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NOTES ON BARE PLURALS AND DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING IN ROMANCE

ALEXANDRU MARDALE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The goal of this paper is to discuss the following contrast:

In Spanish, but not in Romanian, nor in Sardinian, differential object marking[1] *is possible with certain bare nouns*.

The following examples illustrate this contrast – compare Spanish examples given in (1b) with the ones given in (2b) and in (3b) for Romanian and Sardinian, respectively:

(1) a. **Detuvieron a hincha*. (Spanish; adapted from Leonetti, 2003)
'They arrested a supporter'
a'. **Detuvieron a hinchas*.
'They arrested supporters'
b. *Detuvieron a hinchas peligrosos del Atlético*.
'They arrested dangerous Atlético supporters'

(2) a. **Au arestat pe suporter*. (Romanian; same translations as examples in (1))
a'. **Au arestat pe suporteri*.
b. **Au arestat pe suporteri periculoşi ai lui Atletico*.

(3) a. **An moltu a sordato*. (Sardinian; adapted from Menching, 2005)
'They killed a soldier'
a'. **An moltu a sordatos*.
'They killed soldiers'
b. **An moltu a sordatos iltelligentes*.
'They killed intelligent soldiers'

In this paper we analyze exclusively direct objects when realized as bare nouns. We leave aside the cases where direct objects are realized as other nominal expressions. On this topic, the reader is invited to refer, among others, to Mardale, 2007.

The paper is organized as follows. Section **1** constitues the background for DOM analysis. In sections **2** and **4**, we point out some aspects of the syntax-semantics of bare nouns (BNs), more precisely we examine some differences between bare singulars (BSs) and bare plurals (BPs) especially when they occur as direct objets. In sections **3** and **4**, we examine the relationship between differential marking and BNs when the latter occur as direct objects. In section **6**, we provide an analysis for the contrast mentioned above, while in section **7** we offer additional Spanish data illustrating the phenomenon. Finally, section **8** provides the conclusions of our research and announces a number of issues for further research.

[1] In the remainder of this paper, we will use the term DOM (cf. Bossong, 1985) to refer to this phenomenon.

1. A FEW NOTES ON DOM

In Romance, DOM is generally understood as representing more than an alternative case-marking strategy. The presence of the marker has clear semantic effects on the nominal expressions which trigger it.

Assuming a tripartite distinction between the denotations of nominal expressions[2], one way to express DOM in Romance is negative. It can be summed up as follows (a.o., Bleam, 2005; Cornilescu & Dobrovie-Sorin, 2007; Mardale, 2007):

DOM is excluded with those (direct) objects that denote properties, i.e. nouns that are <e,t>-type.

This generalization implies that the DOM-marker may appear with those objects that are <e>-type or <<e,t>,t>-type, within the appropriate class of nouns (i.e., nouns with the feature [+ human]). Most frequently, the presence of the marker imposes a specific reading of the entity denoted by the direct object.

In other words, this generalization accounts for a number of empirical data, namely (i) for the presence of the marker with strong personal pronouns, deictic and anaphoric pronouns (when they have a human / animate referent), proper nouns, specific definite NPs and indefinite specific NPs when they have a human referent, and (ii) for its absence with non specific and/or inanimate NPs and bare nouns.

It must be equally noted that this generalization holds for (contemporary) Romanian and Sardinian, languages in which *pe*- and *a*-marking, respectively, generally depends on the inherent properties of the noun (cf. Aissen's, 2003 *animacy and referentiality / definiteness scales*; Laca's, 2006 *local parameters*).

On the contrary, DOM in Spanish may be subject to additional factors. Apart from the inherent properties of the noun, *a*-marking in Spanish may depend on other dimensions, such as the lexical nature of the verb (Torrego Salcedo, 1999; von Heusinger & Kaiser, 2007), topicality (Aissen's, 2003 *topicality scale*; Leonetti, 2003), modification, secondary predication, clitic doubling, anaphoricity, prosody and / or accentuation, preverbal position, information structure (Lois, 1982; Brugè & Brugger, 1994; Laca's 2006 *global parameters*).

We will not go into the details of the distribution of DOM in this paper.

