The unexplained symmetric reading of reciprocal sentences
Brian Buccola¹, Jeremy Kuhn², David Nicolas²
1. Michigan State University 2. Institut Jean Nicod, CNRS, ENS, EHESS, PSL

- Sentence (1) can be true in a ‘symmetric’ situation:
  Context: The French students hit the Italian students and the Italian students hit the French students.
  (1) The French students and the Italian students hit each other.

- On standard theories of plurality (e.g., Link 1983), conjunction of two pluralities generates a flat plurality.
  • How does the compositional semantics gain access to the two subpluralities that hit each other?

- Landman (1989): a group-forming operator (↑) may apply to plural noun phrases.
  • ↑ [the French students] and ↑ [the Italian students] denotes a plurality containing two atomic groups.

- Schwarzschild (1995): plural arguments are always interpreted relative to a cover of their denotations.
  • This may be any cover that is recoverable from context.

- Schwarzschild: (2) and (3) don’t have a relevant node in the LF for ↑, but they are also true in this context.

  (2) The students from the two countries hit each other.
  (3) The students hit each other.

- Our contribution: An informal survey tests the possible readings of sentences (1), (2) and (3).
  - The attested readings are explained neither by theories like Landman’s nor like Schwarzschild’s.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Landman</th>
<th>Schwarzschild</th>
<th>Reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentence (1)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence (2)</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence (3)</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>×</td>
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The ‘unexplained’ reading

Ambiguity vs. underspecification
- Sentence (3) may be true in the target context, but this does not mean that it is a separate reading.

  • **Ambiguity:** there are situations in which it’s judged true under one reading and false under another.
    (Gillon 2004)

  • **Underspecification:** ‘bat’

  • **Useful test:** ellipsis + negation.

Discussion
- Unlikely that Schwarzschild could explain the data via pragmatics, since (c) sentences were always presented following (a) and (b) on the same screen, so the relevant cover should in principle be highly salient in all cases.

- The reading is not due to group-forming operators, nor to ‘generalized conjunction’ (Partee & Rooth 1983), since it is also available for (2), whose subject is a single noun phrase, without conjunction.

- The explanation cannot be specific to each other, since the same pattern holds across the other contexts, too.

  • **Possible direction for analysis:**
    • Revise Schwarzschild so that choice of covers is restricted to dynamically accessible pluralities.
    • Cumulative readings establish a formal, dynamically retrievable association between two pluralities.

(cf. Brasoveanu 2008, Dotlačil 2011)

References
Dykyma et al. 1996. Reciprocal expressions, and the concept of reciprocity. L&P.