Reflexivization in Middle English and Early Modern English: Evolution of a Syntactic Rule*

Eiko Ito

This study examines reflexive constructions in fourteenth- and seventeenth-century English parallel texts to determine (1) what governed the application or non-application of the reflexivization rule in Middle English and early Modern English and (2) what changes took place in the reflexivization system between these two historical stages of English. It argues that these historical changes are to be analyzed as changes in lexical redundancy rules rather than in the rule itself. It is hoped that this study will point to some significant generalizations about possible ways in which a syntactic rule evolves.

1. Background

In Modern English (MnE), when two noun phrases (NP's) are coreferential within the same simple sentence, the second NP is obligatorily reflexivized, i. e., realized as a compound reflexive (refl.) pronoun in -self, as in:
(1) John killed himself.
(2) He bought himself a nice sweater.
(3) They conferred among themselves.
In one formulation, the statement of the reflexivization rule in MnE is:

(4) Reflexivization: X NP Y NP Z

\[
1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 5 \quad \Rightarrow \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \begin{bmatrix}
+\text{PRO} \\
+\text{REFL}
\end{bmatrix} 5
\]

Conditions: 
(i) 2 and 4 are coreferential
(ii) 2 and 4 are in the same simple S.
(Culicover 1976: 146)

The refl. rule as formulated in (4) can generate all of (1) - (3).

In Old English (OE), however, self was an independent adjective added to a (pro) noun for emphasis and was not, as in MnE, associated with being a refl. marker. The refl. function was performed by the simple personal pronouns (Quirk and Wrenn 1955: 72). Sometime between late OE and early Middle English (ME), the originally emphatic adjective self began to be used where no contrast was to be expressed and, in certain environments, was reanalyzed as a meaningless grammatical marker for reflexivization (cf. Visser 1963: 425). At this point, the rule of reflexivization which

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*The material on the two versions of Troilus and Criseyde was presented in a paper entitled "The Reflexive Object in Middle English and Early Modern English," read at the Annual Meeting of the Research Institute, Kobe College, October 26, 1979.
converted a simple personal pronoun into a compound refl. pronoun in -self entered the grammar of English. The new rule was optional and remained so throughout ME. It seems that it was not yet completely obligatory in early Modern English (eMnE) (Traugott 1972: 137).

Significant questions to be asked then are whether the application of reflexivization was wholly random in ME and eMnE and, if not, what governed it, and what changes took place in the reflexivization system between ME and eMnE. Ito 1978 studies refl. verbs in Chaucerian ME and ascribes the choice of the simple or compound refl. pronouns to the semantic class of the verb. It does not, however, deal with historical changes in reflexivization. Ukaji 1978 posits seven rules, four being syntactic and three semantic, for the occurrence of the simple or compound refl. pronouns in eMnE imperative sentences. However, the rules Ukaji posits are restricted to the imperative sentence type and his diachronic account does not go back to ME. The present study, therefore, addresses itself to the problem of what factors governed the application or non-application of reflexivization in ME and eMnE and of what changes occurred between these two periods of English.

The corpus examined for this study consists of fourteenth- and seventeenth-century English parallel texts. They are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ME</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Geoffrey Chaucer (Ch.)</td>
<td><em>Troilus and Criseyde</em> (TC¹)</td>
<td>c 1385</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Acts of the Apostles (Acts¹)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. eMnE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. J. S.²</td>
<td><em>Troilus and Cresida</em> (TC²)</td>
<td>c 1630</td>
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</table>

For the editions used the reader is referred to the section "Editions" at the end of this study.

