forms of perfective verbs. But even when they feature imperfective verb participles, e.g. *Kuća je gradjena dva mjeseca* ‘The house was being built for two months’, the profile includes not only the duration of the construction process, but also various stages of construction completion over the two-month span. This is the contribution of the passive participle, which is an atemporal relational predication profiling the end state of the process in the conceptual base.

of event elaboration due to lower participant distinguishability, they do not admit agents, only non-volitional agents or effectors.⁷⁹ Periphrastic passives are not subject to that restriction (cf. *Kuća je izgrađena u dva mjeseca od (strane) jedne dobre građevinske tvrtke*/**Kuća se izgradila u dva mjeseca od (strane) jedne dobre građevinske tvrtke* ‘The house was built in two months by a good construction company’). The reason why agents cannot be coded in *se*-passives has much to do with event structure reduction. As a prototypical instigating participant, an agent would increase the degree of event elaboration. Also, since agents are cognitively more accessible than effectors or non-volitional agents, their presence in prototypical agentive events also increases the degree of participant distinguishability. All in all, we may conclude that Croatian aligns itself with languages where passive meanings can be coded by middle markers because passives and middle verbs are both characterized by low participant distinguishability or non-distinctness of arguments (Langacker & Munro 1975: 801; Langacker 1976).⁸⁰ Of course, passives and middle verbs differ in the nature of non-distinctness of their arguments. In passives, the arguments are not the same, but their non-distinctness comes from detopicalizing the agent and consequently, reducing and levelling out the argument structure.

There is a gradience to the generic quality of middles. Apart from fully habitual constructions like those in (22a–c), there are also limited generic constructions, where the degree of event elaboration is somewhat higher. Compare, for instance, *Ove se godine jabuke dobro prodaju* ‘This year apples sell well’ or *Danas se knjige slabo kupuju* ‘Today books sell poorly’. Since there is a time limit to the temporal extent of these actions, we will refer to these constructions as *semi-generic* or *semi-habitual middles*. Besides generic constructions with a theme-marked subject, middle semantics are also found in agentive generic constructions like *On se stalno tuče* ‘He’s always picking a fight’, *Pčele se bodu* ‘Bees sting’, *Mačke se grebu* ‘Cats scratch’, etc., where the theme in the target domain of the event chain is detopicalized. Lichtenberk (1991) calls such constructions *depatientive* and Geniušienė (1987) labels them *absolute reflexive verbs*. We shall refer to them as *agentive*

⁷⁹ For instance, *Stadion se puni gledateljima* ‘The stadium is being filled with spectators’ features a non-volitional agent; the spectators do not have the intention of filling the stadium, their intention only extends as far as simply watching the game. In other words, the agent’s volitional action has nothing to do with the process designated by the verb.

⁸⁰ Langacker & Munro (1975) and Langacker (1976) do not discuss middles, only the similarities between reflexive and passive constructions.

generic middles. In the agentive generic middle construction, participant distinguishability is also low because the theme is highly schematic, generalized, and undifferentiated – which makes it harder to cognitively access. Both generic middles with the theme subject and those with the agent subject are iconic because – if a participant fails to qualify for profiling and only figures as part of the conceptual background on the construction’s semantic pole – it will not qualify for coding on the phonological pole either. At this juncture it may be useful to recall section 2.1.3., where it was argued that middle verbs sit before prototypical one-participant intransitive verbs and immediately after reflexive constructions on the transitivity scale, which confirms middles as the “intermediate” or “middle” voice. The same can be observed with syntactic constructions, where middles also surface as an in-between category. In the hierarchy of event elaboration, the generic, the agentive generic and the semi-generic *se*-constructions fall between prototypical one-participant absolute constructions/thematic processes and passives:⁸¹

[[_{INTR.} *absolute/thematic process* > *generic/habitual middle* > *agentive generic/habitual middle* > *semi-generic/semi-habitual middle* > *passive*]
> [_{TRAN.} *active*]]

