

ABSTRACT

The Teaching of the Impersonal and Passive SE
in First and Second Year Spanish Textbooks

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This study explores the syntax of the impersonal and passive SE structures in the Spanish language and inspects how these two constructions are explained in three first and three second-year Spanish textbooks. A discussion of the syntax of the impersonal SE and passive SE leads to an examination of the instruction of these two phrasal constructions in the six textbooks. The purpose of this study is to understand how these two important uses of the pronoun SE are described to first and second-year Spanish students.

The Teaching of the Impersonal and Passive SE
in First and Second Year Spanish Textbooks

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Modern Foreign Languages

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

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Accepted by the Graduate School
December 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. McManness for her direction and guidance in the writing process. This work would not be possible without her dedication and tireless help. I would also like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Hardin and Dr. Schwarz for giving their valuable time.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Foreign Language Study

Foreign Language Study in a classroom setting provides the opportunity for instructors to teach the students grammar points that may be missed in second language acquisition through an immersion program. Since the end of World War II when Foreign Language Study became an important subject in public schools, there have been numerous different approaches and discussions about the best way to teach a foreign language. Classroom instruction in foreign languages began with the grammar translation method, progressed to the audio-lingual method, and has culminated in recent years with the communicative method¹. The “best” way to teach a language changes as the research and knowledge of how a second language is acquired develops and progresses.

The most recent method of teaching a second language in a classroom is called the communicative method. This approach was started in the 1970’s and the principle idea is to facilitate the communication skills of students in order to encourage them to provide meaningful output in the second language (Koike 13). While several methods have stemmed from this method, such as Suggestopedia and the Silent Way, the important feature of the communicative method is for the instructor to create an environment where the student feels at ease to express him or herself in the target

¹ See Chapter 1 of *Linguística aplicada* by Dale A. Koike and Carol A. Klee for more detailed explanations of these methods.

language (ibid). The four elements to emphasize are four competencies: grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse, and strategic. A focus on teaching grammatical aspects of the language, real-life language application and the ability to communicate while teaching communicative strategies such as circumlocution combine to create an effective learning environment (ibid). Through the years, the communicative method has been modified, and now there tends to be a focus on teaching more of the grammatical structures of the language (ibid). However, the amount of grammar instruction in a classroom will never be able to replace learning the target language in a native environment, as a classroom cannot provide the same level of exposure to the language in a native context, with native speakers and accents in addition the idiomatic use of the language that can be difficult to replicate in a classroom.

Students learning a second language in a classroom setting, unfortunately, do not have the same exposure to natural conversation that would be available in the target language in the native culture. This lack of exposure to authentic conversation from native speakers can hinder the student's acquisition of more complicated constructions, such as, in Spanish, the SE passive and SE impersonal among others, because there is no exposure to the natural use of these grammatical structures. In a classroom setting, with other students who do not speak Spanish natively, the students are able to hear explanations of the grammatical points that prove to be more challenging. While there is much debate over the amount of grammar instruction that should be provided to the students in a classroom setting, most instructors of Spanish do provide some level of grammar instruction.

The Ten Most Common Uses of the Pronoun SE

In the Spanish language there are various clitic pronouns that form a fundamental part of the Spanish grammar; these clitic pronouns are unstressed pronouns that are a part of the verbal phrase in a sentence. Included in the group of clitic pronouns are reflexive pronouns, indirect and direct object pronouns, and the various meanings of the pronoun SE. Undoubtedly the pronoun SE has the most usage of any pronoun, traditionally there are ten, and these different applications can cause confusion for students in the acquisition of Spanish as a second language. These ten uses of SE are reflexive SE, lexical SE, reciprocal SE, impersonal SE, contextual variant SE, dative of interest SE, accidental SE, passive SE and middle SE (Hualde 149).

Teaching the different uses of SE can prove challenging for instructors. It is best for students to learn the most common and popular uses of SE towards the beginning of their learning of the language, while leaving more complicated uses for more advanced levels (Schmitz 430). A major characteristic is that the pronoun SE never takes any stress like the personal pronouns yo, tú, and usted (334). Another important characteristic of the pronoun SE is that it never acts as a subject (Suñer 268). The word “no” cannot be inserted between SE and the conjugated verb; the “no” has to be placed before the pronoun SE (Schmitz 334). Additionally, the suppression of the pronoun SE completely changes the meaning of the sentence; an example of this is the verb lavar (to wash) and lavarse (to wash oneself) (Prado 334).

Learning how to distinguish and differentiate between these ten uses of the pronoun SE can be confusing, frustrating, and challenging for students of Spanish to learn and for instructors of Spanish to explain. Of course, the ten different uses of SE are not all presented in the same lesson and the students learn more how to navigate and use

SE as their level of acquisition of Spanish advances. However, even advanced students of Spanish are apt to struggle with the different uses and when and how to use them correctly. A non-native student of Spanish can conquer certain uses of SE, such as the reflexive SE or the lexical SE in a shorter time than other, more complicated uses, such as the SE impersonal and SE passive.

Normally, the first use of the pronoun SE that Spanish students learn is the reflexive SE. This use is explained to the students as something that the subject does to himself or herself (Lozano, “Spanish Reflexives” 550). There is a lack of an external agent acting upon the subject in reflexive constructions (Rivers 202). Spanish students learn to use the reflexive pronoun SE in examples of daily routines through a series of verbs that can adopt a reflexive pronoun to change the meaning, such as levantarse (to get up), bañarse (to bathe), dormirse (to fall asleep), and acostarse (to bed). Closely related to the reflexive pronoun SE is the lexical SE. Verbs that contain the lexical SE must always be used with SE as part of their inherent meaning (Fish 831). A few examples of lexical SE verbs are quejarse (to complain), divertirse (to enjoy oneself), and conmemorarse (to commemorate).

The reciprocal SE is another use of the pronoun SE that is less challenging for the students to learn. The reciprocal SE is used to express what two or more people do to each other. The phrase, “to each other” is replaced with the reciprocal SE in Spanish. There can be difficulties and confusion between the reciprocal SE and the reflexive SE. However, through the context of the sentence, and the meaning of the verb the students learn to distinguish between the reciprocal and reflexive SE (Lozano, “Spanish

Reflexives” 555)². Once students begin to replace the English phrase, “to each other” or to use prepositional clarification phrases in the sentence, such as in “Los niños se hablan,” (The children talk to each other) versus “Los chicos se peinan,” (The boys comb their hair), they are able to navigate the use of the reciprocal SE more easily.

The use of the contextual variant SE comes along with the knowledge of using direct and indirect object pronouns. As it is not possible to use the third person indirect object pronoun “le” or “les” and direct object pronouns together, the “le(s)” is replaced with the pronoun SE. It is important for the students to realize that this use of SE is different than the other uses of SE, in that this SE is actually a replacement for the pronoun “le,” not SE (Otero 1050). Although the students can have trouble with the location and the identification of the correct indirect and direct object pronouns, learning to replace “le” with SE does not prove an impossible challenge for the students to overcome.

A more difficult and challenging application of the pronoun SE is the dative of interest Se. The dative of interest indicates the concept of strength, intensity, end, or duration of an action (Fish 831). Se dative of interest expresses two different meanings. The first meaning of the dative of interest emphasizes something that someone does or the strength that was necessary to complete the action. The sentence, “Se comió el pastel,” (He ate up the cake) implies that someone consumed the cake quickly or entirely. Unfortunately, when translated into English, this meaning requires additional words, which can bewilder students, as the direct translation is colloquial (Fish 832). Although this use of the dative of interest indicates the strength that someone had when they did something, it is not as common as the second use.

² The meaning of a verb can change when it is used with reciprocal or reflexive pronouns.

The second use of the dative of interest Se is also called the accidental Se, or the SE for unplanned events. The accidental SE expresses an action that happened inadvertently, in which the speaker had no part. In teaching the use of the accidental SE it is helpful to note that the speaker does not wish to claim any responsibility or role in what has occurred and wishes to indicate that the action “just happened” (Schmitz 430-431). The use of the accidental SE is not taught in the same lesson as the other uses of the dative of interest SE because the first meaning of the dative of interest does not deal with accidents but with actions and reactions that can be controlled while the second interpretation, the SE accidental, deals with accidents and occurrences beyond the speaker’s control (432).

The middle SE can be a challenging syntactic construction to teach since there is no English equivalent. Sentences which use the middle SE are formed when the subject, whether the subject is the acting agent or not, receives the action of the verb or is the direct object of the verb (Molina Redondo 29). Some example sentences that can be used are “La mantequilla se derrite” (The butter melts) or “El barco se hundió” (The ship sank). A sentence using the middle SE is formed with an inanimate subject, the pronoun SE, and a transitive verb (30). The middle SE sentences never take a human agent and the SE represents the subject and the direct object at the same time (31).

