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Old English patterns with "self" : evidence from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, manuscript A

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OLD ENGLISH PATTERNS WITH *SELF*. EVIDENCE FROM THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE, MANUSCRIPT A

Introduction

In this article we present a state-of-the-art overview of the rise and early development of Modern English reflexive anaphora, particularly as seen in recent publications such as Elly van Gelderen's [2000], Edward L. Keenan's [2002], Ekkehad König and Peter Siemund's [2000]. The selection of the approaches for this paper has been carried out with a view to contrasting a range of methodologies used in current diachronic studies. The generative grammatical perspective favoured in van Gelderen's approach will first be contrasted with the traditional historical linguistic critique of it by Keenan; focus will then be placed on the pragmatic view of the changes in König and Siemund's analysis. Our own contribution is to check whether we can capitalize on some of this research and note the relevant observations in a synchronic study of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a unique document providing evidence of the dynamics of morpho-syntactic change in Old English (OE). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was not among the documents studied by van Gelderen, neither do König and Siemund make any special reference to it. However, Manuscript E is part of the corpus for Keenan. We shall then make **Manuscript A** the springboard for exploration in this paper.

Viewing one single document through the prism of synchronic description has both its methodological strengths and weaknesses. We shall refer to these in Section 5. Let us also make the following provision: the focus of the analysis is on the relevant morpho-syntactic modifications leading to the emergence of modern reflexives in English, to the near-exclusion of any in-depth conceptual motivations

underpinning the changes. The bias is driven, among others, by a long held belief in diachronic studies, which we share, that any semantic change is actually fed by morpho-syntactic shifts [Hopper 1991].

The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 presents the relevant properties of reflexive anaphors in Modern English, preparing the ground for a discussion in Section 2 on their origins in OE. Section 3 provides an overview of van Gelderen's explanations, followed by Siemund and König's analysis as well as that of Keenan in Section 4. Section 5 is our own analysis of the data gathered from Manuscript A of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The last section summarizes the findings and provides a conclusion.

1. Relevant morpho-syntactic properties of reflexive anaphora in Modern English

We first consider some morpho-syntactic characteristics of present day anaphors, with a view to pointing out precisely how they derive from their precursors.

Reflexive anaphors occur in the argument position, i.e. as objects of verbs or complements of prepositions, as in (1) and (2):

(1) *John$_i$ likes **himself$_i$**.*
(2) *She$_i$ was very pleased with **herself$_i$**/her$_j$.*

Such a distribution differentiates anaphoric reflexives from emphatic reflexives, which are always in a non-argument position, such as an adjunct to a NP, as in (3):

(3) *The Queen **herself** opened the ceremony.*

Let us note that no morphological distinction is made in present day English that would distinguish reflexivity from emphasis.

As the indices in (2) clearly mark, the Modern English system critically distinguishes between reflexive and pronominal anaphora in their distribution patterns: the former are, by and large, in complementary distribution with the latter. A reflexive unambiguously signals local co-reference, thus ruling out the possibility of pronominal anaphora occurring in contexts where the antecedent and its anaphor remain locally bound. The notions of co-reference and its opposite – disjoint reference – are intuitively simple, defined relative to the potential of a pronominal to express, respectively, sameness of reference with its antecedent, or otherness in relation to the accessible NP. As for the notion of locality, in traditional Chomskyan terms the binder and the reflexive bindee remain in a special structural relation towards each other, couched as c-commanding.

Let us briefly return now to the notion of **referentiality** of anaphors, which is basically the question of what constitutes an anaphor. The question is: Why can only full noun phrases, but, crucially, not reflexive and pronominal anaphors refer

to a real world entity? Answers to this question typically refer to the specification of features in terms of which full NPs and anaphora differ; we could say that full NPs are provided in their feature make-up with a very specific (putative) address of an entity in the real world, as we conceive of it, while anaphors lack some specific details of such an address. There is a crucial distinction between a reflexive and a pronominal anaphor, though. If the former are "not fully referential", the latter are "somewhat referential" [van Gelderen 2000: 2]. A lot hinges on this in van Gelderen's account. Let us finally note the split between the third and the other persons fossilized in the form of a reflexive compound. The compounds *him*self, *her*self, *it*self, *them*selves preserve the accusative case of the pronoun, whereas *my*self, *your*self, *our*selves and *your*selves apparently freeze-frame the genitive case of the pronoun.

