



Title	On the Emphatic Reflexive in Japanese : With Special Reference to Zibun-de
Author(s)	Kogusuri, Tetsuya
Citation	言語文化共同研究プロジェクト. 2019, 2018, p. 31-40
Version Type	VoR
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/72789">https://doi.org/10.18910/72789</a>
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# On the Emphatic Reflexive in Japanese: With Special Reference to *Zibun-de*\*

KOGUSURI Tetsuya

## 1. Introduction

A vast majority of previous studies on Japanese reflexives, whether they deal with clause-bound reflexives or long-distance reflexives, have centered around those appearing in argument positions. By contrast, very little research has been done on non-argument reflexives in Japanese, that is, “adverbial” or “adjunct” uses of *zibun* (notable exceptions include Asato (2018) and Kogusuri (2017)). In order to elucidate the nature of such uses of *zibun*, this paper aims to investigate how the reflexive *zibun-de* is used and what distinct uses can be identified. It is revealed that the use of *zibun-de* divides into three uses, including emphatic and non-emphatic ones.

The organization of this paper is as follows. In section 2, I will overview previous studies on *zibun-de*. Section 3 will briefly mention the methodology adopted in this study. Utilizing the data collected from the Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese [BCCWJ] corpus, section 4 will propose a three-way distinction of the uses of *zibun-de*. Section 5 concludes this paper.

## 2. Previous Studies

Several researchers have paid attention to the adverbial function of *zibun-de* that modifies a matrix predicate. Gast and Siemund (2006) calls *zibun-de* an ‘actor-oriented intensifier’: like the emphatic reflexive *himself* in (1), *zibun-de* is used to emphasize that the action described by a sentence is performed by the subject referent, and not by some other person’ (ibid.: 13) (see also Kishida 2011)<sup>1</sup>:

- (1) John has painted the house *himself*. (Gast and Siemund 2006:13)
- (2) Taro-wa *zibun-de* kabe-o nut-ta.  
Taro-TOP self-by wall-ACC paint-PST.  
‘Taro painted the wall by himself.’ (Kishida 2011:35)

According to Gast and Siemund (2006), the sentence involving *zibun-de* conveys a proposition that contrasts with alternative propositions in which someone else other than the actor causes the same event: thus, the propositional content in (2) is contrasted with those in which someone else other than Taro causes the event of painting the wall, such as ‘*John* painted the wall for Taro.’<sup>2</sup>

Another interesting property of *zibun-de* is its effect on locality of the antecedent. *Zibun-de*

\* This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 17K13446.

<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations are used in the glosses of example sentences: ACC=accusative, CAUS=causative, COMP=complementizer, COP=copula, DAT=dative, GEN=genitive, NOM=nominative, PART=particle, PL=plural, POT=potential, PRES=present tense, PROG=progressive, PST=past tense, Q=question, TOP=topic.

<sup>2</sup> Some scholars reduce the adverbial function of *zibun-de* to its idiomaticity, as it is unpredictable from the pronoun *zibun* itself (Uehara 2003, Kishida 2011, among others).

excludes the potential for long-distance binding with *zibun*:

- (3) a. Mary<sub>j</sub>-wa [John<sub>i</sub>-ga zibun<sub>i/j</sub>-o seme-ta] to omot-ta.  
 Mary-TOP John-NOM self-ACC blame-PST COMP think-PST  
 ‘Mary thought that John<sub>i</sub> blamed himself<sub>i</sub>.’ / ‘Mary<sub>j</sub> thought that John blamed her<sub>j</sub>.’
- b. Mary<sub>j</sub>-wa [John<sub>i</sub>-ga zibun-de zibun<sub>i/\*j</sub>-o seme-ta] to omot-ta.  
 Mary-TOP John-NOM self-by self-ACC blame-PST COMP think-PST  
 ‘Mary thought that John<sub>i</sub> blamed himself<sub>i</sub> on his<sub>i</sub> own.’  
 \*‘Mary<sub>j</sub> thought that John blamed her<sub>j</sub> on her<sub>j</sub> own.’
- c. Mary<sub>j</sub>-wa [John<sub>i</sub>-ga zibun<sub>i/\*j</sub>-o seme-ta] to zibun-de omot-ta.  
 Mary-TOP John-NOM self-ACC blame-PST COMP self-by think-PST  
 \*‘Mary thought that John<sub>i</sub> blamed himself<sub>i</sub> on his<sub>i</sub> own.’  
 ‘Mary<sub>j</sub> thought on her<sub>j</sub> own that John blamed her<sub>j</sub>.’

