

Reflexive Nominalizations across Languages: A Pilot Study

Category: oral

The term 'reflexive nominalization' will be used in this paper for derived nouns such as *self-control* in English, *Eigenlob/Selbstlob* 'self-praise' in German, for *autodérision* 'self-derision' and *confiance en soi* ('self-confidence) in French, for *zì ài* ('self-love') in Mandarin, for *samolët* 'aircraft' in Russian and for Fin. *oma kiitos* 'self-praise', *oma-apu* 'self-help', *itse-luottamus* 'self-confidence'.

Apart from some interesting beginnings in Safire (1996), such deverbal nouns have never been analyzed in any detail for individual languages, let alone from a comparative perspective. This paper will discuss both the formal and semantic properties shared by such derived lexemes and thus the reason for subsuming them under one meta-grammatical term, as well as the contrasts exhibited by the relevant derivational processes in the 10 languages selected for comparison.

Among the properties shared by these derived nouns in different languages the following will be identified:

- The first component of these nouns can be derived (both diachronically and synchronically) from intensifiers ((X-)self, *selbst*, *samo*, *zì(ji)*, etc.) and the nouns can be paraphrased in terms of one of the uses normally distinguished for intensifiers. At least two semantic types can be distinguished.
- The prefix of these derived nouns provides information about the noun's argument structure. Despite appearances to the contrary the relevant nouns are neither endocentric nor exocentric compounds.
- The languages under comparison often use older and reduced rather than younger, complex forms of intensifiers in the relevant derivations (e.g. Mandarin *zìjǐ* > *zì*).
- The meaning of these expressions cannot simply be described on the basis of a traditional concept of binding (or co-reference), since different aspects of the identity of a person may be involved.
- Reanalysis of the relevant forms as compounds may give rise to the creation of new abstract nouns such as (*the*) *self* (in addition to *my self*) in English. This abstract noun is currently expanding its use and meaning at an enormous speed.

Among the parameters of variation manifested by reflexive nominalizations we find inter alia the following:

- There may be varying degrees of lexicalization and several historical layers of such derived lexemes in a language.
- Languages may differ in the number of subtypes (one to four) of the reflexive nominalizations they distinguish as well as in the conditions relevant for differentiating these subtypes.
- In addition to nominal forms we may also find analogous adjectival (*self-confident*) and even verbal forms (Fr. *s'auto-féliciter* 'to congratulate oneself').
- Some languages (Romance) do not use their own intensifiers, but employ foreign loans (Gk. *auto-*) instead.
- Some languages (Vedic, Greek) may also have analogous reciprocal nominalizations with a meaning such as 'mutual respect'.