2. The Old English reflexive

The examples below show Old English pronouns in their anaphoric function, as they refer back to the preceding subjects or objects across the clause boundary:

(4) *Þa **Darius** geseah þæt **he** oferwunnen beon wolde* [Orosius, 128.5].
    [Then Darius saw that he conquered be would]
(5) *Ne sende se deofol **ða fyr** of heofonum, þeah þe **hit** ufan cōm* [Aelfric, Catholic Homilies 6.13].
    [Not sent the devil then fire from heaven, though that it from-above came]

It was very early established in linguistic research that in OE it is plain pronouns that function reflexively, thus, as König and Siemund put it, doing the double duty of marking both disjoint reference within the governing category and co-reference within it, as in (6–9). Note the following:

(6) *Gestodon **him** æt his līces hēafdum* [Dream of the Rood 63].
    [They placed themselves at his body's head]
(7) *Gebiddaþ **him** to þyssum bēacne* [*Dream of the Rood* 83].
    [They (will) pray to this beacon]
(8) *Ic **me** mid Hruntigedom gewyrce oþðe **mec** deað nimeð* [Beowulf 1490–1].
    [I myself with Hruntig glory will-bring-about or me death takes]
(9) *Ne ondrade **ic me*** [Dream of the Rood 378].
    [I (will) not fear]

Many of the forms noted will not be reflexives in present day English. Reflexivity is claimed to have been the property of certain verbs and not only reflexive situations, such as the verbs of motion, as in (6) or *pray* and *fear* in (7) and (9).

Puzzling as it may seem to a user of Modern English confronted with the story of reflexive anaphora, in those early stages of English there was no morphosyntactic way of distinguishing between, say, *She killed herself* and *She killed her*. Nor was it easy to distinguish between plain pronouns used in an emphatic function and a reflexive one, as in *She herself died* and *She killed herself*.

The forerunner of a true reflexive in Modern English is such a distribution pattern in which a plain pronoun is followed by emphatic *self*, intensifying a direct, indirect or prepositional object. As illustrated below, *self* is in OE an adjective with separate paradigms for definite and indefinite inflection, not necessarily adjacent to the pronoun/noun it gives emphasis to. Compare emphatic and reflexive *self* in (10), (11), and (12) respectively:

(10) *David **sylf** cwæð to þam halgan gaste* [Lindisfarne Gospels, Mark, 12: 36].
     [David self said to the holy ghost]
(11) *Ond se cyning **sylfa*** [The Exeter Book, Christ, 13].
     [And the king himself]
(12) *Se þe him **sylfum** leofað* [Homilies II 45, 117].
     [Who that himself loves]

Let us now look into in-depth linguistic interpretations of the rise of OE reflexives in the three publications selected for this paper.

3. Van Gelderen's account

In her meticulous, quantitative study of carefully selected texts van Gelderen ties the rise and development of specially morpho-syntactically marked reflexive pronouns to the dramatic changes English undergoes from the Old to Middle English period: the transformation of English from a synthetic to an analytic language, and specifically to pro-drop, verbal agreement and, crucially, changes from inherent to structural case. As we cannot do justice to the whole very complex lattice of interrelatedness between those factors, we shall try to pin down those generalizations that pertain to what happens directly to plain pronouns in the function of reflexives and *self*.

Van Gelderen's research detailing the variation between Old English and Middle English indicates that pronouns continued to be used reflexively on their own. If it occurs, *self* reinforces the third person more frequently than the second, which is itself more frequently reinforced than the first. Its distribution is more typical after a prepositional object than a direct one. First and foremost, however, in the early 13th century the **reanalysis** of a pronoun and *self* into a reflexive complex occurs, followed by the **grammaticalization** of *self*. This is fully evidenced in the morphology of the pronoun that is merged with *self*. Van Gelderen's explanations are as follows: rooted in OE, the preference for the third person reflexives is already well entrenched in the corpus of generations witnessing the grammaticalization of *self* compounds and the form appears to be fully schematised. The third person reflexives are therefore more "automatic" than other persons. The dative form of the pronoun can also be explained by the frequency of usage: reflexive compounds with *self* as prepositional objects in the dative are far more frequent than other distributions [van Gelderen 2000: 79]. If occurring as a beneficial ob-

ject, the pronoun is also dative. Patterns with the accusative form are rare and in decline. In other words, the third person forms in the dative are well-established before the reanalysis with the first and the second persons starts to take place. For the acquirers the less frequent first and second person must have been **mismatches**, reanalysed as a possessive determiner plus a noun phrases.

