

Differential Object Marking competes with Dative Alternation

In this talk, we discuss functional motivations for obligatory and optional Differential Object Marking in Mongolian. We analyse the interaction between Differential Object Marking and the Dative Alternation construction, which have both been assumed to promote arguments. We show that these devices can block each other, but only if the object case marker is optional. This suggests that the object case marker is semantically active only if it is optional. If it is obligatory due to the NP type, it does not make a relevant semantic contribution.

Argument alternations such as Dative Alternation (1) have been widely assumed to be devices of argument promotion (cf. Levin & Rappaport 2005). According to the literature (Bresnan et al. 2007, Arnold et al. 2000 and Erteschik-Shir 1979) the direct object in the PO-construction is more discourse prominent than the prepositional argument in the sense that it is more topical. In the DO construction the direct object is less prominent than the dative object. In the following we focus on Dative Alternation in Mongolian, as in (2), which is like English, except that the linear order of the arguments is the same in both constructions.

In addition to the case frame provided by the construction, Mongolian has another device of argument promotion: Differential Object Marking (DOM). DOM is the phenomenon, found in many languages, that the direct object may or may not be case marked (Aissen 2003, Bossong 1985, Comrie 1975). In Mongolian, DOM depends primarily on definiteness, cf. the Definiteness Scale in (3). If the direct object is realized as a personal pronoun, a proper name or a definite NP, the Acc case marker is *obligatory*, cf. (4). As shown in (5), the Acc marking of indefinite NPs is *optional*. At least with indefinite NPs, the semantic contribution of the case marker is assumed to be specificity, as in Turkish (Enç 1991, von Heusinger & Kornfilt 2005). An indefinite NP without case is semantically unmarked and incorporated NPs are not case marked (Guntsetseg 2009). The distinction between obligatory vs. optional case marking is closely related to the one between split vs. fluid case alternations proposed by Dixon (1994) and reconsidered in de Hoop & Malchukov (2007). Split case is normally assumed to be grammatically required and to have no semantic contribution. In Mongolian, however, it is not clear whether the obligatory case marker on definite NPs is semantically vacuous and is just grammatically required or whether it has a semantic contribution signalling specificity. In principle, the obligatoriness of the case marking of definite NPs could be semantically motivated in the following way: Since in general definite NPs are specific, the case marker as a signal of specificity is obligatory with them. Thus, two different functional motivations for obligatory case marking of definite NPs are possible: a semantic one (specificity marking) and a grammatical one (no semantic contribution).

To determine the motivation for DOM with definite NPs we will examine the interaction of obligatory and optional case marking of direct objects with the Dative Alternation case frame. In (6) the case of indefinite direct objects is considered: in the PO-construction the direct object can be marked with Acc while in the DO-construction the Acc suffix on the direct object is dispreferred. The decreased acceptability of the Acc marker in the DO-construction can be explained in the following way: the DO-construction (6b) demotes the direct object while the Acc marker signals its promotion. This divergence leads to a conflict. No such conflict emerges in the PO-construction (6a), since the PO case frame and the object case marker have the same function of promoting the direct object.

Interestingly, definite NPs obligatorily marked with Acc exhibit no restrictions in the interaction with the Dative Alternation case frame in (2). In (2b) no conflict arises between the case frame and the DOM marker. This suggests that unlike optional case marking of indefinite NPs, the *obligatory* case marking of definite NPs has no impact on argument prominence, hence it has no semantic contribution.

To conclude, the two argument promotion devices, the case frame established by the construction and the object case marker, come into conflict with each other if they promote different arguments. However, such a conflict in promotion arises only if the object case marker is optional because only in this case does it have a semantic contribution signalling specificity. The obligatory case

marker on definite NPs occurs for purely grammatical reasons. It is semantically vacuous and has no effect on argument promotion.

(1) a. The student sent *the mail* to the dean. [PO-construction]

b. The student sent the dean *the mail*. [DO-construction]

(2) a. Bi zahiral ruu ene mail-ig ilgee-sen. [PO-construction]

I dean to this mail-ACC send-PST
‘I sent the mail to the dean.’

b. Bi zahiral-d ene mail-ig ilgee-sen. [DO-construction]

I dean -DAT this mail-ACC send-PST
‘I sent the dean the mail.’

(3) Definiteness Scale and DOM in Mongolian

pers. pron. >	proper noun >	definite NP >	indefinite NP >	incorporat. NPs
obligatory case marking			optional case marking	case marking is ungrammatical

(4) Bi tedn-/Bold-/ene hun*(-ig) har-san [obligatory case marking]

I 3PS.PL/Tuya/this person-ACC see-PST
‘I saw them/Tuya/this person.’

(5) Bi neg ohin(-ig) har-san. [optional case marking]

I a girl-ACC see-PST
‘I saw a girl.’

(6) a. Bi zahiral ruu neg mail-(ig) ilgee-sen. [PO-construction]

I dean to a mail-ACC send-PST
‘I sent a mail to the dean.’

b. Bi zahiral-d neg mail-#ig ilgee-sen. [DO-construction]

I dean-DAT a mail-ACC send-PST
‘I sent the dean a mail.’

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