

Reciprocal verbs and symmetry

Tal Siloni

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Abstract The paper shows that in addition to periphrastic reciprocal constructions and lexical reciprocal verbs, there is a third type—found in Romance and certain Slavic languages—whose reciprocity is not periphrastic but nonetheless composed only in the course of the syntactic derivation. Examining a sample of ten languages, the study reveals and derives the syntactic and semantic properties of these syntactic reciprocal verbs in comparison with their lexical counterparts. It further formulates the precise mechanisms forming the two types. Among other things, the paper devotes considerable attention to the notion “symmetric verb,” to the so-called “I” reading of embedded reciprocal clauses, and to a particular reciprocal construction that denotes reciprocity between two discontinuous phrases.

Keywords Lexical reciprocal verb · Syntactic reciprocal verb · Symmetric verb · “I” reading · Discontinuous construction · Lexicon · Lex-syn parameter

1 Introduction

Reciprocal constructions have been the focus of much recent research, typological and theoretical (e.g., Beck 2001; Frajzyngier and Curl 1999; König and Gast 2008, and references therein). In the literature, they are often argued to split into two types: (i) “periphrastic reciprocal constructions” such as *They kissed each other*, where reciprocity is expressed by means of a reciprocal anaphor (*each other*), and (ii) reciprocal constructions headed by a “lexical reciprocal verb” such as *They kissed*, which describes a reciprocal situation without the aid of a reciprocal anaphor (languages, unlike English, tend to mark such verbs morphologically). The paper presents robust empirical evidence for the existence of a third type found in Romance and certain Slavic languages, whose reciprocity is not periphrastic in the sense of (i), but

T. Siloni (✉)

Department of Linguistics, Tel Aviv University, Ramat-Aviv, 69978 Tel-Aviv, Israel
e-mail: siloni@post.tau.ac.il