

# 英語の再帰代名詞形態の変則に関する覚書

## Notes on the anomaly in the forms of English reflexive pronouns

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### Abstract:

The current paper attempts to explain why Modern English reflexive pronouns demonstrate an asymmetric paradigm. The first and second person pronouns are genitive whereas the third person pronouns are dative. The forms are examined chronologically, and Gelderen's (2000) compelling accounts are presented. At the end of the paper, the table showing the development of English reflexive pronouns with special notes on the issue is offered.

### Introduction

Every language has asymmetric paradigms, which may seem odd to learners as well as to native speakers. Answers to such paradigms are often found in the historical development of the language. This paper aims to investigate the development of English reflexive pronouns from the Old English period to the modern time. The major objective of the paper is to find an answer to the following question: Why did English reflexive pronouns end up the way they are today? An obvious anomaly in the modern English reflexive pronoun paradigm is that the first and second person reflexives have genitive pronouns (i.e., *myself*, *ourselves*, *yourself*, and *yourselves*) while the third person reflexives have dative forms (i.e., *himself*, *herself*, *themselves*, and *itself*). To achieve this goal, discussions proceed chronologically with focus on the forms of reflexives that have been expressed in the history of the English language.

### The Development

In Gothic, Old Norse, and Old High German, there were reflexive pronouns that had no inflections for gender and number but had only case distinctions (Prokosch, 1939; Robinson, 1992). They systematically lacked a nominative reflexive, which is reasonable since “the reflexive refers back to the subject of a sentence,” and hence “it can never be the subject of the sentence” (Robinson, 1992, p.36). These reflexives are given below (Prokosch, 1939, p.280).

# Germanic Reflexives

	ACC	DAT	GEN
Go.	<i>sik</i>	<i>sis</i>	<i>seina</i>
ON	<i>sik</i>	<i>sēr</i>	<i>sīn</i>
OHG	<i>sih</i>		<i>sīn</i>

Keys: Go. = Gothic; ON = Old Norse; OHG = Old High German;  
ACC = accusative; DAT = dative; GEN = genitive

Old English and Old Saxon, however, did not have these reflexive pronouns, and in these languages, simple personal pronouns were used both as pronouns and reflexives. Gelderen (2000) gives examples of the use of pronouns as reflexives from *Beowulf*, which was composed in the eighth century (p.34-37).

- (1) *Þæt ic ænigra **me** weana ne wende*  
that I any me-DAT hope not expected  
'that I didn't expect any hope for myself'
- (2) *ond **þe** þæt selre geceos / ece rædas*  
and you-DAT that better choose perpetual wisdom  
'and seek for yourself a better more lasting wisdom'
- (3) *Wit **unc** wiðhronfixas / werian Ðohton*  
we us-DAT against whales defend  
'We intended to defend ourselves against the whales'
- (4) *ac he **hyne** gewyrpte*  
but he him-ACC recovered  
'but he recovered himself'
- (5) ***him** beborgan ne con*  
him-DAT hide not can  
'he could not hide himself'
- (6) *Þæt hio **hyre** (hearmda) gas hearde ondrede*  
that she her-DAT evil days sorely feared  
'that she feared the evil days very much'

Gelderen reports that only the dative case was used as a reflexive for the first and second persons while both the dative and accusative cases were possible for the third person as is shown in (4) to (6) above.

It is also important to note how *self*, which was to be joined to simple pronouns to form a compound later, was used at this period. Gelderen states that many occurrences of *self* in *Beowulf* are adjectival, most are emphatic, and only one case is possibly reflexive. The following are some of her examples.

(7) Adjectival (p.43)

- a. *æt his selfes ham*  
‘at his own home’
- b. *hire selfre sunu*  
‘her own son’
- c. *ond hyra sylfra feorh*  
‘and their own people’

(8) Emphatic (p.38-39)

- a. *æþele cempa self mid gesiðum*  
noble fighter self-NOM with followers  
‘The noble fighter himself with his followers’
- b. *swa þu self talast*  
such you self tell  
‘as you yourself think’

(9) Reflexive (p.39)

- þæt he hyne sylfne gewræc*  
that he him-ACC self-ACC avenged  
‘He avenged himself’

The three examples in (7) demonstrate various adjectival inflections of *self*. In (8), one could see *self* modifying a full noun (8a) as well as a pronoun (8b). According to Gelderen, example (9) is the only instance that can be analyzed as a reflexive use. Example (9), therefore, sheds light on the view that reflexives were expressed both by simple pronouns and the word *self* at this period. She also argues that in Alfred’s works composed in the ninth century, the reflexive use of *self* increases and that the third person modified by *self* appears more often than the first or second person (p.50).

It is in the thirteenth century when a significant event that leads to forming the Modern English reflexive pronouns occurred—the categorical change of *self* from adjective to noun. Gelderen provides the following evidence for this grammaticalization:

- a. The emphatic function of *self* was lost.
- b. The endings of *self* were simplified.
- c. *Self* was merged with the pronoun and written as one word.
- d. In the merged form, the pronoun was genitive rather than accusative/dative.

For the purpose of this paper, c and d are particularly important. The early version of Layaman’s *Brut*, namely *Caligula* from around 1205, and the later one, called *Otho* from around 1250 include some examples demonstrating these points (p.66-67).

