The diachrony of the Danish indirect middle

Peter Juul Nielsen, University of Southern Denmark

In Modern Danish, the morpheme commonly known as a reflexive pronoun (Hansen & Heltoft 2011: 589) can be added as an extension to a monotransitive construction with a wide range of verbs, including verbs of obtainment, e.g., *købe* 'buy' (1) and verbs of perception, e.g., *høre* 'hear' (2).

(1) *senere købte   hun   **sig**   en   bil*
    later   bought she   REFL.3   a   car
    'later she bought herself a car'

(2) *Vi hørte   **os**   noget musik*
    we heard REFL.1PL   some   music
    'we heard ourselves some music/we enjoyed listening to some music'

Most earlier accounts (Hansen & Heltoft 2011: 1311, Heltoft 2014) regard the reflexive element as a reflexive indirect object (IO), but I argue (in line with Hvilshøj 1999) that the construction is an indirect middle (IM) (Kemmer 1993: 78) with a historical origin in the IO construction (or ditransitive or double object construction, cf. Barðdal 2007, Colleman 2011). The aim of the paper is to explain the properties of the present-day IM as a product of the development of the IO from Middle Danish to the present day, and to present the changes from reflexive pronoun functioning as IO to IM marker, documented with empirical data from historical and modern corpora covering the period 1400-2020.

As seen in other Germanic languages (Barðdal 2007; Colleman 2011), the Danish IO has undergone a process of semantic narrowing from the broad potential of designating an Afficiary (term from Zúñiga (2011) covering Beneficiary and Maleficiary) allowing pure Afficiaries of non-transfer states of affairs as in (3a) from the mid-18th c. (Høysgaard 1752: 107) to the narrow semantics of the present-day IO which designates a Recipient of actual transfer (excluding non-transfer states of affairs and intended but non-realised transfer, Heltoft 2014, 2019: 160-162). The IO in (3a) stands in paradigmatic opposition to PP realisation of the Afficiary (3b), a characteristic property of the IO as an argument in earlier Danish as well as in the modern language (Hansen & Heltoft 2011: 1347).

(3) a. *han skal løse **os** knuden*   b. *han skal løse knuden **for os***
       he   shall untie us   the.knot   he   shall untie the.knot for us
       'he shall untie the knot for us'   'he shall untie the knot for us'

The modern IM construction started out as a reflexive variant of the IO construction as found in the 15th c. provincial law of Scania (4) where the reflexive pronoun is an IO argument.

(4) *Brydir man axul j heghnathe scowe hugge **se**   axla swa marga som han brydir ther*
    breaks man axle in fenced   forest cut   REFL.3.DAT axles so   many as   he breaks there
    'if a man's axle breaks in fenced woods, he may cut himself as many axles as have broken there'

The changes from this starting point constitute a semantic split accompanied by a syntactic differentiation. While the IO undergoes the semantic narrowing, the reflexive element preserves the content of the Middle Danish IO, still found in the modern IM whose function it is to specify the subject referent as an Afficiary (see (1) and (2)), making the IM compatible with a much broader range of verbs than the IO (cf. Barðdal, Kristoffersen & Sveen (2011) for a similar construction in Norwegian). Syntactically, unlike the IO, the reflexive element has lost its argument status. The modern IM no longer stands in paradigmatic opposition to PP realisation, characteristic of the IO (cf. (3)), and from occupying a slot in the word order template as

an ordinary nominal constituent, the IM morpheme is now cliticized to the sentence nucleus (Heltoft 2011), enclitic to either the subject (as in (1)) or the verb (as in (2)).

References

Barðdal, J. (2007). The semantic and lexical range of the ditransitive construction in the history of (North) Germanic. *Functions of Language* 14.1, 9-30.

Barðdal, J., Kristoffersen, K.E. & Sveen, A. (2011). West Scandinavian ditransitives as a family of constructions: With a special attention to the Norwegian 'V-REFL-NP' construction. *Linguistics* 49 (1), 53–104.

Colleman, T. (2011). Ditransitive Verbs and the Ditransitive Construction: A diachronic perspective. *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 59, 387-410.

Hansen, E. & Heltoft, L. (2011). *Grammatik over det Danske Sprog*. Copenhagen: Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab.

Heltoft, L. (2011). Lette pronomeners placering: klise og topologisk integritet. *Ny forskning i grammatik* 18: 61-80.

Heltoft, L. (2014). Constructional change, paradigmatic structure and the orientation of usage processes. In *Usage-Based Approaches to Language Change*, ed. by Evie Coussé, and Ferdinand von Mengden, 203–241. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Heltoft, L. (2019). Fra gammeldansk til nutidsdansk. In *Dansk Sproghistorie* Vol. III, ed. by E. Hjorth et al. Copenhagen: Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 129-225.

Hvilshøj, U. (1999). Refleksivitet i dansk. *Sig* og *sig selv* i et typologisk perspektiv. *Ny Forskning i Grammatik* 6, 81-106.

Høysgaard, J.P. (1752). *Methodisk Forsøg til en fuldstændig dansk Syntax*. Copenhagen.

Kemmer, S. (1993). *The Middle Voice*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Zúñiga, F. (2011). Why should Beneficiaries be subjects (or objects)? Affection and Grammatical Relations. In *Case, Animacy and Semantic Roles*, ed. by Seppo Kittilä, Katja Västi, and Jussi Ylikoski, 329–348. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.