

# The Swedish absolute reflexive construction in a cross-linguistic perspective

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Independent Project for the Degree of Master (1 year), 15 ECTS credits  
Linguistics – Magister Course, LIA739  
Typology and Linguistic Diversity  
Spring semester 2020  
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## Abstract

Swedish has the absolute reflexive construction, where a reflexive marker appears to be used as an antipassive marker. Similar constructions, with omitted objects and reflexive marking on the verb, are found in Slavic and Baltic languages and is only possible with a small set of verbs. This study examines this group of verbs in Swedish and a sample of European languages and finds that the verbs express unwanted action on an animate patient. They also share features of non-resultativity, potential reciprocity and atelicity. A set of core meanings, including 'hit', 'push' and 'bite' are the most frequently occurring in absolute reflexives also in Slavic and Baltic languages. Lexical semantics hence play an important role in the extension of functions of reflexive markers in these languages. There is a functional overlap of reciprocal and absolute reflexive function in all of the languages, resulting in clauses with ambiguous reading between reciprocal and antipassive. It is suggested that the antipassive function of reflexive markers has grammaticalized from the reciprocal function of this marker.

## Keywords

absolute reflexive, reflexive verb, aggressive verb, antipassive, reciprocal, Swedish, grammaticalization

## Sammanfattning

I svenska finns en absolut reflexiv konstruktion, där en reflexivmarkör verkar fungera som en antipassivmarkör. Liknande konstruktioner, med utelämnat objekt och reflexiv markering på predikatet, finns även i slaviska och baltiska språk och är bara möjliga med en liten grupp verb. Den här studien undersöker denna grupp av verb i svenska och i ett urval av europeiska språk och visar att verben uttrycker oönskad handling på en animat patient. Verben är också icke-resultativa, potentiellt reciproka och ateliska. En grupp av kärnbetydelser som 'slå', 'knuffa' och 'sparka' är de vanligast förekommande i absolut reflexiva konstruktioner även i slaviska och baltiska språk. Lexikal semantik spelar följaktligen en viktig roll i utvidgningen av funktioner av reflexivmarkörer i dessa språk. Det finns en funktionell överlappning mellan reciproka verb och absolut reflexiv i alla språken i undersökningen, vilket resulterar i satser med två möjliga tolkningar: reciprok och antipassiv. En grammatikalisering av reflexivmarkörer från reciprok funktion till antipassiv funktion föreslås.

## Nyckelord

absolut reflexiv, reflexivt verb, aggressivt verb, antipassiv, reciproka verb, svenska, grammatikalisering

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## Abbreviations

ACC	Accusative
ABS	Absolutive
AP	Antipassive
AUX	Auxiliary
C	Common gender
CONTR	Contrastive
DEF	Definite
DM	Discourse marker
DISTR	Distributive
DYN	Dynamic present
DYNM	Dynamic
ERG	Ergative
F	Feminine
FM	Formative
HAB	Habitual
INDF	Indefinite pronoun
INF	Infinitive
IPFV	Imperfective
INDIC	Indicative
INS	Instrumental
INTR	Intransitive
ITER	Iterative
LOC	Locative
M	Masculine
N	Neuter gender
NFUT	Non-future
NEG	Negation
OBL	Oblique
P.PTCP	Past participle
PASS	Passive
PFV	Perfective
PL	Plural
PRF	Perfect
PRS	Present tense
PST	Past tense
PTCP	Participle
POT	Potential
RECP	Reciprocal
REFL	Reflexive
REFL.PRON	Reflexive pronoun
REM.PAST	Remote past
SBJ	Subject
TR	Transitive
VOC	Vocative

# 1 Introduction

This thesis concerns the absolute reflexive in Swedish and other European languages: an object-omitting construction with a reflexive marker. Example (2) differs from the transitive example (1) in that there is no syntactical expression of the patient and that the verb is marked with -s. The suffix -s has developed diachronically from an accusative third person form of the reflexive pronoun *\*sik*. In modern Swedish -s has passive and reciprocal functions, among others.

(1) Swedish

*Hund-en        bit-er        människ-or*  
dog-DEF.C.SG bite-PRS people-PL

‘The dog bites people’

(2) Swedish

*Hund-en        bit-s*  
dog-DEF.C.SG bite-REFL[PRS]

‘The dog bites’

Since the absolute reflexive construction involves patient omission, detransitivizing morphology and has a transitive counterpart, it could be classified as an antipassive. Similar constructions in Slavic and Baltic languages, with omitted patients and reflexive markers, have recently been analyzed as antipassives (Janic, 2016; Holvoet, 2017; Say, 2005a). Thus, in these language reflexive markers appear to have taken on antipassive functions. Grammaticalization of reflexive markers to antipassive functions is also attested in the Turkic, Papa-Nguyan, South Caucasian, Chukotko-Kamchatkan language families, among others (Kuteva et al., 2019: 364, Sansò, 2017: 193, Janic, 2010: 158).

In Swedish as well as Slavic and Baltic, the antipassive reading is only available with a subgroup of transitive verbs, that appear to be similar across the languages. Investigating this group of verbs may aid our understanding of such grammaticalization processes.

## 1.1 Aims

The aim of this thesis is to describe the lexical restrictions of the absolute reflexive construction in Swedish and compare this to other languages of Europe with similar constructions.

## 1.2 Research questions

1. What lexical restrictions apply to the Swedish absolute reflexive? What kind of verbs can be used in the construction?
2. How do other languages of Europe with absolute reflexive differ from Swedish in terms of lexical restrictions?

## 2 Background

This chapter is organized as follows. Section 2.1 introduces the absolute reflexive construction. The absolute reflexive in Slavic and Baltic is presented in 2.1.1 and the Swedish absolute reflexive in 2.1.2. The absolute reflexive in Slavic and Baltic has been analyzed as an antipassive. The concept of grammatical voice and the antipassive voice is discussed in 2.2.2. The reflexive marker in the Germanic language Swedish is used in a way that is not found in other Germanic languages, but can be found in geographically adjacent Slavic and Baltic languages. The study of the construction as a possible areal feature is therefore relevant and the field of areal typology is discussed in Section 2.3

### 2.1 Absolute reflexive

In the Swedish constructions in (3b) and (4b), the patient is omitted syntactically and they are the intransitive counterparts of the constructions in (3a) and (4a). The examples describe a two-participant event with an agent and a patient. Only the agent is expressed syntactically. The suffix *-s* is originally reflexive and can be analyzed as detransitivizing.

#### (3) Swedish

- a. *Mygg-or stick-er människ-or*  
mosquito-PL sting-PRS people-PL  
'Mosquitos bite people.' (lit. 'Mosquitos sting people.')
- b. *Mygg-or stick-s*  
mosquito-PL sting-REFL[PRS]  
'Mosquitos bite.' (lit. 'Mosquitos sting.')

#### (4) Swedish

- a. *Pojk-en slå-r andra barn*  
boy-DEF.SG.C hit-PRS other children  
'The boy hits other children.'
- b. *Pojk-en slå-ss*  
boy-DEF.SG.C hit-REFL[PRS]  
'The boy fights/hits (other people).'

Similar constructions with reflexive markers are also found in a number of Slavic and Baltic languages. The Swedish equivalent has received comparably little attention.

#### 2.1.1 Absolute reflexive in Slavic and Baltic languages

The Russian construction in (5) is very similar to the Swedish constructions in (3b) and (4b). The (diachronically) reflexive marker *-sja* is used to detransitivize an otherwise transitive verb. The patient is implied semantically but omitted syntactically. A number of other Slavic and Baltic languages also have similar constructions using reflexive markers. In Geniušienė's (1987) typological study of reflexives, such constructions are attested in Ukrainian, Belarusian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbo-Croatian, Czech, Slovak, Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian.

(5) Russian

*Sobak-a kusa-et-sja.*

dog-NOM bite.IPFV-3SG.PRS-REFL

‘The dog has a habit of biting (people or animals).’ (or ‘The dog bites.’)

The construction is often described as expressing only habitual action or action that is an inalienable characteristic of the agent. For example, Haspelmath & Müller-Bardey (2004) treats the construction as “potential deobjective”, and claim that they can only occur in irrealis sentences. (Deobjective is the use of a transitive verb without an object.) This appears to be a misunderstanding of the common habitual or potential meaning. Israeli (1997: 114-115) notes that the Russian construction can also denote action in progress and that the same can be said for at least some other Slavic languages. Israeli (1997) further discusses the semantics of the Russian construction and argues that it is limited to “aggressive verbs”: verbs denoting an uninvited, unwanted action on an animate patient. Similar observations on possible verbs have been made by Janic (2016: Ch. 5) on other Slavic languages.

Russian marks the verb of such constructions with *-sja*. Modern Russian has developed into what Kemmer (1993) calls a two-form cognate reflexive system, where a ‘heavy’ form marks reflexive proper, and a historically related ‘light’ reflexive marker is used to mark other related “middle” meanings. The reflexive pronoun *sebjja* is used for reflexive proper, i.e. coreference between agent and patient. The suffix *-sja* has a number of “middle” uses.

The middle voice, according to Kemmer (1993), covers a large semantic domain characterized by a low degree of elaboration of participants, i.e. that certain semantics aspects are not expressed. The agent and patient may be coreferential, or the agent may not be expressed at all. Middle constructions are also defined by a low distinguishability of events, i.e. a situation type where the agent and patient are not conceptually distinct. In the closely related reflexive proper, the agent and patient are coreferential but still conceptualized as two different entities. The middle voice is somewhere between active and passive. Semantically, middle constructions are somewhere in the middle on a transitivity continuum. Morphosyntactically they are coded as intransitive.

Other Slavic languages with two form systems, such as Polish and Serbo-Croatian, also use the ‘light’ reflexive marker in absolute reflexive constructions (Lakhno, 2016; Marelj, 2004). In Serbo-Croatian, a clitic form of the full pronoun *sebe* is used. Polish does not have a two-form system and uses the reflexive pronoun *się* for both reflexive and middle uses. Reflexive pronouns are declined for case and it is the accusative form that appears in the absolute reflexive.

(6) Serbo-Croatian (Marelj, 2004: 3)

*Maks se gura*

Maks.NOM ACC.REFL.PRON push.IPFV.PRS.3SG

‘Max is pushing some people.’ as well as ‘Max pushes people in general.’ (i.e. Max is a bully)

(7) Polish (Janic, 2016: 137) [Translated]

*Nie pchaj się, pan!*

NEG push.IPFV.2SG.IMP ACC.REFL.PRON sir

‘Do not push (me or other people), Sir!’ Lit. ‘Do not push yourself, Sir’

The group of verbs used in the Russian construction is limited to a subgroup of verbs with mostly the meaning of aggressive physical actions (Say, 2005b: 427). Similar restrictions seem to apply to several Slavic and Baltic absolute reflexives (Janic 2016: 140, Holvoet 2017: 67). It



is not clear how similar Slavic and Baltic absolute reflexive constructions are regarding lexical restrictions, since comparative data is lacking.

### 2.1.2 Absolute reflexive in Swedish

Swedish is also a two-form reflexive system, with the reflexive pronoun *sig* marking reflexive proper, i.e. co-reference of agent and patient, and the suffix *-s* is used to form passives and has “middle” uses. Examples 8 show some examples of middle voice constructions in Swedish with the suffix *-s*, classified as per Kemmer (1993).

#### (8) Swedish

- |    |  |                        |
|----|--|------------------------|
| a. | <i>De träffa-de-s</i><br>They meet-PST-REFL<br>‘They met.’   | (Naturally reciprocal) |
| b. | <i>Bil-en färdade-s snabbt.</i><br>car-DEF.SG.C travel-PST-REFL quickly.<br>‘The car traveled 100 km/h.’ | (Translational motion) |
| c. | <i>Hon gläd-s över liv-et</i><br>She is.happy-REFL[PRS] over life-DEF.SG.C<br>‘She rejoices life.’       | (Emotion middle)       |

Swedish grammars calls all verbs with non-passive and non-reciprocal uses of *-s* deponent verbs, according to the Latin grammar tradition. The Swedish Academy grammar describes such verbs as having an ‘absolute’ meaning that describes an iterative or generic action without specifying the object or patient. The use of *bita-s* ‘bite’ in the absolute reflexive sense is attested since at least the 17th century, according to the Swedish Academy dictionary (SAOB, 893 : “Bitas”).

Lyngfelt (2016) gives a Construction grammar account of Swedish reflexive and middle verbs and mentions the so called ‘absolute construction’. He characterizes the *-s* morpheme in the construction as an object-oriented marker of non-default transitivity or voice. Lyngfelt (2016) also points out the connection between reciprocal verbs and absolute verbs in that some cases are ambiguous. The verbs *knuffa* ‘push’, *lura* ‘fool’, *nypa* ‘pinch’, and *reta* ‘tease’, are mentioned as typical verbs of the construction, but the topic of lexical restrictions is not expanded on.

Since the absolute reflexive involves the syntactic omission of a patient, detransitivizing morphology and has a transitive counterpart, it could be analyzed as an antipassive. The absolute reflexive construction in Russian has been analyzed as an antipassive by Kulikov (2012), Janic (2016), Say (2005a) and others. Similar constructions in other Slavic and in Baltic languages are analyzed as antipassives by Janic (2016) and Holvoet (2017). The Swedish absolute reflexive has also been mentioned as an antipassive by Holvoet (2017: 67) and Nedjalkov (2007b: 297). Lyngfelt (2016) notes the similarities of the construction to antipassive voice constructions in other languages. The notion of voice and antipassive in particular are elaborated on in Section 2.2.1.

## 2.2 Antipassive voice

### 2.2.1 Grammatical voice

Voice is a grammatical category that expresses the relationship between the participants of an event and the event itself. All languages have strategies to convey different relationships between a predicate and its arguments, but not all languages use grammatical voice.

Zúñiga & Kittilä (2019: 4) define voice as the grammatical category corresponding to different mapping between semantical roles onto grammatical roles. As an example, the Swedish sentences in (9) both describe events with two participants that have a relationship to the predicate *jaga* ‘chase’. I will use A for the more agent-like participant and P for the more patient-like participant (Croft, 2001: 136).

The participants have the same semantic roles in both examples, but they are mapped to different grammatical roles. In example (9a), the semantic role of the agent is mapped onto the transitive subject and the semantic role of patient is expressed syntactically as a direct object. Such an unmarked construction is traditionally labeled active voice and serves as a basis of comparison to other voice constructions. In the passive voice construction in (9b), the semantic roles are the same but their grammatical expression has changed so that P is now expressed as an intransitive subject, while A is expressed as an optional oblique. The passive voice is marked on the verb with the suffix -s on the verb.

#### (9) Swedish

- a. *Polis-en jaga-r henne* (Active voice)  
 police-DEF.SG.C chase-PRS 3SG.F.ACC  
 ‘The police chases her.’
- b. *Hon jaga-de-s av polis-en* (Passive voice)  
 3SG.F.NOM chase-PST-PASS by police-DEF.SG.C  
 ‘She was chased by the police.’

