Middle Voice vs. reflexive pronouns: evidence from Rigvedic Sanskrit

Laura Grestenberger
Harvard University
Lgresten@fas.harvard.edu

LSA Annual Meeting, Boston, 3-6 January 2013

1 Introduction

Rooryck and Vanden Wyngaerd (2011): Two related reflexive constructions:

1. SE-anaphors (direct reflexives):
   Jan heeft **zich** bezeerd (Dutch)
   Jan has SE hurt
   ‘Jan hurt himself’

2. Inalienably possessed body part DPs:
   Jan heeft **zijn voet** bezeert (Dutch)
   Jan has his foot hurt
   ‘Jan hurt his foot’

The connection between inalienably possessed body part NPs and the diachronic development of reflexive pronouns is frequently mentioned in the literature (e.g. Safir 2004, Reuland 2011), but the precise mechanisms are rarely elaborated.

Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd: Unaccusative analysis of (1) and (2) – internal argument contains both the possessor and the possessum:

\[ VP \text{ bezoer } [RP [DP zich/zijn voet] R [PP P [DP Jan]]] \]

**Vedic Sanskrit** (data from the Rigveda, ca. 1,400-1,200 BCE): non-informant language with an active – middle voice distinction and emergent reflexive pronouns. Apparent **double marking** (cp. (1) and (2)):

\[ ánu mṛṣis-ṭa tanvām \]

PIMB injure.AOR.OPT-3SG.MID SELF.ACC
‘May he injure himself’

Reflexivity marked on verb (middle endings) and through a reflexive pronoun (tanā)? Not predicted by standard approaches (e.g. Reinhart and Reuland 1993).
2 Questions

In languages with an active – non-active voice opposition and no reflexive pronouns,

- can non-active voice alone express (1) (‘direct reflexives’) and if yes, is this valency reduction?
- what is the relationship between (1) and (2)?
- how do reflexive pronouns develop diachronically?

3 The middle voice in Vedic

Active – middle endings of the 3 pers. sg. & pl.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Middle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sg. Pl.</td>
<td>Sg. Pl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pers. non-past</td>
<td>-t -nti</td>
<td>-te, -nte, -re</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pers. past</td>
<td>-t -n</td>
<td>-ta, -nta, -ra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Functions of the middle voice:

- Naturally reflexive/reciprocal predicates: pāva-te ‘cleans him/herself’, spārdha-te ‘are competing with each other’
- Anticausative/inchoative: vāha-te ‘moves’, vārdha-te ‘grows’
- Self-benefactive:

(5) harī gṛbh-e
   bright.ACC.DU seize-1SG.MID
   ‘I am seizing two horses for myself.’

4 Body part reflexives

Body part reflexives as part-whole relation: Rooryck and Vanden Wyngaerd (2011) (SE-anaphors = ‘spatio-temporal slices’), Reuland (2011) body part DPs = are referentially deficient relational nouns:

(6) B(ody)P(art)<x,y>, where x is the inalienable body of y

Examples from Vedic:

(7) bāhū anu-mārmiḥ-āno
    arms.ACC.DU PRVB-brushing-MID.PTCP.NOM
    ‘Brushing (your) arms, ...’

(8) savitā bāhū ayān-ta
    Savitar.NOM arms.ACC.DU raise.AOR-3SG.MID
    ‘Savitar raised (his) arms’

(9) divi mūrdhānaṃ dādhi-še
    sky.LOC head.ACC place.PERP-2SG.MID
    ‘You have placed (your) head in the sky’
Intransitive:

(10) a. māmye (mid.) ‘brushes oneself’
    b. yama-te (mid.) ‘extends, stretches oneself’
    c. daith-e (mid.) ‘places oneself’

A puzzle: How is (10) related to (7) – (9)?

5 tanú- ‘body’

tanú f. 1. ‘body’, 2. SELF → 3. reflexive pronoun. Starting point: constructions parallel to (7) – (9):

(11) tanvāh šūmbha-mānāh
    bodies.ACC adorn-MID,PTCP,NOM,PL

Ambiguous: ‘adorning (our) bodies’ or ‘adorning ourselves’

Applying Rooryck and Vanden Wyngaerd (2011)’s analysis to tanú-reflexives:

(12) ārusīr ... tanvō jusa-nīta
    reddish,NOM SELF,AACC enjoy-PL,MID

‘The red (flames) ... are enjoying themselves.’

1. AGREE takes place in RP:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
[VP [RP tanú-[uϕ]] R [P_{oss}P ārusīr[iϕ]]] jusahaan ]
\end{array}
\]

2. Possessor raising out of RP gives SOV word order:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
[TP ārusīr, [VP [RP tanú- R [P_{oss}P t_i]]] jusahaan ]
\end{array}
\]

6 Why middle voice?

(13) \[ V \rightarrow \text{V-VOCl}[^{\text{NonAct}}] \]  

No external DP argument:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\emptyset \\
\downarrow \\
V \\
\downarrow \\
V[^{\text{NAcl}}] \\
\downarrow \\
\text{VP} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{DP}
\end{array}
\]

BP-reflexives (taná-reflexives and (7) – (9)) only have an internal argument \( \rightarrow \) middle voice is assigned:

(14) \[ [v_P \mathcal{O} v [V_P [RP] V ] ] \rightarrow [v_P \mathcal{O} v[^{\text{NAcl}}] [V_P [RP] V ] ] \]

7 Implications

- Diachronic development: BP reflexive construction ((7) – (9)) \( \rightarrow \) direct reflexive construction (12). Final stage: taná- loses \( \varphi \)-features (here: NUMBER):

(15) yá devéšu tanám aíraya-nta  
who gods.LOC SELF.ACC.SG move-3PL.MID
‘... who gave themselves to the gods.’ (cp. (11) – (12))

- Neither type of reflexive merges an external argument in \( v \rightarrow \) middle voice is assigned

- Middle voice is not valency-reducing: Examples in (10) have unexpressed relational variable \( x \) in RP:

(16) mānvrj-e 'He brushes himself':  
\[ [v_P \mathcal{O} v [V_P [RP] x [P_{assP} \text{he} ] ] brushes_V ] ] \]

Prediction: Languages with an active - non-active voice distinction will have non-active morphology in reflexive constructions if their reflexive pronouns developed out of body part DP

References


