

Reflexivisation and reciprocity in Igbo and German

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Abstract

This paper studies reflexivisation and reciprocity as fundamental linguistic phenomena in Igbo and German languages. These linguistic phenomena played important roles in the understanding of the syntactic and semantic structures in the two languages. The objective of this paper is to explore how reflexivisation and reciprocity shed more light in the sentence formation in both Igbo and German languages; to reveal how meaning is constructed through the relationship between subjects and objects in various contexts, to uncover patterns that reveal how meaning is constructed and conveyed in various communication situations and finally to explore how German and Igbo parametrise the binding conditions of semantic interpretation that is realised in different languages. The study discovered that reflexive in German is of three categories: verbs with both external and internal argument, verbs with only an external argument and verbs with only an internal argument. Reciprocity in German is using the reflexive pronoun *sich*, albeit to indicate mutual actions or states between two or more entities. So also the plural forms of the reflexive pronouns *uns*, and *euch*, *einander*. In the Igbo language, reflexive constructions are not complex. It is formed by the adjunction of “*onwe*” to the pronominalised form of the subject or the performer of the action in the sentence.

Introduction

Reflexivisation and reciprocity are fundamental linguistic phenomena that play a crucial role in the understanding of the syntactic and semantic structures in language. These concepts not only shed light on the intricacies of sentence formation but also reveal how meaning is constructed through the relationships between subjects and objects in various contexts. The exploration of reflexivisation involves examining how reflexive pronouns interact with verbs to indicate actions performed by subjects upon themselves while reciprocity focuses on the mutual relationships expressed in sentences where two or more participants engage in reciprocal actions. Understanding these semantic structures is crucial for linguists, language teachers and learners alike, as they provide insights into the cognitive processes underlying language use and enhance our ability to communicate effectively in diverse social contexts. Such an exploration not only enriches our understanding of syntax but also sheds light on the broader principles of language structure and function across different languages. By examining reciprocal actions, researchers can uncover patterns that reveal how meaning is constructed and conveyed in various communicative situations, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic interactions.

The interpretation of reflexive constructions in language becomes crucial in the face of the principles of binding. One of the binding conditions stipulates that reflexive pronouns must be properly bound. In other words, the interpretation of reflexive pronouns must be coincident with that of their antecedents. However, the structure of reflexive constructions does not exclude or rather admits the possibility of reciprocal interpretations. This flux of semantic interpretation appears to be realised differently in different languages. It is therefore

the objective of this study to explore how German and Igbo parametrise this binding condition. It is believed that the correlation of the realisation of this principle in these objectivised languages will throw more light on the tendency of its potential universal application. This is especially as the two languages belong to different language phyla. It is especially important to give an insight into the difficulties that an Igbo learner of German or the reverse may encounter in the process of learning either of the languages.

Reflexivisation in German

Reflexive constructions are crucial for encoding self-directed actions or states, and they play a significant role in German grammar. Reflexive verbs have a special morphological marker only in the third person, namely, the reflexive pronoun, *sich* which has no number distinction and syncretises the accusative and dative cases. In the first and second persons, reflexive pronouns are identical to personal pronouns.

Different attempts have been made by scholars to classify German reflexive verbs based on different criteria. Oya (2010) categorises German reflexive verbs into three main types based on their argument structure:

Verbs with both an external and internal argument

These verbs require both a subject and an object, and the reflexive pronoun *sich* is used to indicate that the subject is also the object, e.g.

1. Ich wasche mich.

1SG.NOM wash 1SGREFL.ACC – “I wash myself.”

Verbs with only an external argument

These verbs have a subject but no object, and the reflexive pronoun *sich* is used to indicate that the action is directed towards the subject itself, e.g.

2. Ich amüsiere mich.

1SG.NOM amuse-1SGREFL.ACC – “I amuse myself. / I am having fun.”

Verbs with only an internal argument

These verbs have an object but no subject, and the reflexive pronoun *sich* is used to indicate that the action is self-directed, e.g.

3. Es fühlt sich gut an.

3SG.NOM feel 3SGREFL.ACC good PTCL – “It feels good.”

