

Symmetric Predicates and the Semantics of Reciprocal Alternations

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Lexical reciprocity appears with predicates that alternate between a binary form and a unary form with a collective meaning. With predicates like "cousin", "identical" and "to date", the unary and the binary entries express the same meaning: if A and B *dated*, then A dated B and vice versa. A more complex alternation shows with predicates such as "hug", "fight" and "collide": the meaning of sentences like *A and B hugged* is different from "A hugged B and B hugged A". Such reciprocal alternations are a long-standing challenge for semantic theory. Addressing this challenge, we observe that the first kind of reciprocity exclusively appears with *symmetric* binary predicates, while reciprocity of the second kind only appears with non-symmetric predicates. This generalization supports the introduction of a lexical operator deriving symmetric predicates from collective predicates. By contrast, reciprocity with non-symmetric predicates is analyzed by "soft" preferences of collective predicate concepts.

To substantiate this proposal, two steps are taken:

- 1- We present recent experimental results (Kruitwagen et al. 2017), showing that non-symmetric predicates exhibit a more complicated kind of "reciprocity" than what has been assumed in virtually all works on the topic since the 1960s.
- 2- We develop previous work by Dowty and Rappaport-Hovav & Levin, and introduce a formal notion of *protopredicates*: abstract predicates at the interface between lexical predicate meanings and mental concepts.

This mechanism explains symmetry and reciprocity as two aspects of one type system of protopredicate representations.

References:

- Dowty, D. (1991), *Thematic proto-roles and argument selection*, Language 67, 547-619.
- Kruitwagen, I., Poortman, E. B. & Winter, Y. (2017), *Reciprocal verbs as collective predicate concepts*. Forthcoming in Proceedings of NELS 2016, UMass, Amherst.
- Rappaport Hovav, M. & Levin, B. (1998), *Building verb meanings*, in M. Butt & W. Geuder, eds, *The projection of arguments: Lexical and compositional factors*, CSLI Publications, Stanford, CA, pp. 97-134.