Review of [The NP-strategy for expressing reciprocity: typology, history, syntax and semantics] by [A. Elitzur, Siegal Bar-Asher]
Staps, C.

SEMITISCH

BAR-ASHER SIEGAL, E.A. — The NP-strategy for Expressing Reciprocity. Typology, history, syntax and semantics. (Typological Studies in Language, 127). John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 2020. (24,5 cm, XVI, 291). ISBN 978-90-272-0478-3. € 105,–.

The cross-linguistic study of reciprocity (expressed for instance by English "each other") has seen a tremendous upswing over the past two decades or so. The Semitic languages have much to offer in this regard. Not only do they display several types of reciprocal constructions, their long stretches of attestation make them ideally suited for diachronic research on reciprocity as well. Unfortunately, studies on reciprocity in Semitic are few and far between. The book under review fills this gap in part by looking at one particular type of construction in great detail. Simultaneously, it makes generalising proposals for further cross-linguistic research.

A secondary goal of the book is "to examine how diachronic processes analyzed in the framework of historical linguistics, and formal semantic analyses of given constructions, can support and enrich one another" (pp. 19–20). The combination of historical linguistics and formal semantics is rare. Yet, in several instances the author shows how the description of diachronic developments can benefit from precise semantic definitions, and, vice versa, how the semantics of a given construction can be illuminated with knowledge of its origins.

The author begins by clarifying which constructions are under consideration. In this respect, he proposes to redefine and redivide the typology of reciprocals. Current scholarship adopts a semantic definition, like that of (mathematically) symmetrical relations, as a starting point, and it divides constructions describing such relations on the basis of formal characteristics. By doing so, no clear division is made between those constructions for which the reciprocal meaning can be compositionally derived and those for which reciprocity is a subcategory of the property actually encoded by the construction. The author proposes to incorporate these elements in a typology of *strategies* for expressing reciprocity, where constructions belong to the same strategy if they "share the same range of interpretations and exhibit a similar relationship between the grammatical components and their semantic properties" (p. 12). Thus, English "each other", German *miteinander* 'with each other', and Dutch *elkaar* 'each other' (from *elk … ander* 'each … other') are of the same strategy even though they are different constructions and have undergone a different degree of univerbation.

Within this typology, the NP-strategy is defined by (a) the semantic definition of *unspecified constructions* and (b) the formal characteristic that the encoding is not through verbal morphology (p. 34). Unspecified constructions denote that for a set of entities (typically, the subject), each member must participate in the relation described by the predicate, but it is immaterial which role each member assumes in that

relation (p. 18). This definition is clearly wider than previous definitions of reciprocity; the goal is to analyse this strategy without assuming that its basic meaning is strong reciprocity (i.e., pairwise symmetry).

Chapter 1 surveys constructions of this strategy in the Semitic languages. The main division here is that between two-unit constructions like Akkadian *aḫum ana aḫim* 'brother to brother' and one-unit constructions like Akkadian *aḫāmiš* 'together, each other'. Several origins for two-unit constructions are discussed, and it is shown that one-unit constructions invariably evolve from two-unit constructions. The author also shows how the components of each two-unit construction work together to denote unspecified constructions. This is not trivial if one considers, for instance, the difference between the existential quantifier *one* in *one another* and the universal quantifier *each* in *each other*.

In chapter 2 the development of one-unit constructions is discussed. The author shows very clearly why the traditional explanation for this change does not apply to (at least) the Semitic languages, and proceeds to give an alternative account: that two-unit constructions are so-called multiple-nominative constructions, of which a left-peripheral element gets reanalysed as the subject. In §2.6 a possible case of the development of a two-unit construction from a one-unit construction in North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic is described. However, since this change may be contact-induced, the impact on the unidirectionality hypothesis for grammaticalization remains limited.

Notably, the author's proposal for the distinction between two- and one-unit constructions allows for one-unit pronouns that have undergone no or only limited phonological reduction. Indeed, in chapter 3 he describes Modern Hebrew *exad … hašeni* 'one … the second', in some contexts, as one-unit constructions. Several tests are put forward to show that in this construction only *hašeni* functions as an anaphor, while *exad* is a frozen form.

§3.5 provides data for a current development in Modern Hebrew by which the preposition is taken out of the construction (*im exad hašeni* 'with one the second'), and, interestingly, the accusative marker *et* may still be interposed (*im exad et hašeni*). In Germanic languages, the parallel change (compare English *one another* and German *miteinander*) became possible due to so-called floating of the quantifier. The same explanation does not apply to this case; if *exad* is a frozen form it is not a quantifier and cannot float. The author does not give suggestions for possible factors driving this development. One obvious idea, that this could be due to contact with languages such as English and German, appears less likely, though not impossible, given that "there are no indications that [these constructions] were produced by non-native speakers of Hebrew" and the fact that several examples are provided by monolingual children. In any case, this is a development to keep an eye on, with potential influences for the analysis of the developments in Germanic as well.

