

# From reciprocity to competition

## Subjectification of reciprocal pronouns in Korean

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Korean has a reciprocal pronoun that under certain conditions takes on an innovative function as a marker of competition. This meaning emerges when the marker is used in reported speech containing a predicate expressing volition, intention, or speaker-orientation. In such contexts, the marker is reanalysed as co-referential with competing subsets of subject referents. The final stage is the extension of the competition marker to simple clauses and predicates. The empirical part of this research is based on a survey with 23 native speakers. The shift from a reciprocal pronoun to a competition marker will be analysed as an instance of subjectification. The innovative use as a competition marker has led to additional distributional differences between the simple use of the marker and its reduplicated form. The situation in Korean is comparable to that in Japanese, Bulgarian, and Karachay-Balkar, and mirrors the polysemy pattern found in Tuvaluan. This is the first typological study of the relevant domain in Korean, and will be a valuable addition to the list of available studies on reciprocity and subjectification.

**Keywords:** subjectification, reciprocity, competition marker, reanalysis, Korean

### 1. Introduction

Reciprocity can be defined as a symmetrical relation between two or more entities, which are in the identical reverse relation to each other, and perform two identical semantic roles (Nedjalkov 2007: 6–7). Reciprocity consequently involves symmetric predicates (cf. König & Kokutani 2006: 272). This relation may be structurally represented by reciprocal pronouns such as *each other*, or by conflating expressions used, among other things, for both reciprocal and reflexive situations, such as *sich* in German or *se* in French (cf. Bußmann 2002: 567). A German example where both the dedicated reciprocal expression *einander* ‘each

other' and the multifunctional, essentially detransitivizing pronoun *sich* (traditionally labelled "reflexive") are in free variation is presented in (1).

(1) *Philip und Caroline treffen ein-ander/sich.*

Philip and Caroline meet one-other/REFL

'Philip and Caroline meet (each other).'

What we shall be presenting in this paper is the semantico-pragmatic evolution from reciprocity to competition in Korean. The utterance in (2) shows the default meaning, i.e. a prototypical reciprocal situation, where the two participants Minswu<sup>1</sup> and Swuni affect each other.

(2) *Minswu-wa Swuni-ka selo ttayli-n-ta.*

Minswu-COM Swuni-NOM RECP hit-PRS-DECL

'Minswu and Swuni are hitting each other.'

Sentence (2) begins with a coordinated subject noun phrase marked by nominative case; the latter can be replaced by the topic marker *-nun* without any relevant difference in meaning. The default constituent order of Korean being verb-final, the subject phrase is followed by the reciprocal pronoun<sup>2</sup> *selo*, which functions here as the direct object. The predicate comes last; more generally, all syntactic relations are head-final.

A reciprocal situation as expressed by (2) is a conflation of two sub-situations. When Minswu hits Swuni, Minswu is the actor and Swuni the undergoer; at the same time, Swuni is also hitting Minswu, and the semantic roles are reversed. Languages may express such reciprocity by different structural means, but in this paper we are going to focus on the Korean pronoun *selo*, corresponding in (2) to the English reciprocal expression 'each other'. Now consider Example (3), which also contains *selo*, but with two possible English equivalents, 'each other' and 'each', depending on the interpretation of the whole sentence.

1. We use the Yale romanization system for the transcription of the Korean data.

2. In the Korean Standard Dictionary (*pyocwun kwuke taysacen*, National Institute of Korean Language 2021), *selo* is labelled both "noun" and "adverb". In the examples provided there, *selo* is a noun whenever it carries a case-marker. While the examples given there to illustrate adverbial use lack case-marking, a nominative or accusative marker can be attached in those sentences as well, which we take as evidence that *selo* can be regarded as a noun. In fact, one of the predications 'love each other' is given under both headings, first with, then without accusative marking. We conclude that the assignment of part of speech in the Korean Standard Dictionary is inconsistent. In the sense that *selo* has a reference, it is reasonable to claim that *selo* is a nominal, or more precisely a pronoun, because it gets its reference from another nominal expression.

- (3) *Minswu-wa Swuni-nun selo ttayli-lyeko ha-n-ta.*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP hit-VOL:SUBR do-PRS-DECL

- a. 'Minswu and Swuni try to hit each other.'  
b. 'Minswu and Swuni each try to hit (someone/the other one) (first).'

There are the two participants Minswu and Swuni again, there is a predication expressing the act of hitting, and a modal construction expressing intention. As in (2), topic marker *-nun* and nominative marker *-ka* are interchangeable, but with the caveat that nominative marking would yield an awkward sentence if *selo* were also to receive nominative marking,<sup>3</sup> as will be exemplified in (21). For our purpose, it is sufficient to point out that nominative vs. topic marking on the subject has no influence on reciprocal vs. competitive interpretations.

As opposed to (2), the *selo* in (3) is open to different interpretations. The default interpretation would still be one of reciprocity, as rendered by translation (3a); but it may also be interpreted as in (3b), where the inferred undergoer of the hitting is a third participant ("someone"), or one of the subject referents ("the other one"). Note however that the translation 'the other one' should not mislead you into thinking that the latter situation is reciprocal in the same way as the translation given as (3a). In fact, the role of *selo* in (3b) is no longer that of expressing reciprocal hitting; rather, it attributes to both participants the *intent* to hit. As the undergoer is covert and not specified, it is not at all excluded that it could be either Minswu or Swuni; but this is now a matter of contextual inference, and no longer an effect of the use of *selo*. The situation in (3b) has therefore diverged from the genuinely reciprocal situation as in (2) and (3a), as Minswu and Swuni are not simultaneously actor and undergoer. There are two participants intending to hit, but if the situation successfully unfolds, only one of the two is eventually going to hit. Both are potential actors, but only one will be an actual actor in the end (if the hitting is perceived as telic and not just intended). If both strive to be the participant who succeeds to hit (at the expense of the other one), this means that there is *competition* for the role of actor. The reciprocal pronoun has thus come to be used as a marker of competition. At the same time, an ambiguous utterance such as (3) suggests that the new meaning is the outcome of reanalysis.

