The role of givenness in Swahili reciprocals

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Cross-linguistic studies have shown that the felicity of sentences with non-canonical word can be explained if information structure is taken into consideration. I present evidence to show that Swahili reciprocal variants can be best explained by looking at the givenness level of reciprocal participants. I argue that the Simple Reciprocal whose participants occur in subject position is used when the referents of a reciprocal event have the same level of givenness, while the Discontinuous Reciprocal, whose participants occur in utterance initial and postverbal positions is used if the referents’ level of givenness is different. Using data from the Helsinki Corpus of Swahili, this analysis investigates these constructions within distinct verb categories, namely, conversation verbs and marry verbs.

1. Introduction

Several factors have been associated with word order variation in diverse linguistic fields such as syntax, the syntax-phonology interface, and pragmatics. In pragmatics, cross-linguistics studies have shown that felicity of sentences with non-canonical word order can often be explained if information structure is taken into consideration. Examples of research which show the relationship between word order and information structure include studies on: subject inversion in Bantu languages (Marten 2011, 2007; Buell et al. 2011; Yoneda 2011; Bresnan 1994; Bresnan & Mchombo 1987); postposing, preposing, and dislocations in English (Birner & Ward 2009, Bresnan 1994, Givon 1983, 1984), preposing of prepositional phrases in Farsi (Birner & Mahootian 1996), and postverbal subject constructions in Italian (Fesenmeier 2009, Suzuki 2009). In the present paper, I explore the role of information structure on word order in Swahili, as informed by a corpus-based analysis. In particular, I investigate how topic, defined as a given referent which a clause or sentence is about (Birner & Ward 2009; Lambrecht 1994; Prince 1981, 1992), may explain word order variation in reciprocal constructions. Prototypical reciprocal constructions denote two subevents that are

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interpretable as a single event or situation that involves more than one participant (Nedjalkov 2007). Though Swahili reciprocal constructions evidently display word order variation that warrants an explanation, they have received little attention in studies related to reciprocals. Moreover, African languages in general, and Swahili in particular, are underrepresented in the study of information structure (Aboh et al. 2007).

In Swahili, participants of reciprocal verbs are expressed via either the Discontinuous Reciprocal construction (DR) (1), or the Simple Reciprocal construction (SR) (2).

(1) [NP1 Juma] [V a-na-pend-an-a] [PP [na] [NP2 Halima]]
   1-Juma 1AGR-PRT-love-REC-FV with 1-Halima
   “Juma and Halima love each other.”

(2) [NP[NPI Juma] [na] [NP2 Halima]] [V wa-na-pend-an-a]
   2 (Juma and Halima) 2AGR-PRT-love-REC-FV
   “Juma and Halima love each other.” (Vitale 1981: 145)

Though the two reciprocal constructions above have distinct syntactic structures, they have the same truth conditions. The PP within which NP2, Halima, is contained in (1) is an “argument-adjunct” because its occurrence is obligatory (Hurst 2010), while both participants in (2) occur as a conjoined NP in subject position. Other studies have discussed the DR as a corresponding syntactic derivative of the SR (Vitale 1981); or the DR as a syntactic strategy to resolve a semantic clash in subject agreement (Mchombo & Ngunga 1994; Mchombo 1993; Mchombo & Ngalande 1980); or the DR and SR as two distinct syntactic structures (Maslova 2000; Seidl & Dimitriadis 2002). Instead, I argue that the two variants of the reciprocal constructions are pragmatically motivated. More particularly, the choice between the DR and SR is motivated by the principle of ‘givenness’ which calls for the organization of information such that old information comes first in a sentence, that is, before new...

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1 Examples in this paper are drawn from the Helsinki Corpus of Swahili; otherwise, citation is given.
2 In the glosses, numerals such as 1 represent nominal class; AGR, agreement; APP, applicative; AUX, auxiliary; CAUS, causative; FV, final vowel; FUT, future tense; INF, infinitive; IMPR, imperative; IMPV, imperfective; LOC, locative; NEG, negation; OM, object marker; PASS, passive; PERF, perfective; PL, plural; POSS, possessive; PRT, present tense; PREP, preposition; PST, past tense; REC, reciprocal; REL, relative marker; SEQ, sequential; SG, singular; STV, stative.
3 Whether the PP is an extraposed argument-adjunct after coordinate deletion of the conjoined NP of a simple reciprocal (Mchombo & Ngunga 1994, following Lakoff & Peters 1969); or a base generated argument-adjunct (Hurst 2010), is a question I intend to further explore in future research.
information (Birner & Ward 2009; Prince 1981, 1992; Givon 1984). Thus, the DR in (1) is used if the NP Juma is more given than Halima in the discourse. On the other hand, the SR construction in (2) is used when Juma and Halima are of equal givenness status.