On the other hand, Hendriks, Hoeks & Spenader (2014), in their study on reflexive choice in Dutch and German, highlight the two reflexive forms or pronouns: the weak form (*sich*) and the strong form (*sich selbst*). According to them, the weak form, *sich* is used in the accusative case, while the strong form *sich selbst* is used in the nominative and genitive cases. Their

article identifies three verb classes influencing reflexive choice: inherently reflexive (Max schämt sich), accidentally reflexive (Max hasst sich selbst), and transitive verbs (Max wäscht sich) (see Hendriks, Hoeks & Spenader (2014:1). The choice between the weak and strong reflexive forms depends on the verb class and the sentence structure. The study reveals that transitive verbs can occur with both forms, while inherently reflexive verbs predominantly use the weak form, e.g.

4. Ich sehe mich im Spiegel. – weak form.

1SG.NOM see 1SGREFL.ACC in. the mirror -“I see myself in the mirror.”

5. Ich denke über mich selbst nach. – strong form

1SG.NOM think- 1SG about REFL.ACC self PTLC. -“I think about myself.”

In this comparative study, however, we will adopt the verb class approach of German grammatical tradition of examining the constructions in which the reflexive appears by considering the verbs that are used with it. Ziegler (2015) analyses German reflexive structures on the basis of a functional syntactic theory, the relational Grammar, describing interdependencies and syntactic correlations both from the syntagmatic and paradigmatic points of view instead of observing individual words only. She criticizes the traditional approach since, according to her, it does not consider the fact that an individual verb can obviously be found in different structures and that the structures themselves are not necessarily linked to the lexical properties of the individual elements that occur. Secondly, the approach cannot explain the structural relationships between the different constructions in which the reflexive pronoun ‘sich’ appears. Although the above criticisms are well taken, the traditional approach will serve the purpose of this preliminary exploration of reflexivisation and reciprocity in German and Igbo.

Let us focus on Duden’s (1998) classification and endeavour to harmonise it with that of Helbig and Buscha (1996) as much as possible. Duden (102) defines reflexive pronouns as such verbs that are used with a reflexive pronoun, whether obligatorily or optionally. Generally, the reflexive pronoun refers to the subject of the same sentence and agrees with it in person and number. However, the valency of the verb determines whether the reflexive pronoun is used in the accusative, dative or genitive case or as a prepositional case.

Special features regarding verb inflection of reflexive verbs

In German, reflexive verbs form the perfect with the modal ‘haben’, e.g.

6. Ich habe mich geschämt.

1SG.NOM have -1SGREFL.ACC be. ashamed. PTCP – “I was ashamed (of myself).”

This is also the case with reciprocal verbs, which require the accusative case:

7. Peter und Maria haben sich verliebt.

Peter and Maria have 3PLREFL.Acc PREF-love-PTCP – “Peter and Maria fell in love (with each other).”

In Example 7 the reflexive pronoun, *sich*, which is also used to express reciprocity, is in the accusative case.

In contrast, some reciprocal verbs which take the dative case form the perfect tense with the modal ‘haben’, while others use ‘sein’ for the perfect tense, e.g.

8 a. Die Zwillinge haben sich geglichen.

the.PL.twins have-3PLREFL.ACC PFV-resemble-ptcp – “The twins resembled each other.”

Here, the valency of the verb *gleichen* requires the dative case, hence, *sich* is in the dative case.

b. Sie sind sich heute zum ersten Mal begegnet.

they. NOM AUX.3PL REFL.DAT today to+the.DAT first.DAT time meet.PTCP.PFV

“They met each other today for the first time.”

The verb *begegnen* takes the dative case as well, hence the reflexive pronoun, *sich*, must be in the dative case.

b. The present participle of reflexive verbs (when used as an adjective) retains the reflexive pronoun, unlike the past participle:

9. das *sich freuende* Kind

the.NOM. REFL.ACC rejoice-PRES.PTCP-NOM.N child – the rejoicing child

c. A passive form cannot be formed with reflexive verbs. However, in colloquial German, certain expressions are used in order to achieve a special communicative effect, namely to make an energetic request:

10. Jetzt wird sich hingelegt!

now become. SGREFL.ACC PART-PFV-lay-PTCP – “Lie down now!”

d. Although the stative passive cannot be formed by reflexive verbs, they can form the stative reflexive. It is identical in form with the stative passive since it is formed with the past participle. However, the reflexive pronoun is left out:

infinitive	stative reflexive
sich waschen	gewaschen sein
sich verloben	verlobt sein

This is exemplified in the following sentences:

11. Das Kind ist gewaschen.

the. N.SG child be-3SGPFV-wash-PTCP – The child is washed.

