Chapter 1

Introducing the cross-linguistic comparison of reflexive constructions

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The topic of reflexivity has been extensively discussed in linguistics over the last few decades. It also attracted the attention of philosophers, cognitive scientists, psychologists, and even artificial intelligence scholars. The domain of reflexivity is complex and has been investigated at various grammatical levels from different theoretical perspectives. It is situated at the interface between semantics, syntax, phonology, and phonetics, and is frequently framed within the generative and functional-typological approach. The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it presents the research on reflexivity in the linguistic arena by providing a concise overview. Secondly, it introduces the present volume giving special attention to its aims, organization, language sample, and language experts.

1 Introduction

Coreference occurs when at least two linguistic expressions have the same referent, i.e. they refer to the same person or thing. Many scholars also share the opinion that the main function of reflexive constructions is to express coreference (but see Frajzyngier 2000). The investigation of reflexive constructions was frequently hidden in the linguistic arena under the umbrella term of "reflexive", which can refer both to the form and to the function of the reflexive construction.

The topic of reflexivity has attracted the attention of various scholars, who explored it in-depth from different grammatical angles. For example, Schladt (2000)

and Everaert (2013) investigate it primarily from a syntactic perspective, whereas Huang (2000) incorporates a neo-Gricean pragmatic account. On the other hand, Reinhart (1983), Geniušienė (1987), Lazard (2007), and Kittilä & Zúñiga (2019) contribute semantic expertise.

In addition to specific grammatical descriptions, reflexivity has also been discussed in various theoretical frameworks. It is strictly related to binding phenomena in generative grammar (e.g. Chomsky 1981; Everaert 1986; Reinhart & Reuland 1993). There is also a growing body of literature approaching reflexivity from a functional-typological perspective (e.g. Faltz 1985; Geniušienė 1987; Kemmer 1993; Frajzyngier & Curl 1999; Haspelmath 2008; and König & Gast 2008). Finally, reflexivity is a subject of thorough investigation in many descriptive studies, including the contributions in the present volume. The fact that reflexivity can be investigated at various grammatical levels led many to admit that much of what counts nowadays as textbook knowledge in this empirical domain still needs further investigation.

The widespread interest in reflexivity has had important consequences for linguistic studies. It has generated a range of related terms such as "reflexives", "reflexivizer", "reflexive forms", and "reflexive verbs", which resulted in their ambiguous use. This has already been observed by Frajzyngier (2000) and Heine (2000), who pointed out that the term "reflexives" is often used in a vague sense, referring alternatively both to the form and function. This makes language comparison difficult, if not impossible. The need for terminological standardization has been noted by Haspelmath (2021), who underlines the necessity of comparative concepts in cross-linguistic studies. Consequently, he proposes a definition of "reflexive construction" as a comparative concept (see Haspelmath 2023 [this volume]).

The growing body of literature on reflexivity is primarily owed to the fact that reflexivity demonstrates remarkable crosslinguistic variation. In the first place, it involves encoding aspects (cf. König & Siemund 2000 and Déchaine & Wiltschko 2017). A survey of the contributions of the present volume shows that encoding strategies may extend from nominals, through dedicated reflexive pronouns grammaticalized into verbal affixes in some languages, to verbal strategies. Possessive or personal pronouns can also express reflexivity.

However, the classification of reflexive forms (or "reflexivizers") encoding coreference poses problems (Puddu 2021). A typical separation runs along the morphological line, leading to a strict "verbal vs. nominal" distinction. This dichotomy was introduced by Faltz (1985) and recognized in both generative and functional-typological traditions. However, it encounters difficulties, particularly when considering those cases in which object arguments are encoded on

the verb and where the distinction between a verbal and an NP strategy relies merely on the affix vs. clitic distinction. Many scholars (e.g. König 2007; Puddu 2021) argue that this distinction should instead be viewed as a continuum. Moreover, the fact that nominal and verbal reflexives, like, for instance, *siebie* and *się* in Polish, frequently provide evidence for a common etymology further supports the gradient approach to reflexive forms (cf. Kazenin 2001). Given the above, the question of how reflexivity can be expressed across languages remains challenging in the linguistic arena (see Janic & Puddu (2023 [this volume]), in particular).