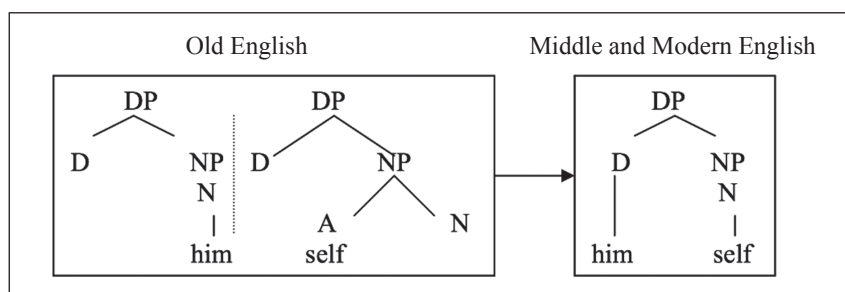
- (10) Caligula: *ah hit wes Ðurh **me** seolfne*  
 but it was through me-ACC self-ACC  
 ‘but it was through myself’

Otho: *ac hit was Ðorh **mi**-seolue*

- (11) Caligula: *7 **me** sulfne heo ÐencheÐ quellen*  
 and me self-ACC they think to-kill  
 ‘and they plan to kill me’

Otho: *and Ðench(eÐ) **mi**-seolue swelle*

At this stage, we have reflexive pronouns that are very close to the modern forms. However, the central question of the paper still remains unanswered: Why did not third person pronoun change its case when it was joined by *self*? Gelderen offers two accounts on this fact. The first account emphasizes the deictic function of the third person. She argues that “since a third person is more deictic” (p.103), it moves to the position of determiner, which causes *self* to change from modifying adjective to nominal head. The process is shown in the tree diagrams below (p.103).



Keys: D = determiner; DP = determiner phrase; N = noun; NP = noun phrase; A = adjective

Figure 1. The Change of *Self* from Adjective to Noun

That is, *him* was seen as a demonstrative inflected for case whereas the first and second persons were regarded as adjectives.

The second account focuses on the time of the merger between simple pronouns and *self*. She assumes that “*self* connected with third person changes before those connected to first and second person pronouns” (p.103). This assumption is in concert with the fact that texts in the ninth century show more instances of the third person pronoun modified by *self* than the first and second persons. More concretely, the logic of her arguments goes as follows: *Himself* becomes a fixed form, where the case of the pronoun no longer functions as it used to, before *self* establishes a solid status as a noun while the first and second persons do so after *self* is clearly perceived as a noun, which explains the appearance of the genitive case before *self*, a noun. It seems rather clear that the situation is not either-or. It is likely for both accounts to play some role in explaining the anomaly of the Modern English reflexive pronoun paradigm.

The coexistence of complex reflexive pronouns and simple pronouns functioning as reflexives continued until about the fifteenth century with decreasing occurrences of the latter,

and a century and a half after Shakespeare, the reflexive use of simple pronouns seems to have been completely gone (Gelderen, 2000).

## Conclusion

The paper has pursued an explanation for the anomaly observed in the forms of English reflexive pronouns. Gelderen's (2000) two accounts on this issue appear to be sound: 1) the third person was seen as a demonstrative because of its deictic feature while the first and second persons were regarded as adjectives, and 2) the third person reflexive grammaticalized before *self* was a noun while the first and second reflexive pronouns did so after *self* became a noun.

To summarize the discussions as well as to add etymological information of individual reflexive pronouns (Lass, 1994; Gelderen, 2000; Prokosch, 1939; Crystal, 1995; Cooke, 1987), the paper is closed with the following chronological chart. It is hoped to provide a historical analysis on one of the mysteries in Modern English and satisfy the curiosity of learners today.

Table1. The Chronological Chart for the Development of English Reflexive Pronouns

Time	Reflexive Pronouns							
	1 <sup>st</sup>		2 <sup>nd</sup>		3 <sup>rd</sup>			
	Sing.	Pl.	Sing.	Pl.	M	F	N	Pl.
8 <sup>th</sup> c	me	us	þe	eow	him/hine	hiere/hie	him/hit	him/hie
12 <sup>th</sup> c					him seolf	hire seolf		
13 <sup>th</sup> c	mi-seolue	us seoluen	þi-seolf		him-self			
	<i>self</i> becomes a noun DAT → GEN				grammaticalization of the form DAT/ACC → DAT/ACC			
14 <sup>th</sup> c	myself	oureselfe ourself	byself	yourself	hymself	hirselle	(weaken- ing of hit) it self	hemself ( <i>th-</i> is brought by Scandina- vian influence)
After 15 <sup>th</sup> c		(the pl. -s ending is added)	(merger with the plural form)	(the pl. -s ending is added)				(the pl. -s ending is added)
Mod E	myself (meself)*	ourselves	yourself	yourselves	himself (hisself)*	herself	itself	themselves

Keys: Sing. = singular; Pl. = plural; M = masculine; F = feminine; N = neuter; Mod E = Modern English

Note\*: (meself), (hisself) = dialectal variations, an instance of paradigm leveling (Gelderen, 2000, p.107) (i.e., moving toward the regularity)

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