

The role of agreement in the diachronic changes of reciprocal constructions

This paper explores the significance of considerations relevant to agreement relations for understanding the evolvement of reciprocal constructions.

Few studies concentrated on the evolvement of such constructions. Plank (2008) and Haas (2010) focus on the quantificational strategy (using König and Kokutani's 2006 terminology.) However, from a typological point of view this is not the most common construction and therefore their explanations do not account for the reciprocal constructions in most languages.

The current paper traces the following three stages in the development of reciprocal pronominal constructions in the history of numerous languages. (Data from five different branches of the Semitic languages stand at the heart of this paper. Similar data from other languages will be mentioned as well):

Stage I two-unit pronouns:

<u>{NP₁...NP_n.NOM}</u>	<u>VERB.SG</u>	<u>RECP₁.NOM.SG</u>	<u>RECP₂.ACC.SG</u>
Topic		Subject	Object

Stage II hybrid construction:

<u>{NP₁...NP_n.NOM}</u>	<u>VERB.PL</u>	<u>RECP₁.NOM.SG</u>	<u>RECP₂.ACC.SG</u>
Topic		Subject	Object

This development is a good example of what is known in the literature as semantic agreement instead of morphological agreement (Corbett 2006: 155-160). It is an interesting example of semantic agreement, as it is not the case that the subject of the *action* is semantically plural (as is the case in “the committee have met”), but rather that the plurality is that of the events, i.e. in different events the same pronoun refers to different entities in the reciprocal relation.

Stage III one unit pronoun:

<u>{NP₁...NP_n.NOM}</u>	<u>VERB.PL</u>	<u>(RECP₁₊.RECP_{2/}.ACC.DU/PL)</u>
Subject		Object

Analyzed as:

<u>{NP₁...NP_n.NOM}</u>	<u>VERB.PL</u>	<u>RECP.ACC.PL</u>
Subject		Object

The last stage is a typical example of a topic reanalyzed as a subject, and, consequently, the two separate pronouns are conceived as one unit. In this context, some languages (Mehri, Akkadian and all dialects of Eastern Aramaic) demonstrate the evolvement of a new dependency with a transparent morphological augmentation of an agreement feature.

The first discussion centers on the semantic plurality of reciprocals, which is relevant to issues of agreement in another way. In this context it will become clear that it is important to distinguish between the plurality of events reading and the single event reading. In colloquial Arabic it is possible to disambiguate between them. If the subject is a set whose members are expressed individually the verb may have either a singular agreement or a plural agreement. In the case of the former all participants must participate at the same event (1a), in the case of the latter both readings are possible (1b). The sentences in (2) illustrate, that this is also the case with reciprocal verbs.

- (1) a. *ruḥet ana w abū-y 'ala talabīb*
 go-PST.1.SG I and father-POSS.1.SG to Tel-Aviv
 “I went together with my father to Tel-Aviv”
- b. *ruḥna ana w abūy(a) 'ala talabīb*
 go-PST.1.PL I and father-POSS.1.SG to Tel-Aviv
 “My father and I went to Tel-Aviv”
- (2) a. *ilyōm t'ābṭet ana w axū-y li-awwal marra*
 today hug.RECP.PST.1.SG I and brother-POSS.1.SG for-the-first time
 “Today my brother and I hugged each other for the first time”
- b. *ilyōm t'ābṭna ana w axūy li-awwal marra*
 today hug.RECP.PST.1.SG I and brother-POSS.1.SG for-the-first time
 “Today my brother and I hugged each of us someone else/each other for the first time”.