The number of participants, valency, is unchanged semantically but lowered syntactically in the passive since the agent is no longer expressed as a core argument. This is illustrated schematically in figure 1, where the non-core argument is marked with parentheses. Some voice operation such as causatives, can also change the semantic valency, but those will not be dealt with here.

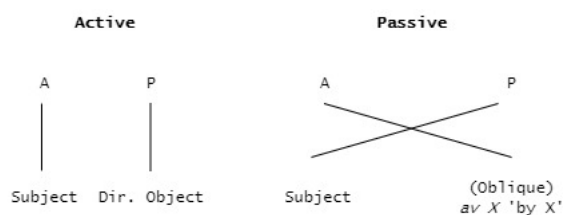


Figure 1: Active and passive voice, adapted from Zúñiga & Kittilä (2019: 83)

The function of passives includes backgrounding of the A-argument. The A-argument may be backgrounded when its reference is already known or understood from the context or earlier discourse, or when its reference is not known or relevant. Politeness can also be a motivation of the passive, when mentioning the A-argument explicitly can be face-threatening (Zúñiga & Kittilä, 2019: Ch. 3).

### 2.2.2 Antipassive voice

Similarly to how passive voice constructions demote the A-argument syntactically to mark a lower prominence in discourse, the antipassive voice construction does the same thing to the P-argument. Here, it is the P-argument that is no longer a core object, but expressed as an oblique or omitted syntactically.

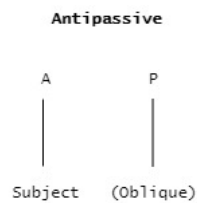


Figure 2: Antipassive voice, adapted from Zúñiga & Kittilä (2019: 83)

Several defining features of antipassives have been proposed but there is no commonly accepted definition and the term is surrounded with considerable terminological controversy. The constructions described as antipassive in languages of the world are diverse in form and function. The following criteria are usually applied:

- i. The construction has a transitive counterpart.
- ii. Its sole core argument corresponds to the A in the transitive counterpart.
- iii. The P is either omitted or expressed as an oblique.
- iv. The predicate is marked.

(i) and (ii) are widely agreed upon. There is some disagreement on the expression of P and the marking of the predicate. These will be expanded on below.

**Expression of P** Antipassives are often described as having an object, expressed by oblique case or an oblique adposition, as in the Greenlandic example (10) where the antipassive in (10b) has an instrumental (non-core) object. (Dixon, 1994: 146) defines the antipassive as having an optional object that is always possible to include. Others (Cooreman, 1994; Janic, 2016; Polinsky, 2017; Heaton, 2020) consider constructions in which the patient cannot be expressed antipassives as well. Zúñiga & Kittilä (2019: 105) consider patientless antipassives less prototypical. Heaton (2020: 137-138) notes that, in a sample of 448 languages, antipassives where the patient must be omitted syntactically were more common than antipassives with oblique expression of the patient. Despite this, the latter type have been central in descriptions of antipassive.

**Markedness and syncretism of antipassive markers** Apart from the lowering of syntactic transitivity, some kind of coding of the antipassivization on the predicate has also been suggested as a defining structural criteria (Zúñiga & Kittilä, 2019: 103), (Dixon, 1994: 146). Without any marking on the verb, it is difficult to argue that the antipassive is derived from the transitive construction. In the Greenlandic example in (10b), the morpheme *-si-* on the verb marks the antipassivization, and it can be assumed that the antipassive is a less basic construction.

(10) Greenlandic (Eskimo-Aleut), (Bittner, 1987: 194)

- a. *Jaaku-p ujarak tigu-a-a*  
 Jacob-ERG stone[ABS] take-TR.INDIC-3SG.ERG/3SG.ABS  
 ‘Jacob took stone.’
- b. *Jaaku ujarak-mik tigu-si-vu-q*  
 Jacob[ABS] stone-INS take-AP-INTR.INDIC-3SG.ERG/3SG.ABS  
 ‘Jacob took stone.’

Compare this to Kabardian, an Abkhaz-Adyge language spoken in North Caucasus. Some Kabardian verbs have a phonologically conditioned antipassive marker. Stems ending in /-ə/ change to /-e/ in the antipassive (Arkadiev & Letuchiy, 2016: 4). Verbs ending in /-e/, however, have intransitive equivalents without any marking on the verb, as in (11). This construction is called “unmarked antipassive” by Arkadiev & Letuchiy (2016), but Matasović (2010: 42-43) argues that the intransitive construction is just as underived and basic as the transitive one. The definition of antipassive depends on the antipassive in some way being more marked than a more “basic”, or unmarked, transitive construction. Using Croft’s (2002: 103) definition of typological markedness, an unmarked construction is expected to have less or equally much structural coding, that is, expressed by fewer or the same amount of morphemes morphemes, and higher text frequency than a marked construction. It is not clear if this applies to the “unmarked antipassive” in Kabardian or if this is simply the case of an ambitransitive verb. An ambitransitive verb is a verb that can be used both transitively and intransitively, with and without direct objects.

(11) Besleney Kabardian (Abkhaz-Adyge), (Arkadiev & Letuchiy, 2016: 5)

- a. *λə-xe-m B<sup>w</sup>efə-r ja-ve-n x<sup>w</sup>je.*  
 man-PL-OBL field-ABS 3PL.ERG-plough-POT must  
 ‘The men must plough the field.’
- b. *λə-xe-r ma-ve-xe*  
 man-PL-ABS DYN-plough(AP)-PL.ABS  
 ‘The men are busy ploughing.’

Cross-linguistically, syncretism of reflexive/reciprocal/antipassive markers are attested in many languages, in language families as diverse as the Pama-Nyungan, Eastern Sudanic, Kartvelian, Cariban, Tacanan, Chukotko-Kamchatkan families and others (Janic, 2010; Sansò, 2017; Polinsky, 2017: 158).

In Cavineña, a Tacanan language spoken in Bolivia, the circumfix *ka-...-ti* productively forms reflexives, reciprocals and antipassives (Guillaume, 2008: 268). Example (12c) is considered antipassive since *ka-...-ti* intransitivizes the otherwise transitive *peta* ‘look at’.

(12) Cavineña (Tacanan), (Guillaume, 2008: 268)

- a. *Señora<sub>s</sub> ka-peta-ti-wae espejo=ju.* (Reflexive)  
 lady REFL-look.at-REFL-PRF mirror=LOC  
 ‘The lady looked at herself in the mirror’
- b. *Ekwana<sub>s</sub> =bakwe ka-peta-ti-bare-kware* (Reciprocal)  
 1PL =CONTR REFL-look.at-REFL-DISTR-REM.PAST  
 ‘(When the wind started to shake the house,) we looked at each other (a little scared).’

- c. *Ka-peta-ti-ya=mi-ke<sub>s</sub>?e* (Antipassive)  
REFL-look.at-REFL-IPFV

‘You are watching?’ (This was said to me in a greeting/phatic communion sense, while I was watching a soccer game.) [Comment retained from original source]

Udmurt, an Uralic language spoken in the republic of Udmurtia in Russia, also has a polysemic reflexive-reciprocal-antipassive marker *-šk*.

(13) Udmurt (Uralic), (Geniušienė, 1987: 309, 317, 315)

- a. *Anaj-Ø diša-šk-e* (Reflexive)  
mother-NOM dress-REFL-PRS.3SG  
‘Mother dresses (herself).’
- b. *Soos čupa-šk-o* (Reciprocal)  
they.NOM kiss-REFL-PRS.3PL  
‘They kiss each other.’
- c. *Puni kurtčil-išk-e* (Antipassive)  
dog.NOM bite-REFL-PRS.3SG  
‘The dog bites.’

In fact, polysemic antipassive markers appear to be more common typologically than specialized markers (Heaton, 2020: 139).

### 2.2.3 Functions of antipassives

According to Cooreman (1994: 51), semantic and pragmatic motivations for the antipassive all involve “a certain degree of difficulty with which an effect stemming from an activity by A on an identifiable O [P] can be recognized”. This happens when P is unknown and non-referential or when P is a generic, indefinite or non-individuated entity.

Table 1: Transitivity features according to Hopper & Thompson (1980)

	High	Low
Participants	2 or more	1 participant
Kinesis	action	non-action
Aspect	telic	atelic
Punctuality	punctual	non-punctual
Volitionality	volitional	non-volitional
Affirmation	affirmative	negative
Mode	realis	irrealis
Agency	A high in potency	A low in potency
Affectedness of O	O totally affected	O not affected
Individuation of O	O highly individuated	O non-individuated

Hopper & Thompson (1980: 254) argue that the main function of antipassive is to mark clauses low in transitivity. Transitivity in traditional grammar is often understood as the binary ability of a verb to take an object. According to Hopper & Thompson (1980), transitivity is better described as a continuum where the number of participants expressed is only of several features. The transitivity features discussed by Hopper & Thompson (1980) are found in Table 1. Clauses with two participants may thus be more or less transitive. The coding of a two-participant event as a morphosyntactically intransitive, antipassive, construction finds

its motivation in other features of low transitivity, such as atelic aspect, a non-affected or non-individuated patient or an agent low in potency or volitionality.

In this view of transitivity, clauses can be highly transitive, highly intransitive or somewhere in between, based on how many features of high transitivity they display. Based on the observation that obligatory morphosyntactic or semantic pairings of transitivity features are always on the same side of the transitivity continuum, Hopper & Thompson (1980: 255) formulate the Transitivity hypothesis: whenever a clause contains an obligatory morphosyntactic marking of high transitivity, then other features in the clause will also be high-transitivity. Conversely, the hypothesis also predicts that low-transitivity features will cluster together. In other words, a proposition with several features of low transitivity is more likely to be expressed by a syntactically intransitive construction, such as the antipassive.

For example, an event with a less volitional agent is lower in transitivity than an event with a highly volitional agent. In some languages, such events are coded with antipassive. Diyari is one language where the antipassive implies a less volitional agent, as in (14).

(14) Diyari (Pama-Nyungan) (Austin 1981: 159, cited in Heaton (2017))

- a. *Ngathu yinanha darnka-rna wara-yi.*  
1SG.ERG 2SG.ACC find-PTCP AUX-PRS  
'I found you (after searching).'
- b. *Nganhi darnka-tharri-rna wara-yi yingkangu*  
1SG.NOM find-AP-PTCP AUX-PRS 2SG.LOC  
'I found you (accidentally).'

Imperfective aspect is also considered lower in transitivity, and in some languages, antipassives are associated with a shift to imperfective aspect. In Chamorro, the punctual verb *galuti* 'hit', takes on an iterative meaning in the antipassive, as shown in (15)

(15) Chamorro (Malayo-Polynesian) (Cooreman, 1994: 57)

- Mang-galuti gue' ni ga'lagos*  
AP-hit ABS.3SG OBL dog  
'He pounded on/repeatedly hit the dog.'

In Bezhta, the antipassive in (16b) has a durative meaning:

(16) Bezhta (Nakh-Daghestanian) (Comrie et al., 2015: 553)

- a. *öždi bābā m-üq-čä*  
boy.OBL(ERG) bread(III) III-eat-PRS  
'The boy eats the bread.'
- b. *öžö bābälä-d Ø-ünq-dä-š.*  
boy(I) bread.OBL-INS I-eat-AP-PRS  
'The boy is busy eating the bread.'

(I = 1st gender, III = 3rd gender)

Vigus (2018) makes use of Timberlake's (1977: 160) notion of individualization defined as "the extent to which an object is conceptualized as an individual". In a sample of 70 languages, Vigus (2018) finds that syntactic obligatory omission and incorporation of the patient are consistently associated with a lower individuation of the patient. Antipassives with oblique

objects, on the other hand, are associated with a lower affectedness of P. Vigus (2018) argues that these two types of antipassives should be treated as two different construction types, since they have different functions, distinct morphosyntactic expressions and pattern with different verbs. The findings from the typological survey in Heaton (2020: 147) confirm that there are two clusters of antipassive-like constructions in languages of the world with different properties: one with the patient expressed as an oblique and one where the patient is omitted. In Vigus (2018) 's view, this systematic mapping between function and morphosyntactic strategies is iconic in the sense that language structure reflects the structure of our construal of the experience. The conceptualization of an event where the patient is seen as less individuated corresponds to a construction with an omitted P. Likewise, the perception of a less affected patient is represented by an oblique expression of the patient.

The functions of antipassive constructions discussed above are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Functions of antipassive	
Pragmatic and semantic functions of the antipassive	
Aspect:	Imperfective: durative, progressive, iterative, habitual
Role of P:	Low individuation
	Low affectedness
	Low discourse prominence
Role of A:	Lower volitionality

#### 2.2.4 Antipassive and alignment

Traditionally, the term antipassive has been applied mainly to ergative languages. When discussing syntactic roles, I will use the Dixonian approach of transitive subject A, transitive object O and intransitive subject S (Dixon, 1972: 128). These are not to be confused with the semantic macro-roles A and P used in the sense of Croft (2001) in section 2.2.1.

Ergative alignment refers to the the intransitive subject and the transitive object being treated the same, while the transitive subject A is distinguished from S and O. This contrasts with accusative alignment, where the intransitive and transitive subjects are grouped together, and treated as distinct from the transitive object. Ergative languages that use morphological case marking generally marks A with ergative case, and P and S with absolutive case. An ergative alignment pattern can also be evident in verbal agreement markers or in syntactic strategies such as word order or relativizing patterns

Antipassive constructions in ergative languages have been described as a mirror image of the passive in accusative languages. Figure 3 shows how a passive construction compares to its transitive counterpart. Transitive *The police chased her* can be expressed as the passive *She was chased (by the police)*. The object, *her*, is treated as an intransitive subject, *she*, while the transitive subject is expressed as an oblique, *by the police*, or completely omitted. In English, we can tell that *she* in the passive construction is now an intransitive subject because of the change in case marking of the pronoun from accusative to nominative, as well as the positioning before the verb. In the antipassive, it is the transitive subject that is treated as an intransitive subject while the object is omitted or expressed by an oblique. The antipassive construction is intransitive and thus has lower valency than its transitive counterpart.

In an ergative language, where A and S are treated differently grammatically, this change will be apparent by case marking or other means. In a prototypical transitive clause, such as (17a), A is marked with ergative, and O is expressed as absolutive case. In the corresponding antipassive in (17b), the argument corresponding to A in the transitive clause, 'man', is in the absolutive case while P is now a non-core argument.

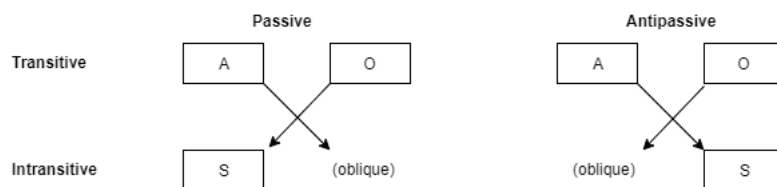


Figure 3: The antipassive as a mirror image of the passive

(17) Warrungu (Pama-Nyungan) (Tsunoda, 1988: 598)

- a. *pama-ngku kamu yangka-n*  
man-ERG water[ABS] search-NFUT  
'The man looked for water'
- b. *pama kamu-wu yangka-kali-n.*  
man[ABS] water-DAT search-AP-NFUT  
'The man looked for water.'

