The use of the reflexive marker in Lusaamia[*]

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Abstract

The present study examines the uses of the reflexive marker in Lusaamia, a Bantu language of Kenya. In addition to being a true reflexive, the reflexive verbal prefix is also used in indirect reflexive constructions, as a middle voice / stative marker, and also to indicate when an action is being done for no particular purpose (when used in conjunction with a causative marker). I show that unaccusative intransitives must be marked by the reflexive, while unergative intransitives may not be marked. The proposal is put forth that the reflexive marker is not merely marking reflexivity, but rather indicating that the subject of a sentence is acting as a patient (and possibly as an agent at the same time). Finally, an explanation is provided as to why the reflexive marker is used to indicate a "lack of purpose".

1. Introduction

Lusaamia is a Bantu language spoken by approximately 50,000 people in Western Kenya and 100,000 people in Eastern Uganda, near the shores of Lake Victoria. Guthrie (1967) classifies Lusaamia as E.34. Several researchers have investigated the related Luyia languages (Angogo Kanyoro 1983), but Lusaamia investigations have been limited to its tonal system (Chagas 1976; Poletto 1998).

The present discussion will center on aspects of the verbal morphology as they are related to the reflexive marker -ee-. The relevant verbal morphemes and their ordering with respect to one another are given in (1).
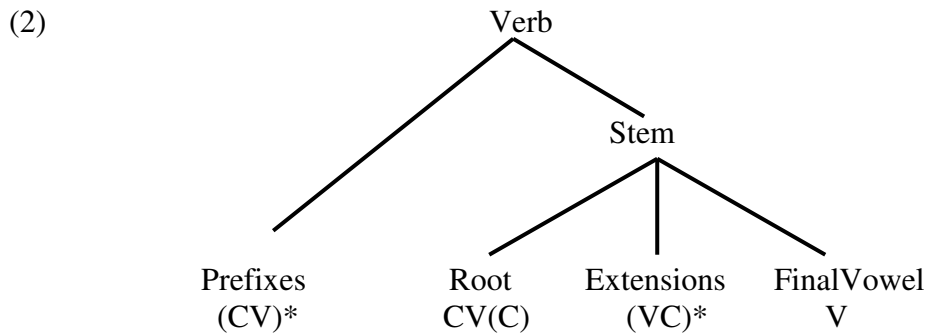
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(1)   SUBJECT-(OBJECT/REFLEXIVE)-ROOT-(CAUSATIVE/APPLICATIVE)-FINALVOWEL[1]

In indicative sentences the final vowel 'a' must follow the verb root, though the causative or applicative derivational affixes may intervene. The reflexive marker, a type of object marker, may optionally precede the verb stem. An initial subject marker prefix is required on all inflected verbs.

The verbal morphology observed in Lusaamia is not very different from other Bantu languages. The structure of the Bantu verb, given by Hyman (1993), is given in (2).

(2)   Verb

                                              Stem

          Prefixes   Root   Extensions   FinalVowel
          (CV)*   CV(C)   (VC)*   V

The above diagram makes the claim that the Bantu verbal stem forms a constituent. This fact is true in Lusaamia also; one piece of evidence comes from reduplication. Marlo's (2002) study of Lusaamia verbal reduplication shows that the entire verb stem may reduplicate. Crucially, however, prefixes may not participate in the reduplication, thus providing an example of the unity of the verb stem.

Lusaamia makes a distinction between long and short vowels, and the reflexive marker is the long vowel -ee-. The reflexive marker is always phonetically prominent, never undergoing partial or total vowel assimilation as would be expected of other object markers in the same position.

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[1] The verbal template in (1) is a simplification of the structure of the Lusaamia verb. For example, tense and negation markers may separate subject and object markers, and other derivational and inflectional suffixes are possible after the verb root. As these verbal morphemes are not relevant for this paper, they are not addressed here.

2. Types of reflexive constructions

I begin my discussion of reflexives by describing several environments in which the reflexive marker is used. In the prototypical reflexive context, a single, transitive action is taking place in which the agent and the patient refer to the same entity. Examples of these "true reflexives" are given in (3).