To explore the role of givenness in Swahili reciprocals, I analyze the information status of participants in reciprocal constructions involving conversation verbs and “marry verbs” (a term borrowed from Levin 1993) using a familiarity model laid out by Prince (1981, 1992) with some insights borrowed from the Centering theory (Walker et al. 1998; Grosz et al. 1995). The data source is the Helsinki Corpus of Swahili (HCS), as well as three pieces of literature, and two newspaper articles.

The organization of this paper is as follows. In section 2, I discuss previous studies on Reciprocal variation across languages. Section 3 is an overview of information structure with a particular focus on the given/new principle. Section 4 lays out the methodology. I then discuss the results intertwined with the discussion in section 5. I conclude the paper in section 6.

2 Studies on variation of reciprocal constructions

Various studies have explained the syntactic, lexical, and morphological realization of reciprocals. In this section, I present an overview of cross-linguistic studies on reciprocal variation based on verb class semantics (Evans et al. 2011; Wierzbicka 2009; Dimitriadis 2008; Alpatov & Nedjalkov 2007) and noun class agreement clash (Mchombo & Ngalande 1980; Mchombo 1993; Mchombo & Ngunga 1994).

2.1 Verb semantics

There has been a recent increase in typological studies aimed at explaining reciprocal construction variation within and across languages. In most of these studies, verb semantics and language specific metalinguistic factors have been claimed to play a role in determining reciprocal variation. In Japanese, for example, the DR and SR are both felicitous for korosi-a-u ‘to kill each other’, (an activity verb) whereas the SR is preferred for aisi-a-u ‘to love each other’ and nikumi-a-u ‘to hate each other’ (stative verbs) (Alpatov & Nedjalkov 2007: 1041). Similarly, in modern Russian, verbs that express emotion via physical contact may allow the reflexive reciprocal affix sja as in obnimat’sja ‘embrace each other’ and celovat’sja ‘to kiss each other’, while the reciprocal interpretation of stative verbs
such as *ljubit* ‘love’ is achieved via the pronoun *drug druga* ‘each other’ (Knjazev 2007). In English, the difference between

(3) a. John and Maria Kissed each other.
   b. John and Maria kissed (Dimitriadis 2008: 379)

is that (3a) may represent an asymmetric event where John kisses Maria at the left chick then Maria kisses John at the right chick, but (3b) is “irreducibly symmetric” in that the event of kissing must be simultaneous (Dimitriadis 2008).

Further, ‘Semantic dimensions’ have been seen to be relevant in explaining reciprocal variants in various languages (Evans et al. 2011). These dimensions include:

(i) Number: In Paiwan, a Taiwanese language *pacun* is ‘look’, *ma-pa-pacun* is ‘look at each other’ and *ma-pa-pacu-pacun* is ‘look at one another (more than two)’.

(ii) Temporal: In Balinese, an Austronesian language, simultaneous reciprocal events are marked with {*ma} prefix, while sequential events are marked by a free reciprocal morpheme *saling*.

(iii) Action/Situation: In English, *they kissed* is reciprocal but *they shaved* is interpreted as reflexive unless the periphrastic phrase *each other* is used.

(iv) Initiation: In Tetun Dili, an Austronesian language, the SR denotes equal responsibility in the initiation of reciprocal events, while the DR indicates that there is a clear initiator. (Evans et al. 2011: 9-12)

The semantic dimension in (iv), that is initiation, is similar to the claim that the DR is the result of an interaction between the semantics of a comitative phrase and the semantics of reciprocal verbs (Hurst 2010; Seidl & Dimitriadis 2002; Maslova 2000). The comitative phrase in the postverbal position implies that there is a primary participant (in preverbal position) and a comitative participant (in postverbal position).

Related to the view that semantic dimensions create variation in reciprocal constructions, is the claim that there is a close relationship between linguistic forms and the culture of a speech community. Under the ‘Natural Semantic Metalanguage’ theory, reciprocal constructions in five languages (English, Russian, Polish, French and Japanese) are analyzed (Wierzbicka 2009). Variation of reciprocal constructions in these languages is argued to be driven by prototypical situations associated with
construal of a particular reciprocal act by native speakers. According to native speakers of English, for example, the prototypical reciprocal situation in *they kissed/embraced/hugged* is simultaneity of an action that is viewed as one. In contrast, the events of reciprocal construction as in *they hit/kicked/accused each other* are construed as separate sequential actions.

However, the restrictions on reciprocal variation due to verb class semantics as is the case in English, for example, do not impact on the grammaticality of Swahili reciprocal constructions (Dimitriadis 2008; Hurst 2010). While the DR, for example is restricted to reducibly symmetric predicates in languages such as Greek and Hungarian, Swahili allows both the DR and SR for reciprocal symmetric events such as *kiss* as well as reciprocal sequential events such as *kick each other*.