2. Reflexivization in ME

2.1 Syntactic Factors

For the purposes of this study the refl. construction is considered to be one of the three syntactic types: the refl. pronoun is a) the direct object of a verb, b) the indirect object of a verb, and c) the object of a preposition. In subsequent sections the distribution of the simple and compound refl. pronoun will be investigated according to these syntactic types. Ito 1978 classifies verbs taking refl. (direct) objects²
into two categories: a) accidentally (acc.) refl. and b) essentially (ess.) refl. The verbs of the first category can take non-refl. objects as well as refl. objects. Their entering into refl. constructions is only 'accidental'. Those of the second category, on the other hand, form a semantically closed set, requiring that their objects be always referentially identical with their subjects. The following sections will discuss refl. objects of acc. refl. verbs. The discussion of ess. refl. verbs belongs in Section 2.2.

2.1.1. Direct Object

Acc. refl. verbs taking refl. objects seem to have little resisted the spread of reflexivization. As Table 1 shows,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Compound</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ch.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wic.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

the compound forms in -*self* are already beginning to establish themselves in the language. With the exception of possible influences of meter, we can discern no clear factor governing the choice of one or the other forms of the refl. pronoun. The same verb may be found with either a simple or a compound refl. pronoun. Examples are given below:

1. Simple pronouns
   (6) Of thing fro which thou kanst the nat defende. (TC1 I 511)
   (7) And wry yow in that mantel evere moo; (TC1 II 380)
2. Compound pronouns
   (8) Love, ayeins the which whoso defendeth *Hymself* most, (TC1 I 603-4)
   (9) *Hymself* to wrye, at hem he gan to smyle, (TC1 I 329)

Interestingly, when the subject of an embedded sentence is promoted to become the surface object of the higher sentence through 'raising,' as in:
   (10) I gesse *me* blessid at thee, (Acts1 26.2)
   (11) Make the redy right anon, (TC1 III 703)
   (12) She nolde nought, ne make *hireselven* bonde

In love; (TC1 II 1223-4)

we find a significant difference in the relative frequency of the simple and compound refl. pronouns between the Ch. and Wic. data, as is seen from Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Compound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ch.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wic.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
It is not clear whether this difference is ascribable to the personal stylistic preferences of Chaucer and Wyclif or to the verse/prose distinction. Generally, however, the spread of reflexivization seems to have been slower in this construction (cf. Visser 1946: 203).

2.1.2 Indirect Object

The refl. pronoun may function as indirect object of a closed set of verbs often called 'ditransitive'. In this case, the simple personal pronoun seems to be the norm (see Table 3 below), although lack of sufficient examples in Wic. makes a conclusive statement impossible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect Object</th>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Compound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ch.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wic.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Examples are:

(13) let the puple go in to townes to bie hem mete/ (Matt.¹ 14. 15)
(14) For which he gat hym thank in every place. (TC¹ III 1803)

The following two examples of the compound refl. pronoun functioning as indirect object:

(15) She doth hirself a shame, and hym a gyle. (TC¹ III 777)
(16) And if thow nylt, wit al thiself thi care!

On me is nought along thyn yvel fare. (TC¹ II 1000-1)

are excluded from Table 3, since they are refl. pronouns used emphatically as well as reflexively.⁶

2.1.3 Object of a Preposition

For the refl. pronoun preceded by a preposition, the compound form seems to be the norm. That reflexivization in this construction is still optional in the late fourteenth century, however, can be seen in such pairs of sentences as the following:

(17) & nyle 3e seie with yenne 3ou ; (Matt.¹ 3.9)
(18) but the erthe tiliers seying the sone/ seiden withynne hem silf / (Matt.¹ 21. 38)

Sentences like:

(19) do aboute thee thi clothis: (Acts¹ 12.8)
(20) And some of hem tooke on hem, for the cold,

More than ynough, (TC¹ I 918-9)

are not relevant to our discussion here. Such sentences are complex, i.e., contain two sentences (cf. Lees and Klima 1963 (1969): 147-8). The structure underlying (19) is roughly:

(19') [(thou) do thi clothis] and [thi clothis are aboute thee].

If this analysis is correct, thee in (19) and hem in (20) cannot be reflexivized, since these pronouns and their antecedents are not in the same simple sentence. Therefore
they have to appear in a simple form.

