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CASTL Spring Conference on Differential Object Marking

The Meaning of DOM in Spanish

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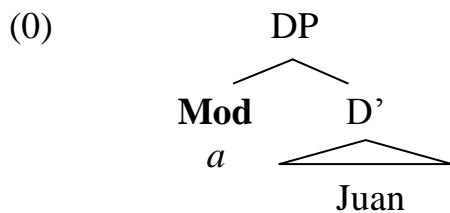
Goal:

To show that DOM constructions have a special underlying structure, which explains:

- the presence of *a* in Spanish
- the properties of the elements that participate in these constructions.

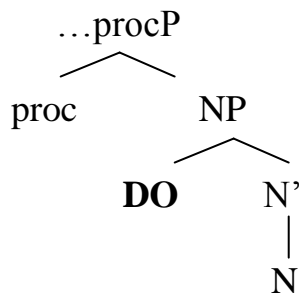
Main ideas:

- a. DOM in Spanish is due to **the presence of a modifier** that has to be lexicalized by *a*:

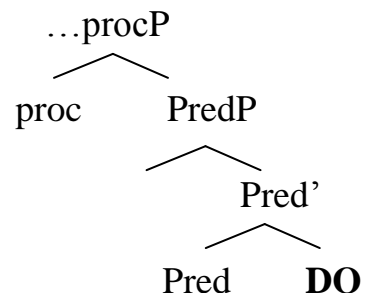


- b. *a*-marked objects occupy **a different position in the structure** than non *a*-marked objects. The structures in which they appear are different:

(1) non-DOM:



DOM:



→ By these two conditions it is possible to unify the special properties that elements in DOM constructions present, like **affectedness**, **specificity** or **animacy** of the object.

Main tools:

→ a universal *fseq* where syntax and semantics are isomorphic (in line with Svenonius 2010)

→ Phrasal spell-out (Starke 2011)

A single lexical item can lexicalize a chunk of the structure.

→ Modifiers that change the properties of terminals

→ *init-proc-res* structure (Ramchand 2008)

1. The data

- In Spanish certain direct objects (DOs) need to be marked by the element *a*:

- (2)
- a. Juan vio (*a) un árbol.
Juan saw DOM a tree.'
 - b. Juan vio *(a) Pedro.
Juan saw DOM Pedro.'
'Juan saw a tree/Pedro.'

- DOM has been said to happen because of different factors

→ Which are the influential factors?

• **Specificity**

- (3) a. Necesité *(a) cierta mujer para el experimento[+ spec]
‘I needed a certain woman for the experiment’
b. Necesito (a) una mujer que hable inglés [- spec]
‘I need a woman that knows English’

- Specific objects are overtly case marked in Turkish, but not nonspecific objects (Enç 1991)

*not always: *a* with non-specific indefinite DPs (Leonetti 2004:82):

- (4) Está buscando a alguien. / No está buscando a nadie.
‘She is looking for someone.’ / ‘She is not looking for anyone.’

• **Animacy**

- Animate objects are *a*-marked, but generally not inanimate ones (Torrego 1998)

- (5) a. Juan encontró *(a) la pelota. [-anim]
‘Juan found the ball’
b. Juan encontró *(a) María. [+anim]
‘Juan found Mary.’

*Animates not always with *a*:

- (6) Juan vio (a) un niño.
‘Juan saw a kid.’

- **Definiteness**

- Not possible in indefinite contexts like existential constructions:

- (7) Había (*a) una enfermera.
There-was DOM a nurse.
'There was a nurse.'

- definite objects are overtly case marked in certain languages (Hindi, for instance), but not indefinite objects.

- **Affectedness**

- Næss (2004), von Heusinger and Kaiser (2011) → highly affected DOs will more likely be *a*-marked

- (8) a. Juan asesinó *(a) un secretario.
'Juan killed a secretary.'
b. Juan buscó (a) un secretario.
'Juan looked for a secretary.'

*What is affectedness?

- (9) Juan ama a María.
'Juan loves Mary.'