### 2.2 Noun class and agreement clash

It is well known that Bantu languages have a noun class system which demands an agreement relationship between nouns and other lexical categories such as verbs and adjectives. In Bantu languages such as Chichewa and Ciyao, it has been claimed that the SR is the unmarked reciprocal construction (Mchombo & Ngunga 1994; Mchombo 1993; Mchombo & Ngalande 1980). On the other hand, the DR is used when reciprocal participants belong to distinct noun classes to avoid an agreement clash between the coordinate structure and the subject agreement marker on the verb. This is illustrated in the following examples.

(4) a. mtengo ndi munthu ?-na-gwer-ana
    tree and person ?-PST-fall on-REC

   b. mtengo u-na-gwer-ana ndi munthu
      tree AGR-PST-fall on-REC with person
    ‘A tree and a person fell on each other.’
      (Mchombo & Ngalande1980: 574)

In (4), mtengo ‘tree’ and munthu ‘person’ belong to two distinct noun classes (not specified by authors). The DR in (4b) is therefore used to avoid a semantic clash of the subject coordinate structure in its agreement relationship with the subject marker (4a). This line of argument predicts that the SR is never used for reciprocal participants whose noun classes are different, and that DR is reserved for NPs that belong to distinct nominal classes.
However, it is attested that Swahili SR constructions can involve participants belonging to different nominal classes. This is illustrated in (5).

(5) ulimi wa moto na sigara
     11Tongue of fire and  9cigarette
     vi-ka-kut-an-a njia-ni.
     8AGR-SEQ-meet-REC-FV way-LOC
     ‘The tongue of fire and the cigarette met midway,’

In (5), the reciprocal construction describes the ‘meeting’ of fire from a gas lighter with a cigarette. The noun *ulimi* ‘tongue’ belongs to class 11, while *sigara* ‘cigarette’ belongs to class 9. In this instance, the preferred agreement morpheme on the verb is that of class 8, *vi-* in which most nouns thought of as ‘things’ belong (cf. Contini-Morava 1996). Therefore, difference in noun class does not seem to be a factor for predicting Swahili DR and SR variants.

I have explained above that verb semantic, and noun class agreement clash cannot account for the Swahili reciprocal variants. Here, I argue that Swahili reciprocal variation can be best accounted for from the perspective of information organization in which the pre or postverbal position of reciprocal participants is a consequence of the givenness status of discourse elements. In the next section, I present an overview of information structure with some bias on the given/new principle, and the notion of topic whose determination is based on algorithms stipulated by the Centering Theory (Walker et al. 1998; Grosz et al. 1995).

### 3 The given/new principle

Though word order variation in Bantu languages have been explained in terms of restrictions imposed on information organization, reciprocal variation is yet to be studied under the auspices of information structure. In this paper, I argue that the syntactic positions of the participants in Swahili reciprocal constructions can be best explained in terms of which referent the preferred center of focus (or topic) is due to its givenness status in the relevant discourse. Thus the DR is used if one of the reciprocal participants has a higher givenness status. In the event that the reciprocal participants have equivalent givenness statuses, the SR is used.

The given/new principle has been used to explain the felicity of sentences that seem to be semantically odd if out of discourse context (Birner & Ward 2009; Prince 1981, 1992; Halliday 1967). The principle of givenness
predicts that, “all other things being equal, a speaker will prefer to place information that they take to be familiar to their addressee earlier in a sentence” (Birner & Ward 2009: 1168). From this point of view, givenness invokes the notion of ‘topic’. Topic is what has been evoked in discourse, directly or indirectly, or what is assumed to be familiar from mutual knowledge (Birner & Ward 2009). The given/new principle, as I will explain, turns out to be relevant in explaining Swahili reciprocal variation.

Givenness can be understood by making reference to ‘assumed familiarity’ explained from the hearer and discourse perspectives of information status as shown in table 1 (Prince 1981, 1992; Birner & Ward 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse entity</th>
<th>Information status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situationally Evoked (SE)</td>
<td>Discourse Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textually Evoked (TE)</td>
<td>Hearer old, Discourse old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unused</td>
<td>Hearer old, Discourse new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferrable</td>
<td>Hearer new, Discourse old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand New</td>
<td>Hearer New, Discourse new</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Givenness of discourse entities*

According to Prince (1981), Situationally Evoked entities (including discourse participants) are within the spatial-temporal space of the interlocutors and are therefore already on the discourse counter. Textually Evoked entities are discourse old as well as hearer old since they have an activated status in the discourse model. They are accessible to the discourse participants because of their anaphoric relationship to previously mentioned referents. At the other extreme, ‘Brand New’ discourse entities are newly introduced referents in the discourse model. They are discourse new and hearer new entities whose activation may require the use of a clearly identifiable referential expression such as a full name. ‘Inferrable’ is a discourse entity which is hearer new but whose familiarity can be inferred from a previously evoked entity hence its status as a discourse old entity (Birner & Ward 2009). An example here is the fact that the presence of a driver can be inferred from the mention of a bus. ‘Unused’ entities are discourse new but hearer old due to mutual knowledge as are referents like *President Barack Obama, the sun, and your wife/husband/son/daughter*.

