

The Finnic "itse" as a non-inflecting adverb or an emphatic word

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The pronoun "itse" 'self' is a Finno-Ugric heritage word. Except for the Samoyedic branch, its etymological equivalents can be found in all the Uralic languages. In the Ob-Ugric languages Khanty and Mansi they still have the meaning 'shadow' or 'soul' which is assumed to be original. In the Permic, the Volgaic and the Sami languages the equivalents of "itse" have developed into pronouns with reflexive, possessive and emphatic meanings.

The word "itse" can be used as an indicating feature to divide the Finnic languages into sub groups. The Eastern and the Northern languages (Finnish, Karelian, Vepsian, and Ingrian) have a reflexive pronominal construction that is based on the word "itse". The reflexive construction of the Southern group (Estonian, Votic, Livonian) is based on the pronoun *end* - which originates from the personal pronoun "hän" 'she/he'. In all the Finnic languages however "itse" is used as a non-inflecting word. It appears in several phonetic variants like "iče" in Karelian, "ise" in Estonian, "iž" in Livonian or "ite", "itte" or "ihte" in the Finnish dialects, but its basic syntactic features are common to all the Finnic languages.

The non-inflecting "itse" can be used as an intensifier connected to a head noun: "itse kuningas" - "kuningas itse" 'the king himself'. This adnominal usage has been well noticed and described. More common though is to use "itse" as an adverbial modifier to express meanings like 'personally', 'without help', 'independently', 'with own hands', 'with own eyes', 'with own ears' or 'instead of someone else': "Teemme saippuaa itse" 'we make soap by ourselves'. Despite of its wide distribution and strong representation in various types of texts this type of usage has been overlooked by the traditional grammars of the Finnic languages.