

Referential stability and differential object marking in Romanian

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This paper has two goals: (i) to define a new semantic dimension that characterizes noun phrases, which we call referential stability; (ii) to show that referential stability is relevant to Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Romanian.

We start the paper with presenting the main facts of DOM in Romanian, a phenomenon that consists of marking with a special preposition, *pe* a subclass of direct objects. We show that, abstracting away from animacy, the pronominal/non-pronominal distinction and position relative to the V, this phenomenon is sensitive to the two scales in (1) (see Aissen (to appear) for the relevance of (1a) to DOM cross-linguistically):

- (1) a. Proper Name > Definite Description > Indefinite Description
b. widest scope indefinite > narrow scope indefinite

We will show that the higher a noun phrase is on these hierarchies the more prone it is to be marked by *pe* when a DO. The question that arises is what semantic parameter is responsible for these facts? This question divides into the following subquestions: (i) what parameter explains the hierarchy in (1a)? (ii) what is responsible for the fact that a widest scope indefinite patterns more like a definite than a narrow scope indefinite.

In the next part of the paper we define the notion of referential stability and show that it is relevant to the answers to these questions. Referential stability concerns the issue of stability of value given to a variable across verifying assignment functions. The narrower the allowed variation, the more referentially stable the expression is. We distinguish between various dimensions of variation and thus various types of referential stability. Proper names are most referentially stable in the sense that once the contextual world parameter is fixed, so is their value, independently of where they occur. Definite descriptions are referentially stable in the sense that once the input assignment function is given, their value relative to verifying updated assignments is fixed as well. (This is a dynamic version of the uniqueness condition on definites proposed in Kadmon 1992). Indefinite noun phrases are referentially unstable in that in principle they allow variation across updates with respect to the value given to the variable they introduce. Note now that narrow scope resulting in co-variation affects referential stability since it results in a variable having to be given multiple values relative to a single verifying assignment. After discussing different types of referential stability we will discuss the various noun phrase classes this parameter allows us to define. The upshot of the discussion is that the hierarchies in (1) are hierarchies of referential stability. Turning back to DOM in Romanian we will defend the claim that DOM in this language is sensitive to referential stability in the sense that the more referentially stable a noun phrase is the better DOM trigger it will be. We will conclude our discussion of DOM in Romanian by showing that the complex facts involved follow the general pattern proposed in Aissen (to appear) cross-linguistically though more parameters need to be added. Recourse to referential stability is needed to account for an important subclass of these. We close the paper by discussing the way in which referential stability underlies various notions of specificity that have been used in the literature.