Reflexives: A Cross-Linguistic Approach

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1. Introduction

In this study we discuss the cross-linguistic characteristics of reflexives from a descriptive point of view. First, we briefly observe reflexives in three languages, English, Japanese and Swahili. Second, the distinction between syntactic function and pragmatic function of reflexives is discussed. Third, the cross-linguistic characteristics of each function are explained.

2. Reflexives in English

There has been much discussion about English reflexives from both the descriptive view and the theoretical view. Here we distinguish two aspects of reflexives, the syntactic aspect and the pragmatic aspect, according to Yasui et al. (1984).

2.1. Syntactic Reflexive

Major syntactic characteristics of the reflexive pronoun in English are as follows (Yasui et al. 1984:43):

    i.   Reflexive pronoun is anaphoric to its antecedent

    ii. Reflexive pronoun and its antecedent must be clause mates

For example:

(1)   a. *John$_i$ hurt John$_i$

         b. John hurt himself

         c. *Himself hurt John

         d. *John hurt herself

(1a) shows that reflexivization is obligatory. (1c) shows that the reflexive pronoun must be an anaphora and needs an antecedent noun phrase within the clause. (1d) shows that the reflexive pronoun morphologically agrees with the antecedent noun phrase.

Yasui et al. (1984) pointed out that the antecedent noun phrase must be a subject, but such is not necessarily the case:

(2)   a. John$_i$ spoke to Mary about himself$_i$

         b. John spoke to Mary$_i$ about herself$_i$

(Shibatani et al. 1982:282)

(2b) is evidence of the object noun phrase being antecedent in an English sentence.

The typical position for the reflexive pronoun in English is the position of direct object, but it is not obligatory.

2.2. Pragmatic Reflexive

While the syntactic use of reflexive pronoun is strictly defined, English has another use of reflexive pronouns that is rather loose, optional and stylistic. See the following examples:

(3) a. I myself love her

   b. I love her myself

(4)   The paper was written by Ann and myself / *himself / *themselves.

(Yasui et al. 1984:48)

(3) is a so-called 'emphatic use' of the reflexive. (4) is an example of exophoric use. Only *myself* is allowed to be used without an antecedent noun phrase. This suggests an interesting contrast with the Japanese reflexive pronoun *jibun*, which has the speaker-oriented reading if it has no apparent antecedent noun phrase (see 9 below). We regard such kinds of reflexive which are exemplified in (3) and (4) as 'pragmatic reflexive'. English uses reflexive pronoun *-self* for pragmatic purposes as well as for syntactic purpose.

3. Reflexives in Japanese

The full-scale generative study of reflexive in Japanese started with the thorough work of Inoue (1976), and it has been developed with the advancement of linguistic theory to recent works such as Kawasaki (1987). In the present study, we restrict our discussion on the characteristics of reflexives in Japan to the ones which can be contrasted with other languages.

3.1. Syntactic Use of *Jibun*

In contrast with the syntactic use of reflexive pronouns in English, *jibun* has the following characteristics:

   i.   *Jibun* is anaphoric to its antecedent

   ii. *Jibun* and the antecedent noun phrase do not have to be in a clause

Examples below:

(5) a. *Taro$_i$-wa Taro$_i$-o aishiteiru

       '*Taro loves Taro'

   b. Taro$_i$-wa jibun$_i$-o aishiteiru

       'Taro loves himself'

   c. *Jibun$_i$-wa Taro$_i$-o aishiteiru

       '*Himself loves Taro'

(6) a. Taro-wa Hanako-ga jibun-o aishiteiru-to omotteiru

'Taro thinks that Hanako loves him / herself'

b. Taro-wa [Hanako$_i$-ga Hanako$_i$-o aishiteiru]-to omotteiru

c. Taro$_i$-wa [Hanako-ga Taro$_i$-o aishiteiru]-to omotteiru

(5) is an example of the anaphoric characteristic of *jibun*. In (6), both (6a) and (6b) are possible underlying structure for (6a).

The target of syntactic reflexives in Japanese is restricted to the direct object or to the indirect object. Of course, noun phrases which have other grammatical roles such as oblique objects can have *jibun* form, but it is optional and is not controlled by the same principles for syntactic reflexive. We discuss this below.

3.2. Pragmatic Use of *Jibun*

Various kinds of noun phrases can take *jibun* form in Japanese:

(7) a. Taro-wa jibun-de hon-o katta

'Taro bought a book by himself'

b. Taro-wa hon-o katta

'Taro bought a book'

(8) a. Taro-wa jibun-no kao-o mita[1]

'Taro looked at his own face'

b. Taro-wa kao-o mita

'Taro looked at his face'

(9) Jibun-wa Taro-to iimasu

'My name is Taro'

(7a) and (7b) have the same logical meaning, but it is emphasized that Taro's act is performed by Taro himself in (7a). The same thing can be pointed out in (8). (9) is an example of exophoric use; generally speaking, when one finds a *jibun* which seems to lack an antecedent noun phrase in a Japanese sentence, he reads the reflexive pronoun as indicating the speaker himself (see an English example 4, in which only *myself* is allowed for exophoric use).