Chapter 4 gives an overview of various reasons for *heterogeneity*: how a language comes to have multiple NP-strategy constructions and what their differences may be, semantically and sociolinguistically. This is illustrated with examples from various stages of Hebrew. It is shown quite convincingly that atypical constructions in Biblical Hebrew may have arisen through contact with Aramaic. However, the discussion of several examples raises questions. For instance, the suggestion that *ḥad ʾet ʾaḥad* 'one ACC one' in Ezekiel

33:30 could be an Aramaic expression (p. 119) seems odd: *ʾt* is not found as the direct object marker elsewhere in Aramaic (Old Aramaic has *ʾyt*; later Western Aramaic varieties have *yt*), and judging from the Aramaic texts in the Bible it is in any case more likely that the Judeans were in contact with an Aramaic variety that used *l-* for direct object marking. Moreover, the idea that the parallel Hebrew construction is a gloss seems to be inconsistent with the fact that the Septuagint does not translate the allegedly Aramaic expression; one would rather expect the Aramaic to be a later addition. Perhaps this verse must be understood as an implicit complaint against a younger generation that does not speak 'proper' Hebrew (cf. Nehemiah 13:24). A second example: the author writes that the Biblical Hebrew construction *ʾîš … rēʿēhû* 'man … his fellow' only appears with plural verbs (p. 116), but it is not clear how cases such as 1 Samuel 14:20, Isaiah 41:6, Ezekiel 38:21, and Ruth 3:14 are handled, nor is it clear what it means that the construction "interfaces between" different stages of development (ibid., n. 3). Note 9 (p. 120), also on plural verbs, does not seem to relate to the example it is attached to, and the fact that Qumran Hebrew uses the 'Biblical' construction on a regular basis (p. 123 n. 14) does not of itself imply an archaizing style (even if this does apply to Mishnaic Hebrew), since the construction may simply still be productive in Qumran Hebrew. Despite these loose ends, the chapter is a useful overview of the different types of heterogeneity that we encounter.

Chapter 5 describes the relationship between one-unit constructions and constructions of the adverbial reciprocal strategy (e.g. English "they reciprocally disavow all intentions of matrimony"; p. 152). It is shown that the adverbial strategy is more restricted in meaning. This is not surprising given that there is strictly less expressive freedom in this strategy. For example, in the NP-strategy one can typically use prepositions to indicate semantic nuances such as the difference between "*with*" and "*against* each other", whereas this is not possible if reciprocity is expressed with a single adverb. See for example Tosefta Sanhedrin 5:3 (Mishnaic Hebrew; (6b) on p. 121): *ʾen dānīn lōʾ ze ʾēt ze wělōʾ ze ʿim ze wělōʾ ze ʿal ze wělōʾ ze bifnêy ze* "they do not judge each other (accusative), nor with each other (*ʿim*), nor concerning each other (*ʿal*), nor in each other's presence (*bifnêy*)", a climactic sequence that cannot be rendered with reciprocal adverbs.

The author then proposes that the Akkadian one-unit anaphor *aḫāmiš* 'together, each other' came to be perceived as a reciprocal adverb (p. 161). (It seems that this development is more appropriately described as a merger, since it involves postulating two original forms: a pronoun and an adverb.) The proposal is corroborated with a similar pattern in Biblical Hebrew. While the overall argument is convincing, the discussion of the individual examples could be more precise. To name a few examples: "(actors) who lift up each other and swing" does not preclude a symmetric reading (p. 160) if we allow symmetry to hold over different eventualities (something the author is attentive to elsewhere); the co-occurrence of the Akkadian Aramaism *ištēn … ištēn* 'one … one' and *aḫāmeš* (a variant of *aḫāmiš*) does not necessarily mean the latter is adverbial (pp. 161–162), since NP-strategy constructions can stand in apposition to each other (as demonstrated for Biblical Hebrew on p. 115, n. 3); at the end of the day the Hebrew pattern described is only truly visible in Jeremiah 36:16 (p. 166)

but one wonders if an emendation should not be preferred (see BHS for a suggestion).

Chapter 6 describes NP-strategy constructions in Aramaic with a particular focus on the North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic dialects. In essence, it does not appear to be much different from a previous paper by the same author.[1] It would have been useful if new insights had been singled out for the reader. One of the more striking observations made is that a two-unit construction can continue to exist alongside a one-unit construction that developed from it. Thus, for Syriac, the two-unit construction is sometimes said to be an archaism, but a similar pattern in NENA (§6.4.1) shows that this need not be the case (somewhat similarly the development proposed in §6.4.3 also presupposes that an older form *ḥaḏḥaḏe (from a repetition of ḥaḏ 'one') continued to exist alongside derivatives like həḏāḏā). A reason for this is not provided, but perhaps the concept of expressive freedom can again be of help (see the comments on Tosefta Sanhedrin 5:3 above): in a fused one-unit expression, the speaker has less freedom to deviate from the prototypical reciprocal situation type, which might cause a two-unit expression to continue to exist alongside it.