A note on terminology might be in order at this point: While from the perspective of Korean we are still dealing with a pronoun, different languages may press into service different word classes or affixes to convey the notion of competition (see §5.1). From a typological perspective then, "competition marker" sounds like a suitable terminological option for the comparative concept (cf.

3. While multiple nominative marking is possible in Korean, it is restricted to very specific contexts such as possessive relations, class-membership, static location, stage-setting, or quantification; see e.g. Sohn (1999: 289–290) and Wunderlich (2014).

Haspelmath 2010; Lander & Arkadiev 2016). We shall alternate between the two terms accordingly.

What are the semantic characteristics of a shift from reciprocity to competition? As did (2) and (3a), Example (3b) also features a non-hierarchical interaction between the two protagonists, i.e. they have the same level of agency. However, in (3b) the inter-actor relation is projected on a non-reciprocal predication, that of hitting an unspecified participant. It appears though that reciprocity has not vanished entirely, but has rather been moved to a meta-situational level. Reciprocity is no longer located at the level of the situation core, but at the level of the situation perspective.<sup>4</sup> In our example, there are not two instances of hitting, but two instances of intending (or claiming; see §3). Syntactically, the reciprocal marker is no longer a pronoun standing for the undergoer, but for the subject; semantically, the extension from reciprocal to competitive is an instance of subjectification, the mechanism by which “meanings are recruited by the speaker to encode and regulate attitudes and beliefs” (Traugott 2010: 35). Langacker (1990: 17–19) illustrates subjectification by contrasting motion actually carried out by a participant (“objective motion”) with motion that “only arises as part of the conceptualizing process” (i.e. “subjective motion”). We shall elaborate on how this can be applied to the passage from reciprocity to competition in §4.

Our paper will be discussing the following key points: (i) there are three reciprocal markers in Korean; (ii) one of those markers, in fact the most frequently used, also has a use as a competition marker, a use which has no counterpart in European languages; and (iii) the situation in Korean is comparable to that of other languages exhibiting this rare polysemy, such as Japanese and Tuvaluan. This is a pioneering exploratory research project: Korean has not been covered in Nedjalkov (2007), nor are we aware of any other recent specialized study. To our knowledge, this is the first account of the semantic evolution of *selo*.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In §2, we introduce and compare the three reciprocal markers of Korean, identifying the pronoun *selo* as the unmarked member of the paradigm and describing its different functions within the realm of reciprocity. §3 focusses on the semantic shift towards use as a marker of competitive relationships. §4 will be devoted to more theoretically-oriented discussions about the role of subjectification and reanalysis, before §5 takes a variationist approach, presenting both cross-linguistic and intra-linguistic comparative data. The main insights are summarized in the final §6.

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4. The term “(situation) perspective” is a cover term for tense-aspect-mood (TAM) semantics specifying the relationship between the proposition and the setting (or “ground” in the sense of Langacker 1990: 9); see Fleischmann (1983: 185); King (1993: 91–93); Johanson (1994: 249–251); Jendraschek (2007: 67; 2014: 163–164).

## 2. Reciprocal pronouns in Korean and their uses

### 2.1 The three reciprocal markers of Korean

Reciprocity can be expressed in Korean by using the expressions *selo*, *phicha* (彼此) and *sangho* (相互) ‘each other’, the latter two being Sino-Korean (cf. Sohn 1999: 207). Among the three expressions, the native Korean *selo* is distributionally unmarked, as is evident from the examples in (4).

- (4) a. *Minswu-wa Swuni-ka selo/?phicha/?sangho-(lul) ttayli-n-ta.*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-NOM RECP-ACC hit-PRS-DECL  
‘Minswu and Swuni are hitting each other.’  
b. *phicha/selo/?sangho tathwu-l philyo-ka eps-ta.*  
RECP argue-ATR.IRR need-NOM N.EXIST-DECL  
‘The two need not argue with each other.’  
c. *twu nala-nun sangho/selo/?phicha hyeplyekha-yess-ta.*  
two country-TOP RECP cooperate-PST-DECL  
‘The two countries cooperated (with each other).’

The example sentences in (4) show that *selo* is acceptable in all of them, which contrasts with the situation for the semantically more specific *phicha* and *sangho*. *Phicha* is restricted to two-participant reciprocal situations, whereas *sangho* is typically used for reciprocal situations occurring between institutions. In this paper, the focus will therefore be on the unmarked reciprocal pronoun *selo*. After discussing the reciprocal-competitive polysemy of *selo* in §3 and §4, we shall briefly revisit *phicha* and *sangho* in §5.2 on intra-linguistic variation.

We shall also have a chance to compare *selo* with similar markers in other languages in §5.1, but it seems useful to point out relevant differences already at this point. Two cross-linguistically attested polysemy patterns are the conflation of reciprocity with reflexive and associative relations. These relations have their own expressions in Korean though: Reflexive relations (‘self’) can be expressed with *caki* or *casin*, as well as a combination of the two, *cakicasin*; see (5). Sociative relations in turn can be marked by *hamkkey* ‘together’ (or synonyms such as *kathi*), as illustrated in (6).

- (5) *Minswu-wa Swuni-nun cakicasin-ul salangha-n-ta.*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP REFL-ACC love-PRS-DECL  
‘Minswu and Swuni love themselves.’/\*‘Minswu and Swuni love each other.’  
(6) *Minswu-wa Swuni-nun hamkkey/\*selo namwu-lul sim-ess-ta.*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP SOC/RECP tree-ACC plant-PST-DECL  
‘Minswu and Swuni have planted trees together.’

Neither the reflexive nor the sociative markers can be interpreted as reciprocal and are therefore usually not interchangeable with the reciprocal pronoun *selo*.

## 2.2 Symmetrical relations

In the remainder of §2, different constellations of reciprocity will be illustrated and occasionally matched with terminology found elsewhere in the literature. The goal is however not an exhaustive theoretical treatise, but to familiarize ourselves with the distribution of *selo* in its original realm before proceeding to its extended uses.