2. A FEW NOTES ON BPs

The common characteristic of BPs and other bare nouns – i.e., nouns lacking a D(eterminer) – is that they have a property-denotation, regardless of whether they are uncountable, plural or singular countables (McNally, 1992, 1995; van Geenhoven, 1995; Dobrovie-Sorin, 1997).

Property-denotation explains why BPs are allowed to appear, in some languages, in predicate position, as in (4) and (5):

(4) *Ion şi Maria sunt profesori.* (Romanian)
John and Mary are professors
'John and Mary are teachers'

[2] Following Kamp, 1981, Heim, 1982 and, more recently, Kleiber & al., 2001, nominal expressions may be analyzed as having three types of denotation: (i) expressions denoting individuals, i.e., <e>-type expressions; (ii) expressions denoting properties, i.e., <e,t>-type expressions; (iii) expressions denoting generalized quantifiers, i.e., <<e,t>,t>-type expressions.

(5) *Juan y María son profesores*. (Spanish; same translations as example in (4))

The difference between BPs and other BNs is that:
(i) BPs and bare uncountables can appear in argument-positions – they introduce indirectly a discourse referent

(6) a. *Mâine voi cumpăra unt*. (Romanian)
tomorrow I-will buy butter
'Tomorrow I will buy butter'
b. *Mâine voi întâlni studenţi / profesori*.
tomorrow I-will meet students teachers
'Tomorrow I will meet students / teachers'
c. *Bebía leche*. (Spanish; adapted from Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade, 2004)
was-drinking milk
'(S)he was drinking milg'

(ii) BSs do not function as arguments (7) – they function as predicates (8a) or as predicate-modifiers (6b,c), i.e., they do not introduce discourse referents

(7) a. **Mâine voi întâlni student*. (Romanian)
tomorrow will meet student
b. **Student va veni mâine*.
student will come tomorrow
c. **Je rencontrerai étudiant*. (French; same translations as examples in (7a, b))
d. **Étudiant viendra demain*.

(8) a. *Ion este student / profesor*. (Romanian)
John is student teacher
'John is a student / a teacher'
b. *Ion are casă / copil / maşină*. (Beyssade & Dobrovie-Sorin, 2006)
John has house child car
c. *Maria poartă pantalon / pălărie / uniformă / poşetă / cravată / rochie*.
Mary wears trouser hat uniform handbag tie dress

3. BACK TO THE PUZZLE

Assuming a property-analysis of BPs (see section **2**) and considering the fact that DOM is excluded with property-denoting nouns (see the generalization given in section **1**), how could the contrast observed in the introduction above be explained ?

To answer to this question, we must take into account the following aspects:

(i) from a *syntactic* perspective, what is the relationship between DOM (a) functional projections governing the noun (Dobrovie-Sorin & al., 2006), (b) argument position (Longobardi, 1994) and (c) pseudo-incorporation (Massam, 2001)?

(ii) from a *semantic* perspective, (a) what kind of reading have marked vs. unmarked BPs?; (b) how should we define predicate composition for marked BPs, in particular, and for unmarked BNs, in general?; (c) what is the relation of DOM to semantic incorporation (van Geenhoven, 1996; Farkas & de Swart, 2003)?

4. MORE ON BPs AND ON THE NOMINAL DOMAIN

4.1. Syntax: are BPs completely bare?

Since Abney, 1987, it has been currently assumed that the projection of the noun must be governed by the functional category of D, especially when it occupies an argument position (Longobardi, 1994). The examples in (9) illustrate the contrast between a bare singular (i.e., without D) in subject position and a DP in singular, in the same position:

(9) a. **Copil mergea pe stradă.* (Romanian)
child was-walking on street
b. *Copilul mergea pe stradă.*
child-the was-walking on street
'The child was walking in the street'

This hypothesis is however contradicted by the fact that Ns without D may appear not only in predicate positions (see (4), (5) and (8a) above), but also in argument position (see (6) and (8b-c) above).

