Reciprocals

Reciprocals are expressions that indicate that the subject of the verb is at the same time the object. Unlike reflexives, however, which have a similar function, reciprocals introduce a distributing element into the meaning. While a reflexive can be applied to a singular subject (\(x \text{ hits } x\)), a reciprocal requires a plural subject, because it expresses that the various members of the subject each perform the action described by the verb not on themselves but on one or more of the other members of the subject: \(x \text{ and } y \text{ hit each other means } x \text{ hits } y \text{ and } y \text{ hits } x\).

Heim, Lasnik & May (1991) argue that in order to achieve this, a reciprocal expression such as each other is composed of two elements: a distributor (each) and a reciprocator (other). The distributor is associated with the subject (which in the theoretical framework that Heim, Lasnik & May use is expressed as a covert movement of the distributor to the subject) and thus turns a plural subject (the men) into a distributed subject (the men each). The reciprocator is in object position, and in a sense directs the action back to the subject.

Arabic employs several different methods of expressing reciprocity. In Classical Arabic, one method is to use the word \(ba’d\) 'part, portion; some' in a correlative manner. This reciprocal expression fits well with Heim, Lasnik & May's analysis: \(ba’d\) occurs twice, once associated with the subject, and once associated with the object:

```
1  a  wa-yuţāhiru  ba’d-u-hum  ba’d-an
    and-help(3sg.m)     some-NOM-them   some-ACC.INDEF
    'and they help each other'
1  b  la’in  inqasama  l-nāširûna  ba’d-u-hum  ’alā
    if    be-divided(3sg.m)  the-publishers(NOM) some-NOM-them  on
    ba’d-in
    some-GEN.INDEF
```
'if the publishers are divided amongst each other'

The ba‘d associated with the subject can appear in subject position, as in (1a), in which case the verb agrees with it, taking 3rd person masculine singular form. The logical subject appears as a genitive (pro)noun on ba‘d. If the subject is not pronominal, a different construction is often used, as in (1b). Here, the subject-ba‘d does not appear in subject position but stands in apposition to the subject al-nāširūna 'the publishers'. It takes a genitive suffix that refers back to the subject.

The ba‘d associated with the object stands in object position and is declined: in (1a) it appears as a direct object with accusative case. (In ditransitive verbs it can also appear as the indirect object). In (1b) it appears as the complement of the preposition 'alā 'on', which is a prepositional object of the verb ingasama 'be divided'. Here, ba‘d takes genitive, because all prepositions in Arabic assign genitive case. The object-ba‘d does not take any suffix, and is often indefinite, certainly in Classical Arabic, although in Modern Standard Arabic, it can also be definite:

2 yulāqī ba‘d-u-hum al-ba‘d-a
meet(3sg.m) some-NOM-them the-some-ACC
'they meet each other'

Obviously, the logical subject of the verb can also be a first or second person. In such cases, the verb may agree with ba‘d, as in (3a), but it may also agree with the logical subject, as in (3b):

3 a wa-yajibu ‘an yastami‘a ba‘d-u-nā ilā ba‘d-in
and-must that listen(3sg.m) some-NOM-us to some-GEN
'we must listen to each other'

b ‘an lā nusdiya l-‘afḍāl-a ba‘d-u-nā
that not we-confer the-benefits-ACC some-NOM-us
Example (3b) also shows an effect that is frequently found in reciprocals cross-linguistically: the distributor, here *ba’dunā*, is not in subject position or even in apposition to it. Instead, it is positioned after the object. This position puts it close to the reciprocator, which is the complement of the preposition *li* 'to'. This appears to be a common development in language: the distributor, although associated with the subject, has the tendency to remain close to the reciprocator, rather than appearing in or adjoined to subject position. This development is also clear in English, where *each other* normally appears as one phrase. (As opposed to constructions such as *they each hit the other* or *each of them hit the other*.)

As seen in (3b), where the distributor follows the object, Modern Standard Arabic shows this tendency as well. And it can in fact even go one step further, by making the distributor and the reciprocator appear more or less as a fixed unit. This is seen most clearly in prepositional objects:

4  wa-hum yulawwiḥūna bi-l-‘aydī li-ba’d-σ-hum al-ba’d

    and-they they.wave with-the-hands to-some-σ-them the-some

    'and they wave their hands at each other'

In (4), the case endings are not indicated, which is actually more in accordance with linguistic practice: spoken Arabic does not have case, and written Arabic usually does not indicate case. Therefore, speakers of Arabic rarely if ever have intuitions about case. (All examples from Modern Standard Arabic quoted here are from Kremers (1997), who collected them from a corpus of written Arabic. Case endings in the other examples are based on the descriptive grammar of Classical Arabic, but because the construction in (4) does not occur in Classical Arabic, it seems better not to
indicate case.) Speakers of Arabic will insert a vowel between \textit{ba’d} and its suffix, but this vowel may vary, hence it is indicated as a schwa here.