The final two uses of SE are the impersonal SE and the passive SE. The impersonal SE pronoun is employed in sentences where the subject is null. The passive SE pronoun makes a sentence passive, where the focus of the sentence is on the action itself. The use of the impersonal SE and the passive SE will be addressed later in chapters two and three.

Students of Spanish that are native speakers of English can be predisposed to insert the pronoun SE into any sentence without reason simply to add a Spanish element to the sentence. This inclination is the result of the students not being familiar with or knowledgeable of the different uses of SE (Otero 1050). Spanish students of all levels, but especially in more advanced levels of Spanish study, will read and hear many sentences with different uses of the pronoun SE. When instructors introduce different, more complicated uses of SE, it is important to give the students exercises to practice the formation of the different uses. The only way that Spanish students will be able to navigate the uses of SE with ease and accuracy is through practice. The ambiguity that exists between the uses of SE results from the same pronoun form being used to create each very different construction. The pronoun SE has many distinct uses in Spanish, and many of the constructions are determined by whether there is an implicit human agent or not in the sentence (Hualde 249). In addition to the reflexive, the most common uses of SE are the reciprocal SE, impersonal SE, and passive SE. The use of the dative of interest SE, accidental SE and middle SE are also important for the students to understand so they can communicate and understand well.

While teaching all the different meanings of the pronoun SE can prove challenging to the instructor and to the students, all of the above applications of the pronoun SE have certain nuances that allow the students to understand the uses after studying. The challenge with the grammatical instruction of the SE passive and SE impersonal is that there is no English equivalent to relate to the students to facilitate understanding. As Koike and Klee demonstrate, it is much easier for a student to make an exact correspondence from a Spanish word to an English word. The Spanish student

will struggle making “zigzag” correspondences from Spanish to English, where a word in English has more than one Spanish translation and vice-versa (Koike 128-129). The SE impersonal and the SE passive-reflexive have the potential to prove challenging and frustrating to the student of Spanish. As with any language, a student of Spanish must dedicate years of study and practice acquiring the language to progress to an advanced level of proficiency. However, the lack of serious instruction in the concepts of the SE impersonal and the SE passive-reflexive is apt to cause confusion for the students. How seriously should each use of SE be explained and taught to students?

Classroom Instruction of a Foreign Language

In order to answer that question, we must first look at research about a second language classroom. For students to be comfortable in a second language situation and provide meaningful output in a second language, in this case, Spanish, the emotional filter must first be lowered. According to Stephen Krashen, “Those with attitudes more conducive to second language acquisition will not only seek and obtain more input, they will also have a lower or weaker filter. They will be more open to the input. . .” (Krashen 31). A student will not provide meaningful output unless they first feel comfortable in the classroom. Additionally, students tend to be more motivated to learn a second language and the grammatical aspects of that language when they see and understand a real-life application of the language. For this reason, students are taught vocabulary that pertains to real life situations such as travel, family life, and work; without a connection to real life, students will typically not feel as motivated to learn the language. Of course, these motivations for learning a second language and providing meaningful output in the

target language are dependent upon the student's ability to comprehend and use the ever increasing knowledge of the grammar.

Naturally, even when the emotional filter is lowered, there remains the difference in the level of language that students will produce. In a beginning classroom, there will be students at many different levels, from those who have had several years of high school Spanish instruction, to those who are taking Spanish for the very first time. Each student will have a different demeanor while speaking; some will speak with carefully controlled language and be conscious of the grammatical structures, while others will communicate in a more careless manner, more concerned about the actual communication than the grammatical structures of the utterances. While dealing with the differences in student ability levels and the level of output that students produce in the classroom, instructors must also be aware of the type of instruction they provide in the classroom, be it rote or meaningful. Rote learning is described as arbitrary pure memorization and is not integrated into the cognitive structure of the student (Omaggio Hadley 68). On the other hand, meaningful learning is integrated into a student's existing cognitive structure because it relates to what has already been learned by the student (68). However, for learning to be meaningful, the student must have a motivation to learn, whether internal or external, and a desire to relate the new material with previous knowledge (69). Thus, instructors must find a way to motivate the students to take learning beyond rote memorization and promote meaningful learning in the classroom.

The Five C's

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has developed the Five C's of foreign language instruction in an attempt to provide national

guidelines for the teaching of a second language from kindergarten classrooms to university language classrooms. These Five C's are:

1. Communication. The ultimate goal of foreign language instruction is communication, be it through conversation, reading, or writing.
2. Culture. By learning a new language, students are exposed to a new culture. Students gain a better knowledge and understanding of new cultures through the study of foreign languages.
3. Connections. In learning a new language, students are able to make connections with knowledge and information that might not be available to speakers of one language.
4. Comparisons. Students who learn a foreign language and are exposed to new cultures realize that there are multiple ways in which to view the world.
5. Communities. Students who have learned a foreign language can feel at home in multi-lingual communities.³

Standards for language classrooms throughout the nation are developed using these Five C's as a guideline, therefore they will serve as the guideline for this study as well.

Research Method

The passive SE and impersonal SE in the Spanish language are intertwined into the daily life of any native speaker. From the first semester of learning Spanish, students at beginning levels are exposed to these structures and are expected to be able to recognize them. However, the question of whether the explanation that first and second year textbooks offer is adequate for the popularity and similarity of these two structures has not yet been sufficiently researched at this time. Frequently, these two important uses of the passive SE and impersonal SE are glossed over in beginning levels of instruction, specifically in the first two years, leaving further detailed instruction and practice to more advanced classes, yet many students do not continue on to these advanced classes and are

³Adapted from http://www.actfl.org/files/public/StandardsforFLLexecsumm_rev.pdf.

left with inadequate knowledge of how these uses function. The purpose of the first two years of Spanish instruction in most colleges and universities is for each student to finish with an ability to communicate at high intermediate to superior level within the Spanish language, nevertheless, do the popular first and second year textbooks equip the students with enough knowledge of the impersonal SE and the passive SE?

Spanish textbooks for first year students abound. There are numerous textbooks, and along with each textbook comes supplementary material that includes but is not limited to workbooks, laboratory listening exercises, and videos. There are textbooks that have a well-established reputation in academic circles such as *Puntos de partida*, *Dos mundos*, *Vistas*, *Sol y viento*, and *Plazas*. The authors of each textbook have compiled information about grammatical points such as the subjunctive mood, the preterit/imperfect tenses, and interrogative words, among others. Yet while many pages and exercises in textbooks are dedicated to the grammatical points mentioned above and many others, there seems, at first glance, to be little instruction and practice of the impersonal SE and passive SE.

Also, there are numerous textbooks for second year instruction (after students have finished their first two semesters of study) of Spanish. Included in these textbooks are *Imagina*, *¡Avance!*, *Enfoques*, *Rumbos*, and *Interacciones*. These textbooks also have additional supplementary resources that correspond to grammar points and give extra practice to the students. As with the first year textbooks, the second year textbooks have information dealing with various grammatical subjects such as, but not limited to, the subjunctive, the imperative, and direct and indirect object pronouns. Being a second year textbook, it is assumed that they would have more information concerning the impersonal

SE and the passive SE along with exercises to allow the students more opportunities to practice these structures. However, at first glance, there does not appear to be sufficient coverage of these two important structures.

During this study, these three first year textbooks, *Puntos de partida* 8th edition, *Vistas* 4th edition, and *Dos mundos* 7th edition, will be examined in regard to how the SE impersonal and SE passive are taught, through instruction and exercises, to first-year Spanish students. Furthermore, three second year textbooks *Imagina* 2nd edition, *Enfoques* 3rd edition, and *Rumbos* will be reviewed to discover how the impersonal Se and the passive SE are taught in, what will be for the majority of student, a terminal course. A discussion of the impersonal SE and passive SE structures will lead to an examination of the instruction of the impersonal SE and passive SE in each textbook and how the impersonal SE and the passive SE are taught based on their syntactic structure. The purpose of this study will be, through the examination of these three beginning and three intermediate Spanish textbooks, to understand how these two important uses of SE, the impersonal and the passive, are taught to first and second- year Spanish students⁴.

The 5 Five's will be used as the guide for all textbooks in this study to understand how effectively the impersonal SE and the passive SE are taught to students in Spanish class.

⁴ The additional learning resources for each textbook, such as workbooks, listening programs, laboratory programs, and video programs, will not be analyzed in this study. These additional materials are based on the instruction material provided within the textbook, and analyzing the extra material in this study could prove to be redundant and are beyond the scope of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

Impersonal SE

Syntax of Impersonal SE

In the Spanish language, there are various ways in which to express an impersonal sentence, a sentence in which the subject of the sentence is null. First, impersonal sentences can be formed with indefinite words such as “uno/una/unos/unas,” where the subject is grammatical and obligatory. These indefinite words do not imply a definite subject in the sentence, but instead the focus is on the action of the sentence. A sentence with these indefinite words could be, “Uno habla español.” (One speaks Spanish). Secondly, indefinite sentences can be formed when the verb of the sentence is conjugated in the third person plural form. In this form of impersonal sentence, the subject is implicit, but unexpressed, as in the sentence, “Cantan en el coro.” (They sing in the choir). An additional impersonal construction occurs when the verb of the sentence is conjugated in the second personal singular form. In this sentence, the subject is also implicit, such as in the sentence, “Tienes que estudiar cada día.” (You have to study every day). These three methods of expressing an impersonal sentence have more traditional structures where there is an obvious subject, expressed either through an impersonal word, or the conjugation of the verb.

