Convergence:
English & Nigerian languages

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65. Reflexive Constructions in Yoruba & English: A Comparison

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Reflexive constructions have been defined in terms of co-reference of the subject and object. In other words, the subject is co-referential with the object. This is the fulcrum of a true reflexive construction. However, what we examine in this paper is a comparative study of contextual usages of reflexives in Yorùbá (a Benue-Congo language) and English (an Indo-European language). The basis for comparison is premised on the fact that English being the official language is 'affecting' to a great extent, the practical use of indigenous languages, including Yorùbá. This is observed in lexical as well as structural transfer among others. A syntactic study of reflexives in these two languages will underpin language pedagogy, especially in an L2 situation.

1. Introduction

Reflexive constructions are defined in terms of co-reference of the subject and the object. Givon (1990:628) using the term "true reflexives" says 'the subject is co-referential with the object, and thus acts upon itself (reflexively). In English, a reflexive construction is achieved when the subject acts upon itself. This is exemplified in (1) below:

1. (a)   He killed himself
    (b)   You know yourself
    (c)   I hurt myself
    (d)   We fined ourselves
    (e)   They know themselves

Reflexivity in (1) above is morphologically marked in himself, yourself, myself, ourselves and themselves. Note, however, that this is not a universal property of reflexivity. In the same vein, reflexivity in Yoruba is marked. However, while (1) above is an instance of reflexives in simple construction in English, we will examine reflexives in Yoruba both in simple and embedded sentences.

1.1 Theoretical Perspective

In this paper, syntactic theory will be reviewed in order to arrive at the conceptual framework to be adopted for analysis. Syntactic theory is an attempt to account for tacit knowledge of sentence structure by adult first language speakers. An influential approach to syntactic theory is generative grammar. Like any scientific theory, generative grammar is a provisional collection of hypothesis comprising assumptions and predictions.

An influential theory in this regard is the Government and Binding theory (henceforth GB). The aim of GB (Chomsky, 1981) is to make it possible for

languages to be captured with simple few. GB is a modular theory in contrast with earlier works in Transformational grammar (from Standard Theory to Revised Extended Standard Theory).

Syntactic complexity results from the interaction of the sub-theories of grammar (Chomsky 1981:5). For example, Bounding theory sets limits on the domain of movement rule. Government theory defines the relationship between the head of a construction and those categories depending upon it. Theta theory deals with assignment and functioning of thematic roles. Binding theory deals with the relationship between grammatical elements such as pronoun, anaphors, R-expression and variables with their antecedents. Case theory deals with assignment of abstract case and its morphological realisation. Control theory determines the potential of reference to the abstract pronominal element referred to as PRO. X-Bar theory constrains the base component of the grammar.

Although X-Bar theory is a central module of GB, the Binding theory will be used to interpret and explain the domain of use of reflexives in Yorùbá and English.

1.1.1 Conceptual Framework

The focus of this paper is the syntactic basis of Yorùbá and English reflexives. By 'syntactic', we mean an appraisal or explanation of a true reflexive construction in Yorùbá and English using syntax as a tool of analysis. The conceptual framework for this analysis is the Binding Theory (BT) of GB.

BT attempts to predict the interpretation of different NP-types in different positions in the sentence, as either co-referents (picking out the same referent in discourse) or non-referent (being associated with distinct entities), (Horrocks, 1987:108). Universal grammar allows a limited range of possible NP-types as well as of sentence structures, and this assumption is borne out in the observation that binding works roughly in all languages. However, there are systematic differences among languages in terms of both of the NP-types and of the structures.

NPs generally differ in their power of reference i.e. the ability to point to some contextual entity or individual. The concept of 'binding' is a co-referential relationship between NPs in the sentence. For an NP to be 'bound', it must, in formal terms have the same semantic identity with some aforementioned NPs (Yusuf, 1997:148). According to Haegeman (1991:203), Binding theory is a module of grammar that regulates NP interpretation. It is responsible for assigning an appropriate interpretation to the NPs in sentences. Binding theory is technically defined as:

> α binds β if α c-commands β and is coindexed with β
> Cook (1988:157)

c-command and coindexation are necessary conditions under Binding theory. Sells (1985:35) captures Binding in the schema below:

```
              XP
             /  \
            C    X'
                /  \
               X    B
```
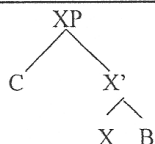
The above schema can be explained in terms of c-command i.e. C c-command X' in the same vein as X c-command B. However, C can be said to c-command B because the same maximal projection dominating C also dominates B (m-command). Recall that c-command and coindexation are necessary conditions for binding.

Binding works through three principles namely:

A: An anaphor is bound in a local domain
B: A pronominal is free in a local domain
C: A referring expression is free.

However, out of these principles, only principle A is relevant to this work though we may make reference to other principles for elucidation.