The example in (6) illustrates how the familiarity model can be helpful in understanding Swahili reciprocal constructions. Sentence (6a) is a request
for information about the whereabouts of a character in the source novel, *Sulubu* (bolded). Sentence (6b) is the hearer response implicating that *Sulubu* had disagreed with his landlord and therefore had moved.

(6) a. Na-i-tafuta nyumba ya bwana 1SG.PRT-9OM-find 9house of man mmoja a-itw-a-ye Sulubu. one 3SG-named-FV-REL Sulubu ‘I am looking for the house of a man named Sulubu.’

b. [NP1 Sulubu Ngufumali] [V a-me-kosana] [PP[P na] 1Sulubu Ngufumali IAGR-PERF-disagree with [NP2 tajiri mwenye shamba]] richman owner field ‘Sulubu Ngufumali disagreed with the landlord.’ (Mohamed 1976: 93)

c. [#[NP2 tajiri mwenye shamba][V a-me-kosana][PP[ na] [NP1 Sulubu Ngufumali]] ‘The landlord has disagreed with Sulubu Ngufumali’

d. [#[NP2,1 tajiri mwenye shamba na Sulubu Ngufumali] [V wa-me-kosana]

While it is syntactically possible to have either the NP *Sulubu Ngufumali* (6b) or *tajiri mwenye shamba* (6c), or both (6d) occupy the subject position, the Textually Evoked NP, *Sulubu Ngufumali*, is preferred because of his givenness status, hence, the infelicity of (6c) and (6d).

Restrictions on which participant can occupy the pre or postverbal position in a reciprocal construction can further be clarified by the notion of topic as described under the Centering theory (Grosz et al. 1995; Walker et al. 1998). The central claim under this theory is that each utterance in a discourse segment has a topic referent, also referred to as the ‘backward looking center’. Several parameters have been used to investigate which of the referents in a preceding utterance, *U*<sub>n-1</sub>, is the most salient and therefore functions as the topic of the following utterance, *U*<sub>n</sub>. Salience “defines the degree of relative prominence of a unit of information, at a specific point in time, in comparison to other units of information” (Chiarcos et al. 2011). In this paper givenness, as explained above, will be the main measure of salience in order to explain the Swahili reciprocal SR and DR variants. In (6a), *U*<sub>n-1</sub> in Centering terms, *Sulubu* is more salient than *tajiri mwenye shamba* since he is an evoked entity, hence, *Sulubu* is the preferred topic element in (6b), *U*<sub>n</sub> in Centering terms. Topic elements
occur in the left peripheral position while non-topics occur in the right peripheral position of utterances.

4.0 Methodology

There has been an increased emphasis on language studies whose results and generalizations are based on contextual analysis of linguistic forms. To this end, the primary source of data for the present study is the Helsinki Corpus of Swahili (HCS) which has 14 annotated corpora with a total of 12.5 million words. In the HCS, concordance searches of the relevant data are done via inbuilt software, namely Lemmie 2. The corpora contain current Swahili newspaper articles, excerpts of literary texts, and education and science material written in the mid to late 20th century. A few other examples were taken from three Swahili literary texts published in the last quarter of the 20th century and two newspaper articles written in the first decade of the 21st century.

Using reciprocal predicates belonging to two distinct verb categories as search words, 84 reciprocal constructions were displayed in context in the Helsinki Corpus of Swahili. The analysis involved displaying reciprocal constructions in concordance lists and displaying the wider context of the constructions. Each reciprocal construction was then categorized as simple reciprocal (SR) or discontinuous reciprocal (DR) and coded for the verb semantic category (conversation/marry). The form of the referring expressions representing the reciprocal participants gave clues as to their givenness status in the discourse. A pronominal NP, for example, meant that the referent in question had been previously mentioned in the discourse. The realization of the reciprocal participants—whether a full noun, a pronoun, or zero—was therefore also recorded.

4.1 The verbs

As mentioned earlier, studies on reciprocals have mainly focused on verb semantics to explain reciprocal variation across languages. In this subsection, I briefly discuss the semantic categorization of conversation verbs and marry verbs using Vendler’s (1957) time aspect. Furthermore, these verbs differ in the way they express their lexical arguments. Swahili conversation verbs in their ‘basic’ form are intransitive while Swahili marry verbs are transitive. Further, conversation verbs are inherently reciprocal because they satisfy the reciprocal requirement of having more

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4 “Basic” form of a verb in this paper will mean a verb without inflectional or derivational affixes.
than one participant with both the semantic roles of agent and patient (Nedjalkov 2007). Thus conversation verbs such aszungumza ‘converse’ are interpreted reciprocally although they do not have a reciprocal suffix -an- in their morphology. Those with the reciprocal morpheme such as gomb-an-a ‘quarrel’ have been lexicalized with the reciprocal morpheme –an- as part of their structure. No reciprocal denotation is expressed by marry verbs unless the reciprocal morpheme –an- is attached to the verb.

