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Reflexive constructions

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13 Reflexive Constructions

The causer's acting upon the causee as expressed in SA constructions shares one crucial feature with the causer's "acting upon one's self" encoded in reflexive constructions exemplified by

- (13.1) She walked herself to the tower.
- (13.2) He marched himself to the store.
- (13.3) He ran himself to shut the window.

Reflexive constructions with self-agentive verbs of locomotion are, admittedly, very rare. Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1999: 215–216) and Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2001: 781–782) explain the preference which is given to non-reflexive constructions by what they term "the event coidentification". In concrete terms, structures like *Robin danced out of the room* do not represent a complex event but a single one, in which the sub-event of the movement and the event of the traversal of the path are co-identified (the situation can thus be paraphrased as "Robin danced, thereby left the room"). The reflexive resultative construction is therefore odd (*Robin danced herself out of the room*) because it construes the very same situation as involving two distinct subevents. And such a construal may be evaluated as flouting Grice's (1975: 45) Maxim of Quantity. By contrast, the construction without a reflexive gives the situation the tightest event structure. An alternative account would be, Levin and Rappaport Hovav add, to attribute the preference for non-reflexive constructions to the operation of iconicity: tightly integrated structures are given tight syntactic expressions (Haiman 1985).

In spite of their rare occurrence, reflexive structures of this type do exist. Rothstein (2004: 84–88), for example, takes the existence of reflexive structures like *She danced herself across the room* as evidence against the obligatoriness of event coidentification. Levin and Rappaport Hovav themselves adduce the authentic sentence *I marched myself into the Harvard Bookstore* (1999: 221) and Boas (2003: 240–246) analyzes the reflexive constructions in question under the heading of "fake reflexives with motion event-frames". It thus remains to be answered what motivates the formation of reflexive constructions under consideration. The semantic status of the reflexive stands out clearly when compared with the semantic status of the reflexive in constructions employing verbs

that also express a self-agentive motion but that cannot, on account of their semantics, appear in SA constructions:

(13.4) John dragged himself to the door.

(13.5) John raised himself from the table.

In the self-agentive motion situations encoded in the *Harry walked himself to the store* type, the nature of the causal relation between the activity of the agent and its effect on the agent is of a specific kind. Both *John walked himself to the door* and *John dragged himself to the door* (or *John raised himself from the table*) denote movements that are internally caused. Also, in both of them the energy transmitted is not externally oriented in that its operational scope does not encompass the entity external to the body.

In movements encoded in *John dragged himself to the door* or *John raised himself from the table* the mover's self is broken down into the 'acting self' and the 'acted upon self'. As Talmy (1976: 96) observes, the reflexive direct object pronoun in *I dragged myself to work* seems "to specify a physical object, viz., the whole body of the agent" (on the 'divided self' see also Talmy 2000).

In structures like *John walked himself to the store*, by contrast, there is a merging of the 'acting self' and the 'acted upon self'. The two selves form a compact unit, albeit composed of two discernible components. Owing to the absence of conceptual space between the acting self and the acted upon self, the force-dynamic relation between the acting self and the acted upon self as expressed in the transitive causative construction with the reflexive (*John walked himself to the store*) cannot involve transmission of physical energy from the acting self to the acted upon self but only transmission of mental energy (of "will"), which manifests itself outwardly in the manner of the execution of the motion in question (this aspect of meaning is, not coincidentally, also borne by the causee in SA constructions). In other words, the acted upon self in *John walked himself to the store* is causally affected by the acting self's profiled exertion of intention.⁴⁵ In this sense, then, the agent is both the source and the recipient of the action.

In view of the previous discussion about the relation between prior intention and intention in action, the reflexive construction, signalling the "enforced intention" of the agent, implies the presence of the agent's

45 This aspect of meaning is not present in resultative constructions denoting the back effects of one's motion upon one's state (as in *John walked himself to exhaustion*).

prior intention, which, in turn, underlies the profiled purposiveness of the movement. From this it follows, too, that when John “walks himself,” he does not “effect the walking by walking his body.” This fact shows itself in SA constructions, in which the external causation is carried out along a volitional axis. When “John walks Mary to the door,” “Mary’s walking” is not a result of “John’s walking” (in the sense that it is “not effected by means of John’s walking”) but is a result of John’s exertion of his will (taking the form of some sort of energy).