In ergative languages, the antipassive is often triggered by syntactical constraints. In Dyirbal, where arguments that are coreferential over clause boundaries have to be in absolutive, antipassivization allows for deletion of an argument in a subsequent clause Cooreman (1994: 73).

Note that nothing in the above description excludes passives in ergative languages or antipassives in accusative languages, they will just be less salient. Indeed, passives have been attested in ergative languages (Polinsky, 2017: 329) and many recent typological works find the use of antipassives attested in accusative languages (Janic, 2016; Vigus, 2018; Heaton, 2020). Since antipassives in accusative languages are not generally syntactically motivated, this suggests the motivation for antipassive in accusative languages is more often semantic. The main point here is that antipassives are not restricted to ergative alignment systems.

A recent typological survey by Heaton (2020: 146), found that two-thirds of the antipassive-like constructions in the survey were either lexically restricted or unproductive. Lexical semantic properties appear to determine what kind of verbs can form antipassives in some languages. For example, Ainu (isolate) antipassives can be derived only from certain semantic classes of perception, cognition, ingestion, interaction, communication or grooming (Bugaeva, 2016).

Lexical semantics interact with morphological processes in various ways. Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Veselinova (2020) give an overview of some domains where morphology and lexical typology intersect in their research questions, such as word-class categorization, lexical affixes and multi-word expressions. They conclude that while there is no systematic methodology for comparing lexical items across languages, it is beneficial to combine methods from both morphology and lexical semantics in cross-linguistic research.

## 2.3 Areal typology

The fields of areal linguistics and linguistic typology have overlapping research interests since they both concern similarities between languages regardless of genealogical relationships. Areal typology differs from traditional areal linguistics in that the main object of study is not the linguistic area, or *Sprachbund*, itself. Instead, the focus of areal typology studies is linguistic features and their areal distribution and patterns (Dahl, 2008: 1456).

This change of focus has the consequence that the areal-typological concept of 'area' differs somewhat from the more traditional concept of *Sprachbund*, which generally requires a



number of features to cluster in the same area (Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli, 2001: 624).

Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli (2001) survey the Circum-Baltic languages, a group of Germanic, Baltic, Slavic and Finno-Ugric languages spoken in the area around the Baltic Sea. The languages of the Baltic Sea area have been in intensive contact over several millennia (Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli, 2001: Ch. 1) and show several features that are not due to genealogical relatedness. Examples of such features are a high number of pluralia tantum (plural nouns lacking a singular form), case alterations to distinguish partial objects as opposed to total objects and relatively flexible SVO word order. Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli (2001) conclude that while several, typologically less common, features are found in the Circum-Baltic zone, there are no isoglosses shared by all of the surveyed languages. These isoglosses sometimes extend outside of the Circum-Baltic area.

The reflexive markers of many Circum-Baltic languages are notable in a typological perspective. Cross-linguistically, reflexivity and related meanings are more often expressed by stem affixes or clitics, while some Baltic, Eastern Slavic and North Germanic languages make use of postfixes, affixes that are not attached to the stem but follow tense/aspect and agreement markers (Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli, 2001: 690-691). The parallel development of reflexive postfixes used with reflexive, anticausative and passive meanings are typical of Circum-Baltic languages and has been attributed to language contact.

Language contact phenomena, such as structural borrowing and calques, and grammaticalization have often been treated separately. However, these two types of processes can interact in language change. Grammaticalization processes can cluster areally (Dahl, 2000: 317). Heine & Kuteva (2005: 80) propose the term contact-induced grammaticalization to describe the interplay of language contact and grammaticalization processes. Specifically, Heine & Kuteva (2005: Ch. 3) discern between ‘ordinary’ contact-induced grammaticalization and ‘replica grammaticalization’. In ‘ordinary’ contact-induced grammaticalization, speakers of a language create a grammatical category equivalent to the model language, by drawing on universal grammaticalization strategies and categories already available in the language. In ‘replica grammaticalization’, speakers of a language replicate the grammaticalization process they assume have taken place in the model language.

## 2.4 Summary

The absolute reflexive in Swedish shows some similarities to constructions with reflexive markers in Slavic and Baltic languages. While the Slavic absolute reflexive is well described, the Swedish equivalent has received little attention. Further, the lexical restrictions of the construction across European language has not been explored.

Recently the absolute reflexive has been analyzed as an antipassive, since the construction shows both structural and semantic features of antipassives. Structurally, the absolute reflexive involves patient omission, has a transitive counterpart and a marker on the predicate. Semantically, it is associated with habitual action.

The fact that lexical restrictions appear to be similar across languages raises the question if the construction is an areal feature. The group of verbs that can appear in the construction has not been examined comparatively across languages. Such an investigation may provide clues to our understanding of the grammaticalization of reflexive markers to antipassive markers.

### 3 Method

The absolute reflexive consists of a transitive base verb used with a reflexive marker. The construction is lexically restricted to a subgroup of transitive verbs. This study aims to define this class of verbs and examines the lexical restrictions of Swedish and a sample of selected Slavic, Baltic and Germanic languages. This is achieved by the combination of two different procedures. The first procedure concerns only Swedish and is described in Section 3.1.1 and the second procedure, described in Section 3.2 treats a sample of selected languages.

#### 3.1 Analysis of Swedish base verbs used in absolute reflexive

##### 3.1.1 Data

The data on verbs used in Swedish absolute reflexive is collected from Språkbanken, a large Swedish-language collection of corpora compiled by the Department of Swedish language at Göteborg university. The corpora are accessible through the interface Korp (Borin et al., 2012). Absolute reflexive is largely a phenomenon of colloquial or informal language. I have used corpus collections where the absolute reflexive is frequently found: the collection “Social media”, which include materials from blogs, Twitter and online forums, and “Tidningstexter”, which includes newspaper texts. Since the study has a synchronic perspective, I have limited searches to results from the year 2000 and onwards. The total number of tokens in the selected subcorpora is 1 699 720 077 and the number of sentences are 778 646 106. Table 3 shows the total number of tokens in the subcorpora used when searching for specific verbs. The name of the subcorpora is given in parentheses after each corpus example.

Table 3: Corpora used when searching for specific verbs

Corpus collection	Subcorpora	Dates	Number of tokens
Tidningstexter	GP	2001-2013	249 638 835
	Webbnyheter	2001-2013	271 806 921
Sociala medier	Bloggmix	2001-2017	579 995 032
	Diskussionsforum	2000-2015	449 340 326
	Twitter	2006-2015	148 938 963
Total:		2000-2017	1 699 720 077

For extracting a list of verbs used in the absolute reflexive construction regular expressions were used in the search. Korp has some difficulties handling regular expression searches in very large corpora. A smaller selection of subcorpora was used for this purpose, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Subcorpora used for extracting a list of Swedish verbs

Subcorpus	Number of tokens
Bloggmix 2014	40 133 589
Bloggmix 2015	27 835 518
Bloggmix 2016	17 699 703
Bloggmix 2017	1 669 477
Familjeliv: förälder	607 080 889
Familjeliv: medlemstrådar allmänna	280 025 873
Webbnyheter 2001 - 2013	271 806 921
Total:	1 246 251 970

### 3.1.2 Procedure

A sample of verbs occurring in the absolute reflexive was extracted from the corpora. Korp treats all verb suffixed with -s as one type, the “s-form”. There is no way to search for specific uses of the suffix through morphological tagging. The CQP string [msd = “VB\PRS\SFO”] thus yielded thousands of results, see Figure 4.

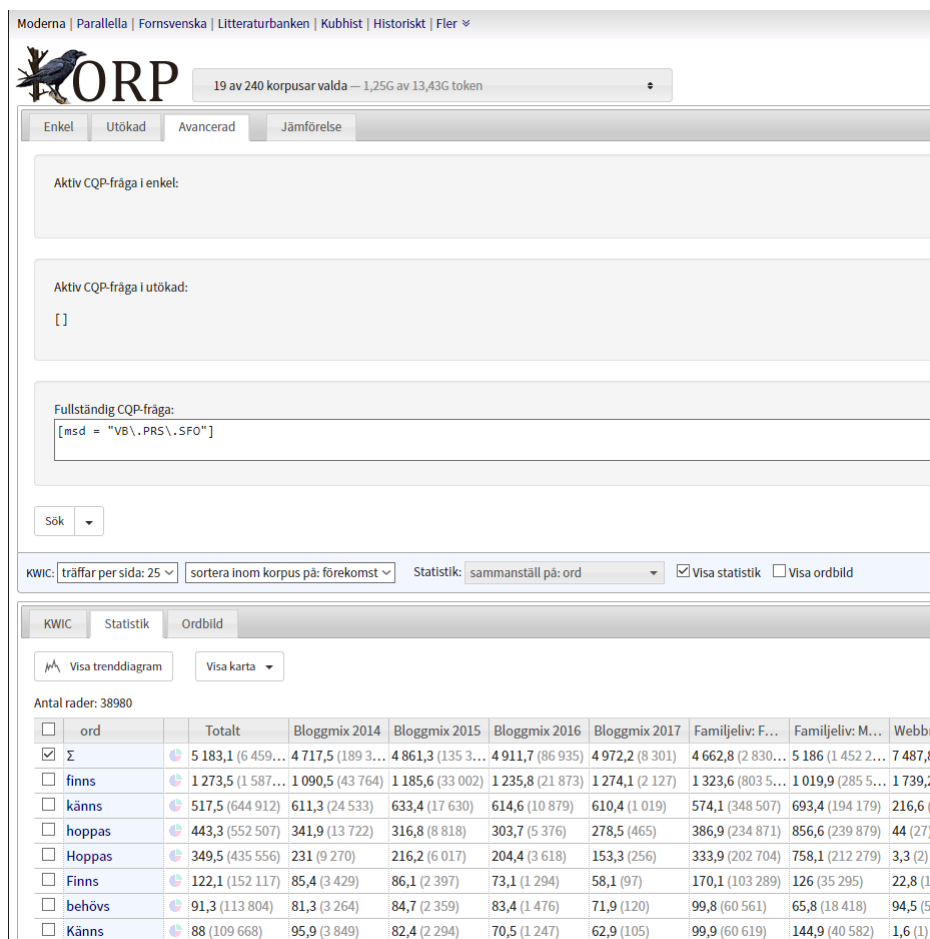


Figure 4: Screenshot of search results in the Korp interface

Of these, the most frequent 1400 verbs were manually examined, which resulted in 25 verbs used as absolute reflexives. A verb was considered absolute reflexive if it can be used so that the following conditions are met:

- it implies a semantical patient that is not expressed syntactically
- it can be used with a singular subject

The last condition is to exclude reciprocal uses. *Spottas* ‘spit’, does not fulfill the first criteria fully, since it can be also used with an expressed patient. It was included since usage such as in example (18) is common, where there is both an implied patient and a parallelism to other absolute reflexives.

(18) Swedish (Familjeliv: förälder)

- a. *Jag möt-er upp henne å hon börja-r sparka, slå-ss och spotta-s.*  
 I meet-PRS up her and she start-PRS kick.INF hit.INF-REFL and spit.INF-REFL  
 ‘I meet her and she starts kicking, hitting and spitting.’

The resulting list, given in Table 6, in Section 4.1, represents the most frequent verbs, but is not exhaustive. In the next step, through the use of the Swedish Academy dictionary (SAOB, 893 ) and corpus searches, the verbs were classified as having a -s-less counterpart or not. The syntactic transitivity of the -s-less counterparts was examined, by classifying verbs as used with direct objects, indirect objects or used without objects. Some verbs display considerable polysemy. If this causes difficulty this is resolved in the following way. One construction was assumed to be more relevant than other constructions where the verb may appear. For example, the verb *slå* ‘hit’, displays considerable polysemy (Viberg, 2016) and can be used in the following constructions, among many others:

(19) Swedish (Viberg, 2016: 190, 193, 195, 208)

- a. *Bill sl-og Harry* (Interaction between two humans)  
*Bill hit-PST Harry*  
‘Bill hit Harry.’
- b. *Han slog ut med arm-ar-na.* (Limb movement)  
*He hit-PST out with arm-PL-DEF.PL*  
‘He spread his arms out wide.’
- c. *Bill slog på dörr-en.* (Physical contact)  
*Bill hit-PST at door-DEF.SG*  
‘Bill hit at the door.’
- d. *Hon slog upp loggbok-en* (Opening)  
*She hit-PST up ledger-DEF.SG*  
‘She opened the ledger.’

However, the absolute reflexive *slåss* ‘hit, fight’, only has the first meaning, of ‘interaction between two humans’, and cannot be used with verbal particles. It is thus this construction, with a direct object, that is deemed relevant for the analysis.

The individual base verbs were grouped together by meaning. For example, *skrämma* ‘scare’, and *hota* ‘threaten’ were considered semantically close. These concepts were then divided in ‘physical aggression’ verbs, ‘psychological aggression verbs’ and ‘not inherently aggressive verbs’.

Further, the verbs were classified according to lexical aspect, or aktionsart. The definitions of different classes of aktionsart and their properties are taken from Van Valin (2005: Ch. 2). This analysis also concerns only the sense of the verb that is relevant to the absolute reflexive, which is the concrete, physical contact sense.

At last, the verbs were categorized as forming reciprocals with -s or not. The categorization is based on a poll filled in by three native speakers of Swedish. The respondents were asked to answer if the construction ‘*V -s*’ is synonymous with ‘*V each other*’. If yes, the form was considered reciprocal. The forms were also confirmed by dictionary data from the Swedish Academy dictionary. For three of the verbs, *luras* ‘fool’, *mobbas* ‘bully’ and *petas* ‘poke’, the respondents gave conflicting answers. These are marked with a question mark in the results section.

## 3.2 Survey of concepts expressed by absolute reflexive in selected languages

### 3.2.1 Data

This part aims to examine how other languages of Europe with absolute reflexive differ from Swedish in terms of lexical restrictions. A survey examines the lexical items of the absolute reflexive in a selected sample of 14 languages. 12 of the languages were chosen on the grounds of having attested absolute reflexives, while the remaining Danish and Norwegian were chosen because they are closely related to Swedish but appear to differ in the functions of reflexive markers. Of the languages, nine are Slavic (of which three are East-Slavic, three West-Slavic and three South-Slavic), two are Baltic and the remaining three are North-Germanic. The languages included and the sources used are shown in Table 5. Absolute reflexives are also attested in some Macedonian dialects (Geniušienė, 1987: 250), but only one example is given in the source. Therefore, Macedonian is not included in the survey on concepts.