A symmetrical relation can be considered the prototype of a reciprocal relation (Nedjalkov 2007), and corresponds to Strong Reciprocity (SR) in Dalrymple et al. (1998). It involves at least two participants affecting each other. Such a relation is exemplified in (7a), and entails the propositions expressed in (7b) and (7c).

- (7) a. *Minswu-wa Swuni-ka selo-(lul) ttayli-n-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-NOM RECP-ACC hit-PRS-DECL  
 ‘Minswu and Swuni hit each other.’  
 b. *Minswu-ka Swuni-lul ttayli-n-ta.*  
 Minswu-NOM Swuni-ACC hit-PRS-DECL  
 ‘Minswu hits Swuni.’  
 c. *Swuni-ka Minswu-lul ttayli-n-ta.*  
 Swuni-NOM Minswu-ACC hit-PRS-DECL  
 ‘Swuni hits Minswu.’

Such symmetrical use of the reciprocal marker *selo* is further illustrated in Examples (8)–(10),<sup>5</sup> which feature symmetric predicates expressing loving, hugging and separating.

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5. As acceptability judgments are crucial to determine the functional range of different constructions with reciprocal marking, most of the Korean data have been evaluated by a group of 23 Korean students at Seoul National University. The questionnaire survey took place in June 2018 and asked participants to evaluate relevant sentences as good (value of 2), awkward (1), or not good (0); all the answers with the corresponding examples in Korean script are listed in the Appendix. Averages of all the questionnaires were then calculated and are marked on the examples in the text as follows:

2.0 ≥ x ≥ 1.5: no symbol, sentence is pragmatically unmarked  
 1.5 > x ≥ 1.0: ?  
 1.0 > x ≥ 0.5: ??  
 0.5 > x: \*

- (8) *Minswu-wa Swuni-nun selo salangha-n-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP love-PRS-DECL  
 ‘Minswu and Swuni love each other.’
- (9) *ku twul-un selo kkyean-ass-ta.*  
 DEM3 two-TOP RECP hug-PST-DECL  
 ‘The two hugged each other.’
- (10) *ku pwupwu-nun selo tteleci-e sa-n-ta.*  
 DEM3 couple-TOP RECP be.separate-ADV live-PRS-DECL  
 ‘The couple lives separately from each other.’

While verbs such as *salanghata* ‘love’ and *kkyeanta* ‘hug’ are not in themselves symmetric predicates, they get a reciprocal, or more precisely symmetric, meaning, when combined with *selo*.

### 2.3 Reciprocal relations between groups

Reciprocal relations between groups may be considered a subtype of symmetrical relations. The sentence in (11) is a representative example.

- (11) *ku twu cocik-un selo ssawu-ki-man ha-n-ta.*  
 DEM3 two gang-TOP RECP fight-NMZ-only do-PRS-DECL  
 ‘The two gangs only fight each other.’

This constellation differs from those of symmetrical relations between individuals in the sense that each group (“gang”) consists of individual members, who each affect (“fight”) one or several members of the opposite group. By using the same marking as for symmetrical relations, the two groups are treated as if “acting as one”.

### 2.4 Collective relations

Relations with more than two participants (“the collective”) where each participant interacts with the rest of the group are called “collective situations”, following Lichtenberk (2000). Typical examples are expressions of (dis)trust or mutual assistance within a group of people. In Korean, such relations can also be expressed using *selo* as illustrated by (12)–(13).

- (12) *haksayng-tul-un selo(-lul) uysimha-yess-ta.*  
 student-PL-TOP RECP-ACC distrust-PST-DECL  
 ‘The students distrusted each other.’

- (13) *ku-tul-un selo tow-a-cwu-ess-ta.*  
 DEM3-PL-TOP RECP help-ADV-give-PST-DECL  
 ‘They helped each other.’

## 2.5 Sequential relations

Sequential relations may be asymmetrical. They involve more than two entities arranged in a sequential order, with each participant unidirectionally affecting (14), or bidirectionally interacting with (15) their neighbour. Note that affecting and interacting do not necessarily involve high transitivity as with the canonical ‘to hit’, but may extend to purely spatial arrangements, as in (15).

- (14) *ku-tul-un selo aph-salam-uy ekkay-lul anmaha-e*  
 DEM3-PL-TOP RECP front-person-GEN shoulder-ACC massage-ADV  
*cwu-ess-ta.*  
 give-PST-DECL  
 ‘They each massaged the shoulders of the person in front of them.’
- (15) *ku-tul-un selo nalanhi anc-ass-ta.*  
 DEM3-PL-TOP RECP side.by.side sit-PST-DECL  
 ‘They took a seat side by side.’

Sitting or standing behind each other constitutes a non-symmetrical relation between entities, as illustrated in (14). In contrast, we obtain a symmetrical relation between entities sitting or standing next to each other, as exemplified for Korean in (15). The reciprocal pronoun *selo* can occur in both kinds of relations.

§3 has an essentially empirical orientation and describes how ambiguous reference of *selo* has led to the emergence of meanings of competition. §4 then examines this evolution from a theoretical perspective, linking this shift to subjectification on the cognitive side, and reanalysis on the structural side.

## 3. Semantic extension: Reflexive, reciprocal, and competitive meanings

### 3.1 Ambiguous uses between reflexive and reciprocal

The function of *selo* as a marker of competition, which in Park (2007:132) was similar to a “distributor”, is particularly interesting. A competitive situation arises when (i) there are multiple actors, and (ii) reflexive and reciprocal reference combine. In contrast to a typical reflexive situation, however, the marker does not anaphorically refer to the whole set of actors, but to each member of the set individually, who each “compete” to be the relevant referent. While in Korean some



uses of *selo* can only be interpreted as expressing competition, others are ambiguous. Such ambiguity occurs, for example, when *selo* is embedded to a matrix verb signalling reported speech (e.g. *sayngkakhata* ‘think’ or (*mal*)*hata* ‘say’; cf. Hong 2007). Example (16) illustrates such an ambiguous context. Note that the singular form *themself* here and in other example translations is intentional to signal that the intended reference is to a single participant out of several.

