

Verbal Reflexivity

Sreekar Raghotham
Harvard University

Based on a thorough description, a simple analysis of the Telugu verbal reflexive is presented: it assigns two thematic roles to one syntactic argument. The resulting theory, in eschewing an active lexicon, simplifies the grammar while improving on the empirical coverage of earlier models. The analysis also has consequences for the study of thematic relations and mapping theories of argument structure.

1 Introduction

Natural languages predominantly mark reflexivity in two different ways: on the verb as in the boldfaced element in the Telugu sentence in (1), which I will call the verbal reflexive, or in the form of a nominal anaphor, as in the English translation of (1).¹

- (1) amith (tana-ni tanu) poguḍu-**kunn**-ææ-ḍu
amith (3SG-ACC 3SG) praise-KUN-PST-3MS
'Amith praised himself'

Much work in the study of reflexivity has attempted to unify the two strategies (Reinhart & Reuland, 1993, Reuland, 2001, Sauerland, 2013, Patel-Grosz, 2013, Ahn, 2015, McKillen, 2016, Safir & Selvanathan, 2017a, *a.m.o.*). However, results from recent work suggest that the behaviour of verbal and nominal reflexives are not entirely identical: they have different empirical profiles both structurally and interpretively (Safir, 2004a, Sportiche, 2023, Paparounas, 2023, Akkus & Paparounas, 2025). If the prospects of a unified theory of reflexivity are questionable, then in its wake are needed theories of nominal and verbal reflexivity.²

This paper contributes to our understanding of verbal reflexivity by offering a detailed description and analysis of the verbal reflexive in Telugu (Dravidian). Telugu is particularly informative for the study of verbal reflexivity because the two reflexive strategies are independent of one another. The verbal reflexive can occur either by itself, or co-occur with the nominal reflexive, as in (1). The nominal reflexive, too, can occur by itself (2).³ Not only

¹ The Telugu data in this paper reflects the judgements of five native Telugu speakers, including the author. The glosses follow the Leipzig glossing rules, except for *kun*, which is simply glossed as KUN throughout the paper, regardless of its reflexive or anticausative use.

² This is as good a place as any to note that I do not include reflexive clitics as found, for instance, in Romance languages (cf. Sportiche, 2014), or agreement morphology that tracks reflexives as in the Bantu languages (cf. Marlo, 2015) in the class of verbal reflexives. While they may descriptively be 'verbal', I take their behaviour to be in the remit of a theory of nominal reflexives

³ Subbarao & Lalitha Murthy (1999) suggest that the verbal reflexive is obligatory when the subject is identical to the direct object, the indirect object or a locative adjunct (p. 226). However, they provide no negative data to this effect. To be sure, (2) is marked in out of the blue contexts, but is acceptable with a suitable

does this independence provide further grounds for pessimism about a unified theory, it also helps us isolate the verbal reflexive’s properties.

- (2) amith tana-ni tanu poguḍu-ææ-ḍu
 amith 3SG-ACC 3SG praise-PST-3MS
 ‘Amith praised himself’

The central claim of the paper is that the Telugu verbal reflexive *kun(n)* has the semantics in (3). It introduces two thematic roles, one of which is agent, making *kun* a flavour of ‘Voice’ — the locus of agent introduction (Kratzer 1996; cf. Labelle 2008, 2022, McGinnis 2022, Paparounas 2023, *i.m.a*). The second is an indefinite thematic role ranging over a list of roles. In contrast, the reflexive anaphor, optional in (1), has the semantics of a regular pronoun. See Messick & Raghotham 2025 for more on the reflexive anaphor.

- (3) a. $\llbracket \text{VOICE}_{\text{REFL}} \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda e. \text{agent } x e \wedge \exists R \in \Theta' : R x e$
 b. $\Theta = \{ \text{Agent, Theme, Goal, Loc, Ben, Instr, Cause, (...) } \}$
 c. $\Theta' = \Theta - \{ \text{Agent} \}$

In defending its proposal for the verbal reflexive, this paper makes two positive contributions: an argument for exo-skeletal treatments of argument structure, and a procedure for differentiating thematic relations. Along the way, I argue, on empirical grounds, against the existence of mapping theories specifically devoted to argument structure like the Theta Criterion (Chomsky, 1981), the Universal Theta Assignment Hypothesis (Baker, 1988b), and their descendants.

I describe the various properties of *kun* and show how the analysis accounts for these facts in §2. The consequences of the proposal to theories of argument structure and to our understanding of thematic relations and their place in the grammar is the subject matter of §3. In §4, I discuss the combinatorial restrictions on *kun*. In §5, I argue that the anticausative use of the same string *kun* is due to a different morpheme, syncretic with the verbal reflexive. Points of comparison with alternate analyses are highlighted where appropriate throughout the paper.

2 Reflexive Voice in Telugu

In this section, I describe various properties of the verbal reflexive, and show how the analysis in (3) accounts for them. In so doing, I will have occasion to refer to one or both of the entities or thematic roles involved in the reflexivity. I will call these the (reflexive) associates, with the context clarifying whether it is the thematic role or the entity that is being referred to.

context: in a list for instance (*John praised Bill, Sue praised Mary, (2)*). See §2 for various other instances where the nominal reflexive can occur on its own.

2.1 Agent Orientation

Cross-linguistically, verbal reflexives seem to be agent-oriented (Reinhart, 2002, Reinhart & Siloni, 2005, Alexiadou, 2014, Reuland, 2017, 2018). Telugu is no different. To see that *kun* is restricted to agents alone, first consider (4), where the goal and theme of the ditransitive predicate are co-construed, and the verbal reflexive unacceptable. In contrast, the sentences in (5), where the two associates are the agent and an internal argument, are perfectly acceptable.

- (4) miina raju-ki tana-ni tana-ku paričayam čees-(***kun**)-in-di
 miina raju-DAT 3SG-ACC 3SG-ACC introduction do-KUN-PST-3FS
 ‘Meena introduced Raju₂ to himself₂’
- (5) a. miina tana-ku tanu pustakam ičču-**kun**-in-di
 miina 3SG-DAT 3SG book give-KUN-PST-3FS
 ‘Meena₁ gave the book to herself₁’
 b. miina kumari-ki tana-ni tanu paričayam čees-**kun**-in-di
 miina kumari-DAT 3SG-ACC 3SG introduction do-KUN-PST-3FS
 ‘Meena₁ introduced herself₁ to Kumari₂’

To discount a description of *kun* as subject-oriented, consider the sentences in (6). Like in many other languages of South Asia, subjects of psych predicates (6a) are often marked dative (Subbarao & Bhaskararao 2004, cf. Verma & Mohanan 1990, Bhaskararao & Subbarao 2004 *i.a.*). However, *maruvu* ‘forget’, in (6b), is an experiencer subject verb whose subjects are marked nominative (Subbarao & Lalitha Murthy, 1999, p. 234).⁴ The incompatibility with either case shows that *kun* places restrictions on the thematic role, and not the case of the subject.

- (6) a. fatima-ki tana-miida tana-ku koopam vačč-(***kun**)-in-di
 fatima-DAT 3SG-ON 3SG-DAT anger come-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘Fatima got angry at herself’
 b. fatima tana-ni tanu marači-poo-(***kun**)-in-di
 fatima 3SG-ACC 3SG forget-go-KUN-PST-3FS
 ‘Fatima forgot herself’

The present analysis bakes this orientation into *kun*: since it introduces the agent thematic role, one of the reflexive associates has to be an agent.

⁴ Balusu (2014, 2019) claims that the light verb *poo* ‘go’ in (6b) is only compatible with unaccusatives and analyzes it as selecting verbs without an ‘INIT’ feature, in the framework of Ramchand 2008. As the example shows, *poo* is compatible with transitives so long as the subject is not an agent, in line with Balusu’s analysis, but not his description.

2.2 Thematic Variability

The two reflexive associates in (1) are agent and theme. However, Telugu does not restrict the non-agent reflexive associate to any particular role. (5a) displays agent–goal reflexivity. The examples below show *kun* associating various other participants with the agent. (7a) has a self-benefactive reading, while (7b) displays agent-location reflexivity (interpreted as ‘silently’), and (7c) agent–instrument.

- (7) a. sowmya (tana-kosam tanu) talupu moosu-**kun**-in-di
 sowmya (3SG-BEN 3SG) door close-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘Sowmya closed the door for herself’
- b. akhil (tana-lo tanu) sowmya-ni poguḍu-**kunn**-aa-ḍu
 akhil (3SG-LOC 3SG) sowmya-ACC praise-KUN-PST-3MS
 ‘Akhil praised Sowmya silently’ (silently = within oneself)
- c. akhil (tana-to tanu) banti aapu-**kun**-aaḍu
 akhil 3SG-INSTR 3SG ball stop-KUN-PST.3MS
 ‘Akhil stopped the ball with himself’

Notice that the anaphor is optional in all examples in (7). In the absence of an anaphor, the strings in (7) can mean what the translations suggest, but need not. For instance, the strings in (7b) and (7c), minus the anaphor, also readily admit a self-benefactive interpretation. (7a), on the other hand, does not admit a self-locative reading in the absence of an anaphor. Even in the presence of an appropriately case-marked anaphor, the sentence is odd (8). This is not surprising: one cannot close doors ‘within oneself’

- (8) #sowmya (tana-lo tanu) talupu moosu-**kun**-in-di
 sowmya (3SG-LOC 3SG) door close-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘Sowmya closed the door within herself’

I take it that the choice of second associate is governed by the felicity of the predicate with that interpretation, as well as the discourse of the utterance as a whole.⁵ Context, in short. On the present analysis, this context-dependence of the associate can be thought as contextual domain restriction on the existential quantifier over thematic roles.

2.3 Structural position

Structurally, *kun* is found between the verbalizing suffixes and the passive suffix.⁶ Consider the behaviour of the verb *karugu* ‘melt’. Unadorned, it is an intransitive verb (9). Adding the causative suffix *-inc* transativizes it (10). The verbal reflexive—here, adding a self-benefactive reading—is suffixed beyond the causative morpheme but before the passive marker (11–12).

⁵ The possibility of a covert anaphor dictating the interpretation of the sentence, when there are no overt anaphors, is discounted in §2.5 and §3.2.

⁶ Telugu verbal morphology is purely suffixal.

- (9) aisu karig-indi
ice melt-PST.3NS
'The ice melted'
- (10) sarita aisu karig-inc-indi
sarita ice melt-CAUS-PST.3FS
'Sarita melted the ice'
- (11) sarita aisu karig-incu-kun-indi
sarita ice melt-CAUS-KUN-PST.3FS
'Sarita melted the ice for herself'
- (12) aisu karig-incu-kuna-baḍ-indi
ice melt-CAUS-KUN-PASS-PST.3NS
'The ice was melted (by someone for themselves)'

Assuming the mirror principle (Baker, 1985), the set of examples above show that the verbal spine is articulated, at least, as in (13). The CAUS morpheme is also used as a verbalizer, especially for Sanskrit borrowings (see Bandi-Rao & den Dikken, 2014). I take this behaviour to suggest that the causative morpheme is a flavour of ν , the verbalizer. I also assume that the passive in Telugu, which is fully productive, is not a type of 'Voice', but rather a head that selects Voice. This much seems to be an uncontroversial possibility in the literature on passives, regardless of whatever else may be analytically open (Chomsky, 1957, Doron, 2003, Collins, 2005, 2024, Bruening, 2013, Alexiadou & Doron, 2012, Alexiadou et al., 2015, Kastner, 2019, 2020). Arguments grounding the assumption are deferred to an other occasion.

- (13) $\sqrt{\text{ROOT}} \ll \text{CAUS} \ll \text{KUN} \ll \text{PASS}$

In conjunction with its agent-orientation, the position of the verbal reflexive can be identified with that of other 'Voice' heads.⁷ For these other flavours, see §5.

2.4 Restricted freedoms

Reflexive anaphors across languages exhibit an interpretive freedom that's absent with verbal reflexives. For instance, reflexive anaphors allow proxy or statue readings (Fauconnier, 1985, Abusch, 1989, Jackendoff, 1992, *et seq.*).⁸ Telugu anaphors show similar behaviour. Witness (14): the complex anaphor can receive a proxy interpretation in the absence of the verbal reflexive (indicated with a subscript 'P').

⁷ The structure in (13) differs from the conclusion reached by Sundaresan & McFadden (2017) for Tamil (another Dravidian language) in not positing a 'voice' head between the verbal reflexive and the causative morpheme. The argument is based on a morphophonological reflex of active voice on verbs in the language, which they capture by positing a voice head, and separating the verbal reflexive from it. These facts can be captured on the present proposal too; see §5.

⁸ Another example of this freedom is the possibility of strict interpretations under ellipsis, comparative deletion and in focus alternatives for reflexive anaphors (Hestvik, 1995, McKillen, 2016), but not with verbal

- (14) Ringo tana-ni tanu pogid-ææ-ðu
 Ringo 3SG-ACC 3SG praise-PST-3MS
 ‘Ringo praised himself_p’

When the verbal reflexive is present, the situation is complicated somewhat. The reflexive anaphor can receive a proxy reading only when another reflexivity is in the mix—that is, Ringo the drummer must play some other role in the praising event. In (15), uttered out of the blue, a self-benefactive reading is the most natural second reflexivity, without which a proxy reading of the theme is impossible.

- (15) Ringo tana-ni tanu poguðu-kun-aa-ðu
 Ringo 3SG-ACC 3SG praise-KUN-PST-3MS
 ‘Ringo₁ praised himself_p *(for his₁ benefit)’

Before seeing how the proposal here captures these facts, some background. The crucial fact about proxy readings in the context of reflexive behaviour is the distinctness of interpretation between antecedent and anaphor. In (16a), the theme’s interpretation is not identical to that of the agent; but it is in (16b). The latter does allow an interpretation where the theme of the dressing is Ringo’s statue so long as the agent is the *same* statue. In contrast, (16a) admits an interpretation where the drummer dresses his statue.