12. Das Paar ist verlobt.

the.N.SG couple be-3SG PREF –engage –PTCP – The couple is engaged.

However, this form is possible only with some verbs which require the accusative reflexive pronoun, as in the examples above (11 and 12), while in others, it is not possible, for example *sich schämen*, (to be ashamed) *sich freuen* (to be happy) and *sich fürchten* (to fear/be afraid).

Categorisation and description of reflexive verbs

Helbig and Buscha (1996) have a very detailed, but, in our opinion, confusing classification. They are discussed here in order to ensure a comprehensive presentation. However, Duden's classification, which is discussed below, is used in the rest of this paper because of its clearer arrangement. Two main types of reflexive are first distinguished based on whether the subject nominative represents the agent of the event/action or not, namely, reflexive verbs in the real sense and reflexive forms. Reflexive verbs in the real sense refer to verbs where the subject nominative represents the event or action, since only then can the action be referred back to the subject and the identity of the pronoun with the subject possible. They used the term 'reflexive forms' for cases where the reflexive constructions have a figurative function, in that the reflexive pronoun expresses a passive relationship.

Under the reflexive verbs in the real sense, the authors make a further distinction between reflexive pronouns, which are replaceable by another fully semantic object that is not identical to the subject and those that are not replaceable. Cases where the pronoun is replaceable are called reflexive constructions. Here, there is a reference and identity in the semantic sense, and there is a subject and an object identical to it. The reflexive pronoun is seen only as a special case of an object. For verbs where the reflexive pronoun is not replaceable, the reference and identity are to be understood only in the formal-grammatical sense, and the reflexive pronoun is seen as part of the predicate. In such constructions, the reflexive pronoun is usually obligatory and belongs to the verb as a lexeme. Helbig and Buscha term them reflexive verbs in the narrower sense.

The authors distinguish a final category called reflexive constructions and reflexive verbs with reciprocal meaning. This concerns certain reflexive constructions and various reflexive verbs in the narrower sense, where at least two subjects occur, and the reflexive pronoun does not express reference and identity in the direct sense, but rather a reciprocal relationship. This category will, however, be discussed below under reciprocity.

Based on certain syntactic and semantic features, which were not further specified, Duden (1998) categorises reflexive verbs into three broad groups, namely, reflexive verbs in the real sense or genuine reflexive verbs, which occur only reflexively, and pseudo-reflexive verbs. However, the reflexive verbs in the real sense are further divided into two groups, namely exclusively reflexive verbs and partially reflexive verbs. These categories are presented below:

Reflexive verbs in the real sense ('Echte reflexive Verben')

The reflexive verbs in the real sense are characterised by the following features, which describe the reflexive pronoun:

a. It is necessary, or rather cannot be left out:

18. Er schämt sich. (*Er schämt.)

He.NOM be. ashamed-3SG REFL.ACC – "He is ashamed."

The reflexive pronoun *sich* in the sentence cannot be left out, since it is seen as part of the predicate. In such constructions, therefore, the reflexive pronoun is usually obligatory and belongs to the verb as a lexeme. Without it, the sentence makes no meaning.

b. It cannot be replaced by another pronoun or a noun:

Er schämt sich. (*Er schämt ihn/ den Nachbarn)

The same argument is applicable here: the reflexive pronoun is irreplaceable by another pronoun or a noun because it belongs to the verb.

c. It cannot be used together with another noun or pronoun:

Er schämt sich. (*Er schämt sich und den Nachbarn.)

The reflexive pronoun here, not being an independent constituent of the sentence, is devoid of meaning and therefore cannot be used with independent constituents.

d. It cannot be inquired about or be queried.

Er schämt sich. (*Wen schämt er?)