We have focused on the story of *self*, yet the underlying motivation for the changes is sought by van Gelderen in the intricacies of the changes of **Case**. If it were not for the changes in Case, the use of plain pronouns could remain the sole strategy in marking reflexivity. In OE Case is **inherent**, or theta-marked. We could say that its case is the property of the word and, as van Gelderen says, it is not visible for other arguments. With structural positions becoming fixed and the simplification/loss of person, number and gender (phi-features) and also case endings, Case becomes **structural**, or tied to distribution and deriving its interpretation via a structural slot. This triggers changes in the specification of features of pronouns and powers of their referentiality (not fully referential vs. somewhat referential) and has far reaching consequences for the whole language system. Among other changes, it allows for the emergence of true reflexives.

4. Keenan's and König and Siemund's analyses

The methodology adopted by van Gelderen and the methodologies used by Keenan and König and Siemund couldn't contrast more, yet, in our view, the differences go much further than the frameworks. They actually differ in their description of some important details related to the emergence of special reflexive forms replacing plain pronouns in the reflexive function. We would say that even if none of the frameworks treats the emergence of reflexives as separate from the whole system, it is van Gelderen who is the most radical. Neither Keenan, nor König and Siemund relate the rise and development of reflexives to pro-drop (Keenan actually refutes this possibility), feature changes affecting movement operations across the whole system of language and the synthetic-analytic revolution directly.

Keenan attributes the relevant changes to forces that are not specific to language but to complex eco-systems in general: decay and inertia – and to some that pertain directly to language, and specifically to semantics: constituency interpretation and anti-synonymy. We start with what appears to us as the first point of disagreement between Keenan and van Gelderen. As Keenan observes, a great majority of plain pronouns that are locally bound with subjects are non-theta. Turning from theta to non-theta is then an unlikely trigger for the changes. Such plain pronouns are always dative or accusative, never nominative or genitive. Semantically they convey the idea of the subject's involvement, intentional action, or the effect of an action upon the subject and a telic action. Keenan's research details the following pattern with *self*: it is most often immediately adjacent to the pre-

ceding full, definite, subject NP, rarely separated from it by adverbs, pronouns or verbs. Where van Gelderen speaks only of reinforcement or emphasis, Keenan and König and Siemund alike find the pragmatic context of patterns with *self* extremely specific. Pronouns in the genitive case take their own intensifier: *agen* (own).

The compound is, in Keenan's account, a case of **cliticization**, an instance of decay (of reducing or obscuring the independent status of a word). There is a lot of inertia in the dynamics of the spread of the small changes in the story of reflexives and this is shown in the distribution patterns, first mirroring the distribution of pronoun + *self* with nominative NPs and only much later is the pattern generalized to non-subject positions. Grammaticalization and cliticisation are motivated by separate processes: while the former is by definition accompanied by the **semantic bleaching** of component meanings, the latter leaves the meaning of *self* intact. Keenan argues against grammaticalization and claims that the weakening of the contrast interpretation is only induced much later as an instance of anti-synonymy strategy. As mentioned before, the scenario sketched out by van Gelderen hinges on the person split between the third and the other persons with *self*, uncovering the starting point of the spread and the reanalysis of *self*. The later forms are possessive *my* and *your* + *self*. Keenan is strongly against this interpretation, for him *my* and *your* are originally dative, phonologically reduced forms which only then become identified as possessive adjectives and, in Keenan's own words, facilitate interpreting *self* as a noun.

For König and Siemund, in turn, *self* is a focusing device that distinguishes the denotation of the noun it intensifies from any other entities in the periphery of this singled out denotation, as in *Crist self*, *Antecristsylf*, *Hoelendsylf*. In their diagnostics of the change König and Siemund refer to the general pragmatic strategy, which says that the initiator of an action and its endpoint are typically disjoint. Accordingly, self-directed flow of event(s), as in reflexive anaphors, requires a formal marking and this is essentially the function of *self*. It is only natural that the pressure for such a marker is the greatest with the third person, thus in contexts when disjoint reference is potentially targeted. We take it to be a point of agreement between König and Siemund's and van Gelderen's accounts. In its essence, then, the pragmatic account of König and Siemund is not incompatible with the dynamics of change detailed in the frequencies noted by van Gelderen. Yet, their respective views on the underlying triggers for the change are polar opposites.

5. Evidence from Manuscript A

Here we look at some very early occurrences of *self* through the prism of the patterns and motivations discussed in the three publications above. For a linguist working on corpora providing vast data pools investigating much less numerous examples attested in a single document may seem not relevant or worth their while.

Surely, it cannot provide any real statistical significance. Yet, it is at the same time free from some important variables which would otherwise have to be taken into account in diachronic studies of a variety of texts: it only evidences one dialect and one main hand, not to be rejected lightly if you consider the efforts put into balancing the dialects in van Gelderen's research. Suffice it to say that the Anglo-Saxon chronicle has been altogether excluded from her analysis. The genre of the document is not then a factor, we avoid the pitfalls of comparing poetry and narrative. The formal feature of person is not a variable: we are dealing with the third person throughout the document. Finally, when we look at van Gelderen's work, or Keenan's, the history of language change is unravelled from a patchwork of a couple of instances only in each document. Our analysis is an attempt at finding a grain that adds to the handful. Our preference for Manuscript A comes from the fact that it documents examples not considered by Keenan. We have decided it would do no harm to look into earlier cases in the same document in order to trace back some indication of what we know follows.

Below we tabulate all six cases of *self* evidenced in Parker:

(13) **3** *Her swealt Herodus from him selfum ofsticod, 7 Archilaus his sunu feng to rice.*
[Here Herod died, stabbed by himself, and his son Archelaus succeeded to the kingdom]

(14) **855** *7 þy ilcan geare gebocude Æþelwulf cyning teoþan dæl his londes ofer al his rice Gode to lofe 7 him selfum to ecere hælo.*
[and the same year King Athelwulf conveyed the tenth part of his land over all his kingdom to the praise of God and his own eternal salvation]

(15) **867** *7 þær wæs micel ungeþuærnes þære þeode betweox him selfum.*
[And there was great discord of the nation among themselves]

(16) **874** *7 he gearo wære mid him selfum.*
[And he himself should be ready]

(17) **885** *(se foresprecena here) worhton oþer fæsten ymb hie selfe.*
[(the-aforesaid army) built another fortress around themselves]

(18) **896** *næron nawðer ne on Fresisc gescæpene ne on Denisc, bute swa him selfum ðuhte þæt hie nytwyrðoste beon meahten.*
[They were neither of Frisian design nor of Danish but as it seemed to himself (King Alfred) that they might be most useful]

The three publications considered in this paper, and particularly König and Siemund's analysis, allow us to consider the following operationalization of the data. We have provided the date as the index of the example next to each variable:

Table 1

Patterns with *self*: variables and relevant instances by the date

Retained as a modern reflexive (direct, indirect, prepositional object) in Online Medieval and Classical Library (OMACL)	867, 874, 885
Retained as a modern emphatic in OMACL	896
Replaced by modern *own* in OMACL	3, 855

Adjacent to a proper noun	none
Modifying, yet not adjacent to a proper noun	none
Non-adjacent to a proper noun with other potential antecedents intervening	none
Adjacent to a definite NP	none
Modifying, yet not adjacent to a definite NP	none
Non-adjacent to a definite NP with other potential antecedents intervening	none
Adjacent to a pronoun	3, 855, 867, 874, 885, 896
Modifying, yet not adjacent to a pronoun	none
Non-adjacent to a pronoun with other potential antecedents intervening	none
Reinforcing a person of high rank (number of intervening words)	3 (2), 855 (13), 896 (46)
Reinforcing a person of average rank (number of intervening words)	867 (2), 874 (4), 885 (5)
In a pro-drop context	885, 896
With the dative pronoun	3, 855, 867, 874, 896
With the accusative pronoun	885
With theta marked pronouns	3, 855, 867, 874, 885, 896
With non-theta marked pronouns	none
Heightening the involvement of/contrasting the subject	3, 855, 874, 885
Heightening the involvement of/contrasting the object	none
With a telic action	none
As a prepositional object in OE	3, 867, 874, 885

