

WHEN A REFLEXIVE MORPHEME IS NOT A DETRANSITIVIZING MORPHEME: A CASE STUDY OF ESAN*

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1. Introduction

In a wide range of languages, such as Kannada (Lidz 1999, 1996, Kim 2006), Greek (Embick 1997, 2004), and Romance languages (Grimshaw 1982, Marantz 1984, Centino 1995 among many others), the same morpheme that appears with reflexives also appears with inchoatives (Marantz 1984, Reinhart 1997). Regarding the distribution of the morphemes in these languages, a longstanding question is: what is the common property of reflexives and inchoatives to which the morpheme is sensitive? One influential proposal to this question is an unaccusative approach in which the property in question is the absence of an external argument (Marantz 1984, Embick 1997, 2004). Under this approach, a morpheme is viewed as a detransitivizing morpheme. The paper examines whether the unaccusative approach can account for the distribution of a similar type of a morpheme in Esan, a Nigerian language, as illustrated in (1):

- (1) a. Ireh tobọ sal-eto
Ireh on one's own comb-hair
'Ireh₁ combed herself₁.'
- b. ọn-ọde tobọ khue
this-door on one's own close
'The door closed by itself.'

Reflexive (1a) is marked for the reflexive morpheme 'on one's own'; the same morpheme can also appear in inchoative (1b). As will be shown later, the morpheme in inchoatives is not a detransitivizing morpheme. This fact suggests that the unaccusative approach cannot capture the full range of the distribution of the reflexive morpheme in Esan. Instead, it is argued that the morpheme in both reflexives and inchoatives modifies an internally caused event but not an externally caused event.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the data relevant to the reflexive morpheme in Esan. Section 3 demonstrates why the morpheme is not a detransitivizing morpheme, thus showing that the unaccusative analysis cannot capture the distribution of the reflexive morpheme. Section 4 introduces the notion of internally and externally caused eventualities and provides an

* I wish to thank the Director of the Esan Grammar Project, Dr. Keren Rice, for enabling for me to carry out the research, and Dr. Diane Massam for her stimulating comments on this material. I am also grateful to my fieldwork consultant, Ireh Iyioha. All errors are my own.

account for the distribution of the morpheme in terms of an internally caused eventuality. Section 5 provides a summary and conclusion.

2. Data: The distribution of the Esan reflexive morpheme

Esan is an SVO language without any case marking. The verb has no agreement marking, and tense is marked primarily by tone.¹ In this section, the distribution of the reflexive morpheme in reflexives and inchoatives is introduced.²

2.1 Reflexives

In reflexives, the morpheme in question appears with a specific type of verb, Kemmer's (1994) body action verbs (e.g., *comb*, *wash*, *dress*, etc.), as exemplified below:

- (2) a. Mary tobɔ sal-eto
 Mary on one's own comb-hair
 'Mary₁ combed herself₁.'
- b. Mary tobɔ kp-egbe a³
 Mary on one's own wash-body RESULT
 'Mary₁ washes herself₁.'
- c. Mary tobɔ ri-ukpɔn
 Mary on one's own put-clothes
 'Mary₁ dressed herself₁.'

The examples in (2) are reflexive in meaning. In other words, they denote a coreferential meaning in which two entities in the sentence are the same entity. However, they do not have two syntactic arguments that are coreferential; the subject 'Mary' does not have an argument that corresponds to the reflexive pronoun 'herself.' Instead, the clauses have the reflexive morpheme *tobɔ* 'on one's own.' In contrast, the reflexives with non-body action verbs are not marked for the morpheme. Some of them are illustrated below:

- (3) a. mɛ daghe egb-imeɛ
 1SG see body-1SG
 'I₁ saw myself₁.'
- b. John gbe egb-ɔle a
 John kill body-3SG RESULT
 'John₁ killed himself₁.'

¹ For the purpose of the paper, tone is omitted.

² All the data presented in the paper are from the consultant, Ireh Iyioha.

³ The morpheme *a* indicates the event described by the verb has already occurred. However, it appears only with certain body action verbs (2b) and with non-body action verbs (3b). Its entire function is not understood yet.

- c. Ireh₁ gbe egb-ɔle₁
 Ireh beat body-3SG
 'Ireh₁ beat herself₁'

Unlike the reflexives with body action verbs, the reflexives in (3) are not marked by the reflexive morpheme, but by the reflexive pronoun. In (3c), for example, the reflexive pronoun *egb-ɔle* 'herself' that is coreferential with the subject 'Mary' is present, but the reflexive morpheme is not present. In fact, it is ungrammatical if the reflexive morpheme appears instead of the reflexive pronoun. For example, consider (3b) with the morpheme:

- (4) * John **tobɔ** **gbe**
 John on one's own kill
 'Ireh₁ killed himself₁.'

