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**An Investigation of Iraqi EFL Learners' Ability in Recognizing and
Producing Reflexive Verbs**

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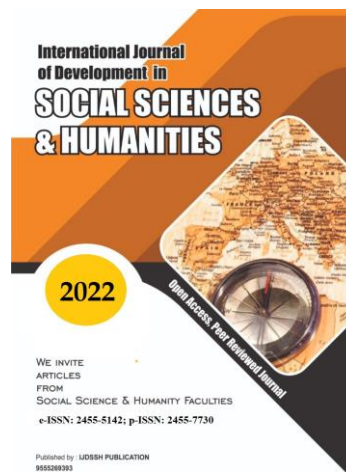
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ABSTRACT

Reflexive verbs are a group of transitive verbs whose grammatical objects are reflexive pronouns. This paper aims at presenting a theoretical background about reflexive verbs. Also investigating the ability of the Iraqi EFL learners in using reflexive verbs at both recognition and production level. It is hypothesized that the Iraqi EFL students' are unable to differentiate the reflexive verbs from other types of transitive verbs. To validate the hypothesis of the study, a test is used to measure the ability of the fourth year students, at Thi-Qar University, College of Education for humanities, English Dept. This study follows Quirk et.al. model. It concludes that Iraqi students mostly do not have the ability to recognize and produce reflexive verbs, and they encounter difficulty when producing them.

Keywords: *reflexive verbs, reflexivity, reflexive pronouns, direct object*

INTRODUCTION

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a property of syntactic constructions whereby two arguments of an action or relation expressed by a single predicate have the same reference (Trauth&Kazzazi:1996:993). Reflexivity indents coreferentiality between the subject and the object of a construction (Lyons: 1968:361), i.e. transitive verbs (prides, saw), where the two participants (Ed-himself, She-herself) are referentially identical are called 'reflexive'. In the reflexive situations, one participant plays two roles agent and patient:

- **Ed** prides **himself** on his tolerance.
- **She** saw **herself** the mirror.

There are two ways for expressing English reflexivity either by reflexive pronouns or by reflexive verbs. Reflexive pronouns (self-form) are inflectional forms of the personal pronouns, formed morphologically by the

compounding of **-self** in the singular and **-selves** in the plural (myself ourselves yourself/yourselves himself herself itself themselves). Reflexive pronouns have two functions: the basic and emphatic (Quirk et.al.:1983:356). In the basic use, the reflexive pronouns function as a subject, object (in/direct), subject complement, and prepositional complement:

- They helped **themselves**.
- She allowed **herself** a rest.
- He is not **himself** today.
- The café pays for **itself**.

In such transitive clauses, an agent acts on a patient with the reflexive expressing that agent and patient are identical.

As its name suggests that it 'reflect' another nominal element of the clause or sentence, usually the subject, with which it is in a coreferential relation. The reflexive pronoun cannot itself be a subject since it corefers to the subject.

In the emphatic use, the pronoun is in an appositional relation to its antecedent:

- I **myself** wouldn't take any notice.
- I wouldn't take any notice **myself**.
- **Myself**, I wouldn't take any notice of her.

The second form of reflexivity can be expressed by reflexive verbs. A reflexive verb, or pronominal verb, is a verb that is accompanied by a reflexive pronoun. This verb construction is used when a person performs an action to or for him/herself. In other words, the subject of the verb and the direct object of the verb are the same person.

- I hurt **myself**
- **Peter** washes **himself**.

Reflexive verb indicates its reflexivity by two forms: **intrinsic reflexivization** and **extrinsic reflexivization** (Reinhart and Reuland:1993:693). In the first case reflexivity is marked with a particular reflexive element (reflexive pronoun).

- **The little girl** liked **herself**.

“**liked**” is extrinsically reflexivized when its object argument appears as the reflexive anaphor herself. “**herself**” is co-referential with its antecedent **the little girl**, it agrees with it in person, number and gender. The interpretation of the reflexive pronoun is referentially dependent on its subject argument the little girl.

In the latter case there is no such marker:

- The little girl **behaved**.

“**behaved**” is intrinsically reflexive because you can understand reflexivity without self-forms since the verbs behave is one of grooming verbs. Reflexive verbs retain reflexivity regardless of the presence of the corresponding pronoun (Carter and McCarthy 2006:385-386)

Reflexive verbs

English has a limited number of reflexive verbs. Reflexive verb is a grammatical term used to refer to a verb where subject and object relate to the same entity as Crystal (2008: 408) mentions “**a term used in grammatical description to refer to a verb or construction where the subject and the object relate to the same entity**”. Herring (2016:301) considers these verbs as transitive action verbs “**reflexive verbs are verbs whose subjects are also their direct objects—that is, the action of the verb is both committed and received by the same person or thing**”.

