

Formal and functional differences between DOM and DRM

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As is generally known, many languages code direct objects differently depending on the animacy of their referent (see e.g. Aissen 2003 and Naess 2003). In these languages, animate objects are usually marked in a more elaborate way than inanimate objects. The phenomenon is known as Differential Object Marking (DOM). These kinds of animacy-determined differences are, however, not related to direct objects only, but similar variation is attested for Goal/Recipient arguments as well. This phenomenon has been labeled Differential R Marking (DRM) by Kittilä (2008).

First, DOM and DRM differ from each other according to the nature of the formal variation. In the case of DOM, the cross-linguistic tendency is that animate objects carry explicit marking, while inanimate objects are unmarked (the only exceptions are illustrated by some ABS-ERG –languages where indefinite objects may be marked in a more elaborate fashion). There is variation, for example, based on whether animate objects may or must be marked and whether inanimate objects may be marked at all. On the other hand, similar tendencies are not found for DRM. Animate objects and inanimate objects are more or less equally likely to be marked more elaborately. Moreover, the variation is more often between two explicitly marked arguments (for example, between dative and allative cases), while DOM is typically variation between zero marked (inanimate) and explicitly marked (animate) objects.

Functional differences between DOM and DRM are also rather obvious (a more detailed discussion is found in Kittilä 2008). DOM has been claimed to be determined by markedness of objects (see e.g. Aissen 2003), disambiguation of Agent and Patient (Kittilä 2005) and also more recently by the higher affectedness of animate patients (Naess 2003). On the other hand, as shown by Kittilä (2008), only affectedness can explain DRM in any satisfactory manner. Rather, the variation is conditioned by semantic roles (which often co-vary with animacy). What is also noteworthy is that DOM is also conditioned by features of Agent, while the definiteness of Theme contributes to the coding of Recipient/Goal in many languages.

In my paper I will discuss the formal and functional differences between DOM and DRM noted above from a broad cross-linguistic perspective. The focus is on animacy-determined differences, since this is the feature typically associated with DOM.

References

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