
Mismatches in argument realization: differential object marking in Spanish

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As in many other languages exhibiting differential object marking (DOM), in Spanish it correlates with animacy, as exemplified in (1), and referentiality (Comrie 1979; Bossong 1995; Aissen 2003). It has been argued to correlate with affectedness (von Heusinger & Kaiser 2011, Heredero & García 2023) as it is conceived by Tsunoda (1985) (REFS).

- (1) a. *Conozco* *#(a)* *esta* *chica*.
 know:1SG **DOM** this girl
 ‘I know this girl.’
- b. *Conozco* *(#a)* *esta* *película*.
 know:1SG **DOM** this girl
 ‘I know this girl.’

The latter claim predicts that, on a more fine-grained affectedness hierarchy proposed by Beavers (2011), verbs with higher degrees of affectedness should show higher rates of DOM across nominals differing in animacy (human – animal – inanimate) and referentiality (definite – indefinite – bare nominals). We test these predictions in a quantitative corpus-based study and show that they are not borne out.

While our study confirm high positive correlation between DOM and animacy and referentiality (Spearman’s $\rho \approx 0.84$), no correlation was found between DOM and affectedness ($\rho \approx 0.08$). These findings challenge transitivity-based accounts for DOM, which link it to high event transitivity and therefore predict DOM-affectedness correlation (Hopper & Thompson 1980; Næss 2004, 2007). Instead, they support ambiguity approaches that view DOM as an economical case-marking strategy serving subject–object disambiguation (Bossong 1985; Aissen 2003).

References: Aissen, J. (2003). *DOM: Iconicity vs. economy*. • Beavers, J. (2011). *On affectedness*. • Bossong, G. (1985). *Empirische Universalienforschung: DOM in den Neuiranischen Sprachen*. • Comrie, B. (1979). *Definite and animate direct objects: A natural class*. • Heredero, R. D. & M. G. García (2023). *DOM in Spanish: The effect of affectedness*. • Hopper, P. J. & S. A. Thompson (1980). *Transitivity in grammar and discourse*. • Næss, Å. (2004). *What markedness marks: The markedness problem with direct objects*. • Næss, Å. (2007). *Prototypical transitivity*. • Tsunoda, T. (1985). *Remarks on transitivity*. • von Heusinger, K. & G. A. Kaiser (2011). *Affectedness and DOM in Spanish*.