



Research Article

Volume-03|Issue-05|2022

On Reflexive NPS in Igbo and French: A Binding Theory Approach

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Article History

Received: 20.05.2022

Accepted: 26.05.2022

Published: 31.05.2022

Citation

Onuoha, O., & Patrick, K. O. (2022). On Reflexive NPS in Igbo and French: A Binding Theory Approach. *Indiana Journal of Arts & Literature*, 3(5), 50-55.

Abstract: This paper tries to compare the syntactic behaviour of the reflexive NPs in Igbo and French, using Chomsky's (1981) Binding Theory which is part of his general Government and Binding theory. The binding part is concerned with semantic interpretations of NPs. Reflexives in Igbo and French are observed to exhibit some similarities in their syntactic behaviour and these similarities are in the areas of reflexive NPs being bound in the governing category of their antecedents, clause-mate condition, and the antecedents preceding the reflexives. It is also observed that reflexives in French, as in Igbo, agree with their antecedents in number but not represented the same way in gender. They are morphophonologically represented. In Igbo, however, only the number is morphophonologically represented while gender is identifiable within the context of discourse.

Keywords: Reflexive NPS, Government And Binding Theory, Anaphors, Igbo And French.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is essentially rule-governed at all levels of analysis. Every language has its peculiar nature of rules governing all linguistic operations within the language. It is argued that syntax is the most well represented level in terms of rules and regulations between linguistic elements. One of such elements is the anaphor.

Anaphors are of two basic types, namely, reciprocal and reflexive anaphors. The focus of this paper is on reflexive anaphors which bear the action performed by their antecedents. They are Noun phrases (NPs) which generally can have no independent reference, but rather which take their references from some other expressions in the sentence, their antecedents (Mbah, 2006).

The "binding" theory is part of Chomsky's (1981) general Government and Binding theory. The theory determines the relation of anaphors and the pronominals. It seeks to find out if, in a given linguistic expression containing more than one NP, a given NP can be interpreted as co-referential to another.

Languages share some similarities and differences at different levels of analysis. Some are clearly marked while others are less well-represented. Anaphors, however, from researchers, have been found to exhibit some disparities in behaviour and relations among languages (Mohammed 2006, & Mbah 2006). It is the concern of this paper to analyze the syntactic relations and behaviours of anaphors (reflexive NPs) in Igbo and French languages.

Background to the Study

After the publication of *syntactic structures* by Chomsky (1957), it went through various systematic reviews due to critical inputs it received from other scholars. Such other works as *Aspects of the theory of syntax* (Chomsky, 1965), *An Integrated Theory of Linguistic Description* by Katz & Postal (1964), and *The Structure of a Semantic Theory* by Katz & Fodor (1963), were published. Also published were *The Sound Patterns of English* by Chomsky & Halle (1968) which became known as the *Standard Theory* (revised in 1972) and came to become known as the revised standard theory or the *Extended Standard Theory*. A major kind of semantic information developed at this stage, including the establishment of a table of co-references in the sentence being analyzed (St Clair, dna): **Mary** saw **herself** in the mirror (co-referential) Mary saw her in the mirror (not co-referential). Mary thinks she is attractive (no specification of preferentiality).

The arguments on the need for autonomous syntax that led to the development of the Extended Standard Theory were led by Ray Jackendoff and were incorporated into the Semantic Interpretation in Generative Grammar. This inclusion of abstract elements and empty categories into the deep structure of sentences marked an important turning point in linguistic theory and led to the emergence of Government and Binding (GB) theory. Although it would not be possible for us to give the details of all these developments, an attempt shall be made to offer a description of the GB theory on which the present study is based.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical frame work of this study is the Government and Binding theory of Chomsky (1981, 1982). The development of Government and Binding Theory as a modular was a follow-up to a study by Chomsky & Lasnik (1977), which questioned the necessity of phrase structure rules in the context of lexical sub-categorizational rules in the lexicon which provided similar information. They also addressed the question of transformational rules with regard to stylistic rules versions of meaning-changing rules. The issues addressed in this early article were further addressed by Noam & Chomsky (1981) in his **Lectures on Government and Binding** and “Some Concepts and Consequences of the Theory of Government and Binding” (1982). In this theory, Chomsky became less concerned with the base generability in transformational grammar and more concerned with structure-preserving constraints on language. According to St Clair (dna), the difference between a deep structure and a surface structure captures what changes have taken once a movement rule has applied. But GB theory involves a lot more than merely revising the deep structures of a grammar. It includes many new features such as D-structure, fully Recoverable D-structures, s-structure, X-structure, X-Bar Theory, Movement Rules, Trace Theory, Empty Categories, Case Filters, Theta Theory, well-formedness conditions, and so on.

This paper is not about everything concerning the GB theory, rather, it concerns the “Binding Conditions” aspects of the GB theory which are dealt with in the Logical Forms (LF) component because they involve semantic issues such as referential dependencies, co-references, reflexivization, and so on.

Empirical Studies

Some literatures exist on anaphors (reflexive NPs). Some of the studies are notable and very apt for this study. They include Okeke’s (2008) “reflexivization and reciprocity” in Igbo” and Mohammed’s (2006) “Anaphoric relations in Hausa”, among others. Below are highlights of theoretical and empirical studies on the subject.

According to Haegem (1994) reflexives are Noun Phrases that must have to be within “reasonable distance” from their referents. Mohammed (2006) sees reflexives NPs as a type of overt NP that must agree in certain aspects (Number, gender) and be bound by the referent. For example, himself, herself, themselves, and itself, are but few examples of reflexive Noun phrases.

However, examples of reflexive pronouns in French include

“elle - meme”	-	herself
“lui - meme”	-	himself
“enx - meme”	-	themselves

In Igbo, reflexive pronouns are presented thus:

“onwe ya”	-	him/her/itself
“onwe ha”	-	themselves
“onwe m”	-	myself
“onwe gi”	-	yourself
“onwe unu”	-	yourselves

This paper focuses on the behaviour of the reflexive NPs in the two languages, looking at the principles of Chomsky’s (1988) government and binding theory.

Government and binding (GB) is a further development of Chomsky’s general syntactic theory. The theory is aimed at accounting for structure process or processes, that is, government and the semantic interpretation of NPs like binding. The theoretical framework of this study resides within the binding theory (BT), which is a part of the grammar or general framework that regulates the referential properties of NPs. Binding theory, according to Chomsky (1988), operates on the logical form that deals with semantic properties of syntactic elements among which are anaphors, pronominals, R-expressions, and others.

On a general note, the binding theory has a principle governing each of these categories. The principles are as follows:

- An anaphor is bound in its governing category
- A pronominal is free in its governing category
- An R-expression is free (Chomsky 1988).

It is therefore clear that the binding theory focuses on anaphoric and structural relations of NPs, including reflexives. However, with practical references to Reflexive NPs, the following are the principles of the operations of the binding theory:

- Reflexives are bound in their governing category (Bound by R-expressions (Noun subjects and pronouns).
- Reflexives and their referents must be within the same clause (clause-mate conditions).
- Antecedents of the reflexives precede the reflexives.
- Reflexives agree in number and gender with their referents.

These principles are the bases for the analysis of the behaviour of the reflexive NPs in the two languages – **French** and **Igbo**. There are, however, differences in their behaviour in the two languages, French and Igbo, under discussion.

Scholars have proposed the government and binding theory in order to account for syntactic relations. These theories accounting for syntactic relations take into consideration functional/grammatical and, or semantic, and/or pragmatic characteristics of syntactic elements. In more recent times, a significant contribution came from Chomsky (1957) with his

“Syntactic Structures”. This was and still is a monumental work that brings to light theories which account for syntactic relations. According to Mohammed (2006) the Government and Binding theory is among the last theories developed by Chomsky and espoused by his followers who identified as follows:

- Structural property or properties involved in syntactic process or processes e.g. Theta Role, case marking, government, etc.
- Semantic interpretations of Noun phrases e.g., binding.

Binding theory focuses on anaphoric and structural relations of NPs. Munkaila (1990) argues that the sub-category “is concerned with relation between anaphors, reciprocals, reflexives and pronouns, whether phonetically overt or otherwise, to their potential antecedents”.

On reflexive NPs, Mohammed (2006) observes that they are a form of dependent NPs which co-index with their antecedents. He identifies three types of overt NPs and they include: (a) full NPs e.g John, Jane, etc (b) pronoun NPs e.g., he, she, they, it, and, (c) Reflexive NPs, e.g. himself, herself, themselves. The first type of NPs is referred to as independent NPs, that is, they select their referent from the universe of discourse. On the other hand, the second type of NPs is restricted to some features which are grammatical in nature. These features allow us to pick a referent of this type of NPs in the universe of discourse.

Reflexives (NPs), as we mentioned earlier, are anaphors and, by the binding theory principles, must be bound in governing category. The reflexive co-indexes with an NP in the sentence. The NP could be full Np like John, Jane, etc or even pronoun NPs, like He, She, etc which bind them. In other words, while full NPs or pronoun NPs are co-referential to their object NPs, reflexes co-index with their antecedents (see Ndimele, 1990).

Reflexive NPs exhibit different syntactic relations in different languages. There are cases of similarities and dissimilarities in their relations and these vary from language to language. Those of French and Igbo are our focus in this study.

The notion of c-command is used in the theory to explain how anaphora works. As we noted earlier, in GB theory, pronouns are co-indexed. An anaphor takes its reference from another expression in the sentence. The element that serves as a reference is known as the antecedent of the anaphor:

John and Mary love themselves (reflexives)
[antecedent] [anaphor]

What these examples demonstrate is that an anaphor must have an antecedent which c-commands it. If the antecedent c-commands the anaphor, the

conditions are right for the formation of reflexives or reciprocals in a language.

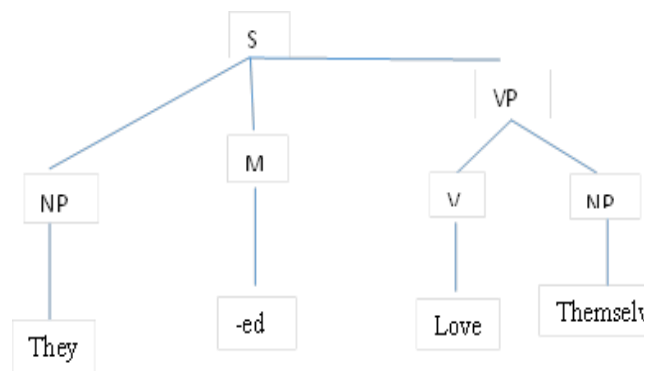


Fig. 1:

In the sentence “they loved themselves,” the pronominal subject “they” c-commands the reflexive “themselves.” The subject is the antecedent (they) of the reflexive (themselves). In view of this relationship, the antecedent c-commands its anaphor. This is why Chomsky (1981) calls it the constituent-command condition (*c-command condition*). By c-command, we mean that neither the antecedent nor reflexive dominates each other.

Okeke (2008) examines forms and functions of reflexives and reciprocals in the Igbo language with a review to throwing more light on the nature, form, and manifestations of Igbo reflexive and reciprocal constructions.

The investigations reveal that reflexivization and reciprocity in Igbo require a compactible clause-mate antecedent. This is because of the anaphoric relations between the reflexive and reciprocals markers and their antecedents.

Reflexivization in Igbo takes a process by which a participant acts on himself or herself rather than on any other.

Thus:

Obi huru obi n'ugegbe
(obi see-past obi in mirror)
(obi saw obi in the mirror)

This is not the way the above statement is rendered in Igbo. Although the sentence is understandable in the Igbo language, we normally, use “onwe ya” to replace the second obi in order to create the right meaning or purpose. Therefore, reflexives are formed in Igbo by using “onwe” (self) plus an appropriate pronominal element which encodes person and number properties of the antecedent:

Obi huru onwe ya n'ugegbe
(Obi see-past self 3rdperssg in mirror)
(Obi saw himself in the mirror)

Obi na Uche huru onwe ha n'ugegbe
 (Obi and uche see-past self 3perspl in mirror)
 (Obi and Uche saw themselves in the mirror)

In the examples above, the NP "Obi" is co-reference with the reflexive "onwe ya". They both agree in number and person. "Obi" is a 3rd person singular NP, and as such, takes a 3rd person singular reflexive anaphor "ya". On the other hand, the subject in example B, is 3rd person plural NP which co-occurs with the 3rd person plural reflexive anaphor "ha".

Igbo reflexive NPs fall under the nominal reflexives. The reflexive marker "onwe" ("self") is constant irrespective of the number or person of the antecedent. Again, Igbo reflexives, agree only in number and person but not in gender. In the Igbo reflexive situation, one participant plays two (or even more) roles, for example agent and patient, or agent and possessor. Alternatively, one can say that in Igbo reflexive situation, the participants playing certain roles (agent and patient) are non-distinct. In clauses with nominal reflexive constructions, the relevant participant is encoded. That is, nominal reflexive constructions highlight the fact that a single participant is involved in a situation in multiple roles. Examples:

Obi na Uche gburu onwe ha mma
 (Obi and Uche cut-past self 3pl knife)
 (Obi and Uche cut themselves/each other with knife)

Mohammed, (2006) examines anaphoric relations in Hausa. He stresses that in Hausa, just as in English, French, Igbo, etc, the reflexive are bound in their governing category with their antecedents. Furthermore, he observes that Hausa reflexive syntactic behaviour or relations share some similarities with the French reflexive notably in terms of agreement in gender.

According to Mohammed (2006), in Hausa, the reflexives agree with their antecedents in number and gender while the gender markers are morphologically represented, as follows:

- *Ita tanaba wa kanta Magana* - She talks to herself
- *Shi yana ba wa kanshi shawara*- He advises himself
- *Su sun aba wa kansu magani* - They treat themselves

Where:

Ita (+ fem, + sing) → *kanta* (+fem, + sing)
Shi (+mas, + sing) → *kanshi* (+mas, + sing)
Su (+mas/fem, + plural) → *Kansu* (+mas/fem, + plural)

- *Aisha ta ji wa kanta rauni* – Aisha hurts herself
- *Adamu yana ba wa kanshi magani* – Adamu treats himself

Data Analysis

Our analysis of reflexives NPs in French and Igbo languages assumes a comparative approach and is based on the principles of the binding theory. These principles shall serve as test frames for the analysis of the behaviour of the reflexives NPs in the two languages. The analysis is therefore broken into the two languages.

Anaphors in French

Anaphors in French exhibit some clearly marked differences in their syntactic relations. Using the Binding theory principles, the following could be tested of anaphors in French: Reflexives in French are bound by their antecedents which also means that their semantic interpretations are tied to their antecedents. The following examples buttress this point:

French	Gloss
▪ John pense que <i>Peter</i> Chante a <i>lui-meme</i>	John thinks that Peter sings to himself
▪ Queen pense que <i>Lura</i> Chante a <i>elle-meme</i>	Queen thinks that Lura sings to herself

In the above examples, we can observe that the reflexive "lui-meme" and its antecedent, 'peter' are bound. More importantly, they are in the same clause. Thereby fulfilling the binding theory principle which states that reflexives and their antecedents/referents must be in the same clause (i.e) clause-mate condition. Therefore, it could be said that reflexives in French exhibit clause-mate behaviour with their antecedents or referents.

It is also evident that reflexives in French agree with their antecedents in number and gender. Again, the antecedent precedes the reflexive otherwise we end up with ungrammatical structure. Examples:

French	Gloss
(b) <i>Elle parle a elle-meme</i>	"She talks to herself"
<i>Il donne des conseils a lui-meme</i>	"He advises himself"
<i>Elles se soignent elle-meme</i>	"they treat themselves"

In the illustration above, the French reflexives "elle-meme", "lui-meme" and "elle-meme" agree with their antecedents "Elle" "Il" and "Elles" in number and gender. They are also morphologically represented thus:

- *Elle* (+ feminine, + singular) → *elle-meme* (+ fem, + sing)
- *Il* (+ masculine, + singular) → *Lui-meme* (+ mas, + sing)