2 Structure of the volume

The present volume is a collection of 27 expert-based contributions and describes how reflexivity is encoded and functions in the six macroareas of the world (Hammarström & Donohue 2014), starting from a shared definition of reflexive construction by Haspelmath (2023 [this volume]) which posits that a reflexive construction is a grammatical construction that meets two criteria: (i) it can only be used when two argument positions of a clause require coreference, (ii) it contains a special form, called a reflexivizer, that indicates this coreference. To initiate the collaboration, we contacted language experts, providing them with several documents for inspiration. These include the position paper by Haspelmath (Haspelmath (2023 [this volume])), the questionnaire by Janic & Haspelmath (2023 [this volume]), and a model chapter by Janic on Polish (Janic 2023 [this volume]), all available in this volume. In addition, contributors were invited to consult the aforementioned study by Puddu (2021) on verbal vs. nominal reflexive constructions.

The position paper (Haspelmath (2023 [this volume])) gave the contributors a theoretical orientation toward reflexive construction. This overview article contains a systematic and comprehensive comparison of these constructions in the world's languages, discussing the most critical aspects such as conditions on coreference, types of reflexivizers, coreference expression, domains of coreference, coexpression patterns of reflexivizers, kinds of coreference, among many others. An essential part of this study are the appendices. While Appendix A (Haspelmath 2023 [this volume]) lists several universals of reflexive constructions formulated in the literature, the last two systematize the terminology related to reflexivity, in general, and coreference, in particular. Specifically, Appendix B represents a survey of technical terms used in the study of Haspelmath (2023 [this volume]), whereas Appendix C summarizes reflexive terms found elsewhere in the literature.

The questionnaire by Janic & Haspelmath (2023 [this volume]) was designed to encourage the contributors to investigate some critical points of variation of reflexive constructions addressed in the literature at the formal and functional levels. Its aim was also to draw the contributors' attention to typologically interesting facts about reflexive constructions, such as a distinction between whole-body and part-body actions or between extroverted and introverted actions. Even if the questionnaire served as a guideline for the authors to structure their descriptions, they were not obliged to follow it. If necessary, they could go beyond the scope of the questionnaire by providing language-specific insights or omit those points that did not apply to the language of their specialization. For instance, the questionnaire focuses on the synchronic aspect of reflexive constructions. However, many authors also included a discussion of the diachronic development of the reflexivizers (e.g. Abdoulaye (2023 [this volume]), Arkadiev & Durneva (2023 [this volume]), Janic (2023 [this volume]), Lahaussois (2023 [this volume]), among many others). Alternatively, they elaborated on the role of language contact in the change of reflexive construction (cf., in particular, Khachaturyan (2023 [this volume]) and Luchina (2023 [this volume])). Therefore, even though we aimed at a broad uniformity of the chapters shaped by the questionnaire, several chapters have included additional features.

Given that some of our language experts have not worked on reflexive constructions specifically and that the topic *per se* is demanding due to the inconsistent use of reflexive terminology in the literature, we wanted to reduce the workload of the contributors by providing them with the model chapter by Janic (Janic 2023 [this volume]). It served as a potential inspiration for the authors and an illustration of what they were expected to deliver.

Finally, the contributors were invited to recognize the problematic, traditional distinction between "nominal" and "verbal" reflexives discussed by Puddu (2021).