Thus, as far as the data we have examined are concerned, reflexivization optionally applies to the direct object and object of a preposition of an acc. refl. verb, but it does not apply to the indirect object of a ditransitive verb.

2.2 Semantic Factors

Ito 1978 claims that ess. refl. verbs consist of at least three subclasses: a) verbs of motion, b) psychological verbs, and c) verbs of social behavior. We will assume this classification in what follows.

2.2.1 Verbs of Motion

Verbs of this subclass denote a change in one's location or posture brought about by moving oneself. One cannot accomplish this change by acting on someone else. Since the object is always coreferential with the subject and, therefore, recoverable, it may be optionally deleted. If retained, however, the refl. object always appears in a simple form. There is no example, in our ME data, of a compound refl. form with a verb of motion. This seems to suggest that at this stage of ME the existence of a motion verb blocks the application of reflexivization even though the structural requirements are met.

Some examples are listed below:

(21) And with that word he drow hym to the feere, (TC' III 978)
(22) & whanne thei hadden take up the ankers: thei bitokun hem to the see, (Acts' 27. 40)
(23) And down she sette hire by hym on a stoon
Of jaspre, (TC' II 1228-9)

31 examples of motion verbs taking refl. objects occur in the Ch. data. Other common motion verbs from Ch. include gan, hasten, lyen/leyen, (re)dressen, speden. On the other hand, only four sporadic examples are found in Wic. In Wic. the deletion of a refl. object is rather frequent, as in:

(24) lo the aungel of the lord apperid to ioseph in sleep in egypt & seide/ rise up & take the child & his modir: & go in to the lond of israel/ ... Ioseph roos & took the child and his modir & cam in to the lond of israel. (Matt. 1. 21-19-21)

Nevertheless, such additional examples as the following are also found:

(25) Pey shulden . . haaste hem to make asep. (c 1380 Wks (1880) 469: OED)
(26) And he wente, and droog hym to oon of the citeseyyns of that cuntre. (1388 Luke XV. 15: OED)

Thus Wiclif was not unaware of the refl. construction with motion verbs. We certainly need more evidence to determine whether Wiclif generally preferred refl. object deletion or whether this phenomenon is perhaps related with the verse/prose distinction.

2.2.2 Psychological Verbs

Psychological verbs describe a situation in which something is perceived or experienced by the animate, typically human, experiencer. Although many interesting questions have been raised about the semantic and syntactic structure of psychological verbs, we concentrate on those psychological verbs which indicate that the subject
intentionally causes himself to undergo a certain psychological experience (see Ito 1978:75-6).

There are 25 examples of psychological verbs taking refl. objects in Ch., but none can be found in Wic. The 25 examples in Ch. all contain a refl. object in the simple form; e. g.:

(27) Remembreth yow on passed hevynesse
    That ye han felt, (TC I 24-5)

(28) Now, mea culpa, lord, I me repente! (TC I 525)

(29) Ayseth yow on it, whan ye han space, (TC I 1124)

Other psychological verbs in Ch. include dreden, greven, recorden, shryven.

Since verbs of this group all describe mental processes the experiencer alone is aware of, the object is always coreferential with the subject and can be optionally deleted. In Wic, the absence of the refl. pronoun after a psychological verb is even more striking than in the case of motion verbs. Certainly more data should be investigated to make a definitive statement about the general tendency of refl. object deletion in Wic.

2.2.3 Verbs of Social Behavior

By 'social behavior' is meant one's conduct which involves oneself as a member in society. Semantically this category is not so sharply defined as the two previous categories of ess. refl. verbs, but the ess. refl. character is clearly involved: one cannot 'behave anyone else'.