(3)   Prototypical reflexive contexts

      a. y-**ee**-xub-a   He is hitting himself.
          3S-RF[2]-hit-FV

      b. nd-**ee**-uuɲa-uuɲ-a   I am smelling myself.
          1S-RF-RED-smell-FV

      c. okelo y-**ee**-xeer-a   Okelo loves himself.
          Okelo 3S-RF-love-FV

      d. y-**ee**-it-a   He is killing himself.
          3S-RF-kill-FV

      e. e-paka   ly-**ee**-lum-a   The cat is biting itself.
          5-cat   5-RF-bite-FV

An indirect reflexive situation differs from a direct reflexive situation in that there may be more than two participants, or there may not be just one single event frame.   For example, in Lusaamia applicative/benefactive constructions, the beneficiary typically has a thematic role similar to a goal. Lusaamia verbs with a benefactive derivational marker take an additional argument, so intransitive verbs become transitive while monotransitives become ditransitive. Examples involving the applicative extension with the reflexive marker are given in (4). In each example in (4), the subject and the beneficiary refer to the same person.

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[2] The following notational conventions are used: RF (reflexive), FV (final vowel), RED (reduplicant), AP (applicative), and CS (causative). Single numbers in a gloss refer to the Bantu noun class numbering system, while '1S' would mean '1st person singular'.

(4)   a. nd-ee-imb-ir-a   I'm singing to myself.
            1S-RF-sing-AP-FV

      b. nd-ee-som-er-a   esitaβu   I am reading a book to myself.
            1S-RF-read-AP-FV   book

      c. y-ee-imb-ir-a   oluimbo   He is singing a song to himself.
          3S-RF-sing-AP-FV   song

The causative marker and the applicative marker are both valency-increasing suffixes –
each requires an additional verbal argument. In the applicative construction the new
argument is the beneficiary of the action, while the causative construction additionally
specifies the causer. Note the glosses for the items in (5): in each case, the causer and the
causee refer to a single entity.

(5)   a. wekesa y-**ee**-saŋgaa-**s**-a   Wekesa is making himself happy.
          Wekesa 3S-RF-please-CAUS-FV

      b. okelo y-**ee**-li-**sy**-a   Okelo is making himself cry.
          Okelo 3S-RF-cry-CAUS-FV

      c. y-**ee**-anj**ya**   emisaala   He is starting himself on medicine.
          3S-RF-start-CS-FV   medicine

In some instances, the reflexive causative constructions connote that the action is being
done with a lack of purpose or for no particular reason. The examples in (6) illustrate this
usage.

(6)   a. okelo y-**ee**-xub-**y**-a   eŋomba   Okelo is drumming for no reason.
          Okelo 3S-RF-beat-CS-FV   drum

      b. oxw-**ee**-lomalom-**y**-a   to talk to oneself, complain
          INF-RF-talk-CS-FV   loudly, talk all over for no reason

      c. embwa y-**ee**-sam-**y**-a   the dogs are barking for no reason
           dog   3S-RF-bark-CS-FV

      d. oxw-**ee**-xeŋg-**y**-a   ekaratasi   to cut something for no reason
         INF-RF-cut-CS-FV paper

      e. oxw-**ee**-xin-**y**-a   to make self dance, dance for no
         INF-RF-dance-CS-FV   apparent reason

The examples in (6) do not actually represent a drastic departure in meaning from the examples in (5). There does not appear to be a strict line dividing whether a given reflexive causative construction would correspond to "causing one's self to do X" or "doing X for no particular reason". Rather, the "lack of purpose" distinction appears to be somewhat gradient, depending on the particular semantics of the verb and whether the subject in human or non-human. That is, a non-human subject does not have volition and is unlikely to "cause itself" to do an action.

Two additional features concerning the semantics of Lusaamia verbs should be noted. First, Botne (2002) reported that a recent innovation of a second infinitival verbal prefix is used to make a distinction in the specificity or lack of specificity of an action. Second, verbal reduplication may connote that the speaker has a derogatory opinion of that person and/or action, or even that the action is being done for no purpose. (This is in contrast to the repetitive meaning usually associated with reduplicated verbs.) Whether the ability to express "lack of purpose", "lack of specificity", and "derogatory" meanings represent a more widespread desire in Lusaamia to mark verbs with secondary information is not clear at this time, but it is important to make note of the existence of such varied strategies.

The remaining uses of the reflexive marker differ markedly from the examples given thus far. I divide the examples into two categories, middle and stative. In the middle voice examples given in (7), the subject of the sentence appears to be acting in a patient role. The middle voice is similar to the passive voice, except that in middle voice constructions the agent is not permitted to be expressed obliquely[3].

