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Lessons from the wax museum

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I argue based on proxy reading possibilities that natural languages can recruit two types of reflexivity, with a language like Telugu being able to recruit both at the same time. Similarly, proxy readings also suggest that grammars distinguish two types of *de se* readings.

1 Introduction

We can use anaphors to talk about entities other than the canonical referent of their linguistic antecedent. The reflexive anaphor *himself* in (1) can be used to refer to not only Ringo himself, but also Ringo's statue. Call this interpretation of the anaphor a *proxy reading*.[1]

(1) Ringo saw himself in the wax museum

Proxy readings are a fairly general phenomenon, not restricted to one kind of anaphora (Fauconnier 1985, Abusch 1989, Jackendoff 1992). For example, the two instances of *her* in (2) are best understood as referring to masks in Marlene Dietrich's likeness. Similarly, the pronoun *he* in (3) can be used to refer to statues of the Beatles, i.e., Every Beatle thought his statue needed a shave. Names and definite descriptions exhibit the same behaviour too—*Sting* in (4) is, in this case, used to refer to people in Sting masks; and a child can utter (5) to her mother when encountering Hercule Poirot's statue in a museum.

(2) At the masquerade ball, everywhere Marlene looked, either her nose was too long, or her chin too weak (Safir 2004a)

(3) Every Beatle thought he needed a shave

(4) At the Police concert, every move I made, there was Sting, watching me.

(5) Look! The nice Belgian who found Father is here.

First and second person pronouns also exhibit similar behaviour. Castro, noticing that their statues need grooming, can utter (6) to Guevara felicitously.

(6) I need a shave and you need a haircut

[1] In this paper, I restrict attention to representations of the canonical referents, and these are what I will call proxy readings. It is not clear to me that all instances of 'deferred reference' allow a uniform treatment (Safir 2004a, King 2022).

The data above suggest that all nominals are alike in allowing proxy readings. The correct analysis of proxy readings should, therefore, generalize to all nominals. If this were all there was to the phenomenon of proxy readings, a simple modification to our theories of nominal reference will suffice. This is not all, though.

Sometimes, proxy readings are unavailable. While (7a) allows a proxy reading, (7b) does not. English grooming verbs which allow the absence of an overt object all display this behaviour. The anaphor *tana-ni tanu* in Telugu can be interpreted as a proxy (8a), but only in the absence of the verbal reflexive (8b). A similar contrast is seen in Greek (9): The verbal reflexive (*afto*) disallows proxy readings, while the complex reflexive (*ton eafto tu*) allows them.

(7) a. John shaved himself ✓
b. John shaved ✗

(8) Telugu

a. Ringo tana-ni tanu museum lo čuus-ææ-ḍu
Ringo 3SG-ACC 3SG museum LOC see-PST-3MS
'Ringo saw himself in the museum' ✓

b. Ringo tana-ni tanu museum lo čuus-**kun**-aa-ḍu
Ringo 3SG-ACC 3SG museum LOC see-VR-PST-3MS
'Ringo saw himself in the museum' ✗

(9) Greek[2] (Paparounas 2023)

a. O Ringo fotografi-s-e ton eafto tu
the.NOM Ringo.NOM photograph-PFV.ACT-3SG the.ACC self.ACC his
'Ringo photographed himself' ✓

b. O Ringo afto-fotografi-th-ik-e
the.NOM Ringo.NOM photograph-PFV.NACT-PST.NACT-3SG
'Ringo self-photographed' ✗

The pairs above suggest, at first blush, that some structural (or linguistic) factors might be involved in disallowing proxy readings. The questions I want to focus on here are (a) whether the contrast receives an identical explanation cross-linguistically and (b) what, if any, structural factors are at play.

In what follows, I will answer the first question in the negative. I restrict my attention to the contrast in Telugu and in English. For an analysis of the Greek contrast see (Paparounas in prep). In §2, I argue that the Telugu facts suggest two types of reflexivity that can be recruited by natural languages—Telugu happens to recruit both at the same time. The behaviour of English grooming verbs is discussed in §3, where I suggest that the contrast is best explained by appealing to extra-grammatical factors. In §4, I show that similar contrasts in proxy possibilities are observed in the domain of *de se* construal and argue that the grammar distinguishes between two types of *de se* construal, but leave its explanation for the future.

[2]I have taken some liberties with transcription here. Please consult the original (Paparounas 2023) for the right transcription.

