

Syntax Data Collection: English Reciprocals

The English expression *each other* is called a ‘reciprocal’. The purpose of Tasks I and II is to prepare you for the main tasks, III and IV. Task I helps to clarify what is meant by the ‘antecedent’ of a reciprocal; and Task II alerts you to a restriction on antecedents of reciprocals that must be taken into account when designing test sentences to gather data. For Task III, you will gather data from native speakers on English in order to determine the anaphoric binding conditions on *each other*; in Task IV you will gather data on a similar English construction in order to compare.

A reciprocal has a special interpretation, illustrated by the following:

1. a. [Susan and Mary]_i admire themselves_i.
b. [Susan and Mary]_i admire each other_i.

Task I. Briefly describe the semantic interpretation of the reciprocal *each other*, and contrast it with the interpretation of a reflexive pronoun like *themselves*. You can illustrate by contrasting the meanings of 1a and 1b.

Like a pronoun, *each other* has an antecedent NP, such as *Susan and Mary* in 1b. All antecedents of *each other* have a special restriction that not all antecedents of reflexives share, as illustrated by these contrasts:

2. a. The girl_i admires herself_i / *each other_i.
b. The girls_i admire themselves_i / each other_i.

Task II. What special restriction on the antecedent of reciprocals is illustrated in 2?

Are there any restrictions on where the antecedent of a reciprocal must appear, relative to the position of the reciprocal? For example, they seem similar to reflexive pronouns with respect to the following examples:

3. a. They_i admire each other_i. (cp. ...for them to admire themselves.)
b. *Each other_i admires them_i. (cp. *...for themselves admires them.)

Task III. Collect data on the English reciprocal form *each other*, using one or more native speakers of English as informants (the informants can include you if you are a native speaker). Your task is to determine the binding conditions on English *each other*. Are they more similar to reflexives (subject to Principle A) or ordinary pronouns (subject to Principle B)? Are there any other syntactic restrictions on reciprocals?

You can base your test sentences on the examples of pronoun-antecedent sentences that we used in class, and/or examples from the book. Or you can invent your own. Try possessives, different case contexts, and other relevant syntactic contexts. Be sure to design your sentences appropriately to abide by the restriction you noted in Task II above. Provide the data that you collect and summarize your results. Indicate whether they or subject to Principle A or B, or formulate an alternative principle for binding of reciprocals. One way to formulate natural-sounding examples for your test sentences is

to look for them on the web, possibly simplifying or otherwise modifying them as needed. You can perform exact string searches on Google by placing a string of words in quotation marks.

Task IV. The following two examples have very similar meaning:

4. a. The girls_i admire each other_i.
- b. Each girl_i admires the other_i.

Suppose that for sequences like *each girl ... the other* in 4b, we consider *each girl* to be the antecedent for *the other*, as suggested by the indices. Are sequences of the form *each girl_i ... the other_i* subject to the same binding conditions as reciprocal-antecedent pairs? Provide data from English on such sequences in order to support your answer.