

# RECIPROCAL CONSTRUCTIONS

by Seda Sürel

## INTRODUCTION

Reciprocal constructions express mutual action or relation among participants. Turkish uses the base *birbir-* with possessive and case suffixes to mark reciprocity between a plural or coordinated subject and a shared object or complement.

### 1. Function

Reciprocal forms indicate that participants act upon one another or are mutually related. The subject must be plural or coordinated, and *birbir-* refers back to this subject set.

### 2. Morphological Structure

#### 2.1. Base

The nominal base is *birbir-*.

Possessive suffixes attach to form person-number-specific reciprocal pronouns:

- *birbirim* (I, each other — very rare)
- *birbirin* (you sg., each other — very rare)
- *birbiri* (3sg possessive; widely used especially with 3pl subjects)
- *birbirimiz* (we, each other)
- *birbiriniz* (you pl/formal, each other)
- *birbirleri* (they, each other)

#### 3rd person note (critical academic rule):

With *Onlar* or coordinated NP subjects, both forms occur:

- *birbirini* (3sg possessive)
- *birbirlerini* (3pl possessive)

Both are grammatical and widely used.

Textbooks typically list *birbirlerini*, but *birbirini* is extremely common and must be recognized as a core variant.

#### 2.2. Case Marking

Case suffixes attach after the possessive suffix.

#### Accusative:

- *birbirini*, *birbirimizi*, *birbirinizi*, *birbirlerini*

#### Dative:

- *birbirine*, *birbirimize*, *birbirinize*, *birbirlerine*

#### Ablative:

- *birbirinden*, *birbirimizden*, *birbirinizden*, *birbirlerinden*

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## Locative:

- birbirinde, birbirimizde, birbirinizde, birbirlerinde

## Instrumental (with ile):

- birbiriyle / birbirimizle / birbirinizle / birbirleriyle

## 3. Syntactic Requirements

- The subject must be plural or coordinated (Biz, Siz, Onlar, Ali ve Ayşe).
- birbir- refers to the entire subject set.
- It appears as direct object or as an oblique complement (dative, ablative, locative, instrumental).
- Verbs are typically transitive or require an oblique complement that can be filled reciprocally.

## 4. Reciprocal Direct Object

When birbir- is marked with the accusative, it functions as the reciprocal direct object.

## Examples:

- Biz birbirimizi anlıyoruz. (We understand each other.)
- Siz birbirinizi tanıyorsunuz. (You know each other.)
- Onlar birbirini seviyor. (They love each other.)
- Onlar birbirlerini bekliyor. (They are waiting for each other.)
- Ali ve Ayşe birbirini gördü. (Ali and Ayşe saw each other.)

("birbirini" and "birbirlerini" are both acceptable for 3pl subjects.)

## 5. Reciprocal with Postpositions

### 5.1. Instrumental (ile)

- Biz birbirimizle konuşuyoruz. (We are speaking with each other.)
- Onlar birbirleriyle tartışıyor. (They are arguing with each other.)

### 5.2. Dative (goal/benefit)

- Biz birbirimize yardım ediyoruz. (We help each other.)
- Onlar birbirlerine güveniyor. (They trust each other.)

### 5.3. Ablative (source/separation)

- Biz birbirimizden şikayet etmiyoruz. (We do not complain about each other.)
- Onlar birbirlerinden hoşlanmıyor. (They do not like each other.)

### 5.4. Locative (state/location)

- İki grup birbirinde değil. (The two groups are not within each other / not aligned.)
- Onlar birbirlerinde kaldı. (They stayed at each other's places.)

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## 6. Reciprocal Relations Without Direct Object

Reciprocal meaning appears in oblique constructions where *birbir-* is the complement rather than the object.

### Examples:

- Biz *birbirimize* benziyoruz. (We resemble each other.)
- Onlar *birbirlerine* alıştı. (They got used to each other.)
- İki şehir *birbirinden* uzak. (The two cities are far from each other.)
- Öğrenciler *birbirinden* öğreniyor. (Students learn from each other.)

### Examples

- Biz *birbirimizi* destekliyoruz. (We support each other.)
- Siz *birbirinizi* dinlemiyorsunuz. (You do not listen to each other.)
- Onlar *birbirini* seçti. (They chose each other.)
- Çocuklar *birbirleriyle* oynuyor. (The children are playing with each other.)
- Ali ve Mehmet *birbirlerine* güldü. (Ali and Mehmet laughed at each other.)
- İki grup *birbirinden* farklı. (The two groups are different from each other.)

### Notes

- The base is *birbir-*; *birbiri* is the 3sg possessed form.
- For 3pl subjects, *birbirini* and *birbirlerini* are both standard.
- Case markers and *ile* attach after the possessive suffix.
- Reciprocal interpretation always depends on a plural or coordinated subject.