

The Diachronic Development of Differential Object Marking in Romanian

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According to recent studies, the diachronic development of differential object marking in Romance is expected to start out at the left corner of the animacy and referentiality scale and spread steadily towards the right. However in Romanian this unidirectional evolution is surprisingly reversed around the 19th century: the conditions of direct object marking with the preposition “pe” are more restrained today than 200 years ago. In this study we present this unusual development based on a diachronic corpus consisting of Bible translations from different centuries.

The main argument of our paper is that the regress in DOM can be explained by the independent development of the Romanian clitic doubling system that case marking gets strongly correlated to. Thus instead of two alternatives, namely marked and unmarked direct objects, in 20th century Romanian three types of indefinite direct objects can be observed as shown in the table below. While this complex system of case marking leads to semantic differences, diachronic data suggest that this system may have only a transitory character, thus differential object marking without clitic doubling (Type 2) tends to disappear.

Type 1 +[pe] +[cl-doubling]	<i>L-am văzut PE un băiat.</i> Cl-3.Sg+aux-1.Sg see-PERF PE indef.art boy I have seen a boy
Type 2 +[pe] –[cl-doubling]	<i>Am văzut PE un băiat.</i> aux-1.Sg see-PERF PE indef.art boy I have seen a boy
Type 3 –[pe] –[cl-doubling]	<i>Am văzut Ø un băiat.</i> aux-1.Sg see-PERF Ø indef.art boy I have seen a boy