In a similar vein, in *John walked the bicycle up the hill* the energy involved in the execution of walking cannot be transmitted to some other entity. Therefore, the movement of the object is not a direct result of “John’s walking”. Here, the causal relation between the agent and the patient involves an intermediary, enabling component, namely, the transmission of statary energy between the agent and the patient (put in plain words, John “holds” the bicycle, i.e. the agent makes it happen that the object is “with him”).

In self-agentive locomotion movements of the *Harry dragged himself to the door* type, the mover is also a source of energy and its receiver. That is, the energy in *Harry dragged himself to the door* also operates internally (it is not directed at an entity external to the mover’s body). Cf. an example with *pull oneself*:

- (13.6) Fernando pulled himself out of the pool to sit on the edge to watch her. (BNC)

The relation between the acting self and the acted upon self is, however, presented as involving what we may call “conceptual space”, i.e. the two selves are presented as quasi-separate entities. This dissociation makes it possible to present the movement as involving the transmission of physical energy from the acting self to the acted upon self. In other words, the acting self is a source of the physical energy and the acted upon self is its receiver.

Symptomatically, then, the merging of the acting self and the acted upon self in *John walked himself to the store* underlies a very low degree of the individuation of the acted upon self as expressed in the reflexive (on the degrees of individuation of objects see Haiman 1983). By this it is meant that the ‘acted upon self’ is not clearly posited against the ‘acting self’ as a self-contained, functionally independent unit. This suppressed individuation is linked to a low degree of transitivity as present in the dynamic relation between the acting self and the acted upon self (to repeat, the transition between the acting self and the acted upon self in *John*

walked himself to the store can only involve a transmission of energy whose source is a more pronounced operation of the acting self's intention).

By contrast, the self-agentive movements in *John dragged himself to the door* and *John raised himself from the table* are presented as involving dissociation between the acting self and the acted upon self, which is accompanied by a higher degree of their individuation and which, to repeat, allows for the transmission of physical energy from the acting self to the acted upon self.

The facts adduced so far confirm Hopper and Thompson's (1980) conception of transitivity as a scalar phenomenon. Hopper and Thompson observe that prototypical transitivity requires a maximum contrast between the participants in the subject and object positions and that reflexives are intermediate between one-argument and two-argument clauses, i.e. between transitive and intransitive constructions (1980: 277). In Kemmer's terminology (1993), reflexives have lower "distinguishability of participants", in contrast to canonical two-participant events that have maximal distinguishability of participants.

Not surprisingly, then, some verbs of the *drag* and *raise* type can, as opposed to the verbs of the *walk* type, take the *body* as their internal argument. It is not possible to say

(13.7) *John walked his body to the store.

(13.8) *John marched his body to the store.

(13.9) *John ran his body to the store.

but it is possible to say

(13.10) Changez let me finish my tea; my anxiety dissipated a little. Then he looked at me. "OK?" he said. "OK what?" Changez dragged his body from his camp-bed like someone trying to walk with five footballs under their arms. (BNC)

(13.11) You'll find him dragging his half-starved body through the streets of London, mumbling random thoughts through a woolly balaclava into a rickety Dictaphone. (BNC)

(13.12) He pulled his round body out of a wicker chair and wobbled towards us, "Where d'ya get the outfits?" (BNC)

(13.13) He just simply moved his body in ways that communicated more effectively than words. (BNC)

(13.14) She recognised his need, and lowered her body so that his anxious pego infiltrated deeper and deeper into her heavenly playground. (BNC)

(13.15) Trent turned his body slowly so that he could get his hands on the rope. (BNC)

- (13.16) Fernando, his mouth clinging passionately to hers, raised his body away from her to give his hands freedom to move. (BNC)
- (13.17) With press-ups you lie on your stomach on the floor and, keeping your back straight, you push your body upwards so that your arms are straight and your body is supported on your toes and hands. (BNC)

In the constructions with the direct object slot being filled with the *body*, the dissociation of the acting self and the acted upon self is effected to a higher degree. In a way, the body is put on a par with objects external to its manipulator.

