

Thematic Roles and *one another* reciprocals

Chris LaTerza

University of Maryland

It has been observed since Fiengo and Lasnik (1973) and Langendoen (1978) that sentences expressing reciprocity can be associated with a variety of readings, characterized by reciprocal “strength”. While some sentences (in a given context) might favor Strong Reciprocity (where every individual in the plurality denoted by the antecedent both affects and is affected by every other individual there), other sentences might favor weaker readings. Indeed, nearly all work on the semantics of reciprocals has taken it as a primary goal to address these many readings, and many different approaches to the problem have been proposed.

One might want to suggest, as Langendoen did, that reciprocals have a single one weak interpretation, since anything satisfying a stronger type of reciprocity will also satisfy the conditions imposed by a weaker type of reciprocity. Dalrymple et al. (1998) reject this hypothesis, and propose the Strongest Meaning Hypothesis, which states that reciprocals are ambiguous, and a reciprocal sentence will pick the strongest meaning possible given the lexical predicate and certain nonlinguistic information. However, I believe that this is incorrect, and that an underspecification analysis such as Langendoen’s can be defended once certain plausible assumptions are made. This paper proposes that *one-another* reciprocals (OARs) have a *single weak interpretation*, brought about by how the parts of reciprocal phrases interact with certain thematic roles.

The focus of this paper will be on OARs in several Indo-European sub-families (Germanic, Romance, Slavic, and Baltic), though the analysis can also be extended to other types of bipartite reciprocals. The thematic analysis will include two proposals: (i) each element of an OAR is associated with a different thematic role, and (ii) each element contains a silent partitive argument: ONE (of them)/OTHER (of them). These two proposals together can be shown to attribute enough descriptive power to capture acceptable reciprocal sentences, while also ruling out unacceptable ones.

Concerning (i), there are two empirical reasons for proposing that each element of an OAR is associated with a different thematic role. The idea is that if we can show that ONE and OTHER are two distinct NPs that do not form a constituent with one another, then that would suggest that these two elements are also thematically distinct. The Spanish (1) and Serbo-Croatian (2) sentences below will help illustrate these points.

(1) los estudiantes se seguian **uno tras otro**

DEF students CL walk one behind_p other

(2a) studenti su predstavili profesorima **jedne druge**

students.NOM AUX introduced professors.ACC one.ACC other.DAT

Reading: The students introduced the professors to other professors

(2b) studenti su predstavili profesorima **jedni druge**

students.NOM AUX introduced professors.ACC one.NOM other.DAT

Reading: The students introduced the professors to other students

The first reason for accepting (i) is preposition placement. Although Germanic OARs do not show this property, in the Romance, Slavic, and Baltic languages, prepositions (when they appear) **must** be placed **between** the elements of an OAR, as shown in (1). If we can assume that it is the complements of prepositions that receive the role associated with that preposition (Goal in (2)), then we can attribute thematic distinctness to each element of an OAR since only one of them is the complement of the preposition in these languages, the OTHER element.

The second empirical reason that suggests that (i) is correct comes from the Case of each element of the OARs in (2). In Slavic, the Case of each element in an OAR **must differ** from the other element. This fact alone is a reasonable argument that each of these elements is in fact a separate NP, and hence, each bears a separate thematic role. **Furthermore**, (2) also shows how *the Case on the ONE element of the reciprocal is dependent on the Case of its antecedent*. This is interesting in the Case of ditransitives like (2), where there are two potential antecedents. In (2a), *jedne* (“one”) is marked as accusative, and as such the reading is one where the reciprocal takes the direct object as its antecedent. (2b), with *jedni* (“one”) being nominative, the only possible antecedent is the subject. This empirical fact will be an important part of the analysis, as I will claim that the thematic role associated with ONE will always be dependent on the thematic role of the antecedent, while the thematic role of OTHER will be the canonical role associated with the position of the OAR: since the reciprocal is an indirect object in (2), the thematic role of *druge* (“other”) in both sentences will be Goal.

Turning now to (ii), it is necessary for this theory to posit a covert restriction argument expressing partitivity within each NP in OARs. In brief, the claim is that the descriptive content of the OAR is roughly *one among them_x...other among them_x*, where X represents the plurality denoted by the antecedent. This will ensure that when considering the values assigned to ONE and OTHER, these values will be proper parts of the whole denoted by the antecedent. Using partitivity has proven helpful in constructing theories of reciprocals, as both Beck (2001) and Schein (2003) have shown. I will extend the claims of these authors by conjecturing that partitivity is present in **both** parts of bipartite reciprocals, expressed by the \leq operator in the logical syntax below.

CLAIM: (3) means (3’). While this theory of thematic roles in reciprocal sentences differs in important ways from Schein’s 2003 take on the reciprocals, I follow him in using a semantic representation that uses a neo-Davidsonian metalanguage combined with number-neutral plural variables of the Boolos (1984) sort. A crucial aspect of the analysis, following Schein (1993, 2003) is that distributive quantifiers, represented by the ONE part in OARs ($\forall Y$ in (3’)), introduce reference to both sub-individuals and sub-events.

(3) They_x hit one another

(3’) $\exists E\{\text{past}(E) \ \& \ \exists X[\text{Agent}(E, X) \ \& \ \text{hit}(E)$

$\ \& \ \forall Y: Y \leq X \ [\exists E':E' \leq E \ \{\text{Agent}(E', Y) \ \& \ \leftarrow \text{contribution of ONE}$

$\ \& \ \exists Z: Z \leq X \ [\text{OTHER}(Z, Y) \ \& \ \text{Theme}(E', Z)]\}\}\}$ $\leftarrow \text{contribution of OTHER}$

The descriptive content of the OAR in (3’) says that for each individual_y in the plurality denoted by the antecedent_x, that individual_y has its own events_E, in which it_y is the Agent and there is/are some Z(s), other than Y, that is the Theme in E’. As mentioned earlier, the thematic roles associated with *one* and *other* depend on the position of the OAR **and** its antecedent. This theory is underspecified enough to handle almost all the readings associated with reciprocals, from Strong Reciprocity to the very weak type of reciprocity exhibited by the sentence in (1) (modulo the person walking at the head of the line—arguably a pragmatic exception). Furthermore, there are good reasons **not** to adopt the even weaker hypothesis: that each element of the plurality participates somehow in the event (either as an Agent **or** a Theme). The weaker theory (and also the Strongest Meaning Hypothesis) would predict (4) to be acceptable so long as just one is taller than the other. However, (4) is not acceptable under such a reading, though the competing theories predict otherwise. The current theory predicts a contradiction, and this prediction is borne out.

(4) #John and Mary are taller than each other.

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