- (16) a. Ringo dressed himself_p in the wax museum
 b. Ringo dressed in the wax museum

This difference can only be captured if there is a representational contrast between a reflexive anaphor and its antecedent in the logical form.⁹ On this, all are agreed (Abusch, 1989, Jackendoff, 1992, 1997, Lidz, 1996, 2001b, Safir, 2004a,b, Reuland & Winter, 2009, Reuland, 2011, 2017, Sportiche, 2023, Paparounas, 2023). For otherwise, the interpretive distinction between the examples in (16) is predicted to not exist. For the purposes of this paper, this consensus suffices.

The representational contrast is indicated here through different subscripts on the anaphor and the antecedent in the logical form (17). The different subscript on the theme in (17a) is to be understood as an abbreviation for one’s favourite theory of proxy readings. (17b) captures the intuition that the asymmetric-proxy ban in (16b) is due to a single syntactic argument being assigned two roles (Jackendoff, 1992).

reflexives (Lidz, 2001b, Sportiche, 2023). The analysis of proxy readings allows us to make the point about representational contrast in the logical form succinctly. The same point can also be made, of course, by considering ellipsis, but given the rich literature, it requires more setup. On this point, see especially Dalrymple et al. 1991.

⁹ I should note that a satisfactory theory of proxy readings of anaphors should not rely on properties of reflexive anaphors not shared by pronominals and other nominals, for proxy readings are a general phenomena. See Safir 2004a and Raghotham 2024 for some discussion.

- (17) a. $\llbracket (16a) \rrbracket = \exists e : \text{dress } e \wedge \text{agent } r_1 e \wedge \text{theme } r_2 e \wedge \text{location } \text{wm } e$
 b. $\llbracket (16b) \rrbracket = \exists e : \text{dress } e \wedge \text{agent } r_1 e \wedge \text{theme } r_1 e \wedge \text{location } \text{wm } e$

On to Telugu. The analysis must capture the need for a ‘second reflexivity’ in the presence of a proxy anaphor; and it does. Consider the interpretation of (15) in (18) before the existential is resolved to a specific thematic role.¹⁰

- (18) $\exists e : \text{praise } e \wedge \text{agent } r_1 e \wedge \exists R \in \Theta' : R x e \wedge \text{theme } r_2 e$

The indefinite thematic role can be resolved in multiple ways; a relevant subset is given in (19). If it is resolved to say, beneficiary, then a second reflexivity (but not its need) is derived (19a). If R is resolved to theme however, two elements get assigned the same thematic role. This state of affairs potentially violates Thematic Uniqueness (Carlson, 1984, Parsons, 1990, Landman, 2000), one formulation of which is (20).

- (19) Different resolutions of R in (18)
 a. $\exists e : \text{praise } e \wedge \text{agent } r_1 e \wedge \text{beneficiary } r_1 e \wedge \text{theme } r_2 e$
 b. $\exists e : \text{praise } e \wedge \text{agent } r_1 e \wedge \text{theme } r_1 e \wedge \text{theme } r_2 e$

- (20) **Unique Role Requirement** (Landman, 2000, p. 38)
 If a thematic role is specified for an event, it is uniquely specified.

We now have all the ingredients to derive the Telugu facts. In a situation like (19b), the only way to not run afoul of Thematic Uniqueness is if the anaphor (r_2) and the antecedent (r_1) receive identical interpretations. In other words, Thematic Uniqueness is only satisfied if the reflexive anaphor receives a non-proxy interpretation.¹¹ Conversely, for the anaphor to receive a proxy interpretation, R must not be resolved to theme, but rather to some other thematic role. The need for the second reflexivity with proxy readings of anaphors in sentences like (15) is now derived.¹²

The observation that *kun* disallows proxy readings of its associates can now be used to probe other properties of *kun*. This task is taken up in the following subsection.

2.5 Structural constraints on *kun*’s reflexivity

So far, we have seen *kun* associate an agent and either a theme, a beneficiary, a location, a goal, or an instrument. The account of *kun*’s thematic variability here relies on contextual

¹⁰ While I speak as if the indefinite is always resolved to a specific thematic role, this is not always the case. I will continue to use the ‘resolve’ locution for expository convenience so long as it doesn’t cause any confusion.

¹¹ Or the odder option, the agent of praising is also a statue

¹² Note here if I am right in arguing that the proxy reading of the nominal reflexive is blocked due to thematic uniqueness in (19b), then it cannot be the case that thematic uniqueness is a linguistic constraint, *pace* Paillé (2025). Rather, it is best treated as a general cognitive constraint on event individuation.

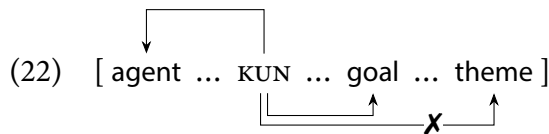
resolution of an indefinite thematic role assigned to the subject (in addition to agent), which predicts the lack of any structural constraints on the choice of the second associate. Two possible sources of such a restriction are AGREE and movement; the predictions of each are investigated in turn below.

The ditransitive examples in (5) already suggest the lack of a structural restriction on the second associate. It is well-known however that the two objects in a double object construction are symmetrical for some syntactic phenomena in many languages (Baker, 1988b, Alsina & Mchombo, 1990, Bresnan & Moshi, 1990, Holmberg et al., 2019, *i.a.*). Lubukusu is one such ‘symmetric object’ language (Diercks & Sikuku, 2013), but displays asymmetries in the behaviour of its verbal reflexive in double object constructions (Sikuku, 2011, Safir & Sikuku, 2011, Baker, 2022).¹³

As (21) shows, only the goal in a true double object construction can be anaphoric to the agent with the verbal reflexive.¹⁴ (22) schematically represents the state of affairs in Lubukusu, as well as Baker’s analysis of the facts: two probes, one upward- and the other downward-looking, come together on the verbal reflexive. The asymmetry, then, is an intervention effect; the goal blocks the theme from being probed. The existence of such intervention effects is predicted by any theory that takes AGREE to be behind the choice of the second associate regardless of how the first associate is chosen (e.g. Murphy & Meyase 2022, Baker & Camargo Souza 2020).

(21) *Lubukusu*

- a. Maria a-a-i-elesy-a omw-eene si-anua
 Maria CL1-PST-REFL-gave-FV CL1-own CL7-gift
 ‘Maria gave herself a gift’
- b. *Yohana a-a-i-okesy-a bab-aana omw-eene
 John CL1-PST-REFL-show-FV CL2-child CL1-own
 ‘John showed the children himself’



Unlike Lubukusu, where a theme anaphor simply cannot co-occur with a verbal reflexive in the presence of a DP goal, Telugu anaphors are independent of the verbal reflexive. In (23), the two reflexive associates are the agent and the theme, where as in (24), they are the agent and the beneficiary.

¹³ As is the case in many ‘symmetric object’ languages, the symmetry is not always present (Holmberg et al., 2019). For other instances of asymmetry in Lubukusu, see Baker et al. 2012.

¹⁴ The theme can be anaphoric to the agent with the verbal reflexive present, so long as the goal is embedded in a prepositional phrase (Sikuku, 2011, Baker, 2022).

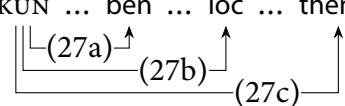
(23) vallu ravi-kosam tama-ni tamu kottu-kunn-aa-ru
 3PL ravi-FOR 3PL-ACC 3PL hit-KUN-PST-3PL
 ‘They hit themselves for Ravi’s benefit’

(24) vallu tama-kosam tamu ravi-ni kottu-kunn-aa-ru
 3PL 3PL-FOR 3PL ravi-ACC hit-KUN-PST-3PL
 ‘They hit Ravi for their own benefit’

However, given that the other internal argument in the examples above are not anaphors, one could appeal to a relativized probing mechanism which skips non-anaphoric arguments (Hicks 2009; cf. Béjar & Rezac 2009). This is where the ban on proxy readings comes in handy. An AGREE-based account of the second associate predicts that in a sentence with *kun*, and multiple internal (anaphoric) arguments, the highest internal argument must always receive a non-proxy interpretation. Alas, this is not true.

Consider (25) with three anaphors, one theme, one beneficiary, and one location. This sentence is licit in all three contexts in (27): each context ensures that two of the three anaphors receive a proxy interpretation and one necessarily does not (proxies are in **boldface** and non-proxies in *italics*).¹⁵ These contexts also control for Telugu’s relatively free word order, which by itself does not inform us of the height of an argument. Schematized in (26) are the thematic roles of participants which receive non-proxy interpretations and the contexts in which they receive them.

(25) amit tana-kosam tanu tana-lo tanu tama-ni tanu pogudu-kunn-aaḍu
 amit 3SG-BEN 3SG 3SG-LOC 3SG 3SG-ACC 3SG praise-KUN-PST-3MS
 ‘Amit praised himself in himself for his own benefit’

(26) [agent ... KUN ... ben ... loc ... theme]


(27) a. **Locative and Theme Proxies**

There is a wax museum shaped like Amit, which he also owns. While standing inside this museum shaped like **him**, Amit sees a group of visitors near a life-sized statue of his own. He goes on to praise **his statue** and the skill that went into it, in the hopes that these visitors get more of their friends to visit the museum – in the end benefiting *him*.

b. **Benefactive and Theme Proxies**

Amit owns a wax museum. One day, Amit finds out that museum has run out of space and hence needs to get rid of some statues. The two options are his own

¹⁵ There is a fourth possible scenario not reported here, where all three anaphors receive a proxy interpretation. The sentence is acceptable in such contexts too, as predicted. For some pertinent discussion see §3.1

statue and that of a footballer. While mulling over his choices, he praises the craftsmanship of his own statue. Retaining it would also benefit the statue because there is no anti-melt coating on it, whereas the footballer’s does. So, this *internal monologue* praising **his statue** has the added advantage of benefiting **his statue**.

c. **Benefactive and Locative Proxies**

There is a wax museum shaped like Amit. While standing inside this museum shaped like **him**, Amit finds out that the museum has run out of space and hence is planning on getting rid of some statues. To prevent **his statue** from being melted or sold, Amit praises *himself* in the hope that the museum admin realise his importance and the value his statue adds to the museum.

Important here is the fact that all three anaphors can receive proxy interpretations. The felicity of (25) in all three contexts tells us that intervention is not at play here; for if it were, two of the three contexts would disallow it. Notice that since the three competitors are all anaphors, (25) and its felicity in the contexts above also argues against relativized probing of anaphors too. I conclude therefore that *kun*’s behaviour cannot be modeled by AGREE.

The second possible source of a structural restriction on reflexive associates (other than agent) is movement (Reinhart & Reuland 1993, Patel-Grosz 2013, Ahn 2015, Paparounas 2023, Akkus & Paparounas 2025, *i.m.a*). First, any account of movement that treats movement as a by-product of AGREE cannot account for the Telugu facts, for reasons just discussed. There, however, is another game in town: the ‘free-merge’ approach to movement (Chomsky 2004, 2013, 2015, Safir 2010, 2019, Ott 2010, Boeckx 2010) which requires us to consider its predictions for Telugu.

Since it is an open question as to what exactly moves to establish the nature of the second associate, consider both a possible head movement account, as well as a phrasal movement account. On the head movement account, each thematic role is introduced by a particular head. If the head moves to Voice, then the agent and the holder of the head’s thematic role are interpreted as being identical.¹⁶ On the phrasal movement approach, *kun* requires that some nominal (other than the agent) be internally merged into its specifier. Merge is free, so it doesn’t restrict which DP/PP can move.¹⁷

Ellipsis rules against both possibilities. Consider (28). The first sentence has a verbal reflexive but no overt anaphor. The second sentence has elided material (an instance of ‘stripping’

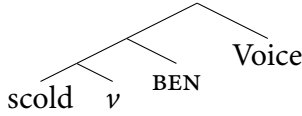
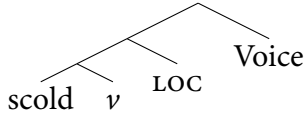
¹⁶ While Telugu does not have overt applicative heads, given that cross-linguistically one finds applicative heads that seem to introduce arguments bearing the thematic roles of the second associate considered here (Polinsky, 2013, Marantz, 1993, Bruening, 2001, Pykkänen, 2008), this is not an entirely otiose exercise. To be sure, there are other applicatives reported in the literature, like the comitative and the suppressive (Peterson, 2007, Tyler, 2021), whose arguments bear roles not considered here. See §3.1 for pertinent discussion.

¹⁷ There might be language-particular restrictions on movement. For instance, A-movement of goals in Greek ditransitives is generally unavailable, reflected, on this analysis, in the impossibility of agent-goal reflexivity in the language (Alexiadou, 2014, Spathas et al., 2015, Paparounas, 2023).

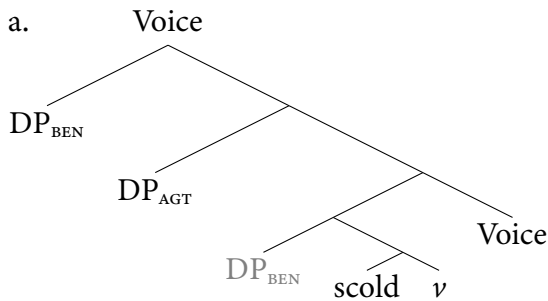
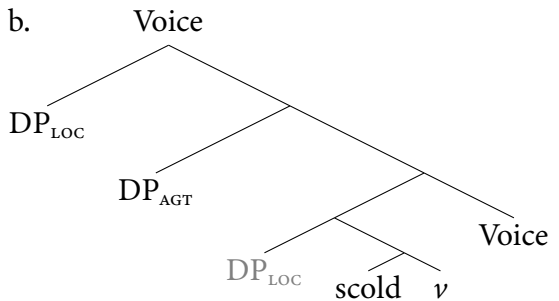
or similarly high ellipsis). One possible (and attested) interpretation of this pair of sentences is given in the second line of the translation: while the antecedent has agent-beneficiary reflexivity, the elided clause shows agent-location reflexivity. That such a ‘mixed’ interpretation is possible argues against both head-movement analyses, as well as phrasal movement analyses of *kun*.