The dissociation of the acting self and the acted upon self in verbs that denote self-agentive movements (the quasi separation of the acting self from the acted upon self) underlies the transmission of physical energy between the two selves. The acted upon self may be (though not always) co-ordinated with entities external to the manipulator of one's body - on this see, e.g., Dušková (1976b: 33) and Wierzbicka (1996: 423). Consider:

- (13.18) Xanthe moved herself and her Coke and unburdened herself of her immediate thought. (BNC)
- (13.19) A never-ending stream of people kept climbing over the sides and lowering themselves and their tremendous baggage into the sea of bodies. (BNC)
- (13.20) The first time she attempted to climb onto the pole she failed, but succeeded the second. With her left foot she pushed herself and the pole away from the building. The pole moved off with her straddling it /.../. (BNC)
- (13.21) /.../ and it was only a matter of seconds before he raised himself and his gun towards it. (BNC)
- (13.22) When Dulé and his companions regained the beach, they were so stunned and wearied by the water /.../ that they dragged themselves and their boat to the first cover they could find, and lay face down against the earth /.../. (BNC)
- (13.23) Victoria ripped the pale-blue cotton dress from her slim body and flung it and herself onto the ruffled bed. (BNC)

The coordination of the acted upon self with entities external to the manipulator's body results in the loosening of the intrinsic (because organic) link between the acting self and the acted upon self, which adds to the

distinguishability of the acted upon self and, in its effect, results in the implication of an even greater transition between the acting self and the acted upon self. Needless to add, the discrepancy between the semantic and syntactic parallelism in examples (13.18–13.23) has a marked stylistic effect.

The dissociation between the acting self and the acted upon self is carried out to a higher degree in motion situations grasped by means of the verbs *take*, *bring*, *place* and *put*:

(13.24) I took myself to my desk . Parked my butt upon my chair.
(BNC)

(13.25) "I've brought you a few things," she said, glancing back to where her basket stood on the floor. "Thank you," he said. "And you brought yourself—that's the most important thing."
(BNC)

(13.26) "/.../ Tell me the truth," I insisted, putting myself between him and the door. (BNC)

(13.27) She had seen their craft land only minutes earlier and had placed herself deliberately here where they would have to pass her. (BNC)

The factors underlying the marked cleavage between the acting self and the acted upon self lie in the structuration of caused motion situations as expressed in these verbs. Consider first:

(13.28) John took (/brought) the book to the meeting.

(13.29) John placed (/put the book) on the table.

The relevant features of these caused motion situations include (a) the type of energy, (b) the position of the object with respect to the agent and (c) the manner of the motion exerted by the agent:

(a) the type of energy transmitted from the agent to the object is of a statory type, not of a dynamic type as in *drag/lower something* (the agent ensures only that the object is "with him")

(b) the object is "at/with the agent", so to say

(c) the manner of the agent's motion is not specified

From the features specified in (a) and (b) it follows that the object moves owing to the fact that the agent moves. By contrast, in the verbs of the *drag* and *lower* type (*John dragged the box to the door*, *John raised the chair*), the energy transmitted from the agent to the object is of a dynamic type and involves direct physical contact with the object (as op-

posed to *raise*, the verb *drag* encodes information about an exertion of force).

The absence of the transmission of dynamic energy, the loosened link between the agent and the object in terms of the spatial positioning of the object and the absence of information about the manner of motion are, then, the factors that determine the cleavage between the acting self and the acted upon self in self-agentive movements encoded in the verbs in question. In addition, in caused motion situations expressed by means of *take* and *bring*, the entity moved does not have to be in direct physical contact with its manipulator at all (this aspect of meaning comes to the fore especially in situations in which the entity moved is an animate one, cf. *I took him to Paris, I took the horses to the river, He brought Helen with him*). The use of the *body* instead of the reflexive is, therefore, extremely rare:

(13.30) I saw then that we shall die, wish ourselves into extinction, unless we find a new course. I would have been content then to die myself, rather than take my body back eventually to encumber the continents with yet another corpse. (BNC)

Here, the body is put on a par with inanimate objects, due to the severing of the organic bond between the person and his body (note that the expression *the body* refers to “the corpse”).