The more defocused a participant, the more salient the middle or absolute meaning and vice versa. Put differently, a higher degree of agent defocusing is proportional to a higher degree of profiling of the middle or absolute meaning. This conceptual hierarchy is shown in Figures (6a–f). Thickness of the dotted lines symbolizes the degree of defocusing of one of the participants or the degree of cognitive salience of the actions leading to the generic state (6b–d).⁸² The construction in (6a) designates a pure

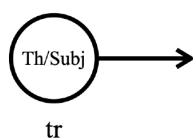
⁸¹ In Cognitive Grammar, absolute constructions or absolute construals involve independent profiling of thematic processes, viz. a pure conception of thematic relations without co-activation of any event chain. For more, see Langacker (1991: 291, 389–393); Belaj & Tanacković Faletar (2017: 284).

⁸² In order for a statement like that in (6b) – viz. that iron should be melted at 1000 degrees – to become an accepted truth, the process must have been construed dynamically in the past. In other words, someone must have tried experimenting with different melting degrees to establish the optimal one. This is why Belaj (2004) argued that generic constructions must not be banished from the passive category. With a little bit of cognitive unpacking of the associated event structure, they too can be associated with dynamic construals. In other words, their static generic nature has emerged from past dynamic processes, and their profiled trajectors correspond to the landmarks of those dynamic processes.

thematic process, neither the agent nor the event chain is evoked. The example simply means that the chemical composition of iron is such that it melts at 1000, rather than, say, 2000 degrees. Next in hierarchy are generic and agentive generic constructions in (6b–c), where one of the participants is highly schematic but, unlike in (6a, remains within conscious awareness. In semi-generic middles (6d) the degree of event elaboration is even higher because constructions of this type activate agents in more specific domains like e.g. apple growers and sellers in the domain of fruit growing and trade, or the majority of today’s population, especially youth, in the domain of digitalized publishing in *Danas se knjige slabo kupuju* ‘Books sell poorly today’. In passive constructions, due to the dynamic construal of the process, its agent is even more specific. This then results in a higher degree of event elaboration and participant distinguishability – e.g. of employees in an ironworks in example (6e). Finally, prototypical two-participant active constructions, where event chain participants from both source and target domain are profiled, enjoy the highest degree of event elaboration.

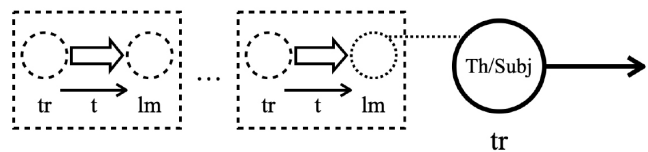
Figure 6a–f. Hierarchy of degrees of event structure elaboration in Croatian *se*-constructions

- a. *Željezo se tali na 1000 stupnjeva.* >
(Talište je željeza na 1000 stupnjeva.)
‘Iron melts at 1000 degrees.’
(‘Iron’s melting point is at 1000 degrees.’)



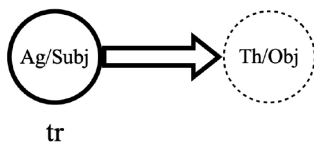
(absolute/thematic process)

- b. *Željezo se tali na 1000 stupnjeva.* >
(Željezo se obično tali na 1000 stupnjeva.)
‘Iron melts at 1000 degrees.’
(‘Iron usually melts at 1000 degrees.’)



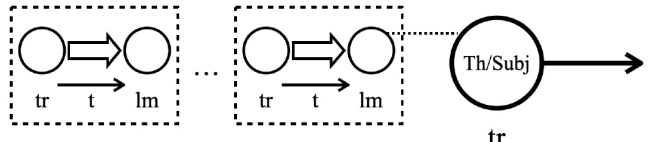
(generic/habitual middle)

- c. *On se stalno tuče.*
‘He’s always picking a fight.’