Here, *sich* cannot be inquired about, since it is only independent constituents that can be determined through such questions.

e. It cannot be negated.

Er schämt sich. (*Er schämt nicht sich, sondern den Nachbarn).

Of course, the sentence as a whole can, be negated, but here, it is the partial negation of *sich* that is not possible, it is part of the predicate.

f. It is subject to certain restrictions regarding its position in the sentence. For example, it cannot be placed at the beginning of the sentence:

Er schämt sich. (*Sich schämt er.)

Owing to the above features, the reflexive pronoun lacks the status of an independent constituent of a sentence or a complement required as a result of verb valency. It has to be regarded as a necessary part of the verb (predicate), albeit devoid of meaning. Furthermore, it does not increase its valency. Consequently, the reflexive verbs behave like absolute verbs, i.e. verbs, which do not have complements. These reflexive verbs can be replaced by absolute verbs without a change in meaning of the sentence:

19. Sie beeilt sich. - Sie eilt.

a. Sie beeilt sich.
she.NOM hurry.3SG REFL.ACC - 'She hurries.'

b. Sie eilt.
she.NOM hurry.3SG - 'She hurries.'

20. Ein Unglück ereignet sich. – Ein Unglück geschieht.

- a. Ein Unglück ereignet sich.
a.NOM accident.NOM happen.3SG REFL.ACC - 'An accident happens.'
- b. Ein Unglück geschieht.
a.NOM accident.NOM happen.3SG - 'An accident happens.'

The reflexive verbs in the real sense are further divided into two groups, namely, exclusively reflexive verbs and partially reflexive verbs.

1.1 Exclusively reflexive verbs('Nur reflexive Verbs')

Duden defines such reflexive verbs as those forms, which exist exclusively as reflexive verbs. According to Helbig and Buscha, these are the cases where one can speak of the use of the reflexive pronoun in the real sense, since only then can the action be referred back to the subject and the identity of the pronoun with the subject possible.

In the following example, the reflexive pronoun is in the accusative case:

21. Ich kenne *mich* hier gut aus.

Ich kenne mich hier gut aus.
I.NOM know.1SGREFL.ACC here well PART –“I know my way around here well.”

Some of the other reflexive verbs in this category are *sich beeilen*, 'to hurry up', 'to get a move'; *sich entschließen*, 'to decide'; *sich gedulden*, 'to be patient'; *sich sehnen nach jmdm/etwas*, 'to long or yearn for somebody/something'; and *sich verirren*, 'to get lost, to lose one's way'.

The following is an example with the pronoun in the dative case:

22. Ich eigne mir diese Kenntnisse an.
I.NOM appropriate.1SG REFL.DAT these.ACC knowledge.PL.ACC PART
- "I acquire this knowledge".

Some other verbs in the dative are *sich anmaßen*, 'to claim for oneself', 'to assume (power, etc)'; *sich etwas ausbedingen*, 'to insist on sth', 'to make sth a condition'; *sich von jdm etw. etwas ausbitten*, 'to ask sb for sth, to request sth from sb.'; and *sich etwas einbilden*, 'to imagine sth.'.

1.2. Partially reflexive verbs ('Teilreflexive Verben')

Partially reflexive verbs are such verbs, which in some meanings occur as reflexive verbs in the real sense, and non-reflexively in another meaning:

23. Er ängstigt sich ständig. - Der Junge ängstigt gern seinen Bruder.
a. Er ängstigt sich ständig.

he. NOM frighten-3SG REFL.ACC constantly – “He frightens himself constantly.”/“He is constantly afraid.”

b. Der Junge ängstigt gern seinen Bruder.

the.N boy.NOM frighten-3SG gladly his.ACC brother – “The boy gladly frightens his brother.”

The following verbs belong to this category: sich ängstigen, ‘to be afraid’, ‘to worry’/jmdn. ängstigen, to frighten, ‘to worry’; sich ärgern ‘to be annoyed’, ‘to be angry’/jmdn. ärgern, to annoy, ‘irritate’; sich aufhalten, to stay’, ‘stay on’, ‘linger’, ‘take a long time over’/jmdn., etw. aufhalten ‘to hold back’, ‘to keep back’; sich entscheiden ‘to decide, make up one’s mind’, come to a decision’/ etw. entscheiden ‘to decide’; sich verlassen ‘to rely, to depend on’ / jmdn. verlassen ‘to leave’.