(7)   a. oβu-ɲasi βw-**ee**-uucha-uuch-a   The grass is blowing.
          14-grass 14-REF-RED-blow-FV

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[3] Thanks to Rose Vondrasek helping me to distinguish middle voice constructions.

b. efwiri ly-**ee**-uucha-uuch-a   The hair is blowing
    hair   5-RF-RED-blow-FV

In (8), I present examples where the middle voice and "lack of purpose" constructions appear to overlap. Recall that the reflexive and causative markers are used in "lack of purpose" situations, while middle voice constructions use only the reflexive. The examples in (8), the subjects appear to be patients of the action, similar to middle voice. However, as is not unexpected with the presence of both the reflexive and causative markers, the subjects are undergoing the actions for no particular reason.

(8)   a. omu-fuuko kw-**ee**-xinya-xin-**y**-a   The sack is bouncing all around.
        3-sack   3-RF-RED-bounce-CS-FV

    b. ama-uwa k-ee-aamya-aam-y-a   The flower is blooming (no reason).
      6-flower 6-RF-RED-bloom-CS-FV

The sentences in (8) can be contrasted with their parallel sentences in (9), indicating a reflexive causative construction is not required. Hence the differences in interpretation may not be unexpected.

(9)   a. omu-fuuko ku-xin-a   The sack is bouncing.
        3-sack   3-bounce-FV

    b. ama-uwa ka-aam-a   The flower is blooming.
      6-flower 6-bloom-FV

Historically Lusaamia may have had a stative suffix '-am', as shown in the verb *oxusigama* 'to kneel'. However, an apparently much more productive form of the stative uses the reflexive marker, as shown in (10).

(10)   a. omusaala kw-**ee**-kod-a   The tree is bent.
        tree   3-RF-bend-FV

    b. oxw-**ee**-xuyuung-a   to be round
      INF-RF-round-FV

       c. oxw-**ee-**siindux-a   to be startled
          INF-RF-startle-FV

Note that Lusaamia does not have non-reflexively marked counterparts corresponding to the verbs in (10). This illustrates that when the thematic patient of a verb is realized overtly as the subject of the sentence, this must be indicated using the reflexive marker.

(11)   * oxukoda, *oxuxuyuunga, ***oxusiinduxa**

The unifying fact about both the middle and stative examples is that the verbs are intransitive. Intransitive verbs in an SVO language such as Lusaamia can be one of two types:

(12)   UNACCUSATIVE: An intransitive verb assigning a patient/theme role to the subject.
          UNERGATIVE: An intransitive verb that assigns an agent role to the subject.

Examples of unergative verbs in Lusaamia would include *oxukona* 'to sleep' or *oxukeenda* 'to walk', while the stative and middle verbs in (7) and (10) would be unaccusative. In each of the middle and stative examples, the subject of the sentence refers to a patient entity, not an agent. No unergative intransitives can be used with the reflexive marker (unless the causative or applicative also appears), while unaccusative verbs in large part require the presence of the reflexive marker[4].

3. The uses of the reflexive marker

Putting aside for the moment semantic issues for why the reflexive causative constructions can indicate "lack of purpose" or be interpreted as "for no particular reason", I will now attempt to develop an account of the use of the reflexive. In the previous section, we saw three different environments in which the reflexive can be

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[4] One possible exception would be the seemingly unaccusative verb *oxufwa* 'to die', which is not permitted to take a reflexive marker.

used. These are summarized in (13).

(13)   Three different uses of the reflexive marker
            a. unaccusative (instransitive) verbs
            b. direct reflexive situations, with inherently transitive verbs
            c. indirect reflexive situations, with the causative or applicative suffix (can be
            attached to either transitive or intransitive verbs)

In unaccusative verbs, the object of the verb appears in subject position. But the same

can be said of reflexivized transitive verbs: the object of the action, which also happens to

be the agent, appears in subject position[5]. Similarly, in reflexive causative or reflexive

applicative constructions, the applied or caused object of the verb appears in subject

position also. The actual use of the -ee- "reflexive" marker is thus summarized in (14).

(14)   The -ee- morpheme is used as a verbal prefix to denote the situation in which the
            inherent object of the verb appears in subject position.

To illustrate that this is indeed how the -ee- morpheme is used in Lusaamia, I will

examine each of the uses of -ee- stated in (13) to show the generalization in (14) holds.

