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: