

## Reflexives

In a sentence such as *John sees himself*, the subject and the object of the verb are one and the same person, namely *John*. Crucially, languages generally do not allow such a meaning to be expressed with something like *John sees John*, or *John sees him*. Most, if not all, languages require a special pronominal form for the object. It is this form that is generally called a *reflexive*. In other words: a *reflexive* is a pronominal form that indicates that two arguments of a verb have the same referent. The syntactic expression that the reflexive is coreferential with is called the *antecedent* of the reflexive.

Reflexives can be simplex or complex. Simplex reflexives are reflexives like French or Spanish *se*, Italian *sé*, Dutch *zich*, Norwegian *seg*, Finnish *itse*, etc. These reflexives have a form that cannot be decomposed. Complex reflexives, on the other hand, are composed of a pronominal element combined with some meaningful element such as *self*, *one's own*, *body*, *soul*, *limbs*, etc. Typical examples are English *himself*, Dutch *mijzelf* ('me-self'), Hebrew *at-sm-o* (lit. 'his bone'), etc. A complex reflexive can also consist of a simplex reflexive combined with a *self*-type element, such as Dutch *zichzelf* or Italian *sé stesso*.

The two types of reflexives show different syntactic behavior (Reinhart & Reuland 1991, 1993). The most conspicuous difference is that simplex reflexives always take the subject as the antecedent, while complex reflexives can take any argument of the verb as antecedent, as long as it is structurally higher. (There is a general argument hierarchy whose effects are visible in many languages: subject > indirect object > direct object > prepositional object.) The example in (1) illustrates this possibility (here and below, coreference is indicated with subscripted indices):

- (1) John<sub>i</sub> protected Mary<sub>j</sub> from herself<sub>j</sub>

In general, reflexives must take a co-argument as antecedent. It is generally not possible for the

antecedent to be in a higher clause:

- (2) John<sub>i</sub> thought that Mary loved him<sub>i</sub>/\*himself<sub>i</sub>

The sentence in (2) is correct with *him* in the object position of the subclause. Using *himself* in this position, with the intention that it refers to *John*, is not possible. Reinhart & Reuland (1991) argue that complex reflexives function as *reflexivizers*: they turn the predicate of which they are an argument into a reflexive predicate.

There are, however, exceptions to this observation, some of which are systematic. For example, many languages have infinitival subclauses with subjects that are case-assigned in the embedding clause (phrases of this type are called Exceptional Case Marking or ECM in the generative tradition):

- (3) Mary wanted John to win the race

(3) consists of a finite main clause (*Mary wanted...*) and an infinitival subclause (*John to win the race*). *John* is semantically the subject of the infinitival verb, as it is the one doing (or supposed to do) the winning. (4) shows that the noun phrase in this position takes oblique (accusative) case. Only the oblique pronoun *him* is grammatical as the subject of ECM-constructions, the nominative pronoun *he* is not:

- (4) Mary wanted him/\*he to win race

If the subject of the infinitival verb is coreferential with the subject of the main clause, the embedded subject is expressed as a reflexive, and cannot be a pronoun, as shown in (5). (Obviously, a pronoun is grammatical in this position if it is not coreferential with the subject of the main clause.)

- (5) Mary<sub>i</sub> wanted herself/\*her<sub>i</sub> to win the race

Whether structures such as in (5) do indeed contradict the observation that reflexive and antecedent must be in the same clause depends on the exact analysis one adopts for such structures: if one assumes that the embedded subject is in the main clause (cf. Postal 1974, Chomsky 2005) there is no contradiction.

More problematic are those cases in which a reflexive appears that does not have an antecedent. *Myself* in (6) would require a first person singular antecedent, but none is available:

- (6) This paper was written by Ann and myself

Reflexives that lack an antecedent are sometimes called *logophoric*. In the analysis presented by Reinhart & Reuland, a complex reflexive can only function as a reflexivizer if it is an argument of a *fully assigned* predicate, i.e., a predicate of which all (potential) arguments are overtly realized. Because *myself* in (6) is not an argument itself, but merely part of an argument (i.e., of *Ann and myself*), it cannot function as a reflexivizer. Reflexives that cannot function as reflexivizers can be used logophorically, if the language in question allows it.

Logophoric reflexives have the property that they can be replaced with a pronoun without changing the grammaticality or the meaning of the clause (although some expressiveness may be lost):

- (7) This paper was written by Ann and me

Arabic uses the noun *nafs* 'soul' to form reflexive expressions. (Although, as noted by Wright (1981), other words are sometimes used in Classical Arabic, such as *`ayn* 'eye', *wajh* 'face', *rūh* 'spirit', *āt*, 'essence', *ḥāl* 'state'.) This noun is combined with a possessive pronominal suffix, which makes it

a typical example of a complex reflexive (most examples here are taken from Kremers 1997):

- (8) yuḥaddidu                    'Aḥmad-u<sub>i</sub>                    nafs-a-hu<sub>i</sub>  
speaks.3msg   Ahmad-NOM SELF-ACC-his  
'Ahmad speaks to himself'

The antecedent of the reflexive in (8) is the subject of the clause *'Aḥmad*. The reflexive may also be a prepositional object:

- (9) li yudāfi`a                    -l-ša`b-u<sub>i</sub>                    `an nafs-i-hi<sub>i</sub>                    didda...  
to defend.3msg                    the-people-NOM                    from SELF-GEN-its                    against...  
'so that the people can defend itself against...'

