Interaction, satisfaction, and (a)symmetric object agreement

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In this talk, I discuss different patterns of object agreement in ditransitive constructions. In some languages, only one object in a ditransitive can control agreement. In this talk, I will discuss languages in which this object is the recipient/beneficiary in a ditransitive. When object agreement is restricted to one object, agreement is called “asymmetric”.

In other languages, either the recipient/beneficiary or the theme can control object agreement, depending on certain properties of the two objects (for example their person) or information structure. When both objects are possible agreement controllers, agreement is called “symmetric”.

I propose a simple approach to capturing (a)symmetry in object agreement relying on Amy Rose Deal's interaction and satisfaction model of Agree. I suggest that (a)symmetry is determined by the satisfaction features of an agreement probe: in asymmetric languages, the probe can only agree once because it is satisfied by a larger class of arguments than in symmetric languages. In symmetric languages, probes look for more specific targets, allowing them to agree with arguments that are syntactically less local.