Although the simple form of the refl. object is normal with verbs of this category, a few examples of the compound form are also found in both Ch. and Wic.; see Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object of Social Behavior Verb</th>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Compound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ch.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wic.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

Examples of the simple and compound refl. pronouns are given below:

1. Simple pronouns

(30) My deere frend, that I shal so me beere, (TC III 1640)

(31) therfor who euer mekith him as this litil child: (Matt. I 18.4)

2. Compound pronouns

(32) Thenk ek how wel and wisely that he kan
    Governe hymself, ... (TC I 374-5)

(33) and he that mekith hym self: schal be enhausid. (Matt. I 23.12)

Since ess. refl. verbs take only refl. objects, emphatic or contrastive -self cannot be attached to their objects. Then the compound refl. pronouns in the examples above may be taken to be heralding the later spread of reflexivization to verbs of social behavior (cf. Section 3.2.3 below).
3. Reflexivization in eMnE

3.1 Syntactic Factors

In this section we will examine refl. constructions in the eMnE data, following the framework adopted in Section 2.

3.1.1 Direct Object

With direct objects of acc. refl. verbs reflexivization seems to be no longer optional. There are 20 examples in JS and 18 in AV; they all appear in compound forms in -self now. See the following examples:

(34) See thou tell no man, but go thy way, shew thy selfe to the Priest, (Matt. 8.4)

(35) Frō wch thou canst not now thy selfe defend. (TC² I 511; cf. (6))

As we have seen in 2.1.1, with the refl. object 'raised' from an embedded sentence, reflexivization was not so common in Ch. By the seventeenth century, however, the compound refl. pronoun seems to have become the norm. See the following examples:

(36) Yet must shee not suppose her selfe deuine, (TC² I 983)

(37) I thinke my selfe happy, (Acts² 26.2; cf. (10))

Over against 13 examples of the compound refl. pronoun (5 in AV, 8 in JS), there are found in JS three examples of the simple pronoun. They may not, however, be counterexamples to the observation above, since the corresponding sentences in Chaucer's original all contain the simple personal pronoun and the three examples may be influenced by the original forms; see, e.g.:

(38) Make thee vnreadie ... (TC² III 703; cf. (11))

(39) a. Lo, hold the at thi triste cloos, ... (TC¹ II 1534)

b. Then hold thee close vnto thy ward, (TC² II 1534)

3.1.2 Indirect Object

In the eMnE data are found only five examples of the refl. indirect object, all in the compound form; e.g.:

(40) What can you hope to gaine yo'selfe thereby. (TC² II 329)

(41) Perhaps I might procure my selfe despiught. (TC² II 711)

(42) send the multitude away, that they may goe into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. (Matt.² 14. 15; cf. (13))

For lack of sufficient examples a definitive conclusion is impossible. Nevertheless, our findings would at least indicate that Ukaji's observation (Ukaji 1978:105) that the compound form is primarily a marker of the direct object does not hold as far as our data are concerned.

3.1.3 Object of a Preposition

As mentioned above, the compound form was the norm for the refl. object of a preposition already in ME. The eMnE data show a tendency toward more regular application of reflexivization.

Naturally, reflexivization is irrelevant to the prepositional object which may be analyzed as deriving from a conjoined sentence, as discussed in Section 2.1.3 above. Corresponding to sentence (19) is:

(43) cast thy garment about thee, (Acts² 12.8)
in which reflexivization cannot apply.

Interesting to note in this connection is the following:

(44) a. than he goith & takith with hym seuen other spiritis wors than him sylf: (Matt.¹ 12.45)

b. Then goeth he, and taketh with himselfe seuen other spirits more wicked then himselfe, (Matt.² 12.45)

In each of these sentences the refl. pronoun seems to come from a conjoined sentence in the same fashion as in sentence (19). Yet (44b) has himselfe rather than him. In this case, increased familiarity with -self forms after the preposition in the simple sentence may have caused reflexivization to apply to the structure to which it should not.

Thus in eMnE reflexivization seems to obligatorily apply to acc. refl. verbs no matter what the grammatical function of the refl. pronoun involved may be, i.e., the direct object, indirect object, or object of a preposition.