According to Vendler (1957), the use of tense in verbs is not limited to the concepts of future, present and past; but may also presuppose other possible distinctions based on the notion of time. There are verbs that can take continuous tense and verbs that may not take continuous tense. Verbs that take continuous tense but are not bounded in time such as run are ‘activities’ while those that “proceed towards a terminus” (Vendler 1957: 146) such as running a mile are ‘accomplishments’. On the other hand, verbs that lack continuous tense and occur within a single moment in time such as win a race are ‘achievements’, while verbs that are durative and unobservable such as love are ‘states’.

According to Vendler’s (1957) aspectual considerations, conversation verbs are activity verbs because they predicate observable and atelic events. Examples of conversation verbs are zungumza ‘converse’, gombana ‘quarrel’, ongea ‘talk’, and bishana ‘argue’. The activity of quarrelling is realized as soon as a quarrel starts, and no matter what time the quarrel stops, the following proposition will be true:

(7) Wa-li-gomb-an-a
     3PL-PST-quarrel-REC-FV
     ‘They quarreled.’
     (Taifa Leo, October 18, 2010)

Conversation acts as in (7) are observable and have no specific endpoint. Notice that conversation verbs can hardly be expressed as accomplishments because the participants may not know how long a quarrel will take, for example.

Marry verbs involving physical contact such as kumbatia ‘embrace’ and busu ‘kiss’ are achievements since they are non-durative. It can be said that two participants of a kissing or embracing act, for example, have realized the act as soon as they kiss or embrace. One indication that a verb belongs to the semantic class of achievements is that the present tense can be used as “historic present or as indicating immediate future” (Vendler 1957: 47) as in (33):
In (8), the act of embracing is not fully realized but the embracing is just about to happen. However, the telicity of marry verbs involving emotions such *oa* ‘marry’ and *penda* ‘love’ depend on a full consideration of the surface argument structure of the verb in question. These verbs may be analyzed as achievements or states. The following sentence is ambiguous between the achievement and stative aspect of the verb *oa* ‘marry’.

> (9) Karibu tu-ta-o-an-a
> Soon 1PL-FUT-marriage-REC-FV
> ‘We will soon get married.’
> (Robert 1968: 89)

One interpretation is that the verb *oa* ‘marry’ in (9) is in achievement terms since the ‘married’ status begins as soon as the couples are pronounced a husband and wife. Sentence (9) may also refer to the stative terms of the verb *oa* ‘marry’ where the couples actually stay together as a husband and wife.

The specific frequencies for the predicate verbs of the reciprocal constructions used in the analysis are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation verbs</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Marry verbs</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>zungumza</em> ‘converse’</td>
<td>19</td>
<td><em>o-an-a</em> ‘marry’</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ongea</em> ‘talk’</td>
<td>15</td>
<td><em>pend-an-a</em> ‘love’</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>bishana</em> ‘argue’</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>Ach-an-a</em> ‘divorce’</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kosana</em> ‘disagree’</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>kumbati-an-a</em> ‘embrace’</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Predicate verbs of reciprocal constructions used in the analysis*

### 4.2 Coding the participants’ givenness

Coding for information status of reciprocal participants was not an easy task and in some cases required displaying long stretches of text before or after the reciprocal construction in question. The contextual analysis was aimed at identifying the start point and endpoint of the discourse segment within which the reciprocal construction was contained. Each discourse

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5 This example was verified by Mwinyihaji Said, a Swahili native speaker.
text has segments with a central (topical) participant whose salience can be signaled by the subject position and pronominalization (Grosz et al. 1995). Discourse segments in a discourse text are linked via referring expressions and can be identified through orthography, that is, division of texts into paragraphs, forms of referring expressions, cue words and so on (Walker 1989).

After displaying the relevant reciprocal construction in the postulated discourse segment (DS), the next task was tracking the discourse participants so as to determine their givenness status. This is illustrated in the following example (bracketing shows the various forms of the reciprocal participants in the stipulated DS, bolding shows their first mention within the DS, and numbers labels the participants).


The following is word gloss of the text excerpt above.

(a) Baada ya ku-subiri kwa muda, [Sakina1]
After PREP INF-wait for time Sakina
a-li-pat-a basi la ku-[m1]-rud-ish-a
1AGR-PST-get-FV bus PREP INF-OM-return-CAUS-FV
Dar-es-Salaam Dar-es-Salaam
‘After waiting for some time, Sakina boarded a bus to Dar-es-Salaam.’