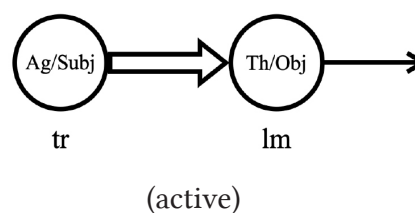
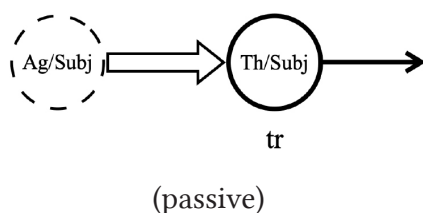
(agentive generic/habitual middle)

- d. *Ove godine jabuke se dobro prodaju.*
‘This year apples sell well.’



(semi-generic/semi-habitual middle)

- e. *Željezo se jučer talilo na 1000 stupnjeva.* ‘Yesterday iron was melted at 1000 degrees.’
 f. *Jučer smo talili željezo na 1000 stupnjeva.* ‘Yesterday we melted iron at 1000 degrees.’



The boundary between passives, middles, and absolute constructions is not always clear, to be sure. Compare (23a–c):

- (23) a. *Prozor se brzo popravio.*
 ‘The window got fixed quickly.’
 b. *Prozor se brzo otvorio.*
 ‘The window opened quickly.’
 c. *Prozor se otvorio.*
 ‘The window opened.’

Example (23a) is unquestionably passive because the agent, though unexpressed, is conceptually very much present and distinguishable. A window cannot fix itself; a human agent must be part of the conceptual background.⁸³ Example (23c) in turn is a case of absolute construal since the situation is conceptualized autonomously, i.e. without reference to the causal chain. If construed dependently, the causal chain is made part of active conceptualization and we can appreciate the link between this construction and the passive. Namely, a window cannot open itself, there is always some kind of causal force, an effector of sorts, like the wind or drought. This makes these constructions different from the construction instantiated by *Željezo se tali na 1000 stupnjeva* ‘Iron melts at 1000 degrees’ (Fig 6a), as in the latter

⁸³ Passive or absolute interpretations are very often sanctioned constructionally, i.e. they depend on the verb at the hub of the construction. For instance, *Kuća se gradi* ‘The house is being built’ is unquestionably passive, just like (23a). The example *Kuća se ruši* ‘The house is being demolished/falling apart’ can be interpreted as a passive if the event involves planned demolition by a contractor, but it can also be interpreted in the absolute sense because a house can collapse all on its own due to age or disrepair. Finally, *Kuća se urušava* ‘The house is falling in on itself’ can only be interpreted as an absolute because the process does not presuppose a causal chain.

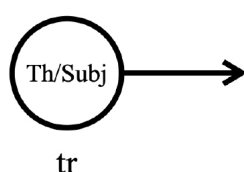
no causal force exists. Regardless of A/D alignment, this is an instance of a purely thematic process. However, if we exclude from the analysis dependent event conceptualization and treat (23c) as an absolute construction, the status of (23b) remains unresolved. On the one hand, it is close to the passive, because the adverbial *brzo* ‘fast’ increases the likelihood of agent activation. But it is not barred from the absolute interpretation, because, ultimately, a window can open fast without the agent’s interference. We seem to be looking at a meaning that sits somewhere between prototypical passives and prototypical absolutes. It does involve a higher degree of participant distinguishability and event elaboration than that typically found in absolute constructions, but this degree is still lower than with passives. Langacker (2008: 385) classes constructions like (23b) as middles, because their degree of agentivity is higher compared to absolute constructions, cf. (23c), and is lower in comparison to prototypical two-participant actives like *Otvorio sam prozor* ‘I opened the window’. However, in English, the passive only corresponds to Croatian periphrastic constructions, cf. *Prozor je (bio) otvoren* (‘The window was opened (by me)'). Thus, unlike the middle, which profiles only what happens to the theme, the passive profiles the full theme-agent relation. That is why English middles do not contrast so much with the passive as they do with absolute constructions. Because the situation is different in Croatian (where the passive is also coded by a middle marker), and because the meaning is somewhat closer to the passive due in large part to the adverbial modifier, which always affects event structure elaboration,⁸⁴ we feel it is only fair to credit these constructions with the label *middle-passive*. These relationships are shown in Figures (7a–d). The extended hierarchy of event structure elaboration now looks as follows:

⁸⁴ Various adverbial (in the source domain of event chain) and adjectival (in the target domain of event chain) modifiers affect the factuality of events, and with it also the degree of prototypicality of the transitive scenario (even where it is only part of the background of intransitive constructions). Verbal aspect and telicity are also important. They have a considerable impact on event dynamicity, which is proportional to the degree of prototypicality of the transitive event. If, for instance, we were to replace the perfective aspect in (23) with a non-perfective, the constructions would become “static” and would transition to prototypical generic middles (cf. *Prozor se brzo popravlja* ‘The window repairs fast’ / *Prozor se brzo otvara* ‘The window opens fast’ / *Prozor se otvara* ‘The window opens’). For more on various factors behind the prototypicality of transitivity, see Hopper & Thompson (1980), for English see Rice (1987), for Croatian, see Belaj & Tanacković Faletar (2017).

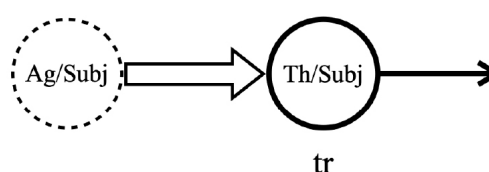
[_{INTR.} absolute / thematic process > generic / habitual middle > agentive generic / habitual middle > semi-generic / semi-habitual middle > middle-passive > passive] > [_{TRAN.} active]

Figure 7a–d. Hierarchy of increasing event elaboration in middle-passive and passive constructions

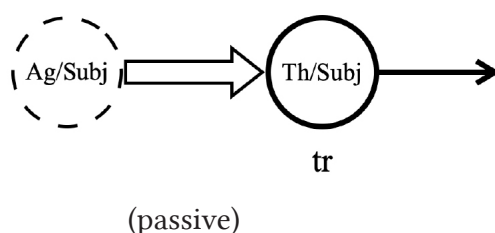
- a. Prozor se otvorio.
'The window opened.'



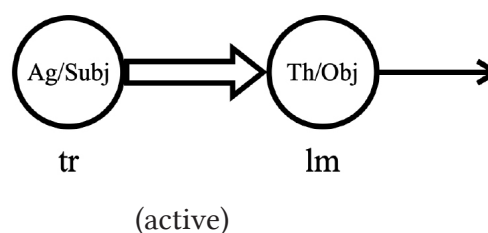
- b. Prozor se brzo otvorio.
'The window opened quickly.'



- c. Prozor se brzo popravio.
'The window was fixed quickly.'



- d. Brzo je popravio prozor.
'He quickly fixed the window.'



2.2.2. Middle and impersonal constructions

A few words remain about the relationship between the semantics of middles and impersonal *se*-constructions. Besides characterizing prototypical generic middle constructions in (22), one of the central properties of “middles”, viz. the topicalization of the process, also underlies the impersonals illustrated in (24a–e):

- (24) a. *Priča se o tome.*
'There is talk of that.'
b. *Gradi se kuću.*
'A house is being built.'
c. *Spava mi se.*
'I'm sleepy.'

d. *Stari se.*

‘We are getting old/People get old.’⁸⁵

e. *Naoblačilo se.*

‘It turned cloudy.’

