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A peculiar restriction on the long-distance “anaphor” zibun in Japanese

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It has been observed that the Japanese “anaphor” zibun ‘self’, as opposed to other anaphors like kare-zisin ‘him-self’ and zibun-zisin ‘self-self’, allows a long distance antecedent with relative freedom as in (1).

(1)  a.  Masao i-wa    [Mai-ga  zibun/*kare-zisin/*zibun-zisin-o   yobidasi-ta-to]  
    Masao, TOP    [Mai-NOM selfi/*him-selfi/*self-selfi-ACC   page-PERF-COMP]  
    omot-ta.  
    think-PERF  
    ‘Masao, thought that Mai had paged him.’

    b.  Sano i-san-wa   [kazoku-ga   [zibuni/*kare-zisini/*zibun-zisini-ga  
                          Sano, -TOP      [family-NOM [selfi/*him-selfi/*self-selfi-NOM  
                                  still somewhere-at  live-PRT-PROG-COMP] believe-PRT-PROG  
                                  think-PERF  
    ‘Mr. Sano, thought that his family believed that he was still alive somewhere.’

However, when zibun is in the subject position of a finite clause, there appears to be a peculiar restriction on its long-distance use. Namely, the verb of the clause containing zibun cannot be a copula as shown in (2). As can be seen in (2b), this restriction is valid even if the copula is phonologically null.

(2)   a.  *Tomomi,-wa    [otoko-tati-ga    [zibuni-ga           bizin-da-to]  
                 Tomomi,-TOP  [man-PL-NOM    [selfi-NOM beauty-be-COMP]  
                             think-PRT-PROG-COMP]    believe-PRT-PROG  
    ‘Tomomii believes that the men think that she is beautiful.’

    b.  *Tomomi,-wa    [otoko-tati-ga    [zibuni-ga kawaii-Ø be-to  
                 Tomomi,-TOP  [man-PL-NOM    [selfi-NOM pretty-Ø be-COMP]  
                             think-PRT-PROG-COMP]    believe-PRT-PROG  
    ‘Tomomi, believes that the men think that she is pretty.’

As shown in (3), the restriction does not hold for local zibun.
Tomomi,-TOP [selfi-NOM beauty-be-COMP] think-PRT-PROG  
‘Tomomi, thinks that shei is beautiful.’  

Tomomi,-TOP [selfi-NOM pretty-∅be-COMP] think-PRT-PROG  
‘Tomomi, thinks that shei is pretty.’

Even more curiously, in the ECM counterparts of (2) zibun has no problem taking a long-distance antecedent as shown in (4).

(4) a. Tomomi,-wa [otoko-tati-ga [zibuni-o bizin-da-to]  
Tomomi,-TOP [man-pl-NOM [selfi-ACC beauty-be-COMP]  
   think-PRT-PROG-COMP believe-PRT-PROG  
‘Tomomi, believes that the men think heri to be beautiful.’

b. Tomomi,-wa [otoko-tati-ga [zibuni-o kawaii-∅be-to]  
Tomomi,-TOP [man-pl-NOM [selfi-ACC pretty-∅be-COMP]  
   think-PRT-PROG-COMP believe-PRT-PROG  
‘Tomomi, believes that the men think heri to be pretty.’

The above data cannot be taken to indicate that ECM makes subject zibun local to the antecedent somehow, say by raising-to-object, because, as illustrated in (5), local anaphor kanozyo-zisin ‘her-self’ and zibun-zisin ‘self-self’ are still impossible in this construction.

Tomomi,-TOP [man-pl-NOM [her-selfi/self-selfi-ACC beauty-be-COMP]  
   think-PRT-PROG-COMP believe-PRT-PROG  
‘Tomomi, believes that the men think heri to be beautiful.’

b. *Tomomi,-wa [otoko-tati-ga [kanozyo-zisin/zibun-zisin-o kawaii-∅be-to]  
Tomomi,-TOP [man-pl-NOM [her-selfi/self-selfi-ACC pretty-∅be-COMP]  
   think-PRT-PROG-COMP believe-PRT-PROG  
‘Tomomi, believes that the men think heri to be pretty.’

The exact nature of the restriction is unclear, but it is probably safe to say that for zibun, at least in its long-distance use, there are quite different licensing conditions involved than for other anaphors.