However, the syntactic structure of the impersonal SE is not quite as easy to decipher. Sentences formed with the impersonal SE do not have a grammatical subject. In these sentences, such as in the sentence, “Se vende libros,” (One sells books) the impersonality expresses itself through the pronoun SE and the emphasis on the verb. The

structure of the impersonal SE sentence is widely used in the Spanish language.

However, just because it is a widely used construction does not mean that non-native speakers understand how to form and use the structure correctly. Another word that can be used interchangeably for the impersonal SE is the term indefinite SE, however, for the purposes of this study, the expression impersonal SE will be used.

The most basic, fundamental information to know in regards to the impersonal SE syntactical structure is that in any Spanish sentence, the pronoun SE can be substituted for the word, “uno” (Koike 61). Also, in an impersonal SE construction, the verb is always conjugated in the third personal singular form. True, these two pieces of data on the creation of the impersonal SE seem easy to remember and understand, but there is much more underneath the surface of this construction. The anonymity of these impersonal SE sentences is combined syntactically and semantically into a null subject that is expressed through a third person, indefinite pronoun through the absence of a stressed subject (Luján 336).

Sentences formed with the impersonal SE, with an indefinite and general subject, exclude a lexical subject (King 204). It does not matter if the verb in the sentence is intransitive or transitive, is in a clause with a complement, has a direct object introduced with the personal “a”, or has a direct object that is singular or plural, the verb is always conjugated in the third person singular (ibid). The lack of a grammatical subject indicates that impersonal SE sentences complete a generic and undetermined action (Molina-Redondo 16). Also, the pronoun SE in impersonal sentences is not the subject, nor does it act like the subject in any way; the pronoun SE always acts like a pronoun (de LoCoco 888). SE does not allow another word to come between itself and the conjugated

verb, while subjects do allow other words, such as other pronouns and negative words to come between them and the conjugated verb (ibid). Although from a syntactic viewpoint, impersonal SE sentences are subject-less, semantically, these sentences do have a subject, the indefinite “uno” (Suñer 268). The pronoun SE cannot be the subject in a sentence with the impersonal SE because there is no grammatical subject.

In the past, it was thought that the impersonal SE in these sentences was the reflexive SE, that there was a subject that received the action of the verb (Lozano “Non-Reflexivity” 452). However, this theory did not last long because in order to classify a sentence that uses the pronoun SE there is a need to examine the subject or the agent of the sentence. Lozano claims that the key to unlock the confusion in the formation of the impersonal SE construction hinges on the classification of nouns into nonhuman/human and inanimate/animate (453). To examine the agent of a sentence, one must first look at whether the agent is either human or non-human, animate (living) or inanimate (non-living). A sentence with the impersonal SE takes agent that is animate and human, inanimate and human, human and inanimate, or non-human and inanimate, while the reflexive SE only takes subjects that are human and live, and live and non-human (454). The fact that the impersonal SE can take every type of verb shows that it is not the same as the reflexive SE, along with the fact that the impersonal SE does not require agreement between the conjugated verb and the direct object, shows that the impersonal SE is not the equivalent of the reflexive SE.

As has been discussed, impersonal expressions in Spanish, although there are different ways to express them, tend to be expressed with the impersonal SE pronoun. The syntactic structure of the impersonal SE construction shows that, while it may seem

similar to other constructions with the pronoun SE, it maintains its own unique structure, distinct from the others. The impersonal SE constructions can have any type of verb, any type of agent, are always conjugated with the verb in the third person singular form, and have no grammatical subject in the sentence. While these characteristics of the impersonal SE may seem quite easy to understand for an advanced speaker/learner of Spanish, presenting first year students with this amount of complex syntactic information will most likely cause confusion and frustration. So, the question that we must seek to address now is, how is the impersonal SE taught to first year students of the Spanish language?

The challenge with teaching first year students of Spanish in a college or university setting is that the level of previous knowledge and instruction that each student brings with him or herself varies drastically. There will, of course, be some students that have had four years or more of Spanish classes throughout high school and junior high, and at the other end of the spectrum are the students that have never taken a Spanish class before in their lives. However, no matter the amount of previous knowledge that the students bring into the classroom, one thing can almost be certain; that in this age of globalism and shrinking borders, students will most likely have been exposed to the Spanish language at some level, whether through commercials, telenovelas, soccer games, or print advertisements. Through this exposure, most students will most likely have heard or seen impersonal SE constructions before their exposure in the language classroom.

Thus we arrive at the difficult question that we seek to answer. What is the best way to teach beginning students of the Spanish language the use of the impersonal SE?

How do instructors explain, in a manner that the students can comprehend and then use to recognize, the impersonal SE? Lozano states, “An examination of outstanding textbooks of Spanish indicates that our pedagogical presentations are incomplete and misleading.” (425). Traditional manners in which instructors have taught the impersonal SE in the past have treated the impersonal SE as a variant of the passive SE (457). This treatment, however, causes confusion among the students because the agents in the impersonal SE sentences act in a different manner than the agents in a passive SE sentence, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. Lozano’s statement begs the question, is there something that can be improved in the teaching of the impersonal SE to non-native learners of the Spanish language? How are students presented with the information regarding the impersonal SE?

Textbook Study

To seek to answer this question, I will examine how three textbooks of beginning Spanish and three second year textbooks introduce and teach the impersonal SE. The textbooks that will be examined are *Puntos de partida* 8th edition, *Vistas* 4th edition, and *Dos mundos* 7th edition, *Imagina* 2nd edition, *Enfoques* 3rd edition, and *Rumbos*. These books have been chosen because of their popularity in colleges, universities, and even high schools across North America. While examining these books and the way they present the material regarding the impersonal SE, the focus will be solely on the textbooks themselves and the activities contained within the textbook.¹ The method used to examine these textbooks will be as follows:

¹ To examine the additional material that comes with each textbook would be too lengthy and is outside the scope of this study.

1. To examine the explanation that the textbook provides for the teaching of the impersonal SE.
2. To examine the instructor's note in the instructor's edition of each textbook to discover if any additional teaching points are suggested and/or added.
3. To examine any activities that refer to practicing using, forming, and recognizing the impersonal SE.

These will then be commented upon based on the Five C's for a productive classroom learning environment using a simple rubric to score each book in relation to the combination of the three categories above. The scoring on the rubric will be based on a combination of the three previously mentioned categories, since it is these three combined that compose a textbook's material. Additionally, the scoring of the rubric will be determined by how true a textbook's instruction is to the syntactic structure of the impersonal SE construction.²

The purpose in examining these textbooks is to discover how the difficult and trying subject of the impersonal SE is addressed in a manner faithful to the syntactical structure, without overwhelming the students with linguistic jargon. What are the reasonable expectations that instructors can place on their students in regards to understanding the impersonal SE as beginning students of the Spanish language and how do these textbooks facilitate those expectations?

² The scoring of the rubric determined by how each textbook provides instruction on the impersonal SE construction is determined by the author's examination of the instruction as related to the syntactic structure.

First Year Textbooks

Dos Mundos

In the textbook *Dos Mundos* published by McGraw Hill, the authors have dedicated an entire section to teaching and practicing the impersonal SE. In chapter eight, in which the theme is “comida,” (food), grammar point 8.4, to the impersonal SE. In this grammar point, found on page 308, the explanation of the use of the impersonal SE is located. In the explanation of the use of the impersonal SE, the book points out that impersonal SE expressions in English are translated using the words “you,” “they,” or “one.” The book also provides a section of example sentences in which the impersonal SE is used, and then translated into English in order for the students to see the English construction. After the instructor has presented the impersonal SE to the students and reviewed the examples, the students then have the opportunity to practice forming sentences using the impersonal SE. The sentences deal with giving instructions regarding preparing food so that the students have more exposure to the vocabulary presented in this chapter. The additional teacher’s notes regarding the use of the impersonal SE point out that SE with a verb in the third person singular form is always used to express the impersonal you or they in English. Additionally, it points out that the impersonal SE is used to give instructions.

Throughout chapter eight, the impersonal SE is used in examples with vocabulary and giving instructions in food preparation in order to provide more exposure of the impersonal SE to the students. The more exposure a student has with reading and comprehending a certain structure, in this instance the impersonal SE, the more familiar and comfortable the student will be in using that structure in their own conversation.

That *Dos mundos* has an entire grammar point dedicated to the instruction of the impersonal SE shows that the authors thought that teaching the impersonal SE was important.

