1. History and introduction

I was recently asked to contribute to a colloquium in honour of a retiring French linguist and colleague. The colleague in question had selected a series of extracts from Berlioz’s Mémoires, and contributors were requested to base their papers on these extracts. I decided to analyse the so-called reflexive pronoun se, using the examples found in the extracts provided as a corpus (Banks forthcoming). I subsequently treated this subject using a more general corpus, taken from a daily paper, for a forthcoming volume being produced by the Association Française de la Linguistique Systémique Fonctionnelle, dealing with Systemic Functional Linguistics and the French language (Banks forthcoming, 2009). Both of these articles were written in French and the present paper is a rewriting of the second of them in English.

This question seems to have been rarely dealt with. Those studies which do exist date from the 1980s and 90s. Zribi-Hertz devoted a series of articles to this question (Zribi-Hertz, 1980, 1988a, 1990a, 1990b), and Mélis published a monograph on the subject (Mélis, 1990). Both of these writers approach the subject from a formalist point of view, which is rather different from the functionalist position I wish to take here. Hence what they have to say is not immediately relevant to the present paper. General grammars (Arrivé et al., 1986, Riegel et al., 1994, Lévy 2000) tend to deal with se succinctly, treating it as a pronoun which is coreferential with the subject.
... la construction réfléchie d’un verbe se distingue de sa construction non réfléchie par le fait que le pronom complément y est coréférentiel au sujet. (Riegel et al., 1994, 256)

Ces constructions pronominales ne constituent donc qu’une version particulière de la phrase transitive ordinaire où le sujet et le complément sont coréférents. (Riegel et al. 1994, 257)

Some grammars do not treat this question at all (Gledhill, 2003).

The corpus used here is derived from a single issue of the daily newspaper, Le Monde. The issue in question is that for 15 February 2005, and this provided 312 examples of se.

2. Possible categories

Intuitively, there seem to be three possible categories that one would expect to find. The first of these is the genuinely reflexive type, on the model of il se lave/se blesse (“he washes/hurts himself”). In this case the subject does something to, or acts on, himself. The following are corpus examples of this type.

(1) La population, comme c’est souvent le cas en Afrique, n’est ni informée, ni en mesure de prévenir l’épidémie, et encore moins de se soigner avec des médications dignes de ce nom.

«The population, as is often the case in Africa, is neither informed nor in a position to do anything about the epidemic, and even less treat themselves with anything that could reasonably be called medicines».

(2) Dans cette action, le laboratoire Pfizer se protège aujourd’hui contre les copies illicites de ses produits, tandis que Microsoft se défend ...

«In this action the Pfizer laboratory is today defending itself against illegal copies of its products, while Microsoft is defending itself ...»

(3) Le raisonnement qui avait conduit Fiat à se jeter dans les bras de l’américain en 2000 est toujours valable ...

«The reasoning which led Fiat to throw itself into the American’s arms in 2000 is still valid ...»

The second category is that where the process remains within the sphere of the subject, on the model of il se promène/il s’éloigne (“he walks/goes off”). There is no other participant involved in the process. I use the term “intensive” to refer to this type.

(4) L’UMP et le gouvernement se sont mobilisés, en revanche, pour venir en aide à M. Fillon.
«On the other hand, the UMP and the government took action to come to the aid of Mr Fillon.»

(5) Le graffiti s’étale en lettres maladroites sur un mur sale du quartier de Bè, au centre-ville de la capitale togolaise.

«The graffiti stretch in awkward lettering across a dirty wall in the district of Bè, in the city centre of the Togolese capital.»

(6) Ils se sont éclipsés un moment avant de revenir sur le terrain pour effectuer un tour de piste triomphant.

«They disappear for a moment before reappearing on the pitch to do a lap of honour.»

The third category is that of impersonal constructions of the type il s’agit/il se peut que (“it’s a case of/it is perhaps the case that”). In fact, there are no examples of il se peut que in the corpus. The following is an example of the impersonal type, and (8) might also be regarded as belonging marginally to this group.

