

Conference Paper

Reciprocal Construction in German and Their Meanings Variations

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Abstract

This paper deals with the syntax and semantics of German reciprocal constructions. The reciprocal constructions in German are marked with the presence of a reflexive pronoun, such as *sich* and *uns* as shown in *Karl und Maria lieben sich* 'Karl and Maria love each other'. *Sich* in that sentence is a reflexive pronoun. To determine that one sentence is considered as a reciprocal construction and not reflexive, it can be tested with the technique of substitution, namely with *einander* 'each other /one another'. The substitution process of reflexive pronoun *sich* with *einander* then became *Karl und Maria lieben einander* 'Karl and Maria love each other'. The other way to test it is by using the paraphrase technique. The sentence is divided into two and express it in a different way, such as *Karl liebt Maria und Maria liebt Karl*, 'Karl loved Mary and Mary loved Karl'. This sentence still has the meaning of a reciprocal relationship, but it doesn't contain the construction of reciprocity. Besides pronouns, verbs also play an important role in the German reciprocal construction. Semantically, the German reciprocal constructions indicate the meaning of reciprocal relationships between the subjects of the sentences. From some data, some various meanings were found which indicate the type of reciprocal relationship in German reciprocal construction.

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1. Introduction

The study of reciprocal constructions in German is interesting because they are unique. The reciprocal constructions in German have different constructions compare to other Indo-European languages, for example English. The reciprocal construction is used to express reciprocal relationships between the subjects of sentences. As we have known, in Indonesian, the reciprocal construction is marked by the word *saling* and followed by a verb. As for in English, this construction is marked by verbs and a phrase *each other* as seen in the sentence 'They help each other'.

Syntactically, the reciprocal construction in German is characterized by the presence of a reflexive pronoun in this case *sich* as shown in the sentence a) *Karl und Maria lieben sich* 'Karl and Maria love each other' and b) *Die Kinder bewunderten sich* 'The

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children admire each other'. *Sich* in both sentences is a reflexive pronoun which is obligatory. In addition to using reflexive pronouns, the reciprocal construction in German can also be expressed by using the word *einander* which in English correspond to the words *one another* or *each other*. The word *einander* can be used to eliminate the ambiguity in meaning, because the reflexive constructions also use the same pronouns, so that the difference between reflexive construction and reciprocal construction is clearly seen. The reflexive pronouns in sentence a) can be replaced by *einander* so that it became *Maria lieben einander* 'Karl and Maria love each other'. While sentence b) has an ambiguous meaning, namely first, it can mean that children admire themselves, and second, the children admire each other. Therefore, to state the reciprocal relationship, sentence b) is better to use the construction with *einander* as seen in *Die Kinder bewunderten einander* 'Children admire each other'

In addition to involving pronouns, verbs also play an important role in the German reciprocal construction. At first glance, the difference between reflexive verbs and reciprocal verbs is very slight. From the semantic aspect, reflexive verbs show self-referring activities, while reciprocal verbs show meanings that express a reciprocal relationship between the subject of the sentences. In general, the subject of sentences in this construction consists of at least two people, so that the 'reciprocal' relationship is clearly seen.

Another interesting thing to be discussed regarding the reciprocal constructions in German language is the variation of their meanings, namely the level of reciprocity or the degree of reciprocity that arise from using different verbs and subjects. In this part will be discussed the reciprocal and reflexive constructions of the German language and their constituent elements because both constructions use reflexive pronouns. In addition, it will also be explained the variations of meaning that arise due to the use of different verbs so that it can be predicted the level of reciprocity between the subjects of the sentences. Based on some data, several types of meanings are found that express reciprocal relationship in German reciprocal construction.

2. Reciprocal Construction

As described in the introduction, the reciprocal construction in German is similar to reflexive construction. This is caused by the use of reflexive pronouns to express reciprocal relationships. Kridalaksana (2001) defined the construction as the process and results of grouping language units into meaningful entities. Regarding the reciprocal construction in German, the phrases *helfen sich* in *Karin und Philp helfen sich* 'Karin

and Philp help each other' are the elements that construct the German reciprocal construction. This is supported by the opinion of Bußmann (2002) which states that reciprocity is a marker that illustrates the reciprocal relationship between two or more elements which in terms of language are expressed by reflexive pronouns (*sich / einander*).