Now, we will examine how the teaching of the impersonal SE in *Dos mundos* is taught to students in Table 1.

Table 1

The Impersonal SE in *Dos mundos*

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication				x	
Culture			x		
Connections				x	
Comparisons				x	
Communities			x		

Dos mundos receives an “excellent” rating for “Communication.” This “excellent” is based on the explanation of the impersonal SE construction in chapter 8. The book clearly lays out how the impersonal SE is translated into English, and the numerous exercises for the students to practice forming the impersonal SE. The rating, “acceptable” was assigned to “Culture” for the reason that while the book points out that the impersonal SE is used for giving instructions, that is the only context in the book in which the impersonal SE is found. “Connections” scores an “excellent” because students, knowledgeable about the impersonal SE construction, will be able to apply this knowledge into other disciplines in their studies. An “excellent” was assigned to the

category, “Comparisons,” as well for the same reason given above, that students will have an understanding of the impersonal SE and be able to make comparisons between it and their native language upon leaving the class. Finally, “Communities” scored an “acceptable” rating. While students will have a well-defined understanding of the impersonal SE function in language, the lack of cultural exposure beyond giving instructions could hinder the students in the future.

Vistas

Vistas, published by Vista Higher Learning, covers the instruction of the impersonal SE in chapter ten, whose theme is “En el consultorio” (In the doctor’s office) on pages 350-353. *Vistas* addresses the impersonal SE construction in comparison with the accidental SE construction. First, the textbook reminds the students of the use of the reflexive SE and then proceeds with its explanation. The textbook notes that with verbs that are not reflexive, the pronoun SE can be used to form an impersonal expression, one in which the person performing the action is undefined. It also notes that the third person singular verb is used with a singular noun (agent), and that the impersonal SE is often seen in advertisements, signs, and instructions. There are a few examples in the text that give an impersonal SE sentence with the English translation. Then, the textbook provides activities for the students to practice using, forming, and recognizing the impersonal SE. First, the textbook provides fill-in-the-blank exercises for the students to form the impersonal SE construction. Subsequently, on page 352, there are exercises that provide the students with the opportunity to create their own impersonal SE sentences in Práctica 1 and in Práctica 2, the students are given the opportunity to translate impersonal sentences from English to Spanish, constructing the sentences with the impersonal SE. Next, on page 353, the students are given the opportunity to practice communication with

the impersonal SE in Comunicación 5. The teacher's tips in regard to the instruction of the impersonal SE are thorough, they prompt the instructor to ask for student participation in making a list of things that should be done and should not be done. Also, the instructor is prompted to have the students work through Práctica exercises orally, and construct their own responses to situations using the impersonal SE. Additionally, the instructor is provided with examples for games in which the students finish each other's impersonal SE sentences and assign signs that could be found in a public building.

Vistas has gone to great length to provide the instructor with additional ideas and to provide the students with ample opportunity to practice using the impersonal SE. Now, we will examine how *Vistas* provides instruction regarding the impersonal SE in Table 2.

Table 2
The Impersonal SE in *Vistas*

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication					x
Culture				x	
Connections				x	
Comparisons				x	
Communities					x

Vistas scores “superior” in the first category, “Communication,” based on the explanation provided regarding the impersonal SE, along with the many exercises that allow the students to practice the use and formation. Additionally, the instructor’s notes in the margins are given to ensure that all students will finish the lesson having a firm grasp on the impersonal SE formation. The second category, “Culture” received a score of “excellent;” *Vistas* exposes the students to the use of the impersonal SE not only in instructions/directions, but also in signs and advertisements. An “excellent” was given to “Connections;” a student should be able to use their new-found knowledge of the impersonal SE to make intelligent connections between Spanish and other areas of study. Also receiving an “excellent” is “Comparisons” for the same reasoning, that students should be able to take their new knowledge and use it to make comparisons between Spanish and their native language to better understand the nature of language. The fifth C, “Communities,” scores a “superior.” This rating was given as a result of the overall instruction of the impersonal SE, students leaving this class would be able to integrate themselves into a multilingual community and succeed because of their understanding of the impersonal SE.

Puntos de partida

The textbook *Puntos de partida*, also published by McGraw Hill, differs in its approach to the instruction of the impersonal SE construction. The impersonal SE is addressed in chapter seven whose theme is “De vacaciones” on page 238 in a box entitled “Nota comunicativa.” The term “impersonal SE” is not used and the students are presented with a few examples of the construction with the English translation alongside. The students are informed “Be alert to this use of *se* when you see it because it will occur

with some frequency in readings and in direction lines in *Puntos de partida*. The activities in this text will not require you to use this grammar point on your own, however.” (353). Next, there is an activity where the students read sentences with the impersonal SE and are asked to identify where some activities regarding travel take place. The instructor’s note in the margin of the page points out that this form has only been pointed out for passive recognition. The instructor is given, however, some prompts for additional verbal and written exercises for the students to practice. *Puntos de partida* does not address the impersonal SE in a thorough manner in the textbook.

Now *Puntos de partida* will be analyzed to discover how it instructs students about the impersonal SE in Table 3.

Table 3
The Impersonal SE in *Puntos de partida*

Five C’s	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication	x				
Culture	x				
Connections	x				
Comparisons	x				
Communities	x				

Each of the Five C’s of language instruction was scored an “insufficient.” *Puntos de partida* scores this way because the textbook clearly states that the impersonal SE is only presented for recognition, not production. There is a lack of opportunity for the students to learn this structure and to understand its use in the Spanish language; no effort

is made to provide formal instruction to the students about the impersonal SE. Therefore, *Puntos de partida* does not provide an environment that is sufficient for students to learn the use of the impersonal SE.

Second Year Textbooks

Imagina

Imagina introduces the impersonal Se to students in chapter seven, grammar point 7.3, page 254. In this grammar point, entitled “Uses of SE,” three uses of the pronoun SE are addressed. The impersonal SE has two bullet points that give the rules and general uses. These inform the students that the impersonal SE is used in sentences with an indefinite subject and offers some English equivalents, such as you, they, or people. The students are also exposed to times when the impersonal SE is applied, such as in warnings and signs (254). There are four examples accompanying each bullet points that introduce the students to real-life instances where the impersonal SE is found. The only note for the instructor concerning the impersonal SE is a prompt to “demonstrate the prolific use of the impersonal SE in everyday life.” (254).

In the “Práctica” (Practice) following the grammar point, there are three distinct opportunities presented to the student that allow them to practice the use and formation of the impersonal SE in groups or individually, most likely depending on the discretion of the instructor. In the first activity the students are provided with a list of verbs in the infinitive and told to make each sentence impersonal using the pronoun SE. In the subsequent activities, the students use the impersonal SE to express what is done in school and other places and also to practice giving rules to employees in a work setting. Finally, in the “Síntesis” (Synthesis) section, the students see a list of events and are

asked to provide impersonal sentences with the pronoun SE that give two logical consequences to each event.

While there are several opportunities for the students to practice the formation of the impersonal SE, how effectively does *Imagina* present the impersonal SE? The analysis of *Imagina* is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
The Impersonal SE in *Imagina*

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication				x	
Culture				x	
Connections				x	
Comparisons				x	
Communities				x	

“Communication,” the first C, scored an “excellent.” This rating was given because, although there are only two points of instruction about the impersonal SE addressed to students that provide correct and useful information, these two points encompass valuable information about the impersonal SE. An “excellent” was assigned to “Culture” as a result of the real-to-life situations posed to the students in activities. The third C, “Connections,” was given an “excellent;” a student having had this instruction over the impersonal SE would be able to make intelligent connections between Spanish, the impersonal SE, and other disciplines in their studies. “Comparisons” received an “excellent” as well because, based on the information in the

textbook regarding the impersonal SE, students would be capable of comparing this area of Spanish to their native language. In conclusion, “Communities” was scored an “excellent” based on the overall manner of instruction of the impersonal SE in *Imagina*. A student leaving this classroom would be able to comfortably join a multilingual community.

Enfoques

The textbook *Enfoques* introduces its students to the impersonal SE in Lección 11, grammar point 11.2, page 410. The grammar point, entitled “Uses of SE” covers the use of the impersonal SE, the passive SE, and the accidental SE in the same lesson. As far as the impersonal SE is concerned, there are two points that give the rules of construction and usage to the students. *Enfoques* notes that the impersonal SE is only used with third person singular verbs, that the subject is indefinite, and that the English correlations are you, we, they, or people. Also noted is “the impersonal Se can also be used with transitive verbs when it refers to a specific person or persons. In this case the personal **a** is used and the verb is always singular.” (410). There are accompanying examples that follow the instructions regarding the impersonal SE that allow the students to understand how the rules are used regarding the formation. There are, unfortunately, no notes addressed to the teacher regarding the impersonal SE. The activities that give the students the opportunity to practice the use and formation of the impersonal SE begin with sentences which have the verb in the infinitive and the students have to conjugate the verb to make impersonal SE sentences. While this type of exercise appears to be common to introduce students to the formation of impersonal SE sentences, this exercise already has the SE in place in the sentence; therefore, students do not receive the practice

of writing in the SE. The following activity combines the impersonal SE, the passive SE and the accidental SE, and the students have three columns of phrases from which they must make logical sentences. The next three activities for practicing the impersonal SE are identical to the activities in *Imagina*. Both books are published by the same publishing company, Vista Higher Learning, and both have José A. Blanco as a contributing author. These activities include the opportunity for students to apply the use of the impersonal SE to say what occurs in different situations and places. This encourages the creativity of the student and allows them to form their own sentences.

