

PLURALITY AND RECIPROCITY IN ENGLISH AND IN FRENCH

Brendan S. Gillon

McGill University

In this paper, I shall show that the semantic facts accruing to the use of plural noun phrases, and reciprocal and reflexive pronouns in French and in English can be brought within the purview of a single analysis, differences between the languages being attributable to independently observable lexical specifics. The analysis presented distinguishes itself from other analyses of plurality and reciprocity insofar as it eschews the postulation of any hidden operators and of any hidden discontinuities, or hidden movement.

It is well known that both English and French plural noun phrases are liable to collective and distributive construals.

(1.1) Bizet and Verdi wrote operas.

(1.2) Bizet et Verdi ont composé les opéras.

Thus, the sentences above are true on the distributive construal but false on the collective one. In contrast, the sentences below are false on the distributive construal but true on the collective one.

(2.1) Russell and Whitehead wrote *Principia Mathematica*.

(2.2) Russell et Whitehead ont écrit *Principia Mathematica*.

It is equally true, but not equally well known, that there are construals intermediate between collective and distributive ones. Consider this sentence:

(3.1) Rodgers, Hammerstein, and Hart wrote musicals.

(3.2) Rodgers, Hammerstein, et Hart ont composé les comédies musicales.

Neither did Rodgers, Hammerstein, and Hart write musicals individually, on their own, nor did they ever collaborate to write musicals. What did happen is that Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote musicals and Rodgers and Hart wrote musicals.

It is also equally true, but not equally recognized, that the variability between collective and distributive construals is evinced by plural noun phrases in almost any syntactic position: subject noun phrase, object noun phrase, indirect object noun phrase, object of a preposition; indeed, even plural noun phrases within noun phrases evince such variability.

(4.1) The children of Mary and of John

(4.2) Les enfants de Marie et de Jean

(5.1) The writing of musicals by Rodgers, Hammerstein, and Hart

(5.2) La composition des comédies musicales par Rodgers,
Hammerstein, et Hart

This fact renders utterly implausible an analysis of the variability between collective and distributive construals of plural noun phrases with a phonetically null distributive operator, as originally hypothesized by Link (1983).

Early generative grammar (Doughtery 1970) sought to analyze English sentences with the reciprocal pronoun as having a derivational ancestor common

with sentences containing pairs of noun phrases, *each N . . . the other*. Although Fiengo and Lasnik (1973) demonstrated the empirical inadequacy of such an analysis, nonetheless, Lasnik, in collaboration with Heim and May (1988), have revived such an analysis.

Their analysis raises several problems. First, it is incompatible with a *prima facie* plausible condition on any potential analysis of the English reciprocal, suggested by Langendoen (1978), namely, that sentences with reciprocal pronouns should be analyzed as a special case of the same sentences with plural noun phrases in their stead. Second, it does not address many of the problems raised for such an analysis by Lasnik himself in Fiengo and Lasnik (1973). Third, it cannot generalize to languages such as French and German, where the relevant pronoun is morphologically simple and liable to both reflexive and reciprocal construals.

- (6.1) Les enfants se regardent.
- (6.2) The children are looking at each other.
- (6.3) The children are looking at themselves.

The analysis presented here, which is inspired by Higginbotham (1981), addresses all of the facts set out above. The essence of the analysis is this. Consider a constituent of the form $[_{SX} \cdots SN_{+PL} \cdots]$. The denotation of XP is not computed directly from the denotation of its constituent NP , but rather indirectly from one of a set values furnished by the NP 's denotation. The paper concludes with a comparison between the approach advocated here and others, such as that of Dalrymple *et al* (1994), Winter (2000) and Beck and Sauerland (2000).

REFERENCES:

- Beck, Sigrid and Sauerland, Uli 2000 'Cumulation is needed: a reply to Winter 2000'. *Natural Language Semantics*: v. 8, pp. 349-371.
- Dalrymple, Mary; Kanazawa, Makoto; Kim, Yookyung; Mchombo, Sam; and Peters, Stanley 1998 'Reciprocal Expressions and the Concept of Reciprocity'. *Linguistics and Philosophy*: v. 21, pp. 159-220.
- Doughtery, Ray C. 1970 'A Grammar of Coordinate Conjoined Structure: I'. *Language*: v. 46, pp. 850-898.
- Fiengo, Robert and Howard Lasnik 1973 'The Logical Structure of Reciprocal Sentences in English'. *Foundations of Language*: v. 9, p. 447-468.
- Heim, Irena, Howard Lasnik, and Robert May 1988 'Reciprocity and Plurality'. *Linguistic Inquiry*: v. 22, pp. 63-102.
- Higginbotham, James 1981 'Reciprocal Interpretation'. *Journal of Linguistic Research*: v. 1, pp. 97-117.
- Langendoen, D. Terence 1978 'The Logic of Reciprocity'. *Linguistic Inquiry*: v. 9, pp. 177-197.
- Link, Godehard 1983 The Logical Analysis of Plurals and Mass Terms. In:

Meaning, Use, and the Interpretation of Language.

Winter, Yoad 2000 'Distributivity and Dependency'. *Natural Language Semantics*: v. 8, pp. 217-236.