Specificity and animacy in the acquisition of differential object marking in child Romanian

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Structure of talk

- Differential Object Marking (DOM): predictions for acquisition
- Goal
- Animacy and specificity in DOM in Romanian
- Data and method
- Main findings
- Tentative conclusions
Direct objects which share semantic features with prototypical subjects (i.e. subject-like objects)

⇒ [+ animate]

⇒ [+ human]

⇒ [+ specific]

tend to be marked across languages

(Bossong 1980, 1985, 1998)

⇒ in the nominal/verbal domain

⇒ affixes/inflections/etc.

⇒ specific morpheme/identical with other morphemes
Differential Object Marking

- The higher in prominence a direct object, the more likely it is to be differentially marked

- The dimensions along which prominence is assessed:

  Animacy < inheritance

  Definiteness/Specificity scale < reference
Differential Object Marking

Animacy scale
Human > Animate > Inanimate

Definiteness/Specificity scale
Personal pronoun > Proper noun > Definite DP > Indefinite specific DP > Non-specific DP

(Aissen 2003)
Differential Object Marking

Farkas & Heusinger (2003)

the semantic dimension which underlies the definiteness/specificity scale is referential *stability*, i.e. determinacy of reference
Differential Object Marking

Farkas & Heusinger (2003)

(i) Dynamically stable DPs
A1: Proper names, definite pronouns [UDS]
A2: Definite DPs [CDS]

(ii) Dynamically non-stable DPs
B1: partitives
B2: indefinite DPs
Dynamic stability scale

Proper nouns, definite pronouns > definite DPs > partitives > indefinite DPs

The more dynamically stable a direct object is the stronger DOM trigger it is
Aissen (2003): Predictions for language acquisition

Most marked

Human Pronoun

- Human PN
  - Human def
    - Human specific
      - Human non-specific
    - Animate specific
      - Animate non-specific
  - Animate PN
    - Animate definite
      - Animate specific
      - Animate non-specific
    - Inanimate PN
      - Inanimate definite
      - Inanimate specific
      - Inanimate non-specific

Least marked
If referential stability underlies the specificity scale it should play an important part in the acquisition of DOM
Farkas & Heusinger (2003) Predictions for language acquisition

Stage 1
- Proper names
- Definite pronouns

Stage 2
- Proper names, definite pronouns
- Definite DPs

Stage 3
- Proper names, definite pronouns, definite DPs
- Indefinite DPs
Predictions for language acquisition

Internalist study of language

Semantic representations at the interface with other systems

Assume: Universal semantic scales are constructed of elements which are innate

Each scale has one core feature which guides the acquisition process

Innate Universal
Predictions for language acquisition

Access to universal semantic features = innate

very early acquisition of DOM
study of the acquisition of DOM in L1 Spanish (Rodríguez-Mondoñedo 2008) on the basis of longitudinal data (6 children < CHILDES)

(hostname errorless)

No analysis of the type of DPs which are DOM-ed
1. Do children have access to the semantic scales relevant to DOM from the onset of acquisition?

2. If they do, how does the early system integrate the animacy and the definiteness/specificity scales?
   - Aissen’s (2003) scale
   - Farkas & Heusinger’s (2003) scale

< child Romanian
Identifying the acquisition route of DOM might contribute to our understanding of the main semantic feature(s) that constrain(s) the DOM system in the target language
The Romanian DOM system

Romanian is a DOM language

the preposition PE

Animacy
Specificity, Referential stability
Topicality

## The Romanian DOM system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animacy</th>
<th>DOM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal pronouns</td>
<td>[ + animate] L-am desenat *(PE) el.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[- animate] Am desenat (*PE) camionul nostru.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uitaţi cum o facem PE mămăliguţă. = [+ upgrading]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The Romanian DOM system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animacy</th>
<th>DOM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indefinite DPs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+ animate]</td>
<td>(L-) am ajutat (PE) un vecin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[- animate]</td>
<td>(L-) am desenat (*PE) un camion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bare Quantifiers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+ animate]</td>
<td>Nu caut *(PE) nimeni.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[- animate]</td>
<td>NU caut (*PE) nimic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partitives</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+ animate]</td>
<td>(Le) caut (PE) cateva dintre studente.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[- animate]</td>
<td>? Am citit (-o) numai (PE) una dintre cărțile pe care mi le-ai dat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definite pronouns</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+animate]</td>
<td>L-am desenat *(PE) acela de acolo. Le-am luat *(PE) ale mele.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animacy</td>
<td>DOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP co-indexed with a clitic</td>
<td>L-am ajutat *(PE) (un) vecin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[- animate]</td>
<td>L-am desenat (*PE) camion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>? Tu crezi topurile dacă vrei să le crezi PE topuri.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative and interrogative CARE</td>
<td>Omul (PE) care l-am ajutat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ + animate]</td>
<td>*(PE) care l-ai ajutat?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[- animate]</td>
<td>Cartea (PE) ai citit-o.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Romanian DOM system

- DOM is used with some degree of (speaker) VARIATION

  Variation in the input might affect the acquisition process

- areas in which the Romanian DOM system is no longer fully constrained by animacy; differences between post-verbal and displaced DPs

  Syntax might interfere with animacy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corpus</th>
<th>Files</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>MLU</th>
<th>TOTAL child utterances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. (Stoicescu 2012)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1;10-3;1</td>
<td>1.110 –2.855</td>
<td>8006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1h/each</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. (Avram 2001)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1;5- 2;11</td>
<td>1.305 –2.790</td>
<td>9823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 h/each</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>35 files/35 hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17829</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main distinctions: [+/- animate] [+/-human] [+/- dynamically stable]
Method

For each marked object:

- ✔ personal pronoun
- ✔ proper name
- ✔ definite DP
- ✔ definite pronoun (demonstrative, interrogative, relative)
- ✔ indefinite DP
- ✔ quantifier
- ✔ partitive
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Nr of DOM utterances</th>
<th>Age of first attested DOM</th>
<th>MLU of first attested DOM</th>
<th>Omissions</th>
<th>Superfluous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>2;2</td>
<td>1.938</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1;10/2;1</td>
<td>1.483/1.755</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

(1) ăla urîtu(l) *(pe) care~l cheamă ... that ugly.the PE who him calls ‘The ugly one whose name is...’ (l. 2;6)

(2) o vulpe care a mâncat *(pe) (S)cufiţa Roşie a fox that has eaten Red Riding Hood ‘A fox which ate RRH.’

Omission of PE in direct object relatives

Omission of PE with proper names
Results

(3) da(r) *PE ăsta e bun? (I. 2;9)
   but PE this is good
   ‘But is this one good?’

   who’s this? PE witch (B. 2;4)
Interim conclusions

- DOM emerges early
- DOM is used target-like from the beginning

⇒ virtually errorless (see data for Spanish A)

(Rodríguez-Mondoñedo 2008)
(5) Uite PE elefant
   look PE elephant
   ‘Look at the elephant!’

(6) Și PE Ioana (o doare burta)
   and PE Ioana (her hurts tummy.the)
   ‘Ioana has a tummy ache too.’

(7) Și PE tine te doare.
   and PE you you hurts
   ‘It hurts you too.’

(I. 2;2)
(8) las~o PE babă
   let her PE old woman
   ‘Let the old woman be.’ (B. 1;10)

(9) Adult: tu o iubeşti pe Dolly?
   ‘Do you love Dolly?’
Child: Da. Şi PE mami.
   Yes and PE mother
   ‘Yes, and Mother too.’ (B. 2;1)
Results

Stage 1: I. xx – 2;2

[+ referentially stable]
[+animate]

proper names
personal pronouns
definite DPs

Stage 1:B. 1;10- 2;3

[+ referentially stable]
[+animate]

proper names
definite DPs
Aissen (2003): Predictions for language acquisition
Farkas & Heusinger (2003)
Predictions for language acquisition

