

## Becoming selfish: The rise of reflexivity and self compounds in Middle English under the contact hypothesis

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This paper discusses the development of the reflexive system in Middle English (ME) and aims at explaining recent findings of Percillier & Trips (2020) that imply influence from Old French (OF). Using recently enriched annotated corpora for ME and OF we will critically investigate the contact hypothesis taking into account the properties of the reflexive system of both languages and discuss possible types of copying (in the sense of Johanson 2002) from OF to ME.

Reflexivity denotes the case where the object refers back to the subject. A difference has been made between argument reflexives and non-argument reflexives depending on whether they are two-place predicates or one-place predicates, depending on whether the reflexive marker is interpreted as a semantic argument of the verb or not (e.g. Steinbach 2001, König & Vezzosi 2004). Reflexivity can be marked by idiosyncratic forms (e.g. reflexive pronouns), by generic forms (e.g. personal pronouns) or remain unmarked as with psych verbs (*she worries*). Like Modern French, OF has a mixed system of idiosyncratic 3rd-person clitics and pronouns (*se, soi*), ambiguous forms in person 1 and 2 (*me, te, vous, nous*) and intensified forms with a modifier (*même*).

In Middle English (ME) there were two ways to mark reflexivity: 1) in addition to marking disjoint reference, personal pronouns were used as markers of coreference (cf. König & Siemund, 2000; van Gelderen 2000, Keenan, 2009, 44), 2) the intensifier *self* was used in compound forms with a personal pronoun in object position (cf. König & Siemund, 2000). In her study of the development of reflexive strategies in ME and Early Modern English, Peitsara (1997) examined competition between these two strategies, which she calls 'simple strategy' and 'self-strategy', in the *Helsinki Corpus* (Matti Rissanen et al 1991) and found an increase of overtly reflexive constructions in ME with a peak in the sub period of ME3 (1350-1420). Further, she related these strategies to classes of verbs (for further details cf. 297ff).

Using three annotated corpora of ME—the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English 2* (PPCME2), the *Parsed Corpus of Middle English Poetry* (PCMEP), and *A Parsed Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English* (PLAEME), that have recently been enriched with verb lemmatisation and etymological information—Percillier & Trips' (2020) quantitative study of reflexivity in ME basically confirmed Peitsara's findings. In addition, however, they made a number of new observations: 1) the 'simple strategy' decreased during ME and was always more frequent with French-based verbs; 2) the 'simple strategy' was more frequent than the 'self-strategy' throughout ME, 3) the 'self-strategy' was more frequent with French-based verbs. This is why the authors suggested influence from OF (see also Einenkel 1916:50, Mustanoja 1960:502-3, Visser 1963:328, Peitsara 1997:287).

This talk will present a critical investigation of the language contact hypothesis. Although the French origin of verbs has a clear frequency effect on both the 'simple' and 'self' strategy, only a deeper analysis of the OF reflexives that examines the syntax (clitic *se*, pronoun *soi*, intensifier *mesme* 'self', co-occurrence of these), the semantics (argument reference, verb classes, types of reflexivity) as well as the impact of translation can shed light on whether ME reflexives result from selective copying from French or global copying (verbs copied with their argument structure; see also Johanson 2002), or if the frequency effects have to be explained by other factors. For this

investigation, we rely on previous work for OF (e.g. Waltereit 2012) and provide a quantitative and qualitative corpus study using the annotated corpora for ME mentioned above as well as the combined corpus MCVF+PPCHF (Kroch & Santorini 2021).

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