Like every other impersonal construction, Croatian impersonal *se*-constructions detopicalize the agent, making this participant ineligible for subject coding. As such, they join a cohort of other constructions with the basic semantics of middles, viz. a low degree of participant distinguishability and event elaboration. Impersonal *se*-constructions differ from this set, though, in how the theme argument is coded, if it is coded at all. The result is an exclusive or partial profiling of the process. A gradient can be established between impersonal *se*-constructions on the basis of this parameter. Example (24a) features a construction most commonly occupied by verbs of speaking and cognition (e.g. *Priča se* ‘There’s talk/gossip’/ *Govori se* ‘There are stories/rumors’ / *Raspravlja se* ‘There’s discussion about x’ / *Razmišlja se o tome* ‘X is being considered’). The agent is detopicalized, schematic, and plural; the theme object is coded in the locative case. Constructions like (24b) are alternatives to passive *se*-constructions, from which they only differ in having a direct object in the accusative instead of a passive subject. As a result, the passive interpretation becomes more salient but so does the process itself since the object’s affectedness is also part of the profile. Impersonal constructions of the type shown in (24c) are especially interesting, both semantically and syntactically. They feature verbs of psychological and physiological events with dative-marked arguments (*Kiše mi se* ‘I feel like sneezing’, *Spava mi se* ‘I feel like sleeping’, *Vrti mu se* ‘He’s feeling dizzy’, *Kašlje joj se* ‘She feels like coughing’, etc.). The latter are occasionally dubbed *logical subjects* (e.g. Barić *et al.* 1995: 427) because they are recognized as subjects on semantic and pragmatic, but not on morphosyntactic grounds (cf. e.g. *Spava mi se* ‘I feel like sleeping’ > *Osjećam potrebu za spavanjem* ‘I feel the need to sleep’). However, looking deeper into their cognitive background, it becomes clear that these constructions also display semantic-pragmatic features of objects

⁸⁵ English lacks an impersonal construction as versatile as the Croatian sentence in (24d). Depending on the context the sentence can be translated having any subject (e.g. *Uvijek zaboravljam/zaboravljaš gdje sam/si parkirao. Stari se* ‘I/you always forget where I/you park the car. **I am/You are getting old**’).

(Belaj 2015). By detopicalizing the effector (e.g. in 24c *umor* ‘tiredness’), agentivity is passed on to the process itself. The effector is absorbed and becomes equivalent to the process it causes. This process is stripped of its participants in the source domain of the event chain and is directed at the dative-marked referent in the target domain. Additional justification for seeing in these dative complements semantic features of objects comes from Cognitive Grammar, where the dative-marked indirect object prototype is defined as the *active experiencer in the target domain* (Langacker 1991: 327) and as the *target person* (Dąbrowska 1997; Palić 2006; Belaj & Tanacković Faletar 2012). Without the grammatical subject and direct object, the dative-marked indirect object is the next one in line to become the pragmatic topic (cf. Shibatani 1985: 832).

