

# John Benjamins Publishing Company



This is a contribution from *Reciprocals and Semantic Typology*.

Edited by Nicholas Evans, Alice Gaby, Stephen C. Levinson and Asifa Majid.

© 2011. John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way.

The author(s) of this article is/are permitted to use this PDF file to generate printed copies to be used by way of offprints, for their personal use only.

Permission is granted by the publishers to post this file on a closed server which is accessible to members (students and staff) only of the author's/s' institute, it is not permitted to post this PDF on the open internet.

For any other use of this material prior written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com)).

Please contact [rights@benjamins.nl](mailto:rights@benjamins.nl) or consult our website: [www.benjamins.com](http://www.benjamins.com)

Tables of Contents, abstracts and guidelines are available at [www.benjamins.com](http://www.benjamins.com)

## To have and have not

### Kilivila reciprocals

Gunter Senft

Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics

Kilivila is one of the languages of the world that lacks dedicated reciprocal forms. After a short introduction the paper briefly shows how reciprocity is either not expressed at all, is only implicated in an utterance, or expressed periphrastically.

#### 1. Introduction

When I was a young boy I was deeply impressed by a story which one of my parents' acquaintances told about his school days. The anecdote runs as follows. In primary school the teacher asked the kids one day to write an essay on the topic "My dog" as their homework. The next day the teacher asked this young boy to read out his essay and he read: "My dog – we have none!" When Nick Evans, Alice Gaby and Asifa Majid asked me to collect data on reciprocals in Kilivila, my answer was identical: "We have none". However, I was willing to use the stimuli they had devised (see Evans et al. 2004) and see what kind of data I could elicit and collect. Most of the data presented here were collected in July 2004 in the village Tauwema on Kaile'una Island, my place of residence in the Trobriand Islands. I want to point out here that Kilivila is not the only Oceanic language that has no reciprocals – Tahitian, for example, does not have them, either (see Tryon 1970: 97; Levinson 2000: 334ff); it is obviously perfectly functional for some languages to not have reciprocals<sup>1</sup>. In this paper I will briefly show that in Kilivila reciprocity is either not expressed at all, is only implicated in an utterance, or expressed periphrastically. However, before I do that I will provide some basic information on the language and its speakers.

---

1. By the way, Kilivila does not have reflexives either. Emphatic pronouns can serve some functions of reflexives (see Senft 1986: 54–59).

The Trobriand Islanders belong to the ethnic group called ‘Northern Mas-sim’. They are gardeners, doing slash and burn cultivation of the bush; their most important crop is yams. Moreover, they are also famous for being excellent canoe builders, carvers, and navigators, especially in connection with the ritualised ‘Kula’ trade, an exchange of shell valuables that covers a wide area of the Melanesian part of the Pacific (see Malinowski 1922). The society is matrilineal but virilocal.

Kilivila, the language of the Trobriand Islanders, is one of 40 Austronesian languages spoken in the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea. It is an agglutinative language and its general word order pattern is VOS (Senft 1986). The Austronesian languages spoken in Milne Bay Province are grouped into 12 language families; one of them is labelled Kilivila. The Kilivila language family encompasses the languages Budibud (or Nada, with about 200 speakers), Muyuw (or Murua, with about 4,000 speakers) and Kilivila (or Kiriwina, Boyowa, with about 28,000 speakers); Kilivila is spoken on the islands Kiriwina, Vakuta, Kitava, Kaile’una, Kuiuwa, Munuwata and Simsim. The languages Muyuw and Kilivila are split into mutually understandable local dialects. Typologically, Kilivila is classified as a Western Melanesian Oceanic language belonging to the ‘Papuan-Tip-Cluster’ group (Ross 1988: 25, 190ff; Senft 1986: 6).

## 2. Reciprocals and Kilivila

As mentioned above, there are no reciprocal forms in Kilivila. With respect to the description of both symmetric and non-symmetric situation types where many languages use reciprocal constructions, the Trobriand Islanders fall back on the following three strategies:

- reciprocity is not expressed at all;
- reciprocity is implicated;
- reciprocity is expressed periphrastically.

