Variation and Distribution of Indo-European S-reflexives

A Piece of the Puzzle

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Introduction

Reflexive variation

Reflexivity is a fairly ubiquitous linguistic feature, most languages have specific morphosyntactic encoding for co-indexed arguments within a clause

But the specific morphology and syntax of reflexive constructions differ greatly.

In English and Ancient Greek, each person and number has a special reflexive form, in German and Latin, this is only the case for 3rd person, and in Russian and Sanskrit, the reflexive is general to all persons and numbers.

One can type the Indo-European languages into two groups, those which have a reflex of the Proto-Indo-European "reflexive", and those which do not, but that does not necessarily fully account for the above variation.

Nor does it account for variation in the interpretation of reflexives, be it local vs. non-local or arbitrary reference vs non-arbitrary reference.

S-reflexives

Many Indo-European languages use a reflexive pronoun derived from Proto-Indo-European *s(e)wé*, hence **S**-reflexive.

Generally, this pronoun is used specifically for all persons (i.e. Russian) or just 3rd person (i.e. Latin).

(1) a. Ya lyublyu sebya
       I love.1SG REFL
       "I love myself."

   b. On lyubit sebya
      he love.3SG SELF
      "He loves himself."   [Russian]

(2) a. *Sē/mē amō
       REFL love.1SG
       "I love myself." (intended)

   b. Sē amat
      REFL love.3SG
      "He loves himself."   [Latin]

1. Is there a (morpho)syntactic motivation underlying the innovation of new reflexives over the original PIE one?
2. Can we tie this motivation to any other changes relating to reflexives?
3. How can one account for the interpretational differences in the languages that retained the original PIE reflexive?

Voice and Reflexivity

Reflexive marking in the Indo-European languages, from a Comparative-Historical standpoint, is very complex.
We observe that in the early Indo-European languages, reflexivity had a very close relationship with verbal voice, specifically the middle. What the middle voice exactly is has remained an annoyance for leaners of Ancient Greek and other such languages for millenia at this point, as it is famously difficult to translate into other languages.

Traditionally, and typologically, most languages exhibit a two way distinction in voice, active and passive, with the passive used to promote the object of a verb to the subject position.

(3)   English Active-Passive
    a.   I teach the student.   [Active]
    b.   The student is taught (by me)   [Passive]

This is a fairly uncontroversial, trivial fact of many languages.

Some languages, like Ancient Greek, have a middle voice, somewhere
between the two.

(4) Ancient Greek Active-Middle-Passive
  a. Tòn   mathētḗn didáxō
      the.MASC.ACC student.ACC teach.1SG.FUT
      "I will teach the student."   [Active]
  b. Ho   mathētḗs (hup' emoû) didakhthḗsomai
      the.MASC student (by me.GEN) teach.1SG.FUT.PASS
      "The student will be taught (by me)."   [Passive]
  c. Tòn   mathētḗn didáxomai
      the.MASC.ACC student.ACC teach.1SG.FUT.MID
      "I will teach the/my student (for my own benefit)." [Middle]

Indo-European Voice

The Indo-European voice distinction is actually somewhat more complex than what was just presented.

A full, tripartite, distinction between active, middle and passive like that of (4) is not the case in general in Indo-European, rather the middle and passive are encoded with the same morphology (with a few exceptions like the Greek future).

> *It seems best to regard the middle as having been, in fact a **mediopassive** or **middle-passive** - capable of expressing either voice depending on the context.*

(Fortson 2011, 90)

The exact interpretation of a verb in the mediopassive differed depending on the type of verb and context.

Reflexivity through the Middle

A common use of the middle was in forming reflexive verbs.
Generally these were unaccusatives (like verbs of grooming), and/or
constructions with body parts.

