Reflexivity in word formation in European languages: the case of Maltese

Complex words as *self-defence*, *Selbstverteidigung*, *autodifesa* are made up connecting a word, mainly a noun or an adjective of deverbal nature, with a morpheme characterised by a grammatical rather than lexical function (König in press). Such function may be either reflexive, indicating that two of the participants of the underlying predication are coreferent, or pragmatic, focussing on the fact that the agent performs the action by itself.

This type of complex words is common in European languages, but the nature of the marks involved may differ both from language to language and into a single language. However in most cases European languages display strategies in which an intensifier, a reflexive possessive and other autonomous lexemes are used as modifiers of right-headed compounds. In Romance languages, instead of a compound strategy, a semi-word of neoclassical origin (*auto-*) is productively used in complex words (Iacobini 2004, Mutz 2004). The only strategy available in Romance languages which employs native autonomous lexemes is syntactic (a prepositional phrase governed by a nominalization containing the reflexive pronoun: e.g. *fiducia in sé* 'self-confidence').

A situation similar to that of Romance languages is displayed by Maltese. In complex words Maltese lacks a native morpheme to mark reflexivity. Nevertheless, the explicit reflexive expression involving *nifs-* 'self' (literally 'breath') may occur in phrases governed by a nominalization: *Il-qtil* **tiegħu nnifsu** *kexkex 'il kulħad* 'his killing himself terrified everyone' (Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander 1997:103). Furthermore, mainly in loanwords from Italian, the formant *awto-* functions as a reflexive mark (*awto-regolamentazzjoni*).

On the one hand, it seems that *awto-* is undergoing in Maltese a process of reanalysis, as it occurred in Romance languages, from element of a redundancy rule to productive mark of reflexivity in word formation. On the other, the lack of a native mark in both Romance languages and Maltese seems to be connected to typological features characteristic of these languages.

References

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