

A comprehensive perspective on reflexive constructions

Convenors

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Workshop description

Most definitions share the idea that the term reflexive refers to events wherein the patient object co-refers with the agent subject as in *Mary saw herself in the mirror*. In contrast, the coding of reflexive interpretation demonstrates remarkable variation across languages (König & Siemund 2000). It extends from nominals (Acholi *body*), through dedicated reflexive pronouns that in some languages grammaticalized into verbal affixes and derive reflexive verbs (Russian *sebjā* > *-sja*) to verbal strategies, including a change in a verbal paradigm. The reflexive interpretation can also be available with possessive pronouns or as in Oceanic with personal pronouns.

Reflexivity has been extensively discussed from different grammatical angles. For example, Everaert & van Riemsdijk (2005) investigate it primarily from a syntactic perspective. Yet Huang (2000) incorporates a neo-Gricean pragmatic account, whereas Reinhart (1983) and Keenan (1988) deliver semantic expertise. Crosslinguistic studies also couch the topic of reflexivity in various theoretical frameworks. While on the one hand, there is a large body of literature nested in a generative perspective (e.g. Chomsky 1981; Everaert 1986; Reinhart & Reuland 1993), on the other hand, there are several studies based on a functional-typological perspective (e.g. Faltz 1985; Geniušienė 1987; Kemmer 1993; Frajzyngier & Curl 2000; König 2001; Haspelmath 2008; König & Gast 2008). But a survey of the literature clearly shows that much of what counts nowadays as textbook knowledge in this empirical domain still remains subject to vivid discussions. Thus, the workshop addressing the key issues related to reflexivity is therefore well motivated.

Reflexives demonstrate a high degree of diversity: (i) in their syntactic distribution; (ii) in the syntactic parallelism they exhibit; (iii) in the patterns of multi-functionality they exhibit; (iv) in their syntactic integration into the clause; and (v) in their semantic mode of composition (Déchaine & Wiltschko 2017: 60). The crosslinguistic diversity of reflexives therefore begs for explanation. In the face of immense cross-linguistic diversity demonstrated by individual languages to express reflexivity, Volkova (2014) admits that reconciling such diversity within the Binding Theory (Chomsky 1981) poses problems and is hard, if not impossible, to accomplish. In contrast, functional-typological oriented studies make no claims about language-individual mental grammars or Universal Grammar. A functional explanation of universals is based merely on general aspects of language use and is achieved after inductively formulated crosslinguistic generalisations that can be easily tested by examination of corpora.

The classification of reflexives also poses problems (Puddu, in preparation). A common separation takes place along the morphological line, leading to verbal vs. nominal distinction. This dichotomy has been tentatively traced by Faltz (1985) and recognized in both generative and functional traditions. But it runs into certain difficulties when we consider, for example, the cases wherein objects are coded on the verb and where the distinction between verbal strategy vs. NP strategy is thin, relying merely on affix vs. clitic distinction. As subsequently argued by Faltz (1985), this distinction should rather be viewed as a continuum with nominal and verbal reflexives allocated at two distinct cut-off points. The fact that nominal and verbal

reflexives frequently provide evidence for a common etymology (Kazenin 2001) further supports the gradient rather than categorical approach to this distinction.

Workshop aims

This workshop seeks to investigate the multifaceted aspects of reflexivity from different theoretical perspectives. It is also interested in describing the general patterns that shape reflexivity in a language or language family(-ies) both in its current structure and historical development. Given that reflexivity is a well-charted territory in languages with a good record of data, we particularly encourage scholars working on less-documented languages to explore this empirical domain so that it could bring not only a new dimension to the theoretical linguistics but also serves as a solid research tool for typological studies.

Possible topics

- How is the reflexive interpretation coded in a language?
- What are crosslinguistic generalisations resulting from the work on reflexivity?
- What are other semantic effects associated with reflexive morphology and how can we explain their common formal source?
- What is the relationship of reflexive marker with the domain of valency?
- What are the possible paths of development of reflexive marker?
- How can reflexives be classified in a functional-typological perspective?

Please send your non-anonymous 300-word abstract to:

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