(b) [A1]-li-po-fika Dar-es-Salaam [a1]-li-kwenda
3SG-PST-REL-arrive Dar-es-Salaam 3SG-PST-go
to friend 3SG.POSS Mwananyamala
‘When she (Sakina) arrived at Dar-es-Salaam, she went to her friend at Mwananyamala.’
5 Results and discussion

Using reciprocal constructions involving the selected verbs, I assessed the relevance of verb semantics on the variation of Swahili reciprocals. Further, each reciprocal construction was displayed in its wider context to code the reciprocal participants for givenness in order to find out the role of givenness in the Swahili DR or SR variants. I discuss these two variables in two subsections.

5.1 Reciprocal variation as a function of verb semantics

Interesting variations in the frequencies of the DR and SR constructions involving marry verbs and conversation verbs are observed in the Helsinki Corpus of Swahili. The following graph summarizes the frequencies of reciprocal variants for each of the two selected verb semantic categories.

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6 The omission of a lexical subject is a common phenomenon in Bantu languages including Swahili (Bresnan & Mchombo 1987, Demuth 1990, Zeller 2008). In the event that an overt lexical subject is omitted, I assume that prefixes such as wa- (10g) are pronominal subject prefixes (cf. Keach 1995; Bresnan & Mchombo 1987; Givon 1976).
Of the 42 reciprocal constructions with conversation verbs as predicates, 31 were discontinuous constructions while 11 were simple reciprocal constructions. On the other hand, of the 42 reciprocal constructions with marry verbs as predicates, 27 were simple reciprocals while 15 were discontinuous reciprocals. Notice the proportional differences on the bar graph. The difference in the DS and SR proportions of conversations verbs was significant, $X^2 (1, N=42) = 9.52$, $p < .005$, but those of marry verbs was not, $p>0.05$. The overall frequency difference, however, was significant, $X^2 (1, N=84) = 10.81$, $p < .005$.

The proportional differences between the SR and DR indicate that it is highly likely for a reciprocal construction whose predicate is a conversation verb to be realized as a discontinuous reciprocal. On the other hand, it is likely for a reciprocal construction whose predicate is a marry verb to be realized as a simple reciprocal. This difference may be due to the tendency of speakers to encode the semantics of initiation in reciprocal verbs (cf. Hurst 2010; Maslova 2000). In the following example, the speaker invites a guest of honor to address an audience via a discontinuous reciprocal (bracketed) involving the conversation verbzungumza ‘converse’.

### Table 3: Frequencies of DR and SR constructions based on verb semantics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Semantic Category</th>
<th>Discontinuous Rec</th>
<th>Simple Rec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>conversation</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marry</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Frequencies of DR and SR constructions based on verb semantics.
In (11), a discontinuous construction is used in a context where both participants, the guest and the citizens, are Situationally Evoked. Here, the preverbal position of the guest, realized as a pronominal NP in the infinitive clause, represents him as the main instigator of the conversation while the citizens are a comitative participant (Maslova 2000). Notice that a prepositional applicative can also be used in which *wananchi* ‘citizens’ can be realized as a direct object.

In (12), there is a clear instigator of the conversation event and a passive participant.

Further, marry verbs encode the semantics of initiation via a transitive construction as illustrated in (13).

In the source novel, the girl in (13) runs towards a woman whom she parted from some months ago. The transitive form of the verb, *kumbatia* is used to indicate that the girl is the initiator of the embracing act. The two women stay in this situation for some time. The narrator uses the following simple reciprocal construction to describe this moment.

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(11) Mwenyekiti a-li-m-karibish-a mgeni
Chairman 1AGR-PST-OM-invite-FV guest
[a-zu-ngumz-e na wananchi]
3SG-converse-IMPR with citizens
‘The chairman invited the guest to address the citizens.’
Lit: ‘The chairman invited the guest to converse with the citizens.’

(12) …[a-zungumz-i-e wananchi]
…3SG-converse-APP-IMPR citizens

(13) Msichana a-li-kimbi-a
Girl 1AGR-PST-run-FV
a-ka-m-kumbati-a.
1AGR-SEQ-OM-embrace-FV
‘The girl ran and embraced her.’

(14) Wa-li-kumbati-an-a kwa muda bila
3PL-REC-PST-embrace-REC-FV for time without
ku-sem-a neno.
INF-say-FV word
‘They embraced (each other) for sometime without saying a word.’
In (14), the embracing act is presented as reciprocal. Thus the semantics of initiation in reciprocal constructions is not reserved for discontinuous constructions as has been suggested (Maslova 2000; Hurst 2010). Notice that a simple reciprocal is used above despite the presence of a clear initiator (the girl) of the embracing act. Here, a better explanation for the use of the simple reciprocal is that the two reciprocal participants (the girl and the pregnant lady) are given at this point in time, hence, the plural pronominal NP in subject position.

It should be emphasized that the differences in the frequencies of the SR and DR constructions for the two verb categories cannot be accounted for using verb semantics alone. More importantly, the data indicates that Swahili allows both the SR and DR when conversation verbs and marry verbs are used in reciprocal constructions. This is illustrated in following examples.

