

Unexpected Cases of DOM

Marco García García (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg)

As is well known, in some languages only certain direct objects are case-marked, while others remain unmarked. Since Bossong (1985) this phenomenon is known as Differential Object Marking (DOM). According to traditional, as well as to recent approaches, DOM is controlled by individuating features of the object NP such as animacy, definiteness or specificity, i.e. object marking is sensitive to the animacy scale, the definiteness scale, or a combination of these scales (cf. Aissen 2003, Bossong 1985, 1998 among many others). The empirical focus of the present contribution is Spanish, a language in which animacy is usually taken to be the crucial factor that governs DOM. As will be shown there are, however, a lot of systematic exceptions, i.e. inanimate objects that do require case-marking (e.g. *La desesperación caracteriza a la situación griega*, 'the Greek situation is desperate'). Interestingly, such unexpected cases of object marking are generally found in sentences that do not only have an inanimate object but also an inanimate subject. Thus, DOM in Spanish seems to be controlled by the relative animacy of subject and object (cf. Zubizarreta 1994, de Morimoto & de Swart 2006). True as this may be, it will be argued that the animacy relation of subject and object is only a superficial reflex of a deeper reason for DOM, namely the thematic relation between subject and object. Following the argumentation sketched in García García (2007) as well as some typological considerations from Malchukov (2006), it will be shown that object marking in Spanish is not only required when the object is not a proper patient but also when the subject is not a proper agent.