An effort has been made to ensure the quality of data. Daniel (2007) points out that typologists have often been criticized for using second-hand data. Especially for reflexive constructions, Dixon (2012: 189) suggests that reliable data can be gathered only by using an "immersion" fieldwork technique, i.e., by analyzing recorded texts or observing everyday conversation. However, the approach favored by Dixon (2012: 189) is virtually impossible when studying a phenomenon at a worldwide level. The use of secondary data is generally unavoidable in a broadly comparative study. Regarding the present volume, we have invited primarily scholars with extensive experience in fieldwork to ensure the quality of data. They delivered extensive and comprehensive descriptions of reflexive constructions based on their collected data and knowledge of the language. This provides an excellent foundation and opportunity for future comparative linguists,

bringing them as close as possible to the primary evidence for the individual languages.

The contributors used different methods to obtain data. Some obtained data directly from fieldwork, and some through corpus exploration. Yet others combined the two methods. Incidentally, it should be noted that eliciting data on reflexive constructions can be subject to cultural constraints. For instance, "giving something to oneself" is culturally absurd to Chini speakers (Lower Sepik-Ramu). Hence, they refuse to produce such sentences. The same situation holds for Oneida speakers (Iroquoian). In Thulung (Sino-Tibetan), sentences which express coreference between an agent and a recipient can be elicited, but are not produced spontaneously. Moreover, in some languages, speakers refuse to employ antagonistic verbs in reflexive constructions. For instance, in Chini, the linguistic practice does not admit the use of verbs like 'hate', 'kill', or 'criticize' in autopathic constructions (see the discussion in Brooks (2023 [this volume])) and on the similar phenomenon in Michelson (2023 [this volume])).

In choosing the language sample, we aimed to document genealogically diverse languages from six macroareas: Africa, Eurasia, Papunesia, Australia, North America, and South America (Hammarström & Donohue 2014). Figure 1 shows the location of the languages represented in this volume.[1]

Unavoidably, finding language experts for such a big enterprise was challenging. Consequently, our sample is not completely balanced in terms of the number of contributions for each macroarea. However, this limitation is compensated by the quality of the data. Overall, the volume contains studies dedicated to the reflexive construction in 27 languages: 6 languages are from Africa (chapters 3–8, Figure 2), 6 languages are from Eurasia (9–14, Figure 3), 5 languages are from Papunesia (chapters 15–19, Figure 4), 4 languages are from Australia (chapters 20–23, Figure 5), 4 languages are from North America (chapters 24–27, Figure 6), and 3 languages are from South America (chapters 28–30, Figure 7).

