1. This paper addresses the interpretative options of reciprocals cross-linguistically, with particular focus on the discontinuous reciprocal construction (1a), found in numerous languages including Hebrew, Hungarian, German, Russian, Polish, Serbian, Sakha, and various Bantu languages, but not in French or Italian (Mchombo and Ngunga 1994, Siloni 2001).

(1) a. Ο Giannis filithike me ti Maria
     the John and the Maria kissed-Recip.Pl
     ‘John and Maria kissed each other’

     b. Ο Giannis kje i Maria filithikan
     the John kissed-Recip.Sg with the Maria
     ‘John and Maria kissed each other’

This construction is closely associated with the semantics of necessarily symmetric events, that is, events involving a binary relationship whose two participants have necessarily identical participation (Dimitriadis 2002); I show that, contrary to prior claims, discontinuous reciprocals cannot be derived from the corresponding “simple” reciprocals. I take the semantics of necessary symmetry to be the core reciprocal meaning of this type of reciprocal; identification of the two arguments is a second, optional operation.

The discontinuous reciprocal construction is specific to a particular type of reciprocal verbs, and is impossible with other reciprocal types. It is just one of a number of specifically reciprocal properties which, while frequently found with reciprocals in genetically unrelated languages, are not found with all reciprocals. Other parametrically varying properties include: whether the reciprocal predicate is formed via a pronominal or quantificational argument with reciprocal meaning, or via an argument structure operation on the verb; if the latter, whether the argument structure operation occurs productively “in the syntax”, or “in the lexicon” (Reinhart 2000, Siloni 2001); scope and scope-like effects: small clauses, derived predicates/ECM, dependent-pronoun readings, or true long-distance binding (Heim et al. 1991, Dalrymple et al. 2004, Dimitriadis 1999, Siloni 2001); whether it shows polysemy with reflexive, collective, or other meanings (Lichtenberk 1985, Kemmer 1993, Frajzyngier 1999); and (keeping in mind that we are characterizing constructions, not languages), whether this construction is the primary means of expressing reciprocal semantics in that language.

These properties raise the issue of classification of reciprocal constructions. Typologically we may speak of identifying reciprocal types and implicational relationships, while formally one must look for a set of representations, corresponding to existing reciprocal types, which can account for the observed clusterings of reciprocal properties.

2. The Discontinuous Reciprocal. The two examples in (1) are, broadly speaking, synonymous: the comitative argument in (1a) is interpreted as part of the logical subject of the reciprocal verb. This makes it possible for the syntactic subject to be singular, as in example (1a), while still satisfying the semantic requirement that reciprocation must be between a plural number of participants.

Prior analyses of the construction have treated it along the lines of the descriptive summary just given, capturing in various ways the intuition that the logical subject of the reciprocal is split between the syntactic subject and the comitative argument. (Vitale 1981, Mchombo and Ngunga 1994, Siloni 2001).

A closer look, however, shows that the interpretation of discontinuous reciprocals is not quite identical to that of the corresponding simple reciprocal. The argument is based on the semantics of sentences in which the syntactic subject and/or the comitative argument denote a plural NP, as in (2a).

(2) a. Maria und Sabine schlugen sich mit Johan.
     Maria and Sabine hit each–other with Johan
     ‘Maria and Sabine fought with Johan.’

     b. Maria, Sabine und Johann schlugen sich.
     Maria, Sabine and Johann hit each–other
     ‘Maria, Sabine and Johann fought.’
Example (2a) only states that Maria and Sabine fought with John, not that Maria and Sabine fought each other; but the equivalent simple reciprocal example (2b) is vague with respect to who fought with whom, allowing any combination of individuals to have fought (subject only to the condition that every individual must have been involved in some fighting). This effect cannot be derived in an analysis which treats discontinuous reciprocals as being derived from the corresponding simple reciprocal: Schwarzschild (1986) has shown that plural individuals correspond to simple unions of atomic individuals, with no intermediate structure such as might be created by the conjunction of two plural NPs; hence an analysis that combines the comitative argument with the syntactic subject of the reciprocal could never separate them again. It follows that the two are separate arguments at all stages of the derivation.

