

Reflexive Verbs in English

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Lee, Jeong-Shik (1995). **Reflexive Verbs in English**. *Linguistics*, Vol. 3. This paper is concerned with certain class of verbs in English that can appear only with a reflexive pronoun, but not with any other objects including a reciprocal. These verbs are called reflexive verbs, or Rf-verbs, and are analyzed as E_{rf} -Vs, where E_{rf} represents an empty reflexive affix containing a feature [+refl]. The status of a reflexive pronoun with Rf-verbs is identified as a VP-internal adverbial NP selected by these verbs. Under the anaphor movement analysis, this reflexive is assumed to undergo X^0 -raising, and in the first step to the Rf-verbs, the [+refl] feature of these verbs is checked. This checking is not possible with a reciprocal due to feature mismatch. This accounts for the fact that only a reflexive, but not a reciprocal, appears with the reflexive verbs.

Emonds (1976, 87, (51)) observed that certain class of verbs in English cannot appear with a direct object other than a reflexive pronoun:

- (1) a. The witness perjured herself.
b. *The witness perjured the lawyer.
- (2) a. Mary absented herself yesterday.
b. *Mary absented Martha yesterday.
- (3) a. The guests should avail themselves of the hotel's services.
b. *The guests should avail each other of the hotel's services.
- (4) a. The children were behaving (themselves) wonderfully.
b. *The children were behaving each other wonderfully.
- (5) a. They braced (themselves) for a shock.
b. *They braced their parents for a shock.
- (6) a. The penalists repeat (themselves) too much.
b. *The penalists repeat the moderator too much.

The verbs in (1)-(6) can only take a reflexive. For this reason, I call these verbs reflexive verbs. They cannot appear with ordinary NPs in (1b, 2b, 6b), a reciprocal in (3b, 4b), and a possessive NP in (5b) in their object positions. Verbs like *perjure*, *absent*, *avail* have an obligatory reflexive, as seen in (1)-(3), while others like *brace*, *behave*, *repeat* have an optional reflexive, as seen in (4)-(6).

Thus, questions arise as to what the status of a reflexive in (1)-(6) is and why only a reflexive, not a reciprocal, can appear with these verbs. This paper attempts to offer analyses that answer these questions.

The reflexives in (1)-(6) cannot appear in non-NP positions other than in the apparent object position:

- (7) a. *The witness herself perjured.
 b. *The children were themselves behaving.

This fact seems to show that the reflexives in question have a categorial status of NP. The fact that the verbs in (1)-(6) cannot take object NPs, except reflexive NPs, leads us to say that they do not have an object position. But the appearance of a reflexive NP in (1)-(6) suggests that the reflexive in question is a VP-internally base-generated adverbial NP that is selected by the verb, obligatorily selected in (1)-(3) and optionally in (4)-(6).¹

The reflexive verbs in (1)-(6) cannot be treated as unaccusatives, as in (8), since there exist no *there*-constructions with these verbs, as seen in (9c, 10c, 11c):

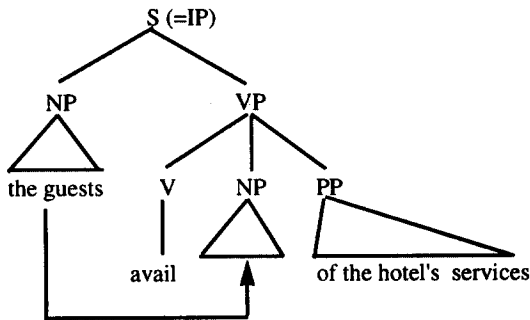
- (8) a. *John arrived a bus.
 b. A bus arrived.
 c. There arrived a bus.
 (9) a. *The witness perjured the lawyer.
 b. The witness perjured herself.
 c. *There perjured a witness.
 (10) a. *The children were behaving each other wonderfully.
 b. The children were behaving (themselves) wonderfully.
 c. *There were behaving some children wonderfully.
 (11) a. *The penalists repeat the moderator too much.
 b. The penalists repeat (themselves) too much.
 c. *There repeat some penalists too much.