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[1]The maps in this chapter and in the conclusion chapter have been elaborated with the package "lingtypology" for R (Moroz 2017), using the language coordinates in Glottolog (Hammarström et al. 2022). A special note must be made for Early Vedic and Yiddish. Regarding Early Vedic, the language was spoken between II and I millennium BCE in an area located between Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, and northern India, i.e. in the most north-western area of Indo-Aryan languages (see Witzel 2006 and Orqueda 2019 for discussion). Early Vedic is not present in Glottolog, while Sanskrit (a subsequent phase of the language) is located in India, where it still survives as a religious language. Consequently, we decided to use the coordinates of Nuristani Kalasha, an Indo-Aryan language spoken today in the area where Early Vedic was presumably spoken. As for Yiddish, the label in this map refers to Eastern Yiddish, as it is generally meant by scholars (see Luchina (2023 [this volume]) in this volume).
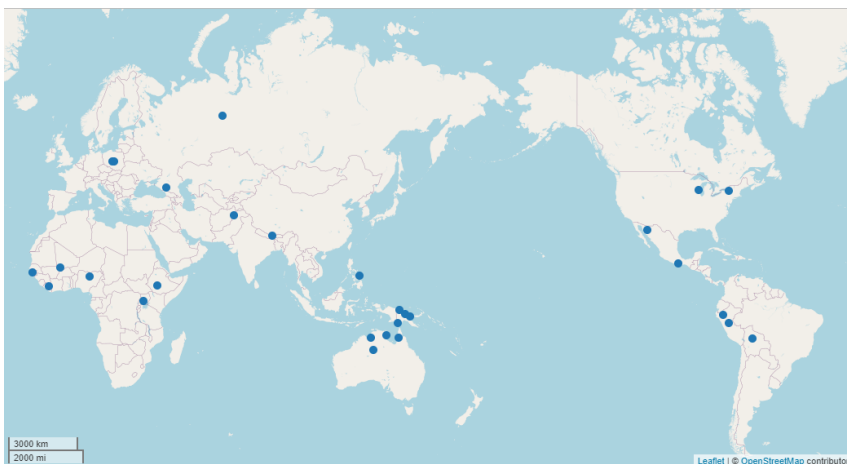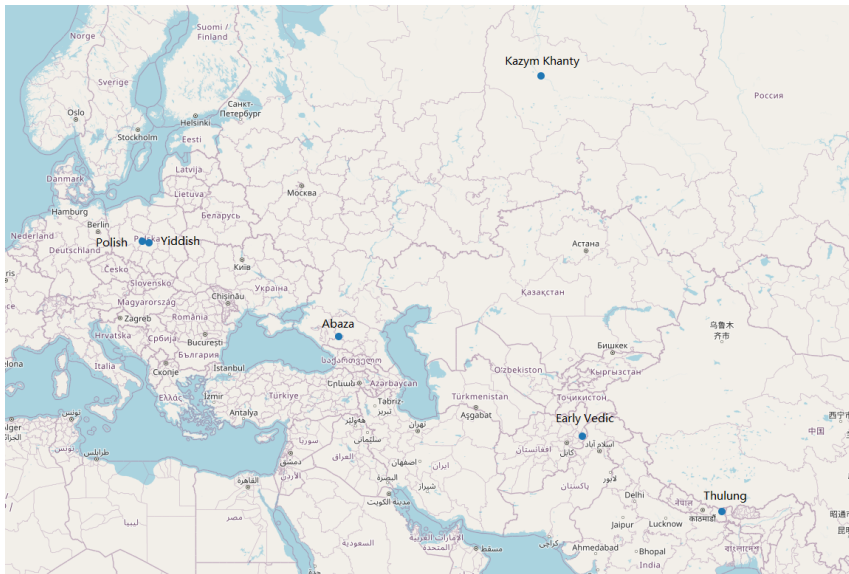
Figure 1: Languages represented in this volume
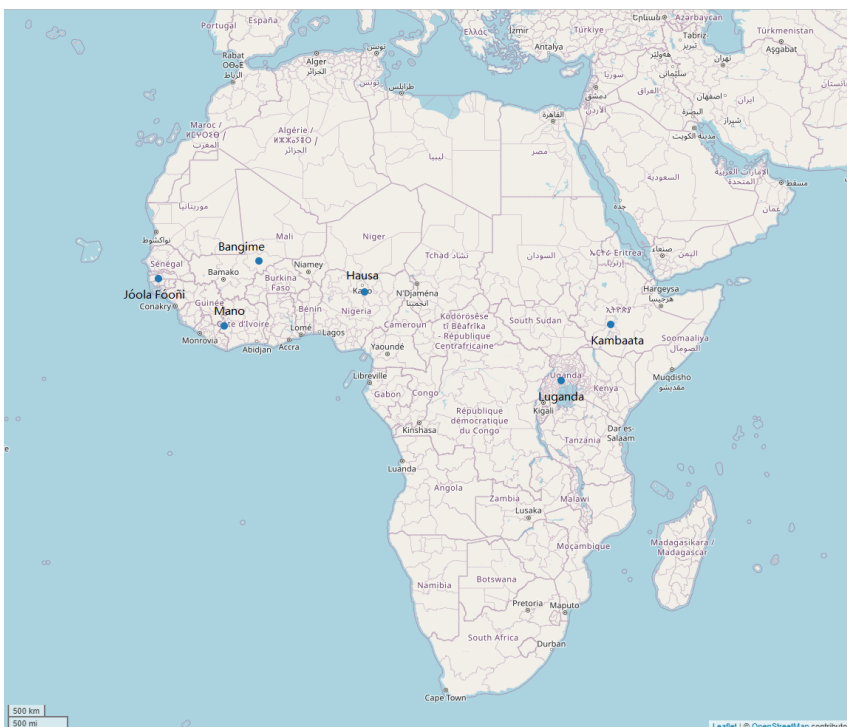
Figure 2: Languages of Africa represented in this volume

