

RECIPROCAL CONSTRUCTIONS AND SYMMETRIC PREDICATES IN SOMALI

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What reciprocal constructions and symmetric predicates have in common is that both involve two-place predicates and that the two arguments are interchangeable. So does the following reciprocal construction:

(1) Peter and Bill hit each other.

entail the sentences:

(1a) Peter hit Bill.

(1b) Bill hit Peter.

The same holds for what is commonly regarded as a symmetric predicate:

(2) Peter and Bill resemble (each other).

The entailed sentences here are:

(2a) Peter resembles Bill.

(2b) Bill resembles Peter.

The difference between the expressions (1) and (2), however, consists in the fact that in (1) the two sentences (a) and (b) are logically independent of each other. Both can be either true or false and a coordination like:

(3) Peter hit Bill and Bill didn't hit Peter.

is well built although it may not be good English. The reciprocal construction, however, implies that both sentences are true.

In (2) the situation is different insofar as the sentences (2a) and (2b) are not independent of each other. (If we accept for the time being that resemble is a symmetric predicate in

a strict sense; but we will deal with that later on.) Bill resembles Peter cannot be true without Peter resembles Bill being true at the same time. The sentence:

(4) Peter resembles Bill and Bill doesn't resemble Peter.

seems to be a contradiction.

That means that there is a factual relation between Peter hit Bill and Bill hit Peter while the relation between Peter resembles Bill and Bill resembles Peter is of a logical kind.

If we look at this from a transformational point of view we might say that in (1), the reciprocal construction, the coordination of the two sentences (1a) and (1b) is the underlying structure while in (2) the coordinated sentence A and B resemble (each other) is derived from or is a variant of the "simple" sentence: A resembles B (see Stoetzel 1970:197).

Reciprocal constructions can thus be formally represented by:

$$(F1) \quad S_{\text{Rec}} : S_1 \wedge S_2, \text{ where } \begin{cases} \text{SUBJ}_1 = \text{OBJ}_2 \\ \text{SUBJ}_2 = \text{OBJ}_1 \end{cases}$$

Whether this should be interpreted transformationally as a kind of "conjunction reduction" or not may be left open here (see, however, Lakoff & Peters 1966). Wierzbicka (1972) has brought forward a number of good arguments against this "reduction view" and I tend to agree with her. For our purpose it is sufficient to interpret the formula (F1) as: If we have a reciprocal construction (of the type x and y ... each other), then we can form two corresponding simple, i.e. non-coordinated sentences, which are logically independent of each other.

The logical structure of a symmetric predicate, on the other hand, can be described by formula (F2):

$$(F2) \quad aRb \equiv bR^1a, \text{ where } R = R^1$$

R^1 stands here for the converse of the relation R , and symmetric predicates are defined as those relations where the converse relation is expressed by the same means as the relation itself. as big as may be taken as an example for a symmetric predicate.

The converse of *a is as big as b* is *b is as big as a*. This may become more obvious if we compare it with an asymmetric predicate like: *bigger as*. The converse of *a is bigger than b* is *b is smaller than a*, or if we take a transitive verb: *a kills b* the converse is *b was killed by a*, i.e. the passive construction.

The difference between reciprocal constructions and symmetric predicates can now be sufficiently described on the semantic level. The problem, however, remains of whether there is anything corresponding on the syntactic level which allows a clear distinction between reciprocal constructions and sentences containing a symmetric predicate. What we are looking for is syntactic definition of the latter.

The following classification may be taken as a first attempt to provide such a definition. No explicit formalization has been attempted here nor has every aspect been investigated. I hope, however, that the examples presented here will at least give a general idea of what I'm aiming at.

The classification is based on two features:

1. The explicit marking of reciprocity;
2. The relation between S_1 and S_2 , the sentences (a) and (b) in example (1) and (2).

R e c i p r o c a l c o n s t r u c t i o n s are then defined by 1) the presence of a reciprocal marker and 2) by the fact that S_1 and S_2 are neither logically nor syntactically related.

S y m m e t r i c p r e d i c a t e s are defined by 1) the absence of a reciprocal marker and 2) the specific relation between S_1 and S_2 .

We will see later on that there are also constructions which are intermediate between these two extremes. They are mainly built by using prepositional elements and we shall call them here - for want of a better term - *quasi-symmetric relations*.

In the following I will investigate these types of constructions and it will be seen that - at least in Somali - symmetric predicates constitute a clearly defined category of their own. I will start by showing how reciprocal constructions are built. Then I will discuss a few cases of quasi-symmetry before I finally come to what I think are genuine symmetric predicates.

A. R e c i p r o c a l c o n s t r u c t i o n s

- (5) Hassan iyo Fadummu w -ay is jecel yihiin.
 H. and F. FOC-3pl REC love COP:3pl
 'Hassan and Fadumma love each other.'
- a. Hassan Fadumma ay -uu jecel yahay
 H. F. FOC-3sm love COP:3sm
 'Hassan loves Fadumma.'
- b. Fadumma Hassan ay -ay jeceshahay.
 F. H. FOC-3sf love:COP:3sf
 'Fadumma loves Hassan.'

As (5) shows, the reciprocal construction is formed with the reciprocal marker *is* (REC), which also serves the function of a reflexive marker. (6) demonstrates the reflexive use of *is* :

- (6) Markaas-aan is idhi.
 then -1s REC say:1s
 'Then I said to myself.'

One may compare this with the situation in a language like German; here, too, the pronoun *sich* is used in reflexive as well as in reciprocal constructions.

The reciprocal construction does not pose any special problems, although there are some uses of the reciprocal marker which are not yet fully understood. But this is beyond the scope of this paper. In general we can say, that *is* indicates an identity of SUBJ and OBJ which holds for both reflexive and reciprocal constructions. In some cases (according to Abraham 1964:135) the reflexive construction is substitutable for a non-reflexive to express emphasis.

- (7) a. Wuu dhuumanayaa 'He is hiding.'
 b. Wuu is dhuuminayaa. 'He is hiding himself.'

In (7a) we have an intransitive verb, while in (7b) we have a transitive verb, indicated by the derivational element *-i-*. This demonstrates clearly that the prerequisite for the *is*-construction is a two-place predicate, in this case a transitive verb.

B. Q u a s i - s y m m e t r i c c o n s t r u c t i o n s

I will now come to what I have called quasi-symmetric predicates. These predicates are characterized by the fact that they denote a symmetric relation but the symmetry is not an inherent feature of the predicate itself but is expressed by some formal means. Let me first demonstrate this by using a fairly simple example.

- (8) a. Hassan Ciise ay -uu shaxda la ciyaraa.
 H. I. FOC-3sm chess COM play:3sm
 'Hassan is playing chess with Iise.'

I don't think that there is any doubt that this sentence implies also

- (8) b. Ciise Hassan ay-uu shaxda la ciyaraa.
 'Iise is playing chess with Hassan.'

Both sentences are logically connected since if (8a) is true (8b) is true as well and vice versa. The question, however, is whether this suffices to say that these sentences entail a symmetric predicate. The first thing we have to notice here is that the main predicate in this sentence is *ciyaraa* 'play' and that the direct object of this predicate is not *ciise* but *shax* 'chess'. So we can form the sentence

- (9) Hassan shaxda ay-uu ciyaraa.
 'Hassan is playing chess.'

which is perfectly well built. It is obvious that the converse of this sentence cannot be something like 'Chess is playing Hassan' or so and *ciyaraa* is hence an asymmetric predicate. We therefore have to extend the predicate by the case marker *la*

'Comitative' which is expressed as a prepositional particle in the predicate. This results in the complex predicate (shaxda) la ciyaraa 'play (chess) with'. But this complex predicate contains two relational elements: 1. the transitive verb ciyaraa which is a two-place predicate and 2. the Comitative-marker la which also denotes a two-place relation. The latter relation, however, may be viewed as a kind of addition: $a + b$ to which the commutative law, which says that $a + b = b + a$ is applicable. It is due to the commutative nature of the comitative relation that both sentences (8a) and (8b) are possible and derivable from each other. It has often been recognized that there is a close relation between Comitative and coordination but it has also been shown that they are not in an exact paraphrase relation (see Seiler 1974:234). This becomes evident when we coordinate sentence (8a) and (8b). The comitative relation in this case has to be explicitly expressed by wada 'together', otherwise there is no indication that the participants are performing the game together.

(10) a. Hassan iyo Ciise shaxda ay-ay wada ciyaraan.

'Hassan and Iise play chess together.'

b. Hassan iyo Ciise shaxda ay-ay ciyaraan.

'Hassan and Iise play chess (but not necessarily together).'

The apparent symmetry of the sentences (8a) and (8b) is hence not due to the symmetric nature of the predicate but to the commutative nature of the comitative relation.

Let's now look at some predicates which figure quite prominently in the discussion of reciprocal and symmetric relations.

The first one, which seems to be the classic example of symmetry, is the expression of similarity or identity. This is, in English, expressed by predicates like: resemble, the same as and the like. Before we investigate these predicates in Somali let us first take a closer look at resemble which in the introduction I have cited as an example for a symmetric predicate. There we claimed, that Bill resembles John implies

John resembles Bill . But this symmetric relation does not always hold as may be seen from the following pair of sentences: The baby resembles the father. / The father resembles the baby. I don't think that an implicational relation holds between these two sentences. This demonstrates that even in these seemingly obvious cases other conditions are involved - like that being of the same general type - which makes it doubtful whether resemble really is a symmetric predicate in the strict sense.

In Somali now, similarity or identity may be expressed by several means and we will look at two of them in turn. The first one is built by using a construction with the verb eeg 'look'.

- (11) Wuu i -i eeg yahay.
 FOC:3sm 1s-BEN look COP:3sm
 'He resembles me.'

The pronominal object may also be expressed by an independent pronoun in which case we get:

- (11)' Aniga b -uu ii eeg yahay
 1sSUBJ FOC-3sm 1sOBJ look COP:3sm
 'It's me, he resembles me.'

After considering the English example it seems doubtful whether (11) necessarily implies the sentence 'I resemble him' as well. Imagine the 3sm in (11) being a baby-boy.

The following example will furthermore show that the symmetric interpretation may be rather unintended.

- (12) Riyuhu haweenka waxay u -ga eeg yihiin kalgacaylka.
 goats women FOC:3pl BEN-ABL look COP:3pl friendly nature
 'The goats resemble the women in (their) affection.'

I think this shows that the reverse: The women resemble the goats ... is not to be regarded to be the converse of the original expression. That means that both sentences can be independently true or false. Consequently, in Somali the reciprocal construction is used when we want to express that similarity holds in both directions.

- (13) Way is u eeg yihiin.
'They resemble each other.'

This proves that u eeg yahay is not a symmetric predicate.

Identity is expressed by forming predicates with the noun mid 'one' (compare German: eins sein). The common expression is is ku mid which Reinisch considers as a separate lexical entry and which some authors even write as one word.

- (14) Waa is ku mid.
FOC REC LOC one
'They are identical.'

- (15) Lo'da iyo riyuhu waxay is -ka -ga mid yihiin kamiinta.
cattle and goats FOC:3pl REC-LOC(?) -ABL one COP:3pl greediness
'The cattle and the goats are identical with respect to their greediness.'

The corresponding non-coordinated, simple sentences to (15) are:

- (15) a. Lo'du riyaha waxay ka-la mid tahay kamiinta.
'The cattle are identical to the goats in greediness.'
b. Riyuhu lo'da waxay ka-la mid yihiin kamiinta.
'The goats are identical to the cattle in greediness.'

We see, that these sentences contain the Comitative-particle *la* which, as has been argued before, is subject of the commutative law. Sentence (15b) can therefore be logically derived from (15a), and vice versa, which proves that the coordinated sentence (15) does not contain a reciprocal construction in the proper sense. But the presence of *la* also shows that *iskumid* resp. *la mid* is not a genuine symmetric predicate, since we can attribute the symmetry to the Comitative, i.e. it is not inherent to the predicate itself. What exactly the status of *is*, the reciprocal marker, in this construction is remains to be clarified. A possible explanation would be found in regarding *iskumid* as an idiomatic expression.

Before we come to what I've called true symmetric predicates let us just take a look at another candidate for a symmetric pred-

icate. This is the verb meaning 'meet', a predicate which in English and German has also been subject of lengthy discussions.

- (16) Ninkii iyo gabadhdhii w -ay kulmeen.
 man and girl FOC-3pl meet:3pl
 'The man and the girl met (each other).'

This sentence does not contain a reciprocal marker although its meaning is clearly reciprocal. This therefore seems to be an example for a symmetric predicate. If we look, however, at the simple sentences, we find that they contain again the Comitative-marker *la*.

- (16) a. Ninkii gabadhdhii ayuu la kulmay.
 'The man met with the girl.'
 b. Ninkii ayay gabadhdhu la kulantay.
 'The girl met with the man.'