(15)  
a. Wandema a-li-kuwa a-me-pend-an-a  
1-Wandema 1AGR-PST-AUX 1AGR-PERF-love-REC  
na Rich  
with Rich  
“Wandema and Rich were in love with each other.”

b. Wandema na Rich wa-li-kuwa  
2[Wandama and Rich] 2AGR-PST-love-REC-FV  
w-me-pend-an-a  
2AGR-PERF-love-REC-FV  
“Wandema and Rich were in love with each other.”

(16)  
a. Deo a-li-zungumz-a na waandishi wa habari  
1Deo 1AGR-PST-converse-FV with reporters of news  
‘Deo and the news reporters conversed.’  
(Habari Tanzania 01 December, 2008)

b. Deo na waandishi wa habari wa-li-zungumz-a  
2[Deo and reporters of news] 2AGR-PST-converse-FV  
‘Deo and the news reporters conversed.’

Example (15) shows that marry verbs such as *penda* ‘love’ allow both the the DR (15a) and SR (15b). Similarly, the DR (16a) and the SR (16b) are felicitous when used with conversation verbs such as *zungumza* ‘converse’. I now discuss the relevance of the given/new principle in accounting for the Swahili reciprocal variants.
5.2 Reciprocal variation as a function of referents’ givenness

Based on the display of reciprocal constructions in their wider context, the givenness of reciprocal participants was coded as either ‘same’, or ‘different’. ‘Same’ meant that the participants’ givenness status was equivalent, for example, both participants are Textually Evoked. On the hand, ‘different’ meant that the givenness status of the participants was not equivalent, for example, one participant Textually Evoked while the second participant Brand New. The following graph summarizes the proportions of discontinuous reciprocal and simple reciprocal constructions in situations where the givenness status of the reciprocal participants was different, and in situations where the givenness status of the reciprocal participants was different.

![Graph showing proportions of discontinuous reciprocal and simple reciprocal constructions]

Table 4: Frequencies of reciprocal variants as a function of familiarity

Interestingly, all reciprocal constructions (29) whose participants’ givenness status was different were realized as discontinuous reciprocals. On the other hand, of the 55 reciprocal constructions whose participants’ givenness status was the ‘same’, 38 were simple reciprocals while 17 were discontinuous reciprocals. The proportional difference between the simple reciprocals and discontinuous reciprocals was significant, \(X^2 (1, N=55) = 8.09, p < .005\). Overall, the proportional difference of the SR and DR as a function of givenness was significant, \(X^2 (1, N=84) = 33.85, p < .001\).

The results indicate that it is highly probable that a discontinuous reciprocal will be used for referents with different levels of givenness.
When the givenness level was the same, most of the reciprocal constructions were simple reciprocals. I now present examples of DR and SR constructions from the Helsinki Corpus of Swahili. I argue that the Swahili DR and SR variants are a function of reciprocal participants’ givenness status.

In the following example, the participants of a conversation verb *ongea* ‘talk’ are expressed via a DR.

(17) Siku ya kwanza ku-fik-a kwa mjomba
Day of first INF-arrive-FV at uncle
wake, a-li-m-kut-a [Rosa a-me-ka-a
his, 3SG-PST-OM-find-FV Rosa 1AGR-PERF-sit-FV
a-ki-onge-a na Bigeyo, mke wa Ndalo] 1AGR-IMPV-talk-FV with Bigeyo, wife of Ndalo
‘The first day he arrived at his uncle’s place, he found Rosa sitting, talking with Bigeyo, Ndalo’s wife.’
(Kezilahabi 1971: 7)

In (17) the relevant DR is an embedded clause (bracketed) that complements the V *a-li-m-kuta* ‘he met her’. The conversation verb in the embedded clause is *ongea* ‘talk’. The participants in the conversation are Rosa and Bigeyo; Rosa occupies the subject position of the embedded clause, while the second participant, Bigeyo, occurs postverbally. As noted earlier, while it is syntactically possible to have either Rosa or Bigeyo occupy the subject position, the more familiar NP is preferred in the subject position. In (15), Rosa, the main protagonist in the source novel, is a Used (familiar) entity in the DR. On the hand, Bigeyo is a Brand New entity mentioned for the first time in the text, hence, a parenthetical remark *mke wa Ndalo* ‘Ndalo’s wife’ just after her name to clarify her identity. Consequently, Rosa occupies the subject position, while the relatively less given NP Bigeyo occurs postverbally. The same can be said for the DR in (18) whose predicate is a marry verb.