Aarts, et.al. (2014:356) comment “**transitive verbs take a reflexive pronoun (myself, ourselves herself, himself, itself, yourself/yourselves, and themselves) as direct object, but not any other objects (as ordinary noun phrases or reciprocal pronoun)**”.

Geniusiene (1987:180) describes reflexive verbs as “**verbs with the prepositionless**

non-emphatic element oneself (myself, yourself, himself, itself, etc.).

Huddleston and Pullum (2002:1487) emphasis on the coreferentiality of the reflexive verbs “ **a number of verbs select objects that are required to be anaphorically linked with the subject, and these must then be reflexive in form**”.

For Brown and Miller (1999:313) **verbs that encode activities that one more commonly performs on oneself rather than on anybody or anything else; witness The man shaved (meaning 'The man shaved himself).**

Reflexive verbs are called so for two main reasons: firstly they should indicate themselves the reflexivity meaning:

1. Ed **prides himself** on his tolerance.
2. All the students **absented themselves** from the class.
3. He **availed himself** of the opportunity to speak to her.

The verbs **pride, absent, and availed** are reflexive ones since they select objects that are required to be anaphorically (co-referential) reflect back on their subjects **Ed, All the students, and He** as Carter & McCarthy (2006:921) mention “a construction that contains a verb with a reflexive pronoun object, or a reflexive pronoun complement of a preposition where the referent of the complement is the same as

that of the subject”. This coreferential relation usually occurs between the subject and object of the same finite verb phrase by reflexive verb.

Secondly these verbs obligatory take a reflexive pronoun as direct object but not any other objects, i.e. they cannot appear with ordinary noun phrase, reciprocal pronoun, and possessive pronoun in their object position (Aarts et.al.2014:365; Levin, Beth: 1993:107; Huddleston & Pullum 2002:1487).

1. He **availed himself** of the opportunity to speak to her.
2. *He availed the boy of the opportunity to speak to her.
3. The politician **perjured himself**.
4. * The politician perjured his aide.

So reflexive verb is a grammatical term can be used to refer to the group of verbs that obligatorily occur with the reflexive marker (self-forms) myself, yourself, himself, etc. Quirk et al. (1985: 357).

The classification of Reflexive Verbs

For most of linguists the classification of the reflexive verbs is an argumentative issue structurally and semantically. Structurally, Paye:2009:181 ;Quirk et.al 1985:357; Geniesi:1987:183; and Huddleston & Pullum 2002:148 consider reflexive verbs as **lexical items** in which the reflexive verb and the reflexive pronoun are two independent separated items, i.e., they are implicitly

regarded as lexical items with the status of a word at the same time reflexive pronoun an independent part of speech (word-class), reflexive pronoun functioning as a syntactic object.

Other linguists such as Futerman 1958: 125-126; Smirnickij 1959: 230; Popova 1965a: 162; Ovtinnikova 1963: 4-5; Xajmovit, Rogovskaja 1967: 129-130; and Payne 2011:307 point that the reflexive verb is a **construction or phrase** in which the reflexive verb and reflexive pronoun act as one unit with the status of free word combinations.

Semantically, Geniesi:1987; Peitsara: 1997:298 classify reflexive verbs into four classes: verbs indicating motion, verbs indicating posture (express sitting, lying, standing and staying), psychological verbs of various kinds, and verbs of social behavior expressing personal conduct or interrelationship between people.

This paper adopts Quirk et.al.(1985:357-8) modal for classification of reflexive verbs (reflexive verbs involve all occurrences of verbs with non-emphatic reflexive pronouns). Quirk modal's divided reflexive verbs into three groups:

1. Obligatorily reflexive verbs): *Pride, absent, avail, demean, ingratiate, perjure.*
2. Semi-reflexive verbs (optionally reflexive verbs) where the reflexive

pronoun may be omitted with little or no change of meaning: *behave, shave, adjust, dress, hide, identify, prepare, prove, wash, and worry.*

3. Non-reflexive verbs: ordinary transitive verbs, but are not particularly associated with the reflexive pronoun for example: accuse, admire, amuse, dislike, feed, get, hurt, and persuade. Reflexive pronouns are used to refer coreference in contrast with non-coreferential object:

- Williams publicly blamed himself for the accident.
- Nobody blamed him for the accident.