Conclusions

In OMACL modern versions of the relevant lines three *selves* survive and one translation (for 3) departs from the original, replacing *by himself* with *stabbed by his own hand*. The 855 *self* is also rendered as *his own*. There are two cases, then, which evidence *own* as an intensifier analogous to *self*, which resonates with Keenan's treatment of them as complementary. All *selves* pattern with pronouns, there are no examples such as *God self* or *Beowulf self*, or *cyning self*, which goes

somewhat counter to our expectations in light of both Keenan's and König and Siemund's claims. This is confirmed by our next variable, the pronoun + *self* phrases equally easily reinforce, or contrast distinguished personages: Herod, King Athelwulf, King Alfred, and persons of average rank, often in the plural: people, army. Amongst the most promising findings is 874, where the local antecedent for emphatic *himself* is a pronoun (three words away), which is eventually anaphoric to a very interesting NP in an object position. The indefinite noun phrase *an unwise king's thane* surely does not denote anyone important. In the OMACL version the name is added, that of Ceolwulf, assuring us that the *self* form was originally used with a low rank referent.

> **874** *7 þy ilcan geare hie sealdon* **anum unwisum cyninges þegne** *Miercna rice to haldanne, 7 he him aþas swor 7 gislas salde, þæt he him gearo wære swa hwelce dæge swa hie hit habban wolden, 7* **he** *gearo wære mid* **him selfum**.
> [OMCL: And the same year they gave **Ceolwulf,** an unwise king's thane, the Mercian kingdom to hold; and he swore oaths to them, and gave hostages, that it should be ready for them on whatever day they would have it; and he would be ready with himself]

The antecedent in 885 is also quite interesting: a dropped subject in the plural, five words away from *themselves*, which eventually (over one more dropped pronoun) refers back to a full, definite NP *se foresprecene here.*

> **885** *Her todælde* **se foresprecena here** *on tu, oþer dæl east. oþer dæl to Hrofesceastre; 7 ymbsæton ða ceastre, 7 worhton oþer fæsten ymb* **hie selfe***.*

Let us note, however, that, if the antecedents in the last two examples do not designate distinguished personages in the real world, they do nevertheless get rich linguistic elaboration: both are preceded by a definite/indefinite article and an appropriate adjective. We would say that they are well anchored in the described reality by virtue of their linguistic encoding.

896 is by far the most interesting example relating to the distance between the *self* form and the antecedent. *King Alfred* binds the emphatic *himself* over 45 words! In between comes the paragraph peppered with the plural pronoun referring to ships, their design, quality etc. And *himself* is powerful enough not to be strengthened by the preceding pronoun, as in *he himself.*

> **896** *Þa het* **ælfred cyng** *timbran langscipu ongen ða æscas; þa wæron fulneah tu swa lange swa þa oðru. sume hæfdon .lx. ara. sume ma. Þa wæron ægðer ge swiftran ge unwealtran, ge eac hieran þonne þa oðru. næron nawðer ne on Fresisc gescæpene ne on Denisc, bute swa* **him selfum** *ðuhte.*

Pro-drop is only evidenced in two examples, once with the singular and once with the plural ending on the verb. The data we have collected confirm the weaker status of the accusative form of the pronoun with *self*. Most complete the meaning of prepositions (*from*, *betweox*, *mid*, *ymb*) in theta-marked positions. One is theta marked by the verb (*him selfum thuhte*). Very provisionally, we would then say that the data collected do not confirm Keenan's count of non-theta pronouns

covering much later period. As claimed by Keenan, reinforcing objects and not subjects is a later development, Manuscript A does not attest such cases.

By way of a final remark let us only note two generalizations, first, that long distance binding seems to be available for relations that in modern times can only be local, and that part of the function of pronoun + *self* compound could then be not only reinforcement but also disambiguation.

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Summary

Old English Patterns with *self*. Evidence from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Manuscript A

This paper is essentially a state-of-the-art overview of the three most current and influential publications on the history of English reflexives, selected for their contrasting methodologies, i.e. Elly van Gelderen's [2000], Edward L. Keenan's [2002], Ekkehad König and Peter Siemund's [2000]. A broad view of some well established insights into the historical development of *self* allows us to detail some factors that are significant in its distribution patterns. In the analytical section we relate these factors to the occurrences of *self* in Manuscript A of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.