Language family		Language	Source
Slavic	East-Slavic	Belarusian	Russian National corpus parallel corpora
		Russian	Israeli (1997)
		Ukrainian	Lakhno (2016)
	West-Slavic	Czech	Medová (2009)
		Polish	Janic (2016)
		Slovak	Isačenko (2003)
	South-Slavic	Bulgarian	Gradinarova (2019)
		Serbo-Croatian	Marelj (2004)
		Slovenian	Rivero & Milojević-Sheppard (2003)
Baltic		Latvian	Geniušienė (1987), Holvoet (2017)
		Lithuanian	Geniušienė (1987), holvoet2017
Germanic	North Germanic	Danish	Gudiksen (2007)
		Norwegian	Enger & Nessel (1999), Laanemets (2012)
		Swedish	Språkbanken (the Swedish Language Bank)

Table 5: Languages included in the survey

Data on the languages in the survey have been collected from linguistic articles and books. The language-specific classification of such constructions vary greatly. Data were collected by searching for key words such as ‘reflexive verbs’, ‘reciprocal verbs’, ‘antipassive’, ‘deob-jective’, ‘absolute reflexives’ and other relevant terms in the search engine Google scholar. Glossed examples containing specific words such as ‘hit’, ‘bite’ and ‘push’ together with re-flexive markers were also searched for. Linguistic descriptions have the advantage over other sources that they often include morpheme-by-morpheme glosses and translations to facilitate an analysis. Descriptive grammars do not always treat this usage of reflexive markers, either because it is considered a peripheral feature or a feature of colloquial language.

For Belarusian, where such data were lacking, the Russian-Belarusian parallel corpus avail-able at the Russian national corpus (<http://ruscorpora.ru/new/search-para-be.html>) was used. A parallel corpus has the advantage over a dictionary of also showing context, which facili-tates the exclusion of reciprocal uses of the reflexive marker. Whenever possible, gathering data from dictionaries was avoided since they often do not differentiate reciprocal and abso-lute reflexive uses of a verb. Dictionaries were however used to confirm information from articles and the corpus, and to translate examples when needed.

Data on reflexive proper and reciprocal functions of the markers involved were also col-lected. This information is mostly gathered from Geniušienė (1987)’s typology of reflexive markers. Data on Slovenian are from Rivero & Milojević-Sheppard (2003: 100), on Slovak from Isačenko (2003: 385) and on Danish from Laanemets (2012: 42).

### 3.2.2 Procedure

In this part of the investigation, the aim was to examine lexical restrictions of the absolute reflexive across languages by concluding which concepts are typically expressed with the absolute reflexive construction. To do this the most frequent meanings found were collected and grouped together as ‘concepts’. For example, the meanings ‘tease’, ‘call names’ and ‘mock’ and other near-synonyms were grouped as one concept. This was deemed preferable to counting lexical roots because the aim is to find out the scope of the lexical restrictions on the construction, and not the exact number of synonyms used in a certain language.

Since all of the languages in the survey have polysemous reflexive-reciprocal markers, only examples with singular subjects were considered to exclude possible reciprocal readings. A construction was considered absolute reflexive if it included a reflexive marker (or a marker that is diachronically reflexive but now has other functions), no syntactical expression of the patient and if the translation implied a semantical patient. Most often such verbs also have a transitive counterpart without a reflexive marker with the same lexical meaning, but this was not posited as a requirement. This is because it is not clear to what degree the absolute reflexive preserves the lexical meaning of the verb. Antipassivization is sometimes associated with meaning shifts, related to the change in telicity (Cooreman, 1994: 58). Such meaning shifts can be lexicalized.

In some cases, the sources clearly state which verbs are not possible as absolute reflexives in the language. More commonly, however, it was not possible to deduce from the source with certainty that a particular concept is not expressed with the absolute reflexive in a certain language. In other words, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The survey shows which meanings are frequent or notable enough to be mentioned in grammars or articles. The results are meant to give a general idea of which type of verbs commonly appear as absolute reflexives across languages, but should not be read as a complete description of the construction in any language.

The reflexive marker used in each language was classified as either having reflexive proper and reciprocal uses or not.

### 3.3 Glossing conventions

Glosses from other sources have been edited to confirm to Leipzig glossing rules. A list of glossing abbreviations is available in the beginning of the thesis. To facilitate comparison between languages, Swedish -s and other diachronically reflexive suffixes in the survey are glossed as REFL, while all reflexive pronouns are glossed as REFL.PRON. I have chosen to do so regardless of whether the marker has retained the function of reflexive proper, i.e. co-reference of agent and patient, in the modern language.

## 4 Results

The absolute reflexive is phenomenon restricted to a small subgroup of verbs. It is interesting to investigate whether the lexical semantics or grammatical features of the base verb determines if a verb can be used in the absolute reflexive. In another perspective, the absolute reflexive construction in Slavic has been analyzed as an antipassive by Janic (2016), Say (2005a) and others (See Section 2.1 and 2.2). The question then is in what circumstances the reflexive marker can be interpreted as an antipassive marker.

Section 4.1 deals with the Swedish absolute reflexive construction and Section 4.2 presents a survey on the most common concepts to be expressed with the absolute reflexive in 15 languages spoken in Europe.

### 4.1 Swedish absolute reflexive

In this section, I will first describe some properties of the the absolute reflexive verbs found in the Swedish corpus, compared to equivalent transitive verbs. Section 4.1.1 presents the data from the corpus, while sections 4.1.2, 4.1.3 and 4.1.4 deal with lexical semantics, lexical aspect and the patient argument of the verbs, respectively. The concept of potential reciprocity is discussed in Section 4.1.5 and the verbs ‘burn’ and ‘sting’ are discussed in Section 4.1.6 and a summary is given in Section 4.1.7.

The type of verbs appearing in the Swedish absolute reflexive has not been described systematically. Descriptions of absolute reflexives in Slavic languages often mention the absolute reflexive being restricted to “aggressive verbs” (Israeli, 1997: Ch. 4, Janic, 2016: Ch. 5.1). The notion of “aggressive” is not clearly defined in these works but what appears to be meant the intention to cause harm directed towards an animate target. However, not all verbs that may be considered aggressive can be used in the absolute reflexive. The verbs *döda* ‘kill’, *miss-handla* ‘assault’ and *kämpa* ‘fight, struggle’ are not compatible with the absolute reflexive, to name a few. This begs the question whether the verbs that can appear in the construction have some common semantic or grammatical denominator. I will call these verbs ‘base verbs’, to differentiate from the same verbs used in the absolute reflexive

#### 4.1.1 Absolute reflexives and base verbs

Table 6 shows the absolute reflexive verbs found by the corpora in the procedure described in Section 3.1 and their corresponding base verbs, sorted alphabetically. The procedure used to extract the verbs is described in Section 3.1.2. Verbs were considered absolute reflexive if they can be used with a singular subject, without a direct object and so that a patient is still implied semantically. The table also shows whether the absolute reflexive verbs have a transitive counterpart without the -s suffix (the base verb).

Many of the absolute reflexive verbs are highly lexicalized. As shown in Table 6, 19 of the 25 absolute reflexive verbs can be found in the Swedish Academy dictionary (SAOB), although the absolute reflexive use is not always differentiated from the reciprocal meaning. *Kivas* ‘bicker’, and *hotas* ‘threaten’, are marked as obsolete.

As Table 6 shows, some of the absolute reflexive verbs allow for the expression of a patient. This is discussed in 4.1.4 below. The table also shows that not all absolute reflexives have a transitive counterpart. A one-to-one correspondence between the forms with -s and without would be expected of a voice operation, but this is not the case. Some base verbs, such as *spotta* ‘spit’, take indirect objects and some take no object at all, as *fäkta* ‘fence, flail’. *Jävlas* ‘mess with’, has no counterpart without -s, since there is no verb *\*jävla*. It is not clear if *trängas* ‘crowd, push’ is really the counterpart of *tränga*, ‘press’ or a shortened version of *tränga sig* ‘push, cut it line’. *Fajta* ‘fight’, is an anglicism on which there are limited data, but it appears to

Table 6: Swedish verbs found in the corpora used in Swedish absolute reflexive

Absolute reflexive	Absolute reflexive allows expression of patient in ‘with’-phrase	Base verb	Baseverb with direct object
<i>bitas</i>	-	<i>bita</i> ‘bite’	+
<i>brottas</i>	-	<i>brotta</i> ‘wrestle’	+
<i>brännas</i>	+	<i>bränna</i> ‘burn’	+
<i>fajtas</i> ( <i>fightas</i> )	-	<i>fajta</i> ( <i>fighta</i> ) ‘fight’	+
<i>fäktas</i>	+	<i>fäkta</i> ‘fence, flail’	- (intransitive)
<i>hotas</i>	-	<i>hota</i> ‘threaten’	+
<i>härmas</i>	-	<i>härma</i> ‘imitate mockingly’	+
<i>jävlas</i>	-	‘mess with’	-
<i>kittlas</i>	-	<i>kittla</i> ‘tickle’	+
<i>kivas</i>	-	<i>kiva</i> ‘bicker’	- (intransitive)
<i>knuffas</i>	+	<i>knuffa</i> ‘push’	+
<i>luras</i>	-	<i>lura</i> ‘fool’	+
<i>mobbas</i>	-	<i>mobba</i> ‘bully’	+
<i>nypas</i>	-	<i>nypa</i> ‘pinch’	+
<i>petas</i>	-	<i>peta</i> ‘poke’	- (with indirect object)
<i>pussas</i>	+	<i>pussa</i> ‘kiss’	+
<i>puttas</i>	+	<i>putta</i> ‘push’	+
<i>retas</i>	+	<i>reta</i> ‘tease’	+
<i>rivas</i>	-	<i>riva</i> ‘scratch’	+
<i>skrämmas</i>	-	<i>skrämma</i> ‘scare’	+
<i>slås</i>	+	<i>slå</i> ‘hit’	+
<i>sparkas</i>	?	<i>sparka</i> ‘kick’	+
<i>spottas</i>	-	<i>spotta</i> ‘spit’	- (with indirect object)
<i>stickas</i>	-	<i>sticka</i> ‘sting’	+
<i>trängas</i>	+	<i>tränga</i> ‘press’	+

be used both intransitively and transitively in the corpus. 6 of the 25 absolute reflexive verbs thus do not have a corresponding transitive base verb with the same lexical meaning.

The agent is coded as a subject in the clause. The base verbs are highly transitive verbs, in the sense of Hopper & Thompson (1980). They require two participants and, typically, an agentive subject. All of the verbs except *bränna* ‘burn’ and *sticka* ‘sting, prick’ require an animate agent as in example (20). The patient of such actions as ‘hit’, ‘push’ and ‘scratch’ is highly affected. Most of the verbs describe physical, kinetic, actions, that are punctual. These features will be elaborated on below.

(20) Swedish (Bloggmix 2015)

*Svart ull-tröja som inte stick-s*  
black wool-sweater that NEG prickle-REFL[PRS]

#### 4.1.2 Lexical semantics

Semantically, the base verbs are similar in that they can describe an unwanted action by an agent on a patient. More specifically, they express an action that can cause harm or discomfort to a patient, either through direct contact by impact or by inflicting psychological discomfort. Such actions may be perceived as aggressive by the speech participants if the patient is animate.

Aggression in its core is the intention to cause harm to another animate being. In social psychology, aggression is the behavior with the intention of harming or injuring another living being who wishes to avoid being harmed (Stangor, 2013: 7). The notion of aggression



	Concept	Base verb
Physical aggression	'hit'	<i>slå</i> , 'hit'
		<i>brotta</i> , 'wrestle'
		<i>fighta/fajtas</i> , 'fight'
	'bite'	<i>bita</i> , 'bite'
	'kick'	<i>sparka</i> , 'kick'
	'push'	<i>knuffa</i> , 'push'
		<i>tränga</i> , 'push'
		<i>putta</i> , 'push'
	'sting'	<i>sticka</i> , 'sting'
		<i>bränna</i> , 'burn'
	'scratch'	<i>riva</i> , 'scratch'
Psychological aggression	'pinch'	<i>nypa</i> , 'pinch'
	other	<i>peta</i> , 'poke'
		<i>kittla</i> , 'tickle'
		<i>fäkta</i> 'fence', 'flail
	'tease'	<i>reta</i> , 'tease'
		<i>mobba</i> , 'bully'
		<i>kiva</i> , 'bicker'
		<i>härma</i> , 'imitate mockingly'
	'scare'	<i>skrämma</i> , 'scare'
		<i>hota</i> , 'threaten'
	'fool'	<i>lura</i> , 'fool'
Not inherently aggressive	'kiss'	<i>pussa</i> , 'kiss'
	'spit'	<i>spotta</i> , 'spit'

Table 7: Meanings of base verbs in the absolute reflexive

also typically requires an animate agent that is volitional, i.e. capable of performing an action intentionally. Abstract entities, such as ideas and words, without volition, can also be conceptualized as aggressive. For example, the target domain of argument is often understood through the source domain of war, through the conceptual metaphor of ARGUMENT IS WAR (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 4).

Verbs such as *reta* and *skrämma* also express actions that are intended to cause harm or discomfort. Psychological aggression and physical aggression are linked through the conceptual metaphors VERBAL AGGRESSION IS PHYSICAL AGGRESSION and COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL EFFECTS ARE PHYSICAL EFFECTS (Vanparys, 1995).

*Pussa* 'kiss', is not usually perceived as aggressive. Kissing can only be aggressive if it is not mutual. If it describes an action on an unwilling patient it may be perceived as aggressive. Interestingly, when this verb used in the absolute reflexive it can express unwanted action, a meaning that is close to aggressive action. Example (21), taken from a children's book, shows how the use of *pussa-s* 'kiss', parallels the use of *bita-s* 'bite' in that they both express an action that is performed without the consent of the potential patient. 'Kiss' is a "naturally reciprocal" event (Kemmer, 1993: 102), but this inherent reciprocity is cancelled in the absolute reflexive. *Kramas* 'hug', is sometimes used in the same way.

(21) Swedish (From the children's book *Puzzel i skolan* by Isabelle Halvarsson)

- Hon <b>bit-s</b> väl inte? [...] - Hon <b>pussa-s</b> bara. Det är det allra värsta som kan hända, sa mormor lugnt. - Usch, ryste Sofie till. En hund som pussas. Vad äckligt!	She doesn't <b>bite</b> , does she? [...] - She just <b>kisses</b> . That's the worst that could happen, grandmother said calmly. -Yuk, Sofie shivered. A dog that kisses. Disgusting!
--	--

#### 4.1.3 Lexical aspect

The Swedish absolute reflexive typically expresses iterative or habitual action (Teleman et al., 1999: 554). This raises the question on to what degree this aspectual meaning is construction-specific and to what degree it is determined by the base verb.

A common test of telicity is sensitivity to time expressions such as *in an hour*. Example (22a) demonstrates the incompatibility of the verb *slå* with such time adverbials. All but one of the base verbs fail this test of telicity. While the base verbs are thus not inherently telic, they can be made more telic and/or resultative when used as phrasal verbs, as illustrated in example (22b). The use of verb particles is otherwise a common strategy of conveying telicity in Swedish.

(22) Swedish (Constructed example)

- a. *De slog honom i en timme / (\*på en timme)*  
 They beat.PST him for an hour (\*in an hour)  
 'They beat him for an hour/ (\*in an hour)'
- b. *De slog ihjäl honom på några minuter (\*i några minuter)*  
 They beat.PST to.death him in few minutes (\*for few minutes)  
 'They beat him to death in a few minutes (\*for a few minutes)'

The only exception is *lura* 'fool'. As example (23) shows, it can be understood as both a process or a result.