We should note two other points with respect to BPs:

(i) in object position, they may occur with a much larger class of verbs than BSs. Compare (8b-c) with (10):

(10) a. *Ion scrie / cumpără romane.* (Romanian)
John writes buys novels
b. *Au arestat / găsit suporteri.*
they-have arrested / found supporters
'They arrested / found supporters'

(ii) BPs can function as postverbal subjects (11), whereas BSs cannot (12):

(11) *În cameră dormeau copii.* (Romanian)
in room were-sleeping children
'Children were sleeping in the room'

(12) **În cameră dormea copil.* (Romanian)
in room was-sleeping child

However, the use of BPs in both object and postverbal position is limited to predicates that provide existential closure, typically 'localizing' predicates (McNally, 1995, 1998; Dobrovie-Sorin, 1997; Kleiber, 2001; Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade, 2004):

(13) a. **Erau (bolnavi / trişti) copii.* (Romanian; from Giurgea & Soare, 2007)
were ill sad children
b. **Admir / respect profesori.*
I-admire I-respect teachers

(14) a. **Erano (tristi) bambini.* (Italian; same gloses as exemples in (13))
b. **Ammiro / rispetto professori.*

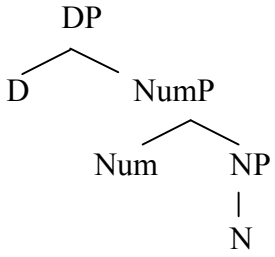
(15) a. *Caut profesori*. (Romanian; from Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade, 2004)
I-search professors
'I am looking for (some) teachers'
b. *Această demonstrație conține erori*.
this proof contains errors
c. *Pe pereți erau hieroglife*.
on walls were hieroglyphs
'There were hieroglyphs on the walls'

(16) a. *Bordeaban cipreses el camino*. (Spanish; from Giurgea & Soare, 2007)
were-bordering cypresses the road
b. *Nella stanza dormivano bambini*. (Italian; from Giurgea & Soare, 2007)
in-the room were-sleeping children

These distributional differences between BPs ans BSs strongly suggest that they belong to distinct syntactic categories.

In order to account for these differences, Dobrovie-Sorin, Bleam & Espinal, 2006 propose a tripartite distinction within the nominal domain, which is based on the following syntactic structure:

(17)



According to (17), there are three syntactic types of nominal expressions[3]:

(i) BSs are NPs (i.e., pure lexical projections of the noun): *copil* 'child', *student* 'student';

(ii) BPs are NumPs (i.e., NPs governed by Num): *copii* 'children', *studenți* 'students';

(iii) nouns with an article are DPs (i.e., NumPs governed by D): *un copil* 'a child', *copiii* 'the children', *un student* 'a student', *studenții* 'the students'.

4.2. The semantics of BPs?

The distinction between the semantic types mentioned in footnote 1 above must be recalled here.

If we assume a property-analysis of BNs in general and of BPs in particular, we are confronted with a number of problems.

The most relevant one for present purposes is that property-analysis cannot account for the difference between BSs and BPs in argument positions (see the examples in the previous section).

[3] Dobrovie-Sorin & al., 2006 formulates a hypothesis in opposition with the one proposed by Longobardi, 1991 – also adopted by Brugè & Brugger, 1994 – who introduces a distinction between weak / covert D and strong / overt D. According to this distinction BNs are nouns governed by a weak D.

In order to account for these phenomena, recent works by Dobrovie-Sorin, 2007 and McNally, in press argue against property-denotation of both BSs and BPs.

More precisely, Dobrovie-Sorin, 2007 develops a theory of the semantics of BNs which is based on the syntactic distinctions mentioned above. According to this theory, there exist distinct types of denotation corresponding to different organizations of the nominal functional structure:

(i) NPs (i.e., BSs) denote properties;

(ii) NumPs (i.e., BPs) denote entities of a particular sort (sums of individuals) ; they cannot denote generalized quantifiers;

(iii) DPs (i.e., nouns with an article) denote individuals or generalized quantifiers.

To sum up:

BPs are not truly bare. They are NumPs and they denote sums of inviduals (and not properties). This explains why they may occur more freely in argument positions, including in (direct) object position.

BSs are truly bare. They are NPs and they denote properties. This explains why they cannot (or are very constrained) in argument positions.

5. RECONSIDERING THE DOM UNDERSTANDING

In the light of these (new) theoretical assumptions, it would be interesting to take a fresh look at the generalization proposed for DOM in Romance (see the section **1** above).