“Placing one’s body” in the following example does not, strictly speaking, designate a translocation of the body but a change in the relative positioning of the body parts:

(13.31) The fighter usually places his body at a 45-degree angle and distributes his weight equally on both feet, with the knees slightly bent. (BNC)

Let us now come back to the observation offered at the very beginning of this chapter, namely, that the causer’s acting upon the causee as expressed in SA constructions (*John walked Harry to the door*) is paralleled by “John’s acting upon one’s self” in the reflexive constructions of the type *John walked himself to the store*. The linguistic presentation of the situation (the transitive causative construction), allocating the acted upon self a slot for the participant directly affected by the action, involves transmission of energy from the acting self to the acted upon self. This type of energy is, in this case, a physical manifestation of a “more intense” operation of the mover’s intention (it may, for example, be the

mover's determination or his awareness of the urgency of the situation). In other words, the patient (the acted upon self) is causally affected by an exertion of his own will, manifesting itself in a higher degree of control over the motion (including its instigation phase) and in the goal-directedness of the movement.

The function of the reflexive in *John walked himself to the store* is to present the 'acted upon self' as a receiver of energy of a different kind than that which is involved in *John dragged himself to the store*. In *He walked (/marched/ran) himself to the store*, the reflexive highlights the fact that the execution of the motion is, in comparison with the "normal" walking(/marching/running), underlain by greater intensity of motion. This profiled release of energy is a result of the profiling of both prior intention and intention in action. These findings are in accordance with Jespersen's (1949: 330) observation that the reflexive form often conveys volition or exertion (e.g., *He didn't stir* versus *I've felt so lazy ... Now I must stir myself*). In this connection it may be interesting to mention, only in passing, that the reflexive constructions under consideration (*Harry walked himself to the store*) provide clear evidence of the operation of general principles of iconicity in syntax. Their form, in which the executor of the movement appears in both the subject and the object position, mirrors the Janus-headed semantic position of the executor of the movement as both the source of energy and its receiver.

In the light of the facts adduced thus far, it can now be stated that the aspect of meaning shared by both types of construction is the expression of "additional energy" (underlain by a more pronounced exertion of intention) which is in operation in the causation of the motion. This is the reason why it is, theoretically, possible to form constructions in which the agent's 'acted upon self' is co-ordinated with another agent as 'acted upon':

(13.32) He walked himself and his friend to the kitchen.

The formation of this type of construction, representing a fusion of the SA construction with the reflexive construction, is made possible by the fact that, in both types of construction, the affected participant is a receiver of energy that underlies the more forcible operation of will. It should be admitted, however, that this type of construction represents an exceptional case: native speakers differ in their judgements on its plausibility (symptomatically, I have not found a single example of this kind in the BNC).

Owing to the more pronounced intentionality of motion as implied in *John walked (/marched/ran) himself to the window*, the verb *march* is the most appropriate candidate for its combination with the reflexive. *March* typically bears reference to the mental state that may be labelled as “determination”, cf.:

- (13.33) Flavia combed her hair, washed her eyes and marched herself to the tower. She let herself in, went up the stairs, set the shutters /.../. (BNC)

This type of inner state reinforces the causative operation of intention (both prior intention and intention in action). Since the causative operation of intention is underlain by a release of energy, the reflexive, explicitly signalling the presence of determination, “adds” to this energy. As can be seen, then, the meaning of the evaluative *march* and the meaning of the reflexive (used in this type of semantico-syntactic configuration) display a considerable degree of semantic affinity.

