

Singular and plural reciprocal phrases in Serbo-Croatian

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Ever since the work of Fiengo and Lasnik (1973) it has been well known that sentences containing reciprocal phrases, such as the English example in (1), can be used to represent varying ‘strengths’ of reciprocal relations of particular events. For example, (1) can be used to represent the strongest possible reciprocal relation holding among the relevant set of students, namely each student hit and was hit by every other student. However, (1) can be felicitously used to describe situations where weaker reciprocal relations hold. An example of such a situation would be a ‘typical brawl’, where there is fighting going on among the relevant set of students, though each student does not necessarily have to hit or be hit by every other student. We plan to present novel data from Serbo-Croatian (henceforth SC), which, unlike English, morphologically distinguishes between different strengths of reciprocity. This distinction is made by way of singular and plural morphology on the reciprocal phrase.

To illustrate this, take the SC equivalents of the English sentence in (1), shown in (2). For (2a), where the reciprocal phrase shows singular morphology, this is best used in a situation where there is strongest reciprocity, or a slightly weaker form which Fiengo and Lasnik call the *each-other* relation, where the set of students is divided into subsets and within these subsets the strongest reciprocal relation holds. Also, when there are only two members in the antecedent set, a reciprocal relation is necessarily strong, hence singular morphology. However, the singular reciprocal phrase cannot be used to describe the ‘typical brawl situation’ mentioned in the preceding paragraph, where we are unsure of any strong reciprocal relations holding. To describe this type of event where a weak reciprocal relation is involved, SC must use a plural reciprocal phrase, shown in (2b).

The phenomenon of using different number morphology to signal different strengths of reciprocity has some interesting consequences. For example, in cases where a weak reciprocal reading is forced, we would predict that the singular reciprocal phrase, which signals a strong reading, would be unacceptable. As shown in examples (3) and (4), this prediction is borne out. For the type of situation described in (3), it is impossible for a strong reciprocal relation to hold since once a person is dead, that person cannot attend the funeral of another family member. As for (4), the act of staring involves looking only at one object, so it is impossible to look at every other member in the set denoted by the antecedent.

Beside the basic data shown above, we will discuss our findings on the behavior of more complex cases involving quantified antecedents as well as reciprocal phrases contained in ATB interrogative phrases and relative clause heads. An example of such a complex case is shown in (5), where the ATB extracted phrase contains a reciprocal. There are a few points of interest here. First, if the reciprocal phrase is singular (5a), the only suitable antecedent for the reciprocal is the first set mentioned, the phrase *Marija i Jovana*. In other words, only Marija and Jovana are in the pictures. However, with a plural reciprocal phrase (5b) the choice of antecedents and resulting meanings are quite different: speakers prefer readings where either all four individuals in the sentence must be in the pictures mentioned, or that there is a reciprocal relation between the sets of individuals (where Marija and Jovana bought the pictures of Marko and Jovan, and Marko and Jovan stole the pictures of Marija and Jovana). Furthermore, such sentences exhibit interesting gender agreement phenomena depending on whether the reciprocal phrase is singular or plural. If the reciprocal phrase is singular, it takes only the first set of individuals into consideration when determining its gender. In (5a), since the first set is feminine, the reciprocal phrase is also feminine. If the reciprocal phrase is plural, the genders of both sets are relevant, and since one set is feminine and the other masculine, the reciprocal phrase is inflected with masculine morphology, which is the default mixed-gender agreement form.

In gathering this new data, we so far consulted with 16 native speakers of SC and used graphic representations of the reciprocal situations for the consultants to better understand the facts we were after. There was unanimous agreement among the consultants that the sentences we presented them with (of which only a small fraction are shown in this abstract) correctly describe the situations shown and described to them. We will explore the consequences of this novel data for current theories of the syntax and semantics of reciprocity. The recent research of Dalrymple et al. (1998), following work of Langendoen (1978) and Kański (1987), provides a thorough and well-accepted characterization of the different meanings reciprocal expressions can have, as well as an analysis of reciprocal phrases as

polyadic quantifiers. We will adopt this approach (with some modifications), and show that the SC data fit well within this paradigm, and support the claim that the meanings of reciprocals are not just a matter of pragmatics, since there are strong formal/morphological correlates in SC.

Examples

(1) The students hit each other

(2a) Studenti su udarali **jedan drugog**
Students aux hit one.SG other.SG
'The students hit each other.'

(2b) Studenti su udarali **jedni druge**
Students aux hit one.PL other.PL
'The students hit each other.'

(3) Članovi porodice su poštovali **jedan drugog/jedni druge** i
members family AUX respected one-other.SG /one-other.PL and
odali su poštu ***jedan drugom / jedni drugima** na svojim sahranama
*paid AUX respect *one-other.SG / one-other.PL at their funerals*
'The family members respected each other, and paid their respects at each others' funerals.'
[based on an example from Schein (2003)]

(4) "Kapetan!" viknuše pirati zureći **jedni u druge / *jedan u drugog**
*"Captain!" yelled pirates starring one at other.PL / *one at other.SG*
'"The captain!" said the pirates, starring at each other.'
[based on an example from Dalrymple et al. (1998), originally from J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*]

(5a) Koje su slike **jedna druge** Marija i Jovana kupile a Marko i Jovan ukrali
Which AUX pictures one other.F.SG Marija and Jovana bought and Marko and Jovan stole
'Which pictures of each other did Marija and Jovana buy and Marko and Jovan steal?'

(5b) Koje su slike **jedni drugih** Marija i Jovana kupile a Marko i Jovan ukrali
Which AUX pictures one other.M.PL Marija and Jovana bought and Marko and Jovan stole
'Which pictures of each other did Marija and Jovana buy and Marko and Jovan steal?'

References

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