So how long have each other known us anyway?

Bernard Comrie

Or, if myself were to express me in more normal English: So how long have we known each other anyway? – if I were to express myself in more normal English. It has long been known that in reflexive and reciprocal constructions, it is usual cross-linguistically for the antecedent to be higher on the hierarchy of semantic roles (agent > patient; experiencer > stimulus) than the anaphor, as in English examples (1) and (2), as opposed to the ungrammatical (3) and (4), and indeed this has even been hypothesized to be a universal (e.g. Haspelmath 2007: 2096, among many others).

(1) If I were to express myself in more normal English ...
(2) So how long have we known each other anyway?
(3) *If myself were to express me in more normal English ...
(4) *So how long have each other known us anyway?

For instance, in Tagalog (following Schachter 1977: 292–293), whether one uses actor-focus as in (5) or directional-focus as in (6), 'grandfather' as experiencer must be antecedent rather than the stimulus reflexive pronoun. The configuration found in (1) and (2) will henceforth be referred to as "standard", that found in (3) and (4) as "nonstandard".

(5) Nag-aalala   ang   lolo   sa kaniyang_sarili.
    AF-be.worried   F   grandfather   D   REFL
(6) In-aalala   ng   lolo   ang kaniyang-sarili.
    DF-be.worried   A   grandfather   F   REFL
    'Grandfather is worried about himself.'

The Tsezic languages, a branch of the Nakh-Daghestanian (East Caucasian, Northeast Caucasian) language family spoken in the west of the Republic of Daghestan in the Russian Federation, seem to provide clear counterexamples to this generalization (Comrie et al. 2011). Thus, in Bezhta, (7) is the only way to express this particular reciprocal, i.e. only the nonstandard version is possible..

(7) pat'imat-na rasul-na   sidi<l>_hosso b- āc-ca.
    Patimat-and Rasul-and   RECIP<LAT>   HPL-love.PL-PRS
    'Patimat and Rasul love each other.'

In an experiencer construction like (7), the experiencer appears in the lative case, the stimulus in the absolute (with no case suffix), as in (8), so that in (7) it is clear that the antecedent 'Patimat and Rasul' is stimulus (in the absolutive), while the reciprocal pronoun is experiencer (in the lative).

(8) di-l   kid   y-ac-ca.
   me-LAT   girl   II-love-PRS
   'I love the girl.'

    Table 1 (adapted from Comrie et al. (2011), including some additional Tsez material collected by Diana Forker) shows the possibilities for experiencer and stimulus as antecedent or anaphor in reflexive and reciprocal constructions in the four Tsezic languages on which we have sufficient data. (For the fifth language, Hunzib, we lack sufficient data to be able to draw reliable conclusions).

	Reflexive		Reciprocal	
	Antecedent	Reflexive	Antecedent	Reflexive
Tsez	Stim	Exp	Stim	Exp
	Exp	Stim	(Exp	Stim)
Hinuq	Stim	Exp	Stim	Exp
	Exp	Stim	Exp	Stim
Khwarshi	Stim	Exp	Stim	Exp
	Exp	Stim	(Exp	Stim)
Bezhta	Stim	Exp	Stim	Exp
	Exp	Stim	*	*

Table 1: Reflexive and reciprocal constructions with experiencer predicates

In the table, a simple entry of the form "Stim Exp" or "Exp Stim" means that the given combination is possible. An entry in parentheses means that the combination is possible but less preferred or subject to further restrictions. An asterisk means that the combination is not possible. It is clear from the table that the nonstandard configuration, where the semantic role lower on the hierarchy, namely stimulus, is antecedent, is always possible, while the standard configuration is sometimes possible, sometimes possible but less preferred, and in one case (Bezhta reciprocals) disallowed. The standard configuration is more likely in reflexive than in reciprocal constructions, a fact which I simply note without further discussion.

    From the detailed interaction Ed Keenan and I had in the King's College Research Centre in the period 1970–1974 – for those interested in the answer to the question posed in the title, we first met a year before, en route separately to Madagascar and Russia – I received at least two take-home messages for which I am eternally grateful. The first is that linguistic typology constitutes a scientifically insightful approach to language, and I think neither Ed nor the rest of the readership of this volume will need further explication of what this meant for me. The other is the importance of studying the logic behind the semantics of natural language expressions, something which is much less visible in my work, in part because it is an area in which I do not consider myself particularly competent, but something that nonetheless continues to haunt me. I therefore present the typological contribution of nonstandard reflexive and reciprocal constructions to Ed in the hope that he will be able to run with their integration into the semantics-logic interface.

    Perhaps a couple of further observations are worth making before turning over the question. First, the reflexive and reciprocal pronouns do seem to be noun phrases. They decline in the full range of cases that are available to other noun phrases with human reference. So in Bezhta example (9), with the nonstandard configuration, the reciprocal pronoun is in the ergative case, as befits the subject/agent of a transitive verb.

(9) kid-na   özö-nä   sid<i>_hos   b-iyaλ'e-yo.
    girl-and   boy-and   RECIP<ERG>   HPL-kill.PL-PST
    'The girl and the boy killed each other.'

Thus one cannot, for instance, claim that the reflexive or reciprocal pronouns are adverbs (of the type 'reciprocally' or 'jointly') rather than noun phrases.

Second, the constituent order properties of the examples are interesting. In the Tsezic languages in general, an argument higher on the hierarchy of semantic roles will precede one lower, i.e. agent precedes patient, experience precedes stimulus (as in (8)). However, the alternative order is also possible. In reflexive and reciprocal constructions, whether one uses the nonstandard or the standard configuration, it is usual for the antecedent to precede the anaphor, which in the case of the nonstandard configuration means that the stimulus will precede the experiencer (as in (7)), that the patient will precede the agent (as in (9)). However, again, the alternative order is also possible, especially in the non-standard configuration; in the standard configuration, however, the order with the anaphor before the antecedent may be less preferred or even rejected.

Finally, one suggestion that has been made is that the nonstandard configuration is purely a morphological phenomenon. I am not sure how the details would work out, but it is alternative approach that should be borne in mind.

Abbreviations

A   actor (as used in Philippine linguistics)
AF   actor-focus (as used in Philippine linguistics)
D   directional (as used in Philippine linguistics)
DF   directional-focus (as used in Philippine linguistics)
ERG   ergative
Exp   experiencer
F   focus (as used in Philippine linguistics)
HPL   human plural
II   gender II (incl. human female) singular agreement prefix
LAT   lative
PL   plural
PRS   present
PST   past
RECIP   reciprocal
REFL   reflexive
Stim   stimulus

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