

Transitivity and the diachronic development of differential object marking

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Abstract

The relation between transitivity and differential object marking (and case marking more generally) has been discussed mainly from a synchronic point of view. In this paper we discuss the relation between transitivity and DOM from a diachronic perspective.

The main claim is that the spread of DOM from one point on the definiteness/animacy scale to the next lower point is not homogenous across verbs, but is dependent on the transitivity of the verb: the P arguments of higher-transitivity verbs are marked earlier than the P arguments of lower-transitivity verbs.

This hypothesis makes three predictions which will be shown to be born out in the development of DOM in Hindi, Mongolian, Spanish, and Uzbek.