Now that the manner in which *Enfoques* presents the impersonal SE has been covered, it is now necessary to see if the impersonal SE conveys an effective learning environment for students, and this is done in Table 5.

Table 5
The Impersonal SE in *Enfoques*

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication					x
Culture				x	
Connections					x
Comparisons					x
Communities					x

The score “superior” was assigned to “Communication” because it not only set out the general rules concerning the impersonal SE, but went a step further and introduced a new concept regarding the impersonal SE to students that is later practiced

in some of the activities. “Culture” scored an “excellent” for the reason that students are presented with situations where native Spanish speakers use the impersonal SE. After learning the tools for superior communication with the impersonal SE, the students should be able to make “superior” connections between Spanish and other areas of study and based on that, “Connections” received a “superior” rating. “Comparisons” scored a “superior,” also, because students are well-equipped to understand and use the impersonal SE and also be able to compare Spanish and their own native language. The fifth category, “Communities”, was given a “superior” because students, having had the instruction on the impersonal SE that is provided in *Enfoques* could easily integrate themselves into a multilingual community.

Rumbos

In *Rumbos*, the impersonal SE is introduced to the students in chapter four, on page 144. The impersonal SE, as in the other books analyzed, is combined with other uses of SE. There are two points that the book gives to the students regarding the impersonal SE, which are that the impersonal SE is used when the agent of the sentence is unimportant to the inherent meaning of the sentence and also that the impersonal SE in English is expressed with you, they, or people. There are a few examples that demonstrate the application of these rules in sentences with the impersonal SE. A note in the margin says that a review of the impersonal SE can be found in the back of the book, on page C-4 in the “indices de gramática conocida” (index of known grammar). The entry for the impersonal SE gives a simple review of the grammar on page 144. There are no additional notes for the instructor in the margin. The exercises for the students to practicing forming the impersonal SE have an activity where the students have to change

sentences with an active agent to a sentence that uses either the impersonal SE or the passive SE. The conversation practices offer students the opportunity to give instructions and directions using the impersonal SE all the while using their creativity to form sentences.

It is obvious from the above that *Rumbos* devotes time to teach students the impersonal SE. However, how effective is the teaching of the impersonal SE, as exemplified in Table 6?

Table 6
The Impersonal SE in *Rumbos*

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication				x	
Culture			x		
Connections				x	
Comparisons				x	
Communities			x		

The first C, “Communication”, scored an “excellent.” This category from a “superior” rating to an “excellent” rating because it is lacking the information that the impersonal SE is only formed with a third person, singular verb, although the information about the impersonal SE is detailed and gives the student information to use it creatively. “Culture” was given an “acceptable” for the reason that there are no specific mentions of how the impersonal SE is employed in daily speech. The third category, “Connections,” was given an “excellent” because the student has a well-formed understanding of the

impersonal SE use and will be able to connect with other areas of study. A score of “excellent” was given to “Comparisons” based on the instruction of the impersonal SE and that a student would be able to intelligently compare Spanish and his or her native language with the provided instruction. The final category, “Communities” was scored an “acceptable.” While every other aspect of the instruction of the impersonal SE in *Rumbos* is excellent, the lack of specific explanation of the cultural facets of the impersonal SE could hinder a student from integrating successfully into a multilingual community.

In this chapter the syntactic structure of the impersonal SE has been examined, along with how three prominent first and second year textbooks teach the use of the impersonal SE. In the next chapter the syntactic structure of the passive SE will be examined, as will the manner in which these textbooks address the passive SE.

CHAPTER THREE

Passive SE

In the previous chapter the syntactic structure of the impersonal SE was discussed in depth. In this chapter, the syntactic structure of the passive SE will be examined and subsequently how the passive SE is taught in three first and second year Spanish textbooks will be investigated.

Syntax of Passive SE

To begin the discussion of the passive SE we must discuss, first, the different ways to express the passive voice in Spanish. The passive voice in Spanish has two formations. The first construction, the so-called “true passive” is formed with the verb “ser” (to be) in the singular or plural third person plus the past participle of a verb. The second materialization of the passive voice in Spanish is the pronoun SE plus a verb (any verb) conjugated in the singular or plural third person. An important aspect of the formation of a passive voice is that it is rare to construct a passive sentence with the verb “ser” conjugated in the present tense, in the majority of passive sentences with “ser”, it is conjugated in the preterit tense. In order to create a passive sentence in the present tense, the speaker must use the passive SE structure. For example, the sentence, “El pasivo esm formado con el verbo ser” (The passive is formed with the verb **ser**) is not entirely correct; the correct sentence would be, “Se forma el pasivo con el verbo ser” (The passive is formed with the verb **ser**).

The passive voice is one of the most popular constructions in the Spanish language, created with either the passive SE or with the verb “ser” (to be) with a past participle (Seco Aguilar 305). However, the passive SE can create confusion with not only its definition, but also with its use. In passive sentences, the agent of the sentence does not have a dominate role; the significant part of the sentence is the action itself (Bull 269). The passive SE eliminates an exterior agent and the action occurs without any reference to a specific entity that could have performed the action (ibid). The passive SE can also be employed in a sentence when there is no agent in the mind of the speaker (Fish 832). Something that is vital to remember about the passive SE is that the subject of the sentence is a thing, not a person, because the person (agent) is in the background of the sentence; the action that occurs has the primary emphasis of the sentence.

Passive sentences formed with the passive SE (which will be our focus from this point on) always occur with a transitive verb (ibid). If the verb is not transitive, such as *vender* (transitive) (to sell), *hablar* (transitive) (to speak), *comprar* (transitive) (to buy), *leer* (transitive) (to read), etc., the pronoun SE has the impersonal SE interpretation and not that of the passive SE. In sentences that are formed with the passive SE, the verb and the passive subject (which is positioned after the conjugated verb) agree in number; if the post positional, or passive subject is singular, the verb will be conjugated in the singular, but if the passive subject is plural, the verb will be conjugated in the plural (Gili y Gaya 128). Additionally, sentences with the passive SE never can have a person as the passive subject; the passive SE always takes a non-animate subject (Gordon 222). A passive subject that is a thing could be *cartas* (letters) in a sentence like “Se escriben cartas,”

(Letters are written), or the subject could be platos (dishes) in this sentence, “Se lavan los platos” (Dishes are washed).

The vital information to remember and to know in order to form a sentence that uses the passive SE is that the agent of the sentence matters to neither the speaker nor the listener. The passive SE hides the agent of the action in order to focus solely on the action. However, one must remember that the passive SE occurs only in transitive sentences. The passive construction with the preterit form of *ser* plus a past participle is not quite as popular in spoken Spanish as the passive SE construction, and tends to occur more in written language, such as in newspapers (Quesada 41). Without changing the meaning of any sentence, the passive SE construction with the verb conjugated in the singular or plural third person is generally preferred.

With regard to passive SE sentences, there exists the possibility that a reader of a passage or a listener of a dialogue could mistake the passive SE for the reflexive SE. In order to distinguish between the reflexive SE and the passive SE, the reader or listener must discern that the subject of the sentence could not have possibly performed the action mentioned on themselves (Sabatini 524). As mentioned earlier, the subject of a passive SE sentence is a passive subject, in that it does not perform the action but receives the action. Since the agent in a passive SE sentence is omitted to focus on the action itself, there little possibility that a passive SE sentence could also double as a reflexive SE sentence. However, for beginners in the Spanish language, that confusion could exist when they are first exposed to the passive SE.

The passive subject of a passive SE sentence differs from the subject/agent relationship that is found in active sentences. The passive subject receives the action of

the verb, and while it is called the passive subject is never treated as the agent. In active sentences such as “Jorge lee el periódico cada día” (George reads the newspaper every day), Jorge is the agent of the sentence, the one that causes the action of the verb to come to fruition. However, in a passive sentence like, “Se lee el periódico cada día” (The newspaper is read every day), there is no agent that causes the action of the verb. Rather, the action of the verb “leer” (to read) is the focus of the sentence. It does not matter to either the writer, reader, speaker, or listener who is causing the action to take place, or there is no particular agent in mind. The passive subject receives the action of the verb. There must be a passive subject following the verb in a passive SE construction.