(Kishida 2011:37-38)

As shown by (3a), *zibun-o* can refer to either the local or non-local subject. With *zibun-de*, however, the antecedent of *zibun-o* must be the same local subject, which is located in the same clause with *zibun-de*, as in (3b) and (3c). This fact has been recognized in the literature as the condition that multiple occurrences of *zibun* must be coreferential (e.g. Iida 1996).

The last, but not least, *zibun-de* emphasizes a reflexive context so that naturally disjoint verbs, such as verbs of hitting, are allowed with *zibun-o* (e.g. McCawley 1972, Hirose 2014). The observation is that the object NP of physical action verbs *naguru* ‘strike’, *tataku* ‘hit’, and *keru* ‘kick,’ for example, is naturally disjoint with its antecedent, hence, unacceptability of *zibun-o* in (4a). However, with *zibun-de*, even such verbs do allow *zibun* to be coreferential, as in (4b):

- (4) a. ??Ken-wa zibun-o {nagu-tta / tatai-ta / ket-ta}.  
 Ken-TOP self-ACC {strike-PST / hit-PST / kick-PST}  
 ‘Ken {struck / hit / kicked} himself.’
- b. Ken-wa zibun-de zibun-o {nagutta / tataita / ketta}.  
 Ken-TOP self-by self-ACC {strike-PST / hit-PST / kick-PST}  
 ‘Ken {struck / hit / kicked} himself by himself.’

According to Hirose (2014:107), *zibun-de* serves as an emphazier so that the Subject of the consciousness [i.e. the antecedent] is construed as separate from the Self [i.e. the denotatum of *zibun*] and as placed on an equality with others. In Hirose’s theory, this Self-as-Other model is essential for the use of *zibun*. Assuming that *zibun* represents the objective self of the agent of an action, Hirose

claims that when one strikes, hits, or kicks him-/herself, the Subject is usually considered to be inside the Self, a situation represented by the “Subject-in-Self model.” This is the reason why physical action verbs are incompatible with the nature of *zibun-o* in (4a). However, *zibun-de* emphasizes the Subject’s separation from the Self, reinforcing the Self-as-Other model. *Zibun-de* thus enables *zibun* to appear as the object of physical action verbs, as in (4b).

Thus far, we have overviewed the previous studies of *zibun-de*. A generally held view among them is that *zibun-de* is a single lexical item that displays the same distributional patterns. In section 4, however, it will turn out that this view must be modified: uses of *zibun-de* divide into three distinct categories, including emphatic and non-emphatic ones.

### 3. Methodology

In this section, I describe the methodology adopted in my study. To begin with, I searched for the strings of *zibun-de* (“自分で”) and extracted them from the BCCWJ corpus. For the purpose of revealing diversity of the actual uses, I confine my attention to examples of *zibun-de* without any element intervening between *zibun* and *-de*. There were 12,024 tokens of *zibun-de* in the BCCWJ, many of which are emphatic uses. I entered the relevant examples into a spreadsheet table for ease of classification and analyzed how they are used in terms of their distribution and meaning.

By manually examining each example, I checked if *-de* is a genuine case particle or a different lexical item, for instance, a copula in the negative form *-de-nai*. Then, 426 tokens turned out to be inappropriate or irrelevant for our consideration and had to be rejected. As a consequence, the present study will be based on 11,598 tokens of *zibun-de*, only those with the case particle of *-de*.

In the next section, I will investigate uses of *zibun-de* based on this data and suggest a three-way classification in terms of their meanings.

### 4. A Three-Way Classification of *Zibun-de*

Through my investigation of all the examples from the BCCWJ, it is revealed that there are three distinct uses of *zibun-de*. In particular, they can be differentiated from each other in the semantic type of the predicate it occurs with. Focusing on the semantics of the co-occurring predicates, the remaining of this paper describes the three-way classification of uses of *zibun-de*.

#### 4.1. Controller-Oriented Intensifier

The most prominent and frequently attested use of *zibun-de* confirmed in the BCCWJ refers to the Controller of an event denoted by the predicate. By the term “Controller” is meant a referent in control of the given situation, whether he/she is volitional or nonvolitional. In general, a controlling referent can be analyzed as an AGENT or ACTOR in terms of semantic roles. For example, in (5a), the younger sister is in control of the event of making a quiz and *zibun-de* emphasizes none other than

her who controlled that event to happen. The same goes for (5b), in which *zibun-de* puts emphasis on the role of the hearer/reader in that he/she can feed animals on his/her own, without help of others.