4. Reflexives in Swahili

Swahili is a language widely spoken in East Africa by approximately one million people as their first language. It was classified as one of Benue-Congo languages in Niger-Kordofanian family by J. Greenberg. It shares many grammatical features with other so-called Bantu languages. For example it has a rather complex noun class system, which classifies all nouns into eighteen categories according to their forms, meaning, and number. Other inflectional lexical categories such as adjectivals, verbal elements and particles change their

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phonological forms according to nouns that they are related to. This phenomenon is known as 'agreement'.

Another important grammatical feature in Swahili concerning the present discussion is its objecthood[2]. In a Swahili sentence, the prefix attached just before a verb stem always shows agreement with the object noun phrase. Only one occurrence of the prefix (Object Prefix) is allowed even in the case that the sentence seems to have two objects. The object noun phrase, which controls the agreement with the object prefix, has most of object properties (e.g., accessibility to the passivized subject, head of certain kinds of relative clause constructions, nearest position to a verb, etc.), while other noun phrases hardly have any of these properties. Thus, Swahili gives its direct object greater prominence than other indirect or oblique objects.

This fact plays an especially important role in distinguishing the language's two forms of reflexives: the -*enyewe* reflexive and the -*ji*- reflexive. We briefly consider the difference of grammatical function in the two types of reflexives below.

4.1. The -*Enyewe* Reflexive

The -*enyewe* reflexive is a pragmatic reflexive, that is, it is used normally as 'emphatic'. For example[3]:

(10) a. Juma *mwenyewe* a-na-m-pend-a Hamisi

Juma himself Subject Prefix-present-Object Prefix-love-indicative marker Hamisi

'Juma himself loves Hamisi'

b. Juma a-na-m-pend-a Hamisi

Juma SP-pres.-OP-love-ind. Hamisi

'Juma loves Hamisi'

c. Juma a-na-m-pend-a Hamisi *mwenyewe*

Juma SP-pres.-OP-love-ind. Hamisi herself

'Juma loves Hamisi herself'

In (10a), -*enyewe* is positioned just after the subject noun phrase *Juma* and shows agreement with the noun phrase, while it appears after the object noun phrase in (10c). (10b) is an ordinal sentence without the -*enyewe* reflexive. The three sentence have a logically identical meaning.

(11) a. mwenyewe ha-yu-ko (Vitale 1981:135)

himself negative-he-is-here

'he himself is not here'

b. Yeye mwenyewe ha-yu-ko

he$_i$ himself$_i$ negative-he$_i$-is-here

(11a) shows an example of a deleted personal pronoun with the *-enyewe* reflexive. It is convenient from an interpretive point of view to assume that the personal pronoun *yeye* 'he' having preceded the reflexive has been deleted as in (11b), though this assumption has problems from a transformational point of view[4].

Here we summarize characteristics of the *-enyewe* reflexive:

i. Morphological aspect: *-enyewe* shows agreement according to the noun class of the antecedent noun phrase.

ii. Syntactic aspect: *-enyewe* may be positioned just after the antecedent noun phrase.

iii. Semantic aspect: *-enyewe* does not affect the logical meaning of the related sentence. It adds only pragmatic meaning to the sentence.

Those itemized characteristics may sound over-simplified, but they are enough to contrast with those of the *-ji-* reflexive below.

4.2. The *-ji-* Reflexive

The second type of reflexive in Swahili is the *-ji-* reflexive. Examples:

(12) a. *Juma a-na-m-pend-a Juma

Juma$_i$ SP-pres.-OP-love-ind. Juma$_i$

'*Juma loves Juma'

b. Juma a-na-*ji*-pend-a

Juma SP-pres.-reflexive-love-ind.

'Juma loves himself'

c. Juma a-na-*ji*-pend-a mwenyewe.

Juma SP-pres.-refl.-love-ind. himself

'Juma loves himself'

(12a), where the subject noun phrase *Juma* and the object noun phrase *Juma* are identical, is not acceptable as well as the English counterpart is ungrammatical. (12a) and (12b) are equally acceptable. (12a) includes the *-ji-* prefix in its verb, while (12c) has both the *-ji-* reflexive and the *-enyewe* reflexive.