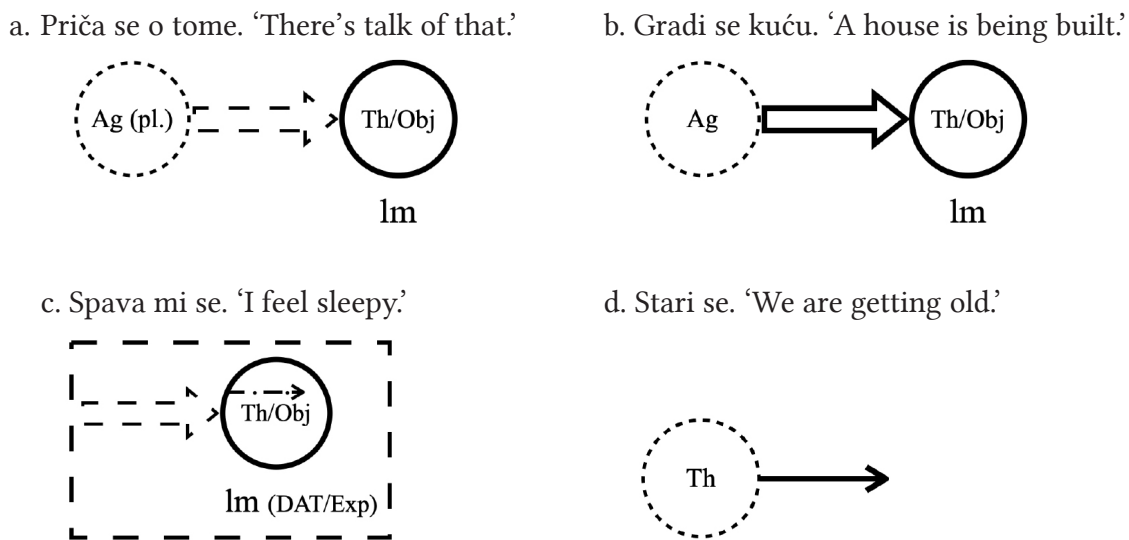
The semantic and pragmatic features of objects also become evident in these dative arguments in a type of paraphrase where the dative referent assumes the prototypical position of the direct object, not of the subject (cf. *Spava mi se* ‘I feel like sleeping’ > *Obuzela me potreba za spavanjem* ‘The urge to sleep came over me’). Constructions like (24b–c) are especially interesting because they appear to depart from the universal feature of middles, viz. focus on the subject’s dominion (Maldonado 1992, 1999). Still, although they do feature objects, these objects are each in its own special way connected to the subject. In (24b) the object is an alternative to the more prototypical passive subjects and is thus associatively linked with them.⁸⁶ As argued above, in (24c) this link is even clearer via the notion of the logical subject. The highest degree of process topicalization is found in constructions exemplified in (24d–e), where the theme argument falls short of being coded at all – thus, they are all only about the process. (24d) exemplifies generic⁸⁷ constructions of the type *Živi se* ‘I’m getting by’, *Životari se* ‘I’m scraping by’, *Stari se* ‘I’m getting old’, *Gura se* ‘I’m getting

⁸⁶ Older Croatian prescriptive literature (Jonke 1952, Vince 1955) pegged such constructions as irregular due to the presence of objects in passive sentences – an alleged influence from other languages. Due to their ubiquity, especially in colloquial language, these normative assessments are no longer accepted. As a rule, descriptive grammars describe these constructions as subtypes of impersonals.

⁸⁷ Note that all types of impersonal constructions in (24a–e) receive a habitual construal if accompanied by a generic adverbial (cf. *Kod njih se uvijek puno priča, a malo radi* ‘Over there, there’s always a lot of talk, but little work gets done’/*Kuću se gradi u proljeće* ‘Houses are built in the spring’/*Ujutro mi se uvijek spava* ‘I always feel sleepy in the morning’/*Zimi se kasno razdanjuje* ‘In winter it dawns late’, etc.).

by', etc., where the singular or plural theme is present in the conceptual background, or, as in (24e), where it is not present anywhere at all. In (24e) the impersonals feature *verba meteorologica*, of which some are in the middle form with the particle *se* (e.g. *Razvedrilo se* 'The clouds broke', *Naoblačilo se* 'It turned cloudy', *Razdanilo se* 'It dawned', *Smrknulo se* 'It grew dark', etc.), and others are without it (e.g. *Kiši* 'It's raining', *Sijeva* 'There's a lightning storm', *Pljušti* 'It's pouring with rain', *Pada* 'It's raining/snowing', *Sniježi* 'It's snowing', *Grmi* 'There's a thunder storm', etc.).⁸⁸ In these constructions participant distinguishability is at its lowest, as is the degree of event elaboration; conceptually, they code events that are all-encompassing, completely levelled out and homogenized so much so that no significant conceptual partitioning can be detected between the process, participants, place or time of the event.⁸⁹ In other words, a processual relation devoid of any participant construal comes into profile. These middle impersonal *se*-constructions are shown in Figure (8a–e), with a focus on the gradience of process topicalization.