(23) Swedish (Constructed example)

- De lura-de honom i en timme / på en timme.*  
 They fool-PST him for an hour / in an hour.  
 'They fooled him for an hour/ in an hour.'

An inherently atelic verb can also have a more telic interpretation when used with a quantified patient argument, as in example (24a), or when used in participle form, as in (24b). This compositional telicity is a feature of the verb phrase, or the whole construction, and not of the verb itself. Thus, the base verbs are not inherently telic or resultative.

(24) Swedish

- a. *Katt-en rev barn-et*  
 cat-DEF.SG.C scratch.PST child-DEF.SG.N  
 'The cat scratched the child'
- b. *Han blev riv-en*  
 he become.PST scratch-P.PTCP.SG.C  
 'He was scratched'

The aktionsart of the verbs is semelfactive or activity. The two aktionsart classes are both atelic event without a result state, i.e. they are not followed by a change of state. They differ in that semelfactives are punctual while activities can go on for an indefinite period of time (Van Valin, 2005: 32). Example (25) and (26) show English semelfactives and activities for reference.

(25) Semelfactive (Van Valin, 2005: 32)

- a. The light flashed.
- b. Chris coughed

(26) Activity (Van Valin, 2005: 46)

- a. The children cried.
- b. Carl ate pizza.

Verbs such as 'hit' and 'bite' are punctual while 'tickle' and 'tease' can occur during a period of time. The base verbs have in common that they are dynamic, involving action, and atelic, without an inherent end point. In other words, they describe action that is directed towards a patient but not necessarily leaving a lasting effect on the patient.

The absolute reflexive is very frequently found with the phasal verb *sluta* 'stop'. The meaning of *sluta* 'stop', is terminative, i.e. it describes an event that has taken place in a preceding period of time but does not (or is not supposed to) take place at the time of reference (Plungian, 1999: 313-315). With activity verbs, the construction with *sluta* 'stop', has the meaning that the activity continued for a period of time, as in example (27) or was repeated during a period of time. Used with punctual (semelfactive) verbs, the construction with *sluta* 'stop', only allows for an iterative interpretation, since it is not possible to stop doing a one-time event. Example (28) implies that the child has bitten at least several times before.

(27) Swedish (Bloggmix 2009)

*Jag vet, jag ska snart sluta reta-s.*  
 I know.PRS I will soon stop.INF tease.INF-REFL  
 'I know, I will stop teasing soon.'

(28) Swedish (Bloggmix 2013)

*Hur ska man få ett barn att sluta bita-s?*  
 How will INDF.3SG get.INF a child to stop.INF bite.INF-REFL  
 'How can one get a child to stop biting?'

To summarize, the absolute reflexive is not used with inherently telic or resultative verbs.

#### 4.1.4 The patient argument

Typically, when a base verb is used in an 'aggressive sense', the patient is coded as a direct object. A few examples of usage in the aggressive sense without a direct object can be found in the corpora. Typically, in such usage the patient is either retrievable from earlier discourse, or identifiable from the context. In example (29), about a pet, the implied patient is the owner. Such a construction may also be used to emphasize the action itself. In example (30), a patient may be implied but the focus of the clause is on the hitting itself.

(29) Swedish (Familjeliv: allmänna rubriker husdjur)

- a. [...] *hon bit-er när jag försök-er klipp-a hennes klor*  
 she bite-PRS when I try-PRS cut-INF her claw.PL

‘She bites when I try to cut her claws.’

(30) Swedish (Bloggmix 2010)

- a. *Han visa-r flera gång-er med sin kropp hur 23-åring-en*  
 He show-PRS several time-PL with POSS.REFL.3SG.C body how 23-year.old-DEF.SG.C  
*gör när han slå-r.*  
 do.PRS when he hit-PRS

‘He shows how the 23-year-old hits, several times with his body’

When the transitive verbs above are used in the absolute reflexive construction, the patient cannot be expressed syntactically at all. Some strongly lexicalized absolute reflexives allow for expression of the patient. *Slåss* used in the meaning ‘fight against something’ where the patient is something abstract, is sometimes used with a prepositional phrase, as in example (31). This constructions does not have a counterpart with a direct object. In example (32), *retas* ‘tease’, used with a prepositional patient has the more specific meaning ‘joke teasingly’ and is used with a prepositional phrase that expresses the patient. *Jävla*s ‘mess with’ (vulgar) has no transitive counterpart \**jävla*.

(31) Swedish (GP 2005)

- [...] *hon slå-ss mot orättvis-or i värld-en*  
 she hit-REFL[PRS] against injusticePL in world-DEF.SG.C

‘She is fighting against injustice in the world.’

(32) Swedish (Bloggmix 2009)

- Jag kan tyck-a det är kul att reta-s med honom.*  
 I can.PRS think-INF it is fun to tease-REFL with him

‘I think it is fun to tease him.’

It should also be noted that when the verb can form a reciprocal with -s, and the patient is expressed as a prepositional argument, it is not always clear whether the reading is reciprocal or absolute reflexive. Reciprocal meaning is when the participants perform the two identical semantic roles of agent and patient and their roles can be reversed without any change in meaning (Nedjalkov, 2007a: 6-7). In example 33 it is not clear who is pushing whom, i.e. if the action is reciprocal or not.

(33) Swedish (GP 2002)

- Det finns ing-a andra ute som man behöv-er knuffa-s med*  
 There exist.PRS none-PL other.PL outside that INDF.3SG need-PRS push-INF-REFL with.

‘The are no other (people) outside that you have to push/crowd with.’

In example (34), in which a parent describes her child, the agent (the boy) is singular and the patient (the parent) is omitted syntactically. Still, it may be better analyzed as the ellipsed counterpart of example (35), because the action is likely reciprocal.

## (34) Swedish (Familjeliv: förälder)

*När han bli-r leds-en vill han krama-s, så det gör vi.*  
 when he become-PRS sad-SG.C want.PRS he hug-INF-REFL, so that do.PRS we  
 ‘When he is sad he wants to hug, so we do that.’

## (35) Swedish

*Han vill krama-s med mig*  
 he wants hug-REFL with me  
 ‘He wants to hug me (literally ‘hug with me’)

In short, whether an action is reciprocal or not may depend more on the pragmatic context than on the grammatical construction itself. For now, it can only be stated that some absolute reflexives with prepositional arguments are ambiguous with reciprocals.

## 4.1.5 Potential reciprocity

Aggressive verbs are not inherently reciprocal. Still, there is a strong component of potential reciprocity in the event described by the base verbs when the participants are of the same type. It is symmetrical in that a person hitting another person risks being hit back and a dog first biting another dog can be bitten back by the second dog. The actions themselves are one-sided but the context is reciprocal.

Some Swedish verbs, among them verbs that denote actions that are by definition reciprocal, are often marked with -s. Examples includes *möta-s* ‘meet’, *ena-s* ‘agree’ and *samla-s* ‘gather together’. Other verbs use the reciprocal pronoun *varandra* ‘each other’ to mark reciprocity. This is what Kemmer (1993: 103) calls a two-form reciprocal system. 15 of the 24 base verbs form reciprocals with -s, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Base verbs that form reciprocals with -s

Base verb	Forms reciprocal with -s	Base verb	Forms reciprocal with -s
<i>bita</i> ‘bite’	+	<i>nypa</i> ‘pinch’	+
<i>brotta</i> ‘wrestle’	+	<i>peta</i> ‘poke’	?
<i>bränna</i> ‘burn’	-	<i>pussa</i> ‘kiss’	+
<i>fajta</i> ( <i>fighta</i> ) ‘fight’	+	<i>putta</i> ‘push’	+
<i>fäkt</i> ‘fence, flail’	+	<i>reta</i> ‘tease’	+
<i>hota</i> ‘threaten’	-	<i>riva</i> ‘scratch’	+
<i>härma</i> ‘imitate mockingly’	-	<i>skräm</i> ‘scare’	-
<i>kittla</i> ‘tickle’	+	<i>slå</i> ‘hit’	-
<i>kiva</i> ‘bicker’	+	<i>sparka</i> ‘kick’	+
<i>knuffa</i> ‘push’	+	<i>spotta</i> ‘spit’	-
<i>lura</i> ‘fool’	?	<i>sticka</i> ‘sting’	-
<i>mobba</i> ‘bully’	?	<i>tränga</i> ‘press’	+

With inherent reciprocals, as in (36) where the reciprocity is a part of the verb meaning, there is no ambiguity of the -s suffix. The reading is always reciprocal. Aggressive verbs, on the other hand, are not inherently reciprocal since they can describe both one-sided action (just one person hitting without being hit back), or one-sided action in a reciprocal context (one person hitting and being hit back). Example 37 is ambiguous between a reciprocal and absolute reflexive reading. It is not clear who is fighting with whom.

(36) Swedish

*De möt-s.*

They meet-REFL

‘They meet (each other).’

(37) Swedish

*De slå-ss.*

They hit-REFL

‘They fight (each other).’ or ‘They hit/fight (other people).’

This feature of potential reciprocity is found in a majority of the base verbs found in the corpus. The verbs describe actions that typically happen in reciprocal contexts, but the base verbs are not inherently reciprocal. Many of them also form reciprocal verbs with -s.

#### 4.1.6 ‘Burn’ and ‘sting’

(38) Swedish (Twittermix)

*allt med ull stick-s*

everything with wool itch-REFL

‘Everything with wool itches.’

(39) Swedish (Bloggmix 2013)

[...] *nässl-or bränn-s trots att dom är torr-a*

nettle-PL burn-REFL in.spite that they are dry-PL

‘[...] nettles burn even when they are dry.’

*Bränna* ‘burn’, and *sticka* ‘sting’, stand out as a subgroup, since they typically do not have participants of the same kind. A nettle or a bee can sting a human being that cannot sting back. These verbs do not use -s to mark reciprocity and they typically have an inanimate subject when used in the absolute reflexive. These constructions always describe a more or less permanent characteristic of the subject.

#### 4.1.7 Summary

Table 9 summarizes the properties of the base verbs found in the absolute reflexive. The typical base verb used in the construction is a transitive, non-resultative verb that expresses an undesirable action on an animate patient. It is used in reciprocal situations and forms reciprocals with -s, but is not inherently reciprocal. The base verbs vary somewhat in that not all are used with direct objects and some of them do not form reciprocals with -s. Nevertheless, the verbs display enough features in common to suggest that the group of verbs used in the construction is not idiosyncratic. It is possible to define a prototypical member of the verb group, displaying all these features.

In addition to the base verbs discussed here, extracted from corpus data as described in 3.1.1, the base verbs of other uses of absolute reflexives, found in other corpora and through Google, also show these features. Two examples are *tacklas* ‘tackle’ with the corresponding base verb *tackla* ‘tackle’ and *smittas* ‘infect’, with the base verb *smitta*. *Tackla* ‘tackle’, has all the features described in Table 9. *Tackla* is an anglicism that is used mainly in sports contexts, as shown in example (40a) about a hockey player. *Smitta* is less typical as an absolute reflexive in that

Table 9: Summary of properties of the base verbs used in absolute reflexive

Feature	Value
Lexical semantics	Aggression, undesirable action on (typically) animate P
Thematic relations	Potential reciprocity
Grammatical relations	Used with direct objects, forms reciprocals with \textit{-s}
Lexical aspect	Atelic, non-resultative (semelfactive or activity)

is is resultative and there is a measurable effect on the patient. It is however an undesirable action from the point of view of the patient, and we can imagine how such an action can be conceptualized as ‘aggressive’. The action is not inherently reciprocal but frequently appears in reciprocal contexts, when people infect each other. *Smitta* can also form a reciprocal verb with -s.

(40) Swedish (GP 2011)

- a. *Han är snabb, kan tackla-s bra och han skjut-er även riktigt lång-t.*  
 he is fast, can.PRS tackle-REFL good and han shoot-PRS also really long-ADV  
 ‘He is fast, can tackle well and he also shoots really long shots’

(41) Swedish (<https://nouw.com/allamåstetitta/sjukdomstombolan-35348926>)

- a. [...] *efter två dag-ar på penicillin-kur-en så skulle han ju sluta*  
 after two day-PL on penicillin-cure.DEF.SG.C so would he DM stop.INF  
*smitta-s.*  
 infect.INF-REFL  
 ‘[...] after two days on penicillin he would no longer be contagious.’

Thus, while all verbs found to be used in the construction may not be associated with all these features, it is possible to describe a prototypical base verb that can be used in the absolute reflexive. Verbs such as *slå* ‘hit’, *knuffa* ‘push’, and *bita* ‘bite’ have all these features and are among the most frequently used. Other more peripheral absolute reflexives have at least some of the features outlined in Table 9 and may be formed by semantic extension by analogy with the ‘core’ meaning verbs.

Positing a set of features common to all verbs that can be used in the absolute reflexive also explains why some, superficially similar verbs, such as *döda* ‘kill’ *misshandla* ‘assault’, and *kämpa* ‘fight, struggle’, are not used in the construction. *Döda* ‘kill’ is resultative. *Misshandla* ‘assault’ is a legal term that focuses on the action of one person, i.e. it is not used in reciprocal contexts. At last, *kämpa* ‘struggle, fight’ does not describe an action on an animate patient.

To summarize, the answer to the research question “What lexical restrictions apply to the Swedish absolute reflexive? What kind of verbs can be used in the construction?” is that the absolute reflexive is used with a group of verbs that is characterized by aggressive semantics and potential reciprocity. Most of them are atelic and non-resultative. These features differentiate them from verbs that are not used in the construction. As mentioned in Section 2.2.2, polysemic reflexive-reciprocal-antipassive markers are common cross-linguistically. In Swedish, the reflexive/reciprocal marker -s can only have an antipassive reading when used with a specific lexical group of verbs.

## 4.2 Absolute reflexives in other European languages

In an even larger cross-linguistic context it may be noted that the use of reflexive markers with antipassive functions has been described in Pama-Nyungan, Eastern Sudanic, Kartvelian, Cariban, Tacanan, Chukotko-Kamchatkan language families and others (Janic 2010, Sansò 2017 Polinsky 2017: 158). However, this thesis focuses on Indo-European languages of Europe which are more immediately comparable to the Swedish absolute reflexive in function and lexical restrictions. This section presents a survey of the type of concepts expressed by the absolute reflexive construction in selected European languages. The data are taken from different sources, as outlined in Section 3.2

The section is structured as follows. Section 4.2.1 presents the most common concepts in the survey. Sections 4.2.2-4.2.6 deals with individual languages in the survey. Section 4.2.7 treats the topic of reciprocity. Finally, a summary is given in Section 4.2.8.

### 4.2.1 Concepts expressed by absolute reflexive

The map in Figure 5 shows the location of the languages included in the survey.