This fact indicates that the verbs in question have a thematic subject. Evidence for this also comes from the fact that the subject denotes the

perjurer in (9b), the person who behaves in (10b), and repeater in (11b). Since these verbs cannot have an object NP other than a reflexive NP and some of them do not require a reflexive, as in (4)-(6), they may well be treated as intransitives in base structure, as in Emonds (1976, 87). If so, the remaining question is how to account for the particular appearance of a reflexive NP in (1)-(6) and the disparity in distribution between a reflexive and a reciprocal, as seen in (3, 4).

Emonds (1976) proposed the structure-preserving Identical Object rule by which a pronoun copy of the subject NP is inserted into the object position, as roughly illustrated in (12) below. The appearance of a reflexive pronoun was then assumed to be due to reflexivization applying after the Identical Object rule. Emonds also offered an alternative analysis in which the reflexive NP is simply inserted into object position.

(12) The guests avail themselves of the hotel's services.



The structure (12) indicates that the object position in which a reflexive NP appears is a non-thematic position. Thus, it might be expected that ordinary NPs cannot appear in this position due to the theta-criterion. The reflexive NP in the non-thematic object position in (12) is then to be regarded as a sort of expletive. But it is not obvious whether a reflexive NP in a non-thematic position can be treated as an expletive or not.

If a reflexive NP in the object position in (12) is an expletive, the sentence in (12) would be like a *there*-construction in (8c), repeated below as (13), with the order between an expletive and its associate argument inverted.

(13) There arrived a bus.

In a *there*-construction like (13), the non-thematic subject position is filled by *there*, which is forced by the Extended Projection Principle (EPP): A subject position must be filled. But in (12) the EPP plays no role in forcing the non-thematic object position to be filled. Thus, the question of what forces the object position in (12) to be filled, particularly, by a reflexive NP remains to be answered.

Further, under Full Interpretation the expletive reflexive must be replaced by its associate subject NP at LF (perhaps with the familiar adjunction mechanism in Chomsky 1986) via lowering of the subject to the expletive reflexive NP position. Then, the agreement between the subject and the reflexive may also be captured in one way or another.

The lowering analysis seems not implausible, given the existence of this analysis in another area. In examples like (14), the quantifier *someone* and the predicate *likely* each takes scope over the other.

(14) Someone_i is likely to be t_i here.

For the reading where *likely* takes scope over *someone*, May (1985) proposes that the quantifier *someone* moves down below *likely*, as represented in (15):

(15) [e is likely [someone_i [t'_i to be t_i here]]]

For *there*-constructions like (13), there exists an overt counterpart like (8b), repeated below as (16) (with the trace added), where the argument of the verb has moved to a non-thematic position, which is otherwise filled by the expletive *there*.

(16) A bus_i arrived t_i.

For reflexive constructions like (1a), repeated below as (17), however, there is no overt form like (18) under the assumption that lowering is possible, as indicated in (12):

(17) The witness perjured herself.

(18) *t_i perjured a witness_i.

Thus, whatever reason rules out (18) will also rule out the LF lowering of the subject to the non-thematic position for the purpose of expletive replacement

in (17).

In addition to the matter of replacement of the expletive reflexive, the non-appearance of reciprocals in the object position in (12) must also be accounted for. If the subject simply lowers to the object position, it is not obvious how the lowering analysis can account for this fact.²

Thus, I take the reflexives in (1)-(6) to be VP-internal adverbials selected by the verbs, which I call reflexive verbs. I also turn to the movement analysis of anaphors (cf. Chomsky 1986, Pica 1987, Browning 1993, among others). In this analysis, reflexives raise near to their antecedents for agreement. I assume that the reflexive raises near to its antecedent via X^0 -movement (see the structure (12)). The subject NP is in Spec IP, and the reflexive under discussion raises up to INFL via X^0 -movement, thereby both being in a Spec-head relation. This then captures the agreement under Chomsky's (1992) minimalist framework.

In most cases, reciprocals share the same distribution as reflexives:

- (19) a. The children love/hate themselves/each other.
 b. They believe themselves/each other to be smart.