(7) Pour l’opposition, il ne s’agit pas d’un mot d’ordre ...

«For the opposition it’s not a case of a call to action ...»

(8) Regardons alors ce qui se passe dans la première moitié du parcours ...

«Let’s see what happens in the first half of the route ...»

In the corpus, 13% of the examples are of the reflexive type, 81% are intensives, and 6% are impersonal. The reflexive group is fairly heterogeneous. It includes cases where se has a more complex role. In the following, se has a role within the Complement of the clause. The reflexive group as whole has 42 examples, of which 13 are of this type.

(9) Il s’est dit favorable au report des élections, au motif que son CRCM n’était «pas prêt».

«He said he was in favour of postponing the elections because his CRCM was ‘not ready’».

(10) Le dirigeant politique sunnite Adane Pachachi, dont la liste ne devrait recueillir aucun siège au Parlement, s’est déclaré «déçu» par la faiblesse de la représentation des sunnites ...

«Adane Pachachi, the Sunni political leader, whose list is unlikely to obtain any seats in the parliament, said he was ‘disappointed’ by the weakness of Sunni representation ...»
Il est rassurant de constater que l’institution ne se laisse pas désarmer et sait se mobiliser.

«It is reassuring to note that the institution is not letting itself become disoriented and knows how to mobilize.»

It also includes examples which I call «reciprocal relationship», where the different members of the subject group act on each other. There are 6 examples of this in the corpus.

... et les chefs d’Etats et de gouvernement se rencontreront à la fin du mois de mars.

«... and the heads of state and government meet at the end of the month.»

Quatre mois durant, ces trois hommes vont s’affronter.

«For four months, these three men will confront each other.»

On aurait dit deux vieillards se disputant la dernière pilule de Viagra ...

«They looked like two old men arguing over the last Viagra pill ...»

Finally, also included in this group are examples of reduplication, that is, where the Complement is part of the Subject. There are 2 examples of this.

Tout n’est pas parfait mais on est là pour se retrousser les manches.

«Not everything is perfect but we are here to roll our sleeves up.»

Une décision dont General Motors se mord aujourd’hui les doigts et qui lui coûte 1,5 milliard de dollars ...

«One decision, which General Motors is biting its nails over and which is costing it 1,500 million dollars ...»

3. Semantic roles

For the sake of argument, let us suppose that the traditional position whereby se belongs to the word class of pronoun and functions as Complement in a clause is correct. In this case one would expect to be able to attribute a semantic role to se in a transitivity analysis. I shall now attempt to do this for the examples in each of the three categories which constitute the corpus.

In the reflexive group, which has a total of 42 examples, se appears in three different roles in Material process. The most common of these is Affected, of which there are 9 examples.
(17) Le raisonnement qui avait conduit Fiat à se jeter dans les bras de l’américain en 2000 est toujours valable ... [example 3, repeated here for convenience]

«The reasoning which led Fiat to throw itself into the American’s arms in 2000 is still valid ...»

It also appears as Receiver, of which there are 5 cases.

(18) ... il est largement prouvé que Téhéran poursuit un programme clandes-tin pour se doter d’armes nucléaires ...

«... it has been generally proved that Teheran is pursuing a clandestine programme to provide itself with nuclear weapons ...»

And there are 3 examples where se functions as Beneficiary.

(19) C’était déjà, cela dit, le cas dans la horde primitive décrite par Freud, le patriarche se réservant toutes les femmes disponibles ...

«That having been said, it was already the case in the primitive pack described by Freud, the patriarch keeping all the available women for himself ...»

In the case of Mental process, there are 2 examples of se functioning as Phenomenon.

(20) ... l’équipe de France de ski a bien du mal à s’évaluer.

«... the French skiing team have difficulty judging themselves.»

More frequently in Mental process, se has a role within a rankshifted Complement, which itself functions as Phenomenon of the main clause. There are 3 examples of this.

(22) ... un homme qui se savait infecté par le VIH avant d’avoir des relations sexuelles non protégées ...