Another issue that can arise with the passive SE construction is that while the verb is active, the sentence is interpreted as passive. How is it possible that an active verb takes a passive subject? According to Pablo G. Jordán, there are two reasons that the active verb-passive subject is possible in the Spanish language. The first reason this verb-subject combination is viable results from the addition of the pronoun SE in front of the conjugated verb. When SE is added to the beginning of the sentence, the SE transforms the verb from an active verb to a passive verb. Also, the second reason that Jordán gives for this possible structure is the agreement between the passive subject and the active verb. Jordán maintains that, as in the use of the reflexive SE, the pronoun SE can have a plural meaning when used with a plural verb (Jordán 601-602). Thus, it is the combination of the addition of the pronoun SE and the agreement between all elements of the sentence, be they singular or plural, which constitutes the validity of a passive SE sentence being interpreted as passive.

To identify passive SE sentences it seems necessary to analyze the act itself and if it is possible that the object performed it (LoCoco 889). In passive SE sentences where there is not agreement between the verb and the object (passive subject), the little word “a” marks the object of the sentence that receives the action of the verb (ibid). An example of this would be “Al hombre se enseña” (The man is taught); or a sentence such as “Se lee a las niñas” (The girls are read to) is an example where the passive subject does not agree in number with the verb, but is still interpreted as a passive SE sentence. The “a” inserted between the verb and the passive subject indicates to the reader or listener that it is the object that follows that receives the action of the verb and eliminates the possible ambiguity that the verb could be reflexive (Gili y Gaya 128). As King and Suñer say, “La voz pasiva subraya la importancia del objeto lógico sobre el que recae la acción verbal; el agente queda desfocalizado.” (King 41). “The passive voice underlines the importance of the logical object over that which the verbal action fall on; the agent remains unfocused.” Thus, in any passive sentence, whether the passive subject is an object or a person, the focus of the sentence is what occurred and to what (whom) it occurred, not who performed the action.

Therefore, we can now conclude with information that is necessary in order to identify a sentence with the pronoun SE as a passive SE sentence. First, there must be an understanding that the passive SE occurs only in transitive sentences and that any transitive sentence can be converted into a passive SE sentence. Secondly, there will be agreement between the verb and the passive subject in the sentence. Thirdly we must recognize that in all passive sentences the focus of the action is not the agent who performs the action, but the action itself and the passive subject, that which receives the

action of the verb. Finally, the passive SE construction is the most popular construction used to express passivity in Spanish and can be used with any verb tense.

Teaching the Passive SE

In the preceding section the syntactic structure of the passive SE was discussed in depth. After analyzing the syntactic components that go into the construction of a passive SE sentence, it can be of little wonder that students become confused when asked to identify, form, and understand passive SE sentences. However, if the goal of a course is to teach Spanish to students in order to bring them to a level of proficiency, then one could imagine that it would be important to instruct students explicitly in the use of the passive SE.

As discussed previously, in any beginning language classroom there will be a variety of student skill levels. A professor can have students who are native speakers, students from bilingual backgrounds, students who have a previous knowledge of Spanish from elementary to intermediate, and students with no previous exposure to Spanish. Of course this diversity in the classroom has the potential to pose problems in reaching a good equilibrium between classroom instruction from the teacher and classroom interaction between the students practicing the spoken language.

The students with varying exposure to Spanish could have already had an introduction to the passive SE without realizing it. From commercials to billboards to newspapers to overhearing conversations in grocery stores to formal instruction, there exists the likelihood that the majority of students in a classroom will have had some previous contact with the passive SE, even if they were not aware of it at the time. It is the responsibility of the instructor to ensure that his or her students learn everything they

must in order to succeed in learning Spanish. However every instructor greatly depends on their respective textbook as a point of departure for what he or she teaches and how it is taught. That begs the questions, “How are students presented with the information concerning the passive SE in textbooks?”

Textbook Analysis

In this section three textbooks *Puntos de partida* 8th edition, *Vistas* 4th edition, and *Dos mundos* 7th edition, *Imagina* 2nd edition, *Enfoques* 3rd edition, and *Rumbos* will be analyzed as to how they present the use of the passive SE to students. The method used to examine these textbooks will be the method that was used in Chapter Two and is re-outlined here¹:

1. To examine the explanation that the textbook provides for the teaching of the impersonal SE.
2. To examine the instructor’s note in the instructor’s edition of each textbook to discover if any additional teaching points are suggested and/or added.
3. To examine any activities that refer to practicing using, forming, and recognizing the impersonal SE.

These will then be commented upon based on the Five C’s for a classroom learning environment using a simple rubric to score each book according to the combination of the three categories above. The scoring on the rubric will be based on a combination of the three categories above, since it is the three combined that compose the material of

¹ As stated earlier, to analyze the extra materials that accompany each book is outside the scope of this investigation.

atextbook. Also, the scoring of the rubric will be determined by how faithful the textbook's instruction remains to the syntactic structure of the passive SE construction.²

The purpose in examining these textbooks is to discover how the difficult and trying subject of the passive SE is addressed in a manner true to the syntactic structure, without overwhelming the students with linguistic explanations. It is hoped that the textbooks provide reasonable expectations that instructors can place on their students in regards to understanding the passive SE as beginning students of the Spanish language.

First Year Textbooks

Dos Mundos

In the textbook *Dos mundos* there is a mention of the passive SE in grammar point 8.4 on page 306. This section is largely devoted to the teaching of the impersonal SE and the use of the passive SE is briefly mentioned at the end of the sentence that explains the use of the impersonal SE. In the example sentences that follow the explanation, the impersonal SE is highlighted rather than the passive SE. In the exercises that correspond with grammar point 8.4 on pages 283-287 there are none that allow the students to practice using the passive SE. The fact that the passive SE was briefly addressed at the end of a grammar point devoted entirely to the impersonal SE does not provide students with sufficient exposure to or the opportunity to practice using SE enough to become comfortable and could also be confusing.

Now we will examine the manner in which *Dos mundos* presents information concerning the passive SE in Table 7.

² The scoring of the rubric determined by how each textbook provides instruction on the impersonal SE construction is determined by the author's examination of the instruction as related to the syntactic structure.

Table 7

The Passive SE in *Dos mundos*

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication	x				
Culture	x				
Connections	x				
Comparisons	x				
Communities	x				

As the rubric indicates, *Dos mundos* cannot be perceived as having an effective learning environment for the teaching of the passive SE. Rather the teaching of the passive SE is “insufficient” in every category. The authors devote half a sentence to the explanation of the passive SE, do not fully explain how it is formed or the way in which it is used, and do not give opportunities for the students to practice using it. Furthermore, its inclusion at the end of a discussion of the impersonal SE could be construed as unnecessarily confusing. A student will leave the classroom not having a complete understanding of how to form and understand the passive SE construction in Spanish.

Vistas

Vistas makes no mention of the passive SE throughout the entire textbook. In the section 10.3 on pages 350-351 entitled, “Constructions with se,” the impersonal SE is addressed along with the accidental SE. However, not even in the teacher’s notes concerning the impersonal SE is the passive SE addressed. *Vistas* lack of attention to the passive SE construction does not prompt an instructor of Spanish to bring up the passive

SE at all during classroom instruction. Therefore, students will complete the first year of their Spanish instruction with no exposure to the passive SE.

Now we will examine if *Vistas* provides effective instruction of the passive SE using the rubric in Table 8.

Table 8
The Passive SE in *Vistas*

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication	x				
Culture	x				
Connections	x				
Comparisons	x				
Communities	x				

The rating “insufficient” was given to each C of foreign language instruction due to the fact that there is not mention of the passive SE at any point in the grammar points in the textbook or in the instructor’s notes in the margins of the page. Students finishing their first year of Spanish instruction will not be familiar with, understand, or be able to correctly form a sentence using the passive SE.

Puntos de partida

The passive SE is momentarily addressed in *Puntos de partida*. In Chapter Seven the passive SE is highlighted in a “Nota comunicativa” in the middle of page 238. This note primarily highlights the use of the impersonal SE, however in the corresponding teacher’s notes in the margin, which expresses that the “passive SE has been presented

here for passive recognition.” (238). There are no explanations of how the passive SE is formed, how and when it is used, and there are no opportunities for the students to practice the use of the passive SE. *Puntos de partida* leaves any further explanation to the judgment of the instructor, but does not lead the instructor to believe that it would be necessary to address the passive SE more thoroughly in the classroom.

At this time we will learn how well *Puntos de partida* provides an effective learning environment according to our rubric in Table 9.

The rating of “insufficient” was assigned to all categories of the rubric since the mention of the passive SE is taught, but rather addressed only for “passive recognition.” “Passive recognition” is insufficient for a student to learn the use of the passive SE and be able to correctly employ it in conversation after an entire year of Spanish instruction.

