Can we fight with trees?  
Exploring the territory of reciprocal verbs

Imke Kruitwagen  
i.kruitwagen@uu.nl

Theory

1. Yasmin and Lisa are hugging

Dominant assumption in the literature:
Sentence 1 is TRUE if Yasmin and Lisa both participate in the act of hugging, like in this picture:

This leads to the Requirement of Symmetric Participation

More general: A and B unary entry reciprocal verb → A verb B and B verb A  
In formula: P(x, y) → R(x, y) v R(y, x)

Research Question 1: can unary entry reciprocals occur without symmetric participation and if yes, under which circumstances?

What about other reciprocal constructions? Reciprocal verb + with: discontinuous construction.

2. Damian fights with Quentin

Research Question 2: can discontinuous reciprocal constructions occur without symmetric participation and if yes, under which circumstances?

Hypothesis: (1) Symmetric participation is not a requirement for the acceptance of sentences with a unary or discontinuous entry. (2) Joint intentionality of the agents boosts acceptance of reciprocal sentences in events without symmetric participation.

Experiment 1: unary entry reciprocals

Verbs tested: hug, fight, whisper and collide
Truth value judgement task with videos
Two types of videos, both featuring asymmetric events

Still from video with joint intentionality  
Still from video without joint intentionality

Test sentences:
1. Shirley en Damian hebben geknuffeld/gevochten/gepraat/geroddeld  
“Shirley and Damian hugged/fought/talked/gossiped”
2. Damian heeft met Shirley geknuffeld/gevochten/gepraat/geroddeld  
“Damian hugged/fought/talked/gossiped with Shirley”

Results Experiment 1 and Experiment 2

Significant difference between acceptance rates of
- The unary and the binary entry combined with the joint intentionality video for all verbs except fight (hug 84% vs 41%, collide 69% vs 4%, whisper 95% vs 10%, fight 40% vs 32%)
- Unary entry combined with the joint intentionality video and unary entry combined with the no joint intentionality video for all verbs except collide (hug 84% vs 51%, collide 69% vs 70%, whisper 91% vs 40%, fight 40% vs 19%)
- Shirley fights with Damian and Damian fights with Shirley  
(75% vs 18%)
- Shirley fights/gossips with Damian combined with the joint intentionality video and Shirley fights/gossips with Damian combined with the no joint intentionality video (fight: 75% vs 37%, gossip 89% vs 54%).

Experiment 2: discontinuous reciprocals

Verbs tested: hug, fight, talk, gossip
Truth value judgement task with videos
Two types of videos: similar to Experiment 1

Test sentences:
1. Shirley heeft met Damien geknuffeld/gevochten/gepraat/geroddeld  
“Shirley hugged/fought/talked/gossiped with Damian”
2. Damian heeft met Shirley geknuffeld/gevochten/gepraat/geroddeld  
“Damian hugged/fought/talked/gossiped with Shirley”

Conclusions

1. Symmetric participation is not required but preferential for the acceptance of the unary entry reciprocal (“Shirley and Damian are fighting”)
2. Joint intentionality boosts the acceptance of unary entry reciprocal in an event without symmetric participation, except for collide  
- Joint intentionality not part of the concept collide
3. For the discontinuous construction (“Shirley fights with Damian”) more research is required