- (28) akhil sameer-ni tiṭṭu-kun-aa-ḍu. shreyas kuuḍa
 akhil sameer-ACC scold-KUN-PST-3MS. shreyas ALSO
 ‘Akhil scolded Sameer. Shreyas did too.’
 ~ ‘Akhil scolded Sameer for Akhil’s benefit. Shreyas scolded Sameer silently’

To see why (28) is problematic for head-movement analyses of *kun*, consider what the structures of the antecedent and the elided clause would have to be. On the head-movement analyses, since the second associate of *kun* depends on which head moves to Voice, one would have to posit distinct structures for the verbal domain of the antecedent and elided clauses. (29) shows the relevant part of the structure for the two clauses above. While examples of mismatches in ellipsis have been uncovered, so far as I know, none have been in the verbal domain *below* Voice, the part of the structures at stake here (Thoms, 2013, Merchant, 2013, Rudin, 2019, Ranero, 2021). Pending evidence that documents such mismatches with overt applicatives, the head-movement analysis can be set aside.

- (29) a.  b. 

The structures below represent a DP-movement analysis of *kun*’s thematic variability, modeled on Ahn’s (2015, 2016) proposal for Kannada: different (possibly silent) anaphors in the syntax associate with *kun* via movement to its specifier. The structures in (30), on this account, are the structures for the antecedent and elided clause on the interpretation being considered. (The structures are agnostic about the nature of how these anaphors enter the derivation: as adjuncts, arguments of applicative heads, ...)

- (30) a.  b. 

When the anaphor is overt in the antecedent, the relevant reading is unavailable (31). A benefactive anaphor in the antecedent clause demands a self-benefactive reading for the elided clause: Shreyas in (31) scolds Sameer for his own benefit. If DP-movement were the source of *kun*'s associate, then the overtness of the anaphor should have no bearing on the acceptability of non-identical associations in the antecedent and elided clauses—*i.e.*, there should not be a contrast between (28) and (31).

- (31) akhil sameer-ni tana-kosam tanu tiṭṭu-kun-aa-ḍu. shreyas kuḍa
 akhil sameer-ACC 3SG-BEN 3SG scold-KUN-PST-3MS. shreyas ALSO
 'Akhil₁ scolded Sameer for himself₁. Shreyas did too.'
 ~ 'Akhil₁ scolded Sameer for himself₁. Shreyas₂ scolded Sameer for himself₂ too.'
 ~ 'Akhil scolded Sameer for himself₁. Shreyas₂ scolded Sameer silently'

On the present account, the distinct interpretations of (28) follow naturally. Both the ellipsis site and the antecedent are interpreted identically: with agent and the indefinite thematic role as the two associates. The mismatch in interpretation is a live possibility here due to the underdetermination of the second associate's thematic role that the indefinite affords. The ellipsis examples also helps us make the case that the second associate is an indefinite thematic role, as opposed to a thematic free pronoun.

It seems from the preceding discussion that neither AGREE nor movement constrain the choice of the second associate. This state of affairs sits naturally with the treatment of *kun* in (3). Since the second associate is an indefinite thematic role, it is predicted that there are no *syntactic* constraints on how it is resolved.

2.6 ECM

The discussion so far has concentrated on reflexivity between two arguments of a predicate. A confounding factor here is that the two arguments considered were also clausemates. We can tease these two notions apart by considering ECM predicates. It becomes all the more important to consider these given the fact that the Romance *se* clitic, whose behaviour is similar to *kun*'s, can signal reflexivity between the matrix and embedded subjects in ECM cases (32).

- (32) *French* (Kayne 1975 cited in Dobrovie-Sorin 2017)
 Jean se considère intelligent
 Jean SE considers intelligent
 'Jean considers himself intelligent'

Telugu *kun* on the other hand, behaves much like Hebrew in not allowing the verbal reflexive to signal reflexivity in ECM contexts. With ECM predicates, an anaphor is necessary (33–34).¹⁸

¹⁸ See Messick & Raghotham 2024 for arguments that Telugu indeed has ECM, and that the examples in (34)

(33) *Hebrew*

(Reinhart & Siloni 2005, ex. 12)

- a. *Dan mitxašev intelligenti
Dan considers.REFL intelligent
- b. Dan maxšiv et acmo intelligenti
Dan considers OM himself intelligent
Dan considers himself intelligent

- (34) a. *akhil buddivantudu ani bhaav-incu-kun-ṭaa-ḏu
akhil intelligent COMP consider-CAUS-KUN-NPST-3MS
'Akhil considers himself intelligent'
- b. akhil tana-ni tanu buddivantudu ani bhaav-is-taa-ḏu
akhil 3SG-ACC 3SG intelligent COMP consider-CAUS-NPST-3MS
'Akhil considers himself intelligent'

The present account predicts this behaviour since *kun*'s bailiwick is the predicate it attaches to. While ECM allows an embedded subject to be part of a higher syntactic domain, it is semantically still very much restricted to the lower predicate.

2.7 Interim Summary

This section showed how the proposal in (3) accounts for the following properties of *kun*: agent-orientation, thematic variability, the ban on proxy readings, the lack of syntactic restriction on reflexive associates, and its incompatibility with ECM predicates. The consequences of this proposal are discussed in the following section.

3 Consequences

3.1 The inventory of thematic relations

I have treated the second thematic role introduced by *kun* as an indefinite thematic role. A consequence of this proposal is the existence of an inventory of thematic relations: the domain of the existential. What roles populate this inventory?

There does not seem to be a consensus in the literature. Baker (1997), following Dowty (1991), leans towards a list of three proto-roles with a prototype structure that are then possibly precisified at the CI interface. Larson (1988, 1990), working with a thematic hierarchy, lists at least four roles relevant structurally with further possible precisifications. Reinhart & Siloni (2005), and others working with the 'Theta system' of Reinhart 2002, use two binary features to derive up to nine possible roles (Everaert et al., 2012, Siloni, 2012, Reinhart

instantiate it, the COMP notwithstanding.

et al., 2016, a.o.). At the other end, Pietroski (2005) suggests we can make do with just two: internal and external.¹⁹

There do, however, seem to be at least two points of near consensus: first, we need at least two, to distinguish participants in the logical forms of sentences like (35). Second, whatever these roles are, their existence must be independent of particular predicates, and hence must admit a degree of imprecision in their interpretation (see Parsons 1990, Parsons 1995, Schein 2002 for discussion).

(35) Mariam saw Nargis

The Telugu data does not help us clarify this debate once and for all. But it does allow us to make some observations that can be used to better answer the question. In principle, the data we have considered so far is compatible with treating the second associate as bearing an underspecified role (see Sundaresan 2012 for such an account of a cognate). If the second role were indeed underspecified, we can recast (3) as (36), where *v* is an underspecified thematic role that encompasses all possible non-agent roles.

(36) $\llbracket \text{kun} \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda e. \text{agent } x e \wedge v x e$

The hallmark of underspecification is the possibility of mixed readings. For instance, the fact that verbal reflexives seem to be compatible with not only reflexive and reciprocal scenarios, but also mixed scenarios, leads Murray (2007, 2008) to posit an underspecified semantics for the Cheyenne verbal reflexive. The same facts hold of the Telugu verbal reflexive too (37). The verbal reflexive merely demands reflexivity in the cumulative event of praising which can be satisfied in various ways.²⁰

(37) abbayilu poguḍu-kunn-aa-ru
 boys praise-KUN-PST-3PL
 ‘The boys self-praised’
 a. ‘The boys praised themselves’
 b. ‘The boys praised each other’
 c. ‘Some of the boys praised themselves and some praised each other’

If *v*, the underspecified role that allows precisification to various thematic relations, were what *kun* assigned (in addition to agent), then we should expect similar mixed readings with

¹⁹ Schein (2017) goes further in making the case for a single thematic role participates, but this reduction is accompanied by an increase in the number of events and relations between events found in the logical forms of sentences. The question of how many ways arguments can relate to events (i.e. the contents of the inventory of thematic relations) can be reproduced with Schein’s supermonadicity. See also Ramchand 2007, 2008.

²⁰ Mixed readings with *kun* are available so long as an anaphor (reflexive or reciprocal) is absent. In the presence of the reflexive anaphor, mixed readings are much harder to get, just like in the case of English. With a reciprocal anaphor, they are impossible.

plural subjects. As (38a) shows, mixed readings of thematic roles are impossible. Consider the impossible paraphrase in (38b), where I assume that (38a) has a distributed reading and that ‘beneficiary’ and ‘location’ are precisifications of *v*.

- (38) a. pillalu akhil-ni poguḍu-kunn-aa-ru
 children akhil-ACC praise-VR-PST-3PL
 ‘The children praised Akhil { silently/ for their own benefit }’
 *Some praised A. silently and some others praised him for their benefit
- b. There is an event of praising, whose agent is a group of children, the theme Akhil, and whose *v* is the same group of children. This praising event is a collection of praising sub-events, such that each sub-event has a member of the group of children as an agent, and Akhil as the theme. Some of these sub-events are such that the agent is also the *v*=beneficiary, and some other sub-events are such that the agent is also the *v*=location. ≠ (38a)

To be sure, there is an assumption that can rule out (38b) as a possible paraphrase of (38a): that however *v* is precisified, it is done at the level of the cumulative event, with the choice trickling down to the sub-events.²¹ This restriction makes (36) indistinguishable from (3) in its predictions of *kun*’s behaviour. However, the assumption does not seem to follow for any principled reasons. The examples above show that no one underspecified role can cover both location and beneficiary roles. Similar conclusions can be drawn for the pairs beneficiary and theme (39), beneficiary and instrument (40), and beneficiary and goal (41). (3) remains an adequate meaning for *kun*.

- (39) pillalu poguḍu-kunn-aa-ru
 children praise-KUN-PST-3PL
 ‘The children praised {themselves/some salient individual for self-benefit}’
 *‘Some praised themselves and some others praised *x* for their own benefit’
- (40) pillalu banti-ni aapu-kun-aa-ru
 children ball-ACC stop-KUN-PST-3PL
 ‘The children stopped the ball {with themselves/for themselves}’
 *‘Some children stopped the ball with themselves and some others, for themselves’
- (41) pillalu bahumatulu pampu-kunn-aa-ru
 children gifts send-KUN-PST-3PL
 ‘The children sent gifts to themselves/to *x* for their benefit’
 *‘Some children sent gifts to themselves and some others to *x* for their benefit’

While I have argued that the second role *kun* contributes cannot be maximally underspecified, the proposal is not incompatible with a lesser degree of underspecification in thematic

²¹ The cumulativity assumption for thematic roles in, e.g., Champollion 2016, 2017 is orthogonal to this assumption.

content. Indeed, such underspecification is required by any theory of predicate-independent thematic relations, and I make use of one such underspecified role in §5.²² Moreover, notice that the possible thematic roles of the second associate do not fall neatly into any of the natural classes Reinhart’s (2002) Theta-system predicts.

This section began by asking what inventory of thematic relations constitutes the domain of the existential quantifier over thematic roles. The set in (42) provides a preliminary set of thematic roles in natural language that *kun* helps us differentiate. Since *kun* already assigns it, agent is presumably not part of the domain of the existential. This latter set I assume is the same as Θ except without agent (43). I am presupposing here that *kun* doesn’t assign thematic roles redundantly, but nothing hinges on this choice.

$$(42) \quad \Theta = \{ \text{agent, theme, goal, location, beneficiary, instrument, (...) } \}$$

$$(43) \quad \Theta' = \Theta - \{ \text{agent} \}$$

Moreover, the ellipsis leaves open the possibility of other members of the set. For instance, causee and experiencer are two roles often put to use in description and analysis, but are absent from this list. Their absence from the list is not because of my lack of conviction regarding their existence, but because *kun* doesn’t help us differentiate them from instrument and goal respectively.²³ The latter pair appears in the list rather than the former for the sake of generality. I defer settling the question of these (and other) roles’ existence to another occasion.

3.2 UTAH and the Theta-Criterion

The existence of a set of thematic roles brings with it a theory of thematic role assignment. Two principles from the GB era that govern this assignment still hold sway after nearly four decades: The Theta Criterion (44) and the Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (45). Both theories require biuniqueness between thematic role and (syntactic) argument/position:

²² I suspect such underspecification is required even for thematic relations that don’t generalize beyond a predicate, to account for the interpretive contrast between ‘Jack hit Bill’ and ‘Jack hit a homerun’ for example.

²³ Other parts of the grammar of Telugu might help make the case that causee and instrument are the same role, the former simply being animate versions of the latter:

- (i) *nenu akhil-{to/čeeta} četla-nu godḍali-to narik-inč-ææ-nu
 1SG akhil-INSTR trees-ACC sickle-INSTR cut-CAUS-PST-1SG
 ‘I made Akhil cut trees using a sickle’

If the two are indeed the same role, then thematic uniqueness explains the unacceptability of the sentence above.

- (44) **Theta Criterion**²⁴ Chomsky (1981)
 Each argument bears one and only one theta role and each role is assigned to one and only one argument
- a. Each argument bears one and only one theta-role
 - b. Each theta-role is assigned to one and only one argument
- (45) **Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH)** Baker (1988a)
 Identical thematic relationships between items are represented by identical structural relationships between those items at the level of D-structure.
- a. Each theta-position is associated with a specific theta-role
 - b. Each theta-role is associated with a specific theta-position

With the dissolution of D-structure as a distinct level of representation, UTAH and the Theta Criterion are no longer principles of grammar that filter representations and aid acquisition (Chomsky, 1995, Baker, 1997).²⁵ However, they can still be thought of as generalizations or theorems of the theory, to be derived from more general principles of the grammar (Baker, 1997, Hale & Keyser, 2002, Harley, 2011, Larson, 2014). Whether or not these should be derived is ultimately an empirical question.