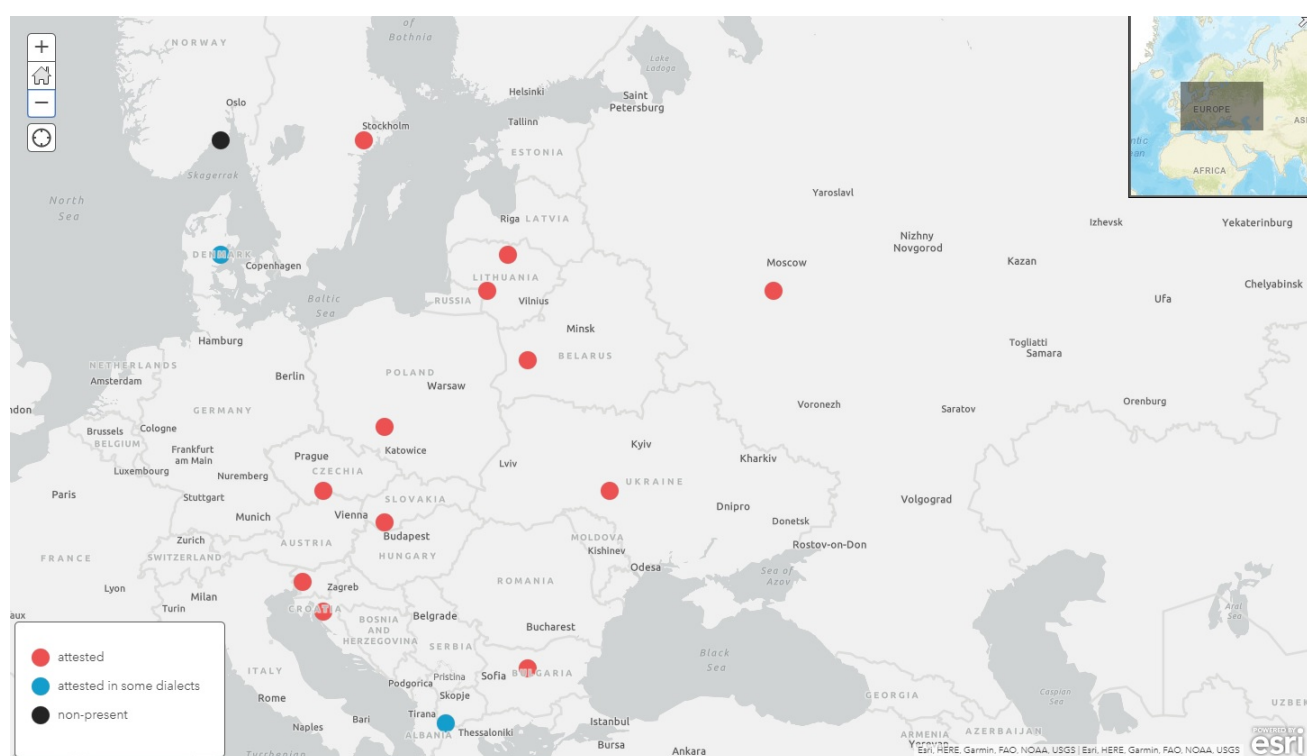


Figure 5: Map of languages in survey

Table 10 shows which concepts that were most frequently found to be expressed by the absolute reflexive in the 15 languages included in the survey. Physical aggression verbs such as ‘hit’, ‘push’ and ‘bite’ stand out as the most frequent meanings. Verbs of ‘psychological aggression’ are also common and such meanings are probably related to the physical contact verbs by metaphorical extension.

Some observations on individual languages follow.

### 4.2.2 East-Slavic languages

In Russian, the construction is restricted to a subgroup of transitive verbs that express unwanted, from the perspective of the patient, action (Israeli, 1997: Ch. 4, Letuchiy, 2016: 212).



Concept	Languages (out of 13)
hit/fight	12
push/butt	12
bite	10
pinch	9
tease/call names/mock	8
spit	7
kick	7
scratch	7
curse / swear / use bad language	6
sting/burn	6
tickle	4
deceive/cheat	3

Table 10: Concepts expressed by absolute reflexive in European languages

The Russian absolute reflexive is used to describe habitual action that is characteristic of the subject, as in example (42a). This meaning is commonly used with an animal agent. It can also be used to express an actual, ongoing action, as in example, typically with a human agent (42b) (Israeli, 1997: Ch. 4). In both cases, only imperfective verbs are used Letuchiy (2016: 212). The most typical agent is a human or an animal, even though there are a few exceptions, notably ‘burn’ and ‘sting’ (Israeli, 1997: Ch. 4). The patient is always animate (Israeli, 1997: Ch. 4, Letuchiy, 2016: 212).

(42) Russian (East-Slavic) (Israeli, 1997: 113)

- a. *Kon’ bryka-et-sja.*  
horse.NOM kick.IPFV-PRS.3SG-REFL  
‘The horse kicks.’ (has a habit of kicking).
- b. *Mužčin-a, nu xvatit mož-et tolka-t’-sja?*  
man-NOM DM enough can.IPFV-PRS.3SG push.IPFV-INF-REFL  
‘Man, maybe it’s enough pushing?’

The Ukrainian set of verbs used in the construction is almost identical to the Russian as far as this survey goes. The construction can express both habitual, potential action and concrete action (Lakhno, 2016). Typically only imperfective verbs are used (Lakhno, 2016: 93). Ukrainian shows the same pattern as Russian in that the habitual function is mainly realized with animal agents (Lakhno, 2016: 92). Usage with inanimate agents is described for verbs that are synonyms of ‘burn’ and ‘sting’ (Lakhno, 2016: 93).

(43) Ukrainian (East-Slavic) (Lakhno, 2016: 92) [Gloss and translation added]

- a. *Kropyv-a žalit’-sja*  
nettle-NOM sting.IPFV-PRS.3SG-REFL  
‘Nettle stings’.
- b. *Kušč kolet’-sja*  
bush.NOM prick.IPFV-PRS.3SG-REFL  
‘(The) bush pricks.’

There is very limited data on the function and restrictions on Belarusian absolute reflexive. Translations from the Russian-Belarusian parallel corpus points at very similar usage as in

Russian. Out of the 10 concepts found expressed as absolute reflexives in Russian, 9 also has Belarusian absolute reflexive counterparts in the corpus. There is no data on aspectual meanings, but all verbs found are imperfective.

- (44) Belarusian (Russian National corpus)

*Tol'ki ne kusaj-sja*  
just NEG bite.IPFV.2SG.IMP-REFL  
'Just do not bite.'

#### 4.2.3 West-Slavic

The absolute reflexive in Polish is used with human agents and inanimate agents, but not with animal agents (Janic, 2016: 143). Judging by the glossed translations, Polish absolute reflexives can express both habitual, or iterative, action, as in example (45a) and non-habitual action, as in example (45b). Examples of verbs given in the literature are mostly restricted to physical action on an animate patient. There is no data on aspectual usage but all examples given use imperfective verbs.

- (45) Polish (West-Slavic) (Kański 1986, referred to in Rivero & Milojević-Sheppard (2003: 115))

- a. *Marek się bi-je.*  
Mark.NOM REFL.PRON.ACC fight.IPFV-PRS.3SG  
'Mark fights (other people).'
- b. *Nie pchaj się, pan!*  
NEG push.IPFV.IMP.2SG REFL.PRON.ACC man  
'Stop pushing (others), man!'

The use of absolute reflexive in Czech is limited to a few verbs and is only possible with a human agent and a human patient. 'Fight' and 'push' are among these verbs (Medová, 2009: 24). A habitual reading is possible. Given the right context, the reading can also be non-habitual, as in example (46), i.e. Valenta is pushing other children right now. Medová (2009: 24) describes this construction as 'reciprocal by nature' with a singular subject. There is no data on aspectual usage but all examples given use imperfective verbs.

- (46) Czech (Medová, 2009: 24)

*Paní učitelko, Valenta se strká!*  
mrs teacher.VOC.F Valenta.NOM.SG.M REFL.PRON.ACC push.IPFV.PRS.3G  
'Teacher, Valenta is pushing (other people)!'

Data on Slovak available to me are very limited. The reflexive marker *sa* is more readily understood as reflexive proper, i.e. co-reference of agent and patient, along with verbs such as 'bite' and 'kick'. 'Fight' is the only attested example available in the material.

- (47) Slovak (Isačenko, 2003: 388) [Translation added]

*Bije sa.*  
hit.IPFV.PRS.3SG REFL.PRON.ACC  
'He fights (is a fighter).'

#### 4.2.4 South-Slavic

Absolute reflexives in Bulgarian are described as a feature of children's speech, that has spread to the speech of adults (Gradinarova, 2019: 27-28). Only human or animal agents are possible in the construction (Gradinarova, 2019: 31). The verbs described all express physical, violent action on an animate patient. The verbs used in the construction are mostly imperfective. The perfective *razritam se* 'start kicking' or 'kick several times' is a notable exception (Gradinarova, 2019: 29).

Slovenian absolute reflexives are limited to verbs where a reflexive reading is not natural, i.e. it is not something one would wish to do to oneself. Examples include *porivati*, 'push', *tepsti*, 'beat', and *grizti*, 'bite'. Examples such as (48) shows a non-habitual meaning. A habitual reading is also possible (Rivero & Milojević-Sheppard, 2003: 117). There is no data on aspectual usage but all attested examples use imperfective verbs.

(48) Slovenian (Rivero & Milojević-Sheppard, 2003: 115)

*Uciteljica Janezek se spet poriva.*  
teacher.NOM Janezek.NOM REFL.PRON.ACC again push.IPFV.PRS.3SG

'Teacher, Valenta is pushing (other people)!'

Serbo-Croatian absolute reflexive is restricted to human patients (Marelj, 2004: 248). The patient is usually interpreted as generic, non-referential and plural, when the verb has a habitual reading. Given the right context, the reading can also be non-habitual with a referential, singular patient (Marelj, 2004: 249). The agent argument is not discussed explicitly but appears to be restricted to humans. Aspectual implications of the constructions is not discussed in the data, but all examples use imperfective verbs.

Some dialects of Macedonian uses absolute reflexives with animal subjects (Geniušienė, 1987: 250). *Kloca* 'kick' is the only attested example in the data.

#### 4.2.5 Baltic

Latvian and Lithuanian absolute reflexives are used in the habitual sense, of an action that is characteristic of the agent, alongside with describing non-habitual action (Holvoet, 2017: 66). The agent is animate, a human or an animal, while the patient is always human (Geniušienė, 1987: 86). The construction is limited to a group of verbs describing aggressive behaviour, typically physical but sometimes verbal (Holvoet, 2017: 70). These verbs "show a natural affinity with reciprocals" (Holvoet, 2017: 70) and the group of verbs used partly overlaps with reciprocals (Geniušienė, 1987: 86). A Lithuanian example of such reciprocal-absolute reflexive overlap is shown in example (49). Lithuanian and Latvian absolute reflexives have a "potential" meaning on the part of the patient, as the patient may or may not be affected by the action. They are typically used in the present tense (Geniušienė, 1987: 85). There is no data on aspectual usage.

(49) Lithuanian (Baltic) (Geniušienė, 1987: 92)

a. *Jiedu muša-si.* (Reciprocal)  
They.two beat.PRS.3-REFL  
'They are fighting'.

b. *Berniuk-as muša-si.* (Absolute reflexive)  
boy-NOM.SG beat.PRS.3-REFL  
'The boy fights (is pugnacious)'.

#### 4.2.6 North-Germanic

Surprisingly, Modern Norwegian and Danish, both close relatives to Swedish, apparently do not use absolute reflexives at all (Enger & Nessel, 1999: 36, Laanemets, 2012: 41-42). The use of *-s* is limited in Norwegian compared to Swedish, and is mainly productive as a passive marker (Enger, 2002: 94-95). The use of *-s* to form passives is less productive in both Danish and Norwegian, compared to Swedish (Nedjalkov, 2007b: 189). Some older Danish regional dialects, now no longer spoken, used absolute reflexives with a similar set of verbs as modern Swedish (Gudiksen, 2007). Swedish is thus the only North-Germanic language with absolute reflexive, and appears to be the only Germanic language with absolute reflexive.

Swedish absolute reflexive has an animate agent, with the exception of ‘burn’ and ‘sting’, and a human patient. As noted in Section 4.1.3, Swedish verbs in the absolute reflexive cannot be used with verb particles that convey telicity.

#### 4.2.7 Overlap with reciprocal function

Just as noted for Swedish in Section 4.1, the other languages in the survey also use the same marker for both absolute reflexive and reciprocal constructions. This leads to some clauses, especially with plural subjects, having an ambiguous reading. Thus, the Russian verb in example (50a) and (50b) is identical. A Lithuanian example is given in (49) above.

(50) Russian (East-Slavic) (Knjazev, 2007: 681)

- a. *Posmotr-i, dv-e korov-y boda-jut-sja* . (Reciprocal)  
look.PFV-2SG.IMP two-NOM.F cow-NOM.PL butt.IPFV-3PL.PRS-REFL

‘Look, two cows are butting each other’.

- b. *Bud’ ostorož-en, korov-y boda-jut-sja* (Absolute reflexive)  
be.IPFV.2SG.IMP careful-SG.M cow-NOM.PL butt.IPFV-3PL.PRS-REFL

‘Be careful, cows butt.’

Table 11 shows which functions the reflexive markers have in the languages of the survey. Note that all languages where the reflexive marker is used in absolute reflexive, also use this marker in reciprocal uses.

Language	Marker	Form of marker	Absolute reflexive	Reciprocal	Reflexive proper
Russian	<i>-sja (-s’)</i>	affix	+	+	+
Belarusian	<i>-cca (-sja)</i>	affix	+	+	+
Ukrainian	<i>-sja (-s’)</i>	affix	+	+	+
Polish	<i>się</i>	clitic pronoun	+	+	+
Slovak	<i>sa</i>	clitic pronoun	+	+	+
Czech	<i>se</i>	clitic pronoun	+	+	+
Serbo-Croatian	<i>se</i>	clitic pronoun	+	+	+
Bulgarian	<i>se</i>	clitic pronoun	+	+	+
Slovenian	<i>se</i>	clitic pronoun	+	+	+
Latvian	<i>-s</i>	affix	+	+	+
Lithuanian	<i>-s (-si-)</i>	affix	+	+	+
Danish	<i>-s</i>	affix	-	+	-
Norwegian	<i>-s</i>	affix	-	+	-
Swedish	<i>-s</i>	affix	+	+	-

Table 11: Functions of reflexive markers in the languages of the survey

#### 4.2.8 Summary

The answer to the research question “How do other languages of Europe with absolute reflexive differ from Swedish in terms of lexical restrictions?” is presented below.

The languages in the sample show considerable similarities in the concepts expressed by the absolute reflexive, both with Swedish and among themselves. This study has not examined the restrictions in each individual language in detail, but it is clear that there is a core group of verbs that tends to be used in the absolute reflexive more often than others. Typical are the physical aggression verbs ‘hit’, ‘bite’, ‘push’ and ‘pinch’. Verbs of verbal aggression, such as ‘tease’ and ‘curse’ are also common. Other features of the construction are also very similar across languages. Almost all descriptions mention a habitual or iterative meaning, but this is not the only possible aspectual meaning. In many languages the absolute reflexive can also describe action that is ongoing at the present moment. ‘Do not push (me right now!)!’ is a common example that appears in descriptions of several languages. I have found no examples of absolute reflexives being used to reference past punctual action. It appears that in languages with grammatical aspect, the absolute reflexive is only used in the imperfective aspect. Such a restriction would exclude a telic interpretation of the action.