The predicate *kulmeen* 'they met' differs from the afore mentioned predicates in that we can also form a sentence like:

- (16) c. Ninkii gabadhdhii ay -ay kulmeen.
 man girl FOC-3pl meet:3pl
 'The man met the girl.'

where the two arguments are just juxtaposed and function as a double subject, which will be described in the following section.

C. S y m m e t r i c p r e d i c a t e s

Let's look now at what I would call true symmetric predicates. These are almost exclusively built from nouns which denote symmetric relations such as, in English: *brother*, *cousin*, *friend*, *enemy*, and the like.

Logically speaking relational nouns, which include kinship terms, locational nouns like *top*, *side*, *end*, and part-whole designations like body part expressions are predicates insofar as they have to be combined with another noun to become a referring expression. Take the example *side* which is always understood as denoting the side of something.

Within the group of relational nouns kinship terms form a special subgroup in that the relations they denote are always reciprocal, taken in the logical sense. Body part expressions are not reciprocal as may be seen from the fact that one can usually not form the converse: The hand is part of the arm but the arm is ? of the hand .

Kinship terms have to be furthermore divided into symmetric and asymmetric relational nouns. *Father* , for example, denotes an asymmetric relation since the converse to *a is father of b* can only be *b is son of a* . *Brother* , on the other hand, denotes a symmetric relation since *a is brother of b* implies (leaving sisters aside for a moment) *b is brother of a* .

Let's see now how Somali expresses such symmetrical relations. We will begin with the coordinated sentence whereby it has to be known that in the plural no distinction is made between brothers and sisters (compare German: *Geschwister*).

- (17) Cali iyo Ceebli waa walaalo.
 'Ali and Eebla are siblings.'

This is a straightforward sentence and is comparable to the other coordinated sentences we have looked at before. But since we know that 'brother' stands for a symmetric relation we have to look for the corresponding non-coordinated sentences, and then the situation becomes a bit more complicated.

- (18) a. Cali Ceebla ay -ay walaalo yihiin.
 A. E. FOC-3pl brothers COP:3pl
 'Ali is the brother of Eebla.'
 b. Ceebla Cali ayay walaalo yihiin.
 'Eebla is the sister of Ali.'

Syntactically these sentences are quite interesting. We have a plural predicate *walaalo yihiin* 'they are brothers' which agrees with the pronominal plural subject which is expressed enclitically on the nominal focus marker *ay-ay* . The anaphoric referent of this pronoun, however, is not a plural or a coordinated NP but rather two simply juxtaposed nouns. The best way to explain

this, I think, is to say that we have a "double subject" here. Something which is not uncommon in the languages of the world and which is usually connected with a possessive expression. The standard example for such a construction is the Japanese:

- (19) zo-wana hana-ga nagai.
 'The elephant has a long trunk.'
 (Lit.: "As for the elephant, the trunk is long.")

Since expressions like (18) are not very frequent in Somali one may wonder why they are so interesting. This will become clearer if we look at the following examples:

- (20) a. Kii aanu ilmadeerka ahayn ayaa yimid.
 DEM 1pl cousins COP:1pl FOC come:3sm
 'My cousin came.'
 (Lit.: "The (one), we were cousins, came.")
- b. Naag aanu saxiib nahay ayaan u tegay.
 woman 1pl friend COP:1pl FOC:1s DIR go:1s
 'I went to a girlfriend of mine.'
 (Lit.: "A woman, we are friends, I went to.")

These sentences are not really problematic since they may be interpreted - at first sight - as a kind of parenthesis. Compare in English: This is Bill, we are colleagues. The same type of sentence may also be used with reciprocal constructions.

- (21) Markaas-aanu dadkii aanu is niqiin u tagnay.
 then -1pl people 1pl REC know:1pl DIR go:1pl
 'Then we went to the people, we knew each other.'

The following examples, however, show that the situation is not as simple as that.

- (22) a. Kii ay seiddigay walaalo ahayeen ayaa yimid.
 DEM 3pl brother in law : my brothers COP:3pl FOC come:3sm
 'The brother of my brother-in-law came.'
- b. Ninkii ay Muxammed jaar yihiin ayaa dhintay.
 man 3pl M. neighbor COP:3pl FOC die:3sm
 'The neighbor of Muhammed died.'