«... a man who knew he was infected by HIV before having unprotected sex ...»

A similar situation exists for Verbal process where se has a role within a rankshifted Complement which is itself the Verbiage of the main clause. There are 9 examples of this.

(21) Cela signifie que les petites listes se réclamant de l’autonomie n’ont pas entamé l’électorat de Tahoeraa.
That means that the small lists claiming that they are for autonomy have not touched the Tahoeraa electorate.

When it comes to cases of reduplication, however, things are rather more difficult. Consider (15) and (16), repeated here for convenience.

(15) Tout n'est pas parfait mais on est là pour se retrousser les manches.

«Not everything is perfect but we are here to roll our sleeves up.»

(16) Une décision dont General Motors se mord aujourd'hui les doigts et qui lui coûte 1,5 milliard de dollars ...

«One decision, which General Motors is biting its nails over and which is costing it 1,500 million dollars ...»

In (15), on is the putative subject of the infinitive verb se retrouser, and as such would function as Actor, and les manches functions as Affected. The inherent process is one which involves an Actor and an Affected, and it is difficult, these two roles having been attributed, to see what possible semantic role could be attributed to se. In (16), a similar situation is found. General Motors functions as Actor, and les doigts as Affected, and again, it is difficult to see what possible role could be attributed to se.

Cases of reciprocal relationship are equally difficult. Consider (12).

(12) ... et les chefs d'Etats et de gouvernement se rencontreront à la fin du mois de mars.

«... and the heads of state and government meet at the end of the month.»

Here we have a case of a process where only one participant is involved, in this example the Actor les chefs d'Etats et de gouvernemen. Since there is no other entity other than these heads of state and government involved, it is difficult to see what possible role se could have.

Thus, out of a total of 42 reflexive examples, 8, or 19%, are problematic.

When it comes to the intensive examples, the degree of difficulty increases enormously. Out of a total of 252 examples, 138 are cases of Material process. Of these there is one case where se can be thought of as functioning as Affected.

(23) ... Microsoft se défend contre le «spamming» publicitaire ...

«Microsoft defends itself against advertising spamming ...»

And there are 4 cases where se can be analysed as functioning as Beneficiary.

(24) Alors qu'elle se procurait des balles de break sur les quatre premiers jeux de service de son adversaire ...
«But when she obtained a break point in her opponent’s first four service games ...»

In other cases attributing a role to se is difficult.

(25) Le taux de participation s’est encore accru : de 76,83% en mai, il atteint cette fois 79,76%.

«The rate of participation has increased again: from 76.83% in May, it has now reached 79.76%»

(26) ... et enfin de Roland Dumas lui-même, s’approchant à son tour en claudiquant pour saluer celui qu’il avait qualifié, quelques jours auparavant, de «factotum» ...

«... and finally of Roland Dumas himself, limping forward to greet the person he had described a few days before as a ‘factotum’...»

(27) ...effacer l’échec qui les avait conduits, en décembre 2002, à détruire en vol le premier exemplaire de cette Ariane-5 ECA, dont la tuyère – plus précisément le divergent – s’était froissé comme du papier parce que mal refroidie.

«... to wipe out the failure which, in December 2002, led them to destroy in flight the first example of this Ariane-5 ECA, whose nozzle – or more precisely divergent – had crumpled like paper because it had been badly cooled.»

In (25) le taux de participation functions as Force (a non-conscious agent (Banks 2005)), but the process, accroître, is here intransitive, for it is the participation rate which rises; it is not increasing some other entity, so there is no possible semantic role for se. In (26) Roland Dumas lui-même functions as Actor, but here again in a process which requires only one participant, thus leaving no role for se. And in (27) la tuyère functions as Affected, and although here there is agentivity involved, so an Actor could be imagined, se is certainly not that Actor, and once again appears to have no possible semantic role.

Of the 252 intensive examples, 42 are cases of Verbal process. There are 2 of these where se, if it does have a pronominal function, could be thought of as functioning as part of the Verbiage.

