

# DISCONTINUITY AS DEFOCUSING? A COGNITIVE INTERPRETATION OF THE SO-CALLED “DISCONTINUOUS RECIPROCAL”

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I intend to analyze a reciprocal construction in which the natural symmetry of the complex event (*kissing, marring*) is split, due to the defocusing of one participant (O), coded as a comitative, and the foregrounding of the other one (A), coded as a subject controlling the agreement with the verb. Found in many languages, the “discontinuous reciprocals (Dimitriadis 2004; Kemmer 1993; Haspelmath 2007) are well attested in standard and informal Italian (1), alongside the prototypical reciprocals (2):

1. *Maria si sposa/incontra/bacia con Gianni*  
Maria REC. marry/meet/kiss SING with Gianni

2. *Maria e Gianni si sposano/incontrano/baciano*  
Maria and Gianni REC. marry/meet/kiss PL

I claim that the foregrounding of one participant weakens the underlying symmetric relation, entailing a more distinguishability of participants: the depiction of the event gets closer on the transitive asymmetric relation between agent and patient (Langacker 1991). Differently from a transitive event, however, the inherent reciprocity and the affectedness of the subject are preserved (reciprocal clitic; unaccusative auxiliary “be”). Moreover, the marked coding of O is a manifestation of the decrease of transitivity (Hopper-Thompson 1980).

I aim at describe the range of use of the construction at different levels of Italian, providing an explanation of its degrees of acceptability as depending on its features of transitivity.

## References:

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