The last two chapters concern the semantics of the NP-strategy, using examples from English and Modern Hebrew under the assumption that the findings generalise. Unlike previous approaches which seek to define a strong basic meaning with a range of atypical deviations, the author proposes that NP-strategy constructions are largely unspecified with a very weak basic meaning (chapter 7), which can be strengthened in context (chapter 8). It is here that the diachronic analysis from the first chapters is put to good use: the author shows rather convincingly how the diachronic data favours his semantic analysis (§7.7.3). The book thus lives up to its promise that "the historical development of a given phenomenon may be relevant to its semantic analysis" (p. 24).

The main argument of chapter 8 is that an NP-strategy sentence is interpreted in the weakest way possible as long as it is pragmatically consistent with the context. For instance, in "They seem to have a sexual relationship with each other. *They hug and kiss each other* and sleep in the same bed" (p. 241), the situation described in the second sentence must be symmetrical because if only one person kissed the other the inference ("They seem to have a sexual relationship") would not be valid. However, the identical sentence in a different context, "Children are veritable Petri dishes for germs. *They hug and kiss each other*, sometimes share contaminated cups and/or snacks, …" (ibid.), does not require a symmetrical interpretation: a kiss poses one at risk of infection even if not reciprocated.

This idea is novel (in broad strokes, previous approaches would depart from the strongest interpretation possible rather than the weakest) and the argumentation is convincing. Nevertheless, the mechanism proposed to induce stronger possible interpretations from the basic weak meaning (§8.3.2) still leaves something to be desired. While previous models were based on a categorization of different types of atypical meaning of reciprocals (such as *chaining* in "one after the other", etc.), the strengthened meaning in the proposed

approach is allowed to be anything that entails the basic weak meaning of the NP-strategy construction (p. 251). Several earlier studies[2] point out that the range of such atypical meanings that can be described with a particular construction differs between languages (even if they share some core meaning), so it may be useful if future work could produce a more fine-grained categorization here.

In conclusion, the book under review provides a very thorough analysis of reciprocal constructions akin to English "each other" in the Semitic languages, from both the diachronic and synchronic points of view. The data provide real new insights that require changes to the way these constructions are viewed in typological studies.

While the argumentation is convincing on key points, there are three things that must be kept in mind. An obvious concern, though not principally problematic, is that the book relies primarily on Semitic data — and apart from Semitic, data from non-Indo-European languages is extremely rare. Second, the discussion of particular examples is at times debatable. I have mentioned a few of such instances in the course of this review. Third, when discussing modern languages, examples are frequently taken from internet sources, and while care is taken not to include obvious mistakes, no distinction is made between commonly accepted and borderline acceptable examples. For instance, the sentence "Your algorithm assumes that the players agree on which pieces are bigger than each other" is used as an example of an ordering in which the NP-strategy can be used (p. 211), but this use is not accepted by all speakers (based on my own anecdotal evidence). In fact, the use of "or smaller" in the similar example "We see, therefore, that the sides of similar triangles are bigger or smaller than each other in just the same ratio" (ibid.) suggests that just "bigger than each other" was not acceptable to the source of that sentence either.

There are some typographic errors and other peculiarities,[3] but none of these are too troublesome. The book provides a wealth of data and discusses the state of the art on reciprocity, advancing it on several points with a precise and in-depth analysis. It is therefore to be hoped that it will be an inspiration to many other scholars who intend to study this area, since much work also remains to be done.

Leiden University   Camil Staps
and Radboud University Nijmegen
April 2020

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[1] E.A. Bar-Asher Siegal, 2014. 'Reciprocal NP-Strategies in Jewish Dialects of Near Eastern Neo-Aramaic in Light of Parallel Semitic Constructions', *Journal of Jewish Languages* 2, pp. 49–77.

[2] See the contributions in N. Evans, A. Gaby, S.C. Levinson, and A. Majid (eds.), 2011. *Reciprocals and Semantic Typology*. Typological Studies in Language 98. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam.

[3] These are the more confusing ones: in the glosses (IND for INDF on p. 35, (4a); lack of gloss for conjunctive -*ma* on p. 65 (6); P for PL on p. 73 (26abc); IMP for IPFV on p. 73 (26a; 27b)). Occasionally references to examples and other sections are incorrect (p. 16 n. 7 should refer to n. 16, not n. 6; p. 54 line 2 should refer to II, not I; on p. 78 it is unclear what the references to (13a) and (14d) should refer to; p. 103 should refer to §2.4.3.2, not §2.4.3.4; p. 111 should refer to (24a–b), not (23a–b); on p. 120 n. 9 does not seem to relate to the body of the text; p. 123 should refer to §4.3.2, not §3.4.2; p. 127 under (14): (I) and (II) should be swapped; p. 168 should refer to §5.3, not §5.2.1–2; p. 195 should refer to §6.4.4, not §6.4.2; on p. 256 it is (8), not (18), that is repeated). There are some transcription errors (such as ʾīš for Biblical Hebrew ʾīš "man"), but not where it is fundamental to the argument.