(28) ... elles s’engagent à «prévoir une protection des cultures traditionnelles ...»

«(...) they undertake «to provide for the protection of traditional cultures ...»

In this case se is the putative subject of prévoir. That is, the content of what they undertook is encoded by se + prévoir une protection des cultures traditionnelles: ‘What they undertook was that they themselves would provide for the protection of ...’"
(29) M. Cukierman s’est plaint de la «cérémonie grandiose» faite à Yasser Arafat.

«Mr Cukierman complained about the ‘grandiose ceremony’ performed for Yasser Arafat.»

(30) Les écrivains s’indignaient que Flammarion ait édité le livre d’un professeur de lycée de 33 ans où n’est épargné «aucun cliché de l’esprit fasciste».

«The writers expressed indignation that Flammarion had published a book by a 33 year-old secondary school teacher where ‘not a single cliché of the fascist spirit’ was absent.»

(31) «On est tous coupables», se désespère Nicola ...

«'We are all guilty', says Nicola in despair ...»

Each of these examples has a Sayer, M. Cukierman in (29), les écrivains in (30), and Nicola in (31), and a Verbiage, la «cérémonie grandiose» faite à Yasser Arafat in (29), que Flammarion ait édité le livre d’un professeur de lycée de 33 ans où n’est épargné «aucun cliché de l’esprit fasciste» in (30), and «On est tous coupables» in (31). There is no role which se plays in the transitivity of these clauses. There are 32 examples of Mental process, and in 3 of these se might conceivably be thought of as functioning as part of the Phenomenon.

(32) Il confesse avoir alors été broyé, se souvient d’être parti en exode avec sa mère.

«He confesses to having been crushed, remembers having gone into exile with his mother.»

This is similar to the situation we had in (28): the Phenomenon in this case is made up of se + d’être parti en exode avec sa mère. What he remembers was that he himself went into exile ... However the majority of the examples of Mental process are problematic.

(33) Le syndicat Verdi, qui pouvait redouter un gel des salaires, peut se satisfaire du compromis.

«The trade union Verdi, which might have feared a wage-freeze, can be satisfied with the compromise.»

(34) Le grand rabbin de Metz, Bruno Fiszon, se félicite de la visibilité des religions dans l’espace public.

«Bruno Fiszon, the head rabbi of Metz, is happy with the visibility of religion on the public stage.»
(35) Elle pense que son amoureux va venir la chercher, elle ne se doute pas qu'elle vit ses derniers instants.

«She thinks that her lover is going to come to get her, and she has no idea that she is living her last moments.»

These examples all have a Senser, le syndicat Verdi in (33), le grand rabbin de Metz in (34), and elle in (35), and they all have a Phenomenon, compromis in (33), la visibilité des religions dans l'espace public in (34), and qu'elle vit ses derniers instants in (35). Once again there appears to be no role left for se.

There are 34 examples of Relational process. Whether they are attributive, possessive or identifying, there seems to be no role played by se. Where these are attributive, as in (36), there is a Carrier, here les Atjehnais, and an Attribute, in this case très à l'aise...

(36) Pratiquement isolés depuis plus de deux décennies, les Atjehnais se révèlent très à l’aise dans leurs rapports avec les étrangers venus si nombreux leur porter secours.

«More or less isolated for more than two decades, the Atjejnais are perfectly at ease with the foreigners who have come in such numbers to bring them help.»

Se, however has no role in the transitivity of this clause. Example (37) is possessive, albeit metaphorical. Hence, there is a Possessor, un débat sur le sens de la consommation ..., and a Possessed, une consommation schizophrénique.

(37) Une consommation schizophrène qui s’inscrit dans un débat sur le sens de la consommation et la réflexion anti-marque.

«A schizophrenic consumption which forms part of a debate on the meaning of consumption and the anti-brand movement.»

There is, once again, no role which se could play. Finally in identifying examples like (38), there is Token, here l'Amérique, and a Value, in this case, George Bush.

(38) Accouru pour montrer que l'Amérique “ne se réduisait pas à George Bush” ...

