

Economy and asymmetry in reflexive marking:
Introverted and extroverted verbs across languages

This study investigates the distinction between “introverted” and “extroverted” verbs in reflexive constructions. Introverted verbs denote actions prototypically directed toward oneself (e.g. ‘wash’), whereas extroverted verbs denote actions canonically directed toward another participant (e.g. ‘kick’) (Haiman 1983). This semantic contrast has been central to debates concerning economy in language structure (Haiman 1983), the relationship between form and frequency (Haspelmath 2008), and principles of differential coding (Haspelmath 2021). These theoretical considerations converge on the prediction that coding asymmetries systematically reflect verb-type semantics, culminating in the formulation of Universal 1.

- (1) If a language uses different constructions for agent-patient coreference for different verb types, it uses shorter coding for introverted verbs than for extroverted verbs (König & Vezzosi 2004, Haspelmath 2008: 44, 2023).

Universal 1 has not yet been systematically evaluated on a broad cross-linguistic scale (cf. Smith 2004). This study addresses this gap by testing the universal against a representative sample of 28 genealogically unrelated languages distributed across six macroareas, drawing on primary data provided by fieldwork specialists. This design enables us to assess whether the coding asymmetry between introverted and extroverted verbs conforms to the predicted pattern in (1) or whether it exhibits language-internal variation, potentially shaped by cultural factors. The analysis is conducted within a functional-typological framework, thereby contributing to the expanding body of research on reflexive constructions and verb-type semantics (e.g. Faltz 1985; Geniušienė 1987; Kemmer 1993; König & Siemund 2000; Dixon 2012).

The preliminary results provide support for Universal 1. For example, Bangime (isolate) employs two reflexivizers: a longer form (*ṇ=dēgè*) with extroverted verbs (2a) and a shorter form (*mī*) with introverted verbs (2b) (Hantgan 2023).

- (2a) *ṇ* *jùrà* *ṇ=dēgè*
 3SG.A kill.3SG.PFV 1SG.B=head.3SG.POSS
 ‘S/he killed her/himself.’
- (2b) *à* *bòw* *dà* *mī* *ṇ=tūrā*
 2SG.A father.2SG.POSS 3SG.IPFV 3SG.D 3SG.B=bathe.3SG.IPFV
 ‘Your father is bathing.’

Some languages preserve the coding asymmetry between introverted and extroverted verbs despite having only a single reflexive marker, by adding additional morphosyntactic material. Thulung (Sino-Tibetan) illustrates this strategy: although both verb types are formally marked by the same reflexive voice suffix *-siŋ*, extroverted verbs may additionally co-occur with the emphatic nominal *twap* (Lahaussois 2023). This extra element increases formal complexity in the extroverted domain, thereby maintaining the predicted asymmetry in coding length.

In some cases, however, the intro-/extroverted verb distinction does not reflect the long/short REFL distribution, revealing language-internal variations. Abaza (Abkhaz-Adyge) uses the same shorter REFL *čə-* with both verb types, but when the longer REFL POSS+‘head’ is used, it often implies an introverted, body-part reading (Arkadiev & Durneva 2023). Moreover, certain asymmetries tend to be culturally conditioned. In Chini (Lower Sepik-Ramu), socially antagonistic verbs like ‘hate’ are excluded from reflexive clauses. Consequently, extroverted verbs of this type cannot be elicited with reflexive marking (Brooks 2023).

Finally, some unexpected results emerged. In Warlpiri (Pama-Nyungan), the generally assumed introverted verb ‘wash’ implies an extroverted meaning when used without an object

argument (Laughren 2023). Yet, Khanty (Kazym-Khanty) uses a special marking with introverted verbs (the detransitivizing *-əs-* or *-ijλ-* affix) but not, as expected, with extroverted verbs. The latter use the 3rd person pronoun *λuw* instead (Volkova & Toldova 2023).

Word count: 500

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