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Derived Intransitivity:
a Contrastive Analysis of Certain
Reflexive Verbs in
German, Russian and English

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1. PRELIMINARIES

1.0 Introduction.

Isačenko (1968:456) writes: "We have seen how in the Russian reflexive grammatical and lexical functions criss-cross." [Wir haben gesehen, wie sich im russischen Reflexivum grammatische und lexikalische Funktionen überschneiden.] This present work shows one way of separating these grammatical und lexical functions which are associated with what have been traditionally called "reflexive verbs" in Russian and German. The so-called reflexive verbs in English do not form such a grammatically significant verb class. In fact, it is the class of English verbs which can be used both transitively and intransitively that is of more relevance to a contrastive study of German and Russian "reflexive verbs". (See section 1.3 where I explain how my use of contrastive analysis differs from the more usual pedagogical one.) The Russian and English verb analyses are not mine. I have used Babby's (forthcoming - Lingua) analysis of Russian SJA-verbs and Bowers's (ms.) analysis of transitive-intransitive verb pairs in English.

1.1 Purpose of this study.

The purpose of this work is to extend our knowledge of the syntax of English, German and Russian and, additionally to explore the possibilities of using contrastive analysis as a tool for linguistic investigation. There are two main reasons why I chose to work on the "reflexive verbs": 1) to clarify some of the problems involved in analyzing them; and 2) to uncover certain syntactic differences among these three languages.

A recent article by Jucquois (1973) entitled "The triple function of the reflexive in some languages" brings out the basis of the problems which have arisen in the analysis of "reflexive verbs". He notes that "reflexive verbs" occur in sentences which have three different interpretations: reflexive, middle, passive. Because of this fact grammarians have been unable to satisfactorily analyze "reflexive verbs".

Leonard Babby's work on SJA-verbs has done much to clarify the analysis of Russian "reflexive verbs". He drops the term "reflexive verb" and uses the term SJA-verb since there is nothing reflexive about many SJA-verbs. I have applied his syntactic theory to German "reflexive verbs" and have also followed him by dropping the "reflexive" label. I call these SICH-verbs which occur with some form of the *self*-pronoun I call SELF-verbs.¹ By using the same theory

for German, Russian and English, I have been able to highlight some of the syntactic differences among these three languages.

1.2 Subject matter of this study.

The verbs which this study covers form a subset of the SICH/SJA-verbs in German and Russian and the English transitive-intransitive verb equivalents. The verbs in this subset have one defining characteristic: all their members are the result of syntactic Derived Intransitivity, i.e. lexically transitive verbs which are intransitive in the surface structure (see my section 1.2.4 and Babby forthcoming - Lingua). Since SICH/SELF-verbs employ forms which are homophonous to the reflexive pronouns, I present a brief description of the reflexive pronouns of English and German in order to help the reader follow the example sentences. The Russian reflexive pronoun is included in order to show up some of the differences in morphology between Russian, German and English.

1.2.1 The reflexive pronoun in English, German and Russian.

The *English* reflexive pronoun has been described by Helke (1970:30) as consisting of the noun *self* preceded by a possessive pronoun in the determiner node. Although this analysis is not the usual one, it has the advantage of being able to relate within one phrase structure the following two sentences:

- (1)a I am not feeling myself today.
 b I am not feeling my usual self today.

The third person reflexive pronouns, however, do not occur with a possessive determiner but with the object pronoun forms:

I	-	my	house	-	myself
we	-	our	house	-	ourselves
you	-	your	house	-	yourself/yourselves
he	-	his	house	-	himself (*hisself)
she	-	her	house	-	herself
it	-	its	house	-	itself (*itsself)
they	-	their	house	-	themselves (*theirselves)

Helke posits a rule to change the underlying possessive forms, i.e. *his*, *its*, *their*, *one's* into object forms, i.e. *him*, *it*, *them*, *one*. Helke's rule operates vacuously on *her*. In English, then, the third person is treated differently

1. Further motivation for this step is provided by the fact that it is generally recognized that the so-called "reflexive verbs" do not have a reflexive meaning (see Poutsma 1926:143-144; Isačenko 1968:457-458; Stötzl 1970:164).

from the first and second persons. The diagram at the end of this section lists the English reflexive pronouns and the parameters by which they are characterized.

The *German* reflexive pronoun inflects for case, number and gender.² In German the reflexive pronoun for the first persons and the familiar second persons declines for case, number and person.

	non-reflexive accusative/dative	reflexive
ich 'I'	mich/mir	mich/mir
wir 'we'	uns/uns	uns/uns
du 'you'	dich/dir	dich/dir
ihr 'you' (plur.)	euch/euch	euch/euch

Because the accusative and dative reflexives are the same as the non-reflexives, some grammarians (e.g. Bierwisch 1965:95) treat these pronoun forms as the same as the non-reflexive forms. In the formal second persons and the third persons, however, there is a special reflexive form *sich* which remains invariant, i.e. it does not inflect for case, number or gender.

Sie 'you'	Sie/Ihnen	sich
er 'he'	ihn/ihm	sich
sie 'she'	sie/ihr	sich
es 'it'	es/ihm	sich
sie 'they'	sie/ihnen	sich

Historically, the formal second person is a special usage of the third person plural. Considering the formal person; then, as a third person form, we can also say that in German, as in English, the third person is treated differently than the first and second persons. I use *SICH* to refer to all members of the reflexive paradigm collectively. The diagram on page 4 gives the reflexive pronoun forms and the parameters which characterize them.