The verb *run* is, apparently, the least suitable candidate for its use with the reflexive.⁴⁶ The reason must be sought in the verb’s heavy functional load. This verb lends itself very easily to changes in its basic semantics, depending, among other things, on the type of syntactic construction.⁴⁷ Owing to lack of appropriate examples in the BNC, let me illustrate the verb’s potential to be combined with the reflexive in the following two examples, obtained via the Google web search engine.⁴⁸

- (13.34) “Yes, yes; but give me some water.” Laptev ran himself to the dining-room to take the first thing he could get from the sideboard. his was a tall beer-jug. He poured water into it and brought it to his brother. (http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Three_Years)
- (13.35) “Shut the doors, shut the windows, shut everything! – the Invisible Man is coming!” Instantly the house was full of screams and directions, and scurrying feet. He ran himself to

46 Levin and Rappaport Hovav (2005: 221) take the sentence *Jasper ran himself to the store* as ungrammatical.

47 The combination ‘the verb *run* + the reflexive’ appears in resultative constructions of the type *John ran himself ragged*, *John ran himself out*, *John ran himself into the ground* or *John ran himself to exhaustion*, in which the reflexive has a different function. It renders the mover as the “sufferer” of the back effects that the movement has on his state.

48 Ex. (13.34) is from C. Garnett’s translation of Chekhov’s short story *The Darling* and ex. (13.35) is from H. G. Wells’ *Invisible Man*.

shut the French windows that opened on the veranda; as he did so /.../. (http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Three_Years)

In spite of its heavy functional load, the verb *run* may enter into the reflexive construction due to the fact that it is, owing to its semantics, suited to carry information about the urgency of the situation – note an explicit expression of the purpose of the motion in examples (13.34) and (13.35). This aspect of meaning, potentially present in the goal-directed use of *run*, may be illustrated by way of the following example:

(13.36) Frightened by the stranger he ran to the kitchen to find his mother. She was not there and after running frantically around the garden he eventually found her beside the old hanging tree at the bottom of the path. (BNC)

The profiling of the exertion of the motion (underlain by the more pronounced operation of intention) results, in its effect, in the profiling of the goal-directedness of the movement. This explains why a path phrase denoting a spatial goal is an obligatory sentence component:

(13.37) *John walked (/marched/ran) himself.

But:

(13.38) John walked (/marched/ran) himself to the store.

(13.39) John walked (/marched/ran) himself towards the store.

(13.40) John walked himself down the stairs.

(13.41) Logic suggested that the Chelonians had marched themselves into battle with their customary lack of subtlety, only to find that their enemy was of a higher calibre than anticipated. (BNC)

As can be seen, these agentive locomotion events include directed motion, i.e. they include a definite change of location or an oriented motion along a path. The obligatory goal-orientedness of the motion is, therefore, the reason why the reflexive construction is barred for verbs that encode an intrinsically non-directed motion, cf.:

(13.42) *John wandered himself round the town.

(13.43) *John roamed himself over the hills.

Notice, too, that the goal-orientedness of a motion requires that the path have a linear (or, put more precisely, an axial) character and that this

stipulation cannot be met if the motion is not oriented in a certain direction.

There is, however, another reason why these verbs do not enter into reflexive constructions. The verbs encode, as part of their lexico-semantic content, reference to a specific (roughly, a relaxed) mental state which is semantically incoherent with the potential to profile the presence of intention and, also, of a goal-orientedness of the motion. It should be added that the goal of the motion does not necessarily have to be expressed by means of a path phrase. The spatial goal may be expressed indirectly, via the purpose of the motion (cf. ex. 13.35).

13.1 The Total Object Inclusion as Manifested in the Meaning of the Reflexive

As is well known, the patient can be rendered as an affected participant if this participant is included in the action denoted by the verb in its entirety. At this point, it may be mentioned in passing that Anderson (1971) is commonly adduced in the literature as the first author to identify the concept of the total inclusion of the object in the verbal action. In actual fact, the idea of a semantic overlap of the action with its object is implicitly contained in Jakobson's specification of the semantics of the Russian accusative case (Jakobson 1971: 31): "Der Akkusativ besagt stets, daß irgend eine H a n d l u n g auf den bezeichneten Gegenstand gewissermaßen g e r i c h t e t ist, an ihm sich äußert, ihn ergreift."

Viewed from the perspective of the intentionality of action, from the requirement for the total inclusion of the object in the operational scope of the action it follows that the reflexive can only be used with verbs lexicalizing intentional movements (as has already been discussed, the requirement for the total inclusion of the object must also be met in SA constructions). Consider, e.g.:

(13.44) *Harry staggered himself to the door.

