

On the ambiguity of *se*-clauses and the role of natural reflexivity in Brazilian Portuguese

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We explore two issues in Brazilian Portuguese (BP): (i) the semantic and the morpho-syntactic properties of natural reflexive verbs (NRVs); (ii) the ambiguity between reflexivity and reciprocity in plural *se*-clauses. We provide novel data on these two phenomena and we show that they are empirically related.

(i) Natural Reflexivity NRVs denote events that are expected to have the two semantic roles referring to the same entity (Kemmer, 1993). NRVs have different interpretations from anaphoric reflexives (Doron & Rappaport-Hovav, 2009) and in some languages they may exhibit Disjoint Reference Effect (DRE) (Spathas, Alexiadou & Schäfer, 2015).

It is traditionally assumed that all Romance languages require the clitic *se/si* to express reflexivity (Reinhart & Siloni 2005, a.o.); however, some BP verbs can denote reflexivity without this element (1). We propose that such verbs are NRVs and they may exhibit DRE, but require the volitional participation of the subject: (1) is true if João depilated himself or if he willingly went to the beauty salon for depilation.

- (1) João (se) depilou
João SE depilated
'João depilated (himself)'

(ii) Ambiguity BP *se*-clauses can denote reflexivity or reciprocity (2). The reflexive/reciprocal polysemy is widespread across several languages (Heine & Miyashita, 2008) and it has been semantically treated as an instance of underspecification (Murray 2008, Cable 2014, Haug & Dalrymple 2020). We propose instead that BP *se*-clauses are ambiguous between reflexivity and reciprocity and we provide empirical evidence from the identity test (Zwicky & Sadock, 1975), showing that reflexive and reciprocal interpretations are not simultaneously available: (2) cannot truthfully describe João thanking himself and Bia and Maria thanking each other. We show that with NRVs, however, reflexivity and reciprocity may be concurrently available in plural *se*-clause, as a result of the lexical semantics of these verbs: possible DRE and volitional participation hold for each individual in the subject.

- (2) João, Bia e Maria se agradecem
João, Bia and Maria SE thank
'João, Bia and Maria thank themselves/each other'

We collected judgments on the interpretation of NRVs and on the concurrent availability of reflexive/reciprocal readings in plural *se*-clauses (with NRVs and transitive verbs) using a questionnaire on 154 native speakers of BP. Our data confirm that (i) NRVs may exhibit DRE while requiring volition of the subject; (ii) only NRVs allow simultaneous reflexive/reciprocal interpretations, while this reading is ruled out with other verbs, suggesting ambiguity of *se*-clauses.

This talk proposes: (I) an analysis of NRVs in BP as intransitive predicates without obligatory co-reference between agent and theme, requiring the volitional participation of the subject, (II) a treatment of reflexivity and reciprocity in BP as derived from two distinct operators, licensed in parallel morpho-syntactic environments but semantically independent of one another.

These proposals contribute to the understanding of the relation between reflexivity and reciprocity and to the manifestation of natural reflexivity in BP. We also illustrate the effects of natural reflexivity on tests intended to determine the underspecified or ambiguous nature of plural *se*-clauses: such effects may hold cross-linguistically and further research should take them into account.

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