In what follows I will briefly illustrate these three strategies with examples from my general corpus of Kilivila and with data that I elicited with the 64 tests clips.

### 2.1 Reciprocity is not expressed at all

This strategy is illustrated in Example (1) – that was produced to describe the videoclip 14 (chasing) and in Examples (2) and (3) – that are taken from my Kilivila corpus:

- (1) *E-kamwau'uru-si.*  
3.-chase-PL  
'They chase [(each other)]?'
- (2) *Subisubi Topwenina e-kimapu-si.*  
Subisubi Topwenina 3.-hit-PL  
'Subisubi (and) Topwenina they hit [(each other)]?'
- (3) *Kwe-tolu bokesi e-takasi-si.*  
CP.general-three box 3.-be.inside-PL  
'Three boxes are inside [(each other)]?'

This strategy was used to describe 21 of the data eliciting videoclips. With respect to six of these descriptions one can argue that reciprocity is probably implicated. However, I cannot find any sound criterion on the basis of which I could decide on whether reciprocity is simply not expressed or whether reciprocity is implicated. The Examples (4) and (5) that were produced to describe the videoclips 44 (hitting) and 51 (delousing) briefly illustrate this problem:

- (4) *Beya e-yowa'i-si.*  
Here 3.-fight-PL  
'Here they fight [(with each other)]?'
- (5) *I-nene'i-si kutu.*  
3.-look.for-PL lice  
'They look for lice [( = they are lousing each other)]?'

If speakers of Kilivila would intend to express that 'they fight him' or 'they delouse him' they would realise the subject and the object at least in the form of full pronouns and make the situation quite explicit – as illustrated in Examples (6) and (7):

- (6) *M-to-si-na e-yowa'i-si deli m-to-na.*  
DEM-CP.male-PL-DEM 3.-fight-PL with DEM-CP.male-DEM  
'They fight with him.'
- (7) *M-to-si-na i-nene'i-si kutu o kunu-la Mota'esa.*  
DEM-CP.male-PL-DEM 3.-look.for-PL lice LOC hair-his Mota'esa  
'They look for lice in Mota'esa's hair (= they delouse Mota'esa)?'

## 2.2 Reciprocity is implicated<sup>2</sup>

This strategy is illustrated in (8) – that is taken from my Kilivila corpus – (9) – a response to clip 7 (man and woman talking) – and (10) – a response to clip 52 (hugging):

---

2. See Levinson (2000).

- (8) *Mumyepu ya-lima e-kauvadulu-si*  
 Papaya CP.flexible-five 3.-be.in.a.row.touching-PL  
 ‘Five papaya are in a row touching [(each other) – (but not something else!)]’
- (9) *Vivila tau e-bigatona-si mata-la tau mata-la vivila.*  
 Girl boy 3.-talk-PL eye-his boy eye-her girl  
 ‘A girl (and) a man they talk [(with each other)], the man (is) eye in eye with the girl.’
- (10) *Beya makala bita-kebiga bobwelila kena avaka*  
 here like FUT.Dual.INCL.-say love or what  
 ‘Here one can say like this: showing affection or something.’

This strategy was used to describe 40 of the data eliciting videoclips. With respect to six of these descriptions one can argue that reciprocity is probably implicated; and with respect to another six of these descriptions one can argue that reciprocity is either implicated or expressed periphrastically or that reciprocity is expressed using both strategies in a more detailed description of what is going on in the videoclip. Examples (11) and (12) that were produced to describe the videoclip 20 (three women hugging) and 10 (two women lousing) illustrate this:

- (11) *E-kepapa-si asitetolu.*  
 3.-hug-PL three.of.them  
 ‘They hug [(each other)] the three of them.’
- (12) *M-to-si-na asiteyu e-yosa o kunula*  
 DEM-CP.human-PL-DEM two.of.them 3.-hold LOC hair  
*so-la, so-la e-yosa o kunu-la*  
 friend-her friend-her 3.-hold LOC hair-her  
*e e-tota-si e-bigatona-si.*  
 And 3.-stand-PL 3.-talk-PL  
 ‘These two people, she holds (onto) the hair of her friend, her friend holds (onto) her hair and they stand (and) they talk.’

