SLE Workshop: Differential subject marking and ergative phenomena

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Introduction

The following proposal is for a workshop at the 46th meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea (SLE) in September 2013 on differential subject marking and ergative phenomena. We invite 300 word abstracts on this topic which will be submitted together with the present workshop proposal to the organisers of the 2013 SLE meeting. If the proposal is accepted, participants will be asked to provide full abstracts. The **deadline** for submission of the first abstracts is **12 November 2012**. For more details, see: `http://www.sle2013.eu/call-for-papers`

Description

While considerable attention has been paid to differential object marking (DOM) in both the functional and generative traditions (cf. Givón 1984, Bossong 1991, Morimoto 2002, Aissen 2003, Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011 *i.a.*), less attention has been paid to **differential subject marking** (**DSM**, but cf. de Hoop and de Swart 2008). This workshop aims to help redress this balance by bringing together linguists working in any framework with an interest in **DSM and its relation to ergative alignment and/or valency alternations**.

It has been claimed that **DSM** occurs primarily in **ergative languages**, whereas **DOM** is prevalent in **accusative languages** (Malchukov 2006). This raises the interesting question of whether it possible to consider these two systems as surface manifestations of the same deep parameter (cf. Malchukov 2006 for an OT analysis in this vein). There are, however, potential problems with such a move. One challenge, notably, is the well-known examples of (partially) ergative languages with DOM (e.g. Hindi: Butt 1993, varieties of Basque in contact with Spanish: Rezac and Fernández 2013). It is less clear whether there are genuine examples of accusative languages with DSM (but cf. Malchukov 2006 on Korean).

Another issue concerns **potential parallels between DSM and DOM** which have not, to our knowledge been fully explored. It is well known, for example, that DOM is closely connected with **movement of the object** (scrambling) in many languages (cf. Bhatt and Anagnostopoulou 1996 on Hindi, Karimi 2003 on Persian, von Heusinger

and Kornfilt 2005 on Turkish). This connection makes analyses of DOM based on Marantz's (1991) dependent Case proposal highly attractive (cf. Baker and Vinokurova 2010, Baker 2012). While there are some instances where object movement appears to give rise to DSM (cf. Woolford 2008), it is not clear widespread this is. A different pattern is found in Turkish where DSM, like DOM, is sensitive to the position of the argument which receives differential marking (cf. von Heusinger and Kornfilt 2005, Kornfilt 2008).

Aissen's (2003) analysis predicts DSM to be the mirror image of DOM, i.e. one would expect indefinite and/or inanimate subjects to carry case or other morphological marking. While this prediction has been challenged for some languages (cf. Woolford 2001), it is possible that apparent differences between DSM and DOM may be clarified by distinguishing DSM from differential agent marking (DAM) where S is the single argument of an intransitive predicate as in Dixon (1994). de Hoop and Malchukov (2007) and Malchukov (2008) effectively propose that two distinct families of constraints affect DAM and DSM: while DAM is sensitive to Silverstein's (1976) animacy hierarchy, DSM is conditioned by the need to morphologically encode semantic roles. Thus languages display DAM sensitive to animacy, the pronominal/non-pronominal distinction and indefiniteness. All of these properties, as well as information structure, are known to also affect DOM. An interesting question is whether this distinction can be maintained on principled grounds. Other questions concern whether this split parallels unaccusativity/unergativity in accusative languages.

A related problem concerns how the availability of **valency alternations** interacts with alignment systems and differential marking. It has been claimed that **passives** are generally found in **accusative systems** whereas **antipassives** are limited to **ergative systems** (cf. de Hoop and de Swart 2008, although there are exceptions to this trend, such as passives in ergative languages such as Georgian, Kham, and many Mayan languages). It is suggested that DSM occurs as an alternative strategy to passivisation in ergative languages. In addition to addressing whether this typology really holds, we welcome papers that discuss whether this supposed distribution might follow from functional considerations or from more abstract constraints on the computational system. Of particular interest in this regard are the parallel contexts in which diathesis and DSM occur: both typically indicate the loss of volition on the part of the agent. Whether this is a fair characterisation of either phenomenon remains an interesting question. We particularly welcome data from understudied languages that might shed light on these issues.

Another open question is whether the same factors condition which types of subjects/objects a language prohibits if it only allows certain types. In Malagasy, for example (cf. Keenan 2008), subjects have to be definite or modified by certain quantifiers, occupying a higher position in the clause than indefinite subjects. A similar effect is seen in West Greenlandic where absolutive objects must be specific and possibly

Tagalog where definite Theme objects are not allowed (Bittner 1987, Manning 1996, Keenan 2008). In Chamorro, Mam, and Halkomelem 3rd person object pronouns are disallowed if the subject is not a pronoun, again an effect of their relative prominence (Aissen 2003). Thus, similar factors seem to restrict the distribution of low-prominence subjects and high-prominence objects, but again, this remains a poorly understood phenomenon.

Call for papers

We invite 300 word abstracts for proposed 20+10 minute presentations on any of the topics mentioned above, and in particular on the following research questions:

- Does DSM exist in accusative languages?
- What types of ergative systems show DSM? Morphological, split-S, extended-S?
- Do split-S and fluid-S alignments result from DSM or is this a separate phenomenon?
- How should DSM be modelled theoretically? Is a unified account of differential marking possible or desirable?
- Is there any connection between the position of a subject in a given language and its Case marking (in the way that DOM and scrambling often go together)? Should the domain of DSM include structural differences and movement?
- Does DSM always adhere to Silverstein's (1976) animacy hierarchy?
- Should passives be seen as an instance of DSM or a distinct phenomenon?

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