First, we examine the unaccusatives. In (15), 'grass' is the patient of the action

'blowing', but it cannot appear in object position. Instead, it must appear in subject

position.

(15)   a * βw-ee-uucha-uuch-a   oβu-ɲasi   The grass is blowing.
               14-REF-RED-blow-FV   14-grass

        b. oβu-ɲasi βw-ee-uucha-uuch-a   The grass is blowing.
            14-grass 14-REF-RED-blow-FV

The -ee- morpheme is used to indicate the object of the unaccusative verb is appearing in

subject position. Lusaamia has a strict constraint mandating that each sentence appear

with an overt subject. English is also often-cited as a language requiring overt subjects;

the sentence "It's raining" shows some element must fill the subject position, even if the

subject does not act in an agent (or any other) role in the sentence. As (15a) illustrates,

Lusaamia objects must be expressed in subject position if no subject is present, and the -ee- marker is required to reflect this usage.

In the direct reflexive construction (13b), the -ee- marker is required to show that the patient object of the verb is co-referential with the agent subject. It is assumed the sentence in (16b) is based on the construction in (16a).

(16)   a. wekesa a-xub-a   okelo   Wekesa is hitting Okelo.
              Wekesa 3S-hit-FV Okelo

       b. wekesa y-**ee**-xub-a   Wekesa is hitting himself.
              Wekesa 3S-RF-hit-FV

       c. *wekesa a-xub-a   wekesa   *Wekesa is hitting Wekesa.
               Wekesa 3S-hit-FV Wekesa

As in English, Lusaamia does not allow two nouns that are co-referential to both be overt, and hence the use of the -ee- marker in (16b) is required.

Finally, the third use of -ee- is in indirect reflexives. The uses of -ee- in the reflexive causative construction in (17) and the reflexive applicative constructions in (18) are similar to the use of -ee- in direct reflexive constructions.

(17)   okelo   y-**ee**-xub-**y**-a wekesa.   Okelo is beating Wekesa (no reason)
        Okelo 3S-RF-beat-CS-FV Wekesa

The example in (18b) is a bit strange in Lusaamia, but also strange in English for the same semantic reason, not a syntactic one.

(18)   a. wekesa y-**ee**-leet-**er**-a   esitaβu Wekesa is bringing himself the book.
         Wekesa 3S-RF-bring-AP-FV book

       b. ?wekesa y-**ee**-leet-**er**-a   okelo   ?Wekesa is bringing Okelo for himself.
         Wekesa 3S-RF-bring-AP-FV Okelo

In (17) and (18) the use of -ee- indicates the primary object of the verb is found in subject position, again illustrating the claim in (14).

Note that the sentence in (17) cannot be interpreted as "Okelo is making Wekesa beat himself". Nor is (18b) open to the reading "Wekesa is bringing himself for Okelo". In the final section of this paper, I explain why (17) and (18b) cannot be ambiguous, and in doing so I will offer an explanation as to the development of the "lack of purpose" meaning for reflexive causative constructions.

4. Object prominence and the reflexive marker

Several previous works have examined the asymmetrical use of objects in Bantu, particularly with respect to the applicative construction (Baker 1988; Bresnan and Moshi 1990; Baker 1992; Marantz 1993). Marantz suggested that Bantu languages pattern in one of two ways with respect to the distribution of their objects, which is summarized below.

(19)   <u>asymmetric</u>   <u>symmetric</u>
       -only one object marker permitted   -multiple object markers permitted
       -restricted ordering of postverbal objects   -free ordering of postverbal objects

I shall argue that Lusaamia is an asymmetric object language. In the applicative constructions in Lusaamia, the beneficiary of the action must immediately follow the verb, as shown in (20a). The examples in (20b,c) illustrate that the object marker position preceding the verb is reserved to mark the applied object, and cannot mark the other object of the verb.

(20)   a. a-leet-er-a   okelo esitaβu   He brought Okelo the book.
          he-bring-AP-FV Okelo book
         * aleetera esitaβu ekelo   He brought Okelo the book.

      b. a-mu-leet-er-a   esitaβu   He brought him the book.
         he-him-bring-AP-FV book

      c. * a-si-leet-er-a   okelo   He brought Okelo it.
         he-it-bring-AP-FV Okelo

The same asymmetry is true of the objects in causative constructions. In (21) it is shown that the object of the causation (the "causee") takes precedence over the object of the

action, and hence must immediately follow the verb. The object marker prefix also can only refer to the causee.