Previous work has argued against these generalizations, or at least one half of them (Hornstein, 1999, Borer, 2005, Ramchand, 2008, Sundaresan, 2012, Bruening, 2013, Legate, 2014, Myler & Mali, 2021, *i.m.a.*). (44a) has been called into question on empirical grounds, with secondary predication and reflexive interpretations of English grooming verbs playing an early role (Higginbotham 1985, fn. 14; Chomsky 1986, p. 97); the same considerations also apply to (45a). On the other hand, (44b) has been much less controversial and shows up in various forms in different theories (e.g., *Uniqueness* of Bresnan 1982 and *Thematic Diversity* of Pesetsky 1996). Indeed, Reinhart & Siloni (2005), for whom theta roles are syntactic objects that can percolate and be checked, think the condition is “obvious”.

The proper treatment of Telugu reflexivity demanded by the data in §2.4 shows that far from being obvious, (44b) is plain wrong. Recall that to derive the interpretive possibilities of nominal anaphors with verbal reflexives, we made crucial use of theme in two different places. The condition is wrong because it is crucially a theory of the mapping between

²⁴ There are other formulations of the theta-criterion that render the constraint merely syntactic. Effectively, they restrict movement from a θ -position to another (Chomsky, 1986, Collins, 2024). On this view, the θ -positions themselves can bear two thematic roles and hence are compatible with the present proposal. Indeed, this situation motivates Chomsky’s (1986) reformulation (p. 97). While they do not comment (extensively) on two positions bearing the same thematic role, that too can be presumed legal. These variations, while retaining the name, are not linking theories in the way UTAH and the Theta Criterion of Chomsky (1981) are. I have nothing to say about these formulations, except to point to the reader to analyses of reflexives where movement into theta positions is invoked (Drummond et al., 2011, Kastner, 2017, Akkus & Paparounas, 2025, *i.m.a.*).

²⁵ See Chomsky 2021 for a return to an axiomatic view of the theta-criterion.

structure and meaning, and if my analysis of the Telugu facts is right, such a condition on the mapping cannot exist. The same argument applies to (45b).

Now there is a way of rescuing the condition that a given thematic role is assigned to only one argument (or to occupants of only one position): by treating the theta-criterion as a purely syntactic constraint (and hence theta-roles as narrowly syntactic objects).²⁶ I did not treat thematic roles as syntactic objects in the previous section, but the required translation is simple enough.²⁷ On this view, since the role assigned by *kun* is an indefinite and not theme, there is no violation of the uniqueness condition on theta-role assignment. While this view captures the facts, it goes against the spirit of Reinhart’s Theta System or the Theta Criterion of Chomsky (1981), where a θ -role is fundamentally an interpretive atom whose distribution is governed by the syntax. Rescuing (44b), then, requires us to dilute the concept of a θ -role — throwing out the baby to preserve the bath water.

The Theta Criterion and the UTAH, then, are not viable mapping theories of the argument domain. Without something else to replace them, it might seem that we are in a lawless land. Note though that the impetus behind a theory like UTAH is the overwhelming cross-linguistic regularity of first-merge positions for agents and themes. Such a regularity is not a proprietary feature of the argument domain by any means—it is the object of inquiry for the Cartographic enterprise (Rizzi, 1997, Cinque, 1999, Cinque & Rizzi, 2009, *i.m.a*). The past three decades are witness to multiple proposals arguing for a syntactic separation of arguments from verbal roots (Schein, 1993, Kratzer, 1996, Williams, 2009, Lohndal, 2014, Ahn, 2022, Elkins et al., 2024, *i.m.a*). If argument introduction is to be handled by different heads in the verbal extended projection, said cross-linguistic regularity is a special case of the cartographic regularity of natural language syntax and we need posit no special devices.

3.3 Lexicalism

Setting thematic variability aside, the proposal for *kun* here greatly resembles the ‘bundling’ hypothesis for verbal reflexives defended in Reinhart & Siloni 2004, 2005 and fruitfully employed by the ‘Theta System’ tradition (Everaert et al. 2012, Reinhart et al. 2016, *a.m.o*; cf. Dimitriadis & Everaert 2014). On this account, Bundling (46) is an operation that applies to two θ -roles (say, agent and theme), combining them into a complex θ -role (agent–theme). Bundling has no effect in the semantics: assigning a bundled role to an argument is equivalent to assigning the component roles to the argument individually (Dimitriadis, 2012). Its

²⁶ A clear counter-example for uniqueness as a syntactic principle might come from languages with (i) verbal reflexives restricted to agent-theme reflexivity that can (ii) co-occur with a nominal theme anaphor, blocking otherwise available interpretive freedom. I haven’t been able to find such a language yet. Moyse-Faurie (2008) and Gaby (2008) report examples from Hmwaveke (Oceanic) and Kuuk Thaayorre (Paman) that could possibly fit this bill, but much descriptive work needs to be done before we are certain.

²⁷ As Uriagereka & Pietroski (2002) note, it is puzzling indeed that no language seems to lexicalize thematic roles, unlike any other syntactic object. (Although, see Kastner 2019 and Krishnan & Sarma 2023 for the morphosyntactic benefits of positing something approximating an agent in the lexicon.) While I am sympathetic to their argument and their conclusion that thematic roles are not syntactic objects, I do not adopt this line of argument here.

effects in the syntax are governed by two parameters: The Lexicon-Syntax Parameter, and the Structural Accusative Case parameter. I will only focus on the former here.

- (46) **Bundling** (Reinhart & Siloni, 2005, p. 400)
 $[\theta_i][\theta_j] \rightarrow [\theta_i - \theta_j]$, where θ_i is an external θ -role.
- (47) **The Lex-Syn Parameter** (Reinhart & Siloni, 2005, p. 398)
 Universal Grammar allows thematic arity operations to apply in the lexicon or in the syntax.

According to (47), the bundling operation can take place either in the syntax or in the lexicon, and languages ‘choose’ a parameter setting. A diagnostic for the setting is the possibility of verbal reflexives associating the agent of a matrix verb and the subject of an embedded clause in ECM constructions. Since the latter is thematically related only to the embedded predicate, the thematic role it receives cannot be bundled with that of the matrix agent in the lexical grid of the matrix predicate — only Syntax languages allow verbal reflexives with ECM. As we saw in §2.6, *kun* is incompatible with ECM. This behaviour would classify Telugu as a Lexicon language.

The Lexicon-Syntax parameter crucially relies on an active lexicon: instead of the lexicon being a mere repository of idiosyncratic information, there are also lexical operations, like Bundling, which apply before lexical items are put to use by the narrow syntax. Let us call this view Operationalism. Subscribing to an active lexicon necessitates what we might call Projectionism: the view that the argument structural properties of a clause are projected from its predicate’s lexical information. In what follows, I argue that the behaviour of Telugu reflexives renders Projectionism untenable. Since Operationalism requires Projectionism, the former is untenable too — natural language lexica cannot be active.

The argument comes from the optionality of anaphors with *kun* (48). Projectionism about argument structure requires that the effect of the verbal reflexive on the syntactic realization of the anaphor be uniform — the anaphor must be either uniformly present or uniformly absent in the syntax.

- (48) a. amith tana-ni tanu poguḍu-**kunn**-aa-ḍu
 amith 3SG-ACC 3SG praise-KUN-PST-3MS
 ‘Amith praised himself’
- b. amith poguḍu-**kunn**-aa-ḍu
 amith praise-KUN-PST-3MS
 ‘Amith praised himself’

In (48a), the anaphor behaves like a *bona fide* argument: it receives accusative case, the theme role (see §2.4), and necessarily antecedes reflexive themes in ellipsis sites (see §2.5). The verbal reflexive, therefore, cannot require the anaphor’s absence. On a projectionist view of argument structure, the anaphor, then, must be uniformly present when a predicate

is modified by *kun*. The apparent optionality in (48) must be merely surface optionality; the only difference between the two examples above must be in the phonological realization of a syntactically projected anaphor. In §2.5 we already saw some suggestive evidence against locating the optionality of the anaphor in the phonology.

The behaviour of reflexive-marked passives provides another argument against a uniform syntactic treatment of (48a) and (48b). In what follows, I argue that in passives of reflexives there is no syntactically projected agent. Since reflexive anaphors in Telugu require a c-commanding antecedent, there cannot be a syntactically projected anaphor either. However, the verbal reflexive can also happily co-exist with a syntactically projected anaphor (48a). This dual possibility is incompatible with Projectionism since it requires that the syntactic behaviour of a predicate's arguments be uniform in a language.

Passivization and subject oriented reflexives are famously incompatible (Rizzi 1986, Reinhart & Siloni 2005, Ahn 2015, *i.a.*). Intuitively, this is unsurprising and especially so for *kun*. Passivization suppresses agents, but agent-oriented reflexives like *kun* need an agent to be oriented to. Another naïve expectation is that passivizing a transitive predicate with a reflexive object should also not be possible. (49) confirms this expectation for English.²⁸

- (49) a. They praised themselves
 b. *They were praised (by themselves)
 c. *Themselves were praised

And yet, some languages allow it. Among the Germanic languages, at least German (50) and Icelandic (51) seem to allow passives of reflexives, unlike their relatives English and Dutch (Árnadóttir et al., 2011, Schäfer, 2012).

(50) *German* (Schäfer, 2012, ex. 3)

- a. Hier haben die Römer sich gewaschen
 here have the.NOM romans REFL.ACC washed
 b. Hier wurde sich (von den Römern) gewaschen
 here became REFL (by the Romans) washed
 ‘Here, the Romans washed’

(51) *Icelandic*²⁹ (Schäfer, 2012, ex. 16)

²⁸ To be sure, citing examples like (i.–ii.) some authors argue that English does allow passivization with reflexives, but only in a small number of environments (Baker et al., 1989, Collins, 2005). This then feeds into their theories of passives where the agent of the passive is syntactically active.

- i. Such privileges should be kept to oneself
 ii. Damaging testimony is always given about oneself in secret trials

See Bruening (2024, §3.2) for discussion of these examples.

- a. Börnin leika sér allan daginn
the.children play REFL.DAT all the.day
'The children are playing all day'
- b. Það var leikið sér allan daginn
EXPL was played REFL.DAT all the.day
'People played all day' (Lit: 'There was playing all day')

Telugu allows passives of reflexives as well (see also [Sundaresan & McFadden 2017](#) for Tamil). In (52) are examples of passives of reflexive-marked transitive predicates. In all these examples, the internal argument of the predicate is distinct from the understood agent, and with the given translations, the thematic roles involved in the reflexivity are agent and beneficiary.³⁰ With co-construed agent and theme, passives of reflexives are unacceptable (53).

- (52) a. annam vanḍu-ko-baḍ-in-di
rice cook-KUN-PASS-PST-3NS
'Rice was cooked (by someone for themselves)'
- b. mamidikaya kosu-ko-baḍ-in-di
mango cut-KUN-PASS-PST-3NS
'A mango was cut (by someone for themselves)'
- c. vaaḍu vimaršincu-ko-baḍ-æ-ḍu
3MS criticize-KUN-PASS-PST-3MS
'He was criticized (by someone for their own benefit)'
- (53) a. *kosu-ko-baḍ-in-di
cut-KUN-PASS-PST-3NS
Intended: 'Something was cut (by itself)'
- b. *vimaršincu-ko-baḍ-in-di
criticize-KUN-PASS-PST-3NS
Intended: 'There was a self-criticism'

One might wonder whether the possibility of passives of reflexives in the language is due to the thematic variability displayed by *kun*. However, with ditransitives, in addition to

²⁹ [Schäfer \(2012\)](#) gives the judgement for (51b) as "(?)" to indicate that some authors in the literature judge it marginal. The surrounding discussion however makes it clear that Icelandic speakers from Inner Reykjavík (whose dialect Schäfer is studying) predominantly judge it acceptable. I take the judgement and free translation for (51b) from [Eythórsson \(2008\)](#).

³⁰ That the parentheses in the translation have beneficiary as the second role in (52) and (54c) is merely a matter of convenience. On the present account, the second role is an indefinite thematic role, and can in principle be resolved to various roles, so long as the context allows it. For instance, (52c) could just as easily have been translated as 'He was criticized (by someone, silently)' where the indefinite is resolved to location. Henceforth, I will simply talk of 'second roles' and not the more appropriate 'resolutions of the second role' for ease of readability.

beneficiary, the second role can be either theme or goal (54). So the passive doesn't place a blanket constraint on how the existential can be resolved.

- (54) a. pustakam ičču-ko-baḍ-in-di
 book give-KUN-PASS-PST-3NS
 'A book was given (by someone to themselves)'
 b. vaadi-ki paričayam čeesu-ko-baḍ-in-di
 3MS-DAT introduction do-KUN-PASS-PST-3NS
 'To him was introduced (someone by themselves)'
 c. vaadi-ki pustakam ičču-ko-baḍ-in-di
 3MS-DAT book give-KUN-PASS-PST-3NS
 'A book was given to him (by someone for their own benefit)'

Indeed, a passive of reflexive with theme as the second associate is possible with a predicate like *muddu peṭṭu* 'kiss' (55). The predicate here is complex, with *peṭṭu* 'put' a light verb hosted by the nominal *muddu* 'kiss'. (56) shows that this is not a garden variety ditransitive use of 'put' (e.g. 'they placed kisses on each other'): the reciprocal receives accusative case. In its standard use, the location where something is placed is marked with locative case (57). See [Balusu \(2014\)](#) for an overview of complex predication in Telugu.

- (55) muddu peṭṭu-ko-baḍ-in-di
 kiss put-KUN-PASS-PST-3NS
 'There was a kissing'
 (56) vaallu (okari-ni okaru) muddu peṭṭu-kunn-aa-ru
 3PL (ONE-ACC ONE) kiss put-KUN-PST-3PL
 'They kissed (each other)'
 (57) nenu table-miida pustakam peṭṭ-ææ-nu
 1SG table-LOC book put-PST-1SG
 'I put a book on the table'

The difference between (55) which allows agent-theme reflexivity, and the examples in (52) which don't, I suggest lies in the fact that the former has a nominal as part of a complex predication. This difference can be seen with passives of non-reflexive predicates as well (58). *guraka peṭṭu* 'work' is an N-V complex predicate unlike *navvu* 'laugh'. Upon noticing a noise in an otherwise silent audio recording, I can utter (58a) if I hear a snore, but not (58b) even if I hear a laugh.