2. Quasi-reflexive/pseudo-reflexive verbs

The reflexive verbs in this group differ from the reflexive verbs in the real sense in that they are used both reflexively and non-reflexively without there being any change in meaning:

24. Sie wäscht sich – Sie wäscht das Kind.

a. Sie wäscht sich.

she.NOM wash.3SG REFL.ACC - “She washes (herself).”

b. Sie wäscht das Kind.

she.NOM wash.3SG the.ACC child - “She washes the child.”

The reflexive pronoun also has the status of an independent component of the sentence or a complement required by reason of the valency of the verb. As a result, it can be left out if necessary:

25. Sie wäscht sich – Sie wäscht.

Sie wäscht sich.

a. she.NOM wash.3SG REFL.ACC - “She washes (herself).”

b. Sie wäscht.

she.NOM wash.3SG - “She washes.”

Furthermore, the reflexive pronoun can be replaced by another pronoun or noun:

26. Sie wäscht sich - Sie wäscht ihren Jungen.

a. Sie wäscht sich.

she.NOM wash.3SG REFL.ACC - “She washes (herself).”

b. Sie wäscht ihren Jungen.

she.NOM wash.3SG her.ACC boy.ACC - “She washes her boy.”

It can also be used together with another pronoun or noun:

27. Sie wäscht sich.

a. Sie wäscht sich.

she.NOM wash.3SG REFL.ACC - "She washes (herself)."

b. Sie wäscht sich und ihren Jungen.

Sie wäscht sich und ihren Jungen.

she.NOM wash.3SG REFL.ACC and her.ACC boy.ACC - "She washes herself and her boy."

The reflexive pronoun can also be inquired about or queried:

28. Sie wäscht sich. – Wen wäscht sie? – Sich.

a. Sie wäscht sich.

she.NOM wash.3SG REFL.ACC - "She washes (herself)."

b. Wen wäscht sie?

whom.ACC wash.3SG she.NOM - "Whom does she wash?"

It can also be negated:

29. Sie wäscht sich. - Sie wäscht nicht sich, sondern ihr Kind.

a. Sie wäscht sich.

she.NOM wash.3SG REFL.ACC - "She washes (herself)."

b. Sie wäscht nicht sich sondern ihr Kind.

she.NOM wash.3SG not REFL.ACC but her.ACC child
"She does not wash herself, but her child."

Finally, it can also be placed at the beginning of the sentence:

30. Sie wäscht sich. – Sich wäscht sie.

a. Sie wäscht sich.

she.NOM wash.3SG REFL.ACC - She washes (herself).

b. Sich wäscht sie.

REFL.ACC wash.3SG she.NOM - "Herself she washes." (Focus on "herself.")

c. The reflexive pronoun can be used together with 'selbst' (self) for emphasis:

31. Sie wäscht sich. - Sie wäscht sich selbst.

a. Sie wäscht sich.

she.NOM wash.3SG REFL.ACC - "She washes (herself)".

b. Sie wäscht sich selbst.

she.NOM wash.3SG REFL.ACC self - "She washes herself."

d. The reflexive pronoun is not devoid of meaning, since its use in the sentence equates the agent and the object of action, thereby actually creating a reflexive, reciprocal relationship between the subject and object. Such reflexive pronouns can also be used in the accusative, dative or genitive case, or as prepositional cases, just like the reflexive verbs in the true sense:

32. (In the accusative case): Ich klage mich an.

a. Ich klage mich an.

I.NOM accuse.1SG REFL.ACC PART - "I accuse myself."

(in the dative case): Ich denke mir etwas.

b. Ich denke mir etwas.

I.NOM think.1SG REFL.DAT something.ACC - "I imagine something."

Sich etwas denken, 'to imagine' and sich etwas verschaffen, 'to obtain something', 'to acquire something.' are other examples with the dative case.