Because the Arabic reflexive is a complex reflexive, we expect that non-subject arguments can function as antecedents:

- (10) ḥattā takšifa-hu<sub>i</sub>                    -l-ḡatal-at-u                    'amāma                    nafs-a-hu<sub>i</sub>  
so.that reveals.3fsg-him                    the-heroine                    before SELF-NOM-him  
'so that the heroine reveals him before himself'

In (10), the antecedent of the reflexive *nafs-a-hu* is the object of the verb, the suffix pronoun *-hu*. Note that with prepositional objects, there is some optionality in the use of reflexives. Especially prepositional phrases that tend toward adjuncthood may contain pronouns, even if such a pronoun is coreferential with the subject:

- (11) *yaznaqūna<sub>i</sub>*    *-l-siġār-a*                    *bayna-hum<sub>i</sub>*  
 squeeze.3mpl    the-small-ACC                    between-them  
 'they squeezed the small ones between them'

In (11), the prepositional phrase *bayna-hum* contains a pronominal suffix that is coreferential with the subject of the clause. From the viewpoint of Reinhart & Reuland's theory, one can argue that *bayna-hum* is not an argument of *zanaqa*, and that therefore it is not the case that the verb has two coreferential arguments, so that it is technically not a reflexive predicate.

The reflexive *nafs* is very common with *masdars*:

- (12) *naħnu lā*    *nurīdu*                    *ħaṣr-a*                    *'anfus-i-nā*  
 we    not    wish.1pl                    restraining-ACC                    SELF-GEN-our  
 'we do not wish to restrain ourselves'

In (12), the antecedent of the reflexive is apparently the subject of the finite verb *nurīdu*. However, the data show that the masdar forms the domain of interpretation for the reflexive; that is, the antecedent of the reflexive must itself be an argument of the masdar. It is possible, however, that this argument is not expressed overtly. In other words, the reflexive in (12) signals that the subject of the masdar is *naħnu*, as well. The following example illustrates this point more clearly:

- (13) *lā*    *yaħsulūna*    *`alā mā*    *yakfī*                    *li 'inqād-i*  
 not    obtain.3mps    on    what    suffices.3sgm    to saving-GEN  
 'anfus-i-him                    min    al-faqr-i  
 SELVES-GEN                    from    the-poverty-GEN  
 'they do not obtain enough to save themselves from poverty'

In (13), the masdar *'inqād*, which has a reflexive argument, is the object of the verb *yakfī*. The subject of this verb is *mā*, which means that the clause containing the masdar does not contain an antecedent for the reflexive. Note, however, that the meaning of the sentence changes dramatically when the reflexive is replaced with a pronoun:

- (14) *lā yaḥṣulūna `alā mā yakfī li 'inqād-i-him*  
 not obtain.3mpl on what suffices.3sgm to saving-GEN-their  
*min al-faqr-i*  
 from the-poverty-GEN  
 'they do not obtain enough to save them from poverty'

In (14), the non-overt, understood subject of *'inqād* is different from the object: in contrast to (13), the ones doing the saving are not the ones being saved. Because of this difference in meaning, it cannot be argued that the reflexive in (13) is used logophorically. That is, (13) and (14) together show that masdars are domains for the interpretation of reflexives, and that a non-overt subject must be assumed.

One further example to illustrate this point is given in (15):

- (15) *Šadād-u yuwāšilu -rtidā'-a-hu li malābis-i-hi*  
 Shadad continues.3msg putting.on-ACC-his of clothes-GEN-his  
*wa tahyi'at-a nafs-i-hi*  
 and preparing-ACC SELF-GEN-his

The example in (15) is telling, because it contains two masdars that are both objects to the finite verb *yuwāšilu*, and both in construct state with a pronominal element. The first masdar, *irtidā'*, has a

pronominal suffix, the second, *tahyi'a*, a reflexive. Crucial here is the fact that the two pronominal elements are in the same structural relation with respect to their antecedent, *Šadād*. Yet, one is (obligatorily) a pronoun, while the other is (obligatorily) a reflexive. The only way to account for these facts is to assume, as before, that the masdar is the domain of interpretation for the reflexive, and that there a non-overt subject is present.

