

Asymmetrical grammar: Optional and differential case marking

Organized by: Hilary Chappell (EHESS, Paris) & Jean-Christophe Verstraete (University of Leuven)

1. Description

The aim of this workshop is to examine the phenomena of optional and differential case marking from descriptive, typological and theoretical perspectives. Optional case marking is the phenomenon whereby a case marker can be left out without affecting the role interpretation of the relevant nominal, but where its presence or absence does have pragmatic effects (see McGregor 2013). In this domain, attention has most recently been focused on optional ergative marking (e.g. McGregor & Verstraete 2010 on Australian and Papuan languages, Chelliah & Hyslop 2011 on Tibeto-Burman languages), but optionality is also found at the other end of the action chain, with optional object marking (e.g. Chappell 2006, 2013 on Sinitic, Iemmolo 2010 on Romance, Mardale 2009, 2012 on Romanian). Strictly speaking, differential case marking - as it is known in the literature - subsumes optional case marking, but in the context of this workshop we will restrict differential marking to the phenomenon whereby a language has two or more competing case markers for what appears to be the same semantic role. The classic case here is differential object marking (e.g. Bossong 1985, Aissen 2003), but there has also been some recent work on differential subject marking (e.g. de Hoop & de Swart 2008, Malchukov 2008, Fauconnier 2011) and even differential goal marking (e.g. Kittilä 2008).

The workshop will explore a broad range of questions relating to the description, typology and theoretical status of optional and differential case marking. These include:

- What are the meanings or discourse properties associated with optional case marking?
- Are these comparable for optional agent marking and optional object marking?
- What are the motivations, meanings or pragmatic effects associated with differential marking? – Are they determined by some kind of discourse saliency?
- Are these values comparable for differential agent, object and goal marking?
- How can one be sure that pairs of markers in an apparent differential system are part of one single system rather than distinct constructions?

- Are optional and differential case systems compatible with the idea of a single ‘basic’ clause structure with a ‘basic’ set of roles?
- Can optional and differential marking be regarded as one type of system?
- How are optional and differential systems distributed across the world? Are there any ‘hotbeds’, and do these correlate with any other features?
- How do optional and differential systems develop and what, specifically, are the main sources and grammaticalization pathways that can be identified? Is there cooptation from other parts of grammar, e.g. relating to information structure or discourse structure?

2. Schedule

The workshop will be organized as a series of five sessions exploring optional and differential case marking in a specific language family, a cross-linguistic sample or a theoretical model. Each talk is to be followed by a period of discussion time, with the whole series framed by a general introduction and summing up by the organizers. The speakers have been selected to represent a range of descriptive and theoretical issues as outlined above, as well as different geographic regions.

- Monday 5 80m: Introduction to the workshop
- *Introduction: phenomena, terminology, questions* (Hilary Chappell, EHES & J-C Verstraete, University of Leuven)
 - *Case studies* (= two areal surveys, to familiarize the participants with the phenomena)
 - *Differential marking in Sinitic and beyond: the East and Southeast Asian context* (Hilary Chappell)
 - *Differential marking in Australia* (J-C Verstraete)
- 30m: Discussion time

Suggested reading: (see ‘Literature’ below for full details of references):

Kittilä (2005) for general introduction; Chappell (2013) on Sinitic; Verstraete (2010) for an Australian example.

Tuesday 6 10m: Introduction
60m: William McGregor (Aarhus University)
Optional case marking and other case-marking asymmetries: typological and theoretical perspectives
30m: Discussion time

Suggested reading:

McGregor (2006, 2013)

Thursday 8 10m: Introduction
60m: Balthasar Bickel (University of Zürich)
Referential conditions on case: what's where why?
30m: Discussion time

Suggested reading:

Bickel, Witzlack-Makarevich & Zakharko (2014); Witzlack-Makarevich et al. (2016)

Friday 9 10m: Introduction
60m: Helen de Hoop (Radboud University)
Tense/aspect based differential subject marking
30m: Discussion time

Suggested reading:

Malchukov & de Hoop (2011), Jenny & Tun (2013)

Saturday 10 10m: Introduction
60m: Alexandru Mardale (INaLCO - SeDyL UMR 8202 IRD CNRS)
Microvariation within Romance DOM
20m: Discussion time
10m: Summing up

Suggested reading:

Mardale (2010); Iemmolo (2010)

3. Literature

A first selection of recent work is given below, including some classics, in the domain of optional and differential case marking.

Aissen, J. 2003. Differential object marking: Iconicity vs. economy. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 21: 435-483.

