

## Reflexive pronouns in Chinese-learning monolingual, bilingual, and trilingual toddlers, and their parental input

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### Abstract

Reflexive pronouns in Chinese have two forms: compound reflexives (e.g., *ta-ziji* ‘himself’ in Mandarin) governed by binding principles in ways similar to reflexives in English, and bare reflexives (e.g., *ziji* in Mandarin, *zi6gei2* in Cantonese) functioning as local anaphors, generic pronouns or intensifiers (Wang & Pan, 2021) (examples in Figure 1). Previous studies found that English-speaking children use reflexive pronouns as a generic pronoun in addition to anaphoric use before age 5 (Wexler & Chien, 1985), and that Mandarin children adeptly produce *ziji* in simple reflexive contexts around age 2, indicating a fundamental grasp of its reflexive function at an early stage (Chen & Wu, 2010; Zhu, 2003). Existing literature has not investigated the aforementioned three fine-grained usages of bare reflexives in Chinese-learner children in naturalistic settings and examine their relations with relevant patterns in their Chinese input.

In this study, we analyzed reflexive pronouns in Mandarin and Cantonese (n = 305) produced by monolingual, bilingual and trilingual toddlers (n = 49) and their parents in naturalistic adult-child play sessions sampled longitudinally over 1.5 years (1;6-3;0, sourced from Early Additive Child Multilingual Corpus, Mai et al., in prep). Preliminary findings reveal early emergence of bare reflexives (around 2;0). Further analysis of the bare reflexives shows that 1) the anaphorical use is missing across children, which is consistent with low dosages of anaphorical use in parental input (0.03%); 2) the generic use dominates use of bare reflexives across groups (0.08%) aligning with patterns reported for English children; 3) the intensifier use, which is specific to the Chinese languages but not in English, is only produced by the monolingual and bilingual children who are learning Cantonese, Mandarin or both, and interestingly not by the bilingual and trilingual children who are acquiring English alongside Chinese, suggesting effects of multilingual input and cross-linguistic influence on production of reflexives in the early years. In-depth analysis of the linguistic and discourse contexts in which the three usages of the bare reflexives appear is in progress.

### Figure 1: Examples of Three Types of Bare Reflexives in Mandarin

Anaphor	erzi	hai	meng-jian	le	ziji	zai	gen	pengyou-men	wan
	son	also	dream-see	ASP	self	PROG	with	friend-PL	play
	‘The son also dreamed about him(self) playing with friends.’ (Parental input, 2;9)								
Generic	ziji	shua	ya						
	self	brush	teeth						
	‘Brush (my) teeth by myself.’ (Amy, 2;3)								
Intensifier	ni	xiang	ziji	du					
	you	want	self	read					
	‘You want to read by yourself.’ (Eason, 2;0)								

### Key References:

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