Table 9

The Passive SE in *Puntos de partida*

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication	x				
Culture	x				
Connections	x				
Comparisons	x				
Communities	x				

Second Year Textbooks

Imagina

The first second year textbook to be analyzed is *Imagina*. The passive SE is presented to the students in the same section as the impersonal SE and the accidental SE in Chapter Seven, grammar point 7.3, page 254. The information presented regarding the construction of a passive SE sentence appears to contain helpful pointers. The book mentions that the passive SE is used to express the passive voice when the agent is not mentioned, that the object of the sentences becomes like the subject of the sentence, and that the third person singular verb form is used with singular nouns while the third person plural verb form is used with plural nouns. Also mentioned is that the personal “a” is used with a singular verb when the passive SE refers to a specific person(s). Below the grammar instruction are examples of the passive SE used in sentences. The teacher’s note in the margin suggests that the instructor use a quote from a corresponding video to further illustrate the passive SE construction. The opportunities given to the student to practice the passive SE form do not contain written exercises, but do contain oral and group work. The students are given a prompt to discuss the decisions of an employer with the employees and to guess what a certain place is from based on clues given using the pronoun SE that describe what happens in each place. Additionally, there is an exercise that permits the students to describe consequences based on actions using the pronoun SE.

Imagina certainly devotes time and space to the teaching and practice of the passive SE, however, is it effective in teaching the passive SE? This is examined in Table 10.

Table 10
The Passive SE in *Imagina*

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication				x	
Culture		x			
Connections				x	
Comparisons			x		
Communities			x		

The first C, “Communication”, scored an “excellent” because the grammar instructions regarding the passive SE formation are detailed and provide the student with necessary information to understand and form the passive SE construction. “Culture” received a “poor”, as there are no explanations at all as to how and when the passive SE is used by native speakers. The next category, “Connections” was given an “excellent” score; equipped with knowledge of the function and construction of the passive SE, a student would be capable of making intelligent connections across different areas of disciplines. A score of “acceptable” was assigned to “Comparisons.” The reasoning for the “acceptable” score is that the lack of cultural information concerning the passive SE has the potential to limit the ability of the student to make successful comparisons between Spanish and their native language. The final C, “Communities” was scored an “acceptable.” The basis for “acceptable” is that, although the instruction portion of the textbook regarding the passive SE is “excellent,” the lack of sufficient cultural instruction has the potential to hamper a student’s efforts to join a multilingual community.

Enfoques

Enfoques, published by Vista Higher Learning along with *Imagina*, presents the passive SE in a similar manner to students using this textbook. The passive SE is found in Lección 11, grammar point 11.2, on page 410, along with two other uses of the pronoun SE, the impersonal SE and the accidental SE. The explanation for the students concerning the passive SE notes that the passive SE is used as a substitute for the passive voice when the agent of the action is unmentioned. Also noted is that singular nouns are used with third person singular verbs while plural nouns are used with third person plural verbs. An important piece of information mentioned is that the passive SE can only be employed with transitive verbs. A note for students in the margin states, “In passive constructions with SE, just like in the passive voice, the object of the verb becomes the subject of the sentence.” (410). Another message in the margin tells students that the passive SE is commonly used for signs and warnings. There are no additional notes to the instructor to facilitate the teaching of the passive SE. The exercises for the students expose them to forming sentences with the passive SE by having them conjugate verbs given to form a passive SE sentence. Also, the students are given the opportunity to do oral group work by creating a story that corresponds with signs provided using the pronoun SE in their story.

We have now seen how *Enfoques* presents the passive SE to students. How effective is the teaching of it, as seen in Table 11?

“Communication” received a “superior” because *Enfoques* not only explains the grammatical rules of the passive SE constructions, but also mentions that the passive SE is only applied in sentences with transitive verbs. An “excellent” was assigned to

Table 11

The Passive SE in *Enfoques*

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication					x
Culture				x	
Connections				x	
Comparisons				x	
Communities					x

“Culture” for the reason that there is mention of where the passive SE is found in Spanish-speaking environments. “Connections” was given the rating “excellent” because, with the instruction provided of the passive SE, students will be able to intelligently make connections with Spanish across academic disciplines and other areas of life. An “excellent” was assigned to “Comparisons” for the reason that students should have a “superior” understanding of the passive SE in Spanish and be able to compare it with their own native language to learn more about the languages. Finally, “Communication” received a “superior.” Students leaving this Spanish classroom, having learned the rules of formation and use for the passive SE and having an understanding of the cultural use of it would be able to join a multilingual community with success.

Rumbos

Rumbos follows the pattern of the two previous second year textbooks in that the passive SE, located in Chapter 4 on page 144, is presented alongside the impersonal SE

and the accidental SE. The grammar points emphasized for the passive SE are that it is used to place emphasis on the action of the sentence rather than on the agent, is utilized when the agent is either unknown or unimportant, that singular nouns correspond with third person singular verbs while plural nouns correspond with third person plural verbs, and that the object of the verb acts as the subject of the sentence. Also given to the students are models of the constructions that the passive SE can take in sentences. In the margin is a note for the student to review the passive SE in “índice de gramática conocida” (index of known grammar) on page C-5. The entry for the passive voice summarizes the information already provided to the students on page 144. There are no instructor notes in the margin that provide additional resources concerning the passive SE. The practice exercises available for the students include changing active sentences to passive SE sentences and distinguishing those passive SE sentences from impersonal SE sentences. The other exercises for the students where practices are given explaining how to do certain things utilizing the passive SE, including preparing for a party with friends.

Rumbos equips the students with necessary information and exercises concerning the passive SE. Just how effective is the learning environment that is promoted through it, as Table 12 demonstrates?

A score of “superior” was given to “Communication” due to the fact that the textbook states, “the object of the verbs . . . act as the subjects of the verbs,” which is an important distinction of passive sentences (410). Additionally, students are given the opportunity in exercises to practice turning active sentences into passive ones. “Culture” received an “acceptable” for the reason that while the passive SE is demonstrated in real-life situations, there are no explicit mentions of how or when native speakers of Spanish

Table 12
The Passive SE in *Rumbos*

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication					x
Culture			x		
Connections				x	
Comparisons				x	
Communities				x	

use the passive SE. The third category, “Connections” was scored with an “excellent” because students, after this course, would have the ability to make connections between Spanish and all areas of life in an intelligent and purposeful manner. An “excellent” was given to “Comparisons” because students, with their knowledge of the passive SE and its function, have the ability to compare Spanish and their native language in an effort to better understand the syntax of each language. Finally, “Communities” was given an “excellent” rating. With their “superior” knowledge of the passive SE construction, and some understanding of the cultural use of the passive SE, students would be able to integrate themselves into a multilingual community.

The syntactic structure of the passive SE has been discussed in this chapter, as has the manner in which the passive SE is taught in three prominent first year and three prominent second year textbooks. The results of the analysis of the examination of the passive SE taught to Spanish students will be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results from Textbook Studies

In Chapter Two and Chapter Three a syntactic analysis of the impersonal SE and the passive SE was followed by a discussion how three first and second year textbooks taught these two important structures to students of Spanish. Each textbook was scored on a simple rubric based on the 5 C's of language learning, communication, culture, connections, comparisons, and communities. In this chapter an overall analysis of the first and second year textbooks will be provided in an attempt to offer a more unified analysis of how first and second year Spanish students are taught the structures of the impersonal SE and the passive SE.

The three first year textbooks examined for this study were *Dos mundos* 7th ed, *Vistas* 4th ed, and *Puntos de partida* 8th ed. The second year textbooks used in this study were *Imagina* 2nd ed, *Enfoques* 3rd ed, and *Rumbos*. The study focused solely on the instructor's edition of each of these textbooks, taking into consideration the explanation in the textbook regarding the impersonal SE, the instructor's notes in the margins, and the activities in the textbook that allow students the opportunity to practice recognizing and forming the impersonal SE. Each textbook was then scored on a simple rubric against how well it incorporated the 5 C's of a language classroom.

Impersonal SE Results

In order to offer a more cohesive understanding of the overall manner of teaching the impersonal SE in a first year classroom using the three books from this study, the same rubric based on the Five C's is below. This rubric will combine the results from

each of the three first year textbooks' rubrics found in Chapter Two, as exemplified in Table 13.

Table 13
The Impersonal SE in First Year Textbooks

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication			x		
Culture		x			
Connections			x		
Comparisons			x		
Communities		x			

As this rubric demonstrates, first year Spanish textbooks in this study tend to do an average job of teaching the impersonal SE to students. Although both *Vistas* and *Dos mundos* scored high individual scores in the first category, "Communication," when combined with *Puntos de partida* the overall scores drop to "acceptable."

