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Reflexivity:
Licensing or enforcing

This dissertation deals with the different strategies for expressing reflexive relations across languages, based on a detailed analysis of the anaphoric systems of 117 languages from a variety of language families.

The main goal of this study was to analyse reflexivization, its reasons and effects, by uncovering cross-linguistic patterns and by taking into account the variation we find between both distant and closely related languages. The facts discussed in this thesis indicate that all languages do something special to express reflexive relations, i.e. licensing of reflexivity is universally required. However, we also found that a lexical element that licenses reflexivity doesn't necessarily enforce it. Hence, licensing and enforcing represent two separate mechanisms, contrary to what the canonical binding theory claims. Of relevance for the binding behaviour of anaphors is on the one hand the internal structure of the noun phrase and on the other hand the internal feature composition of the elements involved.

This dissertation pays specific attention to locally bound pronouns in Fijian and Mashan Zhuang. These languages are shown to use reflexive strategies after all, even if these strategies are masked by language specific characteristics.

These results show that contrary to certain claims in the recent literature binding universals do exist.
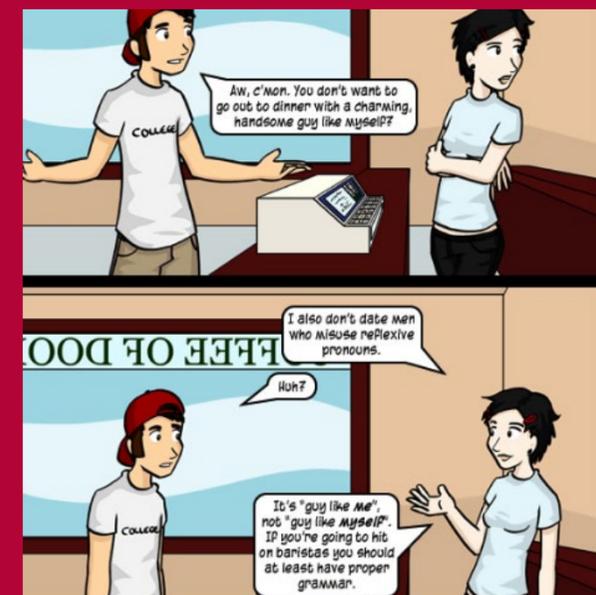
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