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Author(s): Elly van Gelderen

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The Emphatic Origin of Reflexives

Elly van Gelderen
Arizona State University

The reflexive relationship such as that between *I* and *myself* in (1) is expressed through different strategies in different languages. In Old and Middle English, a non-reflexive pronoun such as *þe* in (2) is used. Throughout Old and Middle English, there is, however, an emphatic *self* that refers to the subject as in (3) but that, unlike the reflexive in (1), is not an independent argument:

1. I saw myself.
2. Layamon, *Brut*, Caligula 7219
3if þu wult þe awreken
if you-NOM want you-ACC revenge
'if you want to revenge yourself'.
3. Idem, 5466
he seolf him wolden specken wið
he-NOM self-NOM him wanted speak with
'he himself wanted to speak with him'.

This paper is concerned with the connection between the occurrence of (3) and the introduction of (1) in Middle English. I examine the stage where *self* is in the process of changing its category from adjective as in (3) to (pro)noun as in (1). I show that the adjectival inflection on *self* is lost; that the old adjectival endings are used to indicate Case; and that *self* becomes morphologically dependent (which is a sign of grammaticalization). In 1, I first briefly outline the situation before the changes in early Middle English. In 2, the two thirteenth century versions of Layamon's *Brut* are examined and in 3, some subsequent repercussions for the theory of reflexivity are discussed.

1 Before Middle English

In Indo-European, a reflexive **s(w)* is used for all persons (cf. Hermodsson 1952; Ogura 1989). In Germanic, this becomes **sik* and its use is reduced to third person (reflected in German third person reflexive *sich*). In Scandinavian, the reflexive pronoun becomes a verbal inflection, indicating intransitivity. In other Germanic languages, it disappears (cf. Faltz 1985: 210ff). This is the situation in Old and early Middle English, where a pronoun as in (2) above is used reflexively¹. Subsequently, in Middle English, the pronoun is 'reinforced' with *self*, which is already present in the form of the emphatic pronoun of (3). In this section, I examine the syntactic character of the emphatic pronoun and argue that it is an adjective at least until the beginning of the thirteenth century. I also show that there is no special reflexive pronoun.

In Old and Early Middle English, the use of an emphatic adjective *seolf*,

sulf or *self* as in (3) above, (4) and (5) is very common:

4. Ælfric's *Homilies*, ii, 250, 15
 Judas hine selfne aheng
 Judas him-ACC self-ACC hanged
 'Judas hanged his own self'. (Visser 1963: 423)
5. Layamon, *Brut*, Caligula 6290
 for heo seolf ne cunne
 because they-NOM self-NOM not can
 'because they themselves cannot'.

In this stage of English, *self* is an adjective because it is inflected as other adjectives, e.g. *seolfum*, *selfne*. In many Germanic languages, Old English included, strong or indefinite inflection is used when the noun the adjective modifies is not accompanied by a definite article. Weak or definite inflection is used when the noun is accompanied by a definite article. I will use the terms definite and indefinite in this paper. *Self* is morphologically independent as is obvious in (4) and (5) and generally has indefinite marking. For instance, in (4), the *-ne* ending is accusative masculine indefinite. Thus, *self* usually has a strong or indefinite inflection (cf. Farr 1905). Mitchell (1985: I: 188) agrees: "*self* is used as an adjective and as a pronoun ... As an adjective, it is declined strong or weak according to the usual rules. As a pronoun, it is usually declined strong". The examples of the latter use he provides are *ÆCHom* i, 430, 7 *me sylfne* and *ÆCHom* i, 244, 13 *us sylfum*. The *-ne* ending is masculine nominative indefinite; the *-um* ending is dative singular or plural indefinite (cf. Quirk & Wrenn 1957: 31, 33). This situation changes and, as Mustanoja (1960: 276) writes, indefinite and definite are often confused and by the beginning of the thirteenth century, the endings are much reduced. In Old English, however, there is no such confusion and the ending is indefinite.

Even though the ending on *self* is adjectival, it might be the case that some *selves* are used reflexively. There is no evidence for this, however. For instance, Ogura (1989: 66) finds that there are no Old English verbs that are always reflexive, thus implying that reflexive pronouns are never obligatory. Mitchell agrees with Visser (1963), among others, that *self* is used for emphasis and not reflexively. Visser (1963: 420) lists instances of *self* added to pronouns in the nominative in the earliest texts as in (6) where *self* refers to the subject, otherwise the form would have had an ending. After prepositions, the use is also early, as (7) shows, where the *-um* ending indicates that *self* is modifying the dative *him*:

6. *Beowulf*, 953
 þu þe self hafest ... gefremed
 you-NOM you-ACC self-NOM have-2S furthered
 'You have furthered yourself'.

7. *Genesis*, 2628
bringan to him selfum
bring to him-DAT self-DAT
'bring to himself'.
(both from Visser 1963: 420)

The use of *self* modifying objects is less common. "They do not occur in Beowulf, Cædmon's Hymn, Genesis, Exodus, Crist & Satan, Deor, Juliana" (Visser 1963: 420) and start around the time of King Alfred (late 9th Century). This observation is important because object emphatics are potentially ambiguous and could be reflexive pronouns.

Penning (1875: 8) argues there are three ways to express the reflexive relation (simple pronoun, pronoun with *self*, and *self*), thus implying that there is a special reflexive in Old English. The instances he provides (pp. 15-7) of the pronoun with *self* are similar to (6) and (7) and can be seen as reinforcing either the subject or the object. Penning argues that the inflection on reflexively used forms of *self* is different, namely, indefinite, whereas for the forms used emphatically, "the definite inflection is prevailing" (p. 14). However, later on (p. 21), he writes with respect to emphatic use that "we find the definite inflection only in the nominative case of the singular number, and here it prevails; in all other cases the indefinite inflection alone is used". The definite inflection as in (8) has an *-a* ending in the nominative whereas the indefinite inflection has no ending as in (9):

8. *Genesis*, 553
Sva ic him þisne bodscipe selfa secge
so I him-DAT this message self-NOM say
'In that way I tell him the message myself'.
9. *Luke* 24, 39
Ic silf hit eom
I self-NOM it am
'It is me myself'.

Since indefinite inflections are used in the non-nominative for both reflexive and emphatic use, it is hard to argue that there is a difference and that (7) is in fact reflexive as Penning (p. 16) does. I therefore follow Mitchell and Visser in assuming there is no reflexively used *self* yet. Faltz (1985: 19), surveying the reflexivization strategies in the world's languages, feels that a truly optional reflexive strategy is rare. If this is the case, (2) is the most likely reflexive in earlier English.

Thus, I assume that *self* is an adjective in Old English, inflected indefinitely when used emphatically.

2 Middle English: from adjectival inflection to Case²

In Middle English, adjectives cease to be inflected (cf. e.g. Mustanoja 1960: 375ff). The morphological form of the emphatic also regularizes and *seolf* becomes morphologically dependent on a pronoun as in mid thirteenth century (10). This is the counterpart of the earlier (5) above:

10. Layamon, Otho 6290
 for heom-seolf noht ne conne,
 because themself nothing not can
 'because they theselves cannot'.

Thus, emphatic *self* grammaticalizes from a morphologically independent adjective as in (5) to a morphologically dependent pronoun as in (10). The two versions of Layamon's *Brut* clearly show the change: the Caligula version is from the beginning of the thirteenth century and the Otho one is from the later half of the thirteenth century.

The changes that occur in these two versions are: (a) adjectival inflection is reduced from definite and indefinite to definite and then lost, (b) the inflection is reanalyzed as Case marking, and (c) *self* becomes dependent on a pronoun the form of which changes from oblique to genitive. I discuss each of these separately.

(a) With morphologically independent *self* in Caligula, there are 6 accusative indefinite *-ne* endings as in (11) and (12)³. With hyphenated *self*, there are no indefinite endings. All other endings (to hyphenated and independent *self*) are definite or remnants thereof. There are 9 oblique definite *-an* endings as in (13) and (14). The majority (over 180), however, is zero, *-e* or *-en*. The zero ending is used when *self* refers to a nominative as in (15). The *-e(n)* ending is used when *self* refers to non-nominative nouns as in (16). It is likely that the *-e(n)* ending is the remnant of the definite adjectival ending *-an*:

11. Caligula, 3821
 hæfð hine seolfne bi-boht⁴
 had him-ACC self-ACC thought
 'had taken his own counsel'.
 12. Idem, 4156
 ah hit wes þurh me seolfne
 but it was through me-ACC self-ACC.
 13. Idem, 416
 7 ich wlle þesne king. læden mid me seolfan
 and I want this king lead me self
 'and I want to bring this king myself'.
 14. Idem, 977
 ah scupte him nome. æfter him-seluan

but created him name after him-self
'but gave it a name after himself'.

15. Idem, 1594
7 þu seolf wurd̃ al hisund
and you self become all healthy.
16. Idem, 349
ah 3if þu wlt þu miht wel. helpen inc seluen
but if you want you may wel help you-DUAL self.
17. Otho, 349
ac 3if þou wolt þou miht. wel helpe 3ou-seolue.
(see gloss of (16)).

The later Otho version only has zero and *-e* endings and the latter are mostly used to refer to non-nominatives as in (17). Thus, one might say that the indefinite inflection has disappeared and that little remains of the definite inflection. Even though the endings ultimately disappear, they linger on and are perhaps still seen as definite markers in e.g. late fourteenth century Chaucer. (Definite endings occur on adjectives after definite articles and determiners in Chaucer 18 times whereas the zero form never cooccurs with definite NPs).

(b) Rather than seeing the ending as adjectival, a user or learner might take it to indicate nominative versus non-nominative as shown above. For instance, in Caligula, all forms of *seolf* and *sulf* refer to the subject as in (15); all others refer to objects as in (11), (12), (13), (14) and (16). Diehn (1901: 60) corroborates this: "im allgemeinen die flexionslose Form im Nom. ..., die flektierte Form im Obliquus". It is not clear to me when *-e* or when *-en* occurs, however. The *-en* endings are not related to plural marking as (18) and (19) show where singular objects have endings and plural subjects as in (20) do not⁵:

18. Caligula, 14503
we wulled̃ ouer-al. atlien to þe seluen
we will everywhere incline to you self
'We shall in all points incline to you yourself'.
19. Idem, 12939
a uolden he me laiden. and lai mid me seoluen
but wanted he me lay and laid with me self.
20. Caligula, 6762
we seolf hired haben
we self court have
'We ourselves will have a court'.

Mustanoja (1960: 147), on the other hand, says that "[i]n early ME forms like *him selven*, *þe selven*, etc., are used side by side with *him self*, *þe self*, etc., without any functional difference. In *Ancrene Riwe*, for example, *him sulf* and

him sulven are used without distinction for the nominative and the oblique case. This indiscriminate use continues in later ME". Mustanoja does not comment on Layamon's *Brut* but his observations do not hold for Layamon. In Layamon, as I have shown above, endings mark objects.

(c) In Caligula, there are 10 forms of *self* morphologically dependent on the first person singular pronoun, 2 dependent on the second person singular, and 94 dependent on the third person masculine pronoun (2 on the feminine). In Otho, the numbers are 21, 12, and 85. So, the number of dependent first and second person pronouns increases but those of the third person remains more or less stable (the Otho version is more damaged). The form of the pronoun changes from nominative or oblique to genitive in the first and second persons but to accusative in the third. This can be seen in Caligula and Otho. When *self* is morphologically independent on the pronoun, the nominative, i.e. *he*, *we* etc., are used; when it is joined to it by a hyphen, *mi* and *þi* are used. In Otho, this changes and the nominative is hardly ever used. For instance, where Caligula has 1 *we seolf*, 6 *he seolf*, 4 *þu seolf*, 1 *3e seolf*, and 3 *heo seolf*, Otho has no nominatives preceding *self*. I will not elaborate on the shape of the pronoun, but see e.g. Todorovska (1995). The important part is that, as the adjectival endings are lost, morphological independence is too.

I have indicated three changes in the use of emphatics in this section. These changes make it possible for the reflexively marked reflexive to be introduced but, as will be shown next, it cannot be said the changes 'cause' the introduction of the reflexive pronoun.

3 Implications for the Theory of Reflexivization

In the previous section, I outline the morphological changes taking place with the emphatic pronoun. In the present section, I examine some implications of these changes for the theory of Reflexivization (or Binding Theory). First, in what contexts does the change start? Second, how is it possible for two strategies to operate at the same time?

The change to morphologically dependent *self* starts with third person masculine singular accusative pronouns. By the middle of the 13th century, it is spreading to first and second persons. One expects the 'need' for a reflexive to arise with third persons since ambiguity is possible. These are indeed the contexts where *self* first becomes morphologically dependent. The remnants of the adjectival inflection, I argue above, are by this time understood as Case markers and it therefore becomes possible for speakers to consider the *self* and the pronoun as a reflexive⁶. The contexts in which the reflexive form in *self* is first used are less clear. Visser (1963: 420) says for early Old English that the use of possibly reflexively marked reflexives occurs in oblique and adverbial contexts; it does not in direct object position. Intuitively put, regular pronouns are used reflexively when they are part of the immediate argument structure. (This can be formalized using Binding Domains as in e.g. Chomsky 1981; 1986; Reinhart &

Reuland 1993). In the previous section, I argue that 'real' reflexives are not introduced until the ending shifts, i.e. in the thirteenth century. Hence, one must examine those texts for contexts of the introduction of reflexives but, unfortunately, no definite evidence can be found.

Looking through the Caligula version, reflexives are used as arguments and adverbials (which fits with Visser's observation that the introduction of reflexive direct objects is earlier, i.e. around King Alfred's time). Reflexives occur both as arguments and as adjuncts in *Katherine* as well, which is a text of about the same time and geographical area as Layamon. There are 7 reflexive objects to prepositions and 5 reflexive direct objects. As in Layamon, there is not one single context where reflexives are used more frequently. Simple pronouns are still used liberally. In this text too, the *-en* endings on *seolf* as in (21) and (22) indicate Case rather than adjectival inflection:

21. *Katherine* 1024-5
he ... nom upon him seoluen, us for to saluin
'he took upon himself to save us'.
22. *Idem* 1125-6
ah Crist ouercom deð, 't sloh hire, in him seoluen
'but Christ overcame death, and slew her, in himself'.

An added problem (referred to in note 1) is that argument positions are optional all through the history of English, e.g. in (23) and (24) (Visser 1963: 149-50), from the 15th and 18th centuries respectively. In Modern English, *pride* and *contain* would have a reflexive object in (23) and (24):

23. Henry, *Wallace XI*, 1271
Quha pridys tharin, that laubour is in waist.
24. Sheridan, *Rivals*, III, 4, 250
I can contain no longer.

As to the second aspect mentioned above, one may wonder whether or not two reflexivization rules exist (which Faltz says is uncommon). In the Caligula and Otho versions, there are clear uses of reflexive *self* as in (16) above, but also clear uses of simple pronouns as in (25):

25. Caligula 7219
3if þu wult þe awraken
'if you want to revenge yourself'.

The reflexive pronoun with *self* definitely does not immediately become the preferred reflexive form. For instance, in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, there are 7 reflexive uses of *himself* and 5 of the simple pronoun *him* used reflexively⁷.

Sentence (26) is from another play. Even up to the present century, sentences such as (27) are found:

26. Shakespeare, *Taming of the Shrew*, IV, 4, 63
bid Bianca make her ready.
27. Macaulay, *History Engl.* 22, IV, 697
They then bethought them of a new expedient.
(Visser 1963: 437)

The frequency of this use in Shakespeare prompts Visser (1963: 435) to say that "[b]y the time of Shakespeare and Ben Johnson the simple form does not yet seem to have lost so much ground that it would be warranted to call the form with *self* the regular, the standard, form".

This is reminiscent of the Modern English situation where, in certain varieties, pronouns such as in (28) and (29) can be used reflexively in oblique (i.e. non-direct object) positions. As in Old English where forms in *self* functioned emphatically, Baker (1995) argues that in more modern stages, long-distance reflexives can be used in emphatic and contrastive cases:

28. John saw a snake next to him(self).
29. I bought me(/myself) some flowers.

If one takes Faltz's (1985: 265) observation that it is more natural to indicate coreference between subjects and direct objects than between subjects and adjuncts to be correct (also expressed in Binding Domains), the primary rule of reflexivization in Old English is the one using the simple pronoun. It gradually changes from Middle English on, made possible by the reanalysis of *self* from adjective to (pro)noun. The reason for the reanalysis is the loss of adjectival inflection and the reanalysis of the endings as Case.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I examine the grammaticalization in Early Middle English of emphatic elements from independent adjectives to morphologically dependent pronouns. There are three changes that, I argue, occur in the middle of the thirteenth century: loss of adjectival ending on *self*, reanalysis of the ending as a Case marker and loss of the morphological independence. The introduction of reflexively marked pronouns is made possible by the changes in emphatics, in particular the loss of adjectival inflection. It is, however, not an automatic consequence since simple and reflexive pronouns occur side by side for an extended period.

Notes

1. In fact, Old English also displays a number of detransitivizing strategies, as Beckman (1878) and Mustanoja (1960: 154ff) argue. Where other languages would have reflexives, English has an intransitive, e.g. *to complain*, *to remember*, *to rejoice*.
2. I use a computer-readable edition and TACT which makes it possible to consider all occurrences of the emphatic.
3. The other four are in lines 934, 4165, 10151, 14911.
4. An aspect I do not examine is the relationship between the loss of a special accusative pronominal (cf. van Gelderen 1993) and the introduction of reflexives. Off hand, there may be such a connection because the special form *hine* occurs separate from *self* 11 times whereas *hin-seolf* occurs only once.
5. In Caligula, of the over 180 instances of zero and *-e(n)* endings, there are only 3 counterexamples where plural subjects have endings. Two of these disappear in Otho.
6. But note Haiman (1995: 227) who argues that there is "by Chaucer a strong tendency to use the distinctive reflexive where self-alienation is indicated". That is, "the reflexive was reserved for cases of unexpected reference" (Haiman: 228) until at least the 17th century. In modern English, Haiman suggests unexpected coreference is expressed by means of the simple pronoun.
7. Again using the Oxford Text Archive version and TACT.

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