- *Elles* (+ plural ± mas/fem) → *elle-meme* (+ plural, ± mas/fem)

In French reflexives, an ungrammatical structure is derived when the reflexive precedes the antecedents. This, however, is a short-fall of the binding theory. For instance:

- John pense dque a lui-meme John thinks that Chante Peter sings Peter himself
- Queen pense que a elle-meme chante sings Lura herself Lura

Anaphors in Igbo

Using binding theory principles as test frames, it is identified that Igbo reflexives are bound in their governing category with their antecedents, as in French. For example:

- John chere na *Peter na-aguru* John thinks that *onwe ya egwu* Peter sings to *himself*

According to Mbah (2006), reflexives in Igbo are marked by a reflexive pronoun ‘onwe’ and a pronomial form of the antecedent. The reflexive is constant (onwe), it is the pronomial form that changes with respect to the number and person of the pronoun. Thus:

Person	Singular	Plural
1 st	Onwe m ‘myself’	onwe anyi ‘ourselves’
2 nd	Onwe gi ‘yourself’	onwe unu ‘yourselves’
3 rd	Onwe ya ‘Him/her/itself’	Onwe unu ‘themselves’

Again, from the example (a) above, the antecedent “Peter” (‘Peter’) bounds the reflexive ‘onwe ya’.

Igbo reflexives fulfill the clause-mate condition of the binding theory. Thus:

- chere na Peter na aguru John thinks that *onwe ya egwu* Peter sings to himself
- Queen chere na *Lura na-aguru* Queen thinks that *Lura* sings to *herself*

The reflexives ‘onwe ya’ and its antecedent ‘Peter’ and ‘lura’ respectively, are in the same clause. If the antecedent preceding the reflexive order is altered, an ungrammatical structure is derived. Thus:

- John chere na-aguru onwe ya John thinks that Egwu Peter sings himself Peter

- Queen chere na-aguru Queen thinks sings onwe ya egwu Lura herself Lura

An interesting aspect of Igbo reflexives is that they agree with the antecedents in number and person only. Gender is not marked on Igbo reflexives.

- (a) O na-ekwuru onwe ya okwu He/she talks to himself/herself
- (b) Ha na-aguru onwe ha egwu They sing to themselves
- (c) Unu na-agbara onwe unu You (pl) dance to yourself

The agreement is broken down as follows:

- O (+ sing, + fem/mas) → *onwe ya* (+ sing, + fem/mas)
- Ha (+ plural, + mas/fem) → *onwe ha* (+ plu, + mas/fem)
- Unu (+ plural, + mas/fem) → *onwe unu* (+ plu, + mas/fem)

FINDINGS

The basic point of difference in the syntactic behaviour or relations of reflexives in Igbo and French is in agreement. In Igbo, the reflexive agrees with the antecedents in number and person only as shown in the samples above. Gender is never overtly marked or indicated in an Igbo anaphor but is rather identified within the universe of discourse, by implication.

In French however, the reflexives agree with the antecedents in number, person and gender, as in English. The gender marking is also morphologically represented as shown in the samples above.

In terms of similarities, in both languages, the reflexives are bound in their governing categories with their antecedents. In other words, the semantic interpretations of the reflexives are tied to their antecedents, as shown above.

Furthermore, the clause-mate condition is obtainable in both languages. The reflexives in French and Igbo must be in the same clause with their antecedents to make for the binding.

Reflexives in French and Igbo behave in such a way that the antecedents precede the reflexives. A violation of this principle produces ungrammatical and unacceptable structures.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that reflexives NPs abound in French and Igbo and can be studied in line with the binding theory. Reflexives are bound in the governing category of their antecedents. In other for this binding to be effective, the clause-mate condition must be fulfilled, the reflexives and their antecedents must agree in certain aspects (number and gender). This marks the point of difference in the syntactic behaviour of reflexives in French and Igbo. the gender agreement is morphologically represented in French but not represented in Igbo. The agreement in terms of gender in Igbo is identified or implied in the universe of discourse.

Note

The authors acknowledge the suggestions and inputs of Chimaobi Onwukwe, Ph.D, Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies/Igbo, Uturu.

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