- (5) a. [Imouto-wa] *zibun-de* kuizu-o tsukutta.  
 younger.sister-TOP self-by Quiz-ACC make.PST  
 ‘My younger sister made a quiz herself.’ (BCCWJ PB13\_00209)
- b. [...] *zibun-de* [doubutsu-ni] esa-o ageru koto-ga dekimasu.  
 self-by animal-DAT food-ACC give to-NOM possible  
 ‘You can feed animals yourself.’ (BCCWJ OC14\_04773)

We name this use the *Controller-oriented intensifier* after “actor-oriented intensifier” by Gast and Siemund (2006); though the latter term often singles out the Actor, an volitional participant of an event, the “Controller” is intended to refer to both volitional and non-volitional participants that are responsible for an event happening.

The most frequent verb used with the Controller-oriented *zibun-de* is *tsukuru* ‘make,’ a verb denoting a creation (603 tokens). Creating something is under control of its protagonist in that the process of unfolding of the event can be manipulated by the creator. Also, as illustrated by (5b), the lexical potential verb *dekiru* ‘be able to do,’ as well as potential markers *-reru* and *-rareru*, appear in many cases of this *zibun-de* to encode controllability of the event denoted by the verb. In that reading, *zibun-de* may occur with even verbs denoting normally spontaneous events, such as *kizuku* ‘notice’:

- (6) Sonouchi Ine-wa Benziro-ni hisokani kou-i-o motte-iru-koto-ni  
 soon Ine-TOP Benziro-DAT secretly affection-ACC have-PROG-COMP-DAT  
*zibun-de* kizui-ta.  
 self-by notice-PST  
 ‘Soon, Ine noticed that she had a secret affection for Benziro.’ (BCCWJ PB42\_00180)

With *zibun-de*, the whole sentence in (6) establishes a contrast with alternative propositions that someone other than Ine lets herself notice her affection. In this case, the act of noticing is construed as what can be triggered by someone, that is, a controllable event. Thus, the type of eventuality that allows for the Controller-oriented *zibun-de* is restricted to controllable events or those that can be understood so. By contrast, many stative verbs or adjectives that designate objective properties are not compatible with *zibun-de*, because there is no controllable process involved (e.g. \**Mary-wa zibun-de utsukushii* ‘Mary is beautiful by herself’).

Additional evidence that *zibun-de* marks the antecedent as the Controller of an event comes from a consideration of its semantic role. *Zibun-de* in the Controller-oriented use can be paraphrased by



*zibun-no chikara-de* or *ziriki-de* ‘(lit.) by self’s own power (on one’s own)’ or *zibun-no-te-de* ‘(lit.) with self’s hand (by oneself).’ In this sense, the controller-oriented use of *zibun-de* contrasts with instrumental phrases such as *kikai-de* as below (cf. (5b)):

- (7) [...] *kikai-de* [doubutsu-ni] *esa-o* ageru *koto-ga* *dekimasu*.  
 machine-by animal-DAT food-ACC give COMP-NOM possible  
 ‘You can feed animals by machine.’ (cf. (5b))

Some researchers, in fact, consider the case particle *-de* of *zibun-de* as an instrumental marker (e.g. Uehara 2003:395, Kishida 2011:35, fn.19) and I do not totally object to this idea. However, just because *zibun-de* may be interchangeable with an instrumental phrase does not mean that it really corresponds to an instrumental constituent, since one does not actually “use” a person as an instrument. The case particle *-de* may indeed designate an instrument by taking an inanimate object, as in (7), whereas it cannot follow animate nouns to mark them as “instrument” (e.g. \*Taro-wa *Jiro-de* kita. ‘Taro came using Jiro.’). The analysis of “human-as-instrument” construal, therefore, is not applicable to the original instrumental use of *-de* particle. In this sense, *zibun-de* denotes not so much a concrete instrument as an “abstract instrument,” something metonymically evoked by the referent of *zibun*, which is in line with Gast and Siemund’s (2006:364) analysis of the emphatic reflective in English.

The analysis of the Controller-oriented intensifier further reveals other interesting aspects of *zibun-de*. As mentioned in section 2, Kishida (2011) observed that *zibun-de* takes only the local subject NP as its antecedent. This fact is accounted for by our analysis because the local subject, if the verb semantics is dynamic, most likely refers to the controller of the event. This observation, however, does not capture all the distributional patterns of *zibun-de* of this type. Firstly, in the causative construction, *zibun-de* can refer back to the causee argument marked by dative or accusative:

- (8) a. Taro-wa Yuko<sub>i</sub>-ni *zibun<sub>i</sub>-de* kuuko-ni ik-ase-ta.  
Taro-TOP Yuko-DAT self-by airport-to go-CAUS-PST  
'Taro caused Yuko<sub>i</sub> to go to the airport by herself<sub>i</sub>.'
- b. Mary-wa iyagaru musuko<sub>i</sub>-o muriyari *zibun<sub>i</sub>-de* tat-ase-ta.  
Mary-TOP reluctant son-ACC forcibly self-by stand-CAUS-PST  
'Mary forced her reluctant son<sub>i</sub> to stand by himself<sub>i</sub>.'

