

Differential Object Marking and the Lexical Semantics of Verbs in Spanish

**Klaus von Heusinger (Universität Stuttgart) & Georg A. Kaiser (Universität
Konstanz)**

The use of the marker *a* with the direct object in Spanish is an instance of Differentiated Object Marking (DOM), which is cross linguistically a well-documented phenomenon. In Spanish, there are three main dimensions that determine *a*-marking of direct objects: (i) the referential properties of the direct object, such as animacy, definiteness, specificity and topicality, (ii) the competition between the arguments in the sentence, and (iii) the lexical semantics of the verb. Diachronically, *a*-marking spreads along the Referentiality Hierarchy from personal pronouns and proper names to definite and finally indefinite noun phrases, often triggered by topicality. While this factor of *a*-marking is well studied, it does not suffice to account for the diachronic and synchronic variation. In this study, we argue that the lexical semantics of verb classes can account for this investigation. We present original findings from different types of corpora searches from the 12th to the 19th century. We can show that *a*-marking systematically spreads from one verb class to another. These findings suggest that *a*-marking in Spanish, and DOM in general, can only be described in a multi-dimensional space consisting of the referential properties of the direct object and the lexical semantics of the verb.