A different issue arises with the so-called '*af'āl al-qulūb*, or verbs of the heart. These verbs are similar to the so-called ECM-constructions mentioned above. The verbs of the heart are verbs that have a perceptual or cognitive meaning, such as *ra'ā* 'see, think know', *wajada* 'to find, perceive', *zanna* 'to think', *i`tabara* 'to consider', etc. These verbs take two complements, the first a noun, and the second either a nominal or a verbal predicate. The first complement is the subject of the predicate:

- (16) a.     zanantu         Zayd-an         karīm-an  
           thought.1sg    Zeid-ACC       noble-ACC  
           'I thought Zeid noble'
- b.     wajadtu-hu     yašribu         ḥamr-an  
           found.1sg-him drinks.3msg    wine-ACC  
           'I found him drinking wine'

If the subject of the embedded clause is coreferential with the subject of the verb of the heart, Modern Standard Arabic generally uses a reflexive for the embedded subject:

- (17)   yazunnu         nafs-a-hu             markaz-a         -l-kawn-i  
       thinks.3msg    SELF-ACC-his        center-ACC       the-universe-GEN  
       'he thinks himself the center of the universe'

Similarly with a verbal predicate:

- (18) ya`tabirūna 'anfus-a-hum sabaqū  
consider.3mpl SELVEL-ACC-their lead.3mpl  
'they consider themselves to have been ahead'

Note that these constructions superficially appear to be similar to ECM-constructions discussed above, they are in fact quite different. In English ECM-constructions, the embedded clause has an infinitival verb, while in Arabic, the verb of the heart may take a clause with a finite verb as its complement.

What this suggests is that verbs of the heart are verbs that take a nominal sentence (*jumla ismiyya*) as complement. The topic (*mubtada'*) of this nominal sentence occupies the object position of the verb of the heart, and consequently is assigned accusative case.

In the theory of Reinhart & Reuland, the fact that the embedded subject is in the object position of the verb of the heart means that this subject is, at least in syntactic terms, an argument of the verb of the heart. Therefore, if the embedded subject is coreferential with another argument of the verb of the heart (generally the subject), this verb is a reflexive predicate, and the embedded subject must be a reflexive. Given this theory, then, the occurrence of a reflexive in structures such as in (17) and (18) is expected.

Modern Standard Arabic allows logophoric use of *nafs*, although this use appears to be limited. Kremers (1997) only reports logophoric use of first person plural reflexives:

- (19) ḥayr-un min rabb-i-nā wa šarr-un min 'anfus-i-nā  
good-NOM from lord-GEN-our and evil-NOM from SELVES-GEN-our  
'Good comes from our Lord, evil comes from ourselves'



The reflexive *'anfus-i-nā* in (19) has no antecedent: it would require a 1<sup>st</sup> person plural pronoun as antecedent, but none is present. Note that the reflexive in (19) could be replaced with a pronoun (*min-nā*) without affecting the grammaticality of the phrase. (The expressiveness would be affected, of course.)

Generally, reflexives in Arabic have a pronominal suffix. There are, however, instances of *nafs* that lack a pronominal suffix, although they must be interpreted as reflexives. In such cases, *nafs* appears with the definite article, and has the meaning of an impersonal reflexive:

- (20) a.    *lākin lā jadwā min muḥāda`at-i -l-nafs-i*  
           but not use from deceiving-GEN the-SELF-GEN  
           'but there is no use in deceiving oneself'
- b.    *la-qad kānat fuṣḥat-an li -l-ta`arruf-i `alā -l-nafs-i*  
           PERF was.3fsg opportunity to the-knowing on the-SELF-GEN  
           'it was an opportunity to get to know oneself'

There are several lexicalized collocations containing an impersonal *nafs*, in which *nafs* has a meaning similar to English *self* in compounds: *al-tiqa fī -l-nafs* 'self-confidence', *al-difā`a `an -l-nafs* 'self-defence', *dabt al-nafs* 'self-control'.

Another method of expressing reflexive verb meanings in Arabic should be mentioned here. Certain stem templates in Arabic have a *t*-affix. These *t*-stems all correlate with 'non-*t*'-stems, and often have a reflexive (or in the case of stem VI, reciprocal) meaning. Thus, stem V *takattaba* correlates with stem II *kattaba*, stem VI *takātaba* correlates with stem III *kātaba*, stem VIII *iktataba* correlates with the ground stem *kataba*, and stem X *istaktaba* correlates with stem IV *'aktaba* (which historically had the variant *saktaba*). Similarly, stem VII *inkataba* can have a reflexive meaning, related to the ground stem *kataba*. (See Reckendorf 1967 for some discussion.)

Often, however, verbs with a reflexive verb template have a meaning closer to English intransitive or even passive verbs. For example, *kataba* 'to write' has a *t*-stem *iktataba* 'to write oneself', i.e. 'to register', which can easily be considered reflexive, but stem VIII of the verb *rafa`a* 'to lift, raise' does not mean 'to lift oneself', but rather 'to be lifted' or 'to rise'. (Such a clustering of meanings is not uncommon in language: the simplex reflexives in the Romance languages shows similar effects.)

It should also be noted that even though that many *t*-stem verbs do indeed have a reflexive (or passive/intransitive) meaning, *t*-stems do not represent a productive reflexivization strategy in Modern Standard Arabic (and were at best marginally productive in Classical Arabic). Verbs that show this pattern are lexicalized, not produced through productive derivational morphology.

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## References

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