Stage 1
- Proper names
- Definite pronouns

Stage 2
- Proper names, definite pronouns
- Definite DPs

Stage 3
- Proper names, definite pronouns, definite DPs
- Indefinite DPs
Stage 2: 2;2.13 – 2;6.15
DOM also attested with non-animate direct objects [+referentially stable] [+/- animate] in some cases with upgrading effect
(11) Păstrează pe opt.
   keep.IMP PE eight
   ‘Keep this eight.’ (I. 2;2)

(12) Îl ştiu pe ‘Podu’ de piatră’.
    clitic know PE bridge.the of stone
    ‘I know “The stone bridge”.’ (I. 2;7)

(13) vreau pe bilă # bila.
    want PE ball # ball.the
    ‘I want the ball.’ (B. 2;3)
Results

Stage 2: I. 2;2 - 2;6
[+ referentially stable]
[+/--animate]

proper names
personal pronouns
definite pronouns
definite DPs
quantifiers

Stage 2:B. 2;3 – 2;11 (?)
[+ referentially stable]
[+/--animate]

proper names
personal pronouns
definite pronouns
definite DPs
Results

• **Stage 3**: l. 2;6 –

  indefinite specific direct objects are also DOM-ed

(14) eu l  -am auzit  pe un băiat care a zis ...
  I him have heard PE a boy who has said
  ‘I heard a boy who said....’  (l. 2;6)

(15) (am udat)  pe o fetiță
  (have wetted) PE a girl  (l. 2;8)
Results vs. semantic scales

Animacy scale

Stage 1: both human and non-human direct objects are marked

Stage 2: DOM extended to non-animate direct objects very early

Overall: preference for [+animate]
Results. Animacy in the early DOM system

B. 

I.
Results.

Animacy in the early DOM system

B. Healthy adult in B. corpus at 2;1

Adult in B. corpus at 2;10
Definiteness/specificity scale

**Stages 1-2**: only referentially stable direct objects are marked, irrespective of whether UDS or CDS

**Stage 3** (only I.): referentially non-stable direct objects are also DOM-ed

⇒ Obvious preference for no choice DPs
Referential stability and DOM in child Romanian. I corpus
Referential stability and DOM in child Romanian.

B. corpus
Results. Types of DOM-ed direct objects.
I corpus
Referential stability and DOM in child Romanian. I corpus
Referential stability and DOM in child Romanian. B. corpus
Referential stability and DOM in child Romanian.

B.

Adult in B. corpus at 2;1

Adult in B. corpus at 2;10
DOM across stages

- animate referentially stable DPs
- non-animate referentially stable DPs
- indefinite DPs

- what seems to be relevant at the onset of acquisition is that proper names, definite pronouns and definite DPs are dynamically stable; the fact that their reference is computed with/without involving the context does not seem to have any effect on the early acquisition route of DOM
There is an obvious overall preference to mark unconditionally stable DPs, i.e. those for which the choice of value is fixed and with which DOM is obligatory in the target language.
Farkas & Heusinger (2003)
Predictions for language acquisition

- **Very strong triggers**
  - Unconditionally stable
  - (proper names, definite pronouns)
  - DOM = obligatory/ cuts across animacy

- **Strong triggers**
  - Conditionally stable
  - (definite DPs)
  - DOM = optional/ +/-animacy

- **Weak triers**
  - Conditionally non-stable
  - (indefinite DPs)
  - DOM = optional

50
1. Do children have access to the semantic scales relevant for DOM from the onset of acquisition?

YES, their use of DOM reflects sensitivity to the semantics of the DP

NO errors attested
2. If they do, how does the early system integrate the animacy and the definiteness/specificity scales?

- + animate = the relevant feature on the animacy scale

- specificity: stronger than animacy

- referential stability drives DOM in acquisition
Thank you!

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Selective References