Communication involves oral, writing and reading skills developed in the foreign language. Therefore, students will leave their first year of Spanish with "acceptable" communication with the impersonal SE. "Culture" for the three textbooks is rated "poor." None of the textbooks devotes sufficient explanation to the cultural uses of the impersonal SE. The third category, "Connections" received an "acceptable." Students will not be able to make superior connections between Spanish and other disciplines where the impersonal SE is concerned, especially since their communication levels are only "acceptable." Spanish students will be able to make "acceptable" comparisons

between Spanish and their native language concerning the impersonal SE as they do not contain sufficient knowledge to truly understand what the impersonal SE means. Finally, the rating of “poor” was assigned to the fifth category of “Communities.” If the goal of foreign language learning is for the student to be able to enter into multilingual communities, there will be a disconnect with the impersonal SE is employed by native speakers. Therefore, the overall rating of how first year Spanish textbooks teach the impersonal SE is “acceptable.”

The teaching of the impersonal SE in second year textbooks came next in Chapter Two. Each textbook was examined individually using the rubric; now the overall analysis of the three second year textbook will be presented in the following rubric to determine how the impersonal SE is taught in second year textbooks, shown in Table 14.

Table 14
The Impersonal SE in Second Year Textbooks

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication				x	
Culture			x		
Connections				x	
Comparisons				x	
Communities				x	

“Communication” for the second year textbooks received “excellent.” With regards to oral, writing, and reading skills the second year textbooks will give students the ability to communicate excellently with the impersonal SE construction. An

“acceptable” was assigned to the “Culture” section. Students will have an “acceptable” knowledge of how the impersonal SE is employed in Spanish speaking cultures. The third C, “Connections” rates as an “excellent.” Since students receive “excellent” instruction on the use and formation of the impersonal SE, they will be able to make connections between it and other areas of study. The fourth category, “Comparisons” also scores an “excellent” for the reason that since the students are well informed of the impersonal SE use, they will be able to make comparisons between Spanish impersonal expressions and impersonal expressions in their native language. Finally, “Communities” was rated with an “excellent.” Students leaving a second year Spanish classroom would, in theory, be able to integrate themselves into a multilingual community with relative ease with an understanding of the impersonal SE function in the Spanish language. Second year Spanish textbooks teach the impersonal SE at an “excellent” level.

Passive SE Results

In Chapter Three each of the three first year textbooks were studied to understand how the passive SE is taught to first year students of Spanish. In an effort to offer a unified understanding of the teaching of the passive SE in first year textbooks the following rubric is offered in Table 15.

As evidenced by the rubric, the teaching of the passive SE to first year students of Spanish is insufficient in regards to any of the Five C’s, Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, or Communities. In the textbooks analyzed in this study there was either no mention of the passive SE, or it was attached to the impersonal SE explanation. With no knowledge of the passive SE, students will not be adequately

equipped to engage the Spanish culture and language. The teaching of the passive SE in first year textbooks cannot be anything but “insufficient.”

Table 15
The Passive SE in First Year Textbooks

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication	x				
Culture	x				
Connections	x				
Comparisons	x				
Communities	x				

Following the analysis of the first year textbooks, the analysis of how three second year textbooks teach the passive SE to students is found. The following rubric demonstrates the overarching teaching of the passive SE, in Table 16.

Table 16
The Passive SE in Second Year Textbooks

Five C's	Insufficient	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent	Superior
Communication				x	
Culture			x		
Connections				x	
Comparisons			x		
Communities				x	

“Communication” received an “excellent” rating in that the oral, writing, and reading skills are addressed in the textbooks in order to give students a clear understanding of how to recognize, form, and understand the passive SE construction. An “acceptable” was assigned to “Culture” because while *Enfoques* and *Rumbos* both addressed the cultural aspect of the passive SE at high levels, *Imagina* did not. Therefore, the overall score is “acceptable” for the manner in which the three textbooks present the cultural aspects and use of the passive SE. The third C, “Connections,” scored “excellent;” well-equipped students are able to make connections between Spanish and other disciplines more easily. “Comparisons” was rated “acceptable” for the reason that while the students will understand the passive SE, they do not have as much cultural information regarding it and therefore, it will be more difficult for them to make comparisons between the passive SE and their native language. The final C, “Communities” scored “excellent” as students who are able to understand and employ the passive SE use in the Spanish language should be able to integrate into a multilingual community. The overall score for the teaching of the passive SE in second year textbooks is “excellent.”

From the examination of the textbooks used in this study, one can determine that the manner in which first and second year textbooks address the complicated subjects of both the impersonal SE and passive SE differ. While the first year Spanish textbooks do an “acceptable” job of teaching students the impersonal SE, there is much lacking regarding the instruction of the passive SE. These results indicate that when a student leaves the first year Spanish classroom, they will not be fully comfortable and aware of the impersonal SE function and have no knowledge or understanding of the passive SE.

As far as second year Spanish textbooks are concerned, the instruction of both the impersonal SE and the passive SE are “excellent.” Students should leave a second year Spanish classroom understanding how to form and employ the impersonal SE and the passive SE in their Spanish conversations and communities.

Additional Research Options

This study of the teaching of the impersonal SE and the passive SE in first and second year Spanish textbooks has by no means been or claimed to be a comprehensive study. In this study only six of the numerous first and second year textbooks were studied and evaluated. This study could be replicated with different first and second year textbooks or with a greater number of textbooks from which to compare results. Additionally, the ancillary materials available for each textbook such as workbooks, listening programs, and video programs could also be taken into consideration in a study of this kind.

Furthermore, students in first and second year Spanish classrooms could be placed into a study regarding the teaching of the impersonal SE and the passive SE. After the specific instruction, the students could be give a survey, a test, or exercises in which they would need to identify the correct usage of the impersonal Se versus the passive SE, and/or form their own original sentences demonstrating correct employment of the impersonal SE and passive SE in the sentences.

An additional research option would be to develop a rubric that is used to analyze Spanish textbooks. Through the research for this study, it was discovered that no rubric exists to analyze textbooks. It seems that a need exists for such a rubric, as there is no universal way in which to analyze how a textbook treats a certain grammatical issue or as

a whole. A rubric could be developed using the Five C's of ACTFL or using another guideline by which instructors of Spanish from high school levels through university classes can examine textbooks.

This study has provided an understanding of how six popular first and second year Spanish textbooks teach the impersonal SE and the passive SE, two similar and challenging constructions for students. Further research and examination of additional textbooks and materials are needed to fully understand how best to teach these two uses of the pronoun SE to students of Spanish.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Throughout this study, the syntactic structures of the impersonal and passive SE have been discussed in depth. Furthermore, the manner in which three first and three second year textbooks teach both the impersonal SE and the passive SE to students of Spanish has been examined. The results of the analysis, as discussed in Chapter 4, show that, in regards to teaching of the impersonal SE and passive SE in first year textbooks there is significant room for improvement. It was surprising to discover that there is such little instruction on the syntactic elements that compose the impersonal and the passive SE. In order for students to be able to excel in the Spanish language, it would seem necessary for them to have a better understanding of these two Spanish constructions. The lack of knowledge of the impersonal and passive SE leads to a student not being able to understand the differences in the spoken or written language and can cause confusion and frustration on the part of the student. All of the first year textbooks devoted more energy to the instruction of the impersonal SE, while leaving the passive SE instruction to only a few small sentences or examples. If instructors wish their students to succeed in the Spanish language, there needs to be more thorough instruction of the impersonal and the passive SE.

The three second year Spanish textbooks examined all dedicated more space to the instruction of both the impersonal and passive SE. In comparison to the first year textbooks, the second year textbooks provided significantly better instruction on these two structures in Spanish. However, for the student coming from his or her first year of

Spanish where they received little to no instruction concerning these two structures, there is a high likelihood that they will be greatly confused when presented with the impersonal and passive SE. One very positive thing that the second year textbooks provided was many opportunities to practice recognizing and forming the impersonal and passive SE constructions. The opportunity for the students to form these constructions on their own reinforces the material just learned and allows them to note any areas of weakness where further study is required. Therefore, in the second year of Spanish, the terminal course for the majority of students, they do have more exposure to and instruction regarding the impersonal and passive SE.

An important factor to consider when determining the textbook choice for a first and second year Spanish textbook is not only one or two grammar points, but the overall textbook and how many grammar issues are addressed. By no means does this study of the impersonal and passive SE, only two of many grammar points in the Spanish language, pretend to be a comprehensive review of the Spanish instruction provided in each of the six textbooks. The goal of this study was to study the syntactic structure of the impersonal and the passive SE, and then to examine how the impersonal and passive SE are taught in first and second year Spanish textbooks, keeping in mind the syntax of the two structures. This study has remained true to that purpose, and has discovered that, while each of the six textbooks examined may teach every other aspect of Spanish grammar in a “superior” manner, there is a lack of instruction, particularly in first year textbooks, concerning the impersonal and passive SE. These two widely-used constructions in the Spanish language cannot be left to the side for the student to “figure out” him or herself. As this study suggests, there needs to be an improvement in the

manner in which first and second year Spanish textbooks teach the impersonal and passive SE.

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