The reflexive pronoun in *Russian* inflects for case only and does not reflect person, number, or gender.³ The diagram on page 4 gives the forms of this

2. There are two numbers in German (singular and plural), three grammatical genders (masculine, feminine and neuter) and four cases (nominative, accusative, dative and genitive). Within the pronoun system there is a fourth person category: the second person is divided into familiar and polite/formal forms.

3. There are two numbers in Russian (singular and plural), three grammatical genders (masculine, feminine and neuter) and six cases (nominative, accusative, dative, instrumental, genitive and prepositional). Jacobson (1958 [1971:173f]) posits two other cases, which are listed as genitive II and prepositional II. Their use is marginal and in textbooks they are not

pronoun and its parameters.

The verbal suffix -SJA has been called a reflexive (cf. Lyons 1967:362; Schaarschmidt 1968:24-26) because often a verb with -SJA can be substituted for a verb and the reflexive pronoun, e.g. *myt'sja* can replace *myt' sebja* 'wash oneself'. This suffix is attached to the end of the verb, after the other verbal endings of tense, person, gender, number, infinitive, etc. It has two forms, which are phonologically conditioned, except when used with the active participle: -*sja* occurs after consonants and -*s'* after vowels. The participle occurs only with -*sja*. Hereafter, I refer to this suffix as -SJA, and it is intended that both phonological variants be included.

Babby (forthcoming - *Lingua*) has demonstrated, however, that -SJA cannot be considered a reflexive because it arises from sources other than accusative objects which are coreferential with the subject. In his article Babby discusses the fact that although *myt' sebja* and *myt'sja* can both mean 'wash oneself', it is not the case that *ubit' sebja* 'kill oneself' has the same meaning as *ubit'sja* 'get killed'. There is no reflexive "meaning" at all associated with *ubit'sja* and with many other SJA-verbs. Therefore, -SJA cannot be said to be a reflexive. I present Babby's analysis in chapter 3.

Reflexive Pronouns

English:				
pers.		first	second	third
sing.		<i>myself</i>	<i>yourself</i>	<i>him-/her-/it-/oneself</i>
plur.		<i>ourselves</i>	<i>yourselves</i>	<i>themselves</i>
German:				
pers.		first	second	second third
			(familiar)	(formal)
case		dat. acc.	dat. acc.	
sing.		<i>mir</i> <i>mich</i>	<i>dir</i> <i>dich</i>	<i>sich</i>
plur.		<i>uns</i>	<i>euch</i>	
Russian:				
case		gen./acc.	dat./prep.	instrumental
		<i>sebja</i>	<i>sebe</i>	<i>soboj</i>

A comparison of the above three diagrams reveals certain points of contrast and of similarity among the three languages. These three languages form a

usually listed as separate cases. The accusative and genitive case forms are the same in certain pronouns -- masculine and feminine singular and the plural, which does not inflect for gender. Within the noun system, these two case forms are the same for animate and masculine singular nouns and for animate masculine and feminine plural nouns.

progression along the continuum of "overt expression of referent information" in the reflexive pronoun: English gives the greatest amount of information, since it is the only one to reflect gender and number in the third person, Russian the least amount, since it does not distinguish person, and German stands between the two.⁴ There are also certain relations among these three languages in types of marking. German in the formal second person and the third person is similar to Russian in that there is no indication of gender and number, but German is similar to English in the first persons and the familiar second persons in that number is expressed.

1.2.2 SICH-verbs and SJA-verbs to be studied.

Not all SICH/SJA-verbs are relevant to a study of syntactic Derived Intransitivity. Certain verbs are lexically, and not syntactically, related to the corresponding verbs without SICH/-SJA (e.g. reciprocals).⁵ Much of the confusion in previous treatments of SICH/SJA-verbs arises through an insistence on treating all these verbs in one section (e.g. see Vinogradov 1947:629-639).

The first criterion which a SICH/SJA-verb must have is that there is a corresponding transitive verb without SICH/-SJA (see section 1.2.3). This automatically excludes certain SICH/SJA-verbs: 1) those which are never found without SICH/-SJA such as *sich erholen* 'recover, get well', *sich schämen* 'be ashamed', *bojat'sja* 'be afraid', *smejat'sja* 'laugh'; 2) those which have intransitive equivalents without SICH/-SJA such as (*sich*) *irren* 'err, be mistaken', (*sich*) *leben* 'live' (see section 4.2 for a discussion of this type of verb), *belet'(sja)* 'show white'; 3) those which simultaneously add a prefix with SICH/-SJA such as *schreiben* - *sich verschreiben* 'write - make a mistake in writing', *mečtat'* - *zamečtat'sja* 'dream - lose oneself in dreams'.

There are also certain other SICH-verbs which I have excluded because they involve other syntactic phenomena simultaneous with the addition of SICH. One of these phenomena is the addition of an adjective such as in *essen* - *sich satt essen* 'eat - eat one's fill, be satisfied'. The addition of adjectives is not exclusively associated with SICH. Erben (1959:111) gives some examples; one of

4. An observation from Isačenko (1968:465) is relevant here. He lists several German verbs which have a dative reflexive pronoun with an accusative noun. Their Russian equivalents, however, do not have this dative reflexive. Here there is another instance of more person marking in German than in Russian.

5. Reciprocal verbs are complex enough to form the topic of a separate dissertation. I touch on them briefly in section 4.8.