(in the genitive case): Damit spottet er *seiner* selbst.

c. Damit spottet er seiner selbst.

with.that mock.3SG he.NOM his.GEN self.GEN - "With that he mocks himself."

(in a prepositional case): Ich achte auf mich.

d. Ich achte auf mich.

I.NOM pay_attention.1SG to REFL.ACC - "I take care of myself."

Other reflexive verbs in a locative case are etwas von sich weisen, 'to reject something' and an sich zweifeln, 'to doubt oneself.'

There is not a very sharp difference between partially reflexive and quasi-reflexive verbs, since some of the reflexive verbs listed under partially reflexive verbs could very well have neatly fallen into the category of quasi-reflexive verbs. An example is the pair sich ängstigen, 'to be afraid', 'to worry' / jmdn. ängstigen, 'to frighten, to worry'. I do not see that the meaning of the verb in the reflexive use is distinctive from that in the transitive use. Dreyer and Schmitt (2005) simply differentiate between reflexive verbs, which always use the reflexive verb in the accusative, and verbs, which can be used with the reflexive pronoun, but also, in a different meaning, with an independent accusative case. Their second category contains verbs listed in Duden's two different categories, i.e., partially reflexive and quasi-reflexive verbs. Kars and Häusserman (1992) similarly differentiate between verbs that can be used reflexively and non-reflexively ('teilreflexive Verben', partially reflexive verbs) and those, which exist exclusively as reflexive verbs ('reinreflexive Verben', purely reflexive verbs).

Finally, it must be noted that absolute verbs, i.e. verbs which cannot have complements, (e.g. schlafen, 'to sleep'; arbeiten, 'to work'; krähen, 'to crow'; regnen, 'to rain', etc.) cannot be used non-reflexively:

(*Ich schlafe mich. *Es regnet sich, etc.).

Reciprocity in German

Owing to the fact that reflexive pronouns are also used to express reciprocity, Duden (1998) as well as Helbig und Buscha (1996) treat reciprocity under reflexivisation. As already noted above, reciprocity in German is expressed using the reflexive pronouns sich, albeit to indicate mutual actions or states between two or more entities. Apart from *sich* as well as the plural

forms of the reflexive pronoun, *uns* and *euch*, *einander* is also used to express mutual actions, but especially to disambiguate reflexive and reciprocal verbs (Hidayat, 2020):

33. Karl und Maria lieben sich

Karl and Maria love-3PL REFL.ACC – “Karl and Maria each other.”

The above sentence could also be interpreted either as reflexive, hence the need for ‘einander’ to remove the disambiguity:

34. Karl und Maria helfen einander.

Karl and Maria help-3PL each other - “Karl and Maria help each other.”

Testing Reciprocal Constructions

In order to determine whether a sentence is a reciprocal or a reflexive construction, the substitution test can be used. In this test, the reflexive pronoun *sich* is replaced with *einander* (Hidayat, 2020). If the sentence remains grammatical and retains its meaning of reciprocity, it is a reciprocal construction; else it is a reflexive sentence. For example:

Karl und Maria lieben sich → Karl und Maria lieben einander (Karl and Maria love each other)

Another method of disambiguating both types of construction is the paraphrase test, where the sentence is split into two separate clauses (Hidayat, 2020). For example:

Karl und Maria lieben sich → Karl liebt Maria und Maria liebt Karl (Karl loves Maria and Maria loves Karl)

With the paraphrase above, it can be ascertained that *Karl und Maria lieben sich* is a reciprocal sentence meaning ‘Karl and Maria love each other.’

In certain cases, a reciprocal relationship can be expressed singularly, in which case a prepositional phrase with ‘mit’ is required in addition to the reflexive pronoun:

35. Er streitet sich mit ihr.

he.NOM argue.3SG REFL.ACC with her.DAT - “He argues with her.”

Similar to the reflexive verbs in the narrower sense, Duden also distinguishes three categories of reciprocal verbs: verbs which are used purely reciprocally, partially reciprocal verbs and reciprocally used verbs.

1. Exclusively reciprocal verbs (‘Nur reziproke Verben’)

These are such verbs that are used exclusively reciprocally in the plural:

36. Die beiden Brüder verfeindeten sich.

the two brothers become_enemies.PST.3PL REFL.ACC - “The two brothers became enemies.”