(13.45) *Harry limped himself to the door.

(13.46) *Harry ambled himself home.

(13.47) *Harry crept himself to the door.

(13.48) *Harry galloped himself to the door.

(13.49) *Harry jogged himself down the stairs.

These verbs include in their agentive qualia also the agent's inner state (mental and/or physical). Let us recall that *gallop* and *jog* can be used to

encode the agent's state, cf. examples (13.48) and (13.49). We see, then, that if intention is not the sole factor triggering the release of energy underlying the movement, the executor of the motion cannot be presented as the "object" of his own action.

At this point, a counter-argument may be raised, namely, that the evaluative *march*, in spite of encoding information about the agent's state of mind, can enter into this type of construction:

(13.50) John marched himself into the store.

It should be realized, however, that the nature of the mental state ("determination") encoded in the verb is of a kind that does not run counter to the causative operation of intention but, on the contrary, adds to it.

Reflexive constructions are also barred for verbs that carry information about the circumstances of the motion (the verb *jog* in the sense "to run slowly for physical exercise" encodes the purpose of the motion, *ski* involves an instrument with which the motion is carried out):

(13.51) *Harry jogged himself round the park.

(13.52) *Harry skied himself down the slope.

There is, however, another factor that decides the acceptability of the reflexive constructions with agentive locomotion verbs of the type under discussion, namely, a pragmatic one. Certain verbs do not enter into reflexive constructions, in spite of the fact that they meet all the requirements imposed on the semantics of verbs that can be admitted into reflexive constructions. Cf., e.g.:

(13.53) *? John crawled himself to the door.

(13.54) *? John climbed himself up the mountain.

The verbs *crawl* (in the sense to "move on all fours") and *climb* denote an agentive volitional locomotion that is devoid of the ties to the inner state of the executor of the motion and of the additional information about the circumstances of the motion. Still, the usability of the verbs in the constructions in which the agent is presented as an affected participant is highly questionable. The reason seems to lie in the status of these movements in terms of their 'normalcy' and 'frequency', i.e. in terms of their prototypicality. "Crawling", apparently, does not belong to the class of movements that represent the basic types of human locomotion and the same is valid for "climbing". (Needless to say, prototypicality is a sca-

lar concept. The degrees of plausibility may, therefore, vary, depending also on the experience of a language user.)

Consider now a reflexive construction with *crawl*, adduced in Boas (2003: 241) as an instantiation of what he calls “fake reflexives with motion event-frames”:

(13.55) He crawled himself out of bed and into his chair.

It might seem that this example undermines the role of the pragmatic status of the motion as argued for above. However, the verb *crawl* is not used in the sense “to move on all fours”, but in the sense “to walk or move along with a slow or laborious motion” (*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 1993: 543). That is, the verb does not designate “moving on all fours” which is one of the basic human locomotory movements and which is devoid of additional features (those referring to the agent’s state or those referring to the circumstances of the motion). Here, the verb *crawl* denotes a movement that, even in the absence of the reflexive, encodes information about the agent’s state. In other words, the absence of the reflexive does not deprive the verb of its ability to refer to the agent’s state, cf.:

(13.56) He crawled out of bed and into his chair.

The reflexive in ex. (13.55), bearing explicit reference to the greater effort, merely serves to highlight the fact that the agent is not in good shape, whether mentally and/or physically. Therefore, Boas (2003: 242) can state that reflexive constructions with motion verbs emphasize the fact that “the movers have to overcome some obstacle (typically the proclivity of their mind or body to resist movement in order to reach their destination)” and that the function of the reflexive is thus to describe the mover’s attitude towards the movement.

By way of concluding the discussion of the holistic meaning of the participant in the direct object position (as manifested in the reflexive constructions employing self-agentive verbs of locomotion), let me state the following:

The possibility of forming constructions of the type *Harry walked (/marched) himself to the store* (or *Harry ran himself to shut the window*) and the impossibility of forming constructions of the type **Harry staggered himself to the door* attest to the fact that the ‘acted upon’ self (i.e. the self that changes its position in space due to the activity of the ‘acting self’) can occupy a direct object position (with the subject position being occupied by the ‘acting self’) if it displays a functional overlap with the

acting self. In other words, the ‘acted upon self’ is not only included in the ‘acting self’ as its part – if this were the case, the construction *Harry staggered himself to the door* would not be ruled out. This means that *himself* does not merely designate “one’s body”, but bears reference to one’s acting (controlling) self, too. That is, *himself*, being co-referential with the participant in the subject position, refers to the “person”.