2 Two types of reflexivity

That there is a contrast in proxy possibilities with different reflexive elements is well-known (Jackendoff 1992; Pica & Snyder 1997; Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd 1998, 1999, 2011; Lidz 2001; Safir 2004a, 2004b; Reuland & Winter 2009; Reuland 2011). In accounts of the contrast, one finds three main threads, not all of which run through every work listed. First, notice that the examples in (7–9) all have a complex anaphor in cases where proxy readings are possible. This fact takes center stage in Pica & Snyder's (1997) and Reuland's (2011) analyses. They suggest that the possibility of proxy readings with complex anaphors is due to their morphosyntactic complexity—the extra *self* (or *même* in French, or 'body' in Hebrew) in the anaphors complicates their semantics: the extra element contributes a function that outputs (possibly identical) representations of the antecedent.

However, as noted above, the availability of proxy readings is a general phenomenon—there is nothing special about reflexive anaphors, complex or otherwise, in this regard. I take it, therefore, that the possibility of proxy readings is not a special property of complex anaphors, and that any theory that appeals to the complexity of an anaphor in allowing a proxy reading is a non-starter. Moreover, the range of nominals which allow proxy readings indicates that it is the cases where proxy readings are systematically disallowed that have some explanatory value for linguistic theory.

A related proposal is that the possibility of proxy readings is a lexical property of each anaphor. This is the line Lidz (2001) takes, based on examples like (10). The simplex anaphor in (10a) cannot be construed as a statue of Hari, but the complex anaphor in (10b) can. Therefore, the two anaphors are, it is argued, lexically specified for whether or not they allow proxy readings (Lidz 2001:130). Note however, that the two examples do not form a minimal pair: there is a verbal reflexive (*koṇḍ*) in the former sentence, but not in the latter.

(10) Kannada

a. Hari **tana-annu** nooḍ-i-**koṇḍ**-a
Hari self-ACC see-PP-REFL.PST-3SM
'Hari$_1$ saw himself$_{1/*P}$' (Lidz 2001, ex. 10a)

b. Hari **tana-annu-taane** nooḍ-i-a
Hari self-ACC-SELF see-PST-3SM
'Hari$_1$ saw himself$_{1/P}$' (Lidz 2001, ex. 10b)

We can come up with contexts where the verbal reflexive is present, and so is the complex anaphor (11a), forming a minimal pair with (10b). Once again, proxy readings are blocked, suggesting that it is the verbal reflexive that is blocking the proxy readings. Similarly, the simplex anaphor admits a proxy reading in the absence of a verbal reflexive (11b).[3] Therefore, it seems unlikely that nominals are lexically specified for whether or not they allow proxy readings.[4]

[3]The simplex anaphor cannot be used as a co-argument of its antecedent, at least in my grammar of Kannada. A minimal pair with (10a) is therefore, not possible. Nevertheless any context in which the simplex anaphor admits a proxy reading is enough to make my point.

[4]Lidz (2001) argues for lexical specification by also appealing to the contrast in Dutch between

(11) a. Hari **tana-annu-taane** nooḍ-i-**koṇḍ**-a
Hari self-ACC-SELF see-PP-REFL.PST-3SM
'Hari$_1$ saw himself$_{1/*P}$'

b. Hari **tanu** Ringo bagiliige iddane anta heḷida
Hari tanu Ringo next.to be.3MS COMP said
'Hari$_1$ said that he$_{1/P}$ was next to Ringo'

The second thread, and this runs (at times implictly) through all the works cited above, is that there is a distinction between how the theme arguments of the contrasting pairs are represented at LF.[5] This is required for any theory of proxy readings, as without such a distinction, the holder of the theme role in both examples in (7) are identical at LF (regardless of the syntactic presence of an anaphor). The ability to manipulate the referent of just the theme should be equally available in both cases—contrary to fact. This requirement, that there be a distinction at LF, essentially argues against all reductionist theories of reflexivity (Reinhart & Reuland 1993 *et seq.*; see Sportiche (2023) for a generalized argument along these lines).

The third thread focuses on the concomitant absence of an anaphor with the absence of proxy readings in English (Jackendoff 1992, Reuland 2011). While implementations vary, the idea is essentially this: since there is only one syntactic argument which presumably receives two thematic roles, the interpretive module cannot manipulate one instance of the argument at LF to the exclusion of the other—a precondition for proxy readings. This thread, it seems to me, is on the right track, but it falls short of explaining the absence of proxy readings in transitive reflexives verbs in Telugu (8b) and Kannada (11a).