Not only is the morpheme unable to replace a reflexive pronoun as in (4), but also it cannot appear with the reflexive pronoun:

- (5) * John **tobɔ** **gbe** egb-ɔle a
 John on one's own kill body-him RESULT
 'Ireh₁ killed himself₁.'

As for the reflexives with a body action verb, they must have the reflexive morpheme:

- (6) * Ireh sal-eto
 Ireh comb-hair
 'Ireh₁ combed herself₁.'

Moreover, the reflexive morpheme cannot be replaced with a reflexive pronoun (7) and cannot appear with the reflexive pronoun (8):

- (7) * Mary **sal-eto** **egb-ɔle**
 Mary comb-hair body-3SG
 'Mary₁ combed herself₁.'
- (8) * Ireh **tobɔ** sal-eto **egb-ɔle**
 Ireh on one's own comb-hair body-3SG
 'Ireh₁ combed herself₁.'

2.2 Inchoatives

The same morpheme that marks reflexivity with body action verbs can also appear in inchoatives, as shown in (9):

- b. *mẹ* *wẹ* (**awa*)
 1SG sleep dog
 'I sleep.'
 (* 'I sleep a dog.': intended meaning 'I make a dog sleep.')

The discussion on transitivity of reflexives and inchoatives to follow is based on the traditional notion of transitivity introduced above.

Let us first consider the transitivity of reflexives. Like the non-body action verb in (12), body action verbs appear to be transitive, as they have direct objects, shown in (13):

- (12) *Ireh gbe ọmọ*
 Ireh beat child
 'Ireh beat the child'
- (13) a. *Ireh sal-eto ọmọ*
 Ireh comb-hair child
 'Ireh combed the child.'
- b. *mẹ kp-egbe ọmọ a*
 1SG wash-body child RESULT
 'I washed the child.'
- c. *Mary ri-ukpon ọmọ*
 Mary put-clothe child
 'Mary dressed the child.'

Both the non-body action verb *gbe* 'beat' in (12) and the body action verbs in (13) have the direct object 'child' in the object position.

However, in a reflexive context, the two types of verbs show a different pattern:

- (14) a. *Ireh₁ gbe egb-ọle₁*
 Ireh beat body-3SG
 'Ireh₁ beat herself₁'
- b. *Ireh₁ tobọ sal-eto (*egb-ọle₁)*
 Ireh on one's own comb-hair body-3SG
 'Ireh₁ combed herself₁.'

The reflexive with a non-body action verb (14a) has a reflexive pronoun as a direct object. The reflexive with a body action verb (14b), on the other hand, cannot have a reflexive pronoun as a direct object in the object position; rather, it must have the reflexive morpheme *tobọ*. The contrast between (13) and (14b) suggests that a body action verb changes its transitivity when it appears in a reflexive context; that is, it is transitive in a non-reflexive context but intransitive in a reflexive context. Based on this, a possible conclusion is that

reflexives with body action verbs may be intransitive, and the reflexive morpheme is a detransitivizing morpheme.

Let us turn to transitivity of inchoatives. The verbs in inchoatives are alternating verbs. Consider the verb *chuje* ‘open’ as an illustration:

- (15) a. Mary *chuje* *on-ode* *a*
 Mary open this-door RESULT
 ‘Mary opened the door.’
- b. *on-ode* (*tobo*) *chuje* *a*
 this-door on one’s own open RESULT
 ‘The door opened.’

(15a) is transitive, as indicated by the fact that the verb has the direct object *on-ode* ‘the door’ in the object position. In (15b), on the other hand, the verb is used intransitively: the direct object ‘the door’ is in the subject position. The contrast between (15a) and (15b) suggests that change of state verbs are used as intransitively in inchoatives. Crucially, however, the reflexive morpheme is optional, as indicated in (15b). Therefore, in inchoatives, the morpheme cannot be said as a detransitivizing morpheme.

In short, the morpheme appears in intransitive reflexives and inchoatives; it is obligatory in the former but optional in the latter. Thus, the morpheme is a detransitivizing morpheme only in reflexives but not in inchoatives. This fact indicates that unaccusative analysis is not sufficient to capture the distribution of the morpheme. In other words, the analysis is only partially correct, as the reflexive morpheme in inchoatives is not obligatory. How, then, can we account for the pattern of the reflexive morpheme?

4. Explanation⁴

I now turn to the explanation of the distribution of the Esan reflexive morpheme. It will be shown that the morpheme is sensitive to an internally caused event but not an externally caused event, based on language-internal facts. Before doing so, a discussion of the theoretical assumptions underlying the explanation is in order.