We can now update it and say that:

(A) Within the appropriate class of nouns (e.g. nouns marked as [+ human]), the marker may appear with DPs, i.e., with those objects that are necessarily <e>-type. The presence of the marker imposes a specific reading of the entity denoted by the DP.

(B) The marker is excluded with NPs, i.e., with those objects that have a property denotation. To put it differently, it eliminates predicative readings of the NP.

(C) The marker is optional with NumPs, i.e., with those direct objects that denote sums of individuals.

It is important to point out that (A) and (B) hold for Romanian, Sardinian and Spanish, whereas (C) holds only for Spanish.

Reasons for this contrast?

The contrast is mainly due to the fact that Romanian and Sardinian are less sensitive than Spanish to global parameters (see Laca, 1995 and Mardale, 2007). In other words, global parameters may be responsible for the presence of the DOM-marker with certain direct objects (more precisely, with NumPs) in Spanish.

Note that unmodified BPs / NumPs generally have a weak interpretation, i.e., an existential reading and a narrow scope. In other words, they can not provide a referent for anaphoric pronouns, as shown in the examples below. In this situation, DOM is excluded in all Romance languages:

(18) *Am cunoscut studenți. *Aceştia plecau în excursie.* (Romanian)
I-have known students those were-going in trip
'I have known students. They were going in a trip'

(19) *Detuvieron hinchas. *Estos se encontraban en estado de embriaguez.*
(Spanish; adapted from Leonetti, 2003)
arrested-they supporters those REFL-were in state of drunkness
'They arrested supporters. They were drunk'

(20) *An moltu sordatos. *Issos an assessinatu a su Rey.* (Sardinian)
have-they killed soldiers they have assassined ACC the King
'Soldiers were killed. They assassined the King'

However, in Spanish, but not in Romanian nor in Sardinian, BPs may have a strong interpretation, i.e., a specific reading. As suggested above, this type of reading is triggered by some external factors as for instance the presence of a modifier within the BP (see also the examples in section **7** below). In this case, DOM is optional in Spanish:

(21) *Detuvieron (a) hinchas peligrosos del Atlético. Estos se encontraban en estado de embriaguez.* (Spanish; adapted from Leonetti, 2003)
arrested-they ACC supporters dangerous of-the Atletico those REFL-were in state of drunkness
'They arrested dangerous Atlético supporters. They were drunk'

(22) a. *Am cunoscut studenți la medicină. *Aceştia plecau în excursie.* (Romanian)
I-have known students at medicin those were-going in trip
'I known medical student. They were going in a trip'
b. *Maria a întâlnit copii inteligenți în parc. *Ceilalți erau la şcoală.*
Mary has met children intelligent in park the-others were at school
'Mary met intelligent students in the park. The others were at school'

(23) *An moltu sordatos intelligentes. *Issos an assessinatu a su Rey.*
(Sardinian)
have-they killed soldiers intelligent they have assassined ACC the King
'Intelligent soldiers were killed. They assassined the King'

6. ANALYSIS

6.1. Semantics

From a semantic perspective, the contrast observed so far may be analyzed as follows:

(i) unmarked (modified or unmodified) BPs may be analyzed as (semantically) incorporated objects (in the sense of van Geenhoven, 1995). This means that incorporated objects form a complex predicate with the verb which subcategorizes them. Consequently, the hole complex will be associated with a special reading, namely a non specific reading (often understood as an activity reading).

(ii) marked (and modified) BPs are not (semantically) incorporated. They do not form a complex unit with their subcategorizand, precisely because DOM blocks incorporation. In that case, marked (i.e., unincorporated) objects have a different reading, more precisely a specific reading. It must be noted, however, that all the un incorporated objects do not have a specific reading (see Laca, 1995, 2006, Leonetti, 2003, Mardale, 2007).