(5) a. Tēlémakhos... kheīras nipsámenos poliēs
    Telemachus... hands.ACC wash.AOR.PTCP.MID grey.GEN
    halòs eýkheť' Athēnēi
    seawater.GEN pray.3SG.IMPF.MID Athena.DAT
    "Telemachus, having washed his (own) hands with grey
    sea water, prayed to Athena."   [Homeric Greek]

   b. Eṣa śṛṅgāṇi dódhuvac chíś - īte
    this horns.ACC shaking sharpen - 3SG.PRES.MID
    yūthíyo vṛṣā
    of.the.herd bull
    "This one, the bull of the herd, sharpens his (own) horns,
    ever shaking them, ..."   [Vedic Sanskrit]
                                        (Grestenberger 2018)

Reflexivity through the Middle (cont.)

Some Indo-European languages can use the middle alone to form a reflexive construction, this is seen in Modern Greek with certain (unaccusative) verbs.

(6)   Middle Reflexive

    a.   **Plénomai**,   gia na mi ksana - lerothó...
          wash.1SG.MID, for SUBJ NEG again - get.dirty.1SG.PASS
          "I **wash myself** so I don't get dirty again.

    b.   Kathe méra prépei na   **ksurízomai**
          every day   must   SUBJ shave.1SG.MID
          "I have to **shave myself** everyday."

    c.   Oúte **váfomai**   oúte **stolízomai**
          nor   paint.1SG.MID nor adorn.1SG.MID
          "I neither **put makeup on myself** nor **adorn myself**."

                                       [Modern Greek]
                       (From ELEXIS Greek Web 2019)

In Vedic Sanskrit, we see a new reflexive pronoun evolving from the word for body, reminiscent of the body part constructions we saw a moment ago.

This pronoun was used with the middle voice.

(7) Ánu mṛkṣīṣṭa tanvàm duruktaiḥ
PRVB injure.3SG.AOR.MID self.ACC slander.INSTR
"May he injure himself with his slander." [Vedic Sanskrit]
(Gretsenberger 2018)

Reflexivity through a Pronoun

However, this verbal reflexive is by no means common throughout the language family, and indeed many languages use a pronoun to express the reflexive, with no special verbal form.

(8) a. Senātor sē   sōlum intellegit
         senator REFL only   understand.3SG
         "The senator only understands himself."   [Latin]
     b. Prezident slishkom lyubit   sebya
         president too.much love.3SG REFL
         "The president loves himself too much."   [Russian]

These languages lack the middle voice, the mediopassive became a regular passive in Latin, and the Slavic languages evolved a periphrastic passive.

Reflexivity through either

Ancient Greek used both strategies depending on the verb.
The reflexive pronoun was formed through *autón* with a pronominal prefix which matched in person, number and gender with its antecedent.

(9) a. Kai rhípsas   tà argýria   eìs tón naón,
       and cast.down.PTCP the pieces.of.silver into the temple,
       anekhōrēsen, kai apelthōn,   apēnksato   (∅)
       leave.3SG.PRF, and go.away.PTCP, hang.3SG.AOR.**MID** (REFL)
       "So [Judas] threw the money into the temple and left.
       Then he went away and hanged himself."

    b. Állous   ésōsen.   Héautòn ou dýnatai
       others.ACC save.3SG.PRF. himself NEG be.able.SG
       sōsai.   Basileýs Israēl estin
       save.INF(.**ACT**). king   Israel.GEN is
       "He saved others, (but) he can't **save himself**! He's the
       king of Israel!"   [Ancient Greek]

                              (Greek New Testament 2010, Matthew 27:5&42)   12

Reflexivity through both

Tocharian B makes use of both the middle and a reflexive pronoun to construct reflexive clauses.
The reflexive in Tocharian B was *ṣañ-añm*, a compound of an S-reflexive with "soul".

(10) a. Läklentaṣṣeṃ   klautkeṃtsa   ṣañ-añm   no
          with.suffering.OBL manner.OBL.PERL   REFL-soul.OBL but
          sū   mrauskästrä
          this be.disgusted.CAUS.PRES.3SG.PRET.MID
          "Because of the instances of suffering this one makes himself to feel and aversion [to the world]."

     b. Mā su   nt = ālyekäśco sañ-añm
          not this EMPH = others.ALL REFL-soul.OBL
          pällātär
          praise.3SG.PRES.MID
          "No-one praises himself before the others, then."