- (16) *Minswu-wa Swuni-nun selo sihem-ey tteleci-l kes-ilako sayngkakha/*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP exam-LOC fail-ATR.IRR thing-CONJ think/  
*malha-yess-ta.*  
say-PST-DECL  
a. ‘Minswu and Swuni (independently) thought/said that the other one  
would not pass the exam.’  
b. ‘Minswu and Swuni thought/said (individually about themselves) that they  
would not pass the exam.’

This can either mean that Minswu thought that Swuni would not pass the exam or vice versa (translated as (16a), a somewhat pragmatically marked interpretation), or that Minswu thought that he himself wouldn’t pass the exam, with Swuni thinking the same about herself (the translation given in (16b), the preferred interpretation). In (16a), *selo* is thus interpreted as a reciprocal marker, whereas in (16b), it would be interpreted as a marker of competition. The reference of the marker is reanalysed from reciprocal to split-reflexive. As in a reflexive situation, the pronoun is co-referent with its subject antecedent, but as in a reciprocal situation, the subject referents act individually rather than collectively. The marker has shifted from non-coreferential in the default reciprocal situation to coreferential with the subject referent as it has come to express competition. The directionality of this shift is from a functionally unconstrained environment towards contexts with the structural restriction of embedding to a matrix predicate expressing speaker perspective.

The ambiguity of (16) described above can be resolved if expressions such as *sangdaybang* ‘the other’ or *caki* ‘self’ are added; see (17) and (18), respectively.

- (17) *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo sangdaybang<sub>j/i</sub>-i sihem-ey tteleci-l*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP the.other-NOM exam-LOC fail-ATR.IRR  
*kes-ilako sayngkakha/ malha-yess-ta.*  
thing-CONJ think/ say-PST-DECL  
‘Minswu and Swuni (independently) thought/said that the other one would  
not pass the exam.’

- (18) *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo caki<sub>i/j</sub>-ka sihem-ey tteleci-l kes-ilako*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP REFL-NOM exam-LOC fail-ATR.IRR thing-CONJ  
*sayngkakha/ malha-yess-ta.*  
 think/ say-PST-DECL  
 ‘Minswu and Swuni thought/said (individually about themselves) that they  
 would not pass the exam.’

### 3.2 Towards an exclusive interpretation as competition marker

An interpretation of a situation as one of competition prevails when it is viewed from the subject referent’s perspective. This can manifest itself by underlying direct speech or by the subject referent’s stated intention. In (19), both participants have the intention to hit the other. This is morphologically expressed by the complex predicate *V-lyeko hata* (cf. Hong 2007).

- (19) *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Kiswu<sub>j</sub>-nun selo<sub>i/j</sub> ttayli-lyeko ha-n-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Kiswu-TOP RECP hit-VOL:SUBR do-PRS-DECL  
 a. ‘Minswu and Kiswu try to hit each other.’  
 b. ‘Minswu and Kiswu each try to hit (someone).’

Yet, the function of *selo* is still ambiguous here, because it can refer to the under-goer (19a) or the actor (19b). The former situation would be reciprocal, the latter competitive. This apparent ambiguity is due to different syntactic interpretations, which can be made explicit by adding (otherwise optional) case markers, as in (20) and (21).

- (20) *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Kiswu<sub>j</sub>-nun Ø<sub>i/j</sub> selo<sub>j/i</sub> (-lul) ttayli-lyeko ha-n-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Kiswu-TOP NOM RECP-ACC hit-VOL:SUBR do-PRS-DECL  
 ‘Minswu and Kiswu try to hit each other.’
- (21) *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Kiswu<sub>j</sub>-nun selo<sub>i/j</sub> (-ka) (mence) Ø<sub>j/i</sub> ttayli-lyeko ha-n-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Kiswu-TOP RECP-NOM first O hit-VOL:SUBR do-PRS-DECL  
 ‘Minswu and Kiswu each try to hit (someone) (first).’

In (20), *selo* has direct object function, which may be highlighted by attaching the accusative case suffix *-lul*. In this case, the marker has reciprocal meaning. In contrast, *selo* in (21) is in nominative case, that is, it is in a syntactic relation of apposition to the subject. In this case, the meaning is one of competition. The ambiguity in (19)–(21) is due to the bivalent argument structure of ‘hit’, which allows *selo* to represent either of the two arguments.

In (22a), in contrast, the object slot is saturated with *tonul* ‘the money’. Accordingly, *selo* can only refer back to the subject referent, which can be emphasized by adding *caki* ‘self’ in (22b).

- (22) a. *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo<sub>i/j</sub> ton-ul nay-lyeko ha-n-ta.*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP money-ACC pay-VOL:SUBR do-PRS-DECL
- b. *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo<sub>i/j</sub> caki<sub>i/j</sub>-ka ton-ul nay-lyeko*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP REFL-NOM money-ACC pay-VOL:SUBR  
*ha-n-ta.*  
do-PRS-DECL  
‘Minswu and Swuni each intend to pay.’

The contexts where *selo* functions as a marker of competition are situations where the main verb is an agentive verb requiring a subject referent controlling the situation, and expressing a modal stance towards it. However, the observation that many speakers also accept the simple finite verb form *naynta* ‘pays’ in (23) instead of the complex modalized predicate seen in (22), suggests that *selo* as a marker of competition is spreading to simple predicates compatible with the inference that the protagonists act intentionally.

- (23) ? *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo<sub>i/j</sub> ton-ul nay-n-ta.*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP money-ACC pay-PRS-DECL  
‘Minswu and Swuni each pay competitively.’

A competitive interpretation also applies when the matrix verb *malhata* ‘say’ governs an embedded verb with volitional modality signalled by the modal suffix *-keyss*. According to Koo & Lehmann (2010), this suffix has two possible interpretations: When the speaker has no control over the situation referred to by the clause, it is interpreted as assumptive; if the speaker controls the situation, it expresses volition. In the latter case, the embedded verb must be an action verb. This is illustrated in (24).