The Swedish absolute reflexive frequently often appears with the verb *sluta* ‘stop’. This collocation is also found in some other languages in the survey.

Languages vary in what types of agents are allowed, in a way that follows the animacy hierarchy: humans < animate < inanimate. All languages in the survey allow absolute reflexive with human agents, while only some allow all animate agents. Inanimate patients are even rarer in the data, and are only described in languages that also have animate agents. Thus, in the absolute reflexive constructions of the languages in the survey, the following implication holds:

(51) inanimate subject  $\supset$  animate non-human subject  $\supset$  human subject

The notion of aggression is connected to the animacy hierarchy in that aggression requires a volitional agent. Humans have high volitionality, while animals are understood to have a lower degree of volitionality. Inanimates of course lack volitionality.

There is also considerable overlap between reciprocal and absolute reflexive in the languages, meaning that one and the same grammatical marker can have either of these two functions when used with a specific verb. All of the languages in the survey use the same marker for reciprocal and absolute reflexive functions. Many descriptions also mention readings that are ambiguous between these two functions. The possible implications of this in terms of grammaticalization will be discussed in Section 5.1.3.

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Discussion of results

#### 5.1.1 Absolute reflexive as an antipassive

Referring back to the structural criteria of antipassives described in section 2.2.2, repeated here for convenience, it can be concluded that the absolute reflexive in Swedish fulfills most of these.

- The construction has a transitive counterpart
- Its sole core argument corresponds to A in the transitive counterpart
- The P is either omitted or expressed as an oblique
- The predicate is marked

However, there are some absolute reflexives without a transitive counterpart, such as *jävla-s* ‘mess with’ (profane). Such verbs are presumably coined by analogy with absolute reflexives. Other languages in the survey also have absolute reflexives that cannot be analyzed as an intransitive counterpart to a transitive verb. Russian *drat’-sja* ‘fight’, has a meaning quite different from the transitive *drat’* ‘tear’. Many verbs take on a slightly different meaning when used in the absolute reflexive. As discussed in Section 4.1, the absolute reflexive construction enhances some elements of lexical semantics already inherent to the verbs used, such as atelicity and aggression. This can lead to a shift of meaning. For example, the absolute reflexive *slå-ss*, ‘fight’, is derived from *slå*, with the meaning ‘hit’.

An antipassive analysis of the Swedish absolute reflexive thus depends on whether the lexical meaning of the transitive counterpart is required to be fully preserved. In the WALS chapter on antipassive constructions, Polinsky (2013) defines antipassives as “a derived detransitivized construction with a two-place predicate, related to a corresponding transitive construction whose predicate is *the same lexical item* [emphasis added].” Other approaches do not put an emphasis on preserved lexical meaning, but only requires the antipassive to “correspond” to a basic voice construction (e.g. Heaton 2017: 63. Antipassivization leading to meaning shifts related to imperfective aspect is documented in other languages. In K’iche’ (Mayan), the antipassive counterpart of ‘hit’ means ‘fight’ (Cooreman, 1994: 58).

19 of the 25 absolute reflexives examined in Section 4.1 were found in a dictionary, pointing to a high degree of lexicalization. The construction is heavily lexically restricted in Swedish and the other languages in the survey. Very limited applicability, in the form of strict lexical restrictions, and changes of lexical meaning that sometimes occur in the absolute reflexive are features that are more typical of derivation than of inflection (Haspelmath & Sims, 2013: Ch. 5). This would speak against a voice analysis and suggests that absolute reflexive may be better treated as a lexical phenomenon, rather than a syntactic voice operation. However, the absolute reflexive also displays properties commonly associated with inflection, such as relevance to syntax and obligatoriness. Non-absolute reflexive verbs cannot be replaced by absolute reflexives in transitive syntactic contexts.

One can also adopt a more functional perspective on the antipassive, in that languages often use similar, but not identical, strategies to convey similar functions. In such a view antipassive is a strategy to express a less affected or less individuated patient and atelic aspect, by syntactically detransitivizing the clause. In this perspective it is more interesting to look at possible antipassive-like functions of the absolute reflexive.

Antipassive constructions can have aspectual meaning and are associated with lowering of telicity in the form of habitual, iterative, imperfective or progressive aspect (Zúñiga & Kittilä,

2019: 111). Many descriptions of the absolute reflexive emphasize on the characteristically habitual meaning. The action described is taken to be an inalienable characteristic of the agent. There is also a non-habitual usage in most of the languages in the survey, when the absolute reflexive refers to either an action that is ongoing at present moment, or occurred iteratively during a period of time in the past. What is not found in the data on any language in the survey, is absolute reflexive being used to refer to a telic, i.e. punctual, resultative, one-time action in the past. In Slavic languages with grammatical aspect, absolute reflexive is used almost exclusively with imperfective verbs. While imperfective aspect is not synonymous with atelicity, (see e.g. Borik, 2006: Ch. 3), in general imperfective verbs are also less telic. In Swedish, example (52), that contains a time adverbial referring to a specific time and cannot be read habitually, is understood as iterative, e.g. the action was repeated more than once.

(52) Swedish (Constructed example)

- a. *Hund-en bet-s igår*  
 Dog-DEF.SG.C bite.PST-REFL yesterday

‘The dog was biting yesterday.’ (The dog bit several times yesterday)

Hence, absolute reflexive is associated with habitual and iterative aspect. Other antipassive functions such as signaling a less affected or a less individuated patient, has not been explored systematically in this thesis. It seems likely that an omitted patient is also construed as less individuated. Descriptions on some of the languages in the survey mention generic or non-referential patients. In Swedish, the absolute reflexive construction can sometimes be paraphrased as ‘does V to other people’, which would point to a low degree of individuation. On the other hand, there are cases such as example (52) above, where the patient is more likely to be referential with a higher degree of individuation.

Regarding transitivity, the base verbs used in the construction are highly transitive. The absolute reflexive construction, on the other hand, has features of lower than default transitivity, such as atelicity, non-punctuality and, possibly, a non-individuated patient. The view of antipassive proposed by Hopper & Thompson (1980), as a strategy to convey semantic features of lower transitivity by detransitivizing the clause syntactically, is hence applicable here. It makes sense that highly transitive verbs are marked explicitly when occurring in low-transitivity contexts, unlike verbs of lower transitivity.

Overall, it is clear that the absolute reflexive has enough in common with antipassives in other languages, both structurally and semantically, for such a comparison to be meaningful. Whether the absolute reflexive is best accounted for as a voice phenomenon or not is not as clear. Some more recent works put less of an emphasis on the voice aspect of antipassive. For example, Heaton’s 2020: 148-149’s typological survey of antipassive constructions includes constructions that do not necessarily indicate voice. The wider umbrella term of “antipassive-like constructions” may serve as a better ground of comparison for the absolute reflexive.

**Animacy and volition** Antipassives have been linked to marking a lower degree of volitionality. For example, in Chukchee (Chukotka-Kamchatkan) and Diyari (Pama-Nyungan), the usage of an antipassive can signal a lack of volition of the agent (Cooreman, 1994). An interesting effect, possibly related to volition, is seen with Swedish absolute reflexive with inanimate agents. I define volitionality here as the degree of intention to carry out an action (Hopper & Thompson, 1980: 286).

With an inanimate agent and an animate patient an absolute reflexive construction is strongly preferred, as in examples (53a-b). A direct object construction is construed as slightly odd or even ungrammatical, as in example (54a). If there is a need to specify a patient, a reflexive construction with an animate subject is preferred, as in example (55).

(53) Swedish (Constructed example)

- a. *Nässl-or bränn-s*  
 'Nettle-PL burn-REFL[PRS]  
 'Nettles burn.'
- b. *Ull-tröja-n stick-s*  
 wool-sweater-DEF.SG.C prickle-REFL[PRS]  
 'The wool sweater is prickly.' (lit. 'The wool sweater prickles.')

(54) Swedish (Constructed example)

- a. *?Nässla-n bränn-er flicka-n*  
 nettle-DEF.SG.C sting-PRS girl-DEF.SG.C/  
 'The nettle stings the girl.'
- b. *?Ull-tröja-n stick-er mig*  
 wool-sweater-DEF.SG.C prickle-PRS me  
 'The wool sweater prickles me.'

(55) Swedish (Constructed example)

*Flicka-n brän-de sig på nässla-n*  
 girl-DEF.SG.C burn-PST REFL.PRON on nettle-DEF.SG.C  
 'The girl burned herself on the nettle.'

So while in other cases the choice between a direct object construction and absolute reflexive is mostly pragmatic and depends on the contextualization of the situation, with inanimate subjects absolute reflexive is almost obligatory. This may be because the transitive construction with a direct object is associated with a volitional agent (Hopper & Thompson, 1980: 286). In Russian, use of the absolute reflexive is also preferred compared to a direct object construction with inanimate subjects and verbs such as *žžeč'* 'burn', and *kolot'* 'prick' (Israeli, 1997: 119-120).

Other uses of the absolute reflexive in Swedish also point to an association to a lower degree of volitionality. Human agents typically have high volition, but the absolute reflexive is often used when agents are portrayed as lacking awareness of or responsibility for their actions, due to limited mental resources or because of being affected by strong emotions. The agent is very often a child or a pet. This may be partly related to the habitual meaning, in that a habitual action that the agent has a strong inclination to perform is not fully volitional. But the non-volitional meaning component occurs in constructions referring to non-habitual action as well, as in examples 56-57.

(56) Swedish (Bloggmix 2013)

*Han är så liten men så stor till växten så han förstår ju inte effekten av när han putta-s*  
 'He is so young but so big so he doesn't understand the effect when he **pushes-REFL**.'

(57) Swedish (Bloggmix 2011)

*Nemo slog-s och bet-s för sitt liv när veterinären tog fram klippmaskinen.*  
 'Nemo **fought-REFL** and **bit-REFL** for his life when the veterenary pulled out the clipper.'



### 5.1.2 Absolute reflexive compared to null object constructions

Geniušienė (1987: 251) has suggested that the absolute reflexive is especially prevalent in languages where ambitransitive verbs are rare, i.e. verbs that appear in both transitive and intransitive contexts without any special marking on the verb. In regards of linguistic economy, it is preferable to just omit the object without marking the verb.

Næss (2007: Ch. 6) finds that indefinite object deletion cross-linguistically tends to be restricted to verbs denoting mainly an affected agent or an effected object. Verbs of ingestion such as ‘eat’ are prototypical verbs with an affected agent. An effected object is “[...] one that comes about as a result of the verbal action; it did not exist before the action began, nor does it come into existence if the action is interrupted before it is completed” (Næss, 2007: 127). A prototypical example is ‘write’. In Næss’ analysis, situations with affected agents and effected patients both deviate from prototypical transitivity in that an affected agent more resembles a patient and an effected object is non-referential. The verbs used in the Swedish absolute reflexive are not good examples of such verbs.

English uses a construction that just omits the object. Levin (1993: 39) calls this the “characteristic property of agent alternation”, since it describes a property of the agent. That is, to bite is in some sense characteristic of the dog in 58. With a restricted set of verbs, of which Levin mentions *bite*, *butt*, *itch*, *kick*, *pinch*, *prick*, *scratch* and *sting*, the patient is interpreted as a human.

(58) That dog bites

So, in English, a language closely related to Swedish, a null object construction is used in the same domain, by just omitting the patient syntactically. In Swedish, this subgroup of verbs are sometimes used without a direct object, but such uses are comparably rare and seem to occur when the reference of the patient can be retrieved from the context or discourse or when the action is construed as not having a patient at all. As shown in section 4.2, modern Norwegian and Danish lack absolute reflexives and use null object constructions instead. The -s suffix is mainly used for passive and reciprocal uses, and may be less productive overall compared to Swedish.<sup>1</sup>

Similar verbs in German with reflexive markers and singular subjects only have a reflexive reading, as in (59), or reciprocal as in example (60). The reading of (60) is only reciprocal, and cannot be used to describe non-reciprocal hitting.

(59) German (Constructed example)

*Er schlägt sich*  
He hit.PRS.3SG REFL.PRON.ACC  
‘He hits himself.’

(60) German (Constructed example)

*Er prügelt sich in der Schule*  
He fight-PRS.3SG REFL.PRON.ACC in the school  
‘He fights in school.’

Swedish, then, differs from other Germanic languages in this regard. The explanation to this may lie in the grammaticalization of reflexives as an areal feature.

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Kalle Lisberg and Johnny Meyer for providing Norwegian and Danish examples.

### 5.1.3 Grammaticalization

In this section, I suggest a possible grammaticalization path for the absolute reflexive function of reflexive markers through the reciprocal function.

Section 4.2 showed that the lexical class of verbs used in the absolute reflexive is very similar across a number of Slavic and Baltic language along with Swedish. The markers used in the construction are diachronically reflexive, but have taken on different functions in different language. In Swedish, the reflexive proper, i.e. when the agent and the patient are coreferential, is marked with the reflexive pronoun *sig*, while other near-lying functions are marked with the suffix *-s* (see Section 2.1.1).

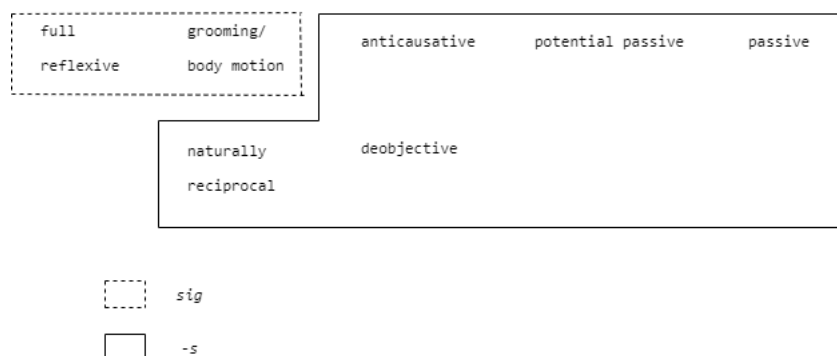


Figure 6: Semantic map of Swedish reflexive markers, adapted from Haspelmath (2003: 13)

Individual languages draw the lines between these functions in different places, but markers occupy a contiguous area on a semantic map. The languages in the survey are both two-form languages (e.g. East-Slavic languages) and one-form languages. An important point is that in all the languages in the survey, the marker in the absolute reflexive also functions as a reciprocal marker. This means that clauses with plural agents are ambiguous between a reciprocal and an absolute reflexive reading.

Polysemy of reflexive/reciprocal/antipassive markers are common cross-linguistically (Janic, 2010; Sansò, 2017; Polinsky, 2017: 158). Janic (2010) suggests a scenario in which reflexive markers grammaticalize to antipassive markers. She argues that reflexivization is associated with a patient that is less distinguished and focused, being co-referential with the agent. The function of the antipassive is to signal a pragmatically less focused patient, and through this functional similarity speakers come to use the reflexive marker even for an event where participants are not co-referential. Further in the grammaticalization process, these two meanings may or may not separate into two different constructions. Janic (2016: 252-253) does not exclude the development of the antipassive function from the reciprocal function, but considers that independent development of reciprocal and antipassive functions from reflexive markers is more likely. The reasoning for this is based on the fact that in some language families, there is reflexive-antipassive polysemy without reciprocal meaning.