- **Verbs and Agentivity** (von Heusinger & Keiser 2011, Bassa-Vanrell 2011):

e.g. *mirar* 'watch' >> *ver* 'see'; *escuchar* 'listen to' >> *oir* 'hear'

- (10) a. Miré *(a) un niño
'I looked at a child'
b. Vi (a) un niño
'I saw a child'

- **Individuation of the object and topicality**

- topic “as an anchor for new assertions. [...] Topics introduce prominent participants in the discourse” (Leonetti 2004:86)

- “more strongly involved in the event” (von Heusinger & Kayser 2007:90)

- (11) a. Besarón un niño llorando
Kissed-3PL a child crying
‘They kissed a child while they were crying’
b. Besarón a un niño llorando
kissed DOM a child crying
‘They kissed a child while they were crying’ OR: ‘They
kissed a crying child’

(Torrego 1999:1789)

- **Disambiguation from the subject**

- Mark the object in a different way than the subject (e.g. Aissen 2003)

- **Telicity:**

-“it is worth considering whether telicity only indirectly determines case-marking via its effect on specificity” Aissen (2003:460)

→ All these factors should be reduced to epiphenomena due to deeper reasons.

2. The proposal

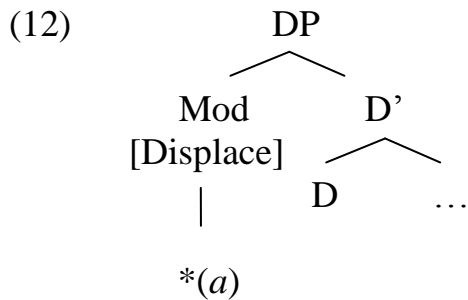
→ *a*-marked objects have a different internal structure than non *a*-marked: there is a **modifier** present

→ *a*-marked objects appear in a different structure and, thus, they occupy a **different syntactic position**

→ All the properties found in the elements of DOM constructions can be explained by these two facts.

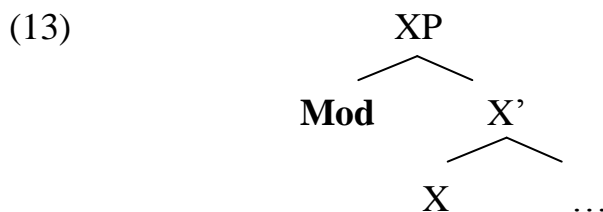
2.1. The presence of a modifier

- *a*-marking is due to the presence of a semantic feature that needs to be lexicalized by *a* in Spanish.



- What is a modifier?

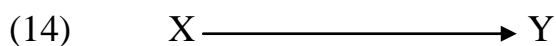
- non-terminal element of the structure that changes the properties of the head it combines with:



→ Zwarts and Winter (2000): a modifier is the element that applies to an element (BP or B-bar) and gives the same element (BP or B-bar).

- What is the modifier that triggers the presence of *a*?

- *Displace*: A modifier that gives the interpretation that the element it combines with is displaced from another point of the event.



→ It is necessary in Goal constructions:

(15) Juan fue {*a*/**en*} su casa.
 ‘Juan went {to/at} his house.’

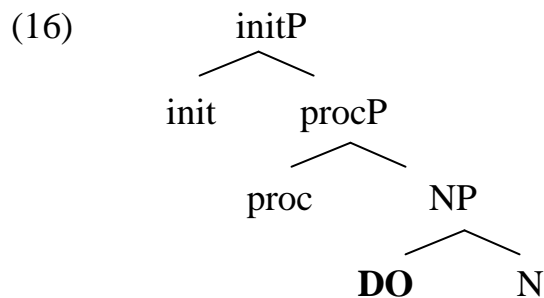
- In this case, as it combines with an entity, it gives the idea that the entity is reached somehow.
- As the entity is understood as reached, it is potentially affected.

→ What is the element that potentially reaches the object?

2.2. Different position of the structure

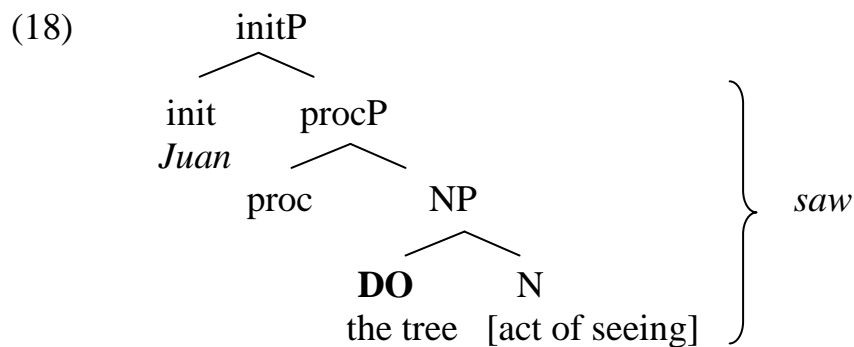
→ different structure of the constructions (in line with Rodríguez Mondoñedo 2010)