If we have a closer look at the examples that illustrate this strategy one could argue that they contain what Ekkehart König (p.c.) and others have called “symmetric predicates” or “bare reciprocal constructions”. Thus, we may argue that Kilivila uses such naturally or inherently reciprocal verbs or verbs with naturally reciprocal implicature as a lexical strategy to express reciprocity: Among these verbs – which Payne (1997:201) calls “lexical reciprocals” – we find, for example:

- (13) *-boda-*  
 ‘to meet’  
*E-boda-si*  
 3.-meet-PL  
 ‘They meet [(each other)].’

- (14) *-katumapu-*  
 ‘to exchange (with the implication that the counter-gift in the gift-counter-gift exchange can be delayed)’  
*E-katumapu-si gugua*  
 3.-exchange-PL good  
 ‘They exchange goods [(with each other)]’
- (15) *-vaka’i-*  
 ‘to quarrel’  
*E-vaka’i-si*  
 3.-quarrel-PL  
 ‘They quarrel [(with each other)]’
- (16) *-mwasawa-*  
 ‘to play’  
*E-mwasawa-si*  
 3.-play-PL  
 ‘They play [(with each other)]’

and also

- (17) *-yowa’i-*  
 ‘to fight’  
*E-yowa’i-si*  
 3.-fight-PL  
 ‘They fight [(with each other)]’  
 (see Examples (4) and (6) above)

It may be that Kilivila – like Kuuk Thaayorre (Gaby this volume) – follows the strategy that stereotypical reciprocal events are not explicitly expressed as reciprocal; the understanding of their reciprocity is left to implicature. One could also argue that reciprocity plays such an important role in the culture of these Melanesians that it is simply taken for granted and therefore needs no explicit verbal marking – but this is just hypothetical speculation. However, whenever speakers of Kilivila want to emphasise reciprocity, they can always express it periphrastically – as illustrated in the following subsection.

### 2.3 Reciprocity is expressed periphrastically

Using this strategy the speakers of Kilivila describe reciprocal relations as exactly and in as much detail as possible – as Example (18) from my Kilivila corpus illustrates. Here Mokeilobu explains – in a nice chiasmus construction – to a visitor from Sinsim Island that my old friend Gerubara and I can completely trust and rely on each other:

- (18) *Gerubara e-nukwali Gunter e Gunter e-nukwali Gerubara*  
 Gerubara 3.-know Gunter and Gunter 3.-know Gerubara  
 ‘Gerubara knows Gunter and Gunter knows Gerubara.’

In Example (19) that was produced to describe the videoclip 41 (exchange spectacles) the speaker describes exactly who is doing what with whom. In this example the first part implicates reciprocity and the second part describes this exchange periphrastically. The second half of this utterance would alone have been sufficient to describe the exchange scene:

- (19) *Vivila tau e si garasi - e-katumapu-si,*  
 Girl boy and their glasses 3.-exchange-PL  
*tau - la garasi e-seki vivila,*  
 boy his glasses 3.-give girl  
*vivila - la garasi e-seki tau.*  
 girl her glasses 3.-give boy  
 ‘A girl, a boy and their glasses – they exchange (them), the boy – his glasses he gives (them to) the girl, the girl – her glasses she gives (them to) the boy.’

This strategy was used to describe 15 of the data eliciting videoclips. This is all the information on reciprocals which I can provide in connection with Kilivila.