4.1 Theoretical assumptions

4.1.1 Externally caused events vs. Internally caused events

In order to semantically characterize transitive causative verbs as well as intransitive noncausative verbs, Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) proposed the notion of externally caused and internally caused eventualities. In an externally caused event, there is an ‘external cause’ with immediate control, such as an agent or a natural force, that results in the eventuality described by

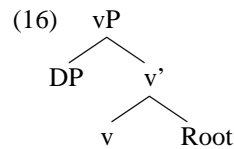
⁴ The proposal made in the paper is very preliminary as the research on Esan is still in inception. As more new data are being added, the direction of the proposal can be further changed.

the verb. In internally caused events, on the other hand, there is some property inherent to the argument of the verb that results in the eventuality. Some agentive verbs, such as ‘play’ and ‘speak,’ are also viewed as having the relevant property: the internal property is the will or volition of the agent who performs the activity. In my discussion of the Esan data, I assume this distinction between the two types of caused eventualities.

4.1.2 Structural assumptions: Reflexives and Inchoatives

For reflexives, I assume a version of the unaccusative analysis (adopted from Embick 2004). In other words, reflexives lack an external argument but have an eventive *v*.

As for inchoative structures, I assume the following structure as proposed in Alexiadou (2006):



(16) does not have a Voice head (as in Kratzer 1996) since inchoatives lack an external argument. The *v* head in (16) represents a simply eventive type as in Marantz (2005).

Importantly, Alexiadou (2006) argues that both a cause phrase and ‘by itself’ phrase modify the head *v*, examining inchoatives in Greek, German and English. Causative semantics is derived by a combination of an eventive *v* and a root. As will be shown below, however, ‘by itself’ in Esan is not compatible with a cause phrase. Based on this fact in Esan, I assume that the two phrases do not modify the same *v*, but two distinct types of *v*.

4.2 *Tobɔ* as negating an external cause

I propose that the reflexive morpheme in Esan negates the presence of an external cause. More specifically, in both reflexives and inchoatives, the morpheme modifies a *v* that represents an internal cause only, not an external cause.

In what follows, I present the data indicating that the morpheme is sensitive to the presence of an internal cause but not to the presence of an external cause, and show that the data can be accounted for by the proposed analysis but not by the unaccusative analysis.

4.2.1 A first step: Relationship between *tobɔ* and Causativity

The reflexive morpheme cannot appear in reflexives with body action verbs when the reflexives are embedded under a causative verb. This is illustrated in (17):

- (17) a. Mary tobɔ kp-egbe a
 Mary on one's own wash-body RESULT
 'Mary₁ wash herself₁'
- b. mɛ zɛ Mary na (* tobɔ) kp-egbe a
 1SG make Mary become on one's own wash-body RESULT
 'I made Mary₁ wash herself₁'

(17a) is a reflexive with the body action verb 'wash' and it is embedded under the causative verb *zɛ* 'make' in (17b). Although the reflexive morpheme is obligatory in reflexives (17a), it cannot appear in a causative context as in (17b). This is different from reflexives with non-body action verbs:

- (18) mɛ zɛ Johni na gb egb-ɔle a
 1SG make John become kill body-his RESULT
 'I made John₁ kill himself₁.'

When reflexives with the non-body action verb are embedded under the same causative verb as in (18), the reflexive pronoun can appear, unlike the reflexive with the body action verbs in (17b). The contrast between the two seems to point out that the reflexive morpheme is not compatible with a causative meaning. A similar type of interaction between the morpheme and causativity is also found in inchoatives. Consider the following examples:

- (19) a. * ramunde ɛghogho, ɔn-ɔde tobɔ chuje a
 because of wind, this-door on one's own open RESULT
 'Because of the wind, the door opened.'
- b. ramunde ɛghogho, ɔn-ɔde chuje a
 because of wind, this-door open RESULT
 'Because of the wind, the door opened.'

(19a) and (19b) are inchoatives with the cause phrase *ramunde ɛghogho* 'because of the wind.' However, they show a contrast with respect to the presence of the reflexive morpheme. When the reflexive morpheme appears with the cause phrase as in (19a), the sentence is ungrammatical. On the other hand, the sentence is grammatical when the morpheme does not appear as in (19b). The contrast suggests that in inchoatives, the reflexive morpheme is not compatible with causative semantics, as it is in reflexives.

I have shown that the reflexive morpheme in both reflexives and inchoatives is sensitive to causative semantics. At a first glance, it seems that the morpheme is relevant to the lack of causative semantics. As will be discussed in the next section, however, a further distinction in causativity needs to be made. Although the morpheme is not compatible with an external cause, it is compatible with an internal cause.