                                        [Tocharian B]
                                        (Grestenberger 2018)   13

Proto-Indo-European Reflexivity

What we see in the (older) Indo-European languages the configuration of reflexives is as in (11).

(11) a.   Middle + ∅   Ancient Greek, Vedic Sanskrit
      b.   Middle + body (part)   Ancient Greek, Vedic Sanskrit
      c.   Middle + S-reflexive   Tocharian B
      d.   Active + S-reflexive   Latin
      e.   Active + non-S-reflexive   Ancient Greek, Prakrit

The question therefore becomes, which strategy was the original one in PIE, and where did the variation come from?

The "reflexive" in Proto-Indo-European was *s(e)wé*, specifically with a weak form *swe* and a strong form *sewé*.

Shields (1998, 126) derives *sewé* from a compound, *se* + *we*:

- *se* is the e-grade of *so*, the demonstrative (whence Greek *ho* "the", Irish *seo* "this").
- *we* is the e-grade of a locative deictic *wo(r)* (whence Hittite quotative particle -*wa(r)*-).

This element was probably used as a logophor (Shields 1998, 126), subject to condition B rather than condition A, then over this logophor evolved into reflexive anaphor, requiring an antecedent.

This logophoric distinction is still found Latin, and other languages, seen in (12).

(12)   Ille   tamen cōnfitētur plūs **sē** petere quam
       that.man however confess.3SG more REFL seek.INF than
       dēbeātur,   sed satis   super - que habēre dīcit
       owe.3SG.SUBJ.PASS, but enough   over - and have.INF say.3SG
       quod **sibi**   ab arbitrō   tribuātur.
       what REFL.DAT by arbiter.ABL award.3SG.SUBJ.PASS
       "However, that man confesses that he is seeking more than is
       owed, but he says that he has enough and more than enough
       of what is awarded to him by the arbiter."   [Latin]
                                                 (Cic. Q. Rosc. 11)

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Reconstructing PIE Constructions

We may assume then, that PIE had several strategies for reflexivity, which accounts for some of the variation we see.
But what was likely the case is that the middle was probably used more than the active in such constructions.

(13) a. *Swé wéydseto / wéydset
           REFL see.3SG.PST.MID / see.3SG.PST.ACT
           He saw/wanted to see himself
      b. *Bʰeh₂ǵʰúm dʰégʷʰeto
           arm.ACC burn.3SG.PST.MID
           "He burnt his (own) arm."
      c. *Woséyetor
           dress.3SG.MID
           He dresses himself   [Reconstructed PIE]
                                                 (Based on Beekes 2011)

It seems that the continuity of the S-reflexive over a new reflexive seems to correlate with the productiveness, or even presence, of the middle voice in the descendent language.

Greek, Sanskrit and Tocharian all retained the middle, and thus evolved new reflexives, from "soul", "self" or a body part.

The evolutionary path of the reflexives in these languages is something like (14).

(14)   Middle (+ PRN) → Middle + PRN and/or *self* → Middle/Active + (PRN-)*self* → Active + (PRN-)*self*

Latin, Germanic and Slavic all lost the middle, and thus relied on *swé (or a derivation of it) to create a reflexive pronoun.

Conclusions

Conclusions

The status of the middle voice seems to directly correlate with the morphology of the reflexive.

It would follow that *sewé* was originally general to all persons.

However, given that logophoricity is only used in the 3RD person, this probably caused its specifying to 3rd person.

The availability of canonical pronouns in 1st and 2nd person likely helped with the possibility of this change too.

From a historical-syntax point of view, the next stage would be to tie this theory to parameter change, and account for the homoplasy seen in the various branches.

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Questions?