As the causee argument serves as a ‘direct’ Controller of the event, i.e. a proximate cause of an action or event, it is qualified as the antecedent of *zibun-de*, even if it is not the subject of the sentence.

Moreover, (8b) demonstrates that the action performed by the Controller is not necessarily volitional: Mary's son reluctantly stood by himself. In fact, there are attested examples where non-

volitional or unwilling referents antecede *zibun-de*:

- (9) a. *Zibun-de* chansu-o tsubushite shimatta yona monoda-wa.  
 self-by chance-ACC kill by.accident like COP-PART  
 ‘It is like I myself happened to kill the chance.’ (BCCWJ LBn9\_00208)
- b. Sodenaito, PC-o *zibun-de* kowasu osore-ga arimasu.  
 otherwise PC-ACC self-by break likelihood-NOM exist  
 ‘Otherwise, you might break the PC yourself.’ (BCCWJ OC02\_07652)

In (9), it is implied that the referents designated by *zibun-de* make the actions against their will. *Zibun* might be construed as encoding a “Cause” of the event like a natural force (e.g. *Taifu-de yane-ga kowareta* ‘The roof was broken by the typhoon’); the emphatic reflexives in (9) are both paraphrasable with *zibun-no sei-de* ‘due to oneself, because of oneself.’ Even so, however, they encode the Controllers of the events: their own actions or behaviors are direct causes of the events happening so that the antecedents are responsible for the events.

To summarize, the major use of *zibun-de* described in this section is Controller-oriented intensification. The category of Controller subsumes the roles of Agent (volitional), Causer (non-volitional), and Causee in the causative construction. According to my corpus study, the Controller-oriented use is most frequently attested, hence most strongly entrenched in the mental lexicon. Probably for this reason, this use has been most often cited in the literature, as if it were the only use of *zibun-de*. However, this is not the case. There are two more uses that have not been studied in detail.

#### 4.2. Experiencer-Oriented Intensifier

Little mention has been made of the type of *zibun-de* that appears with psychological predicates such as *okashiku naru* ‘cannot help laughing’ and *kowai* ‘scared, frightened,’ as exemplified below:

- (10) a. Watashi-wa so itte-kara, *zibun-de* okashiku natta.  
 I-TOP so say-after self-by funny become.PST  
 ‘After saying so, I couldn’t help laughing by myself.’ (BCCWJ LBp9\_00221)
- b. [...] Kinoo-no zutsu-wa itsumo-no itami towa chigatte-ita-  
 Yesterday-GEN headache-TOP always-GEN pain from different-PST-  
 node, *zibun-de* kowakatta.  
 because self-by scared.PST  
 ‘Having an unusual headache yesterday, I was scared of it myself.’  
 (BCCWJ OC02\_07652)

Clearly, these psychological events are uncontrollable, which is also confirmed by the fact that *okashiku naru* in (10a) cannot be attached by the potential marker *reru*:

- (11) \* *Watashi-wa okashiku nareta*  
 I-TOP funny become.POT.PST  
 ‘(lit.) I could find something funny. (I could make myself laugh.)’

Moreover, in contrast to the Controller-oriented use, this use of *zibun-de*, can neither be replaced by *zibun-no chikara-de* ‘on one’s own’ nor *zibun-no sei-de* ‘due to oneself, because of oneself’:

- (12) a. # *Watashi-wa so itte-kara, zibun-no chikara-de okashiku natta.*  
 ‘After saying so, I couldn’t help laughing on my own.’  
 b. # *Kinoo-no zutsu-wa zibun-no sei-de kowakatta.*  
 ‘I was scared of yesterday’s headache because of myself.’

Thus, the type of *zibun-de* in question does not encode the Controller of an event.

Rather, it seems reasonable that it encodes an Experiencer of a stimulus, since the predicates in this case convey an internal event or state that comes about spontaneously without the intervention of an agent; the subject referents in (10) refer to experiencers that experience spontaneous emotions or sensations, with respect to which this use of *zibun-de* is sharply differentiated from the Controller-oriented use. We thus call it the *Experiencer-oriented intensifier*.