- (24) *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo<sub>i/j</sub> ka-keyss-tako (mal)ha-n-ta.*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP go-MOD.VOL-CONJ say-PRS-DECL  
‘Minswu and Swuni each say that they themselves intend to go.’

The addition of *caki* ‘self’ confirms the competitive meaning of (24), as demonstrated in (25). In this case, adding *sangdaybang-i* ‘the other’ instead of *caki* ‘self’ is impossible. The construction without the matrix verb shown in (26) is also unacceptable due to the loss of speaker perspective.

- (25) *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo<sub>i/j</sub> caki<sub>i/j</sub>-ka ka-keyss-tako (mal)ha-n-ta.*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP REFL-NOM go-MOD.VOL-CONJ say-PRS-DECL  
‘Minswu and Swuni each say that they themselves intend to go.’

- (26) \**Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo<sub>i/j</sub> ka-keyss-ta.*

Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP go-MOD.VOL-DECL

Intended meaning: 'Minswu and Swuni each say that they themselves intend to go.'

Without an embedding verb of speech, Minswu and Swuni are no longer understood as original speakers. In contrast to the situation underlying the speech report sentence in (24), the predicate *akeyssta* 'will go' in (26) is therefore no longer interpreted as expressing intention. As *akeyssta* heads the sentence in (26), there is a mismatch between actor and speaker, so that the modal suffix *-keyss* functions as an epistemic marker of supposition (cf. Koo & Lehmann 2010: 90–93). From (24) to (26), the author of the embedded speech has vanished together with the matrix predicate. The modal origo, i.e. the instance controlling modality, has accordingly shifted away from the subject referent. A prerequisite for the use of *selo* as a marker of competition is thus that the subject referent be construable as the modal origo.

Another construction where *selo* can only be interpreted as expressing competition is one where the predicate of the embedded clause is a speaker-oriented verb. The definition of a speaker-oriented verb is as follows: It heads a predication within a situation that is presented from the perspective of the speaker, affects the speaker, or has the speaker as its deictic reference point. Relevant examples of speaker-oriented verbs are *ikita* 'win' or *olhta* 'be right': If A is the speaker and has won against B, the situation will be typically expressed by A as A having won rather than B having lost. Similarly, if A and B have a disagreement and it turns out that A had been right all along while B had been wrong, it will be more natural for A to say that s/he had been right, rather than B having been wrong. See Bentley & Cruschina (2018) for further definitions and illustrations of speaker-orientation.

A speaker-oriented situation is exemplified by (27a). The added reflexive pronoun *caki* in (27b) clarifies once more that the situation is not one of reciprocity, but of competition. The sentence is not well-formed without the matrix verb, as shown by (28).

- (27) a. *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo<sub>i/j</sub> iki-ess-tako (mal)ha-n-ta.*

Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP win-PST-CONJ say-PRS-DECL

- b. *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo<sub>i/j</sub> caki<sub>i/j</sub>-ka iki-ess-tako (mal)ha-n-ta.*

Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP REFL-NOM win-PST-CONJ say-PRS-DECL

'Minswu and Swuni each say (about themselves) that they have won.'

- (28) \**Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo<sub>i/j</sub> iki-ess-ta.*

Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP win-PST-DECL

Intended meaning: 'Minswu and Swuni each have won.'

The rejection of (28) can again be explained by the loss of speaker perspective, expressed by the underlying direct speech in (27). The embedded verb being a speaker-oriented verb, it triggers for *selo* the inference that when two people claim victory, they claim their own victory, which outranks a reciprocal interpretation.

#### 4. Theoretical perspectives: Subjectification and reanalysis

The affinity of *selo* as a marker of competition with (i) volitional predicates or (ii) speaker-oriented verbs embedded in reported speech means that for this construction to be possible, the subject referent has to be in the role of a speaker or planner. This may be quite explicitly encoded as in the case of indirect speech, or inferable as in (22) and (23). What we are observing is then a process of subjectification, which is “the development of meanings that express speaker attitude or viewpoint” (Traugott 2010: 61). This can be illustrated with one of Langacker’s (1990: 17–19) examples, in which he explores the variable construal of *across* in the utterance pair *Vanessa jumped across the table* vs. *Vanessa is sitting across the table from Veronica*. Whereas in the former scenario movement across the table is objectively happening, it is only subjectively construed in the latter. The observer’s eyes or mental focus may move from Veronica to Vanessa, but Vanessa herself did not move.

This is analogous to what is happening between reciprocal and competitive uses of *selo*. Let us therefore revisit our ambiguous Example (19) with the contrasting interpretations (19a) *Minswu and Kiswu try to hit each other* vs. (19b) *Minswu and Kiswu each try to hit someone*. In (19a), the reciprocal relationship holds between the participants Minswu and Kiswu. Located in the same spot, they are facing each other. The reciprocal interaction is an *objective* part of the depicted situation. Now let us contrast this with scenario (19b), where Minswu and Kiswu may not be in the same spot, and may not be the target of any hitting. And since the situation does not require them to interact objectively, it opens up to the non-reciprocal construal. What Langacker (1990: 5) calls the conceptualizer can no longer look at the two participants at once, but will look at them independently. There is Minswu, trying to hit someone; and then, seemingly independently, there is Kiswu, also trying to hit someone. Now, if both protagonists act competitively on a third entity, e.g. by selecting someone else as the potential target of hitting, the undergoer component of the original reciprocal constellation is no longer co-referential with the actor role. If Minswu and Kiswu are not hitting each other, none of them will get hit. Instead, and that is the important conceptual shift, either can become an undergoer of the *competition*. If both try to hit

someone, the intended outcome is that only one of the actors is successful, and the other one too late.<sup>6</sup>

Maybe an even clearer illustration is the scenario of paying the bill. The one who pays first becomes the actual actor; the bill has now been paid. Consequently, the other protagonist(s) can no longer cross the threshold from potential to actual agency, and can be construed as undergoer of the competition.