- **Non *a*-marked objects** are modifiers of an activity (cf. Hale & Keyser 2002)

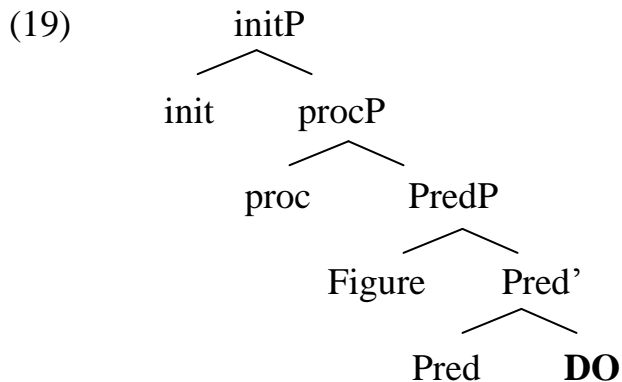


- (17) Juan vio el árbol.
‘Juan saw the tree.’

→ Juan did the act of seeing the tree (tree-seeing)



- ***a*-marked objects** are complements of a predication:



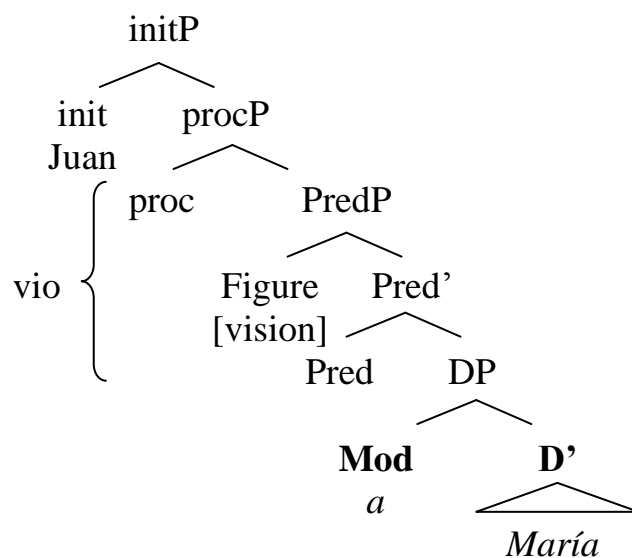
(20) Juan vio **a** María
 ‘Juan saw María’

→ Juan made that his vision went to María

→ *a*-marked DOs are receivers of the Figure:

- For a verb like *ver* → the vision

(21) Juan vio **a** María (Juan saw María)



→ The interpretation: Juan made the vision (go) to María

→ María potentially receives psychologically the vision

→ This explains:

- **Affectedness:**

→ for the position of the DO

- **Animacy**

→ because the only way it can be affected is psychologically. Thus, it has to be an entity that can be potentially affected by receiving the Figure.

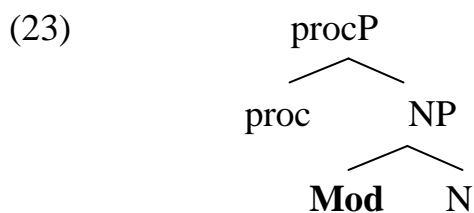
→ Psychological verbs

(22) Juan ama a María.
'Juan loves María.'

- **Definiteness and specificity:**

→ It can have the properties of a participant of the event

→ Unmarked objects are modifiers – they narrow or reduce the denotation of the activity (seeing > tree-seeing):



→ Generally they are non-definite and non-specific elements:

(24) a. Todos vieron un niño → only wide scope
b. Todos vieron a un niño → both readings
'Everybody saw a child'

→ Although it is not obligatory

- **Agentivity**

→ because it is generally an *init-proc-res* construction

- **Telicity**

→ Both DOM and non-DOM constructions can be telic depending on the properties of the elements. However:

→ DOM constructions are generally telic, because there is a change of state.

→ non-DOM are telic or not depending on the properties of the modifier:

- **Topicality:**

→ because a complement position is more adequate to introduce participants.

