

A Frame-Constructional Approach to Emphatic Reflexives in Japanese

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This study provides a frame-based, construction-morphology account of the morpho-syntax and semantics of the Japanese reflexives *zibun-kara* and *zibun-de*, the so-called *emphatic reflexives*. It is claimed that these are idioms marking the volition or agency of the subject (e.g., Kishida 2011), as exemplified in (1):

- (1) John-wa {*zibun-kara* / *zibun-de*} kita.
John-TOP self-from / self-by came
“John came {volitionally / by himself}.”

Data from the Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ), however, reveal that these expressions can occur with non-volitional subjects that designate inanimate or non-sentient entities.

In this study, I propose that the reflexives in (1) can be analyzed as constructions in terms of construction morphology (Booij 2010). That is, they have holistic properties that cannot be derived from those of their constituents: (i) their emphatic readings are not fully reducible to the properties of *zibun* + the case markers; and (ii) *zibun* cannot be replaced in them with another personal noun (e.g., **Taro-wa* {*kare-kara/kare-de*} *kita*. “(lit.) Taro came {from him/by him}”). Moreover, these two expressions differ in whether an intervening element, such as the plural marker *-tachi*, can appear between *zibun* and the case marker (e.g., *Gakusei-ga* {**zibun-tachi-kara/zibun-tachi-de*} *kita* “(lit.) The students came {from selves / by selves}”); this can be understood as a difference in the inheritance relation with more abstract schemas.

Additionally, the emphatic function of *zibun-kara* and *zibun-de* can be accounted for in terms of the frame semantic notion of a *frame element* (FE): they act as emphatic reflexives if they profile *extra-thematic* FEs and introduce information that is not a necessary part of a description of a verbal frame but instead elaborates it, as with the sentence adjunct *yesterday* (Fillmore and Baker 2010). *Zibun-kara* in the emphatic use encodes the self, which refers back to the subject, as the source of the occurrence of an event. With *zibun-de*, the self is metonymically understood as an abstract means that helps cause an event, i.e., the subject’s own force. Even without the reflexives it would be evident that the agent is the source of the event and that the agent makes use of his/her own force, so the reflexives emphasize the agent’s role. This pragmatically implicates that the agent acts volitionally, but the implication is cancellable insofar as the subject is construed as the entity causing and manipulating the event that may be inanimate. This analysis accounts for data of possibly non-animate subjects with the two emphatic reflexives. It also explains different behaviors of the two reflexives, for example, how they interact with negation. In contrast, if the reflexives profile *peripheral* FEs, which involve a verbal frame, they must be non-emphatic, ordinary reflexives. Examples of *zibun-kara* and *zibun-de* with non-emphatic readings are attested in the BCCWJ.

Thus, a frame-based, construction-grammar approach is supported by an examination of Japanese emphatic reflexives. This line of analysis confirms the hypothesis proposed by Gast and Siemund (2006) that, unlike those in English, Japanese emphatic reflexives are derived from a reflexive marker with a postposition (see also König and Siemund 2000). It will also be revealed that emphatic functions of Japanese reflexives differ from one another according to what extra-thematic FE they profile. Also, I will touch on how my analysis can be applied to another type of emphatic reflexives in Japanese, such as *zibun-zishin* and *zibun-dake*, case-less, intensified forms of *zibun*.

References

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