

DOM: Unity or Diversity?

In contrast to the phenomenon of Differential Subject Marking, Differential Object Marking (DOM) has been claimed to be a rather uniform phenomenon cross-linguistically (e.g. Malchukov 2008, de Swart and Malchukov 2008, de Hoop and Malchukov 2009). In this talk I will investigate the validity of this claim and I will argue that although uniformity indeed exists on the surface, we can find considerable variation when we consider individual languages more closely. In particular, I will address the following three points:

1. The motivation for DOM in a given language may be pluriform. The two principles that seem to be motivating DOM cross-linguistically, prominence marking and distinguishability (e.g. de Swart 2007, Malchukov 2008, de Hoop and Malchukov 2009), may be simultaneously active in a single language. Although the result may be a seemingly uniform pattern, we have to acknowledge the influence of the two principles in order to come to a full description of individual languages.
2. The referential features that most commonly interact with DOM are animacy, definiteness, and specificity. Although these three features are often taken to maintain an identical relation to case morphology, I will argue that this is not necessarily the case (cf. de Swart and de Hoop 2006, de Swart 2007, Klein and de Swart 2009). Instead, we should make a distinction between intrinsic properties that trigger the occurrence of case marking (e.g. animacy) and non-intrinsic properties that are the interpretational result of the occurrence of case marking (e.g. specificity).
3. The use of a single referential hierarchy to describe both language-particular DOM systems and cross-linguistic generalizations about DOM seems to obscure part of the variation found in individual languages and provide a false sense of uniformity. In line with Haspelmath (2008,2009) I will argue that the hierarchies used for language description and those used for language comparison (comparative concept) should be strictly separated.

In my presentation I will discuss these points separately and exemplify them with data from a variety of languages. Moreover, I will indicate what their consequences are for theoretical accounts of DOM and where they may be of use in the empirical investigation of the phenomenon.