

Cross-linguistic evidence for underspecification in reflexive morphosyntax

Martha McGinnis and Christiana Moser, University of Victoria

Reflexive marking is often found in non-reflexive constructions, such as impersonals, synthetic passives, unaccusatives, middles, antipassives or unergatives. We propose that such syncretisms are best handled via morphosyntactic underspecification. Our analysis contrasts with that of Wood (2014, 2015), who instead offers a monosemous analysis of two uses of Icelandic *-st*, which he calls *figure reflexives* (1a) and *anticausatives* (1b). Wood proposes that both of these cases involve an expletive argument—a DP (*-st*) that can merge in a theta-position but cannot receive a theta-role. As a result, the figure reflexive is syntactically unergative: the figure theta-role is passed up the tree (from spec-pP) by semantic composition, and assigned to the next higher DP, i.e. the external argument in spec-VoiceP. In the anticausative, there is no higher DP in VoiceP to receive a theta-role passed up the tree, so *-st* can only merge with non-theta-assigning Voice, associated with non-causative *v*. Like other unergatives (Sigurðsson and Egerland 2009), figure-reflexives allow impersonal passives (2).

- (1) a. Bjartur tróðst gegnum mannþröngina.
Bjartur.NOM squeezed-ST through the.crowd
'Bjartur squeezed (himself) through the crowd.'
- b. Hurðin opnaðist.
door.the.NOM opened-ST
'The door opened.'
- (2) Það var troðist gegnum mannþröngina.
EXPL was squeezed-ST through the.crowd
'There was squeezing through the crowd.'

The best evidence for this account of Icelandic *-st* would be that it carries over to other reflexive phenomena, and to other languages with syncretism between reflexives and anticausatives. In fact, Labelle (2008) proposes likewise that French *se*-reflexives are unergative (see also Sportiche 1998, Alboiu et al. 2004). She offers (3a) as evidence: *en* can be associated with the postverbal subject of unaccusatives and passives, but not of unergatives, or of the reflexive in (3a). However, she notes that other reflexives, such as (3b), allow *en*-cliticization (Labelle 2008:870, fn. 27). Such cases are not predicted by an unergative analysis.

- (3)a. Il s'en est lavé beaucoup dans ces douches publiques récemment.
there SE of-them is washed many in these showers public recently
passive: 'Many of them were washed in these public showers recently.'
reflexive: *'Many of them washed themselves in these public showers recently.'
- b. Il s'en est présenté beaucoup pour cet emploi.
there SE of-them is presented many for this job
reflexive: 'Many of them presented themselves for this job.'

This contrast suggests that inherently reflexive verbs are unergative (3a), while other reflexives involve a derived subject (3b). The derived-subject analysis is also supported by raising in French reflexive ECM contexts (Reinhart and Sioni 2005). Thus, Wood's account evidently cannot be extended to French. We argue that an underspecification analysis captures the morphological distribution of reflexive marking better than a monosemous account. We propose that Wood's figure reflexives are indeed unergative, but based on non-reflexive manner-of-motion verbs, comparable to English *walk/squeeze through the crowd*. As predicted, *-st* also marks obviously non-reflexive unergatives, such as *hæði-st* 'mocks.'

References

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