Bickel, B., A. Witzlack-Makarevich & T. Zakharko. 2014. Typological evidence against universal effects of referential scales on case alignment. In I. Bornkessel-Schlesewsky, A. Malchukov & M. Richards, eds. *Scales: A Cross-disciplinary Perspective on Referential Hierarchies*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. 7-43.

Bossong, G. 1985. *Differentielle Objektmarkierung in den neuiranischen Sprachen*. Tübingen: Narr.

Chappell, H. 2006. From Eurocentrism to Sinocentrism: the case of disposal constructions in Sinitic languages. In F. Ameka, A. Dench & N. Evans, eds. *Catching language: The standing challenge of grammar writing*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 441-486.

Chappell, H. 2013. Pan-Sinitic object markers: morphology and syntax. In Cao Guangshun, H. Chappell, R. Djamouri & T. Wiebusch, eds. *Breaking down the barriers: Interdisciplinary studies in Chinese linguistics and beyond*. Taipei: Academia Sinica. 785-816.

Chelliah, S. & G. Hyslop, eds. 2011-2012. Optional case marking in Tibeto-Burman. Special issue of *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* (34-35).

Cristofaro, S. 2013. The referential hierarchy: reviewing the evidence in diachronic perspective. In D. Bakker & M. Haspelmath, eds. *Languages across Boundaries: Studies in Memory of Anna Siewierska*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. 69-94.

Dalrymple, M. & I. Nikolaeva. 2011. *Objects and information structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

de Hoop, H. & A. Malchukov. 2008. Case-marking strategies. *Linguistic Inquiry* 39: 565-587.

de Hoop, H. & P. de Swart, eds. 2008. *Differential subject marking*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Fauconnier, S. 2011. Differential Agent Marking and animacy. *Lingua* 121: 533-547.

Fauconnier, S. & J-C Verstraete. 2014. A and O as each other's mirror image? Problems with markedness reversal. *Linguistic Typology* 18: 3-49.

- Gaby, A., 2008. Pragmatically case-marked: non-syntactic functions of the Thaayorre ergative suffix. In I. Mushin & B. Baker, eds. *Discourse and grammar in Australian languages*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 111-134.
- Hopper, Paul J. & Sandra A. Thompson. 1980. Transitivity in grammar and discourse. *Language* 56: 251-299.
- Iemmolo, G. 2010. Topicality and differential object marking: Evidence from Romance and beyond. *Studies in Language* 34: 239-272.
- Iemmolo, G. 2011. *Towards a typological study of differential object marking and differential object indexation*. Pavia: Università degli Studi di Pavia doctoral dissertation.
- Iemmolo, G. & G. Klumpp, eds. 2014. *Differential object marking: Theoretical and empirical issues*. Special issue of *Linguistics* (52).
- Jenny, M. & S. Hnin Tun. 2013. Differential subject marking without ergativity. The case of colloquial Burmese. *Studies in Language* 37: 693-735.
- Kittilä, S. 2008. Animacy effects on differential Goal marking. *Linguistic Typology* 12: 245-268.
- Kittilä, S. 2005. Optional marking of arguments. *Language Sciences* 27 : 483-514.
- Lazard, Gilbert. 1994. Le *râ* persan et le *ba* chinois. *Cahiers de Linguistique – Asie Orientale* 23: 169-176.
- McGregor, W. 1992. The semantics of ergative marking in Gooniyandi. *Linguistics* 30: 275-318.
- McGregor, W. 2006. Focal and optional ergative marking in Warrwa (Kimberley, Western Australia). *Lingua* 116: 393-423.
- McGregor, W. 2013. Optionality in grammar and language use. *Linguistics* 51: 1147-1204.
- McGregor, W. & J-C Verstraete, eds. 2010. *Optional ergative marking*. Special issue of *Lingua* (120).
- Malchukov, A. 2008. Animacy and asymmetries in differential case marking. *Lingua* 118: 203–221.
- Malchukov, A. & H. de Hoop. 2011. Tense, aspect and mood based differential case marking. *Lingua* 121: 35-47.
- Malchukov, A. & A. Spencer, eds. 2008. *The Oxford Handbook of Case*. Oxford: OUP.
- Mardale, A. 2009. Un regard diachronique sur le marquage différentiel de l’objet en roumain. *Revue roumaine de linguistique* 54: 65-93.
- Mardale, A. 2010. Éléments d’analyse du marquage différentiel de l’objet dans les langues romanes. *Faits de Langues. Les Cahiers* 2: 161-197.