Thus, the common point between reciprocity and competition is that there are actors and undergoers in both, but they are not the same, for semantic roles are different on the situational and the meta-situational level. The situational level is what bystanders would be able to observe: people hitting, getting hit, paying bills etc. In that sense, two people hitting each other would be observable, and their agency and affectedness attributable without further speaker knowledge. The meta-situational level in contrast is not visible to bystanders. All that can be observed from a bystander's perspective is a plurality of actors engaged in the same endeavour, such as acting violently (goal: "hitting") or enquiring about bills (goal: "paying"). It is only in the eye of the conceptualizer that these actions are in fact construed as co-situations belonging to one meta-situation of competition. To get access to the meta-situational interpretation, a bystander would have to ask "Why are they both hitting people?" or "Why are they both trying to pay money?", and the speaker would then provide an answer along the lines of "Because they are competing with each other!" Only then, a bystander would be able to assign roles corresponding to actor and undergoer on that meta-level.

Instead of a single situation core linking the participants in the reciprocal scenario ("hitting each other"), a competitive constellation is made up of two or more co-situations (multiple occurrences of hitting someone), with no obvious, or more pertinently: no *objective* link. Rather, the relationship between the co-situations has to be *subjectively* established by the conceptualizer. In our example, Minswu and Kiswu are trying to do the same thing, the goal being to outdo *each other*. And since that intention to compete is known to the conceptualizer, the two co-situations can be *subjectively* linked by mentally situating the two protagonists in the same arena. That additional layer of meta-situational role assignment is the outcome of subjectification.

The subjectification path leading from reciprocal to competitive construal is graphically sketched in Figure 1.

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6. Admittedly, it is not necessarily the case that in a competitive situation one of the participant wins; it is equally possible that nobody wins. What is crucial here, however, is the intention of all involved actors to come out as the winner of the competitive situation.

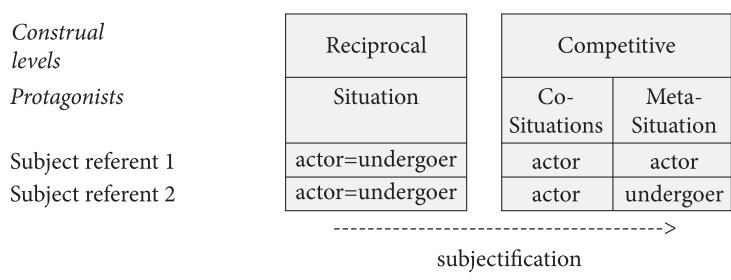


Figure 1. From reciprocal to competitive construal

We prefer the terms for the macro-roles of actor and undergoer instead of agent and patient to avoid associations with an unduly narrow range of transitive predicates. These roles should be understood broadly in the light of the preceding discussion. The assignment of those roles in the meta-situation is not encoded in the utterance, but reflects the projected outcome of only one of the protagonists being successful in acting according to their intention or declaration.

On the structural side, the shift of *selo* from a reciprocal pronoun to a marker of competition is the outcome of reanalysis. It begins with ambiguity when *selo* is used in a complex clause with a matrix verb of thinking or saying. The marker can abandon its usual object slot in the embedded verbal phrase, and is instead interpreted as part of the subject noun phrase, i.e. in a syntactic relation of apposition to the subject. This syntactic arrangement can be compared to the role of *both* in a sentence such as *[[Minswu and Swuni] both] intend to pay*, where *both* is co-referential with *Minswu and Swuni* and functions as part of the subject phrase. In contrast to English, Korean has the option of overt case-marking, so that this syntactic description is corroborated by the observation that *selo* can receive nominative case marking. In addition, it can co-occur with the reflexive pronoun *caki*. In the process, the marker is raised from the embedded predication to the matrix clause. In order to be compatible with simple predicates as seen in (23) “Minswu and Swuni each pay”, with “trying to outdo each other” left implicit, the structural restrictions are loosened further. Such coming about of grammatical settings arising from specific discourse configurations is very much in line with the concept of Emergent Grammar in the sense of Hopper (1987).

This path corresponds to Langacker’s (1990:20) second basic type of subjectification. In his contrastive pair *Vanessa is sitting across the table from me* vs. *Vanessa is sitting across the table*, the latter is more subjective because it “comes closer to describing the scene as the speaker actually sees it”. In the same way as *from me* provides an objective point of reference in Langacker’s scenario, the matrix predicates of volition and speech report in ours attribute the expression of

competitive intent to the subject referents. When these matrix predicates are left out, their modalizing contribution is assigned to (subjective) speaker knowledge.

## 5. Typological perspectives

### 5.1 Cross-linguistic variation

The distribution of *selo* is different from that of French *se* or German *sich*, which display systematic conflation of reciprocal and reflexive meanings, but do not express competition. A language with a marker able to express reciprocal, sociative, as well as competitive meanings is Japanese. In (29), the marker *a(t)-* can be interpreted as having either of the three functions (cf. Alpatov & Nedjalkov 2007: 1043).

- (29) *Akiko-to Taroo-ga ki-o ue-a-u.*  
 Akiko-COM Taroo-NOM tree-ACC plant-RECP-N.PST  
 a. 'Akiko and Taroo plant trees for each other.'  
 b. 'Akiko and Taroo plant trees together.'  
 c. 'Akiko and Taroo compete in planting trees.'

While Korean normally prefers *hamkkey* 'together' to express sociative relations (see §2), certain contexts allow of a sociative interpretation of *selo* similar to Japanese *a(t)-*. As an example take (30a), which contains *selo* and implies a sentence with *hamkkey* in (30b), and compare it with the corresponding Japanese example in (31).

- (30) a. *Minswu-wa Swuni-nun selo malepsi wus-ess-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP speechless laugh-PST-DECL  
 'Minswu and Swuni laughed with each other speechlessly.'  
 b. *Minswu-wa Swuni-nun hamkkey malepsi wus-ess-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP SOC speechless laugh-PST-DECL  
 'Minswu and Swuni laughed together speechlessly.'
- (31) *gakusei-wa warai-at-ta.*  
 student-TOP laugh-REC-PST  
 'The students laughed together./'The students competed in laughing.'