While grammaticalization directly from reflexive may be a plausible explanation for some languages, in my view it is not the most likely explanation for the absolute reflexive in the languages dealt with in this thesis, because it does not explain in what type of contexts such ‘functional similarity’ would occur. Based on the large number of examples I have encountered that are ambiguous between reciprocal and absolute reflexive meaning, the absolute reflexive may have grammaticalized from reflexives through the reciprocal function. The possible steps in this process will be described below.

(61) Reflexive -> Reciprocal -> Antipassive

Stage 1 A language has a reflexive/reciprocal marker. Reflexive-reciprocal polysemy is common cross-linguistically and is the result of reflexive markers extending their function to reciprocity through semantic bleaching (Maslova & Nadjalkov, 2013).

Stage 2 A subset of “aggressive” verbs do not favor a reflexive reading. One does not generally bite or hit oneself. With such verbs, the marker is mainly or exclusively used with the reciprocal meaning. For example, the Croatian example in (62) can have a reflexive or reciprocal meaning, but the reflexive reading requires a special pragmatic context to not sound odd.

(62) Croatian

*Ps-i se griz-u*  
dog-NOM.PL REFL.PRON.ACC bite.IPFV-PRS.3PL

‘The dogs bite each other.’ or ‘The dogs bite themselves.’ or ‘The dogs bite (people or animals).’

In some languages the two functions may grammaticalize into two different markers. For example, Russian, much like Swedish, has two-form system where the ‘light’ suffixes mark reciprocal action, as in example (63a) and the ‘heavy’ full reflexive pronouns have a reflexive proper function, as in example (63b).

(63) Russian

a. *Oni der-ut-sja*

They fight.IPFV-3PL.PRS-REFL

‘They fight (each other)’ (not ‘they fight themselves.’)

b. *Oni b’j-ut (samix) sebja*

They beat.IPFV-3PL.PRS (self-ACC.PL) REFL.PRON.ACC

‘They beat themselves.’ (not ‘they beat each other.’)

Haiman (1998) suggests that the full reflexive pronoun, contrasted to the ‘light’ version, has its origins in the conceptualization of the self as two separate entities, the speaker representing himself as both a performer and an observer. The conceptualization of the self as two separate entities, or the speaker representing himself as both a performer and an observer, leads to the use of a transitive clause where there is co-reference of agent and patient in the form of a full reflexive pronoun, such as in example (63), or *I beat myself*. In other words, a high degree of self awareness leads to the speaker seeing himself as other see him.

Stage 3 A subgroup of verbs with aggressive meaning take on an antipassive meaning when used with singular agents. Reciprocal verbs are typically used with plural agents, where the roles of the participants can be reversed without any change in meaning (Nadjalkov, 2007a: 6-7). This is illustrated in Figure 7: participant A does to participant B what B does to A.

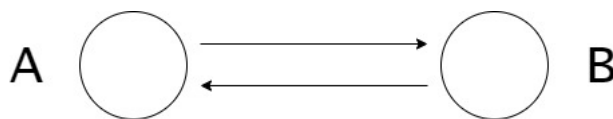


Figure 7: Relations between participants in reciprocal events

The use of this reciprocal form with a singular subject means that only participant A is expressed syntactically. The dotted lines around participant B represent this in Figure 8. The construction may still be interpreted as reciprocal, as in example (64). But the non-expression of participant B can also blur the semantic roles holding between the participants. The reciprocal component of meaning can be subject to semantic bleaching and the construction can also come to be interpreted as participant A doing something to an unnamed, generic and indefinite participant B, who may not do something to B. The context is still potentially reciprocal, but the action is not necessarily reciprocal.



Figure 8: Relations between participants in reciprocal events with a singular agent

In this way, the use of reciprocal constructions with singular agents act as a linking context where reciprocal constructions can be reinterpreted as antipassives. Thus, the example in (65) is ambiguous; it can mean that the boy fights with other children or that he hits other children (who do not hit back).

- (64) Swedish  
*Han slå-ss (med sin bror)*  
 He hit-REFL[PRS] (with POSS.REFL.3SG brother)  
 ‘He fights (with his brother)’

- (65) Swedish  
*Pojk-en slå-ss*  
 boy-DEF.SG.C hit-REFL[PRS]  
 ‘He fights (with someone)’ or ‘He hits (other children)’

If full reflexive pronoun represent detachment from the self for Haiman (1998), the ‘light’ reflexive marker may represent another extreme, where the other participant, who is actually a separate entity, is not represented as such in language.

The ambiguity, and reinterpretation, is only possible with a subgroup of verbs that are not inherently reciprocal (i.e. reciprocity is not an obligatory part of the verb semantics), but tend to appear in reciprocal context. It is not possible with verbs whose reciprocity is a defining feature of the action described. The verb *träffa-s* ‘to meet’ requires mutual action and can not be used with a singular subject in Swedish (unless read as a passive), as shown in example (66). In Russian, singular subjects of such verbs are possible, as in example (67) but require a ‘with’ phrase. The meaning is reciprocal.

- (66) Swedish  
 a. *De träffa-de-s*  
    They meet-PST-REFL  
    ‘They met.’  
 b. *\*Han träffa-de-s*  
    He meet-PST-REFL  
    ‘He met.’

- (67) Russian  
*On vstretil-sja s drug-om*  
 He meet.PFV-PST.SG.M-REFL with friend-INS.SG  
 ‘He met with a friend.’

Stage 4. The antipassive function of the singular form is conventionalized and used in the plural form as well, leading to a polysemous reciprocal/absolute reflexive marker.

- (68) Swedish
- a. *Sluta slå-ss!*  
 stop.IMP hit-REFL[INF]  
 ‘Stop fighting (each other)!’
- b. *Jag slå-ss inte*  
 I hit-REFL[PRS] NEG  
 ‘I’m not fighting.’

The above example in (68) is taken from a conversation with a four year old child, who may have reanalyzed *-s* as a part of the verb stem of a syntactically intransitive verb. Absolute reflexives have been described as being typical of child language in Polish (Kubinski, 2010: 18), in Serbo-Croatian (Rivero & Milojević-Sheppard, 2003: 115-116) and Bulgarian (Gradinarova, 2019: 27). I suspect absolute reflexives are more common in the speech of children in Swedish as well, but I have not been able to confirm this. Further research on the frequency of such constructions in the language of children may shed light on whether morphological reanalysis during language acquisition could drive such grammaticalization processes.

Similar suggestions have been made for other languages. Holvoet (2017), discussing Latvian absolute reflexive, suggests that the antipassive function of the construction has developed from reciprocal function using the same marker. Aggressive behavior, as Holvoet (2017: 70) notes, is naturally directed towards other people and are therefore typical of reciprocal contexts. Dom et al. (2015: 376) suggest a similar development of antipassives evolving from reciprocals in Cilubà (Bantu, Niger-Congo). Sansò (2017) also proposes a similar explanation for reciprocal markers grammaticalizing to antipassive markers, through the notion of ‘co-participation’, used by Creissels & Voisin (2008) based on their work on Wolof. Sansò (2017) argues that when reciprocal verbs that also imply co-participation are lexicalized, they also allow singular agents in object-demoting constructions. In the Hup example (69a) the reciprocal marker also has the reading of two cooperating agents, along with the reciprocal function. In example (69b) with a singular agent, the notion of co-participation has disappeared.

- (69) Hup (Naduhup, South America) (Sansò, 2017: 207)
- a. *yaʔambõʔ=dəh ʔũh-g’ǎç-ə* Cooperating agents  
 dog=PL RECP-bite-DYNM  
 ‘The dogs are biting each other/are fighting.’
- b. *\*yúp=ʔih ʔũh-mǎh-ǎ* Antipassive  
 that=M RECP-hit-DYNM  
 ‘“That man is fighting (with someone).”’

To summarize, I suggest a grammaticalization of reflexive markers to reciprocal functions and, through the use of singular agent constructions, the extension to an absolute reflexive, or antipassive function. This process is only possible with a subgroup of verbs, that I have

given a more detailed description of in Section 4.1. In short, this group of verbs consists of verbs denoting aggressive action of a single participant that is likely to be retaliated, i.e. has a potential reciprocity. The above analysis explains the most prototypical and frequent constructions with ‘hit’, ‘bite’ and ‘push’. Such verbs are lexicalized to the degree of appearing in dictionaries. Other, more peripheral uses of the absolute construction are less frequent. They are likely formed by analogy with these constructions. For example, *lura-s* ‘fool, deceive’, is not typically used in reciprocal contexts. They are however semantically similar to verbs of physical aggression through a semantic metaphor that links unwanted action to physical violence, conceptualizing them as ‘aggressive’.

The reflexive markers in the languages of the survey all have their origin in the Proto-Indo-European reflexive *\*se* (Beekes & de Vaan, 2011: 234). The extension of the semantic domain of the reflexive marker to include absolute reflexive may have occurred parallelly in different languages or, in the case of Swedish, language contact may have played a role. The fact that other Germanic languages apparently lack antipassive use of reflexive markers suggests that the absolute reflexive could be an areal feature.

#### 5.1.4 Suggestions for future research

As discussed in Section 5.1.3, a change in reading from reflexive and to reciprocal and then extended to antipassive may be a natural development for a lexical group of verbs that are used in reciprocal contexts but are not inherently reciprocal. To confirm this one would need to examine possible intermediate stages using empirical diachronical data.

In a larger typological context, the survey of lexical concepts in expressed with antipassive-like uses of reflexive markers should be extended to non-European languages. Such constructions are also described in the Turkic, Papa-Nguyan, South Caucasian and Chukotko-Kamchatkan language families among others (Kuteva et al., 2019: 364, Sansò, 2017: 193, Janic, 2010: 158). Investigating the lexical restrictions of a larger sample of more diverse languages would be interesting, but may prove difficult in terms of collecting lexical data.

## 5.2 Discussion of method

### 5.2.1 Delimitations

The absolute reflexive is a multifaceted phenomenon where many different factors come into play. Depending on one’s starting point, it can be analyzed as a syntactic antipassive voice phenomenon, as a construction with construction-specific meaning independently of the base verb, or as a non-productive lexical phenomenon.

A comprehensive description of how the construction works in a certain language requires investigating at least the following factors: the reflexive marker, its polysemy and diachronic development, the verbs used in the construction and the function and semantics of the construction itself. This thesis has focused on the reflexive marker and the verbs used. While there is plenty of literature on absolute reflexives there is very little on the verbs used in the construction compared across languages. Habituality and backgrounding are mentioned in Sections 4.2 and 5.1.1. Otherwise, functions of the constructions are largely left out of the thesis.

### 5.2.2 Data and procedures

There are two procedures used in this thesis, each with their own advantages and drawbacks.

The analysis of the Swedish base verbs, described in Section 3.1, is based on corpus data that is manually analyzed. The use of large corpora has the advantage of giving access to very large amount of authentic language use. Absolute reflexive is largely a colloquial phenomenon

that is not frequent in all types of speech. Such constructions can be found when searching large corpora of social media and newspaper texts. A large part of the results come from blogs talking about children or animals. Smaller corpora, including spoken corpora, include too few examples of absolute reflexive to make a meaningful analysis.

The main difficulty that arose was that Korp (Borin et al., 2012) treats all verbs ending in -s as one category and different uses of -s suffixation appear in the same syntactic contexts. This made manual analysis necessary, which includes a potential bias of subjectivity. To minimize the effect of subjective judgment on the data and increase the credibility, I have checked my intuitions with corpus data and consulted other native speakers whenever possible.

Another problem related to the lack of an automatic way to sort of absolute reflexive constructions was that no frequency data could be obtained. It would be relevant to this analysis to investigate whether the identified prototypical base verbs in absolute reflexive are also the most frequent, but this was not possible.

The survey of selected language of Europe with absolute reflexives, described in Section 3.2 is based of earlier descriptions of absolute reflexive in the literature. The main advantages of using such materials is their availability and that they often include morpheme-by-morpheme glosses. A drawback is potential author bias, and that information may have been left out (Croft, 2002: 30). In this sense, parallel corpora would be preferable. The use of absolute reflexive in multilingual corpora is unfortunately limited, and difficult to find due to the overlap of reciprocal and absolute reflexive, discussed in Section 4.2.7.

The survey only includes Indo-European languages of Europe that have been described to have absolute reflexives. It is therefore not a diversity sample and the results are not meant to be representative of any linguistic diversity (Croft, 2002: 21). Rather it is meant as a data point to which other, typologically diverse, languages can be compared.

## 6 Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate the lexical restrictions of the Swedish absolute reflexive and to compare lexical verbs appearing in similar constructions with reflexive markers, analyzed as antipassives, in a survey of 15 Slavic, Baltic and Germanic languages spoken in Europe.

Answers to the research questions are presented below.

1. What lexical restrictions apply to the Swedish absolute reflexive? What kind of verbs can be used in the construction?

The prototypical base verb used in the absolute reflexive construction is a transitive, atelic, non-resultative verb that expresses an action on an animate patient that is unwanted by the patient. Such verbs are used in reciprocal situations and form reciprocals with -s but are not inherently reciprocal, in that the reciprocity is not an obligatory part of the lexical semantics of the verb. Prototypical examples are the physical aggression verbs *slå*, ‘hit’, *bita*, ‘bite’, and *knuffa*, ‘push’. Verbs of ‘psychological aggression’, such as *reta*, ‘tease’, *hota*, ‘threaten’ and *skrämma*, ‘scare’ also occur.

2. How do other languages of Europe with absolute reflexive differ from Swedish in terms of lexical restrictions?

The concepts expressed by absolute reflexives are strikingly similar in Swedish and across Slavic and Baltic languages. The most common ones are ‘hit/fight’, ‘bite’ and ‘push/butt’. Verbal aggression verbs such as ‘tease/call names/mock’ and ‘curse/swear/use bad language’ are also common. Languages vary in what type of subject the construction can have, with the following implication: inanimate subject  $\supset$  animate non-human subject  $\supset$  human subject.

The construction has features cross-linguistically associated with antipassives, such as habitual and iterative aspect. Absolute reflexives are used exclusively with imperfective verbs, in languages with grammatical aspect.

A significant overlap of reciprocal and absolute reflexive (antipassive) functions was found, especially in clauses with plural agents, in both Swedish and other languages in the survey. In all of the languages surveyed with absolute reflexives, the same marker is also used to mark reciprocity. This points to a grammaticalization path from reflexives to antipassive through the reciprocal function, with constructions with plural subject functioning as a linking context.

As a whole, the results of this thesis point to the following conclusions on the absolute reflexive in Swedish, Slavic and Baltic languages:

- Lexical semantics plays an important role in the grammaticalization of reflexive markers into antipassive markers.
- The grammaticalization path from reflexive to antipassive may have gone through the reciprocal function of the reflexive marker.
- The absolute reflexive use of reflexive markers clusters areally. The extension of use of the reflexive marker in Swedish mirrors the extension that has occurred in geographically adjacent Slavic and Baltic languages and this development may be contact-induced.



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