Thus, reciprocals can also entertain the raising analysis at LF (cf. Lebeaux 1983). The question, raised before, is then how to account for the non-appearance of reciprocals as well as the particular appearance of reflexives in (1)-(6). Unlike those verbs in (19a, b), I classify the verbs in (1)-(6) as reflexive verbs, or simply Rf-verbs. The verbs in (1)-(3) are obligatory Rf-verbs, and those in (4)-(6) are optional Rf-verbs, as represented in (20a) and (20b), respectively:

- (20) a. E_{rf} perjure, E_{rf} absent, E_{rf} avail
 b. (E_{rf})brace, (E_{rf})behave, (E_{rf})repeat

In (20a, b), E_{rf} stands for a morphologically empty reflexive affix containing a feature [+refl] and it makes the verbs to which it is affixed reflexive verbs. The present assumption that reflexives raise via X^0 -movement then opens a way to distinguish (3a, 4a) and (3b, 4b).

Assume that the feature [+refl] of the empty reflexive affix E_{rf} must be checked by a reflexive. The reflexive in question must first X^0 -move to the verb due to the Head Movement Constraint (Travis 1984), more specifically, to the empty reflexive affix position of the Rf-verbs, which may be viewed as Spec of V; and then on to INFL to be in a Spec-head relation with its

antecedent subject in Spec IP. In the first step, the [+refl] feature can be properly checked.³ On the other hand, if reciprocals raise in the same environment, the [+refl] feature on the Rf-verbs cannot be checked, a case of feature mismatch. From this follows the contrast between (3a, 4a) and (3b, 4b), i.e., the fact that the reflexive verbs can only host reflexives, but cannot host reciprocals.

The present analysis can extend to the following Korean examples:⁴

- (21) a. ku pihayngki napchipem-un (*casin-ul) ca.salha-ess-ta.
 the airplane hijacker-Top self-Acc self.kill-Past-Dec
 'The hijacker killed himself.'
 b. *ku pihayngki napchipem-un Chelswu-lul ca.salha-ess-ta.
 the airplane hijacker-Top -Acc self.kill-Past-Dec
 (Lit.) 'The hijacker self-killed Chelswu.'
- (22) a. ku cengchiin-un nul (?*casin-ul) ca.hwa ca.chan-man ha-n-ta.
 the politician-Top always self-Acc self.praise-only do-Prst-Dec
 'The politician always only praises himself.'
 b. *ku cengchiin-un nul Chelswu-lul ca.hwa ca.chanha-n-ta.
 the politician-Top always -Acc self.praise-Prst-Dec
 (Lit.) 'The politician always self-praises Chelswu.'

As seen in (21a, 22a), Rf-verbs in Korean have an overt reflexive prefix *ca-* on the verbal root, unlike those in English. As seen in (21b, 22b), ordinary NPs cannot appear in the object position, as in English. In (21a, 22a) an adverbial reflexive cannot appear, either. It seems that when an adverbial reflexive appears, the verb in (21a, 22a) requires an overt raising of this element, thereby the combination [casin+E_{rf}] being realized as the affix *ca-* to form an overt reflexive verb *ca-V*-.⁵ This will follow if we assume that the [+refl] feature of the affix E_{rf} on the Korean verbs is strong in the sense of Chomsky (1992).

In sum, it is seen that certain class of verbs, called Rf-verbs here, obligatorily or optionally select a reflexive pronoun, regarded as a VP-internal adverbial NP. Assuming that this reflexive element undergoes X⁰-raising to be in a Spec-head relation with its antecedent within IP, I suggest that the verbs in (1)-(6) are analyzed as Rf-verbs, the verbs to which the empty reflexive affix is prefixed. The postulation of the [+refl] feature on these verbs and the requirement of this feature checking, combined with the X⁰-raising analysis of reflexives, make it possible to account for the fact that only reflexives, but not reciprocals, appear with these verbs.

Notes

1. According to Rizzi (1990, 4), manner adverbials are also base-generated VP-internally and are obligatorily selected by certain verbs.
2. It seems necessary to assume under the lowering analysis that anaphors, both reflexives and reciprocals, in the object position in (12) are an expletive element.
3. The Case feature of the adverbial reflexive NP, if any, can also be checked by the verbs in this first step.
4. See Levin (1985) for similar Russian examples, where the reflexive affix *-sja* appears.
5. Alternatively, this overt reflexive verb formation may be a lexical process, in which the object argument of the base verb is suppressed (cf. Carrier-Duncan 1985). Then, it would be possible to say that this reflexive verb does not select *casin*, as in (21a, 22a).

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374 이정식

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