(21) a. omuxaasi yaanj**y**a aβaana emisaala   The woman is starting the kids on
         woman   she-start kids   medicine   medicine.
         * omuxaasi yaanjia aβaana emisaala

      b. omuxaasi aβaanjia emisaala   The woman is starting them on
                                                  medicine.
      c. * omuxaasi akiaanjia aβaana   The woman is starting the kids on it.

Given this evidence, I claim Lusaamia patterns as an asymmetric object language, following Marantz[6]. In each case, a causativized or applicativized verb has a single prominent object. For causatives, the prominent object is the causee, and for applicatives, it is the beneficiary[7]. This result follows naturally from the structure of the

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[6] There are two cases in which Lusaamia allows double object markers – when one of the two object markers is the reflexive -ee- or the first person singular -n-. Since all other object markers are of the form CV, it is reasonable to assume these two exceptions are permitted because they do not add an additional syllable to the verbal prefixes. However, examples of double object marking are rare and are not possible with many verbs. Consider this example:

   a-mu-n-[detere] xo   He brought me to him.   OR
   he-him-me-bring.PAST   He brought him to me.

There is no default ordering for double object markers, and hence such a sentence can always be potentially ambiguous. Object marking in Lusaamia is in fact asymmetrical, in that there is no standard method to mark two objects at once.
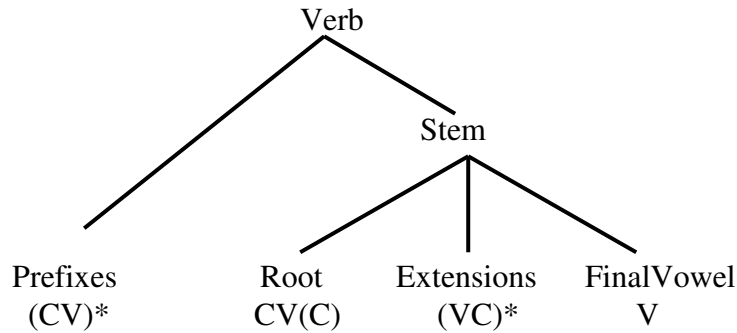
[7] Robert Botne and Vicki Anderson have pointed out that the order of postverbal objects may be the result of an animacy hierarchy in which objects higher in animacy immediately follow the verb and are the only objects available for object marking. I am also aware animacy may be involved in the choice of Lusaamia locatives. However, the example below suggests animacy does not dictate the ordering of objects, as the object 'dog' still appears first, despite it being lower in animacy than 'child'.

   ? βa-lum-i-a   embwa omwaana.   'They are making the dog bite the child.'
     3P-bite-CS-FV dog   child.
   ** βalumia omwaana embwa.

Even in the event that it is later found that animacy may dictate the ordering of objects, this is not directly relevant to the result discussed here. My claim requires only that the object marker on the verb may only mark the prominent verbal object to get the required reflexive readings. Whether this prominent object is determined purely syntactically by the verb or is subject to an animacy restrictions is not extremely important. What is important is that the reflexive marker is only available to refer to a single, prominent object.

Bantu verb stem I presented in (2), which I repeat again in (22). Crucially, because the "reflexive" marker is a verbal prefix, it is not contained in the verb stem. It may only have wide scope over the entire verb stem, and cannot simply have scope over the verb root. Hence, the asymmetry of objects in Lusaamia results directly from the causative and applicative markers selecting their own objects, and the fact that the causative and applicative extensions form part of the verb stem.

(22)

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                        Verb
                        /  \
                       /   Stem
                      /    /|\
                     /    / | \
              Prefixes  Root Extensions FinalVowel
               (CV)*   CV(C)   (VC)*        V
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Since we expect that the object of the applicativized verb stem should be the applied object, not the original object of the verb root, the interpretations of the reflexive marker in indirect reflexive constructions is completely straightforward. It must refer to the object of the applied or causativized verb stem, not the object of the verb root[8], as in (23).

(23)   wekesa y-ee-xub-y-a okelo   Wekesa is beating Okelo (no reason).
       Wekesa 3S-RF-beat-CS-FV Okelo   * He is making Steve hit himself.

Ngonyani (2000) also reports that in another Bantu language, Kindendeule, only the applied object can receive a reflexive interpretation, not the object of the verb root.