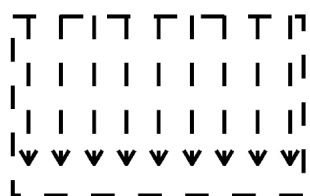
Figure 8a–e. Gradient increase in process topicalization among middle impersonal *se*-constructions



⁸⁸ Both types of verbs appear either in 3rd person singular form (e.g. *Kiši* 'It's raining'/ *Razvedrava se* 'It's clearing up') or in the singular, neuter gender form of the active past participle (*Kišilo je* 'It rained'/ *Razvedrilo se* 'It cleared up'). For more on these constructions see Ruwet (1986), Langacker (1991: 365–366), Smith (2002), and for Croatian, Belaj (2007).

⁸⁹ This conceptual configuration is best illustrated with Givón's (2001: 119) example from spoken Palestinian Arabic, where the corresponding verbs take the noun meaning 'world' as their subject (*id-dunya ti-shti*, translated loosely as *Svijet kiši* 'The world rains').

e. Naoblačilo se. 'It's become cloudy.'



The syntactic and semantic diversity of impersonal *se*-constructions hinders their unique assignment to a specific position in the hierarchy of increasing event elaboration. For instance, constructions in (24e) would fall more naturally ahead of absolute constructions since they are marked by the lowest degree of event elaboration. Those in (24a–b) in turn would sit closer to passive constructions. If, however, one took into account only their common denominator, viz. a strongly profiled process with more or less reduced participant distinguishability, middle constructions would then cluster in that same hierarchy together with the three types of generic middles sharing that particular property.

3. Conclusion

This study examined Croatian middle *se*-constructions, including both single-participant and reciprocal multi-participant middle verbs (2.1.) and syntactic *se*-constructions (2.2.). The main argument was that the term *reflexive verb*, current within and beyond Croatian linguistics, should be replaced with the term *middle verb*. This is in part due to the former's purely morphological and diachronic motivation. However, a range of additional arguments of both semantic-pragmatic and syntactic nature were advanced in favour of this proposal. The bottom line is, if two construction types differ so markedly as to merit inclusion into separate categories, this should also be mirrored in a clear terminological separation. Croatian middle verbs feature particle *se*, the light form of the reflexive pronoun in a highly grammaticalized particle function. This function symbolizes the schematic meaning of middles, glossed as *low degree of participant distinguishability* and *low degree of event elaboration* and situates middle verbs in the transitivity hierarchy somewhere between transitive reflexive constructions and prototypical one-participant intransitive constructions. It was also argued that the concept of reflexivity should in turn only be associated with transitive reflexive

constructions featuring the heavy form of the reflexive pronoun (*sebe* ‘self’). These constructions elaborate the said features to a higher degree, and therefore behave differently syntactically. This property also situates them closer to the prototypical two-participant transitives. Besides middle verbs, we also examined how the particle *se* contributes the semantics of middles to higher-order syntactic constructions. These include prototypical generic middle constructions and, somewhat closer to the category fringe, absolute, passive, and impersonal constructions. The latter also exhibit, though in smaller measure, universal semantic properties of middles. What they all have in common is some degree of process topicalization, which is itself proportional to the degree to which the event is construed without distinguishable participants.

Appendix

Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

A/D	autonomous/dependent
ACC	accusative
Ag	agent
Ben	benefactive
DAT	dative
EC	explicit construction
Exp	experiencer
HF	heavy form of personal pronoun
INTR.	intransitive
LF	light form of personal pronoun
lm	landmark
MM	middle marker <i>se</i>
MORPH.	morphological system

NOM	nominative
Obj	object
PART	particle
Pl.	plural
PRON	pronoun
Rec	recipient
RM	reflexive marker <i>sebe</i>
Subj	subject
SYNT.	syntactic system
Th	theme
tr	trajector
TRAN.	transitive

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