- Mardale, A. 2012. Analyse comparative du marquage différentiel du complément direct et d'agent en roumain. *Revista de Filología Románica*.
- Mardale, A. 2013. Le statut de pe en roumain et de a en espagnol. In J. Tseng, ed. *Prépositions et postpositions. Approches typologiques et formelles*. Paris: Hermès Lavoisier. 207-253.
- Naess, Å. 2004. What markedness marks: the markedness problem with direct objects. *Lingua* 114: 1186–1212.
- Næss, Å. 2007. *Prototypical transitivity*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Nikolaeva, I. 1999. Object agreement, grammatical relations, and information structure. *Studies in Language* 23: 331-376.
- Schikowski, R. 2013. *Object-conditioned differential marking in Chintang and Nepali*. University of Zürich dissertation.
- de Swart, P. 2007. *Cross-linguistic variation in object marking*. Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen dissertation.
- Tsunoda, T. 1985. Remarks on transitivity. *Journal of Linguistics* 21: 385–396.
- Verbeke, S. & L. De Cuypere. 2015. Differential subject marking in Nepali imperfective constructions: a probabilistic grammar approach. *Studies in Language* 39: 1-23
- Verstraete, J-C. 2010. Animacy and information structure in the system of ergative marking in Umpithamu. *Lingua* 120: 1637-1651.
- Witzlack-Makarevich, A., T. Zakharko, L. Bierkandt, F. Zúñiga & B. Bickel. 2016. Decomposing hierarchical alignment: Co-arguments as conditions on alignment and the limits of referential hierarchies as explanations in verb agreement. *Linguistics* 54: 531-561.

4. Abstracts

Optional case marking: typological and theoretical perspectives (September 6th)

William B. McGregor, Aarhus University

This session is concerned with optional case marking – in particular with optional ergative and accusative case marking – from typological and theoretical perspectives. It presents a usage-based account of the phenomenon, according to which use vs. non-use of a case marker are never in totally free variation; case markers are used or not used by speakers in discourse to express and convey meanings. It is proposed that the cross-linguistic diversity of meanings that have been found to be associated with optional ergative and accusative case marking in recent years can be accounted for as specific contextualisations or instantiations of general meanings relating to joint attention. Specifically, it is suggested that there are natural and motivated associations between usage of case markers and prominence, and/or non-usage of case markers and backgrounding. Finally, optional case marking will be situated both formally and functionally in relation to other types of asymmetries in case systems and case marking.

Referential conditions on case: what's where why? (September 7th)

Balthasar Bickel, University of Zürich

Surveys of the conditions that govern differential and optional case marking tend to reveal substantial variation across languages. In fact, the variation across these systems is on a par with the variation between these systems and several other morphosyntactic phenomena in which referential conditions affect how arguments are coded, including hierarchical case marking, differential agreement, differential scenarios, inversion and diathesis.

In this presentation I outline a comprehensive typology of referential conditions on argument marking, implemented to a large extent in an AUTOTYP database module (Witzlack-Makarevich et al. 2011). This typology allows us to locate more precisely the special properties of differential and optional case marking. An assessment of the world-wide distribution of various such properties suggests that the evolution of differential and optional case marking is significantly affected by large-scale areal spreads and less so by universal principles (Bickel et al. 2014)

Bickel, Balthasar, Alena Witzlack-Makarevich & Taras Zakharko. 2014. Typological evidence against universal effects of referential scales on case alignment. In Ina Bornkessel-Schlesewsky, Andrej Malchukov & Marc Richards (eds.), *Scales: a cross-disciplinary perspective on referential hierarchies*, 7–43. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Witzlack-Makarevich, Alena, Lennart Bierkandt, Taras Zakharko & Balthasar Bickel. 2011. *AUTOTYP database on grammatical relations*. Electronic database, University of Zurich [www.autotyp.uzh.ch].

Tense/aspect-based differential subject marking (September 9th)

Helen de Hoop, Radboud University (based on joint work with Sander Lestrade)

I will introduce an account for tense/aspect based differential subject marking, such as attested in Hindi for example, that also covers the distinction between stage- and individual level predicates found in Nepali and Manipuri (Poudel 2007). I will argue that if the role of an event participant can be determined on the basis of information available in the here and now, the use of case marking can be judged redundant and suspended because of economy. This straightforwardly accounts for differential subject marking in ergative languages that show ergative case on the A-argument when the event is situated in the past. Similarly, it can account for ergative case on the A-argument when the event is removed spatially. However, I will argue that the optimization procedure that is responsible for the assignment of ergative case can be grammaticalized in the sense that it is no longer applied in real-time, and the speaker does not really take into consideration whether the hearer can identify the agenthood of a participant. Agents of future events cannot be identified in the here and now either. Hence, we might predict ergative case marking on A-arguments in the future tense too. This is not attested, however (as far as I know). I will explain this in terms of a crucial difference between tense and aspect (cf. Malchukov & de Hoop 2011).