«Rushed in to show that America ‘cannot be reduced to George Bush’» ...

Once again no role can be attributed to se.

Finally there are 6 examples which might, at least marginally, be analysed as Existential process.

(39) Des gens rapportent aussi que le tsunami a détruit la partie basse de la ville parce que de nombreuses garnisons s'y trouvaient.

«Some people also report that the tsunami destroyed the lower part of the town because there were numerous garrisons there.»
Since by definition, Existential process has only one participant, in this case les garnisons, there is no role for se to play.

So the vast majority of the intensive type pose a problem in terms of providing a transitivity role for se. Of a total of 252 examples, 242, 96% are problematic, from this point of view.

There remain the small number of impersonal examples, and here again, it is difficult to see what possible semantic role se could have in these cases.

(40) Il s’agit d’une membrane aux trous microscopiques, qui laisse passer l’air mais pas l’eau.

«It’s a question of a membrane with microscopic holes, which lets air pass but not water.»

Here, there is an impersonal subject, il, but since these examples function as Existential processes, there is only one participant, the Existent, in this case the trous microscopiques.

Thus, in the whole corpus of 312 examples, there seem to be only 44, where it seems reasonable to attribute a semantic role to se. In the other 268 cases, that is 86% of the sample, this attempt poses problems.

I trust readers will forgive this rather laborious reductio ad absurdum, but, at least, it now seems clear that this is not the right direction, and that a solution to the analysis of se must be sought elsewhere.

4. A SUGGESTED SOLUTION

The above argument was based on the supposition that se belongs to the word class of pronoun, and functions as Complement. This meant that se had to be treated as a participant with results like the following, using a corpus example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Il</th>
<th>s’</th>
<th>est juré</th>
<th>de ne jamais livrer ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>participant</td>
<td>Senser</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>process Mental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have seen that in the vast majority of cases the attribution of a participant role is not possible, with the conclusion that, in fact, it is not a participant at all. But if it is not a participant, then what is it? For the sake of argument, let us suppose that se functions not within the nominal group, but within the verbal group. This would then give an analysis of the following type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Il</th>
<th>s’est juré</th>
<th>de ne jamais livrer ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>participant</td>
<td>Senser</td>
<td>process Mental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

participant Phenomenon

participant Phenomenon
If this is now considered in terms of the Interpersonal, rather than the Ideational, metafunction, we know that the parts of the verbal group can be found within the Mood, as Finite, and parts within the Residue. If we formulate the interrogative form of this example, *S'est-il juré de ne jamais livrer*, we see that *se* forms a block with the Finite and forms part of the element which inverts with the subject to form the interrogative. This suggests that *se* is part of the Finite, and would give an analysis of the following type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mood</th>
<th>Finite</th>
<th>Residue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Il</td>
<td>s'est</td>
<td>juré de ne jamais livrer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, it has been pointed out to me\(^6\) that if *se* is part of the Finite, one would not expect it to appear in non-finite clauses, which, of course, it does. In fact, it does so fairly regularly. In the reflexive category there are 15 (46%) cases which are infinitive clauses, and 4 (10%) which are participial.

(41) En décembre 2004, il avait dépensé 500 000 dollars pour *s’offrir* un bijou ambulant : une Daimler-Chrysler Maybach équipée d’un poste de télévision ...

«In December 2004, he spent 500,000 dollars to give himself a piece of mobile jewellery, a Daimler-Chrysler Maybach fitted with a television set ...»

(42) Le TdL voudrait obtenir une hausse générale du temps de travail pour les agents *s’attirant* pour l’instant des menaces de grève de la part de Verdi.

«TdL wanted to obtain a general increase in working hours for the employees, attracting, for the moment, strike treats from Verdi.»

In the intensive category there are 47 (19%) which are infinitive, and 14 (6%) participial.

(43) Les six principaux parties de l’opposition ont réussi à occuper le cœur de la capitale pendant presque toute une journée, forçant même l’armée à *se déployer* et à intervenir.