- (58) a. guraka peṭṭa-baḍ-in-di
 snore put-KUN-PASS-PST-3NS
 'There was a snoring'

- b. *navva-bad-in-di
 laugh-PASS-PST-3NS
 Intended: ‘There was a laughing’

The descriptive generalization we arrive at given these examples is (59). I interpret this generalization as providing evidence for an EPP requirement in the language. I assume that this requirement is to be satisfied at TP, although nothing hinges on this choice.³¹ Since Telugu is a *pro*-drop language, it should be the case that covert nominals in the syntax suffice to satisfy this requirement (60). The generalization in (59), combined with the fact that covert nominals suffice for the EPP, further suggests that there are no covert nominals in (58b). Therefore, the agent of the passive must not be projected in the syntax.³²

(59) **Generalization**

Passivization in Telugu is possible as long as there is a nominal in the structure.

- (60) vell-ææ-nu
 go-PST-1SG
 ‘I went’

Messick & Raghotham (2025) show that there exists a syntactic link (AGREE) between the reflexive anaphor and its antecedent in Telugu. Therefore, the antecedent must have a syntactic life to license an anaphor. If the internal argument associate of *kun* is always syntactically projected, given the nature of anaphors in the language, their antecedents (in this case, agents) must be too. We have just seen, however, that in passives of reflexives, the agent is not syntactically projected and hence unable to license anaphors. The internal argument associate of *kun*, must also therefore not be projected in the syntax when no anaphor is overt.

This conclusion is trouble for the projectionist. On the one hand, when there is an overt reflexive anaphor in the presence of *kun*, it behaves like a genuine internal argument and bears an (argumental) thematic role. On the other hand, the same thematic role is available for interpretation even when there is no syntactically projected anaphor. If one is inclined

³¹ Telugu is an SOV language with *pro*-drop and no expletives and no obvious raising verbs. These properties make it difficult to establish whether or not there is an EPP requirement in this language. The argument from passives, then, is a novel argument for the EPP in Telugu.

³² NPs embedded in postpositions can’t bind anaphors (i-ii). So assuming the presence of a silent PP might help save the syntactic uniformity of agents in active and passive sentences, but they nevertheless will be unable to license an anaphor, overt or covert.

- (i) *akhil ravi-pakkana tana-{ni/pakkana} tanu kuurčo peṭṭ-ææ-ḍu
 akhil rav-BESIDE 3SG-{ACC/BESIDE} 3SG sit put-PST-3MS
 Intended: ‘Akhil put Ravi₁ next to himself₁’
- (ii) *pustakam pillali-dwaara valla-ku valla ičču-ko-baḍ-in-di
 book children-BY 3PL-DAT 3PL give-KUN-PASS-PST-3NS
 Intended: ‘The book was given to themselves by the children’

to steer clear of epicycles, as I am, then the only available recourse is to reject projectionism about argument structure. An active lexicon, whose bedrock is projection, must also therefore be rejected.

4 Causatives and Combinatorial Restrictions

I have so far remained reticent about the verbal reflexive's combinatorial restrictions. It is incompatible, as we saw earlier, with experiencer subject verbs (61). This restriction, I suggested, was the result of *kun*'s agent orientation: it introduces an agent; therefore the external argument can no longer remain an experiencer. Agent orientation also helps explain the unacceptability of *kun* in copular clauses since their subjects are not agents (62).³³

- (61) *fatima paper marači-poo-**kun**-in-di
 fatima paper forget-go-KUN-PST-3FS
 'Fatima forgot the paper (for her benefit)'

- (62) *aame president kaa-kun-di
 3FS president BE.NEG-KUN-3NS
 'She is not the president'

While this explains why the particular examples above are unacceptable, it doesn't suffice to explain the wider incompatibility of these predicates with the verbal reflexive. For once we reject projectionism, as I have argued we should, absent a constraint barring *kun* in certain configurations, we should expect (61) for example to be acceptable, with *Fatima* interpreted as the agent. Such an interpretation is unavailable here, indicating the need for a constraint on the combinatory possibilities of the verbal reflexive.

Moreover, *kun* is also incompatible in configurations where agents are licensed — with ingestive verbs like *eat* and *drink* (63), and with verbs of deictic motion like *come* and *go* (64). All the examples below are intended to show agent-beneficiary reflexivity, which should be possible given that *Ravi* is an agent in all of them. This once again signals the need for a constraint on *kun*'s distribution.

- (63) a. *ravi annam tin-kunn-aa-ḍu
 ravi rice eat-VR-PST-3MS
 'Ravi ate rice for himself'
 b. *ravi soḍa taagu-kunn-aa-ḍu
 ravi soda drink-VR-PST-3MS
 'Ravi drank soda for himself'

³³ (62) has a negation since the positive counterpart has no verbal morphology and hence unable to (even hypothetically) host the verbal reflexive. Even though BE.NEG and 3NS are separated by a morpheme boundary here, they form one unit, and the ϕ -features on the negation don't covary. They're only separated here to affix *kun* in the most plausible position — between the copular and agreement-hosting nodes.

- (64) a. *Ravi inṭi-ki vačču-kun-aa-ḍu
 Ravi house-DAT come-VR-PST-3MS
 ‘Ravi came home for himself’
 b. *Ravi inṭi-ki vellu-kun-aa-ḍu
 Ravi house-DAT go-VR-PST-3MS
 ‘Ravi went home for himself’

Notice here that *kun* is compatible with all of the predicates listed above, once they are causativized (65–68). I take this repair to be diagnostic of the restriction on *kun*, which, I suggest, selects complex events. In each case below causativization results in the creation of a complex event, with the root denoting a predicate of eventualities which ‘end’ the complex event (Pietroski, 2005, Williams, 2015, Zimmermann & Amaechi, 2025).

- (65) nenu fatima-to paper marip-inču-kun-aa-nu
 1SG fatima-INSTR paper forget-CAUS-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘I made Fatima forget the paper for my benefit’
 (66) nenu aame-nu president čeesu-kunn-aa-nu
 1SG 3FS-ACC president DO-KUN-PST-1SG
 ‘I made her president for my benefit’
 (67) nenu ravi-ki idli tinip-inču-kunn-aa-nu
 1SG ravi-DAT idli eat-CAUS-KUN-PST-1SG
 ‘I fed Ravi idli for my benefit’
 (68) nenu Ravi-ni inṭi-ki rapp-incu-kunn-aa-nu
 1SG Ravi-ACC home-DAT come-CAUS-KUN-PST-1SG
 ‘I made Ravi come home for my benefit’

All configurations in which *kun* is incompatible are those which denote a simplex event (or state). I take this conclusion for copular and psych-verb constructions to be uncontroversial. For the cases of ingestive and motion verbs, making the positive case that the configurations in (63) and (64) are simplex is tricky. The unavailability of restitutive readings with *again* serves as a diagnostic here. As (69) shows, a restitutive reading with *vačč* ‘come’ is not available.³⁴

- (69) Ravi malli inṭi-ki vačč-ææ-ḍu
 Ravi again house-DAT come-PST-3MS

³⁴ I should note that test here is not for *any* interpretive ambiguity with *again*. Given the possibility of ‘low’ repetitive readings (Bale, 2007), we expect, given the structure for agent introduction, an ambiguity to be generally available with agentive predicates. See Bale 2007, Smith & Yu 2022, 2024, Asami & Bruening 2025 for discussion.

‘Ravi came home again.’

↪ Ravi came home once; He came home again.

↪ Ravi was home; He left and came home again.

With ingestive verbs, making the claim is trickier still. Many analyses posit a complex event structure for ingestive verbs (Jackendoff, 1992, Krejci, 2012, Smith & Yu, 2024). Since my main goal in this paper is not to argue for one representation for these verbs over another, I will simply point to the fact that restitutive readings with ingestive verbs are unavailable even with a context that makes them plausible (70).³⁵ If the representations of these verbs included states of being in someone then the unavailability of restitutive readings is surprising.

- (70) *We are teamed up in a game of multi-player Pacman against the ghosts: there are two ‘Pacmen’ on the board, striped pink and blue, simultaneously trying to clear the board.³⁶ Ghosts in Pacman, recall, can regenerate after being eaten. In every board of this hypothetical version, the ghosts corresponding to the Pacmen’s colours are ‘pre-eaten’: absent at the beginning, and appear some seconds after the beginning of the game at the location of the corresponding player and make their way home. We’re discussing the fate of the blue ghost:*

nenu dan-ni malli tinn-aa-nu
1SG 3NS-ACC again eat-PST-1SG
‘I ate it again’

↪ I ate it, and then I ate it once more.

↪ You ate it, and then I ate it.

↪ It was eaten first (at the beginning), then I ate it.

repetitive

low-repetitive

restitutive

Again is fairly liberal in its licensing of restitutive readings, such that even verbs that don’t participate in the causative alternation and without any discernible morphological complexity also allow them (von Stechow, 1996, *i.a.*). The fact that the configurations which are incompatible with *kun* do not allow even this, I take to be evidence of their simplicity.

I implement the restriction on *kun*’s distribution as a semantic definedness condition (71). An alternate possibility is to treat this as syntactic selection of a head that builds complex events. Given the data in (65–68), the causative head is a natural contender. Although I prefer the semantic variant over the syntactic selection analysis, for the purposes of this paper, they are equivalent, and the reader is welcome to choose their preferred version.

³⁵ Low-repetitive readings with ingestive verbs are easily available provided the right context contra Smith & Yu (2024), and in line with Asami & Bruening (2025).

I should also note that Smith & Yu (2024) point to restitutive readings with *vomit* in examples supplied by a reviewer: *e.g. Is it okay to let my dog eat the vomit again once they have vomited?.* This seems to be a counter-directional reading, made available by the egress associated with vomiting, as opposed to a genuinely restitutive reading. See Patel-Grosz & Beck 2019, Iyer 2023 for some discussion.

³⁶ The standard version is playable at this link.

$$(71) \quad \llbracket \text{kun} \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda e : \exists e' [\text{end } e' e]. \text{agent } x e \wedge \exists R \in \Theta' [R x e]$$

In analyzing *kun* as being restricted to configurations with complex events, the present analysis greatly resembles the proposal of [Sundaresan \(2012\)](#), for whom *kol*, the Tamil cognate of *kun*, selects a result state (introducing projection). The difference between the proposals, as far as the combinatorial restrictions are concerned, lies in their locality. For [Sundaresan](#), the verbal reflexive has to be local to the state projection (technically, an aspectual projection that introduces the result state). As (72) shows, the verbal reflexive is compatible with *poguḍu* by itself, and also when it is causativized — if *kun* required that its sister be the locus of state introduction, then a causative morpheme cannot intervene in (72b) because the locality conditions of *kun* are already met in (72a).³⁷

- (72) a. akhil nayana-ni poguḍu-kunn-aa-ḍu
 akhil nayana-ACC praise-KUN-PST-3MS
 ‘Akhil praised Nayana’
 b. ravi akhil-to nayana-ni poguḍu-incu-kunn-aa-ḍu
 ravi akhil-INSTR nayana-ACC praise-CAUS-KUN-PST-3MS
 ‘Ravi made Akhil praise Nayana’

Another feature of the present proposal, which speaks in its favour is the treatment of both thematic roles introduced by the verbal reflexive as properties of the same event. This requires a treatment of causatives as complex but mono-eventive. Consider our explanation of how the verbal reflexive comes to block proxy readings of a theme anaphor. In (73), the standard semantic representation of causative verbs (e.g. [Parsons 1990](#), [Pylkkänen 2008](#), [Myler & Mali 2021](#)) does not represent the subject and direct object as the agent and theme of the same event (73b). I suggested that the proxy reading of the direct object anaphor is blocked when the indefinite thematic role is resolved to theme. However, given the different events here, Thematic Uniqueness plays no role in blocking the proxy readings. A postulate such as (74) might rescue the analysis, but as we will shortly see, it is not sufficiently general. On the other hand, the ban on proxy readings follows naturally if all syntactic arguments name participants of the same event as on the present account (73c).

- (73) a. akhil ravi-to vaadi-ni vaadu poguḍ-incu-kunn-aa-ḍu
 akhil ravi-INSTR 3MS-ACC 3MS praise-CAUS-KUN-PST-3MS
 ‘Akhil₁ made Ravi praise himself₁’
 b. $\exists e [\text{agent } a e \wedge \exists R \in \Theta' [R a e] \wedge \exists e' [\text{cause } e e' \wedge \text{praise } e' \wedge \text{instr } r e' \wedge \text{theme } a_1 e']]$
 c. $\exists e [\text{agent } a e \wedge \exists R \in \Theta' [R a e] \wedge \text{praise } e \wedge \text{instr } r e \wedge \text{theme } a_1 e \wedge \exists e' [\text{end } e' e]]$
 (74) $\text{cause } e e' \wedge \text{theme } x e' \models \text{theme } x e$ ([Pietroski, 2005](#), p. 193)

³⁷ I assume that the result state in both examples here are the same.

If the causative morpheme introduced a separate event, represented as such, we should expect the felicity of say, two beneficiaries, one for the caused event — here an applied argument — and one for the causing event, introduced by *kun*. While we rescued the bi-eventive analysis for themes by appealing to a reasonable meaning postulate, such recourse seems unavailable here. As (75) shows, that isn't possible. In (75a), it might well benefit Akhil, if Ravi praising Shreyas benefits Sameer, in a kind of benefit-chain, but that is crucially not the interpretation we're after. (75b) brings out the distinction slightly more clearly: imagine a context where Ravi runs a charity which pays school fees for children; Akhil donates to this charity, and this helps reduce his taxes. A bi-eventive analysis of causatives predicts that Akhil's action of donating is independent of its down-stream effects and each can have their own beneficiary. Such a reading is impossible here.

