

Danish reflexives and the limits of connectivity in copular clauses

Caroline Heycock (University of Edinburgh) & Sten Vikner (Aarhus University)

The appearance of reflexives in English pseudoclefts like (1) is a classic example of a **connectivity effect**. The currently best-supported analysis of such effects is that the reflexive is licensed within an elided clause, on a par with fragment answers like (2) (see in particular den Dikken et al. 2000 (DMW), Schlenker 2003):

- (1) Who she_i chose was herself_i.
- (2) a. Who she chose was ~~She~~-chose herself.
b. Q: Who did she choose? A: ~~She~~-chose herself.

Reflexives also appear in non-cleft specificational clauses such as (3):

- (3) Her_i biggest worry is herself_i.

On the one hand, Schlenker argued that these should receive a similar analysis (i.e. that there is some kind of constituent in the post-copular position, which includes an (elided) c-commanding antecedent for the reflexive). On the other hand, DMW proposed that the occurrence of reflexives in examples like (3) is a distinct phenomena that must get some different analysis.

In this paper we argue that Danish reflexives provide evidence that at least in that language the reflexives appearing in these specificational sentences are not the result of ellipsis (neither in structures that are the closest equivalent to English (1) or in non-cleft cases like (3)).

Danish has a much more complex reflexive system than English (see e.g. Vikner et al. 2017). Reflexives in this language are typically composed of two morphemes: a pronoun and *selv* ‘self,’ but the pronoun itself may be either from the regular set of personal pronouns (e.g. *hon*, *han* ‘she, he’) or it may be the third person subject-oriented reflexive form *sig*:

- (4) a. Vi fortalte Dorthe en historie om **hende selv**. (Danish)
we told Dorthe a story about her self
‘We told Dorthe a story about herself.’
b. Dorthe fortalte os en historie om **sig selv**. (Danish)
Dorthe told us a story about refl self
‘Dorthe told us a story about herself.’

These compound reflexives have the expected properties of requiring c-command by a local antecedent. Importantly, as well as functioning as a bound morpheme that combines with pronominal roots to form these argumental reflexive, *selv* can be adjoined, alone, to a verbal projection as an ‘intensifier’ (5a), or—most relevantly here—it can be adjoined to a full DP, marking focus. This DP may include a common noun (5b), but it can also be a personal pronoun (5c):

- (5) a. De har (**selv**) lavet det meste af restaureringen (**selv**). (Danish)
they have (self) done the most of restoration.def (self)
‘They have done most of the restoration themselves.’
b. Forfatteren **selv** er i højt humør. (Danish)
author.def self is in high mood
‘The author himself is in a great mood.’
c. I modsætning til hende **selv** er Madonnas affald ubevogtet. (Danish)
in opposition to her self is Madonna’s trash unguarded
‘As opposed to [Madonna] herself, Madonna’s trash is unguarded.’

Although the string in examples like (5c) is identical to the regular reflexive in (4a), this focus use of *selv* does not require any c-commanding antecedent, as evident in (5c).

Turning to specificational sentences that parallel the English examples in (1) and (3), it turns out that they do not allow the dedicated reflexive form *sig selv*, but instead a sequence which we analyse as a non-reflexive personal pronoun followed by the focussing *selv*:

- (6) a. Den hun valgte, var **hende**/***sig** selv. (Danish)
 that she chose was her/*refl self
 ‘Who she chose was herself.’
 b. Hendes første valg var **hende**/***sig** selv (Danish)
 her first choice was her/*refl self
 ‘Her first choice was herself.’

Strikingly, this contrasts with what happens in the fragment answer to a question, where the reflexive has exactly the form that would be expected in the corresponding declarative:

- (7) Q: Hvem valgte hun? A: ~~Hun~~ valgte **sig** selv, selvfølgelig!
 who chose she she chose refl self of.course
 ‘Q: Who did she choose? A: Herself, of course!’

While it may look surprising, given the analysis in den Dikken et al. (2000), that both the Danish “pseudocleft” in (6a) and the non-cleft specificational sentence in (6b) pattern alike in not showing a true connectivity effect, this is in line with what has already been observed for apparent pseudoclefts in other languages where the initial phrase is a light-headed relative (e.g. a relative on a demonstrative)—as is the case in Danish—rather than a true headless relative of the English kind. See for example Iatridou et al. (1998) for Greek, and den Dikken et al. (2000) for German, which has specificational sentences with both headless and light-headed relatives, but (optionally) allows case-connectivity only with the former:

- (8) a. Was er schon immer kaufen wollte, ist **ein** / **einen** Audi (German)
 what he PRT always buy wanted is a.NOM / a.ACC Audi
 ‘What he always wanted to buy is an Audi.’
 b. Das, was er schon immer kaufen wollte, ist **ein** / ***einen** Audi (German)
 that which he PRT always buy wanted is a.NOM / *a.ACC Audi

Taken together, the Danish reflexive data give additional support for a view that many apparent connectivity effects—now including reflexivization—in specificational sentences need to be given an account that does not depend on ellipsis; this is true of all the cases in Danish, and the “simple” (non-cleft) cases in English. For these the type of semantic account developed in Sharvit 1999 may be the best solution. However, contrasts such as that just illustrated for case-connectivity in German continue to provide evidence for the proposal that we need to distinguish a distinct class of connectivity effects that require a separate solution.

References

- den Dikken, M., A. Meinunger & C. Wilder. 2000. Pseudoclefts and ellipsis. *Studia Linguistica* 54(1). 41–89. • Iatridou, S. & S. Varlokosta. 1998. Pseudoclefts crosslinguistically. *Natural Language Semantics* 6. 3–28. • Schlenker, P. 2003. Clausal equations (a note on the connectivity problem). *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 21. 157–214. • Sharvit, Y. 1999. Connectivity in specificational sentences. *Natural Language Semantics* 7. 299–339. • Vikner, S. & K. R. Ehlers. 2017. Sin, hendes og korpusdk. *Ny forskning i grammatik* 24. 175–194.