A parenthetical interpretation does not seem appropriate with these sentences. We cannot say: (22b) 'The man, Muhammed are neigh-

bors, died'. What causes the problem is the fact that the relative clause obviously has a plural subject, since the predicate is in the plural, although the nucleus, which is supposed to be the subject in these sentences, is singular.

Reinisch, in his grammar of the Somali language describes this as an "eigentümlichen sprachgebrauch des Somali", which may be translated as either 'peculiar use of' or 'use peculiar of' Somali, and he continues:

"... bei bezeichnungen für einen gegenstand, welcher logisch nur in verbindung mit einem gleichartigen gedacht werden kann, (wird) das zeitwort in den plural gesetzt ..., obwol das subject im singular steht ..." (Reinisch 1903:121).

['... in the case of objects which can only be thought of as being connected with an object of the same kind, the verb is put into the plural ..., although the subject is in the singular ...']

I don't think, however, that it is the connection between the predicate and the subject which causes the trouble here, since - as the examples show - the relative clauses contain a pronominal element, which is in the plural *ay*. But the problem is: where or what is the referent of the pronoun?

Syntactically a sentence like (22a) consists of a main clause: *Kii ayaa yimid*. 'That one came.' and an embedded relative clause: *ay seeddigay walaalo ahayeen* 'they my brother-in-law are brothers'. The pronoun refers now to the subject of the main clause, which is outside the relative clause construction as well as to a nominal constituent within it. This, what we may call "split reference" of the pronoun really seems to be the queer bit of sentences like (22).

This phenomenon is not restricted to symmetric predicates but can also be found with quasi-symmetric and reciprocal constructions. (23a) contains the quasi-symmetric *kulmeen* (see (16)) and (23b) is an extension of (3).

- (23) a. *Ninkii ay gabadhdha ku kulmeen adhiga dhexdiisa*
 man 3pl girl LOC meet:3pl goat/sheep middle:its
ayaa yimid.
 FOC come:3sm

'The man who met the girl amongst the goats and sheep came.'

- (23) b. Hassanka ay Fadumma is jecel yihiin ayaa Xamar u
 H. 3pl F. REC love COP:3pl FOC Mogadishu DIR
 dhoofaysa.
 travel:3sm

'Hassan who loves Fadumma travels to Mogadishu.'

What is the function of such a construction? I think this becomes clear if we compare it to English. If, in English, we want to say something about one of the arguments of a reciprocal construction we can do this only if we give up the reciprocity of the expression. Compare:

- (24) a. Mary and John love each other.
 *Mary who loves each other with John lives in London.
 *Mary who and John love lives in London.
 b. Mary who is in love with John lives in London.

The only way of keeping the reciprocity is by using a parenthetical construction:

- c. Mary, she and John love each other, lives in London.

In Somali, however, we can preserve the reciprocal meaning and can nevertheless say something about one of the arguments. That's essentially what happens in sentences like (22) and (24). With symmetric predicates moreover this construction is more or less obligatory. It seems that Somali is more explicit, more "logical" in this respect than English. The characteristics of this specific syntactic construction are, however, still problematic.

How should we explain it? I think, the best way to do this is by saying that the grammatical subject of a sentence is expressed by the pronominal element which is enclitically bound to the focus marker. Every main sentence in Somali has to contain a focus marker, which may either indicate a noun phrase, in which case it has the form *ayaa* or *baa*, or it may indicate the predicate. In this case it has the form *waa*. If the nominal focus marker stands after a non-Subject NP, the subject is pronominally combined with it. If it stands after the Subject NP, the pronoun is \emptyset . This means, that the subject is usually clearly identi-

fied by the form of the focus marker and it also means that whenever a non-subject is in focus we obligatory have a twofold indication of the subject (provided that there is a nominal subject). First by the nominal expression and secondly by the pronoun, which is combined with the focus marker. This has the consequence that the nominal expression of the subject may be omitted without any concomitant changes in the syntactic structure of the sentence. This indicates that the syntactic status of the nominal subject is somewhat different from the status it has in a language like English or German. It seems to be syntactically independent and may be compared - in some sense - to a nominal apposition, which is also omissible without any subsequent changes in the syntactic structure.

It is the "independency" of the nominal subject which allows the movement of one of the subjects out of the symmetric construction. The consequences of this, especially for a typological description of the Somali language remain to be further investigated.

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