Furthermore, when there seem to be two objects in a sentence, we can observe an interesting phenomenon:

(13) a. Juma a-li-i-andik-a barua hii kwa mwanawe.

Juma SP-past-OP$_i$-write-ind. letter$_i$ this to his son

'Juma wrote this letter to his son.'

b. *Juma a-li-mw-andik-a mwanawe barua hii.

Juma SP-past-OP$_i$-write-ind. his son$_i$ letter this

'Juma wrote his son this letter'

    c. Juma a-li-mw-andik-i-a mwanawe barua hii.

       Juma SP-past-OP_i-write-applicative suffix-ind. his son_i letter this

       'Juma wrote his son this letter'

    d. *Juma a-li-i-andik-i-a barua hii kwa mwanawe.

       Juma SP-past-OP_i-write-app.-ind. $letter_i$ this to his son

       'Juma wrote this letter to his son.'

In (13a), the noun phrase that immediately follows the verb, *barua hii* 'this letter', controls agreement of the object prefix, *-i-*, in the verb. If we move the word *mwanawe* 'his son' to the following-to-verb position, the sentence turns to ungrammatical as in (13b). But if we attach an applicative suffix, *-i-*, to the verb, we have a totally grammatical sentence (13c), and the noun phrase *barua hii* loses its accessibility to the object prefix (see 13d) and to some of the grammatical operations, such as passivization, which it has in the (13a)-type sentence (see Ozeki 1985 and 1988 for detail). This operation (applicativization) can work with most of Swahili verbs and occurs frequently in sentences in Swahili as well as in other Bantu languages.

What will take place if we change *mwanawe* in (13) to *Juma* himself? We can see the corresponding sentences below:

    (14) a. Juma a-li-i-andik-a barua hii kwa mwenyewe

         $Juma_i$ SP-past-OP_j -write-ind. $letter_j$ this to $himself_i$

         'Juma wrote this letter to himself'

      b. Juma a-li-ji-andik-i-a (mwenyewe) barua hii.

         $Juma_i$ SP-past-$refl._i$-write-app.-ind. ($himself_i$) letter this

         'Juma wrote himself this letter'

      c. *Juma a-li-ji-i-andik-i-a barua hii.

         $Juma_i$ SP-past-$refl._i$-OP_j-write-app.-ind. $letter_j$ this

         'Juma wrote himself this letter'

Both (14a) and (14b) are possible as counterparts to (13). The *-ji-* reflexive can occur only after the applicativization as in (14b), and *mwenyewe* in (14a) never induces the verb to have a *-ji-* prefix. So, *-ji-* appears as if it is an object prefix, but it does not show agreement. We can conclude that the *-ji-* reflexive is restricted to reflexivization of a direct object noun phrase.

Here we summarize characteristics of the *-ji-* reflexive in contrast with those of the *-enyewe* reflexive:

    i.   Morphological aspect: *-ji-* does not show any agreement with the antecedent noun phrase.

    ii.   Syntactic aspect: *-ji-* occupies the position of the object prefix. Only the direct object is the target of this reflexivization.

    iii. Semantic aspect: *-ji-* prefix must be properly interpreted in the logical form.

5. Conclusion

In many languages, at least in these three languages presented here, there must be both syntactic reflexives and pragmatic reflexives. As for syntactic reflexives, the following criteria have been revealed (asterisks denote that the constraints cited in the first row are relevant for the languages in reflexivization):

	antecedent NP is the subject	antecedent NP and the target NP are caluse mates	target NP is the direct object
English		*	
Japanese	*		
German	*	*	
Swahili	*	*	*

(German data from Shibatani et al. 1982:286-7)

Swahili has the strictest criteria for both the syntactic reflexive and the pragmatic reflexive. It uses a bound morpheme -ji- for the syntactic reflexive, and a pronominal -enyewe for the pragmatic reflexive. At this point, Swahili seems to have a unique system for reflexives, but the distinction between syntactic reflexive and pragmatic reflexive itself exists in other languages, too. So, we should treat the two kinds of reflexives separately from a descriptive point of view. From an interpretive view, the following strategy may work: when the syntactic criteria fails for a reflexive, the reflexive must be treated as a marked and pragmatic reflexive, that is, for example, it can be read as indicating the speaker himself.

So far little discussion has been held on the role of objecthood in reflexives such as the case of Swahili cited above. Including the present argument, we are now preparing a further work on universal characteristics of syntactic reflexives from a parametric view.

Notes

[1] This type of sentences may be concerned with inalienable possession, and be treated as a syntactic reflexive.
[2] For further discussion on the objecthood in Swahili, see Ozeki (1985).
[3] The data of Swahili in this study are based on my research with informants from Tanzania during 1982-85.
[4] We will discuss them in a further work.

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