- (75) a. akhil ravi-to sameer-kosam shreyas-ni pogid-incu-kunn-aaḍu
 akhil ravi-INSTR sameer-FOR shreyas-ACC praise-CAUS-KUN-PST-3MS
 'Akhil, (*for his benefit), made Ravi praise Shreyas for Sameer'
- b. akhil ravi-to sameer-kosam school fee kaṭṭ-inču-kun-aa-ḍu
 akhil ravi-INSTR sameer-INSTR school fee pay-CAUS-KUN-PST-3MS
 'Akhil, (*for his benefit), made Ravi pay school fees for Sameer'

While the combinatorial restrictions on *kun* showed the need for a complex event, the proper treatment of causatives, given *kun*'s behaviour, requires that the syntactic arguments be participants of the same event. This tension can be resolved once we recognize that events can include their end-points as *parts of themselves* (Pietroski, 2005, Williams, 2015, Zimmermann & Amaechi, 2025).

5 Homophonous anticausative marking

A wide variety of genetically and areally unrelated languages make use of the same element to mark reflexive and anticausative verbs (Haspelmath, 1993). This multifunctionality admits two possible explanations: homophony or underlying unity. In this section, I show that the two uses of the string are the result of two different abstract morphemes and model the homophony as a case of syncretism.

The Telugu verbal suffix *kun*, too, has a reflexive use, which I have focused on here, and an anticausative use (76). Even though Dravidian languages are relatively underrepresented in the generative literature, the properties of *kun* and its cognates are among the most well-studied aspects of the family (see Kissock 1995, Mohanan & Mohanan 1998, Subbarao & Lalitha Murthy 1999, Lidz 2001a, 2004, Sundaresan 2012, 2016, Sundaresan & McFadden 2017, Ahn 2015, Safir & Selvanathan 2017b, Balusu 2019, Baker 2022, *i.a.*). These analyses of the verbal reflexive and its multifunctionality cover the full range of plausibility. Instead of arguing against the specific aspects of these proposals, I will simply make my case here.

- (76) talupu moosu-**kun**-in-di
 door close-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘The door closed’

As noted above, there are two possible families of explanations for this multifunctionality: one in which it is the same morpheme in the two uses and another in which the two uses correspond to two different morphemes that are either homophonous or syncretic (Alexiadou et al., 2015, Balusu, 2019, a.o.). The first family includes analyses where the morpheme is uniformly reflexive (Chierchia, 2004, Koontz-Garboden, 2009, Sundaresan, 2012, a.o.) or where the morpheme marks the absence of an argument (Kissock, 1995, Embick, 1998, Lidz, 2004).

We have already seen evidence in the preceding sections that no arguments need be missing in the presence of the verbal reflexive—they may, but they need not. Before arguments can be made against the uniformly reflexive analysis, some relevant background. Recall that *kun* is necessarily *agent* oriented. In addition to experiencers, it is also incompatible with non-agentive causes (77).³⁸

- (77) a. #bombu (dan-ni adi) pel-ču-kun-in-di
 bomb (3NS-ACC 3NS) burst-CAUS-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘The bomb exploded itself’
 b. #toofanu addaan-ni viru-ču-kun-in-di
 storm window-ACC break-CAUS-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘The storm broke the window (for itself)’

Descriptively speaking, detransitivizing some predicates simply requires the absence of the causative morpheme. In a transitive configuration, *virugu* ‘break’ needs a causative morpheme (78a). In the intransitive variant, while the absence of the causative suffices, *kun* can optionally be suffixed (78b). With some other predicates like *teruvu* ‘open’, the intransitive variant requires *kun* on top of the causative morpheme (79). I assume that the two classes are listed.

- (78) a. amit addam viri-č-ææ-ɖu
 amit window break-CAUS-PST-3MS
 ‘Amit broke the window’
 b. addam virug-(kun)-in-di
 window break-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘The window broke’
 (79) a. amit talupu teri-č-ææ-ɖu
 amit door open-CAUS-PST-3MS
 ‘Amit opened the door’

³⁸ The sentence becomes acceptable if the bomb or the storm are construed as capable of agency.

- b. talupu teru-ču-**kun**-in-di
 door open-CAUS-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘The door opened’

Back to the argument. Four facts speak against a uniformly reflexive analysis: First, *kun*-marked anticausatives cannot be interpreted reflexively (80). Second, they are incompatible with agent-oriented adverbs (81), and we know that reflexive *kun* needs an *agent* and not simply an ‘effector’. Third, reflexive anaphors are incompatible with anticausative *kun* (82). The reflexive anaphors themselves are not agent-oriented: an indirect object can bind a direct object anaphor (Messick & Raghatham, 2025). Finally, for verbs of the *break*-class, a reflexive interpretation is only possible when the causative morpheme is present, unlike (78b).

- (80) addam virugu-(kun)-in-di
 window break-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘The window broke (# itself)’
- (81) #addam jaagrattagaa virugu-(kun)-in-di
 window carefully break-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘The window broke carefully’
- (82) *addam **dan-ni adi** virugu-kun-in-di
 window 3NS-ACC 3NS break-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘The window broke’

Indeed, as we saw in the previous section, reflexive *kun* requires its complement to be interpreted as a complex process which we diagnosed by the presence of an ambiguity with *again*: (83) shows no ambiguity, with or without *kun*, and only admits a restitutive reading. If *kun*-marked anticausatives are in fact marked with just reflexive *kun*, they should allow a reflexive interpretation, agent-oriented adverbs, reflexive anaphors, and in general pattern like other reflexives. They don’t. Anticausative and reflexive *kuns*, therefore, cannot be identical.

- (83) addam maḷḷi virug-(kun)-in-di
 window again break-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘The window broke again’ ✗ (low) repetitive

Arguing against a uniformly reflexive analysis for marked anticausatives in Indo-European, Schäfer & Vivanco (2016) suggest that the marked anticausatives form a scale with their causative counterparts. The existence of this scale results in the anticausative contributing an implicature that no particular cause can be identified. Such an analysis predicts that the implicature can be cancelled by a follow-up explicitly identifying the agent/cause. The Telugu facts, unlike the languages S&V study, don’t conform to this prediction (84).

- (84) a. talupu teru-ču-kun-indi
 door open-CAUS-KUN-3NS
 ‘The door opened’
 b. #in fact, Amith terič-ææ-đu
 in fact, Amith open-CAUS-PST-3MS
 ‘In fact, Amith opened it’

Since we are left with no off the rack analyses, I suggest stocking our shelves with a ‘no initiator’ presupposition. On this view, initiator is a thematic role that subsumes both agent and cause. That the *Hey, Wait a Minute!* clause, where the relevant reading of ‘by themselves’ is ‘no particular initiator’ (Alexiadou et al., 2015) is felicitous in (87), but not (85) suggests that *kun* contributes the ‘no particular initiator’ presupposition (cf. von Stechow 2004). Similarly, the clause can also follow sentences from the P-family (88).

- (85) addam virig-in-di
 window break-PST-3NS
 ‘The window broke’
 (86) #HWAM! I didn’t know windows could break by themselves
 (87) addam virugu-kun-in-di
 window break-KUN-PST-3NS
 ‘The window broke’ ✓ ... (86)
 (88) addam virugu-kun-ind-aa
 window break-KUN-3NS-Q
 ‘Did the window break?’ ✓ ... (86)

The present treatment of anticausative *kun* also predicts that the presupposition it contributes can be filtered in conjunctions (Karttunen, 1973). The proposed presupposition of anticausative *kun* is exactly what an overt ‘by itself’ asserts. Assuming that *by itself* is an adverbial modifier, its place in the semantic representation for (89) is a conjunct modifying the breaking event with *kun*’s semantic contribution serving as another conjunct. The HWAM! clause is no longer a felicitous follow-up in (89) with an overt *by itself*, showing that the presupposition is now filtered. Concretely, I submit (90) as anticausative *kun*’s semantic value.

- (89) a. addam daan-anta-ku adi virugu-kun-indi
 window 3NS-BY-DAT 3NS break-KUN-3NS
 ‘The window broke by itself’ # ... (86)
 (90) $\llbracket \text{kun}_{\text{AC}} \rrbracket = \lambda P \lambda e : \neg \exists x [\text{initiator } x e]. P e$

Phonology		Voice	Semantics
/kun/	$\Leftarrow$	$[-A, +K] \Rightarrow$	$\lambda P \lambda e : \neg \exists x [\text{initiator } x e] . P e$
		$[+A, +K] \Rightarrow$	$\lambda x \lambda e . \text{agent } x e \wedge \exists R \in \Theta [R x e]$
$\emptyset$	$\Leftarrow$	$[+A, -K] \Rightarrow$	$\lambda x \lambda e . \text{agent } x e$
		$[-A, -K] \Rightarrow$	$\lambda \alpha . \alpha$

Table 1: Voices, and their interpretation at the interfaces

This proposal makes another prediction: the presupposition of anticausative *kun* implies that (87), with the anticausative *kun*, cannot be felicitously followed by a clause identifying the breaker, but (85), without it, can. This is true (91–92).

- (91) addam virig-in-di ... in fact, Amith viri-č-ææ-ḍu
window break-PST-3NS ... in fact, Amith break-CAUS-PST-3MS
‘The window broke ... in fact, Amith broke it’
- (92) addam virugu-kun-in-di ... # in fact, Amith viri-č-ææ-ḍu
window break-KUN-PST-3NS ... in fact, Amith break-CAUS-PST-3MS
‘The window broke ... # in fact, Amith broke it’

The data so far argues (in sympathy with [Balusu 2019](#)) that the reflexive and anticausative uses of *kun* arise from an underlying difference, obscured on the surface. The difference here can be captured either by appealing to an accidental homophony, or due to syncretism. Given the crosslinguistically robust multifunctionality, I suggest that the two morphemes are syncretic, and capture it with underspecification of the vocabulary item *kun*.

In particular, I suggest that the anticausative and reflexive morphemes in Telugu share a purely formal feature, $[+K]$.³⁹ I also assume, following [Alexiadou et al. 2015](#) and the fact that anticausative *kun* can be suffixed to the causative morpheme, that the former is another flavour of voice. The syncretism then, is the result of spelling out two different flavours of Voice that share a feature. (1) summarizes the possible voices. The regular Voice morpheme that introduces agents has, on this view, the features $[+A, -K]$. The last cell in the paradigm, $[-A, -K]$ is given for completeness — given it has neither a semantic nor a phonological contribution, detecting this is rather tricky.

³⁹ The natural class picked out by this feature might have a diachronic source, but on my analysis there is no synchronic grounding, a bullet I am happy to bite. The class(es) of latinate plural taking nouns in English can be fruitfully analysed in similar terms. Of course, it could also turn out that on the final analysis, the reflexive and the anticausative are merely homophonous and not even syncretic. This state of affairs seems perfectly compatible with the broader claims about the two uses made here.

6 Conclusion and Outlook

This paper provided a thorough description and analysis of the Telugu verbal reflexive where the morpheme assigns two thematic roles to the nominal merged in its specifier. This theory, in conjunction with the possibility of an indefinite thematic role, and a need for complex process events, I argued, makes for a descriptively adequate theory of Telugu verbal reflexivity.

Along the way, I made the case for a rich inventory of thematic roles. Given the thematic variability of the Telugu verbal reflexive, it seems to me that the program of reducing thematic roles to a shorthand for syntactic configuration needs to be rethought (Hale & Keyser 2002, Ramchand 2008, Borer 2005). However, reifying thematic roles as objects of the theory does not need to come with a theory governing their distribution. I argued against two such theories with lasting relevance: The Theta Criterion and the UTAH. While reduction and the two mapping theories are too strong, it need not be replaced by a lawless world of argument introduction. I suggested here that the advances of the reductive theories should be seen as contributing to our understanding of the regularity of syntactic maps, while at the same time admitting a degree of flexibility.

If a morpheme in a language can assign an indefinite thematic role in conjunction with another thematic role then it is possible that there exists a language where a morpheme solely assigns the indefinite thematic role. That is, we predict the existence of applicative morphemes with a meaning like (93). The applicative head in Chichewa comes close — its choice is restricted to beneficiary, instrument, location, as well as purpose (Alsina & Mchombo, 1990, Mchombo, 2004). Whether or not the Chichewa applicative or an applicative in another language exactly fits the bill remains to be seen. The analysis of the causative in isiXhosa by Myler & Mali (2021) makes use of a similar indefinite ranging over a smaller set of roles.⁴⁰

$$(93) \quad \llbracket \text{Appl}_{\text{FC}} \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda e. \exists R \in \Theta' [R x e]$$

I also made the case against theories where argument structural configurations are projected from individual lexical items. If we can't have projection, then there can be no lexical operations either. Of course, this is not to deny that individual lexical items seem to place restrictions on argument structural configuration they can find themselves in. What is being denied is that these restrictions apply in the *grammatical* component of the language faculty (Borer, 2005, Marantz, 2013, Lohndal, 2014).

⁴⁰ [Anonymized, P.C.] raises another intriguing possibility, that although should generally be countenanced on any theory that admits bundling of argument structural functions, the present account brings to the fore: a morpheme that assigns two thematic roles, either to two different nominals ($\lambda x \lambda y \lambda e. \theta_1 x e \wedge \theta_2 y e$), or one role to one nominal and another to an indefinite. The second option might be a fruitful way of analyzing anti-passives. If multiple externally merged specifiers, or delayed saturation à la Myler 2016 are allowed, then the first option could be thought of as an analysis of an 'anti-reflexive' element. Whether or not such elements exist, and what their proper treatment is, I must leave for future work.

In differentiating the reflexive use and the anticausative use of the string *kun*, I argued that the two are merely syncretic, and not identical. I also suggested that while the reflexive introduces an agent, the anticausative contributes a ‘no initiator’ presupposition. This discovery adds to the typology of marked anticausatives. I must stress, however, that my arguments against unifying reflexive and anticausative uses are restricted to Telugu, and the present proposal is perfectly compatible with unificatory approaches to similar morphemes in other languages (Alexiadou et al., 2015, Kastner, 2017).

Indeed, if universal grammar is impoverished, we should expect cross-linguistic variation in the behaviour of categories hitherto considered monolithic (Legate, 2021). Reflexive voice, on this view, is not a monolithic category with uniform cross-linguistic behaviour to be chosen (or not) in the course of acquisition. So long as the behaviour of verbal reflexives in different languages is compatible with independently attested operations — e.g., moving from one ‘theta-position’ to another (Kastner, 2017, Akkus & Paparounas, 2025), or a ‘bundling’ of thematic role assignment (this paper, Paparounas 2023), or AGREE (Baker & Camargo Souza, 2020, Baker, 2022) — they fall squarely within the realm of possibility.

References

- Abusch, Dorit. 1989. Reflexives, reference shifters, and attitudes. In Jane Fee & Kathryn Hunt (eds.), *Proceedings of WCCFL 8*, 1–13. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
- Ahn, Byron. 2015. *Giving reflexivity a voice: Twin reflexives in English*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Los Angeles dissertation. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8g31j3gn>.
- Ahn, Byron. 2016. Reflexes of reflexivity: Locality and the interfaces. In Ross Burkholder, Carlos Cisneros, Emily R. Coppess, Julian Grove, Emily A. Hanink, Hilary McMahan, Cherry Meyer, Natalia Pavlou, Özge Sarıgül, Adam Roth Singerman & Anqi Zhang (eds.), *Proceedings from the 50th annual meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, 1–16.
- Ahn, Byron. 2022. Mapping OUT-argument structure. *Syntax* 25(4). 417–467. <https://doi.org/10.1111/synt.12241>.
- Akkus, Faruk & Lefteris Paparounas. 2025. Turkish verbal reflexives and movement. Ms., University of Massachusetts, Amherst and Université du Québec à Montréal. <https://lingbuzz.net/lingbuzz/007275>.
- Alexiadou, Artemis. 2014. Roots in transitivity alternations: afto/auto reflexives. In Artemis Alexiadou, Hagit Borer & Florian Schäfer (eds.), *The syntax of roots and the roots of syntax*, 57–80. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Alexiadou, Artemis, Elena Anagnostopoulou & Florian Schäfer. 2015. *External arguments in transitivity alternations: A layering approach*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Alexiadou, Artemis & Edit Doron. 2012. The syntactic construction of two non-active Voices: Passive and middle1. *Journal of linguistics* 48(1). 1–34.
- Alsina, Alex & Sam Mchombo. 1990. The syntax of applicatives in Chicheŵa: problems for a theta theoretic asymmetry. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 8(4). 493–506. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00133691>.
- Árnadóttir, Hlíf, Thórhallur Eythórsson & Einar Freyr Sigurðsson. 2011. The passive of reflexive verbs in Icelandic. *Nordlyd* 37. 39–97. <https://doi.org/10.7557/12.2024>.
- Asami, Daiki & Benjamin Bruening. 2025. Subjectless readings of again: A response to Bale (2007) and Smith and Yu (2021). *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 1–25.
- Baker, Mark. 1985. The mirror principle and morphosyntactic explanation. *Linguistic Inquiry* 16(3). 373–415.
- Baker, Mark. 1988a. *Incorporation: A theory of grammatical function changing*. Chicago, IL & London, UK: University of Chicago Press.
- Baker, Mark. 1988b. Theta theory and the syntax of applicatives in chichewa. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 6(3). 353–389.
- Baker, Mark. 1997. Thematic roles and syntactic structure. In Liliane Haegeman (ed.), *Elements of grammar*, 73–137. Springer.
- Baker, Mark. 2022. On Agree without agreement as a source of reflexive voice constructions. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 7. <https://doi.org/10.16995/glossa.5732>.
- Baker, Mark & Livia Camargo Souza. 2020. Agree without agreement: Switch-reference and reflexive voice in two Panoan languages. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 1–

62. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-019-09463-w>.
- Baker, Mark, Kyle Johnson & Ian Roberts. 1989. Passive arguments raised. *Linguistic Inquiry* 20(2). 219–251. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4178625>.
- Baker, Mark, Ken Safir & Justine Sikuku. 2012. Sources of (a)symmetry in Bantu double object constructions. In *Proceedings of the 30th west coast conference on formal linguistics*, 54–64. Somerville, MA: Cascadia Proceedings Project.
- Bale, Alan Clinton. 2007. Quantifiers and verb phrases: An exploration of propositional complexity. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 25(3). 447–483.
- Balusu, Rahul. 2014. Lexical semantics of transitivizer light verbs in Telugu. In Chandra Pritha & Richa Srishti (eds.), *The lexicon—syntax interface: Perspectives from South Asian languages* Linguistik Aktuell/Linguistics Today, 101–126. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Balusu, Rahul. 2019. Anticausative and reflexive verbal marker and aspectual light verb interactions in Telugu. In Maggie Baird & Jonathan Pesetsky (eds.), *Proceedings of the Northeast Linguistics Society* 49, vol. 1, 101–110. University of Massachusetts GLSA.
- Bandi-Rao, Shoba & Marcel den Dikken. 2014. Light switches: On *v* as a pivot in codeswitching, and the nature of the ban on word-internal switches. In Jeff MacSwan (ed.), *Grammatical theory and bilingual codeswitching*, 161–184. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Béjar, Susana & Milan Rezac. 2009. Cyclic agree. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40(1). 35–73. <https://doi.org/10.1162/ling.2009.40.1.35>.
- Bhaskararao, Peri & Karumuri Venkata Subbarao. 2004. *Non-nominative subjects*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Boeckx, Cedric. 2010. A tale of two minimalisms: Reflections on the plausibility of crash-proof syntax, and its free-merge alternative. In Michael Putnam (ed.), *Exploring crash-proof grammars*, 105–123. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Borer, Hagit. 2005. *The normal course of events*, vol. II Structuring Sense. Oxford University Press.
- Bresnan, Joan. 1982. The passive in lexical theory. In Joan Bresnan (ed.), *The mental representation of grammatical relations*, 3–86. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bresnan, Joan & Lioba Moshi. 1990. Object asymmetries in comparative Bantu syntax. *Linguistic Inquiry* 21(2). 147–185. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4178668>.
- Bruening, Benjamin. 2001. QR obeys superiority: Frozen scope and ACD. *Linguistic Inquiry* 32. 233–273.
- Bruening, Benjamin. 2013. By phrases in passives and nominals. *Syntax* 16(1). 1–41.
- Bruening, Benjamin. 2024. English middles and implicit arguments. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 9(1).
- Carlson, Greg N. 1984. Thematic roles and their role in semantic interpretation. *Linguistics* 22. 259–279.
- Champollion, Lucas. 2016. Covert distributivity in algebraic event semantics. *Semantics and Pragmatics* 9(15). 1–65. <https://doi.org/10.3765/sp.9.15>.
- Champollion, Lucas. 2017. *Parts of a whole: Distributivity as a bridge between aspect and measurement*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

- Chierchia, Gennaro. 2004. A semantics for unaccusatives and its syntactic consequences. In Artemis Alexiadou, Elena Anagnostopoulou & Martin Everaert (eds.), *The unaccusativity puzzle*, 22–59. Oxford University Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1957. *Syntactic structures*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1981. *Lectures on government and binding: The Pisa lectures*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1986. *Knowledge of language: Its nature, origin, and use*. New York: Praeger.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1995. *The minimalist program*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2004. Beyond explanatory adequacy. In Adriana Belletti (ed.), *Structures and beyond*, vol. 3 The cartography of syntactic structures, 104–131. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2013. Problems of projection. *Lingua* 130. 33–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2012.12.003>.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2015. Problems of projection: Extensions. In Elisa Di Domenico, Cornelia Hamann & Simona Matteini (eds.), *Structures, strategies and beyond: Studies in honour of Adriana Belletti*, 1–16. John Benjamins Amsterdam.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2021. Minimalism: Where are we now, and where can we hope to go. *Gengo Kenkyu (Journal of the Linguistic Society of Japan)* 160. 1–41.
- Cinque, Guglielmo. 1999. *Adverbs and functional heads: A cross-linguistic perspective*. Oxford University Press.
- Cinque, Guglielmo & Luigi Rizzi. 2009. The cartography of syntactic structures. In Bernd Heine & Heiko Narrog (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of linguistic analysis*, 51–66. Oxford University Press.
- Collins, Chris. 2005. A smuggling approach to the passive in english. *Syntax* 8(2). 81–120. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9612.2005.00076.x>.
- Collins, Chris. 2024. *Principles of argument structure: A Merge-based approach*. MIT Press.
- Dalrymple, Mary, Stuart M Shieber & Fernando CN Pereira. 1991. Ellipsis and higher-order unification. *Linguistics and philosophy* 14. 399–452.
- Diercks, Michael & Justine Sikuku. 2013. Object clitics in a Bantu language: Pronominal incorporation in Lubukusu. Ms., Pomona College and Moi University.
- Dimitriadis, Alexis. 2012. An event semantics for the Theta system. In Martin Everaert, Marijana Marelj & Tal Siloni (eds.), *The theta system*, 308–353. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Dimitriadis, Alexis & Martin Everaert. 2014. How many theta roles in a reflexive verb? *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 61(3). 247–269.
- Dobrovie-Sorin, Carmen. 2017. Reflexive marking in Romance: Voice and feature deficiency. In Martin Everaert & Henk van Riemsdijk (eds.), *The wiley blackwell companion to syntax, second edition*, 1–105. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Doron, Edit. 2003. Agency and voice: The semantics of the Semitic templates. *Natural language semantics* 11(1). 1–67.
- Dowty, David. 1991. Thematic proto-roles and argument selection. *Language* 67(3). 547–

619. <https://doi.org/10.2307/415037>.
- Drummond, Alex, Dave Kush & Norbert Hornstein. 2011. Minimalist construal: Two approaches to A and B. In *The oxford handbook of linguistic minimalism*, 396–426. Oxford University Press Oxford.
- Elkins, Noah, Justin Royer & Tessa Scott. 2024. Severing verbs from their arguments: Directionals and argument structure in mam. Ms., Haverford College, UQAM and UC Berkeley. <https://lingbuzz.net/lingbuzz/008584>.
- Embick, David. 1998. Voice systems and the syntax/morphology interface. In Heidi Harley (ed.), *MITWPL 32: Papers from the UPenn/MIT roundtable on argument structure and aspect*, 41–72. Cambridge, MA: MITWPL.
- Everaert, Martin, Marijana Marelj & Tal Siloni. 2012. *The theta system: Argument structure at the interface*. Oxford University Press.
- Eythórsson, Thórhallur. 2008. The New Passive in Icelandic really is a passive. In Thórhallur Eythórsson (ed.), *Grammatical change and linguistic theory: The Rosendal papers*, 173–220. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Fauconnier, Gilles. 1985. *Mental spaces*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- von Fintel, Kai. 2004. Would you believe it? *The King of France* is back! (presuppositions and truth-value intuitions). In Marga Reimer & Anne Bezuidenhout (eds.), *Descriptions and beyond*, 315–341. Oxford University.
- Gaby, Alice. 2008. Distinguishing reciprocals from reflexives in Kuuk Thaayorre. In Ekkehard König & Volker Gast (eds.), *Reciprocals and reflexives: Theoretical and typological explorations*, 259–288. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Hale, Ken & Samuel Jay Keyser. 2002. *Prolegomenon to a theory of argument structure*. MIT press.
- Harley, Heidi. 2011. A minimalist approach to argument structure. In Cedric Boeckx (ed.), *The oxford handbook of linguistic minimalism*, 427–448. Oxford University Press.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 1993. More on the typology of inchoative/causative verb alternations. In Bernard Comrie & Maria Polinsky (eds.), *Causatives and transitivity*, vol. 23 Studies in Language Companion, 87–121. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Hestvik, Arild. 1995. Reflexives and ellipsis. *Natural Language Semantics* 3(2). 211–237.
- Hicks, Glyn. 2009. *The derivation of anaphoric realtions*. Amstedam/Philiadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Higginbotham, James. 1985. On semantics. *Linguistic inquiry* 16(4). 547–593. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4178457>.
- Holmberg, Anders, Michelle Sheehan & Jenneke Van der Wal. 2019. Movement from the double object construction is not fully symmetrical. *Linguistic Inquiry* 50(4). 677–722. https://doi.org/10.1162/ling_a_00322.
- Hornstein, Norbert. 1999. Movement and control. *Linguistic Inquiry* 30(1). 69–96. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002438999553968>.
- Iyer, Jyoti. 2023. *Counterdirectionality in the grammar: Reversals and restitutions*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts dissertation.