3.2 Semantic Factors

3.2.1 Verbs of Motion

When the refl. object is not deleted, the simple personal pronoun still seems to be the norm, although we can see a beginning of change; see Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object of Motion Verb</th>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Compound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JS</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AV</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

Our eMnE data contain many instances of get, lie/lay, sit/set, and turn cooccurring with the simple refl. form. These verbs seem to be most resistant to the spread of reflexivization. With other verbs of motion, the refl. pronoun is oftren deleted, as in:

(45) a. She rist hire up, ... (TC¹ II 812)

b. shee rose, ... (TC² II 812)

(46) a. Withinne the temple he wente hym forth pleyinge, (TC¹ I 267)

b. Whilst in ye Temple he wento to and froe (TC² I 267)

More importantly, however, we find a few examples of -self forms:¹⁰

(47) But when Iesus knew it, hee withdrew himselfe from thence: (Matt.³ 12.15)

(48) He raised himselfe, and wh affectiō. (TC³ III 1592)

Since the compound forms in (47)-(48) cannot be emphatic or contrastive, just as in the case of (32)-(33) in Section 2.2.3, they may be best regarded as early examples indicating the direction of the later development of refl. pronouns.

3.2.2 Psychological Verbs

As with verbs of motion, the deletion of a refl. pronoun with psychological verbs seems to be rather frequent in eMnE and, therefore, examples of the refl. construction are not numerous. Moreover, most of the verbs occur only once. It is not reasonable
then to definitively state that psychological verbs as a class do or do not block the application of the rule. However, in those sentences whose original versions do not contain a refl. pronoun, as in:

(49) a. thanne iudas that bitraied hym, ... he repentid (Matt.1 27:3)
   b. Then Iudas, which had betrayed him, ... repented himselfe, (Matt.2 27.3)

(50) And said deare Neece bethinke yorselfe therefore. (TC4 II 327)

(This sentence is original; there is no direct counterpart in TC1.)

only the compound form occurs. This may be taken as an indication that reflexivization has begun to be extended to psychological verbs.

3.2.3 Verbs of Social Behavior

Some of the verbs of this category cannot occur without a refl. pronoun in ME (Ito 1978:83). Consequently, the deletion of the refl. pronoun is not so frequent with the verbs of this category as with those of the other two categories of ess. refl. verbs. 17 and 11 examples of social behavior verbs taking refl. objects are found in JS and AV respectively. Noteworthy here is the fact that the verbs of this class now occur always with the compound refl. pronoun if the refl. object is not deleted. The following examples illustrate this:

(51) Great Loue will guide me see my selfe to beare. (TC2 III 1640; cf. (30))
(52) Whosoever therefore shall humble himselfe as this little child, (Matt2 18.4; cf. (31))
(53) a. Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is non! (TC4 III 1208)
   b. Then yeeld yorselfe, for theres noe boote to strieue. (TC2 III 1208)

Reflexivization is now obligatory with verbs of social behavior just as with acc. refl. verbs taking refl. objects.

4. Diachronic Account

In our examination of the refl. constructions in the ME and eMnE data, we notice the following changes:

1. When a refl. pronoun functions as direct object, or object of a preposition, of an acc. refl. verb, reflexivization applies optionally in ME; the rule is obligatory in eMnE.
2. When a refl. pronoun functions as indirect object, reflexivization does not seem to apply in ME, but its application seems to be normal in eMnE.
3. In ME reflexivization does not apply in the refl. construction involving a verb of motion. This situation remains essentially the same in eMnE.
4. Reflexivization does not apply in the refl. construction involving a psychological verb in ME. There is some evidence to suggest that this may have begun to change in eMnE.
5. The refl. construction involving a verb of social behavior does not undergo reflexivization in ME, though there are a few exceptions, but the rule is obligatory in the corresponding eMnE construction.