In (4), the phrase \textit{ba’dhum al-ba’d} occurs more or less as a single element, as can be seen by the fact that the distributor \textit{ba’dhum} now appears in the complement position of the preposition together with the reciprocator, rather than before the preposition as in (3b). Occasionally, the second \textit{ba’d} is indefinite. When this happens, it is often written with the indefinite accusative ending, which is one of the few case endings that is written:

\begin{verbatim}
5 fa-qa’adū yaštāgilūna bi-ba’d-ə-hum ba’d-an
   and-they.sat they.are.occupied with-some-ə-them some-ACC.INDEF
   ‘and they sat there occupied with each other’
\end{verbatim}

In (5), the second \textit{ba’d} shows the indefinite accusative ending -\textit{an}. However, because spoken Arabic has no case endings, we cannot assume that when a case ending appears in written form, it represents the intuition of the native speaker. According to classical grammar, there would be no explanation for the occurrence of accusative case on the second \textit{ba’d} in (5). Instead, it seems safe to assume that the ending here is a fossilized form.

In fact, it is not unlikely that the phrase \textit{ba’dhum ba’dan/al-ba’d} (with the appropriate suffix replacing -\textit{hum} ‘them’) should be analyzed as a simplex (non-compound) form. This is exactly the final step of the development that draws together the distributor and the reciprocator, as can be seen in Dutch, for example, where the original \textit{elk ander ‘each other’} developed into modern-day \textit{elkaar}. That this development has taken place in Arabic is obvious from the fact that occasionally, only one occurrence of \textit{ba’d} expresses the reciprocal in Modern Standard Arabic:

\begin{verbatim}
6 a yuḥaddītūna ba’d-a-hum ‘an ’axbār-i l-qurā
   they.speak.to some-ACC-them about news-GEN the-villages
\end{verbatim}
'they speak to each other about the news of the villages'

we.hold with-some-GEN-us and-we.approached

'we held on to each other and went closer'

In both examples of (6), only one $ba^d$ occurs, even though the meaning is clearly reciprocal. This $ba^d$ occurs with a pronominal suffix and occurs as the logical object: In (6a), $ba^dahum$ is in direct object position, in (6b) $ba^din\ddot{a}$ is the complement of a preposition. This structure is most likely influenced by spoken Arabic. In spoken Arabic, the use of a single $ba^d$ is quite common for expressing reciprocity:

7 a bi-yhibbu $ba^d$ (Egyptian)

PROG-they.love some

'they love each other'

b ba-t\d\sufu $ba^d$-kon k\ll y\ddot{om} (Syrian)

PROG-you.see(PL) some-your every day

'you see each other every day'

c ka-y\d\sawnu $bo^diyat$-hum (Moroccan)

PROG-they.help some-them

'they help each other'

In Egyptian Arabic $ba^d$ usually occurs without suffix, appearing as expected in object position. Syrian Arabic is similar, except that $ba^d$ (here appearing with an epenthetic schwa) usually appears with a pronominal suffix referring back to the subject. Moroccan Arabic behaves like Syrian, the form of $ba^d$ used here being $bo^diya(t)$.

We can say then that Classical Arabic represents the beginning stage in the development of $ba^d$
as a reciprocal, while the dialect forms in (7) represent the end stage. In Classical Arabic, the reciprocal is expressed with a correlative use of *ba’d*; it occurs twice in the sentence, once in subject position, or as adjunct to the subject, and once in object position. The subject-*ba’d* takes a pronominal suffix that refers to the subject (or it takes the logical subject as possessive modifier). The object-*ba’d* is indefinite and does not take any suffix. In colloquial Arabic, the reciprocal is expressed with a single *ba’d* + suffix. Modern Standard Arabic shows a variety of methods, which are usually somewhere between the Classical and the colloquial expression.

It should be noted, however, that some dialects have chosen a different method. Iraqi Arabic, for example, uses a typical distributor-reciprocator structure, but not with the lexical element *ba’d*:

8 yšūfūn wāḥid il-lāx kull yōm (Iraqi)

they.see one the-other every day

'they see each other every day'

In (8), the word *wāḥid* 'one' is used as the distributor, and *il-lāx* 'the other' as the reciprocator. The use of a word for 'one' as distributor is not unexpected, as witnessed by the English structure *they see one another every day*.

Apart from the method described here, Arabic has another way of expressing reciprocity, one which uses a derived verb stem. The sixth form of Arabic verbs, which is formed with the pattern taKāTaBa, often has a reciprocal meaning: *daraba* 'to hit s.o.', *tadāraba* 'to hit each other, to come to blows, to clash'; *‘āwana* 'to help s.o.', *ta‘āwana* 'to help each other, to cooperate'; *kātaba* 'to write to s.o., to correspond with s.o.', *takātaba* 'to write to each other, to correspond'.

It should be noted, however, that this is at best a marginally productive process. Many sixth-stem verb forms have lexicalized meanings, as the examples show. Furthermore, there are sixth-stem forms that do not have a reciprocal meaning: *xadala* 'to leave, to forsake', *taxādala* 'to wane, to
decrease, to fade'; bāraka 'to bless s.o.', tabāraka 'to be blessed'; saqāta 'to fall', tasāqāta 'to fall down piece by piece, to collapse'. In fact, as Wright (1981) indicates, reciprocity is not the basic meaning of the sixth form of the verb.

Joost Kremers (Nijmegen)
References