- Jackendoff, Ray. 1992. Mme. Tussaud meets the binding theory. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 10(1). 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00135357>.
- Jackendoff, Ray. 1997. *The architecture of the language faculty*. MIT Press.
- Karttunen, Lauri. 1973. Presuppositions of compound sentences. *Linguistic Inquiry* 4(2). 169–193. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4177763>.
- Kastner, Itamar. 2017. Reflexive verbs in hebrew: Deep unaccusativity meets lexical semantics. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.299>.
- Kastner, Itamar. 2019. Templatic morphology as an emergent property: Roots and functional heads in Hebrew. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 37. 571–619.
- Kastner, Itamar. 2020. *Voice at the interfaces: The syntax, semantics, and morphology of the Hebrew verb*. Language Science Press.
- Kayne, Richard. 1975. *French syntax: The transformational cycle*. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.
- Kissock, Madelyn Jean. 1995. *Reflexive-middle constructions and verb raising in Telugu*: Harvard University dissertation.
- Koontz-Garboden, Andrew. 2009. Anticausativization. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 27(1). 77. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-008-9058-9>.
- Kratzer, Angelika. 1996. Severing the external argument from its verb. In Johan Rooryck & Laurie Zaling (eds.), *Phrase structure and the lexicon*, 109–137. Springer.
- Krejci, Bonnie Jean. 2012. *Causativization as antireflexivization: A study of middle and ingestive verbs*. Austin, TX: University of Texas MA thesis. <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/ETD-UT-2012-05-5704>.
- Krishnan, Gayathri G & Vaijayanthi M Sarma. 2023. Unlocking the verbal spine in Malayalam: Past tense is key. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 8(1).
- Labelle, Marie. 2008. The french reflexive and reciprocal se. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 26(4). 833–876. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-008-9053-1>.
- Labelle, Marie. 2022. The French intensifier *auto*, and the roles of v and Voice in introducing agents. *Journal of French Language Studies* 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959269522000035>.
- Landman, Fred. 2000. *Events and plurality: The Jerusalem lectures*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Larson, Richard K. 1988. On the double object construction. *Linguistic Inquiry* 19(3). 335–391. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25164901>.
- Larson, Richard K. 1990. Double objects revisited: Reply to Jackendoff. *Linguistic Inquiry* 21(4). 589–632. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4178697>.
- Larson, Richard K. 2014. *On shell structure*. Routledge.
- Legate, Julie Anne. 2014. *Voice and v: Lessons from Acehnese*. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.
- Legate, Julie Anne. 2021. Noncanonical passives: A typology of voices in an impoverished Universal Grammar. *Annual Review of Linguistics* 7(1). 157–176.
- Lidz, Jeffrey. 1996. *Dimensions of reflexivity*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware dissertation.
- Lidz, Jeffrey. 2001a. The argument structure of verbal reflexives. *Natural Language & Lin-*

- guistic Theory* 19(2). 311–353. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010676623092>.
- Lidz, Jeffrey. 2001b. Condition R. *Linguistic Inquiry* 32(1). 123–140. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002438901554603>.
- Lidz, Jeffrey. 2004. Causation and reflexivity in Kannada. In Veneeta Dayal & Anoop Mahajan (eds.), *Clause structure in South Asian languages*, 93–130. Springer.
- Lohndal, Terje. 2014. *Phrase structure and argument structure: A case study of the syntax-semantics interface* (Oxford Studies in Theoretical Linguistics 49). Oxford University Press.
- Marantz, Alec. 1993. Implications of asymmetries in double object constructions. In Sam A. Mchombo (ed.), *Theoretical aspects of Bantu grammar*, 113–150. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
- Marantz, Alec. 2013. Verbal argument structure: Events and participants. *Lingua* 130. 152–168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2012.10.012>.
- Marlo, Michael R. 2015. Exceptional properties of the reflexive in Bantu languages. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 24(1). 22–22. <https://doi.org/10.53228/njas.v24i1.132>.
- McGinnis, Martha. 2022. Reflexive clitics are verbal, not pronominal. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics/Revue canadienne de linguistique* 67(3). 328–352. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cnj.2022.28>.
- Mchombo, Sam. 2004. *The syntax of Chichewa*. Cambridge University Press.
- McKillen, Alanah. 2016. *On the interpretation of reflexive pronouns*. Montreal, Quebec: McGill University dissertation. <https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/vt150m77n>.
- Merchant, Jason. 2013. Voice and ellipsis. *Linguistic Inquiry* 44(1). 77–108.
- Messick, Troy & Sreekar Raghotham. 2024. The locality of cross-clausal A-operations: A view from Telugu. In Kutay Serova & M. K. Snigaroff (eds.), *Proceedings of CLS 59*, 275–295.
- Messick, Troy & Sreekar Raghotham. 2025. On case-copying reflexives. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-024-09632-6>.
- Mohanan, KP & Tara Mohanan. 1998. Strong and weak projection: Lexical reflexives and reciprocals. In Miriam Butt & Wilhelm Geuder (eds.), *Projection of arguments: Syntactic and semantic constraints*, 165–94. Stanford, CA: CSLI.
- Moyse-Faurie, Claire. 2008. Constructions expressing middle, reflexive and reciprocal situations in some Oceanic languages. In Ekkehard König & Volker Gast (eds.), *Reciprocals and reflexives: Theoretical and typological explorations*, 105–169. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Murphy, Andrew & Savio Meyase. 2022. Licensing and anaphora in Tenyidie. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 7(1). 1–59. <https://doi.org/10.16995/glossa.5740>.
- Murray, Sarah E. 2007. Dynamics of reflexivity and reciprocity. In Maria Aloni, Paul Dekker & Floris Roelofsen (eds.), *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Amsterdam Colloquium*, 157–162. Amsterdam: ILLC/Department of Philosophy, University of Amsterdam. <http://www.semanticsarchive.net/Archive/DgzNzc1Y/>.
- Murray, Sarah E. 2008. Reflexivity and reciprocity with(out) underspecification. In Alte Grønn (ed.), *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 12*, 455–469. Oslo, Norway: ILOS.

- <http://www.semanticsarchive.net/Archive/2ZjNGJiN/>.
- Myler, Neil. 2016. *Building and interpreting possession sentences*. MIT press.
- Myler, Neil & Zoliswa O Mali. 2021. Two places for causees in productive isiXhosa morphological causatives. *Syntax* 24(1). 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/synt.12208>.
- Ott, Dennis. 2010. Grammaticality, interfaces, and UG. In Michael Putnam (ed.), *Exploring crashproof grammars*, 89–104. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Paillé, Mathieu. 2025. Beyond thematic uniqueness. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 10(1).
- Paparounas, Lefteris. 2023. *Voice from syntax to syncretism*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania dissertation. <https://repository.upenn.edu/handle/20.500.14332/59490>.
- Parsons, Terence. 1990. *Events in the semantics of English: A study in subatomic semantics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Parsons, Terence. 1995. Thematic relations and arguments. *Linguistic Inquiry* 635–662.
- Patel-Grosz, Pritty. 2013. The Principle A problem. *Journal of South Asian Linguistics* 6.
- Patel-Grosz, Pritty & Sigrid Beck. 2019. Different again. *Semantics and Pragmatics* 12. 3–1.
- Pesetsky, David. 1996. *Zero syntax: Experiencers and cascades*. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.
- Peterson, David A. 2007. *Applicative constructions*. Oxford University Press.
- Pietroski, Paul. 2005. *Events and semantic architecture*. Oxford University Press.
- Polinsky, Maria. 2013. Applicative constructions. In Matthew S. Dryer & Martin Haspelmath (eds.), *The world atlas of language structures online*, Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. <https://wals.info/chapter/109>.
- Pylkkänen, Liina. 2008. *Introducing arguments*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Raghotham, Sreekar. 2024. Loose nominals. In *Proceedings of the Amsterdam Colloquium 2024*, 365–370.
- Ramchand, Gillian. 2007. Events in syntax: Modification and predication. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 1(5). 476–497. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2007.00025.x>.
- Ramchand, Gillian. 2008. *Verb meaning and the lexicon: A first-phase syntax*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CB09780511486319>.
- Ranero, Rodrigo. 2021. *Identity conditions on ellipsis*. College Park, MD: University of Maryland dissertation. <https://doi.org/10.13016/vn22-v8xt>.
- Reinhart, Tanya. 2002. The Theta system: An overview. *Theoretical Linguistics* 28(3). 229–290.
- Reinhart, Tanya, Martin Everaert (ed.), Marijana Marelj (ed.) & Eric Reuland (ed.). 2016. *Concepts, syntax, and their interface: The theta system*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Reinhart, Tanya & Eric Reuland. 1993. Reflexivity. *Linguistic Inquiry* 24(4). 657–720. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4178836>.
- Reinhart, Tanya & Tal Siloni. 2004. Against the unaccusative analysis of reflexives. In Artemis Alexiadou, Elena Anagnostopoulou & Martin Everaert (eds.), *The unaccusativity puzzle: Explorations of the syntax-lexicon interface*, 159–180. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Reinhart, Tanya & Tal Siloni. 2005. The lexicon-syntax parameter: Reflexivization and other arity operations. *Linguistic Inquiry* 36(3). 389–436. <https://doi.org/10.1162/0024389054396881>.
- Reuland, Eric. 2001. Primitives of binding. *Linguistic inquiry* 32(3). 439–492.
- Reuland, Eric. 2011. *Anaphora and language design*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Reuland, Eric. 2017. Why is reflexivity so special? understanding the world of reflexives. *Studia linguistica* 71(1-2). 12–59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/stul.12070>.
- Reuland, Eric. 2018. Reflexives and reflexivity. *Annual Review of Linguistics* 4. 81–107. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-linguistics-011817-045500>.
- Reuland, Eric & Yoad Winter. 2009. Binding without identity: Towards a unified semantics for bound and exempt anaphors. In *Discourse anaphora and anaphor resolution colloquium*, 69–79. Springer.
- Rizzi, Luigi. 1986. On chain formation. In Hagit Borer (ed.), *The syntax of pronominal clitics*, 65–95. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/97890004373150_005.
- Rizzi, Luigi. 1997. The fine structure of the left periphery. In Liliane Haegeman (ed.), *Elements of grammar*, 281–337. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Rudin, Deniz. 2019. Head-based syntactic identity in sluicing. *Linguistic Inquiry* 50(2). 253–283. https://doi.org/10.1162/ling_a_00308.
- Safir, Ken. 2004a. *The syntax of anaphora*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Safir, Ken. 2004b. *The syntax of (in)dependence*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Safir, Ken. 2010. Viable syntax: Rethinking minimalist architecture. *Biolinguistics* 4(1). 035–107.
- Safir, Ken. 2019. The a/ā distinction as an epiphenomenon. *Linguistic Inquiry* 50(2). 285–336. https://doi.org/10.1162/ling_a_00305.
- Safir, Ken & Naga Selvanathan. 2017a. Niger-Congo transitive reciprocal constructions and polysemy with reflexives. In Doris L. Payne, Sara Pacchiarotti & Mokaya Bosire (eds.), *Diversity in african languages*, 495–512. Berlin: Language Science Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/langsci.b121.496>.
- Safir, Ken & Naga Selvanathan. 2017b. The syntax of transitive reciprocal constructions. Ms., Rutgers University.
- Safir, Ken & Justine Sikuku. 2011. Lubukusu anaphora sketch. In Ken Safir (ed.), *Afranaph website*, <https://afanaphproject.afanaphdatabase.com>.
- Sauerland, Uli. 2013. Presuppositions and the alternative tier. In *Semantics and linguistic theory*, 156–173.
- Schäfer, Florian. 2012. The passive of reflexive verbs and its implications for theories of binding and case. *The Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 15(3). 213–268. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10828-013-9052-4>.
- Schäfer, Florian & Margot Vivanco. 2016. Anticausatives are weak scalar expressions, not reflexive expressions. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 1(1). 1–30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.36>.
- Schein, Barry. 1993. *Plurals and events*. MIT Press.
- Schein, Barry. 2002. Events and the semantic content of thematic relations. In Gerhard

- Preyer & Georg Peter (eds.), *Logical form and language*, 263–344. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schein, Barry. 2017. *‘And’: Conjunction reduction redux*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Sikuku, Justine. 2011. Anaphora in African languages: Lubukusu. Afranaph Case File.
- Siloni, Tal. 2012. Reciprocal verbs and symmetry. *Natural language & linguistic theory* 30. 261–320.
- Smith, Ryan Walter & Jianrong Yu. 2022. Agentless presuppositions and the semantics of verbal roots. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 40(3). 875–909.
- Smith, Ryan Walter & Jianrong Yu. 2024. Introducing agents by binding indices: Implications for subjectless presuppositions and agent entailments. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 9(1).
- Spathas, Giorgos, Artemis Alexiadou & Florian Schäfer. 2015. Middle voice and reflexive interpretations: afto-prefixation in Greek. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 33. 1293–1350. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-014-9279-z>.
- Sportiche, Dominique. 2014. Assessing unaccusativity and reflexivity: Using focus alternatives to decide what gets which θ -role. *Linguistic Inquiry* 45(2). 305–321.
- Sportiche, Dominique. 2023. Constraints on reflexivization. <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/005488>.
- von Stechow, Armin. 1996. The different readings of *wieder* ‘again’: A structural account. *Journal of Semantics* 13(2). 87–138. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jos/13.2.87>.
- Subbarao, Karumuri Venkata & Peri Bhaskararao. 2004. Non-nominative subjects in Telugu. In *Non-nominative subjects*, vol. 2, 161–196. John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tsl.61.10sub>.
- Subbarao, K.V. & B Lalitha Murthy. 1999. Lexical anaphors and pronouns in Telugu. In Barbara C. Lust, Kashi Wali, James Gair & K.V. Subbarao (eds.), *Lexical anaphors and pronouns in selected South Asian languages*, 217–276. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110818888.217>.
- Sundaresan, Sandhya. 2012. *Context and (co)reference in the syntax and its interfaces*: Universitetet i Tromsø and Universität Stuggart dissertation. <https://hdl.handle.net/10037/4835>.
- Sundaresan, Sandhya. 2016. Perspectival reflexivity (or what makes reflexives special): a case study from Tamil. In Rahul Balusu & Sandhya Sundaresan (eds.), *Proceedings of Formal Approaches to South Asian Languages* 5, 123–142. CSLI Online Publications.
- Sundaresan, Sandhya & Thomas McFadden. 2017. The articulated *v* layer: evidence from Tamil. In Roberta D’Alessandro, Irene Franco & Ángel J Gallego (eds.), *The verbal domain*, Oxford University Press. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198767886.003.0007>.
- Thoms, Gary. 2013. Lexical mismatches in ellipsis and the identity condition. In *NELS* 42, 559–572. GLSA Publications.
- Tyler, Matthew. 2021. *Argument structure and argument-marking in Choctaw*: Yale University dissertation.
- Uriagereka, Juan & Paul Pietroski. 2002. Dimensions of natural language. In Juan

- Uriagereka (ed.), *Derivations: Exploring the dynamics of syntax*, London: Routledge.
- Verma, Manindra K & Karuvannur Puthanveetil Mohanan. 1990. *Experiencer subjects in South Asian languages*. Stanford, CA: Center for the Study of Language.
- Williams, Alexander. 2009. Themes, cumulativity, and resultatives: Comments on Kratzer 2003. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40(4). 686–700.
- Williams, Alexander. 2015. *Arguments in syntax and semantics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zimmermann, Malte & Mary Amaechi. 2025. One, but not the same: On complex event-formation in Igbo serial verb constructions. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 48(2). 213–264.