4.2.2 An Account: Correlation with internally caused eventuality

The data in the previous section suggest that the distribution of the morpheme is related to causativity. This section further breaks down the notion of causativity: the morpheme is sensitive to the presence of an internal cause but not to the presence of an external cause. First consider the context where the morpheme is not allowed:

- (20) a. mę zę Mary na (*tobọ) kp-egbe a
 1SG make Mary become on one's own wash-body RESULT
 'I made Mary₁ wash herself₁'
- b. ramunde eghogho, ọn-ode (*tobọ) chuje a
 because of wind, the door on one's own open RESULT
 'Because of the wind, the door opened.'

(20a) has a reflexive clause embedded under the causative verb 'make', and the morpheme in this case cannot appear. (20b) is an inchoative clause with the cause phrase 'because of the wind.' In this case, the morpheme is ungrammatical. The impossibility of the morpheme in both clauses can be explained under the proposal made previously; in other words, the morpheme cannot appear in (20) due to the presence of an external cause. In (20a), there is an external cause 'I' that is the agent of the causative verb; the event of 'washing' is caused by the causer 'I'. In (20b), there is a natural force 'wind' that is an external cause that causes the event of 'opening.' Under the proposal that the morpheme modifies only an internally caused eventuality, the impossibility of the morpheme in (20) can be explained: the morpheme cannot appear in (20) since the events are caused by an external cause.

Next, consider the data where the morpheme is allowed:

- (21) a. Ireh tobọ sal-eto
 Ireh on one's own comb-hair
 'Ireh₁ combed herself₁.'
- b. (* ramunde eghogho), ọn-ode tobọ chuje
 because of wind, the door on one's own open
 a
 RESULT
 'Because of the wind, the door opened.'

(21a) is a reflexive clause with a body action verb and (21b) is an inchoative clause without a cause phrase. In both clauses, the reflexive morpheme is grammatical. In (21a), the verb 'comb' is an agentive verb. As assumed in the paper, with body action verbs, the will of the subject can be viewed as an internal cause, and thus the morpheme can appear in (21a). As for the inchoative (21b), the morpheme can appear if the external cause 'wind' does not appear. In other words, we cannot have a cause other than theme argument itself. In terms

of my proposal, this fact suggests that some internal property of ‘the door’ is responsible for the event ‘opening’; thus, the morpheme can appear in (21b).⁵

Another point is that the data discussed in the section cannot receive an adequate account under the unaccusative analysis. Recall that in this analysis, the morpheme is thought to be related to the absence of an external argument, and thus it is considered a detransitivizing morpheme. Importantly, this analysis does not tell whether *v* in reflexives and inchoatives should be causative. In fact, the presence of a causative *v* is not crucial in the unaccusative analysis. As mentioned in Embick (1998), the *v* in reflexives is causative but not in inchoatives. What matters to the distribution of a reflexive morpheme is the absence of a specifier position of an external argument head (e.g., Voice). As discussed with respect to the Esan data, however, the presence of a causative *v* can be essential to the distribution of a reflexive morpheme. In Esan, the relevant causative *v* represents an internally caused eventuality.

5. Summary and conclusion

This paper investigates whether the Esan reflexive morpheme can be accounted for by the unaccusative analysis that is proposed to account for other well-known similar reflexive morphemes. It is shown that the unaccusative analysis fails to explain the full range of the distribution of the morpheme; rather, the morpheme modifies an internally caused event but not an externally caused event.

The main contribution of the paper is the finding of a reflexive morpheme that shows a different distribution from more well-known reflexive morphemes (e.g., Romance SE). The presence of an Esan-type reflexive morpheme thus suggests that a reflexive morpheme is not universally sensitive to unaccusativity. However, this finding does not necessarily point out the existence of a completely different type of reflexive morphemes. In terms of a typology, the Esan type of reflexive morpheme may be viewed as a subtype of well-known reflexive morphemes that are sensitive to unaccusativity. That is, reflexive morphemes in both types of languages can appear in an unaccusative context. Importantly, however, the Esan type of reflexive morpheme only can appear in the context of an internally caused eventuality, while the latter type of the morpheme does not appear to be sensitive to the type of a causative event.

⁵ This view is different from Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995). They argue that a ‘by phrase’ modifies a cause that is a theme argument itself, and that the compatibility of the phrase with an inchoative indicates that inchoatives are causative. Importantly, under their account, causativity in this case indicates an externally caused eventuality, not an internally caused event (see Levin and Rappaport for details). In this paper, on the other hand, it is argued that the compatibility of a ‘by phrase’ with inchoatives indicates the presence of an internal cause, not an external cause.

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