Upon inspection of the types of changes just summarized, it will be clear that they are not the results of changes in the rule of reflexivization itself. The MnE
reflexivization rule in (4) can generate such ME refl. sentences as (8) and (18) as well as such eMnE sentences as (34) and (40). In ME the non-application of reflexivization in verbs of motion, psychological verbs, and verbs of social behavior occurs precisely within the domain of the rule. There is nothing structurally to block the application of the rule. If we try to account for the non-application of the rule by adding syntactic or semantic stipulations to the terms of the rule, we will have an extremely complicated, 'messy' kind of rule. As Ukaji points out, I believe, correctly, the non-application of reflexivization in the cases mentioned above is best accounted for in terms of lexical redundancy rules which specify the normal behavior of meaning-classes of lexical items with regard to a given rule. Then any change in the reflexivization system should be ascribed not to a change in the rule itself but a change in the redundancy rule.¹¹

Concerning reflexivization in ME, we need to discuss the following set of redundancy rules:

A. For (i) verbs of motion, (ii) psychological verbs, (iii) verbs of social behavior, and (iv) ditransitive verbs taking refl. indirect objects, the redundancy rule states that reflexivization is non-applicable if the verb is regular, i.e., if such a verb is unmarked for reflexivization, it does not undergo the rule.

B. For acc. refl. verbs¹² taking refl. direct objects or prepositional objects, the redundancy rule states that if such a verb is unmarked for the rule, the verb optionally undergoes it.

In eMnE, this set of redundancy rules are replaced by the following:

C. (i) For verbs of motion: no change in the redundancy rule.
(ii) For psychological verbs: if such a verb is unmarked for reflexivization, it may optionally undergo the rule.
(iii) For verbs of social behavior: if such a verb is unmarked for reflexivization, it must undergo the rule.
(iv) For ditransitive verbs taking refl. indirect objects: no separate rule is needed now, since the new redundancy rule D below subsumes refl. indirect objects.

D. For acc. refl. verbs: if such a verb is unmarked for reflexivization, it must undergo it.

Thus the rule of reflexivization did not immediately spread throughout the English language. It gained ground little by little, as it were, as manifested in the changes in the redundancy rules. It is not clear if there is any single principle governing these changes. The behavior of refl. indirect objects in particular is quite disturbing. Nevertheless, some of the changes examined here seem to be compatible with the 'sneaky diffusion' hypothesis of syntactic change proposed in Naro and Lemle 1976. Naro and Lemle claim (237) that "syntactic change tends to sneak through a languange, manifesting itself most frequently under those circumstances in which it is least salient or noticeable."

As we have seen earlier, acc. refl. verbs little resisted the spread of the reflexivization rule. With acc. refl. verbs taking refl. objects or refl. prepositional objects, it
was possible to attach the emphatic adjective *self* to the (pro) noun in question for emphasis, whereas objects of ess. refl. verbs could never occur with *self* attached to them because, they being always referentially identical with subjects, there was no reason to emphasize or contrast them. Therefore, when the refl. marker *-self* was attached to the refl. pronoun following an acc. refl. verb, it was ‘less salient’ than it would be in an ess. refl. verb. Among ess. refl. verbs, verbs of social behavior were the first to occur with refl. pronouns in *-self*. They did not allow their refl. objects to be deleted so often as the other ess. refl. verbs. Presumably, the change from “he mekith him” to “he mekith himself” would be less noticeable than that from “he goeth” to “he goeth himself.” In eMnE, with acc. refl. verbs reflexivization became obligatory, i.e., if they took refl. objects, the latter had to be compound refl. pronouns. The increased familiarity with *-self* forms may have facilitated the further spread of *-self* forms to ess. refl. verbs, although verbs of motion still resisted it. Even though it is premature to draw definitive conclusions as to whether the sneaky diffusion hypothesis can serve as a general model for syntactic change, it does seem to have relevance to some of the changes in the reflexivization system we have examined.

