

Different as a lexical reciprocal: evidence from co-occurrence with neat mass nouns

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This study is concerned with a particular reading of adjectives like *different* – here called the plural-dependent reading – which has been analyzed as a reciprocal construction (Beck 2000). I present novel data showing that this reading is available with a subclass of lexical mass nouns, specifically neat mass nouns (Landman 2011). On the basis of this data I argue, contra Beck’s original proposal, that the plural-dependent reading cannot involve the adjective taking a covert reciprocal pronoun as a complement. Instead, I propose to analyze it as a principally different type of reciprocal construction, namely one headed by a lexical reciprocal item (Siloni 2012).

Background: I focus here on sentences like (1a), under the reading given in (2). This is a **plural-dependent** reading, in that it arises when *different* modifies a plural count noun, and does not arise when *different* modifies a singular count noun. Thus, while (1b) is grammatical, it lacks the reading in (2). I use # to indicate the unavailability of a plural-dependent reading.

- (1) a. John and Bill were born in different countries.
b. #John and Bill were born in a different country.
(2) John was born in a different country than Bill.

A structural and semantic similarity between plural-dependent *different* and reciprocal constructions was first pointed out by Moltmann (1992), and implemented in a straightforward way in Beck’s (2000) analysis. She considers *different* to be a relational adjective, which can take a covert reciprocal pronoun as its complement. The plural-dependent reading of (1a) is then considered to be functionally equivalent to sentence (3).

- (3) John and Bill were born in countries which are different from each other.

Novel data: In the present study, I show that the plural-dependent reading is available not only when *different* modifies a plural count noun, but also when it modifies certain lexical mass nouns. Specifically, the reading arises when *different* modifies **neat mass nouns**, i.e. nouns with denotations composed of atomic building blocks (Chierchia 1998, Landman 2011). That is the case in the naturally-occurring examples in (4). In contrast, the reading doesn’t arise when *different* modifies other mass nouns, i.e. ones with “atomless” denotations, as in (5).

- (4) a. I mean, we’re alike but we aren’t. **We like different furniture.**
b. I let **my bridesmaids wear different jewelry** to break the matchy-matchy up.
(5) a. #John and Bill ate different meat.
b. #John and Bill drank different milk.

The data in (4) present a challenge to Beck’s (2000) analysis. Taken at face value, her account predicts that plural-dependent readings would only be available when an overt reciprocal pronoun is grammatical. However, a lexical mass noun cannot be the antecedent of an overt reciprocal pronoun, as demonstrated by the ungrammaticality of the sentences in (6).

- (6) a. *We like furniture which is/are different from each other.
b. *I let my bridesmaids wear jewelry which is/are different from each other.

Moreover, Beck’s account predicts that plural-dependent readings would always be equivalent to uses with an overt reciprocal pronoun. I claim that this is not the case. Gillon (1992) observes that sentences with a reciprocal pronoun anteceded by a conjunction of neat mass nouns, can only convey that the reciprocal relation holds between the conjuncts; not between the parts of either conjunct. Thus, sentence (7a) cannot support the state of affairs in (8). In

contrast, I show here that plural-dependent uses of *different* can in fact convey that the reciprocal relation holds within conjuncts, i.e. between the parts of each conjunct. Thus, sentence (7b) does support the state of affairs in (8).

- (7) a. John and Bill bought drapery and carpeting which are different from each other.
b. John and Bill bought different drapery and carpeting.
(8) John's drapery is different than Bill's drapery; John's carpeting is different than Bill's carpeting.

Analysis: The data exemplified in (4), (6) and (7-8) suggest that we should distinguish between plural-dependent readings and uses of *different* with an overt reciprocal pronoun. I propose to view this distinction in terms of an established distinction – usually discussed in relation to verbs – between lexical and periphrastic reciprocal constructions (Siloni 2012, see also Dimitriadis 2008, Bar-Asher Siegal 2015).

My proposal makes two predictions: first, that the contrasts identified above would apply not only to adjectives like *different*, but also to lexically-reciprocal verbs such as *match* and *collide*. Second, that established semantic properties of lexically-reciprocal predicates, e.g. the unavailability of an “I”-reading (e.g. Siloni 2012), would also apply to plural-dependent readings of adjectives like *different*. Both of these predictions are indeed borne out.

Formally, I follow Landman (2011) in assuming that the parts of a neat mass noun's denotation may be accessible during semantic derivation (cf. Chierchia 1998). This straightforwardly captures the availability of plural-dependent readings with neat mass nouns, under various formulations of the semantics of lexical reciprocals (e.g. Dimitriadis 2008, Siloni 2012, Winter 2018).

I stipulate that the incompatibility of lexical mass nouns with reciprocal pronouns, is due to a particular property of reciprocal pronouns. The cases with a conjunction of neat mass nouns rule out a purely structural condition. And the availability of plural-dependent readings without the reciprocal pronoun, point away from an analysis in terms of semantic type mismatch. Instead, I suggest the following: a reciprocal pronoun denotes an operation that applies to an object which is presupposed to be grammatically plural. In support of this proposal, I present an independent case where a similar requirement is needed.

References: **Bar-Asher Siegal, E. A.** 2015. The Semitic templates from the perspective of reciprocal predicates. In J. Audring, F. Masini & W. Sandler (eds.), *Proceedings of the tenth Mediterranean morphology meeting (MMM10) Quo vadis morphology?*, 16–30. **Beck, S.** 2000. The semantics of different: Comparison operator and relational adjective. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 23(2), 101-139. **Chierchia, G.** 1998. Plurality of mass nouns and the notion of ‘semantic parameter’. In S. Rothstein (ed.), *Events and grammar*, 53-103. Springer: Berlin. **Dimitriadis, A.** 2008. The event structure of irreducibly symmetric reciprocals. In J. Dölling, T. Heyde-Zybatow & M. Schäfer (eds.), *Event structures in linguistic form and interpretation*, 327–354. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. **Gillon, B. S.** 1992. Towards a common semantics for English count and mass nouns. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 15(6), 597-639. **Landman, F.** 2011. Count nouns-mass nouns, neat nouns-mess nouns. In M. Glanzberg, B. H. Partee and J. Škilters (eds.), *Formal Semantics and Pragmatics: Discourse, Context and Models. The Baltic International Yearbook of Cognition, Logic and Communication*, 6, 1-67. **Moltmann, F.** 1992. Reciprocals and same/different: Towards a semantic analysis. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 15(4), 411-462. **Siloni, T.** 2012. Reciprocal verbs and symmetry. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*, 30(1), 261-320. **Winter, Y.** 2018. Symmetric predicates and the semantics of reciprocal alternations. *Semantics and Pragmatics*, 11(1).