Figure 3: Languages of Eurasia represented in this volume

Figure 4: Languages of Papunesia represented in this volume

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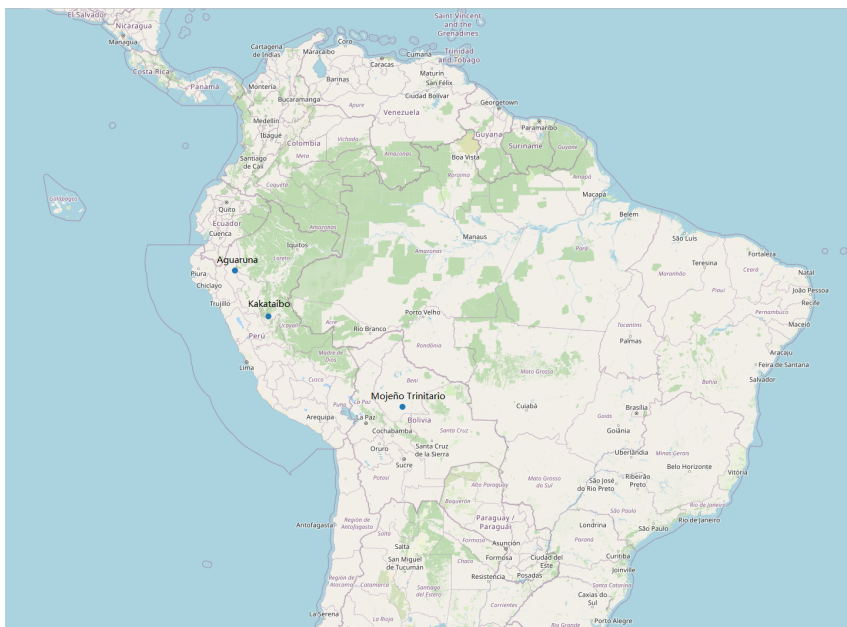Figure 5: Languages of Australia represented in this volume
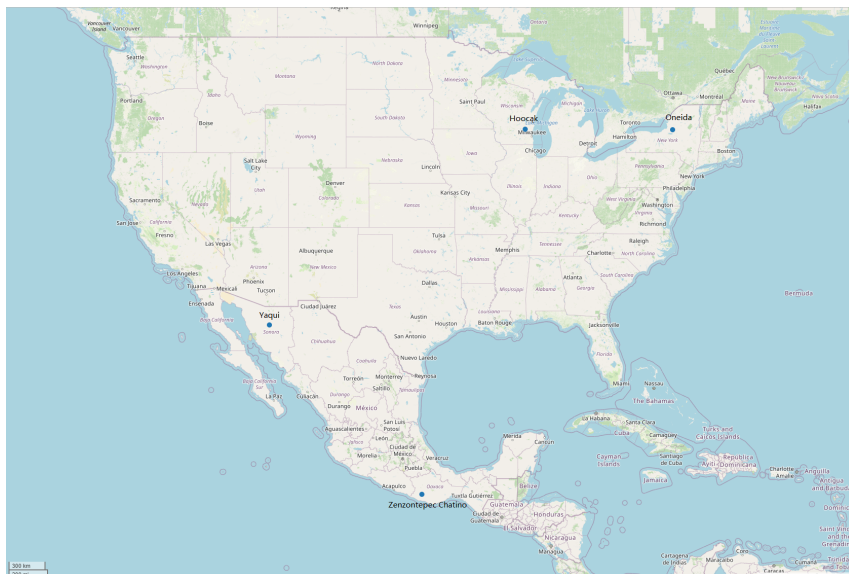
Figure 6: Languages of North America represented in this volume