Malchukov, Andrej & Helen de Hoop. 2011. Tense, aspect, and mood based differential case marking. *Lingua* 122: 35-37.

Poudel, T. 2007. Ergativity and stage/individual level predications in Nepali and Manipuri. Manuscript, University of Konstanz.

Microvariation within Romance DOM (September 10th)

Alexandru Mardale (INaLCO - SeDyL UMR 8202 CNRS IRD – LABEX EFL)

It is well known that in certain Romance languages, the DO can be marked or not by a preposition: *a* in Spanish, Sardinian and other varieties, *pe* in Romanian. The occurrence of these prepositions depends on various parameters. Since Bosson 1985 and Aissen 2003, it is commonly assumed that there are (at least) three main parameters that determine object marking (DOM) cross-linguistically: (i) animacy, (ii) referentiality, and (iii) topicality. To each of these parameters are associated several scaled values: for animacy, human > animate > inanimate; for referentiality – often associated to definiteness (see Dobrovie-Sorin 1997, Aissen 2003, Laca 2006) –, definite > indefinite specific > indefinite non-specific; for topicality (see Leonetti 2003, Iemmolo 2010, Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011), +/- Top.

The goal of my presentation is (a) to sketch an hypothesis (in terms of Topic marker) for the development of DOM in Romance (b) to examine the variation regarding DOM in Romance languages (depending on their sensitivity to one (or several) of the above-mentioned values) and (c) to discuss an analysis correlating DOM with the denotation of the noun.

This analysis is based on the semantic type of the DO (cf. Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003, Bleam 2004, Mardale 2009, 2010) and concerns the following generalizations for DOM in (European) Spanish, Sardinian and Romanian:

(A) *the markers a and pe are excluded with generic DOs and with those that denote properties (i.e. that are not referential);*

(B) *the markers a and pe are obligatory with DOs referring to specific individuals or with universal quantifiers.*

I will show that this generalization must however be considered as *a necessary but not sufficient condition for DOM* since there are certain DOs denoting specific individuals that do not allow the markers. In these cases, the denotation of the noun does not trigger DOM and thus must be corroborated with the (human or animate) nature of its referent. The latter remark must be understood as *a second necessary condition for DOM* and it is observed differently by those languages depending on their sensitivity to the animacy parameter.

Aissen, Judith. 2003. Differential Object Marking: Iconicity vs. Economy. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 21: 435-483.

Bosson, Georg. 1985. *Empirische Universalienforschung. Differentielle Objektmarkierung in den neuiranischen Sprachen*. Tübingen: Narr.

- Bleam, Tonia. 2004. *A Property Analysis of Weak Nominals in Spanish: Bare Nominals and Prepositionless Accusatives*. ms. University Paris Diderot.
- Dalrymple, Mary & Irina Nikolaeva. 2011. *Objects and Information Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dobrovie-Sorin, Carmen. 1997. Classes de prédicats, distribution des indéfinis et la distinction thématique-catégorique. *Le gré des langues* 20: 58-97.
- Dobrovie-Sorin, Carmen & Brenda Laca. 2003. Les noms sans déterminant dans les langues romanes. In Danièle Godard (ed.), *Les langues romanes. Problèmes de la phrase simple*. 235-281. Paris: Editions du CNRS.
- Iemmolo, Giorgio. 2010. Topicality and differential object marking: Evidence from Romance and beyond. *Studies in Language* 34: 239-272.
- Laca, Brenda. 2006. El objeto directo. La marcacion preposicional. In Concepción Company (ed.), *Sintaxis historica del español*. Vol 1: *La frase verbal*. 423-475. México: Universidad Nacional de México.
- Leonetti, Manuel. 2003. Specificity and Differential Object Marking in Spanish. *Catalan Journal of Linguistics* 3: 75-114.
- Mardale, Alexandru. 2009. *Les prépositions fonctionnelles du roumain : études comparatives sur le marquage casuel*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Mardale, Alexandru. 2010. Éléments d'analyse du marquage différentiel de l'objet dans les langues romanes. *Faits de Langues. Les Cahiers* 2: 161-197.