Cross-linguistically, a reciprocal marker able to express relations of competition is rare and has only been attested in a few other languages. Alpatov & Nedjalkov (2007: 1043) list two more languages, "where a reciprocal marker also has a competitive meaning", which are Bulgarian and Karachay-Balkar. In Tuvaluan, the directionality of semantic extension of the verb *fakatau* has proceeded from 'com-



pete, exchange' to the expression of reciprocity. In addition to these two meanings, sentences with *fakatau* can denote plurality, repetition, or back-and-forth motion. The resulting polysemy is shown by (32), from Besnier (2000: 214); see also Moyse-Faurie (2008: 127).

- (32) *tamaliki koo fakatau koukkou.*  
 child INCH compete bathe.PL  
 a. 'The children are washing each other.'  
 b. 'The children are holding a washing-up competition.'  
 c. 'The children are washing themselves over and over again.'

In addition to Japanese, Bulgarian, Karachay-Balkar, and Tuvaluan, Korean can now be added as the fifth language with a marker conflating reciprocal and competitive functions. However, this addition must come with the caveat that in the other languages the counterparts in themselves are able to convey the sense of competition, whereas *selo* necessarily needs to have other linguistic items that contribute to constructing the meaning of competition.

While the competitive interpretation of reciprocal markers is a typological rarity, it is reminiscent of the notion of "co-participation", which can be observed in some Atlantic and Bantu languages (cf. Creissels & Nougier-Voisin 2008).

## 5.2 Intra-linguistic variation I: Other reciprocal pronouns

Reciprocal-competitive polysemy holds only for *selo*; the other reciprocal pronouns in Korean, *phicha* and *sangho*, do not have a competitive meaning, as can be gleaned from Examples (33)–(36).

- (33) \**Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun phicha<sub>i/j</sub>/sangho<sub>i/j</sub> iki-ess-tako (mal)ha-n-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP win-PST-CONJ say-PRS-DECL  
 'Minswu and Swuni each say that they themselves have won.'
- (34) \**Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun phicha<sub>i/j</sub>/sangho<sub>i/j</sub> ka-keyss-tako (mal)ha-n-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP go-MOD-CONJ say-PRS-DECL  
 'Minswu and Swuni each say that they will go themselves.'
- (35) \**Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun phicha<sub>i/j</sub>/sangho<sub>i/j</sub> ton-ul nay-lyeko*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP money-ACC pay-VOL:SUBR  
*ha-n-ta.*  
 do-PRS-DECL  
 'Minswu and Swuni each intend to pay themselves.'
- (36) \**Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-ka phicha<sub>i/j</sub>/sangho<sub>i/j</sub> ton-ul nay-n-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-NOM RECP money-ACC pay-PRS-DECL  
 Intended meaning: 'Minswu and Swuni each paid themselves.'

### 5.3 Intra-linguistic variation II: Reduplication of *selo*

Reduplication of *selo* to *seloselo* highlights the reciprocal relation. Therefore, reduplication is generally possible – albeit often pragmatically marked compared to simple use – whenever *selo* is used as a reciprocal marker. Some examples are presented in (37)–(40).

- (37) ? *Minswu-wa Swuni-ka selo~selo ttayli-n-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-NOM RECP~EMP hit-PRS-DECL  
 ‘Minswu and Swuni hit each other.’
- (38) *Minswu-wa Swuni-nun selo~selo salangha-n-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP~EMP love-PRS-DECL  
 ‘Minswu and Swuni love each other.’
- (39) ? *Minswu-wa Swuni-nun selo~selo kkyean-ass-ta.*  
 Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP~EMP hug-PST-DECL  
 ‘Minswu and Swuni hugged each other.’
- (40) ? *haksayng-tul-un selo~selo(-lul) uysimha-yess-ta.*  
 student-PL-TOP RECP~EMP-ACC distrust-PST-DECL  
 ‘The students distrusted each other.’

Considering Examples (37)–(40) more closely, we observe that acceptability of *seloselo* with transitive verbs such as *ttaylita* ‘hit’, *kkyeanta* ‘hug’ and *uysimhata* ‘distrust’ is not as strong as one might expect, while it is significantly higher with the equally transitive verb *salanghata* ‘love’. At this point, we cannot explain this apparent difference in compatibility.

There are however a few contexts, such as (41) and (42), where *seloselo* is at best only marginally acceptable, depending on the lexical meaning of the verb. In particular verbs of separation, such as *ttelecita* ‘to (be) separate’ in (41) and *heyecita* ‘part, say goodbye’ in (42), are strongly dispreferred or incompatible with *seloselo*.

- (41) ??*ku pwupwu-nun selo~selo tteleci-e sa-n-ta.*  
 DEM3 couple-TOP RECP~EMP be.separate-ADV live-PRS-DECL  
 ‘The couple lives separately from each other.’
- (42) \**ku-tul-un selo~selo heyeci-ess-ta.*  
 DEM3-PL-TOP RECP~EMP part-PST-DECL  
 ‘They said goodbye to each other.’

As the function of *selo* as a competition marker is an innovation, reduplication remains difficult. This leads to a differentiation of the otherwise synonymous simple and reduplicated form. This is illustrated in (43)–(45).

- (43) <sup>?</sup> *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo~selo<sub>i/j</sub> ton-ul nay-lyeko ha-n-ta.*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP~EMP money-ACC pay-VOL:SUBR do-PRS-DECL  
‘Minswu and Swuni each intend to pay.’
- (44) <sup>??</sup> *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo~selo<sub>i/j</sub> ka-keyss-tako (mal)ha-n-ta.*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP~EMP go-MOD.VOL-CONJ say-PRS-DECL  
‘Minswu and Swuni each say that they themselves want to go.’
- (45) <sup>??</sup> *Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo~selo<sub>i/j</sub> iki-ess-tako (mal)ha-n-ta.*  
Minswu-COM Swuni-TOP RECP~EMP win-PST-CONJ say-PRS-DECL  
‘Minswu and Swuni each say (about themselves) that they have won.’