If discontinuous reciprocals do not involve an intransitivized reciprocal verb, what makes them reciprocal? I show that in most languages, reciprocal verbs that allow the discontinuous construction must denote a necessarily symmetric event, that is, an event expressing a binary relationship whose two participants have necessarily identical participation. The effect can be illustrated with implicitly reciprocal verbs in English: example (3a), involving a reciprocal pronoun, can refer to an exchange of non-symmetric kisses (e.g., on each other’s cheek or hand); but the reciprocal verb in (3b) requires a symmetric kiss, with equal participation by both parties (Gleitman et al. 1996).

(3) a. John and Mary kissed each other.
   b. John and Mary kissed.

In some languages, including Serbian and German, the reciprocalization operation does not always create necessarily-symmetric event verbs; but only the symmetric ones allow the discontinuous construction (example (4)). (We set aside for the moment Bantu reciprocals, which conform to a different pattern).

(4) a. Johann und Maria vergötteren sich.
   Johann and Maria idolize Refl/Recip (German)
   ‘Johann and Maria idolize themselves/each other.’
   b. *Johann vergöttert sich mit Maria.

I propose that the function of the core reciprocalization operation in verbs of this type does not detransitivize the base verb, but creates a necessarily symmetric predicate. The roles of the two participants in an event become necessarily identical, but the participants remain distinct. Discontinuous reciprocals take two arguments, while simple reciprocals undergo a second, optional operation, which causes the two semantic arguments of the reciprocal to be identified. An informal definition of “symmetricization” is given in (5). We can then write an abbreviated semantics for verbal reciprocalization as in (6), modeled on the analysis of Heim et al. (1991).

(5) \(\text{Symm}(V)(x, y) \iff \exists e (V(e, x, y) \& V(e, y, x))\)  
(E.g., \(x\) symmetrically-kisses \(y\) if some event \(e\) is both an event of \(x\) kissing \(y\) and of \(y\) kissing \(x\)).

(6) \(\text{Recip}(V) = \lambda R \lambda S \forall x \in S \forall y \in R \ (x \neq y \rightarrow \text{Symm}(V)(x, y))\)

3. TOWARD A TYPOLOGY. A number of different principled schemes for the classification of reciprocal constructions have been proposed. Morphologically, we can distinguish whether a reciprocal predicate is formed via a pronominal or quantificational argument with reciprocal meaning, or via an argument structure operation on the verb; and if the latter, whether the argument structure operation occurs productively “in the syntax”, or “in the lexicon” (Reinhart 2000, Siloni 2001, Plank 2002). Interpretationally, we can ask whether we are dealing with a dedicated reciprocal construction, or with one that is polysemous between a reciprocal and a reflexive, collective, or other meaning (Frajzyngier 1999); alternatively, we can classify reciprocals according to the reciprocal and reciprocal-like situation types they allow (Lichtenberk 1985, 1999). Finally, keeping in mind that we are classifying constructions, not languages, we should ask whether a reciprocal construction is the primary means of expressing reciprocal semantics in that language.

I know of no existing classification of reciprocals that corresponds to the distribution of reciprocal properties. Bantu reciprocals, in particular, systematically cut across the expected categories. They are formed by a demonstrably derivational verbal morpheme but share properties that are usually associated with each of the three morphological types; they do not show reflexive-reciprocal polysemy, but they allow many of the same constructions (such as discontinuous reciprocals) as polysemous reflexive-reciprocal verbs in
same constructions (such as discontinuous reciprocals) as polysemous reflexive-reciprocal verbs in Greek, Serbian and Hebrew (Dalrymple et al 1994, Dimitriadis 2002).

REFERENCES