Helbig-Buscha (2005) also revealed something more or less the same as Bußmann, that the reciprocal relationship between (at least) two subjects and objects is expressed by reciprocal construction. If the subject is singular, this reciprocal behavior can only be expressed in two sentences, as in the following sentence.

1) *Paul informiert Peter und Peter informiert Paul* 'Paul informs Peter and Peter informs Paul'.

Sentence (1) has a reciprocal meaning, but it is not expressed with reciprocal construction. Conversely, if the subject is plural, shorter sentences are used by adding reflexive pronouns. But the construction has an ambiguous meaning because the reflexive pronouns can be interpreted to have a reciprocal meaning and also have a reflexive meaning. For more details let's see the following sentences.

2) *Paul und Peter haben sich informiert.*

A. *Paul hat Peter informiert und Peter hat Paul informiert.*

B. *Paul hat sich informiert und Peter hat sich informiert.*

'Paul informs himself, and Peter informs himself.'

Sentence 2A has a reciprocal meaning while 2B has a reflexive meaning. In order that the sentence does not have an ambiguous meaning, the words *einander* (one another) can be used, as in the following sentence.

C. *Sie haben einander informiert.* 'They have informed each other'.

3. Reflexive Verbs and Reflexive Pronouns with Reciprocal Meanings

Verbs are the word class (category) that function as predicates in sentences. Verbs can be identified through morphological, syntactic and semantic characteristics. In almost all languages, verbs are the central of a sentence. The components that are present in a sentence are very dependent on the verbs. According to Gross (1988: 84), verbs are the center of a sentence and require complement in order to form a sentence.

Verbs classification of based on syntactic criteria is known from the behavior of the verbs as a predicate, its behavior towards the subject, its behavior towards the object,

its behavior towards the subject and object, and its behavior towards other arguments in the sentence (Helbig-Buscha 2005). An overview of the relationship of verbs between subject and object is divided into two things. First, reflexive verbs, namely the verbs whose reflexive pronouns (*sich, mich, etc.*) refer to the subject of the sentence. The reflexive pronouns are identical to the subject of the sentence. Secondly, reciprocal verbs, namely verbs that indicate a reciprocal relationship between the subject and the object of the sentence (usually this verb is followed by pronouns such as *sich* or *einander*). Häussermann (1992: 66) revealed that there are three basic forms of reflexive verbs, namely 1) partially reflexive verbs, 2) obligatory reflexive verbs, and 3) reflexive verbs that state reciprocal relationship.

Furthermore, reflexive pronouns are often called special forms of personal pronouns. According to Helbig-Buscha (2005:186), reflexive pronouns have special morphological characteristics in the single third-person. The pronoun *sich* does not change shape in terms of numbers or cases. As a marker element in the first and second person, the shape of the pronoun changes according to the number and case.

Personal Pronouns		Case	
<i>Single</i>		Accusative	Dative
I pers	ich	mich	mir
II pers	du	dich	dir
III pers	er / sie / es	sich	sich
<i>Plural</i>			
I pers	wir	uns	uns
II pers	ihr	euch	euch
III pers	sie	sich	sich

Reflexive pronouns that are always used in German reciprocal construction are such as *uns, euch, and sich* which are the reflexive pronouns from the personal pronouns *wir* 'us', *ihr* 'you and' *sie* 'they'. Those pronouns represent a plural subject because the reciprocal construction always refers to a subject consisting of two or more elements.

4. Variation in Reciprocal Meaning

In linguistics, the reciprocal construction does not only have meanings related to positive interactions. König (2008) states that, in addition to having positive interaction meanings such as *sharing, exchange, the gift, hospitality, or cooperation*, reciprocal construction also has meaning related to relationships and symmetric interactions. Some types of

reciprocal meanings are relevant in the study of reciprocal construction. The meanings according to König are 1) positive, weak reciprocity, 2) negative, simultaneous / sequential events, 3) strong reciprocity, 4) generalized reciprocity, 5) pair wise reciprocal, and 6) chaining of relations.

The theories above are used to study the reciprocal construction of German and the variation of meanings arising from the use of different verbs. In addition, a number of test techniques will be used to analyze reciprocal construction syntactically, including the replacement technique and the paraphrase technique.

5. Discussion

Before discussing the meaning, it will first be presented various reciprocal constructions in German. Most reflexive verbs cannot be used to express reciprocal relationships, because reflexive pronouns in this case do not occupy functions as objects. The following reflexive construction cannot be paraphrased into reciprocal construction.