Recall: An anaphor is bound in its local domain

Anaphors are phrasal categories that require some aforementioned antecedent NPs. According to Horrocks (1987:109), anaphors are NPs whose referents are necessarily determined sentence-initially and which cannot have independent reference. There are two types:

(a)   Reciprocals
(b)   Reflexives.

1.2 Basis for Comparison
Yoruba is one of the national languages in Nigeria. It is predominantly spoken in south-west part of the country as well as in countries like Benin republic, Togo and parts of Cameroon. It is spoken by about 20 million people. It is language of instruction at all levels of education. It is also used in the media. However, the English language, by design is Nigeria's lingua franca. It is the language of commerce, education as well as language for official transaction. The language has built bridges along linguistic divide. For ease of 'transaction', it is incumbent on individuals to learn the English language. The call and trend have led to linguistic impurity. Also it has created a scenario in which there is inter-lingual structure transfer. This is why this study becomes a sine qua non.

1.3 Yorùbá Reflexives
Reflexive constructions have been defined in terms of co-reference of the subject and object. As earlier mentioned Givon (Ibid) using the term 'true reflexives' says

'the subject is co-referential with the object, and thus acts upon itself (reflexively).
True reflexives in Yorùbá are shown in (3) below:

(3)   araa mi   'myself'
       araa re   'himself/herself'
       araa won   'themselves'
       araa yin   'yourself'
       araa wa   'ourselves'

The occurrence of these reflexives in context is shown in (4).

(4)   (a)   mo   rí   araà mi
              Isg see   REFL
              'I saw myself'
       (b)   A   féràn araa wa
              IPL like   REFL
              'we like ourselves'
       (c)   won rí   araa won
              2PL see   REFL
              'they saw themselves'
       (d)   O   féràn araa re
              3.sg   see   REFL
              'He/she likes himself/herself'

The d-structure for (4a) will run thus:

Mo; rí araa mi;
Isg see REFL
'I   saw myself'

In this example, co-reference is indicated by identity of subscript index
$(i = i)$. This is further explicated on the tree-structure below:

(5)
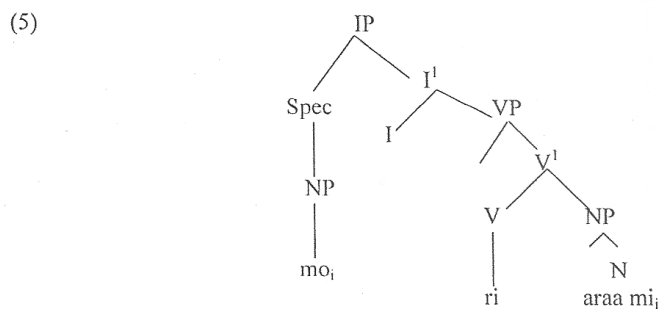
In the same vein, reflexives in (4) share semantic identity with the aforementioned
NPs. In this regard, the reflexives and their antecedents are coindexed; these

antecedents also c-command their reflexives because they are dominated by the same maximal projection (cf. (5) above).

1.3.1 Reflexives in Embedded Sentence

The behaviour of reflexives is not different in embedded sentences. It is observed that reflexives are ruled out in the subject position of an embedded sentence as shown in (6) below:

6 (a) *Mo ni araa mi ri Yemi
    AGENT say REFL see Yemi
    *I said (that) myself saw Yemi

  (b) *Won ni araa won mò mí
    AGENT say REFL   know me
    *'They said (that) themselves knew me'.

Sentences in (6) are bad because the reflexives are outside the governing category of the subject of the main clause (MC) with which they are co-referential. However, for (6a) to satisfy grammaticality condition, an NP must be introduced in the subject position of the embedded sentence (i.e. an emphatic form of *mo*, a pronominal, which is *èmi*), which extends co-referentiality to *mo* in the sentence, hence (7):

  (7) mo ni èmi funraa mi rí Yemí,
    AGENT say Pro EMPH REFL see Yemí
    'I said (that) I myself saw Yemí

èmi in (7) licenses the existence of *araà mi* in the subject position of the embedded sentence.

Other instances include (8):

  8 (a) won ni awon funraa won ló seé
     AGENT say Pro EMPH. REFL foc do it
     'They said (that) they themselves did it'

   (b) O ni oun funraa rè   wà ni ibè
     Pro say Pro EMPH. REFL exist at place
     'He said (that) he himself was there'.

In the same way, it is only strong clitics that can license the occurrence of reflexives in the subject position of a matrix clause. Witness the examples in (9):

 9 (a) Emi funraa mi rí Ade
     Pro EMPH. REFL see Ade
     'I myself saw Ade

   (b) Awon funraa won mò wón
     Pro EMPH. REFL know them
     'They themselves know them'.

(c)	Oun	funraa re	ló si ibè
	Pro EMPH. REFL		go to place
	'He himself	went to the place'.	

1.3.2 Reflexives in Focus Construction

Focus refers to an element of information which is added to, rather than superimposed on the pragmatic presupposition (Lambrecht, 1994:206). Stockwell (1977) considers focus as a way of introducing special marking into the surface structure of the element that is being focused. It is the information in the sentence that is assumed by the speaker not to be shared by the interlocutors.