## 6. Conclusion

The present paper has shown that among the various reciprocal pronouns of Korean such as *selo*, *phicha*, or *sangho*, only *selo* is versatile enough to express symmetrical relations, reciprocal relations between groups, collective relations, and sequential relations, and, in addition to these uses, can function as a marker of competition. As such, it occurs in complex clause constructions such as *(-tako) malhata* ‘say (that)’ or *-lyeko hata* ‘intend to’. The contexts where the marker can be reanalysed as raised into the subject phrase – and thereby into the matrix clause – to function as a marker of competition are those that express the viewpoint of a speaker-subject. In those situations, the subject refers to a person or a group of people that have expressed their thoughts or intentions. This may be explicitly encoded as in the case of indirect speech, or inferable from context. This semantic shift from a reciprocal pronoun to a marker of competition has been analysed as the result of subjectification. Conceptually, it unfolds as follows: Instead of a single situation core linking the participants in the reciprocal scenario, a competitive constellation is made up of co-situations with no objective link. Therefore, the relationship between these co-situations is subjectively established by the conceptualizer privy to the actors’ intention. That additional layer of meta-situational role assignment is the outcome of subjectification. The polysemy pattern in Korean is comparable to that in Japanese, Bulgarian, and Karachay-Balkar, as well as mirrors the polysemy pattern in Tuvaluan. Finally, *selo* may be reduplicated, the resulting form *seloselo* being largely equivalent to the simple form, except in contexts where the predicate expresses some kind of separation. The reduplicated form also remains marginal as a marker of competition.

## Abbreviations

ACC	accusative	NMZ	nominalizer
ADV	adverbial	NOM	nominative
ATR	attributive	O	undergoer argument (≠s, A)
COM	comitative	PL	plural
CONJ	conjunction	PRS	present
DECL	declarative	PST	past
DEM3	demonstrative 3rd person	RECP	reciprocal
EMP	emphatic	REFL	reflexive
EXIST	existential	SBJ	subject
GEN	genitive	SOC	sociative
INCH	inchoative	SR	Strong Reciprocity
IRR	irrealis	SUBR	subordinator
LOC	locative	TOP	topic
MOD	mood	V	Verb
N.EXIST	non-existential	VOL	volitional
N.PST	non-past		

## Appendix. Acceptability index of examples

The numbers in parentheses correspond to the number of respondents who considered an example good/awkward/not good, corresponding to 2/1/0 points respectively. After the parenthesis, the calculated average and the corresponding acceptability class are given. ○ stands here for an acceptable example; these are left unmarked in the main text.

- (10) 그 부부는 서로 떨어져 산다.  
*ku pwupwu-nun selo tteleci-e sa-n-ta.* (18/5/0) 1.78=>○
- (11) 그 두 조직은 서로 싸우기만 한다.  
*ku twu cocik-un selo ssawu-ki-man ha-n-ta.* (23/0/0) 2.0=>○
- (14) 그들은 서로 앞사람의 어깨를 안마해 주었다.  
*ku-tul-un selo aph-salam-uy ekkay-lul anmaha-e cwu-ess-ta.* (17/2/4) 1.57=>○
- (15) 그들은 서로 나란히 앉았다.  
*ku-tul-un selo nalanhi anc-ass-ta.* (16/5/2) 1.61=>○
- (16) 민수와 순이는 서로 시험에 떨어질 것이라고 생각했다.  
*Minswu-wa Swuni-nun selo sihem-ey tteleci-l kes-ilako sayngkakha-yess-ta.* (15/7/1) 1.61=>○
- (22a) 민수와 순이는 서로 돈을 내려고 한다.  
*Minswu-wa Swuni-nun selo ton-ul nay-lyeko ha-n-ta.* (23/0/0) 2.0=>○
- (23) 민수와 순이는 서로 돈을 낸다.  
*Minswu-wa Swuni-nun selo ton-ul nay-n-ta.* (8/9/6) 1.09=>?

- (24) 민수와 순이는 서로 가졌다고 한다.  
*Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo ka-keyss-tako (mal)ha-n-ta.* (22/1/0) 1.96=>○
- (26) 민수와 순이는 서로 가졌다.  
*Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo ka-keyss-ta.* (0/4/19) 0.17=>\*
- (27a) 민수와 순이는 서로 이겼다고 말한다.  
*Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo iki-ess-tako (mal)ha-n-ta.* (23/0/0) 2.0=>○
- (28) 민수와 순이는 서로 이겼다.  
*Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo iki-ess-ta.* (1/3/19) 0.22=>\*
- (37) 민수와 순이가 서로서로 때린다.  
*Minswu-wa Swuni-ka selo~selo ttayli-n-ta.* (10/10/3) 1.30=>?
- (38) 민수와 순이는 서로서로 사랑한다.  
*Minswu-wa Swuni-nun selo~selo salangha-n-ta.* (15/8/0) 1.65=>○
- (39) 민수와 순이는 서로서로 껴안았다.  
*Minswu-wa Swuni-nun selo~selo kkyean-ass-ta.* (11/9/3) 1.35=>?
- (40) 학생들은 서로서로 의심하였다.  
*haksayng-tul-un selo~selo(-lul) uysimha-yess-ta.* (10/10/3) 1.30=>?
- (41) 그 부부는 서로서로 떨어져 산다.  
*ku pwupwu-nun selo~selo tteeci-e sa-n-ta.* (4/13/6) 0.91=>??
- (42) 그들은 서로서로 헤어졌다.  
*ku-tul-un selo~selo heyeci-ess-ta.* (0/4/19) 0.17=>\*
- (43) 민수와 순이는 서로서로 돈을 내려고 한다.  
*Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo~selo ton-ul nay-lyeko ha-n-ta.* (10/5/8) 1.09=>?
- (44) 민수와 순이는 서로서로 가졌다고 한다.  
*Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo~selo ka-keyss-tako ha-n-ta.* (7/6/10) 0.87=>??
- (45) 민수와 순이는 서로서로 이겼다고 말한다.  
*Minswu<sub>i</sub>-wa Swuni<sub>j</sub>-nun selo~selo iki-ess-tako malha-n-ta.* (7/5/11) 0.83=>??

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