37. Die Tarifpartner einigen sich auf einen neuen Vertrag.

the bargaining partners agree.PST.3PL REFL.ACC – “The bargaining partners reached an agreement.”

Some other verbs in this category are *sich anfreunden*, ‘to make or become friends’; *sich mit jdm überwerfen*, ‘to fall out (with somebody)’; *sich mit jdm. verbrüdern*, ‘to swear eternal friendship (to sb.)’, to ally oneself (with/to sb.) and *sich mit jdm. Verkrachen*, ‘to fall out (with sb.)’.

2. Partially reciprocal verbs (‘Teilreziproke Verben’)

Partially reciprocal verbs are those that are used reciprocally in the plural in a certain meaning variant, and non-reciprocally in another meaning:

38. Unsere Nachbarn vertragen sich gut untereinander. - Ich vertrage keine Milch.

a. Our.POSS neighbours get.along-3PL REFL.ACC among.each.other - “Our neighbours get along with each other.”

b. Ich vertrage keine Milch.

I.NOM tolerate-1SG no milk – “I do not tolerate milk” (“Milk doesn’t agree with me.”)

Another verb used in this manner is ‘*sich aussprechen*’, talk things out’/aussprechen, ‘pronounce’.

3. Reciprocally used verbs (‘Reziprok gebrauchte Verben’)

Reciprocally used verbs are such which can be used reciprocally or non-reciprocally without any change in meaning. The following verbs belong to this category:

sich or *einander* *ähneln*, ‘to be alike’, ‘to be similar’, ‘to resemble one another’/jmdm *ähneln*, ‘to be like, to be similar, to resemble’; *sich* or *einander* *begrüßen*, ‘to greet one another’/jmdn. *begrüßen*, ‘to greet sb.’; *sich* or *einander* *belügen*, ‘to deceive one another’/jmdn. *belügen*, ‘to lie or tell lies to sb.’; *sich* or *einander* *gleichen*, ‘to be alike or similar’/jmdn. *gleichen*, ‘to be like sb.’; *sich* or *einander* *hassen*, ‘to hate one another’/jmd. *hassen*, ‘to hate, detest, loathe sb.’; *sich* or *einander* *lieben*, ‘to love one another’/jmdn. *lieben*, ‘to love sb.’; and *sich* or *einander* *helfen*, ‘to help one another’/jmdn. *helfen*, ‘to help sb.’

In such cases, the reflexive pronouns *uns*, *sich* *euch* can also be replaced by *einander*, without any change in meaning:

39 a. Sie begrüßen sich.

they.NOM greet.3PL REFL.ACC - “They greet each other.”

b. Sie begrüßen einander.

they.NOM greet.3PL each_other - “They greet each other.”

c. Sie begrüßen ihre Gäste.

they.NOM greet-3PL their.ACC guests – “They greet their guests.”

Reflexivisation and reciprocity in Igbo

In the Igbo language, reflexive constructions are not complex. It is formed by the adjunction of 'onwe' to the pronominalised form of the subject or performer of the action of the sentence, e.g.

40 a. M sere onwe m foto.

I drawpast self me photograph – I photographed myself.

b. Unu hụrụ onwe unu n'anya.

You pl. see stative self you pl. in eye – You love yourselves.

c. Ha fere onwe ha akụpe.

They wavepast self them fan – They fanned themselves.

d. Ada na Amaka jeere onwe ha ozi.

Ada and Amaka goforpast self them message – Ada and Amaka went on an errand for themselves

Example 40a-d shows that reflexivisation is formed in Igbo by converting the subject of the sentence to itself pronominal form and adjoining same to its or their reflexive form. This pattern of formation is invariable. In 40a-x, the pronominal form of the subjects remains the same because they are themselves pronouns. However, in 40dm the pronominal form of Ada and Amaka is 'ha'. The reflexive particle 'onwe' is adjoined to it by the transformational process of adjunction to the form 'onwe ha'. 'Onwe' is a lexeme; it is not an affix; therefore, it is not prefixed to the pronominal form of the subject.

In order to reflect the fact that they the subject and pronominal forms are co-referential, the indexation of the two linguistic entities is marked by identical indices, to wit:

40¹ a. [M]_x sere [onwe m]_x foto.

I drawpast self me photograph – I photographed myself.

b. [Unu]_x hụrụ [onwe unu]_x n'anya.

You pl. see stative self youpl in eye – You love yourselves.

c. [Ha]_x fere [onwe ha]_x akụpe.

They wavepast self them fan – They fanned themselves.

d. [Ada]_x na Amaka jeere [onwe ha]_x ozi.

Ada and Amaka goforpast self them message – Ada and Amaka went on an errand for themselves

40¹ a-d have constituents, namely, the subject and the pronominal forms, which bear the same referential index 'x'. this bears witness to the fact that each set of them refers to the entity or has the same meaning. It needs to be pointed out that because reflexive marker 'onwe' is a free form, the structure is similar to that of possessive construction, e.g.

41a. Eze hụrụ eze ya n'anya

Eze seestative teeth his in eye – ‘Eze loves his teeth.’

b. Eze hụrụ onwe ya n’anya

Eze seestative self his in eye – ‘Eze loves himself.’

41 shows that though ‘eze’ and ‘onwe’ are in a syntagmatic relationship, the semantic output of the structures are different. Whereas the object of 41a ‘eze’ is a different entity other than the subject, and therefore non-reflexive, the object of 41b is reflexive and therefore co-refers to the subject of the sentence, namely ‘Eze’. The arguments in 41a are disjoint in reference, those in 41b are co-referential.

Another unique character of reflexivisation of Igbo, which is derivable from 40d is that the sense of reciprocity is implicated therein, e.g.

42. [Ada]_x na Amaka jeere [onwe ha]_x ozi.

Ada and Amaka goforpast self them message – Ada and Amaka went on an errand for themselves

42 may mean that ‘Ada and Amaka went on an errand for each other’ or that ‘Ada went on an errand for herself’ and ‘Amaka went on an errand for herself’. The first interpretation infers that the action was reciprocally performed by each of the arguments in favour of the other. Furthermore, the second interpretation implicates the semantic purport of reflexivisation, that is, each of the arguments of the string reflexively performed the action upon herself. In a nutshell, reflexive constructions in Igbo, especially in constructions involving conjoined subjects are patently ambiguous in meaning; they may be interpreted as reflexive as well as reciprocal. Let us see whether reciprocal constructions can as well be ambiguous semantically.

It is implied from the foregoing that reciprocal constructions are structures in which the arguments in the construction perform actions, which are each beneficial to the other. See also Mbah (2011:135ff). The marker of reciprocity in Igbo is -rịta and its harmonic converse reflex -rite, e.g.

43a. Okona Ogbu seritere onwe ha foto.

Okona and Ogbu flashrecip.tnse self them photograph – ‘Okona and Ogbu took each other photographs’.

b. Nne na Nna ga-akpọrịta onwe ha aha ha.

Nne and Nna will callrecip. self them name their – ‘Nne and Nna will call each other, each others’ name.’

From 43, it is observed that reciprocal constructions restrain the possibility of reflexivisation. The affix -rịta and -rite intervenes between the subject and their reflexive forms to ensure that there is no c-command among them; this automatically rules out of government and therefore admits only joint reference.

Conclusion

Reflexivisation and reciprocity in German are complex linguistic phenomena that involve specific grammatical structures and semantic interpretations. Reflexive constructions encode

self-directed actions or states, while reciprocal constructions encode mutual actions or states between two or more entities. In Igbo, the morpho-syntax of reflexivisation and reciprocal constructions is elegant and straight forward. First, it has the structure of possessive construction; however, because of the reflexive marker 'onwe', the interpretation excludes the possessive interpretations. However, the structure admits the possibility of reciprocal interpretation when the subject of the reflexive construction is conjoined. Furthermore, whereas it is possible for reflexive constructions to be interpreted as reciprocal, the reverse is not possible. The markers of reciprocity intervene between the subject and the reciprocal pronouns, which otherwise appear identical, and ensure that there is not constituent command; this automatically rules out government and therefore also co-referentiality.

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