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Reciprocity in asymmetry: Cross-domain structuration in Acazulco Otomí

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The majority of the languages of the world have grammatical means for expressing reciprocity, i.e. for presenting situations as mutual, as in *They hit each other*. However, Majid et al.'s (2011) crosslinguistic study on the semantic domain of reciprocity demonstrates considerable variation in which situations are conceptualized as reciprocal across languages. An important parameter of variation concerns attention to symmetry, i.e. how similar roles languages require the participants to play with respect to each other. Whereas almost all languages would categorize a situation where two persons hit each other as reciprocal, only few languages would categorize an asymmetric situation where one person hits another as reciprocal (Majid et al. 2011).

This crosslinguistic variation in tolerating differences between the participants' roles in non-prototypical reciprocal events is reminiscent of patterns of crosslinguistic variation found in marking of spatial relations (Brown 1994, Kita 2008) and in kinship terminology (Murdock 1949). The findings that cross-domain structuration may be a central organization principle within a language (Levinson & Burenhult 2009, Talmy 2000) makes it relevant to ask whether preference for encoding situations as reciprocal are related to preference for underspecifying role differences in other domains.

To examine this, we investigated reciprocals in an endangered language, Acazulco Otomí (Otomanguan, Mexico), where research in the spatial domain has evidenced a crosslinguistically infrequent tendency to present asymmetric spatial relations as gestalts without differentiation of participant roles (Boeg Thomsen & Phraao Hansen 2015). Using the same video stimuli elicitation set (Evans et al. 2004) as Majid et al. (2011), we investigated the hypothesis that Acazulco Otomí would *also* be highly inclusive in encoding events as reciprocal, paying less attention to role asymmetry.

Our results support this hypothesis of a cross-domain tendency to highlight joint participation at the expense of role specification. Speakers of Acazulco Otomí were generous in extending the reciprocal construction to situations that languages rarely encode reciprocally. Specifically, they paid less attention to the crosslinguistically important parameter of symmetry, as seen in (1), which describes a situation where one person hugs another who stands still:

- (1) Acazulco Otomí
ra-di-n-txhũh-a
3.PRS-CL-RECP-hug-ENCL
“They hug each other”

Conceptualization of reciprocity in Acazulco Otomí thus appears to follow the same crosslinguistically infrequent principle of attending to joint participation and tolerating a high degree of role asymmetry as found in the spatial domain. We discuss the relationship between this cross-domain structure and features of social organization in traditional Otomí culture.

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