(18) Matika mwenyewe a-li-kuwa
1Matika herself 1AGR-PST-AUX
a-me-pend-an-a na Chonya],
1AGR-PERF-love-REC-FV with Chonya
mvulana mmoja ambaye a-li-pat-a
man one COMP-REL 3SG-PST-get-FV
ku-som-a na-ye.
INF-read-FV with-3SG
‘Matika herself was in love with Chonya, a young man whom she once schooled with.’
In (18), *Matika* occurs in the preverbal position of the DR while the postverbal position is occupied by *Chonya*, a young man who schooled with *Matika*. The use of the reflexive *mwenyewe* ‘herself’ indicates that *Matika* in this DR is given, while the young man is a Brand New entity, hence the parenthetical remark *aliyepata kusoma naye* ‘whom she schooled with’ to establish his identity in the discourse segment.

When the participants’ level of givenness is the same, the SR is used. Example (19) is a discourse segment with a reciprocal construction in (19d) whose participants are introduced in (19a-b). The reciprocal verb in (19d) is *zungumza* ‘converse’.


   That lady 1AGR-PST-enter-FV
   That lady entered.

b. A-li-po-ingi-a tu,   Mkuu wa Wilaya
   3SG-PST-when-enter-FV just head of district
   a-li-siki-k-a a-ki-sem-a
   1AGR-PST-hear-STV-FV 1AGR-IMPV-say-FV
   “Aa Pili, karibu.”
   “Oh Pili, welcome.”
   As soon as she entered, the District Commissioner was heard saying “Oh Pili, welcome in.”

   Door 3AGR-PST-close-PASS-FV
   ‘The door was then closed.’

d. Mwanzo-ni wa-li-kuwa wa-ki-zungumz-a
   First-LOC 3PL-PST-AUX IPL-IMPV-converse-FV
   kwa sauti ya chini
   PREP voice PREP low
   ‘Initially, they were conversing in a low tone.’

The first participant of the reciprocal construction in (19d) is introduced in the discourse segment in (19a) via the adnominal demonstrative *yule msichana* ‘that lady’. The second participant of the reciprocal construction, *Mkuu wa Wilaya* ‘the District Commissioner’, is introduced
in the discourse segment in (19b). At the point where the reciprocal construction is presented (19d), both participants have the same givenness status hence the pronominal subject prefix \textit{wa-} in (19d) indicating that the reciprocal participants are identifiable.

Similarly, reciprocal participants involving marry verbs can be expressed via a simple reciprocal. Example (20) presents a discourse segment with a SR construction whose predicate is the verb \textit{kumbati-an-a} ‘embrace’. The reciprocal construction is preceded by an emotional farewell address by the teacher to the student.

\begin{quote}
\text{(20)} Mwalimu na mwanafunzi wa-li-kumbati-an-a.  \\
\hspace{1em} 2[teacher and student] 2AGR-PST-embrace-REC-FV  \\
\hspace{1em} ‘The teacher and the student embraced (rec.)’
\end{quote}

At the point where the reciprocal participants embrace, both the \textit{mwalimu} ‘teacher’ and the \textit{mwanafunzi} ‘student’ are equally familiar to the reader, hence use of the SR.

6. Conclusion

Cross linguistic studies have shown that verb semantics is a factor in the variation of reciprocal constructions (Evans et. al. 2011; Hurst 2010; Wierzbicka 2009; Nedjalkov 2007). Whether verb semantics have a role on the variation of Swahili reciprocal constructions is a question that has been explored in this paper. I focused on two distinct verb categories: Swahili marry verbs such as \textit{oa} ‘marry’ and Swahili conversation verbs such as \textit{zungumza} ‘converse’ to find out if verb semantics impact on Swahili reciprocal variation as has been established in other languages such as English.

Data presented in this paper has shown that Swahili conversation verbs can allow the expression of the participants via both DR and the SR. Similarly, participants of reciprocalized marry verbs such as \textit{kumbatia} ‘embrace’ and \textit{penda} ‘love’ can both be expressed via DR and SR constructions. Furthermore, the DR and SR proportions of marry verbs were statistically insignificant, indicating that verb class semantics cannot be applied across the board as a variable in Swahili reciprocal variation.

Further, in other Bantu languages such as Chichewa and Ciyao, the discontinuous construction, it is argued, is a reciprocal construction that is reserved for reciprocal participants belonging to distinct noun classes (Mchombo & Ngunga 1994; Mchombo & Ngalande 1980). This does not
seem to be the case in Swahili where examples of simple reciprocal constructions involving nouns belonging to distinct noun classes are attested.

The analysis of examples from the Helsinki Corpus of Swahili has further indicated that the participants’ information status, as stipulated in the given/new principle, impacts on Swahili reciprocal variation. The frequency proportions show that it is preferable for participants of the same givenness level to occur in preverbal position. On the other hand, participants with different levels of givenness are only expressed via the discontinuous construction. However, on the part of SR constructions, this claim is based on a statistical tendency because 30% of the reciprocal constructions with the same level of givenness were realized as discontinuous reciprocals. Future research will include exploring further the algorithms laid out by the Centering Theory in ranking the salience of discourse referents with equivalent givenness status.

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