In other words, the ‘acting self’ includes the ‘acted upon self’. Actually, this very fact enables the writers (e.g., Jackendoff 1990: 259 and Parsons 1994: 80–81) to evaluate the participant in the subject position in constructions denoting “subject-oriented” motion events (*John walked*) as conflating the Actor (or Agent) and the Theme (the Theme is a participant that moves or whose position in space is specified).⁴⁹

13.2 The Profiling of Intention in Relation to an Increase in the Patient’s Affectedness

The profiling of prior intention and intention in action rests in the profiling of their causative operation in the instigation of the movement and control over its course. In other words, reflexive constructions, rendering the mover as both the agent and the patient, profile the internal causality of the motion.⁵⁰ Gruber (1976: 201) thus regards the constructions *John walked himself to the store* and *John walked to the store* as expressing the causative meaning and the agentive meaning incorporating a coreferential theme, respectively. Ikegami (1988) also contends that if the grammatical object represents the goal of the action, then the grammatical subject represents the source of the action (as is well known, the link between the patient and the direct object position conforms to the universal mapping rules between syntax and semantics and, as attested by the findings in cognitive linguistics, reflects the nature of human cognitive processes, see esp. Langacker 1990). Furthermore, as the source of action intensifies its activity, “the goal becomes increasingly more markedly affected” (Ikegami 1988: 394). Ikegami adds that, in this case, the object changes its status from the patient, who merely suffers the effects of the action, to the causee, who undergoes a change of state, and illustrates this point in examples like *Mary rocked her baby (in the cradle)* and *Mary rocked her baby to sleep (ibid.)*.

49 The term “subject-oriented” motion events has been borrowed from Wechsler (1997).

50 In this connection it is interesting to mention that Ikegami (1988: 395) sees causativization as the intensification of agentivity.

Since intention can bring about a movement only if it is underlain by a release of energy – let us recall Searle’s (1983: 86) observation that if the causal connection between intention and action is broken, “we no longer have a case of carrying out the intention”– the reflexive construction encodes greater effort. Gruber (1976: 201) observes that the reflexive construction bears, as opposed to its non-reflexive variant, an additional feature of “accompaniment or guiding” and, to illustrate the point, he adduces the following examples:

(13.57) The bird flew itself into the cage in order to get some food.

(13.58) The bird flew into the cage in order to get some food.

According to Gruber, the reflexive construction implies that the bird not merely caused itself to fly but “led itself in flight” (ibid.). Examples (13.59) and (13.60) parallel those in (13.57) and (13.58), cf.:

(13.59) /.../ a hawk moth, disturbed at the window pane, raced towards the bulb of a reading-lamp and dashed itself against the light until it fell exhausted on to the table. (BNC)

(13.60) The animal crouched ready for an attack and then dashed across its cage floor towards the spot where Leyhausen was standing. As it came near he quickly lowered the camera and directed a wide-eyed stare, straight at the big cat. (BNC)

In ex. (13.59), the same movement is successively repeated in a fashion which presupposes the presence of control (the presence of “guidance”, in Gruber’s terminology), hence the presence of the reflexive. In ex. (13.60), the absence of the reflexive pushes the fact of the wilful instigation and conscious control over the movement into the background. The movement is, then, presented as a purely kinetic phenomenon, i.e. as a change of location.

