Symmetrical and reciprocal constructions in Austronesian languages: the syntax-semantics-lexicon interface.

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In Austronesian languages, reciprocal relations are most generally marked by productive and highly polysemous prefixes, not by reciprocal pronouns or reciprocal anaphors. These prefixes are reflexes of Proto-Austronesian *maR-/*paR- and, for languages of the Oceanic sub-branch, of Proto-Oceanic *paRi-. Synchronically, the prefixes marking reciprocal relations are a sub-set of some more general union of plural relations (Pawley 1973, Lichtenberk 2000); they also have various other meanings (Middle, intensive, iterative, dispersive, distributive, Bril 2005) which will not be considered in this presentation.

Depending on the semantic properties of the affixed base, these prefixes denote strict symmetry in reciprocal relations and comparison, or weak symmetry in extended reciprocal and other plural relations (collective actions, chaining, mode of grouping, etc.). Their polysemy is disambiguated by speech-parts (nouns, verbs), by verb types (active, stative, motion, property denoting, etc.) and by their inherent (a)symmetric properties.

As an offshoot of symmetrical relations, these prefixes occur as markers of comparison with respect to a *tertium comparationis*, generally a property ('A & B are RECIP-big').

When affixed to bases denoting kinship or social relations, these prefixes express dyadic kinship (Evans 2005) or reciprocal social relations, which can be symmetrical ('they're RECIP-friends', 'they're RECIP-sisters') or asymmetrical ('they're RECIP-mother and daughter'). Languages vary as to which term of the dyad is chosen, i.e. the higher or the lower term.

Variously symmetrical dual or plural relations are thus expressed:
- symmetrical in strict reciprocal relations such as 'they (2) hold each other's hands';
- weakly symmetrical in transitive extended plural relations (i.e. 'they (plur.) dance in a circle holding each other's hands', 'they (plur.) are sitting next to each other on the bench';
- asymmetrical dual or plural relations between oriented entities ('the logs are on top of each other') or in hierarchical dyadic relations ('they're RECIP-father and son'); extended plural relations are based on the union of the same iterated asymmetrical relation ('all the logs are piled on top of each other').

Syntactically, owing to the symmetrical relations between the agent and patient, reciprocal constructions generally have low transitivity, often favouring the evolution of these prefixes into middle markers, though rarely into reflexive markers; when they do, some additional and disambiguating morpheme usually occurs. In Oceanic languages, strict reciprocal relations tend to be expressed by 'heavy' constructions with the prefix and two coreferential pronominal arguments, while weakly, non-strictly reciprocal relations (and Middle constructions) are marked by 'light', one-argument constructions. In Western Austronesian languages, distinct prefixes occur. In Amis, reciprocal *mal(a)-* tends to be used for reciprocal, symmetrical relations, including dyadic kinship and comparison; while the middle-voice marker *ma-* together with obligatory *Ca-* reduplication expresses weakly symmetrical relations. Dual and extended plural reciprocal relations are further distinguished by *Ca-* reduplication and *Ca-CVCV-* reduplication.

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