«The six main opposition parties managed to occupy the centre of the capital for almost the whole of the day, forcing even the army to deploy and intervene.»

(44) Silencieuses, des milliers de personnes ont pénétré dans l’église, ne *s’y arrêtant* que le temps d’y allumer une bougie ...

«Thousands of people entered the church in silence, only pausing the time it takes to light a candle ...»
In the small impersonal category, there are no infinitive clauses, but one of the 18 examples is participial;

(45) ... et ne va pas sans poser question s’agissant du jugement des délits les plus graves.

«... and inevitably raises questions, being a case of the judgement of the most serious crimes.»

Thus, overall, infinitive clauses account for 20% of the sample, and participial clause for 6%. It is true that among these there are a significant number of cases where the infinitive follows one of the French finite modal verbs (pouvoir, devoir, falloir); there are a number of examples where the infinitive follows the verb aller, giving the clause a future orientation. Although it is not the line of argument which I would wish to take myself (Banks 2003), those who analyse in terms of complex verb phrases of the phase type might wish to exclude these, as well as a number of other cases which might enter into the phase category, from the infinitive examples. However, even if this is done, it leaves sufficient examples for the objection to be taken seriously.

In Halliday 2004, the Finite is described in terms of tense and modality. On the other hand, the probe which is used, works just as well for voice. One of the probes suggested (Halliday 2004, 111) is:

The duke’s given away that teapot, hasn’t he? - Oh, has he? – Yes, he has. etc.

On this basis it seems reasonable to formulate the probe:

The teapot’s been given away, hasn’t it? – Oh, has it? – Yes, it has. etc.

Indeed, the passive is included in the Table which follows (Halliday 2004, 112). The has of this second probe is the voice marker, distinguishing the passive from the active voice. And it is this has which inverts with the subject to give the interrogative mood (Has the teapot been given away?). If we accept that this has is the Finite, then how should we deal with the following (admittedly invented) example:

This sample has been examined many times. Having been examined many times, it has nothing new to offer.

If it is maintained that a Finite can only function in a finite clause, we would have to say that has in the first clause is Finite, but that having in the second is not. It could be argued that has, in these finite clauses, besides being the voice marker, also marks tense (has been examined/had been examined), whereas in the non-finite clause it does not. Nevertheless claiming that there is an essential difference in function does not seem (to me) to be either convincing or consistent. I think it can be claimed that while having (in having been examined) cannot of itself be used to formulate mood, it is the element which would function as Finite in
the corresponding finite clause. Hence, I do not think it unreasonable to think of having in this non-finite clause as being the Finite. If we can accept this notion of the Finite (the element that would be used to formulate mood in a finite clause, whether or not the clause itself is finite), then there is no objection to considering se to be part of the Finite in non-finite French clauses.

5. Semantic function

If se constitutes part of the verbal group, we now need to ask what semantic role it plays. The suggestion I wish to make is that se marks the intensive nature of the process.

By intensive, I mean a process which is contained within the sphere of the subject, which does not go beyond the subject, which does not extend to entities other than the subject. We have already seen that the intensive category accounts for the majority of the corpus (81%), and this fits into the notion of intensivity virtually by definition. Moreover, it can be noted that many of these verbs form pairs, without and with se: étaler/s'étaler, déployer/se déployer, approvisionner/s'approvisionner, battre/se battre, etc., where the first of the pair is extensive, i.e. involves a second participant, whereas the second is intensive.

When it comes to the reflexive category, however, the situation is not quite so straightforward. Take, first, those of the reciprocal type, e.g. (12), (13), and (14), repeated here for convenience.

(12) ... et les chefs d’Etats et de gouvernement se rencontreront à la fin du mois de mars.

(13) Quatre mois durant, ces trois hommes vont s’affronter.

(14) On aurait dit deux vieillards se disputant la dernière pilule de Viagra ...

In these examples, the Subject is a group of people, and the process is one that takes place between the members of that group. Thus in (12), each head of state meets other heads of state; in (13), each of the three men confronts the other two; and in (14), each of the old men argues with the other. So the process is one which never extends beyond the group subject, and involves only the members of that group. In this sense, these examples can be considered to be intensive, and se to mark this fact.