Figure 7: Languages of South America represented in this volume

We were not fully consistent in terms of genealogical diversity in the macroareas. For instance, the African macroarea, in addition to the contributions on Mano (from the Mande family) and Bangime (isolate), contains two studies from the Atlantic-Congo family (one on Jóola Fóoñi from the North-Central Atlantic branch and one on Luganda from the Volta-Congo branch), and two studies on languages from the Afro-Asiatic family (one on Hausa from the Chadic branch and one on Kambaata from the Cushitic branch). Given that Atlantic-Congo and Afro-Asiatic are among the most prominent language families in the world and that the investigated languages (i.e. Jóola Fóoñi, Luganda, Hausa, and Kambaata) descend from different subbranches respectively, their presence does not affect the genealogical balance of the African macroarea drastically.

At first glimpse, the Australian macroarea presents a comparable situation. Among four contributions, two address the description of reflexive constructions from the same Pama-Nyungan family. The first is Kuuk Thaayorre, which belongs to the Paman branch, and the second is Warlpiri, which is part of Desert Nyungic. Nevertheless, the Australian macroarea slightly differs from the African one. Firstly, the Pama-Nyungan family strongly dominates this macroarea when compared to other language families. Moreover, the genealogical classification

of this family is controversial and subject to various discussions (see e.g. Dixon 1980, 2002 and Miceli 2015 for a summary of the debate). For these reasons, we were less rigorous in selecting languages for the Australian macroarea than in other cases. Hence, the presence of two studies from the same Pama-Nyungan family.

The language sample representing the Eurasian macroarea is slightly unbalanced as well. Initially, it contained four studies dedicated to four languages, each from a different family: Abaza (Abkhaz-Adyge), Kazym Khanty (Uralic), Polish (Indo-European, Slavic), and Thulung (Sino-Tibetan). However, the Eurasian sample was extended over time by the studies on Yiddish (Indo-European, Germanic) and Early Vedic (Indo-European, Indo-Aryan). Even though they derive from the same Indo-European family as Polish, we decided to include them in our volume as they are attractive at the linguistic level. Early Vedic is an ancient language whose data are based on religious texts and whose reflexive constructions have been widely discussed from a diachronic perspective (see e.g. Pinault 2001; Kulikov 2012; Orqueda 2019). Our intention was to verify whether the synchronically-based questionnaire by Janic & Haspelmath (2023 [this volume]) can be adapted to an ancient language with a closed corpus. Yiddish also presents interesting characteristics. Due to intense and direct language contact, it adopted the linguistic features of several languages, including German, Hebrew, Aramaic, Slavic, and Romance. According to Schladt (2000), overall, mechanisms of borrowing play an important role in the grammaticalization of reflexive strategies. Both studies thus enriched the volume by valuable insights into reflexive constructions and thereby supplying a better and more promising picture.

3 Aims of the volume

The larger part of earlier research investigating reflexivizers took the behavior of the English reflexive pronoun as a point of reference in the study of reflexive constructions. Based on high-quality data, this volume takes a broader perspective by providing a systematic description of reflexive constructions with different types of reflexivizers from genealogically and geographically diverse languages.

Generally speaking, the contributions confirm what is considered nowadays common knowledge about reflexive constructions, particularly pertaining to their form and function. However, they also highlight some interesting aspects related to the types of reflexivizers in a language, their possible number, and rich coexpression patterns (see Janic & Puddu 2023 [this volume]). These results open a new avenue for further research, as the questionnaire either has not covered all

the aspects related to the reflexive constructions yet or only touched on those that need a more thorough investigation such as introverted and extroverted distinction.

This volume will be of interest to typologists who seek to deepen the crosslinguistic research of reflexive constructions in the world's languages but also to descriptive and documentary linguists who want to investigate the concept of reflexive constructions in the language of their specialization. At a more advanced level, the volume also contributes to the theoretical debate on the quality of data used in comparative research, cross-fertilizing the mutual relationship between field linguistics and cross-linguistic research.

Acknowledgments

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