To explain the transitive reflexive facts, and in line with the second idea, I suggest, with Safir (2004a), Paparounas (in prep) and Sportiche (2023), that natural languages can recruit two types of reflexivity. On the first kind, represented by verbal reflexives, the same syntactic argument is assigned two different thematic roles (12).[6] On the second, an anaphor is assigned an independent thematic role, and is construed as a distinct, but antecedent-dependent element at LF. How exactly to implement this difference is not clear to me yet, but for present purposes, it suffices that such a difference exists. In what follows, I will use constants with different subscripts to indicate this difference.

(12) $[\![\text{kun}]\!] = \lambda x \lambda e.\mathsf{agent}\, x\, e \wedge \mathsf{theme}\, x\, e$

Consider, now, the Telugu sentences which exhibit the relevant contrast (13). The nominal anaphor is optional in the presence of the verbal reflexive. When the former is absent, assuming there is no implicit argument, the posited interpretation of (13a)

simplex *zich* and complex *zichself*. There are reasons to doubt that the clausal syntax of sentences with these different anaphors is the same (Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd 2011), and therefore, Lidz's argument. I leave a fuller discussion of the Dutch facts for another occasion.

[5]While Reuland & Winter (2009) try to derive the contrast between the two readings in terms of different parameter settings of Reinhart & Siloni's (2005) Bundling operation, their proposal too ends up implying a distinction at LF.

[6]This is a somewhat simplified version of the meaning of *kun*. The simplifications, do not however, affect the argument here. See Raghotham (2022) for details.

is given in (14). The verbal reflexive assigns both agent and theme roles to the sole argument *Ringo*. In (13b), since there is no verbal reflexive, the subject *Ringo* is only assigned the agent role, and the anaphor is assigned the theme role; the different subscripts indicating their distinction (15).

(13) a. Ringo (**tana-ni tanu**) poguḍu-**kunn**-aa-ḍu
Ringo 3SG.SELF praised-VR-PST-3MS
'Ringo$_1$ praised himself$_{1/*P}$'

b. Ringo **tana-ni tanu** pogiḍ-ææ-ḍu
Ringo 3SG.SELF praised-PST-3MS
'Ringo$_1$ praised himself$_{1/P}$'

(14) $[\![(13a\text{: intr})]\!] = \exists e : \mathsf{praise}\, e \wedge \mathsf{agent}\, \mathsf{r}_1\, e \wedge \mathsf{theme}\, \mathsf{r}_1\, e$

(15) $[\![(13b)]\!] = \exists e : \mathsf{praise}\, e \wedge \mathsf{agent}\, \mathsf{r}_1\, e \wedge \mathsf{theme}\, \mathsf{r}_2\, e$

The transitive version of (13a) instantiates a case where both types of reflexivity are recruited at the same time. The verbal reflexive assigns both agent and theme roles to the subject, and the anaphor is also assigned the theme role in its own right. This state of affairs violates the Thematic Uniqueness constraint on event interpretation: for any given event, a property must be held uniquely (Carlson 1984, Landman 2000). One formulation of the constraint is given in (17). The only way to satisfy this constraint is if the interpretive independence of the anaphor is curtailed, blocking the proxy reading.

(16) $[\![(13a\text{: tr})]\!] = \exists e : \mathsf{praise}\, e \wedge \mathsf{agent}\, \mathsf{r}_1\, e \wedge \mathsf{theme}\, \mathsf{r}_1\, e \wedge \mathsf{theme}\, \mathsf{r}_2\, e$

(17) **Unique Role Requirement** (Landman 2000:38)
If a thematic role is specified for an event, it is uniquely specified

Even though both types of reflexivity are recruited in Telugu (and Kannada), their distinct effects aren't visible on the surface due to other constraints on interpretations (here, thematic uniqueness).

3 English grooming verbs

While Telugu and Kannada are problematic for the line of reasoning that appeals to the intransitivity of some verbs for them disallowing proxy readings, perhaps the explanation still holds for English. I suggest it doesn't. Consider the English pair again:

(18) a. John shaved
b. John shaved himself

The claim that (18a) is an instance of two thematic roles being assigned to the same element entails that it should be interpreted the way (18b) is, on the latter's non-proxy reading. It seems to me, however, that while the latter is a perfectly reasonable thing to say to report John shaving his head or his legs, the former is

not. It seems to be only compatible with cases where John shaved his beard.[7] In the regard, the interpretation of intransitive grooming verbs in English resembles the interpretation of other verbs that participate in such a transitivity alternation: there is something norm-governed about how the intransitive members of the pair are interpreted (Chomsky 1986). For instance, (19a) does not mean (19b), for while (19b) entails (19c), the intransitive (19a) does not (Pietroski 2012).