6.2. Syntax: a possible structure for marked objects

The semantic analysis sketched so far has a syntactic counterpart. It can be summarized as follows:

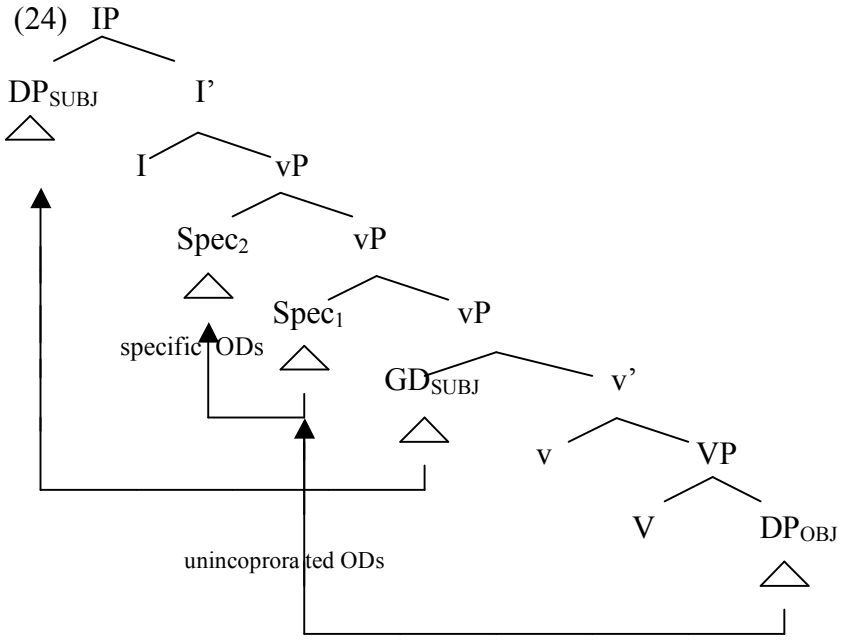
(i) unmarked (direct) objects stay within the VP when incorporated, i.e. they are *in situ* (which means that they are immediately governed by V°);

(ii) a. unincorporated unmarked (direct) objects leave the VP. They move to a higher position (above VP), [$Spec_1$, vP], in order to check (a *weak*) Case. The second operation is a necessary condition for argument licensing;

b. unincorporated marked (direct) objects leave the [$Spec_1$, vP] position and move to a higher position, [$Spec_2$, vP], where they check a so-called *strong* Case (cf. de Hoop, 1992). The result of this operation the appearance of the DOM-marker, on the one hand, and the specific (often associated with an event) reading, on the other hand.

The following verbal structure adapted from Chomsky, 1995, 2000 may be proposed for marked objects:

(24)



7. ADDITIONAL DATA FROM SPANISH

In this section, we give a list of other Spanish BPs with strong readings that may trigger DOM (adapted from Brugè & Brugger, 1994; Leonetti, 2003). They may be assigned the same analysis as the one introduced in the previous section. Note that all BPs below are

under the influence of global parameters, such as (i) modification (see examples (25)), (ii) coordination (see examples (26)) or (iii) focalization (see examples (27)):

(i) modified BPs

(25) a. *Juan ha conocido (a) hombres que tenían menos de 40 años*.
'John met men who were less than 40 years old'
b. *He visto (a) admiradores delirantes de Madonna*.
'I saw Madonna's wild fans'
c. *He conocido (a) enemigos crueles de Gonzáles*.
'I met Gonzalez's cruel enemies'
d. *Hemos conocido (a) estudiantes de medicina*.
'We met medical students'
e. *Hemos conocido (a) escritores de Ibiza*.
'We met writers from Ibiza'

(ii) coordinated BPs

(26) *Han conocido (a) hombres y mujeres*.
'They met men and women'

(iii) focalized BPs

(27) a. *María ha conocido (a) HOMBRES (y no a mujeres)*.
'Mary met MEN (and not woman)'
b. *En el poblado vi (a) PESCADORES (, no a turistas extranjeros)*.
'In the village I saw FISHERMEN, not foreign tourists'

8. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

In this paper, we have examined one of the various aspects of DOM in Romance languages. This aspect concerns direct objects when they are realized as modified bare plurals. We have showed that Romanian and Sardinian cannot mark this type of objects, while Spanish does. We derived this special behaviour of Spanish from its sensitivity to the so-called *global* parameters. Following Mardale, 2007, we also have tried to integrate the analysis of marked BPs in a more general theory of DOM.

At the end of these observations, the following correlations remain to be investigated:

(i) what is the relation between marked vs. unmarked BPs and indefinites?

(ii) what is the relation between marked vs. unmarked BPs and activity vs. event readings?

These questions will be dealt with by further investigations.

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