The focus marker in Yorùbá is *ní*. Awobuluyi (1978:96) calls it INTRODUCER. In this work, we observe that reflexives can occur in the subject position of a focus construction without the presence of a licenser (strong clitic). This runs contrary to what obtains in the subject positions of matrix clause and embedded clause. Consider the sentences in (10):

10   (a)   araa mi ni mo ri
                REFL FOC AGENT see
                'It is myself I   saw'.

        (b)   araa yin ˌni e n se
                 REFL foc AGENT ASP do
                'It is yourself that you are undoing'

        (c)   araa wa ni a mo
                 REFL foc AGENT know
                'It is ourselves we know'.

Much as (10) runs contrary to our earlier claim, the d-structure of (10a) as shown in (11a) reveals the syntactic process that has taken place:

    (11a)   araa mi_i ni mo ri_{ti}

Now consider:

    (11b) mo_i ri araa mi_i

A close look at (11) shows that (11a) is derived from (11b) which is the basic sentence. This is achieved through transformation (movement). This explains why the trace (t) in (11a) is coreferential and coindexed with the moved reflexive. The basic sentences in 12(b&c) are given as (12):

    (12)   (a) E n se araa yin
            (b) A mo araa wa

Given the analysis above, the logical position of reflexives in (10) still remains the object position of the lexical verb.

1.4 English Reflexives

Reflexivity in English is marked by '-self/selves'. It is suffixed to object pronoun in reflexive constructions. Reflexives in English are captured in the table below:

Table 1:   Derivation of Reflexives

Subject	Object	Reflexive
I	Me	Myself
He/she	Him/her	Himself/herself
They	Them	Themselves
We	Us	Ourselves
You	You	Yourself
It	It	Itself

Reflexives function alike in all languages. Apart from the situation where the object acts on the subject (i.e. co-reference), reflexives are also used for any emphasis (cf. section 1.2.1 for Yoruba examples). Instances in English are given below:

13.   (a)   They themselves were there
      (b)   He himself testified to it
      (c)   I myself killed the snake

This situation is also obtainable in an embedded sentence:

14.   (a)   I said that I myself saw Hamed
      (b)   They said that they themselves caught the thief.

1.4.1 English Reflexives in Embedded Sentence

To begin with, English reflexives are ruled out both in subject position of the matrix and embedded clauses. Observe the following:

15.   (a)   *Myself knows him.
      (b)   *Themselves did it.
      (c)   *Himself was there.
      (d)   *They said themselves knew me.
      (e)   *I said myself saw Mfon.

In the instances shown above, such reflexives lack antecedents. In order words, they are neither c-commanded nor governed in their local domains. However, contextual occurrence of reflexives are ruled in in the following embedded sentences:

16.   (a)   I know that they resemble themselves.
      (b)   We noticed he hurt himself.

When reflexives are used for emphasis in embedded clause (as well as in matrix sentence), they are not post-verbal (i.e. not the objects of the verbs). For example,

(c)   He said that he himself was there.
(d)   They claimed that they themselves did it.

1.4.2   English Reflexives in Focus Construction

Unlike in Yoruba where there is lexical reordering, reflexive in focus construction is licenced by another verb 'be' and by extension sub-categorises for an expletive subject 'it'. Thus, in:

17   (a)   I hurt myself

We generate:

(b)   It is myself I hurt.

When this is obtained, a true focus construction is derived in English since the following sentences are excluded:

18.   (a)   Myself I hurt   .
       (b)   Yourself you are undoing
       (c)   Ourselves we know.

The correct reading of the sentences above is shown in (22) below:

19.   (a)   It is myself I hurt.
       (b)   It is yourself you are undoing
       (c)   It is ourselves we know.

This is one major area where structural difference is noticed in the language under study as far as reflexive construction is concerned.

1.5 Observation

Reflective construction in languages differs. Its contextual use is not universally the same. In some languages reflexives are morphologically marked while they are not in others. For example, much as English, French and German belong to the same phylum, structural and contextual use of reflexives are not the same let alone their combinatorial possibilities with other noun phrase categories. It is observed in this work that the use of reflexives is the same in both Yoruba and English though they are not genetically related. However, some difference is observed in the structural occurrence of reflexives in some positions viz. focus construction. With this, the teaching and learning of reflexives in both languages pose not much challenge especially in L2 situation.

Conclusion

Thus far, we have looked into reflexives in Yorùbá and English: their contextual usages as well as their syntactic constraints. We observed how reflexives are used in possible positions i.e. subject and object, in matrix and embedded sentences. We also adduced reasons why reflexives are bad in certain syntactic positions. Above all, we brought forth areas of differences and similarities in reflexives constructions in Yoruba and English. To this end, we submitted that Yoruba and English, though genetically different, share some similarities in their use of reflexives in context, which will make it easier for a Yoruba learner of English and vice versa.

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