An increase in the energy exerted may manifest itself not only in a purely physical domain (the reflexive may signal a higher degree of physical energy exerted in the execution of the motion) but also in a mental domain (the reflexive may, e.g., signal a more forcible determination or resolution). Owing to the functional overlap of the two domains in the concept of ‘person’, the reflexive may be used to encode an increase in both mental and physical force. In other words, the reflexive may indicate a pronounced mental “force” as manifested in the more forceful physical execution of the motion. The interpretation of

the meaning of the reflexive construction along these lines is, needless to say, dependent on the context. Consider an example with *walk*:

- (13.61) He now fulfilled his promise, and walked himself to the temple of Apollo in the manner prescribed by the being he had seen in his vision /.../. (http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/secondary/SMIGRA*/Daphnephoria.html)

I have not found a single reflexive construction of the type discussed here with the verb *walk* in the BNC (the Google web search engine, however, yields many examples). The reason seems to lie in the lexico-semantic content of the verb. As opposed to the verbs *march* and *run*, the verb *walk* is mute about the presence of a higher degree of force (mental and/or physical) as exerted in the execution of the motion. *March*, by contrast, denotes a movement that implies, by virtue of its nature, relatively higher effort, which may be used by the speaker to signal certain aspects of the mover's mental self, such as resolution and/or self-confidence. This fact also explains why *march* is resorted to in situations which do not involve any "marching", but mere "walking". In such cases, *march* fulfils an evaluative function. It is used as an index, i.e. it points to certain specific aspects of the mover's inner self. Consider:

- (13.62) She loved him so damned much she marched herself right into an attorney's office and filed for divorce when Brad wanted to reconcile and keep trying. (<http://www.topix.com/forum/tv/mr-and-mrs-smith/TQS08AVUVEO5JPFC4>)
- (13.63) Logic suggested that the Chelonians had marched themselves into battle with their customary lack of subtlety, only to find that their enemy was of a higher calibre than anticipated. (BNC)

As we have seen, the reflexive not only stresses the mover's agentive position but also highlights his causative position.

In sum, the reflexive profiles the intentionality of motion and, in doing so, highlights the goal-orientedness of the motion. This fact is in line with Hopper and Thompson's (1980) observation that volitionality is one of the parameters that corroborate the expression of high transitivity. Hopper and Thompson claim that "the effect on the patient is typically more apparent when the agent is presented as acting purposefully" (1980: 252).

The profiling of intention has, however, another interesting effect. By explicitly profiling the operation of will underlying the genesis of the

movement, the reflexive draws attention to the agent's inner state. This is far from surprising, given the fact that intentionality of action pertains to the mental, directly unobservable aspects of the action. The explicit presentation of intention in the form of the reflexive thus draws the decoder's attention to the doer's state of mind, to which intention belongs – together with the doer's thoughts, motives, awareness, etc. All these aspects represent what Rescher (1966) calls the "rationale of the action". Vendler (1984) also takes intention as an aspect of the agent's mental state since it points to his responsibility for the undertaking of the action. Boas (2003) observes that there is a connection between the agent's inner self and the use of the reflexive – strictly speaking, he takes the reflexive in the constructions under consideration as the "fake reflexive", not motivated by semantic or syntactic factors but by pragmatic factors since it "describes the agents' attitudes and emotions towards their movement" (2003: 242).

By way of concluding the discussion of the semantic status of the self in the reflexive, the following may be stated:

The discussion has shown that the manipulator of his body is construed as the 'divided self' if the acting self and the acted upon self are each given a separate syntactic position. The dissociation conveyed by linguistic form reflects the conceptual dissociation. Dissociation includes distance, which is a prerequisite for the transmission of energy (on the conceptual link between transitivity and causativity see, e.g., Croft 1991, Lyons 1978, Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976). The acted upon self as a 'patient' has, however, a special status: it is causally affected by greater effort underlain by the profiling of intention (in this sense it can be seen as affected by "additional" energy).

In accordance with the general principles of iconicity in syntax, the acting self occupies the subject position – the position prototypically taken up by a participant that is "a starting point in terms of energy flow" (Langacker 1990: 246) – and the acted upon self occupies the direct object position (the position prototypically taken up by a receiver of the energy). From the point of view of the hierarchical ordering of the two participants as it is reflected in the grammatical organization, the acting (controlling) self is given prominence over the acted upon (controlled) self. This linguistic construal seems to reflect the way humans perceive the agent and the patient. Verfaillie and Daems (1996) have provided experimental evidence that the grammatical priority of the agent over the patient is paralleled by "a privileged status of the agent at the level of perceptual processing" (1996: 144).