(19) a. John ate
b. John ate something
c. John ate a hat

Whatever norms govern our interpretation of these intransitive verbs, I take it that they are not grammatically relevant. Instead, they seem to be dependent on our world-knowledge about shaving and eating. Relegating the interpretation of the themes of these verbs to the conceptual module gives us purchase on the facts reported here (Alexiadou & Schäfer 2014, Borer 2005, Lohndal 2014). The apparent reflexivity of intransitive *shave* is because people are generally wont to shave themselves; similarly people are wont to eat something edible, and not hats. Our understanding of what it means to shave and eat, and how people generally go about these tasks constrains the interpretation of the theme arguments in these cases. Note that relegating the theme interpretation to the conceptual module is orthogonal to the question of whether there is an implicit argument or not. My claim is perfectly compatible with the claim that even in these cases, an argument of some description is syntactically projected (Sportiche 2023). All that is required is that the projected argument not be a covert version of the anaphor.

Moreover, this move also helps us explain why (20) can be used in a scenario in which John is an octogenarian bearded barber, to report that he still practices his craft. To posit a silent verbal reflexive would be to proffer an ambiguity thesis about *shave*'s uses in (18a) and (20), which clearly misses a generalization.

(20) John still shaves

The contrast in proxy possibilities between English and Telugu, then, do not admit identical explanations. Only the latter is grammatically constrained to block them.

4 Two types of *de se* readings

Let us now move to another case of reflexivity, broadly construed: attitudes *de se*. It is well known that obligatorily controlled PRO is only compatible with *de se* interpretation (Chierchia *et al.* 1989, *et seq.*). For instance, while (21a) is compatible with John's expectations being about himself without him realising it, (21b) is not. Only when John knows that it is himself who is the subject of his expectations is (21b) felicitous. This contrast doesn't seem to translate to a contrast in proxy possibilities: both sentences are compatible with John's expectations concerning his statue.

[7] The leg- or head-shaving interpretation is somewhat more readily available when John is widely known to be a bearded-man with clean shaven legs or head, at least to my ear, and to the ears of four speakers of American English that I consulted.

(21) a. John expected that he would win the award
b. John expected PRO to win the award

We can construct other scenarios where PRO admits proxy readings. For instance, (22a) can be interpreted as the Beatles' wishes about their portraits: they want their likenesses to have sharper chins, not their own selves. Similarly, Haddad (2017) reports a study where twelve out of thirteen speakers find examples (22b) acceptable, in a context where my preferences are about the placement of my statue, and not myself.

(22) a. Every Beatle wanted PRO to have a sharper chin (in the portrait)
b. I prefer PRO to be under the spotlight (Haddad 2017)

Other elements that require obligatory construal *de se* also freely admit proxy readings. In Magahi, an embedded first person pronoun can be interpreted either as the speaker of the utterance, or as the subject of the matrix clause. Such shifted indexicals are obligatorily interpreted *de se* (Alok 2020). In the Magahi example in (23), the shifted indexical can be interpreted as a proxy.[8] So can the first person pronoun in (24).

(23) anjaniyaa kahkai ki ham baṛhiyãã lagit hi
anjaniyaa said.3SG that 1SG good look be.1SG
'Anjani$_1$ said that I$_{1/P}$ look good' (Magahi; Deepak Alok, p.c.)

(24) *Looking at Chaplin's statue, which gets a makeover everyday, Chaplin:*
I look good today

The examples above indicated that there is nothing in principle about construal *de se* that blocks proxy readings. With this in mind, consider the Telugu examples in (25). In Telugu, the third person pronoun *tanu* in embedded subject position can control third person agreement on the embedded predicate (25a), or first person agreement (25b). When the embedded subject controls first person agreement, it needs to be obligatorily understood *de se* (Messick to appear). Unlike Magahi, which shows indexical shift, the Telugu pattern is a case of shifted agreement (a.k.a monstrous agreement, indexiphoricity).