5. Conclusion

Upon the reanalysis of the emphatic adjective *self* as a meaningless refl. marker, the rule of reflexivization was added to the grammar of English sometime between late OE and early ME. It was an optional rule and its spread throughout the language was extremely slow and subtle. We have discussed with examples reflexivization in ME and eMnE in Sections 2 and 3 respectively. In ME, acc. refl. verbs optionally undergo reflexivization, but ess. refl. verbs (verbs of motion, psychological verbs, and verbs of social behavior) and ditransitive verbs with refl. indirect objects are immune from it. In eMnE, reflexivization is obligatory with acc. refl. verbs, including ditransitive verbs with refl. indirect objects, and verbs of social behavior. Section 4 is devoted to a historical account of changes in the reflexivization system from ME to eMnE. We have claimed that what changed is not the rule itself but lexical redundancy rules which specify the normal behavior of meaning-classes of words with regard to a particular rule. Although it is not clear if there is any single principle governing these changes, some of the cases seem to be compatible with the hypothesis that the spread of a syntactic change depends upon the saliency factor.

NOTES

1. Thus *self* was originally an independent word and was later turned into the second element of a compound refl. pronoun. For a detailed account of morphological changes in the refl. pronouns, see Ishibashi et al. 1973: 763-4.

2. For Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, there exists a seventeenth-century translation entitled *Troilus and Cresida*. Its translator is known only as J.S. Herbert G. Wright (1959: 14-5) assumes from the manuscript evidence that this “J.S.” was Jonathan Sidnam and the date of translation was about 1630. J.S. translated only the first three books of Chaucer’s original. Thus the corresponding three books in Chaucer have been examined for this study.

3. The study does not investigate the refl. indirect object and the refl. object of a prepo-
4. For the claim that metrical consideration may not be so significant as it is commonly held to be, see Ukaji 1978: 101.

5. The preference for the simple refl. form in this construction is also observed in The Canterbury Tales: the ratio between simple and compound forms is 34:14; see Ito 1978: 72.

6. Cf. Poutsma’s emphatic or distinctive reflective pronouns; Poutsma 1916: 837.

7. I reject the view that the object of an ess. refl. verb is some sort of indirect object; see Ito 1978: 66; also cf. Visser 1963: 321–2.

8. This study does not go into an interesting question of coreferentiality in psychological expressions, namely, the refl. pronoun can occur as the object of a psychological verb, as in “I loathe myself,” but cannot occur as a prepositional object, as in “*I am loathsome to myself.”

9. No explanation is given about this negative form in Wright 1959.

10. Cf. Ukaji (1978: 103) states that “when certain verbs of motion or posture take a reflexive pronoun, the simple form is obligatory.”

11. R. Lakoff (1968: 221) argues that it is not surprising that these redundancy rules change readily, since they define regularities in the lexicon and the lexicon is the most flexible part of a grammar.

12. Although these verbs constitute an open set semantically, I suggest tentatively that they share one property, i.e., the acc. refl. character.

REFERENCES


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Summary

Reflexivization in Middle English and Early Modern English: Evolution of a Syntactic Rule

Eiko Ito

This study examines refl. constructions in fourteenth and seventeenth-century English parallel texts to determine what governed the application or non-application of the reflexivization rule in ME and eMnE and what changes took place in the reflexivization system between these stages of English.

Upon the reanalysis of the emphatic adjective *self* as a meaningless refl. marker, the rule of reflexivization was added to the grammar of English sometime between late OE and early ME. It started as an optional rule and spread throughout the language extremely slowly and subtly. In ME, acc. refl. verbs, which enter into the refl. construction only accidentally, optionally undergo reflexivization, but ess. refl. verbs, whose subjects and objects are always coreferential—verbs of motion, psychological verbs, and verbs of social behavior—and ditransitive verbs with refl. indirect objects are immune from it. In eMnE, reflexivization is obligatory with acc. refl. verbs, including ditransitive verbs with refl. indirect objects, and verbs of social behavior. The rule seems to be optional with psychological verbs, but it is still non-applicable to verbs of motion.

The study argues that what changed is not the rule itself but lexical redundancy rules which specify the normal behavior of meaning-classes of words with regard to a particular rule. Although it is not clear if there is any single principle governing these changes, some of the cases examined in this study seem to be compatible with the hypothesis that syntactic change manifests itself most frequently where it is least salient or noticeable.