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[8] I have found one exception to this generalization. In the sentence below, the reflexive marker must refer to the object of the verb root 'shave'. It is not permitted to refer to the applied object, as expected.

okelo yeeβekera omuxana   Okelo is shaving (himself) for the girl.
Okelo 3S-RF-shave-AP-FV girl   * Okelo is shaving the girl for himself.

In this case, I would argue that 'eeβek' is a lexicalized verb root somewhat distinct from 'βek' Supporting this claim is the fact that 'eeβek' must be used in inalienable possession constructions (ie. "He is shaving his arm") in addition to reflexive construction. It appears -ee- has become a fossilized part of the stem in this case.

The facts I have presented concerning the asymmetry of the objects in indirect verbal constructions provide an explanation for the evolution of the "lack of purpose" meaning attributed to the reflexive causative constructions. In reflexive causative constructions, only one possible interpretation is available for the causativized verb. This is summarized in the table in (24).

(24) Summary of objects: For a transitive <verb> and participants X, Y, and Z

	Lusaamia order	English interpretation	Wrong interpretation
causative construction	X <verb>$_{CS}$ Y Z	X is making Y <verb> Z	X is making Z <verb> Y
reflexive causative construction	X $_{RF}$<verb>$_{CS}$ Z	X is making self <verb> Z	X is making Z <verb> self

The *only* possible interpretation of a reflexive causative constructions is that the agent is causing himself to do a particular action. As a direct result, the "lack of purpose" or "for no particular reason" meanings were able to grow out of this construction. This may have been aided by the fact that, in many event frames, it is hard to interpret an agent as causing itself to do something. This is especially true if the agent is an animal or even inanimate. The examples below illustrate examples in which a true reflexive causative reading is difficult.

(25) a. em-bwa y-**ee**-sam-**y**-a   The dog is barking (no reason).
          9-dog 9-RF-bark-CS-FV   ?? The dog is making itself bark

      b. ama-uwa k-ee-aamya-aam**y**a   The flowers are blooming (no reason).
          6-flower 6-RF-RED-bloom-CS-FV   ?? The flowers are making themselves
                                               bloom.

It is hard for one to imagine dogs making themselves bark, but it is even more difficult to understand how flowers could make themselves bloom. Instead, this extended use of the reflexive and causative markers has been interpreted as meaning the action is being done "for no particular reason." In many cases, this semantic distinction can now be made for human agents as well, as shown in (26).

(26) a. y-ee-loma-lom-y-a   He is talking, babbling for no reason.
          he-RF-RED-talk-CS-FV

5. Conclusion

I have demonstrated several distinct uses of the -ee- marker in Lusaamia, but managed to show all interpretations of the -ee- marker can be unified if it is thought of as morpheme marking a particular syntactic relationship, instead of its traditional use as an object marker. The notion of "object" varies according to the particular verb in question, but each verb has at most one prominent object. An exhaustive summary of the uses of -ee- appears in the table in (27).

(27) Summary of the use of -ee- in Lusaamia

Intransitive verbs			
	Ergative		
	(a) base form	X <verb> ___	Cannot apply, argument position is empty.
	(b) causativized form	X <verb>-**y** Y	Applies only if X=Y
	Unaccusative		
	(a) base form	___ <verb> X	Must apply, or else sentence is ungrammatical
	(b) causativized form	X <verb>-**y** Y	Applies only if X=Y
Transitive verbs			
	(a) base form	X <verb> Y	Applies only if X=Y
	(b) causativized form	X <verb>-**y** Y Z	Applies only if X=Y
		X <verb>-**y** Y Z	Cannot apply; Z is not the object of the . causativized verb

I suggested the "lack of purpose" use of the reflexive causative construction appears to have grown into productive usage. Further work needs to be done to determine exactly how the innovative use came about and how this usage may be related to other aspects of the language, particularly the distinctions in specificity with the two infinitival markers and the lack of purpose meaning associated with verbal reduplication.

The lack of a productive stative marker and the waning usage of the passive marker may have forced -ee- into this more broad syntactic usage. Whatever the trigger for this innovation, the use of the reflexive for this purpose is not known to have been attested in other nearby Bantu languages. The use of -ee- to mark the relationship between the semantic role of the verbal argument and its syntactic position in the sentence is certainly a quite interesting development.

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