

INHERENTLY RECIPROCAL VERBS IN BRAZILIAN SIGN LANGUAGE

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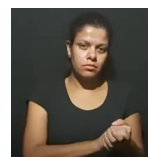
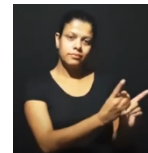
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A reciprocal construction, by definition, “denotes an eventuality that involves reciprocity between its participants” and reciprocal verbs usually bear a specific morphological marking (Siloni, 2008). In this presentation, we aim at describing the phonological specification of verbs that are inherently reciprocals in Brazilian Sign Language and we will argue that not only hand specification (all inherently reciprocal verbs are bimanual) is relevant for the reciprocity reading in these verbs, but also movement type (single or repeated movement vs. alternate movement).

Although reciprocal constructions have been described in different signed languages (Fischer and Gough, 1978; Pfau and Steinbach, 2003; Zeshan and Panda, 2011), most of these descriptions are focused on reciprocalization strategies that take non-reciprocal verbs and by means of different grammatical mechanisms turn the construction into a reciprocal one. In this study we focus on verbs which meanings are inherently reciprocal. In English, for instance, verbs like *meet* necessarily imply reciprocity, in such a way that if A meets B, B also meets A.

From a list of 582 verbs from Lourenço (2018), we extracted all the verbs that were lexical reciprocals. To be considered inherently reciprocal, we followed Rákosi’s (2008) criteria, to wit: i) the verb should be unambiguously reciprocal; and ii) the verb does not require any special marking on its form or any modification of its arguments for the reciprocal relation to hold. We found 18 verbs that meet these criteria and, therefore, can be considered inherently reciprocals. Examples are provided bellow:

- 1) a. IX_a MEET IX_b.
A meets B (B meets A, also true).
- b. IX_{dual} MEET.
 We(dual) meet [each other].
- 2) a. IX_a MARRY IX_b.
 Meaning: A marries B (B marries A, also true).
- b. IX_{dual} MARRY.
 Meaning: We(dual) marry [each other].



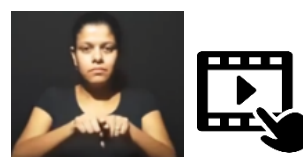
Although lexical reciprocals tend to be analyzed as idiosyncratic, some phonological specifications are interesting among the inherently reciprocal verbs. The first one is that all of them are bimanual. This is interesting, because Pfau and Steinbach (2003) describes that one of the reciprocalization strategy used in DGS (German Sign Language) is to take a one-handed verb and copy its hand specifications into the second hand, resulting in a two-handed derived reciprocal. This strategy is also attested in Libras as a reciprocalization mechanism. So, it is interesting to notice that all inherently reciprocal verbs are bimanual in Libras. The fact that reciprocals usually are two-handed might be due to a semantic mapping (one could call it iconic) between each hand and (at least) a participant of the event. If we consider that each hand would be mapping (at least) one participant, and the hands are coding the very same event (or collection of sub-events, as discussed below), we end up with the observation that these participants share the same properties (e.g. thematic relation) with respect to the event. This is a hypothesis that

should be further elaborated, but it does resemble somehow the fact that hand specifications can display a referential mapping in signed languages, as suggested, for instance, for classifier constructions.

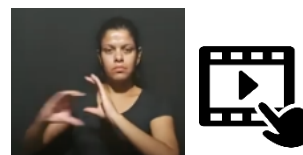
Another interesting observation concerns the movement specifications of these verbs. We identified two different types of movement: single (and repeated) movement and alternate movement. The verbs that have a single (or repeated, but not alternate) movement are [BREAK-UP](#), [COUPLE](#), [SEPARATE](#), [OPPOSE-IN-CHALLENGE](#), [MARRY](#), [MATCH](#), [HAVE-CONTACT](#), [MEET](#), [SHACK-UP](#), [DATE](#), and RESEMBLE. The verbs that have alternate movement are [COMMUNICATE](#), [DIALOGUE](#), [DISCUSS](#), WAR, FIGHT, [NEGOTIATE](#) and ARGUE.

These two groups of verbs seem to code different types of reciprocal events, in respect to symmetry (Siloni, 2012). See the following examples:

- 3) IX_a SHACK-UP IX_b.
A shacks up with B
(B shacks up with A, also true)



- 4) IX_a COMMUNICATE IX_b.
A communicates with B
(B communicates up with A, also true)



In (3), the verb SHACK-UP denotes a singular event that involves A shacking up with B and also B shacking up with A. Therefore, the participants in this event are in a symmetrical relation. On the other hand, in (4), there seems to be a plurality of sub-events, some of which are events of A communicating with B and some of B communicating with A. The reciprocity in (4) is a result of an accumulation of sub-events. The verbs like (3) can be called symmetrical reciprocal verbs (Siloni, 2012) or reciprocal verbs with irreducible symmetry (Dimitriadis, 2008).¹

The fact that reciprocal verbs that are not symmetrical have an alternate movement might not be accidental. Kuhn (2015) notes that, in French Sign Language (LSF), some verbs can have their form changed in order to indicate pluractionality. He calls “/alt/” the morpheme that is pronounced as the “alternating motion of the two hands” (p. 124) and that “entails that a plurality of events vary with respect to their thematic arguments” (p. 126). In the case of the non-symmetrical reciprocal constructions, the alternate movement might be coding the presence of a plurality of sub-events, in which the participants alternate their thematic roles in a reciprocal way. In contrast, the symmetrical verbs have a single movement, which correlates with the fact that they denote a single event in which both arguments have identical (symmetrical) participation. The one exception to this generalization is the symmetrical verb COUPLE that has repeated movement, but this repeated movement is not alternate movement. Probably this repeated movement is related to the atelic reading of this verb, as claimed by Wilbur’s observations on telicity marking in sign languages (Wilbur, 2008).

This relation between type of movement and reciprocal readings (symmetrical vs. non-symmetrical) adds up to the growing body of works that claims that signed languages can make visible some semantic properties that are not usually morphologically realized

¹ “A predicate is irreducibly symmetric if (a) it expresses a binary relationship, but (b) its two arguments have necessarily identical participation in any event described by the predicate” (Dimitriadis, 2008, p. 378).

in spoken languages (Wilbur, 2010; Schlenker, 2018). Moreover, our data seems to align with some theoretical proposals that claim that verb movement is related to event properties of predicate signs. Specially, the Event Visibility Hypothesis (Wilbur, 2008, p. 229) who claims that “in the predicate system, the semantics of the event structure is visible in the phonological form of the predicate sign” and the Bodily-Mapping Hypothesis (Bross, 2020, p. 275) that predicts that the inner aspects (which are located below VoiceP, assuming a Cinquean structure) are expressed “by manipulating the movement path of the verb sign”.

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