(25) a. adwait [tanu baag-unn-aa-**ḍu** ani] anukunn-aa-ḍu
adwait 3SG good-BE-PST-3MS COMP think-PST-3MS
'Adwait$_1$ thought he$_{1/P/2}$ looked good'
b. adwait [tanu baag-unn-aa-**nu** ani] anukunn-aa-ḍu
adwait 3SG good-BE-PST-1SG COMP think-PST-3MS
'Adwait$_1$ thought he$_{1/*P}$ looked good'

[8]For now, let it suffice that the embedded subject does not refer to the matrix speaker. Indexical shift's interaction with addressee agreement provides morphosyntactic evidence for the shift, but I suppress these examples here to save space.

Unlike all the other obligatory *de se* scenarios we saw above, *tanu* disallows proxy readings when it controls first person agreement (25a). It is compatible with such readings when it controls third person agreement (25a). Therefore, it is not a fact about *tanu*, but rather about the context in which it finds itself, that proxy readings are blocked. What is it about the context that blocks proxy readings?

Prominent theories of indexical shift and indexiphoricity differ in how the embedded indexical comes to have a shifted reading, but they all agree on the eventual interpretation of the shifted element. The first person shifted indexical and the first-person agreement controlling subject both end up being interpreted as the author of the embedded context (Anand 2006, Deal 2020). On these theories, while indexical shift arises due to context-overwriting, shifted agreement and logophoricity are the result of binding by an operator in the scope of an attitude verb. For our purposes, we cannot import these analyses wholesale, for logophors, at least in Yoruba, also admit proxy readings (26).

(26) Olú rò pé **òun** ṛewà
Olu think that LOG beautiful
Olu$_1$ thought that he$_{1/P}$ looked handsome (Adesola 2005)

Consider now, the contrast highlighted by Higginbotham (2009). He notes that (27a) asks less of our memory than does (27b): the former is compatible with scenarios where we can recollect a scene in which we are sad, and a pile of tissues around us and thereby conclude that we were crying, without actually remembering the act of crying. The latter on the other hand requires us to remember us participating in the act of crying—that is, a memory of ourselves experiencing the act.

(27) a. I remember myself crying
b. I remember PRO crying

Given that PRO-rememberings are somehow more first-personal than the first-personal interpetation of myself, it is likely that this context blocks proxy readings too; and it does. While (28a) allows a proxy reading (I can recollect the arrangement of statues in a gallery), (28b) does not.

(28) a. I remember myself being next to Chaplin
b. I remember PRO being next to Chaplin

Higginbotham's own proposal about the contrast in (27) is to lexically specify PRO as bearing two thematic roles, one of the embedded event, and one of the matrix event.[9] We have already seen however, that lexical specification is untenable, even for PRO, which does allow proxy readings. His analysis, however, mirrors our own proposal for verbal reflexivity in an interesting repsect—the same element (here, PRO) is assigned two thematic roles, one as the experiencer of the matrix event and the other as the agent of the embedded event. I leave for the future an implementation of this intuition without resorting to lexical specification.

[9]In that article, Higginbotham was concerned with why PRO seems to be immune to error through misidentification (Shoemaker 1963). It seems generally true that PRO is so immune, so this immunity or lack thereof is orthogonal to our concerns.

I have no explanation yet for the contrast in Telugu and in the Higginbotham cases. What's required is an analysis of the grammatical context which renders the embedded pronoun and the embedded PRO respectively somehow more first-personal than other distinctively first-personal interpretations found in natural language. We can conclude however, that the restrained interpretations possible in both contexts are due to the grammatical context, and not due to the pronouns themselves. We can also conclude that grammar renders possible a finer-grained distinction of first-personal interpretations, hitherto underappreciated.

5 Conclusion

Proxy readings help us diagnose the fact that there are two sorts of reflexivity in natural language: verbal reflexivity, which creates genuinely reflexive predicates, and nominal reflexivity, which constrains the interpretation of transitive predicates. These readings also help us diagnose different types of *de se* readings. The explanation for the different sorts of *de se* interpretations, I must leave for future, but we can draw some preliminary lessons from the wax museum.

As we saw from the behaviour of verbal reflexives, syntactic identity necessitates semantic identity, which in-turn necessitates referential identity: the same syntactic element is assigned two thematic roles, and no interpretive process downstream can break this identity. The interpretation of nominal anaphors tells us that syntactic non-identity makes possible, but does not require, referential non-identity: while nominal anaphors allow proxy readings, they don't require them; simple identity is also allowed. That context blocks proxy readings of anaphoric elements, as we saw with transitive reflexives and shifted agreement in Telugu, and PRO-rememberings in English, suggests that linguistic context can further restrict a nominal's interpretive freedom and require referential non-identity. But crucially, this referential non-identity is not something specified in the lexicon for a given nominal.

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