3) *Hans und Peter erholen sich.* 'Hans and Peter are resting.'

A. *Hans erholt sich und Peter erholt sich.* (reflexive)

B. **Hans erholt Peter und Peter erholt Hans.* (reciprocal)

Sentence 3 is a sentence with reflexive construction. There are some reflexive verbs that can form reciprocal construction, but not with the verbs *erholen* 'to rest'. The sentence is expanded to 3A so that the reflexive meaning becomes clearer. While 3B is not acceptable because it cannot form a reciprocal construction.

Reflexive pronouns can always be used for both reflexive construction and reciprocal construction (Gast, 2008). The following sentence can be interpreted as a reflexive construction and also a reciprocal construction, so that the meaning leads to ambiguity.

4) *Karl und Maria sehen sich.*

Sentence 4) can mean reflexively 'Karl and Maria see each other' or has a reciprocal meaning 'Karl sees Maria and Maria sees Karl'. To avoid the ambiguity, the reflexive pronouns can be replaced with *einander*, so that the sentence is *Karl und Maria sehen einander* 'Karl and Maria look at each other'.

In sentences that built through prepositional phrases, the word *einander* is an option that can be used to express reciprocal meanings as indicated by the following sentences.

5) a. *Sie glauben an sich* 'They believe in themselves' (reflexive)

b. *Sie vertrauen sich* 'They are confident' / 'They trust each other'

c. *Sie glauben and einander* 'They trust each other'.

Sentence 5a is purely reflexive, because there is a preposition before the reflexive pronouns. While sentence 5b is ambiguous, that can be either reflexive or reciprocal. The sentence 5c can be ascertained to mean reciprocity because it has been replaced by *einander* to avoid ambiguity.

Some reciprocal constructions in German with various meanings of reciprocity are described as follows.

6) *Die Bewohner dieses Dorfes helfen einander.* 'These villagers help one another.'

Sentence 6 shows the positive interaction between villagers represented by the verb *helfen* 'to help'. According to König, this level of exclusion is called weak reciprocity, because the interaction of helping each other is supposed to be done among the inhabitant.

7) *Paul und Marry hassen einander.* 'Paul and Marry hate each other'.

Reciprocal construction in sentence 7 is a negative interaction between the two subjects of the sentences. That is because of the verb *hassen* 'hate'. This level of reciprocity according to König is classified into simultaneous events.

8) *Die Leute in diesem Haus kennen sich.* 'The People in this house know each other'

The Sentence 8 is in the level of strong reciprocity (strong reciprocity), because people in one house can be ascertained already know each other deeply.

9) *Die Bewohner dieser Inseln haben vorher einander gegessen.* 'The Inhabitant of this island used to eat each other (its members).

The meaning of reciprocal construction in sentence 9 is classified as *generalized reciprocity*. It might be that not all residents at that time did that, but because it is done by most of the inhabitant, so it is generalized.

10) *Viele Menschen auf der Party sind miteinander verheiratet.* 'Many people at the party are married to each other'.

The reciprocal construction in sentence 10 has the meaning of pairwise reciprocal, because the construction is interpreted that guests who come have been married to their own partners, and of course not to all the guest that come.

11) *Die Kisten wurden aufeinander gestapelt.* 'The boxes are stacked on top of each other'.

The meaning described by the reciprocal construction in sentence 11 shows a chain relationship. This relationship does not state reciprocity but *one on another*.

6. Conclusions & Suggestions

From the data of German reciprocal construction can be concluded the following conclusions. 1) The German reciprocal constructions use reflexive pronouns *sich*, *uns* and so on as reciprocal markers. 2) Subjects in reflexive construction must consist of two or more elements. 3) The use of reflexive pronouns in some contexts still raises ambiguous meanings, therefore the reflexive pronouns can be replaced with other lingual unit, namely *einander*. 3) Not all constructions that have reflexive pronouns have reciprocal meanings, depends on the verb used. 4) there are various types of meanings of reciprocity that indicate 'reciprocity', namely (a) weak reciprocity, (b) reciprocity related to simultaneous events), (c) strong reciprocity, (d) generalized relationships, (e) paired relationships, and (f) chain relationships.

Since there are several elements in the formation of reflexive constructions, it is worth examining the semantic types of verbs. The results of the study can answer the question, what types of verbs are classified as reflexive, reciprocal or can be used for both.

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