The fact that *zibun-de* under consideration is used with psychological predicates may, at first glance, appear to be surprising, because unlike its Controller-oriented use the predicates do not designate reflexive events, those that do not involve self-oriented actions. However, the Experiencer-oriented use indeed involves reflexive events in that the emotions described arise as a result of the experiencer’s prior action or behavior. For example, in (10a), what caused an impulse to laugh was his/her act of saying that occurred in the previous context; in (10b) as well, it is his/her headache as inalienable part of the speaker that gave him/her scare. The same is true of the following example:

- (13) [Situation: I was able to say many lies to the hearer so smoothly]  
 [...] *watashi-wa zibun-de odoroi-te shimau.*  
 I-TOP self-by surprise.and end.up.PRES  
 ‘I end up being surprised myself.’ (BCCWJ LBi9\_00218)

Accordingly, *zibun-de* in the Experiencer-oriented use emphasizes reflexivity of an event: a self-performed action, which may be clarified or implied in the previous context, affects the Experiencer,



thereby arousing a spontaneous emotion or sensation. That reflexivity of an event is required for *zibun-de* to modify psychological predicates is confirmed empirically. *Zibun-de* is not allowed if things irrelevant to the Experiencer cause his/her emotion or sensation:

- (14) a. \* Taro-no zutsu-wa itsumo-no itami to chigatte-ita-node,  
 Taro-GEN headache-TOP always-GEN pain from different-PST-because  
 watashi-wa *zibun-de* kowakatta.  
 I-TOP self-by scared.PST  
 ‘As Taro had an unusual headache, I was scared of it myself.’ (cf. (10b))
- b. Kyo-ga harete, (\**zibun-de*) ureshii.  
 Today-NOM sunny self-by happy.PRES  
 ‘I am happy that the weather is sunny today.’

According to my corpus research, the number of the Experiencer-oriented *zibun-de* is rather small compared with that of the Controller-oriented use.

#### 4.3. Literal Use—Lower Limit of a Scale

The last, but not least, remarkable use of *zibun-de* in our three-way classification is to mark the lower limit of an evaluative scale evoked by a stative predicate. In (15), *zibun-de* appears with an evaluative adjective *yoi* ‘okay, fine’ and a stative verb *yakudatsu* ‘be useful’:

- (15) a. Tatebe-wa<sub>i</sub> hontoni<sub>i</sub> konna *zibun<sub>i</sub>-de* yoi-no-daro-ka-to,  
 Tatebe-TOP really such self-with okay-COMP-guess-Q-COMP  
 futo omou.  
 suddenly think.PRES  
 ‘Tatebe happens to wonder himself if he deserves it.’ (BCCWJ LBr9\_00119)
- b. Soshite, [watashi<sub>i</sub>-wa] *zibun<sub>i</sub>-de* yakudatsu-koto-ga areba ureshii-to  
 And I-TOP self-with useful-COMP-NOM be.if happy-COMP  
 tsukekuwae-ta.  
 add-PST  
 ‘And I added that I would be happy if even someone like me could help you.’  
 (BCCWJ OC04\_00816)

These predicates imply alternative values that can be ordered along some lexically evoked scales and take *zibun-de* as their arguments that designate the lower limits of the scales. (15a), for instance, evokes other alternatives more appropriate for the contextually understood purpose and designates the



## 5. Conclusion

This article has revealed that the uses of *zibun-de* do not form a coherent category. I have suggested a three-way classification of the uses based on the detailed corpus study: the Controller-oriented intensifier, the Experiencer-oriented intensifier, and the literal use marking the lower limit of a scale.

*Zibun-de* is morphologically composed of two morphemes, the reflexive pronoun *zibun* and the postposition *-de* (cf. Kuroda 1965, Miyagawa 1989). The observation that *zibun-de* is polysemous can be accounted for partly by the polysemous nature of the postposition *-de*, which is well-known in the realm of Japanese linguistics: other than prominent event roles of location and time, *-de* marks various roles of a referent: a means including an instrument (e.g., *naifu-de* ‘with a knife’), a cause of effect (e.g., *taifu-de* ‘because of the typhoon’), a manner (e.g. *hitori-de* ‘alone’), and an agent (e.g., *Watashi-to Hanako-de yarimasu*. ‘I and Hanako will do.’). The polysemous nature of *zibun-de*, however, should better be characterized as “irregular polysemy,” in that the range of its meaning extensions and syntactic behaviors is not systematically available to other NP+*-de* combinations. Some of the uses of *-de* are completely inherited into *zibun-de* (i.e. the use of the lower limit of a scale), while others are inherited only partly and mixed with the emphatic function of *zibun*, which is unexpected from the composite structure of *zibun* and *-de*.

I leave for future research further investigation of how *zibun-de* inherits its morpho-syntactic and semantic properties from NP+*-de*.

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