### 3. Summary

Unlike many other Oceanic languages that mark reciprocity with a fairly small set of verbal prefixes (like e.g., Aʻjië, Samoan, and Lenakel) or – more rarely – with a suffix to the verb (like e.g., Lusi and Anêm; see Lynch 1998: 131, 145, 216; Crowley et al. 1995: 224) Kilivila – like Tahitian – does not have any reciprocal markers or forms at all. For the description of situation types where many languages use reciprocal constructions, the Trobriand Islanders fall back on the following three strategies:

- reciprocity is not expressed at all;
- reciprocity is implicated;
- reciprocity is expressed periphrastically.

From an anthropological linguistic point of view this is a rather puzzling finding: Kilivila is a language spoken by people for whom reciprocity is one of the central, if not the central, principle of social life (see Malinowski 1922, 1935a, 1935b), yet it is not coded formally in the language! Why is this so? And if the Trobriand Islanders do not need reciprocals, why do we?<sup>3</sup>

---

3. I would like to note here that Ralph Lawton – a former missionary who translated the Bible into Kilivila (Lawton 1997) – states in an e-mail to Nick Evans that Kilivila has a construction

## Abbreviations

3.	third person
FUT	future
CP	classificatory particle, classifier
INCL	inclusive
DEM	demonstrative
LOC	locative
PL	plural
RDP	reduplication

## References

- Crowley, Terry, Lynch, John, Siegel, Jeff & Piau, Julie. 1995. *The Design of Language: An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics*. Auckland: Longman Paul.
- Evans, Nicholas, Levinson, Stephen C., Enfield, N. J., Gaby, Alice & Majid, Asifa. 2004. Reciprocal constructions and situation type. In *Field Manual*, Vol. 9, Asifa Majid (ed.), 25–30. Nijmegen: Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics.
- Lawton, Ralph. 1997. *Buki Pilabumaboma. Kabutubogwa deli Kabutuvau*. Port Moresby: The Bible Society of Papua New Guinea.
- Levinson, Stephen C. 2000. *Presumptive Meanings: The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.
- Lynch, John. 1998. *Pacific Languages – An Introduction*. Honolulu HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

to express reciprocity which consists of a “complex NP as subject” that “is usually broken so that the two (individuals or groups) appear on each side of the verb”. Lawton provides examples like the following one (the morpheme-interlinear transcription is mine):

*makawala tai-tala tau e-bi-bigatona-si sola lubai-la*  
 Like CP.male-one man 3.-RDP-talk-PL with friend-his  
 ‘just as a man and his friend talk to each other.’ (quote from Exodus 33.11)

Lawton’s work is based on the “*biga galagoki*” variety of Kilivila that is spoken in the villages Oyabia and Kavataria on Kiriwina Island. My research on Kilivila is based on the “*biga galawala*” variety of Kilivila (Senft 1986:6–10) that is spoken on Kaile’una Island (with the exception of the village Kaduwaga where the “*biga galanani*” variety is spoken). I have never heard or documented such a construction and I could not elicit it with my consultants, either. However, I could elicit sentences in which the “complex NP” is not “broken” (see Example (2) above) and – as I have argued in this paper – I cannot detect any formal expression of reciprocity in such sentences whatsoever. I analyse the Kilivila phrase

*makala te-tala tau sola lube-la e-bibigatona-si*  
 like CP.male-one man with friend-his 3.-RDP-talk-PL  
 ‘just as a man and his friend talk [(with each other)]’.

as an utterance in which reciprocity is implicated (see also Example (9) above).



- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1935a. *Coral Gardens and their Magic: A Study of the Methods of Tilling the Soil and of Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands*, Vol. I: *The Description of Gardening*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1935b. *Coral Gardens and their Magic: A Study of the Methods of Tilling the Soil and of Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands*, Vol. II: *The Language of Magic and Gardening*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Payne, Thomas E. 1997. *Describing Morphosyntax: A Guide for Field Linguists*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Ross, Malcolm D. 1988. *Proto Oceanic and the Austronesian Languages of Western Melanesia*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.
- Senft, Gunter. 1986. *Kilivila – The Language of the Trobriand Islanders*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Tryon, Darrell T. 1970. *Conversational Tahitian: An Introduction to the Tahitian Language of French Polynesia*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.