On the other hand, linguists like Levin (1993:107) lists the following verbs as reflexive verbs (obligatory take the reflexive pronouns as direct object): *absent, acquit, assert, avail, bear, behave, bestir, betake, bethink, better, busy, camouflage, carry, check, collect, comport, compose, conduct, contain, content, defend, demean, disgrace, disport, efface, embroil, endear, enjoy, ensconce, excel, exert, fancy, find, help, ingratiate, insinuate, intoxicate, intrude, inure, justify, lower, martyr, nerve, outdo, overreach, perjure, plight, pride, profess, prostrate, redeem, relieve, resign, revenge, steel, sun, unbosom, vindicate, worm, balance, catapult, cast, curl, drag, draw up,*

extricate, flatten, (against a wall), fling, hide, perch, post, press, prostrate, raise, recline, rock, seat, squeeze (into a place), steady, steer, shift, stretch, ease (into a chair), remove, thrust, lower (into a chair).

Also Rohdenburg and Schluter (2009: 181) mention to another list of reflexive verbs: *absent, absorb, accustom, acquaint, acquit, address (to), amuse, apply, assert, avail, barricade, bestir, betake, better, bill, bring (to-infinitive), burden, bury, busy, calm, cast, comfort, commend, comport, compose, compromise, conceal, concern, conduct, confine, console, contain, content, control, dedicate, delude, demean, devote, disgrace, disguise, distance, distinguish, divest, drag, ease, embed, employ, endear, enjoy, entrench, excel, exert, expose, express, extend, extricate, flatter, fling, force (on/upon), forget, fortify, fulfil(l), gather, glorify, handle, harden, haul, heave, help (to), hoist, humble, hurl, hurt, impose (on/upon), ingratiate, insulate, introduce, lay (open/bare), lend (to), lever, lose, maintain, measure, model, mortify, nerve, occupy, orient/orientate, perjure, pit, position, possess, pride, prop, prostrate, pull (together), reconcile (to), redeem, reform, repeat, resign, restrict, revenge, rid, rouse, sacrifice, satisfy, seat, settle, spend, steady, steel, stuff, suggest, suit, sun, surround, sustain, throw, unburden, value, vent, wrench.*

Huddleston&Pullum(2002:1488) *absent apply (to)avail (of) behave busy comport compose conduct content demean enjoy excel exert ingratiate perjure*

The structure of Reflexive verbs

Quirk's model mentions three types of reflexive verbs: obligatory reflexive verbs, semi-reflexive verbs and non-reflexive verbs. Structurally reflexive verbs can act both transitive and intransitive ones. All reflexive verbs in first type (**pride, absent, avail, demean, ingratiate, and perjure**) are transitive verbs obligatory followed by reflexive pronoun as their direct objects, so that the basic clause structure is that SVO (Subject, Verb, Direct Object) may be followed by adverbial or other elements:

- The politician **perjured** himself.
- Mary **absent** herself yesterday.
- I wouldn't **demean** myself.
- She always **prides** herself on her academic background

Semi-reflexive verbs behave both as transitive verbs and intransitive verbs. Transitively, clause of semi- reflexive verbs has two constructions:

1. **Subject +Verb +object (SVO)**, the reflexive verb acts as monotransitive verb with optionally complements:
 - The children behaved themselves. SVO
 - My brother has bettered himself. SVO

2. **Subject +Verb + Object + Object Complement (SVOC):**

While in this structure the reflexive verb is complex transitive verb obligatory followed by direct object (reflexive pronoun) and object complement:

- Ann **acquitted** herself extremely well. SVOC
- You **express** yourself very clearly. SVOC
- They acquitted themselves well. SVOC

Usually the subject of reflexive verb is animate, agent and the object is patient refers back the same gender and number of the subject i.e., agent-patient coreference

The semi-reflexive verbs: **behave, shave, adjust, dress, hide, identify, prepare, prove, wash, and worry** can be used intransitively in certain situations and meanings:

1. When they denote daily routine actions or basic every day actions:

- **I washed quickly.**
- **Do you shave on Sundays?**
- **Jill dressed hurriedly.**
- He washed and had breakfast.
- He shaved and had breakfast (Carter& McCarthy: 2006:385)

Wash, shave and dress include implicit reflexive, unexpressed object, but this, always refers back to the subject. These

verbs denote the ability to perform the actions (wash, shave, and dress) upon oneself (I, you, and Jill) rather than other person.

2. When a person is unable to do these things (wash, shave, dress) on his own:

- He washed himself and had breakfast.
- He dressed himself and had breakfast.

3. When they refer merely an unexpected, surprising action:

- He can't shave himself.
- I expect you to behave yourself.

4. To show something that has been done with an effort (Eastwood: 239):

- Polly's now learnt how to dress herself.
- The old man was unable to dress himself.

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine students' ability and performance on reflexive verbs a diagnostic test was given to them. The test consists of two questions. The first question includes twenty items that are designed to know ability of student in recognizing reflexive verbs in the given sentences. The second question contains fifteen items that are intended to measure the students' ability to employ reflexive pronouns as direct objects for reflexive verbs in the given sentences.

The test has been applied to a sample of fifty Iraqi EFL university students at their fourth

year from the Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, ThiQar University in the year 2020-2021.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the findings of the following table (1), the total number of correct answers

in question one are (319, 31.9%) while the incorrect answers are (681, 68.9 %). The highest percentage of incorrect answers reveals inability of Iraqi EFL learners for identifying and distinguishing the reflexive verbs from other types of transitive verbs

Table (1) Student' Total Performance at the recognition Level in Question One

No.	Correct	%	Incorrect	%
Question 1	319	31.9%	681	68.1

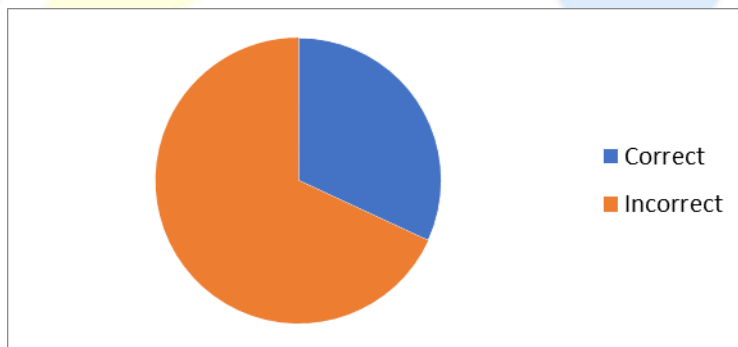


Figure (1) the percentage of recognition Level

The following table (2) reveals the performance of students for each item at recognition level :

Table (2) Students Performance at the recognition Level

No. items	correct	%	Incorrect	%
1.	15	4.7	35	5.1
2.	10	3.1	40	5.8
3.	10	3.1	40	5.8
4.	9	2.8	41	6.0
5.	20	6.2	30	4.4
6.	15	4.7	35	5.1
7.	20	6.2	30	4.4
8.	30	9.4	20	2.9

9.	12	3.7	38	5.5
10.	18	5.6	32	4.6
11.	30	9.4	20	2.9
12.	18	5.6	32	4.6
13.	14	4.3	36	5.2
14.	27	8.4	23	3.3
15.	9	2.8	41	6.0
16.	18	5.6	32	4.6
17.	10	3.1	40	5.8
18.	9	2.8	41	6.0
19.	10	3.1	40	5.8
20.	15	4.7	35	5.1

Table (2) illustrates that items (8,11,and 14) have been scored the highest scores for correct answers:

- I hope you will enjoy yourself at the party.
- She's seven now. She's old enough to wash herself.
- Ann acquitted herself extremely well.

Here, learners depend on their knowledge of the lexical meaning for verbs **enjoy, wash, and acquit**, but they ignore totally theses verbs are reflexive verbs.

While items (1,2,3,4, 5, 6,7,9,13, 15, 17, 19,) scored lowest degrees because the learners consider the verbs **absent, apply, avail perjure, pride, shave, wash and address** are transitive ones can be followed by whatever types of complement such as any

type of pronouns, noun phrases, prepositional phrases:

- Mary absented Martha yesterday.
- He applied a hot poultice to the sore foot.
- The guests should avail each other of the hotel's services.
- The politician perjured his aide.
- She always prides on her academic background.

Low percentage indicates that most of the learners are not aware of the syntactic peculiarities of reflexive verbs so they fail to use them accurately. They don't know this class of transitive verb **reflexive verbs** cannot occur without the reflexive pronoun. With such verbs, the reflexive pronoun cannot be omitted, cannot be coordinated

with a full noun phrase, nor can another noun phrase replace it (Siemund:2014: 52).

