

The syntax of objects: Agree and differential object marking

Rodriguez-Mondonedo, Miguel . University of Connecticut, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2007. 3276641.

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

This dissertation investigates the nature of Differential Object Marking (DOM), using Spanish as a case study. It proposes that DOM arises from an interaction between case and agreement; in particular, from the suggestion that Agree is sensitive to the feature specification of probes and goals. Based on the observation that Spanish Existential Constructions (SEC) have accusative objects and that nominals marked for [person] (for instance *John* or *him*) are not allowed as SEC-objects, not even with list-readings, I propose that *haber*-sentences have a P, which accounts for the presence of accusative. I argue that the small *has* only [number]. If a nominal does not have [person], the probe *will* be complete with respect to its goal, then it will be able to value the [case] feature of the nominal. But if the nominal does have [person], it cannot check case against small *has*, because -incomplete probes cannot value the case feature of -complete probes. Significantly, -complete nominals in SEC cannot be rescued by using A, the element that generally marks specific and animate objects in Spanish (DOM). Based on this, I extend the analysis to all transitive verbs; this means that Spanish *has* only [number] and no [person]: as a result, no [person] nominal can value its Case against *has*. Hence [person] nominals must move out to avoid being spelled-out with an unvalued feature. In transitive constructions, [person] nominals move via [Spec, P] to an additional position (a dative head, which explains the A). This means the incompleteness of *has* is not a marginal aspect of SEC, but a core property of Spanish P, and perhaps of all DOM languages. This dissertation also offers a thorough exploration of specificity and animacy in Spanish DOM, and examines several issues with respect to DOM that have been difficult to solve, proposing an account of these issues that naturally fits the system developed in the dissertation.

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