- **Why is it obligatory with certain verbs?**

- *saludar* ('greet'), *odiar* ('hate'), *insultar* ('insult'), *castigar* ('punish'), *sobornar* ('bribe') or *atacar* ('attack') (Leonetti 2004: 84)

→ they require that the object is psychologically affected

- **Why *a*?**

→ it is the element that lexicalizes *Displace* in other constructions like *Goals* in Spanish

3. Some evidence

a. Extraction

- It is more difficult to extract from a modifier than from a complement:

- (25) Juan busca (a) un profesor de Ciencias.
'Juan looks for a teacher of Science.'
- a. ¿De qué busca Juan un profesor?
b. ¿De qué busca Juan a un profesor?
Of what looks.for Juan (A) a teacher

b. Secondary predication

- As complements are more individualized, they can have a secondary predicate:

- (26) a. Juan buscó un niño corriendo. → Juan was running
b. Juan buscó a un niño corriendo. → Ambiguous
'Juan looked for a kid running.'

c. Difference between the DOs:

- non *a*-marked and *a*-marked objects can't be coordinated naturally, even with the same verb:

- (27) *Juan vio a María y *(a) un niño.
'Juan saw María and a kid.'

- also in gapping

- (28) Juan vio a María y Pedro *(a) un niño.
'Juan saw Mary and Peter a kid.'

d. *a*-marking required by the structure

- When the structure is obligatory, even non-animate elements need *a*, like in causatives:

- (29) a. Hizo *(**a**)l rosal florecer
'It made the rosebush bloom'
Zdrojewski (abstract)
- b. Hizo a la ventana abrirse.
'It made the window open.'
- (30) El uno precede *(**a**)l dos
'Number one precedes number two'
Zdrojewski (abstract)

e. Acquisition

- (31) "children seem to acquire the conditions to tease apart the two types of marking of DOM objects very quickly and with no errors, despite the fact that the conditions that govern this phenomenon are not simple"
Rodríguez Mondoñedo (2010:286)

The different position in the structure explains why:

→Subjects in DOM are more likely agentive

→ DOM is obligatory with certain verbs

→ DOs must behave affected, animate and require certain specificity properties.

4. Last remarks and further research

- **Accusative or dative?**

→ *Displace* can be lexicalized by accusative or dative depending on the language and on other elements.

- **What about the differences among languages with DOM?**

- **What happens in languages in which there is no DOM?**

→ Two possibilities:

1. There is no modifier → the structure is non-DOM
2. Ns can lexicalize the *Displace* modifier

- **What is the relationship with *se*?**

→ Indefinites can't combine with *se*:

- (32) Juan se comió *(las) patatas
Juan SE ate the potatoes
'Juan ate (the) potatoes.'

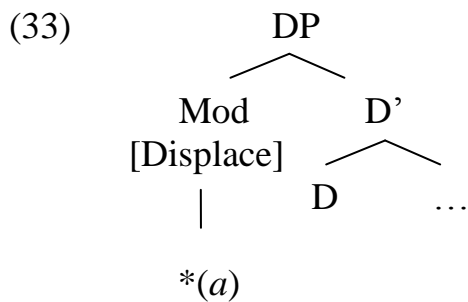
→ Is it possible that there is a third position for non *a*-marked specific elements?

→ Do all *a*-marked objects occupy the same position?

→ Clitics?

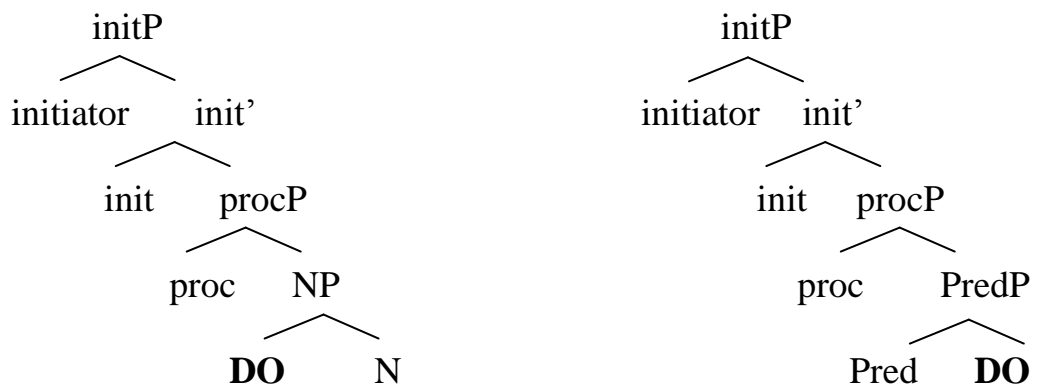
5. Conclusions

→ *a* lexicalizes the modifier *Displace*:



→ DOM constructions have a different underlying structure and (consequently) *a*-marked objects occupy a different syntactic position:

(34) a. non-DOM constructions b. DOM constructions



→ The main conclusion is that the multiple factors found in DOM constructions are epiphenomenal properties that result from deeper grounds.

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