In cases of reduplication, the Complement is an integral part of the Subject, as in (15) and (16), repeated here for convenience.

(15) Tout n’est pas parfait mais on est là pour se retrousser les manches.

(16) Une décision dont General Motors se mord aujourd’hui les doigts et qui lui coûte 1,5 milliard de dollars ...

In (15) on et les manches constitute the same entity, les manches being part of on, and in (16), les doigts is part of General Motors, even if in both these cases, the
sense of the clause is metaphorical. Since only a single entity is involved, these examples can also be considered intensive, as, once again, the process does not extend beyond the entity which constitutes the Subject, and se can be considered as marking the intensive nature of this process.

In those cases which are genuine reflexives, that is, where the Subject acts on itself, it is evident that the process does not extend beyond the Subject and these too can be considered to be intensive in nature.

Finally there is the impersonal category. These are essentially cases of existential process, and since existential process involves a single participant, there is no second participant involved, and so these can be considered to be intensive in that sense.

Hence, in all three of our intuitive categories, se can be considered as marking the intensive nature of the process.

6. Intensives without se

If the above hypothesis is correct, then it would be reasonable to expect se to occur on all occasions when the process was intensive. However, this is not the case; French does have intensive verbs which function without se. This is the case for example of marcher. This verb is a close synonym of se promener, in the sense that both correspond fairly closely to the English verb walk. However, there is a significant difference between marcher and se promener. The latter contrasts with promener (without se), and whereas se promener is intensive, promener is extensive, as in promener son chien (“to walk one’s dog”). Marcher, on the other hand, forms no such opposition, and there are no forms of marcher which are extensive. Hence, it might be hypothesized that with promener, se is necessary to distinguish the intensive from the extensive function, but that with marcher, se would be redundant, since no such opposition exists, and so, se never appears with marcher. The revised hypothesis for se now becomes that se marks the intensive nature of the process where it is necessary to distinguish the intensive from the extensive function.

If the hypothesis is correct, and if French were totally consistent, it would be reasonable to expect that we would not find se with intensive verbs that have no extensive counterpart. To what extent is this true? The 312 tokens of the corpus are made up of 182 types. Of these only 9 are verbs that have no extensive counterpart without se. They are:

s’avérer
s’efforcer
s’emparer
s’envoler
s’évader
s’évertuer
se mutiner
se réfugier
se souvenir
This means that 173 of the 182 verbs in the corpus function in the way predicted by the hypothesis. This also means that the corpus suggests that French is logical and consistent to a degree of 95%, a rate that is perhaps not too bad for a natural language!

Brief conclusion

It has been shown that the traditional treatment of the French word se, as a “reflexive pronoun” does not hold water since it is impossible in the vast majority of cases to attribute to it a transitivity role. It is argued that the true nature of the French word se is to function as part of the Finite, and its semantic role is to mark the intensive nature of the process. However this is only necessary where the verb in question has an extensive counterpart.
1 This version was presented at the 18th Euro-International Systemic Functional Linguistics Conference and Workshop held at Gorizia, Italy, 19-22 July 2006.

2 Translation: ... the reflexive construction of a verb can be distinguished from the non-reflexive construction by the fact that the pronoun complement is coreferential with the subject.

3 Translation: These pronominal constructions are only a specific version of the ordinary transitive sentence where the subject and the complement are coreferential.

4 Translations of examples are mine, and should only be taken as a rough guide to the meaning.

5 In Le Monde direct quotes are printed in italics.

6 By Michael Halliday and others (who, I hope, will forgive for not listing all their names) at the 18th Euro-International Systemic Functional Linguistics Conference and Workshop, at Gorizia, Italy, 19-22 July 2006.

7 I would like to thank Paul Bayley for his insightful and helpful comments on the first draft of this article. It goes without saying that he is in no way responsible for any shortcomings that remain.

NOTES

REFERENCES