Also the students' ignorance for types of reflexive verbs and their grammatical properties led them to answer incorrectly items (6,7, 11 and 15):

- He has to shave twice a day.
- He has to shave himself twice a day.
- John dressed himself for the meeting.
- She's seven now. She's old enough to wash herself.

The verbs **shave, dress and wash** are classified as semi-reflexive verb. They indicate reflexivity either they are followed by reflexive pronouns or not and grammatically these verbs can act both transitive and intransitive. **Shave/dress/wash** himself, here the semi-reflexive verbs show for grooming acts of

shaving, dressing and washing that one might do on an everyday basis, with which the dropping of the reflexive pronoun does not result in any change of meaning.

The subjects have achieved a low performance in distinguishing transitive reflexive from other transitive verbs.

For measuring the achievements of subjects on the production level, they are asked to complete sentences with suitable pronouns. They can fill gaps either by reflexive pronouns or personal pronouns but in some sentences both of them are acceptable. Table (3) reveals that the total percentage of correct responses is 30.5% while that of the incorrect answers is 69.4%. This reveals that a big number of the subjects encounter difficulties at the production level of reflexive verbs.

Table (3) Student' Total Performance at the production Level in Question Two

No.	Correct	%	Incorrect	%
Question 2	229	30,5	521	69,4

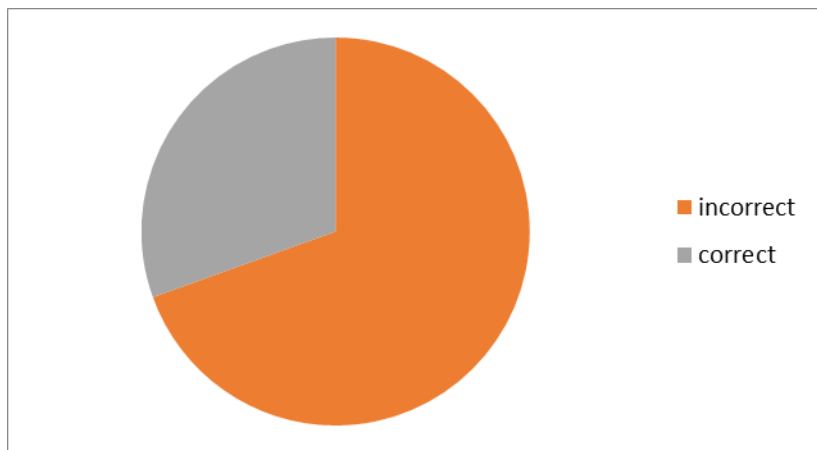


Figure (1) the percentage of production level

The following table (4) illustrates the subjects' performance for each item at production level

Table (4) Students' Performance at the Production Level in Question Two

No.Items	Correct	%	Incorrect	%
1.	10	4,3	40	7,6
2.	8	3,4	42	8,0
3.	12	5,2	38	2,3
4.	30	13,1	20	5,7
5.	20	8,7	30	3,8
6.	10	4,3	40	7,6
7.	8	3,4	42	8,0
8.	18	7,8	32	3,4
9.	10	4,3	40	7,6
10.	10	4,3	40	7,6
11.	15	2,1	35	6,7
12.	20	8,7	30	3,8
13.	15	2,1	35	6,7
14.	10	4,3	40	7,6
15.	17	3,2	33	14,4

It is clear that items (1, 2,3,6,7,9,10, 15, 13, and 14) scored highest incorrect answers

- My brother has **bettered himself**.
- The judge warned the witness not to **perjure herself**.
- We **pride ourselves** on the service we offer
- I wouldn't **demean myself** by asking my parents for money.

- He's always trying to **ingratiate himself** with his boss.
- One should **avail oneself** of such opportunities.

The learners don't have ability to differentiate between reflexive verbs and non-reflexive verbs so that they tend to use personal pronoun to fill gaps rather than reflexive pronouns. Moreover, they do not

know **perjure, pride, demean, ingratiate and avail** are transitive reflexive verbs obligatory followed by reflexive pronouns as their direct objects.

Items (4, and 15) are get low incorrect responses :

- He saw him/ himself in the mirror.
- Henry hates him/ himself.

Learners' responses for these two items (**hat and saw**) vary some of them use only personal pronouns others use only reflexive pronouns. Few numbers of subjects fill gaps with both reflexive and personal pronouns. They lack knowledge for the syntactic and semantic properties of reflexive verbs led them to answer incorrectly. **Saw and hat** are transitive non-reflexive verbs can be followed by both personal and reflexive pronouns according to the situation and meaning in which they are used.

Moreover, they answer item (5) incorrectly because they forget that the verb **blame** is non- reflexive verb so it act as any ordinary transitive verb can be followed by whatever types of complement noun phrase, any kind of pronouns, prepositional object and son on.

- :
- Nobody blamed ---him---or the accident.

Also it has noted that the subjects' performance is poor for items (8 and 12) because their weakness in understanding the correct use of reflexive pronouns and their reference:

The incorrect answer for item (8) scored (32/3,4%) from the total number:

- She was beside ----with rage.

In this item, the learners should be fill blank with reflexive pronoun (**herself**) because the metaphorical use of the preposition, as (Quirk, et.al. 1973: 99) comment "**the reflexive pronouns are often preferred when the reference is metaphorical and emotive.**"

The incorrect answer have been scored (33/14,4 %) for item (12) :

- For somebody like ----me/ myself--- this is a big surprise.

The learners lack to grammatical knowledge for correct using of reflexive pronouns, they consider **like** as transitive verb not as preposition in which it can be followed either by personal pronoun (me) or reflexive pronoun (myself).

After reviewing all the subjects' responses at the recognition and production levels, it is evident that the subjects' performance at the two levels is poor.

CONCLUSION

The main conclusions are as follows:

1. Reflexive verbs constitute a special class in English verbal system, they are group of transitive verbs cannot appear without a direct object.
2. According to Quirk et.al. modal there are three classes of reflexive verbs:

obligatory reflexive verbs, semi-reflexive verbs, and non-reflexive verbs. They behave as transitive verb obligatory followed by reflexive pronouns and intransitive verbs in which the reflexive pronoun can be omitted without effect the meaning of their reflexivity.

3. The reflexivity of reflexive verb is either intrinsic or extrinsic (overt or covert).
4. Iraqi EFL learners have displayed insufficient ability in recognizing and producing reflexive verbs. The percentage of incorrect answers at recognition level is (68.1%) while correct answers are (31.9 %). At the production level, the percentage of incorrect answers have been scored (69,4 %) and correct answers scored (30,5 %).
5. The majority of Iraqi EFL students do not know that there is a class of verbs is called reflexive verbs, for them the term reflexive only restricted for pronouns (reflexive pronouns). Therefore they cannot able to distinguish between reflexive verbs and non-reflexive verbs, for example at the recognition level, the incorrect responses for items (2,3,4,9,13,15,17,18, and 19) scored highest rate in comparison with total number of their correct ones.
6. The subjects' deficiency to syntactic categories and grammatical features of

reflexive verbs led them for poor achievements at production level, so that the incorrect replies for items (1,2,3,6,7,9,10,and 14) are higher than correct ones.

7. Iraqi EFL learners have faced difficulties not only with using and producing reflexive verbs but also with producing reflexive pronouns, they scored high rate (30%) of incorrect answers for items included reflexive pronouns.

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APPENDIX (1)

Q1 Decide whether the following sentences are true or false in terms of reflexive verbs

1. She always prides on her academic background.
2. The children were behaving each other wonderfully.
3. The politician perjured his aide.
4. Mary absented Martha yesterday.

5. The guests should avail each other of the hotel's services
6. He has to shave twice a day.
7. He has to shave himself twice a day.
8. I hope you will enjoy yourself at the party.
9. He applied a hot poultice to the sore foot.
10. He applied himself to the task of organizing the finances of the Company.
11. She's seven now. She's old enough to wash herself.
12. She always felt herself a stranger in their house.
13. The judge acquitted the prisoner.
14. Ann acquitted herself extremely well.
15. John dressed himself for the meeting.
16. Does she feel herself sick?
17. She took a deep breath and braced her.
18. Somehow the key got itself jammed in the door.
19. He availed himself of the opportunity to speak to her.
20. I flossed myself.

Q2 Fill in the blacks with suitable pronouns

1. My brother has bettered -----.
2. The judge warned the witness not to perjure-----.
3. We pride----- on the service we offer.
4. He saw----- in the mirror.
5. Nobody blamed ----- for the accident.
6. I wouldn't demean----- by asking my parents for money.

7. He's always trying to ingratiate-----
with his boss.
8. She was beside----- herself with rage,
9. Jane's mother dresses ----- before 8 a.m.
10. Jane's mother gets ----- up before 8
a.m.
11. One should avail oneself of such
opportunities.
12. For somebody like ----- this is a big
surprise.
13. Jim prides----- on his cooking.
14. They behaved ----- for a change.
15. Henry hates -----.

